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DANCING FROM THE MARGINS: BODY NARRATIVES OF RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Chicana, Mexicana-Peruana, and Puerto Rican grassroots dance performers in the U.S.-Mexico border communities of San Diego use dance as a form of resistance against [post]colonialism, imperial borders and U.S. hegemony. This project is from a qualitative methods approach that includes interview research, visual ethnography, and ethnographic experiences with the dancers and performances. My analysis includes five thematic parts: First, I examine how dancing is a “decolonial praxis” to reclaim ancestral roots and knowledges. Second, I analyze the impact and influences that the U.S.-Mexico border and other imperial borders have on women of color grassroots dancers and how their dances are resisting and traversing these borders. Third, I show how women of color grassroots dancers are challenging heteropatriarchal discourses on our bodies and in our communities. Fourth, I examine how women of color use dance as a source of healing, and how that healing extends beyond the dancers’ bodies and to our communities. Lastly, I conclude with how women of color use their bodies and dance to produce and pass on feminist epistemologies of resistance and liberation.

Key terms: *Danza*, *Bomba*, *Zapateado Rebelde*, bodily discourse, gender, race, sexuality, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, Imperial, U.S. hegemony, U.S-Mexico Border, Resistance.

Page Break

INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago, for International Women's¹ Day 2007, the woman of color circle I was a part of organized a special celebration to showcase our individual passions and talents. It was a space created to build sisterhood, solidarity, and share our stories and knowledge with one another. We were all very excited, and some of the women immediately started identifying the artistic talent they would be sharing and the food they would be bringing. Ideas of various talents were tossed around, like a video, singing, playing the guitar, painting, photography, and spoken word. I wondered, what I was going to do? I don't have any artistic talent, I don't draw, paint, play an instrument, write or sing. Then it came to me, I could dance! I must have said it out loud without realizing it. Two of the women in the group, turned to me and said excitedly, I can dance too! Great! We decided to create a collective dance piece.

On the evening of our celebration, we went around sharing our creations. We viewed drawings, paintings, video, dance and listened to spoken word, and song. It was beautiful. I loved to see and learn more about my *compañeras'* creative voices. We performed right outside in the back porch of a *compañera's* home. The firepit created a warm vibe that lit up our stage. It was an intimate and bold space we shared that evening. After we performed, the women cheered and embraced us. They were generous and kind with their compliments of our dance. They encouraged us to share and perform our dance outside of this space. We chuckled, laughed, and responded with a "naaahh, this is a one-time thing."

On September of 2007, we performed for the first time at the World Beat Center as Mujeres en Resistencia. Thanks to our *compañeras'* love, support, and inspiration, we dared to share our *zapateado* beyond the back porch of *compañera* Irene's home. As we emerged from a

woman of color space, we wanted to use our *zapateado* as an art of resistance and center a woman of color feminist consciousness and imagination.

Historically, women of color have theorized feminism from a place of struggle, acts of resistance, and “other materials besides conventional academic production” (Hurtado 1998:385), such as the use of music, poetry, song, literature, and daily verbal interaction (Hurtado 1998:385 & Hill Collins 2012:402). As a Chicana raised by immigrant working class parents, I learned from an early age how to negotiate my gendered, racialized, and class reality within a U.S. dominant discourse that represents an elite white heteropatriarchal culture.

I remember crossing between the United States-Mexico border at least 2-3 times a week to visit our family, friends and grandparents. On the way to my grandparents’ house, there was a long road that paralleled the border fence, and from my grandmother’s kitchen window there was a clear view of the physical border fence that divided Mexico from the United States. This memory became a part of my bordered consciousness and awareness of the existing differences and injustices along the borderlands. I watched men camp out along these lands, and further ahead (approaching the U.S. side) I feared what awaited, border patrol agents in their white and green blazers ready to detain and deport. I never got tired of looking out of my grandmother’s kitchen window, imagining all sorts of scenarios. Would some of these men get passed the agents in green and make it across, or would they get caught and get thrown back to Tijuana? What made me so different from these men, from the children in my grandparent’s neighborhood? Why were armed men in green trying to keep Mexicans out of *el otro lado* (the other side)?

I often wondered why some of my friends and family from Tijuana couldn’t visit me in San Diego, while it was only a 5-10 minute-drive from the border crossing to my home.

Although I often invited them to visit, they would respond by saying, “*no podemos cruzar*” (“we can’t cross”). I learned at an early age the absurdity of this border that divided a people, families, and friends, and how this physical border invaded our hearts and minds. Ironically, even those of us who could cross the border were not immune to the confine and oppression of borders, we encountered racialized, gendered and class borders on a daily basis.

My cultural marginality became a space of learning. I [re]claimed my historical and cultural roots, centered my transnational borderlands lived experience, and through dance, I theorized and produced a Chicana feminist borderlands discourse. Mexican and Chicana/o² art, women of color fictional writings, grassroots theatre, spoken word, and dance became my pedagogy of resistance. The more I learned about cultural resistance, acts of protest through creative expression and grassroots social movements, the more grounded and critical I became about the social, political and economic injustices that pervade locally, nationally and globally.

Cultural resistance has been and continues to be a powerful praxis against colonial and imperial systems of power. Historically, popular forms of resistance against repressive power structures has been through “subversive creativity and oppositional cultural expressions” (Kuumba, 2006:116). Women from colonized lands, like the U.S., have long resisted the violence upon their bodies, lands, and peoples.

In this paper, I will examine how women of color use dance to create artistic spaces of resistance and challenge post-colonial systems of oppression. As I explore how women of color performance artists use their art as resistance, I draw from Native feminist theory, Black feminist theory, and Chicana feminist theory. I explore how movement is directly used as “a narrative of the body’s history,” a storytelling tool (Karayanni, 2006:265), and reflections of sexual, ethnic, social, and political identities. I argue that women of color performance artists use their dance as

a “methodology of the oppressed” (Sandoval 1998:362) by centering historically marginalized women’s realities, lived experiences, ideas, and creative expressions of resistance as praxis for liberation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Worldviews shape epistemology and the ruling class shape worldviews. The United States has an "epistemological tradition" (Ladson-Billings, 2000:257) rooted in colonial and imperial apparatuses. Epistemology is not simply a "way of knowing," but rather, a "system of knowing" and functions as "both an internal logic and external validity" (Ladson-Billings, 2000:257). The United States’ national discourse upholds worldviews that only validate certain kinds of ideas and knowledge that align with a white heteropatriarchal and capitalist hegemony. The production of a U.S. dominant epistemology is an "effort to maintain power relations that continue to disadvantage those who are locked out the mainstream" (Ladson-Billings, 2000:263). Communities that fall outside of the dominant culture paradigm are identified as Other and forced to grapple with opposing "systems of knowing."

The United States’ dominant ways of knowing and thinking are rooted in colonial and imperial projects. The ruling class in the United States controls and distributes productions of knowledge and ideas associated with whiteness, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. U.S. colonialism and imperialism produce and sustain the ruling class by assigning rights, privileges, and access to wealth. It is one's positionality in relation to the state's dominant cultural discourse that determines rights over power, wealth and privilege. There are "systems of meaning and control" (Spade 2015) that operate within today's colonial and imperialist context that construct and prescribe a dominant way of being, knowing, and thinking. Such systems of "meaning and control" range from state policing, courts, legislation, education, religion, and social services.

The state then, controls and dictates rights, privilege, and capital, by defining and regulating a dominant citizenry and dominant culture that intersects with race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Culture has been used as a means to marginalize and control populations. Culture has also been used as a form of resistance against cultural hegemony. According to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "those with power shape society" and "our consciousness" (Marx & Engels 2002:42). The ruling class controls and produces ideas that filter into daily activity. These ideas "become normalized and naturalized, invisible," and "become, simply, our culture" (2002:42). The ruling class is the "ruling material force of society," as well as "its ruling intellectual force" (2002:48). Therefore, the dominant culture rule as "thinkers" and control the "production and distribution of ideas" and knowledge (2002:48). Marx and Engels believed that in order to change the dominant culture, one must "change the social and material base that produced it, and can only be achieved through revolutionary activity" (2002:42). I will be exploring "revolutionary activity," but not the kind that Marx and Engels had in mind, such as proletariat revolt. I will explore women of color dance as a "revolutionary activity" and a bodily discourse of resistance against U.S. cultural hegemony rooted in colonial and imperial power structures.

Women from colonized lands have engaged in cultural resistance as a form of revolutionary activity for centuries. According to the anti-colonialist Albert Memmi, "it is one thing to throw the colonizer out of your country, it is still another to expel the colonizer within yourself" (2002:193). The ruler's knowledge and ideas are forced and reinforced through violence and terror into the minds and bodies of the marginalized. So then, how do we expel the colonizer within ourselves? How do marginalized peoples achieve liberation? How do marginalized communities theorize their realities, produce and distribute their ideas and

knowledge? What tools do the marginalize use to tell their stories and bring their culture and experiences to the center?

I will explore how dance and movement is directly used as a "discourse of the body," (Desmond 2017:42) "a narrative of the body's history," (Karayanni, 2006:265) and a storytelling tool. I will examine how women of color, grass-roots dance performers in U.S.-Mexico border communities of San Diego, center their histories and socio-political identities on stage, and script an alternative discourse to postcolonial hegemony. I argue that grassroots dance is a method of resistance against the dominant culture and used as agency to produce community-based and women of color feminist epistemologies towards colonial and imperial emancipation. I explore the body of women of color dance performers as a site of resistance, cultural production, theorizing, and liberation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature offers case studies and theoretical analysis on the use of dance and theatre as powerful platforms and catalysts for social, political, and economic change. Examples primarily consist of women performers using their bodies and voice to challenge systemic and institutionalized oppression, such as heteropatriarchy, nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Though most of the literature centers around women performance artists, three of the case studies are of dance troupes that also include male performers. The literature offers a diverse global snapshot on women performance artists who protest injustices on stage and beyond.

Dance as Resistance: Global Perspectives

As I examine the literature that explores performance art as a weapon against the oppressor, I begin with looking at a group from the kingdom of Oku in Cameroon Grassfields of

Africa. Air Youth, a youth dance troupe (made up of both women and men), respond to colonial and state violence through strategies of appropriation (Argenti 2000). By the use of appropriation, Air Youth uses performance as “a means of transforming memories of oppression” (Argenti, 2000:753). Argenti (2006) believes that through performance, Air Youth positions itself within an existing repressive socio-political context and critically describes their relationship to the state. The author proposes that their performance may be capable of expressing the unspeakable of the “terrorizing powers,” and acts out the existing power structures that can only be narrated and spoken through dance and theatre (Argenti 2006). This case is a good example of how performing experiences of colonialism may be the only acceptable platform to voice their dissent against state repression, and a powerful political tool of resistance.

Repressive forms of controlling people's culture vary from nation to nation, and from time period to time period. Ruling powers feel the need to control people's cultures as a method of controlling people's knowledge, histories, ways of communicating, and social identities. In Indonesia, the New Order (1960s-1990s) established cultural policies that became a part of an aggressive process of control over cultural traditions by systematically muting cultural plurality and imposing a “national culture” as a means to secure national unity (Kellar, 2004:1). In a case study of Balinese Arja dancers, Kellar (2004) considers the dancers as agents in the “resurgence of Balinese cultural identity for gender issues in the post-New Order period” (2004:2). Through dance, Indonesian women reclaim their cultural Balinese roots as a subversive act to counter a state imposed national cultural project. The dancers also gain agency and disrupt gender norms by partaking in “unconventional lifestyles that their status as artists grants them” in and outside of the home (Kellar, 2004:2).

In 1983, dance became illegal in Pakistan. Dance was viewed as anti-Islamic, “a woman who dances represents a defiance of the regime and a threat to its order” (Pande, 2004:508). Despite the ban on dance, Sheema Keramani, a well-known dancer and social and political activist from Pakistan continued to dance and teach dance. Pande refers to Keramani's dance as "art as political" (2004). Through Keramani's subversive acts of dancing and teaching of dance, she scripts an alternative narrative against an imposed "national culture" rooted in patriarchy and hegemony. Similar to Keramani, Mallika Sarabhai, a well renowned performance artist from India and from around the world raises awareness and challenges of anti-Muslim sentiments in India, which has grown over the past century with Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) (Grau 2007). Sarabhai's performances challenge Hindu nationalism, repressive state actions, patriarchal policies, violence against women, and corporate greed (Grau 2007). Sarabhai describes her work as “womancentric,” and in one of her speeches stated, “what is anti-Muslim today will be anti-Dalit tomorrow and is anti-women all the time” (Grau, 2004:74). Keramani and Sarabhai center their dance performances from a woman's experience, but also bring forward other marginalized voices. Through dance, they actively combat extreme religious nationalist ideologies that perpetuate patriarchy and oppressive conditions for women and other marginalized groups.

Communities who fall outside of the dominant cultural paradigm are constantly negotiating social, political, and economic identities. The Cyprus island is in the Mediterranean Sea, divided between the Turkish north and the Greek south, and their race politics are complex and constantly negotiated (Karayanni 2006). Cyprus was once a province of the Ottoman Empire, and then passed to British Colonial rule, which enforced a strong nationalist ideology as an ostensibly unifying force. As a result, Cyprus's history of ethnic and political conflict has left a hegemonic ideology that perpetuates a Greek and Turkish dichotomy, homophobia, and

nationalism (Karayanni 2006:258). The author examines how modern and traditional Arab and Greek dance styles are reflective of one's sexual and ethnic identity. Karayanni (2006) proposes that through movement one has the power to embrace plurality and script narratives that reflect a peoples' histories. I agree with Karayanni's argument, dance is a powerful tool as a form of resisting hegemonic ideologies while also creating spaces and cultural bodily discourses that advocate for plurality.

The first works of literature I highlighted focused on how dance performance is used as a way to speak out against colonial oppression and cultural hegemony. In the case of the youth dancers of Cameroon, they are facing colonial violence, while the women dancers of Indonesia, Pakistan and India, are faced with a repressive nationalist agenda. All of the performers, with the exception of the Air Youth dancers, come from a professional dance background. The Air youth dance performers are a community-based dance group and perform for and among community.

Grassroots Theater: Global Perspectives

As I review the literature on grass-roots theatre as political and a catalyst for social change, I begin with global examples. Garlough (2008) examines a situated performance of a specific play titled "Women in Search of their History." She explores the characters in the play, women's roles, and the messages through a rhetorical analysis informed by feminist and performance theory. Garlough (2008) highlights that the common woman is not only represented in the performance, but she is also the protagonist and depicted as the "extraordinary woman." It is through this creative performance as well as other creative feminist spaces that the "common woman" (Garlough 2008) is brought from the margins to the center of a feminist discourse. It is paramount that a feminist discourse welcomes and integrates multiple experiences and voices that challenge patriarchy and actively bring a subaltern standpoint to the center. Grassroots

Indian feminist groups use street theater to create a cultural and political space for raising issues of rape, sexism, political corruption, caste system, and police brutality (Garlough, 2008). The women performing street theatre come from poorer and working class communities, and practice a “different kind of resistance to the project of the nation state, to capitalism,” and “to the project of unjust social order” (Menon 2012:168).

In the late 1970s, a group of Jamaican working-class women founded *Sistren*, a theatre collective to “communally articulate their struggles” and voice the abuses against women. *Sistren* formed as a response to the crisis of “sexual, domestic, and criminal abuses against women in Jamaica” (Akhter, 2008:433). *Sistren* used a “collective creation” methodology in their process of conceiving their performance pieces, which meant that there was a horizontal and collective process of creation (Akhter 2008). During performances, the audiences were allowed to actively participate, react, and respond, which blurred the lines between the performers and the audience (Akhter 2008). This created a space in which performers and audiences are one and the same, faced with similar communal struggles, building community and solidarity.

