

THE LATINX THEATRE COMMONS: FEMINIST DECOLONIZATION IN
THE EARLY YEARS OF A MOVEMENT TO TRANSFORM THE
NARRATIVE OF THE AMERICAN THEATRE

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Title: The Latinx Theatre Commons: Feminist Decolonization in the Early Years of a Movement to Transform the Narrative of the American Theatre

The Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC) emerged in 2012 in response and resistance to years of misrepresentation and erasure of Latinx artistic work and presence by the American theatre field in practice and in scholarship. This dissertation is the first comprehensive chronicle and study of the LTC, reviewing the movement's methods, manifestations, and implications through interviews with key participants and my own reflections as a founding Steering Committee member, balanced against theories of Latinx feminisms, the Commons, and Latin American decolonization.

My research spans the early years of the movement, from the impetus that generated the meeting of the "DC-8" in May 2012, the formation of its first Steering Committee (comprised of Latinx theatre makers, scholars, and advocates from all over the US) in the summer of 2012; through the launch of the LTC's digital and social media presences; the 2013 Boston Convening; the 2014 Encuentro and the 2018 Encuentro de las Américas; the 2015 and 2018 Carnivals; the El Fuego initiative (2016-19); the Dallas, Seattle, New York City, and Miami Regional Convenings (2015-19); the Maria Irene Fornés Institute Symposium (2018); and the TYA Sin Fronteras Festival and Conference (2019).

A review of the mid-twentieth century's Teatro Nacional de Aztlán (TENAZ) and the rise of Latinx feminisms in Chapters II and III provide the foundations for the story of the LTC that is described in Chapter IV. In Chapter V, the movement's activities and methods are investigated through the multiple lenses of Latinx feminisms, commons and decolonization theories. Intersectional, non-hierarchical, and radically inclusive Latinx feminist priorities align with commons ideologies, which champion community consensus when determining the care and application of mutually shared resources. This fundamentally anti-capitalist approach reinforces the work of decolonization, the intentional transformation of the way social, political, and economic processes are viewed and implemented. These three ideological frameworks at work within the LTC are mutually supportive and, interwoven, they sustain the LTC's mission, to transform the narrative of the American theatre, with integrity. Chapter VI concludes with the greater implications and questions about the LTC's work as a model for social justice and revolution.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

2012 marked a turning point in my life and artistic career, and in the professional lives of Latinx¹ theatre makers across the United States. In May, I received an email from director Antonio Sonera, my colleague and friend, with the subject line, “Your Opinions Please.” Antonio was gathering ideas in advance of a meeting he was attending later that week. He asked two questions, “What are the pressing issues facing Latino theatre artists in the American theatre,” and, “What are some ways to move the dialogue in our field forward around these issues?” (Sonera) I replied the next morning with thoughts and ideas that had been on my mind for some time. I, and many other Latinx theatre leaders and friends, had long been concerned about access to resources, Eurocentric training, ethnic identity, representation, the delineations between commercial and community theatre, the need for greater visibility for work created by Latinx and other underrepresented communities, and more.

I had served as the Artistic Director of Milagro, the Pacific Northwest’s premier Latino arts and culture organization since 2003, and, before that, as a co-founder and the Artistic Director of Seattle Teatro Latino, a grassroots project of seasoned actors and playwrights. For years I had participated in the lunchtime gatherings of Latinx theatre makers at the Theatre Communications Group (TCG) Annual Conferences, an effort to carve a space in the midst of a full schedule to share our concerns, challenges, and

¹ The terms “Latinx” and “Chicanx” are inclusive terms that represent the singular and plural forms, replacing the earlier, more familiar “Chicana/o” and “Latina/o,” which privilege a gender binary. These terms are used to describe people, not things.

celebrations. Every year the circle grew bigger, but the time allotted for lunch did not. We tried to stay in touch between conferences, but those opportunities were few, with distance and work separating individuals and companies all over the country. We were not discouraged, however; in 2011, the conference “lunch” meeting was relocated to a post-conference gathering hosted by the Latino Theatre Company at the LA Theatre Company, and the lunch hour was expanded to a full day; clearly there was much to be discussed among the practitioners and scholars gathered. A year later, at the 2012 TCG Conference in Boston, we launched a project called “Latinos in Theatre,” using TCG’s Conference 2.0 communications tool to share information about activities happening all over the country and to support regional and national alliances. Later that summer, when I got a phone call from Karen Zacarías, asking me if I’d like to join the Steering Committee of the Latino Theatre Commons (LTC), a brand-new national effort to support Latino theatre makers around the country, I did not hesitate.

This dissertation documents the formation and early development of the LTC from 2012 to 2019. During those eight years, the LTC has produced large scale convenings in Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Seattle, NYC, Princeton, Austin, and Miami. These convenings were combined with LTC performance festivals, new works festivals, a symposium, and other events with invited and public participants, that illuminate and investigate Latinx theatre making. The LTC has also populated the HowlRound Theatre Commons blog with numerous posts concerning the current state of Latinx theatre making and its pedagogy. Through spotlight events and social media, the LTC has created greater visibility for Latinx theatre makers striving to participate in the professional theatre world. All together, these projects have worked to unite Latinx

theatre makers around the country, extending into Latin America, in a shared effort “to transform the narrative of the American theatre” by accurately acknowledging the participation and contributions of Latinx theatre to the larger field (“Latinx Theatre Commons”). As a movement, the LTC has transformed the lives of numerous theatre makers and as such has raised the visibility of the Latinx community’s concerns. The LTC’s success begs an investigation of its driving principles, methods, and inevitable missteps, as well as the foundations that nourished the ground in which the seeds of this movement were planted.

This study is the first comprehensive chronicle of the early history of the LTC, reviewing the movement’s methods, manifestations, and implications through interviews with key participants, including my own reflections, balanced against the theories of Latinx feminisms, the Commons, and Latin American decolonization. My research spans the early years of the movement, from the impetus that generated the meeting of the “DC-8” in May 2012, through the production of subsequent LTC events and initiatives, including: the formation of its first Steering Committee comprised of Latinx theatre makers, scholars, and advocates from all over the US; the launch of the LTC’s digital and social media presences; the 2013 Boston Convening; the 2014 Encuentro and the 2018 Encuentro de las Américas; the 2015 and 2018 Carnivals; the El Fuego initiative (2016-19); the Dallas, Seattle, NYC, and Miami Regional Convenings (2016-19); the Maria Irene Fornés Institute Symposium; the LTC’s first long-term strategic planning meeting (2018); and the 2019 TYA² Sin Fronteras Festival and Conference. The years from 2012 through 2019 were remarkably productive for this predominantly volunteer project. My

² Theatre for Young Audiences

dissertation seeks to tease out why and how the LTC worked so well, what errors were made, and lessons learned along the way, and what best practices can be shared with others.

The LTC functions as a historical phenomenon in which a number of ideological strands interweave and build upon the legacy of El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán (TENAZ), an association of the *teatros* Chicanos that supported the Chicano *movimiento* in the late twentieth century, to advance the work of Latinx theatre makers in the US. I examine the long history and the intersectional dynamics that inform, motivate, and challenge the LTC, arguing that the movement's efficacy is linked to the groundwork laid by (and the lessons learned from) TENAZ; late twentieth century Latina/x feminisms; the LTC's express praxis as a commons; and principles championed by Latin American decolonization theory. I seek to illuminate and frame the LTC's success and its challenges through these interdependent facets to paint a picture of the interwoven influences that have made LTC a force for change in American theatre.

Why a Study of the LTC?

Our country finds itself in an animated exchange of ideas around representation and equity, leading to more civic engagement in progressive independent and coalitional efforts. The faces, voices, and stories of theatre in the US have changed along with the country's demographic diversification. Previously marginalized communities now have their stories told on mainstages of flagship regional theatres more frequently, in efforts to both respond to and serve a changing audience base. These efforts by predominantly

white institutions (PWI)³ have resulted in varying degrees of success and failure, at times with serious repercussions for ethnic-specific communities including Latinx.

The LTC, as with other culturally specific coalitions, emerged in response and resistance to years of misrepresentation and erasure by the greater theatre field in practice and in scholarship. LTC projects have been well documented throughout the HowlRound blog, as well as in scholarly journals, and in books such as Brian Herrera's *The Latina/o Theatre Commons 2013 National Convening: A Narrative Report*; and the *Encuentro: Latinx Performance for the New American Theatre*, edited by Trevor Boffone, Teresa Marrero, and Chantal Rodriguez. I am grateful to this scholarship upon which I build my study, cognizant that these chronicles have been written around specific events and initiatives. My project differs in that it presents a chronological and methodological overview of the LTC as a movement. That said, no effort of this scope could exist without hurdles, not the least of which is my own position as an insider and a fan. My analysis strives to illuminate the LTC's successes, challenges, and shortcomings, evidenced in misunderstandings and missteps, in the hope that this awareness will prove helpful to the movement and others in the future.

As other ethnically identified theatre movements emerge around the US to champion their distinct art and representation, this study may serve as one model for them to reflect upon. The LTC has shared its practices and challenges with other parallel

³ A PWI refers to “any institution of higher learning that wasn't labeled an HBCU prior to 1964. These institutions usually have student bodies made up mostly of whites, with sprinkles of different races such as African American, Hispanic, Asian, and so on. ... Up until 1963, which is when Clemson University in South Carolina was finally integrated, black students weren't allowed to attend PWIs – hence the creation of [Historically Black Colleges and Universities] HBCUs in the 1800s” (Nicole). The term PWI has been adopted in theatre parlance to describe companies whose mission is not ethnically identified, regardless of leadership demographics.

movements, including the Black Theatre Commons (BTC) and the Consortium for Asian American Theatre Artists Conference and Festival (CAATA), movements which are interested in the LTC's experience with uniting dispersed and diverse members of an ethnic theatre community in a common mission and action. Indeed, the LTC is co-sponsoring a Cross Cultural Coalitions Convening that will bring together representatives of various culturally identified theatre coalitions of the US in 2020-2021.

The early years of the LTC, from 2012 to 2019, are significant for the story of the movement's launch, its remarkable production, and its methods rooted in the commons model and Latinx feminisms, both of which profoundly impact the way the movement organizes itself. The LTC works in a consistently non-hierarchical way, supported by the use of digital technology which facilitates rapid communication and consensual decision-making. Fueled by passion, access, experience, and commitment, the LTC actively works to increase the visibility and inclusion of Latinx theatre and theatre makers within the scope of the national field. Its mission is driven by the awareness that Latinx theatre has been operating historically within a system that overwhelmingly privileges dominant, Anglo-centric culture in three ways: 1) *materially*, in terms of how much Latinx theatre can be experienced or created in the United States and under what conditions, 2) *representationally*, in how Latinx identity and culture is performed; and 3) *socially*, as cultural priorities, including family and community, are undervalued in favor of career success. Yet, the LTC also operates under the fiscal sponsorship of the HowlRound Theatre Commons,⁴ a not for profit project of Emerson College, a PWI. Since the LTC's

⁴ HowlRound self identifies as a “free and open platform for theatremakers worldwide. We amplify progressive, disruptive ideas about theatre and facilitate connection between diverse practitioners. We function as a “commons”—a social structure that invites open participation around shared values. All of the

inception at a gathering at the Arena Theatre (another PWI) in 2012, the movement has benefitted from HowlRound's infrastructural and technological support. Operating in the spirit of commons' ideology, HowlRound shared space and resources by which the LTC Steering Committee could convene, plan, and implement its initiatives. HowlRound has been a remarkable ally, but questions have arisen throughout the history of the LTC as to whether its fiscal sponsorship somehow undermines the cultural integrity of the movement. Such nationalist concerns are not uncommon in the history of Latinx and Chicana liberation movements, and this is one reason I reach back to review the history of TENAZ as well as Latinx feminisms, to reveal some of the deeper roots that have necessitated and cultivated the praxis (theory in action) of the LTC.

I share the desire of the LTC to update the narrative of the 'American' theatre, to raise the visibility of Latinx theatre making and in particular theatre makers who strive to illuminate the concerns of our communities. The LTC movement is a negotiation with larger cultural and economic forces that has opted to proceed within a commons' model, informed and in alliance with transformative Latinx feminisms. The structure of my study begins chronologically and is quickly challenged as strands of emerging ideologies collide with historical events. However, these ideological strands that have woven together to undergird the LTC movement can be tracked and interrogated for the benefit of future cultural activists.

Foundational Terms and Concepts

content (essays, videos, podcasts) on HowlRound comes from the theatre community who chooses to participate" ("Welcome").

In the following sections, I discuss foundational concepts that frame my study on the LTC. The first offers my understanding of the term Latinx, by which the Latinx Theatre Commons identifies its community and their concerns. The second discusses the purpose of Latinx-identified theatre making and why the LTC champions this work. The third discusses the commons model, which I consider revolutionary and rare, but which is successfully at work in the LTC (and which, I will later argue in Chapter V, is due in part to the Latinx feminisms which align with and support this organizational method). Finally, I describe how Latin American decolonization theory, which includes the urgent concerns of Latinx in the US, also aligns with the commons model.

Who are Latinx?

Latinx is a term used to describe people of Latin American descent living in the US. The term can include people of Spanish and Mexican heritage, particularly those whose families have lived for generations in regions now known as the US, though some of Mexican heritage prefer to self-identify as Chicana/o/x. The word Latinx replaces earlier descriptors such as Latino, Hispanic,⁵ and Spanish, and is a respectful term, unlike historically derogatory monikers (not listed here) used to describe people of Latin American, Mexican, and/or Spanish descent living in the US. The word Latino uses the masculine version of the Spanish noun, ending in o, under the patriarchal assumption that it will cover all the necessary bases. Many began using the term Latino/a and Latina/o to

⁵ In the early 1990's, Diana Taylor noted that "the term Latino is often used as antagonistic to, rather than synonymous with, the term Hispanic" (5). Her point was that people who self-identified as Latino embraced their indigenous and African heritage while those who preferred the term Hispanic "often think of themselves as 'white.' European 'First Worlders'" (5).

resist the sexism inherent in the word “Latino” and to actively promote gender equity.⁶

The relatively recent evolution to “Latinx” removes the gender-binary coding inherent in the “a/o” modifier. “Latinx” is used for both singular and plural cases (Padilla). By whatever name, Latinx are not a race; it is more accurate to say we are an ethnicity comprised of myriad cultures and backgrounds, formed by syncretism, juxtaposition, fusion and resistance.

Latinx can also describe immigrants from Latin America living in the US. Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel describes this group as *hispanos* who share an overarching identity even as they can simultaneously be described distinctly. They can emerge from different locations in Latin America, reflect the phenotypical diversity of Latin American identity,⁷ and yet be identified and self-identify as *hispanos*.

The *hispano*, like every human being, lives (ex-ists) inevitably in a “world.” His/her “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger §12, 78ff) has a “world” that has subsumed “many” worlds whose histories are not chronologically simultaneous but have instead unfolded with different rhythms and in diverse places, developing distinct contents. We name the resulting horizon “being-in-the-*hispanic*-world” as a concrete, current, and complex facticity whose intercultural riches converge to form an identity. This identity is always in formation, interstitial, born in a “border land” with such a wide range that *hispanos* pass from one tonality to another continuously without ceasing to experience themselves within *hispanic* solidarity. The *hispano* can be an indigenous Guatemalan in Chicago, a Mexican *mestizo* in San Diego, a white *criollo* Uruguayan in Washington, an Afro-Caribbean Puerto-Rican in New York or Cuban in Miami, a *mulato* from the Dominican Republic in Houston, to name a few. Many worlds in one world. A world that today in the hegemonic North American society is despised, dominated, impoverished, and excluded (beyond the horizon of the acceptable *anglo* world, beyond the “line” of Heideggerean ontology, on the border where non-being, the non-sense of Levinasian alterity commences) (Dussel “Being” 262).

⁶ The Latinx Theatre Commons began as the Latino Theatre Commons but adopted the name Latina/o Theatre Commons before its first public event, the 2013 Boston Convening, and adopted Latinx Theatre Commons in 2017. These changes will be discussed in upcoming chapters.

⁷ Dussel unfortunately omits the presence of Asian-heritage Latin Americans.

Dussel ultimately defines the *hispano* in adverse circumstances, marginalized by mainstream US society to such an extent that they experience a sense of non-being: discounted, disenfranchised, diminished. This definition has merit especially within the current climate of hostility toward immigrants. It permeates the Latinx experience even generations removed from immigration. Animosity toward Latin Americans and their descendants has multiple origins, including colonial-era antagonism between England and Spain, the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War, and the Cold War. Relationships between the US and Latin America have been soured through policies including the Good Neighbor Policy⁸ and the Jones Act,⁹ with exploitative corporate presences such as the United Fruit Company,¹⁰ and covert military interventions such as in Chile, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.¹¹ A residual outcome of these imperialist projects has been a pervasive disparagement of Latin America and its descendants. The proliferation of “American” popular culture in Latin America, including film and television, concurrent with a century of political and economic upheaval in Latin

⁸ Established in 1933 by President Roosevelt, the Good Neighbor Policy implied a respectful distance between the US and Latin American nations and their respective political concerns. However, a unilateral interpretation supported US intervention in Latin America in the name of protection from threats perceived as harmful to both Latin American nations and the US.

⁹ Legislated in 1920, the Jones Act established shipping restrictions that affected US ports, including those of Puerto Rico, limiting access to US goods.

¹⁰ Formed in the US in 1899, the United Fruit Company established large agriculture zones in many parts of Central America which grew to wield enormous political as well as economic power. Protection of UFC interests led to overt and covert political interventions meant to secure policies beneficial to corporate interests.

¹¹ It has been said that the Cold War, ostensibly a battle for supremacy between the ideological capitalist system of the US and the communist system of the USSR, was actually fought in Latin America. Throughout the twentieth century, various Latin American nations, including Chile, Guatemala, and Nicaragua explored socialist and communist economic and government models, often with popular support. Perceived as threats to capitalism, the US engaged in covert operations meant to discredit and undermine such attempts, overstepping the boundaries of sovereignty.

America (often supported by capitalist-motivated US interventions), has nurtured the myths of the American Dream which, combined with US military strength and global economic power, has constructed an image of “American” superiority.

Why Latinx Theatre?

In the 1960s, in response and resistance to this oppressive ideology, theatre created by Chicanos in the southwest and Nuyoricans in the east, emerged as a tool of empowerment by which Latinx expressed cultural pride and demanded civil rights. In “Flights of the Imagination,” Gloria Anzaldúa compares the work of the artist to that of the shaman, positioned in a liminal state between what exists (as perceived) and what might exist (as imagination). For Anzaldúa, artists provide language by which the human experience can be “collectively understood” (“Flights” 39). For example, she describes the interaction between a reader and the text as an *ensueño*, an intentional enchantment and a willingness to engage with imagined realities. Theatre can be seen as a collective *ensueño*; audience members are willing participants who suspend disbelief to embrace the imagined realities presented on the stage.

Latinx theatre provides a necessary service for Latinx audience members who might otherwise not see themselves represented elsewhere in the arts and media, or who see their families, cultures, histories, and themselves represented in distorted fashion in the arts, popular media, or even a classroom. Latinx-identified cultural experiences such as theatre provide a more accurate mirror by which Latinx can know themselves, affirm their culture and values, and see themselves as valued participants in society at large.

The Latinx audience is not the only one that suffers from minimal or misinformed Latinx representation in the arts. Appropriated expressions of Latinx culture performed

without expertise can only approximate the experience at best. With few or distorted images prevailing, the non-Latinx audience's understanding of the Latinx experience is limited and inaccurate. During the 2016 Presidential election campaign, Felix Sanchez of the National Hispanic Foundation of the Arts stated:

There's a real reason why Latinos are the bogeymen of the [Donald] Trump campaign — because of a lack of understanding of who we are that creates fear. The media concepts that get developed are so one-dimensional. They're flat; they don't give you a lot of movement (M. Rodriguez).

Without experience or knowledge to the contrary, demagogic political statements, such as those painting immigrants as criminals, flourish and hold the potential to (re)generate animosity and xenophobia. The Latinx immigrant is slandered, their reputation tarnished by ignorance that builds upon centuries of perceived dominance if not hatred.

Furthermore, despite the fact that many Latinx have lived in the US for generations, some as far back as when southwestern lands were Spanish and Mexican territories, Latinx are nevertheless perceived as others, un-American, un-patriotic, and untrustworthy.

Philosopher Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes this mistrust as a function of misanthropic skepticism, in which the “other” is now obliged to explain their humanity and defend their civil rights in the face of a dominant culture that would paint them as aberrant, inferior, or “naturally” flawed (245). Distorted representations can therefore be understood as manifestations of coloniality, images created to support the superiority of the colonizer over the colonized.

It might be tempting to imagine that the battle for true representation is vain, or superficial. It is not. Myths of racial inferiority, lies which have been embedded into mainstream thought, have tragically justified a host of discriminations and abuses since

Columbus encountered the Taino Indians of the Caribbean (Taylor 55). The continuation of false perceptions serves to perpetuate the interests of those who benefit from the exploitation of labor, the appropriation of property, and the devaluation of lives (Toro 1247). Maldonado-Torres describes how coloniality builds upon misanthropic skepticism by further positioning the other as a conquered being, which validates non-ethical treatment of others by the conqueror class. If one cannot prove one's self worth, one is at risk of being subjected to war-time behavior, normalized even when there is no war (246, 248). Translated into policy, this is manifested in NYC's stop-and-frisk search procedures, or Arizona's SB-1070 legislation, that is, unconstitutional law enforcement by racial profiling, or in the "zero-tolerance" immigration policies that have resulted in the inhumane separation of children from their parents and guardians. For an audience of fearful conquerors whose judgment is compromised by ignorance, Latinx theatre can serve as one strategy to build bridges of understanding instead of walls. Accurate representations demystify Latinidad and its history, values, and cultural expressions to audiences who hold harmful misperceptions about the Latinx experience.

These mirrors and bridges are important, but also only one side of the liminality described by Anzaldúa, the representation of the *status quo*, a material reality accepted as the way things are. Anzaldúa reminds us that artists and their work also navigate the other half of the threshold, that which does not yet exist but can be imagined. Theatre, as art, invites one to imagine a different existence embodied. The impulse to create art that reflects cultural heritage starts as an act of survival, according to Western hemispheric philosopher Edouard Glissant. "Tales, proverbs, sayings, songs" appear first, he writes,

crafted orally without European literary trappings that included descriptions of location or character motivations:

Everywhere that the obligation to get around the rule of silence existed a literature was created that has no “natural” continuity... but rather bursts forth in snatches and fragments. The storyteller is a handyman, a *djobbeur* of the collective soul (69).

In other words, representative creative expression is as inevitable as speaking to confirm one’s presence. However, this expression is overshadowed by the illusion, crafted by those in power, that seeks to negate those voices.

To follow Glissant further, plantation owners and their defenders crafted literature that justified their exploitation of human beings by contrasting the gentle beauty of the landscape of the slavery against their depictions of the enslaved as inherently lascivious. However, literature emerged that defied the planters’ illusions, in a unique voice never before heard. Its expression was not just literary but musical, birthing the blues, jazz, calypso, salsa, and reggae. While Glissant describes this as memory in action, Anzaldúa might argue that this defiant expression also holds within it a vision for the future, one in which human potential and its cultural expression are given full rein to grow (71).

In a similar trajectory, modern *teatro* emerged from the voices of California *campesinos* seeking acknowledgment and justice in the mid-to-late 20th century as a cry of existence, of discontent, and of humanity in resistance to the mistreatment by the dominant class. Much as the Black Arts Movement served as the artistic voice of the Black Power Movement, *teatro* Chicano was a cultural arm of *el movimiento*. This movement began as the struggle for economic justice on behalf of the United Farm Workers but soon articulated the greater Chicano community’s desire for civil rights and social justice, including respect for cultural heritage and bilingualism, protesting unfair

criminal justice practices, and demanding improved access to higher education (Benavides).

Teatro Chicano expresses Indigenous, Mexican, and Chicano culture to remind its audiences of the power in their heritage. Employing the symbols and stories representing the interwoven cultural roots, and honoring the legacy of their ancestors in performance, the work would not only empower the individual but unite the community. Mündel quotes Luis Valdez from his introduction to *Actos*, the 1970 anthology of his early works, where he clearly articulates nationalist ideals and *teatro*'s place in the work:

Chicanos must not be reluctant to act *nationally*. To think in national terms: politically, economically and spiritually... [this will] require a couple of generations of Chicanos devoted to the use of theater as an instrument in the evolution of our people (Mündel 5).

While Valdez is a trained theatre-maker, his engagement with the art was not solely for art's sake but as a tool with which to fashion a new, unified, empowered Chicano mindset to bring about necessary social and political progress. When *teatros* Chicanos united in the TENAZ project, this epistemological shift was identified as an act of decolonization. Similarly, on the East Coast, Nuyorican spoken word poetry and theatre by artists such as Miguel Piñero and the Nuyorican Poets Café expressed self-empowerment and strength in the face of civic neglect and marginalization. Artists often spoke at rallies and events held by the Young Lords, a political party formed in 1969, which focused on providing advocacy and direct services to the underserved, predominantly Puerto Rican community of New York City. Inspired by the work of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, the Young Lords provided sanitation and health services, and breakfast programs for children (Enck-Wanzer 4). Civil rights and human services were chief among the concerns of the Young Lords, concerns eloquently voiced in the Nuyorican and Black art of the era.

As early as the mid-1970s, however, the growing visibility of Latinx culture became commodified by popular media. While still lacking meaningful representation, Latinx men were visible as pot-smokers in television shows such as *Chico and the Man* and the Cheech & Chong film, *Up in Smoke*, or as gangsters in the movies such as *Colors* and *American Me*. Latinx women were cast as maids and gang member girlfriends, exoticized even as ethnic and historical erasure ensued.¹² However, Latinx theatre also grew, developing more playwrights, directors, designers, actors, and companies around the US dedicated to reinforcing cultural expression and values, while combatting ethnic and historical erasure.

Latinx Feminisms

Included in the LTC's ethos is the recognition of the historic and damaging patriarchy in Latinx culture, by which women's leadership goes under-acknowledged. Aligning with Latinx feminist thought that emerged during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the LTC actively disrupts patriarchy in praxis as well as principles. The LTC has a majority of women participants and leadership, and all LTC Steering Committee members interviewed for this study self-identify as feminists or in alignment with feminist ideals. Their advocacy for gender equity, and other intersectional concerns including race, class, and immigration status, permeates the LTC's processes and programs.

A feminist approach is historically unusual. The LTC's predecessor, el Teatro Nacional de Aztlán, or TENAZ, was a movement primarily led by men, as was the

¹² The problematic 2011 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* and its exoticization of Latinx culture for marketing purposes spurred the creation of the LTC. This will be discussed in Chapter IV.

Chicano *movimiento*, the civil rights movement which informed the political agenda of *teatro* Chicano and TENAZ. In the efforts to empower the Chicano community, *machismo* was an ideology by which the predominantly male leadership asserted its power. Some of the criticisms leveled against TENAZ (and early Chicano theatre making) fueled Chicana feminisms, which in turn nurtured the lives and minds of the Latinas/os/x who would go on to inform the leadership, and therefore the culture, of the LTC, both materially and epistemologically. The female- and queer-identified leadership of the LTC reflects feminist ideology in action, supported in a consensual, if not unanimous, manner across the participating genders.

Latinx feminisms have intersectional principles which align with the commons model and decolonization theory; the mission and outcomes of the LTC are part of a larger effort, which can be identified as decolonization, which seeks to de-center modernity, patriarchy, Eurocentrism, and capitalism (among other hegemonic ideologies). Decolonization theory underscores the work of the LTC, as it did the work of TENAZ and Chicana/Latina feminisms (even if not explicitly), and it underscores my investigation. Further, as a movement the LTC values “Service, Radical Inclusion, Transparency, Legacy & Leadership Cultivation, and Advancement of the Art Form” by fostering an “emergent national leadership through an organic organizing method of activating our networks and expanding our circles of connection” (“Latinx Theatre Commons”; “2015Dallas”). These organic organizing methods include consensual decision-making and non-hierarchical structure, values which are grounded in a feminist meritocracy, an expectation of resource abundance rather than scarcity, and an appreciation for the strength and wisdom engendered by diversity. Within an anti-

hierarchical movement such as the LTC, these values reflect an intentional corrective (also evident in the commons model) to greed and self-interest, as well a resistance to unquestioned patriarchal hierarchies.

On the Commons

Any inquiry into the Latinx Theatre Commons would be incomplete without a discussion of the commons model upon which the movement is organized.

Fundamentally, to operate as a commons implies an agreement among commoners to take responsibility for the care and use of mutually shared resources. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt argue that there is a naturally-occurring common, i.e., “the common wealth of the material world— the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature’s bounty— which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together” (viii). However, they go further to define the naturally occurring common as a phenomenon of human socialization:

We consider the common also and more significantly those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects, and so forth. This notion of the common does not position humanity separate from nature, as either its exploiter or its custodian, but focuses rather on the practices of interaction, care, and cohabitation in a common world, promoting the beneficial and limiting the detrimental forms of the common. In the era of globalization, issues of the maintenance, production, and distribution of the common in both these senses and in both ecological and socioeconomic frameworks become increasingly central (viii).

According to political economist Massimo De Angelis, “the commons imply a plurality of people (a community) sharing resources and governing them and their own relations and (re)production processes through horizontal doing in common,” what De Angelis calls “commoning” (10). Commoning means actively participating in the management of

what is valued by the community, and it is through commoning, through the participation of commoners, that a commons thrives. The commons approach is one of radical generosity and trust. According to HowlRound co-founder P. Carl, “A commons is a place to share the resources you have and take the resources you need,” that is, commoners are trusted to share what’s in common and not draw more than their fair share (HowlRound “About”). As economist and commons advocate David Bollier describes,

Throughout the Middle Ages, the traditional use of land was the so-called open-field system, in which arable lands were unfenced and communally managed. Peasants collectively owned rights to large portions of meadow, heath, moorland, and forests, which they used to grow crops; feed geese, sheep, and cows; gather firewood and cut peat; collect honey from beehives; and raise fruit trees (“When Markets” 44).

This system of shared land resources was transformed during the 17th and 18th centuries as the English landed classes petitioned Parliament to allow seizure and land enclosure, creating private property from common held land. Economist Lewis Hyde describes how the creation of enclosures separated formerly common-held lands into privately held parcels in England: “The age of enclosures,” he writes, “ran from the early eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth. During these two hundred years, as much as one seventh of all English common land was divided up, fenced, and converted into private property in the modern sense” (29). Bollier estimates that by 1876, less than 1% of the population owned 98.5% of the agricultural land in England and Wales (“When Markets” 46). This erosion of the practice of public commoning coincided with the rise of European modernization, which supplanted communal endeavor with individual endeavor and success. In Europe and the US, the rise of mercantilism evolved into industrial capitalism, and modernization became a tool of domination, “specifically the

domination of capital, stripped of any purpose other than accumulation” (Quijano *Modernity* 146). Individual success was valued above communal success. Negri and Hardt implicate colonization for the accumulation of land that had formerly been considered common: “through a long process of enclosures the earth’s surface has been almost completely divided up between public and private property so that common land regimes, such as those of indigenous civilizations of the Americas or medieval Europe, have been destroyed” (viii).

Describing a turn away from individualistic aims toward communal ones, De Angelis asserts that “in the last few years we have witnessed several cases of alignment of social movements to the commons, a commons turn which offers great potential” (11). He includes projects such as the Occupy movement in the US, the anti-austerity Indignados movement in Spain, and the Zapatistas movement in Mexico among projects engaging with commons ideology and praxis. He writes, “there is a social revolution in the making that, if recognised and able to attract more energies from people around the world, could give us a chance to embark on a process of transformation towards postcapitalist society” (De Angelis 12). The commons challenges not merely capitalist society but neoliberal ideologies in which the well-being of the multitude is undermined for the sake of the success of a privileged few who wield the power and influence to act with impunity. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt posit that in the 1990s, the drive toward privatization, free trade, and the diminishment of trade unions went “hand in hand with U.S. dominance of global political and military affairs” (263). They go on further to accuse the rise of these policies of dominance for a host of social, political, and economic ills:

One also hears today urgent, desperate appeals for socialism or some form of government control of the economy as a result of the crises and the devastation that neoliberalism and unregulated capitalism have wrought. Capital is indeed destroying the common in both its physical and social forms at alarming rates. Climate change, resource depletion, and other ecological disasters are ever-increasing threats. Extreme social inequality, barriers and hierarchies of wealth, race, and nationality, crushing poverty, and a host of other menaces too are shattering social forms of the common (272).

The decision to operate as a commons, which could otherwise be considered a historic and outmoded model, or, one which ecologist Garret Hardin deemed inevitably doomed to fail in the face of greedy human nature, is therefore an intentional decision to operate in a non-competitive manner for the benefit of the community however it self-defines (Bollier “Reclaiming” 19; Hyde 32).

The founders of HowlRound expressed just such intentionality in response to the challenges faced by US nonprofit theatre. Many flagship companies around the country were facing an existential crisis in correlation with their financial success. Having grown in size to negotiate multimillion-dollar budgets, these companies could not produce risky, diverse, unpolished work that might undermine their bottom line. HowlRound was “formed as an experiment in creating a new kind of infrastructure for nonprofit theatre that intentionally and explicitly supports commons-based values and behavior” (Frasz and Sidford 9). In 2012, co-founders P. Carl, David Dower, Jamie Gahlon, and Vijay Mathew combined two projects, the New Play Map and the HowlRound online journal, as well as other activities, when they moved from the Arena Theatre to Emerson College in Boston, relaunching these projects under one banner, HowlRound. HowlRound, “a knowledge commons by and for the theatre community,” is the LTC’s launch platform,

fiscal sponsor, and infrastructural partner, and has philosophically guided the LTC from the beginning.

In the case of the LTC, the common resource which the LTC seeks to protect, reproduce, and share, as described by De Angelis earlier, is Latinx theatre (10). The commoners are primarily Latinx theatre makers and scholars who know well the fields they tend, and how misinformation, discrimination, and colonialism devalue the fruits of their labor, if not threaten their ability to make theatre and professionally thrive. Through the course of this dissertation, I will point out where commons model values and practices are evident. The LTC's resource and its practice are intertwined; the LTC strives to operate in a manner that reflects the transformative goals of its commoners' theatre making. This work is intentional, if imperfect, and carries broader social, political, and economic ramifications.

To this day, most mainstream politicians and economists tend to regard the commons in Hardin's sense, as an inert, unowned resource. But this framing fails to acknowledge the reality of a commons as a dynamic, evolving social activity: *commoning*. In practice, a commons consists not just of a resource, but of a *community* that manages a *resource* by devising its own *rules, traditions, and values*. All three are needed (Bollier "Transformative" 6).

A commons is created through acts of *commoning*. The origin story of the Latinx Theatre Commons begins with a generous invitation extended by playwright Karen Zacarías, supported by the HowlRound co-founders who championed the idea that operating within a commons model was revolutionary activism. Given the nature of the need for social transformation in the theatre field with regard to its problematic engagement with Latinx theatre making and theatre makers, it made sense to take on the work through an approach that defied the status quo. The commitment to the commons model would

impact all aspects of the LTC's endeavors. As mentioned earlier, the LTC defines itself as "a national movement that uses a commons-based approach to transform the narrative of the American theatre, to amplify the visibility of Latina/o/x performance making, and to champion equity through advocacy, art making, convening, and scholarship" ("Latinx Theatre Commons"). Self-identified as a movement, not an organization, the LTC is powered by volunteers and one sole employee, the Producer. Many of the individuals who gathered at the TCG lunch meetings for Latinx theatre makers have participated in the LTC, building upon a shared desire to strengthen the Latinx theatre making field, to serve theatre makers, audiences, and the field at large. Since its inception, LTC participants have shared personal resources, including expertise and professional clout, and secured material support from their affiliated institutions or philanthropic foundations to sustain the LTC's work. Such shared contribution aligns with the commons model espoused by HowlRound. This research then, looks at how commoning is enacted in the LTC, guided by the principles of Latinx feminisms, toward decolonization.

Latin American Decolonization

While the commons model as described by Bollier (2002, 2015), De Angelis (2017), Hardt and Negri (2009) and Helfrich and Bollier (2019) traces its origins to Europe, its values and practice also align with Latin American modernity and decolonization theory illuminated by Latin American philosophers Enrique Dussel (2004, 2009), Maria Lugones (2003), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), and Anibal Quijano (2007).

Decolonization is the intentional transformation of the way social, political, and economic processes are viewed and ultimately carried out. In this case the status quo reflects the impact of European hegemony, and later that of the United States, on Latin Americans and Latinx. Decolonization is the process of de-centering discursive, epistemological, and affective elements of colonization that have contributed to continued inequity and domination. Maldonado-Torres provides a succinct definition of the legacy of colonization and how decolonization is tool for liberation:

With decolonization I do not have in mind simply the end of formal colonial relations, as it happened throughout the Americas in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. I am instead referring to a confrontation with the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place or strengthened by European modernity as it colonized and enslaved populations through the planet. In short, with decolonization I am thinking of oppositions to the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being (261).

As a movement, the LTC is striving to elevate the presence of Latinx theatre making (and by extension, the Latinx community and its concerns) in the dominant culture field of the American theatre. The racial, gender and sexual hierarchies that Maldonado-Torres refers to are the values championed by the dominant Eurocentric culture: whiteness, maleness (within a binary understanding of gender), heteronormativity, patriarchy, and Eurocentrism itself. Along with these hierarchies come the systems which gave rise to them, particularly capitalism which, according to Anibal Quijano, allowed Eurocentric modernity to spread globally (“Coloniality”). The Eurocentric brand of modernity, as later expressed in the United States, was informed by the economic system which defined race in relation to work and employment status. “Blacks” were enslaved, “Whites” earned wages, and the Indigenous did not participate in modern society. Quijano goes on to describe how, in the Americas, the many diverse nations of indigenous became merged

into one single identity called Indians. According to Quijano, “This new identity was racial, colonial, and negative. The same happened with the peoples forcefully brought from Africa as slaves: Ashantis, Yorubas, Zulus, Congos, Bacongos, and others. In the span of three hundred years, all of them were Negroes or blacks” (“Coloniality” 552).

Ultimately, these non-European peoples and their corresponding cultures were devalued. “The conquered and dominated peoples were situated in a natural position of inferiority and, as a result, their phenotypic traits as well as their cultural features were considered inferior” (“Coloniality” 535). This informs the center-periphery model in which Eurocentric values reside at the center of society’s concerns and all others reside at its periphery. Quijano describes how the center-periphery model functions:

Intersubjective and cultural relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world were codified in a strong play of new categories: East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern—Europe and not Europe. Even so, the only category with the honor of being recognized as the other of Europe and the West was “Orient”—not the Indians of America and not the blacks of Africa, who were simply “primitive” (“Coloniality” 542).

In this model, the so-called western, civilized, scientific, rational, and modern versions of European political, social, and economic processes are deemed superior and desirable. Non-Europeans, whose values are identified as non-Western, primitive, magic/mythic, or irrational, are considered by nature, inferior. In Spanish-colonized America, these biases became evident in the social stratification charts that determined privilege and access to positions of power and influence. European Spaniards, those born on the Iberian Peninsula had the highest ranking, and were granted the most rights and privileges, including land ownership, military offices, and government positions (Chavez-Dueñas, et al. 7).

With this understanding of the rise and impact of Eurocentric modernity in the Americas in mind, I turn to focus on the Latinx community. We are the inheritors of Latin American culture and thought, including Eurocentric bias, which has been transplanted and/or translated within the context of the United States. Whether or not one considers oneself an immigrant, or someone whose family has lived on this land for generations, or even someone connected to the land from indigenous heritage, the legacy of Eurocentrism has wielded a defamatory weapon upon the Latinx body, mind, and spirit. This defamation serves not only to support mistrust and discrimination from non-Latinx, but to work affectively on the Latinx psyche. As Franz Fanon laments, “As though it were possible for a man to evolve otherwise than within the framework of a culture that recognises him and that he decides to assume” (Bhabha 111). Within the Eurocentric sphere of power and influence, Latinx are peripheral and worse, grow to believe that the margin of society is their rightful place, that they are, in fact, marginal people. Evoking an intersectional perspective, Maria Lugones expands the description of those whom she calls *los marginales*, to:

[M]ostly folks of color, with and without “papers,” with and without housing of any sort, permanently out of jobs, young and old, women and men, queer, battered women and children who “left him” to live in America’s streets, the raped, the violated, those left out of any of the “social” goods produced by and for more stable folk (230).

Maldonado-Torres argues that the concerns of historically marginal people do not trouble those whose concerns and identity are central to society, because it is doubtful that *los marginales* can be considered people at all. Marginal people engage with what Eurocentric thought deems as mythic therefore they are thought to lack the capacity to think clearly. Indeed, Spanish colonists labeled the Indigenous *gente sin razón* (literally,

people without reason) and, doubting their humanity, justified expedient labor that could be worked like beasts of burden. Maldonado-Torres deepens the implications; if *los marginales* lack the capacity to think clearly, do they even exist? He considers the famous Cartesian proof of existence: ‘Cogito, ergo sum,’ I think, therefore I am. By Maldonado-Torres’s reckoning, “Beneath the ‘I think’ we can read ‘others do not think’, and behind the ‘I am’ it is possible to locate the philosophical justification for the idea that ‘others are not’” (252). Those who do not think, *gente sin razón*, and *marginales*, also do not exist.

Maldonado-Torres uses the term, *damné*, to identify those who do not exist in Eurocentric society, and insists that those in the center of society have no need to change their ideology, as maintaining the status quo supports capitalist gains. Instead, Maldonado-Torres places the work of liberation, of visibility, of existence, squarely on the shoulders of the *damné*.

Lugones shares Maldonado-Torres urgency that the work of liberation emerges from bodies of *los marginales*, rather than from the top down. This is clearly reflected in the work of *teatro Chicano* and TENAZ, which brought *teatros* together to share their aesthetic strategies. This work was a cultural invigoration, a centering, of all that was otherwise considered marginal, peripheral, non-European, mythic, unscientific, earth-toned, spiritual, traditional, humane, and socialist. The creative acts that celebrated Mexican American heritage were not superficial gesture; their existence implied the possibility of a transformed society in which this heritage and identity might exist centrally. As Gloria Anzaldúa expressed, “Fantasy is not just a way to cope with, correct, or supplement reality. A dream/fantasy frees you from the confines of daily time and

space, from your habitual identity” (“Flights” 37). Indeed, culturally identified art functions in multiple registers to re-center the *marginales* and re-humanize the *damné*.

Decolonization is also an anti-capitalistic and anti-hierarchic practice, a rejection of the power differentials created by colonialism. According to Anibal Quijano, the goal of Latin American modernity, rooted in Andean ideologies of reciprocity and solidarity, was to promote human liberation as it emerged from its colonial history.¹³ Quijano describes indigenous Andean social institutions as models which were “established around reciprocity, solidarity, the control of chance, and the joyous intersubjectivity of collective work and communion with the world” (142). Therefore, while the commons is primarily considered a European model, its values and practice also align with pre-encounter Andean thought. This notion is, in itself, a decolonizing perspective that goes beyond the scope of this study, but I offer it as a bit of food for thought.

Methodology to *Testimonio*

In this study, I employ an arc of four interconnected lenses through which to review the work of the LTC: the legacy of TENAZ as impetus, the rise of Latinx feminisms as ideological compass, the structure of the commons model, and the overarching necessity of decolonization as mission. My point of departure is the history of TENAZ, the first Latinx-identified theatre movement that emerged out of the desire to better represent US Chicanx and Latinx voices and concerns. The mission and methods of TENAZ have informed the strategies of the LTC. Latinx feminisms is the primary

¹³ This brings to mind the Iroquois Confederation, an alliance and functioning democracy of six indigenous nations, the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscaroras. Centered in the region now known as New York State and New England, this centuries-old functioning democracy inspired Benjamin Franklin to write numerous tracts that influenced the foundation of the united colonies (Feathers).

critical/theoretical lens through which my study of the LTC will proceed, as empowered Latinas/x, including professional artists, emerging practitioners, scholars, and producers, lead the efforts of the Latinx Theatre Commons within an environment conducive to feminist praxis. Thirdly, LTC's methods will be reviewed against recent literature on commons and commoning that has inspired HowlRound co-founders in the formation and praxis of their knowledge commons. Finally, both the LTC's mission – to transform the dominant narrative of the US theatre field – and its organization as a commons – with its commitment to shared resources and transparency – are firmly based in non-Eurocentric, non-capitalistic, and non-hierarchical principles, and as such are examples of decolonizing practice. I will analyze whether the LTC, as a non-masculinist, decolonizing project, has worked so effectively because the active engagement of so many Latinx feminists aligns productively with its commons model.

I write through archive and repertoire, by accessing records that have documented TENAZ, the rise of Chicana and Latina feminisms during the late twentieth century, and the work of the LTC, as well as through interviews with over twenty participants and leaders of both TENAZ and the LTC. Some of the LTC meeting notes which span the period from 2012 through 2019 will identify speakers by name, others simply list the ideas, questions, decisions, and/or next steps without individual attribution. The decentralization of note taking means the record of the LTC will have shared and, in many cases, anonymous authorship. With multiple pens writing the LTC's process, decisions, and actions, authority belongs to more than one person, inherently penning the identity of the commons.

My first impulse to chronicle this movement was to simply provide a history of events. It quickly became clear that I could not do so without revealing my personal bias. I am an original member of the LTC's Steering Committee and, recently moved on to the LTC's Advisory Committee though I am still engaged in some initiatives and subcommittees. I have participated in the LTC's work since the beginning (even if informally, through my response to Sonera's questions for the DC-8 meeting), and as a theatre-maker who has been a practitioner and champion of Latina/o/x theatre for years prior to the launch of the LTC. I decided to treat my lived experience, my bias, and my opinions, as theory. Inspired by First Nations scholar Dian Million, who champions the validity of "felt knowledge" as scholarship, I include personal statements throughout the dissertation, but most notably in Chapter IV (66). I offer my memories, recount my experiences with LTC events and processes, noting the ways in which the LTC's activities felt revolutionary, or just special, to me. By design, these passages will embrace a conversational tone that will contrast with the more dispassionate bulk of this dissertation.

The second consideration, challenging the idea to simply chronicle the LTC's activities from 2012 to 2019, emerged from my observation that women had done much of the heavy lifting for the movement. I learned through conversations with other Steering Committee members of all genders that I was not alone in perceiving women's significant contributions to the movement. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of women's participation was celebrated rather than resented (as had occurred during the Chicano *movimiento* of the 1970s). There were many accounts, via *testimonios*, of women whose participation in the *movimiento* had been discounted, who were assigned

domestic or secretarial tasks while men asserted themselves in positions of leadership (Muñoz). Chicana feminists had been accused of being traitors to the *causa*, of being inspired by white feminists who were perceived as members of the oppressive class. If any such sexist mistrust exists in the LTC, it is under wraps as far as I can see.

Nevertheless, despite anti-feminist attitudes found in the Chicano movement and its *teatro*, there was much to celebrate about the work of *teatro* Chicano, TENAZ, and the *movimiento*. The movement and its artistic output inspired community action, political activism, and creative expression that reclaimed cultural beauty in defiance of mainstream norms, toward empowerment of the Chicano community. In this it found alignment with Latin American decolonization theory.

The chapters that follow are informed by the philosophical and historical frames discussed above in order to build my argument that LTC constitutes a significant movement in American theatre, one that revised how all theatre makers and scholars tell the story of who we are. Chapter II is an overview of the Teatro Nacional de Aztlán (TENAZ), the forerunner of the LTC. TENAZ began as a Chicano-identified affiliation of *teatro* activists, whose decolonizing work was aligned with the socio-economic goals of the Chicano *movimiento* of 1960s and '70s. The history of TENAZ reveals the necessity and perhaps inevitability of the LTC. TENAZ promoted the craft and dissemination of *teatro* and sought to create a unified, national Chicano-Latino theatre. TENAZ wrapped up in the early 1990s, but as with all marginalized communities, there was still work left to be done in order to realize their vision. I describe TENAZ's principles and practices in terms of the LTC's four guiding tenets: Convening, Advocacy, Scholarship and Art making, to begin to describe the legacy of TENAZ in the work of the

LTC. The work of the LTC has roots in the historic oppression of Latinx and Chicana people of the US, and as such its work is ultimately not only about theatre making, also about transforming the way Latinx are represented and treated in this country.¹⁴

Chapter III describes the rise of Latina/x feminisms in the latter part of the 20th century, including a description of its roots in colonial Latin America. The Spanish colonial tradition of patriarchy was in evidence in the work of TENAZ. While plenty of women participated in TENAZ as an extension of the commitment to *el movimiento*, their work was rarely acknowledged as leadership. In response, many Chicana/Latina activists articulated their experiences with patriarchal oppression through their creative writing, visual art, and performance. In turn, these creative expressions, and the scholarship and relational interventions about them, influenced a generation of younger Latinx, including the leaders of the LTC, who credit these works for the formation of their feminist identities and ideologies as well as their empowerment. The feminist expressions of the late twentieth century informed and transformed Latinx society writ large, creating the environment necessary to support both the challenge to patriarchy and the commons model of the LTC.

Chapter IV is the story of the LTC thus far, how the movement came into existence, and its activities and rationales from 2012 to 2019. It describes how the legacy of TENAZ, its mission, ceremony, and education, are foundational and visible in the LTC. The LTC is predominantly volunteer-run, and it works in a uniquely non-hierarchical way, fueled by passion, access, resources, expertise, and commitment. With

¹⁴ While the word “Latinx” is used throughout the dissertation, this term was not in use during the twentieth century, so the terms Chicano, Chicana, Chicana/o, and Latino/a will prevail throughout Chapter II and wherever they accurately represent history.

this ethos of sharing resources, communication, and service, the LTC can be said to operate as a commons model. As with Chapter II, this chapter includes a review of the LTC's activities through the lens of its Four Tenets: Convening, Scholarship, Advocacy, and Art making. The chapter closes with a report from the most recent strategic planning meeting which has set the stage for the LTC's next round of activities.

Chapter V reviews the activities and methodologies of the LTC through the lens of Latinx feminisms discussed in Chapter III. The impact of Latinx feminisms is clearly visible in the numbers of women participants represented in the Steering Committee; the presence of women is also manifested in the LTC initiatives and programs, as artists, authors and educators. However, the LTC's praxis also responds to the demands articulated by Chicana/Latina feminists of the late twentieth century. Intersectional, non-hierarchical, and radically inclusive priorities identified in Chicana/Latina feminisms have shaped the practices of meeting, communicating, and decision-making that have facilitated the movement's work. Further, this chapter points to how Latinx feminist praxis aligns and supports the commons model and decolonization.

One challenge with the commons model is that it is sometimes difficult to ascertain which person did what action, throughout the LTC's history. As opposed to a hierarchical model with a clearly defined chain of command, the LTC, as a commons, takes credit communally for its activities and achievements. In certain cases, I intentionally mirrored this practice, to follow the LTC's praxis. However, this means names are sometimes omitted from the body of this document. I have attempted to address these lacunae, which threaten the erasure of names from the record, by adding the names of champions, co-champions, and committee members, as best as I could ascertain

from the archive of event programs and LTC files, to Appendix A which lists the history of LTC programs.

A Personal Note

This study is a work of love born of personal relationships and history. The LTC changed my life and aligned my Latinx theatre making focus, which is attached to my questions about identity and belonging, with my desire for my work to be meaningful, to help make the planet a better place. My questions about identity are tied to my self-worth. I grew up always feeling like an outsider, like someone whose family didn't quite fit in. I didn't feel "American" even though both my parents and eventually my grandmother became naturalized citizens. I love my family (and once beat up my next-door neighbor for making fun of my grandmother's accent) but I struggled with our difference. My father said as much: he would raise me according to his ways, not anyone else's. My friends' families seemed so much cooler than mine; they understood the rules of America. I felt like I needed to learn what it meant to be American in order to be accepted, and by American, I now mean Unitedstatesian. Back then, America was the USA, and the gold standard. My friends' families, the families and relationships I saw on tv, the foods, the values and norms, the interior design, the heroes, all of these were elements of predominantly mainstream culture, even if, in New York City, the legacy of African American, Jewish, Italian, and Irish culture pervaded. R&B, pizza, matzoh ball soup, and the St. Patrick's Day Parade were all American to me, while my "Latin" heritage was outsider, exotic.

Working in Latinx theatre has given me a way to weave my culture into the fabric of US culture. In Portland, Oregon, where Latinx make up only 12% of the population, I was grateful for the appreciation that others felt for our stories, cultural traditions, and diversities. But I was also frustrated by the lack of resources that seemed to inevitably accompany this work. I could always make do, but I realized that this wasn't just a small theatre thing. I was a pervasive condition of creating ethnically identified theatre. So many of these companies have been around for decades, often still led by their founders (often families), committed to their missions of sharing their cultures and identities through the art of theatre.

The LTC has helped me to challenge that status quo, the under-resourced conditions, the exploitation of our decades-long labor refining our art making, and the under-representation in our scholarship, as an individual and in the commons. But more broadly, the LTC has challenged me to think about what's important, culturally, globally, and personally, through what I now see as its insistence on being a Latinx feminist, decolonizing, commons movement. I have grown as I have watched and participated in the growth of the LTC.

CHAPTER II

TENAZ

What is a movement? It is when there are enough people with one idea so that their actions are together like a huge wave of water which nothing can stop. It is when a group of people begin to care enough so that they are willing to make sacrifices... It is when the silent hopes of many people begin to become a real part of life – Steiner.

