

2017

# Young Chicanx on the Move: Folklórico Dance Education as a Mechanism of Self-Assertion and Social Empowerment

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## Recommended Citation

Salas, Maya, "Young Chicanx on the Move: Folklórico Dance Education as a Mechanism of Self-Assertion and Social Empowerment" (2017). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 1042.  
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**YOUNG CHICANX ON THE *MOVE*: FOLKLÓRICO DANCE EDUCATION AS  
A MECHANISM OF SELF-ASSERTION AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT**

**by**

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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**4/21/17**

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks go out to all the professors who have inspired, challenged, and guided me throughout my four years at Scripps. And particularly to the women of color professors in whose classes I first learned to put words to the feelings and phenomena I experienced my whole life. In these classes I learned to question more critically, name more confidently, and claim more proudly the histories and identities that left me ostracized for much of my formative years. If it were not for their constant, genuine, authentic care for my holistic well-being, I do not believe I would have been inspired to write the thesis I have written today. They have emulated, in different ways, the teaching pedagogies I esteem so highly in my work. It is from their example—their embodied commitment to relationships of care—that my thesis first found life.

But of course, these acknowledgements would not be complete without the immense appreciation and gratitude I feel towards my parents, family, and ancestors for getting me here today. In times of doubt, self-hatred, and dejection, my parents have pulled me back up, reminding me of my potentials and their love for me. They invoked in me a cultural intuition that would guide me in times of pain, and they reminded me of that intuition in times when I questioned myself. They have taught me resilience and they have taught me how to fight—how to fight for myself and how to fight for those I love. Gracias por enseñarme que yo no nací sin causa, yo no nací sin fé.

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## Abstract

In the context of Chicana experiences in the United States, where varying generations of Chicanas experience bicultural realities, this study shows how embodied knowledge performed through the body's movements in folklórico dance by Chicana youth from multiple generations, acts as a mechanism for reconnecting youth to cultural ties, reevaluating educational practices, and emplacing within youth, the ability to foster the confidence to express and create imagined futures. Data collection incorporated a series of interviews with eight Chicana youth and adults who have either taught or danced folklórico in the Phoenix, Los Angeles, or Coachella Valley areas. Interview participants revealed a strong sense of cultural *orgullo* that acts as a bedrock for their cultural identity affirmation and reclamation. This *orgullo* and other cultural knowledges such as *familismo* and collective consciousness were emphasized through pedagogies of embodiment. Dancers described learning these cultural knowledges not just through the embodiment of physical dance steps but through the embodiment of social customs honored by their folklórico communities. Much of these social customs centered around fostering and maintaining relationships of genuine, holistic caring. These relationships were foundational for personal, mental, and emotional growth of dancers. Through these relationships, individual identities found the support to thrive within collective communities. Given the influx of educational pedagogies that attempt to depersonalize, depoliticize, and de-emotionalize the education through the implementation of tracking systems, standardized tests, and culturally inaccessible curriculums, these stories suggest alternate forms of learning that may account for students' entire well-being. While this project is very much about reclaiming historical pasts, it is also about re-envisioning educational possibilities, discovering inner potentials and building collective communities that recognize and rejoice in those potentials. Through this study, a deeper understanding of the functions of movement and dance will strengthen platforms that push arts education and ethnic studies to greater educationalist agendas.

Introduction  
We Must Act. We Must Remember.

*“If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say that you enjoyed it.”*  
—Zora Neale Hurston

***The Seeds***

When I consider what are the seeds grounding this project, I know it has to do with my early experiences as a minority within the public education system. As a Latina raised in a predominantly white, middle-class, and conservative suburb of Phoenix, I struggled with internalizing many discriminatory racial narratives. In primary school, my curriculum pertaining to Westward expansion celebrated manifest destiny at the cost of silencing Native American narratives. In addition, school discourse forced me to endure the hateful rhetoric of my peers who questioned President Obama’s citizenship and supported Sheriff Joe Arpaio, a 24-year term sheriff who prided himself on Senate Bill 1070 will ultimately legalized racial profiling. Such speech carved into my very being, and still, my own knowledge and experience informed me of another reality. With a mother who works at a family literacy center that serves Latino immigrants, I grew up hearing stories of resilience and love as immigrant parents worked hard to become advocates for their children. These stories made me consider my own family’s positionality and experiences with discrimination. I acknowledged the privileges my family experienced being English-speaking U.S. citizens and wondered how I could turn my back on Mexicans who still endured repressive policies. I questioned what it meant for my parents and grandparents to abandon pieces of their culture and identities if still, it was not enough—I could feel the hate today.

Dolores Delgado Bernal refers to these messages and knowledges we learn from our homelife as part of our “cultural intuition” (Bernal, 1998, 7). Our cultural intuition aids minorities in coming to terms with what it means to live ambiguous identities or experience contradictory realities. It allows us to breathe the air of a racistly polluted environment, yet maintain lungs that can repel such pollution. I can recall a series of instances in my home life where my lungs were made stronger because of things my family taught me.

One of my earliest memories that informed my cultural intuition involved a mural painted in my house at the door’s front entrance. I remember barely entering kindergarten the summer that my mom’s friend, Billy, painted that mural. I never asked questions about the mural; I was never concerned about what it meant or why the brown women in the mural were naked or why they were crying or why the mountain in the background had a weeping face. I never asked these questions until white friends or the parents of my white friends came to my house and upon their puzzled faces, I saw discomfort and disapproval. It was then that I too felt shame for the womens’ grief and nakedness, because the mural accentuated this unapologetically by its very size. When I asked my mother all my questions, she told me that the women are indigenous women. They are crying because their husbands were killed by the Spaniards, and on the mountain is the face of Mother Earth who also cries because of the unfathomable tragedies and violence suffered. Though I could not understand the extent or complexities of the genocide of indigenous peoples by Spanish colonizers, I know that having attained this bit of knowledge at the age I did and having a visual reminder of its

truth in a space that symbolized safety and security throughout my childhood, shifted forever how I would understand histories and their connection with social issues of today. This knowledge sparked in me a cultural intuition. This is not to say that I could verbalize or even conceptualize what this intuition meant. But it made me realize that my family and I understood parts of the world differently than those I would grow up with and call my friends and peers.

I think about all this now. I think about how my mom's stories forced me to open my eyes to injustice. And I think about how that mural in my house made it impossible for me to forget the pain of conquest. I think about all the messages I received from my formal educational experience that contradicted the cultural intuition I knew to be true in my gut. And in the midst of this large swarm of contradiction, I recall the words of Zora Neale Hurston when she says, "If you are silent about your pain, then they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it." And I think about how that mural and my mom's experience as a social worker never allowed me to forget that pain. Because though it was not my personal pain, it was pain that reverberated to me through historical memory and the understanding that the immigrant experience of my grandparents was not so removed from my life.

This project gives me the opportunity to not only acknowledge my own pain in my educational upbringing, but to expand those wings of pain and take flight into realms of embodiment, remembrance, and creation. This healing process began when I came to college and started taking Chicana/Latina and Latin American Studies classes.



In these classes, I developed the language to express how I felt and lived for most of my life. Some of my greatest insights, however, did not come from academic settings. They came from the informal ways I was privileged to engage with art. Trained in classical music for most of high school, I decided to join the college mariachi band mostly because I happened to play the violin and a very encouraging friend never let me doubt my abilities. The switch was unexpected yet remarkably fulfilling. Fulfilling for my spirit, in the way that music connects us to those with whom we create. And fulfilling for my sense of self, for finally feeling that I was participating in something that was a part of me. And though I still felt self-conscious to claim mariachi as my own, there was no denying that I felt pride in performing and crafting a sound that connected me to the culture I felt deprived of my whole life. It is in these moments of rehearsal, when we sing those *coros* that I find a connection, an assertion, reclamation of an identity, and I know no one can take that away.

With this study, I will begin to understand and comprehend how other forms of art, such as folkloric dance, removes barriers for Chicana youth from multiple generations to reconnect not only with their cultural pasts but with their relationship to themselves, their confidence in their ability to express and create imagined possibilities, and their ability to engage in art as a community-building act. As Zora Neale Hurston reminds us, we must not be silent about our pains and sorrows. We must act. We must remember.

### ***The Roots***

This project has been a way for me to act and remember. It first took root while I was studying abroad in Cochabamba, Bolivia and attending some of the dance shows performed by my host sister's school. I remember sitting in the school bleachers with hundreds of families, my eyes sifting through the bodies of students wearing elaborate costumes, some loud and eye-catching, while others were more formal and quiet. Though the area was packed tight, I could still see small groups of dancers finding just enough space to review a few dance steps before their turn came to perform. As each grade presented their dances, parents pushed and squeezed to find the best camera shot, making me wonder if this was some sort of staple moment within the Bolivian childhood. In fact, I quickly learned that this event was called the *feria de las danzas* [dance fair] and that it happened annually at all public schools in Bolivia. As the announcer's voice rang introducing each grade level and explaining the significance and history of each dance, he emphasized the importance of dance in a Bolivian education. This made me start wondering the role that dance plays in shaping national and cultural identities.

These questions inspired me to begin conversations with students and dance instructors at an arts school for high school students in Cochabamba. During my time in this school, I observed students during dance classes and shows. I saw how freely young high school students carried their bodies, shifting their weight left and right, up and down, not ashamed of their body's exposure, and not afraid to misstep or trip. No, in fact, falls only appeared inevitable to them as they laughed at their stumbles and made

light of others' mistakes. Seeing this sort of confidence at an age this young from not only young boys but young girls who are typically made to feel embarrassed or ashamed of their bodies, changed forever how I saw the power of dance. I was in awe of their bravery and I needed to know how it was fostered. I quickly began interviews and extensive surveys with instructors and students who shared beautiful words about how the expressive feature of dance has transformed how they interact with and understand themselves as vehicles of expression and growth. In one conversation, a young girl shared with me, "La danza me ha enseñado a sobrellevar la vida y enfrentarla de una manera distinta." [Dance has taught me to endure life and to confront it in a distinct manner.] I think about this young woman's words and how dance became a way for her to externalize her life occurrences and give shape to her experiences—a way to both shape and assert her identity.

Concluding my time with these students in Cochabamba, I wanted to create a project that would exemplify what I had learned from these brave, intelligent, young students. A branch of this project entailed writing a fictional bilingual children's novel about a young Bolivian girl's journey in remembering her familial and cultural history through folklórico dance. Much of my interest in painting this story came from my many conversations with young dancers who attested to the ways that folklórico is deemed lesser or more archaic than Western dance forms such as ballet or contemporary dance. It surprised me that even in one of the most indigenous Latin American countries, where folklórico is portrayed as a staple component to an authentic Bolivian education, folklórico was still castigated for its indigenous associations,

placing it on the bottom of an art hierarchy that aggrandizes European art forms above all else.

Like in the U.S., where ethnic art forms such as *folklórico*, *danza azteca*, *bomba*, or *cumbias* are deemed strange or sinful in the light of a dominant white music industry, *folklórico* dance in Bolivia could also suffer from the rule of whiteness. This saddened me, but it also propelled me to create something that imagined other possibilities. For me, publishing *Camila y los sueños bailarines* was about reclaiming a proud connection with a cultural past in a reality where public representation of such proudness is rare or only used in appropriative terms. Furthermore, my children's book was a creative process that helped me explore how the importance of cultural continuity may be conveyed to younger audiences. It reminded me that educational understanding of the roles that cultural tradition plays in shaping our identities is a task that should be engaged with at all age ranges. Children are never too young to start learning about themselves and what factors shape their identities.

This is largely where my interest in educational pedagogies, specifically *folklórico* as a pedagogy, enters my discussion concerning how children acquire self-understanding through cultural reclamation. In the context of the Chicana<sup>1</sup> experience in the United States, where varying generations of Chicana experience bicultural realities

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<sup>1</sup> 1 It should be noted that though I use the term Chicana in my research in order to connote a historical process of displacement and its political legacies for generations of today, I acknowledge that not all Latina are Chicana or identify as Chicana. I use the term Chicana for the purpose of expediency and to highlight the political work of resistance behind the identities I describe. Chicana was a word born out of a resistance movement, and I'd like to connect my participants work with its legacies of resilience and dignity.

and face daunting pressures to assimilate to U.S. values of individualism, competition, and practicality, forgetting their culture in the midst, I ask how folklórico practice can be used to re-instill cultural values as well as equip Chicana youth with the ability to remember collective pasts. Considering my learnings from abroad that proved to me the ubiquity of Western, white culture and acknowledging the similar ways that Chicana youth are pressured to give up pieces of themselves and their cultures to survive in this Western-dominated society, I attest that now more than ever, educators must make moves to create curriculums and pedagogies that remind our Chicana youth of cultural belongings that are theirs to claim. For this reason, I have chosen to partake in a project that can help spearhead these conversations by learning and observing from what educators are already doing now to incorporate folklórico's teachings in their classrooms, rehearsal spaces, and communities. Thus, I have interviewed Chicana dance instructors and students who all dance within different regions and variously structured spaces. It is my hope that through these interviews, I might highlight some of the universal pedagogical strengths of folklórico while also acknowledging the individual conditions and realities that make every person's experience within it nuanced and salient.

### ***Chapter Review***

Because I find the specific contexts and conditions of Chicana youth critical to how they experience folklórico, I dedicate one chapter to each of the contexts where dancers learned to fashion their cultural identities. Within each setting, we see the

differences of how such identities were fashioned while looking specifically at how folklórico was taught, the relationships formed through the practice, and how student's environments determined how they grew through folklórico.

Before reaching these insights however, I find it useful to review scholarship highlighting the Chicax experience within today's socio-political context and how this context affects their experience within education. In my first chapter, I review scholarship surrounding folklórico's history and political uses both in Mexico and the U.S.. This helps set the framework for how scholars have already discussed folklórico in terms of its socio-political impacts. My discussion then moves forward reviewing the dominant pedagogies prevalent within today's educational system. I do this in order to highlight where the system is failing students, and particularly Chicax students. In this discussion I emphasize the injustice perpetuated through tracking systems, standardized testing, and colorblind curriculums speaking specifically to how they constrain, dehumanize, and disempower Chicax youth. As these educational barriers become apparent, I offer alternative pedagogical possibilities. I incorporate scholarship pertaining to embodied learning and the empathic connections created through embodiment. I discuss how these pedagogies foster the holistic growth of youth, preparing them not just for academic success but for internal growth as human beings.

With the insight gained from this educational and pedagogical overview, I began my second chapter highlighting the story and experience of Jazmin López, a first year at Scripps who discussed with me her experience dancing with her school's folklórico club in the Coachella Valley. As is shared within the chapter, Jazmin's school and those

participating in folklórico were mainly children of immigrants who spoke Spanish at home. The group performed dances for the community and at school events, and aimed to attract students from all tracks and grade levels (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>). As Jazmin attempts to organize a ballet folklórico community at the Claremont Colleges, she reveals to me the ways that community was built through her own ballet folklórico group. She shows how personal growth and development were central to building community for it was only through mental, emotional, and social growth that students were able to be better community members to one another. Jazmin also discusses the relationships students developed with the directors, who, in daring to be vulnerable with their students, opened pathways for students to heal and be vulnerable with themselves and others. This level of vulnerability, caring, and commitment to individual growth is what allowed for the holistic nourishment of students.

In my third chapter, I build from this topic of holistic caring and growth. However, instead of focusing on individual journeys of growth, my participants in chapter two emphasized the embodiment of community as key to strengthening their identities, ties, and ability to survive. The people of Ballet Espíritu are mostly recent Mexican immigrants who have found Ballet Espíritu through informal, word-of-mouth communication, either through schools, churches, or community centers. The group accepts dancers from age 5 to young adults, and even invites parents to join a few dances. In addition to the ballet folklórico, there is an instructor that teaches students and parents mariachi music. Though the two groups, mariachi and folklórico do not

perform together, they often practice at the same locations and are comprised of the same families and networks.