Theater Performance in The United States: From the Margins to the Center

Women of color in the United States are constantly negotiating multiple social and political identities within a national cultural narrative that reflects the dominance of an elitist white male's heteronormative imagination. Barbara Ann Teer was an influential artist and activist during the Black Arts Movement (1965-1976) who created “new women-centered African-based mythology and promoted community activism by providing a platform to discuss the devastating effects of racism” (Forsgren, 2015:137). Teer had been trained in Broadway, but after experiencing discrimination, she founded a Black theatre group and incorporated “the emotions

and spirituality within black female cultural practices” (Forsgren, 2015:139). Black feminist theorist, bell hooks, explains how personal testimony and personal experience “is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because usually it forms the base of our theory-making” (1992:81). Teer’s performance art exemplifies “liberatory feminist theory” through her lived experiences and innovative performance style of fusing religious practices/rituals with poetry, singing, chanting, and playing instruments (Forsgren 2015).

As a way to resist dominant United States culture, artists, poets, musicians, and dancers from the Black Arts Movement, “advocated a black aesthetic as a means to promote racial [liberation] and incite community activism against racist social and institutional practices in the United States and abroad” (Forsgren, 2015:136). While still in Broadway, Teer cut her hair into a “natural” or “afro,” in an effort to advocate for a black aesthetic (2015:140). Teer’s act of cutting her hair into a “natural” while on Broadway was a political act of resistance against “whitening” (Alamos-Pastrana 2009), while also reclaiming and asserting her cultural roots and aesthetics as a Black woman in the U.S.

Performing a racialized aesthetic rejects white hegemony, while also creating a woman of color discourse. Alamos-Pastrana (2009) discusses how cultural “whitening” is practiced in countries that were once European Colonies. The notion of “whitening” (*blanqueamiento*) refers to “ways in which physical and cultural characteristics associated with Blackness are erased, marginalized, or all together ignored as a means of constructing a whiter and by default, more modern nation” (Alamos-Pastrana 2009:578). Like in the United States, many countries throughout the Americas and across the globe have inherited the social construct of “whiteness” and everyone else who falls outside of “white” is viewed as “other” (Aschcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 1998). Mainstream culture on Broadway enforced a white aesthetic and expected Teer to subdue

her natural aesthetic as a Black woman. Women of color performance artists, like Teer, use their bodies and voices to challenge white hegemony and systemic oppression.

In the United States, women of color immigrants face multiple forms of discrimination because of their language, color of skin, non-western traditions and customs. Josefina Báez is a performance artist of poetry, dance and theatre (García-Peña, 2008). Báez' art highlights the Dominican immigrants' transethnic identity. Báez' work speaks to how Dominican immigrants negotiate and re-create their "cultural space/s" in a place like New York and the Dominican Republic, where "space is dominated by the powerful" (García-Peña 2008:38). Báez' performances are a praxis of resistance and a "methodology of the oppressed," (Sandoval 1998:362) they are "acts" and reflections of "daily resistance against the norm" (García-Peña 2008:39). Báez embodies her "otherness" (García-Peña 2008:39) by repositioning the immigrant from the margins to the center as she performs memories, culture, language, songs, and stories. García-Peña claims that Báez' play *Dominicanish* "embraces the contradictions created by politics of location, nationality, ethnicity, and race, in a hopeful gesture toward shattering the silences of marginal communities and a successful exercise to talking back" (2008:40). García-Peña emphasizes that Báez' work actively resists imposed homogenous ideas of immigrant identity as being monolithic, but rather she proves that "immigrant's 'trans' identities which are often used to alienate him or her are in fact tools that can be appropriated to confront the systems of oppression and to demand attention" (2008:40). Baez' work scripts a new narrative that is centered in a transethnic reality and other ways of being and knowing.

Like Báez, Imani Henry, Susana Cook, and Diyaa Mildred Gerestant are performance artists from New York who tell the stories of those whose gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, and class, places them at the margins. Henry, Cook, and Gerestant are queer

immigrant performance artists who disrupt the gender binary and whose performances “become fertile ground for activating social change” (Goddard, 2007:99). Cook is a “self-avowed butch lesbian from Argentina,” who critiques economic systems of power, and celebrates “butch/femme lesbian identities” (Goddard, 2007:98). Gerestant is a queer Haitian-American who performs gender “from many corners of the spectrum,” and “educates her audiences by elucidating her own potential to unmask gender” and explores “her own personal transformational path through gender, drag king performance, and spirituality” (Goddard, 2007:98). Henry is from the Caribbean, and identifies as queer, female-to-male “transsexual” activist who creates “characters that express masculine gender identities, ranging from butch women to playing himself” (Goddard, 2007:98). These queer performance artists use their art as a “catalyst for social change” and as a way to create an alternative discourse of gender that includes the “intersections of multiple identities” and brings queer voices to “center stage” (Goddard, 2007:97). Through grassroots theater, these diverse bodies and voices on stage are challenging systemic and institutionalized oppression of heteropatriarchy, nationalism, post/colonialism, and capitalism.

Decolonizing Through Dance in the United States

Colonial and imperial projects in the United States have systematically attacked past and present cultures and "systems of knowledge" from colonized peoples. Attempts to destroy Indigenous and African languages, spiritual practices, science, communal systems of living, economy and labor greatly depleted non-European cultures and their "systems of knowledge." Historically oppressed peoples have endured psychological and physical intergenerational trauma, and the healing of these traumas are essential and critical towards self-determination and empowerment. Jacob highlights how “Indigenous decolonization is about reclaiming traditions”

and the importance of healing from the settler colonial violence that Indigenous people have endured (Jacob, 2013:6). The Yakama people are creating ways in which to resist and combat “oppressive systems” that are harming the “people, land and culture” through “cultural revitalization activ[ism]” (Jacob, 2013:12). Jacob shares various examples of reclaiming Indian culture as ways of living, knowing, sharing, and relating to the earth and the community as powerful acts and practices of resistance. The Wapato Indian Club, for example, provides Indigenous youth a model for resisting assimilation to a “settler-colonial education system,” and teaches core values of “respect, inclusivity, responsibility, self-awareness, listening, healing, and unity” (Jacob, 2013:44-45). Through traditional native dances, the “children’s bodies become a site for critical pedagogy,” and as a “liberatory tool for critical awareness, leadership development and decolonizing praxis” (Jacob, 2013:45-46). Reclaiming and teaching dance help create stronger ties and webs to ancestral pasts with the present. It helps pave the way towards “the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation” (Jacob, 2013:6). “[T]heory-making”, according to hooks, can be a place of healing (1992:82), it is also powerful and necessary as we engage in a process of decolonizing our minds and our bodies.

Bomba, from Puerto Rico, is a great example of how the use of music and dance have been instrumental in reclaiming and teaching African ancestral paths. Like traditional native dance, *Bomba* is a form of resistance against U.S. attempts at eradicating non-European "systems of knowledge." *Bombera/os* play and dance to instruments and beats that date back to 1501. *Bomba* emerged shortly after the beginning of the trans-Atlantic African slave trade, when millions of Africans were enslaved and brought to the Americas (Alamos-Pastrana 2009). The first documented *Bomba* celebration was in 1797, where slaves came together to “sing, dance,

and on occasion organize a rebellion” (2009:579). There are more documented accounts of the use of *Bomba* throughout the 19th century as an “organizational tool for the development and initiation of slave rebellions” (2009:579). Alamos-Pastrana claims that *Bomba* dancing is used as an “instrument of agency” and the performance space is where “identities are simultaneously produced, challenged, and expressed” (2009:594). I agree with Alamos-Pastrana, I believe that women *bomberas* (*bomba* female dancers) in particular use dance as agency. Unlike in other Latin American dance genres, *bomberas* don’t have male dance partners who lead them, but rather, they lead their own movements, and through their movements they direct the beat of the drums, which are primarily played by males. There are males who dance and a minority of women who play the drums, but for the most part, it is the women who dance and move with freedom, power and grace, while leading the beat of the drums throughout the performance. Although *Bomba* is no longer an organizational tool to organize a rebellion, *bBomba* is an “instrument of agency” to resist post-colonial prescriptions of mainstream culture, *bombera/os* (*Bomba* dancers) are claiming and producing their Borikén identities and resisting euro-centric cultural ideologies that erase Puerto Ricans’ African and Indigenous history and cultural roots.

During the civil rights era, “dance served as a very specific and unique role especially within oppressive political systems as a physical medium that allowed the body to express what oppressed voices could not” (Gittens, 2012:51). U.S. Black dancers purposely used African dance styles as technique and as a way to reclaim and reconnect with their cultural diasporan African roots. In dominant Western culture, it has been a taboo to dance and accentuate movements with the hips, thighs or the “booty,” however, Gittens (2012) highlights how it was courageous and necessary for African American dancers to speak with the very body parts that

were considered taboo. It is a powerful form of weaponry to resist the dominant culture with the body parts and body movements that are being repressed.

Conclusion

The reviewed literature offered a diverse representation of how women performance artists and other performance artists from marginalized communities use their art as social and political agency to speak out against repressive systems of power in their states and communities. Although the performance artists are from distinct ethnicities and different parts of the world, these artists' social and political narratives of resistance echoed similar protests against oppression. Some common themes of resistance related to patriarchy, gender violence, heterosexual hegemony, post-colonialism, nationalism, capitalism and racism. Several artists reclaimed traditional forms of dance and theatre that had been systematically denied and/or silenced by state policies that attempted to create a dominant national culture. The resistance against cultural hegemony and [post]colonialism was one common thread that all artists incorporated into their work. The resistance of the violence against women, sexual and gender oppression was also prominent in most of the performances. The use of the artists' bodies and voices are acts of protest against injustices and catalysts in creating a discourse of liberation. Through their performances of protest, they assert their right to live with dignity, equality and justice.

THEORY

Historically women of color bodies have been oppressed, abused, raped, hyper-surveilled, and stigmatized. According to Judith Butler, "the abjection of certain kinds of bodies, their inadmissibility to codes of intelligibility, does make it known in policy and politics, and to live as such a body in the world is to live in the shadowy regions of ontology" (Meijer & Prins,

1998:277). As there are dominant systems of knowledge there are also dominant systems of bodily discourse, and as Butler mentions, there are certain kinds of bodies, like women of color bodies, that fall outside of mainstream ontology and pushed to the margins. Women of color bodies can represent memories of oppression, struggle, exploitation, and violence, as well as sites of resistance, strength, and emancipation. Their "bodily voices" as "subversive act[s]" reclaim and reinvent the body. Moreover, it is from the shadowy regions and from the margins that women of color use their bodies to center their stories and script an alternative ontology.

Women of color grassroots dancers draw from their own lived experiences, struggles, social identities, sexuality, and gender to create bodily discourses that re-imagine a more just world. Women of color dancers use their bodies as sites of resistance and their movements as a method of reclaiming ancestral knowledge, theorizing and producing pluralistic ways of knowing and being. I draw from Critical Feminist Theory for my ethnographic research on women of color grassroots dancers from San Diego border communities. I examine how women of color use dance as resistance against world systems of: patriarchy, imperialism, [neo]colonialism, heterosexuality and white supremacy.

With origins in U.S., Third World Feminism, critical feminist theory is grounded on a "methodology of the oppressed," that brings to the center of scholarly analysis historically marginalized women's realities, lived experiences, ideas, expressions, and resistance (Sandoval 1998:362). This social and political movement was created and led by U.S. women of color who hoped to be "a trans-national, -gendered, -sexed, -cultural, -racial, and coalitional political site" (Sandoval 1998:355). It was a movement that generated alliances with local and global women's struggles, and was propelled out of the "juxtaposition of anticolonial and antisexist U.S. histories that are often underestimated or misunderstood" (Sandoval 1998:353-354). U.S. Third World

Feminism challenged the notion of a linear conception of patriarchy, which failed to acknowledge how patriarchy engenders various forms of oppression within distinct socio-ethnic groups. Viewing patriarchy as a linear concept only perpetuates a binary ideology of gender and gender inequality, and fails to look at the multilayered systems and practices of oppression that intersect with [post]colonialism and imperialism.

Within the existing white heteropatriarchal dominant narrative, “Europeans are the originators of modernity” and “colonized peoples are portrayed as secondary people whose modernity is incomplete and, even when complete, will always be an inferior copy of superior original” (Go, 2016:50). We are continuously challenged with a patriarchal discourse that legitimizes how “elite white men control western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship” (Collins in Longhofer & Winchester, 2012:402). The suppression of Native, Black, Mestiza and other women of color ideas by “white-male-controlled institutions” pushed women of color to the margins, where they influenced to produce works outside of conventional academic productions (Hurtado 1998:384). Theorizing from the margins influenced how women of color experienced gender oppression outside of a mainstream feminist paradigm, and instead conceptualized gender within their own socio-political experiences. I will analyze how women of color grassroots dance performers produce a counter narrative to colonial heteropatriarchy through dance performance and the lenses of Native Feminist Theory, Black Feminist Theory, and Chicana Feminist Theory.

Native Feminist Theory

Native feminist theory critically addresses the intersections of oppression, and is particularly critical of how several westernized countries, such like the United States, is “balanced upon notions of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Arvin, Tuck and Morrill

2013:9). Moreover, how our social, political, and economic hierarchies are not only “racialized and gendered, but also [have] a relationship to settler colonialism” (Arvin et al. 2013:9). Settler colonialism is a structure of society and a social and political formation where newcomers, colonizers and settlers arrive to a place, claim ownership, and exterminate Indigenous peoples from those lands (Arvin, Tuck and Morrill 2013:12).

In the United States, Indigenous cultures, traditions, languages, and histories are structurally absent from a U.S. dominant culture discourse prescribed by European settler colonialism. U.S. settler colonialism has attempted to systemically obliterate Indigenous peoples’ histories, traditions, languages, and cultures, as a way to debilitate and ultimately destroy Native peoples. Colonial projects of extermination and dominance over Native peoples and women's bodies went beyond the earlier centuries of colonialism. During the 19th and 20th century there were several forms of violence and repressive campaigns and policies against Native people and other people of color. These included forced sterilization, childrearing policies, and U.S. eugenics ideas and practices (Smith 2004:123). During the late 19th century and early 20th century, Native children were sent off to Christian based boarding schools. Their mission was to socialize and assimilate Native children into the dominant culture and replace Indigenous systems of knowledge with westernized systems of knowledge, such as gender roles, sexuality, language, identity, religion and politics (Arvin, Tuck and Morrill 2013:15). Horrifying and tragic, many Native children endured sexual, physical, psychological, and emotional abuse while in these boarding schools (Smith 2004:123). Colonial projects of dominance over native bodies, and in particular, over native female bodies, have helped sustain racialized and gendered systems of power. Colonialism racialized Native women and produced ideas of Native women's bodies as "dirty," "sinful," and "unworthy," and hence, considered "sexually viable and rapable" (Smith

2003:73). Rape, among other forms of violence, abuse, and repression, was as a method of control over native women's bodies, native peoples and their lands. European worldviews have racialized, sexualized, and gendered Indigenous and women of color. The U.S. dominant culture is rooted in European worldviews that represses Indigenous and women of color bodies' sexuality, identity, and expressivity. Repressing women of color bodies' expressivity means to silence women of color identities, histories, and life stories.

Michelle M. Jacob, an Indigenous scholar and ethnographer shares how Native Yakama communities use cultural resistance as a form of healing, settler colonial emancipation, and creating social change. Jacob describes her work as a “decolonizing praxis [that] contributes to theories of indigenous social change centrally concerned with ‘making power’ to reclaim indigenous traditions, bodies, languages, and homelands” (Jacob 2013:6). Jacob speaks of historical trauma that Indigenous communities have endured as a result of settler colonialism, and how through practices of reclaiming and teaching dance, language, food traditions, and oral histories help create stronger ties to ancestral pasts with the present (Jacob 2013:6). Like Jacob, I will examine cultural resistance as a form of healing, and as reclaiming ancestral ties. Native Feminist Theory provides a critical foundation for my research that will help me examine women of color bodies in relation to settler colonialism and postcolonialism. Systemic violence and oppression of Indigenous and women of color bodies is a European settler colonialist agenda that produced/s racialized, sexualized, and gendered discourses about non-European bodies. In examining women of color dance performers' use of body as a method of storytelling and passing on knowledge, I will explore how [post]colonialism influences their dance, performance and resistance.

