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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Mexican-American Female Identity in Choreographic Process

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Dance

by

Andrea Ordaz

Thesis Committee:
Professor Loretta Livingston, Chair
Professor Tong Wang
Dr. Lisa Naugle

2019

DEDICATION

To

my family

in recognition of their time

and worth.

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To my family. My mother and father whose love and support is endless and forever appreciated.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Mexican-American Female Identity in Choreographic Process

By

Andrea Ordaz

Master of Fine Arts in Dance

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Professor Loretta Livingston, Chair

As an American contemporary modern dance maker, I explore the ways in which my Mexican-American female identity reveals itself in my choreographic work. In this two-fold dance thesis research, I insightfully search for mind and body connectives to help increase awareness centered around various parts of my ethnicity. I inquire about my mixture of histories, lineages, and experiences and share my collaborative choreographic process for the making of *Agave Americana*, a dance work that premiered on April 25-26th, 2019 at UC Irvine's Experimental Media Performance Lab. I poetically insert my personal perspective of dance making to engage with a broader discourse in the fields of cultural studies, feminism, and the contemporary dance making body.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is structured around my perspective as an identifying Mexican-American female, with attempts at discovering the platform from which I can speak. I have chosen to explore ways in which my Mexican-American female identity may reveal itself in my choreographic work as a contemporary modern dance maker. I come from a disciplinary orientation of American concert modern dance making, which responds from parts of society, based on perceptions that are both inclination and tool. In this thesis, I aim to deeply understand choreographic process by focusing on my ethnicity. I reflect on my attempts to gain mind and body connectivity through the use of somatic based movement practices to increase levels of self-knowledge about the various parts that make identity.

I investigate my creative process as a freelance and independent contemporary modern dancer, meaning a modern dancer choreographing in the twenty-first century. Dance artist and author Susan Rethorst of *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings* describes the use of proprioception, explaining how seeing, feeling, reading, and projecting the ways of the body through perception heightens bodily awareness (23). In a similar capacity, I will be utilizing my skills as a dancer and choreographer to produce a new dance work, related to this thesis research, in order to achieve an increased level of bodily awareness by exploring parts of my ethnic identity. My choreographic process operates through the cultural aspects of the dance lineage in which I am trained in Los Angeles, California. The new dance work and analysis of my choreographic process will inform me, further the voices of Mexican-American females, and offer perspectives that add to conversations in the current professional dance field about

relationships between the body and artistic practice. I find, read, respond, and expand upon Juanita Suarez's essay "Spectres of the Dark: The Dance-Making Manifesto of Latina/Chicana Choreographies" with this thesis investigation. Essentially, I am addressing a perceived gap due to a feeling that my ethnicity is not being foregrounded and represented in contemporary modern dance studies, and in my own choreographic practice. As a female living in North America, this feeling leaves me with many questions about personal identity and the messages I put forth in my choreographic modes of thinking and assessing. With this research journey, I aim to close this perceived gap that I find myself addressing with fellow dance peers. My inquiries lead me to ask: In what ways, if any, does my ethnic identity feature itself and influence my choreographic process? What forms of evidence, if any, reveal a connection between sensation and perception, separate and not separate, from my identities? What social interactions and cultural dynamics influence my choreographic process? How am I recreating and reinventing my ethnic identity into the contemporary?

Under identity politics and its social constructs, I am an American-born female with ethnic ties to Mexico, meaning, many of the Mexican cultural traditions that I live by have been inherited. These traditions have assimilated into my American culture where I can still trace and acknowledge the specificity of my lineage and ethnicity. Labels used to describe ethnic identifications in the Latin American community are Hispanic and Latino/a/x. I choose my ethnic label as *Mexican-American*, but it is best to value ethnicity as a complex and ever changing subject in social representation. Ethnicity can be identified by something as simple and beautiful as a culinary event, but also as something that can shape serious social and political consequences in American thinking (Shay 45). I explore my ethnic label and my perception of a

hyphenated America and, in doing so, I realize that my history began way before I was conceived by my mother and father. My mother was born in California in the mid 1960's when my grandma and grandpa moved from Jalisco, Mexico to the United States of America. My father was born in Mexicali, Mexico and migrated to Los Angeles in the mid-late 1960's as a young boy with my great-grandparents, *Abuela* and *Abuelo*, and some aunts and uncles to become part of society in the United States of America. My parents are both ethnically tied to Mexico and as children, alongside their immediate families, they navigated their nationality in America in different ways. Together, leaving behind parts of another country, my family now focuses on and contributes to the shaping of American thinking by raising first-generation American children in California. My family's investment in freedom and economic liberty is what encourages me to pursue higher education with attempts of locating opportunities for artistic growth.

In the same way that my body learns, moves, shifts and makes choices as an American female with cultural and ethnic roots to Mexican culture, I learn many American modern dance modalities with ties to various cultures through my practice as a dancer and choreographer. I study the Eurocentricity of classical and contemporary ballet, along with modern techniques that cover a spectrum of codified practices such as the Lester Horton Dance Technique to conceptual approaches to movement, all from mentors and professors with diverse cultural backgrounds. I am choreographically inspired by the works of artists, such as European choreographer Jiri Kylian for the way he can masterfully create dances that feel beautiful and articulate, Canadian choreographer Crystal Pite for her strong theatrical and narrative sensibilities, and female German choreographer Pina Bausch for her unique blend of collaboration and use of emotional depth. More local to Los Angeles, I learn from choreographer Loretta Livingston about inquiry

driven choreography where movement and intention intersect and unfold. I have a mixture of histories, lineages, and experiences that contribute to and develop my artistic aesthetic, yet, the Mexican ethnic component feels distant for me in my dance realm.

Slowly, it is being revealed to me that I am constantly exploring a layering of multiple facets daily, both in dance and in social environments. I am switching between foregrounding my various identities, interwoven in what professor and philosopher Mark Johnson suggests in his research as *five dimensions of human embodiment*: The Body as Biological Organism, The Ecological Body, The Phenomenological Body, The Social Body, The Cultural Body (Johnson, "What" 159-169). An overwhelming feeling of split identities leads me to Jennifer Roche's written work *Multiplicity, Embodiment and The Contemporary Dancer: Moving Identities*. Roche describes the dancer having a "moving identity" enmeshed in patterns of embodiment and cultural inheritance (Roche vii). I deeply feel that mind and body carry a specific and unique way of moving in and around communities. Through a nature and nurture developmental process of assessing, I analyze how intellectual knowledge deepens with experiences that include trainings of professional creative practices. Blending in Roche's notion of a moving identity, in which encompasses choreographic traces, I choose to explore the ways in which I can "synthesize ancestral and modern perceptions" through somatic based movement practices to create a new art work to understand myself as an artist and essentially, enhance my craft as a choreographer (Suarez 420). I do not intend to discover a certain truth about the dance making process but instead offer a new perspective that steers away from insular ways of looking at dance and ethnicity.

As research, I am creating a choreographic work specific to my non-linear, poetic, and narrative based aesthetic. I address feminine and Mexican-American ethnic components that serve my choreographic individuality and experimentation. The choreographic process in this investigation will help discover the parts of identity that are naturally and intentionally revealing itself in my contemporary choreographies. This choreographic artist-based inquiry is a two fold thesis that consists of an analysis of creating the dance *Agave Americana* and the showing of the performative work. I have set up a ten-week rehearsal process with an all female cast of undergraduate dance majors from the University of California, Irvine to produce an evening length performance. I am writing this thesis document in parallel time with my creative process to discuss my discoveries based on information generated and gathered from a variety of activities. These activities include listening to self-reflective recordings following rehearsals, reading various scholarly material, watching live and online dance performances, and participating in workshops, discussions, and choreographic festivals. I intend for these activities to help prompt inspirations for in studio choreographic explorations. I learn from a variety of viewing experiences that include watching companies and artists in performance such as Ballet Hispánico, choreography by modern dance pioneer José Limón, local Los Angeles dance companies, and Mexican and Mexican-American choreographers making work today.

I reference my experiences that speak of the Latin American perspective to highlight the ways in which research impacts creative process. I look right at the complexity of my American identity with a type of normalcy depicting the ways in which the topic of ethnicity, in some instances, brings up feelings of sourcing through notions of repressiveness. I refer to *Narratives of Mexican American Women: Emergent Identities of the Second Generation* by professor of

sociology Alma M. García, throughout this writing, to help support the ways I feel about navigating and discussing ethnic boundaries, identities, and cultures between spaces that do and do not include the performing arts. In similar ways, I am putting together an analysis of my choreographic stories, thoughts, and feelings that are centered around the discourse between ethnic identity and what I call a *migrating search*, a moving inquiry. This search occurs through a lens that encompasses feministic ideologies with an acute sensitivity to power. This search occurs throughout the vessel of my physical and moving mind and body.

My writing has a clear creative emphasis to help analyze the theme of ethnic layering and complexity in my choreographic behaviors to help discover the tools necessary for reflection, comparison, and artistic growth within myself and the dance field. I address journal entries from my 10-week rehearsal process and utilize William James's "stream of consciousness" in voice recordings for reflection (Gurwitsch 449-452). I poetically insert excerpts of short essays, that I have written, and include perceived thoughts and insights about the choreographic mind to locate and discuss symbolic points of reference to both my Mexican-ness and American-ness. I insert a writing device, a poetic deviation, consisting of excerpts of a writing sample authored by me. These notes will appear in italics and speak to the heart of this thesis investigation. My singular perspective is supported by literary resources that are centered around ethnic studies, feminism, and the contemporary dance making body. It is my hope that my personal perspective engages with broader discourse in these fields yet relates to a greater whole of concert style dance in North America. The assembly of literary works in this research addresses the interconnections between choreographic embodied knowledge and processes associated with the importance of culture and desire for new artistic manifestations.

