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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Native American Indigeneity Through Danza in Southwest Powwows: A Decolonizing,
Feminist Approach

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

Jessica Margarita Gutierrez Masini

March 2023

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Liz Przybylski, Chairperson

Dr. Deborah Wong

Dr. Jacqueline Shea Murphy

Dr. Dawn Avery

Dr. Jonathan Ritter

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2023

The Dissertation of Jessica Margarita Gutierrez Masini is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

Acknowledgements: Penayawalu a'chama pish niyxap umun emem miyik

To all my relations... "I would like to show my appreciation to everyone today."

A special thanks to William Madrigal Jr. and Raymond Braveowl Haute for teaching me Cahuilla language at UC Riverside, sharing their culture, and providing me the language to show my appreciation in the original and current tongue of these lands and waterways; "Penayawalu a'chama pish niyxap umun emem miyik."

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tremendous gratitude for my kapulli, Kapulli Teuxihuitl, my teachers “Mr. and Mrs. Cencalli,” and all my fellow danzantes for dancing with me in ceremony, sharing their time and expertise with me. I have never felt such belonging as coordinating powwows or practicing Danza. Thank you to the staff and student coordinators for welcoming me into these Native spaces and enlightening me on the complexities of university and nonprofit powwow productions. I thank the countless students and community members who volunteer their time and efforts during powwow season to ensure powwows happen successfully and *in a good way*. I acknowledge my fellow committee members and the heartfelt memories we created while volunteering countless hours: including Wendy Hernandez, Celeste Joaquin, Valentin Sierra, Leo Youssef, Desiree Negrette, Kealani Beltran, Joshua Little, Day Ocampo, LeeAna Espinoza Salas, Beyaja Notah, Sara Medel, Alex “Panda” Armendariz, Itztli Arteaga, Victoria Rios, Jess Delgado, Elise Green, Daniel Archuleta, Maddison Garcia, Roseanne Rosenthal, Phil Rosenthal, Clifford Button, Brandon Molina Berrios, Danna Castaneda, Nogwa Smith, Mario Chutnicut, Amelia Vigil, Roger Kuhn, Javier Stell-Fresquez, J. Miko Thomas a.k.a. Landa Lakes, Ruth Villasenor, John Sneezy (R.I.P.), Mija a.k.a. Dandilion, Richard Buettner, Nicholas Orcher, and many more. I express my deepest appreciation to Josh Gonzales, Cuauhtémoc Peranda, Joshua Little, William Madrigal, Itztli Arteaga, Jess Delgado, Kali Simmons, Kat Warren, “N,” “Emily Meyers,” and the BAAITS Powwow committee who shared their time, knowledge, and musical practices with me in extended interviews, casual conversation, guest lecture-demonstrations, and/or via social media.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Native American Indigeneity Through Danza in Southwest Powwows: A Decolonizing,
Feminist Approach

by

Jessica Margarita Gutierrez Masini

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Music
University of California, Riverside, March 2023
Dr. Liz Przybylski, Chairperson

In this dissertation, I investigate cross-cultural perspectives of Indigeneity through Danza and powwow communities in the Southwestern United States. Exploring sonic and corporeal intersections between identity, place, and decolonizing strategies, I demonstrate how Indigenous peoples dismantle settler colonial narratives and negotiate their sovereignty. Founded in present-day México, Danza is a multi-generational, music, dance, and spiritual group practice that draws from Mesoamerican intertribal rites of passage ceremonies and Conchero traditions. In the context of Danza in this region, talking circles were my primary entry into research—a decolonizing strategy for community building and revisiting contentious topics between powwow participants, dancers, and community. Talking circles provided spaces for conflict resolution in terms of detribalization, feminist interventions, and questions of Indigenous belonging. By

centering critical relationality narratives for danzantes and Two-Spirit women through methods of autoethnography, dancing, listening to local communities, and virtual connections, I examine: 1) How do danzantes practice and reflect communal and individual praxes of Indigeneity in powwow spaces? 2) How has Danza in powwow hubs changed intertribal relations in the Southwestern United States, including gendered notions of Indigeneity and decolonial praxis? 3) How can hybrid autoethnography inspire decolonizing, feminist perspectives in future Danza and powwow spaces and the academy?

Unpacking the variations and tensions concerning what it means to be Indigenous—and which groups get to claim it—reflects understanding the gendered sociopolitical histories among Danza and powwow participants from differing Nations. My decolonizing, feminist approach joins an ongoing dialogue documenting Danza history, politics, and its emergence as a decolonizing movement. Drawing from BIPOC feminist praxes of refusal and relationship-building, I expand discourse on Indigeneity and explore how Indigenous worldviews are relational and reciprocal avenues for self-determination and to combat dominant colonial structures like xenophobia and homophobia. My findings on fostering decolonial interpersonal relationships go beyond Southwestern powwows to extend to Native hubs and spaces online—a global powwow network—and further demonstrate why critical feminist and Two-Spirit perspectives are crucial in ethnographic music research.



“If you don’t have a Two Spirit amongst the leadership you roll with, then your čangleška is broken...AND don’t forget, Two Spirits we’re [sic] here before first contact, we have been proud of our full authentic selves’ since before 1492 🍷”

~TwoSpiritWarriorQueen

[#LandBack](#)

[#YourPRIDEMarchIsOnStolenLands](#)”

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1 (suplyi) Beginnings¹

Permission and Introductions²

In this introduction chapter, I employ personal introspection to demonstrate decolonization as an ongoing, complex, and messy process, with long-lasting impact on Indigenous self-determination.³ As a researcher, student, organizer, dancer, teacher, friend, and activist, the boundaries of when I am in the field and when I am not, are ambiguous. I learned to navigate these overlapping, revolving roles through flexibility, open-mindedness, love, and compassionate listening. Since 2017, I have formally investigated cross-cultural perspectives of Indigeneity through Danza and powwow spaces in the Southwestern United States.⁴ Danza is a multigenerational music, dance, and spiritual group practice that draws from intertribal rite of passage ceremonies and Conchero traditions found in present-day México (Luna 2012, Nielsen 2017). My ethnographic project follows the lived experiences of Danza dancers (danzantes) and powwow communities. I explore the intersections between identity, place, and decolonizing strategies to show how Native American peoples construct and maintain their worldviews in urban spaces and how music and dance are tools for deconstructing colonial narratives. Through deep engagement, dancing, listening to local communities,

¹ Like all my chapters, I am using Cahuilla numbers in the titles in recognition of the original caretakers of the Indigenous Cahuilla lands where I live and work.

² This introductory section I titled permissions to call attention to the necessity of asking permission and inviting-in relatives as well as granting myself permission for personal introspection, mistakes, and sharing this research *in a good way*.

³ See Key Concepts section of this chapter for definition and description of Indigenous.

⁴ See Key Concepts section of this chapter for definition and description of Indigeneity.

online interactivities, and reading existing scholarship on Native American/Indigenous, feminist, and decolonizing theories, I answer and expand upon questions: *How do danzantes practice and reflect communal and individual praxes of Indigeneity in powwow spaces? How has Danza in powwow hubs changed intertribal relations in the Southwestern United States, including gendered notions of Indigeneity and decolonial praxis? How can hybrid autoethnography inspire decolonizing, feminist perspectives in future Danza and powwow spaces and the academy?*

The following is a poem I composed to represent the permission dance called *Danza del Permiso*. In Danza, we do this dance at the beginning and end of every ceremony, as well as in between the dances, to ask the spirits for permission to begin our dance offering and as a way of giving thanks once completed.⁵

Shaking ayacaxtli in my left hand,
Dun, da-dun, da-dun, da-dun
Dun, da-dun, da-dun, da-dun
We float inwards together
Our circle shrinking
Following reverberating beats,
We expand
In together & out, a calming
Breath

⁵ As my Danza teachers have explained to me, everything has a spirit: the Moon, the trees, the rocks, our Mother Earth, as well as those who have moved on like our ancestors.

Centers our practice

Step out to the left

Just a touch,

Spin left

Bounce carrying momentum through

Spin right

Soak in, rejuvenating Sun

Beats quicken

Dun, da-da-da-da-, dun da-dun

Dun, da-da-da-da-, dun da-dun

Fancy footwork marks the six directions

Shifting weight

Ball to heel, left foot, then right

Twirl again,

North winds,

then South

Our bodies

Lifting

Up-

In closing we bow our heads,

Resting beaded brows onto cool Earth.

Thanks, permission, responsibility.

Ometeo. Tazlocamatli.

I am Mexican by blood, born and raised in Southern California, but most of my cultural upbringing was influenced by my white, working class, adoptive mother.⁶ I often describe my upbringings as an intersectional matriarchy because I spent most of my childhood navigating in-between the worlds of two very different working-class women: my birthmother, a Mexican-born undocumented immigrant, and my later adoptive mother, a third generation Italian American from Michigan. In 2010, my birthmother dropped me off at Valencia High School and never returned. As a teenager I was already battling depression and recovering from a failed suicide attempt, and then I found myself disconnected from my Mexican roots through young adulthood. Before starting graduate school in 2016, I reconnected with my birthfather's family in León, Guanajuato and ever since, return there in the summers to practice my Spanish and rebuild family relations. Every year I am learning more about my heritage.

In trying to find language to describe my heritage, I once called myself a Xicana following writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and AnaLouise Keating whose words and feelings of reconnection resonated with me.⁷ Today I consider myself a

⁶ As with any decolonized approach to research, I must address my own positionality because my research methodology and how I approach the research itself is molded by my own social position. According to sociologist Maggie Walter (Palawa) and Native studies professor Chris Andersen (Métis), social position encompasses “much of who we are socially, economically, culturally, and racially,” creating a bounded self that is reflected in all our research (2013, 41). Additionally, I clarify my speaking position to assist readers’ understanding of how I situate my research as both an insider and outsider ethnographer.

⁷ See Key Concepts section of this chapter for definition and description of Xicana.

detrribalized accomplice, and live life through a blended Mexican, American, and Native American framework.⁸ While my paternal family lives in Chichimeca territory, my grandparents do not describe any ties to a particular Indigenous Nation; instead, like many proud Mexican nationals they share that they are Mestizos, a blend of Spanish and Indigenous heritage (Vasconcelos 1997).⁹ ¹⁰ This perpetual idea of mestizaje, or mixture, continues to erase and blur my own family history. I understand the historical processes of assimilation and “detrribalization” in México that began Indigenous peoples’ loss of lands and recognition. Through centuries of colonization, my family has forgotten their name, language, and critical connection the land, water, fire, and air, so now the world no longer recognizes us.¹¹ My family’s connection is not completely broken. I desperately feel that learning how to make beans and rice with my grandma and aunts, practicing Danza, listening to my grandparents’ stories, and drinking *café de olla* on the mountaintop overlooking León all bring me closer to our Indigenous ways.¹² My heightened desperation speaks to the trauma of dislocation, and in the complexities of yearning, I reaffirm an inexplicable existence (Vizenor 2008).

⁸ See Key Concepts section of this chapter for definition and description of Detribalized accomplice.

⁹ I reference Vasconcelos’ *The Cosmic Race* (English translation) for its historical significance in the creation of a National Mestizo identity, however, do not use this definition for Mestizo as it erases African heritage in said racial mixture.

¹⁰ Following Gregory Younging, I capitalize the term Nation because it has become widely accepted by Indigenous peoples to describe separate Indigenous groups as political entities (2018, 68). I am extending this here to refer to intertribal relations (Mexica, Lakota, Cahuilla, etc.) and geopolitical nation-states like México or Canada.

¹¹ See Laura Harjo’s *Spiral to the Stars* (2019).

¹² *Café de olla* is Mexican coffee made from a traditional earthen clay pot.

I do not claim a tribal Nation or affiliation, yet I carry the weight of my ancestors who were Indigenous to this continent. Recognition and a community who claims you is crucial and so I thank my Indigenous mentors, Elders, and fellow peers in Native American Student Programs at UC Davis and UC Riverside.¹³ As scholars have noted, an Indigenous identity is political and often led by initiatives such as the returning of traditional homelands, ways of self-determination, or tribal sovereignty (de la Cadena and Starn 2007; Grande 2015).

My birthparents migrated to this place we call California, settled, and then I was born in a hospital on unceded Tongva and Kizh territories, yet granted United States citizenship. I live and work in Riverside proper and thank the Íviatem (Peoples in Cahuilla) past, present, and future, for their stewardship of these lands, waters, airs, and fires. I recognize the long history of exchange and migration in this area, and equally acknowledge Máara'yam (Serrano), Payómkawichum (“People of the West”), Tongva, and Kizh (Gabrieleño) Peoples as original and current caretakers of these lands and waterways. For this reason, I choose to identify with the term accomplice, raising awareness and advocating for territory and water rights that are not mine.¹⁴ Additionally,

¹³ It is customary in Native American introductions to locate where you come from or your community (Perea 2014, 13-14).