Black Feminist Theory

There are multiple levels of domination that take place within colonial and imperial structures. Black feminist theorists speak of oppression as being "interlocking systems" and part of "one overarching structure of domination" (Collins 1990:222). Seeing race, class, sexual orientation, and gender as "interlocking systems" of oppression, is essential to begin to deconstruct binary paradigms and relationships of those in power and the powerless. Black Feminist thought critically looks at how patriarchy is interwoven and perpetuated within our world systems of global capitalism, imperialism, [neo]colonialism, hegemonic heterosexuality, and white supremacy. It offers a critical analysis of the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and sexuality. The Combahee River Collective state, "as Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face" (Combahee River Collective 2002:235).

The enslavement of Black bodies, and the history of rape of Black women by white men has been "a weapon of political repression" (2002:237). "The Negro woman was [forced to be] either a work animal or a producing animal," consequently dehumanizing her, and "stripping her of any traits of intelligence and attributes of femininity" (Forsgren 2015:141). It is difficult for Black women to separate race, class, and sexual oppression because their racialized, gendered and hypersexualized bodies by the white dominant gaze puts them at risk of physical and sexual abuse by men in public and private spaces. The psychological toll of being a Black woman cannot be underestimated, "there is an extremely low value placed upon Black women's [bodies] and psyches in this society, which is racist and sexist" (Combahee River Collective 2002:239), and traumatic, I would add. According to the women from the Combahee River Collective, "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (2002:239).

There is systemic and structural violence against Black women, where race, class, gender and sexuality are closely intertwined with the nation (Hill Collins 2012:399). Domination is experienced across social, economic, and political institutions controlled by the nation-state's dominant group, like in schools, the police, church, hospitals, the media, and other formal organizations. The United States operates as "a nation-state that disproportionately benefits affluent white men" while also controlling social institutions that legitimize truth, power, and special interests as being national interests (2012:399). The fact that women are capable of becoming mothers makes women symbols of a nation as being responsible for "reproducing the nation's population, passing on an American national culture, and accepting the role of being inscribed with that same national culture" (399). Within the "U.S. matrix of domination," Black women and other women of color occupy varying subordinate positions. As race, gender, class, sexuality and nation intersect the access to privilege, capital and power is constructed; for example, population policies systemically discourage and prevent Black women from having children, "claiming that Black women make poor mothers and their children will end up receiving handouts from the state," while middle-class white women are "encouraged to increase their fertility" and "develop healthy white babies" (Hill Collins 2012:400).

The violence and oppression of Black women that exists in neighborhoods, communities, families, intimate relationships, and in the streets is directly tied to state violence against Black female bodies. Patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white supremacy does not only exist within elite circles of society, these binary systems of power exist in our everyday practices and environments in all sectors and in social and political spaces. Black women and other women of color intellectuals realize that domination operates not only by structuring power from the top down. Collins cautions that we should not only think of power as a top down structure, but that

power and control is also imposed by those who are among us and we too can be in a position of privilege and exert power over others (Collins 1990:226). Our public and private spaces are closely interwoven with our systems of law, education, healthcare, employment, religion, and economy. These systems are prescribed by a white heteropatriarchy discourse, and socio-political construct of “citizenship,” power, and privilege. As I examine how women of color dance performers resist white heteropatriarchy and imperial powers, I also explore resistance as defined by the participants. I also will examine how their public and private spaces influence their interpretations and storytelling in their dances through their own analysis and meaning, as well as through my observation of their dance performances.

Chicana Feminist Theory

Chicana feminism has a history that some might argue dates back since before the Chicano movement of the 1960s, where *mestiza* (woman of mixed race, Indigenous and Spanish from the Americas) women in the United States have historically fought against their socioeconomic and subjugation as Indigenous, brown, mestiza and marginal women in colonized lands. Though there are varying explanations and interpretations of the etymology of the word Chicano/a, we know that it was rooted within a socio-economic and political movement during the 1960s among Mexican American activists who consciously adopted *Chicano* as a socio-political and *mestizaje* identity (Acuña 1988:338). The term Chicano had been historically used as a pejorative term that applied to lower-class and working-class Mexican Americans (338). As Mexican Americans reclaimed and redefined Chicano as a unifying socio-political *mestizaje* identity, they were also developing ideological constructs and methods of resistance against the subjugation of Mexican Americans as a result of colonization and the expansion of U.S. Empire in the 19th century (Muñoz 1989:19).

During the 1960s-1970s there was mass mobilization and movements around civil, gay and lesbian, women's, anti-war, Asian American, American Indian, Black, and Chicano rights. Chicanas, like other women of color, faced multiple forms of oppression that intersected with race, class, gender, and sexual marginalization within the larger apparatus of U.S. patriarchal hegemony. Chicanas' gender and sexual oppression was not a part of the larger Chicano movements' theorization of oppression, which was concentrated more on class and racial struggle. Though Chicano/as were critical of their colonial and historical oppression, they weren't critical of white patriarchy, and how white patriarchy was deeply rooted in and perpetuated colonial and imperial oppression of African, Native, and *Mestizo* peoples. Chicanas experienced marginality on both sides of the isle of social movements; within the Chicano movement gender and sexual oppression positioned them in the margins, and within the white feminist movement their race and class positioned them in the margins. Chicanas were inspired and motivated to come together and create sites of *diálogo* (critical dialogue), to analyze, and theorize from their marginal experiences and intelligences that would inform and further develop their Chicana feminist consciousness. Chicanas, like many other critical feminist thinkers, don't view nor experience patriarchy as a "universal" (Butler, 2012:472) concept. A universal view of patriarchy perpetuates a binary ideology of gender and gender inequality, and fails to look at the multilayered systems and practices of oppression within patriarchy, such as, imperialism, colonialism, racism, classism, and hegemonic heterosexuality.

Chicana feminist theoreticians describe a "third space," where women of Color are negotiating social and political identities, and live at the 'cross-roads' between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures" (Hurtado 1998:358). This "third space" is a place of alliance building, theorizing, creating, decolonizing and [re]-imagining. Chicana Feminist

theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of a "consciousness of the Borderlands," a "new *mestiza* consciousness"(Anzaldúa 1987:77). Anzaldúa refers to this consciousness as a space of ambiguity, and continually straddling ethnic, sexual, gender, and class identities. It is from this marginalized consciousness that Anzaldúa refers to and describes her own experience. She writes, "[a]s a *mestiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman's sister or potential lover ([a]s a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races)" (Anzaldúa 1987:80). A borderlands analysis speaks to how a racialized, gendered, heteronormative and nationalized discourse positions certain groups as country-less, as *los atravesados*: "the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (Anzaldúa, 1978:3). Theorizing from the borderlands is where we also imagine deconstructing borders that confine us and force us to perform subordinate roles within the dominant culture paradigm. According to Chicana feminist scholar, Chéla Sandoval, a "methodology of the oppressed is only made possible through *la conciencia de la mestiza*" (Sandoval, 1998:362). A *mestiza* consciousness is an imagined site of resistance from the margins, where we theorize, gain knowledge, produce new knowledge, and empower ourselves at the *crossroads* and in this liminal space against dominant systems of knowledge and oppression over our bodies.

Native, Black, Chicana and other women of color feminist theorists have turned to alternative forms of theorizing, such as, everyday interactions and creative expressions and productions like poetry, song, oral histories, and *teatro* (community theatre) (Hurtado 1998:384). A growing body of Native, Black and Chicana feminist theory has been produced from non-traditional academic forms productions, and precisely through these alternative forms of

theorizing, such as creative expressions of resistance, women of color have imagined and created new ways of thought and praxis for liberation. bell hooks speaks of her own experience and development as a Black feminist thinker who theorized from a place of personal struggle and experience (McKinnon 1996:817). hooks describes a site of feminist thinking and theory making where many Black women feel they belong, from a place and space in their own lives, their own bodies, and their dreams (McKinnon 1996:825). hooks speaks of “theory-making” as a place of healing (hooks 1992:82). “Theory-making” from a site of struggle is powerful and necessary as we engage in a process of decolonizing our minds and our bodies. The importance of healing colonial and imperialist wounds for women of color and other marginalized groups is part of the process of liberation. We cannot liberate ourselves and move towards creating new ways of knowing and being without expelling the colonizer within us without healing [post]colonial traumas like sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and racial violence.

I am proposing through my research that women of color grassroots dance performers are creating sites of resistance and sites of healing. Through dance performance, women of color are using their art as alternative forms of theorizing and as a praxis for liberation. Women of color grassroots dance performers are disrupting binary systems of thought and creating ethos of multiple ways of knowledge. Among marginalized communities, art and performance art has been used as an agent for raising awareness of socio-economic inequalities that “promotes social justice and mitigates disparities” (Martínez 2007:10). Women of color grassroots dance performers are using their bodies with agency as a method for educating, engaging, inspiring, uniting, healing, and creating new forms of thought. In examining how women of color performance artists use their dance as resistance, I’ve gained a greater understanding about these women’s narratives of resistance and how their lived experiences, social identities, sexuality, and

gender influence their bodily discourse. My theoretical framework includes Native feminist theory, Black feminist theory, and Chicana feminist theory. I've explored how these women use their bodies and voice to theorize and produce knowledge. Women of color dancers create spaces of resistance where they imagine, heal and create new possibilities for liberation.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Methods

My research focus is on women of color grassroots dance performers who use their dance as a method of resistance against [post]colonialism. I examine how dance and movement is directly used as a body narrative of social identities, community and personal [her]stories. I also examine how grassroots dance is a method of reclaiming and recreating systems of knowledge that challenge colonial and imperial "systems of knowledge." My research is through a qualitative methods approach. I believe a qualitative methods approach of my research is the best means to explore my overarching question of how women of color grassroots dance performers use their dance as resistance. This method allowed me to explore and examine the multiple aspects of dance as a method of resistance, and how women of color dance performers interpret and make meaning of their dance. My qualitative methods approach included interview research, visual ethnography, and ethnographic experiences with the dancers and performances.

My past and current ethnographic experiences as a community member and grassroots performance artist in San Diego has influenced and shaped my sociological inquiry of dance as resistance. I have participated as a performer and an audience member in various political and community-based events in San Diego. I've learned of these dance genres through participation and ethnographic experiences. I've witnessed these dances in non-traditional formal spaces like, at protests, marches, schools, student-led conferences, U.S.-Mexico border crossing, churches,

parks, cafes, and community cultural centers. As an audience member I've observed these groups align with political and social justice issues that relate to local community struggles and global community struggles. I found it essential to include my ethnographic experiences and personal memories of myself as a dancer and as an audience member in dance performances. Including my ethnographic experiences in this study provides for a multifaceted research approach that contributes to a broader analysis of my findings.

Interview research as a "method of inquiry" (Seidman 2013:13) allowed me to gather women's stories and interpretations of their dance performance so that I am able to better understand their lived experiences. According to Seidman, "recounting narratives of experience has been the major way throughout recorded history that humans made sense of their experience" (2013:8). Interviewing was an effective way to have women of color grassroots dance performers tell their stories and make meaning of their dance experiences. Moreover, interviewing allowed me to examine how dance is influenced by their communities and their social identities.

Visual ethnography is another method of research used in this project. I believe visual ethnography further expands my research in centering women of color bodies, their dance, and stories of resistance. According to Harper, "images allow us to make statements which cannot be made by words," while also expanding our "consciousness and the possibilities for our sociology" (Harper 2012:38). In examining performance art through interviews alone limits the visual imagination, symbolism, and emotions that visual ethnography evokes. This is not to diminish the power of storytelling through language, but rather, to be aware and make note of these limitations.

As I explored women of color grassroots dance performers' lived experiences, I wanted to capture both the oral and visual stories of resistance. I've included visual ethnography as a way

to offer a visual representation of women of color dance performers' stories. I used the media of still photography to aesthetically center women of color bodies and offer a visual representation of the dancers' bodily discourse. I used photographs taken by a local photographer, Pedro Ríos, of various group and individual shots of performances and performers dated from 2011 to the present (November 2018). The photographs provide a visual element in my research that conveys symbolism, meaning, and evoke emotion.

Recruitment and Participants

My research consisted of women of color grassroots dance performers from the following dance genres: *Danza Azteca* (Indigenous *Mexica* dance, and will refer to as *Danza*), *Bomba* (Afro-Puerto Rican dance), and *Zapateado Rebelde* (rooted in Mexican *Baile Folklórico zapateado* and inspired by feminist and Zapatista organized movements). The pool of participants in this study are from the following ethnicities, *Mexicana*, *Xicana*, *Mexicana-Peruana*, and *Puertorriqueña*. Two from the three dance genres, *Danza* and *Bomba* have women and men of color participants, and *Zapateado Rebelde* is comprised by all women of color (*Mexicana* and *Xicana*). I've included a table of demographics on the participants' dance genre, ethnicity, gender, years of dance, age, and motherhood (Appendix A - Table of Demographics).

I chose to examine three distinct dance genres as a way to explore the plurality of bodily discourse and body narratives that counter colonial and imperial systems of knowledge. I was also inspired to choose these dance genres partly because they are grassroots dance forms that have strong participation by women of color and presence among U.S.-Mexico border communities in San Diego.

Danza and *Bomba* date back to pre-colonial times. Both styles of dance symbolize a long history of resistance to colonialism, to this day both dances are performed and continue to be

passed on from generation to generation. In choosing dances that are rooted in older systems of knowledge, such as Indigenous and African worldviews, I was able to explore how women of color are performing old and new ways of knowledge. *Zapateado Rebelde* was founded out of a woman of color space that in part inspired and encouraged creative expressions of resistance. *Zapateado Rebelde* is rooted in Mexican *Baile Folklórico*, but is a non-traditional way of doing *zapateado* that also incorporates other dance styles to various music genres (*norteñas*, hip-hop, Latin American female vocalists, Mexican folksongs, and Chicana/o musical artists) that also have politicized lyrics. These three genres of dance allowed me to look at organic processes and bodily discourses of resistance. *Danza*, *Bomba* and *Zapateado Rebelde* are great examples of how women of color are using these dance forms and their bodies as a method of theorizing, creating spaces of resistance, and producing new ways of being, knowing, and thinking.

Interview Process

A formal description of the research project and criteria for participation was sent to 9 dancers from the three dance genres through email and Facebook messenger (Appendix B – Outreach Letter on Research Project). My active participation as a dancer and community audience member at several community and political events over the past 10 years allowed me to establish some level of relationship with most of the dancers. My past relationships with the dancers ranged from having close dancing relationships, friendships, to no personal relationship. For those dancers whom I had no previous relationship, I had known of them because of past performances at community-based events. I interviewed 9 women of color dancers, three participants from each dance genre of *Danza*, *Bomba*, and *Zapateado Rebelde*. My qualitative data collection consisted of 8 tape recorded face-to-face interviews, and 1 tape recorded phone interview. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants (Appendix C - Sample

Questions). I guided my interviews with a set of pre-crafted questions that focused around themes relating to community, cultural and ancestral roots, the U.S.-Mexico border, gender, and dance as healing. I tried to ask all of the participants the same questions, however, there were some variations with some of my questions which depended on the participant's answers to certain questions that encouraged me to further explore and ask additional questions or exchanges some questions for others. The interviews were conducted at locations that were most convenient for the participants, such as residential homes, cafes, and one phone interview. The interviews ranged from 1 hour to 1.5 hours. The participants were given the option to waive and refrain from answering any of the questions asked throughout the interview. They also had the option of being anonymous with a pseudonym or be identified by their actual name (first name only). All of the participants agreed to have their first name used in this study.