In Chapter 1, I delve deeper into the beauty and struggles of understanding a sense of self in culture, tradition, heritage, and society as a Mexican-American. To include a historical dimension, I explore *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* by Laura E. Gómez and *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* by George J. Sánchez. I examine the influential capacity of the Mexican-American historical body in association with my present time self. I direct attention within a post-structural feminist way of looking at my identity to emphasizes the complex interactions between two cultures and their gendered subjectivities in the United States. I set out the terms, shifts, and nuances that helped lay out my foundation for looking at Mexican-American culture in which I utilize for my choreography.

In Chapter 2, I reference some of the iconic symbols that I identify with and share with society as a Mexican-American female dance choreographer. I look into the heterogeneous qualities of Mexican-American women and the ways in which we maintain cultural heritage yet debate some concepts of cultural norms in the modern world (Rodriguez 61-86). I address recent attempts to develop a more corporeal approach to the study of my body in which I have gained insight in creating two choreographic works titled *Fotos Antiguas*, premiered as part of the 2018 BlakTina 6 Dance Festival in Los Angeles and *Tierra Intocable*, shared at the American College Dance Association hosted by the University of California, Irvine in 2019. I compare and recognize acculturation, which can be described as a “complex process of psychological and cultural change resulting from the content of two different cultures” (83). I look into the legacy of my ethnicity through participating in various dancing experiences to locate the similarities and

differences between my worlds. I do this to share perspective and engage in discourse about dance works in contemporary American culture.

In Chapter 3, I share my choreographic research referencing *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance* by author Susan Leigh Foster and essay “Family Resemblance” by author Sondra Horton Fraleigh, to help underscore my choreographic process, driven by inquiry, collaboration, and a weaving of improvisational tasks and engagements. This research is personal, yet, connects to a broad sense of locating and embodying creativity through acts of expressivity. I dig deep into decision making, inspired by the unique and poetic writing in *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings* by Susan Rethorst, to regard curiosity to my “unmade dance”— waiting and allowing the dance to reveal itself as every experience unfolds (Rethorst 8).

Overall, I respond and expand upon Suarez’s findings in “Spectres of the Dark: The Dance-Making Manifesto of Latina/Chicana Choreographies.” What is the representation for Mexican-American female choreographers in the twenty-first century? I hope to further Suarez’s work by creating new choreographies and sharing my creative experiences, along with mentioning articles and sightings that have recently put forth on online databases. I also share the names of other Mexican-American female choreographers, such as Michelle Manzanales, to advocate for our Mexican-American narrative finding its voice through contemporary exploration and choreography.

I deeply investigate and examine the relationship between the display of my Mexican-American body in motion and the articulation of social categories of identity, its transmission, transformation, perception, and enactment. With this thesis research, I hope to enlighten a

conversation about the contemporary Mexican-American female modern dancing body and examine dance as both product and process to seek a more accurate representation of a diverse America in concert dance.

CHAPTER 1

My Ethnic Body

I am curious about my psychosocial history that interweaves various social factors that include those of my ancestors, and individual thoughts and behaviors. How does the past inform my body and mind? My eyes have been underexposed to my own ethnic identity in American modern dance in the twenty-first century, thus, I am seeking a more holistic view of who I am and who I want to be. I seek ways in which I can learn more about heritage and traditions that make up the culture of Mexican-Americans. Becoming culturally aware of my ethnic identity is the process of making sense of my female self, my parents, my communities, American society, and a creatively imagined Mexican culture.

In this chapter, I look into the history of the American Southwest to understand the ways in which colonization influenced the splintering in Mexican-American identity. I look into my perceived split identity to discover the mesh of culture that is Mexican and American. I try to capture, on a small level, the echoes of different cultural influences from one societal generation to the next. I acknowledge the varying degree in which acculturation occur and remains specific to my process of inquiry for the purpose of personal and artistic discovery. I investigate the world before my existence to learn about how a Mexican-American female contemporary modern dance maker is woven into the fabric of society in the United States.

I learned about the frameworks in which ethnic identity is defined and categorized in Alma M. García's *Narratives of Mexican American Women: Emergent Identities of the Second Generation*. García suggests a reconceptualization of ethnic boundaries by discussing Fredrik

Barth's research and its developments into "a social phenomenon constructed out of a contingent upon the structural conditions under which groups exist within American society" (23). If we think of ethnicity as a fixed concept it may hinder ways in which we look at the flourishing complexity of an emerging culture. I acknowledge García's references to William Yancey, Eugene Ericksen, and Richard Juliani's work in "Emergent Ethnicity" that states ethnicity is "basically a manifestation of the way populations are organized in terms of interaction patterns, institutions, personal values, attitudes, life styles and presumed consciousness of kind" (qtd. in García 24). I utilize parts of this framework through discussing how my Mexican-American traits are more of a continuous process that unfolds. This notion of unfolding is very similar to my process and approach to choreography. When fully comprehending, learning, and valuing ethnicity as a form that is "fluid, malleable, contested, negotiated, and contingent," (24) I become less agitated about the separation between my 'Mexican-ness' and 'American-ness.' I start to understand and perceive a world where both cultures exist in contemporary America.

I often question and conclude in this manner of poetic deviation:

*Movement is my preferred language.
Instead, today, can we sit and discuss with spoken words?
I believe it is Jonathan Burrow's book, A Choreographer's Handbook,
where he says "research is whatever you need"
"It's as likely to be about remembering something you do know, as about finding
out something you don't."*

Separation and Crossing Between

The past informs me of the long and compromising relationship of Mexico and The United States of America that began with the U.S. "colonization" of northern Mexico (Gómez

xxi). The relationship between these nations contests the feelings of separation I associate between Anglo-American and Mexican-American culture. The origins of splitting the nations by the drawing of a definitive line, separating people and cultures, came with acknowledging the terms *meaning* and *power*. Choreographer and scholar Minerva Tapia, researches the inequalities at the border through her use of dance and states that “the most dramatic inequalities begin with the rules governing those allowed and those unfit to cross” (Tapia 11). The conquest over the American West and the border as a reflection of disparity is why I feel I have dual identities with thoughts that one side defines me more than the other. A switch in mindset occurred when reading a more detailed account of history in chapter “The U.S. Colonization of Northern Mexico” in *Manifest Destinies: the Making of the Mexican American Race* (Gómez 15-47). Author Laura E. Gómez reveals that “the U.S. colonization of northern Mexico should be understood as the moment in which Mexican Americans first became constituted as an American racial group” (17). The stories of the original Mexican Americans are different than the stories of my parents, subsequently, they are different than my story. This connecting line is important to me because it allows me to question the progress and process to citizenship in America. This historical information better informs me of the ways in which I can steer away from looking at ethnicity with an in-between status.

I learn about Mexico’s history from watching films like *Patria* by director Matías Gueilburt and *John Leguizamo’s Latin History for Morons* starring actor John Leguizamo, where there is an emphasize on war, patriarchy, land, and change. It is important to note that the inception of the Mexican nationality carries with it injustices mainly due to the colonization by Spain and other European countries beginning in the sixteenth century. Mexico had been

conquered by so many and fought for throughout the decades. After the U.S.-Mexico War of 1846, Mexican territory, Nuevo Mexico and Alta California, became New Mexico, California, Texas, and Arizona. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 was when the United States gained a huge portion of Mexican territory and first offered American citizenship to the people that once held Mexican nationality. The combination of *mestizo*, meaning of Spanish and indigenous decent, or Pueblo Indians with the Euro-Americans is often cited as the beginning of the Mexican American. The war led to a lot of discourse over citizenship rights in which I think birthed a notion of labeling and hyphenating the two nationalities together. A hyphenated American identity speaks to the lived experiences of their time, where their ethnic background was more so foregrounded and actively intermixing with new American culture. Politically in America, “significantly, both the dominate and progressive narratives were *racist*: both [nations] assumed Euro-American racial superiority and Mexican and Indian racial inferiority. They differed in the degree to which they allowed the participation of Mexican Americans in American civic life” (Gómez 83). The difference in stories and experience for me occurs here, I am not sacrificing a side and defending my right to be an American in the ways that were extreme for my ancestors. Yet inherently, I am dealing with the social and cultural repercussions by having to negotiate all the various parts of my ethnicity and ask similar questions about my place in society today.

The process of negotiating cultural labels informs me of the importance I wish to hold in hyphenating my ethnic identity. It helps confirm that I am a synthesis of both cultures for the reasons in which I choose to express myself in experiences. This negotiation is common in the “dimension of ethnic identity formation” for Mexican Americans of later generations moving

into the twentieth century (García 75). Author George J. Sánchez of *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* discusses the choices people were making when they were faced with similar questions of who they are and want to be. In Sánchez's chapter "Farewell Homeland," he looks at the migration of "approximately one and a half million Mexicans migrating northward between 1900 and 1930, most settling in the Southwest" (18). He mentions the way in which scholars focus on the economic reasons for migration. He inquires more about cultural questions between the two nations with their unique histories, and discusses the products and consequences that bridge Mexico and America together. Geographical movement occurred because of the discovery of gold, the necessity of farming labor, and the building of the railroad system. This geographical movement can stand for the metaphoric movement of the Mexican transmission of cultural values and practices.

It is always intriguing for me to listen to my grandparents speak of their decision to become American, and then reaffirm their choice, when I share successes with them. I think my grandparents understood that "rather than simply abandoning a world characterized by cultural systems passed from generation to generation, Mexicans who eventually came to the United States in the early twentieth century were products of a vibrant, rapidly changing society, one which was coming to terms with what in the future would be both modern *and* Mexican" (Sánchez 25). As a choreographer, I feel that I understand the process of moving back-and-forth to settle with place and choice. However, utilizing the feeling of displacement in the choreographic process is less strenuous than having to make a choice in social and political environments. The developments and change in relationship between Mexico and America

encompasses “a legacy of oppression” (Rodriguez 64-72) and in the sacrifices of those that came before me, I am able to define myself today as someone that is abundantly rich in ethnic culture.

