

Contesting Identities Through Dance: Mestizo Performance in the Southern Andes of Peru

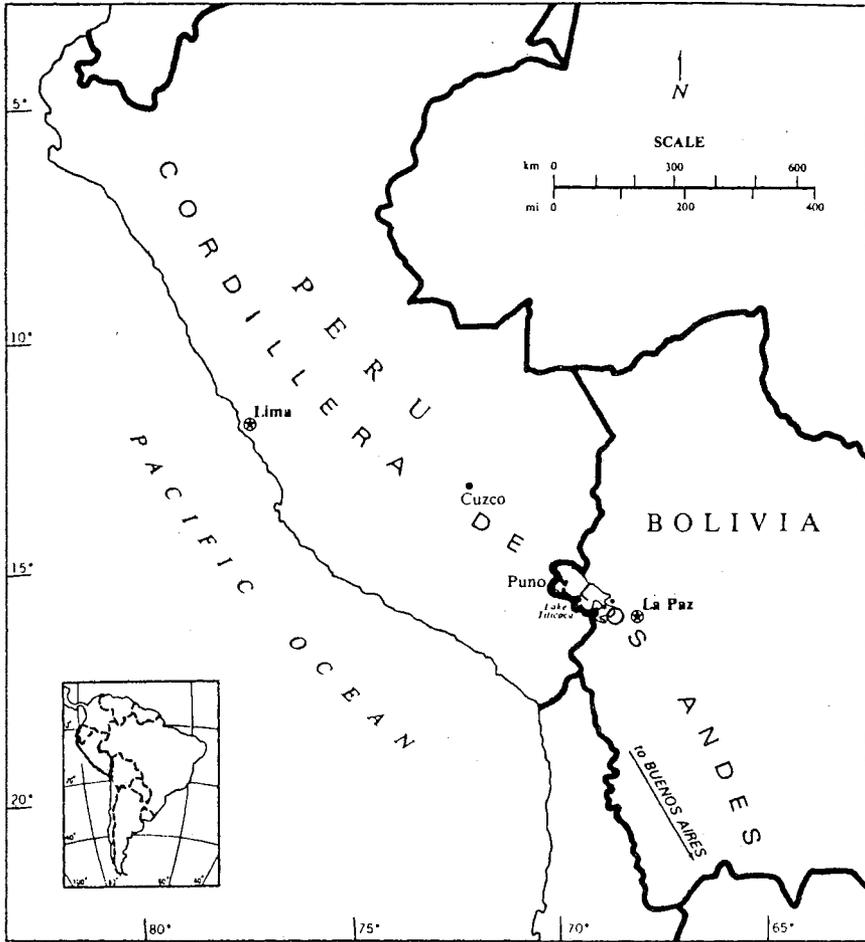
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This article analyzes an event in the city of Cusco, Peru that reverberated throughout the entire region during the late 1980s.¹ This incident, which became known as the “events of Corpus,” generated a series of open antagonisms that pitted young members of Cusco ritual dance associations (called *comparsas*) who performed dances from the “Altiplano” region against a coalition of civil, religious and “cultural” authorities who opposed that performance.² These confrontations, which have continued into the early 1990s, demonstrated the relevance of *comparsa* performance and of state and private “cultural institutions” in the definition and redefinition of local and regional identity among Cusco “mestizos.”³ In particular, they made evident that these dances were being used by young mestizo *cusqueños* (people of Cusco), especially women, to construct a

1. Peru is divided into twenty-four departments. Each department has a number of provinces, and every province is organized into districts. The department of Cusco, also known in the literature as Cusco region, is located in the southeastern section of the Republic of Peru (see map). In 1988 the estimated population of the department of Cusco was a little over a million. Instituto Geográfico Nacional, *Atlas del Peru* (Lima, 1989), 94. The capital of the department is Cusco city.

2. These dances are generally known in Cusco as “Altiplano” dances because they have reached this area primarily from the Southern Peruvian Altiplano (high-altitude plateau) located in the neighboring department of Puno (see map). The Peruvian and the Bolivian Altiplano form a geographical and cultural unit.

3. “Cultural institution” and “mestizo” are explained below, pages 67, 68, 70.



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Bolivia and Peru



Altiplano region

From Steve J. Stern, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press) ©1987.

new public identity that contested the gender and “ethnic” stereotypes promoted by the cultural institutions.⁴ Here I will discuss in some detail the confrontations that emerged in the town of San Jeronimo demonstrating how a “folkloric” institution such as the *comparsa* can become a site for transformation rather than conservation of cultural values and roles.⁵

Comparsa Performance in the Andes

Many authors have demonstrated that music and dance are powerful forms of social action aimed at the definition and re-definition of distinctions and identities within society.⁶ Their studies have also shown that the organization of dance or music ensembles, and the creative innovations made by them, offer valuable insights into wider sociocultural processes and into the perspectives of the people who participate in these processes. The case presented here supports these findings, demonstrating that ritual dance can be the focus of struggle over identity and social relations.

4. For the concept of “ethnicity” that I use here, see page 67.

5. San Jeronimo is a district of the province of Cusco located twelve kilometers southeast of the capital city on the main paved commercial road and railroad line connecting Cusco with the other major trade centers of the southern Peruvian Andes. The town of San Jeronimo, the site of my intensive field research during 1989 and 1990, is the capital of the district and home of about 9,000 people.

6. See for example Terence Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa: The Beni Ngoma* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1975); Thomas Turino, “The Urban-Mestizo Charango Tradition in Southern Peru: A Statement of Shifting Identity,” *Ethnomusicology* 28 (1984): 253-70, “The Music of the Andean Migrants in Lima, Peru: Demographics, Social Power, and Style,” *Latin American Music Review* 9, no. 2 (1988): 127-50 and *Moving Away from Silence: Music of the Peruvian Altiplano and the Experience of Urban Migration* (Chicago, 1993); Jane K. Cowan, *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* (Princeton, 1990).