¹⁴ I encourage readers to look up and learn more about the Peoples whose lands/waterways they occupy in one of three ways: 1) <https://native-land.ca/>
2) Sending a message (city, State) to Facebook bot: <https://www.facebook.com/LandAcknowledgement/>
3) a new SMS bot developed making it easier for those in the US to learn which Indigenous territories they're standing on. Just text your zip code or your city and state (separated by a comma) to (907) 312-5085 and the bot will respond with the names of the Native lands that correspond to that region. The service currently only works for US residents but may be available for other countries in the future.

I critically reflect on my own layers of privilege, as a lighter-skinned adopted daughter of the white working/middle class, and in my academic training (although I am the first generation in higher education in my birth family and will be the first in my adoptive family with a Ph.D.). Lastly, my abilities to speak, move, hear, and interact with all my senses, aid in my exploration and understanding of the world around me.

Unlike my heritage, my sexuality and love for people despite their gender was never a part of my identity that I questioned. I am a proud bisexual, polyamorous woman, who thrives in supportive Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (2SLGBTQIA+) spaces.¹⁵ While it has taken time to communicate and come out to family and friends, the exposure to different types of peoples and ideas of love has dismantled some of my settler colonial upbringings.

Since the moment I was born, I have been unlearning and relearning the complexities of my own blurred identities. I have come to terms that some questions may never be answered because I lost touch with my birth mother's family and my grandparents have all since passed. I found solace when first hearing the drumbeats, creating instantaneous intimacy to Danza practice. Or perhaps Danza found me?

“I remember my first time seeing a Danza group perform. After my first volunteer shift, I joined the outer circles of the powwow as an eager spectator, eating my first Indian Taco. Watching the danzantes (Danza practitioners) twirl in brightly colored regalia combined with the sounding of their drums and shells made my breath stop and body cover in goosebumps. Why did this practice speak to my heart and

¹⁵ I honor Indigenous peoples first and foremost by placing “2S”, or “Two-Spirit(s)” an umbrella term to represent specific gender or sexuality constructions to various Indigenous communities. There is pushback against adding another axis of identity for fear of convoluting the message. However, I believe it is important to not continue Indigenous erasure as well as acknowledge that there is power in identifying with a community.

soul? What does it mean to first hear the blowing of the conch shell and huehuetl drumbeats and feel at home? This visceral reaction must speak to something meaningful.” (Gutierrez Masini 2018, 1).¹⁶

My beginnings into the intersecting worlds of powwow and Danza were through volunteering and coordinating constructs my master’s thesis.¹⁷ However, nothing compares to learning the songs and dances. Now a Danza practitioner myself, my research necessitates deep reflexivity and attention to the autoethnographic and embodied experience. I also highlight voices and experiences from my friends and interlocutors, reflecting on these lived experiences and movements with cultural insiders (sometimes across temporalities). As my Danza teachers remind me, our communities are both human and nonhuman, the animals, rocks, stars, a stream, and other bodies make up our world. I do not wish for my own voice to dominate or speak for others, although any ethnography is an interpretation or translation after processing our experiences and understandings with others in the field through our own frames of reference. My dissertation was mostly written in chronological order, so in earlier chapters my authorial voice is more inquisitive and unsure, whereas in later chapters (as I learn and grow in-

¹⁶ Powwows are intertribal social gatherings, usually on weekends, between Natives and non-Native peoples that celebrate Native American cultures, and centered around dance, songs, food, and oral histories. I intentionally use the term intertribal instead “Pan-Indianism” –a previously popular but misunderstood notion in powwows that consequently saw Indigenous peoples as a homogenous cultural or pan-ethnic group (Ellis, Lassiter, and Dunham 2005, viii; Perea 2014, 2017, 9).

¹⁷ In my master’s thesis, I used an alliance studies approach to explore Danza in select University of California powwows, and I demonstrated the layers of complexities when understanding Native American identity formation and creation in music. I credit Beverley Diamond’s 2007 article in which she suggests that we focus on the diverse alliances that Indigenous musicians sound, to demonstrate how they are active agents in their varied performances. She reminds researchers to first “regard musical practices as theory not as objects to which we might apply theory”; and second, that relationships are central to any ethnomusicological study, for “our alliances produce our identities” (Diamond 2007, 170-71).

community) my voice comes off as more authoritative and is coupled with calls to action. I agree with Shawn Wilson's assertion that "If the research doesn't change you, then you're not doing it right (2008, 135).

This project is an ongoing dialogue that will further document Danza, including history, politics, and emergence of Danza as a decolonizing movement and consciousness in the Southwestern United States. Danzantes have had a growing presence in the United States since the 1960s. As powwows spread to urban areas, regional practices become integrated into the local powwow traditions and my scholarship shows Danza's growing presence in University of California powwows at Davis, San Diego, and Riverside (Gutierrez Masini 2018).

I have two main points of intervention. The first is bringing more attention to Danza and powwow cultural intersections.¹⁸ As far as I know, my work is the first major piece to intentionally focus on and examine these practices in conversation with each other. I found Danza (usually called Aztec Dance or Danza Azteca in earlier texts) in the footnotes, where authors often otherized and questioned on their connections to Indigeneity in the context of other powwow participants. For example, Goertzen's

¹⁸ Prominent powwow music scholars like Chris Goertzen, Tara Browner, and John-Carlos Perea often defined Danza as a Special, and therefore not part of the standard exhibition dances. Special is more of an umbrella term for Native American music and dance traditions that are given a spot in the powwow program but not part of the standardized powwow dances. Furthermore, it's important to note how dances are "standardized," is a manner of powwow committee preference and tradition, and these "standards" may or may not change as members of the committee come and go. For example, some California university powwows invite danzantes to perform into the powwow circle during dinner break. Others may not include Danza but may provide that space and time to other Native American traditions like Hoop Dancers or Miwok Dancers. However, at the Sacred Springs Powwow and BAAITS Powwow, danzantes are invited to compete for money (former powwow not latter) and both featured Danza exhibitions about the same amount of time as other powwow dance categories.

surprised reaction to “visiting troupes of ‘Aztec dancers’” whose “ancient dances resemble ones I’ve [Goertzen] seen at historic pageants put on by students at Mexican universities but do not recall any rural Indian dances of Mexico that I [Goertzen] know” (Goertzen 2001, 85; Goertzen 2005, 301-302). Besides basing their authenticity on his own personal knowledge and exposure to Mexican Indigenous traditions, Goertzen fails to understand intertwining colonial histories between Indigenous Nations but in the end does trust that these Indigenous communities have their own ways of Indigenous recognition and self-determination. When questioning the Danza groups’ unbroken traditions, he asks the North Carolina Indians (whose powwow and territories he is doing his research on) about the “traditionality of the ‘Aztec Dancers’, to which he was told that “U.S. Indians leave the weighing of authenticity of ‘Aztecs’ to the ‘Aztecs,’ the transparent implication being that I [Goertzen] ought to follow.”

I explore these growing intersections between Danza and powwow cultural spaces, such as the first ever Danza Powwow.¹⁹ Inviting Danza practitioners into the powwow space challenges members’ understanding of Indigeneity. As Danza and powwow dancers share their different intersecting colonial histories, participants and community spectators alike begin questioning or pushing back on the dominant colonial structures keeping their communities oppressed. While only a few powwows invite

¹⁹ Danza Powwow is my own naming for the Sacred Springs Powwow in San Marcos, Texas. I call this the Danza Powwow for its equal presence of traditional powwow dances alongside Danza dances and equal representation in promotional materials (videos, flyers, program). Rather than merely providing dinner entertainment, danzantes are welcomed into the circle as exhibition dancers and encouraged to participate in Grand Entry and other social dances, thereby providing a rich space for inquiry into the workings of Indigenous concepts of belonging.

Danza, the degree to which danzantes participate and are included in the powwow planning varies. These variations and tensions concerning Indigenous identities and belonging serves as another case study for the negative social and political climate in the United States towards peoples from other Nations.

My second point of intervention and a significant contribution of my fieldwork regards the university settings and predominantly university-associated participants. This dissertation research contributes to the expectations of the academic as an offering to it. As I play with form and voice, I am asserting that these kinds of *unexpectedness* are what the academy needs more of. As shared in my subsequent methodology chapter, witnessing and learning from innovative dissertations that blended Indigenous protocols like ceremony, reciprocity, and non-human relations, inspired and broadened my intellectual horizons. My dissertation's decolonizing, feminist approach seeks to unsettle and expand creative modes of academic knowledge production.

Much of my research takes place in and with universities because I shared my intellectual endeavors with my peers and folks wanted to talk to me. At that point, I was intrigued by the powwow and Danza intersections already happening among my peers and friends in academia. I was intrigued by the friends and relations I was making while coordinating or dancing in powwows together. Lastly, I was intrigued by powwow and Danza's individual and collective impacts on student participants. Like much of my scholarship, this dissertation and the research supporting it was guided by my passions.

For my research in this dissertation, I spoke with the following (some participants have overlapping identities): undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, powwow

attendees and organizers, danzantes, Elders, online participants in virtual powwow and Danza spaces, Indigenous scholars. All participants were over the age of 18, with a range up to 70 years of age. Some of the names of my friends and interlocutors have been changed, while others were anonymized using single letters to represent their name.

Universities are intrinsically tied to dissertation research because there is an end goal of an institutional degree, but I want my dissertation to inspire others to create their own research and projects that bridge gaps between decolonization, self-determination, and Indigenous community praxes. By reading my dissertation, readers witness blossoming moments of intellectual self-determination and embodying Indigeneity across academia and Southwestern Indigenous communities. Indigenous and other oppressed peoples are changing academia, through discourse, personal presence, and research, thereby rebalancing education and opening doors for others.

One approach to decolonizing is Indigenizing academia. I am part of collective efforts to Indigenize academia, and people shared their wisdom and teachings from Elders. These are little kernels often shared in ceremony or stories, but I am uplifting them, recognizing these moments to be as valuable as other published and lauded scholarship. The presentist perspective offers a window into generational layers of how to heal and reverse our current conditions as colonized peoples. I engage deeply with my generation of scholars and practitioners because these issues of Indigeneity, belonging, and the future of Indigenous peoples are at the forefront of our minds.

Friends and community are the authority, but they are not mutually exclusive from the academy. I highlight us as bridges to the gaps between academia and the

communities they serve and mold. Over 7 years in research, I have met people and formed relationships. After building trust and once we were in clearly established relations, I asked people if they wanted to participate in my research. Community is an essential component of my fieldwork.

During a Two Spirit talking circle, I learned that community can be thought of as a combination of “come” and “unity”, meaning that community can be fluid and thought of whomever shows up with the intentions of uniting. This aligns with my scholarly view and is how I conceive of community throughout this dissertation. Some may be at the forefront in talking circle interviews, and others may have been a passing interaction or conversation. I also imagine the non-human and spiritual relations that may not be tangibly visible in written word, but have influenced our lives as teachers, providers, and models.

In this dissertation I will reference communities of which I am a member, so readers may notice the use of “we” throughout this dissertation. Identity (alongside sovereignty and theories of decolonization) is one of the simultaneously vexing and liberatory issues at the heart of Native American Studies. Seneca associate professor of English and Native American Studies, Michelle H. Raheja argues that “Native American identity is proving ground for radically different conceptions of self and community—from multiple modes of expressing self- and community-hood from Indigenous nation to nation to race-based, Western juridical notions implicit and explicit in the U.S. and Canada’s desire to measure blood quantum and other Western concepts as a legal marker of belonging” (2010, 111). As an autoethnographer, my subjectivity is a crucial

component of my work, which is why I refer to myself and the larger community groups to which I belong. Generally, these two communities, which are not always mutually exclusive, are danzantes and BIPOC. The relevant group will be clear through context.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith acknowledges the complexities in defining community. One problem is that “the community” is often situated as different from the space of “the field” because the former conveys a human, self-identified space whereas the latter is a place “out there” that may or may not involve people (2012, 129). Furthermore, I agree with Shawn Wilson’s argument from *Research as Ceremony*, which states that “research must use relational accountability, that is, must be connected to or a part of a community (set of relationships), if it is to be counted as Indigenous” (2008, 41-42).