Central to Ballet Espiritu's identity as a group is their location in South Phoenix, Arizona, an area with some of the highest poverty rates in the state and that face some of the toughest anti-immigrant climates in the country. In interviewing both the director of Ballet Espiritu and four teenage dancers who are now leaders and mentors within the group, I see how lessons of cultural continuity are conscious issues that influence the structures and styles through which folklórico is taught. For instance, six years trailing the passage of SB 1070 which essentially permitted the practice of racial profiling and instated harsh punishments to those who hire undocumented workers, immigrant raids within local *barrios* of South Phoenix have become common and lived nightmares for those without documentation in Arizona. As immigrant communities fight to assert their right to exist, they face a fear that threatens to silence their existence. Immigrant communities have essentially been left with little room to advocate for themselves or their communities, and as a result, have been fearful to take up and disrupt spaces. This silencing of immigrant voices evidences their exclusion from social platforms and spaces, denying their social citizenship and their rights to exist as fulfilled people in this world. Yet, even under these circumstances, communities like Ballet Espiritu which consist largely of those who live under these pressures and fears, have found innovative ways to create, disrupt, and nurture new spaces of community.

Thus, whereas Jazmin discusses folklórico as a personal journey, participants from Ballet Espiritu discuss folklórico as a family act that relies on full family



participation and support in order to exist. Embodiment of cultural and social values is just as critical as the embodiment of folklórico steps. Creating spaces through which families can teach their children cultural and social values through embodiment leaves lasting impacts on how these families reclaim a social citizenship that they have been denied.

As I venture into my third and final chapter, I engage more closely with this idea of embodied learning; however, I look specifically at how the raw emotions summoned during dances lay as the foundations of cultural and social knowledge. This knowledge dictates how Chicanx youth carry themselves in the world. I turn towards my own family's story and battle with assimilation, interviewing my tío and tía who both danced folklórico for their city's parks and recreation program in the City of Commerce in the 1970s. Children of immigrants, they reflect on the lessons engrained in them through folklórico, and specifically how cultural dignity and pride were instilled through embodiment of emotions, dress, and movements. Through their experiences, we come to see how embodied emotions lie as the foundations for much of our knowledge. And just as our emotions evolve across time, so do our knowledges, demonstrating the fluid, fluctuating, and living aspects of knowledge. It is through this chapter that I discuss the living elements of knowledge, art, and community and how individual contributions and sacrifice are critical to feeding the knowledge, art, and communities alive within us.

As I reflect on why I selected the stories I feature, I am reminded of a quote by bell hooks<sup>2</sup>. She claims that experiential and analytical ways of knowing is a privileged standpoint that “does not emerge from the ‘authority of experience’ but rather from the passion of experience, the passion of remembrance” (hooks, 1994, 90). I firmly believe that through the words of my participants, one can hear not just an experience, but a profound passion for that experience and an eager willingness to remember that experience with urgency. Through this mindful selection of experiences, stories are cradled from the lips of my participants, unraveled slowly in some moments and rapidly in others, synching rhythms, inflections, tones with the emotions, memories and intuition felt within. It is my hope that through careful listening and considerate reflection, I am able to capture the passion of their experiences and their passion to recollect those experiences—sometimes with pain, sometimes with love.

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<sup>2</sup> I do not capitalize bell hooks’ name because hooks herself abstains from doing so. This is to avoid hierarchal systems of thinking, especially in regards to who produces knowledge validated by academia and who is barred from doing so. Anytime that her name is capitalized is because it begins a sentence.

## Chapter 1

### Literature Review: Beyond the Aesthetic of Performance

At first glance art is seen as purely aesthetic. If not visual, the aesthetic is audible, tactile, aromatic, or a combination of all four. In the Western context, art is something to be enjoyed, something to bring aesthetic pleasure. Only those behind the craft—those who have hunched over their work for hours, rubbed their skin thin slamming their feet against the floor, calloused their fingertips digging their skin into metal strings—only those who have labored through art can see what lies behind the aesthetic. Behind the labor of producing and creating, there is authentic, internal, transformative work being done that transcends the aesthetic outcome of art. Art is more than the aesthetic. It is more than the performance. And that is what I aim to show with this project. I want readers to see the undertones, internal battles, complexities, and confusions that come with art making. All of which amount to growth. Only then might art be taken seriously and given adequate consideration as a critical component of educational pedagogy.

Before I can unravel the testimonies that speak to this truth, I must bring my conversation to the ongoing discussions already surrounding folklórico. Thus, I will look to the work of folklórico artists and researchers who have written extensive histories about folklórico on both sides of the border, acknowledging how it has been used in both places to perpetuate and challenge violence. To do this, I examine cultural theorist Sydney Hutchinson's socio-political account of folklórico's role in constructing

the Mexican nation state. Her analysis gives insight into the history of folklórico as a social and political weapon within Mexico, which aids me in unpacking anthropologist Russell Rodriguez's arguments about the lack of authenticity of U.S. born Mexicans performing folklórico. Debunking this notion of authenticity, Rudy Garcia emphasizes the unique perspectives Chicax youth bring to folklórico. He invites readers to evaluate the distinct context under which Chicax youth experience folklórico, and how that unique context alters the significance of its performance, so that folklórico's embodiment can symbolize a very political act. Through this analysis, we are led to Susan Coutin's notion of "re/membering" and the ways Chicax youth are made to forget or "dis-member" the conditions that immobilized them in the first place. It is through these accounts that I hope to relay the social, historical, and political context of folklórico practice in the U.S.. We may then situate my participants and their stories within these circles of dialogue.

### ***Socio-political History of Folklórico***

Despite common belief, some veterans of the Chicano Movement and researchers of folklórico have proposed contrasting views in regards to folklórico's ability to be a political force that reconnects Chicax youth with cultural identities. In his essay, "Folklórico in the United States" Rodríguez, a folklórico dancer during the Chicano Movement, describes his personal realization that throughout all his years dancing folklórico, he was only mimicking representations of Mexican culture, but never embodying that culture itself (Rodríguez, 2010, 344). From a different vantage

point, while studying the history of Ballet Folklórico de México<sup>3</sup>, one understands that its choreographies, movements, symbolisms, and performance attire were all interpretations of its leader and founder, Amalia Hernández. In her essay, “The Ballet Folklórico de Mexico”, Hutchinson explains the ways Amalia Hernández’s work complied with efforts to formulate a state-sponsored nationalist narrative that fabricated a visual definition for Mexican authenticity, despite the fact that such choreographed dances were actually the creations of one woman’s interpretation of mestizo and indigenous culture (Hutchinson, 2010, 214-215). The danger in imbuing a cultural representation with culture itself is that it simplifies and erases the contradictions and differences that reside in cultural realities. And as Rodriguez would argue, it manufactures a false expression of authentic culture.

While I problematize the political and appropriative construction of folklórico, I argue that folklórico practiced and embodied by Chicax within the U.S. is not a representation of Mexican culture (and thus, inauthentic). Instead, it becomes its own piece of culture. Rudy García refers to the cultural perspective or outlook that the dancer brings to folklórico. He asks how one’s context shapes one’s cultural perspective so that from his or her vantage point, the embodiment of folklórico transcends realms of representation and becomes culture itself. In the Chicax context then, we must refer specifically to the double colonization of Chicaxs—the fact that Chicaxs in the U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> Ballet Folklórico de Mexico was the first and leading folklórico group in Mexico. Its founder and director, Amalia Hernández, would choreograph and imagine all the dances and outfits that all folklórico groups to follow would mimic and reference as their main understanding and interpretation of Mexican ballet folklórico.

confront a peculiar form of cultural reclamation and remembering because they must engage with two interlocking and overlapping histories of colonization from Spain as Mexicans and the U.S. as Chicaxs.

These histories are embedded with structural violence that has made the remembering of societies before colonization a difficult and nearly impossible task. Coutin describes this process of “dismemory” when she speaks about the thousands of Salvadorian youth who flee from one form of violence only to travel through Mexico and encounter alternate forms when they enter the U.S. The U.S.’s refusal to acknowledge these migrants as refugees and label them as “economic” migrants erases the structural factors that expelled migrants from their homes and split them from their families in the first place. It manipulates the human memory to only recall *that* they left and that they are *not* welcome in this country. It criminalizes their existence in the U.S. They become “dismembered” as Coutin puts it—they are literally denied membership but also forced to forget “the histories through which people become deportable” and through which violence is naturalized (Coutin, 2016, 4).

“Re/membering” as Coutin phrases it, puts us into conversation with the structural formations that propelled us to forget in the first place. It provides for a “creative process...that involves ‘putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible’” (Coutin, 2016, 5). It allows us to affirm, internalize, and write those memories like an etching on our skin. I think about this notion of re/membering when I consider all the innovative ways those with identities of color must learn to re/member in order to assert their identities in this society.

For example, the distance, both generational and geographical, that separates Chicana youth from their Mexican ties, creates a wedge of “dismemory” such that, in their attempts to confront the barriers that have normalized forgetting, Chicana youth formulate memories based on what is known to them. Those with closer ties and memories to Mexico remember ballet folklórico because of its worldwide commercialization and its use by Mexican authorities as a script for Mexican nationalism (Hutchinson 2010). Such nationalism constructed a visual representation for Mexican authenticity that generated a political economy of folklórico culture founded upon Amalia Hernández’s single interpretations of mestizo and indigenous culture. Her depictions erased the stories of current indigenous populations by glorifying their dead ancestors, excluding indigenous people today from writing national narratives. In doing so, Hernández also adopted a single mestizo identity that occupied a peculiar position with its access to racial mobility through *blanqueamiento*, a strategy used to become more European and similar to their U.S. neighbors. In showing how cultural meanings are determined and molded by the contexts and conditions through which people create and experience political realities—not by an innate essence that comprises culture—I show how culture can never claim title to authenticity. Thus, before we critique the authenticity of Chicana who appropriate folklórico dance for their individual purposes, we must ask ourselves what makes Amalia Hernández’s interpretations of mestizo and indigenous cultures any more authentic? In attempts to pin-point authenticity, we simplify and erase the contradictions and differences that are inherent to how people experience cultural realities.

So while ballet folklórico does not provide an “accurate representation” of *indigenismo*, *mestizaje*, or *Mexicanidad* for that matter, and fails to fully undo the cultural and social legacies wrought by double colonization, I argue that the unique vantage point through which Chicax youth experience folklórcio allows them to remember their roots in ways that destabilize power structures and uncover new methods of sustaining tradition across borders. Given the institutionalization of imbuing crime to color and the valorization of white culture over non-white cultures, it is difficult for Chicax youth to construe positive cultural identities. That is why I argue that the specific U.S. context through which Chicax youth reclaim those identities, alters the meaning of folklórico within that context. When Chicax youth dance in the U.S., they are doing more than constructing a cultural identity—they are fashioning such an identity within a political economy that profits from their cultural and political erasure.

### ***Dominant Pedagogies***

For the rest of this chapter, I want to move towards constructing an understanding of the unique context through which Chicax youth experience folklórico dance education. In order to do this it is useful to unpack Chicax youth experience within education on a general level. This allows us to evaluate how the teaching pedagogies of folklórico compare to the dominant pedagogies and norms prevalent within many Chicax educational experiences. As such, I examine some of these dominant norms, looking specifically to the works of Chicano historian Gilbert



González and his research documenting the historical roots of tracking systems and standardized testing within Chicana education. Drawing connections to how these historical legacies persist today, I turn towards educational theorists Gillian Russom who elaborates on how educational policy makers have attempted to translate neoliberal economic policies into classroom pedagogy and structure. We can wholeheartedly see the ramifications of such policies through the accounts of educational theorist Gilda Ochoa, as she specifically highlights how racial, social, and class politics directly impede how Chicana youth see themselves and their potentials.

Further research confirming the implications of racist and classist pedagogies on students' of color self-concept is evident in a Stanford study examining the psychological damage of implementing "colorblind" curriculums. Through these discussions, we see how institutional legacies such as tracking systems, standardized testing, and "colorblind" curriculums have become normalized. By naming and addressing their racist and classist origins, we can more easily identify how they permeate and distort the achievement of Chicana youth today. With familiarity of the educational barriers facing Chicana youth today, readers are better able to understand the significance of folklórico scholar Olga Najera-Ramirez's accounts of folklórico's use within the Chicano Movement. Her descriptions of the transformative work it did in refashioning how Chicanos viewed themselves helps us understand what is lost and at stake when dominant pedagogies (i.e. tracking, standardized testing, and culturally incompetent curriculum) exclude the possibility of folklórico.

To begin this discussion, I look to Ochoa's work in *Academic Profiling* (2013), which deploys a three-pronged analysis of the structural factors in the educational system which perpetuate achievement gaps along lines of race/ethnicity. She explains a macro-meso-micro framework where the macroscopic describes the dominant ideologies that shape institutional structures (ex. racist, classist, sexist principles), the meso-level includes school policies and administrations (for example tracking, standardized testing, etc.), and the microscopic signifies the common-day interactions that function through language, attitudes and simple exchanges (such as micro-aggressions, teacher expectations, etc.) (Ochoa, 2013, 11). Ochoa turns the social division of the classroom into a political argument by exposing how economics impact the educational structure. She argues that the educational system today is overwhelmingly capitalistic, systematically dividing students based on economic and racial groups, and tracking them into particular career paths. This "prepar[es] both middle- and upper-class students for managerial and high-wage positions while ensuring a pliable working class—often comprised of Blacks and Latinas/os—that fills low-wage occupations" (Ochoa 11).

Such division of labor through the educational tracking of students has historical roots tied to the era of segregation in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his book *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*, González provides a historical context for how educational tracking first took root in Chicanx communities. Dating back to the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, González depicts how agricultural labor demands in the Southwest

delineated how education was implemented as well as who received what education. Because Mexican migrants, with their children, comprised a vast majority of the agricultural labor force, there was economic incentive for educators to maintain these labor divides.

As González relays, public education served to train citizens for a class society with a rigid division of labor. But first, policy makers and educators needed to convince populations that there was a legitimate determinant that dictated a specific labor route for students. That is the role Intelligence testing, or IQ tests, played in separating and tracking students for different life paths. However, as González conveys, IQ tests were neither unbiased nor legitimate determiners of intelligence. In fact, they perpetuated notions of biological intelligence, despite the fact that all IQ tests were in English and placed English Language Learners at a distinct disadvantage. Nonetheless, IQ tests and the biological intelligence discourse it perpetuated set the framework through which educators were able to justify that “knowledge should not be equally accessible to everyone but apportioned in relation to their mental ability” (González, 2013, 71). Thus, Chicax students were quickly and automatically tracked into vocational training as opposed to Anglo students who received curriculums that trained them for white collar, professional careers. From this, we see how tracking and standardized testing have classist and racist origins. Understanding these roots is fundamental in that we can begin to problematize normalized structures of tracking and standardized testing by identifying how their classist and racist roots leave legacies on Chicax educational experiences today.

Russom analyzes these same structures of tracking and standardized testing, drawing connections about how these structures naturalize and facilitate capitalist economies and values. She argues that they attempt to turn students and teachers into robots by manufacturing a standardized curriculum and method of measuring growth that rewards obedience over independent and critical thinking. In critique of the value-added model system, which quantifies “the ‘value’ a teacher has added to his or her...students’ test scores”, Russom argues that the system simplifies the diverse complexities of educational disparities (Russom, 2012, 123) . It ignores the nuanced histories and conditions through which disparities arise, such as underfunding, stress at home, or internalized inferiority propelled by decades of racist and classist tracking systems.

Student growth is then consolidated and constricted to percentiles, scales, and test scores. These scores determine and justify what track a student will take and too often the student’s self-worth. The internalization of such self-worth is further perpetuated when school systems ascribe cultural and racial inadequacies to explain why certain students do better in tracking systems than others. For instance, in Ochoa’s case study involving students from Southern California High School, Ochoa describes how discourse surrounding family is used to explain why Latino children, who tend to follow the remedial track, have lower retention rates than Asian-American students, who tend to follow the International Baccalaureate or honors track. Some educators claim that it must be because of a flaw in Latino culture that undervalues education rather than, as Ochoa explains, “the multiple economic and political contexts infringing

on household resources and opportunities” (Ochoa, 2013, 37). Accusations that ascribe structural inequities to cultural flaws have psychologically hurtful effects on Latino children and their self-concept. Suddenly, when a teacher shares a joke with the class that justifies someone’s high marks on a test because he or she is Asian, Latino students, though consciously registering the statement as a joke, subconsciously find truth within the claim. Ochoa shares one student’s remarks: “but it’s like even if you’re joking around there is always some form of truth to it. It has to come from somewhere”, showing how simple exchanges in the form of a joke (i.e. the microscopic), can implant internalization processes among Latino children—processes that could result in lower self-expectations, self-esteem, and overall performance of Latino children. These negative effects on Latino children’s self-concept only work to heighten already existing insecurities concerning their cultural and racial belonging within a white America.