American historian Stan Steiner's definition of a movement was included in *Aztlán, An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*, a collection he co-edited with *teatro* Chicano leader Luis Valdez. Steiner was writing about the Chicano movement in 1972, but his words also describe the contemporary work of the Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC). This is because the LTC has taken up the work of resistance against hegemonic cultural forces at work in the mainstream field of "American" theatre. These contemporary forces are, in turn, the legacy of the discriminatory socioeconomic entities that the Chicano *movimiento* rallied against in the twentieth century. The *movimiento* made strides in this work. Both *teatro* Chicano and El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán (TENAZ) were projects of activism and empowerment through theatre. But more work remained to be done, and in the twenty first century, the LTC arose to advance that work.

The LTC emerged out of a frustration with underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Latinx culture, history, theatre, and theatre-makers in the mainstream theatre field. Even in the early twenty-first century, after fifty years of professional development, Latinx plays were still routinely omitted from mainstage season selections at regional flagship theatres (Tran). The plays that were produced often

suffered from a lack of dramaturgical accuracy,¹⁵ because the teams hired to produce these works were often unfamiliar with their cultural grounding. Latinx were rarely found in positions of leadership at well-resourced theatres, and in academia, Latina/o theatre was still not a topic of study at institutions of higher education. In the early twenty-first century, this began to change.

During annual Theatre Communications Group (TCG) conferences, a group of Latinx theatre makers began to meet in lunchtime gatherings to get to know each other better and share our achievements, struggles, and mutual support. In 2011, Latino Theatre Company co-founders Jose Luis Valenzuela and Evelina Fernandez relocated the TCG conference lunch meeting to a post-conference gathering at the LA Theatre Center. Significantly, Valenzuela and Fernandez were both *veteranos* of TENAZ and the Chicano movement. They had attended several of the groundbreaking TENAZ conferences that brought together Chicano and Latino theatre makers together, and they understood firsthand the power of in-person convening. The 2011 meeting lasted several hours, demonstrating the necessity and desire for a greater national conversation among Latinx theatre makers, the sort of engagement that had been lacking since the years of the Hispanic Playwrights Project, the Latino Theatre Initiative, and TENAZ.

In this chapter I will relate the history of TENAZ, the Chicano and Latino theatre-making movement, based on first-hand accounts by participants such as Valenzuela, Fernandez, and Valdez, as well as published primary and secondary sources. My intention is to show how TENAZ is the foundation for the LTC, in essence the shoulders upon which the LTC stands. Within this recounting I will also reflect on Latin American

¹⁵ See: *In the Heights* (Peterson); *Talking Broadway Review: Anna in the Tropics* (Murray); and “THEATER REVIEW: Diversionary Comedy 'Latina' Misses the Mark” (Kragen).

decolonization ideology which developed formally after 1990 by theorists including Santiago Castro-Gómez (2007), Enrique Dussel (2009), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), Anibal Quijano (1993, 2000), and Chela Sandoval (2000). These theorists did not directly influence TENAZ, but decolonization was boldly articulated in the TENAZ IV Teatro Chicano Festival Manifesto – 1973:

DESCOLONIZACION/ En este Festival, queremos que nuestro espíritu aprenda a ser mas colectivo, mas unido. Trazar nuestro propio camino en el campo del Teatro, de la Cultura, *y no, que nos trazan [sic] el camino desde Europa o de otras metrópolis*. Somos trabajadores del Teatro y la Cultura. Es necesario entender esta definición, discutirla y practicarla, para que la gente sepa que estamos y luchamos por los trabajadores. Ser un trabajador del Teatro es una iluminación, que nos permite ver que no somos del Sistema. Un trabajador de la Cultura, es un pensamiento humilde frente al arte, frente a la vida; pero, a la vez, es un orgullo pertenecer a los trabajadores que construyen el mundo del futuro (Martinez 288, italics mine).¹⁶

As articulated later by Dussel, Quijano and Maldonado-Torres, the call for decolonization includes the rejection of hegemonic European influence. Additionally, TENAZ and the LTC share the commitment to transform how Chicanos and Latinx are perceived, represented, and treated in the US. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres writes:

The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the ‘invisible’ people themselves. Indeed, one must recognize their intellectual production as thinking – not only as culture or ideology (262).

Maldonado-Torres argues that narrative of erasure within systemic oppression must be

¹⁶ DECOLONIZATION: In this Festival, we want our spirit to learn to be more collective, more united. To carve our own path in the field of Theater, of Culture, *and not have our path traced from Europe or from other metropolises*. We are workers of Theater and of Culture. It is necessary to understand this definition, to discuss and practice it, so that people know that we exist and fight for the workers. Being a Theater worker is an illumination, which allows us to see that we do not belong to the System. A culture worker is but a humble thought in the face of art, in the face of life; but, at the same time, it is an honor to belong to the workers who build the world of the future (italics mine).

told by the oppressed and heard *as knowledge* by the oppressors. TENAZ was, and the LTC is, a cultural movement committed to this kind of work, to supporting the artists who strive to illuminate untold stories with the goal of transforming an inequitable society, rooted in colonialism, toward justice.

The Roots of the LTC

El movimiento, the Chicano liberation movement, was a cultural and political effort to unify the Mexican American community during its struggle for economic, labor, legal, and educational justice. Similar to the social justice and anti-war movements of the 1960s and 70s, *el movimiento* included activities such as walk-outs, marches, and worker strikes to build awareness, foster participation, and create social change. One of the most important ways to rally support for *la causa*¹⁷ was by instilling pride in Mexican American heritage and cultural identity through the arts. Chela Sandoval identifies this creative production as a way to raise “differential consciousness,” the awareness of inequity within one’s sociopolitical circumstances. According to Sandoval, following Roland Barthes, differential consciousness is “accessed through poetic modes of expression: gestures, music, images, sounds, words that plummet or rise through signification to find some void — some no-place — to claim their due” (157). These poetic modes defy the identity that is cast as second-class, undeserving of the same rights and opportunities as any other American. Culturally identified music, murals, and theatre flourished with *el movimiento*, celebrating Mexican heritage, and uniting people through shared experience. A new genre of agit-prop theatre emerged, known as *teatro* Chicano.

¹⁷ Literally, “the cause”, another term for the Chicano movement.

Bilingual and culturally informed, *teatro* Chicano placed social, political, and economic concerns of its audiences on stage, as acknowledgement and incitement to activism.

At the forefront of this new theatre was El Teatro Campesino (ETC), the farmworkers' theatre, founded by Luis Valdez in 1965 to promote unionization (Huerta "Concerning" 13). ETC's short works, known as *actos*, embodied and reflected the farmworkers' working conditions, the relationships with their bosses and the benefits of creating a strong union (Pottlitzer 17). As more Chicano youth entered institutions of higher education and their political consciousness expanded, new *teatros* Chicanos were formed, modeled after ETC to reinforce their cultural identity within an educational system that otherwise encouraged assimilation with dominant culture.

"American" History

A cursory history of Latinx, particularly Mexican Americans, in the US illuminates the sociopolitical dynamics that led to political activism of the 1960s. The presence of Spanish-speaking Americans in the Southwest of the United States dates back to late sixteenth century Spanish explorers, who charted the territories that included the present US states of California, Nevada, and Utah, and parts of Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Viceroyalty of New Spain extended to include the areas of current day Texas, Oregon, Washington, Florida, and parts of Idaho, Oklahoma, and Louisiana. Colonizing efforts grew in intensity as Spain claimed Alta California for its missions and secular settlements. However, in 1864, Mexico ceded all lands north of the Rio Grande to the US through the Treaty of Guadalupe that ended the Mexican-American War. More than one hundred years of

second-class citizenship in the southwestern US followed. Unitedstatesians became the new colonizers of the region, and the Mexicans, Indigenous, and Afrodescendents who were already Hispanicized into the racial hierarchy of the *casta* system became members of a large underclass. Although they were deemed *persona non grata*, Mexicans and people of Mexican descent thrived amid the change of dominant culture, language, and laws, as well as outright dispossession of their properties. As Chicana have wryly stated, “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us.”¹⁸ This political and economic sea-change was reinforced by abusive discrimination policies institutionalized in the education system, which forced erasure of heritage languages, whether Spanish, Tagalog (an official language of the Philippines), Indigenous, or other, in favor of English.

The markers of skin color and heritage-based cultural practices identified brown people as outsiders and inferior to the dominant Anglo culture. Homi Bhabha reflects this as the residue of colonialism by which “the difference of the object of discrimination is at once visible and natural—colour as the cultural/political *sign* of inferiority or degeneracy, skin as its natural ‘*identity*’” (114). Phenotypical markers including skin color determined the status of one’s humanity, whether one could even be considered fully human. According to Maldonado-Torres, “Some identities depict superiority over others. And such superiority is premised on the degree of humanity attributed to the identities in question. The ‘lighter’ one’s skin is, the closer to full humanity one is, and viceversa [sic]” (244). Santiago Castro-Gómez describes this as the coloniality of power, “specifically the idea that the colonizer possesses an ethnic and cognitive superiority over

¹⁸ Mexican residents continued to reside in formerly Mexican territories despite institutionalized discrimination that accompanied the establishment of the US government. In the late twentieth century, the unattributed saying, “we didn’t cross the border, the border crossed us,” became a popular slogan for immigrant rights activism (D’Amato).

the colonized” (428). By this standard, the predominantly *mestizo* people of Mexican descent living in the Southwest region of the US, and their cultural production, were considered inferior.

In addition to the people of Mexican heritage who were already living in the territories that became part of the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, the number of Mexican nationals and their descendants in the US increased through migration. Exact numbers are difficult to verify; however, it is estimated that 100,000 Mexican nationals were living in the US in 1900. With the onset of the Mexican Revolution that number doubled to 220,000 in 1910, and again to 478,000 in 1920. It is estimated that by 1930, the population of people of Mexican origin or Mexican descent in the US rose to at least 1.5 million (Gutiérrez 54). Despite this growth, ensuing generations of students were not taught Mexican American history, culture, or legacy in US schools (Moraga 170; Sarabia and Price 639-630; Rochin). Enrique Dussel sees this as a self-protecting move, one that reinforces white supremacy. “It would be difficult for an elementary school, high school, university, labor union, or religious group to demonstrate to the *hispano* an existence so rich and ancient and with such present potential,” he writes; “The *anglo* zealously defends his/her cultural, political, and religious superiority” (“Being” 261). Without knowledge and respect for one’s own cultural legacy, white American culture emerges as superior.

During WWII, as millions of men left the US to fight overseas, the US government installed the Bracero program (from a colloquial term for a manual laborer), providing special visas for agriculture workers from Mexico to take up jobs on US farms. Post-war, many of these workers continued to live in the US, and the farm owners, *los*

patrones, did not object to this racialized and transitory labor force. The population of Mexican Americans grew, but the identification of brown people as "foreigners" was extended even to families who had lived in the Southwest for many generations, even to those whose ancestors had lived in the region well before first contact with Europeans.

The United Farmworkers (UFW)

Migrant farmworkers, predominantly people who were of Mexican and Philippine heritage, worked long hours in backbreaking work, were paid meager wages, and lived in temporary housing with poor conditions. As pesticides became part of the agricultural arsenal for improved productivity, farmworkers were subjected to toxic sprays that increased respiratory problems, disease, and eventually, birth defects. Migrant farmworkers traveled according to the harvest of the crops, for example, migrating from Texas through California heading north to Oregon and Washington, east to Idaho, and then back south again to start the annual cycle over again. Along the route, children were pulled from classroom to classroom and then encouraged to join their parents in the fields in order to contribute to the family's survival, rather than continue their education.

Dolores Huerta, a teacher, having watched these undereducated, malnourished, sickly children in her classroom for years, decided to quit her job and dedicate herself to creating change in the farmworker's work and life conditions. She met César Chávez and together they created the UFW in 1959, with the goal of unionizing the farmworkers. Once they were organized as a bloc, farmworkers were able to make demands upon their employers for better wages and working conditions. In addition to raising the visibility of

the farmworkers' plight and uniting the community, this activism, by example, effectively launched what became known as *el movimiento* (literally, "the movement").

Chicanas/os around the Southwest, predominantly youth, realized that their working conditions, their inability to access higher education, and the disdain and discrimination from the Anglo community that they had come to regard as normal life, were institutionalized conditions that could be changed. The National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver in 1969 and other gatherings increased visibility for issues of concern including the discrimination experienced in criminal justice, education, health services, and other areas of society. Student-run clubs such as MEChA (the acronym for the *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*, or, the student movement of Chicanos of Aztlán) mobilized youth throughout the southwestern states of the US to challenge historic patterns of social inequality. Chicano/as organized themselves around the regional efforts such as the Colorado Crusade for Justice and the Raza Unida Party in Texas, among others.

El movimiento became a force for social change which also drew heavily from artistic expression to inspire, articulate, and empower the participants (García 1997). Cultural expressions, including music, dance, murals, engraving, and theater, celebrated the beauty of ethnic traditions and Mexican heritage counteracting the negative messages inscribed by more than a century of Anglo dominance. This empowering celebration of culture exemplified what Chela Sandoval identifies as *decolonial love*, "a 'breaking' through whatever controls in order to find 'understanding and community': it is described as 'hope' and 'faith' in the potential goodness of some promised land; it is defined as Anzaldúa's *coatlicue* state, which is a 'rupturing' in one's everyday world that permits

crossing over to another” (157). In this context, love is consciousness raising through cultural activism, an awakening of deep appreciation, combined with the vulnerability that love demands to envision, engender, and embrace better realities.

The unifying ideology which framed the work of organizing the community through culturally informed protest, education, and creative expression became known as *Chicanismo*. The work, literature, and art of the Chicano *movimiento* can be considered postcolonial, argues Rafael Pérez-Torres, given the alignment, if not solidarity, with African American, Native American, Latin American, and other global efforts by those who strive to define themselves beyond the dominant, colonial discourses (qtd. in Tatum). Postcolonialism acknowledges the vestiges of colonialism still at work after the “departure” of colonial forces. The next step is decolonization, the work of dismantling harmful structures and persistent colonial ideologies that survive in external as well as internal (self) manifestations.

In his article, *On the Coloniality of Being*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres creates a new category in order to accurately describe “the effects of coloniality in lived experience” as a transformation that occurs within the subjugated consciousness (242). Maldonado-Torres references Heidegger’s definition of the human being, *dasein*, or, “simply the being who is there” (250). In contrast, the colonized, considered non-human, is therefore “not there” or, in Maldonado-Torres’ terms, *damné* (253). The *damné* has no potential, nothing to offer, nor the ability to receive. According to Maldonado-Torres, decolonialization, the reclamation of humanity by the marginalized and the overthrow of coloniality as the governing principles of society, must be enacted by the *damné*.

El Teatro Campesino and the *Teatro Chicano* Movement

El Teatro Campesino (ETC) was founded in 1965 by Luis Valdez, who intentionally invited farmworkers to generate and perform theatre. Valdez had worked alongside his farm-working family in California, but he left the fields to pursue higher education. At San Jose State University, Valdez was inspired by theatre models such as the work of Bertolt Brecht and the agit-prop theatre of the 1930s (Copelin 74). He was also inspired by the Mexican theatre that had emerged from the Revolution, the touring *carpa* theatre tradition, and Federico García Lorca's touring company *La Barraca* (Pottlitzer 16; L. Valdez). After university, he joined the San Francisco Mime Troupe to engage in their politically fueled theatre making. In 1965, when the UFW's Great Grape Boycott and workers' strike broke out, he left the Mime Troupe and went to Delano to see how he could support the UFW with theatre, which led to the creation of ETC (Huerta "Agit-Prop" 45). Valdez brought his experience as an actor, director, and playwright, skills he had honed at the university and merged the influences of Brecht, Lorca, and *carpa* with the agit-prop and commedia dell'arte-based techniques he acquired working with the San Francisco Mime Troupe. Rather than trained actors, Valdez recruited and trained farmworkers for ETC. He famously created *actos*, short bilingual sketches notable for a broad performance style which suited their venues; outdoors, on the flatbeds of pickup trucks in the middle of a field, or indoors, at UFW rally halls. By 1968, ETC was touring California from San Jose to Los Angeles (Huerta "Evolution" 4).

The themes of ETC's *actos* embodied and reflected the farmworkers' working conditions, the relationships with their bosses and the benefits of creating a strong union (Pottlitzer 17). During its early years, ETC focused on demonstrating alternatives to the

conditions that sustained poverty and racism in the lives of California farmworkers (Mündel 2). The UFW was promoted in entertaining ways; quickly, boldly, humorously, and in the vernacular of the audience; the elements of agit-prop theatre were enhanced by Chicano culture (Kanellos “Hispanic Theatre” 198). ETC toured the *actos* with Chávez and Dolores Huerta as they traveled around California and other western states organizing the labor force. In the midst of an environment that otherwise devalued people of Mexican heritage and exploited their labor, ETC provided their community audiences a source of joy and empowerment as they built awareness about the UFW through these short comedic skits that were as accessible as they were activist.

The iconic performances inspired other Chicanos, especially students, to take up

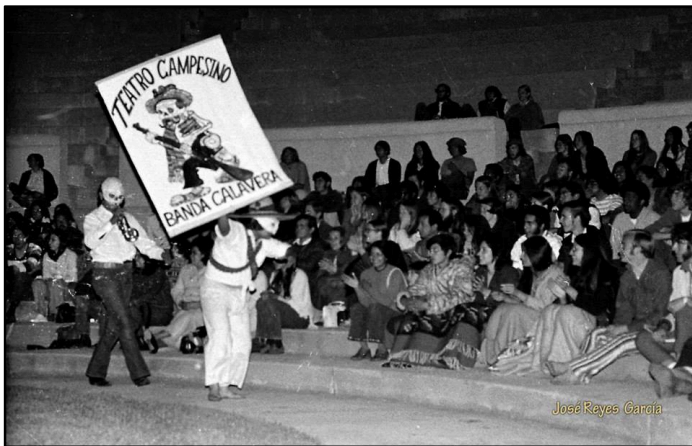


Figure 1 1970 Occidental College, Los Angeles County. Teatro Campesino photo by Jose Reyes Garcia (J. Gomez).

teatro as an artistic manifestation of their social and political aims.

In the late 1960s, Chicanas/os were enrolling in institutions of higher education in greater numbers than ever before.

Politicized students formed

MEChA groups in their

universities and colleges. The concept of Aztlán, the legendary land of origin of the Aztecs, helped to unite and empower the community. Situated in the swath of the land that stretches from Texas through the Southwest up to northern California, this ancestral homeland provided activists the basis upon which to enact *el movimiento*, the movement for Chicano social justice. The celebration of heritage, combined with the assertion that

Chicanos stood upon the land of their birthright, fueled the philosophy of *chicanismo*. This cultural nationalism rooted in indigenous identity sparked artistic imagination and redefined identity for many (Simpson). The Chicano *movimiento*, as defined by Carlos Muñoz, Jr., was “a quest for a new identity and political power” (26).

Concurrently, Luis Valdez developed a new methodology for creating ETC’s work which was rooted in ancient Mayan philosophy (Morales 14). This increased connection to indigenous heritage resonated well with the work of *el movimiento*, which found empowerment in these roots of identity. As Chicano historian Jorge Huerta¹⁹ stated at the time, “The Chicano movement is in need of some sort of spiritual guidance, and teatros may be the source of that guidance for many Chicanos” (“Concerning” 16). With



Figure 2 Luis Valdez (J. Gomez).

the support of their universities, MEChA and other Chicano student groups also formed their own *teatros* modeled after ETC, building awareness that higher education was attainable for young Chicanas/os (“Concerning” 13, 18). It was an expressly Chicano movement.

The UFW, however was organized on behalf of all farmworkers regardless of ethnicity, which caused a rift with ETC. In a 1982 interview, Valdez revealed that he left his work with the UFW because

¹⁹ *Teatro*-maker and scholar Jorge Huerta is a leader of the Chicano *teatro* movement, through his creative work as the founder and artistic director of Teatro Esperanza at U.C. Santa Barbara, his earliest documentation of the work of Luis Valdez, El Teatro Campesino, and numerous other Chicano *teatros*, and his leadership in the formation and development of TENAZ. Huerta is the primary historian of TENAZ, especially for the roots of the project, as he was a participating artist and administrator as well as documenter. Huerta has also been a member of the LTC Advisory Board from the beginning.

of his differences with Chávez who “did not agree with Valdez’s effort to locate the union in the framework of Chicano nationalist ideology” (Muñoz 17). Muñoz explains that the UFW could not back such nationalist ideals because it was not an exclusively Chicano- or Mexican American effort but one that united multiethnic farmworkers including Filipinos, Arabs, and Jews (17). ETC’s departure from the UFW’s banner exemplified a move toward nationalist pride²⁰ rather than class struggle (Muñoz 17). Interestingly, while ETC as a company focused on cultural expression, including Chicano spirituality, the Chicano movement writ large was engaged in discourses similar to those of the Black Power movement, looking toward Marxism, Maoism, Leninism, and theories of dialectical materialism to understand and articulate the historic imbalance of power and lack of respect. Therefore, the foundations of the UFW and the *movimiento* shared a basis in economic inequities, though they defined their participants by different criteria.

As the opportunity to escape the harsh working conditions of farm fields was becoming a reality for more and more young Chicanas/os, too often this opportunity was accompanied by the desire to assimilate into the mainstream, distancing oneself from one’s cultural heritage. In response to this trend and as an articulation of the commitment to intentionally serve the Chicano community, the *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was

²⁰ Cultural nationalism was critiqued within the *movimiento* by some who ascribed to Marxist theories of inequity based on class, or by those who felt inequities were due to the effects of coloniality. Later it was critiqued by feminists who found cultural nationalism was used “to legitimate male dominance in cultural and political terms” (Blackwell 93). Nevertheless, as an ideology it served to fuel the vision and unify over one thousand attendees gathered at the 1969 Denver Youth Liberation Conference who crafted *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* – the manifesto that declared sovereignty by rights of Aztlán, the legendary homeland of the Mexica in the southwest of the US. From the 1969 *Chicano Student Movement* newspaper: “Cultural nationalism gives the Chicano the relevancy that Anglo brainwashing has destroyed, by filling the incredible vacuum created by the struggle of the dominant but irrelevant value system of the majority against that of the minority. In our case, cultural nationalism becomes a tool which we use to organize our oppressed Chicano communities” (Blackwell 92). It can also be seen as a tool of decolonization.

presented and adopted at the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference held in Denver, Colorado, in 1969. The *Plan* “posited a strongly anti-assimilationist agenda that supplanted US nationalist discourse with an equally essentializing embrace of a new Chicano nation and identity” (Mündel 6). Unlike earlier Hispanic-identified theatre practices in the Southwest, *teatro* Chicano was bilingual and highly political, advancing the transformative *movimiento* with powerful messages about social unity, human rights, and indigenous beliefs.

In streets, parks, churches and schools, Chicanos were spreading a newly found bilingual-bicultural identity through the *actos*, one-act pieces introduced by Valdez that explored all of the issues confronting Mexican Americans: the farmworker struggle for unionization, the Vietnam War, the drive for bilingual education, community control of parks and schools, the war against drug addiction and crime, and so forth (Kanellos “Hispanic Theatre” 198).

In urban Los Angeles, where the farmworkers’ struggle held less urgency, young Chicanos engaged politically in projects such as CASA, a pro-immigrant rights organization which strived to redefine the international Chicano-Mexicano relationship. According to actress and playwright Evelina Fernandez, who was a member of Teatro Esperanza, Teatro Primavera, and Teatro Chancla in her early career, “Our message was, ‘*somos un pueblo sin fronteras*’”²¹ (Fernandez). Again, these activists studied Mao, Lenin, dialectical materialism, and engaged in walkouts as well as protests against police brutality. Some of this work was controversial and risky, as Huerta reported in 1973:

I believe it is safe to say that Teatro Chicano is a living, viable weapon in the struggle against Gabacho²² oppression in Aztlan. Some teatros are so political, in fact, that they are under-ground, performing whenever possible, but trying to remain anonymous. Due to their transient quality, these groups are the most difficult to document—nor would we want to

²¹ “We are a people without borders”

²² Chicano/a/x slang for an Anglo

publicize their existence” (Huerta “Concerning” 13-14).

These theatre makers were motivated by their mission, not by the art nor business of theatre. Most of these new companies were formed by novices “more interested in politics than in aesthetics” (Huerta “Encuentro”). “We believed in social justice,” recalls Fernandez (Fernandez). In a surprising parallel, these companies were like the sixteenth century Spanish friars who also strategically used theatre as a pedagogical tool. Intent on converting the Indigenous population encountered in New Spain, the friars soon realized that the spectacle of theatre could more effectively convey their message to indigenous audiences than any lecture (Versényi 220).

Whereas the Spaniards hoped to educate the *indigenas* about a new religion, Christianity, *teatros* are also attempting to educate the Chicano about their religion, in this case the socio-political struggle of ‘El Movimiento’ (Huerta “Concerning” 13).

Chicano *teatros* strove to remind their audiences that there was power in their heritage. Employing symbols and stories representing the interwoven roots of Aztec, Mayan, Spanish, and Mexican cultures, these theatres embraced spirituality in performance that honored the legacy of their ancestors. “This drawing from our ancestors is an important means of giving the Chicano a stronger hold on his roots; of helping us identify ourselves in the cosmic world,” wrote Huerta (“Concerning” 16). *Teatro* Chicano became a cultural arm of the *movimiento*. Not unlike the Latinx theatre-makers of the twentieth-first century, in time the new Chicano companies sought to convene and learn from each other. This was the impetus for the creation of TENAZ.

Teatro Festivals and TENAZ

In 1968, ETC performed at the Radical Theater Festival at San Francisco State College, and the following year the company was invited to perform in the Théâtre des Nations, an international festival held in Nancy, France. These festival experiences inspired Valdez to create a similar convening for the emerging Chicano theatres. "Valdez knew that these incipient *teatristas* (theatre workers), more interested in politics than aesthetics, needed guidance in how to successfully promote social justice through political theatre" (Huerta "Encuentro"). In 1970, ETC hosted the First Chicano Theatre Festival in Fresno, California. Around fifteen companies participated, gathering to assess the needs of their companies and to determine how ETC could be of service. In Nancy, Valdez had met the wife of Colombian playwright Enrique Buenaventura, who told him that his work reminded her of the Mexican student company, Los Mascarones. One of the first international troupes to participate, Mascarones was a student street theatre from Mexico City (Marrero "From" 46). The Festival was a success and repeated the next year with even more troupes in attendance.

The *Festival de los Teatros Chicanos* was held in Santa Cruz in 1971, and it



Figure 3 Mariano Leyva, Mascarones (J. Gomez).

became clear that these independent *teatros*, performing "in factories and steel mills, on college campuses, and even on the welfare rolls," according to Kanellos, needed to develop a consistent vehicle through which to communicate and strengthen their work in order to best

serve their *movimiento* (“Folklore” 60). At the Santa Cruz Festival, Mariano Leyva (see fig. 3), director of Los Mascarones, suggested the name TENAZ, an acronym for “*El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán*”²³ which is also the Spanish word meaning tenacity, to identify the consortium of *teatros* and theatre-makers committed to this work. The goals of TENAZ were to “1) establish communication between Teatros, 2) provide a means for sharing materials, i.e., actos, songs, etc.; and, 3) establish a summer workshop for representatives from as many teatros as possible” (Huerta “Concerning” 14). The commitment included annual festivals, in which work was shared and workshops offered. It was also agreed that the *teatros* should meet every three months to discuss the challenges to their work. The first such meeting of TENAZ was held one week after the second Festival, with nine *teatros* represented. TENAZ’ goals informed the events scheduled during the TENAZ festivals, conferences, and workshops. There were workshops in a variety of theatre practices that exemplified the culturally informed agit-prop of Chicano theatres. In these early days of *teatro* Chicano, the work had two primary forms, the *acto* and the *corrido*, which wove music and songs into the *actos*. In the evenings, the companies would perform their works for each other, and the following morning, panels featuring four representatives from different groups would provide their responses, in critiques meant to strengthen the work (Huerta “Encuentro”). The third year saw the participation of twenty-five groups all “working toward the same goal: unity of the Chicano” (Huerta “Encuentro”). Huerta continues:

As in previous festivals, there were workshops in all manner of theater practice including mask making, dance forms, music, improvisation, and playwriting. Every morning representatives from four different groups sat on panels to discuss the previous evening’s performances. For some, the critiques were too critical; others took their notes and returned to their

²³ The national theatre of Aztlán

respective communities and campuses with a renewed vigor and determination to bring about social change (Huerta “Encuentro”).

For the first few years festivals were held in different locations in California, including Fresno, Santa Cruz, and San Jose, but participation was welcomed from theatres around the country, including Puerto Rican theatre companies from New York, and companies from Latin America.²⁴ These connections had been fostered during ETC’s national touring in support of the Great Grape Boycott, remembers Luis Valdez.

All along we were meeting Puerto Ricans, African Americans, other Mexican Americans, we met Corky Gonzalez, the Revolutionists. We needed to do something that summer, the summer of ‘68, so we had our first workshop. I invited Ronni Davis from the San Francisco Mime Troupe, he taught us commedia dell’arte techniques, but we also talked about politics (L. Valdez).

The fourth festival, held in San Jose, California, gave birth to *El Manifiesto del Teatro*



Figure 4 Felix Alvarez and Dr. Jorge Huerta (San Diego 4th TENAZ Festival) (J. Gomez).

Nacional de Aztlan, the TENAZ manifesto (see fig. 5). It is interesting to note that there are two meanings to the acronym, one which acknowledges the multiple participants (*Los Teatros Nacionales de Aztlán*)²⁵ and one which unites the work into one

²⁴ As an interesting side note, the engagement of multiple theatre companies from around the country and Latin America may be considered direct precedents to the 2014 Encuentro and the 2017 Encuentro de las Americas, both produced by the Latino Theatre Company, led by Jose Luis Valenzuela, at the Los Angeles Theatre Center. The LTC was a partner for both the festivals, which included opportunities for critical discussions about the performances.

²⁵ The national theatres of Aztlán

large effort (*El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán*). The TENAZ manifesto uses the latter definition.

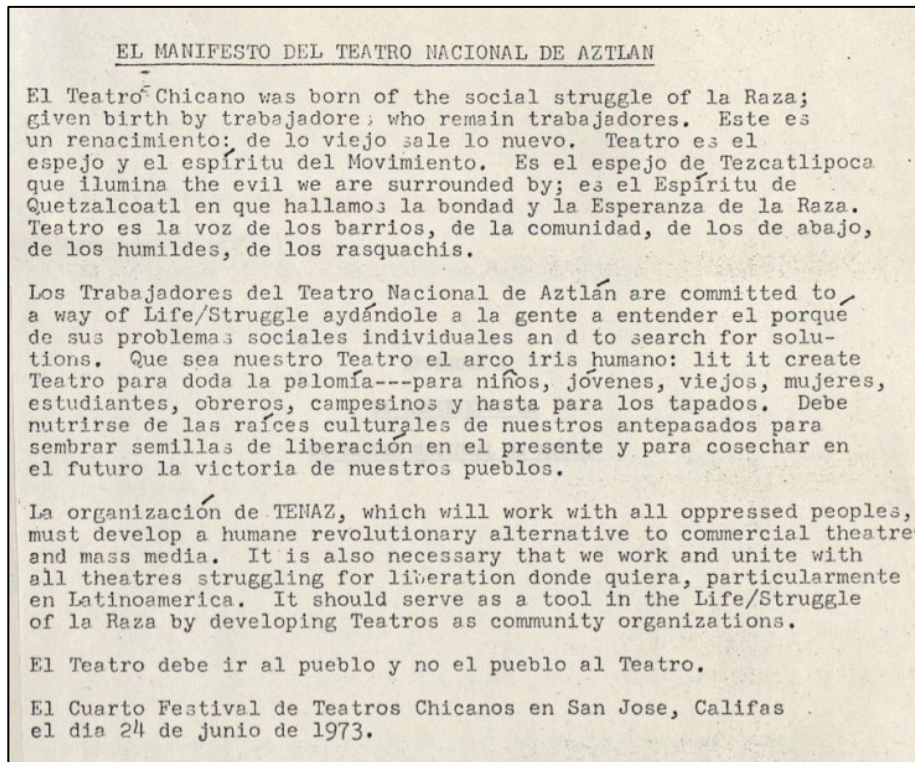


Figure 5 TENAZ Manifesto²⁶ (Huerta "Encuentro")

By 1973, the time of the fourth festival, Huerta noted that:

Teatros are sprouting-up all over Aztlán from Seattle, Washington to San Antonio, Texas. Indeed, teatros come and go so quickly that it is

²⁶ The Manifesto of the National Theatre of Aztlán

Chicano theatre was born of the social struggle of the People; given birth by workers who remain workers. This is a rebirth: from the old comes the new. Theatre is the mirror and the spirit of the Movement. It is the mirror of Tezcatlipoca who illuminates the evil we are surrounded by; it is the Spirit of Quetzalcoatl where we find kindness and the Hope of the People. Theatre is the voice of the neighborhoods, of the community, of the downtrodden, of the humble, of those who make do with little.

The Workers of the National Theatre of Aztlán are committed to a way of Life/Struggle helping people to understand the why of their personal social problems and to search for solutions. May our Theatre be a human rainbow: let it create Theatre for the flock—for children, youth, elders, women, students, workers, farmworkers and even for the buried. It should be nourished by the cultural roots of our ancestors to plant seeds of freedom in the present and to harvest the victory of our peoples in the future.

The organization of TENAZ, which will work with all oppressed peoples, must develop a humane revolutionary alternative to commercial theatre and mass media. It is also necessary that we work and unite with all theatres struggling for liberation everywhere, but especially in Latin America. It should serve as a tool in the Life/Struggle of the People by developing Theatres as community organizations.

The Theatre should go to the people and not the people to the theatre.

The Fourth Festival of Chicano Theatres in San Jose, Califas, the 24th day of June, 1973.

impossible to get an accurate count of them. But numbers, in this case, are irrelevant; what matters is that Chicanos everywhere are coming to realize the importance of teatro as an educational tool (“Concerning” 13)

As Alma Martinez recounts, “The formation of TENAZ and its first manifesto represented the first important step in the ideological and aesthetic consolidation of the *Teatro Chicano* movement” (88). TENAZ became a movement within the *movimiento*.

Continuous training was necessary for a variety of reasons, including transience. Nicolás Kanellos reports that companies faced frequent turnover in personnel as individuals moved from location to location, often from one company to another. He himself had left Teatro Chicano de Austin in 1972 to move to Gary, Indiana where he formed El Teatro Desengaño del Pueblo with University of Indiana students and community members. While this kind of mobility promoted the expansion of *teatro* around the country, *teatros* were left with the “additional responsibility of teaching new members the roles that have been vacated” (Folklore 61).

One of the most memorable of the TENAZ convenings occurred in 1974, with the Chicano/Latin American Theatre Festival, held primarily in Mexico City. This gathering, the fifth TENAZ conference, exposed the grassroots Chicano theatre makers to some of the most accomplished theatre artists of Latin America, including Mexican playwright Emilio Carballido, Colombian playwright Enrique Buenaventura, Colombian director and founder of Teatro de la Candelaria Santiago Garcia, Augusto Boal who was developing his Theatre of the Oppressed, and others (“Encuentro”).

The fifth festival, *el Quinto*, was transformative and arguably the apex of the TENAZ experience. Professional “maestros” of Latin American theatre were creating sophisticated and inspiring works that were also deeply political, responding to

circumstances such as the ongoing civil war in Colombia, the struggles of the Cuban revolution, and the Chilean coup d'état. According to Jorge Huerta:

Their politics were solidly in support of a people's revolution, and their productions were eye-opening examples of what great theater can accomplish. Political theater, we learned, could and should be entertaining *and* educational (Huerta Personal interview).

However, the deep political commitment of the Latin American theatre makers who leaned toward Marxism ran contrary to the emerging spiritual inflections of *teatro* Chicano. According to theatre historian Beatriz Rizk, the Latin American theatre makers at the Quinto Festival:

...thought it was escapist that Luis Valdez was turning to the spiritual. He came under heavy criticism because he brought *La Gran Carpa de los Rasquachis*,²⁷ in which the solutions to the problems of the Chicanos was in the hands of the Virgen de Guadalupe and Quetzlacoatl/Jesus Christ. Many of them felt that he was not facing reality (Rizk).

Valdez remembers the conversation following the performance, "The Marxists got on our case. Someone stood up and pointed at me and said, 'You should be shot!' It was ugly" (L. Valdez).

This ideological rift was not limited to Latin American theatre makers. Valdez could sense that "even within the group, there were splinters. Chicano groups turned against Chicano groups" (L. Valdez). Several Chicano *teatros* felt that the aesthetic move toward spirituality did not respond concretely enough to create the social changes

²⁷ The Great Tent Show of the *Rasquachis*. Alma Martinez, a former member of ETC, described *rasquachismo* as the reflection of "Mexican poor and working class values that Chicanos absorbed from their parents and grandparents" (5). Tomás Ybarra-Frausto defined it in activist terms, as "brash and hybrid, sending shudders through the ranks of the elite, who seek solace in less exuberant, more muted and purer traditions. In an environment always on the verge of coming apart (the car, the job, the toilet), things are held together with spit, grit and *movidas*. *Movidas* are the coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options, to retain hope" (qtd. in Huerta "Margins" 468). Reinforcing the idea of style as weapon, Diana Taylor calls *rasquatchi*, "the aesthetics of the underdog" (Archive 97). *Rasquatchi* is another tool of decolonization, centering and celebrating the resourcefulness of the under-resourced.

demanding by the movement. Valdez, as Amiri Baraka, had traveled to Cuba in the early 1960s and witnessed Marxist-Leninism as a transformative socioeconomic force that could inform the struggles faced by Mexican Americans of the US Southwest (Martinez 25). It had inspired him to work with the UFW, form ETC, and align with the Marxist ideological foundations of the *movimiento*. However, by the mid-1970s, and certainly during the *Quinto Festival*, members of TENAZ began to ask:

Was Valdez and ETC's abrupt turn to *Indigenismo* a retreat from addressing the pressing social political issues, an anti-*Movimiento* gesture? If Valdez, one of the most prominent activists and intellectuals of the Chicano Movement, was "giving up," according to some, then should Chicana/o teatristas continue to follow him? (Martinez 180).

These questions reflect the foundations of *teatros* Chicanos as activist ventures, not artistic ones. Eight *teatros* in Los Angeles had created a new caucus within TENAZ which they called Teatros Unidos (T.U.) TENAZ. In a collective report written by Teatro Movimiento Primavera, T.U. TENAZ states:

Our presentations would always be linked up with political struggles for this is how we feel we can help "call the people to action". This is the essence of political theater, and one of the fundamental differences between T.U. TENAZ and TENAZ (Rouse 5).

This branch of TENAZ flourished in the presence of the Latin America theatre makers who shared their political motivations. They identified the push back from "cultural nationalists" who "believe that liberation lies in the cultural concept of Aztlan and La Virgen" was a product of class difference, rather than an example of Chicano vs. Latin American "alienation" (Rouse 8). T.U. TENAZ resented the restrictions TENAZ placed on its member *teatros* such as Teatro Movimiento Primavera, which was prevented from participating in a May Day march in "solidarity with immigrant workers" (Rouse 14).

The sixth TENAZ festival, hosted by Teatro de los Barrios in San Antonio, Texas the following year, became “the forum for the continuing and final debate between Marxist-Leninistas, represented by Guillermo Loo and Teatro de la Gente and the *Indigenistas* represented by Valdez and ETC” (Martinez 188).²⁸ Again T.U. Teatro objected that the *teatros* were encouraged to “give full support to the United Farmworkers of America” without a discussion with the whole TENAZ body. They felt this was in “direct violation with the original purpose of TENAZ, that Teatros work together in order to coordinate political, cultural, and social aims, through directors [sic] meetings held four times a year” (Rouse 14). Following the sixth festival, Luis Valdez and ETC left TENAZ. Teatro de la Esperanza, a collective theatre and the only other full time *teatro* besides ETC, took charge of TENAZ (Huerta Personal interview).

The seventh TENAZ festival was notable for hosting a series of festivals in Seattle, Denver, San Jose, and Los Angeles during the summer of 1976. TENAZ chose to magnify its presence to oppose the “chauvinistic efforts” of the celebrations surrounding the US bicentennial (Kanellos “Séptimo” 72). However, tensions arose among TENAZ participants as some felt that *teatros* Chicanos should engage and support the nationalism and militancy of the *movimiento* more explicitly in their work. A TENAZ meeting held in Los Angeles in October 1976, following the seventh festival, concluded that tensions needed to be aired productively. They unanimously approved:

That a date be set for the next National Coordinating Committee meeting to discuss these four points:

1. The reorganization of TENAZ, and the definition of the members of TENAZ.

²⁸ See Alma Martinez’s dissertation, “*¿Un Continente, Una Cultura?: The Political Dialectic for a United Chicana/o and Pan-American Popular/Political Theater Front, Mexico City, 1974*” (2006), for a thorough review of the events and ideological differences that kept this festival, destined to be a project of hemispheric unification, from achieving that vision.

- a. To ask, what do the members want of TENAZ.
2. What are the rights and duties of the members of TENAZ.
3. What is the relationship of TENAZ with other political organizations.
 - a. What is the position of TENAZ with respect to the Crusade for Justice.
 - b. That a political and ideological assessment be made.
4. That a discussion be held on the reorganization of the next National Festival (Tarango).

These notes were sent out on letterhead with a Los Angeles address for TENAZ, which was now identified as “Teatros National de Aztlan” (Tarango).

The festivals were inspiring and edifying, as Huerta recounts:

Teatro was not only a powerful weapon, but that [sic] the groups shared common problems and desires. The teatros returned to their barrios eager to apply what they had learned in the various workshops, and eager to "spread the word" about the growing Teatro Movement. The festival had reflected the inexperience of most of the participants, and everyone looked forward to the next festival when they would have a chance to see each other's growth (Huerta “Evolution” 5).

The festivals were positioned as opportunities to develop the artistry of Chicano *teatro*, but also served as convenings by which participants could share their distinct concerns and their plans for action. Such gatherings helped countermand any sense of isolation in the work of liberation by expanding its geographic basis. With troupes traveling from as far away as Washington state, Texas, New York, and Puerto Rico to attend the festivals, it was clear that the concerns of the Chicano/Latino community were shared along a broad swath of the United States (*El Festival*). In addition to broadening the geographic scope and potential impact of the work, gathering at the festivals fostered relationships, as participants returned year after year to report on their progress and challenges, and to share new work. These relationships were strengthened between convenings by periodicals such as *TENAZ Talks Teatro*, a newsletter sent to all TENAZ member

companies and to individuals as interested, that provided updates on productions and other news.

By 1978, Jorge Huerta had published the first four issues of *TENAZ Talks Teatro* (TTT); its mailing list numbered two hundred. Nicolás Kanellos was finishing the manuscript for *TENAZ / Revista Chicano-Riqueña Anthology of Chicano and Nuyoricán Plays*. The minutes from the October 1978 meeting reveal numerous activities such as workshops and seminars conducted with marginal resources; TENAZ approved asking *teatros* to fundraise on its behalf. The organization did not slow down, planning for its X Festival de TENAZ, in which “members of TDLG [Teatro de la Gente] and Teatro Mestizo are organizing a workshop on ‘What is the Womens [sic] role in Chicano Theatre?’” (“Minutes”). Among the numerous TENAZ meeting notes saved in Dr. Huerta’s archives, this workshop is the first noted to address women’s concerns in the TENAZ festivals. These concerns will be described in Chapter III.

Huerta assures us that “TENAZ remained a driving force in the Chicano theatre movement well into the 1980s. The coalition sponsored yearly festivals and minifestivals, conferences, workshops, a newsletter, and other services dedicated to the evolution of the *teatro* movement” (“Sleeping” 33). Yet, playwright Evelina Fernandez recounts that as young *teatro* activists grew older and began having families, their dedication to the art form wavered in favor of making a more reliable living: “very few of us continued to do theatre, or made it our lives’ work, everybody got a straight job and did *teatro* on the side” (Fernandez).

The fifteenth festival, hosted by Pregones Theatre in the Bronx in July 1990, proved to be one of the last, although technically, the organization never disbanded

("Encuentro"; Nelson 324). In the final years of TENAZ activity, Beatriz Rizk joined the board which was by now chaired by Huerta. Unquestionably a national project, TENAZ decided to divide its efforts regionally in order to better serve the needs of each area. For example, there were few Chicanos in the southeastern region of the US, where the Latino demographic was more populated by Cuban and South American immigrants. In order for them to have a voice in the project, they needed to have a greater presence in the organization. Affiliated with Teatro Avante in Miami, Rizk was named head of the southeastern chapter. However, she felt that this division, and other factors, led to the end of TENAZ' effectiveness.

People did not see a need for a national organization headed by the story that TENAZ brought with them. It was a time of multiculturalism big time, many people became engaged in the big institutions. The funds were not really there to support ethnically-bound projects, but more multicultural projects, and the big theatres. It was a matter of economics (Rizk).

In 1993, Ed Morales reviewed the sixteenth and final TENAZ festival for *American Theatre* magazine, beginning with the following description:

Although San Antonio sits some 200 miles from the border of Mexico in a southwestern corner of Texas, for a week in mid-November it became the spiritual center of Aztlan, a legendary land ruled by indigenous cultures before the Europeans arrived 500 years ago. With the slow erosion of the Chicano movement of the '60s, these days the idea of Aztlan is largely kept alive by Chicano theatre, whose oldest organization, TENAZ (Teatros Nacionales de Aztlan), held its 16th festival at the extraordinary Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, deep in the heart of San Antonio's impoverished West Side barrio (38).

This prosaic paragraph reveals both the power that TENAZ still held to inspire its participants even as the project was sunsetting, and the necessity for that work to continue on behalf of the barrio.

TENAZ and the Four Tenets

The 2013 LTC Convening in Boston was the largest gathering of Latinx theatre makers since the last TENAZ gatherings in the early 1990s. At that Convening, the participants agreed that the future path of the LTC's activities should be guided by four tenets: Convening, Scholarship, Advocacy, and Art making. While these four tenets were not articulated as guiding principles as such by TENAZ leaders or participants, I will reflect upon TENAZ activities through these tenets, in order to reflect later upon the activities of the LTC with a similar lens.

Convening

Convening was at the heart of TENAZ, to bring together the disparate, emerging *teatros* Chicanos and Latino-identified companies from California, the Southwest, and beyond. The idea was to share work and practices, to strengthen the theatre making skills of the various groups, and ideally, to create one theatre from among the participants, the *Teatro Nacional de Aztlán*. The commitment to travel was already part of the *teatro* Chicano ethos. ETC was well versed in touring; visiting numerous farms throughout California as part of their support for the UFW, as well as touring to colleges and universities. In 1967 they went east to Northport in New York City and to Washington DC, where they performed for thousands. Soon after, ETC was invited to the first World Theatre Festival, the Théâtre des Nations organized by the International Theatre Institute (ITI) held in Nancy, France. This festival sparked Valdez' interest in what could emerge from convening the emerging *teatros*. Valdez recalls, "We came back very excited, wondering how we could do that here" (L. Valdez).

In 1969, ETC realized the first step of its vision, with the convening in Fresno. It was originally planned to take place at California State University, Fresno, where Valdez was teaching.

We planned it for May 4th, close to Cinco de Mayo, but it turned out that that week of the festival, Kent State happened. The Kansas National Guard started killing students, there were demonstrations all over the country. Governor Reagan closed all the schools. No way to cancel (no way to call people). One of the local Catholic high schools allowed us to use their gymnasium. That was it, that became the site of the first Chicano Festival. The participants slept in sleeping bags on the floor of the gym. The workshops were right there. The attendance was tremendous given the circumstances (L. Valdez).

The attendance of these young *teatristas* participating despite the adverse circumstances demonstrates their interest and commitment to the work, and the desire for social justice that this *teatro* was meant to advance.

TENAZ continued to convene regularly for festivals, workshops and other events. As mentioned earlier, convening took on greater significance beyond reviewing other work and providing workshops. TENAZ convenings created and strengthened relationships. “*Carnalismo*,²⁹ brothers and sisters, bonded,” remembers Javier Gomez, an early TENAZ member and the founder of Teatro In Lakech (J. Gomez Personal interview). Jose Luis Valenzuela also recalls the “great relationships” that were grounded in political affinity. “It was a national movement, so the unity, the friendships, the conversations, it was all in relation to the Chicano movement or, from Latin America, their movements” (Valenzuela). Beatriz Rizk confirms that, at the beginning, the majority of TENAZ participants were Chicano-identified, and for them, convening “was a political act. They thought they would be much better off. Being a sort of a union, they thought

²⁹ Based on the word *carnal*, which is slang for someone who is “like a brother.” *Carnalismo* is the value of brotherhood.

they would have more” (Rizk). Convening strengthened the work, deepened personal relationships, and generated a powerful unity among the conveners that translated into political capital.

In addition to political affinity, collaboration was required to make TENAZ programs happen. The *rasquatchi* ethos, low-budget and resourceful, was already part of the *teatro* Chicano way of making theatre. “We did it ourselves, we wrote it, designed it,” recalls director Valenzuela. “If we were on tour, there were no technicians, we did everything as actors and then performed” (Valenzuela). They had grown accustomed to homestays. “We were very attached to the community,” Valenzuela continued, “We would stay in people’s houses, they cooked for us, gave us clothes, whatever. It was a very different time, a very rewarding time” (Valenzuela). Indeed, according to Valdez, one of the visions for TENAZ was that the camaraderie established among the *teatros* would ease some of the challenges of touring by establishing a mutually supportive circuit:

Everywhere from southern to northern California there were spots where a company could go and could make a stop, say in San Jose and then come to San Juan, then go to Fresno, then go down to Del Rio and to Bakersfield and then to LA. Members of TENAZ would support each other, and allow ground support in their area, for touring companies to come through and allow for funding. I thought of this as a self-supporting endeavor, not a business but a self-supporting endeavor (L. Valdez).

Thus, convening was envisioned as a way to develop and strengthen personal relationships that could engender geographic alliance as touring companies visited and were hosted at one another’s home bases.

Finally, in addition to the support provided to those who participated in person, TENAZ’ impact was meant to reach beyond those in attendance. Convening provided

unity, training, and mutual support that could be shared with theatre makers beyond those who gathered in person at TENAZ events. As Gomez reports, “what we learned from the festivals, we went back to our communities, we went back to our institutions, and we drew on what we learned, and we created and utilized what was taught to us.” Those in attendance served as liaisons, ambassadors, and interpreters in their home communities.

Scholarship

Chicana/o theatre was a nascent field of scholarship in the early 1970s, associated with the increase in the number of Chicana/o students attending institutions of higher education due to the implementation of the Equal Opportunity Program (EOP). The EOP is a California State College assistance program that was created in 1969 in response to the demands of various Civil Rights movements through the passage of California Senate Bill 1072. The EOP provide financial support and guidance to students of minority populations (“EOP History”). Guidance was necessary because so many of these students were the first in their families to attend higher education, as reflected by Diane Rodriguez, Javier Gomez, and Jorge Huerta. “Our parents were Depression-era survivors,” recalls Rodriguez, “farm or cannery workers or the equivalent in the city” (D. Rodriguez). Gomez affirms, “We were the first wave of Chicanos going into colleges,” which meant their parents and other family members were unable to provide advice on how to navigate college and university life (J. Gomez Personal interview). “As Mexican American youth went on to college in unprecedented numbers, they found campus environments that were a radical departure from what anyone in their families or communities had experienced” (Blackwell 55). In order to meet their educational needs

in culturally appropriate ways, new curricula needed to be developed. Luis Valdez describes how an opportunity to broaden curriculum emerged while he was teaching at Fresno State's Experimental College. That year, seventeen Mexican American students were admitted on a "special basis," and the college "wanted to have one class that dealt with their cultural orientation that was Chicano. That was me. I believe I taught the first Chicano Studies course in the country. This was in the spring of '68. I didn't even have materials, I had to take it out of newspapers and magazines and old books. This became my teaching materials. Eventually it caught on" (L. Valdez). This work was revolutionary and critical to the development of a Chicano consciousness, one that understood its history within the United States and how its history predated the United States' colonialist control of the southwestern region.³⁰

The growth in the numbers of Chicana/o students in higher education did not mean that students were pursuing degrees in theatre, a risky career choice under any circumstances. Huerta suggests that many students pursued political science as their major field of study and participated in *teatro* as a form of creative political expression in the *movimiento* for social and economic justice (Huerta Personal interview). Newly formed MEChA student clubs were often the base organizations for these emerging *teatros*; student club funds helped bring touring productions to their schools. ETC toured numerous colleges, met with poly-sci students, and offered workshops in mask making and *commedia dell'arte* (Huerta Personal interview). These performances and workshops,

³⁰ Unfortunately, this pedagogy continues to be considered revolutionary in certain sectors of the country. In Arizona, for example, House Bill 2281, passed in 2010, banned ethnic studies courses fearing they would "promote the overthrow of the United States government." This led the Governing Board of Tucson Unified schools to suspend their Mexican-American studies (MAS) program in 2012. These have since been modified. MAS has been reinstated but nearly ninety textbooks are forbidden inclusion in the reading list (Simón).

and the creators' commitment to the *causa* championed by the work, inspired more students to form their own *teatros* and try their hand at theatre. "Teatros began to emulate ETC in 1968, from their tours to San Jose, and LA, for example. By spring of 1970, ETC's first Teatro Festival in Fresno hosted 14 groups from NY to Califas"³¹ (Huerta "Evolution" 3). TENAZ gatherings, which focused on training and discussions of aesthetics, inspired in student activists a greater commitment to the art form. "Many of us returned to our respective communities with a renewed respect for aesthetics. By the early 1980s, more and more people entered the academies for formal training in the theater arts" (Huerta Personal interview).