The members of contemporary *comparsas* in Cusco adhere to the cult of a particular Catholic saint and sponsor the annual festivity in celebration of that saint. The Andean people consider "saints" to be not only the martyrs or other salient personages of Christian history canonized by the Catholic Church, but also different representations of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary.⁷ They sponsor this festivity, in which they perform masked and costume dances. Although this kind of dance performance has been a central component of Andean Catholic ritual since the sixteenth century, the performative aspect of Andean ritual has been insufficiently studied.⁸ Historical data suggests that during the colonial period (1532-1821) the dances performed in Catholic festivals became an arena of confrontation and negotiation of symbolic practices and identity. The massive participation of indigenous populations in Catholic rituals through the performance of dances and the constant preoccupation with—and at times repression of—these forms

7. Manuel M. Marzal, *Estudios Sobre Religión Campesina* (Lima, 1977).

8. Of the studies that exist, none has made the dance associations or *comparsas* its focus of interest. See Frank Salomon, "Killing the Yumbo: A Ritual Drama of Northern Quito," in Norman E. Whitten, Jr., ed., *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (Urbana, 1981); Juan van Kessel, *Danzas y Estructuras Sociales de los Andes* (Cusco: Instituto de Pastoral Andina, 1981); Deborah Poole, "Accommodation and Resistance in Andean Ritual Dance," *The Drama Review* 34, no. 2 (1990): 98-126 and "Rituals of Movement, Rites of Transformation: Pilgrimage and Dance in the Highlands of Cusco," in Ross Crumrine and Alan Morinis, eds., *Pilgrimage in Latin America* (New York, 1991); Zoila Mendoza, "Las Danzas de 'Los Avelinos,' sus Orígenes y sus Múltiples Significados," *Revista Andina* 7 (1989): 101-21. Despite the fact that all of them give some indication that ritual dancing in the Andes has been a way to re-create local and regional identities and is a practice that deals with ambiguities and paradoxes in history and in everyday life, only Salomon's work has touched upon the role of *comparsas* in the configuration of local and regional distinctions and identities. Although Poole's work shows some aspects of the creation of identity, she focuses on the dance forms and on the "structural" position of Andean dancing within Catholic rituals.

have indicated that these expressive forms channeled the capacity for contestation and accommodation of this population during the colonial period.⁹

My research in Cusco has shown that throughout this century *comparsas* have redefined and given form to disputed ethnic, gender, class, and generational distinctions and identities.¹⁰ This has been done not only through the performance of dances and other ritual activities during festivals but also through the ongoing interaction among the *comparsas'* members during the year. Dances and association members comment and act upon key sociocultural categories such as "decency," "elegance," "authenticity," "modernity," and "folklore" that have shaped the relations among local groups as well as between these local groups and the larger context of the Cusco region and of Peruvian society. Cusqueños have confronted these categories in their everyday lives in the forms of regional, national and transnational hierarchies and dichotomies (for example, rural/urban, white/Indian, highland/coastal, center/periphery).

The members of *comparsas* have been "bricoleurs" who have drawn upon the signifying capacity of ritual symbolism to shape and generate new meanings for their dances.¹¹ By incorporating into their performances a series of iconic symbols (costumes, masks, songs) and by metonymic and metaphoric associations (for example, to landowners, peasants, etc.), the members of *comparsas* have creatively brought together different domains of society (defined by ethnicity, class, gender, or

9. Bertha Ares Queija, "Las Danzas de los Indios: Un Camino para la Evangelización del Virreynato del Perú," *Revista de Indias* 44, no. 174 (1984): 445-63; Poole, "Accommodation and Resistance."

10. Zoila Mendoza-Walker, "Shaping Society Through Dance: Mestizo Ritual Performance in the Southern Peruvian Andes," Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1993. The research for this dissertation was carried out in 1989 and 1990 with support from a Fulbright-Hays fellowship.

11. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966); Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London, 1985).

generation) and specific situational contexts (the demise of the hacienda system, the promotion of "folklore") to make convincing "arguments" through ritual performance.¹²

Ritual dance performance for *comparsa* members has been a "site and a means" of "creative" and "experimental" practice, playing a key role in the redefinition of local distinctions and identities.¹³ More specifically, such performance has creatively mediated between this local redefinition and the regional, national, and transnational processes that have affected the life of *cusqueños*—migration, urban growth, and the "folklorization" of cultures, for example. In this ritual performance, as I will show here, tension is always present and confrontations and contestation can sometimes take place.

Los Majeños and La Tuntuna

Los Majeños is a dance that most *cusqueños* today consider part of "traditional" regional folklore.¹⁴ It is performed both in religious festivals and in staged presentations. *Los Majeños* presents an idealized image of the rich and successful merchants and landowners of the colonial and republican periods. It is composed of about nineteen adult men and a woman who plays a passive and marginal role, that of the wife of the leader of the dance, a very proper and beautiful woman who dances on the arm of her husband (see figure 1).¹⁵ The dancers portray three

12. Nancy Munn, "Symbolism in a Ritual Context: Aspects of Symbolic Action," in J. J. Honigmann, ed., *Handbook of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (New York, 1974), 579-612; James Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances* (Bloomington, 1986).

13. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, eds., *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual, Power, and History in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago, 1993), xxix.

14. I say "today" because this dance only became popularized as regional folklore through the regional contests initiated in 1967. The dance originated in the district of Paucartambo around the 1920s.

physically distinct personages: the *Majeños*, performed by the majority of the men; the *Dama* (lady), performed by the woman; and the *Maqt'as*, performed by two men noticeably smaller than the rest who represent the indigenous servants of the *Majeños* (see figure 2). The *Majeños* wear matching costumes: brown leather boots, belts and jackets, jodhpurs, button-down shirts and wide-brimmed straw hats. Their masks are meant to imitate white men with round, rosy cheeks, light color eyes, mustaches and long noses (see figure 3). The *Dama* mask also resembles the face of a white woman (see figure 1) while that of the *Maqt'a*, on the contrary, exaggerates the features considered characteristic of "Indian" phenotype.¹⁶

The choreography of *Los Majeños* is repeated almost identically every year.¹⁷ The basic dance step used in most of the sections is a swaying, gentle body movement accompanied by long and firm steps.¹⁸ The music is played by a brass band and

15. I was able to experience the passivity of this female role because I performed this character with the San Jeronimo *comparsa* in 1989. In rehearsals and public presentations I was constantly discouraged from taking any initiative in the dance or from leaving the arm of the dancer who performed as my husband. Throughout my research in the town, the woman who regularly performs this role in the *comparsa* hardly ever rehearsed the dance with the men. When I inquired about the reasons for this I was told that she does not need to practice because she only needs to take the arm of the leader and follow him.