Curriculums that fail to incorporate or convey the experiences or histories of minority children also catalyze feelings of inferiority. Renato Rosaldo begins one of his books by sharing the words of queer U.S. feminist poet, Adrienne Rich. He quotes Rich by saying “ ‘When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing ’ ” (Rosaldo, 1993, xxi). This idea of ‘psychic disequilibrium’ or complete internal disjuncture speaks to why many proponents of ethnic studies

programs argue that these curriculums help assert a political, cultural, and historical identity that has otherwise been subverted by such ‘psychic disequilibrium’.

The practice and teaching of folklórico dance can be considered a type of ethnic studies, for within each dance, lays a history that captures the cultural, political, and social dynamics of a peoples and place. Thus, it should be noted that as I continue a pedagogical argument for ethnic studies programs, I also, by extension, argue for dance education, but specifically folklórico dance education as I see it as a medium through which young generations may learn and embody ideologies and knowledge performed and practiced by ancestors.

We see some of the harmful effects of educational curriculums that fail to incorporate perspectives and ideologies of communities of color when we look at student performance within colorblind curriculums. In a study observing student of color performance in Arizona where colorblind curriculums have proliferated, Julio Cammarota outlines why adopting a color-blind attitude and eliminating curriculums that include racial terminology is in fact, harmful to students of color. Cammarota says that “Denying the existence of racism may connect to the realities of those who live above and beyond oppressive circumstances but often fails to capture the experiences of students of color” (Cammarota, 2014, 80). This speaks as a counterargument to colorblind ideology that has been implemented in response to legislative movements of the Civil Rights Era. Where colorblindness denies the existence of racism by refusing to ‘see’ color, it also denies experiences of students of color who suffer alienation and

isolation in the classroom, thus exposing how the colorblind perspective perpetuates unfair treatment among students (Cammarota, 2014, 83). Curriculums that fail to capture culturally relevant pedagogy participate in this colorblind ideology which can have detrimental effects on student academic achievement.

A Stanford Study examining the academic achievement of students enrolled in an ethnic studies program in San Francisco High Schools as opposed to similar students who were not enrolled in ethnic studies courses, showed that students taking ethnic studies courses attained attendance rates 21 percent higher and GPA's that were 1.4 grade points greater (Donald, 2016). Some of the lessons implemented through the ethnic studies program included a student analysis of how advertisements further enforce cultural stereotypes, invoking the idea that some acts are 'normal' while others are not. Such lessons in critical inquiry helped students to better understand how stereotypes are created and perpetuated. They reduce the psychological effects of stereotypes on students by revealing the external forces that craft them (Donald 2016). Lessons such as these equip students with the ability to critically analyze the social and institutional systems (i.e. external systems), that so greatly impact their experiences as cultural, racial, and ethnic minorities. In doing so, they may be able to undo internalization processes that isolate their experiences from external forces, and as a result, begin a process towards self-assertion and empowerment.

The study of the historical and cultural roots embedded in Mexican folklórico dance has been used on several occasions to re-instill and inscribe cultural values and ideologies. During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, folklórico groups

became instrumental vehicles for re-invigorating Mexican culture and pride, especially among youth populations. Nájera Ramírez likens the push from the Chicano Movement to re-seize Mexican cultural traditions to the efforts of Mexicans to re-claim and re-define Mexican nationalist identity during and after the 1917 Mexican Revolution. She quotes muralist Adrian González saying:

“ ‘The post-Revolutionary artists sought within Mexico those art forms most representative of the Mexican culture. This attempt to re-invest with native pride the indigenous and the mestizo, the lowest members of the classes, was reinterpreted in the United States, particularly in Los Angeles in the Mexicans’ struggle for equality’ ” (Ramírez, 1989, 27).

In reinvigorating Mexican culture, folklórico dance groups during the Movimiento helped Chicanxs whose families had been in the United States for generations to better connect with their cultural ties while also dispelling negative stereotypes that plagued the Chicantx identity in the U.S. such as the lazy, dumb, criminal Chicantx. Folklórico groups could be found at political meetings, church groups, community events, or public schools. In fact, Ramírez describes how Chicantxs at universities used folklórico groups to attract Chicantxs to their campuses, showing and exposing a visual image that Chicantxs are enrolled in higher education—their bodies and presence cannot be erased (Ramírez 28). If we consider these encounters of folklórico and the specific ways through which they counter the harmful student internalization processes that Ochoa described in her research, we see the potential that folklórico dance education possesses for Chicantx youth today. Its historical ability to ward off negative stereotypes and bring Chicantx youth together despite efforts to divide



with tracking systems, fortifies cultural identities that have been beat down through social and political shame.

### ***Embodied Pedagogies***

More than explaining the historical context through which folklórico dance has been used to inspire cultural unity and calling out the damaging pedagogies that target Chicana youth, I want to explore the psychological underpinnings as to why art—ballet folklórico—can serve the development and growth of Chicana youth. I will begin with a review of literature revolving around theories of embodied learning. In relation to our discussion of dominant pedagogies, I propose embodied learning as a pedagogical tool that counteracts the systemic attempts of dominant pedagogies to compartmentalize, de-emotionalize, and depersonalize the learning experience. I find it critical that we study closely literature concerning embodiment, as I feel it is the starting point for delving into deeper conceptualizations of how embodiment may be used for transformative change.

To begin this discussion, I first reference Foucault's analysis surrounding surveillance of the body and how societal knowledge (e.g. standards of politeness) is performed through the physical behavior of the body (e.g. how we greet and say bye to people). Through this constant performance of knowledge through the body, we become the enforcers of our own discipline. Foucault's argument about surveillance becomes more prevalent with Judith Butler's discussion of gender performance. Through her work, we see how gender identities are embodied through the body's behavior, making

us realize that all identities—gender, class, social, or racial—embody behaviors that exemplify how certain identities are supposed to move through the world.

In order to gain more insight into how people embody cultural identities, I turn to education theorist Helen Boyle’s work on Muslim children’s embodiment of the Qu’ran. Her work shows how embodied learning inscribes itself into the character and memories of young children, so that as they move throughout life, they will always have their cultural inscriptions to reflect upon and from which to pull new meaning. Her analysis exemplifies embodiment’s everlasting qualities, and the reason why it is such a strong pedagogical tool for combating pressures to assimilate and “dis/member” cultural ties. Eliza Huerta’s example of how *danza azteca* strengthens cultural connectedness in the midst of intense pressures to assimilate echoes Boyle’s notion about the resilience embodied learning possesses. Huerta shows how amidst hate, dances themselves embody the cultural values of equity, balance, and communal respect that assimilation platforms aim to silence. If we recall Foucault’s earlier point about carrying social knowledges within our bodies, we may ask what can be powerful enough to erase the knowledge inscribed in how someone learns to move. This is why I argue that embodiment must stand at the forefront of teaching for radical change.

As such, my dialogue surrounding embodied learning begins by acknowledging the foundational notion that the body is not merely an instrument of knowledge transmission, but an archive of knowledge. Within it and its movements, resides knowledge itself. Foucault claims that the normalization of the observational

examination process is what produces knowledge. Using his Panopticon Theory of surveillance, Foucault shows how people become subjects of their own discipline as social expectations (i.e. methods of surveillance) are normalized in order to produce an almost ‘natural knowledge’ of how certain bodies are to act and behave (Foucault, 1975, 58). Movement, performance, and action are critical ways through which people police their own bodies to perform in socially accepted ways. In this way, our bodies perform a certain type of societal knowledge. Likewise, Butler argues that physical embodiment is critical for identity formation processes or how we come to know ourselves. Butler specifically speaks of embodiment in terms of gender identity formation. She explains how gender is produced on the “surface of the body”, that is, “acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs” (Butler, 1990, 417). In other words, gender identities are a socially constructed form of knowledge that ascribe how particular bodies are to act, perform, and move.

I want to expand Butler’s idea of embodiment and gender identity formation to explore how embodiment is used to construct racial, ethnic, or cultural identities.

Boyle’s examination of embodied learning through the memorization practices of the Qu’ran by pre-school students in Morocco, helps us understand how cultural identities are constructed. Boyle uses the analogy of an engraving to help readers conceptualize

that similar to the sacred calligraphy engraved into the walls of the finest Islamic mosques, the early memorization processes of the Qu’ran by pre-school children is a way to inscribe knowledge “on the walls of [young children’s] minds, over which they can let their minds’ eyes wander as they grow. They can appreciate the beauty of words—the rhythm, the rhyme, the intonation” (Boyle, 2007, 121). That is, sound, inflection, tone, and rhythm, as opposed to solely written text, can also become sensory details that further stimulate the interpretation process shaping how Moroccan children come to discover and give meaning to a cultural knowledge which will then shape their cultural and religious identities. With Qu’ran verses engraved into their very psyches from the youngest ages, the words can be “retrieved, uncovered, and rediscovered” at different points in their lives so that “The meaning of the words unfolds itself over time, providing insights on how to live” (Boyle, 2007, 122). In this way, we see how memorization practices are used as a tool for embodied learning, through which Moroccan children shape the foundations of their religious and cultural identities.

Though folklórico dance may not have the same world view impact that the Qu’ran has on Muslim children, I want to acknowledge the similar ways that folklórico is an embodiment of knowledge that guides children in their cultural self-discoveries. For Chicax children who often grow up with differing degrees of bicultural realities as they balance Latino home culture with the Americanized influences at school and through the media, the transmission of such cultural knowledge, traditions, and values that are critical for identity formation become more difficult. Huerta shares how the

practice of *danza azteca*, which includes indigenous cultural dance forms used to express contemporary interpretations of Aztec-Mexica philosophic ideologies, allows Chicana to embody indigenous knowledge in the midst of the overwhelming amount of pressure to assimilate and forget cultural ties. She shares the specific testimony of a Mexican-Apache woman who, after feeling concerned about self-damaging comments made by her four-year old son concerning his dark features, decided to enroll him in *danza azteca* classes with the hopes that he may develop a more positive self-image (Huerta, 2009, 10). Huerta explains how *danza azteca* can include movements that mimic astronomical formations as well as the movements of daily life called *pasos*. Some of these *pasos* can include the harvesting, planting, and preparation of foods (Huerta, 2009, 13). Though such movements are probably foreign to young Chicana, the fact that they can speak through their bodies, the astronomical belief systems and food preparation knowledge of their ancestors, helps foster a sense of cultural belonging and inclusion.

Huerta speaks about how many of these *danzas aztecas* maintain a community inclusive aspect. For example, during the dances that mimic astronomical formations, one person is designated as the sun and thus, leads the rest of the community members who follow in circular formations embodying the surrounding stars, moon, and planets. However, the position of sun always rotates among the dancers so that each person has the opportunity to lead, communicating the importance of balance, equality, and respect for each community member (Huerta, 2009, 13). The ways that dance choreographies

inscribe cultural values and knowledge through movement is an almost irreversible process. As one of my participants remarked to me “how can I unhear the choreography...you can’t unhear the steps of this dance”. Thus, I ask how might dancers unhear the values of recognition, acknowledgement, and communal consciousness that come from embodying steps which exemplify those values?

### ***Embodied Pedagogy as Point of Empathic Connection***

Beyond embodied teaching’s resilient ability to stay with dancers throughout their lifetimes, I want to look further into the empathic connections that embodied pedagogy fosters. It is my belief that such connections serve to emotionalize and personalize educational experiences in a way that promotes community among our classrooms and the humanization of our peers and teachers. As such, I value observing what ethnomusicologists and teaching philosophers have to say about group art making and relationship of care fostered through dance. That is why in this next section, I look majorly towards ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino’s work about the psychological emotive feelings that music can trigger. Though Turino solely speaks about sound as stimulus that triggers emotive connection, his arguments are useful for imagining how movement and tactile sensations may also act as stimulus for empathic connection. With this analysis, it is useful to look towards a classroom that actively attempts to enact these sort of connections. Thus, a study from New Zealand detailing how dance teachers may connect with students along empathic lines aids us in understanding how those connections expand children’s potentials and growth.

To begin this discussion, I highlight concepts from Turino's *Music as Social Life* (2008), particularly his comments on community building through music making processes. Instead of emphasizing music as a performative event, he values the collaborative process of music making and how emotive relationships are formed through such processes. He references U.S. philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs and how they function to communicate and forge emotive bonds between human beings. Peirce's theories of signs include icons and indexes where icons reference images or sounds that *resemble* stimulus we have seen or heard before, and indexes include the "experiencing of a sign and object together" (Turino, 2008, 8). Turino shares examples for each, such as how for an icon we associate a sound as 'scary' if it *resembles* sounds that we have previously categorized as 'scary' in our psyches, or how for an index, a song that is repeatedly played at weddings can cause a person to think of weddings even when a wedding is not occurring (Turino, 2008, 8). In this way, we develop emotive meanings and interpretations for certain sounds which help us to develop empathetic connection among those with whom we experience those sounds. Turino illustrates this in further depth with his explanation for how icons and indexes function during participatory music practices:

*Iconic and especially indexical signs ties us to actual experiences, people, and aspects of the environment. Indices are of our lives and experiences and thus are potentially invested with greater feelings and senses of intimacy and reality. Indexical experience plus a perception of iconic similarity with other people and forms of life is the basis for feeling direct empathic connection* (Turino, 2008, 16).

Pierce's theories of signs as well as Turino's analysis of the empathetic connection signs can foster during collaborative music creation processes, adds a new dimension to how we perceive embodied knowledge as a vehicle for community inclusion and belonging. Instead of sounds acting as signs, movements become icons and indexes that dancers learn to associate with certain spaces and times. If a dance is about honoring Mother Earth and the harvest she brings, then the actions and movements used to represent such harvest will trigger emotions of celebration, joy, and community wellbeing. Likewise if a dance is about war and loss, its motions, which are often performed in a synchronized manner, will evoke emotions of loss, pain, and collective healing. Both instances of dances—harvest and war—induce an empathetic connection among those who embody its actions. This speaks to Turino's words about the sense of 'oneness' emitted through participatory artistic practices:

*Within the bounded and concentrated frame of musical performance that sameness is all that matters, and for those moments when the performance is focused and in sync, that deep identification is felt as total. This experience is akin to what anthropologist Victor Tuner (1969) calls *communitas*, a possible collective state achieved through rituals where all personal differences of class, status, age, gender, and other personal distinctions are stripped away allowing people to temporarily merge through their basic humanity (Turino, 2008, 18).*

It is in this way, that we come to see embodied dance practices as mechanisms for social empowerment. When communities can share one another's joys and pains, they are stronger. They are more unified, and their loyalties run deeper. Instead of existing as unlinked individuals, they transgress into an entire ocean whose force is not



easily or readily stopped. Dance education, and specifically folklórico dance education within Chicana communities has the unique ability to both nurture a personal identity rooted in cultural and historical frameworks while also threading a collective identity, that by default of its colonial positionality, is political in nature and functions to socially organize and empower communities. I argue that it is through this nurturing and threading of personal and collective identities that souls are transformed.

I study folklórico dance practice and education with the intent of joining a greater argument for the national implementation of a dance and ethnic studies curriculums that emphasizes embodied knowledge and self-expression as vehicles to discover our most inner potentials. Living in a society that increasingly undervalues the impact and role of the arts in our national educational systems, it is important now more than ever to consider how creative processes of expression through art develop students on a holistic level, tending to their mental, emotive, cultural, and social needs.