Confidentiality and Safeguards

The participants' personal information was safe and secure at all times. All recorded data for this research was kept safely locked in a file cabinet and the only individuals who had access to the data was myself (the researcher) and my committee chair, Dr. Theresa Suarez. The audio recordings, interview transcripts, and other personal information was stored in a locked file cabinet. All electronic interview transcripts were recorded and kept on a USB drive, and was also kept locked in a file cabinet; only myself and my research committee chair had any access to all data records. There were no foreseen risks to the population that was interviewed for this study. As performance artists, the participants are in the public eye and have had contact and exposure with the public on various occasions.

While there were no direct benefits to the participants in this study, their participation in this study was used to get a better understanding of how women of color grassroots dance

performers utilize and interpret their dance and body movements in relation to their lived experiences. It also offers us a better understand how dance is a language of the body that reflects and speaks to multiple aspects of past and present lived histories and experiences. Finally, it has helped broaden and contributed to the academic literature of dance, discourse and power.

Reflexivity

“My research is part of my life and my life is part of my research” (Ladson-Billings 2000:268) I am co-founder and active member of an existing *Xicana/Mexicana* dance collective in San Diego, Mujeres en Resistencia. As a woman of color dance performer, my positionality makes me an insider within the larger community of grassroots dance performers in San Diego. However, as a researcher I was coming into these communities as an outsider as well. As an insider, I may have easier access to potential participants, and may have an easier time framing certain questions and understanding the participants' dance experiences. Patricia Zavella, however, warns "cultural insider" researchers about the constraints, like feeling accountable to the community and compelled to construct an analysis that is sympathetic to the group's cultural interests (Zavella 1993:54). For instance, as an insider, one may feel obligated to overlook or gloss over some critical issues relating to power relations and inequity among a community. Another insider challenge for me, can be my *Chicana* feminist standpoint, which could impair in some ways my interpretation and analysis by assuming my feminist lens aligns with other women of color. It was important to be aware of my position as a researcher, and how potential power relations may occur when conducting research on women and in this case women of color. As Zavella suggests, we must be cognizant of social and power relations, and reflexive of our position within this context of researcher and participant (Zavella 1993:57). To ensure I centered

women of color dance performers' stories in my research, I was critical of my researcher position and any preconceived binary social and political paradigms that may have silenced the participants' voices.

Postmodern criticism regarding the use of documentary and photography raises some critical points about the production of power relations that can form between the researcher and the community being researched. For one, the "idea and meaning of the photograph is constructed by the maker and the viewer, both of whom carry their social positions and interests to the photographic act." (Harper 2012:32) Historically, those with access to wealth, privilege and power are the makers and interpreters of knowledge. It is often the "powerful, the established, the male, the colonizer typically portray the less powerful, established, female and colonized" (Harper 2012:32). The colonizer and colonized relationship that often gets re/produced between less empowered researched groups and the visual researcher is very problematic because it objectifies and exploits marginalized communities. I have approached my literary and visual ethnography by being conscious and reflexive of my positionality within the community of women of color dance performers. First and foremost, I didn't try to rear or force the women's stories towards the direction that I think they should go. Instead, I wanted to center and represent the plurality of their narratives of resistance, regardless of what that means and is for them. I greatly value people's stories, and I am always humbled to hear them. Storytelling is sacred to me, and I will always approach my work through this same lens, with great respect and humility.

ANALYSIS

Introduction

The border between Mexico and the United States is highly militarized and imposes fluid and physical boundaries that prescribe Mexicans and Central Americans to lower socio-political positions as “Others” in relationship to whites. Furthermore, these perceived foreign brown bodies are socially constructed as threats to wealth and cultural identity among patriotic nationalists, especially white working-class people. It strengthens the hegemonic dominance of a nationalist identity that would undergird and extend U.S. imperial borders globally. According to Anzaldúa, “the dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance [...] The whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with their hidden weapons; so they can whitewash and distort history” (Anzaldúa, 1987:86). Arguably, the “hidden weapons” are not so hidden, but instead subtle and perverse because they are situated within an omnipresent colonial and imperial apparatus of laws, policies, institutions, and cultural practices that sustain U.S. hegemony.

The imposition of imperial power, which is reproduced across all institutions today, overshadows and erases all other forms of intelligences and knowledge, especially those from Indigenous and African epistemologies. Black and Brown bodies have a subordinate socio-political relationship to the nation-state and experience stronger restrictions over their bodies and freedom of movements. The U.S.-Mexico border is a place of hyper-surveillance that literally imposes repressive restrictions over peoples’ mobility based on racial, gendered, sexual, and class boundaries. As such, these physical and social boundaries are imperial borders that reproduce racialized and economic power structures through the constant control and surveillance of black, brown and immigrant communities.

Moreover, the U.S.-Mexico border is a socio-political space that influences and defines how Chicana/os and Mexicana/os, and Central Americans see themselves in relation to the United States. Communities that live along the U.S.-Mexico border experience and internalize the border on a daily basis; it is a constant reminder of those who hold the power and those who don't, of an "us" and "them", those who cross freely and others who are killed for crossing. The border instills and fuels violence, terror, and trauma in our communities, and in our bodies. Gloria Anzadúa describes the U.S.-Mexican border as "*una herida abierta*, where the Third World grates against the First World - and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country - a border culture, [...] The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here..." (1987:3). So, then, how is colonial and imperial violence resisted within their communities? How do we expel the colonizer's influence over our bodies, and within ourselves? How do all marginalized peoples subject to U.S. imperial power achieve liberation? How do marginalized communities theorize their realities, and produce and distribute anticolonial ideas and knowledge? What tools are used to tell their stories and bring their cultures and experiences from the margins of power to the center of knowledge production?

I begin to answer some of these questions by first sharing a memory - one that inspired me to center women of color bodies and dance within this larger question about how we resist U.S. hegemony and [post]colonial violence. I examine how Chicana, Mexicana-Peruana, and Puerto Rican grassroots dance performers in the U.S.-Mexico border communities of San Diego center their histories, her/stories and socio-political identities on stage. I argue that community-based, grassroots dance is a method of resistance against the dominant culture and an expression of power and agency that produces community-based epistemologies towards colonial and

imperial emancipation. I explore the body of women of color dance performers as sites of resistance, cultural production, theorizing, and liberation.

Throughout this chapter I reflect on the words and stories of women of color grassroots dancers from three distinct dance genres tied to Indigenous, African, and Latin American origins: *Danza Azteca*, (which I will refer to as *Danza*), *Bomba*, and *Zapateado Rebelde* with my personal memories and ethnographic experiences with the dancers and performances. The first part introduces my recollection of a community protest at the San Ysidro port of entry against state sanctioned violence on immigrants, where *danzantes* (Aztec dancers) offer their prayers through their dance in front of Customs and Border Protection agents. Second, I examine how dancing is a “decolonial praxis” to reclaim ancestral roots and knowledges. Third, I analyze the impact and influences that the U.S.-Mexico border and other imperial borders have on women of color grassroot dancers and how their dances are resisting and traversing these borders. Fourth, I show how women of color grassroots dancers are challenging heteropatriarchal discourses on our bodies and in our communities. Fifth, I examine how women of color use dance as a source of healing, and how that healing extends beyond the dancers’ bodies and to our communities. Lastly, I conclude with how our bodies as women of color dancers pass-on feminist epistemologies of resistance and liberation.

Praying with our Feet

Smoke rises, the smell of the copal fills the air around us, the drums play, and the *danzantes*’ feet begin to move in unison. The *chachayotes* rattle after each foot hits and stomps onto the earth, creating a soothing and harmonious sound that juxtaposes the presence of Customs and Border Protection agents that stand tall and statuesque-like behind the *danzantes*. The agents and the physical site of the San Ysidro port of entry represents the state’s repression

and violence against [im]migrants. The widow of Anastasio Rojas, the mother of Francisco Ceseña, and the wife of José Gutierrez stand with signs and images of their loved ones who have been killed or brutally beaten by Customs and Border Protection agents. A group of about 130 people gather at the San Ysidro pedestrian crossing in protest of Customs and Border Protection abuses and killings. We are only a few hundred feet away from where Anastasio Rojas was brutally beaten, Tazered, and killed by at least 12 customs agents, ICE agents, and border patrol agents in May of 2010.



A woman *danzante* leads a dance with warrior-like movements, her fists are tight, one arm goes up with her fist in the air, while stepping forward, alternating with her arms and feet, and creating warrior-like poses with each stride. Her movements follow the dramatic drum beats, and vice-versa. Her strong warrior-like energy incites the drummers in reciprocal energy that is encouraged by all participants in the dance circle and transcends beyond the dance space. The *danzantes* are predominantly women and children who lead us in ceremony and prayer with their feet and instruments. The dancers' moving bodies in their Indigenous regalia juxtapose the backdrop of Customs and Border Protection agents. The row of agents behind the *danzantes* is reminiscent of the constant presence, surveillance, and terror that brown border communities

face on a daily basis. On the eve of Christmas of 2014, Francisco Ceseña died at the San Ysidro port when he was sent to secondary inspection after returning from visiting his father in Mexico.

He allegedly became combative; Customs agents Tazered him 7 times, put a rag in his mouth, and forced him face-down on

the ground. Francisco suffered

a cardiac arrest and died

within the hour. On 2010,

José Gutierrez was brutally

beaten by border patrol agents

in Arizona while he was

trying to cross the Sonoran



Desert into the United States. Unlike Anastasio and Francisco, José survived, but was left with neurological and physical disabilities due to his fractured skull that resulted from the beating.

I look over to see Maria, Theresa, and Shena. I think of their loss, pain, trauma, and rage. I hope our presence offers them some comfort and strength to remind them that they aren't alone.

The community also grieves. The warrior-like dance makes me think of the battles we face as immigrants and non-immigrants of color whose bodies are perceived as foreign, and as a threat along the borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico and within the continental United States.

There is power behind the dancers' feet, bodies, and movements. I see and hear their dissent.

Danza helps us connect to our historical and continuous resistance against repressive systems of power. The drums, the *chachayotes*, and the movements of the *danzantes* echo María's,

Theresa's, Shena's, and the communities' collective resistance.

Reclaiming Home and Embodying Ancestral Knowledge

Women of color from colonized lands have long used subversive creative expressions to challenge a dominant cultural discourse rooted in colonial and imperial power structures.

Women of color grassroots dancers use dance as a “decolonizing praxis” that is essentially about “making power” (Jacob 2013:6). It is a praxis of resistance against the ruling powers that destroy and control peoples’ cultures, knowledges, histories, languages, and socio-political identities.

Danza is a practice of resistance and a method of re/claiming ancestral histories and ancestral bodily discourses that center Indigenous epistemologies. At the fall of the Aztec Empire, the last *Mexica* leader, *Tlatoani*, Cuauhtémoc, surrendered and offered his last mandate to his people, and since they could no longer resist militarily, he called on them to resist spiritually (Luna 2013:48). Cuauhtémoc’s last prophecy for his people was that “one day a new era will open up the possibility to once again live in the ways of the ancestors.” (48) While many *danzantes* resisted through uprisings, some were tortured and killed, while others resisted by practicing *Danza* clandestinely and sustained their spiritual beliefs with “songs, dances and prayers under the guise of Catholicism” (49). The Nahuatl were allowed to conduct their dances in church courtyards in honor of the saints and virgin Mary (Vento 1994:59), which aided the survival of *Danza Azteca*, and influenced the faith-based and cultural trajectory of *Danza* in a post-Colombian era. Today, the most common form of *Danza* in México and in the United States is *Danza Conchera*, and dates back to 1521. It is a syncretic spiritual practice influenced by both Indigenous spirituality and Catholicism (Interview with Eva, 16 April 2018).

Eva, a *danzante* from *Danza Coatlicue*, points to some distinctions between *Danza* in Mexico and *Danza* in the United States, and how Mexicana/os (from Mexico) seem to be much more influenced by Catholic practices in their *Danza*, than Chicana/os with *Danza* in the United States. Eva states,

They are super religious [in Mexico], they pray long prayers, they do the full rosary, and a lot of Chicanos don't relate to Catholicism, there is even a *Danza* about Jerusalem, and I think, what is going on here? We aren't from Jerusalem, and neither is our history, except when we got clobbered, and slaughtered, and were converted. (Interview with Eva, 16 April 2018).

Eva shares how over the years more Mexicana/o *danzantes* from Mexico have been coming up North to the United States to share their knowledge and teachings of *Danza*, and though she is grateful for their knowledge, she's observed the contrasts between the strong Catholic influences that they bring as opposed to what she has been taught by older Chicana/o *danzantes* in the United States. She goes on to say,

They (Mexicana/o *danzantes* from Mexico) tell us, *que nos falta la fe* (we lack faith) ...when they do *velaciones* it is like church, but here the *velaciones* aren't like that. *Danza* is more of a spiritual connection for me than church, and a lot of Chicana/o *danzantes* won't even sing, or show up to some of these *velaciones* that have stronger Catholic practices. (Interview with Eva, 16 April 2018).

For Eva, like many Chicana/os, *Danza* is a spiritual practice that is tied to a socio-political *mestizaje* consciousness that is distinct from Mexicana/os in México. Our *mestizaje* doesn't marginalize us in México. Our *mestizaje* doesn't marginalize us here in Mexico, but our *mestizaje* does marginalize us here in the United States and positions us as Othered bodies in the margins. México is an ethnically diverse country, with mestizos, Indigenous cultures and communities of African descent, however, Mexicans identify first and foremost by their



national identity and not ethnicity; where Indigenous roots are often denied or diminished while trying to inflate and highlight any kind of European heritage. Mexico's dominant culture is

Eurocentric and strongly influenced by Catholicism, patriarchy, and colonialism, while Indigenous and African cultures are often perceived as inferior and uncivilized. The practice of *Danza* for both Mexicana/os and Chicana/os in Mexico and in the United States are practices of cultural resistance and a way to preserve Indigenous knowledges. However, *Danza* for Chicana/os also extends as a social and political force that resists imperial oppression and U.S. hegemony.

For decades, *Danza* has been a practice for Chicana/os to reclaim and pass on cultural and ancestral roots within a dominant culture that prioritizes western European thinking and marginalizes Indigenous and *Mestizo* ways of knowing and being. During the Chicana/o movement, there was a strong social and political push for reclaiming Indigenous ancestral roots which had been historically denied by Spanish colonialism and U.S. Imperialism. *Danza* became an integral part of the Chicana/o movement as part of the political and social collective and the aesthetics at marches, protests, and cultural events. The Chicana/o movement was largely mobilized by a collective consciousness to reclaim what had been stolen and denied by the dominant culture in the United States. María, from *Danza Coatlicue*, describes *Danza* as a “spiritual branch of the Chicano movement”. María positions *Danza* as part of the larger body of the Chicana/o movement, which speaks to the historical and contemporary role that *Danza* has played within a movement of spiritual and political resistance in the United States for Chicana/os. María goes on to say that being a Chicana *danzante* in the United States is not only a spiritual practice, but also a “political force.” She states,

I am a Chicana and I am a *danzante*, and by that, I mean I have a particular consciousness and commitment and *Danza* is part of that commitment to consciousness raising and political awareness or political movement [...] I didn't learn *Danza* in México, you know? it's unique. (Interview with María, 13 April 2018).



María's theorization and practice of *Danza* is rooted in a Chicana consciousness that situates *Danza* in a socio-political context. María's assertion of not having learned *Danza* in México, and how learning *Danza* here is unique, speaks to the experiences and challenges that Chicana/o *danzantes* face in the U.S. as they work towards keeping Indigenous knowledges and practices alive.

