

# The Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship

## A Movimiento for Queer Chicana/os and Latina/os

Anita Tijerina Revilla

The Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS) is an organization dedicated to nurturing queer Latina/o, Chicana/o culture through practices that recognize the intimate relations of art, activism and scholarship. For AJAAS, “Jotería” represents a decolonizing Latina/o-Chicana/o feminist, queer consciousness and praxis. By way of community-building and knowledge sharing, we facilitate a generative and communal space to map and shape our stories toward a Jotería homeland.

— AJAAS Mission Statement

AJAAS has a long history/jota-historia. This history is mainly undocumented and lives in the oral testimonios of our ancestors, elders, and *comunidad*, and among activists, artists, and poets.

The origins of AJAAS are intertwined with those of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS), which was established in 1972 as the National Caucus of Chicano Social Scientists and later became the National Association for Chicano Studies (NACS). In 1986, the Chicana Caucus formally incorporated into the NACS structure to insert issues related to women, gender, and Chicana inclusivity/exclusion within the organization. A formal anti-sexual harassment statement was incorporated in 1989. The Lesbian Caucus was instituted in 1990 and was renamed the Lesbian, BiMujeres, and Trans Caucus in 2005. During the 1992 NACS conference, the National Association of Latino Gay Academics and Activists (NALGAA) was formed; it later became the

Joto Caucus. According to the NACCS (2012) website, the Gay Caucus became a part of NACS in 1993 and was renamed the Joto Caucus in 1995; however, Raúl Coronado states that NALGAA was renamed the Joto Caucus in 1993 “to keep the edge” (2006, 234). Also in 1995, the organization’s name changed to the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies to reflect gender consciousness and female inclusion in the focus of the organization. Each of these changes marked a struggle of marginalized groups within NACCS. Collectively, they worked to create spaces for themselves while reminding the rest of the membership that they were integral to the continued success and growth of the entire association. With each change, there were conversations, debates, conflicts, and resolutions. This is common within social justice projects.

In 2007, members of the Joto Caucus proposed an intellectual and social *encuentro* that would be dedicated solely to the scholarship, activism, art, and contributions of Jotería. While NACCS had officially incorporated feminist and queer themes into its agenda, there was still a desire for a space that was wholly committed to these topics and struggles, in and outside of academia. Thus, in collaboration with feminist and queer activists, students, and one faculty member at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), the Joto Caucus and the UNLV Women’s Studies Department sponsored their first conference, “Towards a Queer Homeland: Bridging Communities and Resisting Hate,” on November 9–10, 2007. The Vegas conference emphasized the collaboration and inclusion of men, women, and non-gender-conforming people. In this sense it was distinctly different from the women-only and men-only queer spaces that were purposefully created and protected at NACCS for reasons of survival and autonomy.

That first conference was an exciting success (fig. 1). Many jotos and jotas remarked that this was a historic/queerstoric conference—similar to the 1969 National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference held in Denver, except that this conference was distinctly feminist and queer! There was a sense that we had accomplished something very important and transformational with this *encuentro*. And so we vowed to do it again. The second conference was held at California State University, Los Angeles, on October 9–11, 2008 (fig. 2). The event was titled “Sacred Space Making:

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Figure 1. Poster for the first Joto Caucus conference, November 9–10, 2007.

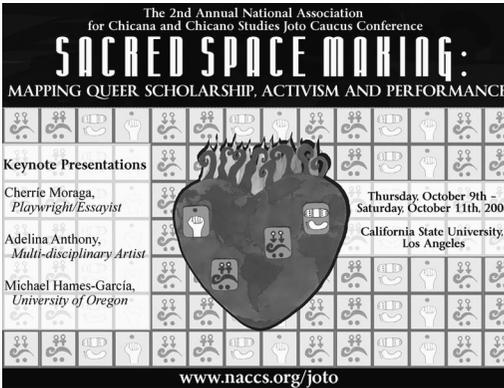


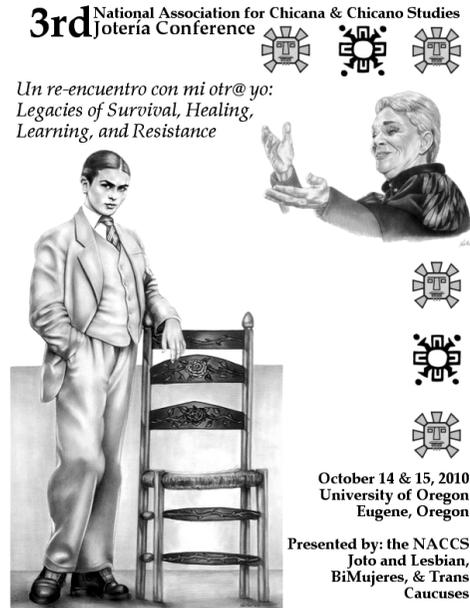
Figure 2. Poster for the second Joto Caucus conference, October 9–11, 2008.