In addition to the student clubs which sponsored emerging *teatros*, institutions of higher education supported emerging Chicana/o and Latina/o theatre makers directly. Nicolás Kanellos, who started his theatre participation as a graduate student in Texas with Teatro Chicano de Houston, founded El Teatro Desengaño del Pueblo while working at Indiana University Northwest, and then Teatro con Ganas when he returned to Texas to teach at the University of Houston. An early participant in TENAZ, he engaged in his scholarly work while working in *teatro*. Recalls Kanellos, "I did a lot of solo traveling that also fit in with my research agenda. Especially writing my first book on Hispanic theatre in the United States. I did a lot of traveling for that. It was poor man's travel. I would sleep on people's couches, I would sleep in the library, people would put me up, what have you" (Kanellos Personal interview). Indiana University Northwest housed his

³¹ California

journal, *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, “the first national magazine of US Hispanic literature,” for several years (Miyatsu).³²

Jorge Huerta is notable as the first Chicano in the US to earn a PhD in theatre. Driven, as were his cohort, to champion the *movimiento*, Huerta’s area of research and artistry focused on *teatro* Chicano. He founded Teatro de la Esperanza with his students at UC Santa Barbara, but decided that writing about his own company would have been “self-serving.” Instead, he chose to document the work of El Teatro Campesino, which also toured to numerous colleges and inspired the emergence of college and university-based *teatros*. Diane Rodriguez credits the growth of ETC’s visibility and renown to the documentation provided by Huerta, who wrote from the perspective of a fellow artist as well as a documenting witness (D. Rodriguez).

As mentioned earlier, Luis Valdez may have launched the first Chicano Studies class while teaching at Fresno State. However, lacking appropriate textbooks, his curriculum was comprised of newspaper and magazine articles, and old books. Despite the lack of formal teaching materials, the program thrived and provided a foundation for a greater focus on *teatro* Chicano. Valdez’ one class was expanded to include workshops on *teatro* and soon supported the first Chicano theatre festival.

My class became La Raza Studies at Fresno State. With La Raza Studies we had a foothold at Fresno State, and we started making plans for the spring of 1970, and with [co-director] Risco’s help I was able to get college funds and we started planning our first Chicano theatre festival which we announced in late ’69. The Chicano newspapers were coming out by then, so we announced that we were planning a huge festival of all these groups that were starting to come together in colleges (L. Valdez).

³² Dr. Kanellos also founded Arte Público Press, “the nation’s oldest and most esteemed Hispanic publishing house ... which is also the largest non-profit publisher of literature in the US.” (“Nicolás Kanellos, Ph.D.”). His *Revista Chicano-Riqueña* is now known as the *Americas Review*.

Eventually, scholarly publications emerged to support Chicano Studies. In 1972, working with Stan Steiner, Valdez' course materials were compiled and published in the anthology entitled *Aztlan* (Steiner). Kanellos published several groundbreaking books on the history of Hispanic theatre in the US, and Huerta documented the *teatro* Chicano movement extensively. Kanellos and Huerta, among others, published articles in academic journals chronicling several TENAZ festivals.

The importance of the structure and support provided by universities and colleges in the formation and expression of the early *teatros* is evident in the report provided by Javier Gomez. However, "the reality of college *teatro* groups was that once the students that participated graduated, they stopped doing it" (J. Gomez Personal interview). Chicano students reported feeling guilty for "not contributing economically to their families" when they went off to college (NietoGomez qtd. in Blackwell 55). To continue creating *teatro* after graduation may have been seen as an indulgence. Several Chicano *teatristas*, including Jorge Huerta, Jose Luis Valenzuela, Nicolás Kanellos, Carlos Morton, and Luis Valdez, found ways to integrate their theatre making with their careers in higher education. In doing so, they inspired and trained the next generations of theatre makers and scholars.

Advocacy

Teatro Chicano and TENAZ advocated for the rights of a marginalized community through an art form that represented the community's concerns, provided empowering images that countered the demeaning mainstream narrative, and united the community toward concerted activism. Community concerns included police brutality,

racism, poverty, identity, and inaccessibility to education (D. Rodriguez; J. Gomez Personal interview). To a certain extent, it was the commitment to the *movimiento* that created the need for TENAZ in the first place, as Jose Luis Valenzuela recounts, to sharpen their tools. For Valenzuela, the idea behind TENAZ's festivals and workshops was, "Let's share what we're doing so we all become better" (Valenzuela). Critiques about the work presented at the festival were offered with the intention of strengthening the work; "You need to do this better because the message is not coming through clearly" (Valenzuela). "Everybody was involved because we believed in Social Justice," recalls Evelina Fernandez, and some "thought that the content was more important than the form" (Fernandez). Again, most of the participants were college and university students, engaged in political activism that used theatre as an agit-prop tool. Diane Rodriguez confirms that there were "many participants [in *teatro*] from the student movement [which] was about the community in totality, doing the best for all" (D. Rodriguez). There was little desire on the part of these theatre makers to professionalize. Indeed, the TENAZ manifesto directly rejected the notion of commercial for-profit theatre: "La organización de TENAZ, which will work with all oppressed peoples, must develop a humane revolutionary alternative to commercial theatre and mass media" (Copelin 89). Speaking in Marxist terms, to professionalize would have meant to engage in creating "bourgeois theatre," according to Javier Gomez "The actors and the directors were the by-product" of their activism, not the career goals of the students (J. Gomez Personal interview).

The *movimiento* and its *teatro* took on nationalist qualities, particularly in their identification with the legend and ideology of Aztlán. Aztlán is held to be located in the

Southwestern region of the United States and is considered the original land of the Aztecs who later migrated south to Tenochtitlán (currently known as Mexico City) where they built their empire. “When we converged on the Youth Conference in Denver, we needed a name. Alurista had written a poem, and Corky Gonzalez, Manuel Gomez, and I, we all endorsed Alurista’s name, Aztlán” (L. Valdez). Aztlán provided a basis for birthright and belonging on lands that had been denied to Mexican Americans for generations, providing the disenfranchised community an important reminder that many of their ancestors had lived in the Southwest well before it was United States territory. This knowledge inspired research and led to legal battles for the restoration of lands confiscated through broken agreements, such as those created after the Mexican American War with the Treaty of Guadalupe. In New Mexico, Chicano activist Reies López Tijerina organized numerous inquiries into violated treaty rights and put forth demands for compensation (Tijerina 48, Arrizón 26).

However, as politicized as the work may have been, Valdez assures that the students “weren’t trying to overthrow the government” but simply become more civically engaged, to see that self-determination was as much a right for Americans of Mexican heritage as any other (L. Valdez). Naming the *teatro* Chicano unification project *El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán* (TENAZ) was itself an act of advocacy.

Rifts emerged within TENAZ as certain *teatros* wished to focus on the political rather than the spiritual or aesthetic aspects of their productions. Luis Valdez departed as the de facto leader of TENAZ, and the political branch appears to have led the future activities of TENAZ. Advocacy broadened as TENAZ began to investigate and speak out against negative representations of Chicanos in film (“TENAZ Board”).

Art Making

One of the clearest objectives of TENAZ and its programs was to strengthen the art making capacity of *teatros* Chicanos. Inspired by their political aims, this early generation of theatre makers used the art form to convey their messages of liberation. Most were revolutionaries first and artists second. As Javier Gomez recalls, “A lot of us were not actors, [had] never taken an acting class” (J. Gomez Personal interview). Valdez and El Teatro Campesino, on their various tours to college campuses, seeing the work of the emerging *teatros*, felt that the work of these emerging companies could be even more impactful, diversified, and artistic with training. Luis Valdez says, “I thought we needed a training center in San Juan [Bautista] to train people in theatre arts. We needed to shift our focus to the arts and develop more technique, develop better writers, develop better material and work in other techniques, not just the broad comic style. Music, dance, realism, sets, whatever” (L. Valdez). They also recognized that the work being created by these emerging artists had a unique aesthetic, brought about by its nurturance in Chicana/o and Latina/o cultural heritage. Language, materials, humor, and themes reflected the profound connection to its audience’s experiences and values. *Teatros* Chicanos also took pride in their ability to make meaningful theatre with the resources at hand. The *rasquatchi* style, as this became known, is what Diana Taylor called “the aesthetics of the underdog” (97). *Rasquatchi* reflected the challenging economic circumstances that *teatro*-makers were protesting, by bringing these challenges on stage.

Evelina Fernandez agrees that one of the most important and satisfying aspects of her experiences with TENAZ was the training.

The best part of TENAZ was the learning. Most of us were not trained in theatre, most of us came into Chicano theatre because of the Chicano movement. I'm not saying nobody was trained but the majority of us were not trained. We didn't study theatre, very different from today, right? We had a lot to learn. We started from zero, we had to learn how to write, and direct, and act, and all of those things (Fernandez).

Jose Luis Valenzuela concurs, "We were young people, some had training, some didn't.

The workshops were very good for the companies" (Valenzuela). TENAZ hosted workshops on *actos*, mask making, singing, juggling, highly visible, theatrical agit-prop techniques, infused with Chicano cultural experience rooted in indigenous traditions.

Among the influential trainings offered by TENAZ were *Indigena* workshops led by Andres Segura Granados, a spiritual teacher who "traveled to the US to teach Chicanos how to integrate the heritage of the Nahuatl culture inherent in the roots of the Aztec, Mayan, Toltec, and other ancient civilizations with the militant traditions of La Raza" (Martinez 39). These traditional practices were "highly performative" and located in a "dance-theater form called simply *la danza*" (Martinez 40). Recalls Gomez,

I remember being in the gym and Ris is tumbling on the ground and we're all tumbling along with him to the exercises he's leading. We all sat mesmerized listening to Andres, then we were mesmerized listening to Luis, describing realities that we had never thought about. Eventually a lot of the people in Sacramento, the elders over there, began to have *ceremonias*, and then they started dancing. Eventually *danza* evolved out of that. People started going back to their own communities trying to learn *danza* that reflected the *ceremonias*. We were at a pivotal point. Teatro Campesino was influenced by all of that, and likewise other *teatro* groups (J. Gomez Personal interview).

Performative indigenous traditions such as *danza* and *ceremonias* were performed to honor ancestors, to "exercise collectively" and deepen one's Chicano/a cultural identity (J. Gomez "Danza Azteca"). Diane Rodriguez credited Segura's *indigena* teaching for

elements found in ETC's work such as honoring the Four Directions in works including the controversial *Carpa de los Rasquachis* (Martinez 41).

Not all the *teatros* lacked training, as Evelina Fernandez remembers, "There were a few groups, like El Teatro de la Esperanza, that were held very highly because they were so professional. Jorge [Huerta] really put that Chicano theatre on the right path. With the right kinds of rigor. Not everybody had that rigor, not everybody trained that way, not everybody cared about the work" (Fernandez). As part of the effort to strengthen their practices, morning critique sessions were held during TENAZ festivals to discuss what had been presented the night before. "We were brutal with each other," recalls Fernandez, "People showed up the next day to tear you apart." Valenzuela saw these as necessary. "The criticism sessions were an integral part of the festival. Sometimes they were brutal, but we were being criticized by Maestros, so we had to take it and learn from it. It was about the work, essentially" (Valenzuela).

One of the most important and transformative training opportunities occurred for the fifth TENAZ festival, which was held in Mexico and brought together leading practitioners from Latin America and the *teatros* Chicanos. After this festival, the relationships continued, and the masters were brought to the US to offer workshops. As Valenzuela recalls, playwrights "Enrique Buenaventura and Santiago Garcia, they were masters in Colombia, they had created a whole method of Collective Creation. Their interest in Chicano theatre was amazing, one of the greatest things that could happen to us. As well as the image-making of Mascarones, the Mexican theatre. That was really important for us" (Valenzuela). However, these artistic exchanges with the Latin

American theatre makers were not perfect, given different political aims. Valenzuela continues,

We were in a very complicated time, between the Latin Americans who were very Marxist and very well educated and super amazing at what they were doing in theatre in Latin America at the time. The Chicanos, we were much more naïve because we were not in the same historical moment as they were. They had the Cuban Revolution. After '73, Allende had already been president, they had a socialist government (Valenzuela).

However, these ideological and creative differences aside, Fernandez affirms how impactful these artistic exchanges were for Chicano theatre makers. Wilson Pico visited from Ecuador, and spent months providing workshops, “training us to see what great political theatre was” (Fernandez). She recalls seeing one of the Colombian companies perform at another TENAZ festival, “It was either La Candelaria or el TEC [Teatro Experimental de Cali] ... their show was amazing, it just blew us away. We were able to see what great political theatre could be. These were professional theatre companies from Latin America. It gave us something to aspire to” (Fernandez). The creative models at work in Latin American theatre, even if generated under very different political conditions, proved informative and aspirational for Chicano *teatro*.

The opportunity to train with Latin American master theatre makers, as well as to see their performances, strengthened *teatro* Chicano theatre making. Nicolás Kanellos deftly sums up how TENAZ employed its festivals and other convenings:

as a means of not only bringing good examples, best practices, but also involving specialists and professionals in giving workshops and training to a vast array of *teatros* that would attend, some of which would not even perform. They were there for the training foremost. It definitely played a needed role in bringing *teatros* up to certain standards, in professionalism, political clarity, and so forth (Kanellos Personal interview).

As theatre came to be viewed as a profession, as a viable and valuable career choice, greater numbers of Latinx sought advanced training in university and conservatory settings. Over time, the appreciation for *teatro* as an organizing tool, and the call for the pursuit of advanced education in the arts for Chicanx and Latinx yielded a professionalized cadre of theatre makers around the country. Many of these individuals are now found in positions of leadership as authors, auteurs, independent artists, and scholars with national visibility. Some work in affiliations with theatre institutions, both Latinx-identified and not, as well as in institutions of higher learning. Working alongside some of the original leaders and participants of TENAZ, the new generation could not help but be inspired by the commitment of the arts activism that preceded them, whether they were aware of it or not. Together, these people formed the early leadership of the Latinx Theatre Commons.

CHAPTER III

THE RISE OF LATINX FEMINISMS

Chicanx/Latinx³³ feminisms of the late twentieth century arose in response to gendered dynamics within the organizing entities of Chicano and Latino civil rights movements, seeking to challenge the re-inscription of oppressive sexism on display even within the efforts toward liberation. Chicanx/Latinx feminisms were illuminated and advanced by Chicana and Latina³⁴ artists who sought to describe their experiences through creative writing, visual art, and performance. These works inspired many people, including those who would enter the academy to articulate the nature of Latinx feminisms in scholarly terms more palatable to the feminist discourse of the dominant culture. In this chapter I will chronicle some of the circumstances that motivated and nurtured this ideologic and creative work, tracing the emergence, concerns, and nature of these voices back to the proto feminists of colonial Latin America and Spain. Throughout the centuries of protest, identifiable values emerged which encapsulate the Latinx feminist demands, including the right to self-determination; suffrage; entrepreneurship; advanced education; equal and acknowledged participation in the public sphere; resistance to

³³ Chicanx are Mexican descendants living in the US, and some can trace their heritage to ancestors who lived in the US Southwest before it was US territory. This history differs from that of non-Mexican-heritage Latinx, whose ancestors migrated to US territories from Central and South America, and parts of the Caribbean. This distinction, combined with the nationalist trends inspired by *el movimiento* described in Chapter II, has unified Chicanx in activism and self-identity. Therefore, a distinction is maintained throughout this study that honors this self-identification. Generally speaking, the term “Latinx” broadly includes “Chicanx,” but “Chicanx” does not generally speaking include non-Mexican heritage “Latinx.”

³⁴ The term “Latinx” is an inclusive term that replaces the earlier, more familiar term, “Latina/o” and variations which privilege a gender binary. Where the terms Latina, Latino, Latina/o, their plurals, or any other terms to describe Latinx are quoted, the sources’ words are maintained. Similarly, the term “Chicanx” is a non-binary modification of “Chicana/o.” However, this term did not come into use until the early twenty-first century, so the terms Chicano and Chicana are used where historically accurate.

patriarchal hierarchies; and representation far beyond the simplistic Virgin/Whore dichotomy. In the late twentieth century, acknowledging that Latinx identity is inherently diverse and charged by intersectional concerns, Latinx feminisms expanded their scope, to value inclusion and alliance with other marginalized communities, including other people of color and members of LGBTQ+ communities whether or not they also identify as Latinx. While Latinx feminisms may have begun by voicing resistance against patriarchal systems that oppress women, they have grown inclusive and expansive, understanding that patriarchal hierarchies and their limitations negatively impact all genders, and further, all historically marginalized people.

As described in Chapter II, *teatro* Chicano emerged in the southwestern states of the US as a creative arm of *el movimiento*, a medium by which the Chicano community articulated its economic and social justice concerns and its strategies for advancement. Women participated as members of the workforces of the *movimiento*, in *teatros* Chicanos, and in TENAZ (el Teatro Nacional de Aztlán). On the East Coast, women engaged with liberation movements such as the Young Lords Party, a predominantly Puerto Rican-identified project which was inspired by and paralleled civil rights movements such as the Black Panthers in their dedication to providing needed services and advocacy for their communities. However, the leadership of both of these movements was overwhelmingly male and paternalistic at the start, a reflection of traditional Hispanic *machista* culture (A. García 1989, 220). As the Chicano rights movement gained visibility for the economic, educational, and social concerns of the community, women found that although they participated with as many responsibilities for organizing

as the men, the men were the ones who were hailed and respected as the leaders.³⁵

Women were challenged in their attempts to voice their concerns, and to find acknowledgement within the male-dominated discourse.

By deliberate contrast, the leadership of the LTC has had a significant representation of women from the very beginning and throughout its history. While Luis Valdez initiated the *teatro* Chicano gatherings that launched TENAZ in 1969, it was Latina playwright Karen Zacarias who extended the invitation that convened eight Latinx theatre-makers in 2012 that launched the LTC. While TENAZ required time and special efforts in order to encourage and acknowledge women's participation, it is not at all unusual for women to engage as champions and leaders of many LTC initiatives. The dedicated efforts of Latinx feminists, working since as far back as the seventeenth century in art, action, and scholarship, has created social change that is visible in the ideologies and activities of the LTC. This chapter charts a journey from the early colonial-era proto feminists to the expressions of Chicana/Latina feminisms, including in the arts, as they emerged on the East and West Coasts of the US.

Historical Roots

It may be imagined that the flourishing of Chicanx/Latinx feminisms emerged in the late twentieth century; however, its roots date back over five hundred years to the colonization of the American continent by Spain. The roots of patriarchy grew deep in

³⁵ The well-known dynamic of male dominance was revealed in other civil rights efforts such as the Black Power and American Indian movements, yielding similar responses that in turn were criticized as betrayals to the solidarity required for these movements' success. In time, it became clear that some of the entrenched sexism within communities of color was a by-product of dominant European ideology, and that its dismantling is a necessary part of creating social change (hooks 120; Smith 62).

Latinx culture and thus in the work of diasporic theatre, *teatro* Chicano, and TENAZ. These roots merit review. When the Spanish arrived at the American continent, they brought patriarchal social norms that were inscribed upon Indigenous and African social traditions through colonization. While Spanish law of the sixteenth century afforded women greater rights than those granted Anglo-Saxon women,³⁶ they were nevertheless considered the property of men, including fathers, husbands, uncles, and, in the case of older women, sons, through the ideology of *Patria Potestad*, paternal power. The rules of *Patria Potestad* “granted patriarchs control over all property and individuals within a household,” which meant that patriarchs controlled and were responsible for the actions of their charges (Chambers 34). Men had access and agency in the public and private sphere while women were relegated to the private sphere of their own homes, with less agency than men. Unseemly behavior on the part of any of the women or servants reflected poorly on the patriarch, whether a husband, father, or another dominant male family member, which could lead to the patriarch’s loss of status and honor, and damage a family’s social, political and financial position. Patriarchs were within their rights to punish family members as they saw fit, to control anyone who might bring dishonor and risk the well-being of the family (Johnson 82). This was seen as responsible caretaking by the patriarch in their role as family protector, and is a foundation of *machismo*, but it held special implications for wives, mothers, and daughters, who had no legal recourse in situations of abuse (Johnson 82).

³⁶ According to Latin American feminist scholar Elizabeth Dore, “in particular contrast to the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, where until the late 19th century women were virtually denied juridical personhood, the Spanish and Portuguese crowns granted women extensive privileges. Women could sign contracts, ratify official documents, make wills, and appear in court. ... Women of the propertied class were guaranteed an equal share of their parents’ wealth, including land, by mandatory partible inheritance laws” (12).

Racist principles that emerged in colonial Latin America complicated patriarchal ideology. The hierarchical *casta* system used racial markers to determine status, employment, and influence (Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, and Organista 7). Accordingly, women of noticeably Indigenous and African descent were treated far worse than women of Spanish descent.³⁷ Racialized gender inequality, reinforced by the principles of patriarchal honor in Latin American society, became a foundational element of Latinx culture. The intersectional factors of gender and race which were at work in Latin American households of the colonial era continued to oppress women in the twentieth century, even as women engaged in civil rights movements for the liberation of their communities, by limiting access to and acknowledgement of their participation in these public arenas.

Certain social, economic, and political factors transformed the role of women in Spanish colonies. For one, the number of women-led households increased as marriage became an expensive and binding enterprise for everyone except the moneyed upper classes. Without a traditional male breadwinner in the home, women launched their own independent businesses in order to support themselves and their families (Lavrin 330). The Bourbon Reforms of the eighteenth century increased educational opportunities for women, particularly in crafts and trades, in order to reap the economic benefits of women's industries. Similarly, women were granted entry into the trade unions, where they had been previously excluded (Cowans 229-230).

The late 20th century Latinx feminists had powerfully determined antecedents in the Americas, such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1645-1695), the seventeenth-century

³⁷ See de la Teija and Frank, Lavrin, Elizabeth Martínez, and O'Connor.

feminist writer who, among many concerns, advocated for women's education at a time when most colonial women were illiterate (Martínez "In Pursuit" 1020, Lavrin 340). The late Colonial through Neo-colonial period of Latin America (1749-1921) saw the rising popularity of women writers and political leaders as Latin American colonies questioned their allegiance to Spain and engaged in struggles for independence. Women participated in a number of new, non-traditional ways during the wars, supporting the revolutionary efforts from the frontlines to the bylines, that is, as writers of influential political tracts. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the numerous wars of independence against Spain brought opportunities for the new republics to redefine themselves through their new constitutional documents.

Writers Josefa Amar (1749-1833), Gertrudís Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873), and Emilia Pardo Bazán (1852-1921) advocated for greater rights for women by rejecting the prevalent notion that women lacked the intellectual capacity and temperament to engage at the same level as men. In their own careers, they strived to enter scholarly academies, the intellectual public sphere exclusive to men of that era. Despite challenges, some of these women ultimately found success and acclaim in this arena. On the other hand, Manuela Sáenz (1797-1856) and Francisca "Doña Pancha" Gamarra (1803-1835), entered a more physical public sphere, the fields of war and politics, which again were traditionally men's territories. Their actions challenged the established definitions of "honorable" women's behavior. In the end both Sáenz and Gamarra suffered social ostracization for their activities, and in the case of Sáenz financial ruin. Whether through physical or intellectual action, all five women criticized the patriarchal hierarchies that limited scope of women's engagement in public society. These women and initiatives

stepped beyond the boundaries proscribed to them, in order to transform their lives and societies, even as their societies' political environments were in transition. Their successful engagement in political discourse and entrepreneurship gave rise to questions about whether and how to include women in the public sphere (Dore 15).

It would take another hundred years of debate, of a sort happening all over the world and which inspired the convenings such as the International Feminist Congress in Argentina in 1910 and the First Feminist Congress of Mexico in 1916, but eventually, from 1929 to 1960, Latin American women were granted suffrage (E. Martínez 1020, Macías, *Documenting* 163). Women had made advances in their economic independence, education, and political voice since the 1700's, yet their enfranchisement was denied until the mid-twentieth century, an era that brought even more social upheaval as political unrest and economic challenges throughout Latin American forced and/or inspired many to move to the United States.

These early histories of Hispanic and Latin American feminist activism have been largely overlooked because they lacked extensive documentation. With few exceptions, such as writers Flora Tristán (1803-1844) and Ricardo Palma (1833-1919), it was not until the late twentieth century that the investigative work of Asuncion Lavrín (1984), Pamela Murray (2001, 2014), Henriette Partzsch, Nina Scott (1995, 2001), Susan Migden Socolow (2015), and Tiffany Wayne (2011) unearthed and documented late colonial and early post-colonial women's engagements in the public sphere where they advocated for women's equity.

Diasporic events shaped Latina feminisms in the US as Latin Americans moved north to the mainland US, but a different trajectory was experienced by women living in

the southwestern quadrant of the US. This area was home to generations of Mexican descendants whose ancestors had lived in the vast region before the border changed in 1848, making the lands part of the US. Performance historian Andrew Gibb argues that the transition from Mexican to US authority was, at the outset, primarily a formality among leaders that maintained many elements of the status quo for the oligarchic families who were the dominant figures of Alta California. This included the pervasive stratified *casta* system and gender inequities inherited from Spanish colonization. In time, taxation and other economic policies, as well as deceit, led to the confiscation of Mexican properties, and the demotion of residual Mexican authority. Former oligarchs became second-class citizens, further deepening the oppression of women, Afro-descendants, and the Indigenous people who had been in the region for millennia.³⁸ The 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe ushered in US colonization and a US version of racism that drew a hard line between whites and non-whites (Gibb). Women of Mexican heritage in the Southwest experienced compounded oppressions owing to their ethnic as well as female identity.

The Mexican Revolution, beginning in 1910, further exacerbated tensions between Anglos and Mexicans in the US Southwest, as Mexican immigration swelled. “[B]etween 1900 and 1930, the Mexican population in the Southwest grew from an estimated 375,000 to 1,160,000” (Cuéllar 46). During the Great Depression of the early twentieth century, in response to the dire economic conditions and in a racialized attempt to alleviate high unemployment, Mexicans and Mexican Americans were rounded up and deported to Mexico, without verification of their citizenship status; many were sent away who were actually US citizens. Broadly speaking, Mexicans and their descendants, even

³⁸ Elizabeth Martinez reminds us that these “Mexican” lands had been earlier seized from the Native Americans by the Spanish colonization project (1020).

if US-born, were *persona non grata* in the US, routinely treated as unwelcome immigrants, whether or not their ancestors had lived in the territory for generations. According to Elizabeth Ramirez, Mexican women fared worst of all, often taking on work outside the home in addition to their homemaking responsibilities and earning far less than their Anglo counterparts (*Chicanas/Latinas* 39). These inequitable working conditions persisted throughout the twentieth century; Chicanas had a personal stake in the *movimiento* fighting for economic equity. However, as will be discussed ahead, the imbalance of power reinforced by centuries of paternalism within the *movimiento* as well as TENAZ became an issue of contention.

On the East Coast, migration from Puerto Rico and Cuba also grew significantly during the twentieth century, becoming the next largest Latinx populations after those of Mexican heritage. Puerto Rico became a US territory in 1898, and by the Jones Act of 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship (against most Puerto Ricans' wishes). According to Ramirez, after serving in World War I, few Puerto Ricans chose to return to the island which faced increasing unemployment and under-employment. Instead many opted to live on the mainland, predominantly in New York City. She writes, "By 1970, the mainland Puerto Rican population had reached 1.4 million, having doubled in size in only one decade" (*Chicanas/Latinas* 50). Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans (people of Puerto Rican descent born and/or predominantly raised in New York City) faced discriminations because of their ethnicity and race, and again, women faced additional constraints because of their gender identification. As with the women of Mexican heritage, Latinas of the East Coast began to question the conditions by which their communities resisted discrimination from the dominant society. As shall be discussed, Latinas of the West and

East Coasts began to question and challenge the practices of their own culturally identified liberation movements (González).

These intracultural challenges were often creatively expressed at a time when advanced means of communication made dissemination more widespread than ever. Unlike the less-documented protofeminist efforts that occurred in Latin America and the United States prior to the mid-twentieth century, late twentieth-century Chicana/Latina feminist expressions had unprecedented and sustained visibility through readily available means of duplication and distribution. Creative works which challenged both the patriarchal systems within their cultural communities and the sexism found in US mainstream society could thus readily reach, inform, and inspire new generations of Latinx, including those who engaged as the LTC's first Steering Committee and Advisory Committee members. Women's participation in the LTC demonstrates the transformation of patriarchal epistemologies through the centuries of sustained efforts. Feminist efforts at the end of the twentieth century, made even as the community fought for liberation within the mainstream, broadened the scope of feminists' concerns intersectionally.

Feminist Emergence in the *Movimiento*

In the tradition of Latin American activists, Chicana feminists participated in the work of *el movimiento* during the 1960s and '70s, but in time found the "male supremacist practices" contradictory to the goals of the movement (E. Martinez 1021). An "ideal Chicana," that is, a strong woman who endured suffering to keep the family and its cultural traditions intact (not unlike the woman described earlier who both takes

care of the home and holds outside employment), was glorified in the movement as an emulation of the long-suffering Virgen de Guadalupe (A. García 1989, 222). *Machismo*, the Latin American and Chicano/Latino version of sexism derived from *Patria Potestad*, exerted oppression over women's activities even within the movement, where women were relegated to a private sphere within the public one (A. García 1997, 5). Traditional Latin America patriarchal hierarchy, which placed men in leadership positions and women in subservient ones, also dominated the work of the *movimiento*. While the men took on the roles of public spokesmen, decision makers, and strategists, they preferred that women participate as cooks, child-care providers, and lovers (Tatum 20). In her *testimonio*, Gloria Arrellanos described her experience as a member of the Brown Berets³⁹ with regard to its gender dynamics. "Men and women in the group got along fine for the most part but underlying this was still the machismo of the men, which became destructive. The men tended to look at women as subservient and not as equals. There was a real division of labor" (M. García 155). Even when women had leadership positions these were rarely acknowledged. For example, Helen Chávez, wife of Cesar Chávez, served as the credit union manager for the UFW. Dolores Huerta praised her work, saying, "You should see her books. We have been investigated a hundred times and they never find a mistake" (Oboler 73). Yet Suzanne Oboler charges that Helen Chávez' significant contribution to the UFW has gone unrecognized in history. This erasure in the history of *el movimiento* was resented by women who were reconsidering

³⁹ Per the Cambridge History of Latina/o American Literature, "Brown power groups such as the Chicano Browns Berets and the Puerto Rican Young Lords – inspired by Black Panthers – sought to address problems of economic redlining, governmental neglect, and racial discrimination through direct-action strategies such as street protests, takeovers of governmental and university offices, and mass boycotts" (Morán González and Lomas 15).

and questioning their roles within the family at the same time (A. García 1989, 219). Feminist consciousness emerged, according to Alma García, in response to sexist attitudes that posed a “serious obstacle to women anxious to play a role in the struggle for Chicano liberation” (Mirta Vidal, qtd. in A. García 1989).

Additionally, some women felt that the goals of the movement were skewed toward an agenda that omitted women’s concerns and did not address their gendered oppression. Recalling her experiences with the Chicano movement in the very early 1970s, Gloria Anzaldúa granted that the nationalist and cultural movements were important, but to her, “the movement was trying to secure the *male* part of the culture, the male ideology” at the expense of women’s concerns (*Interviews* 214). Anzaldúa suggested that the reason women’s issues weren’t addressed was because they were threatening to the male leaders (*Interviews* 215). Chicana feminists were accused of being “anti-man,” of trying to destroy the fundamental values of the movement that sought to promote the family as well as traditional culture. Such women were labeled *malinchistas*, after La Malinche, the iconic translator and consort to the Spanish Conquistador Hernán Cortes who was portrayed as one who betrayed her own, the indigenous of Mexico, during the era of conquest. Chicana feminists were accused of focusing on an individualistic search for identity instead of working on the more important issue of racism (A. García 1989, 225; Moya 447). The message, overt and implicit, was that Chicana feminists were traitors, undermining their community’s well-being and their culture.

Elizabeth Martínez and Alma García have chronicled comments by men who sought to squash women’s resistance (1997, 1989). Most predominant were the

accusations that Chicanas were being misled by white feminists. Oboler recounts how in 1970, while leading a meeting of the La Raza Unida party, the speaker made it clear that,

[O]ne of the problems that I see, as one of the grass roots people that came out of the *barrios* as someone who worked in the fields, is that I recognize too much of an influence of white European thinking in the discussion. I hope that our Chicana sisters can understand that they can be front runners in the revolution, but I pray to God that they do not lose their *Chicanisma* or their womanhood and become a frigid *gringa*. So I'm for equality, but still want to see some sex in our women (77).

Tellingly, this statement reflects the same sexual objectification that has characterized Latinas as the iconic spitfire for decades in popular mainstream media. Such objectification dehumanizes women even as it reinforces the notion of moral superiority held by an ostensibly virtuous dominant culture. Cultural historian Brian Herrera, following Homi Bhabha, posits that demeaning ethnic stereotypes are an “ubiquitous discursive means of preserving existing structures of cultural power” (230). This gendered simplification, at work against women in the dominant culture, was therefore experienced within the Chicano community as well. In the quote above, even as the speaker welcomes women’s engagement in the *movimiento*, he objects to the loss of sex that may occur due to the Chicana leadership that is presumed to be influenced by white feminism, challenging existing structures of power. In essence, for the speaker, a woman’s value as a sexual being is more important than her value as a leader.

Chicana activist Anna NietoGomez recalls that, “There was so much hate it forced the Chicanas out of the Chicano movement.” Indeed, she left to form “las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc, one of the first Latin American feminist organizations” (Sanseverino). Originally known as Las Chicanas de Aztlán, the group took the name of “a Mexican feminist organization that worked for women’s political rights [and] education” in

advance of the Mexican Revolution (Blackwell 91). Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc, based at Cal State Long Beach, were noted for their commitment to *hermanidad*, a word they coined to describe Chicana sisterhood and solidarity. Their *hermanidad* was codified in a series of five “Basic Beliefs” which included the belief that “knowledge was a source of power” that must be sought after and shared; that “all accomplishments should be recognized as for the people” rather than for personal gain; and that “[a]ny Man or Woman who condones or accepts the oppression of the Chicana and transfers this value to the Children, works only to destroy the revolution” (Blackwell 83). Las Hijas understood that the way in which they conducted their work was as important as the issues they wished to address. These rules advocated solidarity for communal empowerment and further, the understanding that oppressive *machismo* did not need to be passed down to future generations as part of an inevitable cultural legacy. In fact, Las Hijas considered it dangerous to the success of the movement to do so. As will be seen further on, a similar sentiment came to light on the East Coast by women of the Young Lords Party.

Many Chicanas participated in “double militancy,” working within the male-dominated Chicano *movimiento* groups while also meeting with Chicanas in groups such as Las Hijas to address their gender-specific concerns. However, Chicana organizing was at times seen as a challenge to the power of the Chicano groups. NietoGomez remembered how the language used by Chicana feminists to describe their struggles was used against them as a reflection of the influence of mainstream feminism. According to Alma García, there were loyalists in the movement who held that Chicanas’ complaints

were not the fault of Chicanos but of the system that oppressed them (225). She cites Nieto Gomez⁴⁰ quoting “one such loyalist”:

I am concerned by the direction that the Chicanas are taking in the movement. The words such as liberation, sexism, male chauvinism, etc. were prevalent. The terms mentioned above plus the theme of individualism is a concept of Anglo society; terms prevalent in the Anglo women’s movement (Nieto Gomez qtd. in A. García 1989, 225).

These accusations were especially hurtful to Chicana activists, because a primary goal of *el movimiento*, a vision shared by the women, was to be free of mainstream values and the domination imposed by white society (E. Martinez 1021).

It should be noted that, with so much vitriol directed at Chicana feminists in general, Chicana lesbians who participated in these activities remained silent about their concerns at the start; it was not until the early 1980s that Chicana feminist lesbians began to voice their experiences with homophobia as well as sexism within the Chicano movement (A. García 1997, 7). In the groundbreaking anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*, co-editor Cherríe Moraga called for illumination of the multiple oppressions. “In this country,” she wrote, “lesbianism is a poverty—as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, 28). Hers is an early identification of intersectional oppressions preceding Kimberlé Crenshaw’s important contribution to this conversation. Martinez credits the courageous writing of lesbian authors such as Moraga and Anzaldúa, and the performance art of lesbian comedians Marga Gomez and Monica Palacios, with

⁴⁰ In this article, Alma García separates NietoGomez’ name into two: Nieto Gomez. However, Mariana Ortega (“Latina Feminism, Experience and the Self”), Maylei Blackwell (*¡Chicana Power!*), and García herself later, use NietoGomez. *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*, edited by Alma García, includes essays by Anna NietoGomez. There are other instances in which NietoGomez’ name is hyphenated, but apparently not by NietoGomez herself.

advancing the cause of Chicana feminisms (E. Martinez 1025).

Before long, Chicana feminists recognized that the multiple oppressions of sexism, racism, and homophobia were experienced by other women of color, including African Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans (A. García 1997, 4). Indeed, Moraga credited her attendance at a literary reading by African American writer Ntozake Shange for re-orienting her own writing from a feminist position to a more culturally specific Chicana feminist one (1983). “I have, in many ways, denied the voice of my brown mother – the brown in me;” Moraga expressed the intersectionality of women of color feminisms, whereby a person can be oppressed for their phenotype and ethnicity as well as gender (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, 31). Thus, women of color were struggling on at least two intersecting fronts throughout the 1970s. Even as they were fighting alongside their men in nationalist efforts to end oppression by the dominant culture, Chicana, African American, and Asian American feminists engaged in the struggle to end sexism within their own communities, in their own ways (A. García 1989, 220). The intersectionality of Chicana feminisms became a foundation in the evolution of Latinx feminisms, which broadened the scope of its concerns to include racial, environmental, and gender-fluidity oppressions.⁴¹

Critiques of the Teatro Chicano Movement

Chicana/x feminisms also arose within one specific branch of the *movimiento*, *teatro* Chicano. El Teatro Campesino (ETC), the first theatre of the Chicano movement,

⁴¹ This will become evident in the concerns of the LTC, to be discussed in upcoming chapters.

was the founding company of TENAZ and the model for the Chicano *teatros* that emerged in alliance with the movement. However, ETC was criticized for sexist and marginal representations of women onstage and in the workings of its company.

According to Socorro Valdez, Luis Valdez's sister and a long-time member of ETC,

You were either the novia, la mamá, la abuela o la hermana [girlfriend, mother, grandmother or sister]. And most of the time these characters were passive. The way those females are laid out are for the most part very passive and laid back, *y lo aguantaban todo* (they endured it all) (Marrero *Latina Playwrights* 275).

Anna NietoGomez describes this image of the long-suffering patient woman as a manifestation of *marianismo*, a reflection of the Virgin Mary. "Church teachings have directed women to identify with the emotional suffering of the pure, passive bystander: the Virgin Mary...she is not to do for herself but to yield to the needs of others—the patron, her family, her father, her boyfriend, her husband, her God" (49). In ETC, women's roles onstage were assigned in primarily two categories, as "virgins" or as "whores," an enduring dichotomy duly criticized for its limited view of women's roles.

Alicia Arrizón points to a Christian inflection on Aztec legends for the development of this dichotomy. In Aztec legend, the deity Coatlicue gives birth to Cihuacoatl, the serpent goddess, who divides, creating Tonantzin. As part of the Spanish missionary conversion project, Tonantzin becomes identified with the Virgin Mary in the form of the Virgen de Guadalupe, "the chaste, protective mother of the *mestizo* nation" (Arrizón 37). In contrast, Cihuacoatl, the serpent goddess, was given "evil attributes" along with another sister, Tlazolteotl, and both were "rendered into defiant beasts." As Arrizón writes: "Thus, as an opposing force, Cihuacoatl's legacy helps to explain the whore-virgin dichotomy that has shaped gender relations and sexuality in post-Spanish

colonial sites” (37). This dichotomy was reflected in ETC’s casting choices. The actors who played these roles were selected for their physical and personality characteristics. "Virgins" were small, delicate, and fair-skinned, while “whores” were darker and difficult, women who spoke up (Hurtado 50). Even as ETC aimed to empower the Chicano/a community through its work with indigenous legends and imagery, its casting choices inadvertently re-inscribed Spanish racial and gender hierarchies that had also determined employment in the colonial era.

An illumination of this dynamic is found in 1991, when ETC moved to a new theatre facility in San Juan Bautista and launched its play *La Virgen de Tepeyac* (“Our History”). In this retelling of the Mexican legend, Juan José, a converted Indigenous man, now a Christian, is visited by the Virgin Mary on the site of the temple of the Aztec goddess Tonantzin, on the hill of Tepeyac. The tale is performed entirely in Spanish, and features pageantry, Aztec dance, and costume (Drake). However, Aida Hurtado found it startling that, given Socorro Valdez’s tremendous reputation as a performer, she was never cast as the Virgen de Guadalupe. Socorro Valdez explained:

I never even got close to it. They wouldn’t let me... [I] could never have that role... because Luis didn’t see me that way. They see the Virgen de Guadalupe as a soft, demure, peaceful, saintly, ingénue type. The really incredible part was when it turned out that I have too many teeth. I was told, “You got too many teeth. The Virgen didn’t have that many teeth” It appears that the Virgen de Guadalupe had no teeth. I thought to myself: “That is the stupidest thing I ever heard of!” Apoco estaba molacha la Virgen de Guadalupe? [Don’t tell me the Virgen de Guadalupe was toothless!] ... He [Luis] can’t experience women any other way except as a man. And no one else can do that either unless they are willing to stretch their own image of themselves (qtd. in Hurtado 74).

Socorro Valdez was clearly unhappy with the standards by which this lead role was cast. Furthermore, as the seminal, model Chicano *teatro* of its day, these practices and their

rationale were replicated by the many *teatros* that emulated ETC. It is interesting to note however, that in *Aztlán*, the 1972 anthology of writings based on Luis Valdez' Chicano Studies curriculum, Valdez and Steiner very clearly advocate for a partnership between the men and women of the *movimiento*. Nevertheless, despite the concern which existed around gender inequities it wasn't until 1979 that Carolina Flores of Teatro Mestizo called for a women's gathering at the upcoming TENAZ conference: "now is the time that hermanas⁴² in teatro want to throw away the old and cultivate for new avenues for Women in Teatro" (Flores "Purpose"). Topics for the conference workshops organized by Flores included:

How many women Directors are there? ... Women as Playwrights ... stereotypes of women in plays ... what if any curriculum is available for women? What avenues need to be created for supportive research dealing with women: as Latinas, as Women in Teatro, as women, as daughters, as mothers, as Third World women, as lovers? ... Children and Teatro ... Child Care ... ourselves as a result of male or female rearing ... Myths that we have of each other, or that we have heard about each other ... Should there be a committee of Women in Teatro to be working within Tenaz [sic]? (Flores "EVERYONE").

Another document by Flores is labeled "Emotional Survival of Women in Teatro" and includes the following questions: "What does the emotional survival of the Chicana have to do with our political theatre?" and "What CONTRASTS are there, if any, to the roles we portray..Our [sic] own feelings, conditioning, traditional beliefs, ideology?." She concludes: "It has been the consensus that TENAZ is ready for extended avenues of resources; such as; organized network of Chicanas in Teatro. In the movimiento" (Flores "Emotional").

⁴² sisters

Accordingly, it must be acknowledged that not all women felt negatively about ETC's practices or those of *teatros* Chicanos writ large, nor those of TENAZ, either.

Diane Rodriguez, former ETC member from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, provides a compelling statement about the work from a different perspective:

During the days of TENAZ, there were so many strong women, particularly in our company in San Juan in the Teatro. Socorro was ridiculously strong, there was me, there was Olivia Chunacero. We were really loud, we were very outspoken, if we didn't like the roles, we would play men. Or we would play androgynous characters. We always complained that we couldn't play the Virgen. We were very, very loud. We were just who we were, amidst the struggle for our people to get empowered. That was the important thing that our community become empowered and proud of who we were, that was the big message. So, within that, the notion of lifting the female, I don't know, we felt we were all lifting together. I never felt the difference until Yolanda Broyles wrote her book in, I think, '81 or '82.⁴³ She characterized the Teatro as male-dominated. ... And I think that she was very well-intended in trying to empower us, but it read like we were oppressed, which I don't think she intended. And none of us really felt that way (D. Rodriguez).

Rodriguez argues that there were plenty of women in the company who did not feel the same sense of gender discrimination within their theatre making experience, and that the narrative presented by Hurtado as well as Yolanda Broyles-González was overstated.

Playwright Evelina Fernandez, a founding member of the Latino Theatre Company in Los Angeles and member of the LTC Advisory Board, also participated in TENAZ as a member of Teatro de la Esperanza and Teatro Primavera. She confirms that there were nuances to be found in relationship of *teatro* Chicano, TENAZ, and Chicana feminisms. Although she recalls that all the *teatro* directors were men, she worked with Teatro de la Esperanza, which was run as a collective after its founder Jorge Huerta left

⁴³ Yolanda Broyles-González' book, *El Teatro Campesino: Theater in the Chicano Movement* (1994) is noted for its approach to historicizing *ETC* within its cultural context, as a Chicano phenomenon, as opposed to focusing on Brechtian and other European roots of the work such as Commedia dell'arte.

to teach at UCSD. Also, while all the other *teatro* Chicano directors were men, “In Teatro Primavera,” which she recalls was identified as a leftist organization, “there was a lot of consciousness about *la mujer* and *mujeres* having a voice and all that” (Fernandez). Nevertheless, she observed that this was not the case for most of the other *teatros* that comprised TENAZ.

TENAZ of itself had a lot of male leadership. There were a lot of powerful women, like Lupe Valdez⁴⁴ for example, but at that time she wasn’t a prominent voice in TENAZ. A lot of these men had strong *compañeras*,⁴⁵ but they didn’t have strong voices in the organization at the time. ...I don’t think that feminism was really at work in TENAZ. It was just like the movement, it’s a reflection of the Chicano movement, the leadership was male, women’s voices were secondary. TENAZ was just a reflection of the movement (Fernandez).

Fernandez confirms that patriarchy was for the most part a foundation of Chicano culture, evident in the *movimiento*, in most *teatros* Chicanos, and in TENAZ. This cultural ideology required an epistemological shift in order to make its organizations more equitable.

It is important to note that Fernandez credits the collectivism of Teatro de la Esperanza and the leftist identity of Teatro Primavera for creating working environments in which women were equitably engaged. It appears that the non-patriarchal environment of Teatro de la Esperanza was also non-hierarchical, as it was organized as a collective, a working environment in which participants contribute with equal consideration. The Marxist ideologies that inspired the *movimiento* (as well as the Black Panthers movement) were concerned with materialist realities, economic power systems, and resource-sharing. These critiques and strategies, along with the non-hierarchical practices

⁴⁴ Wife of Luis Valdez.

⁴⁵ Female partners.

of Teatro de la Esperanza, also appear in Commons ideology, discussed below. Suffice for the moment to call attention to these philosophical alliances found in *teatros* committed to equitable participation and resource sharing.

Looking back at women's experiences in ETC, according to Diane Rodriguez, Chicanas who felt discrimination or longed for a more female-centered theatre making experience branched out to create other opportunities by which to better express themselves (D. Rodriguez). Before shifting to describe those efforts, I will take a brief look at the conditions for Puerto Ricans and Cubans in the New York area and its environs, to show how they contributed to twentieth century Latinx feminisms through their artistic expression.

Feminist Emergence in the Young Lords Party

While a primary project of this study is focused on the Latinx Theatre Commons and a comparison with the methods of TENAZ, which relates to the Chicana/o/x experience, it is important to consider the Latinx feminisms that emerged on the East Coast, which are more closely connected to the Puerto Rican and Cuban experience. While both groups share homelands in the Caribbean, their historical trajectories and circumstances in the US varied considerably. In terms of mid- to late-twentieth century migration, generally speaking, Puerto Ricans moved from their island to New York City, while Cubans moved to Florida, particularly Miami. To discuss the Latina feminisms that emerged on the East Coast, I turn my attention to the Puerto Rican civil rights movements of the late 1960s and '70s, in particular, the dynamics within the Young Lords Party. As

historian Darrel Enck-Wanzer⁴⁶ writes, “Economic conditions were lean: jobs were hard to come by (especially if you did not speak English), and those jobs you could find involved hard physical labor and little pay. More than one job was often needed to support a family” (1). Inspired by the efforts of the Black Panther Party to support their own community through self-initiated and self-regulated education, health, and economic programs, young people of the New York Puerto Rican community (many of whom self-identified as Nuyoricans) aligned themselves with the Young Lords to transform their civic circumstances in urban New York City.

The name “Young Lords” was borrowed from a Chicago-based “street gang ‘turned political’” that was seeking to create programs similar to those of Black Panther Party in Chicago; the New York faction made it clear they would be operating as a political party (Enck-Wanzer 3). Formed in 1969, the NYC-based Young Lords held a drive to collect garbage from neglected city blocks, provided blood testing to counterattack lead poisoning in children, opened up a breakfast program for poor school children (like the Black Panthers Party in Oakland), and “established the first in-patient drug rehabilitation program for the working class” (Enck-Wanzer 4).

Oboler argues that the “experience of exclusion” was a motivating factor driving both the Chicano and Puerto Rican social movements of the 1960s and ‘70s. In addition to their demands for economic and political equity, these communities demanded “the right to have rights” in the US (71). “This included affirming primarily to themselves, to one another, to their group, and ultimately, to the society as a whole the moral and

⁴⁶ In his book, *The Young Lords, A Reader*, Enck-Wanzer has compiled an extensive volume of primary sources including excerpts from the Young Lords’ newsletter *Pa’lante* and transcribed interviews of the era.

political imperative of participation in the struggle to redefine the way the United States was imagined as a nation” (70). That is, the definition of “America” which had been understood as a nation of immigrants primarily from European countries would have to be expanded to include Puerto Ricans who were US citizens since the Jones Act of 1917 (not to mention Mexican Americans since 1848). Puerto Ricans as well as Cubans express multi-racial phenotypical identities that are a product of sexual relations among Spanish, African, and Indigenous people. However, by the legacy of the historic Black-White binary US society, “one drop” of Afro-descendant blood (visible phenotypically) relegates a person to an underclass position. The Young Lords Party understood that their full acceptance as US citizens required a dismantling of racist limitations such as those that had been imposed on the African American community.

Women of the Young Lords Party felt that their contributions were overlooked or unwanted. Soon after its formation in 1969, the women openly demanded representation within the party, asking the party to “start promoting women’s equal agency in the revolutionary struggle” to affirm and acknowledge the participation of women (Enck-Wanzer 163).

“When the Young Lords started a year and a half ago, there were very few sisters,” said Denise Oliver, 23, minister of finance and one of the two highest ranking women in the party. “We had a hard time being heard at meetings, and most of the work we did was secretarial work” (Klemesrud).

The impact of women’s demands is clearly visible in the “13 Point Program and Platform of the Young Lords Organization (October 1969).” Modeled after the Black Panther Party’s 10-point platform, the list identifies the fundamental ideals of the movement, including self-determination, cultural education, an end to racism, capitalism, and the

oppression of all third world people. In 1969, point number ten stated: “We want equality for women. Machismo must be revolutionary...not oppressive,” and continues:

Under capitalism,⁴⁷ our people have been oppressed by both the society and our own men. The doctrine of machismo has been used by our men to take out their frustration against their wives, sisters, mothers, and children. Our men must support their women in their fight for economic and social equality, and must recognize that women are equals in every way within the revolutionary ranks (Enck-Wanzer 10-11).

Not only did women’s concerns extend to specifically editing the 13 Point Program, but their concerns were moved up in the order as well, from point number ten to number five. By November 1970, the revised “Young Lords Party 13-Point Program and Platform” states, as its new point number five, “We want equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism. ... Men must fight along with sisters in the struggle for economic and social equality and must recognize that sisters make up over half of the revolutionary army; sisters and brothers are equal fighting for our people” (Enck-Wanzer 12).

In the “Young Lords Party Position Paper on Women,” published in September 1970 in the Young Lords’ newsletter, *Palante*,⁴⁸ women’s concerns were illuminated on topics that ranged from sexist violence to forced sterilization, a procedure sanctioned by the US government for post-partum women in Puerto Rico (Enck-Wanzer 169-174). The paper exposed the historic oppression of women by the colonizing society that exploits women’s labor and bodies, through lower wages, prostitution, and sterilization. Additionally, it points out sexism within the Puerto Rican community, which the author

⁴⁷ Anti-capitalism is a hallmark of the commons model as well, which values communal rather than individualistic management of resources (Helfrich and Bollier).

⁴⁸ Sometimes written as Pa’lante, which is perhaps a more accurate elision of the words, *para adelante*, which mean, roughly, moving forward.

links to the influence of capitalism. The *Palante* article also identifies the challenges faced by women who resist such oppressions within their own community.

Today Puerto Rican men are involved in a political movement. Yet the majority of their women are home taking care of the children. The Puerto Rican sister that involves herself is considered aggressive, castrating, hard and unwomanly. She is viewed by the brothers as sexually accessible because what else is she doing outside the home. The Puerto Rican man tries to limit the woman's role because they feel the double standard is threatened (Enck-Wanzer 171).