My curiosity reveals to me the most obvious appearances:

*I am accepting of who I am, where I come from, and where I might go.
I am proud, but I can not deny that when it comes to an ‘r’ rolling off my tongue,
more questions come up.*

*Ethnicity, my shoes.
I bought them because they look like huaraches from Mexico.
They’re not, they are from Target.*

*American or Mexican-American?
Aprendiendo y madurando.*

American and Mexican-American

“The establishment of fresh Mexican communities within the Los Angeles area” starting in early twentieth century “created new foundations for an emerging Mexican American culture” (Sánchez 65). Los Angeles became a place where a new home could be built and people like my great-grandparents and grandparents, made choices to migrate to the United States after experiencing labor opportunities and sunny vacations in Southern California. Fluidity between the lands was common, and a permanent choice to locate in the Los Angeles area, specifically for my family, became far more than just an opportunity marked by geographical convenience. The city itself had much to offer in terms of ethnic variety. I recall reading the chapter “young man goes west” in Larry Warren’s book *Lester Horton: Modern Dance Pioneer*, where he describes the early experiences that shaped the diversity in Horton’s dance company (21-44). One of those experiences, includes the collaboration with Clara Bates, said to be on a “cultural mission” (22). I learned about Lester Horton and trained in his modern dance technique growing up as a young

dancer at Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. In the reading, I discover more in detail the ways in which Horton was drawn and inspired by Native American cultures and had a keen way of locating beauty. “The prospect of spending some time in the far West was actually as intriguing to him as the possibility of professional opportunities in California” (21). People rich in culture, with ideas and goals, were moving all around the U.S. at the time, until serious immigration regulations were put in place by the U.S government. “Consider that in 1970 less than 20 percent of Mexicans in the United States were born in Mexico—in other words, more than 80 percent of Mexican Americans were American-born” (Gómez 2).

Los Angeles became a diverse geographical region with a large representation of cultures and peoples. The Mexican-American narrative plays a significant role in the shaping of American society. Specifically in Los Angeles, Mexican-Americans contributed to the growing of a metropolitan city. Yet, I learn that “despite familiar-sounding place-names, a congenial climate, and an occasional structure which looked like home, Los Angeles was indeed a strange environment for a person who had only recently shook the dust of real Mexico from his or her shoes” (Sánchez 87). In “Newcomers in the City of Angels” I read how Anglos had “romanticized” the nineteenth century Spanish and Mexican parts of Los Angeles showing new settlers a washed version of Mexican identity (63-83). Sánchez references the novel *Ramona* written in 1884 by Helen Hunt Jackson to highlight the ways in which Mexican life and culture morphed into the “rapid American settlement and urbanization” and describes how the novel “glossed over Mexican heritage and influence in the California region” (70-71). I attended an adapted version of the novel, choreographed and directed by Los Angeles based choreographer Heidi Duckler at the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse in 2018. Duckler’s adaptation also titled

Ramona, is said to be “inspired by the [same] quintessential California story” (Duckler). The work featured company members Lenin Fernandez, Roberto Lambaren, Ryan Walker, Rafael Quintas, Rosanna Tavaréz and Himerria Wortham. Found on the website, Duckler describes her work with the following:

A west-coast coming-of-age story. . . . Amplifying the golden romantic myth of California, *Ramona* became used as a branding tool for the state, and was a leading driver for people to migrate there from all across the country. Prophetically, the novel articulates themes of female empowerment; themes that are still relevant today. Now, more than ever, it is essential that people in our communities – especially young women – be exposed to stories that celebrate strong female role-models who have played a major part in shaping the history of California, like *Ramona*. (Duckler)

My thoughts lead me to examine Mexican colonial life and its expression through movement in Duckler’s site-specific adaptation. I was looking for myself in the story, looking for a way that connected myself to movement, narrative, and Mexican culture.

I recall a visit to Aguascalientes, Mexico in 2011:

*A Mexican professor once wrote me a poem.
In the convalescent home, he asks for a pen, paper, and for my name.
He writes, then recites a poem to me in Spanish
I can not remember the poem and I lost the handwritten copy,
but I remember that I loved it, and his words.
I guess I will forever search for that poem,
or at least search for what I think he would have said to describe me
at first glance.*

A (a)

N (ene)

D (de)

R (ere)

E (e)

A(a)

The more obvious indications of Latino heritage are the choices in costuming, casting, and use of Spanish guitars. One part in particular felt relatable, it spoke to the entanglement of cultures that

makes up ethnic identity in Los Angeles. I enter the playhouse and watch the performance of a trio unfold: Tarez dancing the role of a Scottish-Native American girl, Fernandez as a Native-American sheepherder, and Quintas as a Mexican son of Spanish ancestry. They fluidly wrap and spiral in and out of themselves and discover ways to articulate subtle religious gestural and postural movements. The spiraling ends with the bringing of palms together, in other moments, with a religious delicacy in the fingertips to the sternum. To notice, perceive, and accept a cultural mixture was possible because of the relate-ability of living in Los Angeles as an ethnic American. There is sentiment in the thought of bringing two parts of a whole together in one simple moment. However, other parts of me recognize when stories such as *Ramona*, bring the Latino/a/x heritage altogether and gloss over the Mexican-American experience. “By depicting the city’s Latino[/a/x] heritage as a quaint, but altogether disappearing element in Los Angeles culture . . . [it] inflicted a particular kind of obscuring onto Mexican descendants of that era by appropriating and then commercializing their history” (Sánchez 71). For this research, I am curious about unlocking the specificity of my ethnic story while acknowledging the similarities in hyphenated American identities. I map and shape my artistic inquires to highlight and honor Mexican-American backgrounds and experiences. In response to Rodolfo Uranga’s statement in *La Opinion* in 1926, Sánchez, in part two of his writing “Divided Loyalties,” mentions that an individual will have to “learn to balance nationalistic sentiments with a new ethnic identity” (125). Balancing acts still occur, and through this cultural research, I blend my words and feelings into the pages of what I read because today they still fit like puzzle pieces:

To all it is clear that although [we] dress, eat, and entertain [ourselves] like Americans, [we] have well defined and indelible characteristics, and the majority [of us] preserve

[our] customs, native language, parents' religion, and deeply rooted love of native land.
(qtd. in Sánchez 125)

When civilizations encounter one another they experience a balancing act of power and undergo a process that develops an international influence that shapes people's ways of thinking. Assimilation tactics in the 1900s were put in place, mainly "targeting" women and the "patriarchal nature of the Mexican family" to affect future generations and ensure cultural alliance to the United States" (Sánchez 99-107). Years of cultivation, representation, and transformation marked the Mexican-American narrative by the tasks of "Americanization" and "Mexicanization" programs (124). Americanization encourages American identity and patriotism yet denies equal status citizenship. Parts of history highlight this denial, for example, the Mexican-American civil-rights movement of the 1960s, organized by labor unions and activists such as Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez. On the side of cultural maintenance, "promotion of ethnic [Mexican] pride within the community ironically fostered identity as an ethnic American rather than encourage a return to Mexico" (124). These two processes lay the framework in which my personal narrative begins. Parts of me feel like a product of these tasks and other parts of me accept the value in opportunity my family sought in both processes. The Mexican-American label adheres with my process of understanding my female identity. The word becomes the image in which best describes me, for example:

*My first label: female "you're having a girl"
Daughter and Little Sister
They have a tone entering a traditional Mexican-American family.
I come to understand and find myself fitting in these labels.
They describe me, I am these things.*

*My mother speaks of my questioning at a young age.
I asked 'why' very often, she says.*

I guess I never stopped, I just ask 'why' in different ways.

*I understand not wanting to confine oneself to a label, that is apparent.
There is something about questioning yourself at the hands of others...*

*Labels are not awful if you question them enough to understand why they might
describe you.*

It is more about understanding the source of the questioning.

The Mexican-American experience is made up of many stories, some of which are stories of imperialism and policy and others of globalization and combination. In search of the Mexican-American narrative in America, I recall the ways in which civilizations rise and fall and leave behind their art to tell stories of wealth, ideas, and identity. These concepts mirror a discussion around “Choreographies of Migration: patterns of global mobility,” found in journal *Congress on Research in Dance Conference Proceedings*. The writing references modern dancer and choreographer Doris Humphrey’s “principle of Fall and Recovery” later adopted by Mexican-born, American modern dance pioneer José Limón (Jowitt 121-123). I think José Limón gravitated toward the concepts of “fall and recovery, tension and relaxation” and “always the breath” because of his Mexican-American ethnic background full of *transference* and *transformation* in connection with the human spirit (Limón 17). Limón’s history as a modern dancer and choreographer, and as a Mexican-American, allows me to make space for the wide range of ways history can be explained and sometimes overlooked. Limón often explored themes of universalism in his works, and I think that is partly due to the thought that the body speaks with honesty. The body is the vessel in which stories of increased interconnection occurs, humankind. I think the cultural crosses within my body yield the world in which I live in today,

and I will forever try to make sense of those crosses, to further develop a deeper sense of identity within American society.

CHAPTER 2

Understanding Identity through Mexican-American Cultural Aspects

I must assign and attribute the various aspects I consider to be a part of me in order to inform myself of my cultural identities. I want to acknowledge the parts of culture that I fasten and unfasten, and assess the ways I harness chameleon-like skills to grow and contribute to art and dance making. I look at my female, American, and Mexican identities through the lenses of both parentage and personal life experiences. I assemble myself in a process that examines gender and ethnicity and its influence on my relationship with my Mexican-American cultural habits. In poet T.S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," tradition and culture are a particular continuum working in "a conformity between the old and the new" (37). I feel as if I shape the features of my identity in the same way. In chapter one, I discuss the ways I view my body as the vehicle for expressing my feelings and thoughts about the world when examining the fusion of past and present. Eliot describes this as the "historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together," and this "is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer more acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity" (37). Eliot's approach to writing mirrors my conceptual approach to dance as a woman dance artist today. I utilize my body as a measure of difference, bridging my feelings of split-ness between my cultures. Therefore, in this chapter, I negotiate the preservation of my Mexican-American female self as a part of my identity for deeper personal, social, and artistic connections.