16. The two main features of this phenotype are the hooked nose and the prominent cheekbones (see figure 2).

17. The choreography is not exactly the same in all towns. In San Jeronimo this choreography is composed of four basic sections. During the festivities not all the sections are always performed together. The complete performance lasts about twenty minutes. *Los Majeños* is the only San Jeronimo *comparsa* that performs on two occasions each year. One is during the *Octava* of Corpus Christi (a one-day celebration in June), when the townspeople return the image of Saint Jerome from the city of Cusco to the town. The second, the main performance, is given during the four days of the patron-saint festivity (29 September through 2 October).

18. This type of body movement is considered "decent" and "elegant" and is supposed to characterize "gentlemen." For an analysis of the construction of these categories in the context of *comparsa* performance, see Mendoza-Walker, "Shaping Society through Dance," ch. 4.



Figure 1. The leader of *Los Majeños* dance and the *Dama* character dancing on his arm. *Los Majeños* is a “traditional” Cusco dance. Cusco city, 1990. (Photo: Author)

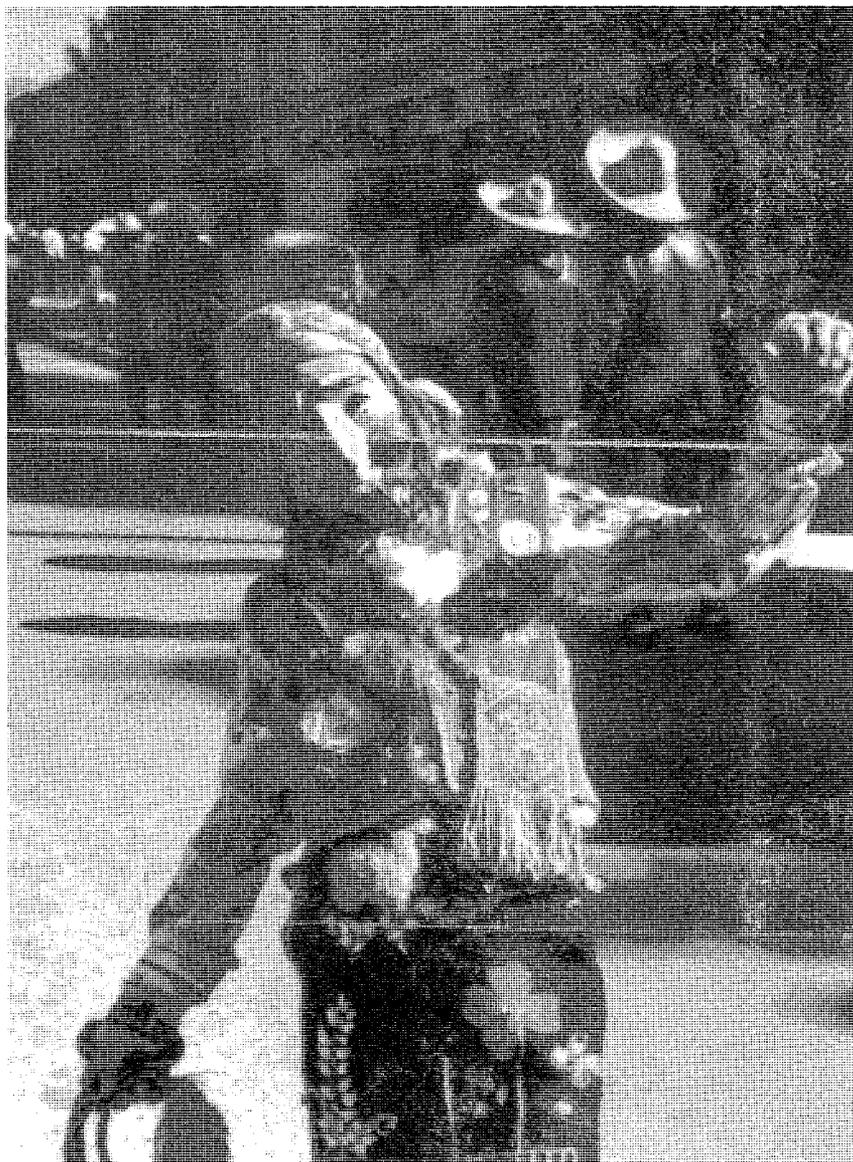


Figure 2. The *Maq'a* character, who represents the indigenous servant of the merchant/landowner *Majeño* character in *Los Majeños*. Cusco city, 1990. (Photo: Author)



Figure 3. All the *Majeños* wear matching costumes and their masks imitate the face of white men. Cusco city, 1990. (Photo: Author).

among the melodies there are mestizo *waynos*, a *marinera* with *wayno fuga*, and a marchlike one which is known regionally as the defining characteristic of the dance.¹⁹

In San Jeronimo, *Los Majeños* is performed by the most powerful and respected adult *comparsa* of the town. This dance, and another entitled *Los Qollas*, are considered by all *jeronimianos* (people of San Jeronimo) to be the “traditional” dances of their town.²⁰ *Los Majeños* and *Los Qollas* do not challenge the models of ethnic and gender roles promoted by state and private cultural institutions.²¹ On the contrary (as in the case of *Los Majeños*), those models have been used by *comparsa* members in order to establish their local power. As I have ar-

19. The brass band is composed of wind instruments such as tubas, trumpets, and trombones, and percussion instruments such as drums (among them one bass drum) and cymbals. *Wayno* (also *wayño* or *huayno*) is a situationally defined term that “refers to the most ubiquitous mestizo song-dance genre of the highlands as well as to specific musical genres and dances as defined by indigenous communities” (Turino, *Moving Away from Silence*, 293). The basic dance structure of mestizo *cusqueño wayno* consists of a *paseo* (slower dance) followed by a *zapateo* (foot-stomping)—which in the case of *Los Majeños* is very gentle—performed by couples. See Josafat Roel Pineda, “El Wayno del Cusco,” *Folklore Americano* 6-7 (1959): 129-246, for a thorough description and analysis of the *wayno* genre in Cusco with an emphasis on the difference in the performative aspects. The *marinera* is a genre that originated in the coastal mestizo musical tradition known as *criollo* around the end of the nineteenth century. The two genres, the *marinera* and the *wayno*, have been gradually fused by Andeans into various combinations, the most typical of which is now the *marinera* with *wayno fuga*.