Many Chicana/os in the United States often feel disconnected and displaced from a homeland and their cultural roots, and particularly when the dominant narrative in the United States views and treats Chicana/os as foreigners and/or second-class citizens. A well-

known *danzante* from México once asked Eva, *Capitana* from Danza Coatlicue, "Why do you obsess about your culture, why do you thirst for it so much, all of the knowledge?" Eva responded by saying, "We didn't grow up with it, and we feel like something is missing and when you discover *Danza*, it's like, that's what was missing, or that connection with the mother land." (Interview with Eva, 16 April 2018). In México, *Danza Mexica* is a family tradition where grandparents, parents, and the children are all *danzantes*; but, in the United States, it isn't viewed the same way - we are disconnected from our home, our cultural roots. Eva expands,

Here, you are trying to figure out who you are, where your roots are from, and when you hear the drum it is like there is some kind of connection with the drum

and your heart...so you go to *Danza* to figure it out.” (Interview with Eva, 16 April 2018)

The U.S.-Mexico border imposes binary socio-political identities, where a Chicana in México is a *Gringa* or *Pocha*, and a Mexicana in the U.S. is a “wetback” or “an illegal.” Grecia, a *danzante* from Danza Tlayolotli, shares how when her family relocated to the border community of San Diego during her pre-teens she didn’t feel she belonged anywhere. She states,

I’d go back to visit in Tijuana, and I was too American, and then I’d be here, and I was too Mexican, jajajaja...but there is something [about danza] that keeps you there, something that makes you feel like that’s where you belong.” (Interview with Grecia 20 April 2018)



Grecia’s difficulty identifying with “American” culture and feeling as though she didn’t belong here (San Diego), nor there (Tijuana), speaks to how Chicana/os can experience a sense of ambiguity and a sense of displacement, a loss of home and ancestral roots. Anzladúa speaks of *Nepantla*, a nahuatl word referring to “an in-between state, [an] uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, [...] when traveling from the present identity into a new identity” (Darder and Torres 1998:165). For Chicana/os and other people of color in the United

States a state of *nepantla* is familiar terrain we walk daily as we grapple with our identity and positionality within the larger scheme of U.S. hegemony.

We are at a “cross-roads between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures” (Hurtado 1998:358). We carry these borders with us, however, we don’t have to live along the U.S.-México border to experience the border and its manifestations in our communities and our collective consciousness. *Atravesadas, nepantleras*, are those who are negotiating social and political identities, but also theorizing, creating, decolonizing, and [re]-imagining crossing borders. María, a *danzante*, shares how we all carry a bordered consciousness, whether we live along the U.S.-México border or live 1,000 miles away from the U.S.-México border.

One thing is to be geographically centered at the border or places at that physical border, and I think the other thing is to have a *conciencia* that is living in a region that is bordered [...] *Danza* to me feels like it traverses all of that, like it has the ability to, like the way I have used danza as a teaching tool, a cultural preservation tool, as a resistance tool. I don’t need to be only in San Ysidro or within close physical proximity to have that *conciencia*, [...] it’s where ever I go, *la misma conciencia voy a cargar con migo*.” (Interview with María 13 April 2018).

María speaks of resisting those borders that confine us and oppress us, like dancing on the border is an act of resistance, and, in addition, dancing in various communities, marches, cultural and political events. María’s relationship and conceptualization of the border is one that transcends beyond the geographical site of the border. Though María does not live along the borderlands of Tijuana and San Diego currently, she shares a collective memory and relationship to the border with Mexicana/os and Chicana/os who live in the borderlands, and who cross the borderlands daily. She mentions how she carries a shared consciousness of the border and believes that *Danza* has the ability to “traverse,” the border, and be used as a “teaching tool, a cultural preservation tool, [and] a resistance tool.”

Bomba, like *Danza*, is a dance form rooted in colonial resistance, it dates back to the enslavement of Africans and the Taino's decimation by the Spaniards in Puerto Rico. *Bomba* is a communal participatory musical art form that combines drumming, song, and dance, and it is believed to come from West Africa and from the Ashanti people of Ghana (Cartagena, 2004:17). It was developed within the African slave communities from the coastal regions of Puerto Rico and was a music and dance of "resistance and rebellion," where enslaved Africans came together to plot escapes and uprisings (Cartagena, 2004:17). The etymology of the word *bomba* has been linked to the Bantu of Africa (Congo, Angola, Mozambique, Camerun) and has a common meaning that connotes a form of spiritual gathering (17).

Bomba is home for many Puerto Ricans and Boricuas in the diaspora. Like *Danza* is for Chicana/os and Mexicana/os in the U.S., *Bomba* is a way for Boricuas to reclaim and embody ancestral roots and knowledges that are marginal within U.S. hegemony. Through drums, song, and dance, *Bomba* has been an essential way to be Puerto Rican outside of the island. Many Puerto Ricans who come from the island to the diaspora (U.S.) have their first contact with *Bomba* here. Jade, shares how,

People outside of Puerto Rico think everyone is doing *Bomba* everywhere, just walking around and doing *Bomba*, that's just not the reality, *Bomba* was driven underground and almost stopped being practiced." (Interview with Jade, 18 April 2018).

By the 1950s and 1960s *Bomba* reemerged with Puerto Rican musicians taking it to different parts of Latin America, while also fusing it with national and regional musical genres. The fusion of *Bomba* went out internationally, while in Puerto Rico, the folk tradition of *Bomba* remained, but retreated back to parts of the island where there was a high population density of Black Puerto Ricans (Alamo-Pastrana 2009:579). By the 1960s and 1970s, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture nationalized *Bomba* and created guidelines and standards in an attempt to preserve

the authenticity of the music and dance (2009:580). Despite the state's efforts of nationalizing *Bomba*, "it's still very marginal, [and] seen as Afro-Puerto Rican." (Interview with Jade, 18 April 2018). On the one hand *Bomba* can be proudly displayed as an essential symbol of African heritage in Puerto Rican culture, but also symbolizes blackness and antithetical to the dominant discourse of whiteness in Puerto Rico. The marginality of *Bomba* in Puerto Rico stems from a racialized legacy of Spanish colonialism that constructed whiteness as superior and modern and blackness as inferior and primitive. After the end of slavery in Puerto Rico (March 22, 1873), like throughout all of European Colonial America (Latin America and the United States), Black bodies remained socially, economically, and politically marginalized (Maldonado, 2008:96). The social discourses of Blackness in Puerto Rico, like throughout the Americas, have been produced by elite sectors that control and distribute productions of knowledge and ideas that shape and manipulate a Eurocentric national consciousness. Scholars and folklorists have historically perceived and depicted *Bomba* through a colonial, racist and patriarchal lens that has described it as "an expression of frenetic primitivism," "[dancing] in dramatic fashion full of grotesque, imitative and sensual movements," "vulgar," and "lumpen." (Cartagena, 2004, 20-21). The dominant white gaze has historically distorted the meaning and symbolism of Othered peoples' knowledges, histories, cultures, and practices, and *Bomba* is no exception.

Bomba has never been a practice among dominant social groups, but rather, "a response to be used against them," a source of knowledge production and knowledge distribution (Alamo-Pastrana 2009:594). Jade shares the importance *Bomba* has been for her as a Puerto Riqueña in the Diaspora.

As a Puerto Riqueña living in the diaspora, *Bomba* has been essential for me to be able to not just be Puerto Rican, but also to do it! and enact it! and bring it into life!" (Interview with Jade, 18 April 2018)

Bomba in the diaspora moves from a marginal cultural practice to an essential way of embodying Puerto Rican cultural and ancestral roots that are heavily influenced by African and Indigenous ancestral knowledges and practices. The U.S. colonial project positions all Puerto Ricans as Other, Black and marginal to U.S. hegemony. It has been in the diaspora, in *nepantla*, where Puerto Ricans are reclaiming lost African traditions that are still perceived as marginal ways of being and thinking on the island. *Bomba* is a praxis of



cultural resistance and a pedagogical and cultural preservation tool for Puerto Ricans in a place that encourages you to shed knowledges and practices that fall outside of Eurocentric worldviews and practices.

Napantleras Atravesando Fronteras

There is knowledge and power in dance, and where and how we move our bodies has the ability to ‘traverse borders,’ claim space, and resist U.S. hegemony and oppressive institutional structures. On May of 2014, Mujeres en Resistencia performed at a march demanding justice for the brutal beating and killing of Anastasio Rojas by Customs and Border Protection agents. Hundreds of people gathered at Balboa Park in downtown San Diego in honor and in remembrance of Anastasio’s life. We all joined Anastasio’s family and marched with his parents, widow, and children to the San Diego Federal courthouse building to demand justice for the



killing of Anastasio Rojas. Mujeres en Resistencia was among the groups that performed political *teatro*, spoken word and dance. Police officers stood as guards between the community and the federal building as we performed our *Zapateado*

Rebelde. Our protest against the violence and repression that the U.S.-Mexico border and other imperial borders instill on migrant bodies was echoed through our dance and the t-shirts on our bodies that read, “Revitalize NOT Militarize.” The creative discourses of resistance at a site, such as the federal courthouse building, claims power in public space where we “bear witness to state oppression [and repression]” while also challenging dominant “discourses of power relations.” (Moser 2003:177).

Fernanda, from Mujeres en Resistencia, explains how *Zapateado Rebelde* in community spaces is a way to resist injustices, support community initiatives, and work towards building a better world.

If we, (Mujeres es Resistencia), are talking about resisting and creating a better world where we can all live *con dignidad* and live without fear of this system coming down on us because we are women, LGBTQ or *migrante*... *entonces*, we are critical [of where we perform]. But most of the time when it is an event for community, where the community is organizing, we perform. So, we've performed in places like Chicano Park, Centro Cultural de la Raza, Tijuana, small venues, [marches], we've also performed at some schools, at MEChA conferences, MEChA graduation, and even at a church, which even that could be looked at as, oh well you are trying to resist the system and the church is also part of it, but most of our communities belong to a church or some spiritual space. It is important to share this message... *entonces, llevamos nuestro baile pa' ya*. (Interview with Fernanda, 11 April 2018)



Fernanda shares how *Mujeres en Resistencia* uses a critical lens in deciding where they choose to dance, which is greatly influenced by socially and politically inspired events and actions for social justice. Like the *Zapateado Rebelde* that was offered at the march demanding justice in Anastasio's killing, *Mujeres en Resistencia* protests in other community sites against the same oppressive system rooted in colonial and imperial violence against marginal bodies. We carry these stories with us. Like Fernanda said, "*llevamos nuestro baile pa' ya,*" (we take our dance over there), meaning we take our dance where community is present, where we offer our dance of resistance, with dignity and without fear.

Gabriela, from *Mujeres en Resistencia*, shares how *Zapateado Rebelde* reflects lived experiences of the U.S.-Mexico border, migration, and other imperial borders that exist in other parts of the world, like Palestine. She also explains how the group's song choices for the dances are a testament of the struggles of immigrant and non-immigrant communities that are systematically denied entry and movement into and within the United States.

I think that in our dance, in some ways we reflect the border, like in the song choices that we make, talking about migration and even bringing up Palestine ... tying [together] these similar violent borders that are not natural and that have historically

disrupted our communities, that all is embodied in our dances and in the spaces where we are performing. (Interview with Gabriela, 19 April 2018).

Mujeres en Resistencia's use of lyrics in *Zapateado Rebelde* is socially and politically inspired and speaks to local and global struggles against imperial systems of power. Mujeres en Resistencia dance to several songs in relation to the U.S.-Mexico border, the border wall, global borders, and migration. For example, in the song *Pieces of Me*, by Olmecca, the Chicano hip hop artist speaks of the oppression and desperation that people face when their livelihoods are in danger because of economic, and socio-political violence, and oppression.

Olmecca

...and how did we get here? Our folks forced out of their country, [...] no one crosses the desert 'cause they want to. It's a necessity...a sacrifice for the family. You don't call them illegals you call them Economic Refugees." (Olmecca, *Pieces of Me*, Album *La Contra Cultura/Counter Culture*, June 23, 2010)

Olmecca renames migrants as "Economic Refugees," which disrupts the dominant discourse around immigrants and migrants as "illegals." In the lyrics "no one crosses the desert 'cause they want to. It's a necessity...a sacrifice for the family," he points to the fact that there are violent and oppressive structures and conditions that force people out of their homes, their countries, and into dangerous migration paths like crossing over the dessert. He challenges the criminalization and dehumanization of brown people of all ages who are forced to leave their homes and risk their lives in order to just survive. Of course, "you don't call them "illegals," they are "Economic Refugees," and have a right to migrate and seek a better life for themselves and their families.

The following songs are about imagining a world without borders, of breaking down the physical and conscious borders that keep us oppressed and divided. In *El Muro*, by Los Tlaxiqueros a Mexican musical band from México, the lyrics talk about resisting the

normalization of borders, and specifically, the U.S.-Mexican border wall. We are reminded that borders are unnatural, they are constructed, and have been defined in a time of war, powered by imperial wars.

Los Tlaxiqueros

*“En un sitio de guerras se construyeron los muros y todo mundo quedó en hambre (In a place of war, borders were constructed and the world was left in hunger)[...] El muro no es mi frontera y aunque los contruyen hasta el cielo los podemos derrumbar!” (The border wall is not my border and even if they are constructed as high as the skies we will dismantle them!) (Los Tlaxiqueros, *El Muro*, recording 2010).*

In *Somos Sur*, by Ana Tijou and Shadia Mansour, the Chilean hip hop artist collaborates with the Palestinian hip hop artist who was exiled with her family from her Israeli occupied homeland of Palestine.



Ana Tijou & Shadia Mansour

*Todos los callado, todos los omitidos, todos los invisibles, todos, todos, todos...all the silenced, all the neglected, all the invisible, everyone, everyone, everyone [...] fuera yanquis de America Latina[...] te quiero libre Palestina[!!!] somos Africanos, Latinamericanos, somos de este sur y juntamos nuestras manos. (Ana Tijou, *Somos Sur*, Album *Vengo* 2014)*

El Muro and *Somos Sur* imagine a world without borders and calls for the oppressed and marginalized to unite and build solidarity across borders. We are reminded that borders are unnatural, they are constructed by imperialism and attempt to control and divide peoples. For *Mujeres en Resistencia* to dance *Zapateado Rebelde* to Arab lyrics from a Palestinian hip hop artist exiled from her homeland is a way to break down national and global borders and unite our struggles and our voices. Part of the chorus of *Somos Sur* ends with “*somos de este sur y*



juntamos nuestras manos,”

and some of the steps and movements that *Mujeres en Resistencia* use in this song reflect the call for uniting our hands, our struggles, our peoples. *Mujeres* carry the *kufiyyeh* on their bodies, and

dance with the *kufiyyeh*, which is of great significance because of its Arab roots and it symbolizes Palestinian Resistance. While *Mujeres* wears the *paleacate* over their faces, representing the Zapatista’s organized resistance, at the point in the song when it says, “*Yo te quiero libre PALESTINA!*” they raise the *kufiyyeh* and then put it around their necks. Towards the end of the song of *Somos Sur*, *Mujeres* tie their red *rebosos* with the *kufiyyehs*, symbolically uniting their struggles together. They end the song with their red *rebosos* and *kufiyyehs* locked together, raised up, and with their fists in the air. Their use of the *kufiyyeh* on their bodies and throughout their dance is a symbolic marker that they’ve chosen to signify their solidarity and

claim their position of a free Palestine, and a united struggle of self-determination. In creating dance steps and movements to these songs, *Mujeres en Resistencia* interpret and center an alternative narrative that challenges U.S. hegemony and resists colonial and imperial borders over our bodies. *Mujeres en Resistencia*'s dance echoes the feelings of a marginalized peoples' resistance and hope to end power structures that oppress the masses.

On January of 2012 *Bomba Liberté* performed at a political event named *Enero Zapatista*, honoring and celebrating the anniversary of the uprising of the EZLN, *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, from Chiapas México. Some of the *bomberas* chose to wear a red *paleacate* which is representative of the struggle of Indigenous Autonomous Zapatista communities from southern part of México. This is one example of how through *Bomba* a space of *convivio* is created amongst Boricuas and Chicana/os and Mexicana/os to unite struggles. The *bomberas* wearing the *paleacate* over their faces and/or around their necks while they do *Bomba* is way to embody these united struggles through dance, and it is depicted by what and how the *bomberas* carry on their bodies.



Bomba has provided a space where both communities who share in a history of colonial and imperial oppression are coming together to create, build, and resist through music, song, and dance. Norell, a *bombera*, says how she sees parallels between the lived experiences of displacement that both Boricuas in the diaspora and Chicana/os and Mexicans in the United States have lived through because of imperialism and colonialism.