This response is reminiscent of the challenges experienced by early Chicana feminists who were labeled as traitors to the *movimiento* for questioning the traditional social structures of Chicano family life and seeking visibility within the movement. Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa made a similar claim, that men were opposed to women's empowerment because they felt threatened (*Interviews* 215). In the evolving Young Lords Party, *machista* behavior—including traditionalized infidelity, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and subservient gender roles, which are the some of the legacies of *Patria Potestad*—became identified as contrary to the goals of the movement, which sought freedom for all (Enck-Wanzer 169-173). These feminist ideals influenced the next generations of Puerto Rican activists, as Erin González reports on the Fortieth Anniversary of the Young Lords:

Whether it's been in their professional lives or raising families, many of the Young Lords women continue to instill and share the same values – chiefly, a commitment to advancing communities and to the dignity of women. “It's really key that women from that period learned lessons not only about raising daughters a certain way but also sons a certain way,” [Denise] Oliver said (González).

As with Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc, the education of future generations was a critical concern, so as not to pass on traditional *machista* beliefs. The notion that men must also be educated to support and advance the dignity of women is an important dynamic at

work in the Latinx Theatre Commons, where women's leadership is resoundingly championed by men. This is a remarkably different response to the emergence of women's leadership among the activists of the late twentieth century. This change of attitude among men came about through various feminist strategies deployed in the arts as well as through scholarship and child rearing.

East Coast Activist Artistry

It has been said that the Black Arts Movement served as the artistic expression in alignment with the liberation goals of the Black Power Movement. On the East Coast, the creative project that most closely expressed the Young Lords Party's goals of self-determination, cultural respect, and intersectional feminisms of the Puerto Rican liberation movement was the Nuyorican Poets Café. Historian Noel Urayoan writes, "Puerto Rican poets were at the forefront of the (counter)cultural ferment of 1960s New York City and, as epitomized by Pedro Pietri's epochal performances with the Young Lords, they were central to the Puerto Rican Movement" (1). Pietri, a founder and long-time participant and supporter of the Nuyorican Poets Café, debuted his renowned poem "Puerto Rican Obituary" at a Young Lords rally in 1969. For Pietri, the work of activism and poetry were aligned, and the Nuyorican Poets Café was part of the movement, as "an acclaimed center for oppositional arts and literature" (Pietri 48).

One notable difference between the artistic expressions of the *movimiento* and that of the Puerto Rican liberation movement was that while the *movimiento* focused on the concerns of Mexican Americans in an intentionally nationalistic way,⁴⁹ Puerto Rican

⁴⁹ And, as mentioned earlier, in contrast to the work of the UFW which represented the concerns of all farmworkers, whether of Mexican, Filipino, or other heritage.

liberation was intentionally diverse. Yes, there was great concern for the conditions in Puerto Rico and for Puerto Ricans in the northeast, but the work included African Americans and Asian Americans, with the goal of lifting up all underprivileged peoples together. It may be that the phenotypical diversity among Puerto Ricans, indeed many Latinx, which reflects African and Asian parentage in many regions of Latin America, made it only natural that diversity was found in its liberation movements. Generally speaking, *Afrolatinidad*, the presence and expression of Afrodescendant Latinx experience, is more prevalent on the East Coast than on the West (López). Another consideration is that, on the East Coast, which is a densely as well as diversely populated region, more opportunities exist for camaraderie and coalition among people of various ethnicities and cultures.

In any case, the cultural arts provided a sense of belonging, pride, and righteousness for communities engaged in liberation movements. Artistic expression generated joy, in stark resistance to the mainstream society and culture that otherwise served rejection and shame. One effect of marginalization is that the authorities at the center of society write history in ways that justify or obfuscate their oppressive actions. The perspective and narratives of the oppressed are neither requested nor required. Indeed, it is a symptom of oppression that the dominant society creates, owns, and distributes the narrative which, in time, becomes a history that even the oppressed can come to believe as true. Hence, the importance of cultural expression as a tool to empower communities and set the record straight. Morán González and Lomas affirm that, for liberation movements,

The purpose of aesthetics became increasingly and directly politicized: to instruct the masses about their untaught histories, to instill pride in their

suppressed cultural practices (especially the use of Spanish), and to mobilize them to agitate for state resources and social respect. Throughout this period, anticolonial and decolonial imaginaries remained vital aspects of Latina/o literature even as the United States initiated and consolidated its role as global hegemon, with particularly devastating results for the Americas (15).

Creative expression was a source of education and empowerment for people who had too long been subjected to a reality of second-class citizenship justified by dominant culture and its messages of superiority. Women were an important part of this liberating creative expression, and they complicated the work of liberation as members of an ethnic, racialized, and gendered underclass. In cases reviewed ahead, we will look at artists who expressed feminist critiques in their culturally inspired and empowering works.

Chicana / Latina Creative Responses

The exponential growth in Latina feminism from the late twentieth century onward is due in some measure to the increase in artistic as well as academic materials (literature, painting, music, performance, essays, and curricula) with which women were able to recognize and express their conditions, form alliances, and transform their circumstances.⁵⁰ This output of materials, which I'll track in two streams corresponding to East and West Coast production, was launched around the same time, from the late 1960s to the late 1970s.

Aida Hurtado suggests that in order to truly understand the history of women's experiences and responses, it is necessary to search within oral traditions and literary texts (37, 47). She quotes a poem by Lorna Dee Cervantes:

⁵⁰ See Maylei Blackwell's *¡Chicana Power!* for a variety of signs, posters, logos, and political cartoons that demonstrate women's creative expression in support of the *movimiento* as well as their feminist critique of machismo found within the *movimiento* (75, 121, 127-130).

I come from a long line of eloquent illiterates
whose history reveals what words don't say.
Our anger is our way of speaking,
the gesture is an utterance more pure than word (qtd. in Hurtado 37).

Cervantes champions the histories and experiences that are shared in personal ways, in ways that have been considered illegible in academe for their lack of adherence to scholarly protocol. However, the move to acknowledge “felt knowledge” as scholarship, to use First Nations scholar Dian Million’s phrase, has thankfully taken hold in many fields, particularly when documenting experiences of marginalized communities (57). Mariana Ortega reflects that “a great number of Latina feminists regard their lived experience as an important component of their theorizing” (246). Next, I will identify several significant creative projects by Chicana/Latina artists that expressed felt knowledge and resistance in art.

Teatropoesía

In the early 1970s, some Chicanas seeking a way to create *teatro* that represented their concerns and aesthetics turned to the wealth of poetry being generated by Chicana feminists to create dramatic presentations of strong female identities (Tatum 156).

Teatropoesía, a women-centric performance style that integrated poetry, prose, music, dance, and mime, provided a form by which women could challenge the subordinate roles they received in plays produced by other *teatros* while at the same time, sharing emergent Chicana writing (Yarbro-Bejarano 1986, 397). In 1974, a women’s group called Las Cucarachas performed a *teatropoesía* piece entitled *Chicana*, for a small festival in San Francisco. It was then performed in Mexico City during TENAZ’ fifth festival. Interestingly, Yarbro-Bejarano continues, while this performance provided strong images

of women throughout history, including the indigenous woman of pre-Columbian Mexico, the *Adelita* of the Mexican Revolution, and the modern “*nueva Chicana*,” the narrative of the performance culminated in the assertion that family life, motherhood, love, and devotion were the ways in which the modern Chicana proved her loyalty to her people (1986, 397). “Although several poems and pantomimes dramatized the need for women to be independent, the group was careful to couch any critique of male/female relationships in a context of solidarity and support of men” (Yarbro-Bejarano 1986, 397).

In 1981, the Cultural Heritage of Chicana Literature festival in Oakland, California commissioned Barbara Branson-Pineda to create a *teatropoesía* script based on the writings in Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga’s anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back* (Yarbro-Bejarano 1983). *Tongues of Fire*, a well-received production, was named for a passage from Anzaldúa’s piece, *Speaking in Tongues*, about the correlation of economic oppression to illiteracy and in turn, low self-esteem, a condition exacerbated by the patriarchy of her own culture (Yarbro-Bejerano 1986, 401). The popularity of *teatropoesía* showed that there was a ready audience for *teatro* Chicana, works that centered women’s concerns, and empowered the artists and audiences, with women’s unabashed claim for stage time, the spotlight, and the microphone.

Nuyorican Poets Café

According to Suzanne Oboler, Puerto Rican artistic expression was widespread, and much like the artistic work of Chicano *movimiento*, it served to challenge and transform the ways Puerto Ricans were seen and saw themselves. The poetry of the movement was rooted in empowerment, taking cultural symbols that had been markers of oppression and transforming them into markers of pride.

On the streets, in the new community-based movements, through the newly founded Young Lords party, in the literary and music scene of the late sixties and early seventies, Puerto Rican students and youth in Chicago and New York proclaimed the death of the docile Puerto Rican and the emergence of a new era of struggle for civil and social rights (Oboler 52).

This “death of the docile Puerto Rican” is clearly evident in Pedro Pietri’s poem, “Puerto Rican Obituary.” Puerto Rican poet María Teresa (Mariposa) Fernández credits the poets of the era, including Sandra María Esteves, one of the founders of the Puerto Rican Poets Café, for “actually put[ting] Nuyorican into existence as something positive and as something that we would want to even identify with and be proud of” (Perez Rosario 472).

The Nuyorican Poets Café was launched in 1973 by a group of writers who felt their writing, which addressed their experiences as marginalized people of color was misunderstood and undervalued by the mainstream literary centers and publishing houses New York City. The group began meeting in the living room of Miguel Algarín on East Sixth Street before landing their sessions at a bar on East Third where the project still meets. However, the project extended far beyond these establishments, as member poets participated in and performed their works “during demonstrations, marches, and takeovers” led by “revolutionary social movements of the time” (Aparicio 978). Of the twenty founding poets, five were women, including Sandra Maria Esteves and Ntozake Shange⁵¹ (“History & Awards”). The Nuyorican Poets Café is understood to be a creative arm of the Puerto Rican liberation movements, including the Young Lords Party. There

⁵¹ The first version of Ntozake Shange’s renowned choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* was presented in Berkeley, California at a bar called Bacchanal in 1974, the same year that Las Cucarachas produced their work of *teatropoesía* entitled *Chicana* in San Francisco (Wilmeth 157). Whether either work influenced the other is a subject for future inquiry.

were several organizations formed in the 1960s and 1970s that were identified with the Puerto Rican movement and with which the poets of the Nuyorican Poets Café also engaged. Sandra María Esteves' recited and recorded her canonical poem "A la Mujer Borriqueña" with El Grupo, a musical and performance collective known as the "cultural arm" of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (Urayoan 28). Noel Urayoan describes the poem as he quotes from *Yerba Buena*, Esteves' 1980 poetry collection:

[H]er mythic tale of "a Puerto Rican woman born in el barrio" (*Yerba Buena* 63) is defined by the tension between a localized poetics of barrio self-definition and a transnational politics of revolutionary struggle, a tension evident in the lines "I speak two languages broken into each other / but my heart speaks the language of people / born in oppression" (Urayoan 29).

Esteves' work, as that of other Nuyorican poets' and the Puerto Rican movement itself, strived to redefine herself as an individual, as part of an urban diasporic community, and as an advocate for the home island of Puerto Rico still struggling under historic financial, political, and social duress. Faythe Turner, editor of the 1991 anthology, *Puerto Rican Writers at Home in the USA*, concurs, describing the Puerto Ricans living and writing in New York as "people living in two worlds at once. An issue which recurs in one guise or another in the work of nearly all of these writers is the question of identity. One of the many strengths of their writing is the frequency with which that question appears as a matter of affirmation and celebration" (5). As a case in point, Turner refers to "Ending Poem" by Rosario Morales and Aurora Levins Morales, which launches the anthology:

I am what I am.
A child of the Americas
A light-skinned mestiza of the Caribbean.
A child of many diaspora, born into this continent at a crossroads.
...
History made us.
We will not eat ourselves up inside anymore

And we are whole (Turner 10).

Not only do the authors reclaim pride in their otherwise marginalized identity, but they reject external disdain and self-loathing, knowing that these perceptions are created, not factual. Poetry, along with protest and community activity, became an activity by which Puerto Ricans and Nuyoricans redefined themselves for themselves and for the community at large. Turner argues that the cultural appreciation for poetic recitation and music, evident throughout the island of Puerto Rico, transferred naturally to the mainland (2).

Poetry remained the primary artistic production of Nuyorican literary artists even as playwriting gained recognition as a powerful form, particularly with the 1974 success of Miguel Piñero's play *Short Eyes* on off-Broadway and Broadway stages. Nuyorican playwriting often retained a poetic sensibility. The first anthology of works by Nuyorican Poets Café playwrights including Miguel Piñero, Amiri Baraka (formerly LeRoi Jones), and Ntozake Shange was published 1997 entitled, *Action: The Nuyorican Poets Café Theatre Festival*. Of the nineteen plays published, five are written by women. One, by Gloria Feliciano, is listed under the heading "Gender Plays." The other four, all placed within the chapter entitled "Monologues and Performance Pieces," are written by Lois Elaine Griffith (also a co-editor of the anthology), Eva Gasteazoro, Ntozake Shange, and Janis Astor del Valle. Possibly in aesthetic alignment with the *teatropoesia* movement described earlier, the last four are predominantly solo pieces. Some of these solo works featured multiple characters, but all were female identified. In some of the works, music and dance are indicated in the stage directions, again emulating the *teatropoesia* aesthetic as well as Shange's choreopoem aesthetic (Algarín xvi). As with Ntozake Shange's *For*

Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, an affinity for the poetic and non-linear dramatic form is found in the creative theatre making of feminists of color. Shange's presence in the Nuyorican Poets Café may well have precipitated this genre's expression in the works selected for the anthology but such a claim is beyond the scope of this research. Suffice to say that certain theatrical works created by feminists of color on both coasts centered women's experiences as gendered, ethnically othered, and racialized beings. These works manifested multivalently through movement and poetic text, rather than following the recipe for the "well-made" play popularized on Broadway throughout the twentieth century. Resistance to dominant culture was found in the form as well as its content.

It is also noteworthy that this anthology included writers who identified as Italian and Chinese American, broadening Nuyorican alliances and advocacy. The Nuyorican Poets Café is identified as a literary venue lifting the voices of the underclasses; the inclusion of works by Italian and Chinese Americans indicated that experiences of oppression were not limited only to specific ethnic identities. The curation of the anthology acknowledged that systemic oppression is experienced by diverse communities, albeit in distinct ways. Ultimately, it pointed to an interest in the broader community, and a willingness to engage in artistic coalition against oppression writ large. And, while works by women comprised barely twenty five percent of the anthology's plays, the pieces demonstrated the artists' explorations into new performance forms by which they expressed identity, individuality, and agency.

Creating and Teaching: María Irene Fornés

One of the most beloved figures in East Coast theatre making is Cuban-born María Irene Fornés, who began writing and directing her plays for the off-Broadway scene in the early 1960s, before the formation of the Young Lords Party or the Nuyorican Poets Café (Rollyson). Indeed, she is considered one of the founders of the Off-off-Broadway movement (Delgado xvi). Fornés' early works were considered "lighthearted" and "delightful" by the New York City critics, but over time her work grew darker, addressing issues of violence and abuse, and her reviews got harsher (Moroff 11). According to Rachel DeSoto, Fornés' work challenged traditional roles of men and women (sometimes but not always within Latinx contexts), which created the dramatic tension of her plays (2). In 1981, Fornés was invited by Artistic Director Max Ferra to create a series of workshops at INTAR/Hispanic American Arts Centre, which served to train playwrights in order to strengthen and grow Latino theatre around the country (DeSoto). Fornés' impact on the emerging playwrights who attended her workshops at INTAR over the course of fourteen years, and in other locations around the US and in Mexico, cannot be underestimated. In addition to authoring forty-six plays, Fornés trained many of the most significant playwrights of the 1980s, '90s, and today including Migdalia Cruz, Nilo Cruz, Anne García-Romero, Cherríe Moraga, Milcha Sanchez-Scott, Octavio Solis, and Caridad Svich (Svich 2009).

According to various playwrights who worked with her, Fornés could be counted on not to be kind, but to be honest, and to guide her students toward truth, even if it was painful or inconvenient. She encouraged her students to trust the wisdom in their bodies, regularly beginning her writing classes with an hour of yoga. Cherríe Moraga writes,

She could be so hard, and not an easy person to be with; loving and kind and generous and all those great things, too. But just hard. She didn't

know how to lie. She wasn't nice like that. Now years later, so [many] people thought bad about her. If a man does that he's brilliant, he's a genius. If a woman does that, she's a bitch (2017, 13).

Fornés rejected the labels that might have been attached to her, such as Latina, feminist, or lesbian, preferring to allow herself to emerge unconditionally (Delgado 149). She urged her students to do the same, not allowing them to be defined by others' terms that would make them, in the words of scholar Tiffany Ana López, "dependent on the expectations or acceptances of others" (Delgado 152). Fornés practiced what she preached, trusting herself as an artist and a teacher to find the way into her task spontaneously. Migdalia Cruz, a leader of several initiatives in Fornés' honor, recounts:

Irene improvised her exercises. She spoke as things occurred to her. Sometimes everything fit perfectly and at other times, we had to struggle to make sense of her words. For each one of us, it was a deep journey into the minds of our characters, with Irene as our personal guide into our memories and into the souls of our characters (qtd. in Svich 7).

Fornés' contributions to US Latinx theatre as an author, teacher and role model have inspired recent efforts to create new anthologies of her work, produce festivals in her honor, and collect her teaching methods in order to create a codified syllabus that can be shared with the academy and future students (García-Romero and Vega). At the Latinx Theatre Commons National Convening in 2013, Fornés' contributions to the field were acknowledged by a proposal for future LTC programming, the Fornés Institute. Currently, the Fornés Institute exists as an ongoing LTC committee which "aims to preserve and to amplify Maria Irene Fornés's legacy as a teacher, mentor and artist, through workshops, convenings and advocacy" ("The Fornés Institute"). In 2018, the committee produced the LTC Fornés Symposium in collaboration with Princeton University, that aligned with a Fornés Colloquium hosted by the NYU Tisch School of

the Arts the following day. Participants were encouraged to attend both days of programming. At the Princeton symposium a new initiative was announced, *Celebrando Fornés/Celebrating Fornés*, by which theatres and institutions of higher education have committed to presenting readings or full productions of her works from fall 2019 through December 2020. *Celebrando Fornés* is spearheaded by Marissa Chibás and Cynthia Decure, both Advisory Committee members of the LTC. In August 2019, the LTC's Fornés Institute soft-launched its website dedicated to Fornés' history and legacy, where current activities such as the ones affiliated with *Celebrando Fornés* can be announced as well.

María Irene Fornés is often labeled the “mother” of Latinx theatre (as a juxtaposition to naming Luis Valdez as its “father”). This may be true, but not without nuance. Fornés' impact was not solely nor specifically Latinx-identified. For one, her students came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including pan-Latinx and Latin American heritages. Also, most of Fornés works did not address the Latinx experience, even if her dramaturgical choices reflected her Latin American heritage in its embrace of poetic language and use of movement. She never taught in Spanish, even when leading writing workshops in Mexico City, although she often wrote marginal notes in Spanish, and never lost her Cuban accent. Near the end of her life, she responded to Spanish-speaking voices rather than English. Her identity and work as a theatre maker and educator defies simplistic characterizations.

All that said, Fornés' influence on the twentieth century field of emerging Latinx playwrights was profound. Several of her most dedicated students, including playwrights Anne García Romero and Migdalia Cruz, are in the process of archiving and codifying

Fornés' pedagogy to share with other instructors and the next generation of playwrights, especially Latinx. Fornés is an unwitting "mother" of Latinx theatre who nurtured the values of creative courage, independence, and truth.

This Bridge Called My Back

As noted earlier, Chicanas struggled to find ways to express their experiences of oppression and to voice their resistance to the patriarchal world in which they lived. However, turning to the existing feminist projects, that is, second wave feminism organized predominantly by white women, did not quite fulfill the necessities of their circumstances either. Gloria Anzaldúa recalls feeling treated like a "poor relative" and an outsider at a women's retreat, an environment where she should have felt perfectly accepted. She and Cherríe Moraga had worked for two years as members of a national feminist writers' organization. As the only Chicanas in the group, they couldn't help but notice that the other women could not or would not discuss their privileges or racism, which complicated the lives of women of color. Elizabeth Martínez states that emerging Latina feminists of the late twentieth century were hard pressed to find resonance in the second wave feminisms that were perceived to speak for the experiences of women who were predominantly white and middle-class. "This sense of clashing worldviews, which resulted from having such different historical experiences, became a major reason why only a few Chicanas looked for lessons that could be learned or alliances that could be forged with Euramerican feminists" (Martinez 1021). In this light, the argument proposed by Chicano objectors that Chicanas were being led astray by Anglo feminists seems misplaced.

Anzaldúa decided that the time had come to reflect the multifaceted experience of sexism for Chicanas (and other women of color) in contrast to the experiences of sexism for white women. With Moraga, she compiled *This Bridge Called My Back*, an anthology that united diverse voices of women of color within one groundbreaking volume that illuminated women of color's struggles but also resilience, resistance, survival, and sisterhood in their intersectional experiences of oppression (xxiii). This book, first published in 1981 along with Anzaldúa's book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, is credited with inspiring a host of future women writers of color. For example, on the occasion of its third printing by SUNY Press, Black Power activist and environmentalist Angela Davis wrote:

This Bridge Called My Back ... dispels all doubt about the power of a single text to radically transform the terrain of our theory and practice. Twenty years after its publication, we can now see how it helped to untether the production of knowledge from its disciplinary anchors—and not only in the field of women's studies. *This Bridge* has allowed us to define the promise of research on race, gender, class and sexuality as profoundly linked to collaboration and coalition-building. And perhaps most important, it has offered us strategies for transformative political practice that are as valid today as they were two decades ago (SUNY Press).

In the rededication to the third edition of *Borderlands*, renowned Dominican author Julia Alvarez wrote,

“As one of that first generation of Latinas who came of age in those pre-multicultural, pre-women's movement days, I floundered as to what it meant to be a hyphenated, bicultural, bilingual American... I began to write out of necessity, a way to integrate the many selves, to understand the confusion, string for the labyrinth. But my writing was a private matter, a lonely way to make sense of the divisions. To drown out, momentarily, what the larger culture was telling me—something was wrong with me for not being able to assimilate and be grateful for the opportunities I had received...It was a lifesaver to discover other Latinas undergoing similar journeys. The Civil Rights movement gave us hope. And Gloria Anzaldúa, along with other Latina writers who began to

publish in the early 80s, helped us to understand what was happening to us” (Anzaldúa 2012, 233).



Figure 6 Portrait of the Artist as the Virgen of Guadalupe by Yolanda M. Lopez, 1978. (Y. Lopez).

Alvarez argues that creative writing by women of color helped others feel that their experiences were not unique to them alone, but part of larger experience of systematic and racialized sexism playing out in the confrontations with mainstream society at large, and within their own ethnic communities. Aesthetic choices made for this work, such as writing bilingually or including traditional iconography, were inspired by and validated cultural legacy. Elizabeth Martinez

describes how meaningful it was for women to

discover writing and art that spoke to them directly, asserting that the women would not have come as far along in the feminist movement and the Chicano *movimiento* without the poems of Sandra Cisneros, the stories of Ana Castillo, and the paintings of visual artists such as Yolanda Lopez and Ester Hernandez, whose transformed images of the Virgin de Guadalupe (see fig. 6) upended the reverence for the model of self-sacrifice (E. Martinez 1025). The use of iconic images such as those of the Virgen, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, or *Las Adelitas* or *soldaderas* (the female soldiers of the Mexican Revolution) formed part of the argument against claims that Chicana feminists were simply embracing Anglo feminism in a traitorous move against Chicano liberation. By using images of strong women of Mexican history, Chicanas could point to their own cultural legacy as the source of their inspiration (Roth 160). Furthermore, Lopez and Hernandez

replaced the traditional image of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*, the long-suffering and patient mother, with images of physically active modern women, in essence replacing the tradition of *marianismo*, or submission, with self-actualized power and independence.

Chicana / Latina Feminist Scholarship

In addition to the creative arts, a great debt is owed to the Chicana/Latina scholars of the late twentieth century who carved out theoretical frameworks that spoke to the unique historical, social, economic, and cultural circumstances that underlie the necessity of Latinx feminisms. Historian Maylei Blackwell argues that early Chicana print culture, which included the short-lived *Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* newspaper and the *Encuentro Femenil* journal, was “a strategic site of intervention and contestation for women in the Chicano movement” that helped shape a Chicana “counterpublic” in the 1970s (133). According to Blackwell, the essays and reports written in the numerous publications that emerged during the *movimiento* “appeared in a narrative format that mirrored the urgency of their words” (155). That is, the writing was personal, poetic, and “politically infused” rather than journalistic (*ibid.*). In time, this sort of personally charged writing supported the creation of culturally coalitional anthologies, most famously, *This Bridge Called My Back*.

This Bridge Called My Back, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga’s anthology, was filled with poetry, fiction, and testimonio by women of color that spoke directly to many readers, but it also carried scholarly essays illuminating the Chicana experience by Norma Alarcón and Jo Carrillo. The book’s mixture of literary genres is a testament to the diverse paths by which the message of women of color feminisms, as well as

intersectionality and coalition, were conveyed. Feminist theorists, many of whom who have been cited in this chapter, include Alma García (1989, 1997), Aida Hurtado (1996), Elizabeth Martinez (1995), Chela Sandoval (1993, 1998, 1998), Ofelia Schutte (1993, 1998), Carla Trujillo (1998) and Margaret Villanueva (1999). Latinx theatre scholars who illuminated the rising field of Latinx theatre making through a feminist lens include Alicia Arrizón (2000), María Teresa Marrero (2000), Lillian Manzor (2000), and Yvonne Yarbrow-Bejarano (1983, 1986). This writing has been critically important in the discourse and refinement of Latinx feminisms which grapples with a myriad of circumstances and has grown as a field of study to reflect the concerns of Latin Americans.

However, given the relatively low numbers of US Chicanas/Latinas with access to higher education in the mid-to-late twentieth century, they similarly would have lacked access to scholarly publications. Chicana/Latina feminists found alternate means to express themselves and advance their feminist ideas in meaningful, personal, and relatable ways, in artistic registers as well as polemic. Ahead, several examples of noteworthy late twentieth century feminist Latina creative output will be discussed, selected for their influence upon the women leaders of the LTC.

Feminist Acknowledgments in the LTC

Unlike the early history of TENAZ, women have been and continue to be well-represented in the leadership of the LTC; forty-six (or so) of the current sixty-seven⁵² Steering Committee members are women (Huipé). I asked fifteen women, who or what had inspired and/or empowered them to become the leaders not only of the LTC but in

⁵² As of 1 August 2019; this number must be approximated to allow for transgender and non-binary people whom I have not yet met.

their own lives as professional theatre artists, producers, writers, and academics. The inspirational artists whose names were repeated are listed below, alphabetically:

Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga were mentioned by several LTC Steering Committee members for their expression and embrace of Latina feminisms. Their essays were notable for the inclusion of indigenous philosophy, as well as their honor for the earth. Along with bell hooks and Ntozake Shange, Anzaldúa and Moraga were noted for their nuanced perceptions of women of color's experiences. Anzaldúa wrote of the new *mestiza*, the Chicana experience, as a negotiation of multiple identities:

She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else (*Borderlands* 2012, 101).

In her later work, Anzaldúa introduced the concept of *nepantla*, from the Nahuatl word which describes the feeling of in-betweenness in the borderlands of identity. She elaborated on this further to name the *nepantlera*, a person in the state of *nepantla* but in search of, and helping others to locate, 'an unmapped common ground: the humanity of the other' (*Interviews* 570). In these ways, through naming and normalizing the sense of multiple identities, and inviting the generosity to embrace others who share that self-awareness, Anzaldúa lays the groundwork for later theories of intersectionality, which complicate identities with other inequities and social justice concerns.

Chilean-born Isabel Allende inspired a number of LTC women artists by her example as someone who honored her calling to be a creative writer later in life. Her enormous success as a novelist defies ageist as well as sexist expectations about a woman's usefulness in her later years. Additionally, Allende is noted for her commitment to writing openly about her life and relationships, making transparent her challenges and strategies for survival, and to searching for a life of passion and fulfillment at all ages.

Julia Alvarez, a Dominican writer, was cited for her novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, which resonated especially with women communicating in two or more languages. *Garcia Girls* is the story of four sisters from the Dominican Republic, who emigrate to the US as children accompanying their parents. The story tracks the girls' encounters and negotiations with US culture including events of racism, bullying, and the sexual revolution of the 1970s. Their Spanish language is a layer of their Dominican identity that they must shed in order to assimilate to the ways of the US, but doing so also means cultural alienation from their parents and the traditions of their family back in the DR. The backwards structure of the novel, in which the most current events occur first and the narrative goes backwards in time, reflects a challenge to the classic chronologically ordered narrative model.

Like Alvarez, Sandra Cisneros was touted for championing the Latina voice that often speaks in more than one language, and for her attention to details of

character and place in her lyrical stories. Her *House on Mango Street* reflected a young Chicana's life in Chicago, within a small community of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, and with the community at large. Comprised as a series of vignettes centered on the young girl's and other women's experiences, the novel breaks with form by allowing the vignettes to stand on their own as contributions to a neighborhood rich with wisdom.

Playwright Migdalia Cruz's bold writing, featuring strong female characters and raw situations, inspired many for its unflinching commitment to harsh realities of life and the politics that create them. Cruz is a champion of the Nuyorican experience, bringing to light the complexity its history. Her play, *Yellow Eyes*, is set in the 1970s. The protagonist is a young girl, the grand-daughter of an Afro-descendant enslaved in Puerto Rico, who found his way to freedom in NYC. However, after two generations of mixed parentage, the girl is phenotypically white, and struggles against young Black Power activists who reject her friendship. A long-time protégé of María Irene Fornés, Cruz's writing is poetic, challenges traditional narrative form, and speaks to painful issues of race, family, and aging in a hostile environment, as well as the strength and resilience found within a supportive family.

María Irene Fornés inspired many with her joyful experimentation and trust in an embodied creative process. Her teaching reflected a rejection of labels that limited an artist, preferring to encourage her students to search within for their true voice.

Her writing workshops included yoga and other meditative practices in order to be fully present in the artistic process. A true avant-garde artist, her work reflected a fearless commitment to personal truth.

Visual and performance artist Ana Mendieta, a Cuban émigré, inspired through work that centered the earth/body connection. Mendieta often used her own body combined with natural materials such as plants, feathers, blood and dirt, as sources for her artwork. As Rosalba de la Cruz, one of the most avid collectors of Mendieta's works, describes, "it's all about the healing nature of Mother Earth, the healing power of the female body" (Voien). Her untimely death in 1985 sparked outrage among many who felt it had occurred at the hands of her husband, who was charged with her murder but ultimately released due to reasonable doubt (Sullivan).

These are only a few of the creative voices of Latina feminists who spoke through literature, poetry, visual art, and theatre and made a difference in the hearts and minds of influential Latinx women who followed them. They sowed pride in cultural legacy. The influence of these twentieth-century Latina feminist artists is acknowledged by the contemporary leaders who make use of what they've read, seen or heard from the artists and art that has inspired them.

The Legacy of Latinx Feminisms

LTC participants of this study identified other influences, in addition to the direct inspiration provided by feminist Chicana/Latina artists and art works, that informed and strengthened their championship of Latinx feminist ideals. These include family, higher education, and theatre making itself. The acknowledgement for these influences echoes the writing of Latinas/Chicanas and other women of color feminists who refuted the images and narratives that created misleading and harmful stereotypes. For Chicanas/Latinas these stereotypes included the submissive and long-suffering woman in the model of the long-suffering Virgin Mary, or the hypersexualized woman in the model of the Latin spitfire. These limiting representations of Latina womanhood did not diminish women's true capacities, just the acknowledgment of their strength and capabilities. Acknowledging the strength of mothers and other female family members represents a shift in the narratives about women and their place in the public sphere.

Influences included upbringing, relationships, partnerships, and educational experiences. For example, some members were raised by single mothers or were surrounded by sisters, aunts, and grandmothers who instilled in them the necessity of respect for women and their struggles. Playwright and actor Evelina Fernandez acknowledged the legacy of "all the strong women in my life, my mother, my grandmother. Basically, my whole family has been run by women for generations, for the last one hundred years that I know of" (Fernandez). Alex Meda also stated that she came "from a long line of women writers, thinkers, activists, scholars," and that her upbringing "informs my world view, practice, any room I step into I bring that, allow it not to be erased, and also lead with that" (Meda). Meda may not be a direct descendant of any of

the late colonial profeminists mentioned earlier, but clearly the work of her family echoes the work of writers Josefa Amar, Gertrudís Gómez de Avellaneda, and Emilia Pardo Bazán, cited earlier. Playwright Enrique Urueta shared that he “grew up with my mom and five sisters and they instilled in me a respect of women. When I encountered cultural misogyny, I couldn’t get down with that” (Urueta).

Feminist influence in the home was not limited to mothers and matriarchs. Karen Zacarías shared that, although she was raised within a Mexican *machista* society, she “grew up in a non-*machista* household” (Zacarías Personal interview). She found a powerful ally in her father, who was “the only one who didn’t have sons, and he didn’t feel the need to keep going on” (ibid.) It was meaningful to her that, unlike other patriarchs of her extended family, her father actively demonstrated his appreciation for his daughters by not insisting on more births in order to produce a male child. “That was a powerful message to my sister and me” (ibid.). While geographically unrelated to the East Coast, and Denise Oliver’s appreciation for how women of the Young Lords party raised their sons to advance “the dignity of women,” Zacarías’ recollection reflects how such advocacy was unusual during her childhood (González).

Director Richard Perez echoed the importance that his upbringing had on his feminist ideals but added that his current relationship also held strong sway. Perez’ feminist identity emerged from “several generations of family members, colleagues, and inspirational people who I’ve met in my life who’ve shown me the light, including my wife who inspires me every day in that realm” (Perez). Perez was not alone in acknowledging his wife for her influence. Luis Valdez, who received criticism for certain practices in the early days of El Teatro Campesino, admitted that...

I wasn't always a feminist, but I learned along the way. Since the 70s to be sure, to appreciate the women's movement. ... Also I've been married, my wife and I have been married almost 50 years ... My wife has been a feminist all the time that I've known her, all her life as far as I know. I agreed with her and I continue to agree with her that we're not going to have social justice until we have gender parity in our life. There cannot be this disengagement that pays women less and treats them like animals. It's the most egregious part of masculine domination of history and it needs to be overturned (L. Valdez).

Several other men engaged in the LTC cited their partners as the source of their feminist awareness, people who had deepened their understanding of feminist concerns. It seems clear that the Chicana/Latina feminist movement of the 1970s and 80s exerted an influence on the mothers, aunts, and wives who instilled some feminist ideals in their partners and the next generation. Their contribution to the feminisms at work in the LTC is significant (as will be discussed in Chapter V).

A few of the LTC participants interviewed for this study cited their engagement in women's studies programs and scholarship within their educational institutions for illuminating their understanding of Chicana/Latina, as well as mainstream, feminisms. Dr. Jorge Huerta, who founded el Teatro de la Esperanza, credits "the initial teachings of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga," as well as the scholarship of Jill Dolan and SueEllen Case who discussed feminism within the context of performance studies for his feminist sensibilities (Huerta Personal interview). Scholar-artist Irma Mayorga, who co-champions the Scholars project of the LTC's El Fuego initiative, also noted the profound influence of Cherríe Moraga, who is possibly best known as playwright. Mayorga considers herself, "a direct [protégé] of Cherríe Moraga, who was a teacher and professor, primary instructor of my doctoral studies at Stanford. I trained with her in both poetry and playwriting, and in Chicana Feminist theory ... She wouldn't have spent four

years with me if I wasn't a radical Chicana feminist" (Mayorga). Not unlike what has been said about Maria Irene Fornés, Moraga is known for writing and teaching from her deeply held principles regarding women's equity, creativity, and freedom. Playwright Enrique Urueta also credits his undergraduate experience with deepening his understanding of feminisms. "I had the opportunity to study with Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw.⁵³ The way they taught writing was through the body, everything began with body, questions and assumptions of gender and power" (Urueta).

Finally, the practice of feminist theatre making was influential. Jose Luis Valenzuela, co-founder and Artistic Director of the Latino Theatre Company, recalled how his early career years creating *teatro* Chicano helped develop his awareness of feminist concerns. Working with Teatro de la Esperanza, a non-hierarchical collective, he saw how "its work was very feminist-oriented. In *La Victima*," arguably the company's most renowned work, "all the leading roles were women, the strongest roles were women, the women in the company were very strong. That education helped me" (Valenzuela). Not surprisingly, that sensitivity is embedded in the Latino Theatre Company, which Valenzuela co-founded. "In our company, the women say that the men are very in touch with our feminine side" (ibid.). The feminist and collective sensibilities espoused and practiced by Teatro de la Esperanza influenced at least two of its company members, Valenzuela and Fernandez. In stark contrast to the concerns articulated by Women in Teatro during the TENAZ era, (including the lack of women playwrights), Evelina Fernandez, a co-founder of the Latino Theatre Company, is the company's lead playwright, and one of the leading Chicana playwrights in the US today.

⁵³ Weaver and Shaw were members of Split Britches, an early feminist lesbian performance duo that performed at the Wow Café in the 80s, among other NYC performance venues.

Latinx Feminisms and Men

This chapter has focused predominantly on women's circumstances, and their responses to patriarchal Latin American and Latinx society, and to the Chicano/Latino liberation movements of the late twentieth century. However, as has been seen in the testimonies above, these responses, whether in art, scholarship, or relationships, influenced future generations of Latinx of all genders, not just women. Men have examined culturally informed patriarchal behavior and beliefs which were not only oppressive and harmful to women but also generated a stereotype of the Latino male. For the US mainstream, the image of the dysfunctional, patriarchal Latino man took hold in 1961 when introduced by anthropologist Oscar Lewis in his popular book *Children of Sanchez*. "His description of the dynamics of a poor Mexican family with an abusive father and four dysfunctional children became iconic of all Latino families, whether residing in the United States or in Latin America" (Hurtado 116). Soon after, William Madsen, another anthropologist, reinforced this image with his own report on the "predominance of machismo in all Latino familial relationships." Hurtado quotes Madsen, who wrote,

The ideal male role is primarily defined by the concept of machismo or manliness. Every Mexican-American male tries to make his life a living validation of the assumption that the man is stronger, more reliable, and more intelligent than the female (116).

Not only is this generalization unfair, it also functions to create one of the stereotypes that serve to perpetuate Anglo supremacy. *Machismo*, as a personality trait, has been constructed in the US as a negative trait of the Latino man and deployed in elitist and racist ways that limit the understanding of complex people. Worse, these stereotypes

would indicate that *machismo* is inherent, essential, or genetic, “to men with one or another geographic and/or class ancestry,” that is, men of Latin American descent (González-López and Gutmann). This stereotype must be dismantled as Latinx culture in the US moves away from the colonial legacy of patriarchal identity.

Hurtado and Sinha’s 2006 Latino Masculinities Study, conducted with 105 men of mostly Mexican descent, most of whom were attending an institution of higher education, revealed that more than one-third of the men self-identified as feminists. When asked, “What does the word ‘manhood’ mean to you?” none included the negative ideas traditionally associated with *machismo* in their definitions, these being the domination of women, emotional distance/reserve, and the denigration of intellectual activities. The themes which emerged included defining manhood as a “developmental process” connected to the fulfillment of responsibilities, including familial ones; manhood as an ethical position, equated with “womanhood, humanhood, peoplehood,” respect for self and others, independence, confidence and educational success; and the rejection of the definition of manhood in biological, hegemonic, or violent terms (63).

The young Latinos who have come to identify as feminists may be outlining new conceptions of manhood that go beyond *machismo* and that are aligned with other oppressed groups. They see themselves in alliance with women, the poor, gays, and other disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, they view being a man as something to question and redefine, leading to a possible new model for more equitable social arrangements (77).

These young men are redefining Latinx masculinity with an intersectional dimension, recognizing how their identification as men of color engenders marginalization in ways comparable to that experienced by other socially and economically oppressed people.

This ideological transformation may also be seen as a decolonizing effort.

Maldonado-Torres suggests that toxic models of masculinity are a legacy of coloniality, ideas constructed to support a system of power that reinforces post-colonial domination of the colonized by colonizer (243). The Spanish male rehearsed and re-inscribed his power in the New World through his domination over women, the Indigenous, and enslaved Afro-descendants, behaviors that became policies. The normalization of sexism towards women and the appropriation of the word *macho* in the US to describe Latinx men pejoratively, are ways in which dominant culture, whether Spanish, Latin American, or Unitedstatesian have undermined the humanity of Latinx. Ultimately, the ability to redefine Latino masculinity rests in those who perform it (250). Decolonization is the reclamation of humanity by the *damné*, those who have been condemned to powerlessness and the acceptance of labels imposed upon them by dominant culture, who perform masculinity in the proscribed manner, and who internalize the accompanying negative judgment from mainstream society. In rejecting the toxic model of masculinity, and instead articulating specific qualities and values such as allyship, education, self-reflection, intersectionality, self-respect, and respect for others, this new generation of Latinx men liberate themselves and support the liberation of women as well. These young men's encounters with feminism have provided ways to think critically about masculinity and envision their own way.

Conclusion

Several values essential to Chicana/Latina feminisms emerge from this historical view of Latinx feminist ideologies, from their roots in colonial Latin American society to the present. These include self-determination; suffrage; entrepreneurship; advanced

education; equal and acknowledged participation in the public sphere, including in the struggles for liberation; resistance to patriarchal hierarchies; representation beyond the simplistic Virgin/Whore dichotomy; and ultimately, the freedom to champion these values without being labeled unwomanly, or traitorous to their people and their causes. Latinx feminisms value, demand, and receive alliance and support from Latinx of all genders to achieve these goals. In alignment with cultural movements for liberation, Latinx feminisms value the right to be Latinx, and to express, challenge, and celebrate cultural heritages and identities, including self-definitions of Latinx femininity or personhood. Finally, acknowledging that Latinx identity is inherently diverse and charged by intersectional concerns, Latinx feminisms value inclusion and alliance with other marginalized communities, including other people of color and members of LGBTQ+ communities whether or not they also identify as Latinx. While Latinx feminisms may have begun by voicing resistance against patriarchal systems that oppress women, they have grown inclusive and expansive, understanding that patriarchal hierarchies and their limitations negatively impact all genders, and further, all historically marginalized people.

Ultimately, the challenge for feminist Latinx has been to embrace empowering cultural legacies even as they challenge traditions that reinforce inequitable or hierarchical structures. No Latinx wishes to be reduced to any sort of stereotype, whether gendered, cultural, or racial. As will be seen in Chapter V, these nuances of Latinx self-identification are visible in the work and goals of the LTC, supported by the common structure by which the LTC organizes and carries out its mission.

CHAPTER IV

THE LATINX THEATRE COMMONS

The Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC) is a national movement of Latinx theatre makers, scholars, and supporters that aims to transform the narrative of the American theatre, amplify the visibility of Latinx performance, and champion equity through convening, scholarship, advocacy, and art making. In Chapter II, I quoted Stan Steiner's 1969 definition of a movement, and it bears repeating for how well it describes the impetus and force of the LTC today. For him, a movement is "When there are enough people with one idea so that their actions are together like a huge wave of water which nothing can stop" (Steiner 210). When Steiner wrote this, he was describing the sentiments behind the Chicano *movimiento*, and TENAZ, the Teatro Nacional de Aztlán. Nearly fifty years since the founding of TENAZ, the Latinx theatre-making community still has more work to do in order to bring their community to a more equitable position within mainstream US society.

Independent Latinx theatres are under-resourced, Latinx playwrights are under-produced, Latinx actors, directors, and designers are under-represented among those who are hired by the nation's larger theatres (those with the ability to offer living wages to freelance artists), and Latinx are under-represented in positions of leadership in these larger companies as well (*Diversity* 20; Lehrer; Onuoha; TCG). An Actors' Equity Association (AEA) study compiled from 2013 to 2015 showed that only approximately 3% of all AEA contracts for actors and stage managers are offered to Latinx professionals (Lehrer). There were no plays by Latinx playwrights on TCG's "20 Most Produced Plays" lists from 1994 to 2014, nor in 2016 or 2017. The situation is similar for all

historically marginalized groups; according to a study by the Artists Anti-Racism Coalition, directors hired at the ten largest off-Broadway theatres from 2007 to 2017 were 89.5% white and 10.5% people of color (Newton, Brewer). The increasing awareness of these discrepancies is supporting the engagement of Latinx in the professional theatre field and has brought celebration for recent successes such as the appointment of Maria Goyanes as the new Artistic Director of Washington DC's Woolly Mammoth Theatre and the many regional productions of Lin-Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights* and Karen Zacarias' *Native Gardens*. However, these achievements do not mean that longstanding discrimination is over. Despite efforts toward diversification, Latinx artists and their work continue to be marginalized by the vestiges of cronyism, racism, misogyny, and exclusionary habits which have kept from being welcomed at the palaces of the industry. Latinx theatre makers can't help but remain aware of this continuous marginalization in the professional theatre field, and its social and political implications.

The LTC identifies a narrative composed of longstanding tropes, stereotypes, expectations, and misinformation that is continually re-inscribed by dominant society both within the industry and in the imaginations of the theatergoing public. This narrative is legible to theatre makers and audiences, Latinx and non-Latinx alike, with potentially harmful ramifications. "Images circulated through popular culture are an important part of the contested terrain in the struggle to define the place of Latinos in North America" (Romero and Habell-Pallán 20). The propagation of this narrative reinforces misinformation that justifies socio-economic and political policies with harmful implications for the Latinx community and the community at large. According to justice studies scholar Mary Romero and women's studies scholar Michelle Habell-Pallán,

“narratives about cultural images and icons are key in struggles to define superior or inferior cultures, to establish what is central and what is marginal, to dictate official and forgotten histories, and to reinforce and police external and internal representations of social relations” (20). To return to Maldonado-Torres, the LTC is comprised of people whom he might define as the *damné* working on behalf of themselves and other Latinx *damné* to decolonize themselves and the field (if not mainstream audiences) by replacing simplistic and erroneous representations with more accurate expressions of the Latinx experience (253).

As mentioned in Chapter II, TENAZ provided opportunities for activists to train in theatre arts as a means to become more effective at raising awareness about their cause and concerns, and to inspire its audiences to action. One outcome was that it inspired more Latinx to enroll in institutions of higher education to pursue professional training and a viable career in theatre. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a surge of Latinx-identified theatre making, much of it created by college- and conservatory-trained artists. Interestingly, along with the increase in work by Latinx theatre makers that reflected their experiences, work by non-Latinx theatre makers interested in exploring the contexts of Latinidad also grew. Examples include *Evita* by Andrew Lloyd Weber in 1996, and *The Capeman*, a Broadway musical created by Paul Simon and Derek Walcott in 1998. Below, I offer a different example, a Latinized production of *Much Ado About Nothing* in 2011 that offended the Latinx theatre-making community and instigated the activism that inspired the LTC.

This chapter describes the rationale, launch, and major events of the LTC, which will include the framework inspired by commons ideology. In 2012, the newly created

HowlRound Theatre Commons introduced the commons model to the LTC, and it has subsequently guided the LTC's practical as well as ethical organization. In this chapter, I will refer to commons theories articulated by David Bollier (2016), P. Carl (2017), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2009), Silke Helfrich and David Bollier (2019), Lewis Hyde (2010), and Massimo De Angelis (2017). Jamie Gahlon, HowlRound Director and co-founder, recommended Hyde and Bollier's writing, which are included in HowlRound's current commons book club, as well as the extensive bibliography located on Bollier's blog ("Commons reading").

As in Chapter II, which described the history, rationale, and activities of TENAZ, I will turn to the framework of the LTC's four tenets to identify how the LTC's programs satisfy the desire to affect the field through convening, scholarship, advocacy, and art making. These tenets were identified during the Boston Convening, as recommendations for action proposed by eight groups comprised of all the attendees were "distilled by the full group into four areas of strategic engagement for the LTC as it moved forward" (Herrera 100). Since then, the four tenets, articulated collectively, have helped define the LTC's programmatic activities. To begin, however, I'll briefly review the history of the launch and earliest programs of the LTC.

Birth of a Movement

The founding of the LTC in 2012 was precipitated by an open letter written by director Tlaloc Rivas in December 2011 to Michael Kahn, the Artistic Director of The Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, DC. Rivas wrote on behalf of a larger pool of Latinx theatre makers, issuing a collective response that would prove to be a

model for the LTC's future advocacy. Rivas' critique of the Shakespeare Theater Company's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* raised important questions about the way in which Latinx are represented on the stages of the nation's most prominent theatres. Art philosopher James O. Young identifies location as well as content as a potential source of offense (141). A renowned, highly respected, Tony Award-winning regional theatre with national visibility such as The Shakespeare Company sets the standard for professional excellence for audiences and artists around the country. The audience applause, the positive reviews, and the continuing donor support, reinforces, condones, and rewards the company's choices even when its choices are offensive or harmful. As Rivas expressed, it "is disappointment unworthy of the stature of such a revered company." Young argues that the state of offense "may hinder people in the pursuit of their interests and thus cause harm," and warns artists to be especially sensitive when appropriating material from historically oppressed minority cultures (141).

The production under discussion, an intercultural experiment which set Shakespeare's comedy in a Cuban sugar plantation of the 1930s, triggered concerns in several areas, including casting, marketing, and adaptation. Although set in Cuba, there was only one Latinx-identified lead performer in the show, and he was cast in the role of Don John, the primary villain. As one of the theatres in the country that TCG classifies as Group 6,⁵⁴ those with the largest annual budgets in the nonprofit theatre universe, the company should have had the resources to cast ethnically appropriate actors either from within its cosmopolitan environs or from out of town. It appeared that the production's Latinized concept would apply only to the design elements and the marketing, not the

⁵⁴ In 2011, TCG's Group 6 budget size was \$5 million or more (Voss 2012). In 2015, TCG's Group 6 budget size was redefined as \$10 million or more (Voss 2016).

casting. The advance marketing for the show suggested that setting it in Cuba would provide a titillating locale for the play, “a tropical destination for cultural excess and entertainment,” according to Rivas. In his open letter, Rivas pointed out that this exoticization has had serious historical precedence, including a lasting impact on Cuban economics, government, and society in the 20th century (Geiling). Additionally, framing the show in its marketing campaign as “hot and sexy” re-inscribed the images of the “Latin Lover” and the “Spitfire” — reductive stereotypes which defined Latinx as little more than sexually-charged beings. These were only a few of the offenses cited in the letter.

The damage done through ignorance and the use of offensive stereotypes would not be easily repaired. As Rivas wrote, “The honest truth is that ethnic enmity is inherent in our cultural fabric. It takes thought to rip it apart and re-weave our cultural fabric so that we are fair, representative, and honest about who we are... and who we want to be.” It takes concerted efforts to repair the reputation of a maligned community. Furthermore, Young warns that “the members of such a culture will quite reasonably be particularly sensitive to further indignities,” giving rise to mistrust and alienation towards an art form that the community might otherwise embrace (141). To its credit, The Shakespeare Company responded thoughtfully to Rivas’ letter, and made changes be less offensive, including changing the names that had been assigned to the two clown characters (Juan Huevos and Jose Frijoles) back to their original, Shakespeare-given names of Hugh Oatcake and George Seacoal.

Inspired by Rivas’ open letter and cognizant of the struggles and harms endured by Latinx theatre-makers and audiences, playwright Karen Zacarías, then a resident

playwright with the American Voices New Play Institute at Arena Stage, convened a group of eight colleagues in May 2012. One of the benefits of the Arena's three-year residency was access to a discretionary micro-fund which could be used in whatever manner the playwright saw fit. David Dower, who guided the program as the Arena's Associate Artistic Director, recalls how Zacarías was the only one of the six playwrights who asked for what she felt was needed for her community rather than for herself personally (Dower). Jamie Gahlon, who was also an administrator of the Residency program, reflected how Zacarías' gesture was an act of resource sharing that set the tone and foundation for the LTC commons model. Rather than put the residency micro-fund toward her own project, recalls Gahlon, "She felt compelled to purpose these resources toward a sort of gift ... The spirit behind gathering people was planted in that orientation" (Gahlon Personal interview).

Directors, playwrights, scholars, and producers from around the country – including Rivas – were brought to Washington, D.C. for two days to speak, as Zacarías put it, "*a calzón quitada*"⁵⁵ about the challenges and the hopes of being a Latinx theatre artist in this country (Zacarías "Foreword" 1). These sorts of conversations had been happening for several years in an informal way at annual TCG Conferences but without sufficient time to dive into analysis or strategize unified responses. The conversation in DC lasted two full days. Zacarías remembers that "every one of the participants expressed a deep desire to bring together a larger group of artists to form a concrete action plan" (ibid. 2). Inadvertently invoking the legacy of TENAZ, the time had come for Latinx artists to again support and serve each other in a concerted way. Commons

⁵⁵ loosely, no holds barred.

ideology, as identified by theorists Helfrich Silke and David Bollier, emerged in this moment. Silke and Bollier state that *Shared Purpose*, crafted from the unique and potentially disparate needs of participants, is one of “ten dynamics of Peer Governance that tend to be present in effective commons” (119). The shared purpose that brought together a disparate group of Latinx theatre makers from all around the country created a theoretical foundation for the LTC.