20. In San Jeronimo *Los Majeños* was first performed for a few years in the late 1940s and then resurrected in 1978. *Los Qollas* was first introduced to the town in 1973.

21. The *Qollas* is performed by about twenty men—the number varies every year and at certain moments of their performance—and one of them represents the role of a woman. The dancers impersonate llama drivers/merchants from high-altitude zones who are considered by mestizos the prime representatives of the rustic, poor, indigenous highland population. Stanzas of Quechua (the indigenous language) accompany several of the stages of the *Qollas* performance. The music is played by a group of three trumpeters, one accordionist, and a trap set player. Most of the *Qollas* music is pentatonic. Among the different melodies there are *waynos*.

gued elsewhere, since the 1940s the emerging petty bourgeoisie of San Jeronimo, formed by merchants and men who worked in transportation, have used *Los Majeños* and their *comparsa* organization to establish themselves as a new local elite.²² In San Jeronimo, *Los Majeños* has incorporated contemporary symbols of masculinity and wealth and has itself become a symbol of socioeconomic prestige and male power. Members of this *comparsa* constantly reiterate the three central themes of their dance—economic power, social prestige, and masculinity—in their interactions outside of ritual. In public and private gatherings, members flaunt their power in front of their wives and fellow townspeople. This *comparsa* is without doubt the most powerful and prestigious of San Jeronimo and is the only one of the town which has constituted itself officially into a “folkloric” institution.²³

In addition to these traditional ritual dances are dances which have reached Cusco from the Altiplano region; of these, *La Tuntuna* is the most popular in the Cusco region. In San Jeronimo, as in other towns, it is performed by about thirty dancers between twelve and twenty years old, half of whom are women. As opposed to the case of *Los Majeños* or *Los Qollas* dancers, these young *cusqueño* performers do not attribute any specific meaning to their dance. They do not wear masks or purport to represent any particular personages; they only assert that it is a dance whose vitality and happiness is extremely “contagious” (“danza alegre y contagiante”).²⁴ *La Tuntuna* costumes vary from town to town but they are all made of bright, shiny, synthetic materials, and all feature a

22. Zoila Mendoza, “La comparsa Los Majeños: Poder, prestigio y masculinidad entre los mestizos cusqueños” in Raúl Romero, ed., *Música, Danzas y Máscaras en los Andes* (Lima, 1993).

23. To obtain this status, they registered their institution in 1984 in Cusco city’s public records of associations.

24. A few dancers have inquired into the meanings attributed to the dance in Bolivia and know that there it is said that the dance imitates the way in which black slaves danced.

common design: long sleeves with waves of ruffles, worn by men and women alike, and short flared skirts worn by the women (see figures 4 and 5).²⁵

La Tuntuna is full of acrobatic and athletic movements such as high jumps and turns in the air (see figure 6). Unlike *Los Majeños*, it does not have a set choreography. This dance has one basic step which consists of a fast, short hop, side to side. While doing this the dancers shake their bodies, most notoriously their shoulders (see figure 7). Most of the time the dance is performed in two groups, one of men and the other of women, although there are moments when these groups come together. Both groups are arranged in parallel lines (generally between two and four) and usually the group of women performs in front of the group of men. Each group has a separate leader who guides the movements of the dancers with a whistle. The brass band that accompanies the dance, the same type as that of *Los Majeños*, determines the texture of the music; it is performed in an antiphonal style with a clear call and response structure between the high and the low brass.²⁶

Cusco, San Jeronimo, and "Mestizo" Identity

The Huatanay valley, which encompasses Cusco city and the districts of San Sebastian and San Jeronimo, is better known by *cusqueños* as the "Cusco valley" area. The inhabitants of this geopolitically and historically unified subregion share many

25. The few-inches-above-the-knee-length skirts worn by *La Tuntuna* female dancers are considered by *cusqueños* to be short in comparison to the ones worn by most women in other dances and in their everyday lives.

26. The predominant meter of the music is duple and a number of phrases, which are of different lengths, are repeated many times. This musical description has been written with the guidance of Philip Bohlman. Nevertheless, I am responsible for any misuse of the terms or concepts used.



Figure 4. A young San Jeronimo woman performing *La Tuntuna*, an Altiplano dance, in the main square of her hometown. San Jeronimo, 1990. (Photo: Fritz Villasante)