I am turning to my individual experiences within the diversity of Mexican-American womanhood to engage with the multiplicity of our “language, customs, and ways of perceiving and acting in the world” (Rodriguez 61). I examine the ways in which I practice cultural maintenance, the ways I may be similar to others within the “patterns of integration” (Waters 3) in America and the ways I may be acting out of fear of cultural amnesia. How do I adopt, adapt, and transfer my Mexican-American heritage maintaining an authenticity to my experiences and how do I offer a fuller socio-historical perspective with my dance making? I intend to engage with these discoveries in the studio while choreographing *Agave Americana*, discussed further in chapter three. I begin by identifying the symbols with which I most relate in my ethnicity to offer insight on the beautifully complex narrative of Mexican-American women. Inspiration lingers in many places for me, for example, the following quote by Stuart Hall in “Cultural identity and diaspora,” also referenced in Sánchez’s *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900 - 1945*.

Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation . . . Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past . . . identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and motion ourselves within, the narratives of the past.
(Hall 225; Sánchez 127)

According to Rodriguez, “income, urbanization, experience, and education all influence an individual’s assumptive worldview” and by situating myself more clearly in my ethnic culture I highlight the importance of recognizing the ways that “Mexican-American women are a heterogeneous group in which the identification of acculturation factors is critical” (81, 61). The framework I choose to utilize in this chapter extends further with the work of author Jennifer Roche, in particular, her writings in *Multiplicity, Embodiment and the Contemporary Dancer:*

Moving Identities. Where in, she explains the process of the moving identity, and like Eliot, is the process of “identify[ing] this feeling of continuity” and “finding connections and through-lines” within “destabilis[ed] known and habitual movement” (Roche 99). These feelings echo the ways in which I find value in opening myself further into my experiences, ultimately, serving my choreographic modes of engagement.

Speaking Language

The Spanish language is a form of practice that associates me with my Mexican-American identity. In *Artistic Practice: Social Interactions and Cultural Dynamics*, author Tasos Zembylas loosely defines practices as “configurations of cohesive activities that establish coordinated and collaborative relationships among the members of community” that are “implicitly and intrinsically tied to living communities situated in time and space (1). Often, I practice Spanish only with my family, and my actions toward sustaining the Spanish language as part of my vocabulary feels like a passed down version of language/identity, which I am encouraged to maintain. I never seem to forget my need to practice speaking a description in Spanish in order to feel effective in communicating with others about my ethnicity.

From a personal passage, I describe my response when asked if I speak Spanish:

*I speak English,
and can speak Spanish
but not too well,
but I very much understand it.*

In *Narratives of Mexican American Women*, García states that “English does not reflect a decline in ethnic identity” and for some, Spanish may “serve as an identity touchstone” (73). Would I be able to understand Spanish, speak a bit of it, and feel a connection to my ethnic

culture today if I had not been given time with my grandparents as a young girl? García describes this wondering as a “language issue” by suggesting that Mexican-Americans “use both languages within specific contexts” and this use is “central to ethnic identity formation . . . leading to different ethnic identity attachments (73). I feel as if I am the closest I will ever be to fully comprehending my Mexican-ness when I speak with my grandparents. The Spanish language is the way in which my grandparents communicate and has become one of the most intellectual tools that I have inherited from them to help me in this process of disentangling myself. I view the Spanish language in the same manner in which I wear my grandmother’s scarfs. Her knittings are the details that hold together the blanket of my identity. The scarfs are of me, though, they were not created with my own hands.

I experience the world in a variety of ways, some of which are gaining awareness from understanding older perspectives, feeling and responding from words, images, artifacts, and engaging in lived experiences with educators, family, and friends. All language is important to me and I revere the Spanish language for the ways in which I may utilize it as a connecting tool to my lineage and more recently, my dance making.

I reflect on a couple of scenarios in this chapter, where I examine my feelings toward the Spanish language in dance settings. I choose to refer to them because I think that they highlight my phenomenological embodied approaches to movement. I am trying to “recognize the central role of my body and movement in lived cognition” (Loke 7:1). I recall learning the dance *La Casa*, set to the music *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5* by South American composer Heitor Villa Lobos with choreography by Lester Horton Technique dance educator and choreographer Don Martin. My first experience with investigating *La Casa* was as an audience member during my

first year at Los Angeles County High School for the Arts. In 2010 as a graduating senior approaching adulthood, I experienced *La Casa* as a performer resonating forever with Martin's dance-theatre explorations. I remember the feeling in my body moving to the vocalist's hollow cries in the musical composition, wearing heavy layers of black fabric over a white slip dress, and seeing a decaying wooden chair in my peripheral vision. As I investigate this memory to gain a fuller context of the dance, I discover the play *The House of Bernarda Alba* written by Federico Garcia Lorca. I learn about the "conflict between an anachronistic honor code distorted to the point of tragic absurdity and the instinctive desire of the individual for freedom of conduct . . . presented on two planes . . . dramatic and realistic; the other, symbolic and poetic" (Greenfield 456). The drama in my body became intensely supported by the pulsing and haunting feelings in the drama of women in a Spanish village contemplating repression, passion, and conformity. The drama is exuberant not only in the narrative of both the play and Martin's dance, but in the body, much like in the way movement in the body feels in twentieth century classic American modern dance. Even though I was relating to themes of religiosity and female repression, I never consciously associated my ethnic identity in rehearsals while learning Martin's choreography or in watching the context unfold in dramatic dance-theatre works that humanistically relate to civilizations and cultures. I remember in *La Casa* the language mixed with both sound and movement being extremely vivid. The vibrations of sound are transparent in my body yet slightly distant from my Mexican-American ethnicity. I think about more ways in which I could have utilized cultural information along with Martin's choice of sound, to help thread myself closer into my performative time with *La Casa*. These thoughts come up when I reflect today on the associations that I think were unconsciously occurring in the past. My family

reciprocated my feelings by sharing their perspective on the ways in which the performance brought up images of my widowed great-grandmother from Michoacán, Mexico. The work touches on deep seeded notions of patriarchal structures within society, structures I feel are embedded within many Mexican-American households. I very much gravitated to the themes and aesthetic presentation of the dance because it felt real to me, despite my slight naivety at the age of seventeen, and having missed the dances plausible ethnic connections. Martin's *La Casa* follows me like a ghost from a colonized past, where I am subtly reenacting a combination of it's essences in my own choreography because of its major experiential influence. This idea is further supported after discovering more recently, through ancestry DNA testing, that I am forty-three percent Native American, twenty-eight percent Spaniard, and nineteen percent Portuguese. My Mexican-American identity is a mixture of many ethnic and cultural influences and I can view my experience with *La Casa* as either a looming ghost, some divine power cluing me into my own future, or merely a kinesthetic response to ideas centered around maturity.

I took part in a dance workshop after learning that a female Mexican choreographer was going to lead a masterclass, present experts of her choreography, and engage in a public conversation at MiModa Studio in Los Angeles. The event was organized by Los Angeles-based choreographer Rosanna Gamson/World Wide who invited Mexican choreographer Cecilia Alvarez Appleton, artistic director of contemporary dance company Contradanza A.C. based in Mexico City, Mexico. I attended the event because I wondered if a choreographer sourced in 'contemporary Mexico' was anything like me, a 'Mexican-American.' I was looking to define the terms of my ethnic identity by looking at the differences and similarities between my characterizations in dance practice and discussion. I was curious to look at my ethnic identity

elsewhere because at home my culture feels commonplace. I wanted to bring parts of home with me into the studio more cognitively.

From my interior, time, history, all embedded into the essence of my being:

*I am unable to experience difference with mom and dad
With them, I am home
I'm whole.
Without them, who and how am I?*

The workshop was led mostly in Spanish with attendees eagerly translating Appleton's words to English. The advertisement promised ways to discover the happenings with contemporary dance in Mexico in which I began to presume a closeness with my Mexican-American culture by researching my interests in the 'motherland.' However, I was able to sense the differences among the similarities. I felt vulnerable, separate from my family, and alone with my connection to my ethnicity during my participation in the workshop. The four hours I spent consciously working through my vulnerabilities with the Spanish language in Appleton's dance setting highlights the ways in which language has barriers, yet, can be overcome with the communication of movement and gesture.

Movement does carry meaning. It is an elaborate, culturally coded symbol system, communicating consciously and unconsciously at times with a clarity and comprehension that transcends verbal description, at times shrouded in ambiguity. (Groff 27)

Mainly during the dance portions, English translations seemed unnecessary due to the ways of the body. Movement spoke to the group first before any native tongue. Movement in the body is universal and I remember eagerly wanting to speak with movement first. It was through that language that I felt understood the most. In a verbal discussion with Appleton after the movement portion in the workshop, my feelings about my investigation and search of cultural

markers in my identity through the use of dance, did not easily translate into Spanish words. Unfortunately, leaving me with addressing once again, the void between my two cultures.

Language in My Choreographic Voice

My experience with taking my first dance class in Spanish inspired me to look at the ways in which I can utilize all my languages to tell stories that are more specific to my lived experience. I share these personal experiences because according to Roche the undertone and “*enfleshed* knowing of repertoire” is something of significance insofar as it serves choreographic dance research by expanding the “sources to draw from when researching dancers’ perspectives” (2-3). Already, Mexican-American women that work from the choreographic perspective are scarce (Suarez 403). This invisibility of Mexican-American women choreographers is what inspires my interests to create in a way that encompasses and manipulates tension to be able to find a type of fluency in language and movement.