A case study completed in New Zealand that evaluated the role of multicultural dance education at the primary level, reports that dance pedagogies that incorporate, “an interactive approach where the teacher and the students construct learning through the relationships they develop with each other, and with the curriculum”, allows children to enhance their critical, creative, and empathic capacities (Melchior, 2011, 121). This means that student and teacher relationships are fostered when teachers truly come to know their students and how their students learn. One way teachers can better come to know their students is by valuing students’ personal experiences and encouraging the

expression of those experiences. When teachers enact learning environments where students can reference personal experiences as the inspiration for their creative productions, youth were able to engage with embodied understandings of themselves as opposed to a disembodied pedagogy that centers the teacher's choreographies. Melchior refers to words of dance educational theorist Adrienne Sansom: "Dance, as an embodied understanding of ourselves, can connect to a moral and ethical pedagogy that not only honours the life of the child but also makes possible a new way to envisage being human" (Melchior, 2011, 126). I ask readers to evaluate this quote within the context of Chicax experience in today's current educational system. I argue that with the ability to "envisage [new ways of ] being human", Chicax youth are not confined to the conditions of their contexts. Instead, they use the knowledges gained from living in those contexts as the inspiration for what allows them to see possibilities beyond those contexts. In an age of teacher-centered pedagogies, dance pedagogies that value students' individual experience and expression undermine structures that cloud imaginative thinking.

Thus, the driving force in my methodological approach centers the voices of youth dancers, asking them what is the role that folklórico has played and should play in Chicax youth lives—not merely on a cultural level, but on an emotional, mental, spiritual, social, and educational level as well. If it were to be enacted through an educational paradigm, what might we learn from those already doing it?

### ***Methodologies***

This study consists of interviews with eight people, one of whom is currently a ballet folklórico director and the rest who had the pleasure of learning folklórico throughout their childhood. All interviews took place within the summer and fall of 2016 in the homes and rehearsal spaces of my interviewees. All of my interviewees are Chicaxs who are from and danced in one of three places: Los Angeles, the Coachella Valley, or Phoenix. All interviews were conducted in the cities where my participants dance, except for the dancer from Coachella Valley who I interviewed in a Claremont College dorm. Interview duration ranged from 30-75 minutes but averaged around 50 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for reference. I chose interviews as my main method of research because I felt that if done carefully, they leave open pathways for participants to reflect honestly and intricately about experiences. I also appreciate the conversational style that my interviews adopted. I enjoy the aspects of *convivencia* and *compartiendo* that manifest within interviews that adopt conversational tones. It is my hope that through the light-hearted yet passionate tone of my interviews, participants felt comfortable to share the fun and the sad, the rough and the joyful. Only with both dimensions, an embracing of that which hurts and that which heals, do we reach full-fledged reflections.

In order to accomplish this, I tried to ask questions that might cover all terrains of their experience. I asked about relationship formed within folklórico, be it relationships with themselves, other dancers, their instructors, or the families of other dancers. I asked about how folklórico was taught and how dances were created. I asked

them to describe the dynamics of their folklórico groups and the feelings they experienced while dancing. I ask them what they feel folklórico has taught them and I asked them how they carry those lessons into their daily lives. Given the limits of time, it was not always possible to delve deeply into each of these questions. Thus, I purposefully hovered over topics that my participants seemed passionate about, careful not to force questions that did not seem to influence or energize participants in ways that other questions did. In this way, I tried as best I could to read the language and signals of those I interviewed to allow them to control what we talked about and how long we talked about it. So for example, some interviewees had a lot to say about the relationships they built with themselves through dance while others stressed more the familial ties created through bonding within a greater folklórico community. Others went into specifics about the structure through which folklórico was taught while others emphasized the dynamics of the group they danced with. In all these conversations, I tried to respect what my interviewees chose to emphasize and shed their hearts on.

In terms of how I came in contact with my participants, I met most through informal settings. Many of my interviewees are family, friends I met through school, or people I came in contact with through community work in Phoenix. Though all my interviewees are Chicaxs, their ages vary. Three of my interviewees, including the folklórico director, are in their middle years, typically 50-60 years of age, while my youngest participants are students in high school. The class backgrounds of my interviewees remains relatively constant within my interviewee pool. While all participants are working-class or were working-class at the time during which they

practiced folklórico, two now consider themselves middle class, though their low-income backgrounds still determine how they experienced folklórico. Besides the folklórico instructor, all my participants were second generation to the United States, meaning that their parents are immigrants from Mexico. The folklórico director, however, is an immigrant to the U.S.. Of my nine interviews, one was conducted in Spanish while the rest were in English. In terms of gender breakup, the majority of my interviewees were women, while I only spoke to one man. This speaks to the regulation of gendered activities prevalent within Latino families.

While the variance in age, geographic location, and the lack of parity among gender and class may pose theoretical issues in terms of how I come to synchronize my data and sew a common thread throughout, I value the variety of backgrounds my interviewees provide. If anything, the diverse conditions under which people learned folklórico in tandem with the commonality of their positionalities, demonstrate the ways through which folklórico's themes, values, and lessons may hold true regardless of the different contexts through which it is practiced. The similarities and commonalities that are maintained despite contextual differences speak to the universality of folklórico and the lessons it is capable of instilling.

Additionally, the variety of how people learned folklórico (some learned through city centers, school clubs, and community groups), informs me of the different tactics, methods, strategies, and pedagogies folklórico instructors are already using to infuse their practices. Some of these strategies may assume a different appearance within the different contexts they are exercised. However, with my project, I aim to

highlight the similarities in strategies used under different contexts, exposing the ways through which people experience similar phenomena in different ways. In drawing connections amongst different folklórico experiences, I hope to weave a narrative that finds recognition between differing yet related experiences.

While weaving a common narrative is key to my project, I also aim to differentiate and spotlight specific narratives and stories. Though my number of interviews is relatively small, and cannot speak to all the memories, knowledges, and experiences felt through folklórico, it allows for a more intimate understanding and expression of individual stories by the mere fact that there are less voices competing to be heard. In fact, Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa claims narrative-style story-telling as a Chicana feminist epistemology, highlighting the intuitive ways through which Chicana women “know” and theorize. Honoring this method of knowing as a stark challenge to Western systems of knowledge that often enforce binaries (e.g. emotional vs. logical) as a means to cement hierarchal, hegemonic ways of thought, I embrace the intimate and nuanced honesty that narrative-style writing grants to my project. Through it, I am able to humanize and individualize my participants in a way that is often absent from dominant knowledge-making processes.

## Chapter 1

### Through the Pulling of Flesh: Self Discovery and Empowerment Through Folklórico

Jazmin Lopez is in her first year at Scripps College, a liberal arts school in Southern California. I first met her one afternoon while hanging out in SCORE, a community space on Scripps' campus for students affinity groups. Perhaps it was because it was the beginning of the year and there were a lot of new faces, but for one reason or another, I decided to introduce myself. Within the first few minutes of conversation, Jazmin mentioned her deep desire to begin a ballet folklórico group on campus. Given my thesis topic and my past experience in Bolívia with folklórico dancers, I was immediately excited with the energy, enthusiasm, and hope that Jazmin's aspirations represented. I shared with her my own experience with Claremont's performing mariachi group and a bit about my thesis topic. Being that not too much of our campus's population is familiar with the topic of ballet folklórico, I would say that it was luck that Jazmin and I crossed paths that day.

When I finally sat down with Jazmin, months later, to begin our interview she explained to me a little of her background, where she started to dance, and what first brought her to folklórico. Growing up in the Coachella Valley and attending a high school with a predominantly low-income Mexican migrant population, Jazmin describes how she first encountered folklórico through an afterschool club organized through her high school. She began her sophomore year because it was something a few of her friends had gotten involved with, and she figured she should try because it looked "cool". Though Jazmin had never taken any previous dance classes, it was something

she was attracted too because it was “difficult and fun”, and through it she found herself “meeting new people” and “hanging out with [her] friends”.

Through her words, we witness how folklórico quickly became a personal journey for Jazmin to discover her physical, mental, and emotional self. We examine the conditions and relationships that allowed Jazmin to foster such self-growth, specifically the relationships of “authentic caring” practiced by her folklórico directors. In her testimony, we see how her directors’ practice of vulnerability in community spaces became a critical teaching pedagogy that aided students in their own journeys of self-growth. At times, practicing vulnerability meant raising concerns within the folklórico space. But rather than these concerns eating away at the communal aspects of Jazmin’s folklórico group, such contention may be viewed as community in progress—showing how acts of creation, such as dancing, may involve a tough, painful, and at times confrontational experience, but one that ultimately strengthens communal bonds and empowers individuals. As Chicana feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa states, “For only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed”. I believe that through Jazmin’s experiences, we see where physical challenges underlie mental, emotional, and spiritual transformation. In this chapter, I invite readers to ask how pain births growth and becoming, and how expression of the body through folklórico becomes a vehicle to foster such becoming.



### *Folklórico as a Method to Disband Tracking Systems*

As described previously, folklórico functioned as a personal hobby that attracted Jazmin because it gave her a social space to connect with friends. Yet later, as Jazmin described the dynamics of the group and the challenges that would arise, we understand how her initial reasons for joining transformed to give her greater reasons to stay. One of these reasons includes how folklórico became a pathway for Jazmin to meet new people, people with whom she did not normally interact with given the structure of her school. For example, Jazmin described some of the social barriers at her schools that divided students amongst different academic tracks. She explained how counselors did not pay much attention to the kids who were not on specific tracks for success such as the Advanced Placement (AP) track, and how they would “kinda just put you on whatever [track] to be babysat”. Such divisions prevented the formation of a cohesive, tight-knit community among the vast student body at her school. It was only through the extracurricular of folklórico that Jazmin, a student chosen for the AP track, found herself breaching some of the barriers that stratified students. However, though Jazmin reaped the benefits of being part of a club that brought together students from all cliques and tracks, that was not necessarily an intended effect of the club.

In fact, Jazmin described how the folklórico director hoped to create a folklórico classroom curriculum that was intended specifically for seniors who had been pushed to the side throughout their educational upbringing. She explained how student who weren't AP students or students seen as “problem students” were often ignored by

counselors and “put on whatever [course schedule] to be babysat”. This meant that oftentimes, when seniors were getting ready to graduate, they would be missing simple P.E. credits. Jazmin states how this was humiliating for seniors and she expresses how her folklórico director thought to correct that by creating a folklórico P.E. curriculum:

*And as seniors, I guess they don't wanna be in the class with a bunch of freshmen. So maybe they don't show up or they don't pass the class or for whatever reason it doesn't work out, right. So that class kinda served to put the students who weren't necessarily on a track or they weren't considered special, but once they got there they were given an opportunity to do something that was fun and worthwhile and keep them off the streets hopefully, and keep them on track for their grades. And give them a reason to kinda wanna go to school.*

The director's as well as Jazmin's acknowledgement of the unjust ways through which students are shuffled through the counseling system at their schools is evident of a deeper awareness that aims to support children rather than abide by the labels and treatments previously prescribed to them by school systems. It is clear that the director's compassion for his students and their struggles transferred to other students involved in folklórico—even the students who had not been pushed through the educational cracks, such as Jazmin. For example, Jazmin's non-judgmental and empathizing language used to describe why students may not finish their last P.E. credit is evidence of how such consciousness was learned. For instance, she empathized with how students might feel embarrassed or humiliated to “be in the class with a bunch of freshmen” so as a means to rebel against a school system that has never shown them much compassion, “they don't show up or they don't pass the class”. Such understanding and ability to empathize with her peers of different tracks is exactly what the tracking system robs from students. But aided with her director's mindset and outlook, Jazmin adopted a

different approach that challenges normative thinking patterns aimed to solidify hierarchal relations. In the next section, I want to take a closer look at how the director's outlook influenced the quality of relationships he had with students. More so than just verbally expressing his desire to create a space for those who had been unjustly pushed to the side by the educational system, Jazmin affirms the ways he attempted to nurture that space through caring words and practices.

### ***Authentic Caring of the Full Dancer***

Chicana educational theorist, Angela Valenzuela introduces the concept of aesthetic caring versus authentic caring in her book, *Subtractive Schooling* (1999). Behind the idea of authentic caring lies the notion that the teacher or instructor cares for the whole student's well-being, not just the aesthetic appearance of their well-being or temporary success. While aesthetic caring focuses on "nonpersonal content" like rules, goals, and 'the facts', authentic caring is "premised on relation with teachers and other school adults" where the entire well-being of students is their chief concern" (Valenzuela, 1999, 343). Though Jazmin never uses the word "authentic" to describe the actions or relations her director had with students, evidence of this level of caring becomes apparent when Jazmin exemplifies how her folklórico director expressed his motives for investing and spending time with his students.

*He would always say 'I love doing this because you all are my children pretty much and I'm taking care of you and teaching you and spending time with you. And it's better that you do this than go out doing things that kids that age shouldn't do because it could set them on a really dangerous or unhealthy path.'*

The level of honesty and vulnerability exhibited through these words is immense. The director was willing to express his care and concern for the personal well-being of his students before any mention of their academic success in return. Unlike Valenzuela's description of nonpersonal aesthetic caring, his words are premised with the personal, alluding to the love a parent feels for a child. When Jazmin's folklórico director not only verbally expresses the ways in which he cares for his students like his children, but also shows them through the time and effort he puts in to making folklórico a permanent curriculum, we can feel his genuine yearning to see his students happy and safe. Such expression of caring aligns with Valenzuela's idea that before students will care about school, they need to see that teachers care about them. This is how the authentic caring of students is embodied in practice. However, in order to further dissect this idea of authentic caring, it is useful to look at the lessons and skills that students learned under the folds of authentic caring, which aided not only their academic success, but their mental, emotional, and social development as well—in other words, how the authentic caring of students nourished students' holistic, genuine growth as young adults.

Jazmin shares how the guidance of her director through folklórico created a space for some to begin such pathways of holistic development:

*There wasn't anyone in the group who didn't have their issues and every time we danced and the director noticed that people were having a bad day, he'd tell them, 'I understand that you're having a bad day. But don't take it out on other people. Take it out on the floor. Use that energy and channel it through your feet'. And ya, I think that helped out a lot of people. And some of us didn't form that strong of bonds, but others did, through that.*

The fact that the director validated the students' feelings by saying, "I understand that you're having a bad day" does work to strengthen the trust between teacher and student, demonstrating that the teacher cares and is in tune with his students' emotions. Additionally, the director acknowledges that when his students come to dance, he is not just interacting with a person that has come to dance. He is engaging with a whole being. A person that has home life, school life, and complicated life involving friends. A person who experiences stress and pressures within these facets of their lives and who cannot compartmentalize aspects of themselves to fit the demands of the moment. The director acknowledges the students' whole being by validating that they have emotions and realities outside of ballet folklórico and encouraging them to not repress those realities, but embrace them. Use them as fuel to channel energy "through your feet". Take those emotions "out on the floor". When students feel that sort of acceptance—a holistic, entire, unconditional acceptance—they will discover their best selves.

Likewise, in her book, *Teaching To Transgress (1994)*, bell hooks makes the point that in order for students to be willing to find their best selves, they must see their teachers' willingness to do the same. Jazmin sheds light on a how the folklórico space was not just a space for students to deal with their problems, but a space where even the instructors found healing and resolution:

*So I think [dance] helps a lot of people. Not just me. I had a lot of self esteem issues and a little bit of depression and bad eating habits, but also there were people with severe clinical depression. Like the Misses, the one who was the director, she has really bad depression, clinical depression, and I think she has bipolar disorder. And I*

*think dancing was a really good way for her to kinda vent that out. That was true for a lot of the dancers.*

The recognition that *everybody*, not just young students, was in a process of developing and growing together, tears down walls of supremacy or hierarchy. It creates the understanding that not one person is more worthy than another when all are on journeys of self-improvement and healing. Hooks comments on this when she states, a “holistic model of learning...cannot happen if [teachers] refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (hooks, 1994, 21). Thus, it is a positive experience for students to see their teachers reveal aspects of their personal growth and journeys because it challenges the “dualistic separation of the public and private”, allowing teachers and students to recognize a “connection between life practices, habits of being, and the role of [educators]” (hooks, 1994, 16).