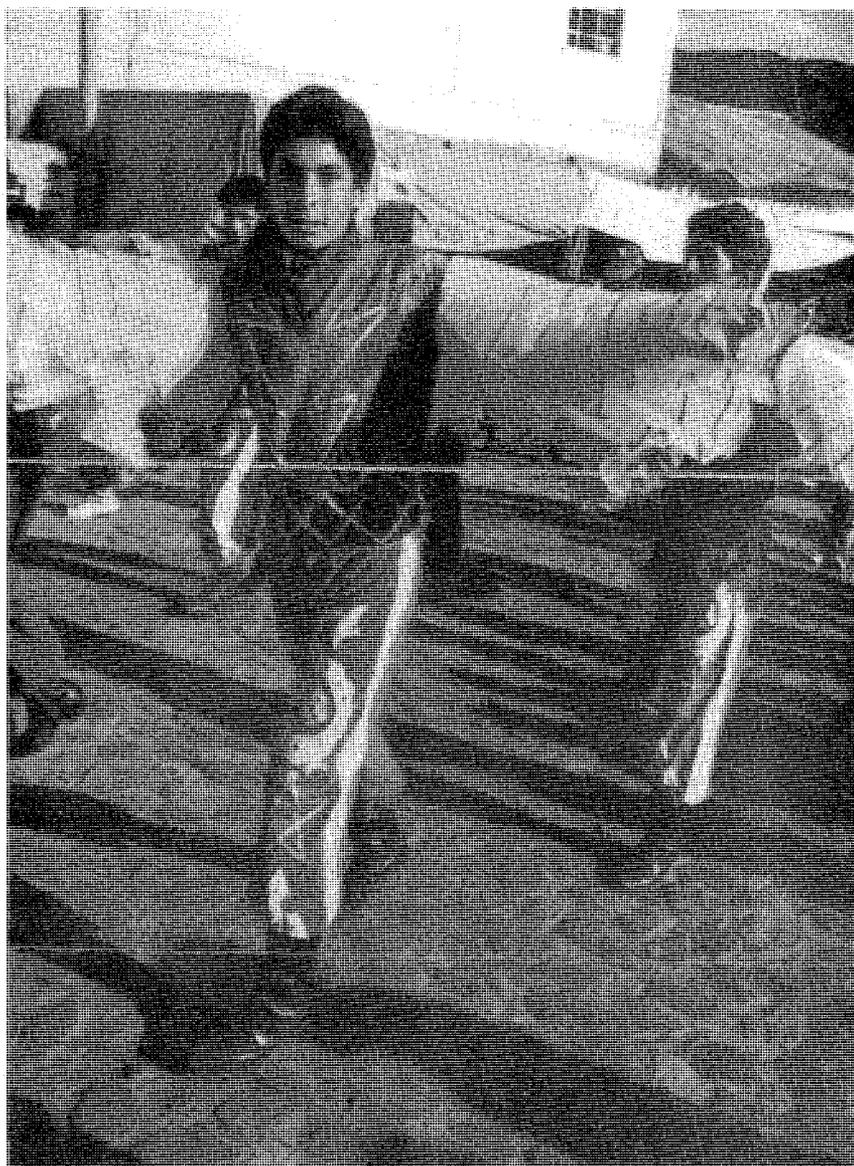


Figure 5. Bright, shiny, synthetic costumes with long sleeves which have waves of ruffles are worn by men and women alike in *La Tuntuna*. San Jeronimo, 1989. (Photo: Fritz Villasante)



Figure 6. *La Tuntuna* is full of acrobatic and athletic movements. San Jeronimo, 1989.
(Photo: Fritz Villasante)



Figure 7. In *La Tuntuna*, men and women shake their bodies, most notoriously their shoulders. San Jeronimo 1989.

(Photo: Fritz Villasante)

common traits seen as distinctive of this area. For example, *cusqueños* refer to some of the dances performed by *comparsas* as “dances of the valley”; such dances supposedly originated in the Huatanay valley or are at least typical of it. As viewed by contemporary *cusqueños* and outsiders, most of the population and cultural elements of Cusco valley are “mestizo.”

The colonial Spanish racial category of “mestizo,” which literally means “mixed blood” (Spanish and Indian), has over time become an “ethnic” category and an indicator of class position within society. Based upon new perspectives in the study of the subject, I take “ethnicity” to be an historically defined category that binds together ideological and material aspects of a culture. In the Andes as elsewhere, “ethnic” difference has been constructed drawing upon biological referents, cultural practices, and economic and political positions of different groups within society. In this construction both the ideology about ethnicity and its material referents are equally important realities that transform each other historically.²⁷

The category of “mestizo” also suggests characteristics such as Spanish-speaking or bilingualism (Quechua and Spanish), urban residence, and advantageous position in the economic structure in relation to those considered “Indians” (i.e., ownership of the means of production). In Andean urban settings, at least since the eighteenth century, phenotype has been less important in defining “mestizo” than the position of people in the division of labor.²⁸ In contemporary Cusco the ethnic categories of “white,” “cholo,” “Indian,” and “mestizo” are the rel-

27. See Marisol De la Cadena, “Las Mujeres son más indias’: Etnicidad y género en una comunidad del Cusco,” *Revista Andina* 19 (1991): 7-29.

28. See Thomas Abercrombie, “La Fiesta del Carnaval Postcolonial en Oruro: Clase, Etnicidad, y Nacionalismo en la Danza Folklórica,” *Revista Andina* 20 (1992): 279-352. In the case of Bolivia, Ellen Leichtman has pointed out that the differentiation between categories such as Indian and mestizo has to do more with cultural elements than with race. Ellen Leichtman, “Musical Interaction: A Bolivian Mestizo Perspective,” *Latin American Music Review* 10, no. 1 (1989): 29-52.

evant ones, both in general and to dance production and performance.²⁹

Since 1950 the population of the department of Cusco has been concentrated particularly in the areas surrounding the capital city. By 1987, 25 percent of the population of the department lived in the city of Cusco and its area of urban expansion.³⁰ This change in population patterns should be understood in a national context of massive migration to the cities because of rural pauperization, political violence, and generalized economic underdevelopment of the country.³¹ The most dynamic and prosperous economic activity of the department is wholesale and retail commerce supplemented by agricultural production, transportation, services, small industry, and tourism.³²

The district of San Jeronimo, together with that of San Sebastian, was declared in 1979 to be an area of urban expansion of Cusco city.³³ Since the 1970s, facilitated by the

29. The tripartite division of the Peruvian population into *campesino*, *mestizo*, and *criollo* presented by Turino in several of his works ("The Urban-Mestizo Charango Tradition"; "The Music of Andean Migrants in Lima"; *Moving Away from Silence*) cannot be applied to my study for two main reasons. The first is that to differentiate cultural traits and dance repertoires, characters, and performers, *cusqueños* rarely use the categories of "*criollo*" and "*campesino*." The second is that those three categories do not do justice to the complex ethnic situation of Cusco and the country at large; for example, there are many mestizos who are also *campesinos*.

30. Information from CEDUR-Ununchis, Cusco, 1990.

31. For information on the contemporary situation of poverty and violence in Peru see Jo-Marie Burt and Aldo Panfichi, *Peru: Caught in the Crossfire* (Jefferson City: M. Peru Peace Network-USA, 1992). For information on forced migration to Lima, the capital of the nation, due to violence in the countryside see Robin Kirk, *The Decade of Chaqwa: Peru's Internal Refugees* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1991). The bibliography in Spanish about the massive migration to the cities, in particular to Lima, is extensive. See, for example, José Maros Mar, *Desborde Popular y Crisis del Estado: el Nuevo Rostro del Peru* (Lima, 1984); and Carlos Iván Degregori, Cecilia Blondet, and Nicolás Lynch, *Conquistadores de un Nuevo Mundo* (Lima, 1986).

agrarian reform carried out by General Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-75), new urban areas proliferated within the district of San Jeronimo. These urban areas are continuing to grow and are becoming suburbs of the metropolis. During Velasco's government the growth of public education and the increase in public and private transportation had an important impact in San Jeronimo. The number of *transportistas* (people who work in transportation and/or own the means of transportation) greatly increased. Today, about 20 percent of the population of the town works in transportation as their main economic activity.³⁴

One of the effects of the growth of public education in San Jeronimo during the 1970s and 1980s has been the increased access to it for women. Some of them, still not the majority, through higher education and technical training have started to have access to urban, skilled occupations previously unavailable to women (such as accounting, teaching, and technical

32. For a concise study of the development of Cusco's regional economy in relationship to urban growth see Patricia Ruiz Bravo and Carlos Monge, *Cusco Ciudad y Mercado* (Cusco: Centro Bartolomé de las Casas, 1983). During the 1970s, Cusco developed into a cosmopolitan city full of hotels, restaurants, and souvenir stores. Even though the tourist industry had started to grow in the 1950s, it was not until the 1970s that Cusco and its famous Inca ruins of Machu-Picchu became tourist meccas.