You have Boricuas who have been displaced because of colonialism, and then you have a bunch of Mexicans who have been displaced too [...] so there is this kind of *encuentro entre estas dos comunidades*. I would say we (Mexicanos/Chicanos) are more affected by the border than Puerto Ricans who are experiencing this displacement, but they are U.S. citizens, right, and I'm not trying to say, we are more oppressed, I'm just saying that there is a difference in the way they can experience the border, or whether or not they are necessarily seen as immigrants in the same way... although they still can be seen as foreigners. (Interview with Norell, 16 April 2018)

Norell describes this space as an “*encuentro entre estas dos comunidades*.” Puerto Ricans and Chicana/os and Mexicana/os have parallel histories of colonial oppression, beginning with Spanish colonialism, and then U.S. imperialism. Both Boricuas and Chicana/os have been displaced from ancestral lands, stripped from ancestral knowledge, and repressed by U.S. power systems of control. The U.S.-Mexico border does not carry the same meaning for Puerto Ricans as it does for Mexicans, Central Americans, and Chicano/as; however, we share a bordered consciousness that is shaped by imperial borders and positions our black and brown bodies as foreigners. Although Boricuas are U.S. citizens and can move freely within the United States, Puerto Rico is still ostensibly a colony of the United States, and its people are under U.S. colonial rule.



An organic *convivio* and relationship between Puerto Ricans and Chicana/os highlight the historical relationship both groups have to the U.S. that is expressed through dance. Within *Bomba*, Jade of Bomba Liberté shares that being a *bombera* resists U.S. colonialism and imperialism alongside Chicana/os.

A lot of people who have supported the *Bomba* community have been Chicanos and Chicanas in the border region, and there has been this kind of organic *conviviencia de las dos culturas*, partly because of the ways in which *Bomba* allows a community to articulate a politics of relation, to articulate a politics of social justice, of naming inequality, something that is already happening in Chicano and Chicana communities, so there has been this kind of organic connection between the two and the communities *se an aliado a traves de eso*. (Interview with Jade, 18 April 2018)

Bomba has provided a space for collective resistance between both Puerto Ricans and Chicana/os in the border communities of San Diego. Jade describes how *Bomba* “allows a community to articulate a politics of relation, to articulate a politics of social justice, of naming inequality,” which creates a space to build community across cultural identities and socio-political struggles (Interview with Jade, 18 April 2018). *Bomba* is situated in a geopolitical place

as a site of resistance where Boricuas in the diaspora build solidarity and community with Chicana/os and resist colonial and imperial structures of power that attempts to erase all of us.

Norell goes on to say,

I think *Bomba* allows for us that space of liberation, a space to feel...there is something about music and dance, and nobody can take that away from you, this legacy is going to continue [...] and having these two communities coming together is in a way, a form of breaking these barriers that are imposed. (Interview with Norell, 16 April 2018).

Norell describes *Bomba* as a “space of liberation,” and how music and dance has the power to connect us as a way to resist and breakdown borders that impose binary identities, division amongst communities, and perhaps at times antagonistic relationships with one another as oppressed peoples. I personally echo Norell’s sentiments; nobody can take the music and dance we make with our bodies from us. Indeed, oppressed and colonized Indigenous and diasporic peoples from across the globe have used their bodies as sites of knowledge and resistance to create and pass on knowledge and ways of being through our music, song, and dance.

Bomba along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands is unique and looks different from *Bomba* in the East coast, in the Bay Area, and in the island of Puerto Rico. As Norell and Jade both mentioned, *Bomba* along this geopolitical landscape has provided a “space of liberation” and “*convivio*” between Boricuas and Chicana/os, and where national, ethnic, gendered, and sexual borders are being traversed. Still, I wondered about Lazarene’s and Norell’s potential challenges as non-Boricua *bomberas*, and how they have negotiated their socio-political identities as non-Puerto Riqueña *bomberas* within *Bomba* spaces. I can imagine how not being Puerto Rican can be problematic for some *bombera/os* and Puerto Rican audiences, and might be viewed as cultural appropriation. It is a complex subject, and I felt it was necessary and important to ask

Norell and Lazarene about their experiences and thoughts. Both Norell and Lazarene shared similar experiences when asked to join *Bomba*. They expressed feeling appreciative of being welcomed into *Bomba* as non-Boricuas, and although some Puerto Ricans do have issues with non-Puerto Ricans doing *Bomba*, they didn't seem to particularly have a personal conflict or negative experience as they integrated into the group. Norell stated,

Some Puerto Ricans have issues with [non Puerto Ricans doing *Bomba*]...I think for Puerto Ricans there are different reasons why they would want to participate in *Bomba*, and Chicanos aren't going to have the same kind of relationship to *Bomba*. The way [Bomba] manifests in San Diego, I think *Bomba* is more open than other genres and traditions. Many of the group members are Chicanos, and I'm really thankful that the leaders in the group are open to it [...]As somebody who's identity is very much shaped by the border, I think that just the fact that we are dancing [Bomba] is a reminder *que somos un chingo de Mexicanos* aquí [...]even though we are not Puerto Rican, we are also continuing this legacy, and we are here due to similar political, economic, and social inequities. (Interview with Norell, 16 April 2018).

Bomba in a border community like San Diego is unique. I've witnessed *Bomba* in historically predominately Chicana/o and Mexicana/o communities and cultural spaces, like Barrio Logan, Chicano Park, La Bodega, Centro Cultural de la Raza, Chicana Perk (Sherman Heights), and at The Front (San Ysidro). I've never seen *Bomba* outside of these communities, so I am not familiar in how it manifests in other geographical sites, where perhaps there is a stronger presence and a denser population of Boricuas, like New York for instance. I've witnessed Chicana/os and Mexicana/os as not only audience members, but active participants in *Bomba*. Our geographic locality intersecting with our ethnic demographics situate us at a crossroads, where Boricuas and Chicana/os are not only traversing borders, but creating trans-bordered spaces as symbols and narratives of our trans-cultural and trans-political experiences.

Lazarene stated,

Soy Mexicana-Peruana, so a lot of times when I dance for a *primo* that doesn't really know me, they can tell that I'm not Puerto Rican, but they are also not sure what I am, because, it's not that I'm touting my horn, but I've been told I dance well, and they be like, *oye tu ere Boricua?* And I say, *no, soy Mexicana-Peruana*, and they be like, *¡Ay! pero, pero nena, baila tan bueno, como, como si casi llegara de la isla*, and I'd be like, oh no, no, I barely speak Spanish, *jajajajaja*...but I will say this, when I first joined the group, there was some hesitation from some Puerto Ricans. There are some people who feel like Mexicans shouldn't do *Bomba*, there is a bit of a divide sometimes, you know? So, I imagine this also happens with other races and cultures...there was some hesitation, but that was not going to stop me, because I was going to work for it, and I've always been drawn to the *tambor*, ever since I was a little girl and lived in the Mission (the Mission District of San Francisco), back when it still was the Mission.

It is understandable that Boricuas would like to have a *Bomba* group comprised of primarily Puerto Rican community members as an attempt to sustain and preserve Borikén cultural roots, and not risk losing cultural body knowledge and narratives that Boricuas bring to *Bomba*. “How we hold our bodies, gesture, move in relation to time, and use space (taking a lot, using a little, moving with large sweeping motions, or small contained ones)” speak to our racial, class, gendered and sexual lived experiences (Desmond, 1993-1994:38). We embody racial, class, gender, and sexual identities, and our bodies narrate these experiences and knowledges, so a Chicana Fronteriza expresses a distinct body discourse than a Boricua from the island, or from the borderlands of San Diego, or from a Mexicana-Peruana who was raised as a child in the Mission District of San Francisco, and later came to settle in San Diego and Tijuana. It is difficult trying to preserve cultural knowledges and practices while grappling with the inevitable flow and exchange of new forms of knowledge and ways of being that are influenced by dynamic environmental social, political, economic, and geographical conditions. Though there may be some tensions from Puerto Ricans who want to keep *Bomba* as strictly a Boricua space, the *tambor, canto y baile* manages to bring us together in these contentious times and geopolitical sites. It is in this liminal space where we cross through conceptual borders and

embrace “multiple epistemological positions” and produce counter-hegemonic knowledge (Ladson-Billings 2000:267). *Bomba* on the borderlands is a liberatory tool of resistance for Boricuas and Chicana/os. Though *Bomba* carries different meanings for Boricuas, Mexicana/os and Chicana/os, this *encuentro* is a site of transresistance that centers their liminal experiences and produces an alternative discourse to imperial borders and binary systems of knowledge.

Abajo con el Patriarcado!!! Resistimos con Nuestros Cuerpos

Women of color grassroots dancers use their bodies as a “decolonizing praxis,” (Jacob 2013:6) challenging white heteropatriarchy over their bodies. Indigenous and African systems of knowledge are reflective in their movements, aesthetics, music and instruments. Moreover, their ancestral epistemologies are an integral part of their bodily discourse that centers a woman of color consciousness and scripts a liberatory narrative that expresses their agency, autonomy and emancipation of their bodies. In this section I analyze the dancers’ movements, aesthetics, their physical positionality within the dance space (or stage in some instances), and meanings expressed through their bodies.

In *Bomba* and *Danza*, there is a time and space within the dance where a dancer (s/he/they) is physically positioned in the center and hold a role of leading the dance and/or the music. Although *Bomba* and *Danza* have women and men dancers, when women are physically at the center and leading the dance and/or the music, she has agency to speak in her way, and men follow her, whether it be with the beat of the drums or through dance movements. The practice of having women of color dancers at the center, and leading and interpreting the dance in their own way offers a counter narrative to white patriarchy. When women of color are physically positioned at the center, their reality, knowledge, story and way of speaking is no longer marginal, but central to our collective imagination.

In *Danza*, when a dancer goes to the center, it is referred to as having the “*palabra*.” María describes it as if you’re being given “the mic” to share your word/s. The *danzante* is at the center, near the drums, and the copal burns, while the rest of the *danzantes* are in the outer circle following the *danzante*’s “*palabra*.”



The person who holds the *palabra* (or as María refers to it “the mic”) is leading and sharing their prayer to the beat of the drums and the *chachayotes*. At the moment a woman *danzante* takes “the mic,” and offers her “*palabra*,” her body narrative is centered, while also resisting a Eurocentric patriarchal discourse imposed on her body. “As a *mujer*,” María describes, “I feel I have an opportunity to interpret this particular dance in this way, because my *mujer* body wants to in this way, but my *mujer* feminist consciousness also wants to share this in this way.” During María’s *palabra*, she leads the *danzantes* with her body, her prayer, her feelings, her interpretation of the dance. The *danzantes* around the circle see her, follow her, and also embody her way of being. She scripts an alternative bodily discourse to white patriarchy, a Chicana feminist bodily discourse, through her movements.

In *Bomba*, the *batey* is when you are in “the middle of the cypher, the circle,” and where a dancer has the liberty and freedom to move her/his/their body in whichever way they desire,

and while the primo drummer plays the drum to accent the dancer's body movements. (Interview with Norell, 16 April 2018). There is a direct relationship and interaction that takes place between the primo (drummer) and dancer, which is unique and distinct from other dance forms where the body movements follow the music at all times. In *Bomba*, however, the *bomera/o* is given the space to play music through their body. Jade describes the dancer as having a "music making role, where she, the dancer has all of this agency that she rarely has...the *Batey* is a place to be seen [...] it's like I move my body, and I'M being HEARD!!! Right? You are hearing me! You are not just seeing me!" In the *batey*, as Jade strongly states, the dancer's black and brown body is seen and heard in a way that she is usually not seen or heard within a white male dominant discourse. She has agency over her body, her music, and the story she tells the audience. Lazaren shares how *Bomba* has provided a safe and empowering space in her life.



Bomba is very empowering... In *Bomba*, you are in control, and for me I feel like I am actually in control, my life has been in such disarray, I went through a lot of stuff in my life, so with *Bomba*, I feel safe, for me it is safe, because I am controlling what I'm doing with my body, and I'm expressing it, and if I'm sad it comes out, but I know it is okay because I'm controlling it. (Interview with Lazaren, 14 April 2018).



Lazaren is “in control” of her body, in a way that she may not always feel outside of the *batey*, outside of this creative space, outside of this platform that centers a woman of color consciousness. In the *Batey*, she chooses how to move and expresses her body, she has agency and has the freedom to express various feelings, like vulnerability and sadness, but in her terms, and in her own way. She is controlling her body, and not allowing someone else to impose and control her movements and expressions of her body, or her will. As an audience member, I see her, I hear her, and I'm in rhythm with her. I learn from her, I learn her story, and it isn't an imposed pre-scripted story of a black and brown woman through the lens of white patriarchy; instead, it is a woman of color centered bodily script of resistance.

The policing and controlling of race and gender solidifies the cultural hegemony and establishes binary relationships that create fear and violence towards the Other (Spade 2015:55). Women of color bodies are a threat to the dominant national discourse of white heteropatriarchy which results in heightened levels of racial and gendered surveillance and policing over their bodies. Western European dances are particularly rooted in Eurocentric worldviews that construct white heteropatriarchal gendered ways of thinking with our bodies, performing with our bodies, and how we relate to one another with our bodies. By dancing what the body feels and resisting a gendered dance, the women are challenging heteropatriarchal norms that impose binary gender narratives on our bodies. I asked the women about the role and influences gender plays in their dance. From their responses it is evident that gender is an integral part of their dance, and the stories they convey about gender, their relationship to gender and their resistance of gendered norms. Veronica describes how in *Mujeres en Resistencia*, *zapateado* is danced differently in comparison to traditional baile folklórico. She describes how *Zapateado Rebelde* breaks through traditional gender roles that are reproduced in baile folklórico. She says,

It's not like this kind of *zapateado* is for the men, and this *zapateado* is for the women, we fuse them, and we dance *zapateado* in the way we want. We create *zapateado* based on what we feel [...] it's about creating something new and [challenging] the traditional...and what resonates with our own struggles as women in resistance. (Interview with Veronica, 10 April 2018).

In crossing over from one gendered *zapateado* to the other, as Veronica describes, fusing the *zapateado* styles together, gender becomes much more fluid, and offers another way of doing gender on stage and off stage. In addition to crossing over to traditionally male *zapateado*, *Mujeres* dance as couples, which is another example of how our *Zapateado Rebelde* bends gender, and also challenges a heteronormative way of dancing. When we dance in couples we

disrupt a heteronormative consciousness that assigns a gendered bodily discourse instructing



male and female bodies to perform heteropatriarchal gendered norms. In some dances, male dancers lead female dancers during couple dancing, one of their roles during these dances is to court the female and win her over. Women's role is a more passive role, where she is courted, saved and/or conquered, but at

times gets to be flirtatious. When *Mujeres* dance as couples, however, they script another way of dancing and interacting with one another. They enact and imagine dancing that challenges heteronormativity and centers a queer discourse on stage.

In traditional *zapateado*, like in Baile Folklórico, the male centered gendered performance with machetes is a clear depiction and reflection of our male dominant worldviews that we continue to perform and produce beyond the stage. The use of the machete is strictly carried and used by men. Men dance with machetes and get their time at center stage to show off and shine with them, while the women dancers are behind the men, and/or to the sides of them, almost like a backdrop to them. The men are positioned at the center with machetes to perform their power and masculinity while the women are on the outskirts watching them show off their manhood. *Mujeres en Resistencia's Zapateado Rebelde* challenges the traditional gendered use of the machete by redefining it's use, role and meaning it has for women of color on stage.

Veronica shares the use of the machetes within *Zapateado Rebelde*, and the meaning it carries.

Generally, in traditional dances it is the men who use the machetes, that is what I have seen, and they show off with them, and the women are flirty, and submissive

and waiting to be saved by the man with the machete, however, we use them and with our presence we say, we are strong, and we are brave[...] the machete also represents las mujeres campesinas, they also use the machete for work, *y para luchar, es una arma de lucha, lucha campesina, y lucha guerrera.* (Interview with Veronica 10 April 2018).