My spirit of ethics requires that I first enter a community as a true community member, one who listens, volunteers time and labor, and eagerly participates. Only then do I feel comfortable engaging in deep research conversations with those in local Danza and powwow. My ethics also require me to receive explicit confirmation before and after conducting my research that I can use participants’ names and experiences. If I do not receive explicit confirmation after research is conducted, I anonymize the source. General methodology is further explained in Chapter 2.

The rest of the chapter follows a question centered approach to a literature review, hopefully guiding readers through the layers of historical, theoretical, and practical knowledge needed to understand my dissertation project. I share through the personal wisdom and experiences of myself, my friends, and interlocutors. After explaining the value in exploring Indigeneity through Southwest powwows, I trace my decolonizing

methodologies in research and writing. Lastly, I briefly introduce other chapters of my dissertation through questions and entry points on topics such as the layers in settler society, technological mediations, and reflections on innovative hybrid Indigenous methods for music research.

Key Concepts and Grammar Conventions

The following list provides select vocabulary. More specifically, this list explicates how I am understanding these terms for peoples and ideas central to this dissertation. Most of these terms have multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings, and this does not provide an exhaustive account. By privileging how Native peoples have utilized and reinvented these words, I strive to unpeel some layers of coloniality. Following Dena'ina music studies scholar Jessica Bissett Perea, I bring attention to and utilize some grammatical conventions that may be new to readers of this dissertation (2021).

According to Gregory Younging in his *Elements of Indigenous Style* guide, capitalization is a powerful tool because it is a “deliberate decision that redresses mainstream’s society’s history of regarding Indigenous Peoples as having no legitimate national identities; government, social spiritual, or religious institutions, or collective rights;” (2018, 77). Jessica Bissett Perea capitalizes Indigenous and Indigeneity to emphasize “respect in referencing our *beings* and *relations*,” calling in human and beyond-human connections (2021, 250). I also join other decolonizing, feminist scholars in refusing historical and ongoing objectification of Black, Indigenous, and other Peoples of Color. For these reasons, I capitalize Elder, Indigenous, Indigeneity, Nation, Oral

Tradition, and Two-Spirit. Since working with the Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirit (BAAITS) organization in 2020, I have chosen to follow how BAAITS spells Two-Spirit; I acknowledge other spellings are used in the vernacular (e.g., Two Spirits and Two Spirit) within the community and in scholarship.

I refuse to italicize Indigenous words. Some bilingual and multilingual writers like Gloria Anzaldúa, have pushed back against italicizing because it reinforces othering and English-language writing as a monolingualistic culture. Following Jessica Bissett Perea's teachings from Kānaka Maoli scholar Noenoe K. Silva, this refusal is a tool "in keeping with the recent movement to resist making the native tongue appear foreign in writing produced in and about a native land and people" (Silva 2004, 13-14; Bissett Perea 2021, 251). Lastly, I mimic Indigenous protocol of introduction, by acknowledging the various Indigenous Nations individuals come from in the way of parenthetical and in-text affiliation.

American Indian is a generalized term to refer to Indigenous individuals living in the United States (Perea 2014, 113). The term Indian was first coined by Columbus thinking he had reached India, but then commonly used to describe the hundreds of Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas (Younging 2018). A study by Michael Yellow Bird (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) shows that the term has been reclaimed and redefined in positive ways and at the time was the most preferred umbrella term (1999, 8). There has been a generational shift away from this term towards Native or Indigenous amongst my friends and interlocutors and I do not wish to erase the diversity of names used for self-identification. However, it should be noted that the peoples described here

first and foremost locate themselves by introducing their specific tribal Nation before associating with the larger collective.

Chicana/o is a name that began during the 1960s and 1970s that functioned as both an ethnic and sociopolitical identity, primarily for those born in the United States and had cultural ties to México. This idea of racial and cultural mixture represented “the trace of a historical material process, a violent racial/colonial encounter,” and often marked by three historical moments: 1521 Spanish Conquest, 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe, and the third is ongoing xenophobia (Pérez-Torres 1998:154). These three historical moments mark transformations of the same peoples in current day Southwestern United States, from specific Tribes to New World citizens, to Mexican citizens, to Mexican Americans, then Chicana/o citizens.

Danza is a multigenerational music, dance, and spiritual group practice that draws from Mesoamerican rite of passage ceremonies and Conchero traditions found in present-day México. The Spanish language term Danza, throughout Mexican scholarship, (as opposed to baile) is used to identify dances “whose choreography draws heavily from autochthonous, indigenous dance traditions” (Huerta 2009, 8). The central distinctions that make danza, as a dance category term in Spanish, are group dancing (as opposed to couples/pairs) and spiritual or religious foundations (as opposed to social or entertainment) (Nájera-Ramírez, Cantú, and Romero 2009, xiv). Please note that different Danza groups may practice slightly different protocols based on their mission or teaching lineage; for example, my kapulli is more for local families and persons to learn and earn

their regalia over long-time commitment, whereas other kapullis may travel around sharing their cultural teachings through entertainment.

While there is no singular “true” definition of Danza, I list what Danza is and is not because a definition must provide clarity, and I find that clarifying what Danza is not is vital to understanding what it is and its purpose in Indigenous communities.

Danza is:

- Performing ritual to demonstrate the process at which Xicanas/os arrived in our contemporary homelands. (Luna 2012, 56)
- A philosophical, spiritual, cultural base derived from the observation of natural life cycles of the universe (Luna 84)
- Ritual dance and ceremony that puts into practice the ideals of balance, harmony, and veneration of the world/Earth (Luna 84)
- A historical record (Luna 85)
- An ongoing practice or respect and reciprocity to the universe (Luna 86)
- Movement and human expression of natural and cosmic phenomena, creating consciousness and a connection between participants themselves, the Earth, and universe (Luna 89)
- Evolving (Nielsen 2017, 56)
- “...a communal reflection of diaspora and dislocation” (Nielsen 2017, 81)
- A method (Mireles 2007 from Nielsen 2017, 85)
- Repetitive, cyclical

Danza is not:

- “...an exclusive demonstration of Indigenous identity” (Nielsen 2017, 47)
- “...for the ego” (Nielsen 2017, 52)
- Music or Dance or Spirituality alone
- Prehistoric or primitive
- Stagnant
- A commodity
- Extractive

Detribalized accomplice is the language I have found to identify and name my tribal affiliation or Nation. Detribalization, originally referred to as “de Indianization” comes from Mexican ethnography and is defined as “a historical process through which populations that originally possessed a particular and distinctive identity, based on their own culture, are forced to renounce that identity, with all the consequent changes in their social organization and culture” (Batalla 1996, 17). For over 500 years Spanish, Mexican, and United States policies de-indigenized Native peoples by removing them from their homelands including my ancestors. However, I recognize that I am a guest on unceded lands/waters/airs/fires, so I intentionally use accomplice over ally in reference to a 2014 post by the sacred lands defense organization Indigenous Action, “[Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex.](#)”

Indigeneity is a complex term. In his Global Music Series textbook, urban powwow scholar John-Carlos Perea (Mescalero Apache, Irish, Chicano, German) defines Indigeneity as “The quality or state of being Indigenous,” characteristic of close relations

to land and traditional ancestral knowledge (Perea 2014, 113). Indigenous identity politics are constantly changing and particular to place, although historically and in practice, identification is measured by blood percentage, or tracing family ancestry (TallBear 2015). Due to the processes of colonization such as forced relocation and capitalistic extortion of resources, today most of the Native American populations in the United States and México are away from their ancestral homelands. In recognizing Native peoples' history of genocide and dislocation from land, Kanaka Maoli feminist historian Maile Arvin extends the definition beyond historical racial and colonial effects, to include "anticolonial demands and desires related to a certain land or territory and the various displacements of that place's original or longtime inhabitants" (2015, 121). Indigenous self-determination and expression are born out of this connection between the past, the present, and the future, in relation to place.

Indigenous is related to the term Indigeneity (above), which recognizes Native peoples today rarely belong to any one place. It is a human-constructed category used to describe peoples or ways of life that are closely related to land and ancestral knowledges. Contemporary scholars challenge accepted notions of original inhabitants as an ethnic category by examining the transnational dynamics of Native cultures and politics around the world (de la Cadena and Starn 2007). Witnessing the generative possibilities of learning ones' history, Mary Louise Pratt imagines how "different settings and historical junctures will activate different sources of energy, with effects that are unpredictable beforehand and decipherable in retrospect" (2007, 402). Following these dynamic

understandings of this one term, my usage is less a category of identity and more a powerful, counter-hegemonic force.

Mestizaje refers to theoretical and political conceptions of racial mixture in the Americas created by Spanish and Portuguese colonizers beginning in the 16th century. It crossed geopolitical borders, and later adapted into the nation building of many Latin American countries after Independence from colonial rule (Wade 2005). During the nineteenth century, ideas about race in the Americas quickly shifted from explanations of human difference based on geographical environments, to scientific theories of race that upheld fixed notions of social evolution (Hooker 2017). In México, philosopher Jose Vasconcelos postulated a theory of mestizaje that envisioned mixture as the solution to Latin America's twentieth century racial hierarchies with Mexicans as a model. He argues that while other civilizations destroyed and oppressed Indigenous inhabitants, México "assimilated them," and this gave Mexicans "new rights and hopes for a mission without precedent in History" (Vasconcelos 1997, 407). In present-day, "mestizaje has an ambiguous status", regulated by social processes of exclusion and inclusion that created hierarchical, yet messy and confusing representations (Chanady 2003, 202). Therefore, any understandings of mestizaje communities should be just as complex and resistant to overgeneralizations.

Mestiza comes from cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa envisioned and birthed "la conciencia de la mestiza"—a mestizaje methodology that attempts to uproot dualistic thinking, welcoming ambiguity, and engendering an oppositional consciousness (Anzaldúa 2012, 99-101). Thus, while mestizaje is historically constructed from

biological racial mixture, this borderlands conceptualization comes from the diverse experiences and lives of those living in the margins of the geopolitical and metaphorical spaces of las fronteras/borderlands (not limited to the United States/México though this study focuses on this region). Mestiza consciousness has been reinforced, reconstructed, and expanded, by self-identified Mestiza feminist scholars like Moraga (2011), Hurtado (2003), Sandoval (2000), Vargas (2012), Keating (2006) and others, who intervene and support collective resistance against patriarchal, cultural, and imperialist domination.

Mexican American refers to a group of people; its usage has changed significantly over time. After the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 ended the Mexican-American War (a war initiated by the U.S.), México lost over half its territory to the United States. Mexican landowners were promised citizenship and continued ownership of their fields but the ever-growing influx of Anglo-American squatters, with xenophobic attitudes, quickly forced out (or exterminated) many Mexicans (Forbes 1967). For a brief time in the 1930s, Mexican appeared on the United States census to classify peoples in the United States with Mexican heritage (Gratton and Merchant 2016). Mexican American generally translates to “estadounidenses de origen mexicano” or United States citizen of Mexican origin in Spanish. This term is still used today among certain communities including those with dual México and United States citizenship, those living or traversing across the U.S./Mexico borderlands, or those in the United States with strong cultural, linguistic, and familial ties to the nation of México. However, other terms to describe these same individuals (like Chicana/o and Mestiza/o) are

becoming increasingly popular amongst younger generations engaged in decolonial discourse.

Native American is a census term in the United States that refers to the Indigenous peoples of the American continent, while terms like American Indian and First Nations offer more geographically located concepts for Indigenous peoples in the United States and Canada respectively (Garrouette 2003). These are all collective terms for Native peoples (my preferred terminology) and are often heard in intertribal gatherings like powwows and big times. I use the term Native Americans or Native peoples to locate the particularities of my research since both Danza and powwow practices are Indigenous to the American continent (mostly North America).

Xicana (read like Shicana with the X sounding like “sh”) refers to reemerging identity politics, especially among younger generations, “grounded in Indigenous American belief systems and identities” (Moraga 2011, xxi). Drawing from Robert Rodriguez, Moraga argues the X in many ways reflects Indigenous identity that has been robbed and continually denied through processes of colonization – just as Malcom X’s use of the letter in his slave name. Moraga argues that since many individuals left in this predicament cannot recall their specific Indigenous Nation, spelling with the X strategically unlinks her from the colonizer language of English and back to Nahuatl (Moraga 2011, xxi). However, through personal testimony from Nahuatl language learners, this spelling combination of “Xi” does not produce natural sounds or recognizable words in modern Nahuatl language. A Xicana feminist lens is

“multidimensional,” drawing on generations of decolonial feminist philosophers and women of color from Mexican and Latin American communities (Alvarez et al. 2013).