Director Antonio Sonera was one of the eight invited to this gathering. As described in Chapter I, he contacted a number of Latinx theatre-makers in Portland, Oregon, including myself, for our thoughts on the questions that he and the other invitees had received in preparation: “What are the pressing issues facing Latino theatre artists in the American theatre?,” and, “What are some ways to move the dialogue in our field forward around these issues?” (Sonera). I replied, expressing concerns about access to resources, Eurocentric training, ethnic identity, representation, the delineations between commercial and community theatre, the need for greater visibility for work created by Latinx and other underrepresented communities, and more, which he shared at the gathering. Sonera’s approach, of arriving at the meeting in DC speaking not simply for himself but on behalf of a larger community, became a foundational value of the LTC. As an emerging knowledge and resource-sharing commons, it has been a part of the LTC’s ethos that information is shared via ambassadorship in the spirit of transparency and inclusion, for the benefit of the whole community.

The eight gathered at D.C. included playwright Kristoffer Diaz, playwright and scholar Anne García-Romero, director Lisa Portes, director Tlaloc Rivas, director Antonio Sonera, playwright Enrique Urueta, director Jose Luis Valenzuela, and

playwright Karen Zacarías. Along with HowlRound co-founders P. Carl and David Dower, the group discussed the danger of reproducing misleading and potentially harmful narratives such as those seen at The Shakespeare Theatre and throughout the country. They addressed the demise of two significant play development programs, the Hispanic Playwrights Project (HPP, 1985-2004) of the South Coast Repertory Theatre and the Latino Theatre Initiative (LTI, 1992-2005) of the Center Theatre Group. Both programs had nurtured playwrights, actors, directors, and other artists for a number of years. As Anne García-Romero noted at the LTC’s first Steering Committee meeting, “the gathering, the work I saw at HPP as a young artist was remarkable and really influenced my craft—sharing the work in the room together is powerful and raises the level of what we do in the world” (Gahlon “3.22.13”). These programs provided the Latinx theatre-making community significant, culturally appropriate support with which to generate and refine its narrative-changing plays (C. Rodriguez 8, 37). The closure of these programs impacted not only the development of new works but the opportunity for theatre makers from around the country to convene, reflect upon the work, and reinforce their professional network. The eight practitioners gathered in DC discussed the geographic isolation of Latinx theatre makers all over the country, the history and legacies of Latinx theatre, and the need for community and action.

The goal of the conversation was not simply to criticize but to see if the group could, as a highly committed *ad hoc* think tank, create recommendations of benefit to the Latinx theatre-making community and field. The result of this two-day conversation was the creation of the Latino Theatre Commons (LTC) and four initiatives “that will

continue to advance the field of US Latina/o theatre” (García-Romero). The initiatives were:

1. To broaden the conversation begun in Washington DC through a National Convening in 2013, to be organized by a Steering Committee, that is, an expanded cohort of Latina/o theatre makers.
2. To launch Café Onda, an online platform of articles, blogs, and live-streamed events, linked to *HowlRound*'s online journal.⁵⁶
3. To support the Los Angeles Theatre Center's (LATC) festival of Latina/o plays, designed to reflect the complexity of US Latinx theatre making and the Latinx experience.
4. To pilot a festival of new Latina/o work hosted by the Theatre School at DePaul University.

Each of these four initiatives was created to respond to the pervasive and damaging narrative about Latinx theatre with high-visibility national programs that would correct its image. Latinx theatre-makers would update the narrative of the American theatre, by authoritatively telling their own story.

The four initiatives were scheduled in order of feasibility and available resources. The first project, the Convening, gathered the community in Boston at Emerson College, where HowlRound was newly situated. In the spirit of the commons model, Gahlon

⁵⁶ HowlRound itself describes as “a free and open platform for theatre makers worldwide. We amplify progressive, disruptive ideas about theatre and facilitate connection between diverse practitioners. We function as a “commons”—a social structure that invites open participation around shared values. All of the content (essays, videos, podcasts) on HowlRound comes from the theatre community who chooses to participate—that means you! (“Welcome to HowlRound”)

recalls how the members of HowlRound, specifically Carl, Dower, and herself, offered to share their resources.

What we had said at the end of that meeting was, ‘here’s what we have to offer moving forward, we don’t have any money, but we do know we’re going to have access to space when we get to Emerson; they have a lot of space.’ There was this idea that the next thing that the group wanted to do was have a much larger national gathering and we knew they would have to have a space for that, so we said, ‘if it’s wanted we could definitely provide space for that and we can support a grant that goes in to marshal resources for such a meeting’ (Gahlon Personal interview).

The DC-8, as they became known, understood that they alone could not coordinate the national convening, let alone all four initiatives. “The original eight reached out to more than a dozen key members of the Latina/o theater community and formed a diverse Steering Committee of experienced, nationally recognized leaders. Together, the twenty-five became the LTC” (Zacarías “Foreword” 3). This was when I came on board, joining the first Steering Committee, and its Outreach and Programming Committees for the Boston National Convening, “the largest reunion of Latina/o artists in over twenty-five years,” that is, since the last TENAZ convening (Zacarías “Foreword” 3).

Second, Café Onda would be hosted by HowlRound’s new website, within the HowlRound blog. Third, LATC Artistic Director José Luis Valenzuela was already planning for a national-scale Latinx theatre festival within the next few years and was happy to connect his project to the LTC’s endeavors as they aligned in shared purpose. Fourth, director Lisa Portes had participated in several of the HPP workshops before the program closed and she also missed the creative process and national camaraderie found there. DePaul University, where Portes serves as Head of the Directing Program, was opening their new Theatre School building in 2015, and she envisioned how this new venue could serve for a Latinx playwright’s development event. Portes contributed her

access to institutional resources in order to reinstate a necessary Latinx playwrights development program for the national community.

HowlRound agreed to serve as the LTC's fiscal and organizational agent for the Boston Convening, but also became a philosophical mentor as the LTC embraced the commons model in its practices. Jamie Gahlon, who served as the LTC liaison to HowlRound, also provided infrastructural support until the LTC hired its first Producer, Abigail Vega. Gahlon admits that HowlRound, a brand-new initiative housed at Emerson College, was itself learning how to function as an information commons, and it only made sense to support the emerging LTC, but in a new, appropriate way. Because nearly everyone on the Steering Committee was a working professional with other obligations, "nobody had bandwidth to schedule meetings, do the notes," as Gahlon recalls, "but people had the passion bandwidth to show up. The role I stepped in to was to make sure that everybody could show up in the way that they were best able" (Gahlon Personal interview).

Gahlon, I clearly recall, organized teleconferences, took and distributed notes, managed grants, and maintained online records in service to the LTC, without ever imposing her, HowlRound's, or Emerson College's wishes. It was a masterful demonstration of allyship. With support from HowlRound, Emerson College, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and many other national and regional funders, as well as a dedicated team of volunteers led by the LTC's Steering Committee, all four initiatives and more have been carried out since 2013.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ For a complete history of the LTC's activities, initiatives and programs see "Appendix A."

Before describing how the LTC's activities have amplified the visibility of Latinx theatre and theatre makers in the US, strengthened the national network, and transformed the narrative of the American theatre through convening, scholarship, advocacy, and art making, I would like to acknowledge the legacy and influence of TENAZ on the LTC.

TENAZ in Common

A notable precedent of the LTC is found in the history of El Teatro Nacional de Aztlán (TENAZ), which was discussed in Chapter II. TENAZ is understood to be a direct predecessor to the LTC, with similar goals and even some common participants, including Jorge Huerta, Luis Valdez, Diane Rodriguez, Beatriz Rizk, and Jose Luis Valenzuela, all of whom attended the historic Boston Convening in 2013. Both movements emerged out of a frustration with the negative images and narrative promoted by the mainstream US about Mexican Americans and Latinx.

To briefly recap; TENAZ served as the theatrical manifestation of the Chicano *movimiento*, which protested inequitable economic and social conditions that affected all aspects of Mexican American life, from education to social justice. The *movimiento* was grounded in Marxist theories of dialectical materialism which reviewed human events in relation to material exchanges. The *movimiento* used culture and arts to empower its activists to embrace their Mexican heritage as an asset rather than the defect that mainstream society would have them believe it to be (Fernandez). In the 1973 manifesto, TENAZ identified its theatre making as “*la voz de los barrios, de la comunidad, de los de abajo, de los humildes, de los rasquachis*”⁵⁸ (Copelin 89). However, the emerging *teatros*

⁵⁸ The voice of the barrio, of the community, of the downtrodden, of the humble, of those who make do with little.

were rooted in a growing political consciousness and activism, rather than an art making mission. TENAZ leaders, particularly Luis Valdez, felt that strengthening art-making skills would create more effective *teatro* and thereby the desired social changes. Nonetheless, the ideological tensions that caused rifts among the members did not diminish the movement's unified commitment to creating *teatro* for social justice. TENAZ quickly grew to include theatre makers from all over the U.S. and Latin America, producing festivals and workshops that brought renowned US and Latin American *maestros* to train young theatre makers who otherwise would not have had that opportunity. TENAZ and its *teatros* operated with great dedication to their causes despite limited resources. This spirit of resourcefulness, and of making use of shared and contributed resources is echoed in the generosity of the LTC, which is powered by committed volunteerism and informed by commons ideology.

TENAZ promoted a commitment to cultural expression by celebrating the beauty of Mexican American heritage, especially through indigenous traditions in ceremony. The 1974 *Quinto Festival de Teatros Chicanos/Primer Encuentro Latinoamericano*, held in Mexico, was an international gathering of TENAZ companies and theatre makers from all over Latin America, the first of its kind. This convening was launched with ceremonies atop the Pyramid of the Moon at Teotihuacán to commemorate the return of the Chicano *Teatristas* to their cultural and spiritual origins (Martinez 169, 192). El Teatro Campesino's controversial production of *La Carpa de los Rasquachis* began with a ceremony honoring the Four Directions. This ceremony was also present at the Boston Convening, where Luis Valdez himself blew a conch shell and invited all to turn and face

the four directions in honor.⁵⁹ The 2014 Encuentro Convening opened with a Día de Muertos-themed ceremony of smudging with incense around a lectern decorated with *cempazuchitl* (marigolds), the traditional flowers of the Día de Muertos. The 2015 Carnaval launched balloons in nearby park as a symbol of seeding the field with Latinx talent and work, and participants at the 2019 TYA Sin Fronteras Festival stood in a circle around an Aztec dance company that invited everyone to turn and face the four directions before and after their dance.

Perhaps as an outcome of the heightened awareness of Indigenous history as championed by *teatros* Chicanos and the *movimiento*, and supported by current efforts to honor Native sovereignty, convenings are always very conscious about where they are located. Land acknowledgments to the original Indigenous caretakers are voiced at all LTC Convenings, a practice which took hold with the LTC's Carnaval 2015. Convenings are also intentionally inclusive of the local community in which are held; ad hoc host committees deliberately plan events to build relationships between local theatre makers and national and international visitors. This effort echoes one of Luis Valdez' original visions for TENAZ, to build a supportive network for *teatros* in different places around the country.

In addition to TENAZ's commitment to cultural celebration, the LTC inherited the awareness of ethnically situated economic inequities such as those that propelled the UFW's initial protests in the 1960s. The UFW protested low wages and dangerous working conditions that made it clear that the labor of farmworkers, who were

⁵⁹ Some at the Convening wondered privately about the Chicano-centric cultural expressions but ultimately realized that these simply acknowledged its historical precedence and similar mission. One of the few in-person program committee meetings for the Convening took place in Los Angeles with predominantly Chicanos in attendance, so it was no wonder that these elements were suggested.

predominantly Mexican, Mexican Americans and Filipinos, was undervalued. Similarly, the LTC recognizes that Latinx theatre makers are undervalued in the economies of US theatre, as was part of the discussion in D.C. and in Boston. At the Boston Convening, director and playwright Diane Rodriguez, who also participated in TENAZ as a company member of El Teatro Campesino, “pressed the group to ‘excavate that reality we live in’ and share ‘our strategies to get more of our arts produced in the multilayered theatrical ecosystem that we live in’” (Herrera 41). Similarly, Olga Garay-English, a longtime Los Angeles Arts Commissioner, reminded the conveners that even as Latinx theatre makers are accomplished artists, of the sort that TENAZ championed, they are still challenged financially.

“Yes, there are a lot of powerful people here from the artistic side, but we are not powerful from the economic side. We may be the majority,” Garay-English continued, “but we are not an economic majority.” Garay-English proposed that Latina/o theatermakers begin to demand that every funder be “brought to task” on whether they are serving the Latina/o community effectively and equitably. “We better get smart,” admonished Garay-English, “Or 2046 is going to come and we’re going to be as under-resourced as we are now” (Herrera 47).

Additional concern was raised for the smaller Latinx-identified companies and how historical under-funding impacted the artists they employ. Without a viable income for the next generation of Latinx theater artists, educator Micha Espinoza worried that they might even turn away from identifying as Latinx. Visibility in the professional arena counteracts the effects for students who “see how Latina/o theater is marginalized in the academy, how it’s marginalized financially, professionally” (Herrera 55). Espinoza worried that students might downplay their ethnic identity for the sake of employment in the field, a strategy employed in the mid-twentieth century when it was common for actors to change their names to hide their ethnicity. For example, Ramón Gerard Antonio

Estévez, Jo Raquel Tejada, and Antonio Rodolfo Quinn Oaxaca changed their names to Martin Sheen, Raquel Welch, and Anthony Quinn, respectively. Assimilation by denial within mainstream society, a move which may only work for educated, US-born Latinx who present as phenotypically Anglo, is always a danger. Without championship for the racial diversity of Latinx identity, the implicit bias and racism that is deeply embedded in US and Latin American societies will persist in terms of representation, employment, and funding. The awareness of racist economic dynamics at work in the field of US theatre is another legacy of TENAZ.

In addition to an embrace of ceremonial traditions, and the awareness of economic ramifications found in Latinx identified theatre making, the LTC inherited fundamental organizing principles from TENAZ, particularly these three commitments: to convene in person, to promote networks and mutually beneficial collaborations, and to encourage and engage in education. These are three of the four tenets that the LTC agreed upon at the Boston Convening. Perhaps the most important legacy of TENAZ for the LTC is its identification with/as a movement. The LTC is similarly motivated by the understanding that Latinx theatre is a microcosm as well as a source of representation of the US Latinx experience. As Maldonado-Torres insists, it is up to the *damné* themselves to work on decolonizing themselves and the society which marginalizes them (262). Jamie Gahlon recalls how, as the meeting of the DC-8, “at some point in the conversation people respond[ed] to this notion that we need to stop waiting for people to call us, or ask to have a seat at the table, we need to build our own table” (Gahlon Personal interview). Returning to Steiner’s definition of the nature of the Chicano *movimiento*, a movement “is when the silent hopes of many people begin to become a real part of life” (Steiner

210). Like TENAZ, the LTC has become “a real part of life,” by the commitment of the dedicated activists who have contributed their hours, weeks, and years to make its initiatives a reality.

Finally, the agency that TENAZ offered its participants, to become the experts of *teatro* Chicano by offering trainings and critiques, displayed commons ideological practices. *Commoning* is the act of participating in a commons with agency; “it occurs as ordinary people decide for themselves how to identify and meet shared needs ... they are empowered to show creative agency in developing solutions that seem fair and effective to them” (Helfrich and Bollier 75). While TENAZ itself was organized hierarchically, with a small committee that determined its activities, its intention was to empower its members through participation. It doesn’t appear that the TENAZ board attempted to grow any larger; its decision-making process did not formally engage the will of the members, which would have emulated a commons model. According to Helfrich and Bollier, “every Commons arises through Commoning” (75). The legacy for the LTC is this commitment to the empowerment of its participants. Questions have arisen over the years about who is welcome, entitled, or due to participate as a commoner of the LTC; these challenges will be addressed in the following chapter. In the upcoming section, the programmatic activities of the LTC will be reviewed according to the rubric of the LTC’s four tenets.

The LTC and the Four Tenets

On the third day of the 2013 LTC Convening in Boston, after gathering in “Wisdom Groups,”⁶⁰ participants offered their suggestions to the whole group for initiatives, programs, and actions that could be undertaken to update the narrative of the American theatre. Suggestions spanned a broad scope from personal change to national action, including creating a national database of Latinx theatre-makers, holding producers accountable for misrepresentations, supporting the next generation of artists, establishing regional consortiums, and integrating Latinx materials into higher education curricula. Upon reflection, we agreed that these activities fell under four guiding tenets (Convening, Scholarship, Advocacy, and Art making), and that these tenets would guide the future path of the LTC’s activities. In Chapter II, I reflected on TENAZ activities through these tenets (even though TENAZ had never identified them as guiding principles) in order to establish a comparable framework. Here, I will reflect upon the activities of the LTC with the same frame. I wish to note that, because of my personal experience with the LTC, which began formally in 2012 when I was invited to join the first Steering Committee, and which continues to this day as a member of the Advisory Committee, I will include personal reflections at the top of each the four sections (in italics). I chronicled my strongest memories during the summer of 2018, primarily while in attendance at the Carnival in Chicago. I have generally placed them at the beginning of each chapter in order to first reveal my bias.

⁶⁰ Wisdom Groups was the name given to one session of breakout groups during the Boston Convening, organized by the self-identified number of “years-in-the-field,” who were invited to contribute to a list of resources such as festivals, institutions and initiatives of interest, to recommend leadership and communication models, and “to dream toward the future” (Herrera 107).

Convening

I was seated in the Artists Lounge in DePaul for the 2018 Carnaval, for the first gathering among the playwrights, directors, dramaturges. I was there early, putting finishing touches on the dramaturgy packet for Shoe by Marisela Treviño Orta. In walked Marisela – hugs. Then Diane, Lydia, and Michael John, hugs. Then Guadalís, hugs, then David, then Ricardo, then Lisa and Carlos, then Abigail...hugs. It was a family reunion. Even with this, we were only the few who had arrived early for the play development process; the rest of the family was yet to arrive. A week later, the Carnaval began in earnest, and it was almost overwhelming as more arrived to DePaul. Daniel Jaquez, Jose González and Dañel Malán, Mariel Sierra, Roy Arauz, Rose Cano, Leslie Ishii, Luis Alfaro, Geo Escobar, Jose Luis and Evelina, Samuel, Teresa, Michael, Richard, Rebecca, Estefanía. I met Carlos and Lisa's kids, Carlitos & Eva. Guadalís, Milta, Kelsey Mesa ~ it's reading like a laundry list, but these paths have crossed again and again over the years. These folks are more than colleagues; it's a family reunión. I've never felt so profoundly the joy of convening, the meaning it adds to my life, how it enriches. I am so grateful to the LTC for the family it has engendered and brought together, the conversations that we have, the work that we do, the love we share for our work, the art, and each other (Sanchez "Recollections").

Each year, from 1985 to 2004, theatre makers from across the US had gathered in Costa Mesa, California, for the Hispanic Playwrights Project (HPP) at South Coast Rep. The HPP, founded by playwright José Cruz Gonzalez, and later helmed by director Juliette Carrillo, provided week-long workshops for Latinx playwrights to develop new works. Staged readings of the workshopped plays were directed by Latinx directors from around the country and performed by a professional pool of Latinx actors from the southern California market. Similarly, the Latino Theatre Initiative (LTI) at the Center Theatre Group in LA developed new Latinx works with Latinx actors and directors. This is reminiscent of Maria Lugones' description of the streetwalkers' practice, "from hangout to hangout without betrayal." Lugones describes the activities involved in hanging out, "to learn, to listen, to transmit information, to participate in communicative creations, to gauge possibilities, to have a sense of the directions of intentionality, to gain social depth" (209). This was certainly the case among Latinx gathered in self-identification who believed that out of shared community something greater could emerge than what might be possible alone.

With the closure of the HPP and the LTI, the only way for Latinx theatre-makers to convene on a national basis was during the Theatre Communications Group (TCG) national conferences, which meant finding a suitable lunch hour and location within the conference schedule and venue. These efforts, which began in 2009, worked for a few years but soon proved insufficient.⁶¹ As the number of Latinx attending the conference

⁶¹ Over time, TCG transformed its conference programming to include sessions for "affinity" groups to gather independently during the course of the convening. Notably, there were three such sessions for Latinx theatre makers during the Dallas Conference in 2013: a lunch, an affinity gathering, and a session to discuss the current movements, including the LTC. Almost every year thereafter TCG has welcomed sessions proposed by the LTC in which its activities and methods are shared with the conveners. In 2018, the LTC was awarded the Zeisler (Practitioner) Award by TCG and its nominators for service to the field.

grew, there was only enough time in the lunch hour for each person to introduce themselves and share a little bit about their work before we had to disperse back into the conference. However, the will to network and convene never waned. In 2011, Gus Schulenberg, now Director of Communications at TCG, supported the construction of a digital network called *Latinos in Theatre* situated on the TCG Conference 2.0 platform. This network allowed conference attendees to communicate before, during, and after the National Conference, and served as a medium for conversations about work. It was, in a certain way, a prototype for the more public Café Onda blog that was launched on HowlRound a few years later. However, the disadvantage was that participation was limited to people affiliated with TCG, which meant predominantly institutionally affiliated artists.

In June 2011, the year in which the TCG conference was held in Los Angeles, Jose Luis Valenzuela invited Latinx theatre makers and allies to stay an extra day for a gathering at the Los Angeles Theatre Center, the home venue of the Latino Theatre Company. This multi-hour gathering provided plenty of time to check-in, and to share triumphs as well as concerns. Beginning in 2012, Kinan Valdez, then the Producing Artistic Director of El Teatro Campesino, spearheaded a regional convening of LA-based Latinx theatre-makers, with the support of Valenzuela, as an investigatory project of the emerging LTC. This meeting included a demographic tally (years in the field, specialty, etc.) and an assessment of resources, and results were shared with the members of the growing database on TCG's *Latinos in Theatre* platform. An independent Gmail listserv was created to share information about *Latinos in Theatre* as widely as possible. Inspired by this effort to unite Latinx theatre-makers on a regional basis and share their

experiences with the national group, and following the structure of Valdez' meeting agenda, I convened Latinx theatre-makers in Tucson, Arizona, and Miami, Florida, during the summer of 2012, and shared the responses of those meetings with the national list as well. At all these regional gatherings, participants shared their perceptions about their assets, challenges, and big ideas, including developing a national network of Latino theatre makers.

In the fall, I invited Kinan to Portland to lead a similar gathering for Portland and Seattle theatre-makers, and a few months later, eSe Teatro founder and artistic director Rose Cano brought him to Seattle to continue to strengthen a Pacific NW alliance of Latinx theatre makers. Regional alliances for Latinx theatre makers had begun to emerge around the country, in Los Angeles, New York City, in North Texas, Chicago, and now, in the Pacific Northwest. Working in alliance with theatres as far south as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, eSe Teatro organized and hosted two regional auditions for Latinx actors in Seattle. These early meetings confirmed that those in the field were hungry to connect with other theatre makers around the country.

These regional conversations that happened around the country were affinity spaces, organized before TCG began creating such spaces within their conference schedule, organized culturally around Latinx theatre makers, and providing opportunities for participants to speak freely about their experiences as Latinx theatre makers. The rationale for meeting in affinity spaces has long been understood to be to provide a space in which people who share similar cultural or marginalized experiences can convene in relative safety. These are spaces where one can speak freely and where one's accounts are accepted as truthful and significant. For example, the existence of a toxic mainstream

society is not a challenged notion, and there is no need to take care of the feelings of members of the dominant culture because they are not in the room. Additionally, cultural references, history, and language do not have to be explained or translated because everyone in the space is familiar with the culture. The LTC's National Convening in Boston, the largest gathering of Latinx theatre makers from around the country in twenty-five years, was organized with these values in mind, as a space in which people could speak freely.

The selection process for invitees was a painstaking process that took weeks, first to establish criteria and then to create the invitation list. An initial list was drafted with nearly one hundred names. When the Steering Committee met for the first in-person planning meeting in April 2013, at Emerson, the list had grown to over three hundred names. However, based on the budget, only eighty people could be invited, as the Steering Committee had made it a priority to cover the participants' travel and lodging expenses, so that no one would be excluded for lack of funds. With so many potential participants, the selection process thus became a nuanced conversation about the need to reflect diverse experiences of Latina/o theatre making at the convening, as well as to bring individuals who demonstrated a commitment to arts activism and to Latina/o theatre artists and their work (Gahlon "Outreach").

The selection process hurt some people's feelings and angered others, no matter how much the LTC tried to explain that resources only permitted a certain number to attend, and that everyone who had been selected was perceived as a representative, an ambassador to a regional community of Latinx theatre-makers (Portes "Food for Thought"). Fortunately, one solution to the limit of in-person attendees was found in

technology. Skype was used to multiply participation in the Convening via satellite sites in five cities: New York, Chicago, Dallas, Miami, and Los Angeles. New York brought approximately twenty people to the conversation; Miami, at least four; Chicago, approximately twenty; Dallas, at least two, and approximately twelve from Los Angeles (Herrera 111). In total, these satellite conversations added at least fifty-eight more participants. This expanded conversation was held on the second day of the Convening. There were some technical glitches with some of the connections in this multiple Skype conference call, but in short, there was a six-way conversation between all those gathered in the five remote sites and those in Boston, expanding the attendance at the Convening to one hundred and thirty six attendees, even if only for a portion of the time.

This commitment to convene, to share information about the work, its challenges and successes as Latinx-identified artists in camaraderie, has endured in nearly all of the LTC's initiatives. At the Encuentro 2014, the primary contribution of the LTC was to support and organize the national convening which included Encuentro theatre makers, such as the actors and directors of the fifteen featured productions who were in Los Angeles for the month-long festival.⁶² They were joined by those who arrived specifically to convene for one long weekend while also attending the festival productions. Harkening back to the TENAZ festivals, Reflection Sessions were held on three mornings during the Convening weekend after participants had attended various productions.⁶³ At the Reflection Sessions, artists involved with the production were

⁶² Two of the fifteen productions were unable to run in residence for the full four weeks of the festival, and so those theatre-makers participated in the workshops but were unable to join the national LTC Convening.

⁶³ This is no surprise given that José Luis Valenzuela, the Artistic Director of the LATC and the Encuentro producer, had participated in critique sessions at TENAZ conferences in the 1970s.

interviewed about their creative intentions, process, and results, and then responded to questions from the audience. Holding Reflection Sessions in person enabled conversations to emerge not only with the production artists but across the audience organically. As most of the people attending were theatre makers themselves, these conversations became an opportunity to share experiences and approaches to the work from a rare variety of perspectives.

In the tradition established at the Boston Convening, the Steering Committee held an in-person meeting to debrief the Encuentro and discuss LTC concerns immediately following the Encuentro Convening weekend. This practice has continued for all LTC public events, and in-person Steering Committee meetings often function as substitutes for the regular monthly meetings formerly held in teleconference and now through videoconferencing technology (particularly Zoom). In this way, the act of Convening, even among the foundational committee, commits to in-person relationship, enhanced by virtual connectivity. Additionally, because these meetings are held in a variety of locations around the country, guests have always been welcomed to sit in, primarily to observe the meetings (as most lack the necessary background information and experience with the LTC to engage in the conversations). Guests are often regional attendees who are interested in joining the LTC; attendance at an in-person Steering Committee meeting allows them to see how meetings are conducted, and to begin to hear the concerns of the LTC and how they are addressed. Finally, at many of the in-person Steering Committee meetings that occur post-event, at least a portion of the meeting is open for the participation of members of the Steering Committee who cannot attend in person but who can participate via Skype.

Convening implies that the meetings will occur primarily in person, and, as modeled by the Boston Convening, is an opportunity to engage in camaraderie as well as to discuss concerns and opportunities. This interest in finding out more about the widespread Latinx theatre-making experience had its roots in TENAZ of course, and later with the *Latinos in Theatre* gatherings at TCG conference. More recently, however, convenings have occurred at all the public events produced or co-produced by the LTC: the 2013 Boston Convening, the Encuentro 2014; the 2015 Carnaval of new Latina/o Work, the 2016 Regional Convenings in Dallas, Seattle, and New York City; the 2017 Encuentro de las Americas; the 2018 María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium, and Carnaval of New Latinx Work; and the 2019 TYA Sin Fronteras Conference. Whether structured formally as circles within circles (Boston 2013, Encuentro 2017), full circles (Dallas 2016), or activities and workshops (NYC 2016, the 2018 Fornés Symposium, and Carnaval 2018), LTC convenings make time for introductions, conversation, and collaboration. A symbiotic relationship is strengthened between the individual and the movement when convenings allow for the creation and nurturing of personal relationships. That is, artists find others who share interests, whether thematic, aesthetic, or procedural through conversation engendered in convening. These affinities have translated into collaborations beyond the convening, which not only benefit artists, scholars, and their audiences, but enrich the field of Latinx theatre making, and the field of theatre making writ large.

Scholarship

Again, I offer my memories.

El Fuego couldn't really begin immediately after the Carnaval in 2015 because companies need to determine their upcoming season in the fall and announce it in the spring. So, our first season of Carnaval productions was in 2016-2017. Irma Mayorga and I committed to organizing the scholarly documentation; we created flyers that described the project and its critical questions and distributed them to all the Latinx scholars we knew, including handing them out at ATHE⁶⁴ 2016. That first season there were six productions and four blog posts. Irma presented her article on Georgina Escobar's Sweep at that ATHE conference, and I presented my long form article on El Payaso by Emilio Rodriguez at ATHE 2017, as well. At ATHE 2018, Irma and I organized a panel featuring two of our blogger-scholars: Marci McMahon, who documented Milta Ortiz' Más and Diane Rodriguez's The Sweetheart Deal, and Laura Lodewyck, who documented Parachute Men by Mando Alvarado at Teatro Vista. For Irma and me, the challenge has been to find scholars who can write with expertise about Latinx theatre making. By that, we mean scholars who can address not just the aesthetic considerations of the work, but the political and historical ones; scholars who understand the importance of a Latinx-identified theatre company and its aims, and the audience and its reception as well (Sanchez "Recollections").

Latinx theatre in the U.S. is an under-served field of research and documentation,

⁶⁴ Association for Theatre in Higher Education

creating gaps in higher education. This lack means that courses on contemporary US theatre are being taught without adequate scholarship of a model of identity-based theatre making that debunks harmful stereotypes and demystifies its cultures. The necessity to provide culturally identified theatre for our nation's diversifying audiences, in conversation with global theatre, demands that we provide culturally-informed and responsible training. Absence in the annals of academia has widespread implications. If the training and the background in Latinx drama and theatre history is thin, the foundation upon which that theatre is created and critiqued will also be thin. One way to correct these lacunae is for academics and academia to make concerted efforts to champion and add to the existing scholarship. However, the solution is not simply a matter of documentation. Academic institutions provide important resources for artistic development, beginning with education, but viable resources are determined by scholarship. Scholarship becomes a form of vetting; for example, research is validated by peer-review and publication. The absence of scholarship on Latinx theatre implies a lack of merit.⁶⁵ If Latinx theatre were considered worthy of study, it would be studied and taught.

Members of the first Steering Committee are well aware that their theatre making lacks substantial presence in academia, that courses on Latinx drama, theatre history, aesthetics, or creation, are rare. Understanding this, the Committee invited several Latinx theatre scholars to the LTC's Boston Convening, several of whom (notably Jorge Huerta,

⁶⁵ A related anecdote reflects how some Latinx theatre makers still don't understand the relationship between theatre making and scholarship. At the 2018 Encuentro Internacional, Dr. Jorge Huerta, the leading scholar of the history of Chicano theatre in the US, addressed a large group of attendees. Attempting to encourage engagement with scholars, he said, "If we don't write about you, you don't exist." He was speaking about the archive and historiography but apparently this remark was upsetting to some, who criticized scholars for their presumption.

Beatriz Rizk, and Teresa Marrero), had also documented *teatro* Chicano, TENAZ, and late-twentieth century Latinx theatre. Historian Brian Herrera was invited to document the Convening's events, and in the spirit of generosity and necessity, he accepted this work even though it was beyond the scope of his research agenda. In his account, *The Latina/o Theatre Commons 2013 National Convening: A Narrative Report*, Herrera reflected on how the presence of scholars influenced the Convening's conversations:

The convening's notable inclusion of both scholars and practitioners prompted several groups to contemplate the gaps between artistic and educational leadership. Several Wisdom Groups noted the potential to leverage academia to support and sustain Latina/o theater practice. Some groups emphasized the priority of documentation of Latina/o theater's legacy, noting the comparative lack of accessible material (narratives, histories, memoirs) about Latina/o theater artists, companies, and movements of the recent past. Other groups wondered whether academia might provide a possible site for new work development or artistic residencies. Several groups affirmed an awareness that particular universities, professors, libraries, and academic societies might prove essential allies not only in the archiving and teaching of Latina/o theater texts and practice, but also as potential collaborators in the production of contemporary Latina/o work (Herrera 108-9).

To strengthen the relationship between Latinx theatre making and academia, the LTC has launched several initiatives and programs that support new Latinx theatre scholarship. In addition to inviting scholars to join the first Steering Committee and attend the 2013 Boston Convening, the decision to document this event was a significant acknowledgment of the importance of scholars' contributions to the construction of the narrative of Latinx theatre. Herrera's robust and engaging historical account of the Boston Convening, filled with interviews and photos, was published by HowlRound in 2015, and made freely available in pdf format.

However, documentation at the Boston Convening was not carried out by scholars alone. The value of lived experience as a valid source of scholarship was championed by



Figure 8 Boston Convening Timeline (Taintor “Day One”).

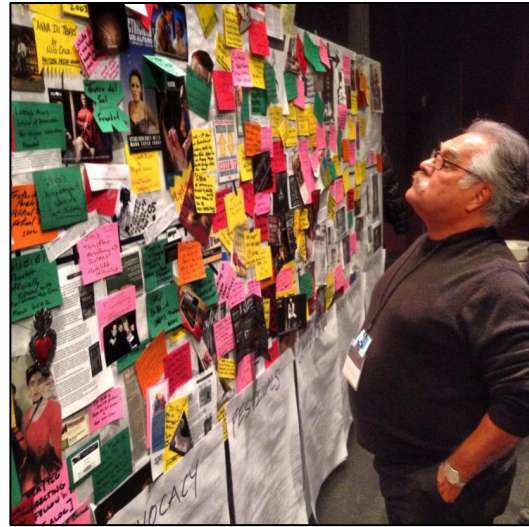


Figure 7 Luis Valdez reviews the Boston Convening Timeline (Taintor “Day Three”).

renowned Chicano *teatro* scholar and maker Jorge Huerta and director-playwright Juliette Carrillo. Together they

devised a way to chart the history of Latinx theatre from the 1960s to 2013 with the participation of all the attendees at the Convening. A visual timeline was constructed in a series of panels made of butcher paper that totaled thirty feet in length. The panels were marked at regular increments to indicate the decades from 1960 to the present. In an act of commoning, all attendees were invited to fill in decades with colorful sticky notes upon which were written significant personal events related to their theatre work as Latinx theatre-makers as well as meaningful historical milestones. The founding of companies, awards received, publications, and more were chronicled visually on this timeline that served as the backdrop and kept growing throughout the Boston Convening. This visual chronicle made of the butcher paper panels and sticky notes, has been stored in safekeeping for the annotation that will construct a written history in a form more

academically legible. Whether this next step occurs or not, history was charted by those who lived it, those who remembered it, and those who wanted to be sure it would not be forgotten (see Figs. 7 & 8).

The following year, for the Encuentro 2014, Prof. Marissa Chibás and I championed the Tertulia project to provide events that would illuminate the fifteen productions selected for the festival. These free public humanities events, in which artists and scholars engaged in conversations with each other and the public, were designed to deepen the audiences' experience by providing history and context for the shows they would see. We put out the call among the members of the Steering Committee, and encouraged them to share the call, for recommendations for pre- or post-show conversations, panels, and presentations. We received a long list of proposals, but upon learning there was no budget for the program, it became clear that we could only work with LA-based presenters or people who would be in town for the festival, who would not mind volunteering their services. No one objected, and nine presentations were scheduled on a variety of topics, including the emergence of gay Latina/o theatre, the ubiquity of video projections in twenty-first century theatre, and the histories of the Latino Theatre Company and Culture Clash, ensembles celebrating their thirtieth anniversaries at the time. These public humanities events were a way for Latinx theatre to be discussed in the public sphere in a recognizably academic performance style. As such, this work fulfilled the aspiration of academic legibility rehearsing an otherwise rare academic forum on Latinx theatre. Jill Dolan describes the utopian performative as that which can "enact the affective possibilities of 'doings' that gesture toward a much better

world” (6). The much better world here would be one in which lectures and discussions on Latinx theatre are commonplace in higher education.

Scholarly publication is also rehearsed within *Café Onda*, the LTC’s blog.⁶⁶ It is a curated and edited outlet, but it is not peer-reviewed and therefore the posts lack traditional academic validation. Nevertheless, scholarly contributions exist, including two journal series created to address the pedagogy and production of Latinx theatre.

Pedagogy Notebook, launched in January 2016 by Trevor Boffone, is a series on pedagogical practices to teach Latinx theatre. Its essays are written by instructors and students, referencing actual methodologies and their outcomes. The second series, *Ignited*, features scholarly essays on the El Fuego productions, an initiative which emerged with the 2015 Carnaval of New Latina/o Works. Scholars of Latinx theater and performance were paired with each of the nine El Fuego productions of works by Carnaval playwrights at Latinx-identified theatres around the country. In addition to documenting the projects, their rehearsals, and performances, the scholars generated critical reflections that considered the process, audiences, and material realities of creating Latinx-identified theatre.

Bringing scholars into the rehearsal process responded to one of the visions that emerged from the Boston Convening, to see “scholars in the theaters and artists in the universities” (Herrera 122). Two projects emerged from the El Fuego initiative, the *Ignited* blog series on HowlRound, which publishes public-facing essays of approximately one thousand words in length, and scholarly articles suitable for peer-

⁶⁶ As the content of *Café Onda* expanded to cover Latinx theatre making more broadly, HowlRound and the LTC decided to dissolve the designation of these posts as belonging to *Café Onda*. This work is now all hosted within the HowlRound online journal, identified as “Latinx” and any of a number of other appropriate tags.

reviewed journal publication. As mentioned at the top of this section, two of the longer essays were presented at the 2017 Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) Conference, and three more were presented at ATHE 2018, all within the context of ATHE's Latinx and Indigenous of the Americas (LIA) focus group.⁶⁷

Three more scholarly projects have emerged from the 2014 and 2017 Encuentros, and from the El Fuego initiative. Scholars Teresa Marrero, Chantal Rodriguez, and Trevor Boffone serve as editors for two anthologies drawn from the two Encuentros. The first, *Encuentro: Latinx Performance for the New American Theater*, publishes six of the scripts that were presented at the 2014 Encuentro, with critical introductions illuminating each production written by Carla Della Gatta, Jorge Huerta, Tiffany Ana Lopez, Irma Mayorga, Beatriz Rizk, and me. *Encuentro* was published by Northwestern University Press in spring 2019. The second anthology, which will include international scripts and excerpts from the 2017 Encuentro productions, will also include critical introductions by Latinx scholars (Boffone, Marrero, and C. Rodriguez). A third anthology is in development, related to the El Fuego initiative. This anthology will focus on the Latinx theatres that produced the El Fuego plays, including Pregones, Teatro Vision, and Milagro, and their decades-long commitment to supporting Latinx theatre making. These scholarly essays, written by Domenika Laster, Laura Lodewyck, Marci McMahon, Irma Mayorga, Teresa Marrero, Noe Montez, Priscilla Ybarra, and me, will contribute to the documentation of thriving ethnic-specific companies. Irma Mayorga and I have begun curating the anthology, as the final El Fuego production wraps up in fall 2019. These

⁶⁷ LIA is the new name for the ATHE focus group originally known as the "Latina/o Focus Group." It is another indication of the marginalization of Latinx theatre scholarship that this focus group did not come into existence until the ATHE Conference in July 2002.

three anthologies of scripts and the analysis generated by their productions is in direct response to the historical lack of documentation that exists for Latinx theatre making. These LTC publications will contribute to the body of knowledge, serve as resources for Latinx theatre courses and as foundations for future scholarship.

Scholarship, as an LTC tenet, has been championed within nearly every LTC initiative, including the Regional Convenings, the Carnivals, and the Encuentros. The 2016 Regional Convening in Seattle deepened the scholarship of Latinx theatre in the Pacific Northwest through a historical presentation curated by scholars Maria Soyla Enriquez and Chris Goodson. The presentation included images and documents that chronicled Pacific Northwest companies such as Teatro del Piojo, a TENAZ *teatro* founded by the late Rubén Sierra (Enriquez). Both the 2015 Carnaval and the 2018 Encuentro de las Américas Convening provided opportunities for scholars to meet in break-out sessions and discuss issues of concern including curriculum enhancement, Wikiturgy, and publication (Becerra).

The María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium, a one-day event held at Princeton University in April 2018, was an artist-scholar event. There were workshops based on Fornés' pedagogical methods, as well as panels that discussed her work dramaturgically ("2018 Latinx"). The Symposium was crafted to reflect Fornés' informal rigor, that is, there were plenty of breaks between the scheduled sessions, which provided participants time to reflect on the work with others. Immediately following the Fornés Symposium, an in-person strategic planning meeting was held to review the trajectory of the LTC's activities and its relationship with HowlRound. Among its recommendations to the whole

Steering Committee was the necessity of creating a historical archive of the LTC's documents. Such an archive will serve as a resource for future historians and students.

Finally, on a personal note, my decision to enter the field of academia by pursuing a doctoral degree was inspired by the LTC. Through conversations with Latinx theatre scholars in the Steering Committee, at LTC events, or through their comments in Steering Committee meetings, I grew to understand how scholarship can create social change by valorizing the experiences of the marginalized. I envisioned how my experience as a Latina-identified theatre maker, working in Latinx theatre, might strengthen the presence of Latinx drama and theatre history in higher education, and I took this path.

Advocacy

What I remember most about the New York City convening, besides an enthusiastic after-hours conversation with Georgina Escobar about aesthetics, was the Steering Committee meeting that was held once the public convening was all over. It was on a Monday. A group of about twenty-five of us sat in a circle. Isaac Gomez spoke passionately about anti-blackness, and how we, the LTC Steering Committee, had to commit to unpacking our Latino brand of implicit bias if we were truly going to be radically inclusive. There was a call for training. Isaac then brought up a suggestion that had been raised by many of us on social media for months, to re-name ourselves the Latinx Theatre Commons (from Latina/o). So many Latinx, he argued, felt like there wasn't a place for them with the LTC because it maintained a binary identification. One person, while

supportive of the idea, wondered how they were going to explain the 'x' to their grandmother. After some discussion, I proposed we change the name and called a vote. I think it was a unanimous yes. We also agreed to engage in anti-blackness training to look more closely at our biases. Of course, without all the members of the Steering Committee present, these were only recommendations for future consideration. In the commons model, we need consensus from the Committee to make such far-reaching changes. As it turned out, the Steering Committee decided to make the anti-blackness training mandatory for all SC members and to change our name to Latinx (Sanchez "Recollections").

The LTC itself is an act of advocacy for Latinx theatre-makers and theatre making. It resonates with the advocacy seen in Tlaloc Rivas' *Open Letter* in 2012, i.e., championship for accurate representation and culturally authoritative employment, as well as informed critique. The LTC's activities and programs have served as sites of advocacy for concerns of the Latinx community and Latinx theatre makers throughout the US. Examples include Café Onda, an online platform open to all for the discussion of a variety of theatre-making concerns; the El Fuego initiative, which has supported nine productions of Latinx playwrights around the country; and the María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium, which elevated and illuminated the art making, pedagogy, and legacy of one of Latinx theatre's most influential innovators. However, in addition to the advocacy inherent in the LTC's programs, the LTC has found other ways to advocate for the causes it finds most necessary. The Steering Committee has united to craft letters to

articulate support and protest, as the occasion demands. This is a time-consuming process but well worth the effort. Notable examples of this advocacy include a letter to *The New York Times* in spring 2016.

On March 6, 2016, *The NY Times* reviewed the world premiere of the play *Ropes*, written by Barbara Colio and produced by Two River Theatre in New Jersey. The review by Michael Sommers came under scrutiny by the Latinx theatre-making community for its offensiveness and lack of cultural competency. Sommers had written, “It is curious that *Ropes*...possesses no Latino flavor or content.” In response, the LTC crafted a letter that read, in part:

Latina/os are people from vastly different cultures, realities, and experiences. To say that something is or is not Latina/o is an attempt to flatten a deeply layered cultural group. We are glad that reviewers are coming to see our shows. But we hope they come with an open mind about what it means to be Latina/o. There is no singular Latina/o experience, nor is there a litmus test that identifies a person as Latina/o. Our cultural community has a vast spectrum of experiences which span from recent immigrants to those who have been in the US for multiple generations. Some of us grew up speaking Spanish, some of us grew up speaking Portuguese, some of us grew up speaking English, some of us grew up speaking indigenous languages. Others grew up speaking a combination of the four. Some of us only speak one of those languages. Others speak all. Some of us create plays about our cultural identities. Some of us do not (“Cultural Microaggressions”).

Uninformed criticism is an ongoing problem in the field, one that particularly affects theatre making representing marginalized communities. The criteria by which mainstream theatre is critiqued is applied indiscriminately to representative theatre. This not only creates bad publicity, which can be damaging at the box office, but worse, without correction, the practice of misinformed criticism is perpetuated. It does its readership no favors either, as such reviews propagate incorrect assumptions about Latinx culture, concerns, and theatre making.

The LTC response was reviewed and edited by the Steering Committee via Basecamp, an online project management tool that the LTC has used since its beginning. The response was ultimately signed by fifty-four members of the Steering Committee, who affixed their affiliations to their signatures. It was posted on HowlRound with the signatures listed alphabetically beneath the text on March 16, 2016, ten days after the review's original publication. The LTC's concern for cultural competency in theatre criticism has not diminished; during the past year a new initiative has been forming to nurture the field of Latinx critics. This is a project still in the earliest stages of development and although it was not selected by the Steering Committee for the next three-year cycle of programming, its serious consideration demonstrates the ongoing concern and the LTC's interest in responding actively.

The LTC extends its advocacy efforts beyond the concerns of Latinx theatre makers, in recognition of how other identity-based theatre making is marginalized in similar ways, or in ways that, similarly, undermine the empowerment of marginalized communities. In solidarity, the LTC has been committed to advocating publicly on behalf of other artistic communities as well as its own. For example, immediately following the surprising results of the 2016 Presidential election of Donald Trump, which demonstrated the influence of xenophobic, homophobic, and misogynist rhetoric in our polarized nation, the LTC issued a response that read, in part:

Like many of you, we are confused, devastated, and/or overwhelmed by last night's presidential election returns. We do not fear any one man, but the movement his campaign has incited. Up until now, the LTC has not taken a stand on any one political issue as a group. We fundamentally believe in the diversity of our community, and disavow any language that attempts to ignore this. Latina/o/xs come in all skin colors, nationalities, language preferences, races, genders, sexual orientations, and yes, even political affiliations. However, we do stand against literal and symbolic

violence against our peoples. While we do acknowledge that this country was founded upon violence, we believe we must continue working toward a different kind of United States. We believe the same work applies to our Commons. (Vega and LTC Communications).

To achieve consensus (a practice of the commons model), the Communications Committee of the LTC and Abigail Vega crafted a draft response, which was then shared with the whole Steering Committee who honed it. The final version was published and distributed within twenty-four hours in the LTC's November 2016 e-newsletter⁶⁸ on November 9, 2016, titled "Statement from the Latina/o Theatre Commons Steering Committee in Re: 2016 Presidential Election." This response to the results of the Presidential election of 2016 expressed the LTC's dismay, as a movement, for the violence that was championed by Trump and his followers during his campaign. With this political response, the LTC asserted its presence as a body of like-minded individuals who would articulate their shared position publicly through social media outlets that could multiply their reach.

Additionally, the LTC took the opportunity to move beyond a statement of rejection to address its own missteps. In this same response, the LTC described its efforts to recognize and address its own forms of violence, particularly the implicit biases which shaped the demographics of the Steering Committee and the LTC's initiatives:

Over the past few months, the LTC Steering Committee has been engaged in work to actively assess where our gaps are: who is missing from our conversations and decisions, why they are missing, and most importantly, how can we make our space not only more welcoming, but more accessible. We are working to ensure that inclusion is not just a buzzword; it is a daily practice, and in doing so, we are equitably empowering Latina/o/x theatre artists and leaders to interrupt the current power

⁶⁸ At the time, the LTC sent out reports about its activities through the Latina/o Theatre Commons Monthly Digest, a quarterly email newsletter with a free subscription. The Communications Committee decided to discontinue the newsletter to avoid redundancy and the additional work of formatting, as the same announcements were being sent out via other platforms including Facebook and Twitter.

dynamic of our culture, nation, and field (Vega and LTC Communications).

This admission of failure or shortsightedness reflected transparency, a value maintained by the LTC. While one might argue that admitting flaws leaves the movement vulnerable to criticism, the LTC aims to abide by its stated values of “Service, Radical Inclusion, Transparency, Legacy & Leadership Cultivation, and Advancement of the Art Form,” even if it means revealing its imperfections (“Latinx Theatre Commons”). Furthermore, these particular problems were ones for which the LTC had already received criticism, so for some readers this was not a revelation but a response. Moreover, the response included a call for support in the form of engagement with the LTC to help it become the inclusive movement it imagined itself to be.

Over the next few weeks, you will start to see some updates to our language and action. We welcome any questions, comments, criticism, and concerns to help make our Commons a more equitable place. We ask for your help, patience, trust, and tough love, when we need it. You are our community, and why we do this work. This is our country, and we will not allow it to crumble (Vega and LTC Communications).

By this statement, the LTC aligned itself as a movement dedicating itself to work in opposition to the divisiveness championed by the Presidential victory. The LTC would champion inclusion by welcoming the community to participate in its work. In November 2016, when this message was posted, at least one thousand readers were signed up to receive the LTC’s shareable e-newsletter. By asking for the community’s help indiscriminately, the LTC expressed its willingness to receive input and participation from anyone.

Even as a movement dedicated to advocating on behalf of Latinx theatre makers, the LTC had been called to task for exclusionary practices since 2013. As mentioned

earlier, some long-time Latinx theatre-makers and allies had felt excluded from the Boston Convening, which resulted in hurt feelings and anger (Portes “Food for Thought”). Similarly, in 2014, the LTC heard from Latinx theatre-makers in San Antonio and Miami who felt excluded from the Encuentro selection process because they had not received adequate information. Subsequently, they had not submitted works for consideration by the Selection Committee, and there was no representation from those two regions in the 2014 Encuentro Festival (Vega “FULL”). Attempting to correct this problem, regional representation became one of the primary criteria for the selection process of the LTC’s next project, the 2015 Carnaval. It was planned that the eight play readings would represent “2 playwrights from the North, South, East & West” (Vega “RESPONSE”). This successfully diversified the regional representation of the playwrights selected.

However, sensitive to its history of criticism and cognizant of the fact that the LTC had completed its initial four initiatives, the Steering Committee agreed that it was time for the LTC to take stock of its work before launching into new initiatives that, without oversight, might unwittingly replicate practices of exclusion. In 2016, the LTC Steering Committee began by looking at its own composition and demographics to determine who was actually engaged in the LTC’s work, and whose concerns could enter the conversation and influence future LTC activities. The Steering Committee Cultivation & Governance (SCCG) committee was formed to review the Steering Committee’s demographics and develop strategies to diversify its recruitment practices. A survey conducted in February and March of 2016 determined that the majority of Steering Committee members were twenty-five to fifty-four years old, Californians, cis-women,

heterosexual, Catholic, and college graduates (SCCG). Out of forty-two respondents, only one person identified as Afro Latino; only one person identified as Genderqueer, and no one identified as Transgender or Muslim. Everyone had attended at least one year of college.

One step toward inclusivity came later that year, in December 2016, a month after posting the letter in response to the presidential election results. The Steering Committee met in person following the NYC Regional Convening, discussed the issue at length, and decided to recommend to the whole Steering Committee that the movement's name be changed from the Latina/o Theatre Commons to the Latinx Theatre Commons. This expressed the LTC's commitment to the inclusion of transgender people or those who do not identify along gender binary lines. The name change was a highly visible act, announced through all the LTC's media outlets; as such it was also a gesture of advocacy for gender fluidity.

Two years later, the LTC's commitment to inclusivity, advocacy, and alliance was again manifested publicly in two significant ways. During the 2018 TCG Conference in St. Louis, attendees went to a production of *Jerome Robbins' Broadway* at the St. Louis Municipal Opera Theatre, familiarly known as The MUNY. During the show, it became apparent that The MUNY had engaged in racially insensitive casting resulting in an offensively stereotypical performance. Audience members booed, called out "yellowface," and left the theatre in protest (Peterson). The next day, theatre-makers, including members of the LTC, reconvened at the TCG conference and penned a letter of protest in alliance with the Coalition of Asian American Theatre Artists (CAATA) and other allies. The message was again distributed to the Steering Committee via the

Basecamp platform, to offer members an opportunity to add their signatures. The message read, in part:

With members of the theater community nationwide, we stand in solidarity with the St. Louis theater community, and are here to support your efforts to address the systemic oppression reflected in The MUNY's production ... We charge the American theater community to engage in sometimes uncomfortable conversations which are often ignored by predominantly white institutions as too difficult to engage in, and dismissed as not relevant to their audiences. We are here to assert that this is a conversation that is essential both to our audiences and our shared humanity (Chan).