Jazmin’s recognition that dancing was a really healthy way for many dancers to vent their personal issues reveals that to an extent, dancers felt comfortable enough to share their private lives within the public setting of folklórico. This, I attest, is largely attributed to the director’s embracing of self-actualization in the rehearsal space, an act that hooks claims engages students and encourages them to become active participants in the classroom and to “consider issues of reciprocity” (Hooks, 1994, 11). That is, if teachers are willing to be open with students about their struggles and learning journey, both academic and personal, students are more likely to give back through their own openness and vulnerability. This breaks down hierarchal methods of thinking that solidify the teacher as all-knowing while inviting students to give back through their

own honesty and engagement with intimacy. It creates dynamics of giving and receiving and of reciprocal balance, so that the group becomes a place of community. A place where independent identities may develop within a collective.

### ***Finding Oneself Through Folklórico***

While Jazmin speaks about her journey to find herself through dance, we see how her self-discoveries enabled her to be a better friend and community member to those around her. However, before she could reach that level where she was able to support others, she had to undergo self-discoveries. Jazmin shares how when she first started ballet folklórico, she was very “impressionable” and “tended to follow what everyone else was doing”. Though she knew she had the potential to be her own person, she had the tendency to find someone she admired and try to be exactly like them, “hav[ing] them in mind whenever [she] was making decisions”. Such habits did not create for the healthiest friendships. When she joined the ballet folklórico group and was exposed to a new variety of people from groups and cliques she had never interacted with, she found friendships that functioned in healthier ways, friendships that did not always put her down. She describes how she had to start finding her own way and exploring her body’s abilities and strengths:

*In the beginning I mentioned that I would look a lot to other people to see what the steps were so that was something I had to get over and I think by the end, I did. You can’t spend the entire time looking at your feet or looking at someone else’s feet. You have to keep your chin up, look everywhere else but your feet or anybody else’s feet because you’re gonna get confused. And also, you just gotta learn to feel. And that’s not something someone can teach you, you just gotta learn. I remember when I was trying to help that girl out who was having a lot of trouble, that’s something I told her, ‘I can*

*teach you how to do the steps technically correct. But the rhythm, the confidence, the tone, the facial features, everything that's you. I can't teach you to do that. And that's gonna come with time. And I'd tell them, 'don't look at your feet, don't look at me'. Remember what you're supposed to do. So that was something that I learned and something that I really like doing because I could see how that transformed other people like it had transformed me.*

Jazmin makes the point that there are some aspects to folklórico that nobody can teach—it must come from within yourself. The ability to find these aspects of yourself within folklórico begins with not looking at your feet, or even the feet of others—one must look upwards and feel how to move. From a metaphorical viewpoint, this journey to find your own style of expression and creativity through folklórico is similar to finding one's self through young adulthood and maturation—one must ultimately look up and follow their own way. Perhaps Jazmin only intended for a literal interpretation of the passage above; yet, there is no contesting that Jazmin's ability to “feel” the music and allow the inner-most parts of her being to guide her physical expression, aided her discovery of her sense of self.

Turino, an ethnomusicologist, speaks of this phenomenon of self-discovery when he comments on the state of intense focus that art-making pushes its participants towards. For instance, Turino refers to the state of “feeling the music” as a state of “flow”. Flow refers to the idea of how music and art aid individuals to reach a “fuller integration of the self” (Turino, 2008, 4). It literally refers to “a state of heightened concentration, when one is so intent on the activity at hand that all other thoughts, concerns, and distractions disappear and the actor is fully in the present.” (Turino, 2008, 4). This ability to let go of the daily concerns, worries, and distractions of life and enter



a state of pure concentration can be relieving and restful. In fact, it could explain why many psychologists say it is healthy to balance one's life with work and physical activities. More so, it allows people to leave behind worries of the immediate past and future and to live in the present—to feel in that exact moment. When Jazmin reminds her fellow dancer that she must “learn to feel” and “remember what [she's] supposed to do”, she is touching upon Turino's concept of flow and the ability to trust yourself enough to reach a “fuller integration of self”. Thus, when dancers like Jazmin explore their body's physical limits and capabilities, they also explore the mental and emotional nuances of their beings, finding new avenues through which to synchronize their physical, mental, and emotional selves.

When members of a community are given the space to explore alternative methods of expression and develop their individual selves by focusing on their internal happiness, emotional well-being, and physical capabilities, they become better community members because they now have the time and energy to act as greater support systems to those in need of finding themselves as well. That is why, in our analysis of personal growth, it is useful to also analyze how social connection and aspects of community building and mentorship play immanent roles in fostering strong independent identities within collective communities.

### ***Mentorship as a Means to Sustain Spaces of Growth***

I want to specifically focus on how relationships of mentorship within Jazmin's folklórico group, instilled traditions that sustained and recreated spaces of growth, both

literal and figurative. Such traditions, which were enacted by the whole community, nourished the individual development of dancers, both in terms of their dance technicality and personal empowerment. For instance, Jazmin refers to the idea of older members of the group making space for new members of the group by giving up their spots during performances:

*[I]n the beginning because I was a newbie they put me out there a lot. Because for most newbies, they're trying to get you used to performing. Trying to get you to manage nervousness and stage fright, trying to get you to start managing that. And by my senior year, I wasn't there as much, but that was so that I could give up my space so that someone new could take my place.*

The reciprocal practice of claiming space with the mindful intent to recreate that space for younger, less experienced dancers needing to improve their technique and self-confidence, is demonstrative of social and collective awareness. Instead of self-advancement and individual gratification acting as centers of validation, students are taught to make way for younger generations of dancers, whose skill set and ability to perform with confidence determine the longevity and activity of the group to come. Thus, Jazmin, along with the rest of the student dancers, learn that individual interests and improvement cannot exist if not for the continuation and unity of the entire group. Such communal consciousness is rooted in the notion of moving in and out of space. Such concern for taking and creating space shows the value of balance, equality, and respect for each community member.

Hooks comments on this idea when she mentions that in order to reach the goal of transformative pedagogy, “everyone [must] feel a responsibility to contribute”

(hooks, 1994, 39). However, in order to reach this level of comfort where people feel willing to contribute, “the [director] must genuinely value everyone’s presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes” (hooks, 1994, 8). When Jazmin’s folklórico group makes a tradition of moving out of spaces for newer members to occupy, they practice what hooks refers to as an “exercise of recognition”—the practice of hearing one another speak. In the case of folklórico, where sentiments are expressed through movement, the exercise of recognition is fulfilled by *seeing* one another move. Thus, we realize how the exercise of recognition enables individual abilities and confidences to grow while also permitting collective respect and communal prosperity.

I assert that there is a correlation between making space to develop a dancer’s technical ability and the making of space to develop a dancer’s holistic growth as a person. The two ride hand in hand because the physical and expressive aspects of folklórico push people to come to terms with questions of who they are. Jazmin’s drive to encourage a struggling friend to join folklórico is a testament to this:

*And there was this one girl and she’s like my sister now. And I encourage her to join because I saw that she needed it. I saw she was going through the same things I was going through. She had a lot of self esteem issues and issues with her body. And she suffered with anxiety and depression and she had a lot of problems at home. And I was like ‘hey, this is a safe place and you’re gonna do good here’. And she did. She’s a completely different person now. She grew into herself. So I think that helps a lot of people. Not just me.*

Through these words, Jazmin expresses concern not for her friend’s growth as a dancer, but as person who cares, knows, and loves herself—as someone who feels

complete. In this case, Jazmin saw her folklórico group as a space that would allow for such understanding and growth. She knew that it would make space for her friend, not just on the level of developing her technical abilities but on the level of developing her own self-love and self-knowledge. Thus, what begins in a communal space immediately becomes a personal journey, yet, the knowledge and understanding gained through the personal journey enables the prosperity of the folklórico as a collective. As a means to avoid an overly-picturesque, all-praising analysis of the dynamics and functions of Jazmin's folklórico group, it is useful to also give attention to points of contention and the ways with which they were dealt.

### ***Contention As Community In Progress***

One matter of contention that Jazmin brought up consisted of how the group, both directors and dancers, dealt with issues of gender dynamics within the dances and rehearsal space. For instance, Jazmin elaborates on how many students, particularly those who identified as girls, protested when the director assigned the guys to lead the dances:

*A lot of the girls would have a lot of issues when the director would be like, 'girls you have to let the guy take the lead'. And they'd be like, 'no I can take the lead too'. So there would be that and he'd have to be like, 'well it doesn't matter who takes the lead, but someone has to take the lead, preferably someone who know what they're doing'.*

Here we see a glimpse of how matters of gender roles reinforced through dance were addressed. We see a group of young girls ready to speak out against the confined tradition that males must lead couples dancing. Upon first look, this particular protest

may be seen as negative or as detracting from the strong community bonds described previously. Yet, I argue that such points of confrontation may be signs of community in progress. Bell hooks claims that within spaces where individual voices are genuinely valued, “there is infinitely more feedback because students do feel free to talk—and talk back. And yes, often this feedback is critical” (hooks, 1994, 42). The fact that students felt comfortable enough to voice their frustrations—to “talk back”—signifies the points at which communities are reshaping and refining their own understandings. Folklórico’s reinforcement of masculinity and gender binaries within the Latino culture has been a matter of contention for dancers for many years as they grapple with how to celebrate a culture whose traditions can enforce harmful gender binaries. In the end, Jazmin’s folklórico group dealt with these issues by allowing the most skilled dancer to take the lead, regardless of gender. Yet, Jazmin recognized that this did not address a bulk of the gender issues she confronted while dancing, such as the very particular messages these dances reinforced about womanhood and sexuality.

*But ya, all the dances, all the costumes, the way we were supposed to act, like all coy, and hard to get, that’s like reinforcing this idea of virginity and virtue. And that was something that I really struggled with, even in my personal life because that was something my mom really believed in. And it’s a time in your life when things like that aren’t really talked about but they’re still being reinforced. There wasn’t really a healthy way that I dealt with that because I didn’t know how. And you just kinda go with it and I didn’t focus so much on me and what that meant to me as a woman but more like this is fun for me, and this is me being comfortable with my body and stuff.*

From Jazmin’s words, we see that she did not necessarily have a solution to this stalemate. But she recognized how it affected aspects of her personal life, in particularly

the way she was taught to carry herself as a young woman in relation to her mother's beliefs on womanhood.

Though Jazmin may not have had an answer to these questions, her constant awareness of these issues and how they manifest in other aspects of her life signifies a thought process. A thought process that was likely experienced by other young women in the group who felt strong enough in their convictions to vocalize their discontent with male leads. In other words, though neither Jazmin nor any other group members had specific answers to address their discontent towards these confining gender roles, their thoughts were in process and progress, demanding that women too, take the lead. Thus, we see how Jazmin's feelings and ideas towards the reinforcement of gender binaries through folklórico dance were constructed within a community of other young women and men whose ideas and thoughts were also in a state of becoming.

The authentic caring of their directors and their directors' willingness to be vulnerable with their students created the atmosphere where students could be vulnerable with themselves and their peers. Under this environment, students were encouraged to explore the physical potentials of their bodies, not only understanding the constraints and limits of their physical selves but understanding their mental and emotional habits and behaviors. Through this discovery process, frustrations arose—physical, social, and personal, reminding us of Anzaldúa's words from the beginning of the chapter: “only through...the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed”. We see that under the dynamics of a community family, students were taught to be

vocal and creatively express their frustrations so that their developments on a personal and communal level were always in a state of becoming—never halted or paralyzed. In this way, transformation was welcomed and embraced. Community was treated not so much as an object or thing, but an action and always in motion. This is an idea I will discuss in more depth in my next chapter as I look at how one folklórico group in Phoenix, Arizona embodied community as an act of knowing.

### Chapter 3

#### Embodying Cultural Values: Dance Pedagogies Mirrored In Social Lives

On Monday and Tuesday evenings on the basketball courts of a small middle school in South Phoenix, a congregation of families and friends meet. The sound of mariachis and the small feet of children zooming by laughing reverberate. The families set up lawn chairs around the basketball court; parents hold open the seams of colorful trajes, providing balance and support to their uncoordinated children attempting to slip their wiggly bodies into these trajes. Siblings who accompany their parents to this folklórico rehearsal pull out their homework for the evening, looking for other kids their age with whom they can find a homework buddy. From an outsider perspective, this scene may look chaotic and confusing with kids running here and there, holding instruments larger than themselves, and dressed in half a traje outfit; yet amazingly, there is an overwhelming sense of calmness to this chaos, as if everyone, despite the commotion, knows exactly where they are supposed to be and what they must do to get there—it is obvious this is a learned ritual. They have done it hundreds of times before.

When I interviewed Maria Sepian, the director of Ballet Espíritu, a performing folklórico group in South Phoenix, Arizona, these were a few of the observations I made as we sat down to talk before rehearsal began. Her daughter, Carla, also dances with Ballet Espíritu and has danced with them for most of her life. Now a senior in high school, preparing to graduate, she and three other high school dancers sat down to reflect with me about their years dancing together and what it has meant to them.

Similar to my interview with Jazmin, I became immediately aware of the strong sense



of communal consciousness that exemplified this folklórico family. However, unlike Jazmin's experience, Ballet Espiritu revolves and depends very much on the families of the dancers, making Ballet Espiritu less a collection of dancers and more a community of families. This familial aspect, along with Ballet Espiritu's location in a heavily saturated anti-immigrant climate of Phoenix, Arizona, drives and determines how dancers learn, utilize space, and enact community amongst themselves. As I reflect on the words and stories shared with me, I see how a communal consciousness is enacted through the mentor relationships emphasized by Maria. I see how the particular social, political, and cultural climate of Arizona pushes families within folklórico to find new ways to utilize space and embody the social and cultural values that keep their communities strong. I see how community is not just a thought but a constant shared commitment that pushes parents and children to expand values of *familismo* and interpersonal awareness to greater aspects of their life, strengthening bonds of trust, respect, and understanding. Lastly, I see how the collaborative creation within folklórico activates feelings of synchrony and cohesion amongst dancers. To begin my discussion of how such strong feelings of cohesion and synchrony are developed, I want to look at how lessons of interpersonal awareness are practiced within the structure and values guiding Ballet Espiritu.

Evidence of such community consciousness is seen in the words of Bianca, one of the high-school aged dancers. When asked if she loved folklórico, she nodded her head in confirmation, explaining how it gave her an opportunity to express herself. Further clarifying on this, Bianca states, "When you dance, it's like some songs have a

story behind it and while you're dancing you can express it by the movements of the skirt, the steps you add in it. And then some people might have a different meaning to it but you know yourself a meaning within it." Bianca's words expose the flexibility and fluidity of dance to allow for multiple meanings, feelings, and interpretations. Bianca's awareness that dance gives meanings in different forms and her acceptance for these different forms, demonstrates a high level of maturity and external-consciousness. Bianca has learned to come to terms with the idea that her experience with expression and art may be very varied from others; yet, it is the ability for dance to form unique and particular meanings for each dancer, that makes it special to her. By looking at some of the behaviors and philosophies of Maria Sepian, the folklórico director, we will begin to see how such teachings of interpersonal awareness are emphasized and developed through Maria's teaching philosophies and values.

### ***Mentorship as a Community Commitment***

Similar to Jazmin's experience with dance, Maria encourages relations of mentorship and familial bonds. She describes how she encourages this influence through her teaching pedagogy:

*Quando practicamos me gusta que vengan las niñas chiquitas con las niñas grandes porque cuando están bailando los grandes, las chiquitas están mirando qué están haciendo los grandes...es un programa alguien me dijo, un programa Montessori porque las chiquitas aprendan de las grandes. Pero cuando ellos se presentan en un lugar no quiero que ellos se miran dos equipos de diferentes. Me gusta que ellos ya se conocen. Tú eres de ballet, también eres familia.*

*[When we practice, I like that the smaller girls join the older girls because when the older girls are dancing, the little girls watch what they are doing...it's a program someone told me about, it's called Montessori because the younger girls learn from the*

*older ones. But when they perform in a place, I do not want them to look like two different teams. I like that they know each other. If you're in ballet, you are also family.]*

While Jazmin's folklórico group promoted the development of an external consciousness through the reciprocal claiming and re-creation of space, María's younger students learn to look at those older than them to develop an external consciousness. Alongside the older dancers, young dancers explore new ways of moving. Young dancers grow in tune with the movements and expressions of the older dancers while older dancers are brought in touch with the difficulties and challenges of younger dancers. The group becomes more conscious of one another as they observe one another's state of being.