Why Investigate Indigeneity in Powwows?

Powwow

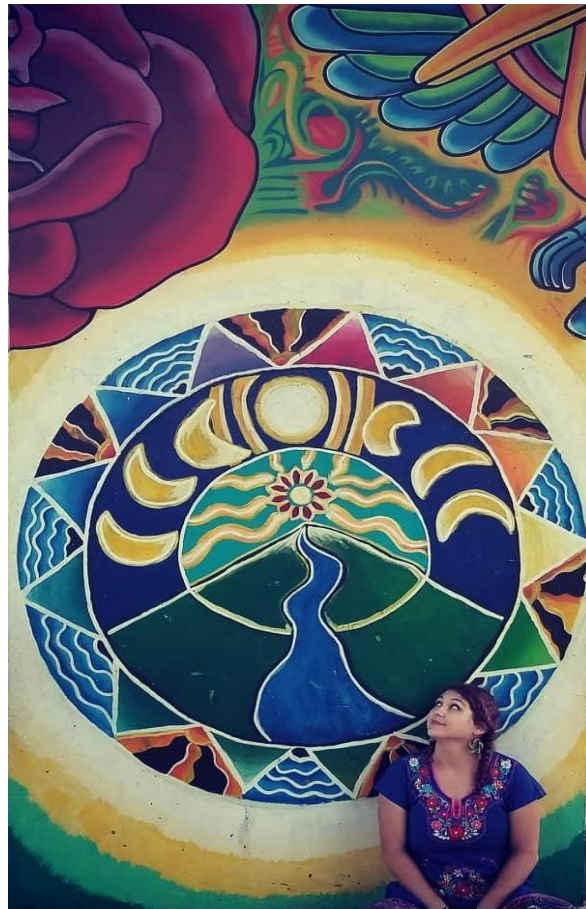


Figure 1.1: My first time visiting Chicano Park in San Diego after volunteering at the 8th Annual UC San Diego Powwow (June 2nd, 2018). The circles in this mural reminded me of the cyclical nature of powwows. During my master’s fieldwork, I posted this photo on Instagram captioned with my own powwow haiku creation and relevant descriptive hashtags.

All circled around.

Drum, dancers, food, and stories,

Natives celebrate.

#powwow #haiku #mastersthesis #xicana

Powwows provide a dedicated time and place created by and for Native American peoples to support their communities. Because they are open to the public, they also serve as Native hubs for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to learn, create alliances, and celebrate powwow culture.²⁰ These annual powwow gatherings bring people together *in a good way*—meaning not under the influence of drugs and alcohol—ultimately creating a social space for both entertainment and cross-cultural sharing (Perea 2014, 26).²¹

Powwows emerged in the United States as a way for Native American peoples to revitalize and share their traditions after being forcibly removed from their homelands during the period distilled through mainstream United States education as “Manifest Destiny” (mid-late 1800s). From the 1830s through the 1870s, various policies of territorial expansion in the United States forcibly relocated Native American Tribal Nations to the Plains (Conlon 2016). Native peoples were not allowed to practice cultural traditions, such as language, song, and dance, to cut them from their heritage. This is because songs and dances reflected Native American worldviews and teachings on

²⁰ Powwows are not the only example of “Native hubs” (a space/time that supports the representation and creation of Native American culture, community, identity, and belonging), as Reyna K. Ramirez investigates alliance meetings, sweat lodge ceremonies, and school board meetings in Silicon Valley (2007). I elaborate further on her use of “Native hubs” later in this chapter.

²¹ The importance of sobriety is significant to doing things *in a good way* because of the alarming number of deaths and suicides across Indigenous communities, however this is not the only understanding of *in a good way* and this concept is further explored in my subsequent chapter on methodology.

themes ranging from birth, death, religion, warfare, and agriculture to healthcare and alliance-making (Perea 2014). This strategy of forcing Native American peoples to convert to the dominant U.S. American culture is called assimilation.

Precursors to powwows include Tribal Nation-specific warrior practices, however, the powwow is considered intertribal because it emerged in an era when different Native Nations intermingled on reservations and secretly shared their songs and dances with one another underground (Conlon 2016, 613-616). While most Native American peoples were repressed from practicing their traditions under initiatives of assimilation, some were influenced to sing and perform in various Wild West shows and World's Fair exhibitions (Perea 2014, 21). According to historian Clyde Ellis, these staged performances had significant influence on the powwow in several ways, including the shaping and creation of new dance styles, the inclusion of Grand Entry procession, and competition (2005, 13-14). Spaces like the Wild West shows allowed Native peoples a chance to continue practicing and creating new traditions. Ellis quotes a dancer who shares how Wild West shows were a form of cultural capital, "For Lakota headmen, touring in the shows was a validation in the white world of their accomplishments as warriors" (Ellis 2005, 14). However, showcasing to mostly White audiences (who did not understand or looked down upon Indigenous ways of life) consequently solidified their negative stereotyping towards Native Americans (e.g., "primitive" or "lazy") –who then must continually dispel these negativities for generations (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 52, 56).

When efforts to "Kill the Indian and Save the Man" (coined by General Richard H. Pratt, the founder of the first Indian boarding school) failed in assimilating Natives

into mainstream Western society, the United States issued the Federal Relocation Program in the 1950s and 60s (Simonson and Nadeau 2016, Conlon 2016, 613). This encouraged Native American populations to move to metropolitan cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco, by offering incentives to those who chose to relocate (Perea 2014). These government initiatives were strategies to take away Native peoples from their families and homelands, by breaking family structures and converting them to mainstream American culture. Federal relocation brought different Tribal Nations together in one place, giving them a chance to create new communities and bridge differences that had interfered with political mobilization (Ramirez 2007, 3). Powwows are one of the ways Native peoples create community in urban areas, while also fostering a zone in which non-Indigenous spectators could begin to interact with and learn from them.

At the turn of the millennium, a wide array of powwow research furthered understanding concerning the diversity of these spaces, highlighting tensions between sacred and secular, intertribal and tribal-specific practices, as well as the complexities of modernity and maintaining tradition (Diamond and Hoefnagels 2012:18). As ethnomusicologist Christopher Scales notes, “these events have become important and ubiquitous sites of intertribal Native American popular culture and one of the most vital and active areas of musical and choreographically creativity and innovation” (Scales 2007:1). Utilizing extensive fieldwork in the Central Plains of Canada and the Northern Plains of the U.S. and terminology by powwow participants, Scales addresses the gap in powwow literature concerning the “very important musical and social differences

between *competition* (also called, significantly, ‘contemporary’) and *traditional* powwows” (1-2). Competition powwows feature formal song and dance competitions with cash prizes for participants, while traditional powwow tend to operate on a smaller budget, have more giveaways or honorings, and emphasize community and intertribal friendship over competition. Since there are still contemporary tribal-based powwows that are considered more traditional, I tend to use competition over contemporary to describe those types of powwows in modern day.

Unlike the staged productions from the nineteenth century, contemporary powwows provide a platform for non-Indigenous peoples to access powwow culture on Indigenous peoples’ terms. It is intriguing how open some powwow participants are to outsiders’ curiosities, especially campus or school-sponsored powwows. From students buying handmade jewelry and embroidered handbags from vendors while listening to them share about their culture and craft, to first-time spectators asking (or not asking) to take pictures of dancers in ceremonial outfits and then hearing about proper protocol and the dancers’ regalia (the name for said outfit and accessories). While only a day or weekend long, I have witnessed how the powwow is a decolonized hub, providing Native American peoples agency to exercise how they want to represent, express, and live their lives as peoples of their respective Nations.²²

Native peoples themselves have defined and continually redefine elements of Indigenous identity in various performative spheres. For example, Native American

²² I argued in my master’s thesis that student-organized powwows within the University of California are decolonizing practices because they center Native American epistemologies and ontologies (Gutierrez Masini 2018, 9).

academic conferences, Michelle Raheja explains, “do not constitute a ‘traditional’ form of communication, but...provide an intellectual virtual reservation for academic and nonacademic communities that draws from precontact gathering traditions and forges new traditions as well. In addition, powwows are not ‘traditional’ for many tribal communities, but have become a vital cultural, economic, political, and collective site throughout North America for practicing ‘survance’ and its attendant forms of knowledge production. In spaces as diverse as academic conferences and powwows, Native Americans enact, create, and rehearse identity and culture in often nonarchived virtual reservations off the indexed and official grid primarily for themselves” (2010, 138). This collective process through spaces that allow for open dialogue, mistakes, and learning-in-community are vital for Indigenous peoples to reflect and envision self- and group-identification, and their place in this universe.

Furthermore, Raheja explores the history of Native actors, directors, and spectators, revealing their contributions, and attempts to create positive representations in film that reflected the vibrant and complex experiences of Native peoples and communities (2010). In her chapter on redfacing, she interrogates the perspective that Native Americans are passively accepting the Vanishing Indian narrative by demonstrating how actors exerted their influence on the film industry. Redfacing, typically associated with white actors who play Native American roles, became a tool that Native peoples used to change white, one-dimensional stereotypes of themselves. Raheja investigates actor Iron Eyes Cody and his fraudulent identity as Native both on and off the screen, demonstrating how such false claims wreak havoc on Native peoples'

ability to assert self-determination. In other words, white dominant culture benefits by setting the standards of Indigeneity while Indigenous individuals and communities are expected to fit that mold. Consider that although some Indigenous actors and talent in film knew Cody likely fabricated his claimed Indian ancestry, they didn't expose him until after his death because of his philanthropic endeavors. He played "Indian" characters in films, television programs and commercials, in addition to claiming to be Cherokee and Cree, and yet "Iron Eyes Cody most likely was not an Indian after all" (Raheja 2010, 104).

Imposters shed light on the fraught relationship between US and Canadian institutions of power as manifested in popular culture; such struggles complicate Native American attempts to self-govern and gain control over the representation of Indigenous identity (133). Raheja concludes that "Cody's performance ultimately fixes Native Americans in the distant past and relegates this site as a space of mourning, refusing to consider the complex, often fraught and sometimes humorous engagements with the present and future that Native American writers and filmmakers have enacted both in response to and outside of the performances of imposters" (144). She uses the term mourning in reference to Rosaldo's imperialist nostalgia, which I discuss further in this chapter as well as in chapter 3, wherein I explore mestizo mourning.

Native American Worldviews, Hubs, and Spaces

Returning to the question of why powwows as a place to examine Indigeneity requires an understanding of Native American worldviews or matrices and the importance of Native American hubs or spaces. As "the most widespread intertribal

tradition in North America,” no two powwows are alike, and as conversations with friends and interlocutors will show, their meaning to people varies from location to location, between different generations, and from year to year (Diamond and Hoefnagels 2012, 5). Since there is such a variation across powwow events, scholars, new practitioners, and community members need extended time participating in or observing Native American practices at these powwows to understand the unique processes that go into music and dance making (Young 1994). Over time, researchers with permission gain intimacy with what a song or dance communicates (linguistically, corporeally, sensually, etc.).

As a danzante, I now understand how dance holds corporeal and spiritual meaning, which is difficult to verbalize or describe in writing because once you stop, it is quickly fleeting. The following is an example my embodied experience of dance during the moment of dancing:

Dance becomes music, music becomes dance, together collecting our mind/body/souls, ancestors dance with us, among us. I know who I am and where I belong when I dance, my limits, my dreams, my failures, my whole heart, all exposed. The lingering unsettled feeling in the pit of my stomach calms, thighs burn as I push off my feet, twisting and turning to the drumbeats, I am me.

In these processes of music and dancemaking, I examine how Native peoples maintain and create their worldviews or “make sense of the world around them, make artifacts..., generate behavior, and interpret their experiences” (Kawagley 2006, 8). This idea of worldview is further developed by Jicarilla Apache/ Hispanic philosopher Viola

F. Cordova who defines worldview by how different cultural groups recognize themselves as humans, the world, and their role as humans in that world (2007, 1). She explains that in Native American philosophies, worldviews are not simply one description of the world, but “shared views,” made up of multiple descriptions (61). This interconnected view of the world is exactly why Viola F. Cordova prefers the term “matrix since it implies a web of related concepts” (61). A matrix is exposed when two different peoples from different cultures come together because they find it is difficult to understand and communicate with one another. Some argue that the “lack of shared contexts, of shared matrix, leads to the notion of incommensurability, which is attacked from time to time by those who are threatened by the idea that there might be different explanations for similar phenomenon” (62-63). These differences and lack of shared understanding are typically not a site of conflict, unless one matrix dominates another. This is the case seen in settler societies where particular ideologies and matrices are superimposed as the *status quo* over others. Understanding how Indigenous Nations may have dealt with differing matrices to negotiate spaces and resources before colonialism is crucial to setting up looking at Danza and powwow community interactions.