Steering Committee members were encouraged to sign and then share the statement, "along with something to uplift other alliances of color ... we want to center the narrative on the great work of our aligned alliances and St. Louis based artists and companies of color" (Vega "Standing"). Links to other identity-based efforts, such as CAATA, the Black Theatre Commons, and the Announcement of the Native American Theatremakers Convening at HowlRound, were included in this message. In accordance with the way in which CAATA wished to register alliance, the LTC was not represented as a movement, but through the individuals whose signatures reflected their LTC affiliation. Some signers chose to identify as members of the LTC Steering Committee, some chose other affiliations with which to identify. Ultimately it did not matter, there was no need to identify the LTC as an ally; its advocacy had occurred in The Muny, in the TCG conference the next day, and in sharing the means by which individuals could sign CAATA's statement. There was no need to subsume the individual for the sake of the movement in order for the movement to act in advocacy.

The incident at The Muny, with its cross-cultural response in solidarity, mirrored a collaborative project launched by Leslie Ishii and Joan Osato, the co-chairs of

CAATA's Steering Committee, and Abigail Vega, as they realized that both the LTC's Carnival and CAATA's ConFest would be occurring in Chicago within three weeks of each other. With a desire to build a more formal alliance among theatre-makers and coalitions of color, the LTC hosted a pre-conference, supported by TCG, the day before the launch of the Carnival, on July 18, 2018. Members of CAATA, the Black Theatre Commons (BTC), and unaffiliated members of the Native American (NA) and Middle Eastern North African (MENA) theatrical communities met with a few members of the LTC Steering Committee at DePaul University. Those gathered discussed the need for a coalition and how it might strengthen the capacity for group efforts, expand representation in diverse circles, and provide compensation for united efforts. In other words, the group recognized that support was needed to build the structures by which identity-based coalitions could thrive, to bring more people to the tables at which POC are asked to represent, and to raise funds that would go toward addressing mutual needs, including travel to convenings (CAATA). The conversation was continued in August at the CAATA Fest, which was also held in Chicago. It was determined that the next step for this committee was to craft a manifesto. However, this is inevitably a slow process and, indeed, must be if it is to be done right. Theatre makers of color share some similar experiences of disparity and discrimination, such as lack of informed critical reviews and a history of under-funding. However, distinct ethnically specific experiences, such as genocide, enslavement, internment, repatriation, and targeted violence cannot be homologized. Building an active and ongoing coalition is necessarily a delicate process as the various cultural communities face not only different concerns but face them in different ways.

In the fall of 2018, Alex Meda, Artistic Director of Teatro Luna and a long-time LTC Steering Committee member, crafted a proposal for the LTC's consideration, to support a Coalition of Color Convening in 2020. At the January 2019 TYA Conference, the Steering Committee considered all of the proposals put forth and decided to recommend this proposal as one of five for 2020-2023. This convening will be the LTC's largest act of advocacy on behalf of the Latinx community and for itself and for others who champion under-represented theatre making and theatre-makers.

Art Making

My final memories of this series reflect on the María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium, which was held in April 2018. Numerous LTC events and initiatives connected to the necessity of art making will be mentioned ahead. I focus my personal reflection on the Fornés Symposium because of the way in which it deepened my awareness of Fornés, her work, and her way.

This one was tremendously meaningful, honoring la maestra María Irene Fornés, a force of nature, a beloved teacher and artist. I attended the workshop led by Amparo García-Crow. But I told her, as it was about to start, that I was torn because I also wanted to watch the excerpt being presented by Estelle Parsons' group, of the play The Danube. She said, "yes, go, and you can come in late and be an interruption and that'll be perfect!" I had no idea what she meant but she sounded sincerely encouraging, so, I went. I really enjoyed watching the work, left before the Q&A (which I heard was great but alas), then went to Amparo's workshop

where I walked in late, into the room of writers who were then asked to incorporate my interruption into their work. I instantly understood, my interruption was a prompt. It was very Fornés, and I was delighted to help. At this symposium I also watched Michelle Memran's remarkable film The Rest I Make Up, which captures Memren's ten-year relationship with Fornés as a student, assistant, and then documentarian. Fornés' memory began to slip during that time, and what emerged is a beautiful film about aging, creativity, friendship, and the inimitable Fornés (Sanchez "Recollections").

While the LTC is profoundly and fundamentally in support of Latinx theatre making, it is not an art-making entity in and of itself. There are many other Latinx-identified projects such as theatres, ensembles, individual artists, and allied organizations who are already fully committed to this work. Following its four first initiatives (the 2013 Boston Convening, 2014 Encuentro, 2015 Carnaval and Café Onda), two guiding recommendations emerged from the 2015 Dallas Convening that have helped the LTC determine what future projects to take on ever since. The Steering Committee has been asked to review proposals by determining "which projects would happen either way, and which ones need our help to exist," and "what is it LTC can do that no one else can do?" (Vega "PLEASE REPLY"). The LTC does not wish to duplicate existing efforts nor compete with other important programs for funding. This had been the rationale behind all four of the original initiatives -- that no other entities were doing that work.

The LTC has operated as a producer and a co-producer of programs that have illuminated, investigated, celebrated, and promoted art making, but is not an art-producing movement *per se*. This is a fine distinction perhaps, but an important one. The LTC supported but did not produce the Encuentro festivals of Latina/o and International work; rather, it produced the national and international Convenings held during the Encuentro festivals. These convenings allowed theatre-makers from all over the US and Latin America to discuss the work they were seeing together in the Festivals, and to share information about their theatre making, producing, and scholarship practices. In these cases, the LTC supported Latinx art making by providing shared experiences among creative colleagues that were inspiring, enlightening, and edifying.

Following the same guidance, the LTC produced the Carnivals in 2015 and 2018 in order to fill the gaps in the development of new Latinx works that had been left by the suspension of South Coast Repertory's Hispanic Playwrights Project and the Center Theatre Group's Latino Theatre Initiative in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Once these two programs were shuttered, no nation-wide Latinx new play festival remained. During Carnival 2015, eight new scripts were workshopped during the week before their fully staged readings, and excerpts of four more were in rehearsal with the playwright present. Over two hundred national theatre-makers gathered at DePaul University in August 2015 to watch a remarkable ensemble of Chicago actors perform readings of the works authored by LA-based playwrights Mando Alvarado and Diane Rodriguez, NYC's Migdalia Cruz, Georgina Escobar, Virginia Grise, and Matthew Paul Olmos, as well as works by Amparo García-Crow (Austin, TX), Magdalena Gomez (Springfield, MA),

Milta Ortiz (Tucson, AZ), Emilio Rodriguez (Detroit, MI), and Octavio Solis and Marisela Treviño Orta of San Francisco (“Join Us,” and Sanchez “Carnaval”).

A little-known detail about Carnaval is that months before the twelve playwrights were selected, eighteen theatre companies simultaneously agreed to produce works by these playwrights, whoever they might be. In an unprecedented championship of new Latinx playwriting, demonstrating confidence in the wellspring of Latinx talent and the LTC Carnaval selection process, the following companies agreed to produce the plays of one of the Carnaval playwrights over the course of the next four seasons: Aurora Theater (Lawrenceville, GA), Borderlands Theater (Tucson, AZ), Camino Real Productions (Albuquerque, NM), Cara Mía Theatre Co. (Dallas, TX), Duende CalArts (Valencia, CA), El Teatro Campesino (San Juan Bautista, CA), GALA Hispanic Theatre (DC), Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center & San Antonio Latino Theatre Alliance (San Antonio, TX), INTAR Theatre (NYC), Latino Producers Action Network LPAN (San Diego/LA), Latino Theater Company (LA), Milagro Theatre (Portland, OR), Su Teatro (Denver, CO), Teatro Avante (Miami, FL), Teatro Prometeo (Miami, FL), Teatro Luna (Chicago /LA), Teatro Vista (Chicago, IL), and Teatro Vivo (Austin, TX). This initiative was called El Fuego, designed to “[fuel] the field of the American theatre” (“El Fuego”). While not all of the companies were able to participate in time,⁶⁹ from 2016-2019, El Fuego supported nine productions around the country, and three more are under consideration to complete the original vision of the initiative. The LTC did not produce these works itself; rather,

⁶⁹ El Fuego’s limited funding cycle, the inability to acquire rights to certain plays, and previous commitments to other projects are among some of the reasons for the inability to produce all twelve playwrights by June 2019. However, all remaining Carnaval 2015 plays found future performances: *Mother Road* by Octavio Solis at Oregon Shakespeare Festival (2019); *APPEAL: The New American Musical of Mexican Descent* by Amparo García-Crow at the Second Annual Futurx Festival (2019); and, *The Living Life of the Daughter Mira* by Matthew Paul Lopez at Milagro (2020).

members of the El Fuego committee and the Producer provided support throughout the initiative.

El Fuego committee members served primarily as liaisons, to establish and secure the original matches between companies, playwrights, and the documenting scholars. Producer Abigail Vega supported these efforts with her own outreach efforts as well as by managing the contracts for all parties involved. El Fuego provided funding to support the playwright's residency at the producing theatre, or the residency of another production artist that the company would otherwise be unable to include in their budgets. This funding has helped build relationships between theatres and a national network of Latinx theatre-makers. For example, at Milagro, in Portland, Oregon, El Fuego supported the residency of playwright-director Georgina Escobar. Since that engagement in 2017, Escobar has been invited to Milagro as playwright and/or director three more times. The LTC's support has similarly strengthened relationships between Latinx theatre-makers and theatres around the country and raised the visibility of their engagements through nationwide publicity.

LTC has also provided a variety of arts workshops at its events, thus demonstrating its commitment to the strengthening of the field of Latinx theatre through art making. At the 2015 Carnaval, a playwrighting workshop based on the pedagogy of María Irene Fornés was offered by Migdalia Cruz and Anne García-Romero. One did not have to identify as a playwright to participate; the workshop was open to anyone interested. In April 2018, at the María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium, there were several generative workshops grounded in Fornés' writing practices, led by Anne García-Romero, Josefina López, and Amparo García-Crow. Later that year, the theme of the

2018 Carnival, *Conexiones* (connections), provided the foundation for a creative workshop that fostered new relationships.

Groups received a surprise challenge held within a mystery suitcase, such as portraying Peter Pan through Tiger Lily's eyes or, in my team's case, producing *The Three Little Pigs* as told by Brecht. We worked together within a limited amount of time to design a poster offering a treatment of our production concept using only items provided within the suitcase (markers, pipe cleaners, random magazines, scissors, glue, and a mystery item—such as the hamster ball we received). This intense, fun challenge allowed us to see the power of the collective and of collaboration, since rarely do theatremakers, producers, actors, and scholars work together in this way (Postma-Montaño).

Each team solved their unique challenges collaboratively by creating collages that addressed their approaches to production and marketing. In this case, everyone's creative abilities were engaged in a low-stakes collaboration where the end-product was camaraderie and fun. It served as a reminder of one of the reasons so many of us commit to theatre making; it's fun to play with others.

This sense of fun was nurtured during the 2019 Sin Fronteras TYA Festival, which featured five performances for K-12 audiences, from the US and Latin America. In addition to the featured performances, the festival spotlighted young theatre artists of Austin. "Latinx youth were the focus of the entire festival—not only as audience members and storytellers but as workshop speakers and leaders, amplifying youth as valuable voices" (McMahon). The presence of youth and children at the festival and in the audiences influenced the festival's art-making workshops, which we geared toward adults making theatre for young audiences. Georgina Escobar led a workshop for artists, in particular playwrights who were working on commissions and finding themselves negotiating between the desires of the commissioning producer and those of the artist. The second workshop, on mask performance, was led by David Lozano, artistic director

of Dallas' Cara Mia Theatre. Lozano shared generative techniques to enhance theatre making for audiences of all ages. Along with the inspiration gained by watching imaginative works for young audiences, these creative workshops strengthened participants' artistic skills in practice.

Ultimately, the craft and art of Latinx theatre making has been nurtured and nourished by the LTC's commitment to art making. The LTC has engaged around the US in meaningful ways that do not replicate or compete with other efforts, such as producing plays. The LTC has strengthened the capacities of Latinx artists by offering arts workshops at its events and has engendered artistic collaborations through convening and funding. These new relationships have manifested an increase in the production and visibility of Latinx theatre.

The LTC Moving Forward

The final program of the second three-year cycle of LTC activities was the National Convening in Miami, held in July 2019. To determine the next round of LTC activities, a call for proposals was announced in September 2018 by the LTC producer, inviting proposals from people beyond the Steering Committee. Free workshops about the LTC, its guiding principles and methods, including the Princeton recommendations were offered to the public. These recommendations emerged from the in-person Strategic Planning meeting held at Princeton University in April 2018:

We recognized our programming gaps in the past and recommend the entire Steering Committee prioritize and value the experience and participation of Afro-Latinx, indigenous, disabled, and queer people; designers, technicians, and critics; and advocate for language justice in our convenings. We recommend that the Steering Committee look to the ten year anniversary (2023) as a celebration and evaluation of the current

LTC. We encourage convening proposals, initiatives, and activities around this idea (Vega “New Programming”).

Following the workshops, which were not a prerequisite to submissions, prospective proposals were presented as “elevator pitches,” that is, synopses of the ideas, to the LTC producer and a small committee. Proposals received either encouragement to move forward with a full proposal, or an explanation of how the project, as pitched, might be beyond the scope and mission of the LTC at this time.

In addition to the Princeton recommendations, the following values and tenets were listed on the Scoring Sheet by which the LTC Steering Committee reflected and began voting on whether to move projects forward as LTC programs for 2020-2023: Artmaking, Advocacy, Convening/ Networking, Scholarship, Radical Inclusion, Service, Transparency, Leadership and Legacy Cultivation, and Advancement of the Art Form. On a scale of one to five, with five representing the most, Steering Committee members were asked to rate how much the proposed project furthered the field, whether the project would be best or only undertaken by the LTC, and perhaps most importantly, “How excited are you about this project?” (Vega “New Programming”). It should be noted that while the full proposal narratives were made available to Steering Committee members, the proposed budgets were not included, so that the cost of each proposal would not be a factor in determining the merit of each project. The committee crafting the New Programming Sheet decided that the LTC’s experiences warranted confidence in the abundance, rather than the scarcity, of resources that could be accessed for any project that the Steering Committee might deem worthy. We have learned that a combination of good will, volunteer time, in-kind contributions, and expertise are as valuable as financial resources when considering the viability of a project.

The applications were reviewed and rated by the whole Steering Committee during December 2018 and January 2019 via an on-line rating process. An LTC in-person Steering Committee meeting was held, in the tradition of previous LTC Convenings, immediately following the LTC TYA Sin Fronteras Festival in Austin, on Sunday, January 27, 2019. (“Future Programming”). All of the proposals were reviewed and the ones that received the most enthusiastic support rose to the top of the list. The results of that process were compared with the earlier voting results. As it turned out, the two lists were nearly identical. These five projects for 2020-2023 (which have not been announced to the general public) were recommended to the entire Steering Committee:

- 2020 Creative Renewal Retreat
- 2021 LTC Comedy Carnaval⁷⁰
- 2022 Latinx Directors Lab
- 2022/23 Cross Cultural Coalitions of Color Convening
- 2023 LTC Combatting Colorism Summit (Vega “January”)

These programs have not been announced to the public yet because certain details remain to be sorted out. Questions about logistics were raised during the selection process in Austin including questions about venues, personnel, audience, schedule, and budget. When more of these questions have been sorted out there will be a formal announcement to the field (Vega “[LTC] the 2020-2023”).

⁷⁰ Originally identified as the Comedy Symposium when first proposed, in summer 2019, the title “Carnaval” replaced “Symposium” to build upon the established commitment toward convening around new work which had been established with Carnaval 2015 and 2018, in essence creating a brand for this LTC activity. This change came about after the selection process had been completed, which was a consternation to several Steering Committee members who felt the process had been upended.

Nevertheless, the five recommended projects reflect the values of the LTC and the continued commitment to the four tenets, Convening, Scholarship, Advocacy, and Art making. All five projects involve Convening. The Creative Renewal Retreat was advanced for the well-being and revitalization of the Steering Committee, as well as an opportunity to build relationships between Advisory Committee members (most of whom have been members of the Steering Committee at one time) and current Steering Committee members. Reflecting the LTC's commitment to Convening, the Creative Renewal Retreat is also one of the Princeton recommendations. The Comedy Symposium and the Directors Lab support Art making by engaging in skill-based workshops grounded in Latinx culture. The Comedy Symposium also provides access to Scholarship as part of its proposal is to hold discussions with regard to how Latinx comedy is "read." The Cross-Cultural Coalitions of Color Convening is an organic next step in the coalition-building Advocacy work with CAATA, the Black Theatre Commons, Indigenous Voices, and MENA theatre-makers. Finally, the Combatting Colorism Summit is also a next step in the LTC's journey toward radical inclusion that prompted the mandatory anti-blackness training for all Steering Committee members. It is understood that Latinx in attendance will challenge their own systems of implicit bias both personally and institutionally. This bolsters advocacy for the inclusion of all Latinx, regardless of phenotype, toward creating a more truthful Latinx identity.

The LTC's past and potential future productivity is rooted in a mission of decolonization similar to that of TENAZ, which stated that "*luchamos por los trabajadores ...no somos del Sistema. ...es un orgullo pertenecer a los trabajadores que*

construyen el mundo del futuro”⁷¹ (Martinez 288). Maldonado-Torres’ *decolonial turn*, “making visible the invisible,” emerges again as the LTC envisions and works toward a more equitable future for Latinx theatre and theatre makers, one that is constructed by Latinx theatre makers themselves (262).

What has been described throughout this chapter is the history of the LTC, its programs, initiatives, some of its rationale, and how it manifests in the field of Latinx and “American” theatre more broadly. Since its inception in 2012, the LTC has produced diverse activities through collaborative action designed to strengthen Latinx theatre, empower Latinx theatre-makers, and heighten the visibility of Latinx theatre making in the US, thereby transforming the narrative of the American theatre. Its programming, carried out by a predominantly volunteer workforce, has engendered a united community. The members of the LTC’s Steering Committee, numbering over one hundred and thirty people since 2012, have contributed their time and resources to make the LTC’s initiatives happen. The programs are guided by four tenets, Convening, Scholarship, Advocacy, and Art making, which inform the framework by which the LTC determines and carries out its activities.

All four of the LTC’s tenets carry a performative element. Convening brings together the bodies, minds, and hearts of workers who share a commitment to liberation through theatre; Scholarship documents, contemplates, and legitimizes this work in the academy and beyond through pedagogy and publication; Advocacy identifies offense, voices indignation, and calls for justice; and Art making communicates life and Latinidad poetically. These four kinds of performances, illuminating and promoting, echo

⁷¹ We fight for the [theatre] workers ...who do not belong to the System. ...it is an honor to belong to the workers who build the world of the future.

Anzaldúa's image of the artist as shaman, one who works between the realms of what exists and what might exist ("Flights" 39). The LTC's work, "making visible the invisible," thereby transforming the narrative of the American theatre, approaches the quality of "utopian performatives" as described by Jill Dolan, which "persuade us that beyond this 'now' of material oppression and unequal power relations lives a future that might be different, one whose potential we can feel as we're seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later" (7). Dolan was addressing theatrical performance specifically, but the LTC in fact rehearses a more just *field*, one which with a little more rehearsal, might just get it right.

Up ahead, in Chapter V, I will discuss the ideological underpinnings of the LTC, beginning with the principles grounded in Latinx feminisms and manifested in a commons model, and how they impact the work of decolonization.

CHAPTER V

LATINX FEMINISMS IN THE LTC

“Feminism really was at the genesis of the LTC,” according to playwright and scholar Anne García-Romero, who participated in the 2012 DC-8 meeting that gave rise to the movement (García-Romero Personal interview). Those who gathered for that initial meeting brought with them the awareness and concern for the historic marginalization of Latinas within the Latinx community. Chapter III discussed the rise of Chicanx/Latinx feminisms, including how they were expressed as art and scholarship in response to the liberation activism of the *movimiento* and the Young Lords Party during the mid-to-late twentieth century. This chapter will discuss how these expressions, influential in the identity formation of early and current leaders of the LTC, have in turn influenced the LTC’s mission and methods. The acknowledgement of patriarchy in the history of Chicano/Latino theatre⁷² was not a rejection of the important contributions made by Chicano/Latino theatre and theatre-makers of the past. The awareness simply yielded the desire to move forward without the patriarchal element. Playwright Enrique Urueta, who also participated in the DC-8 meeting, concurs.

From the inception of the eight to the Steering Committee in planning for the initial Boston Convening, we were conscious of the importance [of the] necessary inclusion of everyone ... how do we create something that honors and acknowledges and respects the people who have paved the

⁷² As discussed in Chapter III, patriarchal rule was the norm in Spanish colonial culture; male heads of households were granted control and the right to discipline those who lived within their households through the laws of *Patria Potestad*, which protected their status as men of honor, and their access to power in the public sphere which women, as well as the Indigenous and Afro-descendants, for the most part, did not have.

way and who've made the space for all of us to what we do, and at the same time make space for women theatre artists especially?⁷³ (Urueta). The LTC was launched with the understanding that marginalization can occur even within a marginalized community, and that the effort to rectify the damages of intramarginalization must be undertaken intentionally, and through action. Women⁷⁴ are and have been well-represented in the leadership of the LTC since its inception, and most self-identify as feminists. However, feminist self-identification is not relegated to women alone. All of the members of the LTC Steering or Advisory Committees who were interviewed for this study either self-identify as feminists or openly embrace feminist ideals. A few of the men were reluctant to self-identify as feminists, doubting whether it was appropriate for men to do so.

Director Alex Meda preferred to self-identify as an intersectional feminist noting that to limit or privilege her alertness and activism to women's issues alone was to risk overlooking the concerns of other minoritized communities whose issues may not solely be women's but whose concerns certainly overlap with women's (Meda). Crenshaw has described this as "the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (280). Regardless of whether anyone other than Meda has used the term *intersectional feminism*, this inclusive and expansive definition represents well the feminisms at work within the LTC. With so many participants of the LTC self-identifying as feminists or as advocates of feminist ideals, and as shall be seen,

⁷³ This commitment to access was exemplified in the invitation list for the 2013 Boston Convening. The Steering Committee paid close attention to balance the diversity of invitees in areas including gender, sexual orientation, geography, job, and years in the field, among other self-definitions (Gahlon "3.22.13").

⁷⁴ Most of the women and men in the LTC Steering, Training, and Advisory Committees are cis-gendered, which is one of the criticisms against the LTC. For this chapter, all self-identified women, whether cis or trans, are identified as women. Accordingly, all self-identified men, whether cis or trans, are identified as men. Gender-non-conforming or gender-fluid people will be identified as such.

whose concerns about who and how the LTC serves extend beyond “women” and even “Latinx,” the LTC could be called a Latinx intersectional feminist movement or, at the very least, a Latinx movement of intersectional feminists.

García-Romero also noted the connection between feminism and the commons. “In the early days of the planning, the commons-based approach could be viewed as a feminist approach” (García-Romero). The LTC’s commitment to working within a commons model aligned with its commitment to approach the work through feminist ideals, possibly because both modes share a wariness if not rejection of structural hierarchy. I add that the decolonization work begun by TENAZ and carried forward by the LTC also aligns with Latinx feminisms and the commons model. This chapter will address how feminist ideals are manifested in the LTC, review how commons theory – the infrastructural philosophy of the LTC – aligns with these ideals in practice, and, how this work manifests efforts toward decolonization. I will also reveal challenging moments for the LTC when ideals were confronted by real life.

Latinx Feminist Values

In Chapter III, several values of Chicana/Latinx feminisms emerged through a historical view of the trajectory of Latinx feminist ideologies from their roots in colonial Latin American society to the present. Latin American, Chicana/Latina, and Latinx feminists have championed self-determination, suffrage, entrepreneurship, advanced education, the resistance of patriarchal hierarchies, representation beyond the simplistic Virgin/Whore dichotomy, equal and acknowledged participation in the public sphere including in the struggles for liberation, and ultimately, the freedom to champion these

values without being labeled unwomanly, or traitorous to their people and their causes (Amar 1764; Anzaldúa 1987; Broyles-González 1994, Pardo Bazán 1892, García 1989, 1997; Gómez de Avellaneda “Women”; Hurtado 1996; Martínez 1995; Sanseverino 2011; Sandoval 1998, 2000; Schutte 1993; Trujillo 1998; Villanueva 1999; Yarbrow-Bejarano 1983, 1986). Latinx feminisms value, demand, and receive alliance and support from non-female Latinx to achieve these goals (Gómez de Avellaneda; Enck-Wanzer 2010; Klemesrud 1970). In alignment with cultural movements for liberation, Latinx feminisms value the right to be Latinx, to express, challenge, and celebrate cultural heritages and identities, including self-definitions of Latinx femininity or personhood (Gómez de Avellaneda; García 1989, 1997; Hurtado 1996; Klemesrud 1970; Martínez 1995; Moraga 2017; Palma 1896; Tristan 1838; Yarbrow-Bejarano 1986). Finally, acknowledging that Latinx identity is inherently diverse, Latinx feminisms value inclusion and alliance with other marginalized communities, including other people of color and members of LGBTQ+ communities whether they also identify as Latinx or not (García 1997; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Yarbrow-Bejarano 1983). While Latinx feminisms may have begun by voicing resistance against patriarchal systems that oppress women, they have grown inclusive and expansive, understanding that patriarchal hierarchies and their limitations create negative impacts for all genders, and further, for historically colonized and marginalized people. Chicanx/Latinx feminisms are visible in the LTC in several manifestations: *Presence, Acknowledged Leadership, Praxis, Representation, and Publication*. Each of these will be discussed independently below, even as they are of course intertwined in practice.

Latinx Feminisms at Work

Presence

Many members of the LTC self-identify as feminists or uphold feminist ideals, but how are these ideals actually manifested in the work of the LTC? As a member of the Steering Committee who supports a commons-based approach to knowledge sharing, I will include the opinions of other members of the Steering and Advisory Committees in response. Their answers fall into two general observations: they perceive feminisms at work in the LTC by virtue of the significant, visible, and supported presence of women in LTC leadership, and in the feminist praxis of the movement in action. I begin by discussing the impact of women's participation in LTC leadership, then will turn to discuss how Latinx feminist ideals are seen at work in the processes and productions of the LTC. Throughout, I will also share some of the challenges that emerged as humans attempted to put ideals into action.

Marrero bluntly says, "I don't see how one could not perceive feminism at work in the LTC. It is basically fueled by women, and I would borrow from Gloria Anzaldúa by calling us 'Radical Women of Color'" (Marrero "Responses"). (Marrero references the diverse as well as subversive nature of Anzaldúa and Moraga's groundbreaking anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, notable for its multicultural solidarity and insistent attack on institutionalized racism.) The word 'radical' may have a different connotation now than in 1981, when *Bridge* was first published. The word was previously associated with the extremism or even militancy of the social justice movements of the 1970s and '80s. These definitions do not describe the movement that is the LTC. Its infrastructural relationship with HowlRound, which serves

as the LTC's fiscal sponsor through the institution of Emerson College, as well as its financial support from national foundations implicitly prevents the LTC from such behavior. Furthermore, the initial Steering and Advisory Committee members were, for the most part, affiliated with professional theatres and institutions of higher education, which again, inhibits extremism.⁷⁵ What else might be inhibited, or alternately promoted, by the LTC's affiliation with Emerson College, national foundations, or the acquired protocols of professional theatre?

Marrero acknowledges the legacy of third-wave feminism, nonetheless, by pointing to the current abundance of women's leadership. Playwright Karen Zacarías is one of the most notable presences in this leadership as the person who decided to use her residency support funds to bring eight Latinx theatre makers to Washington, DC, for the conversation that launched the movement in 2012. Several people acknowledge the importance of Zacarías' leadership, including García-Romero:

The fact that essentially the founder of the LTC is a Latina playwright, is really important. I think that Karen's expansiveness, generosity, her point of view as a Latina playwright set the tone. She kept using this word ... *calzón quitado*, pants down. The vulnerability of that, the desire to really have a more honest conversation from the get-go was really important and I think, coming from a woman, a Latina, a mother, that needs to be noted (García-Romero).

García-Romero implies that had the meeting been called by a man, its tone may have not been so vulnerable. Many Latinx are accustomed to living and working within patriarchal systems, whether in families or in Latinx-identified theatre companies, and whether they

⁷⁵ Tension has arisen as some in the LTC perceive the goal of the movement to infiltrate established institutions, with the potential of transforming these institutions; others believe the movement should be focused on supporting the existing Latinx-identified theatres, which are notoriously under-resourced. This question emerged most vocally during the debriefing session that immediately followed the 2018 Carnival. The LTC has more often than not selected projects invested in the former goal.

like it or not. A number of early Latinx theatre companies were founded by husband and wife teams, heteronormative relationships which supported a patriarchal administration. Leadership positions, such as Artistic Directors, Executive Directors, or a combination of the two, were often assigned to the male partner.⁷⁶ Zacarías' leadership style is noteworthy; she has a steadfast yet understated presence which García-Romero describes as expansive and generous. Zacarías encourages a leadership model in which a person can participate fully, openly, and with authority, without needing to claim a title, run the entire show, or take full credit for successes. Sharing recognition for leadership and sharing leadership itself are foundational practices that have impacted the continuing work of the LTC. No one takes credit alone for the success of any of the LTC's initiatives. As a predominantly volunteer project, it is understood and acknowledged that teamwork is critical to making things happen.

Volunteerism is of course predicated on not only goodwill but also an alignment with the volunteer's other responsibilities. Theatre is a notoriously multitasking field, where professionals are often involved in several projects at once, including teaching, which may take them to multiple physical and digital worksites seven days a week, all year long. That said, during her tenure as Producer, Vega found that while time and

⁷⁶ El Teatro Campesino was founded and led by Luis Valdez for decades, with his wife Lupe's support, before his son Kinan took over the reins. The Latino Theatre Company is headed by founder and Artistic Director Jose Luis Valenzuela, while his wife and co-founder Evelina Fernandez is an actor and playwright for the ensemble. José Gonzalez is Executive Director of Milagro; his wife and co-founder Dañel Malan is Artistic Director of the touring company. On the east coast, the model is less patriarchal. Pregones Theatre was co-founded by Artistic Director Rosalba Rolón and Executive Director Alvan Colón; however, Rolón is the figurehead of the organization. Interestingly, GALA Hispanic Theatre's leadership includes the longest-held Artistic Directorship in the US theatre field: co-founder Hugo Medrano. GALA co-founder Rebecca Medrano serves as the Executive Director, but Hugo Medrano is the artistic leader who also engages in business decision making. Most of the long-established Latinx-identified theatres in the US are headed by men: Teatro Vista (Chicago), Teatro Avante (Miami), INTAR (New York), Repertorio Español (New York), and Su Teatro (Denver).

follow-through were important measures of value for Steering Committee members, one of the most important qualities was perseverance.

When we fall, which we do because we all do, I need people, whether they are the most involved or the least involved, to say, 'let's get up,' and, 'what can we do better next time?' And where we fail is when people say, 'look at you down on the ground, how did you get there?' It becomes about 'you' and not 'we.' ... We put up a lot of parameters around [Steering Committee] membership and a lot of them are really effective, and there's still one missing piece, and I think that missing piece is, 'what is your inclination when we fall?' If it is to not help us get up, you can't be here (Vega Personal interview).

Vega has shifted the definition of efficacy from a quantifiable to a qualitative measure, from hours and achievements to attitude. Funders will want to have a report on results, but in the long run, it is more important for Vega to identify qualities that will sustain the movement.

The radical notion is that such committed teamwork does not require a captain, *per se*. This is, in essence, a rejection of an offensive hierarchical reward system wherein a head is acknowledged and rewarded for the work of subordinates. Helfrich and Bollier identify this in the commons model as *mutualization*, "to contribute and belong to a group enterprise with a larger, enduring social purpose" (83). This work is not entirely without benefits and privileges, as Helfrich and Bollier continue: "...this association in turn entitles participants to specific individual benefits" (83). In the LTC, specific individual benefits include equitable support for travel and lodging expenses incurred by attending LTC events. However, LTC project champions, those who have committed to leadership and oversight of a particular initiative, are especially celebrated for their efforts. During informal but traditional ceremonies of gratitude that occur at In-person Steering Committee meetings immediately following LTC events, project champions will

receive small gifts on behalf of the Steering Committee in acknowledgment of their work. No one begrudges this acknowledgement (as far as I can tell); the work is volunteered and necessary. However, there have been instances where the work of committee members has gone unrecognized. For example, during the 2018 Carnaval, the printed program listed many of the volunteers but omitted the names of the early grant writers. This work was done very early in the process, almost a year in advance of the event, and the 2018 Carnaval was quite a complicated logistical event, introducing designers, directors, dramaturges and actors as well as playwrights to the large field, and visiting multiple Chicago sites, so it is not surprising that these early volunteers fell off the radar, so to speak. However, this lack of acknowledgment is unusual within the LTC.

Returning to the visibility of women's leadership in the LTC, some respondents noted the circumstances of the 2014 Boston Convening as an example of feminism at work in the LTC. There, Kinan Valdez, Clyde Valentin, and I served as the co-facilitators of the three-day convening. This sharing of facilitation represented geographic as well as gender parity, with Valdez representing the West Coast, and Valentín the East. However, it did not go unnoticed that I, a woman, was co-facilitating on equal ground with my two colleagues. Irma Mayorga reflected on this:

I saw three people leading the dialogue. When I saw this conscious structure, it was balanced between three people so there was no leading figure. I found that very feminist. If we think about the very basic working definition of feminism, which is equality for women ... You were on equal ground, it wasn't like Kinan was the head, or you were the head, or Clyde was the head. It felt also like, as a woman in that group, you weren't sidelined. It was very, very clear you guys had divided up whatever tasks and duties that you were going to do between you in a very even and striking manner (Mayorga).

For Mayorga, this shared leadership was an important optic that reflected feminist values through highly visible action⁷⁷ during a historic gathering for the Latinx theatre making community, the LTC's first public event.

The commitment to gender parity has continued throughout the subsequent years of the movement. In addition to greater numbers of women than men in the Steering and Advisory committees, as Marrero pointed out earlier, the balance of leadership is found among women. Former LTC Producer Abigail Vega confirms that "Most committees are championed by at least one if not all women" (Vega Personal interview). Alex Meda concurs: "a lot of the work at the LTC is completed by women. We are the predominant workhorses of the LTC, if you look at who's in championship roles, [and] who ends up doing the work" (Meda). As of May 2017, twelve committees were championed or co-championed by eleven women and six men ("LTC Champion").

The word "champion" could be equated to "committee head" in some organizations but, for the LTC, championship reflects a different approach. Champions are committed to the work of their committee; often they have proposed the committee's project and have expressed the willingness to be responsible for its undertaking. Champions also serve as liaisons to the LTC Producer, who serves as a network hub for all the committees' endeavors, and in turn a liaison to HowlRound. Champions do not operate unilaterally, without the knowledge or approval of other members of their committee, and the responsibilities of a champion may be shared at any time. For example, in a Steering Committee meeting a champion may report recent activity from

⁷⁷ Much of the Boston convening was live streamed through HowlRound TV and is archived online, accessible via HowlRound.com.

the committee, and then ask fellow committee members to contribute their reflections as well. The commitment to a democratic process by which all invested parties have a voice reflects the commons practice which Helfrich and Bollier define as *peer governance*, by which:

People make decisions, set boundaries, enforce rules, and deal with conflicts — both within Commons and among different commons. In a peer-governed world, individuals see each other as Peers with the equal potential to participate in a collective process, not as adversaries competing to seize control of a central apparatus of power ... It is governing *through* the people (85).

Championship for the LTC is an approach that provides transparency, accountability, and the opportunity for others to contribute. Irma Mayorga sees this style of leadership in the El Fuego committee. “Having the majority of women lead that project, that’s very feminist to me because it’s not just that women are there, but women are organizing, leading that initiative, and running that initiative” (Mayorga). Therefore, while a champion is not a committee head, they are committee leaders, and this leadership is defined by service and a responsibility to a consensual decision-making process that reinforces the commitment to non-hierarchical leadership.

Acknowledged Leadership

Women are present and engaged in the work of the LTC, as they were for TENAZ. However, with the latter, it took effort for women to receive acknowledgement for their participation and their concerns. The LTC demonstrates an evolution in practice. Mayorga notes,

The fact that we have women in these leader roles, these guiding roles, is very feminist and not typical of the history of Latino theatre ... Usually they’re more hidden. We can read books about them, [working] in the

background ... men are in front. And we want to recover the women because they were really important in the background. That's not true here. Women are really important in the foreground (Mayorga).

Again, it is not simply that many women are participating in the movement but that they are acknowledged as leaders by virtue of their commitment as champions and active committee members.

One of the most significant examples of acknowledged leadership in the LTC occurred with the appointment of Abigail Vega as the LTC's first Producer in 2014. This was, as Mayorga put it, "a big feminist step forward especially for Latino theatre which has this terrible history of being male-dominated and side-lining our women into the kitchen" (Mayorga). Yet, again, the position is not defined by its power but by its service. The Producer, while the only paid staff of the LTC, is not a director but a facilitator of the movement. In July 2019, Armando Huipe became the LTC's second producer,⁷⁸ but this did not change the role of the Producer. As Abigail did, Armando attends all Steering Committee and subcommittee meetings, negotiates schedules, craft budgets, serves as the point person for grants and contracts, keeps the work of the LTC subcommittees on task, and serves as the primary liaison with HowlRound (Gahlon "Producer"). The Producer also writes the agendas for LTC Steering Committee meetings and facilitates those meetings, and they voice their opinions as someone who's aware of all the LTC's projects and HowlRound's logistics, but they support whatever decisions a committee may make. As Mayorga reflected, "no one has a problem with that. [Abigail] is equal and

⁷⁸ Armando Huipe uses "they, them, their" pronouns, and so will I, to refer to either Huipe's, or both Vega and now Huipe's, work as the LTC Producers.

we see her as a leader, a leader for those specific conversations because someone has to create an agenda and guide us through [it]" (Mayorga).⁷⁹

As the first person to occupy the Producer position for the LTC, Vega discovered some tensions between engaging in a supportive role or a directing role.

What gets complicated is, when am I steering the ship, and when am I doing the work of the other sailors? Most Steering Committee members ... most people, think most of the time that I'm a sailor. And sixty percent of the time I'm a sailor. Forty percent of the time, I'm working steering the ship (Vega Personal interview).

Her work directing "the ship" was necessary because the Producer is aware of what's happening with all the LTC projects and must navigate these multiple projects in different stages of development.

The Producer is the face of the LTC. Unlike TENAZ and most long-lived Latinx theatre companies, the image of leadership was a woman's, until July 2019 when Armando Huipe became the Producer; now it is gender-fluid. When the LTC received the 2017 TCG Peter Zeisler Memorial Award,⁸⁰ Vega delivered the address thanking the TCG Board at the TCG Annual Conference. However, in acknowledgment of the Steering Committee's shared responsibility, all Steering and Advisory committee members who were in attendance at the TCG Conference accompanied Vega on stage to receive the award as a group, backing her as she read the speech. In an echo of the technology that was available for the Boston Convening, Steering and Advisory

⁷⁹ Meeting agendas are crafted for group discussion and consensus-based decision making, practices which also express the values of the commons model as well as Latinx feminisms in the work of the LTC.

⁸⁰ *"The Peter Zeisler Memorial Award recognizes an individual or organization whose work reflects and promotes the ingenuity and artistic integrity that Peter Zeisler, late executive director of TCG, prized. The honorees exemplify pioneering practices in theatre, are dedicated to the freedom of expression and are unafraid of taking risks for the advancement of the art form. In honor of Peter's uncanny ability to introduce talent to the rest of the field, the nominees have not been recognized nationally for their work" ("Zeisler Memorial Award").*

committee members who were not at the conference but who were available at the time the award was presented, were “brought on stage” via Facetime or Skype on the cellphones of those who could be there in person (“Zeisler Memorial Award”). The speech had been crafted by a team of LTC Steering Committee members and the final draft of the speech was made available to the full Steering Committee for response and last edits via Google Drive (Vega “PLS REVIEW”). The writing group then asked Vega to read it solo. Here, Latinx feminisms are present in the combination of several factors: representation by a female leader, the practice of collaborative and consensual writing that created the speech she read, and the backing of all LTC committee members in the room and beyond.

One more measure of the depth of feminism in the LTC is the *response* to the abundance of female leadership. As mentioned in Chapter One, the concern that feminism might dilute the efforts of the cause was a justification evident during the Chicano *movimiento* that generated and informed TENAZ. As Elizabeth Martínez recounts:

[M]ale supremacy hurled two weapons at such Chicanas. The first was the accusation that "you're acting like a white woman" [*agringada*]. In other words, you're a traitor to your people, your culture. This could be devastating to Chicana activists, given that a central goal of the *movimiento* was liberation for brown people from Anglo-imposed domination and its values. In effect, the charge accused women of undermining ethnicity as a unifying force (Martínez 1021).

These accusations created tensions for twentieth century activists, some of whom, like Anna Nieto Gomez, left the larger Chicano liberation movements to form their own feminist-identified efforts (Sanseverino). In the LTC, this mistrust of feminism appears to be absent, or if it persists, the sentiment has gone underground. For example, Artistic

Director Jose Luis Valenzuela, who also participated in the early years of TENAZ, comments with a tone of admiration that “We have a lot of strong women in the LTC” (Valenzuela). He and others are well aware that women’s leadership and strength have not always been welcome in social movements, and they support the gender equity of the LTC. Director Richard Perez affirms that “One of the things I love is that so many of the people who are the movers and shakers within the LTC are women” (Perez). He points out that women’s engagement in the movement is a manifestation of the LTC’s intention to elevate the historically diminished status of women, and he describes women’s leadership as “at least an outward indication that that’s at play ... that there are on-going conversations about those issues” (Perez). Tlaloc Rivas, also a director, hopes that “people from the outside see that the LTC is driven by a majority of women rather than men, which is really cool and unique” (Rivas Personal interview). Rivas confirms that Latinx women’s leadership is historically unacknowledged, and that the LTC has the potential to promote Latinx women’s leadership by its example. That is, the impact of women in leadership in the LTC may be felt beyond the LTC, as its progressive model is observed. Ultimately, the important thing to note here is that women in the LTC do not get push back for their leadership simply because they are women; in fact, it appears that at least some men celebrate women’s leadership because they know it is politically and socially radical.

Examined in a larger context, in addition to responding to historic Chicana/Latina calls for representation and acknowledgment in the movement, this feminist support also acknowledges Latin American, Chicana, and Latina women’s longstanding socioeconomic participation as entrepreneurs. It has never been unusual to see women in

positions of self-reliance and independence, leading their own initiatives. What has changed over time is society's response to this independence. Women's self-reliance is no longer perceived as a necessary condition brought about by the absence of a patriarch who will provide for and defend women, but rather as an act of a woman's honorable volition.

With this in mind and having discussed ways in which Latinx feminisms are demonstrated in women's leadership and the acknowledgement of this leadership, I turn now to discuss how the initiatives and events produced by the LTC have also manifested the values of Latinx feminisms.

Theory in Action (Praxis)

The evidence of Latinx feminisms at work within the LTC is found not only in the numbers of women participating or leading initiatives but whether and how Latinx feminist values are apparent in the practices and products of the LTC. Latinx feminisms are not simply about the numbers and conditions of women in the workplace, or whether their contributions are welcome and acknowledged. Latinx feminisms also speak to the culture of the work itself, how it is organized, what it values, and how it manifests. As Dominican writer Julia Alvarez wrote in a rededication to Anzaldúa's groundbreaking *Borderlands*, she needed "to drown out, momentarily, what the larger culture was telling [her]—something was wrong with [her] for not being able to assimilate" (Anzaldúa 2012 233). I begin by discussing the earliest production of the LTC, the Boston Convening held in 2013.

As mentioned earlier, the Boston Convening manifested intentional female representation among the facilitators and the invited participants. The Convening also reflected Latinx Feminist values through its culturally informed activities. The meeting was shaped in a progressive as well as culturally representative way. Simply organizing a professional convening in an ethnically informed way is in itself progressive. However, given the historic challenges faced by feminists working within traditional society, vigilance was required to avoid re-inscribing oppressive practices. The convening protocols were defined in Latinx ways that were informed by feminisms. For example, spirituality is an important value for many Latinx. At the start of the Boston Convening, we gathered in a circle, took an intentional breath together, and I read a *bendición*, a prayer “to that which we thank,” to express gratitude and awareness for the historic gathering (Herrera 15). Expressing gratitude without naming a specific god or higher power allowed everyone the freedom to be grateful in their own way, without adhering to any specific spiritual ideology. Heteropatriarchal⁸¹ Christianity is often associated with Latinx culture and it also has the unfortunate history of alliance with and responsibility for the oppressive Spanish colonial project. The LTC would be a space that welcomed all beliefs; it would not impose the hierarchy of traditional Christianity. Decolonization is manifested both in the rejection of Christianity as the sole spiritual tradition associated with Latinidad, and in the inclusion of spiritual traditions within a professional gathering.

⁸¹ “By heteropatriarchy, we mean the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent” (Arvin et al 13).

Showing respect for one's elders is also a traditional Latinx value. Cherríe Moraga described this as very different from mainstream intergenerational relations.

What she learned,

...very much countered the sort of youth culture, competitiveness, and individualism of US society. How one deals with one's elders is one example of *familia*, and that family wasn't necessarily mom, dad, and the kids, the nuclear family, but there was a sense of intergenerational reciprocity. And a kind of accountability too, to this community of people. In that sense it required courage to be who you were (Anthony).

Respect for elders beyond one's own grandparents granted older people in the community a higher status, generally speaking, and according to Moraga, became a signifier of cultural identity. Luis Valdez fondly remembered the elders of his youth, as "people I admired" (L. Valdez). The Boston Convening was the first time in over twenty-five years that so many Latinx theatre-makers had met intentionally to discuss their shared work.

Much had changed in the field, as playwright Evelina Fernandez affirmed,

[Now is] a very different reality from when we were members of TENAZ. Now there's a lot of young people that have been trained in theatre, graduating out of the universities, have got their MFA's. It's a whole different world when it comes to that, a lot of people working ... not enough, but in comparison! Several people working in the regionals, infiltrating in that way, just being subversive about getting our plays on the mainstage (Fernandez).

Still, it was necessary to acknowledge those who had paved the way for decades for those who now gathered in Boston. On the first evening of the Convening, which fell on the night before Día de Muertos, everyone in attendance introduced and contributed a personal *ofrenda*, an offering, to the altar that we had constructed to honor the legacy of Latinx theatre.

The altar then stood in the space it would remain for the duration of the gathering. Photos depicting the legendary faces of United States Latina/o theater—Lupe Ontiveros, Sandra Maria Estevez, María Irene Fornés,

Miguel Piñero, Hugo Medrano—stood among the piles of mementos and archival materials. Books by José Rivera, Tennessee Williams, Michelle Serros, Aristotle, Sandra Cisneros, Jean Genet, August Wilson, and María Irene Fornés were surrounded by objects with complex connections to lives and works of Latina/o theatermakers: rosaries and prayer cards, commedia masks and *calavera* heads, bottles of tequila, vodka, and rum. Interspersed among these were a mix of archival treasures: a promotional button from the Broadway run of *Zoot Suit*, original flyers and production programs from legendary *teatros*, production photos and props, a flashdrive containing everything one scholar had written on Latina/o theater (Herrera 29).

The *ofrenda*, which resonated with the celebration of Día de los Muertos that coincided with the dates of the Boston Convening, reflected both the traditional elements of altar construction (levels, bright cloths, *papel picado*, *calaveras*,⁸² and candles) but veered from tradition as it honored those who were still alive as well as those who had died. Furthermore, the traditional hierarchy inherent in the pyramidal structure was challenged by the placement of the *ofrenda* items. Traditionally, the top level of an altar is relegated to the memory of the most important person, whoever that might be. In this case, there was no such designation; mementos were placed there, but not because they represented people more special than others. A mirror was placed in the center, so one could see oneself on the altar acknowledged as a participant in the history of Latinx theatre making, and worthy of honoring, if only briefly. All in all, the altar symbolized the nature of artists to build upon cultural tradition in order to express contemporary ideas. In this case, it was the acknowledgement of the generations of Latinx theatre

⁸² Traditional cut-out tissue paper flags, skeletons or skulls

makers, some still with us, many who had personally sacrificed for their art, and to use a popular phrase, upon whose shoulders we stand.



Figure 9 Dia de Muertos ofrenda, Boston Convening, 2013 (Taintor)

However, a challenge has surfaced recently with regard to intergenerational relationships. At the Encuentro de las Américas, some Steering Committee members felt a sense of indifference from younger participants, disrupting the cultural tradition of intergenerational respect. Fernandez, one of the co-founders of the LATC which hosted the Encuentro, recalled that she “really felt there was a lot of ageism going on. That concerns me. Just like any young generation, did I ever think that my elders knew anything? Hell no! I never did! [Yet] I’m thinking, we have so much experience, and I’d wish you’d listen to me, so you don’t make the same mistakes that we made” (Fernandez). Marrero feels that there are several ways in which age has delineated new dynamics in the LTC. First, while she admits she does not know the current

demographics of the Steering Committee, her impressions are that “many of us older folks have moved into Advisory. We have baggage, history, and experience. You can’t buy or borrow that ... How many of the older people are able to make their way in theatre, how many people in their fifties or sixties are artists? You can’t afford it” (Marrero Personal interview). It may be that the more professionally trained younger generation are engaging in the regional theatre field in a way that the older generation never could, thereby creating a sense of superiority among the more “successful” generation that leads to disrespect toward the elders. However, this is mere speculation on my part. During the Encuentro de las Américas, there were uses of blackface, the exoticization of transgender identity, and female nudity which offended many people in the Steering Committee. Some of the older members were more tolerant, however, because even if they agreed that these choices were offensive, they saw them as expressions of Latin American culture. Fernandez, who had attended TENAZ international conferences and had experienced the cultural clashes that had occurred at those gatherings, was disappointed by the lack of generosity she perceived in the negative criticism by US-based Latinx theatre makers.

I know there were criticism of our brothers and sisters from Mexico and Latin America and their work. I feel like there wasn’t a place for us to talk about it. I don’t feel anybody’s being racist, or sexist, or misogynistic, deliberately. But there wasn’t any place to talk about it with them, to exchange ideas. ... We’re working in different realities, and that’s what our work reflects. I get worried when we become intolerant of different ideas, without really discussing it, and seeing everything in black and white. We need to be more compassionate, more understanding. Zero-tolerance is awesome, and sometimes zero-tolerance is not so awesome (Fernandez).

Therefore, the tensions that led to the feeling of ageism may have arisen out of a difference of perspective, in this case born of different experiences with international

performance. Or, it may be a manifestation of a cultural shift occurring within the younger, less traditional generation.

I turn now to speak about the LTC's relationship with Maria Irene Fornés, who died in October 2018 at the age of eighty-eight. It is perhaps ironic that in the midst of concerns about ageism, one of the most beloved LTC projects, ideated during the Boston Convening of 2013, is the Maria Irene Fornés Institute. The Fornés Institute "aims to preserve and to amplify Maria Irene Fornés's legacy as a teacher, mentor and artist, through workshops, convenings and advocacy" ("The Fornés Institute").

Acknowledgement: María Irene Fornés

Speaking of shoulders upon which we stand, the continuing work to celebrate the legacy of playwright, director, and teacher María Irene Fornés is another manifestation of Latinx feminisms at work in the LTC. Fornés is legendary and beloved among Latinx theatre-makers but, in the wider field, she has been, as the Village Voice put it, "America's great unknown playwright" (Laneri). The María Irene Fornés Institute Symposium, which was held at Princeton University in April 2018, is again an example of an LTC commoner, in this case Brian Herrera, putting the institutional resources at his disposal in service to the movement. The Symposium has been the LTC's most visible initiative to update the narrative on the Fornés' contributions to Latinx theatre. The day-long event featured two screenings of *The Rest I Make Up*, a documentary film by Michelle Memran, as well as workshops led by Fornés protégées Anne García-Romero, Amparo García-Crow, and Josefina López, an excerpt of Fornés' play *The Danube* directed by Estelle Parsons (who engaged in a post-performance discussion), a full

production of Fornés' *Fefu and her Friends*, and a closing poem by playwright and Fornés protégé, Migdalia Cruz. In addition to the overwhelming presence of women engaged in the programming committee and the event, it is significant, in the work of the LTC to "transform the narrative of the American Theatre," that Fornés influence on the East Coast is shared as a counterbalance to the narrative of Luis Valdez's influence on the West. While Valdez' work was clearly committed to championing the Chicano experience, and therefore provided a more culturally-centered approach to theatre making, Fornés' commitment to complicating the narrative of women in society through her plays, to teaching playwriting with an invitation to channel subconscious and embodied influences, and her impact on a generation of Latina playwrights who are committed to passing on her pedagogy, center her contributions in feminism. Many of the members of the LTC's Fornes Institute committee who worked to produce the Symposium, have also engaged in the creation of a new website dedicated to Fornés activities and scholarship, www.fornesinstitute.com.

Representation in Theatre Making

The concern for representation, how Latinx are seen on stage and in their participation in the profession more broadly, is at the heart of the LTC movement; it has profound implications for the way in which Latinx are perceived in society at large. This concern has emerged within the work of the LTC in its attention to the ways in which women and othered Latinx are represented. Perez, an Advisory Board member, confirms that, "certainly in our efforts, for instance, at the festivals that we've had of new work, we've been intentional about making sure that there's been a relatively good

representation” of women (Perez). In addition to ensuring diversified participation at LTC events and in the Steering and Advisory committees, the LTC is mindful of the works it selects for presentation, as well as the identities of the artists who are spotlighted around these works. Members of the Steering Committee have served as curatorial committee members for both Encuentro performance festivals in 2014 and 2017, both Carnaval New Works festivals in 2015 and 2018, and the TYA Sin Fronteras festival of 2019.