While making dances after attending the workshop, I noted that Spanish language soon began supporting my artistic and choreographic choices. *Fotos Antiguas*, my first choreographic work titled in Spanish, explores an ageless and strong sense of femininity inspired by old photographs of my Mexican-born, Mexican-American grandmothers. The work premiered at the BlakTina 6 Dance Festival, directed by artist and choreographer Licia Perea, at the Bootleg Theatre in Los Angeles in 2018. *Fotos Antiguas* was created in collaboration with composer and sound designer Andrew J. Tarr and was scored in a way that set up “a tense and turbulent environment” (Slayton) for three female characters, performed by Los Angeles-based professional dancers Julienne Mackey, Joan Holly Padeo, and Samantha Scheller. My grandmother and mother’s recorded voices in the score supported the solidarity and individuality

of both the characters and the choreographed narrative. I found substance in exploring the passing through of my identity from generation to generation carrying it's way via the Spanish language representing my Mexican-ness. Among shuttering camera sounds, guitar strings, knocking, and shimmering nostalgia, I hear old and young in the recorded voices reciting Jaime Manrique's poetic words from "El Cielo Encima Del La Casa De Mi Madre" from his book *El Libro de los Muetros: Antología Poética*:

El cielo es una cámara oscura
que proyecta imágenes borrosas.
En las casa de mi madre
los destellos de los astros
me perforan con nostalgia . . .

The concept of unconscious movement in *Fotos Antiguas* led me to explore the theme of conscious movement in a later work. My work titled *Tierra Intocable*, which premiered at the University of California, Irvine's Claire Trevor Theatre as part of the New Slate Graduate Choreography Concert in 2018, explores the theme of migration inspired by the monarch butterfly.

In a reflection essay, I wrote about the ways in which my dance making and language informs me of my hopes of a communal America:

The journey does not provide any real answers but rather raises more questions, entangled in beauty. This non-linear and abstract-like storyline is theatrically explored and gives attention to dancer physicality in route patterns, all in response to community. I hope the work crafts moments that support dancing bodies. Creating spaces, where dancers get to ask questions about how they move in real time. This is done to answer questions that may feed a grander story.

I often sat at the back of the studio in rehearsals to switch my perspective, later begging the question: Am I on the outside looking in? Or am I in the inside looking out? With images of butterflies, earth, borders, dirt, and people, this

dance piece is a depiction of how I remind myself of my moving identity in America and how it is constantly navigating, feeling, and adjusting.

My process for *Tierra Intocable* emulates the feelings with which I associate when looking at artist Craig Becker's artwork *Migration I* (Becker). The artwork depicts a clear portrait of characterization in an abstract environment, echoing my thoughts on both my ethnic and choreographic identity. I insightfully utilize, Ernest Hemingway's quote from *A Moveable Feast* — appearing in program notes at the premiere. The quote puts me in a place of age, flight, life, loss, and nostalgia in a way that becomes specific to my Mexican-American identity. I change Hemingway's use of pronouns in the quote to "our" in the program to clue the audience about a communal journey that is depicted within the performance. When I use "we" I refer to the world and speak from my western thoughts and ideas. My reason for integrating my ethnic female body with Hemingway's perspective serves as example to the ways in which I adapt within American culture:

[Our] talent was as natural as the pattern that was made by the dust on the butterfly's wings. At one time [we] understood it no more than the butterfly did and [we] did not know when it was brushed or marred. Later [we] became conscious of [our] damaged wings and of their construction and [we] learned to think and could not fly any more because of the love of flight was gone and [we] could only remember when it had been effortless. (Hemingway 147)

The journey in *Tierra Intocable* is the natural pattern of forgetting where we come from and being wrapped in the struggle to move forward. Perhaps, this theme surfaced over the angst I have about forgetting my grandparent's language, recipes, and values. I join my thoughts with the perspective in poem *La Prieta* by Gloria Anzaldúa in which she states: "I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet" (233). I wanted there to be opportunities in the dance where audiences could witness individuals. Thus solos,

duets, and trios take moments to separate from ensemble work, highlighting the importance of personal perspective and growth. I worked with University of California, Irvine undergraduate dance majors and coached them to whisper in various scenes to create an ominous sound of people speaking in Spanish. Dancer Isabella Harris more clearly alludes to the work's nuances when she repeats "*todos volvemos al lugar donde nacimos*" (we all return to the place where we were born) in the final moment of the performance.

My choice to start titling my choreographies in Spanish serves as a symbolic gesture to the Mexican-American narrative. I feel that *Fotos Antiguas* and *Tierra Intocable* were short studies that pushed my personal and artistic boundaries by revealing the ways in which my ethnic identity can creatively inspire. It is when I reflect on these performances that I discover that my use of language helps to reinforce, yet regardless, will always represent my ethnic identity because it is the perspective in which I operate. In my dance making, all my languages provide me with evidence that the bodies I collaborate with have stories to tell and the Spanish language carries with it specific connotations that weave me right up against my ethnic identity.

Religious Symbols of Femininity

I view languages as tools, and similarly, I am making sense of my spiritual practices through the vessel of my body and its creative expression. I feel as if my practices are partly inherited, giving me space in which to personally connect with and develop. I am inspired by Zembylas's definition of creative thinking as something that serves "as a catalyst for social interactions," for him "art may either cause public conflict and create dissensions or facilitate mutual understanding and strengthen collective bonds" (Zembylas). I think about his claims of "the body, it's lived experience, and it's embodied knowledge [being] fundamental in all

everyday human practices” (91) and where I am assessing both my traditional and progressive views working together inside of me. I resonate with ideas merging and mixing, learning and doing, described more so in Anzaldúa’s poetic and powerful statements:

I am trying to create a religion not out there somewhere, but in my gut. I am trying to make peace between what has happened to me, what the world is, and what it should be. The mixture of bloods and affinities, rather than confusing or unbalancing me, has forced me to achieve a kind of equilibrium. (Anzaldúa 232)

I have adopted and adapted personal views of faith to help make sense of my role in my often father-dominate, mother-centered, Mexican-American, and Roman Catholic household. Upholding traditional values within a family may develop and diminish interpersonally as generations continue. Ultimately, this affects the ways in which women, especially, make choices about membership and place within their own body and family. I relate to the findings in García’s chapter “Confronting and Contesting Patriarchal Constraints,” where in many accounts, Mexican-American daughters are trying to understand their “gendered identity explicitly grounded in an ethnic context” (116). In some aspects, the strength of the Mexican family is determined by who, how, and why we should enter a marriage, effecting and often implying roles onto an individual. The seemingly balanced presentation of gender roles in my Mexican-American family, where weight of authority is held differently between males and females, speaks to the process of “becom[ing] aware of an unfolding, but often ambiguous, gendered layer of identity” (115). With respect, I, too, have adopted various strategies to deal with and improve patriarchal situations that take the “form of both verbal exchange and attempts to limit behaviors” from my male counterparts (114). I often question the idea of gender being identifiable through roles and actions but also navigate through them customarily. I am a

combination of both my father and mother's masculine and feminine energies; where both their attributes of strength live inside of me and where I choose to claim, own, embody, integrate, and create. I am countering the ideals that I feel are limiting and in others times I am balancing them with grace and poise. I transcribe my Mexican-American ethnic ideals and attachments to my choreography by making room for things that are fluid, empathetic, and delicate in movement, even with what can be described as my structured cement-like bones.

I often think that it is part of human nature to look for images of one's self to help represent one's story. When it comes to my art making, I turn to matriarchal figures first because I feel that their stories allude, encompass, and more accurately represent both my cultural and religious identity. As I discuss this part of me, I hope to offer a perspective that turns away from stereotypical views of Mexican and Mexican-American women defining and, or defying themselves within the symbolic nature of icons. My interests in examining my thinking, faith, and religion as an ongoing process, again echoes theoretical approaches to which I apply to my cultural and choreographic practices:

This definition implies that religion cannot be separated from human emotion and human life—religion is integral to the human experience. . . .the religious object may vary from person to person and from culture to culture. . . . For Hispanics, relationality is even more prominent, and it operates on three levels: the cultural (human), the religious (divine), and the complex (interrelationship between human and divine). (Rodriguez 51-60)

This notion of mind, body, and spirituality parallels with the Catholic symbols of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is where I grow in my western ways of thinking and look for diverse representations that illuminate the way in which feminist practices cross disciplinary boundaries. In *Practicing Feminism: Identity, Difference, and Power* I learned that “feminist identity politics tend to foreground individual behavior and lifestyle rather than structures of

oppression” (Charles 4). Thus, I acknowledge that “Our Lady of Guadalupe is part of the Mexican-American women’s cultural milieu” (Rodriguez 60). I, too, perceive La Virgen de Guadalupe with her “black hair and olive complexion” as “a religious experience, image, and story” living within the personal and internal landscape of my Mexican-American femininity and identity (19, 47). I find myself in juxtaposition with the limiting and idealistic versions of women that society may hold and look to my own experiences to identify myself within the images of my female counterparts. I continue learning from Rodriguez who beautifully states that:

. . . the history of the Mexican-American women is a legacy of conquest and resistance, shaping the uniqueness of her perceptions, emotional states, images of self, values, gender roles, and expectations — all of which affect her relationship with Our Lady of Guadalupe. (Rodriguez 59)

My relationship with faith, that is overtly part of my culture, shapes my feminist consciousness in a way that gives agency to challenging ethnic, class, and gender constraints. I find similarity in “Spectres of the Dark: The Dance-Making Manifesto of Latina/Chicana Choreographies” by author Juanita Suarez. Her findings illustrate the strategies of working with creative consciousness to achieve one’s own personal and cultural understanding of feminist practice that transcends limits. The process of locating difference in solidarity speaks to the ways in which Mexican-American female choreographers may address specific Mexican American images and symbols and uniquely reconstruct their personal narrative within these metaphoric narratives throughout time. Suarez shares the story of *La Llorona* as a “gendered-specific tale that models and conveys the lives of two women, one mythical and the other real” while also sharing and discussing the image of Mexican-American choreographer Licia Perea portraying Mexican painter Frida Kahlo (408-409). As dance makers we are sharing ourselves through our creative

ideas that are attaching themselves to other Mexican-American women and, or, similar Mexican stories. This may be reason for exploring embodiment in dance, in a way that is searching for a material form of my human experiences and consciousness (Low 9-18). With my dances, I am speaking of my involvement with society. I am managing the terms in which my stories are discussed and configuring myself within the process. Suarez's words read like poetry and empathetically feel like my own:

Migrant voices feed into and are feed by the creative process; a Latina who makes dances by drawing from a cosmology of "otherness" listens to all the voices in escort as they guide her to places where the sound of a familiar voice resonates with her own experience as a woman of colour. (Suarez 416)

This evidence leads me to wonder if I am coming up with anything new or if simply attempting to state that I am also a part of the story; the story of my family, the academic and choreographic story in dance, and in the grander story of American society. I turn to traits, spirituality, and symbols to inform me of my cultural details that make up my identity. I do this to more closely intersect myself with my female and ethnic perspective, in a way that will manifest and live with creative ideas in the world.