Today, the powwow remains a space in which Native American practices and expressions are more generally accepted. Cordova reminds us that before colonization, among North American Indigenous groups there was a shared assumption that different cultural groups have differing truths based on the unique experiences and locations to that group (Cordova et. al. 2007, 64). She argues that this assumed difference helped early European colonist survive on lands not their own, until Indigenous peoples learned that

Europeans did not share this sense of land and occupation. Native peoples' diverse understanding of worldviews or matrices is fruitful for my investigation with powwow communities because different points of views are brought together in the space, providing those who frequent powwows continuous opportunities for intertribal negotiations and intercultural understandings of identity. The intersections between powwow and Danza cultures in this study can clarify how different peoples construct matrices or interrelated understandings of themselves, the world, and their place in it.

Since this project focuses on urban powwows it is particularly important to understand how powwows provide a dedicated hub for Indigenous peoples in largely populated cities. In her examination of diverse and heterogeneous Indigenous communities and individuals in the San Francisco Bay Area, Reyna K. Ramirez (Winnebago/ Ojibwe) adopts the term hub from Laverne Roberts (Paiute), a close interlocutor and the founder of the American Indian Alliance (2007). A hub is both a geographical and virtual concept that fosters Native notions of culture, community, identity, and belonging away from homelands (Ramirez 2007, 3). By accounting for the landlessness many Indigenous peoples experience, I follow Ramirez's approach and instead focus on the relationships and ways that peoples connect (or disconnect) across Tribal Nations and geography. Ramirez observes Native peoples' relationship to multiple social and political communities and argues for a transnational understanding of Native American peoples and the hub. I build on her approach to Native American research by investigating both external and internal dynamics that marginalize members of Indigenous communities.

In examining the powwow in New York City, Mexican performance studies scholar, Antonio Stambaugh argues:

The powwow performance displays residual and emerging elements of Indigenous cultures within the framework of a constant process of migration and urbanization. Through festivities that combine word, food, song, music and dance, urban Indians sympathize with each other, beyond their tribal ascriptions. The fact that various tribes can be conceived as a coherent group implies a constant renegotiation of their ethnic borders - both inside and outside - in order to establish ties with non-indigenous groups with whom they live daily. In this sense, Native Americans trace the boundaries of their pan-indigenous community with entry and exit paths to allow the community to breathe and therefore be in a position to survive in the multicultural space of large cities” (2002, 198, translation by me).²³

In other words, the powwow event is a microcosm of overlapping matrices creating exclusionary and inclusionary social processes. Native peoples continue to build Indigenous solidarity, while simultaneously celebrating and negotiating their varied differences.

In my research, I consider the powwow attitudes in the United States towards tribal-specific or regional practices from outside the Plains region. Powwow studies that discuss the changing powwow traditions and expressions to a particular area, such as the eastern woodland Stomp Dance practice in Oklahoma powwows, often contextualize the

²³ The original text is in Spanish: “El performance del powwow despliega elementos residuales y emergentes de las culturas indígenas en el marco de un proceso constante de migración y urbanización. Por medio de festividades que combinan la palabra, la comida, el canto, la música y la danza, los indígenas urbanos se solidarizan entre sí, más allá de sus adscripciones tribales. El que diversas tribus puedan concebirse como grupo coherente implica una constante renegociación de sus fronteras étnicas -tanto en el interior como hacia el exterior- a fin de establecer lazos con los grupos no indígenas con los que conviven a diario. En este sentido, los Native Americans trazan los límites de su comunidad panindígena con senderos de entrada y salida para permitir que la comunidad respire y por lo tanto esté en condiciones de sobrevivir en el espacio multicultural de las grandes urbes” (198).

event as generally inclusive, although this openness to regional music and dances varies to location (Jackson 2003). Some powwow communities try to push back against being perceived as Pan-Indigenous, by rejecting contest powwow practices that tend to value standard exhibition dance categories and not particular dances that affirm specific tribal identity (DesJarlait 1997,120; Scales 2007, 12). When powwow practice conflicted with local Ojibwe-Anishinaabe dance traditions, Elders shared disdain or sentiments on how powwows were becoming increasingly commercialized, a sentiment still prevalent today with bigger, casino-sponsored powwows (DesJarlait 1997, 126).

Other strategies include changing intertribal powwow elements into Tribal Nation-specific ones. Ethnomusicologist Janice Tulk highlights three strategies that Mi'kmaw powwow participants use to transform general "intertribal" elements into more locally meaningful and Mi'kma'ki specific practices. For example, she discusses transposing "I'ko" (a Mi'kma'ki song of peace) to fit powwow aesthetics, embellishing plains-style regalia with Mi'kmaw imagery, and performing local histories in the powwow space (2012, 70-88). Despite various attitudes towards non-traditional powwow practices, I do not get a sense that powwow communities see danzantes as "wannabes," a sentiment tied to new agers appropriating Indigenous cultures (Alred 2005). "Wannabes" are described as European Americans who romanticize a culture not their own, often noticeable at powwows by their mixture of tribal attire, exaggerated dance movements, and imaginative stories that connect them to an Indigenous great grandparent, aunt, etc. (259-261). While "wannabes" tend to use the First Amendment's freedom of expression to take part in the powwow space, danzantes are often invited or have established long

relations in the community as powwow goers, vendors, or organizers (262). Depending on the powwow event, dancers appear to fall somewhere between complete integration into the powwow program, such as the Danza Powwow, and outside or not belonging to the traditional powwow event.

Knowledgeable and well-connected peoples, like Emcees and community Elders, can identify Tribal Nation-specific aspects within the powwow space by recognizing music lyrics (e.g., Lakota language, Kiowa language, place names), regalia elements (e.g., family colors, tribal patterns, bustle or roach), or dance gestures (e.g., stance, footwork, attention to honor beats). However, to the outside public, these insider details get lost and misinterpreted into a sort of “Pan-Indian” and unitary space (Ellis, Lassiter, and Dunham 2005, viii). What is important to remember is that for some Native families and individuals, the powwow is their livelihood. It is how they make a living, meet future partners, educate their children, learn from their Elders, and keep their Indigenous ways alive.

Indigeneity

Indigeneity is more than an identity that one is born into or can claim based solely upon blood. Here, I am referring to the concept of “blood quantum” in the United States, an ideology that one can measure Indigeneity based on a certain blood percentage or genetic makeup. Leading expert on the problems of blood quantum, Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) argues:

to understand Native American DNA, it is not enough to discuss simply what genetic scientists say they are looking for in their samples...It is also important to look back at how Native American bodies have been

treated historically, for knowledge-producing cultures and practices that shaped earlier research continue to influence the way science is done today (2013, 2).

Through distasteful empirical research methods, dominant knowledge-producing cultures throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries utilized Native Americans' bodies (and other marginalized bodies) to study human biology and cultural history. An example of a dominant knowledge-producing culture is the American School of Anthropology, who achieved worldwide prominence through graverobbing and scavenging Native people's decomposing bodies (TallBear 2013, 2). Furthermore, anthropologists and scientists alike justified digging up sacred burial sites because they said it was good for all of humankind, and by calling it "salvage ethnography," the idea that a vanishing Native American population needed to be studied before they were all gone (Risling Baldy 2018, 73-99; TallBear 2013). Since the 1960s, genetic researchers began to apply new techniques to traditional anthropological questions, concerning biological and cultural relationships between populations (TallBear 2013, 3). This led to using genetic tests (like DNA) in criminal cases to profile and identify individuals, and then soon after the United States Tribal Nations and Canadian First Nations implemented enrollment protocols based on DNA. While Tribal Nations have deep historical and practical understandings of the intricacies of tribal enrollment and its implications, those without this knowledge misinterpret the DNA fingerprint as the sole marker for Indigeneity (TallBear 2013, 4).

Mentors, friends, and interlocutors in my communities, express concerns with blood quantum for Native American recognition because by 2050 the percentage required

by the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to claim federal recognition will be genetically untraceable. As early as the 1980s, Native populations were concerned that policies based on blood quantum were unsustainable. Due to population mixing and marriages within and outside tribal-specific Nations, anthropologist and Native American Studies professor Jack Forbes (Powhatan-Renapé and Lenape) predicted that by 2050-2100 most of the United States population could genetically trace some percentage of Native American heritage in a person's blood, "although for most individuals, the knowledge of any Indian ancestor will be nonexistent" (1982, 8-9). This means that although an individual could biologically identify with Native ancestry, it would be meaningless without comprehending tribal-specific ties to land, language, or worldview.

In other words, unless Indigenous peoples only have children with Indigenous peoples, any individuals of mixed ancestry will not be able to prove through DNA or blood quantum that they are Indigenous. With "increasing geneticization of the categories of tribe, First Nation, and race," Tribal councils should look inward and critically think about what that Tribal Nation's community means and appears to them (TallBear 2013, 10). At the most recent American Indian Engineering and Sciences Association (AISES) conference in Palm Springs, California in October 2022, Norbert Hill Jr.'s discussion of blood quantum overflowed the conference room. I remember he started the talk by promoting his unique co-edited collection with Kathleen Ratteree, *The Great Vanishing Act: Blood Quantum and the Future of Native Nations*, and in minutes the copies he brought were sold out (2017). I could tell from folks still entering the room and cramming in by sitting on the floor, that many people were eager to hear what he had to

say. He started out, “Blood quantum is not sustainable over time, no matter how you look at it. This issue is in your lap.”

The room fell silent as he went on sharing case studies and personal experience around this idea. For example, in his Oneida community Norbert Hill Jr. perceives a pressure for Native women to marry within the community. He told us that he has heard people repeat a phrase, “you can practice on the Whites, but when you wanna settle down find a good Indian.” Norbert Hill Jr. explained his viewpoint that Native Americans marry outside more than any other community, which would not be a problem if certain tribal enrollments did not have requirements like blood quantum minimums, having to be born on one’s homelands, or lineage tracing. The sense of urgency within these could be felt during the 20-minute question and answer portion, where folks shared personal struggles such as not being able to enroll their children, negotiating a new Constitution with their Nation, and desires to pass on traditions to the next generation. The decolonizing possibilities in the room inspired collective action and attention to how Indigenous communities could change these colonial rulings and ways of dividing them.

Similarly, scholar Jeff Corntassel (Tsalagi Cherokee) suggests that “it’s about how we honor our place-based responsibilities and live our values and principles, as Tsalagi in everyday life, even when the land we’re on does not recognize us. While the land may not recognize us, the goal is to be known not as strangers but as welcome visitors with accountability to the Indigenous nations and peoples of the territory” (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel 2014, 5). While Corntassel’s connection to homelands may not resonate with all individuals who can name their Tribal Nation, I as a

detrribalized accomplice find solace in the fact that regardless of paperwork or Nation to claim there are tangible ways (like Danza and reciprocity) to make those meaningful connections. Maybe completely abandoning tribal enrollment systems that use blood quantum criteria as sociologist Michael Yellow Bird (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) argues for, is the solution because they perpetuate too narrow of a definition, thereby upholding colonial standards (Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird 2005, 179-188). He proposes five tribal citizenship criterions to guide how to move forward in granting full membership. These include community service; required levels of knowledge and understandings of Nation’s history, culture, and politics; language learning; taking an oath of allegiance to the Nation; and “show[ing] good character according to the tribe’s code of morality” (Yellow Bird 2005, 180). All I know is that is not for me, nor any single person to decide, or for that matter, any single Tribal Nation or public organization to make overarching rules for others.²⁴

In constructing a transnational understanding of Indigeneity, I weave concepts from Mexican ethnography, anthropology, and music studies, as well as hemispheric approaches to Native American and Indigenous studies (Contreras 2008, Medina 2009). Crucial to my borderlands project are literature on the processes of detribalization and mestizaje in Mexico, merged with historical understandings of blood quantum in the United States. Mexican ethnographer, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987) traces the processes of Mexican de-Indianization from Cortes to today—including loss of Indigenous

²⁴ This is a reference to the recent debates over the “Pretendian” list—a list calling out public figures who have pretended to be Indigenous but turn out not to be—that is created and managed by Diné/ Ihanktonwan Dakota journalist Jacqueline Keeler (Gatewood 2021).

language, land, and sovereignty to the nationalist legacy project of mestizaje, or mixture. A clear example of a tool and the logics of mestizaje are evidenced in historical Casta Paintings depicting scenes of over 16 different heterosexual intermarriages between Indigenous peoples, enslaved Africans, and Europeans thereby fueling Latin Americans' understanding of race and race relations for the next five centuries (Carrera 2003, Vinson III 2017). This rhetoric of miscegenation differs from the blood quantum practices seen in Indigeneity and Indigenous genealogical recording in the United States and Canada. Historical and outside forces (e.g., mestizaje, detribalization, blood quantum) create dissonances among contemporary powwow and Danza communities when it comes to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

It is important to remember that Indigeneity looks, feels, and is experienced differently from person to person, and from generation to generation. Some people (like me) experience greater difficulty tracing their Tribal Nations because of the colonialist agendas that led to the genocide and displacement of millions of Indigenous peoples across the Abya Yala / Turtle Island.²⁵ By disrupting Native peoples' connections to their land, histories, and knowledge, colonial (later imperialistic and capitalistic) powers easily maintain dominance. Over centuries these hegemonic powers transform their stories of conquest into the new Nation's founding history. Despite these colonialist strategies, Indigenous peoples have retained their histories, traditions, and expressions in their bodies, minds, and souls (Cordova et. al. 2007). By listening to Indigenous peoples in

²⁵ Abya Yala and Turtle Island are two original names and Indigenous worldviews for the American continent or Americas. Renaming is a powerful decolonizing strategy.

intertribal cultural places, like powwows and danza, I interrogate what Indigeneity means today and how this sense of belonging is enacted daily and over time.