33. Information from CEDUR-Ununchis, Cusco, 1990.

34. Information from a survey about socioeconomic aspects of San Jeronimo that I conducted in 1990. This survey has also revealed that the economic activities of San Jeronimo people are very diversified. While about 80 percent of the families practices some small-scale, part-time agriculture, only 20 percent of this population gains half of their income from this activity, and 45 percent gains only one fourth or less. Apart from agriculture, the other economic activities in the town are clearly divided by gender. This, however, is changing among those who are now under twenty years of age. Most of the women are involved in some kind of petty commerce. About half of the adult male population have become part of the regional urban petty bourgeoisie (formed by professionals, cattle dealers, *transportistas*, state and private employees, and technicians). The remaining adult men are occupied as craftsmen (e.g., tailors, masons, carpenters, tile-makers) and as unskilled wage earners (e.g., janitors, bus conductors).

jobs).³⁵ Single women under twenty years of age had also been excluded from performance in public events, yet since the mid-1970s, larger numbers of them have participated in sports and social clubs, and (more recently) have begun participating in *comparsa* performances in honor of their “patron saint.”³⁶ They formerly were either excluded from or occupied a more passive role in these events.

Young men, like young women, have adopted a more cosmopolitan outlook than that of the older generation through greater access to higher education and urban skilled occupations, combined with the growing influence of national and international mass media. This new outlook among both men and women is also evident in their *comparsas* through which young *jeronimianos* are struggling to assert their views over and against the dominant regional ideology of gender and ethnic identity.

The Cultural Institutions in Cusco

Cusqueños generally use the term “cultural institutions” (*instituciones culturales*) to refer to those organizations in charge of promoting “traditions” and “folklore.”³⁷ The first cultural

35. Although men continue to receive higher levels of education than women (i.e. parents invest more in sending men to the university or technical schools than in sending women), in this generation, thanks to coed schools, women and men are almost equally receiving primary and high school education.

36. The patron saint, the Catholic saint who is considered the main protector of the *jeronimianos* and in whose honor the main ritual of the town is performed, is Saint Jerome. As its name suggests, San Jeronimo has recognized the saint as its patron since its foundation in the colonial period.

37. Sometimes these institutions are called “folkloric.” As in the case of *Los Majeños*, *comparsas* now and then seek to be legally acknowledged as “cultural” or “folkloric” institutions.

institutions were formed in the 1920s by representatives of the intellectual movement called *indigenismo*.³⁸ Members of these institutions—artists, intellectuals, and other members of the mestizo middle class in the city of Cusco—have since devoted their efforts to configuring a regional identity based on their idea of “folklore” and their created repertory of *cusqueño* “traditions.”³⁹ The members of this provincial urban class were the first to re-create and invent a music and dance repertoire, staging presentations and thus initiating the process of “folklorization” of Andean music and dance.⁴⁰ By the 1960s the first state-sponsored cultural institutions were founded. These institutions became widespread only by the 1970s as an integral part of the Velasco regime’s attempt to create a national identity based on tradition and folklore. The school system, the creation of state cultural institutions, and the promotion of contests were the means to that end.

Through a repertoire of *cusqueño* traditions and the promotion of folklore, the members of both private and state-sponsored cultural institutions have without a doubt shaped the practices of *comparsas* in and outside of the city of Cusco.

38. Dating from the 1850s in Lima and in the provinces, *indigenismo* was a series of intellectual movements on the part of the non-“Indians” from different social and political perspectives that sought to make the “Indian” a central focus of study, identity construction, and sometimes, political action. The bibliography on *indigenismo* is large. See José Tamayo Herrera, *Historia del Indigenismo Cuzqueño, Siglos XVI-XX* (Lima, 1980); José Deustua and José Luis Rénique, *Intelectuales, Indigenismo y Descendentalismo en el Perú* (Cusco: Centro Bartolomé de las Casas, 1984); and Efraín Kristal, *The Andes Viewed from the City: Literary and Political Discourse on the Indian in Peru 1848-1930* (New York, 1987).

39. For an expanded analysis of this attempt at identity construction between the 1920s and the 1980s, and for an explanation of the concepts of *cusqueño* “traditions” and “folklore,” see Mendoza-Walker, “Shaping Society Through Dance,” ch. 2.

40. See Thomas Turino, “The State and Andean Musical Production in Peru,” in Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer, eds., *Nation States and Indians in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991); and Mendoza-Walker, “Shaping Society Through Dance,” ch. 2.

The dances promoted by the cultural institutions generally exclude or give passive roles to women, present idyllic images of hardworking and at times lustful or aggressive indigenous peasants, and/or evoke romanticized images of the past. Therefore dances such as *Los Majeños* and *Los Qollas* are encouraged by the members of cultural institutions because they fit their model of tradition.

From their privileged position in the capital city and as authorities in the field of *cusqueño* "culture," the ranking members of these institutions have set certain models that *comparsa* members have used in attempting to redefine their identity. In mestizo towns like San Jeronimo these models have influenced the forms that the dances have taken (for example, choreographies and costumes) and the dancers' perceptions about their roles as representatives of local and regional folklore. Members of this town have long participated in Cusco city rituals and have readily used the models employed in the activities of the cultural institutions.