The invitation to the first Encuentro celebrated “the Richness of Contemporary Latina/o Theater in the U.S.,” explicitly incorporating Latina theatre in its mission (Scott). Of the fourteen plays ultimately selected for the 2014 Encuentro, seven were written by women playwrights, and five were directed by women. There were one hundred plays submitted for consideration of the 2015 Carnaval of New Latina/o Work, which, again, included Latina theatre in its title and so, expressed an intention to include works by Latinas. Of the eight selected to receive full staged readings, four were written by women playwrights and four were directed by women. There were also four shorter readings of script excerpts, all written by women, and two directed by a woman. For the 2018 Carnaval, seven of the fourteen members of the curatorial selection committee were women. One hundred and twenty-five playwrights had submitted work this round. In spring 2018, the committee announced the twenty-four playwrights that were finalists in the selection process, as a way to promote the richness of the field. Of the twenty-four finalists, twelve were women. Of the six playwrights ultimately selected for fully staged readings at the Carnaval, four were women and one identified as non-gender specific. The 2018 Carnaval was also notable for its active inclusion of directors, designers, and

dramaturges who were spotlighted with almost as much visibility as the featured playwrights. Of the six directors, three were women; of six dramaturges, five were women; of twelve designers, seven were women.⁸³ Finally, for the TYA Sin Fronteras festival held in January 2019, of the five works selected for full productions at the first ever Latinx TYA festival, three were written or devised by women, and two were directed by women. The selection committees clearly considered gender representation as they made their selections. Abigail Vega concurs that, throughout the history of the LTC, “there have been more female artists and women-defined artists featured than men, generally speaking. With very few exceptions. Encuentro this time around [2017] had more work by men. That wasn’t necessarily on us but there we go” (Vega Personal interview). Vega points out the curatorial process for the Encuentro de las Américas International Theatre Festival included participants who were not members of the LTC Steering Committee, which meant they held different priorities and values. The results were noticeably different. Of the fourteen productions presented at the 2017 Encuentro de las Américas, which featured works from all over Latin America as well as from the US and Canada, five of the scripts were written by women, and only two works were directed by women. In this case, the curatorial priority appears not to have been gender equity. The selection committee, as an independent body, determined the values and criteria by which they selected works for inclusion in the Encuentro 2017 festival. The values

⁸³ A bit of controversy arose as, unlike the script selection process whereby plays for the Carnaval were chosen through a committee process, the designers for this Carnaval were recommended by Christopher Acebo, a premier, Tony Award-winning, Latinx scenic designer. His selections were excellent but appeared to circumvent a committee vetting process.

included “cross-cultural collaboration, exchange of methodologies, openness to risk, and inclusive dialogue” (Vega “How a Commons”⁸⁴).

The full criteria for the 2017 Encuentro selection process are presented in Appendix D, but for this discussion on the influence of Latinx feminisms on the LTC, it is appropriate to point out that out of a fifty-point scale, proposals received a maximum of ten points based on their alignment with the values of the LTC: “Do the values of the proposing company or artist align with the values of Encuentro 2017?” (Vega “How a Commons”). Unfortunately, despite the best efforts of the committee to invite work that supported the LTC’s value of radical inclusion, certain performances did the opposite, offending through their use of blackface, the exoticization of transgender identity, and female nudity.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the selection committee was only provided with excerpts of the works submitted for consideration, and therefore were not aware of these performance elements in advance. A long conversation ensued following the Encuentro, primarily during the Steering Committee meeting, and strategies have been discussed. At heart is the thought that if the LTC stands for radical inclusion, this means it privileges the comfort of the historically marginalized over the comfort of the historically centered.

Latin American scholar Beatriz Rizk pushed back, arguing that the questionable works were Latin American productions and the Steering Committee’s response bordered on cultural imperialism. “You cannot judge the development of another culture based on your culture,” she said, “Yes, we want to grow up aesthetically, but this borders on

⁸⁴ The 2014 Encuentro national festival received some criticism for not explaining how participating performances had been selected. For the 2017 Encuentro, Producer Abigail Vega penned a blog post in HowlRound to provide transparency about the selection process, in advance of the festival.

⁸⁵ The presenting company argued that the nudity in its production was necessary; some audience members, including members of the Steering Committee, disagreed, arguing that they found it exploitative.

religion. Who are we to be the Moral Majority of the community? The next step is
censure” (Rizk). Zacarías also shared concerns about the Steering Committee’s criticism,
wondering whether the LTC’s ideological ideals wouldn’t be “something that kills the
art” (Zacarías Personal interview). As a playwright, and “as a Latina, a Mexican,” she
was well aware that she didn’t create characters who only said things she agreed with. “I
was upset about the Encuentro,” she recalled, yet she appreciated the challenges raised by
the questionable works, and their creative act. “Even if it was a misstep, it came from a
generosity” (Zacarías Personal interview).

Publication

Finally, Latinx feminisms are visible in many LTC publications. *Encuentro: Latinx Performance for the New American Theatre* (Northwestern University Press 2019) is an anthology of six of the plays presented at the 2014 Encuentro. Edited by Trevor Boffone, Teresa Marrero, and Chantal Rodriguez, two of the plays are written by women playwrights, and four of the six critical introductions are written by female scholars.

With the relaunch of Café Onda in July 2014, thirteen out of twenty-four blog posts were penned by women by the end of that year, and twenty-two of thirty-two Café Onda posts were written by women through from January to July 2015 (“Café Onda Content” and “2015Dallas” 18). Two blog series launched within the Café Onda, *Ignited* and *Pedagogy Notebook*, also demonstrated a commitment to publishing women. For *Ignited*, by which scholars document El Fuego productions, five out six published blogs, and two of the forthcoming three blogs, will have been written by women. In *Pedagogy Notebook*, in which educators share classroom practices for teaching Latinx theatre, five

out of eight blog essays were written by women. Through its publications, the LTC has been successful at placing women in the spotlight, as leaders, artists, and intellectuals.

As mentioned earlier, Latinx feminisms value the right of women to express, challenge, and celebrate their cultural heritages and identities, including self-definitions of femininity and/or personhood (Gómez de Avellaneda; Garcia 1989, 1997; Hurtado 1996; Klemesrud 1970; Martínez 1995; Moraga 2017; Palma 1896; Tristan 1838; Yarbrow-Bejarano 1986). Women's agency and leadership within the movement resists patriarchal hierarchies and postcolonial tropes by creating more truthful and complex representations beyond the simplistic Virgin/Whore dichotomy and other oppressive or degrading stereotypes. These are intentional and public-facing expressions of Latinx feminisms at work in the LTC.

Representational images are also resources, or intellectual property, and taking collective control of the images of Latinx femininity parallels the commons model by which "commoners" share control and decision-making power of the use and care of their common resource. Therefore, the act of deciding how they are represented, in images more complex than stereotypical, is an act of resource oversight. This is akin to what Helfrich and Bollier describe as *value sovereignty*, whereby "a commons generally strives to protect its moral and cultural identity and to control the value it generates" (90). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri remind us that, "identity is property. Notions of the sovereign individual and possessive individualism, which constitute the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century origins of bourgeois ideology, pose identity as property in a philosophical sense: 'Every man has a property,' writes John Locke, 'of his own person'" (326). In this case the LTC is not protecting its own image; its work supports Latinx in

the act of protecting their images. This act of self-definition is also one of decolonization, as Anibal Quijano indicates. Quijano points to the creation of an underclass identity of Latin Americans as the US strove to re-identify itself in the mid-twentieth century (561). In this case Latinx and female both reject underclass status.

Next, I will discuss how Latinx feminisms are at work in the internal operations of the movement.

Steering Committee Meetings

LTC meetings are the primary sites of the LTC's work, where ideas are shared and discussed, works plans are made, progress is reported, and where Latinx feminist practice is visible. The Steering Committee has met nearly every month, for an hour, since the first meeting in April 2013. Subcommittee meetings have been scheduled to meet as needed – often monthly, but more frequently as production dates near. Before Abigail Vega came on board as the LTC Producer in May 2014, meetings were facilitated by committee champions with the support of Jamie Gahlon, then HowlRound Associate Director. Since 2014, the Producer (first Vega, then Huipe) has facilitated most of the meetings.

The timing of Steering Committee meetings has varied over the years to accommodate members' schedules. National time zones, work schedules, and other variables make it impossible for all the Steering Committee members to meet at the same time each month, so the compromise achieved by trial and error has been to provide variety so as to not privilege one schedule over another. Variety makes it possible for the greatest number of members to attend as often as possible, and for as many voices as

possible to engage in the conversations that affect the work of the LTC. The flexibility of the meeting agenda and meeting times speaks to the privileging of the needs of the group over the needs of any one individual, no matter who they might be.

While the agendas for the meetings are written primarily by the Producer, they are driven by the needs of the subcommittees. As deadlines near, imminent projects will frequently require attention and extra support from the Steering Committee, and this additional support can be requested during these meetings. Meeting notes are primarily written by the Producer, composed as Google Docs during the meeting, but they are open for anyone to edit in real time. For example, if the Producer is in a conversation, someone else in the meeting will take over that note-taking work or fill in details. It is not unusual for there to be several people contributing to the notetaking in any meeting. It is understood that the Producer needs to engage in the conversation, and that there are others in the meeting who can better serve by tracking that discussion. That is, the Producer's knowledge and voice are valued over their ability to take notes.

The Plurality of Voices

Latinx feminisms are at work in the communication dynamics of the Steering Committee meetings, as anyone in attendance is welcome to enter the conversation, ask questions, and offer suggestions. This corresponds to the desire for equal and acknowledged participation in the public sphere. Scholar Trevor Boffone acknowledges:

The way that different voices rise and fall by choice or not, is very feminist. But I think also the respect that is there is really palpable. We're not all best friends ...But, when we're on a meeting we're all showing each other respect. No one is really speaking over each other, no one is arguing with each other. If someone says something that's just a really bad

idea, no one [says] that was a bad idea, or, that's stupid. There's a lot of respect. To me that's indicative of the feminist method (Boffone).

The plurality of voices has been encouraged in the LTC since the first Convening in Boston, and its prioritization has influenced not only conversational processes, but also the physical layout in which these conversations take place. The dominant conference model for plenary conversations, for example, is one in which a panel of experts is seated on a raised stage to address an audience. This configuration was not utilized for the Boston Convening. Rather, conversations with experts were in a circle within a larger circle, and appropriately named Listening Circles. There were three Listening Circles during Day Two of the Convening, and anyone could join in the conversation after listening to an initial discussion among people who identified as “Creators,” “Translators,” and “Pillars” (Herrera 36). This process was facilitated by the physical layout. Anyone could join the conversation by taking a seat in the inner circle, and anyone who felt they'd had their say could leave the circle, to create space for a new voice. Massimo De Angelis advocates that “when there are commons, then it is because there is an ‘us’ in communication and relational practice with one another” (110). The focus of the Listening Circles is on the community of makers sharing wisdom, recognizing that no one alone will hold all the answers.

It was important and intrinsic that these conversations be held in non-hierarchical configurations. “Creators” (predominantly playwrights) were neither more nor less important than “Translators” (primarily directors, designers, and actors), nor more nor less important than “Pillars” (producers, administrators, and scholars). Irma Mayorga credits the commons model for its commitment to non-hierarchy as “an inherently feminist structure, because it tries to democratize or ameliorate power hierarchies”

(Mayorga). Enrique Urueta described this structure as one of the hallmarks of the first Convening: “It was a space where everyone had a voice, but that no one was able to take control, and that was great” (Urueta). This model for conversing in horizontal circles, both figuratively and in actual formation, without a head speaker, has been used at multiple LTC convenings, including Carnaval 2015, Dallas 2015, and Encuentro 2018.

These horizontal configurations express and encourage the inclusion of everyone’s voice in the conversation. However, even the best intentions and seating arrangements cannot erase nor control old habits of behavior. Tlaloc Rivas has observed:

The way that we have organized our gatherings whether it’s Encuentro, or the convenings or the meetings, have definitely had a very specific feminist approach in terms of how we value every voice in the room and the conversations taking place. That’s not to say that there haven’t been *machista* flare-ups from time to time. I think these have come about subconsciously, or by people on the outside trying to essentially use the LTC for their own benefits. And these are mostly by men by the most part, who try to essentially frame the LTC as being hierarchical even though for the most part, we’re not” (Rivas Personal interview).

Rivas acknowledges that in *machista* society, it is natural for men to dominate a conversation. Yet, Latinx feminist awareness is a foundation of the LTC ethos and people, such as Rivas, actively look out for it. Enrique Urueta recalls how, at the Boston Convening, he “was cognizant of watching for the moments where some guy would take the reins, and the folks in charge were masterfully able to derail that without hurting anyone’s pride” (Urueta).

In acknowledging the history and potential for male dominance within the dynamics of conversation, Rivas and Urueta demonstrate the vigilance that one would hope to see from a feminist ally. This awareness and support for feminist praxis in the LTC presents the opposite reaction to the criticism and mistrust experienced by

Chicana/Latina feminists of the late twentieth century, whose allegiance to the cause of Chicano liberation was called in question when Latinas raised feminist concerns.

Negotiating Machismo and Patriarchy

Above, Urueta mentions the sensitivity with which a show of masculine dominance was diffused during the Boston Convening, “without hurting anyone’s pride.” This form of pride reflects status, which is historically grounded in honor for people of Latin American heritage. Honor is highly valued in Latinx culture, it is a legacy of Spanish colonial culture. However, its definition has transformed since the colonial era, as has the definition of machismo. As Chapter III reflected, “Honor” has transformed into one of the “positive definitions of machismo” which now include “protection of the family ... dignity, wisdom, hard work, responsibility, spirituality, and emotional connectedness” (Arciniega et al 20). In a similar way, and perhaps in response to Latinx women’s rejection of simplistic representations of femininity, a new generation of Latinx men are choosing to redefine their masculinity and its values. Urueta’s appreciation for the facilitation at the Boston Convening that interrupted traditional dominant masculine behavior “without hurting anyone’s pride” demonstrates an appreciation for culturally appropriate acts of Latinx feminism (Urueta). Behavior that reinforces traditional male dominance was subverted but in a culturally sensitive manner, in a way that yielded growth rather than resentment, anger, or opposition.

Dominant male behavior is certainly not limited to Latinx men. Trevor Boffone makes the distinction with regard to the LTC that, “we’re not meeting the same way that

the LORT⁸⁶ theatre down the street does, we're doing it in that different way, where everyone's voice matters." He continues, "The cis-gender men in the group are a lot more aware of these things than when I go to a department meeting at the university, where men are talking over women, or when a woman says something and the man basically repeats it" (Boffone). This behavioral difference is an indication of how men working in the LTC practice their feminist ideals in their respect for other voices, including women's. The rejection of hierarchical patriarchal power disinclines the need to dominate the conversation, or to get one's way.

Boffone's statement also reveals the kind of working environments that professional Latinx theatre makers encounter in the field, situations that may have led them to participate in the movement in the first place. As director Lisa Portes shares,

I never feel when I'm talking to [any of a number of men in the LTC] that I have to be less than what I am. And it's probably the only space where that's the case. The only space that I operate in, in which I feel that I don't have to be less than what I am. Where I can be fully what I am ... In predominantly white spaces, I identify both as a woman and a Latina because predominantly white spaces tend to have a lot of predominantly white guys ... therefore I make sure that if I have something to say I say it ... I don't know why it is that I don't feel like I'm negotiating gender in LTC spaces. I don't know if we just have really good guys, if we just have really good feminist men. In the field, there are men that I deal with that are Latino that I'm like, you are exhausting me, you remind me of my father, will you just ... let me talk, and not assume, and not mansplain to me right now? So, it's not that it's all Latinos, it's not that it's all Latinos making theatre. For whatever reason, the men that we're working with in the LTC, I haven't felt that (Portes Personal interview).

Portes describes at least two kinds of freedom available to her in LTC encounters, a freedom from gender-based discrimination, and ethnically based discrimination, points of intersection that she experiences in spaces outside of the LTC. In essence she points out

⁸⁶ League of Resident Theatres, the largest professional theatre association in the US.

that the men who participate in the LTC share a commitment, they “walk the walk,” as it were, to Latinx feminisms. These are people who are drawn to the LTC and embrace its non-hierarchical practice.

Marrero concurs. For her, “the LTC is a place where gender does not play a role in power politics, which is a welcome relief” (Marrero “Responses”). Mayorga agrees that it is the nature of the people involved in the LTC that plays a big factor in how women’s voices, including her own, are heard:

I’m usually amazed that no man tries to shut me out or talk over me. No man does that to any of the women which I think is a great feminist gesture on every gender’s part, every gender who’s in that conversation. It’s not what I expected. I expected more to have to elbow my way in as a woman on those phone calls. We don’t. We respect people’s right to speak, we create space. I find that, abandoning just-the-men-talking or abandoning a very misogynistic tone that could take over (Mayorga).

That women speak freely, and that this speech is supported, demonstrates that they are counted as equals within the movement. They have agency and the opportunity to lead at any given time.

It should be noted that Portes, Marrero, and Mayorga compare their current and past experiences in binary terms, their experiences as women among men. While their comments are sincere expressions of gratitude, they also reflect binary gender dynamics. The privileging of binarism within Latinx gender identity and culture has led to an invisibility of trans and gender non-conforming Latinx within the community and at large. This default may explain the low numbers of non-binary participants within the LTC, which in turn has contributed to a lack of representation and power for the intramarginalized.

Horizontal Organizing

Latinx feminisms are also found in the non-hierarchical committee structure of the LTC. Some LTC members describe the influence of Latinx feminisms as an upheaval of the hierarchical systems which are associated with male-dominance or patriarchy referenced by Boffone, Portes, and Marrero. Mayorga confirms that “theatre in and of itself is inherently patriarchal in its model — heteropatriarchal at that. Theatre in the western model tends to be built on the dynamism of the director, and then everybody bows to that director... It’s feminist to move away from hierarchy” (Mayorga). The LTC’s Steering Committee functions consensually and democratically, as a manifestation of its commitment to the commons model, which aligns well with the goals of Latinx feminisms to work in a non-hierarchical structure.

A non-hierarchical structure is manageable when only a few people are engaged, but when a group is larger and engaged in multiple projects, greater intention and vigilance are required. During the first year of the Steering Committee, the group of about twenty-five people focused on one project, to produce the National Convening in Boston in 2013. There were three sub-committees, Fundraising, Programming, and Outreach, that together covered all the needs for producing the Convening. During the Convening, however, seventy-four participants each turned in a *Loteria* card, upon which they had identified a number of projects that they were interested in moving forward, as individuals as well as on a national scale. Respondents had expressed interest in working on the Fornés Institute, advocacy, academia, the canon of Latinx plays, communications, new play development, and the LTC website (Sanchez “Loteria”). These disparate projects could not be grouped as one or even a few initiatives; each would require its own

dedicated committee, should they be selected to advance. After the Boston Convening, the LTC Steering Committee was faced with having to decide which projects it might take on. Furthermore, the LTC had to determine whether the three-committee approach would serve its future needs, or whether a new structure was needed.

The LTC was already committed to co-producing the Encuentro with the LATC the following year, to produce the Carnaval in 2015, and to curate the ongoing Café Onda blog. It fell to the LTC Steering Committee to determine whether the movement would take on other large-scale projects as well. From November 2013 through January 2014, the Steering Committee that produced the Boston Convening now turned its attention to restructuring itself from a group that had worked on one project into one that worked on several.

Inspired by what he identified as a “feminist means of organizing,” Kinan Valdez designed and proposed a horizontal organizational model comprised of cells that he identified as pods (K. Valdez). The current structure of the three subcommittees would remain in place, with the addition of a Coordinating Ring that would include pods for Communications, Facilitation, and Fundraising (for the LTC as a whole), and a pod for Think Tanks that would consider the proposals as they related to the four tenets (Convening, Scholarship, Advocacy, and Art making). Finally, an Advisory Committee was established for people who wanted to be part of the movement but who could not devote as much time as the Steering Committee membership required (Gahlon “Restructuring”). Kinan Valdez described the model as:

Definitely aligned with feminist principles and organizing strategies. I think the fact that [the LTC] is not a hierarchical organization but a series of concentric circles, that is about building a sense of community, has been reflective of feminist means of organizing. The leadership of the

LTC, those who have been the movers and the shakers have brought those organizing principles to bear, so consequently it's part of the DNA of the LTC. During the early days after the national convening, when we were all in discussion about the proper structural guide for the LTC, I remember reading one particular notion, that was a feminist way of organizing, was called *The Web of Inclusion* [by Sally Helgelsen], and it seemed to me that this particular way of organizing, built in a web and building those connective threads was something the LTC was doing naturally and organically. A feminist practice that was consciously done, a natural extension of the experiences of the people who were the movers and shakers of the LTC (K. Valdez).

Helgelsen's book was written as a response to her earlier bestseller, *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership*, in which she recognized an effective leadership style practiced by female business leaders. For lack of another term, she called this style "webs of inclusion," and published a book devoted to the concept.

[I]t is not too extreme to say that all of our major public sphere organizations have been build, structured, reformed, and refined virtually without the input or ideas of women. Thus it only makes sense that women, coming now to assume public leadership for the first time in any degree, would cast a fresh and critical eye at how our organizations are structured and led (11).

Helgelsen demonstrated that this new leadership style, while evident among women executives, was not exclusively for women leaders, but was embraced by men who found themselves "increasingly alienated from and critical of the top-down hierarchies that have long set the pattern for how we organize our public world" (11). Furthermore, according to Helgelsen, working this new structure into an existing institution would also require a review of marginalization of people of color, immigrants and sexual minorities, among others. "[D]iversity in its broadest sense implies not only an alteration in who gets to be part of the structure, *but in the shape and workings of the structure itself*" (Helgelsen 94, italics as published). This book inspired Kinan Valdez to devise the horizontal, circular structure that he presented to the LTC's restructuring committee. Valdez' plan was not

wholly taken up; there seemed to be too many pods for the number of people who were signed up to join the Steering Committee. However, the model reinforced the values of inclusion, transparency, self-accountability, and non-hierarchy that continue to inform the Steering Committee's work as a commons model. The structure that emerged duplicated the Convening model, with fundraising, outreach, and programming committees (as appropriate and among other subcommittees) serving individual initiatives.

Leadership in Non-hierarchical Service

At the Boston Convening, co-facilitator Clyde Valentin, then the Executive Director of the Hip-Hop Theatre Festival, invited all Steering Committee members to stand “in acknowledgment of their work in making the event happen and also to identify them as fellow stewards for the Convening's complex itinerary” (Herrera 19). Non-gendered collaboration was acknowledged by highlighting the shared responsibility undertaken by the planners of the Convening. This collaboration had succeeded non-hierarchically, without the necessity of an individual leader, though each subcommittee was led by a two-person team that created the agenda for its meetings. The first Steering Committee members were committed to supporting everyone else's participation at the Convening. This model would be repeated at the other LTC events: all Steering Committee members, regardless of gender, participated as hosts in service to the guests in attendance. Participation on the Steering Committee meant that one was committed to doing the work of the LTC.

All of the LTC's working committees work on par with each other. There is no executive committee, several people work on various committees, and active committees

report to the whole Steering Committee at the monthly meetings. Prioritization occurs as deadlines near, and often an agenda will allot more time to upcoming projects. Proximity to a deadline will generally earn that committee more attention than others. It is not unusual to see a call go out from the Producer requesting additional help in the weeks leading up to an impending event, and often people will shift their priorities from one committee to another, sometimes adding work to their load, if they can. One example of this occurred in preparation for the Encuentro de las Américas in 2017. It was a project goal to provide a fully bilingual version of the participant bios, in order to create greater accessibility among the international artists convened. However, the bios needed to be proofed and edited in both languages and the planning committee members were busy with other tasks. Several of us, not on any of the Encuentro committees, took up the call, and with the support of others who made themselves available to confer, the work was completed in time for the launch of the International Convening. The fluid committee structure means that anyone with the skills, interest, and time to respond to a call is welcome to do so. It is in essence a replica of the conversational model of circles within circles at the Boston Convening. The LTC Steering Committee can be considered one large circle in which there are multiple sub-circles; and all have permeable boundaries, as needed, to get the work done. The LTC has organized itself this way, intentionally and organically, to reflect its values. “Commons are not just resources held in common, or commonwealth, but social systems whose elements are commonwealth, a community of commoners, and the ongoing interactions, phases of decision making and communal labour process that together are called commoning” (De Angelis 12). Other commons models may organize themselves differently; what is important is that the LTC has

determined *for itself* how it wishes to operate and will determine if it wishes to change its style of commoning on its own. As noted in Chapter III, self-determination is also a demand of Latinx feminisms.

Ideally everyone on the Steering Committee would attend all meetings and engage in the conversations and work equally but this has not been possible. Everyone on the Steering Committee, barring the Producer, is a volunteer with other professional and personal responsibilities. The ability for anyone to “pick up the baton,” so to speak, in the work of the LTC also levels the hierarchy. No one is considered indispensable. This is a humbling approach, and a value of the LTC, reflected in the service of hosting, a practice that began with the launch of the LTC itself.

In 2013, the selection criteria for invitations to attend the Boston Convening was based in part on bringing together people who would serve as ambassadors and liaisons to their regional communities. Ambassadorship has been a practice of LTC public events since then. LTC Steering Committee members are charged with serving as hosts especially for those who may be attending an LTC event for the first time, demonstrating inclusivity through embodied welcome. At the Encuentro, this included serving as simultaneous interpreters during panel or group discussions, as well as facilitating group discussions, tabling the registration desks, or filling ‘swag’ bags. At the 2019 LTC TYA Sin Fronteras festival, this included leading post-play discussions with youth-filled audiences or generating social media content. All the volunteer tasks are necessary and performing them is an act of service to the movement. When someone signs up to be a member of the Steering Committee, they essentially agree to relinquish the hierarchies that are present outside the movement. For example, the deference that might be shown to

an Artistic Director, Managing Director, or a Professor within their milieu is not necessarily at work in the LTC. One's professional status does not prevent the LTC Producer from asking them for help; any one of these esteemed people will happily do a stint as a greeter at the registration table or a member of a clean-up crew at the end of the day. Ultimately, this reinforces the position that membership on the Steering Committee is a position of service, not one of privilege.

No one on the Steering Committee is required to do anything they do not wish to do. Nor is there a minimum time allotment of how many hours per month one must spend on LTC business. However, beginning in 2014 with the on-boarding of new members to the Steering Committee 2.0 following the Boston Convening, members signed letters of commitment that indicate how much time and energy they imagine they can invest in the LTC. On the same form, Steering Committee members select the subcommittee they'd like to work on. As Producer Abigail Vega notes:

As a whole the LTC works best when the people working on it are utilizing their actual talents. I'm using the word talent [as] in, the thing that you can't help but do. I see things like competition as a talent, some people are naturally and can't help but be naturally competitive. When those folks use, something that even others sometimes see, especially in women, see as a negative trait and they use it for the good of the LTC, things work the best then. When people who are naturally squeaky wheels use that for the benefit of the LTC, it's great. When people who are naturally inclined to sit down and pound out a thousand-word grant because that's how their advocacy and efforts are best used, that's what works the best (Vega Personal interview).

The decision to create a Letter of Commitment emerged in response to the experience with the inaugural Steering Committee; as mentioned earlier, not all members were able to participate and contribute to the work of their committees as much as they may have hoped. The Letter of Commitment is a form of self-accountability as well as a

commitment to the LTC, by which a participant can tell whether they actually have the time to engage in the work. In December 2016, the process of signing a letter of commitment was modified. There is no longer any uniform letter *per se*. Rather, everyone answers a series of questions that reflect how they will participate in the LTC during the year, in terms of meeting attendance, committee participation, and contributions to Café Onda, which means either writing blog posts or encouraging others to do so (Vega “12.8.16”). With regard to meeting attendance, it is recommended that Steering Committee members attend at least 50% of all Steering Committee meetings, though how many or which meetings one attends is self-determined, for, as it has been noted earlier, the dates and times vary from month to month.⁸⁷ The Producer keeps track of Steering Committee member attendance in a spreadsheet that is accessible to all Steering Committee members, again so that members can see whether they have the time to engage well. Because the Steering Committee is the primary workforce of the LTC, it is important to be upfront about participation. No one has ever been “fired” from the Steering Committee; usually a Steering Committee member will recognize on their own that, for whatever reason, they are no longer able to participate in the work as they had anticipated, and it is time to step away. Frequently such a person will move to the Advisory Committee (as I have), where they can remain informed and support LTC

⁸⁷ The “Statement of Commitment” document (see Appendix B) crafted in November 2014, requested that Steering Committee members agree to “[a]ttend at least 8 out of 12 scheduled Steering Committee teleconferencing meetings (this includes being prepared having done preliminary reading of previous relevant communications on Basecamp in order to move the conversation forward)” (Marrero “DRAFT”). This draft was created by a subcommittee championed by Marrero, and then presented to the whole Steering Committee for its feedback and edits. There have been iterations of the Commitment Letter over the years, and the latest now asks Steering Committee members to identify how many full committee meetings they feel they can commit to attending: 100% (all 12 calls); at least 75% (9 of the 12 calls); at least 50%, (6 of the 12 calls) “RECOMMENDED for Active and In Training Steering Committee Members;” at least 33% (4 of the 12 calls); or Other (See Appendix C) (Vega “2018 LTC”).

initiatives. If there is little or no communication, the Producer reaches out to ask the Steering Committee member if they are unable to fulfill their commitments and would be better participants on the Advisory Committee. Advisory Committee members are contacted from time to time when their particular expertise is needed, and some are also members of sub-committees, but they are not required to attend Steering Committee meetings. Previously, Advisory Committee members did not receive weekly updates from the Producer, but after a few of us expressed an interest in keeping abreast of LTC activities, this changed. Ultimately, Steering Committee members are beholden to each other to fulfill their self-identified commitments. In a horizontal structure that refutes a hierarchy of organizational power, there is no “higher up” but rather an accountability to “us.”

These horizontal structures are challenged, naturally, by human nature and diverse personalities that influence the conversation and decision-making in committees. Even as there is an ideology of equity, personal dynamics cannot help but come into play. As Perez relates,

I think sometimes (from a person who falls into this trap) there are a lot of big personalities in the LTC and thank God, because they make things happen. I wonder if people who aren't as strong personalities feel intimidated by those strong personalities, that they don't have the voice that they might have in those situations? How can we encourage the voices to have an opportunity to speak? (Perez).

Perez asks important questions about whether working within a non-hierarchical system creates an expectation of democratic participation that is not always present. Have the hierarchies at work in professional theatre and other professional institutions inscribed inadvertent power plays? Do some people feel it is not their place to speak their minds because they lack seniority in the movement? Interestingly, Mayorga has a different

impression of what is happening with the new generation of Steering Committee members.

There are new people who are very young who talk a lot, a lot of whom are men, and there's a lot of learning right now that has to happen, because they're coming from professional theatre models. If they were in my classroom, it would be weeks to talk about how you make feminist theatre makers. You can't make feminist theatre makers over a phone call (Mayorga).

The challenge may also be in the communication tool; not everyone attends the meetings through videoconferencing. For those attending through audio-only teleconferencing, it is hard to know who's speaking, and not as easy to gauge when an opening in the conversation has occurred.

Intersectional Inclusion: Gender

I step back briefly here to recap the foundations of Latinx intersectionality. Latinx identity is inherently diverse, multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual, and is further complicated by other defining factors such as religion, education, politics, class, and immigration status. Latinx feminisms have investigated the negotiation of the multiple identities that Latinas can claim, identified as the *nepantla* or borderland state described by Gloria Anzaldúa, followed by Mariana Ortega as the concept of “multiplicitous subjectivity” (Anzaldúa *Interviews* 79; Ortega 71). However, oppressions experienced by Latinas and Latinx are also informed by intersectional factors that, broadly speaking, are targeted by class, race, and immigration status discrimination.⁸⁸ These factors impact one's access to opportunities, services, and social engagement. Isolating single elements

⁸⁸ Per Crenshaw, a woman of color may experience different but combined and cumulative (i.e. intersectional) oppressions for her femaleness, her brown-ness, her non-heteronormativity, and/or her gender fluidity. Oppressions may occur from within her cultural community and from without (281).

of oppression, rather than addressing intersectionality, is short-sighted and an unproductive strategy for resisting oppression. As Chicana feminist and playwright Cherríe Moraga warns in *This Bridge Called My Back*, “the danger lies in ranking the oppressions” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, 28). Moraga and Anzaldúa advocated for solidarity among women of color. This solidarity across marginalized cultures was also present in the organizing and protests of the Young Lords Party, who shared their platform with African Americans and Asians. Nationalistic concerns for the well-being of the Chicano and Puerto Rican communities which informed Latinx feminisms did not preclude engagement with and support for other oppressed communities. Rather, diverse voices raised in unity clarified the identification of shared oppressive forces. It became clear that in the US, endemic social oppressions privilege a white, heteronormative, able-bodied cis-male citizen, within a patriarchal, binary, and hierarchical system of power.

This awareness has informed the ways in which the LTC has committed to inclusion, since the start of its organizing. At the very first gathering of the Steering Committee in 2013 at a meeting organized to begin planning for the Boston Convening, one of the primary concerns was the invitations. The project’s budget, which would cover travel and lodging for all participants, limited participation to about eighty people. The invitation process had to be carefully undertaken. As the notes to that planning meeting show, there was a call from the outset that the selection process should reflect the values of inclusivity. Scenic designer Christopher Acebo noted that the Convening invitation process had the potential to engage with people in an intentionally thoughtful way. “Such a diverse group of people we’re trying to connect right now, and those questions of who is in the room—who is at the table, etc. Feels like this is a great opportunity to make sure

that we're being very careful about being inclusive"⁸⁹ (Gahlon "3.22.13"). Professional, economic, and societal factors limit theatre-makers' participation in national conversations. To open access, the Steering Committee created the following list of descriptors by which to determine and diversify the guest list for the Boston Convening: Gender, Geography, Age, Theater Role (i.e., scholars, administrators, designers, playwrights, actors, designers, or dramaturgs), individual artists (whether professional, journeyman, or apprentice), institutionally affiliated (whether fringe, small, medium, large, community theater, or LORT), sexual orientation, aesthetic form, years in the field, the number of delegates per organization, and whether someone was Latino or non-Latino (Gahlon "3.22.13").

While it might seem obvious that only Latinx theatre-makers would be invited to attend the first Convening of the LTC, the decision would rule out inviting non-Latinx allies who had participated in creating and championing Latinx theatre for decades, most notably, Barclay Goldsmith, the founder and former Producing Director of Borderlands Theatre in Tucson, Arizona. Goldsmith had been a member of the Chicano collective Teatro Libertad in the 1970s, and Borderlands has been identified as a Latino theatre since its founding in 1986. Barclay wrote a letter to several Convening organizers asking why neither he nor anyone else from Borderlands had been invited to attend. His concern was not personal, as he wrote, "It appears possibly that yours truly does not have the right gene pool. This is fair perhaps" (Gahlon "Urgent"). After years of working with TENAZ, Goldsmith graciously understood that ethnocentricity, which he had experienced as Chicano nationalism, was a critical part of identifying who and why a group of people

⁸⁹ This comment is attributed to "CA" which is identified as Christopher Acebo in a key at the top of the notes.

were mobilizing for change. However, he was disappointed that no one from Borderlands had been invited, thereby reinforcing the inaccessibility that his Arizona-based company experienced geographically. “Borderlands and other more isolated theaters cannot benefit from this new energy where new alliances are made, new friendships created, and yes new funding sources identified” (Gahlon “Urgent”). Perhaps unaware to Goldsmith, director Marc Pinate, then a resident director at Borderlands, had been invited to attend and had accepted the invitation. Pinate represented Borderlands at the Convening, and was able to “benefit from the energy, contacts and new vision of this conference” as Goldsmith had envisioned. Two years later, Pinate was appointed as the new Producing Director of Borderlands, and in addition to producing a variety of programs with artists who attended the Boston Convening and other LTC events over the years, Borderlands produced the final El Fuego production, *And Their Dogs Came With Them*, an adaptation of the novel by Helena María Viramontes, written by Virginia Grise, one of the featured playwrights of the 2015 Carnaval. Goldsmith was right; attendance at the Boston Convening would go on to benefit Borderlands in many ways.

Returning to the list of descriptors by which invitations to the 2013 Boston Convening were determined, the list cited above is in the order as it was written in the notes, which would have likely been in the order in which the ideas were put forth in the conversation. It is noteworthy that “Gender” was at the top of the list, demonstrating an awareness and commitment to ensuring a balanced representation of women and men at the Boston Convening. This is confirmed further on, as Outreach Subcommittee notes at the same meeting identify the following concerns:

- **Bring up name change** [sic]⁹⁰
- Latino or Latina?, funders would go to [male] gender[ed], patriarchal way of thinking
- way that the Doris Duke Grant says - a/o, keep riding that, encourage people, when you're talking about it, one of the shifts you are willing to foster
- [Y]oung [L]ords - recognized machismo and importance of women, brought women's liberation to the platform (Gahlon "3.22.13," bold in the original).

These bullet points reveal that a question regarding the name of the movement was raised in the subcommittee meeting, and that the members felt it should be brought up within the larger committee. Up until that point, the movement had been identified as the Latino Theatre Commons. Should it be the Latino/Latina Theatre Commons? Or, Latina/o Theatre Commons? The committee considered how potential and traditionally-minded funders might respond to the more inclusive name for the project, one that would indicate a rejection of the patriarchal default⁹¹ term "Latino," which erases the narrative of Latina presence as it is subsumed within the catch-all term. "Latina/o" acknowledges the distinct and equal participation of Latinas in the movement. The committee was encouraged by the example set by the Doris Duke Foundation to use the term "Latina/o." The response to the concern that other funders may be put off by the use of the more inclusive term, was to "keep riding ... the shifts [the LTC is] willing to foster," i.e., championing the use of the "a/o." This choice, made at the risk of losing the movement's earliest funding, demonstrated the commitment to publicly acknowledging women's contributions to the theatre field and the movement, just as the Young Lords did in their day by updating their

⁹⁰ This is a recommendation regarding the name, Latino Theatre Commons, and whether it needs to be changed to include Latina theatre in its representation.

⁹¹ In the Spanish language, a descriptive word defaults to its masculine form with the presence of one male subject. By this rule, when a man walks into in a room full of Latinas, the room is now described as full of "Latinos."

guidelines. The name change reflected one of the goals of Latinx feminisms: equal and acknowledged participation in the public sphere including in the struggles for liberation.

This acknowledgement of women’s participation was intended to include all who self-identify as women. Respect for gender self-identification is evident further down in the first Steering Committee meeting notes, under the heading of “Strategy,” as the subcommittee recommended inviting “50 men, 50 women, self identified” [sic] (Gahlon “3.22.13”). However, it appears this strategy was more theoretical than real; in May 2013, a demographic list of the invitees identified gender as either male or female (Rivas “LTC Gathering #’s”). It is impossible to know for sure, but it appeared that nearly everyone who attended the Boston Convening was cis-gender or identified binarily as either male or female, with the notable exception of Dr. Carl, a co-founder and the first Executive Director of HowlRound. The name change, from “Latino” to “Latina/o,” while relatively progressive, nevertheless reflected binary gender identification and dynamics. This proved to be problematic because historically, the privileging of binarism within Latinx gender identification and culture has led to an invisibility of trans and gender-nonconforming Latinx within Latina/o communities. The list of considerations around the invitation process for the 2013 Boston Convening had also included the call to “unpack Latino.”⁹² This is not explained further but nevertheless reflected an awareness of the diversity found within the Latinx experience, and a desire to discuss this diversity. However, using the word Latina/o in the LTC’s name kept gender-fluid and trans Latinx from being identified, and possibly from self-identifying, with the movement.

⁹² This appears to be a recommendation to the whole Steering Committee, rather than a criterion, that Latinx identity, including how people self-identify, their national identification, intersectionality, and other ways in which Latinx identity may be complicated, needs to be discussed. The point is included here as written in the meeting notes.

By 2016 it became clear that the LTC Steering Committee had been formed and repopulated within an identifiably limited construct. In February and March of 2016, the Steering Committee Cultivation and Governance Committee (SCCG) Survey revealed that out of forty-two Steering Committee members who responded to the question, “What is your gender identity? (Please select all that apply)”, only two self-identified in each of the categories labeled “Genderqueer, Agender, Gender questioning, or Two-spirit” (“SCCG Survey”). There existed a lack of true representation of Latinx gender diversity, as well as a lack of voices to contribute to identifying the full concerns of the movement. This invisibility echoed the disenfranchisement experienced by Chicana lesbians in the *movimiento* and at the beginning of Chicana feminist organizing. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Chicana lesbians kept relatively silent about their particular concerns in response to the vitriol directed at Chicana feminists in the 1970s by those who felt the feminists were challenging the aims of the *movimiento* (García 1997, 7). In the current case, few gender fluid Latinx were choosing to engage with the LTC. At the December 2016 In-person Steering Committee meeting following the NYC Regional Convening, the LTC addressed this. The Latina/o Theatre Commons changed its name again, to the Latinx Theatre Commons, in January 2017, signaling its rejection of traditional binary gender identification that excludes transgender and gender fluid persons from participation (“Toward Inclusivity”).

Intersectional Inclusion: Race

In addition to this name change, efforts to engage in inclusivity included addressing the question of why the LTC Steering Committee also lacked significant

AfroLatinx representation. The spring 2016 internal demographics survey conducted by the LTC's SCCG showed that only one person out of forty-two identified as either Black, African American, or Afro-Latino ("SCCG Survey"). The LTC decided to engage in self-reflection, to identify ways in which its actions, messages, and decisions might be reinforcing Latinx anti-blackness that is a legacy of Spanish colonialism supported by US racism (Sanchez "(Afro)Latinx"). The call for introspection is not new, despite the LTC's productive track record; the Steering Committee has urged and engaged in the practice of self-critique throughout its history, according to Alex Meda.

We are consistently looking back, to assess what worked and what didn't ... it goes back to the circular component, you must look back to move forward. The ease with which we do a level, a very deep level, of self-assessment and to try to adjust where things aren't working, is so integral to the survival of the LTC, and why I think we do improve year after year, event after event, is because we are committed to that work (Meda).

The LTC is a new project working in an unusual way toward a unique goal, and as such must undergo evaluation. As a commons, the evaluation process is the responsibility of the commoners. In addition to the 2016 SCCG Survey, the LTC has engaged in several reflective and revisioning processes during its short history including the following:

- Steering Committee restructuring following the Boston Convening 2013-14;
- a year-long strategic planning process following the completion of the LTC's first four initiatives. This began at the Dallas Regional Convening with Internal and External reviews and a refashioning of the mission, vision and values statements, and culminated at the Seattle Regional Convening, with the presentation of the 2016 SCCG Survey. The results informed the plans for the next three years of LTC programming; and,

- Strategic Planning that launched with a small meeting following the Fornés Institute Symposium in April 2018 and developed what has become known as the Princeton recommendations (see Appendix E).

In order to address the implicit bias inherited from Latin American or US history, the December 2016 Steering Committee meeting (which also recommended the name change to Latinx) recommended that everyone on the Steering Committee participate in anti-racism training. For the January 2018 LTC Steering Committee Commitment Form, anyone returning to or joining the Steering Committee was asked to indicate which of the anti-racism trainings they would attend during the coming year. The question asked them to commit to “make room in [their] schedule in 2018 to travel and attend an in-person LTC-funded anti-racism training,” and, if unable to commit, to move to the Advisory Committee (Vega “2018 LTC”). One could not be a member of the Steering Committee without attending anti-racism training.

However, advocating for inclusion through commitments to training and name changes did not mean that the Steering Committee would change overnight; there have been speedbumps along the road to actual inclusion. As mentioned earlier, certain performances at the 2017 Encuentro dismayed LTC members for the ways in which they presented values that the LTC was trying to eschew. Some of the productions were identified as misogynistic, transphobic, and racist. As playwright Isaac Gomez wrote in advance of the Steering Committee meeting immediately following the 2017 Encuentro:

One of our core values that we agreed upon as a group is radical inclusivity, and I’m not sure the encuentro [sic] was totally reflective of that value. We already lack greatly in representation in our Steering committee of Afro Latinx voices and transgender & gender non conforming voices, that this weekend un-did a lot of our recruitment efforts when black latinxs see blackface in a show, queer people

experience transphobia and homophobia in several shows, and no one says anything about it, especially the LTC (I. Gomez).

It was a tough learning moment for the LTC. The commitment to anti-racism training became more urgent than ever. Steering Committee members participated in one of two trainings on Anti-Blackness led by the People's Institute for Survival (PISAB) that year. The first of the two-and-a-half-day workshops was held at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, immediately following the July 2018 Carnaval; the second workshop was held in September, at Su Teatro in Denver. More work is needed and underway to identify the effects of anti-black bias in the LTC, but participation in the anti-racism trainings has built a common vocabulary and understanding within the Steering Committee. In the fall of 2018, Steering Committee meetings were dedicated to reflection on the LTC's participation with the PISAB Anti-Racism training and next steps. The PISAB training informed the selection process for the LTC's 2020-2023 projects, resulting in overwhelming support for the proposed Anti-Colorism Summit (Vega "January 2019").

These acts of inclusion, extending the LTC's engagement with women, non-binary folk, and AfroLatinx, as well as other under-represented theatre-makers, strengthen the LTC's ability to hear the most pressing needs surrounding Latinx theatre making and theatre makers. Points of intersection emerge, where some of the concerns of one group overlap with the concerns of others. Histories of oppression are also shared, as systems of patriarchal hierarchies are identified as sources of oppression for women, non-binary folks, AfroLatinx, and others. As more diverse voices contribute to identifying and responding to the pressing needs of the greater community, the circle and scope of the LTC has expanded. This is evident in the approval of two specific projects for the 2020-2023 cycle of activities: The Cross-Cultural Coalitions of Color Convening, and the Anti-

Colorism Summit (Vega “January 2019”). Based on the Steering Committee’s near unanimous approval of both proposals, it appears that the LTC is ready and willing to take on the challenges that this broader vision may bring.

Conclusion

A wholistic view of the practices of the LTC leads to the conclusion that the movement is working with Latinx feminist ideals in place, and further, that the work itself reinforces those ideals. This is not surprising, given how many LTC Steering and Advisory Committee members self-identify as feminists or as advocates of feminist ideals. These ideals were instilled by Chicana/Latina artistic expression described in Chapter III, as well as through formal education, family upbringing, and personal relationships with women who illuminated the necessity and fundamentals of Latinx feminisms. Latin American, Chicana/Latina, and Latinx feminists have championed self-determination, entrepreneurship, advanced education, equal and acknowledged participation in the public sphere including in the struggles for liberation, resistance to patriarchal hierarchies, representation beyond the simplistic Virgin/Whore dichotomy, and ultimately, the freedom to champion these values without being labeled unwomanly, or traitorous to their people and their causes (see Chapter III). These values have influenced the work of the LTC in a myriad of ways, from leadership and initiatives to praxis and inclusion.

From the very start, Karen Zacarías modeled self-determination, choosing to leverage her privilege not to advance her personal career but instead to bring together Latinx theatre makers for a conversation on the state of Latinx theatre in the US. She

chose to address the concerns of her Latinx theatre making community rather than operate in the self-serving or competitive fashion that is prescribed by hierarchical, dominant society. Her invitation led to the creation of the Latino Theatre Commons and its first Steering Committee, an act of shared entrepreneurship without capitalist intentions. This spirit of entrepreneurship is encouraged by the call for new proposals which has occurred roughly every three years, and within existing initiatives as ideas develop. New projects can be proposed, selected, and championed by anyone regardless of gender. These are acts of self-determination. No one is elected to champion committees. People self-nominate and work according to their interests, capacities, and schedules, which are self-determined.

It is notable that most LTC committees, and therefore projects, are championed by self-selected women. Equally notable from a Latinx feminist perspective is that women's leadership is appreciated and supported. In the 1970s, women sought spaces at the decision-making tables and acknowledgement for their contributions to the *movimiento*, and in the case of TENAZ, they asked why there were so few female playwrights and directors in their companies and in the organization. These feminist Chicanas were thought to have been influenced by white women's feminisms, which meant they were being influenced by the very same forces that the movements were attempting to resist. As such, they were perceived as threats to the cause, and mistrusted. In the LTC, women's leadership is welcome and encouraged. There is pride in the fact that so much of the LTC's leadership is in the hands of women, an understanding that this demonstrates sociopolitical progress.

The quality of leadership as championship reflects another value of Latinx feminisms: the resistance of patriarchal hierarchic structures. This was evident in the non-hierarchical configuration of the Listening Circles at the first National Convening in Boston, which replaced the traditional conference panel structure. This promotes an environment of shared expertise that encourages the contribution of multiple voices and viewpoints. In the working environments of the LTC Steering Committee meetings and other convenings, men do not feel the need to dominate the conversation, a dynamic which is often present in hierarchical groups including professional theatre circles, whether Latinx-identified or not. The horizontal organizing structure which began during the planning for the Boston Convening, with its three equal committees, has remained in place ever since. Project committees receive greater attention in the Steering Committee as their events near. As more support is needed, people will put aside long-range work to join sub-committees that will help lift necessary and pressing burdens of the approaching deadlines. Resistance to hierarchy is visible in the generosity of participants to join in the work at all levels of importance regardless of their professional status.

Finally, the LTC's commitment to radical inclusion is a reflection of the Latinx feminist call for accurate representation beyond the simplistic Virgin/Whore dichotomy. Supported by intersectional theory, Latinx feminisms argue that the Latinx experience is multidimensional, informed by many factors including race and gender identification. The concern for truthful representation whether in the art works curated by the LTC or in the demographics of the Steering Committee reflects the LTC's commitment to reflect the complexity of Latinx identity and experience. This has led to new initiatives including the name change from Latina/o to Latinx, which was a public gesture of welcome to trans

and gender-fluid Latinx. Additionally, the Steering Committee's commitment to anti-racism training has generated greater attention to Latinx anti-blackness and fostered initiatives to address these dynamics within the LTC and the field. The Anti-Colorism summit which has been approved by the Steering Committee for the LTC's 2020-2023 cycle is a proactive opportunity to hold conversations and build strategies to combat Latinx anti-blackness.

Vega summarizes where she sees feminisms at work in the LTC, and its effects on Steering Committee members:

I see it in a wagon wheel of intersectionality. I see a freedom from factors that contribute to oppression inside of the LTC for some folks. [The LTC's feminism} doesn't have to work against something. So often feminism is defined by what it has to work against. By definition, just on the base level, there are more women on the Steering Committee than there are men. There have been more female artists and women-defined artists featured than men, generally speaking... In some ways, I hope there's a little bit of a reprieve from what I know many of our Steering Committee members are functioning under on a daily basis in their institutions and their universities. That doesn't mean that we're free of all oppression at all. But I do think that by the nature of who's leading the conversations most of the time there is a lack of things to push up against (Vega Personal interview).

The feminisms witnessed by Vega in the LTC provide an alternate model to the patriarchal hierarchies experienced by Latinx theatre makers in the institutions in which they work. This means that within the LTC, women do not have to expend energy fighting for the right to participate. The commitment to radical inclusion means that this right is extended to anyone who is traditionally marginalized from circles of power. The original goal of the LTC, to update the narrative of the American theatre, is itself updated by Latinx feminisms which demand attention to the representation of complicated Latinx identity, i.e. intersectionality, which inherently opens gates of inclusion to non-Latinx

people. With so many of the LTC's Steering and Advisory Committee members self-defining as feminists or championing feminisms and feminism, it is no wonder that Latinx feminist values have influenced the work of the LTC in such varied and profound ways. While not perfect, many of the conditions, including a feminist-informed perspective, make it possible for the LTC to be guided by and to operate with values promoted by Latinx feminisms. Furthermore, as has been pointed out throughout this chapter, Latinx feminisms align with and support the LTC's common model and the long-range goals of decolonization that have been articulated since the launch of TENAZ fifty years earlier.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE ROAD AHEAD

If we can imagine our liberation, we can create it and inhabit it. This dissertation chronicles a movement known as the Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC), which has activated the imaginations of Latinx theatre makers, pooled their strengths and resources, and created spaces of liberation for Latinx artists. Self-described as “a national movement that uses a commons-based approach to transform the narrative of the American theatre, to amplify the visibility of Latinx performance making, and to champion equity through advocacy, art making, convening, and scholarship,” the LTC was founded in 2012 and continues today as primarily volunteer-run operation, and a flagship program of the HowlRound Theatre Commons. Throughout this study, I have sought to illuminate the productive early history of the LTC and its praxis which is rooted in Latinx feminisms, Latin American decolonization theory, and the commons model. These three critical strains center marginalized epistemologies which give voice to women and under-valored people, focus on Latinx and Latin Americans in the US, and rehearse an anti-capitalist, mutually beneficial, mutually accountable approach to organization. All three interwoven strains underpin resistance as championship of the under-valued, which is necessary to change traditional mainstream theatre practices, and to dismantle discrimination, harmful stereotypes, and violence against the Latinx community in the US.