CHAPTER 3

A Choreographic Process for *Agave Americana*

I work with a multiplicity of dance techniques in the same manner that I weave together the cultural practices of my Mexican-American female identity. When I choreograph, I mix and move through physical, improvisational, compositional, and performative explorations. I looked deeply into my particularities after reading *A Choreographer's Handbook*, written by Jonathan Burrow, who states that “choreography is a negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking” (27). I compare his definitions of choreography with author Susan Leigh Foster’s “patterning of movement . . . a plan or orchestration of bodies in motion” (15). The patterns I examine in my research are encoded in my Mexican-American female body and are utilized, translated, and presented as part of this choreographic thesis. In this chapter, I share the ways I explore historical meaning, cultural significance, and kinetic sourcing through a highly collaborative process with performers and artistic designers from the University of California, Irvine to create and present my dance thesis *Agave Americana* in concert.

I investigate my choreographic process as research to bring to life my internal and external landscapes. I look at the ways in which my cultural and artistic negotiations inspired the making of this dance to help facilitate sensory awareness and aesthetic decision making for and beyond movement. I share the visible movement qualities in my contemporary choreographies to help broaden the American modern dance perspective in regards to exploring and depicting ethnicity. Throughout this writing, I reflect on my somatic movement based experiences that occur in the studio to provide insight on the ways in which I interpret my choreographic world.

Journal entries recalling my studio experiences, alongside my subconscious self-recordings, are the essential materials of my findings. In *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry* by Sondra Horton Fraleigh I learned about the ways in which “dance grows out of culture and feeds back into it. When we study dance, we are studying culture” (6). This statement reminds me of the ways in which my cultural research will undeniably coexist with my choreography:

“We mistakenly suppose that culture is something that only anthropologists study, and that the study of dance as a matter of ethnic identity applies only to cultures outside the contemporary Eurocentric network. . . . It is a reminder that all dance is essentially cultural and as such has ethnicity.” (Fraleigh 6)

In my dance making, I cultivate ideas about space and place by examining my feelings of dense vastness that pulls at my mind and body when approaching the topic of Mexican-American identity as a theme for a dance. My dances are non-linear, poetic, and made up of American modern dance essences, and with this research, I am able to weave more vividly the various parts of my Mexican-American story into that aesthetic. I am reconceptualizing the multiple perspectives of my ethnic background to further explore and rethink my reality into a dance that will take up space (Low 1-47). In what ways can I be informative and specific to my Mexican-American narrative in my choreographic material and refrain from appropriating my ethnicity and culture ? What are the elements with in which I play and explore to empathetically convey a narrative that is mine, the dancers’, and the audiences’ ? How do I visually identify with the Mexican-American narrative in my choreography if I am not performing in the dance, removing the most obvious portrayal of my ethnic identity?

I Move In The Ways of My Cultures

I focus on the history between the United States of America and Mexico in the first chapter and begin to imagine a dance breathing and existing in a desert landscape. Through various snapshots, the images motion together when I close my eyes to focus on my breathing patterns. I see a family of female characters protecting and sharing, with sensitivity, my ethnic past. I manifest a dance through places of thought and begin to create movement when I take those ideas into the studio to construct the dance. While in the studio, Feldenkrais and Paxton's meaning of *awareness* comes to mind (qtd. in Manning 46). I establish a relationship with my thoughts by locating connectivity between my mind and body in stillness. To achieve a level of awareness in my body, I search for an "altered idea of consciousness" where "this consciousness is not of the body but with the body moving. . . .a layering of felt experience in the making" (Manning 46). I think about all the layers that make up my ethnicity, communities, and artistry while laying on the ground of a dance studio trying to empty myself to engage with my present experience. Mind and body become the medium for culture.

How will my mind and body serve the dance I am about to make?

Diagonal streams of warm sunlight touch my skin
Parts of my body are still in dark shadow
Movement in stillness and silence
Inhale,
Exhale, the desert dirt
A swaying hip to a forgotten cumbia

I sense the feeling one might have when admiring an endless landscape. I recall my adventures with my family to the Grand Canyon and remember the ways I marveled at American lands. As I continue to lay on the floor, an internalized throb sends sensations of movement through my

body. I am finding meaning to move. A reason to make a dance. I want to make a dance that speaks to the quality of being Mexican-American and female in a world that is constantly changing and growing.

The point is to tie meaning to embodied interactions, rather than to alleged disembodied entities and processes. (Johnson “Big Baby” 34)

I work from systems of “felt qualities and emotional patterns” (Johnson, “Big” 41) that are organized through the concerns of my body in process. To develop a sense of self, I form meaning through organizing my sensory, social, and personal perceptions (41-45) in a way that facilitates structure and connection to develop a sense of a dance. I remind myself that the way I move in this world inherently gives representation to my cultural and ethnic identity. This prompts me to work in ways that are more organic in presentation. “Culture is not something we put on or take off. . . . all people are culturally identified in their dances; all dance has ethnicity, and aesthetic, social, and historical essence” (Fraleigh 6). I value modes of deep thinking and assessing because it is crucial to the development and shaping of my choreographies. My physical movement and consciousness begin to creatively structure the inner workings of my work. I am making more cognitive choices where I let my personal story supplement and subtly shape the physicality of the dance in a way that seems deconstructed and embodied. Through this mindful practice, I give trust to all connections and intuitively explore my belief system, trying to sharpen my skills of examining my intrinsic nature. What are the things in my culture that I can explore and how will their *affect* affect this dance?

I let the sound of my breath generate heat, fluidity, flexibility, and length throughout my joints, muscles, and bones. My body anticipates moving to a place of full and grand motion. I

integrate more sound into the room by playing music of the Latin genre. I listen while moving, and embrace improvisational skill to discover the possibilities of movement. I anticipate feelings of familiarity and play with rhythm while listening to various musical compositions, some of which I enjoy listening to leisurely at home with my family. I share a closeness in narrative with artists such as La Santa Cecilia, a Mexican-American band from Los Angeles, Mexican band Daniel, Me Estas Matando who integrates Mexican *bolero* style sounds into their music, and the three female vocalists, Natalia Lafourcada, Linda Ronstadt and Lila Downs who sing of their Mexican roots. I play with rhythm when I hear musical groups such as Los Ángeles Azules and Ondatropica, both exploring the *cumbia* genre, and musical artist El Búho, who, too, plays with Latin American sounds and rhythms in digitally mixed ways. I set up an environment in which I find trust in my body with sound in space. Layers of movement begin to morph into dance phrases, a patterned sequence of ideas. I remain open to ideas interconnecting with one another, letting linger the ways in which my ideas will transition from conceptual place to physical place and back. In this stage of creating, I am more occupied with listening for sounds that put me in a specific mood. I am trying to grasp and formulate a potential atmosphere in which I want my dance to live through trying out and creating various movements in lived time.

I create *a space* in which I find *the place* that I can form various reiterations of my ethnic experience. Foster articulates the way in which human movement can inherently relate with the use of space in *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*:

Space, conceptualized as a universal medium, and movement worked together to signify the journey of the psyche as the dancer's motion either expanded, radiating away from the body, or contracted, compressing in toward its center. Movement itself was a tangible and observable representation of self and world. (Foster 60)

I let movement be movement and add principle to the dance as it unfolds itself to me by thinking about concepts and memories. I allow the dance to become its own entity by locating the terms of the dance within my ethnic and gendered perspective and process. Dance making often feels like a philosophical venture, where I am opening and moving in and around my bodily means to invent an aesthetically constructed combination of my cultural and ethnic expression.

Searching to name my actions, to name the dance:

*Continual identity, history, form. Complex, a state of quality, and organically honest.
A name, Mexican and American. American in Spanish. Natural, yet planted to bloom.
Native to Mexico and the Southern USA.
A desert cactus, flowering to end up 'muerta'
Leaves yielding fibers to make my grandmother's scarfs.
Embroidery and cloths—
The century plant, Agave Americana.*

It is as if I open my choreographic tool box when I name dance. The title symbolically holds together the content of the dance, challenging me to generate creative material to help convey its meanings. I name the dance *Agave Americana* because I like to think that the cactus carries with it the same feelings of being and growing in America, alongside those of an ethnic background tied to Mexico. The flowering cactus represents my Mexican-American identity in a way that carries with it the weight of protecting Mexican culture. The plant grows a hard shell to protect its internal textures, stores its healing properties, and lives through the cycle of age and time. The cactus represents native lands, roots, and generations, considerably giving the dance a map to explore my human psyche, memories, past and present social interactions that flow between conscious and subconscious worlds.

Collaborating: Sound and Bodies

My choreographic process is also about collaboration with other elements and artists. I engage and pick apart conceptual and physical patterns to assemble a dance that is full of aesthetic inquiry. What can be explored? What are the boundaries? I turn to shaping my choreographic starting points by sharing and further developing my thoughts with other creative thinkers and movers. As a choreographer, my role is to organize thoughts, movements, and bodies to essentially create a communal artwork. I ponder and set up parameters of trust between myself and my collaborators when choreographing a dance. This is most important to me because I think it gives agency to all the people, and all the parts, that need to come together to make a concert style dance work.