The Events of Corpus and their Repercussions in San Jeronimo

The "events," or rather event, of Corpus refers to the 1989 celebration in the city of Cusco of the festival of Corpus Christi, one of the main symbols of Cusco mestizo identity, in which dances from the Altiplano outnumbered those considered "traditional" in Cusco. The immediate reaction of Cusco city authorities and "cultural" experts (members of cultural institutions), widely publicized by the media, was to explain this event as a consequence of the "invasion from Puno" and to start a campaign to prohibit the performance of those dances in Cusco. While most of the dances performed at that event were originally from Bolivia and belonged to a common repertoire

of the transborder culture shared by the people of the Peruvian Altiplano and much of Bolivia, *cusqueños* called the dances as well as the "invasion" "*puneñas*," referring (often pejoratively) to their neighbors of Puno.⁴¹ Although most of the performers were actually *cusqueños*, or *puneños* brought from Puno by *cusqueños* who frequently traveled to the area, the opponents of the performance of Altiplano dances blamed *puneño* migrants in the city of Cusco for "invading" their neighborhoods and their most important ritual. Nevertheless, as one inquired into the motivations of these opponents, it became apparent that their strong reaction to the event of Corpus stemmed from their realization that these Altiplano dances had become so popular among young *cusqueños* that their spread was virtually unstoppable.

In San Jeronimo, the public and private debates about the "correctness" of the young townspeople's performance of Altiplano dances in the town's main religious festivity (the patron saint celebration) centered on two issues, upon which performers and their opponents held different views. The first was the role of women in public ritual performance, specifically ritual dance performance. The second was the frames of reference under which local identity was to be defined. In the discussion about both issues it was clear that the changing social experience of younger *jeronimianos*, especially of women, had led them to explore these two issues by adopting dances from the Altiplano. They had made use of the wider national and international repertoire at hand, largely displacing regionalist, male-centered models of *cusqueño* folklore by adding cosmopolitan and transnational elements to the negotiation of local identity.

41. If one were to make a regional hierarchy based on dominant *cusqueño* ideology about the relative prestige of southern Andean departments, Arequipa would be at the top, Cusco next, and Puno at the bottom. Racism as well as economic and political power play a central role in this classification. People from Arequipa are considered the "whitest" of the area.

Numerous factors must be considered to understand the popularity of Altiplano dances among young *cusqueños*. These include: migration within the department of Cusco and between Cusco and Puno, smuggling across the Peru-Bolivia border, urban growth in the Cusco region, expansion of the national educational and communication systems, and the role of the international media in promoting certain musical styles as representative of "Andeans." These musical styles have mainly come from the Bolivian urban tradition of "folkloric" music internationally popularized by groups such as the *Savia Andina*, *Kjarkas*, and *Proyección Kjarkas* (see below).⁴²

Like previous generations of *comparsa* performers, these young *jeronimianos* face ambiguities in defining their identity. First, they still accept that *cusqueño* regional identity is best represented by the type of traditional dances that the cultural institutions promote. They often perform traditional dances or regional folklore in their high schools or institutions of higher education. But in decisions about their own identity at the local level, they reject the gender and ethnic stereotypes promoted by those dances, stereotypes also favored by the adult *comparsas* of the town, and instead choose the Altiplano dances. In contrast to traditional Cusco dances, Altiplano dances feature women in large numbers and leading roles. Altiplano dances also discard the bucolic and romantic image of the Andean past and present. Without masks, dancing to the tunes of their favorite internationally-acclaimed Bolivian groups, displaying athletic skills and wearing shiny, bright costumes, these young performers show that they are part of a transnational culture, urban and cosmopolitan, shared by the young population of other Andean countries.

A second conflict emerges as these *cusqueños* seek to identify themselves in relation to the larger national and interna-

42. About Bolivian "folkloric" music see Gilka Wara Céspedes, "New Currents in *Musica Folklorica* in La Paz, Bolivia," *Latin American Music Review* 5, no. 2 (1984): 217-42 and Leichtman, "Musical Interaction."

tional communities. While the Altiplano dances that they perform seem to overcome some dichotomies ever present in the *cusqueño* traditional dances, such as white/Indian, patron/servant, urban/rural, these dances still address wider national and transnational dichotomies that are based on a relationship between center and periphery. Because these dances are considered "folkloric" and representative of the Andes or highland region, for local performers and their audiences they continue to be cultural forms that differentiate the highland periphery, to which *cusqueños* belong, from the coastal metropolis, or the third world from Europe and North America.

A *comparsa* of young *jeronimianos* started to dance the *Tuntuna* in 1983 and was promoted and supported from the very beginning by the members' parents who had an urban economic activity: they were the owners and drivers of a bus line that connected San Jeronimo to Cusco city. The group, (comprised of men and women in equal numbers), had been first organized to carry on studies and to play sports. After five years, when this organization had matured, the members decided to make a public presentation in the most important ritual of the town as a way to take an active part in this central social event. In order to do that they needed a dance that featured men and women in equal numbers. As already mentioned, the majority of traditional mestizo *cusqueño* dances either do not include women or give them a marginal role. This was a fact frequently recalled by young *cusqueños* in the confrontations with their opponents. On the other hand, the youngsters argued, all the Altiplano dances allowed women in large numbers. Therefore this *comparsa*, as well as *Los Mollos* (the other younger-generation *comparsa* which emerged a few years after the first), chose an Altiplano dance.

At the moment of the emergence of these two *comparsas*, it was clear that the repertoire available to the young *cusqueños* was no longer limited to that of Cusco music and dances. At the time the *comparsas* arose, music from Bolivia, played constantly on the radio, had gained great popularity among young

mestizos in Cusco. The favorite melodies which are danced in *La Tuntuna* are those popularized by the Bolivian group *Proyección Kjarkas*.⁴³ Within this repertoire of Bolivian music, the songs that are performed for the *Tuntuna* are the ones that have a rhythm that is known as *Saya*, a tropical rhythm played at a fast tempo which purportedly originated among black slaves in Bolivia. This kind of music is, for young *jeronimianos*, something that unites them with the rest of the urban youth of the Southern Andes. At the same time, this music is a link between that which they considered their own—"Andean" or "Southern Andean"—and that which comes from the outside, such as the popular tropical styles *cumbia*, *chicha*, and *salsa* which they dance at their parties.⁴⁴ Young *jeronimianos* consider *La Tuntuna* dance and music closer both to their "folkloric" culture and to their festive practices outside of the public ritual contexts. For example, in both *La Tuntuna* and in the tropical styles mentioned above, shoulder shaking is central to the dance style.

