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The Festival of the Mejorana in Panama; the Spirit of Competition as Connected with National Pride

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HAWAII INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE – JANUARY 5-8, 2014

TITLE PAGE

- a) **Title:** The Festival of the *Mejorana* in Panama; the Spirit of Competition as Connected with National Pride
- b) **Topic Area:** Arts Education and/or Higher Education
- c) **Presentation Format:** This presentation falls under the conference category of “Abstracts” and most appropriately would be included with “Paper Sessions.”
- d) **Description.** See below –
- e) **Author:** Elizabeth Rhodes – Affiliation and contact information, see below.

75-Word Description: In the Republic of Panama, the Festival of the *Mejorana* is an event that takes place each year allowing for musicians and dancers from across the country to gather and celebrate as well as compete. The idea of competition provides a platform to discuss commonalities among the performers as well as their differences. This presentation will highlight the national pride of Panamanian folkloric performers as associated with a specific, annual festival venue.

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ABSTRACT

This paper presentation is grounded in on-going research on folkloric dance in the Republic of Panama. My original field work occurred in 1996-97 while in residence as a Fulbright Scholar in the Department of Dance at the University of Panama. During that time period, I witnessed folkloric performances in venues including the National Theatre, schools, and on village streets during festivals, documenting the dancing through video, still photography, and hand-written notes. I participated in rehearsals and performances with the national folkloric company and conducted qualitative, intensive interviews whenever possible. Within each celebration, I observed cohesiveness of the participating groups as well as individual pride in ones wardrobe and performance which ultimately supported a sense of competition. Examples include the devils during the Congo Ritual who seek to control their neighborhood street and out-dance rivals, companies formed to represent different departments on the University campus, and annual festivals where formal competitions are organized and prizes are awarded during the culmination of the event. One of the best-known and largest occurrences of the last example mentioned above is the Festival of the *Mejorana* which takes place in September in the town of Guararé. Folk groups from the diverse provinces of Panama travel to perform and vie for awards in organized events that include competitions for the best musician of the *mejorana*, a stringed instrument with Spanish legacy, as well as the best folkloric dance troupe. The competition for the *reina* or queen would have already taken place, and the handing down of the crown is another aspect of the festival which derives from competition and selection. The festival was established over 40 years ago by folklorists Mañuel and Dora Zárate, and it continues to bring together communities from across Panama as well as observers from other destinations and nationalities. In addition to providing an overview of the Festival of the *Mejorana*, I will describe specific folkloric dances that would have been performed during the early years of this celebration as well as more contemporary times. By using the concept of competition, I will be able to discuss commonalities among the groups performing while also offering observations dealing with diversity of theme, choreographic design, and movement style as part of each group's meaningful representation of their region or province which collectively contributes to an overall national pride.

Research Objectives:

- To provide an overview of the Festival of the *Mejorana* in Panama
- To discuss one to two specific dances presented for competition as part of the festival
- To identify connectivity between the competitive aspect of folkloric dance and national pride, as based on the specific venue of the Festival of the *Mejorana*

Proposed Methodology: The project is primarily qualitative. A literature search has been conducted, and a review of personal archives from past field work will take place. At present, travel arrangements for collection of new data have been made, and continuation of primary source field work in Panama is projected for September of 2013.

Expected Outcomes: See abstract.