Danza in Southwest powwows: a story on Indigenous Identity and Belonging

Danza in the Southwestern United States

In February 2019, I began dancing under the guidance of Mrs. Cencalli (Tejon) and her husband Mr. Cencalli (Mexica) in their Danza group called Kapulli Teuxihuitl [Teo-shi-hui-tl], which means fine turquoise and has connotations of family relations.²⁶ Since he was a teenager, Mr. Cencalli began dancing in a Danza group in Los Angeles led by his Elders who brought the dance up from México City. Mrs. Cencalli met Mr. Cencalli during their time together as undergraduates at USC and have been practicing this music, dance, and spiritual tradition together since 1997. In 2004, they were granted permission to start their own Danza group or kapulli in Ontario, California. As Mrs. Cencalli and Mr. Cencalli started their family, they also gave birth to a kapulli, which means family or clan in Nahuatl.

Let me transport you to my first rehearsal. Mrs. Cencalli describes this practice as, “a safe space, especially for my children to learn.”

To learn what? I wonder. Danza? Spirituality? Identity?

²⁶ Originally, I planned on joining the Danza practice in Riverside provided through [Corazón Counseling](#), a center for holistic wellness and restoring mental, emotional, and spiritual balance. However, the person who was in charge shared with me via text message that they were not holding consistent practices and then connected me with my current kapulli by sharing their practice information.

Her husband comes in carrying a covered huehuetl drum and I ask him if I could help bring in anything else. He says, “Nope, that’s all it.” My customary tendencies to volunteer and assist the community are denied, but I have planted the seed. They know I am available and willing to take on some of the labor of the group and in doing so, my belonging comes organically.

Sonically, the conch shells call us together, followed by the huehuetl drumbeats. The huehuetl is an upright tubular drum made from a wooden body opened at the bottom that stands on three legs, with animal skin stretched over the top. The drum is more than a physical object, it is a living spirit made from the Earth that is reinvigorated when played. We gather around, warming up our feet, rattling their feet shells (ayoyotes) and shaking hand-held rattles (ayacaxtli). We circle the altar consisting of a blanket in the center of the room with charred copal, antlers, a feather, whistles, sometimes a conch shell or two, and little glass containers of water. There are often families trickling in and children running around the room until their mothers are geared up and ready to join.²⁷ Somehow amid the cacophony of sounds (e.g., huehuetl drum and popular music from the Community Center’s speakers) and trying to keep up with the rapid steps and spins of the danzantes, memories of my birth mother and feelings of her inner conflict as a mom and addict flood my mind. My unresolved pain and abandonment, which I have learned in my academic training to call intergenerational trauma, bubbles up, forming hot tears streaming down my face. I do not stop for a moment—instead my body, mind, and spirit

²⁷ Copal is a tree resin from the Protium Copal Tree and is an aromatic resin used by Mesoamerican cultures ceremonially as incense.

were transported to this peaceful glow and calmness. This out of body transcendence brings me back home. Creating a circle with our collective bodies, it is almost impossible to feel alone. Just look up and see the danzante across mirroring your steps to the right and spins to the left. We are together, “one dance, one heart.”

From the first day, I am welcomed with open arms by the Cencalli family, and this weekly practice quickly becomes another home and classroom. My refuge and healing place. Entering the circle is a step towards undoing the years of colonial damage that continues to weigh down my body. With such intense focus on movements and our dance together, the rest of the world melts away. Naturally, almost instinctively, the shaking movements of my feet and right hand become synced to the huehuetl Drum and any concerns and self-doubts are gone. I feel this good energy, and I hear my ancestors saying to keep going. My *self* and *body* are still recovering from layers of trauma, however, learning about my own histories (colonial and personal) and practicing Danza traditions long term is healing and can lead to new decolonial possibilities. Let us leave the present sense of my first steps into a kapulli and resume analysis of Danza scholarship.

The flourishing and contemporary practices of Danza tradition has survived invasion, genocide, militarized borders, and colonization. Scholar and Danza practitioner Jennie Luna (2012, 2014) traces the Danza tradition and documents how those of Mexican heritage name and re-name themselves based on their diverse experiences and more importantly, how they (re)claim and embrace Indigenous knowledge using Danza. Danza resonates with Luna and was a turning point and moment of (trans)formation; she

shares in her autoethnography how “movements not only changed me (“transformation”) but also were a critical part of her ‘formation’ as a human being, critical thinker, and organizer” (Luna 2014, 70). She describes coming into her own Native knowledges through processes of reclaiming memory and being reminded that she carries her ancestral legacy wherever she goes. Building on Luna’s scholarship through an intertribal feminist and decolonizing framework, I use my own autoethnographic research to show how Danza as this spiritual, musical, and corporeal group practice provides danzantes both an avenue to claim and embody Indigenous ancestry and nurture a sense of belonging for many oppressed communities throughout México and the United States.

Using the term Danza includes the diverse branches that today are known as Danza Azteca, Danza Azteca Chichimeca, Danza Mexica, Danza Mexica-Cuauhtémoc, or other Pre-Cuauhtémoc designations. Danza Azteca, Danza Azteca Chichimeca, Danza Mexica, Danza Mexica-Cuauhtémoc are seen by scholars as the same praxis; the name has evolved over time so the same general Danza practice is referred to differently by distinct kapullis. In Colín’s book, he uses “the adjective pre-Cuauhtémoc to describe any historical occurrence in Mexico prior to European invasion. Cuauhtémoc was the last Huey Tlatohani (Speaker of the Great Council) of the Mexico-Tenochtitlan Confederacy and led the resistance to European invasion” (2014, 223).

Ethnomusicologist Kristina Nielsen in her 2017 dissertation, “Composing Histories: The Transmission and Creation of Historicity, Music and Dance in the Los Angeles Danza Community,” chronicles how danzantes in Los Angeles navigate tradition, history, and identities through music and dance. Following Kristina Nielsen, I

use the term Danza “to accommodate the diversity of signifiers used to denote loosely the same practice— albeit interpreted through different historical, spiritual, and ethnic frameworks” (2017, 3). In this way, I see Danza as more of an intertribal practice than belonging to any specific Tribal Nation. This is emphasized in the dance variations and ornamentations between various Danza groups, or completely different names for similar dances. While variations of each dance exist between them, (maybe extra footwork, jumps, or pauses) the rhythmic pattern of the dance is consistent, so different groups can dance together.

Ernesto Colín’s book *Indigenous Education through Dance and Ceremony: A Mexica Palimpsest* is a seminal text on Danza in the US scholarship (2014). His book is organized in a way that models Danza ceremony; this inspired me to write my dissertation in disruptive formats to mirror the oppositional forces that many participants see in Danza.²⁸ I learned as much as I could process in the archive reading and talking with people, but after dancing and now re-learning and re-embedding myself in Danza practice around those relations, I am able to understand Colín’s text in an embodied way. Physical practice is vital to comprehending embodiment.

Where I use the word practice, Colín uses the word “ensayo.” As he notes, “Colloquially this activity is often called ensayo, Spanish for practice/rehearsal. It is a typical dance ceremony done weekly but stripped down in terms of formal pomp and

²⁸ When I first read Colín’s book, I was not fully immersed in Danza as a practitioner or a scholar, so it was overwhelming. I could not understand the diagrams without a frame of reference. Now, revisiting Colín’s text after four years dancing with Kapulli Teuxihuitl (since February 2019), I understand and can engage with his insights on Danza practice.

pageantry such as ceremonial attire that would be present at "official" ceremonies. That is why it is called ensayo; it is rehearsal for the "real" ceremony. In some Danza groups, ensayo is for all intents and purposes a rehearsal; it is the time to learn dance steps and go through the procedures of ceremony. For many in Calpulli Tonalehqueh, the line between practice and ceremony is blurred at ensayo” (Colín 102-103). Colín’s kapulli is much larger and older than my kapulli in Ontario; while Colín’s kapulli holds three levels of classes (beginner, general, and advanced), we hold one weekly practice for all levels.

As we’ve been coming back from the pandemic, finding a safe and sustainable place to practice our ceremony and burn our medicine has most recently been an issue for my kapulli since losing our space at the community center. We’ve adapted to multiple spaces. From a public park outside the center, where we have to clear needles and trash and go in groups to the restroom in order to safely practice – to the multipurpose room of a local elementary school since last fall (2022), where one of the copaleras (keepers of the copal) must maintain the fire outside. But place doesn’t truly matter to our practice. Once we reorient ourselves to the six directions and begin practice, we are grounded together in ceremony no matter our location. Colín’s above description of the blurred lines between larger, formal ceremonies and our weekly practice also holds true for our group.

However, specificities depend on the particular Danza events and audience. The broad structure is the same: calling danzantes by blowing the conch shell; honoring the six directions; dancing the Danza del Permiso first (and in between every dance); dancing other dances as chosen by participants; the leader switches places with other dancers who

then lead the next permission dance and dance of their choice; after the last dance we honor the 6 directions again, then gather for closing songs and/or palabra. Before attending practice, I had no idea danzantes sang because my only exposure to Danza was at powwows for student cultural events. In our kapulli, songs are one of the most sacred and intimate parts. We only sing at more private events or at our own ceremonies, which we host, and always with the advisory warning to not record.

According to verbal testimonies from my teachers and other danzantes who talk about Danza origins, all groups in the United States are said to come from one, or one of a few, kapullis. While there are multiple histories and they are all meaningful, many people identify Florencio Yescas and Andrés Segura as the ones who brought Danza to the United States from México City in the 1970s (Aguilar 2009, 142). However, Nielsen reveals that some danzantes are troubled by the historical errors that have been widely disseminated through Mario Aguilar's 2009 dissertation (2017, 234). Because of Aguilar's acclaimed apprenticeship with Florencio Yescas and his many years training as danzante in San Diego his dissertation is widely cited but perpetuates misinformation such as: Florencio died of AIDS, Aguilar himself was the first Chicano to learn Danza, and Aguilar's exaggerated claim that he was an elite touring member in Yescas' group, Esplendor Azteca (Nielsen 2017, 235). Furthermore, Jennie Luna critically points out that Danza's historical narrative and the origins of Danza in the United States has been

overwhelmingly credited to men, ignoring the contributions of women such as Señora Cobb.²⁹

Both Florencio Yescas and Andrés Segura had professional training as dancers and dozens of groups across California and Texas can trace their kapulli lineage back to them. Since the 1970s, steady streams of danzantes have traveled between the United States and Mexico in a circuit of mutual exchange. Established dancers from Mexico migrated to the United States, and danzantes who joined in the United States sometimes travel to Mexico and immerse themselves in ceremonies with hundreds of other groups. This multi-layered embodiment of border crossing through Danza, from the physical back and forth to the large networks of danzantes on both sides of the border, bridges ideas, styles, and approaches to Danza: "As a living object, Danza migrates transnationally, continuously"(Colín 2014, 26). Although Danza was popularized throughout the Southwest in the 1960s and 1970s during the Chicano Movement/el movimiento, various forms of Danza have existed in parts of México for centuries providing Mexican Indigenous peoples ways of connecting to Mesoamerican epistemological and ontological foundations (Valencia and Polkinhorn 1994; Huerta 2009; Ceseña 2009).³⁰

The Southwestern United States is home to Greater Mexico/México Profundo, also called the U.S./México borderlands, as it often blurs or erases entirely any distinguishing features between either side of the geopolitical border. I chose to study

²⁹ For more information on Señora Cobb, see Jennie Luna's dissertation chapter, "Señora Cobb: A Living Codex" (2012).