Mapping Queer Scholarship, Activism, and Performance,” and it too was magnificent. From morning to late evening, the agenda was packed with presentations, plenaries, keynotes, performances, and social events.

Both the first and second conferences were organized in collaboration with members of the Lesbian, BiMujeres, and Trans (LBMT) Caucus. The third conference, held at the University of Oregon on October 15–16, 2010, was the first to be intentionally co-sponsored by both the Joto Caucus and the LBMT Caucus (fig. 3). It was also the first conference that highlighted the inclusion of mixed-race people and transgender members of our communities in participation and programming. It was titled “Un Re-encuentro con mi otr@ yo: Legacies of Survival, Healing, Learning, and Resistance.”

After the third conference, we met in 2011 to plan our next steps. We agreed that we wanted to continue our work as more than caucus members of NACCS. Rather, we wanted to create our own association,

Figure 3. Poster for the third Joto Caucus conference October 15–16, 2010.



as a complement to NACCS and MALCS (Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social, created in 1985).

We embarked on this endeavor at Berkeley on October 14–15, 2011, when we founded the Association for Jotería Arts, Activism and Scholarship. Since then, we have had a series of working meetings in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. Each working meeting is committed to engaging new people who represent different facets of our communities. We are building the foundation of AJAAS as a collaboration rather than basing it on the vision of a few people. Already, we have encountered disjunctures and challenges, but we have a core group of committed members who are pushing forward.

Our first AJAAS national conference, “We Speak for Ourselves: Decolonizing Nuestr@s Conciencias, Cuerpos, La Tierra y el Alma,” was held at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, on October 19–21, 2012 (fig. 4). We had an amazing turnout and an intense experience as we witnessed great voices, performances, and Jotería theory in praxis. Our keynote speakers and activist scholars blew us away with their stories of resistance. The 2012 AJAAS Jotería Lifetime Achievement Award recipients were Felicia Alvarado Elizondo, aka Felicia Flames, a longtime LGBT activist and participant in the Compton’s cafeteria riot in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, and Dr. Rusty Barceló, a Chicana lesbian and



Figure 4. Poster for the fourth Joto Caucus conference October 19–21, 2012.

president of Northern New Mexico College. They brought many of us to tears as they shared their stories and we honored their journeys and life accomplishments. We also enjoyed almost thirty concurrent panels, workshops, and performances that drew presenters and participants from all the over the country, with a strong youth and undocuqueer presence. In August 2013 we continued laying the foundation for this organization at another working meeting in San Francisco.

At every step, we are employing a distinct muxerista and Jotería consciousness that is expansive and inclusive. We invite all Jotería and allies to join us in this work and to support the Jotería that has always been a part of Chicana/o studies and the feminist community, as well as the Chicana/o movement.

I will end with our association's vision for the future, which was drafted collectively by several members of AJAAS at our working meeting in San Francisco in the summer of 2013:

We envision a world that affirms Jotería consciousness and that celebrates multiple pathways for generating knowledge, sharing

experiences, and becoming catalysts for social change. We seek to live in a world free of all forms of ideological, institutional, interpersonal and internalized oppression.

Activists, artists, and scholars, all of whom are intimately connected to our growth and future, also drafted a vision statement and poem at our working meeting in Las Vegas in February 2012. While we opted for a shorter statement for clarity in San Francisco, I believe the earlier version offers our wider vision:

We envision a world that affirms a Jotería consciousness and celebrates multiple ways of knowing, being, and becoming. We seek to live in a world where all forms of ideological, institutional, interpersonal and internalized oppressions are eradicated everywhere. We believe that critical knowledge of self is a path to individual and collective wellbeing.

A healthy Jotería embodies *familia* and contributes to a social ethos of humanization and transformation in the face of dehumanizing pressures. Our *familias* are grounded in establishing trust through communicating truthfully and kindly. AJAAS dreams of communities where members of the Jotería flourish. Fluidity is what binds us.

A present of love

Of healing

Of communing among generations

Of solidarity and imagination

Of self-actualization

Where continuous movement of our minds, bodies, and spirits is encouraged

A world where violence is challenged

Where we voice our pain

Where we heal each other

A world of renewal

A future of abundance

Of transformation

A future where we are autonomous

And free.

## Works Cited

- Coronado, Raúl. 2006. "Bringing It Back Home: Desire, Jotos, and Men." In *The Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Angie Chabram-Dernersesian, 233–40. New York: Routledge.
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