Veronica describes the use of the machetes by *Mujeres* as a way to declare their presence, demand attention, and say “we are strong, and we are brave.” *Mujeres’* use of machetes challenges the gender binary narrative in traditional *zapateado*. Women performing with machetes also disrupts a gendered power dynamic that is performed in traditional *zapateado* between men and women, where the men are the ones who are in a dominant position and can carry the machetes and use it in a way to show off their strength, masculinity, and power, while the women look pretty on the side. Gabriela describes further how the use of the machete for women is an empowering tool of resistance and defense against patriarchy, racism, and oppressions over our bodies and our lives.

[It] is very powerful[...] symbolically what they [machetes] represent in terms of kind of defending yourself and using it as a weapon of defense, particularly as *mujeres* [...] for me the machete is an ancestral tool, and taking that tool and

creating a path for yourself, and in this sense of kind of empowering yourself to create the path that you always wanted for yourself, but for some other reason or reasons like for patriarchal reasons or racist reasons, for all of these other forms of oppression have made it difficult for you to create that path. (Interview with Gaby, 19 April 2018).



Gabriela describes the machete as a tool of weaponry and as an ancestral tool. She offers a symbolic representation of the machete and describes it as an ancestral tool that helps “create the path you always wanted for yourself.” In both of Gabriela’s and Veronica’s description of the machete, the machete is an agricultural tool in the fields, but also carries meaning and history of struggle and resistance, particularly for the resistance of *campesina/os* (agricultural workers) and rights to land. In both accounts the machete is being conceptualized and described as a tool of resistance against colonial, imperial and heteropatriarchal systems of oppression that controls marginalized peoples’ existence and self-determination.

Similar to Veronica’s and Gabriela’s insight of how patriarchy has influenced traditional *zapateado*, like in baile folklórico, Grecia questions how patriarchy has influenced the tradition

of *Danza*. Grecia shares her critical perspective on how gendered roles within *Danza* influences gender power dynamics within the group.

The majority of the time the man is the one who carries the *Danza*, the man is the sergeant, the one who takes care of the discipline, so I like to compare it to as if I am at home, and why is it the men who have the right to put that discipline in me or to teach me these things? What about the woman? I want to see someone who I can relate to, because I consider myself a female, a woman, a young woman, and I want to see someone I can relate to and have that connection to. (Interview with Grecia, 20 April 2018.)

Grecia questions, “why is it the men, who have the right to put the discipline on me?”

Her synthesis of patriarchy within *Danza* is salient. She questions the role that men are given within *Danza*, and their inherent gendered role they have in relation to power over women. The dominant role that men often have within *Danza* is influential and reflective of our private and public spheres. It is no surprise that a male-dominant narrative influences how some *danzantes* do *Danza* and embody and perform gender. Grecia points to the fact that it is often men who lead the *Danza*; they are the sergeants, the disciplinaries, and what is spoken and practiced in *Danza* also influences our gendered relationships to one another outside of *Danza*. She goes on to share how in her *danzante* group, they are consciously challenging gender roles by practicing new ways of sharing traditionally gendered responsibilities within *Danza*.

In our group, and in our own home, everybody is given the opportunity to take on different roles, where we have the guys as *saumadores*, which are traditionally done by women, and women blowing the *concha* which is usually blown by men. In our group all of the drummers are girls, the youngest is 8, they are taking all of these roles and learning from all of them, because maybe one day there is no man or no woman, how are they going to know how to play these different roles if they’ve never practiced them. (Interview with Grecia, 20 April 2018).

The practice of sharing gendered roles within *Danza* is a critical method of embodying another way of being that can be empowering for everybody. By practicing multiple tasks and roles within *Danza*, gender then becomes more fluid, and less restrictive. *Danzantes* are then given the

opportunity as Grecia states, to learn and know how to practice various roles within *Danza* and potentially outside of *Danza*. By embodying multiple roles, gender begins to be less binary, and more plural. One then imagines other ways of being outside of *Danza* and gains new insight and a broader perspective of gender and agency over their bodies.

María shares how the trajectory for women *danzantes* is shifting, and their role in leadership positions are becoming more and more common. María states, “there are a lot of groups that are being led by *Capitanas*, and more so now, there are just more *mujeres capitanas*, *jefas*, *generalas*, [...] they are leaders, and I would argue that it is the women who are preserving



the tradition.” According to María, women’s roles within *Danza* are shifting while also impacting men’s roles, and ultimately disrupting a male privileged structure. Women *danzantes* are practicing new ways of embodying gender roles

within *Danza* and offering another way of conceptualizing gender in relation to power. Dance has been a tool of resistance that challenges a white heteropatriarchal narrative over our bodies. We have agency over what and how we communicate who we are, the knowledge we carry, the stories we want to tell, which incorporate our gender, sexuality, and ethnicity all at once.

As women of color, we are taught from a very young age to be good girls, stay in our place, not take up space, don’t be loud, don’t be loose, don’t make trouble. White heteropatriarchy racializes, genders and hypersexualizes black and brown bodies, and situates

women of color in a dichotomy of virgin/whore, feminine/masculine, and white/black. This westernized dominant narrative positions black and brown women's bodies as inferior, savage, and hypersexualized beings in contrast to white female bodies that represent pureness, beauty, and goodness. Black and brown female bodies have been historically raped, beaten and psychologically oppressed by colonial and imperial powers; slavery dehumanized "the Negro woman" and "stripp[ed] her of any traits of intelligence and any attributes of femininity" (Forsgren, 2015:141). We learn and carry a white dominant narrative of who and how a "good" and "proper" woman should be and act, hence, how to display and perform white femininity. Veronica, from *Mujeres en Resistencia*, shares how, as she was growing up, she felt judged and as though she couldn't move her body freely, because she was perceived as demonstrating too much emotion and sensuality with her body. She states,

Or you are completely submissive and don't show anything, or quite the opposite, when you show your emotions with your dance, *eres una puta*. That is how I grew up, I'd hold back with my dance, because having that critical gaze over me was very difficult and I didn't allow myself to move in the way I really wanted. (Interview with Veronica, 10 April 2018).

Veronica describes what many women and particularly women of color face with these gendered and sexualized binary systems of expression. We internalize a white heteropatriarchal narrative that instills on our bodies and minds a dominant bodily discourse that defines how a woman is supposed to express her body. European worldviews of female sexuality racialize and stigmatize black and brown bodies. Therefore, in order to achieve the performance of a woman, one must adopt a bodily discourse of white femininity. Like Veronica, Norell also shares similar experiences about learning and carrying white patriarchal norms on our bodies that get passed on to us, and sometimes by not only men, but also by the women in our lives, and often by some of the most important women in our lives. We pass on what we learn about our bodies and our

relationship to our bodies that is rooted in a white heteropatriarchal narrative that attempts to define and dictate how we express our bodies. Norell explains,

The way I was raised among my *tías* and my mom, they were just more conservative, and in being sexy is seen as if you are asking for it, or at least that's how I was raised, don't sway your hips too much, don't be loud, or just like, be invisible[...]I was shy when I was young, and it wasn't good to be confident, being confident was like, *te crees* mucho, so there was something about being in the *batey* (patio), in the middle of the cypher, the circle, *y te tienes que creer* mucho in this moment! Right? you do have to have that confidence...there were boundaries to push for myself, learning how to move my body in a different way, in a way that I was not used to or in a way that I was conditioned to think as "Sexy" and "Inappropriate," even though it wasn't inappropriate, like some people consider backing up with your butt towards the primo player as inappropriate, you know, but for me, *me destapó eso*, it gave me a certain confidence. (Interview with Norell, 16 April 2018)

Norell shares what her mom and aunts told her about being a well-behaved woman, which is reminiscent to the messages I received from the women in my life as I was growing up, and a popular way of thinking among Mexican families. European worldviews of sexuality are dominant among Mexican families and stem from Spanish colonial rule, where Indigenous and African ways of expressing sexuality are perceived as dirty, sinful, and savage. The dominant narrative of a loose woman's behavior was and continues to be equivalent to body expressions that fall outside of an elite western European feminine bodily discourse. Women expressing their bodies freely, and "asking for it" is to express blackness, brownness, and lower-class ways of being. White hegemony imposes a dominant bodily discourse that prescribes white and black ways of moving that parallel acceptable and unacceptable ways of expression and being. To move freely and boldly is to perform a non-white discourse, to be asking for it, to be looked at in a degrading manner, to being touched, or to even being raped because you must be swaying your hips too much, showing too much skin, being too loud, being too confident, or simply being seen.



Norell shares how being in the *batey* helped her push patriarchal boundaries that she had internalized and kept her from expressing her body in the way she was shamed and restricted in doing. *Bomba* helped her uncover herself, *destaparse*, and build the confidence to move freely without the fear of looking too “sexy” or “inappropriate.” The *batey* provided a space for Norell to be seen, to be heard, where she found a way to heal and liberate her body and move in a way that felt good to her. Norell mentions that some people see *Bomba* and the women dancers as moving inappropriately when they are “backing up with [their] butt towards the primo player,” which reinforces white heteropatriarchal norms that say women shouldn’t move in certain ways because they are asking for it. When a *bombera* uses and emphasizes a part of her body that has been objectified, controlled and shamed, she is resisting white patriarchy. For instance, when a

bombera sways her hips, uses her upper torso, shoulders and pelvic area to move in whichever way she chooses, she is challenging white patriarchal norms that have been particularly instilled and attached to brown and black women's bodies.

While women are expected to perform the erotic and display submission to white male dominance," women have [also] been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence" (Lorde 1978:53). There is a fine line that women are expected to walk when enacting the erotic. The dominant discourse views women of color's bodily expressions of the erotic as something that needs to be overpowered and controlled. Moreover, European worldviews function under binary forms of knowledge and power dynamics that repress and often deny the presence of sexuality in our lives.

Just like women's bodies are shamed and restricted to move in ways perceived as sexy and inappropriate, women's bodies are also controlled and expected to enact sexiness in a particular way and for a particular audience. Lazaren mentions "crossing over" to another style in *Bomba*, another way of communicating with your body that doesn't always fall within a feminine style. There is an expectation for women to embody all feminine forms and ways of moving, by expressing the self in a way that is expected in a female body. A heteropatriarchal dominant narrative prescribes a feminine way of being to a female body that moves sexually and sensually for men. Our gender, sexuality, sensuality, and spirit are all interconnected, and are reflective in our dances. "Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world," and reject the vilification and suppression of the erotic (Lorde, 1978:59). Women of color dancers are crossing over racialized, gendered and sexual boundaries that attempt to impose binary systems of knowledge on our bodies. Dance is often the medium women are expected to use to enact our sexiness, and are expected to be sexy,

but not for ourselves; rather, for the pleasure and desire of men and the hetero male gaze. As

Lazaren explains,

In *Bomba*, with certain styles, there are different connotations attached to them, so like you have *Sicá*, it represents the roots of the Island, and *Ura*, the strong part, you stand upright, the core is super straight and long, like a warrior, there is a warrior type of rhythm, and then you've got, *Quembe*. *Quembe* is the flirty rhythm, it's the very flowy rhythm, and, I don't feel very flowy, jajajajaja, like a woman, all woman, [...] I don't think I'm all woman, I feel like I'm a man too, I like crossing over into the man's style because,...don't get me wrong, I love the woman's style, but with the male aspect of *Bomba* dancing, there is a lot more footwork involved, it is a bit more complex because you have to do a lot of sentences, and the men's sentences are more complicated...and it kind of affects my dancing, *Quembe* has been very challenging, because I don't feel all womanly, and sexy, yeah I'm not really like that, jajajaja ... I'm more like boom, in your face, like, what's-up, (voice is raspy) like the *Umbe*, very strong sexually, but I don't feel very sexy, I feel more powerful than flowy, so certain rhythms are challenging for me. (Interview with Lazaren, 14 April 2018)



Lazaren shares how she doesn't feel "all woman" and in *Bomba* the steps and dance styles that are attached to a woman's body doesn't necessarily make the statements she wants to make. Lazaren identifies and connects more with the male steps and styles that seem to convey

and connote to her power and that depict warrior-like movements. Lazaren doesn't identify or connect with the flowy feminine movements associated with women's bodies, she feels restricted and challenged with the *Quembe*, the flirty style. Lazaren likes to cross over to the masculine style, a style that she feels comes more natural to her, and the *batey* is where she imagines it, embodies it, and enacts it. She doesn't conform to what is expected of her woman body, nor move in a particular way that is expected of her. Lazaren's dance interprets and defines beauty, power, strength, and sexy in her way.

Women are taught that our relationships with one another "diminish rather than enrich our experience, that we are natural enemies, [and] solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another." (hooks, 2015:43). Fernanda, from *Mujeres en Resistencia*, shares some thoughts about her experience of dancing with women and building community.



I love to be able to move, *de crear con otras, de sudar con otras, de convivir con otras, de aprender con otras...* bailo para desaugarme, destresarme, para crear comunidad, to share and create with other women, and specifically with *Mujeres en Resistencia*. I like to dance with *todas* and to use dance to convey a specific

message de *resistencia, de lucha, de esperanza*. (Interview with Fernanda, 11 April 2018).

Fernanda's experience of sharing and building community with other women challenges a male dominant ideology of women as rivals, and who are only capable of having antagonistic relationships with one another. Fernanda mentions her love and experience of dancing, creating, sweating, being, and learning from one another and in community with women, and how these elements are all "part of the *baile*." These elements of community building and community empowerment are rooted in a social and political collective past and consciousness that centers a woman of color experience while also disrupting a heteropatriarchal notion of women who dance. Gabriela, from *Mujeres en Resistencia*, also shares sentiments about the group dynamics that center a feminist praxis within the private sphere, meaning when the group is creating and practicing their dances.

Dance is what brings us together, and what keeps us together, but it's also the importance of establishing these bonds and almost like I would say like a sisterhood with each other that helps us kind of create an intimate space for dancing that allows us to be creative, that allows us to come up with these dances together, and the way we come up with the dances is horizontal, in terms of us deciding together and each of us coming up with steps[...] people will ask who does your choreography, who is your leader, [...] and we say, oh, there isn't a leader, we all made the steps and choreography. (Interview with Gaby, 19 April 2018)

Gabriela speaks about a horizontal process and way of being and creating within *Mujeres en Resistencia*. From an audience perspective, it may be difficult to know about *Mujeres en Resistencia*'s conscious effort to practice a horizontal collective process that happens in the private sphere. For instance, when *Mujeres* is invited to perform, we'll usually speak before the performance and offer our dance to the community, and local and global struggles. Within the group, we all take turns to speak from one event to another, and we do this to dispel the notion or idea of one face, a protagonist representing a group. We challenge the narrative of a top down

structure, and instead, adopt a practice that reflects the power in the collective and not one individual.



Another example that speaks to our collective and horizontal way of being is in our aesthetic. A distinct physical trait that stands out in *Mujeres en Resistencia* is the use of the *paleacate* over our faces. Since the inception of *Mujeres en Resistencia*, we chose to use the *paleacate* to cover our faces like the Zapatistas, an organized Indigenous socio-political autonomous group from Chiapas, México who rose up in arms (January 1, 1994) against the Mexican government for the repression and violence over Indigenous communities and their lands. Although there can be much to be said about the *paleacate* and the Zapatistas, our use of the *paleacate* is simple. We align ourselves politically with the Zapatistas, and we also believe in

representing a feminist *mujer* collective front, a collective front that is reminiscent of the women Zapatistas, a horizontal collective, there is no one, we are all of us.