³⁰ I use Chicano Movement/el movimiento here because I am drawing from both Spanish and English language sources.

Danza in the Southwestern U.S., because it is a land that was formerly part of Greater México/ México Profundo. Greater Mexico/México Profundo (GM/MP) holds a rich, violent, and contradictory history in which borderlands peoples sounded, reproduced, and lived in current day United States and México (Paredes 1958; Bonfil Batalla 1996; Anzaldúa 2012). While separated into two nation-states, migrating peoples, transnational organizations, and intercultural music-making continually bridge the United States and México by sharing resources or music styles (Calderón 2004). Coined in the United States by folklorist Américo Paredes, Greater Mexico originally referred to geography, including “all the areas inhabited by people of Mexican culture –not only within the present limits of the Republic of México but in the United States as well –in a cultural rather than political sense” (1976: xiv). As early as the 1940s, Paredes and Mexican ethnologist Bonafil Batalla established México Profundo discourse to give voice to a particular peoples’ history that has been misconstrued over time. More than a geographical location, GM/MP is embodied and performed by those navigating multiple worlds, borders, and internal conflicts. Danzantes and those who are a part of Danza are part of this generational phenomenon.

The Greater México/Southwestern U.S. area is a prime site for mixed colonial histories having been governed by Spain, México, and now the United States, providing a rich background for decolonization research. I initially focused on this region thinking it would have strong connections to México; however, my findings in that regard have been inconclusive. Nonetheless, all these layers of colonization that disenfranchised

Indigenous peoples across the Americas is the reason discourse on Indigeneity is complicated.

While present in México during the Chicano Movement/ el movimiento, California dancer Marylou Valencia recalls in an interview why Danza was different in the United States than in México: “Here we’ve always had to deal with the issue of identity. We’ve had to deal with being the second-class citizen. We’re not accepted by society at large. We’re looked at as ‘those radical crazies,’ even in our own [Mexican] communities” (Valencia and Polkinhorn 1994, 157-158). In this way, dancers experience the same displacement and exclusionary processes as other oppressed communities in the United States. And on top of that general confusion or personal discrepancies within their own communities, dancers need the luxury (or privilege) of time and space to attend Danza practice and learn traditions, which proves difficult when they work long hours in laborious jobs (Gonzales 2018).

In recent years, Danza circles in Los Angeles, and other broader transnational Danza communities in California and the Southwest, have moved away from the Catholic heritage Conchero practices and towards agentive initiatives and Indigenous reconnection (Ceseña 2009; Luna 2012; Nielsen 2017). This is the continuation of a shift from the 1960s towards Indigenizing or decolonizing syncretic traditions that had once helped them keep their Indigenous values alive, but now dancers want to be at the forefront and center. Ernesto Colín connects this shift “from the 1960s forward, to changing trends in Danza accelerated, influenced by international civil rights movements (including the American Indian Movement, the United States and Mexican Civil Rights Movement, the

Cuban Revolution, the Chicano Movement, the civil unrest in Mexico in 1968, and so forth)” (2014, 16).

It’s important to note “not all Mexica dance groups call themselves a calpulli. Doing so usually means that the group is intentional about collective community work and usually signals some ideological accord with the Mexicayotl movement” (Colín 2014, 31).³¹ According to Ernesto Colín, “Mexicayotl can be translated as ‘the essence of that which is Mexica’” and he as well as Jennie Luna identify this shift in Danza by re-centering interpretations of Pre-Cuauhtémoc cultures and spirituality (Colín 2014, 17; Luna 2012). Danza provides its participants access to embodied recuperations of Indigenous epistemologies by combining the spiritual reawakening of mexicayotl with a political agenda of decolonization (Luna 2012; Colín 2014). One immediate way I can think to describe this embodied Indigeneity is the overwhelming senses so that we are physically, mentally, and spiritually transported back to the ways of our Indigenous ancestors from present-day Mexico. This is done through the smell of burning copal, the sounds of the huehuetl (upright barrel drum) and shaking seeds against gourds or chachayotl tree shells, through our movements mimicking old ways of life or the elements, and the feathered headdresses we earn through years of practice. So, before I was able to articulate my reconnections to Indigeneity, I could hear, smell, taste, move, and embody it through Danza.

³¹ Note that Ernesto Colín spells kapulli with a “c.” There is discrepancy between danzantes on spellings; some common examples are words like kapulli or capulli and Mexica or Mexika.

Traditionally, danzantes gather in two concentric circles, as a way of representing their cosmologies (Sandra Garner 2009, 422). Capitanes and Maestros – danzantes with the most expertise and seniority – often dance in the center so that younger danzantes can observe inward to learn and engage in Nahuatl cosmology, sounds, movements, and language (Peranda de Lauren 2018). This is not always the case. Jennie Luna explains that while those in Danza the longest are often given the responsibilities to lead, each person or subgroup (children, women, men, etc.) may be called upon to lead in the center, offering all the opportunity to lead and follow (2011, 271). In the spirit of mexicayotl and decolonization, Danza groups increasingly focus on educational and healing practices so that future generations can grow up knowing their history and culture, and hopefully, foster new creations.

Danzantes dance to create harmony and balance in their lives. Some dances imitate the natural world, others are more abstract. Regardless, both styles enable danzantes to transcend the human body and elevate into a spiritual realm. In these moments, Danza becomes the vehicle with which danzantes can reach a point of release from the material and physical world and arrive at a point of peace or home through movement and ceremony. Danza experiences and practice are a spectrum and not all may be on this journey or have the goal of reconnection to Indigeneity, but Danza remains a complex spiritual practice and history directly connected to Mexico's Indigenous identities (Luna 2012). Growing participation in Danza since the 1970s signals a community wanting to revitalize and reconnect to origins of self and history.

Danza is a critical space for the development of oppositional consciousness because it provides danzantes both an avenue to claim and embody Indigenous ancestry and nurtures a sense of belonging for many oppressed communities throughout México and the United States. For example, many danzantes living in urban areas today are away from ancestral homelands. Whether the reasons for relocation were voluntary (economic opportunity) or forced (government relocation or extortion of natural resources), displaced peoples amongst the borderlands embrace Danza to recuperate and embody Indigenous acts like the planting, growing, and harvesting of corn through gestures mimicked in dance (Huerta 2009). Drawing on her work in Northern California, Central Texas and Mexico, Elisa Diana Huera argues that Danza offers a “critical medium through which Chicanas and Chicanos are able to claim and embody an Indigenous (Azteca-Mexica) ancestry” (2009:6). One way this is done is through Danza movements and accompanying teachings that “corresponds to a particular philosophical-scientific principle within Aztec/Mexica thought.” Spanish laws banned Danza and other Indigenous practices during colonization, but the language, movements, and teachings were never destroyed entirely. As in the scholarship of Colín (2014), Luna (2012), Huerta (2009/2019), and Nielsen (2017), I reconnect Danza back to Nahuatl culture by positioning the dance (including its repertoires, language, regalia, and ceremonial elements) as collectively Indigenous.

With these understandings, I now turn to a discussion of how Danza is incorporated into powwow in southwestern U.S., and its resulting significance to local Indigenous communities. In what follows, I explore how danzantes negotiate conflicting

concepts and feelings of detribalization and belonging by embodying Indigeneity and embracing self-determination.

Detribalization and Questions of Indigenous Belonging Among Danzantes

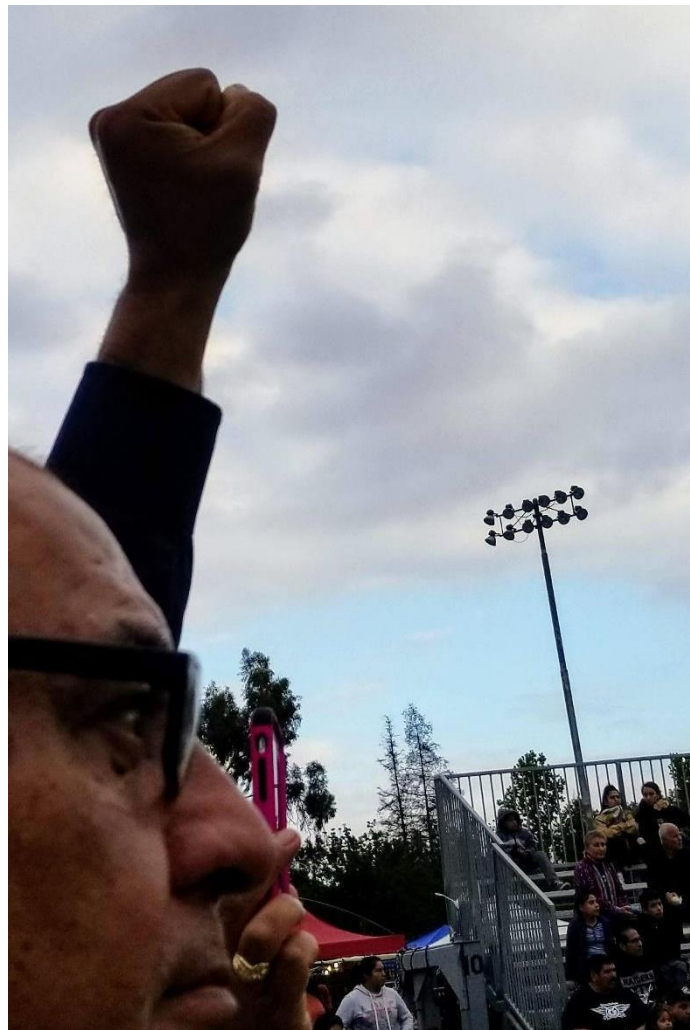


Figure 1.2: Master of Ceremonies, Bobby Whitebird (Cheyenne) introduces the danzantes to the powwow space as they set up, "We're all related. México and the United States were not separated until 1842 with the Treaty of Guadalupe." I hear cheering in solidarity from the crowds sitting in the bleachers. A middle-aged man with glasses raises his left fist and leaves it up for the remainder of the introduction until the danzantes begin their practice. "At the Treaty of Guadalupe, California was sold. And they say they're gonna put that wall up" More shouts are heard from the crowd. "They're trying to stop the natural order. The natural order of mankind coming across, coming across for hundreds of thousands of years. They have evidence...they found artifacts, from the Aztecs, artifacts from the Chumash, artifacts from the Mohawk. They

would gather, to share and talk, and go back to their respective ways, and honor the four directions. And here today, you look at this powerful circle and you hear this drumbeat, and our people uniting all across this Indian country, the United States, México. We're Indigenous. We didn't come on a boat, we didn't come across the Bering Strait. Our brothers here have a rich culture down South. It was the government that separated us..." Photo taken by me on May 26th, 2018, with permission from the 37th Annual UC Riverside Powwow committee.