Bianca further clarifies that of the many things dance has taught her, she has learned how to “communicate with people better”, “how to be patient around little kids and not get frustrated”, and that “no matter where you're at you always have to be friendly and smile...because you don't know who's looking up to you so you always have to give a good example”. Through these words, we see Bianca's commitment to community mentorship and the idea of bettering yourself as a means to better those around you. That means maintaining the conscious notion that our actions, attitudes, and ways of being carry meanings that are translated to those around us, connecting and intertwining our moods, behaviors, and performance. Such is the mindset of a family that María aims to create. However, even within the dynamics of mentorship that set the older students apart as teachers and models, María is careful that this does not create a disjuncture within the group itself. She wants students to be on equal levels:

*Tengo niñas que tienen 16 años conmigo pero si una niña empieza hoy conmigo, para mi es la misma. Tengo mucho respeto por las que están por 7 siete años. Pero cuando practican o cuando bailan tiene que estar la misma. Aquí no es como, “oh tu empezaste ahora”. Este año de ballet hacemos una fiesta muy grande y damos un trofeo a cada niño. Y nunca decimos cuanto tiempo tienen. No más decimos, “este niño es parte de este grupo”.*

*[I have 16 year old girls with me but if a little girl starts {dancing} today, the two are the same to me. I have a lot of respect for the ones who have been here for 7 years. But when they practice and dance it is all the same. Here it is not like we say, “oh you just started now”. This year, we had a very large party and we gave trophies to each child. Never did I say how long each dancer had danced. I only said, “this child is part of this group”.]*

Here, we see María is very careful in how she treats dancers of different levels and who have belonged to the group for different amounts of time. She is particularly mindful about how she presents her group in public because she understands that messages can be sent, sometimes subliminally, that instill hierarchal structures meant to divide groups rather than bring groups together. Maria’s mindful practice to encourage relationships of mentorship while also emphasizing oneness and cohesion evidences a value of working and surviving together—behaviors exemplified through the community that dancers’ families have formed with one another.

### ***Creation of Touchscape as an Embodied Knowledge***

In my next section, I will discuss how the particular context through which these families live and survive, determine the strategies and methods they use to build community and strengthen support networks. Because many of the families who dance with Ballet Espiritu share the experience of being first-generation immigrants, low-income, and native Spanish-speakers, they lean on one another as they strive to foster

homes away from homes in Mexico. That means that in order to survive in the United States, where language barriers, class inequality, cultural disconnect, and the anxieties of racism and poverty impede the mental health and material wealth of immigrant families, these families must find innovative ways of nurturing and re-imagining communities.

Cultural and ethnic studies theorist, Gay Theresa Johnson, comments on the importance of space in building these re-imagined communities in her book *Space of Conflict, Sounds of Solidarity* (2013). She shares, “Spaces have social meanings. They function to maintain memories and to preserve practices that reinforce community knowledge and cohesiveness” (Johnson, 2013, 48). When communities are pushed to leave their homes in Mexico and ostracized from holding legal and political citizenship in the U.S., they find innovative pathways to create social and cultural citizenship among themselves through the occupation of space and the practices carried on within that space. That is, within that space they create rituals and common ways of understanding, solving problems, and raising families that are conducive to their new environments and conditions. Highlighting this idea of social and cultural cohesion, Esperanza, one of the older dancers, explains the enduring aspects of folklórico, that make it difficult for people to forget the social and cultural circles they come from.

*[Y]ou pass [ballet folklórico] onto to your kids and it's something...it's something you continue especially since it's in your roots. People tend to forget where they come from and when you have something like ballet you can't forget because it's something like [bam] it's there. (claps loud with hands)*

Esperanza discusses the continuation of folklórico across generations as a way to develop a string of memory and connections to roots. In an urban, low-income, bustling section of Phoenix, Latinos may find a small Mexico within if they keep alive the roots that began in Mexico. Johnson describes a phenomenon similar to this when she explains how neighborhoods of color have created “soundscapes” during times of gentrification. That is, when landscapes have been demolished and communities physically torn apart, communities of color had maintained cohesion through the utilization of sound and music as methods to communicate and connect. I believe that through folklórico, a practice that requires the multi-sensory stimulation of not only sound and sight, but also the tactile sensation of the body in movement, communities can summon kinesthetic spaces of connection, that is, a touchscape. Through the tactile sensation of movement—of bodies touching bodies, gliding through the air, brushing and beating the ground—dancers are taught to make sense of the tactile stimulus they encounter in ways they are not asked to do with many other art forms or methods of expression. The touchscape, then, becomes a highway of communication and connection. It provides an additional layer through which communities may bond and create a language of understanding. It invites dancers to utilize physical sensations to connote emotional meanings so that the physical body envelops the emotional and mental being.

Johnson shares, a “community requires more than physical space to survive” (Johnson, 2013, 48). Similarly, the ability to envelop our entire mental and emotional selves and move in synchrony with others as a community, requires space of embodied

connection. It requires a touchscape through which people can physically feel and become the memories, knowledges, and understanding that unite a specific community. When such things are clipped short due to assimilation pressures and historical and cultural erasure as alluded to in my introduction, the creative formation of spaces, such as touchscapes, become central to reaffirming the ability to exist as a community. When dancer, Esperanza, of Ballet Espiritu comments, “how can I unhear the choreography”, “you can’t unhear the steps of this dance”, she is referring to the fact that the movements now live within her. And it is impossible for her to unlearn the embodied knowledge she now feels, both physically and spiritually.

### ***Embodying Community--Community as a Verb and Motion***

In my next section that discusses community as a verb and constant act, I ask how embodiment—the ever encompassing ability to become in flesh and spirit that which we know, value, and understand—functions to promote communal values that sustain and keep communities alive. Through embodied knowing, which is engrained through the touchscape of movement, communities create opportunities to transmit cultural and social values—values that when enacted by an entire community, create a sense of social and cultural citizenship from within when legal and political citizenship is denied from outside. This means that communities, through their “everyday cultural practices...claim space and their right to be full members of society” when institutional barriers bar them from legal, political, and social spaces (Rosaldo, 1994, 403). For instance, María shares how families within Ballet Espiritu embody acts of community-

preservation as a means to fortify their own preservation. They look out for one another and this practice ensures their own well-being:

*Una de las cosas que hacemos que tenemos nosotros, ellos de ballet folkórico es que somos como muy caritativos. Por ejemplo, si tiene cáncer, hacemos un festival. Cada mama trae un platillo, vendemos comida, bailamos el ballet folkórico, tocan los niños del mariachi. Y todo ese dinero que saca es para la persona que está enfermo. Si alguien me dice, 'oh maria, fijate que a una niña circa a la casa y se quedaron sin nada, no ropa', digo 'okay cuanto años tiene la niña' y ellos me dicen cuanto años tiene y les digo a las mamas, 'esta niña necesita ropa' y todas las mamas empieza a traer ropa.*

*[One thing that we do here at ballet folklorico is that we are very charitable. For example, if someone's family member has cancer, we do a festival where each mom brings a plate of food and sells them and we dance folklorico while the children play mariachi. And all this money we raise goes to the person that is sick. If someone tells me, 'oh I notice a little girl close to my house that has no clothes', I ask 'okay how old is the girl' and the moms tell me and I tell the moms, 'this girl needs clothes' and all the moms start to bring clothes.]*

By adopting these charitable practices, these families are strengthening their support systems should they ever find themselves in extreme cases of need. But more than that, they are instilling and transmitting ways of knowing and acts of knowledge to younger generations, redefining cultural citizenship, reshaping its borders and perimeters to make it legible to their needs and values as a community. Through modeling, they are teaching younger generations how to take care of one another and how to preserve themselves as a community. This is a vital component to educational theorist Angela Valenzuela's ideas about Mexican notions of education.

In her research, Valenzuela discusses how Mexican children in the U.S. often hold different notions of what it means to be 'educado' (educated) than their white teachers and peers. For instance, whereas 'educated' in the U.S. sense refers strictly to the academic excellence and prowess of an individual, 'educado' in the Mexican culture



“refers to the family’s role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning” (Valenzuela, 1999, 23). It is inclusive of formal academic training, but it also refers to “competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others” (Valenzuela, 1999, 23). Instilling in children the idea that in times of need, hurt, pain, and struggle, we invent ways to gather and utilize our resources and skills in order to benefit those in need, affirms the idea that inter-personal awareness and thoughtful action are the foundations of our education as well-rounded, genuine peoples. In this case, to be educated, demands a moral, empathetic, and innovative consciousness. To achieve this, dancers and their families begin to occupy a social citizenship among themselves where they reap the social benefits of exhibiting an external communal consciousness. Maria describes in more detail how families helping families becomes second nature within Ballet Espíritu and how community is performed through acts of taking care of one another:

*Y cuando vamos a bailar a una fiesta, las mamás llegan y nos dicen, “a este cuarto se cambian las niñas.” Cada mamá lleva las cosas a su niña. Si una niña se olvido un moño y la otra niña trae, rápido lo prestamos. Si una mamá tiene dos niñas y miramos que estás ocupada y otra mamá tiene una hija no más, viene y empieza a cambiarla rápido.... Gracias a dios tengo papas que apoyan mucho.*

*[And when we dance at a party, the moms arrive and they are told, ‘this room is for the girls to change in.’ Each mom takes the clothes to her child. If a girl forgets her bow and another girl brought hers, she lends it quickly. If a mom has two girls and we see that she is busy and another mom only has one daughter, the mom with one daughter begins to change the other girl quickly... Thank God that I have parents that support us so much.]*

Through this example, we witness how community is enacted through mindful consideration and actions. We see how dance and the familial aspect of folklórico

pushes parents and children to embody more than the dance steps and rhythms, but the cultural values and knowledge that act as the foundations for such artistic creation. Central to these cultural values is the notion of parenting and specifically mothering. In her work, *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins comments on mothers in black communities who practice “othermothering”, or the act of parenting those outside of one’s kinship family. Doing so is a form of community based activism in that it disrupts notions of individualistic, biological parenting and the belief that education may only come from trained professionals (Ochoa, 2011, 9). When adults of a community take it upon themselves to model the type of communal relationships necessary to sustain the communal family, children learn through practice. They see mothers helping other daughters with their *moños* and they know that they too must help their dance siblings in what ways they can. In this way, moving, growing, and functioning as a community is not a thing to be attained but a constant act to be realized. Community is movement and motion. It is cyclical and reciprocal. It is not just children learning from parents how to embody values of ‘educación’, but it is parents learning from parents what it means to practice that sort of moral and social awareness. In this case, learning and growth becomes a family affair that affects everyone involved in folklórico, not exclusively dancers. By incorporating and demanding the communal participation of entire families, folklórico can become a family affair that, within the harsh context of an anti-immigrant climate, serves to strengthen immigrant Latino families.

***Folklórico as a Family Affair—Strengthening Latino Family Relations***

In her book *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), hooks describes Paulo Freire's term "authentic help" as the ability for all those involved to help each other mutually and grow together. This means that "those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously", destabilizing power structures where the "helper dominates the helped" (hooks, 1994, 54). As we can see from the most recent example of mothers helping mothers during performances, there is an essence of authentic help where parents help and grow from one another mutually. To illustrate, I would like to explore more closely how folklórico as a family act helps promote parents learning from and through their own children. For instance, María shares: "tengo niñas que lloran mucho cuando empiezan por las mama las reganan porque no bailan bien. Siempre yo les digo a las mamas, "no las reganes. Ven tu para que miras que no es fácil." [I have girls that cry a lot when they start because their mothers nag them because they don't dance very well. I always tell the moms, "Don't nag them. Come here and watch how difficult it is.] By inviting parents to pull away from insensitive mindsets that could serve to frustrate their children even more, María is asking parents to better empathize with their children. She wants them to adopt a more understanding approach when discussing with their children their difficulties. This fosters better communication and listening skills that promotes trust between parent and child. Thus, we see how in this environment, engagement with folklórico may push many family members to pay more attention to their relationships and how they communicate with one another. In this way, we witness glimpses of Freire's notion of "authentic help" where parents learn through their children and from other parents. In addition, if we recall the styles of understanding and

empathic connection fostered through the practice of mentorship within Ballet Espiritu, we see how children learn from dance mentors and mentors learn from young children. From this perspective, help is truly given and received by all members involved in folklórico, making folklórico a family affair that strengthens familial bonds.

In her research about how the Latino value of *familismo* acts to protect and strengthen immigrant families within detrimental anti-immigrant climates, immigration policy professional Cecilia Ayón highlights the inherent strengths of Latino family values. She adopts a resiliency lens through which she analyzes how notions of respect, love, and communication contribute to family unity and cohesion—mechanisms to overcome barriers and trials (Ayón, 2012, 197). María gives an example of how she tries to instill family cohesion, specifically focusing on the relationship between mother and daughter, through her dances:

*cuando las niñas llegan a 12, 13, 14 años, quieren que la mamá “dejame a la esquina de la escuela”. Entonces no me gusta que no sepan quien es la mama de ese niña. So hicimos este baile con la mamá y la hija. Y hay un pedacito de baile donde la niña le da un beso a la mamá y la mamá le da un beso a su hijo. Por eso, para mí es muy bonito porque estás enseñando la unión de las personas. Estás enseñando a la gente que la relación con tu hija tiene que ir más allá de tu casa, más allá de la escuela. Tiene que estar también en un baile.*

*[when the girls approach the age of 12, 13, 14 years, they tell their moms, ‘drop me off at the corner of the school’. But I don’t like not knowing who is the girl’s mom. So we made this dance with a mom and a daughter. And there’s a dance step where the daughter gives a kiss to her mom and the mom gives a kiss to her daughter. For me, it’s very beautiful because you are teaching the union between peoples. You are teaching people that the relationship with your daughter has to go further than the home, further than the school. It can be in a dance as well.]*

We see how María challenges immigrant parents to maintain and strengthen the resiliency already existing within many first-generation Latino families by asking how

they can bring aspects of affection, listening, trust, and compassion to other sectors of their lives, such as through embodied movement. This serves to fortify an already existing survival mechanism by expanding the realms through which it can be applied and nurtured. In doing so, it helps combat habits of detachment and “dis-memory” that come as a result of political, economic, and social stresses of being an immigrant in this country.

### ***Creative Collaboration as a means to Reach Synchrony***

In my next section, I want to discuss in more focus the collaborative artistic process as an additional realm through which familial bonds are strengthened within the greater folklórico community. Speaking on what it means to be in community, hooks comments:

*Rather than focusing on issues of safety, I think that a feeling of community creates a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us. What we all ideally share is the desire to learn—to receive actively knowledge that enhances our intellectual development and our capacity to live more fully in the world. (hooks, 1994, 40)*

I want discuss in more depth the shared commitment and common good that binds dancers and families within Ballet Folklórico. I believe that the creative collaboration involved in how Ballet Espíritu teaches folklórico along with their end goal of producing an enjoyable performance, calls dancers and their families together under a common goal and commitment. This common goal is the ability to produce a performance where dancers feel good about what they did. Oftentimes this entails executing steps correctly and together, but not necessarily perfectly. Their common commitment is to help one another do so, which involves commitment beyond the

performance itself. It means dedication to the rehearsals and creative processes needed to produce a performance.

In their interview, the older dancers of Ballet Espiritu commented on how often times María gives them dances to choreograph because she is often busy bringing younger dancers into familiarity with folklórico and its style. During this time, the older students work together to create their dances. Esperanza shares, “We bounce ideas off of one another. [Someone might be] like, ‘I have this step but I don’t know where to put it in.’ And we’re like, ‘oh that would fit here’ or ‘oh we like this step’ and she’ll be like, ‘okay’. So we just bounce ideas off of each other too.” It becomes evident from these words that many of these dances are not one single person’s imaginative creations, but the collaborative combination of many artistic visions.