I started assembling together the environment of *Agave Americana* by discussing sensation and sound in relation to movement with collaborator, composer, and sound designer Andrew J. Tarr. Sound takes me to various places where dance can exist. It sets to scale the limit with which my dance and movement may live. I often try to make sense of those various places by combining them with one another to help figure out the dance's specific journey.

Early in the process of creating *Agave Americana*, I express to Tarr that we are making a dance that is essentially American. I provided insight into how we can investigate, with sound, the ways in which we can explore elements of my Mexican-ness to help convey a theme. I shared with Tarr my choreographic starting points, i.e. desert landscape and vast and desolate memories motioning through time, my Latin inspired musical playlist, and how I attach instrumental sounds with body parts when choreographing. I shared how a guitar strum effects my spine, a passionate voice stimulates a mindful experience, and how stomping rhythms entice grounded

footwork and connection. We worked through samples of music as I played with dance phrasing and motifs until we mutually agreed that something of quality was formulating. I listened to Tarr's musical composition in sections and we built the dance in the same manner over time. We both conjured old and new ideas to help create and produce our artworks in union.

I set up a ten-week rehearsal process with undergraduate dance majors from the University of California, Irvine — Lauren Gresens, Ember Hopkins, Emily McKeon, Samantha Scheller, Sophia Vangelatos, and Katherine Wong — to create *Agave Americana*. I meshed my choreographic ideas with educational aspects to more clearly engage in concept when sharing parts of myself with the dancers in my choreographic process. Through teaching movement to other bodies, learning, and then unlearning with those bodies, I discover I am constantly exploring the integrity of my womanhood and artistry in cultural, historical, and experiential ways. A place others may find similarity. With the dancers in *Agave Americana*, I explored function and form to create an “intrinsic dance” where the dancers were “most concerned with embodying movement holistically, shaping and pouring it through the lived time of her performance” (Fraleigh 14-15). I build on the premise of movement deriving from the body through internal sensations with an ability to connect to narrative through external explorations. In regards to *Agave Americana*, I turned to personal narrative for my explorative content, sharing with my collaborators my Mexican-American perspective. I manifested a structure in which sound and bodies explored their own sense of identity and maturity.

Making the Dance: Play, Materials, Quality, Narrative

I enter the studio with my dancers feeling that everything I need to make a dance exists in the studio with me in that present moment. In the chapter “Play Profound” in *A Choreographic Mind: Autobodygraphical Writings* by author Susan Rethorst, I read about how work combined with play will instinctively create a dance. She turns to her influences, “upbringing,” “era,” “interior,” and “inclinations” (71) during a period in her life where she was readjusting and renaming her identity. She strives to arrive to a “dance’s meaningfulness” through exploring both necessity and inevitability. I say “let us play” often in rehearsals with the dancers after teaching them phrases inspired by *cumbia*-like dance steps. I rigorously use the term the way that Rethorst defines the meaning of play. “Questions are valued over statements. Keeping the play instinct primary means embracing the dance that *is* something, not the dance that is *about* something. (77).

I reference my stream of consciousness recordings to describe *Agave Americana*:

The title of the dance symbolically represents Mexican-American femininity and becomes a story of six females with influx characterizations. The story poetically takes space and place in the desert landscape of the American Southwest asking: How do our bodies form attachments to home, community, and nation? Is our sense of place affected by time?

I taught phrases to the dancers and began structuring and outlining the dance. I deconstructed the phrases by adding swaying hip motifs and striking postural stances that remind me of my great-grandfather’s cowboy hat. I explored detail and intention by making choices about gaze and discussing an attention to the desert world. I played with dimension and perspective by exploring breath, length, and sustained fluidity between each transition. I continued to place all the movements within the narrative in a way that made sense to the dancers and the dance. And I

looked at the relationship between my movements on the dancers' body and made use of extensive symbolism to develop the relationship between characters in the dance. A definition for material:

Another way of looking at it might be this: that 'material' is what happens in the gap between two movements. This puts the emphasis on composition, on the placing of two things in relation to each other. Placing things in relation to each other utterly changes them. (Burrows 6)

For *Agave Americana*, I use plants and flowers as symbols of femininity, passion, and local identity as a poetic expression of my worldview. Thoughts, memories, stories, and images of family start to attach themselves to my movement ideas. I integrate calla lilies as props to represent my great-grandmother Leocadia "*Callita*" Gomez. I drew further inspiration from the aesthetic in painting *Nude with Calla Lilies* by painter Diego Rivera. The layering of visual and auditory input over time gave the dancers an environment in which they could explore and develop their own way of moving within the dance. I produce a kind of thinking with my dance making, where cultivation of physicality could be conducted. I was and am, essentially trying to mold the senses intuitively by crafting a perceptual journey for dancers and the audience.

Foster points out the way in which American dance critic John Martin, focused on crusading the modern dance movement by theorizing that "kinesthetic experience was intrinsically connected to emotional experience" (qtd in Foster 7-8). In what way could I work with a higher level of kinesthetic awareness and response in my choreography? Can I embellish the dancers' reactions with an acute sense of sound? These questions sparked ideas and a decision to have *Agave Americana* accompanied by Tarr's live music during the performative presentation at UC Irvine's Experimental Media Performance Lab(xMPL). I played with my

ethnic and local identity taking shape in a way that was embodied and supported with live music. The music features guitar, cajón, and wood flute sounds intermixed with harmonic progressions inspired by the themes in Mexican folk music and *son mexicano* to speak to my Mexican-American feelings. Tarr plays the guitar and with its lush reverb sounds, I mold the physical fluency in the dancer's body. Mind and body is united in pulse, range, density, and structure. With the element of live music the dance is alive and changing in the present moment, telling the audience a story of beauty, love, cultural legacy, and womanhood.

A developing structure scribbled in my choreographic notebook:

Introduction: we(world) enter your desert, land and your home

Section 1: Family Portrait, confronting, time changing, slow cumbia, weaving, hyphenated, balancing and blending

Section 2: Same motions, switch perspective, assimilation, returning, remembering

[Transition: After-life, death after flowering, "Canta no Llores" and opaqueness into society]

Section 3: Structure, protective, México viejo

[Transition: Time]

*Conclusion: Memories, re-building and leaving home, passing, self
"Un Día a La Vez"*

Imagining scenic elements for *Agave Americana* was also part of this choreographic process. Foster explains how "the body must perceive simultaneously its position, movement, momentum, and proximity to everything around it" (Foster 73). How does the environment of *Agave Americana* look? I work with scenic designer Anna Ialeggio to help create a world that resembles the American Southwest. Her design is inspired by the study models of a stage set created for American modern dance pioneer Martha Graham's *Errand into the Maze* by artist and landscape architect Isamu Noguchi and the illustrations in book *Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of*

George Herriman by author Patrick McDonnell. These inspirational images creatively inform me of the world in which the dance will live.

Agave Americana is set in a landscape that is sculpted by agaves in adobe potted planters, a dried up tree branch, and a clothesline made of my scarfs that were knitted with detail by my *Abuela*. Ialeggio's use of sculptural art in the dance helps integrate the concept of the American Southwest for the dancers. This in turn, gave me more ways to play with isolation, dimension, and peripheral infinities. I follow these aesthetic patterns of shaping by making choices to blend neutral, white, and brown hues into costume design. Golden textures and nighttime shadows created by lighting designer Morgan Embry help enhance the moods of the dance. In the opening image of *Agave Americana*, I recreate the feelings I have upon witnessing Catholic church architectures:

I notice the gold details on the walls and for a moment, I realize I have entered a vast dimension of honor and respect. I am overcome with grand-ness, an overwhelming experience of static air, that is full in gaze. There is direct attention to the front of the altar, aware of the sounds — filling the vastness of the space, reverberating around. I look for the images of Mary, wondering how her honor is recognized sitting alongside her son. The oldness of the church dissipates into stories, prayers, memories, longings, forgiveness, and tones of beautiful deaths. It's history reminds me of my own, the power in the delicacy of my mothers and fathers before me. It feels like home yet all just echos into what becomes empty air. —2 July 2018 in Rome, Italy ¹

I produce and combine various artistic and observable properties to better understand human movement and behaviors. Fraleigh says that “our biases stem from and reinforce our

¹ Awarded a travel grant during the graduate academic year of 2017-2018 by the Research/Travel Committee of the UCI School of the Arts. I immersed myself in places of culture posing questions about nationalism and indulged in the Catholic religious aesthetics for choreographic inspiration. Helped structure a troupe of UC Irvine dance artists to answer questions surrounding a theorization of identity. Dancing with familiar bodies in a different country allowed me to notice more clearly how corporeal, individual, and social interactions from within a culture feed artistic process.

gender perceptions and concepts of normalcy, our inherited and learned culture, and the known territory of our experience” (17) The disconnect I felt between my Mexican-American culture and my dance making was because I had not yet deeply investigated the ways they naturally live inside of me. With my dance making, I take my daily experiences into the studio and digest them through movement and language. I express my thoughts and pull them apart, almost making them unrecognizable. I let my experiences subconsciously speak through my choices. With the dancers, I layer their feelings, modes of assessing and expressing, and attune to the type of human they wish to be in dance. The dance starts to shape itself together with all our layers.

CONCLUSION

My research journey provokes a sensibility with heritage, creation, self, and world. I situate myself within my Mexican-American family, artistic culture, gendered and spiritual perspective to make sense of my history, and ultimately, present a dance work that speaks to my present time. This research informs me of the topics with which I practice and engage in for creative makings. Memory, voice, language, awareness, maturity, space, and time are the themes that appear in many of my mundane activities that I find are later depicted as realms of poetic ambiguity in my artistic creations. I draw from my Mexican-American female experiences and reveal the challenges with its beauty of connecting threads and recognizing patterns. My intellectual curiosity gives me the ability to find and create meaning for contemporary choreographies. My artistic and ethnic identities feel like they coexist after making the dance work *Agave Americana*. I made cognitive choices to listen to my ethnic identity to create an artistic manifestation of self and culture. I wonder, if, in the same manner, others are also listening and speaking to their ethnic experiences. I continue questioning: Are Mexican-American female choreographers a rarity? Are others digging into their ethnic self and sharing their stories through dance? How is the Mexican-American modern dance experience developing in the world of dance today? What opportunities are there for Mexican-American choreographers and are there limitations to these ethnic specific festivals and institutions?