Fernanda goes on to share,

[*Ser parte de esta] colectiva de mujeres me ha ayudado crecer bastante, pero no es facil trabajar en colectivo, our decisions sometimes aren't the easiest to decide on y duramos bastante, y dialogamos, y escuchamos, y mas dialogo, y mas escuchar, y llorar... as Mujeres I've seen us try to stay true to *sigiendo el mismo ejemplo que trabajamos igual*, but needing lots of patience as we work together.*

As Fernanda mentions it is not easy to work as a collective, there are internal and external forces that are influenced by heteropatriarchy and neoliberalism that centers around the individual, male dominant, and capitalist power systems. *Mujeres en Resistencia* works towards building community, relationships, love, solidarity, and *compañerisma* through dance as a way to embody and enact a woman of color feminist horizontal praxis. As we engage in a process of decolonizing the mind and body through creative expression, such as dance, we are also engaging in “theory making.” We are theorizing and creating new feminist and postcolonial thought from non-traditional spaces, such as, creative forms of expression and our own lived struggles and personal experiences.

Bailar para Sanar y Liberar Nuestros Cuerpos

In the last section I examine how women of color use dance as a source of healing, and how that healing extends beyond the dancers' bodies and to our communities. As women of color dancers, colonial oppression has inflicted emotional and psychological wounds on our bodies and in our communities. Our bodies and our collective consciousness carry these memories of historical and present violence and oppression. There is an absolute need to heal our

bodies and spirits if we intend to emancipate ourselves as women of color, and as a marginalized people.

María and Norell share how *Danza*, and *Bomba* were integral in their healing and empowering process with regards to loss and grief in past relationships. María shares her experience of *Danza* being a spiritual space to heal, regain strength, and recover a sense of self.



Danza is about healing, a healing practice, the dancing itself [...] I got divorced five years ago, and so for me that was very difficult, that was extremely traumatic, it was a challenging separation, and it was a challenging marriage, and during the challenges of the marriage, I think that in retrospect, *Danza* was like my sacred space to go heal, to go and just pray and move, and be away, like physically away from the home where I felt it was very oppressive, from my former husband who was abusive, you know... and sometimes away from my own children where I just needed to be with myself,...today it still serves the same purpose, it has served to help me recover from that trauma, to help me recover from the trauma of domestic violence, or to feel empowered that I could actually exit the marriage and be okay and exit with my children intact and then heal and grow in my community or with the support of my fellow *Danza* community in my circle. (Interview with María, 13 April 2018).

María identifies *Danza* as a healing practice, and as a “sacred space” that provided her a time for prayer, a place to be with herself, to move freely and away from her home, where she was feeling oppressed. María mentions how she felt supported by her fellow *danzantes*, in community, in her “circle.” Norell echoes similar sentiments,

For me *Bomba* has been healing, *Bomba* has given me confidence, when having experienced so much kind of shit, even just like my first marriage, it was horrible, I was treated horribly, my experiences with men have not been positive, except with my last relationship, which is not that way now [...] I think *Bomba* in particular, is a way to say, I’M HERE! (Interview with Norell, 16 April 2018).

Norell describes *Bomba* as healing and as a way of saying, “I’M HERE!” which speaks to her survival, presence, existence, and resistance. *Bomba* and *Danza* offers a space where drummers, singers and dancers build community, and through the collective *baile*, there is a collective voice of resistance and a collective process of healing. Both Norell and María speak of



how they healed, recovered themselves and empowered to move forward and intact from unhealthy and painful relationships. The trauma that heteropatriarchy causes

is not exclusive to elite circles, or a top down structure, power and control is also imposed by those among us (Collins 1990:226). It is essential to also heal our bodies and spirits from the binary systems of power that penetrate and cross into our neighborhoods, communities, families, and intimate relationships. *Bomba* and *Danza* were spaces where Norell and María healed within

and among community. *Bomba* and *Danza* are empowering spaces of resistance, where pain, grief, and loss, can be brought to these circles, collectives, and heal our bodies and spirits in community.

When Hurricane María hit Puerto Rico, it was devastating for the island and the people. It is difficult to imagine how one can begin to pick up the pieces, recover, and rebuild after so much loss. Jade shared how after Hurricane María many people in Puerto Rico sought and found refuge in *Bomba*.

La gente iba a la bomba[...]there was no electricity, but classes were packed more than ever, because people needed it, they needed it more than ever, it was a relief, *un despojo*, but it's also like, you do it with the people you are in community with, you are responsible for each other and you take that with you. (Interview with Jade, 18 April 2018).

Jade describes *Bomba* as a way to heal, as a practice to release and relieve pain while in community with others who were living through the same chaos, trauma, and loss. In the most difficult and devastating times for Puerto Ricans, *Bomba* provided a space of healing that brought people together to create music, play the drums, sing, and dance, to feel alive, to celebrate life, and begin to release some of the pain. It makes sense, there is power in our voice, in our bodies, in our movements, and these are our tools of resistance that help us heal, empower ourselves and our collectives.

Grecia was among the women and children who offered *Danza* at the protest at the San Ysidro port of entry. She describes their dance as an offering, a blessing, and a way to give strength, faith and support to those who are fighting against border violence and terror.

We have offered *Danza* at the border, we've done marches from Larsen Field to the San Ysidro border port of entry... As people are protesting they give us the space to share what we have to give, which is giving a blessing to the space and the people, supporting one another, for all of the violence and discrimination that has been happening at the border [...] we hope to give them that strength or faith that

they need, to uplift them to keep going on with their fight. (Interview with Grecia, 20 April 2018).

Indeed, *Danza* is all of what Grecia describes - power in the collective, and the act of a collective prayer through *Danza* to support and heal the collective trauma inflicted by state violence. There is a need for the healing of the oppressed, and our healing practices stem from our cultures and ancestral knowledges, and *Danza* and *Bomba* embodies those teachings.



Danza is where community is present, it centers around community, and connects with community through dance and prayer. *Danza* is in the streets, parks, marches, cultural festivals, ceremonies, and pow wows. Like Grecia, María, refers to *Danza* as “an *ofrenda*, a personal *ofrenda*,” an offering. María states, “*Danza* is about community, you should never be a solo *danzante*, that has been a teaching that I have learned through the years from various people, *Danza* is not about the individual, *Danza* is about the collective, but each individual brings in their *granito de arena*, you know?” María’s point of how someone should never be a “solo

danzante,” but instead should be a “collective,” speaks to the fundamental teachings and beliefs that come from Indigenous epistemologies about a collective existence and consciousness that connects us to one another. Grecia echoes María’s sentiments about the collective and describes *Danza* as “a circle.” Grecia states, “we try to stay as one circle, we are all the same, we have a center, we have the elements, the directions, fire, water, earth, wind [...] *danza* is based on energy, and it is a way to lift one another when we are going through hard times.”



Grecia’s description of *Danza* is not simply referring to a physical space that is defined by the *danzantes*, but also as a praxis, a methodology of being in unison and in harmony with one another and with mother earth. The collective is created and manifested through the dance circle with the *danzantes*’ bodies, the drums, and the dance. The circle has no beginning and no end, it ties everyone together, and everyone is valued and supported equally within the circle.

Danza, *Bomba*, and *Zapateado Rebelde* are community-based dance forms that are for community. There is power in the collective, and in the ways in which these dancers’ bodies enact the collective through dance. It is not about the individual, it is about community healing

and community empowerment. These dancers' bodies are sites of resistance and their bodily discourse produce women of color feminist epistemologies and a liberatory methodology from colonial and imperial oppression. These dances are *ofrendas* and offer a healing source as they join communities in protesting *la migra* at the San Ysidro port of entry, marches, Barrio Logan, ceremonies, cultural celebrations, and schools. "Any liberation struggle to end domination is fundamentally about a revolution" that begins with the self and healing the wounds of domination. (hooks 1995:271) Once we begin to expel the colonizer within ourselves, we heal as individuals, within our communities, and then become empowered and imagine another way, a more just way of living, of being with one another, of dismantling patriarchy, imperialism, capitalism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Conclusion

Dance is more than entertainment, more than body movements inspired by beats, more than a just a feel-good motion. Dance tells stories, evokes feelings, engages and inspires. Dance is a language of a people, a form of storytelling, a discourse. So then, how are women of color dancers resisting colonial and imperial violence on their bodies, expelling the colonizer within, and achieving liberation? As I explored how women of color use dance as a form of resistance, I gained a broader understanding of how they produce a bodily discourse grounded on a "methodology of the oppressed" (Sandoval 1998:362). A method that brings to the center historically marginalized women's realities, lived experiences, ideas, expressions, and resistance that inspires us to re-imagine a more just world.

Women of color worldviews are distinct from U.S. hegemony worldviews, and there is power in that distinction, because there is power in the margins. A woman of color worldview lens is broad, multifaceted, and comes from a place where marginal voices, knowledges and

ways of being are centered and hold power. The women of color dancers in this study conceptualize power and knowledge differently by challenging colonial and imperial power systems through their bodily discourse. These dancers reconceptualize and reposition power by reclaiming and centering ancestral knowledges and her/stories on stage and in public spaces. Their dances represent and stem from a worldview that works from a different value system, one that believes in the power of the collective and not the individual, one that opposes the idea that “dominating and controlling others is *the* basic expression of power.” (hooks, the book:87)

The women in this study have demonstrated how their dance has been an "emancipatory commitment to community action that performs social change" (2003:196). *Danza, Bomba, and Zapateado Rebelde* create sites for community building, solidarity, and critical knowledge building. These dance forms are rooted in community and have an active presence in community centered spaces, like at cultural events, farmers markets, schools, churches, parks, marches, and community art centers. *Danza, Bomba, and Zapateado Rebelde* center narratives of struggle, resistance and collectivity and where sites of cultural and political exchange are created between the performers and the audiences. These women of color dancers claim political space and a political voice in public arenas where they challenge patriarchy, imperial powers and produce a feminist discourse that centers marginal voices. They do this by offering their dance in the streets, in front of state and federal buildings, at the U.S.-Mexico border and border crossing, and at marches to bear witness and protest state repression against marginal bodies.

The dancers also traverse through racial, gendered, and sexual boundaries, and script non-binary ways of knowledge. Their movements script a woman of color centered consciousness that disrupts white heteropatriarchal norms and claim autonomy, agency, and power over their bodies. *Danza, Bomba, and Zapateado Rebelde* are rooted in [post]colonial

resistance and women of color dancers produce feminist epistemologies that imagines a more just world and moves us towards colonial and imperial liberation.

Future Research

As I began my sociological inquiry of dance as a form of resistance, I hadn't realized of the range of literature that already existed on dance as a political voice. To my surprise, I came across a wide range of literature that explored influences and styles of dance reflecting our social, political and economic realities. My own inquiry of dance as resistance came from a personal place, where dance for me became my point of inquiry, of theorizing, and knowledge production. My dance pushed me to examine social and political power relations that involved our bodies and our performance of socio-political identities within U.S. hegemony. My dance made me more aware of my body, and of how my body was supposed to grapple with contradictory and binary systems of knowledge. Still, even after being exposed to an array of transnational and U.S. literature of dance as political, there is still much to be said and explored about dance and how we make sense of power and our relationship to dominant power with our bodies and through dance as a bodily discourse that upholds or disrupts cultural hegemony.

Our bodies speak, we just have to learn how to listen to them. Dance is a bodily discourse that still needs much more sociological inquiry, particularly when we are looking at dance as a bodily discourse of resistance. I barely scratched the surface with examining how women of color use dance as a form of resistance. The following are some areas of research to explore further with regards to dance as a point of inquiry and its relation to how we interpret and make sense of our worlds. The first one is to inquire on what inspires Chicana/os to dance *Bomba*? Second, further examination should explore dance as healing, and how dance heals wounds of systemic oppression and how those wounds cross into our private spaces. Third, it would be

important to further examine gender dynamics within dance forms like *Danza* and *Bomba*, where both women and men are active participants to gain a broader understanding of gender performance, gender power dynamics within the dance spaces and how it translates and transfers into their personal lives.

Appendix A

Participants in Study
Table 1.1

Name of Participant	Dance Genre	Name of Dance group	Years Dancing	Ethnic Identity
Eva	<i>Danza Azteca</i>	Danza Coatlicue	24	Chicana
María	<i>Danza Azteca</i>	Danza Coatlicue	22	Chicana
Grecia	<i>Danza Azteca</i>	Danza Mexica Tlayohlotli	11	Mexican American
Lazaren	<i>Bomba</i>	Bomba Liberté	8	Mexicana-Peruana
Jade	<i>Bomba</i>	Bomba Liberté	15	Puerto Rican
Norell	<i>Bomba</i>	Formerly Bomba Liberté	10	Chicana Fronteriza
Veronica	<i>Zapateado Rebelde</i>	Mujeres en Resistencia	4	Mexicana Tranfronteriza
Fernanda	<i>Zapateado Rebelde</i>	Mujeres en Resistencia	12	Chicana or Xicana
Gabriela	<i>Zapateado Rebelde</i>	Mujers en Resistencia	15	Xicana

Appendix B

Draft of Script Outreach to Potential Participants

Hello Compañerxs,

My name is Angélica Ruíz, and I am currently working on a master's program from California State San Marcos, in Sociological Practices. I am beginning my research project on womxn of color grassroots dance performance artists from San Diego. As a dancer myself, this project is personal and dear to my heart. My research is focused on dance as a language of the body, and how our bodies communicate and pass on her/stories, culture, knowledge, and resistance. Themes I will cover are dance and community, gender, ethnicity, storytelling, and healing. My overarching research question is how womxn of color grassroots dance performers use their art as resistance.

My project highlights the importance of dance as storytelling and how dance is, and has been, a peoples' form of resistance against repressive systems of power. I would be humbled and thrilled if you would share your experiences, thoughts, and ideas about your dance. I am trying to capture diverse voices by womxn of color on this topic, and hope that you will participate in sharing your knowledge and experiences.

The interview with each participant will last approximately from 1 to 1 ¼ hour. The interview will be audio tape recorded. The interview can be held in my home or a place of your choosing, depending on where it's most convenient for you.

Thank you for your consideration and time.

Peace and Solidarity,

Angélica Ruíz

Appendix C

Proposed Interview Questions

History of Dance

1. What inspired you to dance?
2. Can you describe your dance?
3. How did you become a part of this dance group?
4. What is your group's mission and vision?

Dance & Community

1. Where do you perform usually, at what kinds of events?
2. What determines where your group performs?
 - a. How does the location impact your performance?
3. Is your dance influenced by your communities? How so?
4. What meaning does dancing for community have for you and what do you think it means for your audience?
5. How does your dance reflect your experience living in a border community like San Diego?

Dance & Aesthetics

1. What story /ies are you telling through your dance?
2. What kind of attire do you wear for your dances, what meaning do they carry?
3. Do you dance with props, what do they represent in the dance?

Dance & Socio-Political Identities

1. Does your ethnic identity influence your dance, how so?
2. Does gender influence your dance, how so?
3. Does sexuality influence your dance, how so?
4. Do you see dance as a source of strength and healing how so?
5. Have you faced any tensions and challenges to dance?
6. Do you have family support for your dance?
7. What kinds of knowledge and teachings have you gained from dance?
8. Is there anything you would like to add that I may not have asked about, but you feel it is important to share?

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¹ The use of the "x" in woman is a way to be inclusive of all genders, and to challenge binary ways of thinking and speaking of gender. I believe it is important to engage in rethinking and reconceptualizing gender that breaks binaries and includes everyone. I struggled with the idea of using the "x" in this study, and ended up deciding not to for several reasons. I decided not to use the "x" in woman partly because it is not representative of the group of women who are in this study. I find power in the meaning and use of the "x" and because participants in this study are women who don't identify as genderqueer or gender non-binary, I thought by using the "x" it misrepresents the use of the "x" and potentially dilutes its meaning. Another reason for not using the "x" in woman or any other name that could potentially have the "x" is because this study has an overwhelming use of the names woman, Chicana/o, *bombera*, I thought it could be potentially confusing and incomprehensible for many.

² Why I chose not to use the "x" in Chicana/o. Throughout the interviews, many of the women on various occasions mentioned Chicanas and Chicanos but no one mentioned Chicanx, which is one of the reasons why I decided not to use the "x" as with other Spanish gendered names, like *bombera*. I wanted to be consistent with the language being used and spoken by the participants in this study.