Commenting on collaborative art making, ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino, explains the difference between participatory and performative music practice. The first calls on all people, performers and audience members, to contribute to the music making process, dissolving barriers between audiences and performers. The second maintains strict divisions between those performing and those observing from the sidelines. Though Ballet Espiritu utilizes primarily aspects of performative music practice, I want to make a case for how the collaborative creation of each dance draws on aspects of participatory music practice because it calls all its collaborators to contribute and engage their minds and bodies with the process of creation. Such collaborative choreographic creation enables dancers to feel greater levels of intimacy

and connection. For example, Turino shares that in participatory music making, “one’s primary attention is on the activity, on the doing, and on the other participants, rather than on an end product that results from the activity” (Turino, 2008, 28). When Esperanza, Bianca, Carla, and Karla engage with one another to create a single dance that blends all of their imaginations and tastes, in that moment, they are not focused so much on the end result as they are in one another—in receiving feedback, understanding, and recognition from one another. Hence, this explains why the girls turn to each other with their questions and doubts—they realize that they need to give attention to one another in order to most easily reach their end goal of creating something to be performed. This is how participatory dance bonds those involved in the process—it pushes them to turn their attentions outwards, de-centralizing feelings of self-consciousness. Additionally, Turino characterizes good music making as a

*realization of...human relationships where the identification with others is so direct and so intense that we feel, for those best moments, as if our selves had merged. It is the sounds we are making, our art, that continually let us know that we have done so or that we are failing to achieve this ideal. Being in seamless synchrony with others feels wonderful, and it is one of the main experiences that attracts me to musical performance again and again. (Turino, 2008, 19)*

Carla and Esperanza identify with these feelings of synchrony and oneness; however, it is not during moments of collaborative choreography when they feel this most, but during times of and between performances when everyone is working towards the common goal of successfully producing a performance. Below, they express these sentiments:

*like the best moments have to be when we're in a rush going from one performance to another...I think that is the most fun part of all. Because we're just all like going up and down and there's been like confusion with direction sometimes. So I just think it's kinda funny with everyone running around.—Carla*

*it's like an organized chaos. I started about a year and a half ago, maybe two, so I'm kinda like jumping in but when I'm with my mom she's like, 'hurry hurry!' and I'm like, 'mom, relax!' I don't know how to explain it. It's like an organized chaos. And there's a comfort in the discomfort—Esperanza*

Whereas Carla describes the best moments as occurring during the disordered time of performances, Esperanza further elaborates by coining that feeling as 'organized chaos'; she feels 'a comfort in the discomfort'. Through this, we can infer that there is an element of synchrony to this disorder. Or the idea that even through the chaos and commotion, dancers feel tied to one another because they trust in each other's intentions and aspirations to collectively create and produce something together and with love. Thus, we might better understand Turino's words about identifying so strongly with another, it is "as if our selves had merged". While Turino argues that participatory music making tends to evoke emotions of connectedness more so than performative music making, I see where the effects and influences of participatory music making creep into the performative aspects of dance creation, allowing for dancers of Ballet Espiritu to feel synchrony within the chaos of their own performance and as a result, feel more connected to one another.

This idea relates to hooks point at the beginning of the section that emphasizes a shared commitment and "common good that binds us". I believe that for Ballet Espiritu, that common good is the ability to find connection and synchrony within the disorder, confusion, and chaos that accompanies performance. It is what allows relationships of



mentorship to prosper without the confinements of hierarchies to develop. It is what fuels the creative ability for communities to invent new ways of solidifying cultural and social citizenship. This is done through the inventive usage of space that relies on “soundscapes” of music and touchscapes of movement as a means to transfer embodied knowledge. Through the connections fostered through the sonic and tactile synchronization of folklórico, families feel determined to reproduce those relations of connection in their social and cultural lives. As immigrants who are often denied the right to exist as free, healthy, and fulfilled beings, folklórico becomes a point through which they can enact an ever-becoming spirit of community that validates their social and cultural meanings. To achieve this, community becomes a series of conscious actions and a way of understanding—it becomes a constant act and way of living. It is through this understanding and the embodiment of community that shared commitment is realized, and folklórico becomes a family affair involving not just the commitment of dancers, but the participation and dedication of entire families and support systems. This sort of reliance and dependence is mirrored in how dancers are taught to work with one another and depend on one another in order to create and imagine new dances. Thus, the value of communal creation, respect, listening, and empathy are actualized in both the dancers’ artistic and social lives, creating a teaching pedagogy that mirrors itself not just in the curricular form of dance but through the familial interactions that make up the dancers’ social and cultural lives.



## Chapter 4

### Out of Emotion Comes Knowledge: The Work and Sacrifice of Creation

My next set of interviewees are very near and dear to my heart. That is because I interviewed my own family members. They are my Tío Sal and Tía Terry, my father's siblings, who danced folklórico for much of their youth and have agreed to sit with me and reflect on what those years mean to them now. During this interview, which was a group interview with both siblings, one can see where remnants of "folklórico as a family affair" still persist within the experiences of Terry and Sal's folklórico years. We also witness once again, how context and conditions push families to gather resources in inventive ways and utilize elements of "rasquachismo", a term that some scholars have coined as a survival and protection mechanism for immigrants in the U.S.. However, as the chapter continues, we begin to build upon previous themes as Terry and Sal share new insight into elements of embodiment, speaking specifically about the critical aspect of "dress" as a means to exhibit embodiment.

Through examining the intersections of dress and embodiment, we begin to look at how knowledge itself stems from the emotions, attitudes, and feelings manifested through movement and dress. This embodied sort of knowledge has the peculiar ability to carry on within the memories and experiences of dancers so that they may apply its teachings to other aspects of life down the road and continue to add new meanings to its teachings. This element makes knowledge malleable, fluid, and evolving, leading me to orient knowledge as a living and growing creation. As we begin to look at knowledge as alive, we see how the form of its expression—art—is very much alive too. Through the

way that Terry and Sal speak of their relationships with their audiences, we see how dances enliven while connections between audience and dancers thrive. This is because dance forms are living, and they require constant energy and constant giving so that dancer and audience engagement with one another is critical to the dances' success. However, apart from audience and dancer connection, dancers develop an individual relationship to art as they imitate dances—a process that requires dancers to give pieces of themselves in order to feed the hunger of dance. Through Terry and Sal's words that explain the physical challenges of dance as well as the feelings of ecstasy that accompany these challenges, we see where self-sacrifice becomes a common demand of art, expression, and remembering.

As I situate these themes within a pedagogical context, I ask how we can envision dance's interworkings—particularly its elements of embodied knowledge and how it functions to guide students and enliven art forms—as a critical pedagogical tool for Chicana youth today. Furthermore, how might the lively aspect of art and the social contributions critical to creating it act as a way to more greatly engage students with their creations and expressions, as opposed to traditional pedagogies that emphasize regurgitation and robotic memorization? Continuing onward with the chapter, I hope that readers keep these thoughts in their minds so that Sal and Terry's story becomes more than just two reflections, but meaningful insights that may aid current and future Chicana youth in their infinite becoming.

### ***Background/Context***

In order to better understand the significance of Terry and Sal's experience, I find it important to understand the context in which they grew up. Teresa Salas Ortiz (Terry) and Salvador Salas (Sal) were born and raised in South East Los Angeles in the City of Commerce in the 1970s. They grew up there alongside their three other siblings and two parents. Their mom, Juanita Salas, is from Eagle Pass, Texas, a small agricultural town bordering Mexico; their father, Aureo Salas, was born in Jalisco, Mexico but moved to Aguascalientes in his adult years before making his permanent move to Los Angeles in 1958. During their upbringing, the City of Commerce consisted predominately of lower-income Latino families, most of whose kids were first generation, their parents being from Mexico. There were also several families who were second generation and whose parents established ties in the United States by serving in the military, in either World War II or the Korean War. In conversations with my father, the younger sibling of Sal and Terry, he described the City of Commerce being very tight knit. There were four neighborhoods in Commerce, each having their own parks, facilities, and elementary schools. It was common for families from each neighborhood to know each other either through church, "parks and rec." programs, or school.

Spanish was Terry and Sal's first language. They learned English as they went to school. While growing up, bilingual education was a matter of contention amongst different families and community members. While some families prioritized the benefits of speaking English fluently and feared the repercussions of not learning English as quickly, others valued their children's immersion and exposure to their

Mexican heritage. The contention of this issue reveals that many Latino families believed matters of assimilation and cultural immersion played high-stakes in their children's opportunities, successes, and quality of life. Such accounts speak to the lasting legacies of tracking programs and IQ tests which justified the reservation of knowledge for particular groups of people. As children who came of age in a schooling system that justified who gets to receive what knowledge, parents of Terry and Sal's generation needed to assure their children would not be excluded from the circles of education. Thus, proving their ability to assimilate was a very real and honest concern that determined their livelihood. As I relay the content of the interviews, the conditions and atmosphere through which Terry and Sal grew up should constantly be evaluated and put into conversation with their current behaviors, understandings, and state of mind. Terry Salas now lives in the city of Montebello and Sal in the city of Whittier, and they both teach at César Chavez Elementary School in Bell Gardens.

### ***Pride Through Rasquachismo***

My interview began with Terry and Sal explaining how they became involved in ballet folklórico. While Terry began at age 6 or 7 and Sal at age 7 or 8, both took folklórico classes that were offered free of charge by the city parks and recreation programs. In explaining how they began, Terry described how at first she started “de fuerza”. It was the pressure and wants of her mother, but as time went on, what maintained their interest and commitment to folklórico Sal explained, was that the music was familiar to them and their families. It was the music they might hear at family parties. To put a dance to these songs, as Sal expounded, made the songs and

music more meaningful, not just for themselves, but for their parents as well. Terry and Sal recall the emotions their mother felt once when Terry and Sal danced at a wedding:

*Terry: And I even remember dancing in front of family members and I think my mom was just, so proud because we were able to dance at a wedding. We literally went out there and started dancing to the mariachis. We didn't have our costumes.*

*Sal: That's right. And it was an instinct. We automatically remembered the steps because we'd learned them.*

This feeling of proudness, not just felt by themselves but by their parents too, was an emotion Terry and Sal described multiple times throughout their interview. Such sense of pride was demonstrated in the ways that both parents did whatever they could to involve themselves in folklórico. For example, Terry explains how their mother made their costumes:

*she had a knack for going into the different fabric stores and finding what she needed for really cheap and making a really nice looking dress, an expensive dress. So um, that was another art, the costume, the traje, was another unique thing that she put into it...And I remember even dad getting involved. He made our ballet shoes....But it was more out of necessity that dad and mom made our costumes. But you know, it was a sense of pride for both of them.*

Within these words, Terry recognizes that it was necessity that forced her parents to be inventive and creative with their skills in order to produce good-quality *trajes*. Immigrant communities have given this inventiveness a name. They call it *rasquachismo* and it essentially means making the most out of the meager things life gives you. Chicano folklorist and literary scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto describes *rasquachismo* as a sensibility and way of seeing the world. It manifests when people, particularly low-income people who are often given the least, utilize their personal qualities and vision in order to make something useful and of meaning and love

(Ybarra-Frausto, 1989, 5). Applied to the experience of Terry and Sal, rasquachismo can be witnessed most beautifully when Terry describes her mother's "knack" for finding cheap fabrics and making something elegant from them or her father's ability to make shoes by utilizing whatever resources they had.

### ***Dress as an Element of Embodiment***

Though rasquache thinking and creation may be hard work, Terry also informs us that the costume-making was "another art" involved with folklórico and that despite the time and effort, it gave their parents a reason to feel proud. To create something with their sweat and hands and watch that something, that piece of art, become a greater piece of art, an embodied art, was beautiful because their designs came alive through the touch and work of their labor and the motions and movements of their children. What I am referring to is the inalienable ability for dress and costume to enable a greater, deeper and more fulfilled embodiment of each dance. That is, as dancers subsume the character and attitude of each dance, they are driven deeper into the mentality, mindset, and persona of each dance so that for moments, when the audience is enraptured within performance and the dancer is intent upon the movements, the line between performing and being is blurred. It is as if for a fleeting second, dancers become that which they emulate. Terry alludes to this phenomenon when she describes the feelings that accompanied her spirited and proud use of her folklórico *vestido*.

*In the Mexican culture, you use a lot of flaring [of the vestido], and I remember when I would flare, it was like pulling out my chest and feeling the proudness. Ya know, at a certain time you need to turn, and there went the dress and that, THAT, was a sense*



*of proudness and pride that I got when I was dancing and hearing that song. So you know, going back to the wedding part, I do remember having done that dance but not having that dress. And that dress was part of the costume obviously but also part of that sense of pride when you danced. Just because it's so flary and it made a big statement when you turned and whipped that dress back and forth.*

Through these words, we see how the dress was a critical component that helped Terry get into character. Her dress gave her the literal materials she needed to twist and turn and flare with a sense of attitude that was neither unapologetic nor shy but loud and proud. Her dress allowed her to better embody the attitudes and feelings she needed for each dance. In fact, Sal speaks of the differences within each dance's costume in accordance with the styles and attitudes they demanded. For instance he describes how "the different costumes portray a different feeling of the region" they represent. He elaborates that in Veracruz the dress is very "formal and white" while in Jalisco the dress is very "festive and colorful". Thus, we see how dress is a prelude to the specific attitudes and emotions expected from that region.

### ***Embodying Emotions—Feeling as a Way of Knowing***

In coming to understand the intersections of dress and emotion, we see how the two function together to promote embodied learning. We gauge more insight into what embodied learning entails when we listen to Sal's description of how dress, attitudes, and emotions intersect to promote embodied being and knowing.

*Sal: So even if I were to dance those two dances, my feelings inside are different because the regions are different that I am representing.*

*Maya: So do you feel that while you did different dances from different regions that had different styles, you almost had to adopt a different attitude while you were dancing?*

*Sal: I think so. You didn't have to, but it helps with the performance.*

*Terry: Like the viejito...*

*Sal: Oh tambien la danza de los viejitos. I was in part of that too. And you're fully covered in a serape. And you have this mask and this hat. But you're bending down the whole time so of course that is the attitude you have to represent.*

From Sal's description one can imagine where the attitudes, emotions, and even logic of each dance must be assumed by those performing it. That is, when Sal attempts to convey to audiences that he is a viejito, he must consider many points: 1). What does a viejito look like? 2). What does a viejito feel on the inside? 3). How does a viejito move, with what part of his foot does he step, how light or heavy are those steps, how do these movements blend into one another? When examined more closely, we see that all these questions formulate the viejito's way of being, way of carrying himself, and his way of knowing. People physically move in the world in a way that is conducive to the identity they attempt to claim. Those identities determine how they see the world the way they see it—they determine their logic and reasoning. Thus, what begins as “the way we move” translates into a much larger picture when “the way we move” which is determined by how we feel, dictates how we come to reason and see the world. From this framework, emotion and feeling sits at the roots of logic and way of knowing.

In his article, "Intuitive Knowing and Embodied Consciousness" (2012), Randee Lipson Lawrence describes how “Feelings are prereflective”, how “people have feelings and sensations before [they] are consciously aware of them” making feelings, “not yet knowledge, but they are the foundation for knowledge” (Lawrence, 2012, 9). Lawrence further elaborates on this process when describing how our strong emotions often

incorporate physical components. Such as when we feel fear, our heart rate may increase or when we feel ecstatic, our bodies may feel more energized, confident, and strong. He describes how transformative learning often comes after extreme experiences that evoke powerful emotions and shocking physical reactions, such as when faced with unemployment or death (Lawrence, 2012, 8). During this process of transformative learning, we acquire a sense of reasoning and logic based on the intense emotions and physical sensations felt during these extreme experiences. Such reasoning and logic dictates our future interactions, sensibilities, and our ways of moving and reacting within the world. From this perspective, learning and knowledge really does take root in emotion and feelings.

Terry's feelings of pride were a way of knowing and carrying herself within a world hostile towards her culture and status as a low-income woman of color. For instance, we can see examples of how pride emanates within Terry's later life encounters when Terry speaks about how her *orgullo* was nurtured.