My two-fold thesis research for *Agave Americana* helped illuminate a more profound knowledge in myself and hopefully inspired others to ask questions about my Mexican-American ethnicity. I think the performance highlighted the familiarity one may feel with the Mexican-

American culture. For Americans living in the Southwest and West, the Mexican experience always surrounds us. I think within this familiarity, the dance also provokes a sort of realization of naivety towards some aspects of the culture. I think juxtaposing ideas and paradoxically blending deep thoughts is what makes art feel whole. My research process and dance reveal to me that the premise of artistic work is based on an amalgamation of self and world. Zooming out of my process for further inquiry, I discover just a handful of Mexican-American dance artists that are making and working in the field as well. The ways I turn to these artists and their work for different purposes, is similar to the ways in which I turn to Los Angeles-based dance artist, choreographer, and mentor Loretta Livingston. I discover familiarity with Livingston in our artistic exchange of process and ideas in our discussions. She teaches me to search for the value in learning, sharing, teaching, and growing with the body and its practice to develop identity.

Throughout my research journey, I hear about, meet, and see other Mexican-American choreographers pulling apart ideas mainly centered around separation and the marginalization of our culture in the United States of America. The choreographers do this by creating and producing dance works as they feel necessary. I embrace the similarities in the narratives of these artists and thinkers. As we share and explore our ethnicity in the contemporary, I witness our unique presentations of story and craft. For example, in Riverside, California, dancer, teacher, and co-founder of Primera Generación Dance, Rosa Rodriguez-Frazier takes “*quebradita* basic dance steps. . . and uses experimental choreography and research that focuses on Mexican-American identity and its many marginalized connections” (Brien). In Phoenix, Arizona artist and choreographer Liliana Gomez showcases her art in public spaces and works “alongside artists and public servants of all genres” (Gomez). Gaining more national attention, Texas-born

choreographer Michelle Manzanales has been touring her work *Con Brazos Abiertos*. The dance allows Manzanales to “investigate this place of being in between two cultures and just standing in that” as she describes in a video, found on the online database Youtube, posted by dance company Ballet Hispánico based in New York City (Instituto, “Michelle”). I had the privilege of seeing the work in Portland, Oregon where for the first time, with dance, I felt visible. I empathize with many of the online sources describing Manzanales’s work and find myself more and more wanting for my ethnicity to come out from the shadows in dance academia. Thus, I share another artist located in New York. Recent graduate of New York University Tisch School of the Arts and dance company director of Valletto Dance, choreographer Valeria Y. González pays homage to her Mexican roots while exploring the female psyche with her very bold and human dance works. Lastly, although not female, I mention choreographer Victor Quijada, a Los Angeles native creating concert dance works for his company RUBBERBANDance Group in Montreal, Canada. Quijada is internationally representing the Mexican-American experience through his work. He blends hip-hop dance forms with classical ballet and dance theatre and shares with students back in Los Angeles the ways in which he investigates “language and lineage” through his RUBBERBAND Method (Kiner). He celebrates hybridity and diversity in his art form, and without emphasizing his ethnic background, I think his ideas and ways of looking at dance is developed because of his Mexican-American cultural upbringing.

I find commonality between these contemporary choreographers, however, placing this information within a broader societal structure reminds me of how limited our experience can be and how it carries with it resonances of patriarchy. This is where I find purpose for further investigation. I have presented my personal Mexican-American female choreographic process,

but, where does the contemporary dancing Mexican-American female body fit into society in a grander spectrum? I wonder if economic advantages and disadvantages is a root effect to the outcome of studying dance for first-generation Mexican-Americans. What are the difficulties for Mexican-Americans who want to study contemporary dance techniques and how do these difficulties differ between women and men? I continue to ask questions to reveal the ways in which this research carries limitations and can extend into other areas of study. There are many parts that make up the Mexican-American dancing female body in which I think deserves further discovery and articulation.

Choreography as research allows for a more diverse representation of people and civilization. I have enriched my own life through learning more about and respecting my ethnicity and listening to all bodies through dance. As a dance artist and researcher, I am engaged with facilitating sensory awareness for myself and others to foster a fuller understanding of place and culture within the world. Thus, I am always pleased to discover platforms that promote the voices of Latino/a/x communities. They offer opportunities for more voices to be heard, be seen, and noticed. Luna Negra Dance Theatre in Chicago showcased Latino-inspired dances until financial difficulties led to their shut down in 2013 (Lazare). Many of the same artists and directors that were associated with Luna Negra Dance Theatre switched their attention and efforts to Ballet Hispánico. Artistic director Eduardo Vilaro is helping shape the dance organization into the leading role model for dance in the Latino/a/x community. Ballet Hispánico hosts *Instituto Coreográfico*, where online, they market the program as an “innovative learning laboratory” (Instituto, “Ballet”).

On the West Coast of the United States, co-director Liz Duran Boubion and Juan Manuel Aldape Muñoz produce the Festival of Latin American Contemporary Choreographies in San Francisco. The annual showcase is produced to connect and strengthen “diverse heritages and innovations” (Boubion). My participation in Blaktinx in Los Angeles, with director Licia Perea, is where I learned about the importance of these platforms. In this dynamic network of dance makers, I found power to make work about my ethnicity. However, the power does not limit me to only making dances about ethnic content. I have a variety of channels in which I explore. For example, the mysteries of black holes inspires me and was explored in my choreography *Eyes of your Eyes*. The work premiered at a graduate dance concert titled Dance Escape in 2018 at the Claire Trevor Theater amidst my ethnically rich research. Making work about other interests of mine makes me realize the importance of variety and choice in my identity. I wish that the findings in this research highlight the importance of advocating for oneself, engaging in opportunities, and knowing the weighted difference of being viewed through only one lens.

Parts of me began this journey knowing myself as a Mexican-American woman and artist wanting to truly utilize and distinguish myself in that uniqueness. I did not realize that my voice as a choreographer had always been there, creating from the place of complexity and balanced grace. Throughout my life, my Mexican-American background has been pushing me and fueling creative energy. “Our language is the reflection of ourselves” (Chavez) and it is with my choreographic research and language that I discover the meaning behind reason, love, artistic, and intellectual creation. Today, I make more choices that advocate for my dance making and ethnicity in way that helps shape my artistic, personal, and global views into the twenty-first century.

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APPENDIX A

Performances Referenced

Fotos Antiguas. Choreography by Andrea Ordaz, sound composition by Andrew J. Tarr, directed by BlakTina 6 Festival with Licia Perea, performances by Julienne Mackey, Joan Holly Padeo, and Samantha Scheller. 4-6 Oct. 2018, Bootleg Theater, Los Angeles.

Tierra Intocable. Choreography Andrea Ordaz, sound composition by Andrew J. Tarr, lighting design Avery Regan, directed by University of California, Irvine, performances by Edgar Aguirre, John Barclay, Piper Bockstahler, Lauren Gresens, Emily McKeon, Alexis-Nichole Pineda, Isabella Harris, Sophia Vangelatos, Katherine Wong, 6-8 Dec. 2018, The Claire Trevor Theatre, Irvine.

Patria. Directed by Matías Gueilburt, written by Nicolas Gueilburt, cast Paco Ignacio Taibo II, 18 Jan. 2019, *Netflix*, <https://www.netflix.com/title/80988257>.

John Leguizamo's Latin History for Morons. Starring John Leguizamo, 2018. *Netflix Original*, <https://www.netflix.com/title/80225421>.

Ramona. Choreographed by Heidi Duckler, directed by Heidi Duckler Dance Theatre, performances by Lenin Fernandez, Roberto Lambaren, Ryan Walker Page, Rafael Quintas, Rosanna Tavarez and Himerria Wortham, instrumentation by Chris Garcia, Israel Heller. 23 Sep. 2018, San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, San Gabriel.

La Casa. Choreography by Don Martin, music by Heitor Villa Lobos, directed by Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, performances by Mawiyah Dowd, Marcella Lewis, Andrea Ordaz, Nayeli Rescalvo, Jordyn Wheeler, 16-18 Apr. 2010, Glorya Kaufman Theatre UCLA Dept. of World Arts and Cultures, Los Angeles.

Agave Americana. Choreography and direction by Andrea Ordaz, sound composition by Andrew J. Tarr, lighting design Morgan Embry, scenic design Anna Ialeggio with knitted details by Maria Trinidad Ordaz, costume design Andrea Ordaz, performances by Lauren Gresens, Ember Hopkins, Emily McKeon, Samantha Scheller, Sophia Vangelatos, Katherine Wong, 25-26 Apr. 2019, Experimental Media Performance Media Lab (xMPL), Irvine.

Con Brazos Abiertos. Choreography by Michelle Manzanales, artistic collaboration Ray Doñes, soundscape Carla Morrison, Cheech & Chong, Julio Iglesias, Edward James

Olmos, Gustavo Santaolalla, Maria Billini-Padilla, Juan Carlos Marin Marin, Ember Island, Mexican Institute of Sound, Costume design Diana Ruettiger, Lighting design Joshua Preston, performances by Ballet Hispánico, 16 May 2018, Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall, Portland.

Eyes of your Eyes. Choreography by Andrea Ordaz, sound composition by Andrew J. Tarr, lighting design Morgan Embry, directed by University of California, Irvine, performances Nola Gibson, Martha Gray, Lauren Gresens, Ember Hopkins, Samantha Scheller, Mikayla Wieser, Katherine Wong, 19-21 Apr. 2018, The Claire Trevor Theatre, Irvine.