**HAWAII INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE on
EDUCATION**

JANUARY 5-8, 2014

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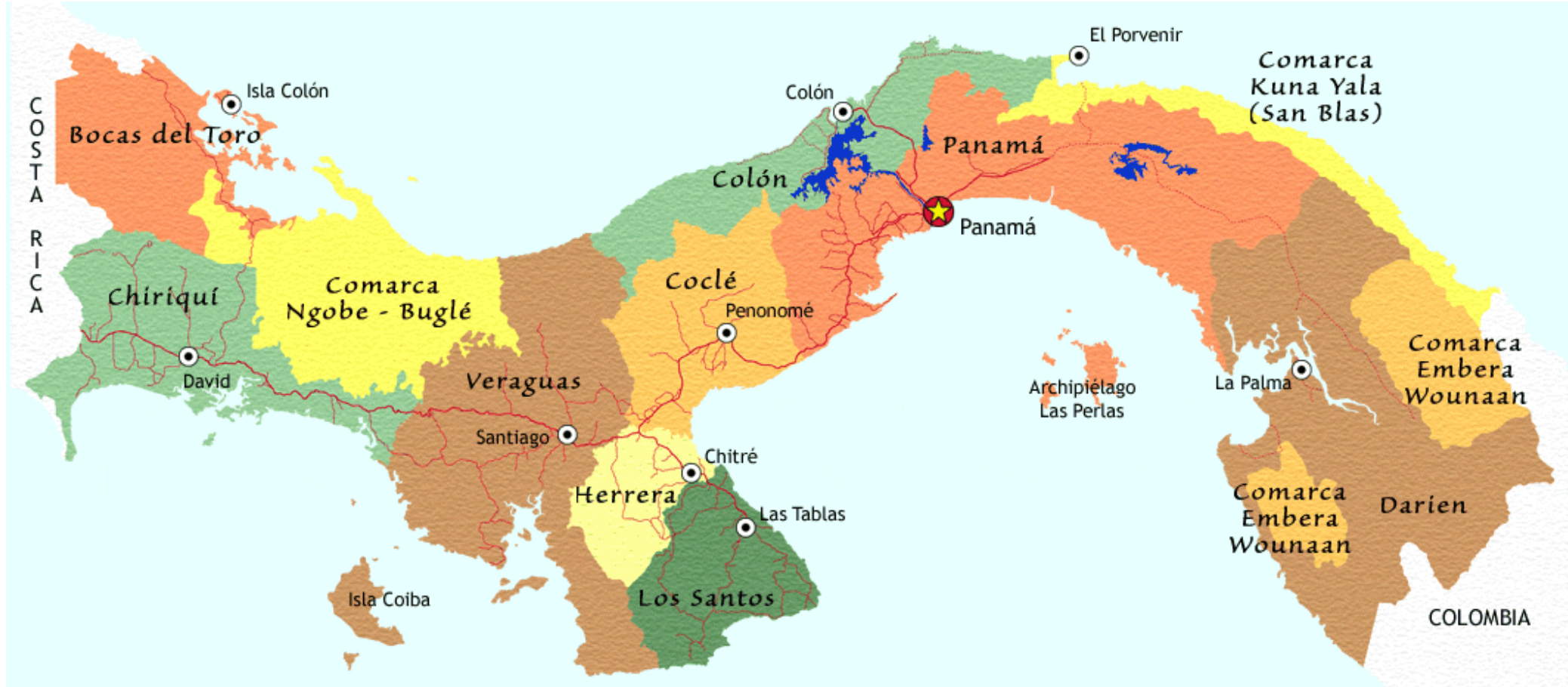
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“The Festival of the *Mejorana* in Panama;
the Spirit of Competition as
Connected with National Pride”

Background - Festival of the Mejorana

- Annual celebration - September
- Founders - Dora and Manuel Zárate
- Mejorana - stringed instrument
- Village of Guararé - province of Los Santos

Republic of Panama - Provinces



Components



Pollera and Mejorana



Competitions

Mejorana

Tambor/
drum

Accordion

Voice

Folklórico
dance

Competitions – Youth Category

Tambor/Drum



Voz/Voice



Dance – Geographic Representation



Los Congos Negros - Colón



Los Diablos de Espejo – Portobelo



Los Diablos Sucios – Chitré



Folkloric Group - Guararé

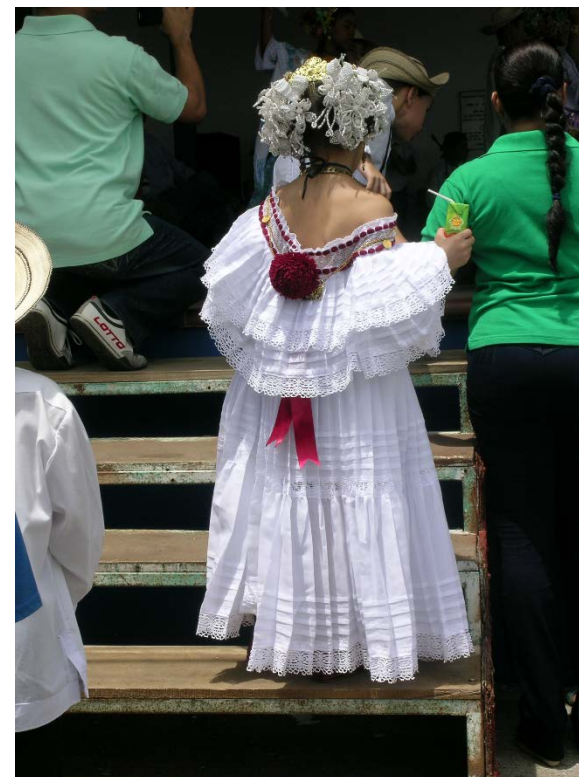


Spanish Influences

Tembleques



Pollera



Pollera Elaborada



Examples of Dances – influences & themes

- Cumbia
- El Punto
- Curacha Montañera
- La Marinera

Preparation for Performance



Receiving the certificate