*I think for me, the orgullo came—ya know growing up, my culture wasn't very welcomed in some areas. But I know that as I grew older, I would put on a hand-stitched blouse with more proudness because I became proud of my culture because of all the dancing I grew up doing... So when I grew older, as a teen, as a young adult, it was easier for me to show off my culture because that's what folklorico had instilled in me.*

*[W]e didn't know how proud to be so to speak. And I think that's what dancing has done for us. It has shown us how to be proud. And if someone has an issue with it, as we were more educated growing up, we were able to say, "fooly on you" or whatever we needed to say in order to say that it was okay to wear what we needed to wear.*

Reflecting on these words, it becomes evident that being proud, though it is rooted in emotions of elation and confidence, became a way for Terry to carry herself, such as when she wears hand-stitched blouses with dignity. Furthermore, it also became a way for her to address those who were resistant to her expression of identity, enabling her to say “fooly on you” to those uncomfortable with her existence. Such tactics of not only expressing her identity with pride, but also learning how to confront those uncomfortable with it, are ways of knowing and being that aid how Terry sees herself and the world around her. In embodying emotions of pride and dignity that folklórico demanded, those emotions became the foundations for Terry’s logical reasoning and way of knowing:

In order to comprehend how such an embodied wealth of knowledge sustained itself even after Terry stopped dancing, we must turn to the permanent elements of embodiment that allow people to form continual understandings from momentary motions. That is why I find it useful to speak about the eternal features of embodied learning and the ways knowledge can evolve through time.

### ***Knowledge as an Evolving Process***

I believe that Terry’s ability to reflect upon her learnings within folklórico as a child and adopt ways of knowing and being as an adult, highlights the timeless impacts of embodied learning that comes through folklórico practice. As referenced in my introduction to this thesis through the words of educational theorist Helen Boyle, embodied learning allows for students to return to the cultural etchings that have been

inscribed through their body's movements. In this way, they may "retriev[ed], uncover[ed], and rediscover[ed]" the meaning of those etchings across their lifetime, creating new understandings that shape the contours and grooves of their lives (Boyle, 2007, 122). For instance, Terry and Sal describe the lasting effects of folklórico on their memory when they share how even after years without practice, they still "knew where to go" and "what the steps were", evidencing that "it didn't leave [them]". More than that, Terry's strong convictions of cultural pride that she adopted as a young adult may be seen as examples of her revisiting the values she embodied as a child. That is, through time she returned to the memories of folklórico practice and uncovered and rediscovered new meanings that would be useful to her present life, such as her decision to wear hand-stitched blouses representative of her culture in her young adult life. However, this uncovering of additional meanings may also be seen when Terry attempts to transfer such meaning to her children. For instance, Terry speaks about how she prioritizes instilling in her children the same type of *orgullo* she learned to feel through folklórico.

*I know that in the dancing and learning how to be proud and being able to show it, I learned more about [folklórico], researched more, so that I could tell my children "this is where this dance comes from...this is where this region is..."...whatever I needed to educate my own children. I know that the seed was grown in folklórico when I was younger. So I seek to talk to my classroom, my own students, but more importantly my own children, so that they know that's part of their own culture. Yes, you're American, but know that [foklorico] is your background.*

As Terry emphasizes cultural roots to her children who have grown up within white American school systems and socialization processes, she attempts to transfer pieces of the knowledge she gained through embodied practice. This transfer of

knowledge will not be an exact mirror, meaning that her children, by the mere fact that they are coming of age within a drastically different context than Terry, will listen and soak in the knowledge she shares differently. They will undoubtedly ascribe new meanings to her knowledge as well—meanings that make sense within their contexts and that answer their questions, doubts, and imaginings. Thus, knowledge will not always have the same exact meaning for different people, especially across generations. However, it is this exact element of flexibility and elasticity that permits the transfer of knowledge to exist, persist, and survive across time and space.

***Knowledge and Art are Alive!***

Dance educational theorist, Judith Lynne Hanna elaborates on the way that knowledge expressed through dance permits for such elasticity. Contrary to popular belief, reproducing traditional dances across decades and centuries does not freeze dances or cement one way through which we may perform them. Hanna explains how imitation, though implying exact mirror outcomes, “requires observation” or the ability to “infer mental representations” and “store the representations in memory”. Reproducing such representations “is not strict copying but a constructed version of what is imitated” (Hanna, 2008, 496). This means that dancers place creative interpretations within these choreographed dances as they consider the facial features, tones, and feelings demanded to conjure them. From this analysis, it becomes evident that “ ‘the continuity of tradition is due not to its passive inertia but to its active regeneration—in the tasks of *carrying on*’ ” as cultural anthropologist Elizabeth

Hallam and Tim Ingold state (Hanna, 2008, 496). Reflecting on these points, we see that what is typically seen as static and unevolving (i.e. tradition), is very much changing and alive. This means that the knowledge created through tradition is also evolving and that the form through which such knowledge is expressed (i.e. the art of dancing), is also alive and becoming. We get glimpses of the organic, living elements of dance when Terry and Sal describe the different ways that audience members enjoying folklórico impact Terry and Sal's performance and experience on stage.

*Terry: I am sure it encourages us more when [audience members] smile and you get more into the dance.*

*Sal: Ya, you get more into the dance and you'll probably do that extra whip or that little zapateada*

*Terry: or that little attitude look*

Through these words, Terry and Sal highlight how audience reactions and engagement with a show may feed or starve a performance. If the audience gives energy, that energy is transferred to and consumed by the dancers and eventually recycled back to the audience through *gritos* or “extra whip[s]”. As Terry and Sal pointed out, what they feel from the audience directly affects what the audience gets back in return, making art production a mutual, two-way relationship. It demands attention and it demands being tended to. The audience must give, but then so must the dancers. In the act of both parties' engagement with one another, the dance itself thrives. This element of back and forth engagement directly contrasts traditional forms of schooling where classrooms are merely spaces for students to regurgitate information, neither adding to nor critically thinking about that information. This is evident through standardized tests that forbid students from engaging with their

curriculum beyond the fill of a bubble. Folklórico dance curriculums that are dependent on reciprocity for learning, engage students through physical movement, emotional expression, and mental embodiment. The fact that dance demands the “active regeneration” of energies through giving and receiving demonstrates the ways in which dance is living and surviving.

In her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1980), Gloria Anzaldúa describes her relationship with writing and the ways that its growth demands her sacrifice. She describes the painful, anxiety-packed discomforts she feels while writing when, as she states, “it feels like I am carving bone...My soul makes itself through the creative act” (73). This experience of hers coincides with Aztec conceptualizations of art describing art not merely as an object of adoration, as it is often viewed in Western cultures, but an identity that has a “who” and “what” and “manifests the same needs as a person”; “it needs to be “fed’, la tengo que bañar y vestir” [I have to bathe and dress it] (67). Thus, the process of writing, of art-making, is extremely arduous for Anzaldúa because she is literally “feeding” her work, “offer[ing] [her] neck to its teeth”. This implies that art is alive, has an identity, and only survives through constant sacrifice, nourishment, and care. This is similar to Valenzuela’s notions of authentic caring, except instead of referring to the relationships teachers have with students, we may re-interpret this meaning of care to signify the relationships student carry with their artwork and means of expression. Meaning that processes of artistic creation can be painful, frustrating, and uncomfortable, but all those sentiments are experiences we endure for fruitful growth. Terry alludes to such feelings of physical



discomfort and exertion when she describes the difficulties, yet thrills she felt while doing her favorite dance.

*It would get hot. I remember being in a heavy costume; that part was not fun. When you were performing out in the sun and you had that beaming sun and you had a thick costume...Another unique thing that I do remember that I got a lot of sense of pride in doing was the Zapateada. It's a step that had a lot of tapping and quick movement. And it was a cardio event, an aerobic type of step. I remember feeling very proud to be able to make that step and make that loud noise that came with that step.*

I find it interesting that the dance that physically challenged Terry with its quick steps and agile footing, sometimes under a scorching sun, was actually the dance that brought her the most intense feelings of pride. Perhaps this speaks to Anzaldúa's descriptions of the ways that art demands sacrifice. Through Terry's experience, we see where physical sacrifice resulted in satisfactory outcomes. But if we take the time to reflect on Jazmin López's experience with dance, the student who danced with her school's folklórico club, we notice where emotional and mental labor played critical components in determining what Jazmin gained from ballet folklórico. Thus, in both instances, we see that in order to generate fulfilling experiences through dance, dancers needed to give pieces of themselves, whether it be physical, mental, or emotional. Through such self-work and the drive to better oneself and one's community, growth on a holistic level become realized. Jazmin learned how to walk more confidently in the world and Terry and Sal learned how to be more proud. This attests to Anzaldúa's notion that, "only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed". However, more than merely describing the ways that art practice and

knowledge comes alive through conscious tending and nourishment, both to art pieces and oneself, I find it useful to discuss what such findings mean for pedagogical practice.

***What Does this Mean for Pedagogical Practice?***

Similar to Anzaldúa’s notions of sacrifice, bell hooks comments on the topic of doing work and making contributions when she elaborates on how classrooms become community settings. She claims that any radical pedagogy must adopt an “ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes.” (hooks, 1994, 8). She asserts that these contributions are resources, and that through these contributions, “excitement is generated through collective effort” (hooks, 1994, 8). We see evidence of this in the above example where Terry and Sal reminisce on how audience participation and excitement propelled them to engage more passionately with their performance, in many ways, giving back to the audience’s experience. However, we see further examples of how contribution, sometimes through the mere willingness to show emotion, may also generate excitement amongst dancers and audience members, creating greater feelings of connection and community. For example, Sal reflects on one experience performing for a very particular audience:

*I do remember that one time as an adult, we went to an old folks home. And we were all dressed up and I remember walking out looking at all the older people there and they were sitting in their chairs. And I don’t know if they got very many visitors but I do remember that when we were walking out, they were all smiling. We were shaking their hands and we were kinda being flirtatious, and then we started our dancing. And I remember that brought us happiness because these people were happy, because we had come to visit them and we had dressed up and we were gonna do something.*

After all these years, what remained in Sal's memory, more so than the physical execution of performance, were the feelings created through performance and the acute awareness of how his audience members felt—how their feelings were inextricably tied to his feelings. In this moment, we recognize hook's point about how everyone's contributions, even if just revealing how we feel, influences the community dynamic. This means that community, just like art and just like the knowledge generated through art, also demands being tended to—it survives through the conscious contributions, sacrifices, and actions of individual members.

When reflecting on Terry and Sal's experience, we see how contributions and sacrifices began with their parents—in the raw labor and rasquache manner through which they fashioned dresses out of cheap materials and ballet shoes out of pure craftsmanship. We see where such work permitted Terry and Sal to better embody the attitudes, emotions, and spirits of each dance. Eventually, through the repetitive embodiment of such feelings, these emotions become the foundations for ways of knowing and understanding for Terry and Sal. Through reflective work, Terry and Sal are able to muster emotions of pride and dignity they embodied through dance and apply them to how they live their daily lives, how they raise their kids and students, and how they choose to perform their cultural identities across time. Thus, it is through constant work—through conscious physical, emotional, and mental contributions—that Terry and Sal found and continue to find ways of being. These ways of being inform Terry and Sal on how to carry themselves with dignity while also granting them an acute sensibility for the contributions and work of others. This process lies as the

foundation for embodying community as an act, as a living entity that survives with work, sacrifice, and love. As educators who philosophize pedagogical practices, this notion of creating active community through the sacrificial “carving of bone”, must be central to how we envision teaching for transformative change.

## Conclusion

### Let our Imaginations Dance: Our Work Is Not Done

As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, folklórico is more than the aesthetic. Though its final outcome for audiences amounts to an aesthetic, visual performance, I would like to re-emphasize the ways that folklórico's movements stretch far wider than performance. As seen through the stories of Jazmin López, Maria of Ballet Espiritu, and my tío and tía, embodying folklórico's movement inscribes the knowledge of those movements to the beings of dancers. In other words, folklórico's end product is much more than the final performance; it extends deep into the personal, holistic development of those dancing.

When reminded of the words of Anzaldúa concerning art and growth, we know that all of this internal development requires sacrifice and work. Work that transcends the physical and extends to multiple realms. For instance, through Jazmin's words we see how much of her work was personal, focused internally on how she could learn to trust and guide herself versus always looking to others. She had to literally learn to not watch other peoples' feet and that meant trusting her own path and essence. It meant embodying the act of leading herself, of allowing herself to be vulnerable and mess up with the acknowledgement that with time, she would gain the self-confidence to fully guide herself. This work, she reminds us, was not only done by herself, but by her whole community of folklórico dancers, including her directors. Through their ability to be vulnerable and their encouragement for students to be vulnerable as well by bringing their whole selves to the folklórico floor, we see where relationships of authentic care

were formed. It was only through this authentic care that authentic growth could be realized.

We saw elements of this authentic care in the structure and culture of Ballet Espiritu. We saw where collaborative, community work became the way through which this immigrant community practiced authentic care. Like how when a member of the Ballet Espiritu's community is struggling financially or health wise, the group gathers their resources and imagines ways to support those that they otherwise would not have the material wealth to support. Fostering external consciousnesses that function to keep the community alive is what allows for authentic, transformative learning in a socio-political context that suppresses these cultural and social values of communalism. When folklórico's team-centered choreographic processes mirror the values of communalism practiced through Ballet Espiritu's social interactions, embodiment of cultural values and knowledges transcends to another realm. Not only do dancers receive lessons about cultural values through the physical dances they embody, but through the social behaviors they embody in order to make Ballet Espiritu a community. When pedagogies of community consciousness come to life in students' dancing and social lives, opportunities to learn and grow are constant. The work necessary to maintain communities that push us learn and grow is also constant. Work is central to all authentic growth.

This point becomes further evident through Terry and Sal's experience with folklórico, and specifically their descriptions of the dancer/audience dynamic existent

within folklórico. They relay how performances are very much a back and forth conversation between dancers and audience members, where each group feeds off of each other's energy, taking and giving back the energy they receive. The giving and taking of energy is expressive work. But the feelings and emotions felt through the dances that manifested this type of positive energy is ultimately what allowed Terry and Sal to feel the *orgullo* they reflect upon as adults. Thus, it is through expressive labor that Terry and Sal learned their *orgullo*—through expressive work they embodied the *orgullo* that allowed them to know themselves better as adults. Self-understanding and self-confidence like this is evidence of authentic growth because Terry and Sal learned to carry the *orgullo* embodied in dance to their daily lives. We then see where folklórico extends far deeper than its aesthetic, performative aspects. Its impacts are intricate and authentic and come with relationships of authentic caring. Such care is seen in the labor Terry and Sal's parents put in to crafting their childrens' *trajes* from their *rasquache* inventiveness. And the care that Terry and Sal give back to educating their own children and students.

Through all my participants' stories, we see how accounts of growth, transformation, and learning are all accompanied by work of some form, performed either by the dancers themselves or the communities comprising their folklórico experience. This work is demonstrated either through the relationships of authentic caring existent within folklórico's communities or elements of embodiment that push dancers, instructors and families to embody the confidence, communalism, and *orgullo*

present in their dances. Through relationships of authentic care and elements of embodiment, we as educators can learn new forms of fostering growth and becoming.

As discussed in my first chapter, dominant pedagogies that promote the compartmentalization and depersonalization of knowledge and the erasure of student cultural identities are ultimately compromising the holistic well-being of Chicana youth. I do not believe that my study is complete; nor do I believe it holds all the answers for radical pedagogical reform. However, I believe it is a starting point to theorize about embodiment and relationships of authentic caring as critical pedagogical tools of transformation. Though my study focused on highlighting positive experiences within folklórico, I acknowledge that this is not all of folklórico's story. While I spoke with dancers who had particularly enriching experiences with folklórico, we must not forget about those whose gender or sexual identities could have been ostracized within folklórico practices that abide by rigid gender and sexual expectations. Furthermore, we must acknowledge how hierarchal, divisionary relationships may manifest in the rehearsal spaces where folklórico directors do not value authentic caring. In recognizing the work that folklórico still must do, we can more deeply understand how folklórico may be taught in a way that doesn't perpetuate the very systems we aim to replace. Moving forward, I ask that we commit to maintaining imaginative minds that continuously strive to envisage alternate ways of knowing and expressing. Learning and growth stop when we cease to imagine. Let us always tend to the movements of our imagination. Let our imaginations dance.



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