The Latinx Theatre Commons is an active champion of Latinx-identified art and Latinx artists, that creates opportunities for their greater appreciation within American Theatre and society at large; as such the movement re-centers the cultural production of

the marginalized. Since its inception, the LTC has operated with Latinx feminist and commons model principles and is a model of resistance. Its practices may be applicable to other culturally identified movements in theatre, the arts, and other fields. The commons model operates in a consensually democratic way and provides a working structure that is aligned with Latinx feminisms. Naturally, there have been strong personalities in the mix of leaders in the Steering Committee, whose voices hold more sway or who simply speak up more often for their positions. However, the LTC strives to be a self-aware, reflective movement that adjusts its practices in order to more fully carry out its work as a commons, practicing radical inclusion, transparency, and shared leadership.

The art of theatre is one of creating community among people – the audience – who implicitly agree to be affected by actors and events occurring on stage before them, and to share the experiences of joy and pain with the circle of humanity gathered. This subtle act of publicly shared emotion, a communal empathy, has the capacity to nurture and build humanitarian values. Unfortunately, when the images on stage are inaccurate or worse, degrading, they nurture falsehoods instead, which in turn can engender or perpetuate animosity, degradation, or fear. Many Latinx artists strive to present the untold stories, to counter the dominant narrative, but have faced the lack of material resources to “properly” produce their work. Additionally, they have lacked access to the dominant storytelling outlets, such as flagship regional theatres or Broadway houses, and have encountered a lack of validation from academia. All of this has diminished the potential for Latinx work to be considered art, and for Latinx theatre to be given the same press, awards, and depth of criticism as mainstream theatre. In American theatre, the validity

and importance of Latinx-identified theatre is determined by the hegemonic taste makers.

As Tlaloc Rivas urges,

American theatre has taught us to believe that there are a finite number of jobs and opportunities, and if someone of color or someone who is a woman gets the job that means that a white man doesn't get that job. We have to, first, keep doing the work, and also avoid falling into the trap of the zero-sum mentality (Rivas Personal interview).

This institutionalized bias affects the economics of theatre making in America, but its impact also extends to aesthetics. Gabriel García Márquez observed that the hegemonic art world privileges a Eurocentric lens because it considers its own values superior. “It is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world,” said Márquez in Stockholm, “exalted in the contemplation of their own cultures, should have found themselves without valid means to interpret us” (Popova). The thought-leaders of the art world have simply lacked the knowledge and tools by which to understand Latin American and Latinx arts. This dynamic is visible in the flawed efforts by critics to respond to Latinx theatre, and in the lacunae of scholarship. It is visible in the under-resourcing of Latinx theatre, which keeps the annual budgets of Latinx-identified theatres dangerously low. The LTC has reached out to scholars in the US, and to the gatekeepers of cultural funding and the palaces of theatre, and has invited them to attend programming that spotlights Latinx playwrights, directors, designers, dramaturges, actors, and their work. The LTC has articulated the precedents, meanings, and nuances of the work through its publications, online posts, advocacy missives, and other communications. More importantly, however, whether or not this has advanced the presence of Latinx theatre in the mainstream field, the LTC has nurtured and grown a creative network of Latinx theatre makers, who are engaging with each other,

collaborating creatively, and celebrating our own work in historically unprecedented ways around the country and internationally.

The LTC is a movement which naturally transforms over time; my research considered its activities, rationales, and development from 2012 to 2019 through three ideological strains. Balanced against its values, I examined the LTC's successes, challenges, shortcomings, and evolutions. This conclusion reviews the significant aspects and arguments within the four chapters of my dissertation to weave an analysis of my findings and determine what can and must be considered in future research. It poses questions about the LTC's praxis, its theory in action, and my own research, going forward.

The Research Distilled

This study began with a history of TENAZ, the Teatro Nacional de Aztlán, which convened Chicano/a, Latino/a, and Latin American theatre makers from the late 1960s to the early '90s. The work of Chicana/o and Latina/o theatre makers was inherently and often explicitly political, created in resistance to over a century of social and economic oppression by Anglo-Americans. The invasion of Mexico and Puerto Rico, the establishment of so-called Banana Republics in Central America, and the interventions in political struggles in Central and South American nations rehearsed US supremacy that has manifested in discriminatory dynamics against Latinx. False superiority is a legacy of colonialism not easily overturned. Without challenge, it becomes expressed and re-inscribed epistemologically, legally, and culturally, throughout the dominant narrative. Distorted representations emerge, stereotypes which, as Maldonado-Torres suggests,

support the superiority of the colonizer over the colonized, the *damné* who are “not there” and therefore not worthy of regard, respect, or resources (253). Decolonialization, the reclamation of humanity by the colonized through the dismantling of coloniality as the governing principles of society, becomes the responsibility of the *damné*. Hence the work of the *movimiento* which resisted the *status quo* through education, organizing, and activism.

Grounded in the work of the Chicano *movimiento*, *teatro* Chicano animated resistance through theatre, raising awareness and cultural pride. TENAZ sought to unify these efforts, to build a supportive network among the emerging companies. Additionally, Luis Valdez sought to develop the performative aesthetics of the work which was carried out primarily by university students with little if any theatre training. The methods by which TENAZ went about achieving these goals were reviewed against the four tenets identified by the LTC: Convening, Advocacy, Scholarship, and Art making. Ultimately, TENAZ inspired a new generation of Latinx theatre makers, trained and professionalized. However, the ongoing history of marginalization and misrepresentation, circumstances that fueled the creation of TENAZ back in the mid-twentieth century, led to the creation of the LTC in the twenty-first. Lessons were learned from the TENAZ experience, as Teresa Marrero observed:

Historically, I think everyone is aware by now of the issues with TENAZ and the whole early Chicano movement and its machismo. But then again, this was true of all leftist movements including the Cuban Revolution, which was held up as a model. In the ‘All for the cause’ enthusiasm, we women came to realize, little by little that our own needs for leadership were not being met. Live and learn. I do believe that the LTC has learned from those mistakes. These are different times (Marrero “Responses”).

Marrero pointed to the leftist ideological frameworks of many civil rights movements of the 1960s as well as the Latina feminist consciousness that emerged from within these movements. Chicana and Latina feminisms developed over the decades, influenced people of all genders, and became ideologically foundational in the work of the LTC. This is why I took up Latinx feminisms in the next chapter.

Latina feminisms are not an exclusively twentieth century response to the patriarchy, or machismo, expressed in Hispanic, Latin American and Latino culture. Chapter III of this study charted the expression of proto-feminist activity in late colonial Latin America and Spain, through the political activism of the early twentieth century, the visual art, literature, and scholarship that began in the mid-twentieth century. Latina feminism migrated contextually, appearing first as a woman's movement within its societies, then as a marginalized women's movement, responding to the sexism within its community and the racialized sexism from the hegemony. From the 1970s on, Chicana feminists working to raise awareness and change behaviors within the Chicano *movimiento* were labeled traitors to the movement and accused of undermining traditional cultural values. This was not unusual; feminists working within the Black and American Indian liberation movements experienced similar responses, leading to cross-cultural alliances expressed in works such as the groundbreaking anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back*. Such work clarified intersectional feminisms, which understood that the oppressions experienced by women of color were multi-valanced, faced as sexism, racism, classism, among other discriminations. Furthermore, the concerns of Latinx feminisms expanded beyond gendered targets of oppression, toward building awareness for the people historically oppressed by patriarchal hierarchies in the US, including

people of non-heterosexual orientation, gender non-conforming people, non-Christian people, racialized minorities, and the Indigenous.

Several values essential to Chicana/Latina feminisms emerged in my study as a result of this historical view of Latina feminist ideologies, including self-determination; equal and acknowledged participation in the public sphere; resistance to patriarchal hierarchies; representation beyond simplistic stereotypes; and the freedom to champion these values without being labeled traitorous to their people and their causes. Latina feminisms value, demand, and receive alliance and support from Latina of all genders to achieve these goals. In alignment with cultural movements for liberation, Latina feminisms value the right to be Latina, to express, challenge, and celebrate cultural heritages and identities, including self-definitions of Latina femininity or personhood. Finally, acknowledging that Latina identity is inherently diverse and charged by intersectional concerns, Latina feminisms value inclusion and alliance with other marginalized communities. These values are foundational to the LTC, whereby the engaged community is challenging the effects and legacies of hierarchical patriarchy and colonialism.

This dissertation has worked to show that the LTC's achievements, its feminist concerns, and its common methods, are woven together inextricably toward decolonizing action. Chapter IV elucidated how the LTC has pursued projects that not only raise the visibility of Latina theatre and theatre-makers, but more importantly, that transform narratives that have minimized the participation of Latina theatre makers in the American theatre generally. Rather than seek to dismantle existing institutions, the LTC is infiltrating the media, the academy, national foundations, and theatres around the

country to raise visibility for people too long overlooked. It also champions Latinx theatre making that lives outside of the mainstream agenda, including small theatres that have been committed to training Latinx artists and producing Latinx work for decades. These historically under-resourced companies, as with the early Latina/o theatre makers whose work went unacknowledged in historical narratives, have been illuminated for the next generation.

While theatre productions themselves can have a decolonizing effect (as well as a reifying one) as Sepulveda and Anzaldúa have noted, the LTC is not a body that produces shows but rather one that champions the genre of Latinx-identified theatre. So, my study reviewed other kinds of labor such as that which is pertinent to movement organizing: ideological, strategic, and project management work. As a self-reflective movement, evaluative labor is also contributed. The work of the movement is conducted primarily by volunteer theatre makers intentionally drawn from all four directions of the country, committed to working together to identify methods and sites in which to update the narrative of “American” (US) theatre, in which Latinx theatre is an undervalued, underfunded, and under-registered participant. As this dissertation has shown, this movement is worthy of its own historical documentation. The engagement of Latinx theatre professionals in the work of liberation is new and highly effective. While TENAZ predominantly engaged student activists, the LTC has predominantly engaged professionals in the field, people with established careers who are affiliated with professional theatres and/or institutions of higher education which grant them privileges and access to resources. Born of a frustration with the *status quo* that has privileged an Anglo-American model of theatre making in the US, Latinx theatre makers have asserted

their own agency through the LTC, taking it upon themselves to create the changes they wish to see. In a reflection that parallels the review of TENAZ activities in Chapter II, the methods by which LTC went about achieving its goals are reviewed against the movement's own four tenets: Convening, Advocacy, Scholarship, and Art making.

The LTC acknowledges and appreciates how its movement might not exist were it not for the infrastructural support and alliance of the HowlRound Theatre Commons at Emerson College. P. Carl, David Dower, Jamie Gahlon, and Vijay Mathew, the founders of HowlRound, were based in D.C. and working with the Arena Stage's American Voices New Play Institute, and directly supported Karen Zacarías' convening of the DC-8 in 2012. At that meeting, HowlRound committed to serving as the LTC's fiscal sponsor and hosting the Boston Convening at Emerson College. HowlRound has been a committed ally to the LTC ever since, contributing project management support (first, by contributing Jamie Gahlon's time and expertise until and even after Abigail Vega was hired as the LTC Producer), website and blog hosting, administrative resources including access to Basecamp online management system, personnel support from online and print editorial staff, and photography and video production, and by providing a base of operations at Emerson College for the LTC Producer. Indeed, the LTC Producer is considered a member of the HowlRound "team" ("About"). However, despite HowlRound's investment, championship, and care for the LTC, HowlRound has determinedly steered clear of influencing the LTC's decision-making process. This position was very clear from the outset of the movement; as Vega mentioned earlier, her work as a Producer often called upon her to make decisions on behalf of the movement. It would have been wise of her to sound out some of her concerns with HowlRound

personnel; how much of an influence they may have been is unknown. When Gahlon was a participant at the meetings, it was evident she eschewed such power. The relationship between HowlRound and the LTC is symbiotic, the LTC's activities engage HowlRound and HowlRound's administrative processes (woven with their relationship to Emerson College) will invariably impact the LTC. What is clear is that HowlRound's methodology, its commitment to operate as a commons model, profoundly influenced the LTC's methods as it took up the invitation to also operate as a commons model, for the good.

The commons model aligns with the LTC's Latinx feminist principles as decolonizing approaches that make the LTC a truly unique project in the landscape of American theatre. Chapter V reviewed the LTC's practices and concerns through the critical lens of Latinx feminisms while pointing to how the commons model supports these principles toward decolonization. The LTC's commons model works because of its commitment to intersectional feminisms which insist upon a non-hierarchical approach to organization.

Commitments and Challenges

Within the LTC, the commons approach is best understood as a commitment to service, transparency, and radical inclusion. *Service* is exemplified by the LTC's mission to support Latinx theatre making through the volunteerism of predominantly Latinx theatre makers. The Steering, Advisory, and In-Training Committees work alongside each other and with community members to produce LTC programming non-hierarchically. The LTC selects and evaluates its activities against a matrix of self-

identified values and challenges itself to do better with every program, whether that implies more accurate representation, broader inclusionary practices, or more considerate working conditions within LTC programming. Environmental costs, including human ones, are part of the equation by which success is measured. As the many interviews and oral histories that formed the basis of my research bear out, relationships are valuable. Service is also evident in the practice of resource sharing. Many of the earliest Steering Committee members were and are affiliated with professional theatres and institutions of higher education. These professional relationships made resources such as venues, student volunteers, and technical equipment more readily available to the LTC. Resource sharing is a practice at the heart of commoning.

My research revealed that *transparency* is activated through open access to LTC processes. The LTC makes full use of technology to share news and information not only with members of the Steering Committee, but with the field at large who connect with the LTC via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the Café Onda and HowlRound blogs, and an emailed newsletter, all of which deliver announcements and invite engagement. Additionally, all public LTC events have live-streamed segments via HowlRound TV which are then archived for future audiences on HowlRound.com. For the LTC, communication is not simply about getting the word out but rather, about doing so in ways that uphold the LTC's values. This allows for multiple perspectives, approaches, criticisms, and refinements to any plan. The communication must be able to flow in many directions, quickly, in order to hear from as many people as possible and mobilize in accord. Processes must be transparent so that all conversations are visible to all who wish

to participate, all participants are well-informed, and everyone knows who else is in the conversation.

Third, the commitment to *radical inclusion* means that the LTC makes concerted efforts to welcome those who are historically marginalized not only in dominant society but within the Latinx community, such as AfroLatinx. The intersectionality of Latinx feminisms is evidenced in the commitment to inclusion. Concerted efforts include changing the movement's name from the Latina/o Theatre Commons to the Latinx Theatre Commons to signal its rejection of binary gender identification which implicitly excludes transgender and gender fluid persons from participation. However, no one's participation is obligated; one makes one's own way into the commons and establishes one's own working parameters – or not. One is also free to decide that, based on the serious omissions in the Boston Convening guest list which revealed a certain colorism, that the LTC is not a welcome place. It is now mandatory for all Steering Committee members to participate in anti-racism training to address implicit bias inherited by the anti-blackness embedded in Latinx and Latin American history and heritage. Radical inclusion is now practiced within the LTC's invitational and curatorial processes. The goal is to expand the circle of the commons, so that more may contribute to identifying and responding to the needs of the greater community, rather than the needs of an unnecessarily limited few.

As the struggles that I have documented bear out, the commons model is not easy. Service, transparency, and radical inclusion each create challenges that can be frustrating. In some cases, the challenges can be seen as a learning process, problems have been identified through self-reflection and addressed with new practices. For

example, volunteerism can fail unexpectedly for a number of reasons. Sometimes the work is assigned inappropriately, even when self-assigned. As Abigail Vega recalled, “what doesn’t work, [whether for] events or initiatives, is when people are operating outside of their talents” (Vega Personal interview). By talents, Vega refers to a person’s personality and natural inclinations, such as being detail oriented, or competitive, or outspoken. Sometimes people don’t exactly know how to engage with processes already underway in the LTC. For example, early in the LTC, new Steering Committee members were on-boarded without sufficient guidance to understand the projects at hand, the commons model, or the history of the LTC. In time, many new members felt unsure about how to contribute and simply rolled off the Steering Committee. This was addressed with changes to the on-boarding process, including the creation of an “in training” category during which new members received focused guidance through the new Steering Committee Governance Committee (SCGC). This committee also created a process by which Steering Committee members could not only define the parameters of their engagement but track their commitment. These tools allow Steering Committee members to determine whether they are able to meet their commitments or not, and, if not, to excuse themselves from the Steering Committee and move into the Advisory Committee.

Another challenge to the democratic process required by the commons model is that it is simply time-consuming to hear all voices, and to reach consensus when those voices don’t agree. As Mayorga observes,

It also makes things harder to get things done. One of the struggles about it is that we want to decentralize ourselves from a hierarchical model, but we want things to run on a time model since inherently the only thing we have to look at in terms of time is hierarchical models. ... The commons-

based horizontal model ... being lateral versus vertical, that means you have to cover more ground and it takes more time to find consensus, and it takes more time to check in with all the parties (which I think is very feminist too), to count every voice rather than count the voice at the top of the pyramid (Mayorga).

Furthermore, not everyone agrees that the commons model is a viable approach. Portes, one of the DC-8 and the champion of the 2015 and 2018 Carnivals readily admitted that she didn't believe a non-hierarchical model could be effective (Portes "Confessions"). As she wrote,

I fell in love with theatre in the 1980s, the age of the auteur director: Peter Sellers, Robert Woodruff, Lee Breuer, Joanne Akalitis. As a grad student I was schooled by Des McAnuff, then Artistic Director of the La Jolla Playhouse, who led with explosive vision, rock star charisma, and intense powers of persuasion. That's how shit got done, as far as I was concerned—through fierce and singular leadership (Portes "Confessions").

Then she saw the commons model in action. After engaging with the movement and seeing how effectively LTC's various program committees worked independently and in concert to produce the 2015 Carnival, Portes embraced and championed the LTC's horizontal leadership. Still, this model is highly unusual, especially in theatre. Irma Mayorga notes that the hierarchical model is comforting. She reflects how the non-hierarchical model of commons organizing is related to feminist ideologies.

From hierarchical model theatres, they're looking for the Executive Director, or leader. A lot of people like hierarchy, and non-feminist models, that's when we run into trouble, we forget many, many, many Latinos are not feminists ... we've created this bubble of feminism and want everyone to be on the same train. But ... the rest of the world isn't feminist. Homophobia still exists in the rest of the world (Mayorga).

Mayorga sees feminisms at work in the LTC, particularly in its commitment to operating non-hierarchically, but knows this puts the LTC at odds with others who do not share the same values. As described in Chapter IV, in the very first year of the LTC, when the

discussion of whether the movement should be called the Latino Theatre Commons or the Latina/o Theatre Commons, there was concern that adding the “a” might alienate potential funders. Fortunately, the Steering Committee determined that its principles were not for sale.

Finally, the commons model can be threatening. As Tlaloc Rivas observed, “it’s a threat to the Matrix⁹³ that we’ve all grown up in, the patriarchal capitalistic, individualistic [system] that [we pay] allegiance to, that benefits the very few” (Rivas Personal interview). The commons model is simply not for everyone. In a field which is already under-resourced and highly competitive, it may not seem sensible or viable to share one’s time, expertise, or resources for the benefit of a movement. For example, well-trained young leaders are being lured away from grassroots, traditionally under-resourced, ethnically identified arts and culture organizations by better-paying positions in mainstream regional theatres. This leaves smaller, Latinx identified companies without a viable strategy for succession. But can one blame an emerging professional, potentially loaded with college debt, for selecting a path of greater financial security?

The Potential and Power of the LTC

Perhaps the most significant result of this study is the revelation that the commons model not only works, but that it may be an antidote to neo-liberal influences. Deregulated multinational capitalism and celebrity culture promote individual achievement, self-preservation, and greed without consideration for harms that may be inflicted on others along the path. Capitalism that is bankrupting the world morally and

⁹³ Rivas refers to the 1999 film *The Matrix* in which people live in a false reality. Humans are simply imagining this reality while their bodies power the machines that generate the false realities.

depleting its resources greedily. This is a dire and perhaps exaggerated depiction of a neo-liberal world, but the commons model offers an alternative. Unfortunately, the commons model has been criticized as a “failed management regime,” one which died out with the enclosure process by which land became fenced and controlled by feudal lords (Bollier 5). Enclosure is the antithesis of the commons and, according to Helfrich and Bollier, is paralleled by the current demand “driven by investors and corporations, often in collusion with the nation-state, to privatize and commodify all sorts of shared wealth — land, water, digital information, creative works, genetic knowledge” (78). In 1968, biologist Garrett Hardin published an essay entitled, “The Tragedy of the Commons” which concluded that without incentive to limit one’s use of common resources, the resources would be inevitably depleted (Bollier 5). However, Bollier argues that a commons is not just a resource, but must include the “*community* that manages a resource by devising its own *rules, traditions, and values*”⁹⁴ (6). By these criteria, the LTC operates as a successful commons model.

The work of the Latinx Theatre Commons organized and enacted by Latinx theatre makers, structured non-hierarchically, infiltrates and transforms the field by making the invisible visible, correcting misrepresentations that reify racist thought and justify violence, and championing equitable access to available resources. The LTC is guided by an intersectional Latinx feminist approach that aligns with the growing awareness, prodded by movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, that we have a long way to go before our white heteronormative patriarchal hegemony is dismantled and the bodies and lives of women, children, darker-skinned people, people

⁹⁴ Italics in the original.

who are differently-abled, LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, and non-Christians are truly respected. Much work remains until there is true equity and representation in the field of the American Theatre, and in the field of Latinx theatre as well.

The *damné* stand up for themselves, and they stand up for the othered. The LTC diligently strives for liberation through, and for, theatre and the theatre makers who create new worlds through their art. Further, as a self-reflective, self-assessing entity that takes stock of who has access to LTC resources and makes them available through its connections, the LTC offers an example for the many socio-political-artistic endeavors that strive to move society toward greater justice and cultural fullness. To this end, the Latinx Theatre Commons and other movements support the artists, the playwrights, the actors, the designers, and others who produce visions of freedom that empower and encourage liberation.

This dissertation has served as a history of this new movement, a manifesto, and an invitation, for the LTC at its core is an open, emergent, ongoing, and ever-changing movement. The LTC is young, not yet eight years in action, and many of its early missteps as well as its values-based successes may serve as reflective lessons for others. Its continuous change is organic, a response to realities of the Latinx experience in the US, which is reflected by Latinx theatre making and its processes. It is therefore unpredictable. Angelika Bammer states that one difficulty faced by movements that work toward social change is “sustaining the very principle on which [they are] predicated, namely the idea of the future as possibility rather than as preset goal” (Dolan 13). The composition of the Steering Committee shifts over time and determines the LTC’s actions and programs based on their passion for the proposals submitted for consideration.

Ultimately, the LTC is an experiment in commoning for decolonization with guiding principles found in Latinx feminisms. The movement is learning as it goes, but also has something to teach.

Questions for the Road Ahead

Through reflection on my own experience and in conversation with other participants, my research has revealed concerns about the future of the LTC. I outline them here as topics of discussion for the LTC and a roadmap for my own research going forward.

With regard to the relationship with the HowlRound Theatre Commons:

- Does HowlRound's fiscal sponsorship compromise the LTC's autonomy, logistically or philosophically?
- Does the LTC's access to major national foundations, supported by the fiscal relationship with HowlRound, place the movement too comfortably near the world of corporate success and its potential demands?
- Volunteers, most of whom are Latinx, donate their time, finances, and other resources, for the benefit of the LTC. HowlRound has supported the LTC with integrity and respect, but does its position as a project of Emerson College inadvertently create an exploitative situation in which POC are donating their resources to a predominantly White institution (PWI)?

With regard to Latinx professionalism:

- The LTC has focused much of its energy and efforts on introducing individual Latinx theatre makers into mainstream institutions. Should these efforts be viewed

as acts of infiltration or does this focus on individual success contradict or undermine the LTC's commons ideology?

- Are Latinx infiltrating PWI's intact, or are we inevitably assimilating into dominant culture, thus neutralizing any efforts to bring change to institutions?

With regard to Steering Committee demographics:

- As the ranks of the Steering Committee are increasingly filled by early career practitioners, will they be able to access the resources needed to fulfill the LTC's programming going forward?
- How will less-experienced Steering Committee members transform the horizontal leadership model? Will they be confident enough to share power?
- How does the newer generation's experiences with twenty-first-century Latinidad transform the concerns and the work of the LTC?
- Does the new generation eschew the traditional value of intergenerational relationship? The demand for more youth presence in the movement has engendered experiences of ageism for some of the older participants who have been champions of Latinx theatre for decades.
- Is the passion that fueled the launch of the movement sustainable through the inevitable transitions in personnel?

These questions point to the continuation of the movement; hopefully a time will come when the LTC is no longer necessary. How will that be determined? What must the landscape of the "American" theatre look like in order to be a field where the LTC is no longer necessary? What must American society look like? How would we greet the sunset of the LTC? Some of these questions were raised at the LTC's strategic planning

meeting in April 2018, but the work of the LTC was considered still too vital and necessary to consider stopping. In all, these and the other questions above are concerns that may transform the LTC's values and praxis. There are many strategies to be developed on the part of the LTC to fully realize itself as an instrument of liberation. What's vital is its commitment to serve as that instrument. As a participant in the work of the LTC and decolonization more broadly, I hold García Márquez' thoughts as a beacon:

We, the inventors of tales, who will believe anything, feel entitled to believe that it is not yet too late to engage in the creation of the opposite utopia. A new and sweeping utopia of life, where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible, and where the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth (Popova).

This dissertation records, illuminates, and champions that evolution and change. It has not only documented the roots and formation of the LTC, but imagined its future, and its open questions/shortcomings/challenges. As one of the original Steering Committee members of LTC, I am aware that being close to and impressed by my research topic, can sometimes result in a kind of critical blindness. However, it has been my hope that my insider's perspective can provide a window into the organic development, operations, and mission of an artistic movement that cannot be gleaned by outsiders. I am inspired by the LTC and its commons model. It has been a revelation and a relief to me, even with its inevitable challenges, to work in this way. My goal has been to share its progressive praxis and, by historicization and theoretical analysis, to demonstrate its place in a greater humanistic trajectory. I wonder how this praxis will transform within the LTC, whether over time the LTC will grow, or ossify into an institution and lose the flexibility that

commoning requires. I wonder how the commons model might manifest among other cultural communities, particularly those who chose not to affiliate with HowlRound.

There are larger questions that this study has inspired for me personally, in the realm of women's and ethnic studies that may be asked beyond this study. Can only female-identified Latinx identify their own culturally identified feminisms? What is inherent Latinx culture? As cultural conditions change and people encounter other cultural influences, what is valuable to hold on to? Does the commons model align with certain cultural traditions more readily than others? How do the different concerns of ethnic communities, and histories of cross-cultural oppression, keep people from forming coalitions which may promote mutual empowerment and liberation? I am grateful to the LTC for these questions, for what the movement has taught me as an artist, an activist, a scholar, and a human being. I am grateful for the LTC's imperfect, successful, transforming model rooted in progressive feminist, decolonizing, and commons values. It is in gratitude that I submit this research.

APPENDIX A

LATINX THEATRE COMMONS TIMELINE AND ACTIVITIES⁹⁵

May 19, 2012: DC-8 MEETING. HowlRound hosts eight Latinx theatre makers to discuss the state of Latino theatre in the US at Arena Stage. From this conversation, four initiatives are proposed with the aim of advancing the field of Latino theatre: 1) a national festival of ten Latino plays to be produced at the Los Angeles Theatre Center; 2) a biannual conference of new Latino works hosted by DePaul University in Chicago; 3) Café Onda, an online platform for articles, blogs, and live-streaming of events related to Latino theatre; and, 4) a national convening of Latino theatre-makers. (García-Romero)

The DC-8: Kristoffer Diaz, Anne García-Romero, Lisa Portes, Tlaloc Rivas, Antonio Sonera, Enrique Urueta, José Luis Valenzuela, and Karen Zacarías, engaged in conversation with HowlRound co-founders P. Carl and David Dower

Summer 2012: An additional fourteen Latinx theatre makers from around the country join the DC 9 to form the first **Latino Theatre Commons STEERING COMMITTEE** to plan and implement the national convening. Three committees are formed, fundraising, outreach, and programming, and with the infrastructural support of HowlRound, organize the Boston Convening, launch Café Onda, social media, and articulate the purpose of the LTC. The committee changes the name to Latina/o Theatre Commons (García-Romero; Herrera 2)

The First Steering Committee: Christopher Acebo, Luis Alfaro, Juliette Carrillo, Sandra Delgado, Kristoffer Diaz, Michael John Garcés, Ricky J. Martinez, Anne García-Romero, Lisa Portes, Tlaloc Rivas, Anthony Rodriguez, Diane Rodriguez, Olga Sanchez, Tanya Saracho, Octavio Solis, Antonio Sonera, Enrique Urueta, Kinan Valdez, Clyde Valentin, José Luis Valenzuela, Patricia Ybarra, and Karen Zacarías

September 20, 2013: CAFÉ ONDA #cafeonda is launched, an online platform hosted by HowlRound, which seeks to build connections among Latinx theatre makers, promote dialogue and deeper understanding at large, address cultural misrepresentations, inspire greater participation in the American theatre field, and raise awareness for the body of Latinx dramatic production to the field at large (Rivas)

Café Onda Champions and committee members (various times): Emily Aguilar, Trevor Boffone, Georgina Escobar, Arlene Martinez-Vásquez, Tlaloc Rivas, Marisela Treviño Orta

Café Onda translation champions: Roy Arauz, Georgina Escobar, Beatriz Rizk

⁹⁵ Champion and committee member names are predominantly drawn from printed programs distributed at the LTC events. Additional names are drawn from LTC files: “2017 Committees Breakdown,” “New Project Proposals 2017-2020,” “LTC Champion Contact Sheet (as of May 2017),” “LTC Project Matrix.xlsx” and Basecamp notes. These lists are inconsistent in format, and incomplete – sincere apologies to anyone whose name has been inadvertently omitted.

October 31 – November 2, 2013: The **BOSTON CONVENING** is the “first large-scale formal gathering of the Latina/o theatre community since 1986.” The Convening brought together over eighty artists, scholars, and advocates of Latinx theatre to Emerson College, and also engaged with Latinx theatre-makers in Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas, Miami, and New York City via simultaneous video-conferencing, and around the country through live-streaming (“HowlRound Video Archive,” Herrera)

Steering Committee: Christopher Acebo, Luis Alfaro, Kevin Becerra, Juliette Carrillo, Anne García-Romero*, Abel López, Jacob Padrón, Richard Perez, Lisa Portes, Tlaloc Rivas*, Anthony Rodriguez, Diane Rodriguez, Mario Ernesto Sanchez, Olga Sanchez, Kinan Valdez*, José Luis Valenzuela, Clyde Valentín*, Patricia Ybarra, Karen Zacarías

*Boston Convening Co-chairs and subcommittee chairs

November 10, 2013: **LTC FACEBOOK** group launches, encouraging postings about Latinx theatre events, announcements, opportunities, and discussions about the field and its intersection with politics. As of October 10, 2019, the group has nearly 4,500 members (Sanchez Saltveit “Created”).

LTC Facebook Group Administrators (various times): Roy Arauz, Cynthia DeCure, Courtney Flores, Armando Huipe, Daniel Penilla, Olga Sanchez Saltveit, Marisela Treviño Orta, Abigail Vega

November 6 – November 9, 2014: The **LTC SECOND NATIONAL CONVENING** at the Los Angeles Theatre Center’s **Encuentro 2014**. The Convening brings together the artists participating in the 10 productions featured at the month-long festival of Latinx theatre from around the US, with theatre-makers, scholars, and advocates interested in Latinx theatre. (Huerta; “Participate,” “The Los Angeles”) Additionally, throughout the Encuentro, which ran from October 12 through November 10, 2014, the LTC produced a series of nine **Tertulias**, public conversations with Festival and LA-based artists and scholars to contextualize and interrogate themes raised by the Encuentro (“Video Archive”)

2014 LATC Encuentro Champion: José Luis Valenzuela

Selection Committee: Jose Carrasquillo, Jamie Gahlon, Amparo Garcia-Crow, Daniel Jaquez, Alex Meda, Richard Perez, Chantal Rodriguez, Mark Valdez, Jose Luis Valenzuela, Karen Zacarias

Tertulia Co-chairs: Marissa Chibás and Olga Sanchez

LTC Steering Committee: Rose Cano, Juliette Carrillo, Polly Carl, José Carrasquillo, Marissa Chibas, David Dower, Regina Garcia, Tony Garcia, Amparo Garcia-Crow, Anne Garcia-Romero, Jorge Huerta, Armando Huipe, Daniel Jaquez, Tiffany Ana Lopez, David Lozano, Alex Meda, Richard Perez, Olga Sanchez, Abigail Vega, Mark Valdez, Laurie Woolery, Karen Zacarias

July 23 – 28, 2015: CARNAVAL OF NEW LATINA/O WORK, features staged readings of eight full-length four 10-minute excerpts of new works by Latinx playwrights, at DePaul University in Chicago. The works selected displayed a range of themes and dramaturgical styles, exemplifying the diversity of Latinx theatre in the US. In addition to the readings, participants engaged in workshops and conversations throughout the weekend. A networking and community building event in the spirit of the defunct Hispanic Playwrights Project (Lopez; Reid)

Carnaval Champion: Lisa Portes

2015 LTC Steering Committee: Alexandra Meda*, Amparo Garcia-Crow, Anne García-Romero, Anthony Rodriguez*, Armando Huipe, Beatriz Rizk*, Beto O’Byrne, Brian Herrera, Chantal Rodriguez, Clyde Valentin, Daniel Jáquez, David Lozano, Diane Rodriguez*, Evelina Fernández, Georgina Escobar, Irma Mayorga*, Jacob Padrón, Jamie Gahlon*, Jorge Huerta, José Carrasquillo*, José Luis Valenzuela, Juliette Carrillo*, Karen Zacarias, Kinan Valdez, Lisa Portes*, Marc David Pinate*, Marisela Treviño Orta, Marissa Chibas, Nancy García Loza*, Olga Sanchez*, Regina Garcia*, Richard Perez*, Rose Cano*, Sandra Delgado*, Sandra Islas, Teresa Marrero*, Tiffany Ana López, Tiffany Vega, Tlaloc Rivas, Tony Garcia

Incoming LTC Steering Committee Members: Catherine María Rodriguez*, Courtney Flores, David Mendizábal, Emily Aguilar Thomas, Isaac Gomez*, Jecamiah Ybañez, Rebecca Martinez, Trevor Boffone

*Member of the Carnaval 2015 Producing Task Force

October 30 – November 1, 2015: LTC TEXAS REGIONAL CONVENING, held in Dallas, Texas, was the first of three regional LTC convenings dedicated to learning more about each region’s specific experiences, “because every community is different, it has its own identity and own kind of needs that can flourish if recognized and addressed” (Octavio Solis; Marrero & García-Crow) In addition to meeting and attending local productions and events, the Steering Committee engages in self-assessment, based on internal and external reviews of the LTC as the first step in a year-long self-reflection (Marrero).

Texas Regional Convening Champions: Clyde Valentin, Teresa Marrero, David Lozano

April 15 – 17, 2016: LTC PACIFIC NORTHWEST REGIONAL CONVENING includes theatre-makers from northern California, Portland, and Vancouver, BC, hosted by the University of Washington, Seattle. As with the Regional Convening in Dallas, local participants expressed a sense of isolation from Latinx theatre-making around the country, due to its geographic location. At this Convening, “the Steering Committee was charged with determining the criteria for selecting future projects, key factors like local support for each proposal, the feasibility of each project within the proposed timeline, and, finally, how each project fits into the overall goals of LTC” (Marrero, Ávila “Gathering;” Martínez-Vázquez).

Pacific NW Regional Convening champions: Rose Cano, Roy Arauz

September 2016 – June 2019: EL FUEGO INITIATIVE: FUELING THE AMERICAN THEATRE WITH LATINA/O PLAYS aims to support productions of each of the twelve playwrights featured at the 2015 Carnival of New Latina/o Work. In an unprecedented fashion, eighteen theatre companies agreed to produce the playwrights' works before they had been selected, demonstrating a commitment to championing Latinx playwrights and "a profound trust in the Carnival selection process." (Mayorga) As of October 2019, nine playwrights have received productions with support from El Fuego, many of which have been documented through the IGNITED series on Café Onda ("El Fuego"):

- *Parachute Men* by Mando Alvarado at Teatro Vista, Chicago, IL, September 10-October 16, 2016 (Lodewyck).
- *Women on Fire* by Marisela Treviño Orta at Camino Real Productions, Albuquerque, NM, September 29-October 16, 2016 ("El Fuego").
- *El Payaso* by Emilio Rodriguez at Milagro Theatre, Portland, OR, January 12-21, 2017 (Sanchez Saltveit "Ignited").
- *Sweep* by Georgina Escobar at Aurora Theatre, Lawrenceville, GA, February 10-March 5, 2017 ("El Fuego").
- *Más* by Milta Ortiz at Su Teatro, Denver, CO, March 9-26, 2017 (McMahon "Ignited").
- *The Sweetheart Deal* by Diane Rodriguez, Latino Theatre Co., (co-production with El Teatro Campesino) Los Angeles, CA, May 4-June 4, 2017 (McMahon "Chicana Heroine").
- *Dancing in My Cockroach Killers* by Magdalena Gomez, GALA Hispanic Theatre (co-production with Pregones Theatre), Washington D.C., 2018 (Montez).
- *Gentefrikation* by Emilio Rodriguez, Teatro Prometeo, Miami, FL December 2018 ("A Problem").
- *Fur* by Migdalia Cruz, Teatro Dallas, Dallas, TX, April 2019, (Sweeney).
- *And Their Dogs Came With Them* adaptation by Virginia Grise, Borderlands Theatre, Tucson, AZ, February and October 2019 (Shauger).

El Fuego Co-champions: Lisa Portes and Olga Sanchez

El Fuego Committee: José Carrasquillo, Teresa Marrero, Irma Mayorga, Alex Meda, Mario Ramirez, Catherine Rodriguez, Chantal Rodriguez

Ignited Co-champions: Irma Mayorga and Olga Sanchez

December 1 – 4, 2016: LTC NEW YORK REGIONAL CONVENING, where participants move among nine venues, including INTAR, Pregones Theatre, and the Puerto Rican Travelling Theatre, to engage in creative workshops as well as conversations about Latinx theatre in NYC and the country. The programming was oriented along three focus tracks: leadership, aesthetics, and identity (Ávila “Gathering”).

NYC Regional Convening Co-champions: Rebecca Martinez, David Mendizábal, Jacob Padrón

LTC “On the Ground Producing Team” members/also LTC Steering Committee members: Georgina Escobar, Adriana Gaviria, Beto O’Byrne, Tiffany Vega

November 8 – 12, 2017: LTC INTERNATIONAL CONVENING is held during the **Encuentro de las Américas** International Theatre Festival, at the Los Angeles Theatre Center. This convening echoes the Encuentro Convening of 2015 but broadens its scope to include theatre-makers from Canada and Latin America. 260 participants witness fourteen productions and meet in large and small groups to discuss process, aesthetics, scholarship, and international collaboration among other things (“2017 LTC”, Della Gatta).

2017 Encuentro Champions: José Luis Valenzuela and Chantal Rodriguez

2017 Encuentro Programming: José Carrasquillo, Jamie Gahlon, Daniel Jáquez

Members of the 2017 LTC International Convening Producing, Fundraising, Selection, Host, or Outreach Teams: Amelia Acosta Powell, Emily Aguilar, Dr. Patrice Amon, Dr. Trevor Boffone, Rose Cano, José Carrasquillo, Cynthia DeCure, Dr. Carla Della Gatta, Maria Soyla Enriquez, Estefania Fadul, Evelina Fernández, Jamie Gahlon, Nancy Garcia Loza, Adriana Gaviria, Isaac Gomez, Meggan Gomez, Dr. Patricia Herrera, Daniel Jáquez, Dr. Teresa Marrero, Rebecca Martinez, Arlene Martinez-Vasquez, Dr. Irma Mayorga, Alex Meda, David Mendizábal, Jonathan Muñoz-Proulx, Elizabeth Nungaray, Beto O’Byrne, Daniel Penilla, Richard Perez, Lisa Portes, Mario Ramirez, Anthony Rodriguez, Diane Rodriguez, Elaine Romero, Olga Sanchez Saltveit, Dr. Gina Sandi-Diaz, Selene Santiago, José Luis Valenzuela, Tiffany Vega-Gibson

April 14, 2018: LTC MARÍA IRENE FORNÉS INSTITUTE SYMPOSIUM, produced in partnership with Princeton University’s Lewis Center for the Arts, gathers Fornés’ students and collaborators, as well as scholars and more theatre-makers, to “celebrate her living legacy and collaboratively document her enduring impact” (“2018 Fornés Institute”). The small in-person meeting featuring two representatives from each year of the Steering Committee, convenes to reflect on the LTC’s growth and its relationship with HowlRound. The “Princeton Recommendations” emerge from this meeting (see Appendix E).

Fornés Symposium Champions: Anne García-Romero and Brian Herrera

Fornés Symposium Committee (LTC SC members): Carla Della Gatta, Georgina Escobar, Amparo Garcia-Crow, Olga Sanchez, Gina Sandi-Diaz, Abigail Vega

July 19 – 21, 2018: CARNAVAL OF NEW LATINX THEATRE WORK, again hosted by DePaul University. This iteration focuses on six playwrights, six directors, six dramaturges, and twelve designers, all Latinx, whose work was made visible to other theatre makers, scholars, advocates, and producers from around the country. Additionally, site visits, performances, and workshops at Teatro Vista, Aguijón Theater, Urban Theater Company, and by independent theatre makers, reveal the breadth and depth of Latinx theatre-making in Chicago (“2018 LTC Carnival,” “THE LATINX”).

2018 Carnival Champion: Lisa Portes

Selection Committee: Dr. Patrice Amon, Dr. Trevor Boffone, David Mendizábal, Regina Garcia, Adriana Gaviria, Isaac Gomez, Dr. Brian Herrera, Alex Meda, Daniel Penilla, Richard Perez, Lisa Portes, Mario Ramirez, Jelisa Robinson, Dr. Daphnie Sicre

Carnival Outreach Committee: Estefania Fadul, Annabel Guevara, Daniel Jáquez, Elizabeth Nungaray, Diane Rodriguez, Tony Rodriguez

Carnival Programming Committee: Dr. Patrice Amon, Kevin Becerra, Cynthia DeCure, Maria Soyla Enriquez, Georgina Leanse Escobar, Adriana Gaviria, Sarah Guerra, Maya Malan-Gonzalez, Elizabeth Nungaray

Carnival Fundraising Committee: Maria Lisa Portes, Olga Sanchez, Dr. Maria Soyla Enriquez

January 24 – 26, 2019: LTC TYA SIN FRONTERAS FESTIVAL AND CONVENING is held at UT Austin and the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Culture Center, with the support of Teatro Vivo, Austin, Texas. The first ever Latinx-identified TYA festival in the US, features five companies from the US, Chile, and Mexico, serving approximately 1200 children and youth, and 150 adult conveners. Sin Fronteras “put the spotlight on the transcultural, racial, economic, gender, sexuality, and language diversity of Latinx youth” (McMahon “Learning”).

TYA Sin Fronteras Champions: Emily Aguilar and Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

July 12 – 14, 2019: MIAMI IN MOTION: 2019 LTC MIAMI REGIONAL CONVENING brought together Miami theatre makers who “[took] stock of their region’s resources, opportunities and challenges” with each other and national attendees. Like the Dallas and Seattle convenings, local participants express a sense of isolation from the rest of country, due to its geographic location and work in Spanish. The sense of isolation among South Floridians is also expressed and a group forms to create a South Florida Latinx theatre alliance (Roa).

Miami Regional Convening Champion: Adriana Gaviria

Miami Regional Convening Committee: Patrice Amon, Gina Sandi-Diaz

ADDITIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Communications Committee: Marisela Treviño Orta

Resource Generation: Rebecca Martinez, Maria Soyla Enriquez

Steering Committee Cultivation and Governance: Nancy Garcia Loza, Isaac Gomez

Anti-Racism Task Force: Beto O'Byrne, Alex Meda

LTC PUBLICATIONS

Boffone, Trevor, Teresa Marrero, and Chantal Rodriguez, eds. *Encuentro: Latinx Performance for the New American Theater*. Northwestern University Press, 2019.

Herrera, Brian Eugenio. *The Latina/o Theatre Commons 2013 National Convening: A Narrative Report*. Boston: Emerson College, 2015.



Figure 10 LTC Programs 2013-2019 (Sanchez Saltveit)

APPENDIX B

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT FOR LATINA/O THEATER COMMONS

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Latina/o Theatre Commons (LTC) is a growing network, a forward-thinking movement, and a digital workspace made up of passionate, articulate, driven Latina/o theater-makers and scholars from across the country. Steering Committee members are diverse volunteers who serve on subcommittees that actively undertake and advance the work of the Latina/o Theatre Commons.

Therefore, in the spirit of active collaboration with the overall goals of the Latina/o Theater Commons, as a member of its National Steering Committee, I agree to meet the following minimum expectations:

- Attend at least 8 out of 12 scheduled Steering Committee teleconferencing meetings (this includes being prepared having done preliminary reading of previous relevant communications on Basecamp in order to move the conversation forward);
- Take action and assume responsibilities for moving issues forward, and following up on commitments;
- Promote and spread the word about LTC events by carrying one-sheets to other events, posting on social media, etc.;
- Support the generation of articles/blogs on *Café Onda* and increase its visibility through social media, etc.;
- Self-challenge to assume new responsibilities (such as becoming active in the Fundraising Committee);
- Assume a financial commitment by either fundraising, individual or other types of pledges.

In addition, I understand that Steering committee members are encouraged to:

- Regularly check Basecamp in order to keep up with reports, messages and the scheduling of Steering Committee and relevant sub-committee meetings
- Identifying personal strengths and how they can be of service to the greater good;
- Represent their particular communities within the Commons;
- Assume ownership for the content of *Café Onda*.

(printed name) _____

(signature) _____ (date) _____

(Marrero “DRAFT Steering Committee Commitment Letter.”)

APPENDIX C

2018 LTC COMMITMENT FORM

Due by Sunday, January 28, 2018!

The Latinx Theatre Commons (LTC) is a growing network, a forward thinking movement, and a digital workspace made up of passionate, articulate, driven Latinx Theatre makers and scholars from across the world, and the LTC Steering Committee members are a group of diverse volunteers that actively undertake and advance the work of the LTC. Therefore, in the spirit of active collaboration with the overall goals of the LTC, as a member of its National Steering Committee, I agree to meet the following expectations of myself, which will be then shared with the entire committee to keep me accountable. Over the course of 2018....

* Required

First Name *

Last Name *

City, State (where you do your work) *

Please insert a current 100 word bio. *

I will attend _____ of monthly Full Steering Committee Calls. *

- 100% (all 12 calls)
- at least 75% (9 of the 12 calls)
- at least 50% (6 of the 12 calls) -RECOMMENDED for Active and In Training Steering Committee Members
- at least 33% (4 of the 12 calls)
- Other:

I will either write for or connect writers to Café Onda, resulting in _____ new articles. *

- 2
- 1
- None

- Other:

I will participate in the following Project Committees (at least one is required): *

- I'm "in-training," so Resource Generation!
- Fornés Symposium Programming Committee
- Carnaval 2018 Selection Committee (you must have emailed Isaac already!)
- Carnaval 2018 Programming Committee
- Carnaval 2018 Outreach Committee
- Carnaval 2018 Host Committee
- TYA Sin Fronteras 2019 Communications Committee
- TYA Sin Fronteras 2019 Educational Engagement Committee
- TYA Sin Fronteras 2019 Host Committee

I will continue to work with OR step up to join the following committee(s):

- Anti-Racism Task Force (not Producing Team)
- El Fuego Task Force
- Steering Committee Cultivation & Governance
- Fornés Institute (evergreen, not the Symposium committee)
- Other:

I will contribute to the LTC and the field in the following actionable ways (click as many that apply): *

- Help spread the word about the World Theatre Map
- Create 10 entries on the World Theatre Map for Latinx artists, theatres, and/or plays
- Livestream an event at my theatre on HowlRound TV
- Connect other organizations to HowlRound TV to livestream

- Actively search for potential steering committee members with organic alignment to join the Steering Committee in July
- Attend a conference or gathering and represent the LTC
- Comment and share Café Onda posts on a regular basis
- Advocate for Latinx artists in my classroom, syllabus, and/or institution
- Raising awareness of the LTC as a movement in my classroom, syllabus, theatre, and/or institution
- Share opportunities, calls to action, and calls for support to my networks
- Actively connect allied organizations to the LTC and our work
- Ensuring open communication by bringing concerns, questions, suggestions, and criticisms of the LTC to the Steering Committee so we can answer, clarify, or amend our policies
- Other:

I will financially contribute to the LTC in the amount of _____ throughout the year.
(optional, cash or in kind)

I will regularly check Basecamp in order to keep up with reports, messages and meeting schedules. *

- Yes

I will take action and assume responsibility for moving issues forward and following up on commitments. *

- Yes

I will represent my home communities within the Commons, and will promote and spread the word about LTC and Latinx artists in my home communities. *

- Yes

I will work to end any practice of colorism and patriarchal behavior on the Steering Committee and in LTC programming. *

- Yes

I understand that if I claim a slot and/or travel funding for an LTC event, I will release that slot back to the LTC no less than four weeks before the event if I can no longer attend. *

- Yes

I will make room in my schedule in 2018 to travel and attend an in-person LTC-funded anti-racism training during: *

- July 22-24, 2018 (Chicago, IL)
- August 10-12, 2018 or August 17-19, 2018 (location TBA)
- September 21-23, 2018 or September 28-30, 2018 (location TBA)
- November 16-18, 2018 (location TBA)
- I will be moving to the Advisory Committee.

I will make the following additional contribution to the LTC: _____
("2018 LTC Commitment Form.")

APPENDIX D

ENCUENTRO 2017 CURATORIAL GUIDELINES

Excerpted from “How a Commons Becomes A Selection Committee” by Abigail Vega

“The selection committee of the LTC met with the LATC staff and Latino Theater Company members to establish the values of the 2017 Encuentro:

By articulating these values, we were then able to define how we would evaluate applications. All projects were scored on a fifty-point system (one being the lowest, and five or ten being the highest). The criteria were:

- cross-cultural collaboration
- exchange of methodologies
- openness to risk
- inclusive dialogue

- How relevant is the content? (1—10)

How relevant is the message/theme/politics of the proposed piece in 2017? What does it say about the country or region it is "representing?"

- Aesthetic Strength of Proposed Piece (1—10)

What aesthetic form is the piece presented in? Does it take artistic risk? Is there a rigor to the work proposed?

- Artistic Boldness of the Company (1—10)

What is the proposing company's (or artist's) history, in terms of artistic boldness? What does their production history and origin story tell us about their way into the work?

- Openness to Cross Cultural Exchange (1—10)

How open is the company (or artist) to collaborating with other companies at Encuentro 2017?

- Values Alignment (1—5)

Do the values of the proposing company or artist align with the values of Encuentro 2017?

- Technical Feasibility (1—5)

Is the project possible at the LATC, and is it possible for the tech staff to undertake?" (Vega “How a Commons”)

APPENDIX E

PRINCETON RECOMMENDATIONS

April 2018 LTC Small Group Meeting

Sunday, April 15, 2018, 9am-5pm

Location: Seminar Room, Wallace Theatre & Dance Building, 3rd Floor

Present from Steering Committee: Karen Zacarías (2012), Olga Sanchez (2013), Dr. Chantal Rodriguez (2013), Kevin Becerra (2013), Alex Meda (2014), Armando Huipe (2014-note taker), Georgina Escobar (2014), Dr. Brian Herrera (2014), Emily Aguilar (2015), Dr. Trevor Boffone (2015), Meggan Gomez (2016), Roy Antonio Arauz (2016), Arlene Martinez (2016)

Present from HowlRound: Abigail Vega, David Dower, Jamie Gahlon, JD Stokely
Facilitator: Lydia Garcia

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FULL STEERING COMMITTEE

- 1) We recommend SCCG review and create mechanisms for Steering Committee accountability, Producer accountability, operational accessibility, meeting practices, and supporting successful goal setting by individual Steering Committee members.
- 2) We identified a need to document pre-LTC history, intentional tracking of LTC's online presence, and the organizational life of the LTC. We recommend creating a documentation subcommittee who would be responsible for developing an archival strategy for the LTC.
- 3) We recognized a lack of programming agreements, (i.e. what makes an LTC convening an LTC convening), partnership agreements (#inclusionrider), and an updated job description for champions. We recommend an out-of-cycle call series that anyone may attend that will address these gaps and create these documents.
- 4) We identified a need for a creative renewal/retreat event for the Steering Committee. We recommend a proposal be submitted by an interested Steering Committee member(s) willing to champion once we begin the proposal process in July 2018.
- 5) Based on our current staffing and fundraising capacity, we recommend considering a six to nine month gap between events for all future programming.

- 6) We recommend the Steering Committee fundraise to increase staffing capacity (i.e. part-time assistant, second LTC producer) to support the growth of the LTC.
- 7) We recognized our programming gaps in the past and recommend the entire Steering Committee (not just recruitment and programming committees) prioritize and value the experience and participation of Afro-Latinx, indigenous, disabled, and queer people; designers, technicians, and critics; and advocate for language justice in our convenings.
- 8) We recommend establishing a habit of reflection and evaluation after our events in an effort to codify learning and move the collective knowledge forward.
- 9) We recommend that the Steering Committee look to the ten year anniversary (2023) as a celebration and evaluation of the current LTC. We encourage convening proposals, initiatives, and activities around this idea. (Vega “4.15.18.”)

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