Young *cusqueños* seem to have found in dances like *La Tuntuna* the vitality of renewal and change while keeping within the boundaries of the "folkloric." In *La Tuntuna*, for example, the sense of dynamism comes not only from the fact that, as mentioned above, the dance is full of acrobatic and athletic movements, but also from the absence of a set choreography. The fact that the dancers can change the choreography every year was another argument that the young *cusqueños* used to defend their dances against their opponents. In San Jeronimo the members of the two young *comparsas* practice several times a week for over a month before the annual patron saint festivity. These young *jeronimianos* maintained that it was too

43. While I was in Cusco, *Proyección Kjarkas* performed there twice; most young *jeronimianos*, certainly all *La Tuntuna* performers, attended these concerts.

44. About the role of coastal tropical music in highland towns, see Raúl Romero, "Música urbana en un contexto campesino, en Paccha (Junín)," *Antropológica* 7 (1989): 119-33.

boring to repeat the same choreography every year as do those who perform traditional *cusqueño* dances.

Young *jeronimianos* who perform Altiplano dances often expressed their boredom with traditional *cusqueño* dances as well as their rejection of the regionalist ideology propagated by the members of cultural institutions and of the adult *comparsas* of the town. Responding to those who criticize their performance, one *jeronimiano* said:

...we always reply to them: "Why in all the public activities and religious festivals of Cusco do we always see the same Cusco dances? And why not bring in dances from different parts of our land, for example, from Puno since we do not see much of that around here?" ...I think this can be done because Peru is integrated, we have to take it as a whole, right?... This is a way to innovate, to make new things known here....⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, after the "events of Corpus" *Los Majeños*, as "the" folkloric/cultural institution of the town, led the opposition to the performance of Altiplano dances by the two *comparsas* of young *jeronimianos*. Temporarily suspending its competition with *Los Majeños*, *Los Qollas*, the other main adult *comparsa* of the town, supported their efforts in the name of strengthening local traditions. In the public debates at the town hall, members of both adult *comparsas* seemed to dismiss offhandedly the argument of the young women that mestizo traditional dances gave them almost no opportunity to perform. Nevertheless, when I interviewed some of these fervent opponents, they not only acknowledged that most traditional *cusqueño* mestizo dances were male dances but they also expressed prejudices against the participation of women in this kind of ritual performance. The president of *Los Majeños comparsa* said the following when discussing with me the argu-

45. Interview conducted in 1989 with one of the leading founders of the San Jeronimo *La Tuntuna comparsa*.

ment of the young *jeronimianos* about the lack of female presence in mestizo *cusqueño* dances:

You see, the young people of San Jeronimo who perform Altiplano dances say: "That's how it is, there are no other dances that we can all perform, there are none" ... It is true, in Altiplano dances there are a lot of women, in our dance [*Los Majeños*], instead, there is only one, one woman against nineteen men. [Laughter] She has to be open-minded, right? She has to know how to defend herself against all the piranhas.⁴⁶

In his comment this *Majeño* dancer expressed the prejudices which most adult *jeronimianos* and *cusqueños* hold against the participation of women in this kind of public performance. They consider it "dangerous" for women to spend so much time without the close supervision of parents and/or partners in rehearsals and during the days of the patron-saint festivity.⁴⁷ The danger, according to this ideology, comes from the assumption that women are fragile and can be easy targets for seduction; they may be attacked by "piranhas." This danger is purportedly higher during religious festivals due to the amount of drinking and social freedom. Until very recently only single women performed in *comparsas*. Nevertheless, the oldest non-single female members of the Altiplano dance *comparsas* in San Jeronimo have been pioneers in continuing to perform in their *comparsas*. They have not been free from criticism.

During my research the prejudice against women participating in large numbers and actively in *comparsas*, and against married women participating in any way, was not always obvious, but it was nevertheless present in comments such as those of the *Majeño* quoted above. Most of the time, however, the most open element of criticism by the adult *comparsas* and members of cultural institutions was based on *cusqueño* region-

46. Interview conducted in 1990.

47. It is common practice in Cusco that couples live together and have children before they get married. It is also not uncommon to find single mothers since those relationships are broken from time to time. The proper place of a woman with a partner or a child is considered to be at home.

alist ideology. According to these critics, there was nothing that tied the Altiplano dances to their local and regional history and sociocultural reality, referring to the rural and indigenous aspects of that reality.

Despite this opposition and criticism, the young *comparsas* of San Jeronimo have continued to perform their Altiplano dances in the patron-saint festivity. Arguing that all townspeople have the right to pay homage to the saint in the best way they can, they have continued their public presentations. Controversy and confrontations over the performance of Altiplano dances continue to mark ritual in Cusco today.

Conclusion

Focusing on the struggle between *comparsas* which perform Altiplano dances and traditional cultural institutions, I have sought to demonstrate how *comparsa* performance, considered by performers and audiences as "folkloric," has become in Cusco a site for transformation. It clearly has not filled its purportedly conservative role. By selecting Altiplano "folkloric" dances and performing them in the very places where they are prohibited, young *cusqueños*, especially women, have devoted their efforts to transforming the dominant ideology, an ideology that portrays women as passive and fragile. From a regionalist standpoint, the adherents of this ideology also want to deny an emergent mestizo urban and cosmopolitan identity, contesting this in the name of a *cusqueño* "traditional" identity that must remain rural and "Indian," and that should glorify certain aspects of the past.

The selection of Altiplano dances and the efforts to give them local meanings through ritual performances could not be understood if one saw these performances as mere reflections of changes occurring in the rest of the society. The agency of the

performers themselves requires analysis. What is happening in Cusco today is that, through these performances, the dancers are shaping society by opposing certain dominant views of women and of ethnic identity.

The popularity of Altiplano dances in Cusco poses many other questions about *cusqueños*' gender, ethnic, and class identity and their notions of "tradition" and "modernity," than those explored here. For example, not all the Altiplano dances are the same, and the choices that young *cusqueños* have made among those dances reflects their social and economic resources as well as the performers' cultural preferences. This article leaves many open questions. However, the disputes over the performance of Altiplano dances in Cusco demonstrate that *comparsa* ritual performance can be a site for performers to engage actively in the transformation of their society.