Danzantes' connection to Indigeneity in the United States requires understanding the convoluted history of mestizaje and detribalization in México. Detribalization, originally referred to as "de Indianization," comes from Mexican ethnologist and anthropologist Bonafil Batalla and is defined in his iconic book *México Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* as "a historical process through which populations that originally possessed a particular and distinctive identity, based on their own culture, are forced to renounce that identity, with all the consequent changes in their social organization and culture" (1996, 17). Here, he traces how the processes of de-indianization from Cortes to today—including loss of language, land, and sovereignty—has been fueled by the Mexican nationalist project of mestizaje. Beginning with the elimination of racial categories after Mexican independence in 1821, México honored Aztec peoples as the "first Mexicans" as witnessed by Aztec statues, paintings, and performances around the National Museum in México City (Alonso 2004, 461). For the last 200 years, Aztec cosmologies, practices and cultures have been recontextualized and consumed as Mexican, therefore idealizing and recreating a stagnant past, while also erasing the diversity of Indigenous nations within current day México (462). Like

assimilation tactics in the United States with Indigenous populations, Latin American countries like México valued lighter skinned through processes of *blanquemento*.³²

Danzantes living in the United States or México seeking to identify with Indigenous Nations in present-day México are essentially detribalized peoples, or Indigenous Tribal Nations not recognized federally or given sovereignty (Batalla 1987; Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 2015). Just as powwows created avenues for Indigenous communities to survive in the U.S. and Canada, some danzantes argue that Indigeneity needs to be loud and visible to gain recognition (Huerta 2009). In their coauthored piece, “Indigenous but not Indian? Chicana/os and the Politics of Indigeneity”, María Eugenia Cotera and María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo situate Chicana/os detribalization in a historical context. Understanding danzantes’ connections to Indigeneity requires grasping the centuries-long processes of colonization that created and continues to create complex Mestizo/a subjects who occupy a complicated position between “settlers” and “Indians” (Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 2015, 553-554). The authors identify “mestizo mourning,” described as subaltern “explorations of their submerged historical relationship to Indigeneity,” which are often felt through multiple generations (563). To address their colonized condition as subjects and to recuperate decolonial meanings, danzantes following mexicayotl philosophy mentioned in the previous section critically think about

³² *Blanquemento*, or whitening, arose from the legacies of European colonization, as seen in the Spanish caste system, which ranked pure Spanish blood at the top with other entities and mixed blood at the bottom. Therefore, encouraging centuries of generations that lighter skin and “pure” European ancestry is of utmost value (Arrizón 2017, 133).

and work towards detaching from colonial influence, with the goal of re-centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Danza scholarship is divided on whether Danza is uncritically an Indigenous dance or an “invented tradition” (Nielsen 2017, 18-19). Ethnomusicologist Kristina Nielsen describes an interview with a *danzante* who shares their experience twenty years ago being called out by an ethnomusicologist who claimed that “if you were not ‘actually an Indigenous person, from that Indigenous tribe, from that Indigenous town, your music was not valid as Indigenous’” (2017, 19). Nielsen reflects on how the researcher’s notion of authenticity clashed with the Danza community’s experiences and “fluid interpretations.” To outsiders who do not consider *danzantes*’ convoluted colonial history, this mourning and reconnecting to Indigenous or ancestral knowledge, cosmologies, and practices seems like “playing Indian” (Deloria 1998).³³ However, *danzantes* often describe this need for reconnection as a dire impulse or uncontrollable urge to restore their lost relationship to homelands and ceremony. Knowledge comes from and circulates from within and outside the academy, like community practice, cultural intuition, and everyday lived experiences (Delgado Bernal et al. 2006). As I share my own experiences in learning this spiritual, ephemeral, and corporeal practice, I build upon current Danza expertise, while also highlighting fellow *danzantes*’ histories, stories, and lives. Arguing for or against their authenticity is not my primary concern, but to

³³ In his book, *Playing Indian*, Vine Deloria Jr. explains the practice of playing Indian has clustered around two paradigmatic moments: the Revolution in the United States which created a new national identity appropriating Indigenous cultural symbols and customs, and postindustrial life (1998, 7). He argues that colonists appropriate cultures of the Indigenous populations as a geopolitical strategy to establish themselves as Americans.

render visible the complex and fraught landscape which discourses of Indigeneity, belonging, and decolonizing praxes interact with Danza and powwow communities.

What are my Decolonizing Methodologies to Music/Dance Research and Writing?

Decolonizing Methodologies

Decolonization is an ongoing, contradictory process that seeks to dismantle and undo the longstanding and current effects of colonialism (Tuhiwai Smith 2012). For this reason, the first steps towards decolonizing are intimate, creating personal consciousness, and involving deep reflection (Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird 2005). Colonialism is an ongoing structure, rather than a historical event, so in order to disengage within the colonialist structures, one must first recognize its surrounding presence in one's life (Wolfe 2006, 390).

Many of those living in settler societies, like Australia, New Zealand, and most of the Americas, are unable to recognize colonialism, because hegemonic powers strategically disguise colonialism by indoctrinating it into the fabric of everyday life (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995). A settler-colonial relationship is characterized by a particular form of domination, “a relationship where power –in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power –has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations...” (Coulthard 2014, 17). By erasing Indigenous presence through strategic rape, genocide, and renaming, settlers can insert themselves into recent historical memory

as original inhabitants and their ways of life as the standard (Wolfe 2006). Being able to identify and name colonialism as the source of this oppression allows Indigenous and targeted communities to strategize, regroup, and fight back.

Maori education scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith is my primary research guide for decolonizing methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Tuhiwai Smith not only links the history of colonialism, imperialism, and education to Indigenous genocide and oppression, but encourages Indigenous research and methodologies. I am deeply tied to the communities with which I do research *with* and *for* and in building these relations consider them my closest classmates, friends, and teachers. I created organic connections and work together with participants in everyday life through local events, in classes, and developing projects. Therefore, I am aware of the historical trauma still present in Indigenous and other oppressed communities who have endured being under the gaze of the academy. Interdisciplinary and community-based approaches like mine are crucial and can serve as ethical models for future music and dance researchers. In this project guided by decolonizing strategies, my continued listening, volunteering, and compassion-led approaches speak to my goals of developing projects that may serve the community and their needs (e.g., educational, infrastructural, political).

Bridging decolonizing methodology to methods and practice brings me back to my beginnings as an undergraduate under the mentorship of Native Studies musicologist, Dr. Jessica Bissett Perea (Dena'ina). Sitting in office hours or over dinner, she shared her path to academia, and I learned about Bissett Perea's question-centered dialogic approach

to tribalogy (documenting tribal history/culture/memory).³⁴ Her research is first and foremost a matter of social justice that “illuminates politics of self-determination that reclaims and indigenizes the very definitions and narratives that have served to ‘authenticate’ and dehumanize Native peoples for centuries” (6). In solidarity with other global Indigenous scholars, like Tuhiwai Smith, she calls for “indigenous communities to ‘research back’ in order to reclaim control over the representations and continued survival of indigenous ways of knowing and being” (21). There is hope that Indigenous researchers may offer diverse perspectives that critique the underlying assumptions behind research by dominant colonial culture.

Dr. Bissett Perea’s approach follows three tenants 1) privileging Indigenous worldviews and perspectives [or matrices], 2) understanding Indigeneity as a system of relations, and 3) advocating for self-determination and healing. While her research highlights the diversity of Alaska Native researchers, artists, and activists contributes to what she calls an “archive of presence,” I see an opportunity to experiment with this approach in my research with powwow and Danza communities (4). Her theoretical and methodological approaches are thrilling; however, I recognize that her work is specific to Alaska Native communities and that I cannot replant them without careful consideration of its implications and suitability for my work. These three tenants (privileging

³⁴ Jessica Bissett Perea's "question-centered" dialogic approach to tribalogy in her work with Alaska Natives beautifully weaves Native knowledge and wisdom with ethnography, historiography, and cultural theory (2013, 5). Since Native American peoples are considered a homogeneous group to the general population, a tribalogical approach helps crumble neocolonial notions by paying attention to the subjectivity or particularities of the people or communities under consideration. Additionally, Bissett Perea encourages us to think critically about the unexpected meanings that "tribe" can hold, such as those constructed through imagined relations, and ultimately, to listen to how Native peoples are defining themselves (7).

Indigenous worldviews and perspectives, understanding Indigeneity as a system of relations, and advocating for self-determination and healing) have been the underlying pillars in my training as a scholar.

Dr. Jessica Bissett Perea reminds readers to be mindful of the precious stories we listen to and how we are reproducing them and our ethnographies because they are filled with traditional Indigenous knowledge. The communities I work for and with become memorialized in my writing and continually reinterpreted when others read it years later, for this reason I often ask for clarification or corrections when sharing my writings and transcriptions with friends and interlocutors. Giving communities the chance to intervene creates this communal effort of researching back. I use this applied approach when listening to danzantes share their days or previous lived experiences: I listen with open heart and mind, am slow and careful when crafting my prose, and most importantly, constantly maintain transparency with communities throughout and after the research process.

Decolonization is a spectrum ranging from actionable matters such as giving the land back to Indigenous peoples and recognizing tribal sovereignty, to more intimate but powerful movements of hope, resilience, and love. My understanding of decolonization draws on three major theoretical approaches to decolonization in settler colonial societies. First, I examine moving from the personal, or micro-level decolonial moments of critical consciousness, healing, and love (Anzaldúa 2012, Million 2009, Simpson 2013), towards processes of decolonizing ones' community through cultural caretaking, sharing stories, and learning music and dance in community (hooks 1994, Swadener and Mutua 2008,

Grande 2015). Lastly, I expand to a macro-level to support the goals of decolonization including Indigenous self-determination, returning land and water to their caretakers, and ultimately, building sustainable decolonial alliances across Indigenous and Non-Indigenous communities (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, Risling Baldy 2018). Decolonization does not mean that we can undo or forget centuries of ongoing colonialism. However, decolonizing processes create a future based on stewardship and reciprocity rather than extraction.

The initial steps to decolonization begin with personal experiences on a micro level: stories from parents or Elders, aunts and uncles found without papers and deported, a sister raped and forced to have a child she cannot support, or making less money than a White, cis male, heteronormative, coworker.³⁵ Over time, centuries even, this creates intergenerational trauma that remains “felt” by multiple generations of individuals and communities (Million 2009). Dian Million’s felt theory is crucial to understanding how lived experiences in Indigenous communities provide windows to participants’ emotions and emotional knowledge through time. The second step in decolonizing moves from the personal to the immediate community; healing the historical trauma in our communities is a major priority for those following decolonizing methodologies. One way to heal is teaching younger generations through cultural care taking, a mixture of love, nurturing

³⁵ These experiences come from a mix of my personal background and national news stories. For further information see: Mohamad Moslimani, “[Around Four-in-Ten Latinos in U.S. Worry That They or Someone Close to Them Could Be Deported](#),” Study, Immigration Attitudes (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, February 14, 2022).; Eyder Peralta, “[You Say You’re An American, But What If You Had To Prove It Or Be Deported?](#),” *NPR*, December 22, 2016, sec. The Two-Way.; ACLU, “[The Best Decision: How Abortion Changed These Lives for the Better](#),” *American Civil Liberties Union*, January 11, 2023, sec. News & Commentary.

growing minds and spirits, and sharing cultural values. I hope for critical consciousness where all colonized peoples (whether settler, settler of color, or Indigenous) carefully consider what we do in this moment and as we move forward. This shift in consciousness, along with the power to self-govern bodies, lands, and communities, is the final step in bringing the personal to the community to the macro goals of decolonization.

In a proceeding chapter I consider these conversations around overcoming and dismantling settler colonialism among Danza and powwow, specifically: *How do we as researchers maintain or center Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in a world that has subsumed them for so long? How do we as danzantes heal multiple layers of colonial wounds to learn in the present moment for a better future? What histories are being created and shared in this very moment? Whose stories and histories will be shared with future generations and how? Since decolonizing strategies are complex and often happen from micro-macro levels, it takes careful attention, patience, and ultimately love to disrupt the ongoing colonial forces. Decolonizing collaborations, negotiations, and intercultural exchanges are happening every day in Native hubs (e.g., powwows, universities, and cultural centers); what can I learn from these everyday interactions?*

Decolonizing Methods to Research and Writing: A Holistic Approach

As a discipline, North American ethnomusicology has been in crisis for the past few years, digging deep into antiblackness and our colonial legacies (Brown 2020, Rosenberg and Siegel Conte 2016). Understanding the complex layers of decolonization draws our attention to the smaller decolonial moments like singing a song or sharing a story, while still recognizing the larger, long-term goals. Following the disciplinary

tradition of extended ethnographic fieldwork, my primary research methods include immersive participant observation through dance practice, autoethnographic reflections, and interactions with participants through online platforms.

My holistic approach to music research is a broad, comprehensive account that integrates methods from anthropology, dance, and performance studies, with close attention to critical feminist and cultural theories. I blur the disciplinary binary between music and dance by drawing heavily on performance studies to bring attention to the body in music scholarship (Facio and Lara 2014). I consider how movement is thinking and meaning-making, and with Native American communities in particular, world-making (Cordova 2007). Following feminist and other decolonizing scholars, I value artistic practices, our personal lived experiences, and interconnected relations as theory (Diamond 2007; Million 2009). In this way theory arises organically –laughing at jokes, listening to a story, dancing to a song –rather than theoretical assumptions superimposed on peoples and their practices.

Drawing on Beverly Diamond’s alliance studies approach (2007), which illuminates the importance of social relationships across space and time, I trace real and imagined connections between Danza and powwow cultures.³⁶ Using engagement in Danza and powwow events, I build community relations that extend beyond the musical space that give me insight to how cultural traditions create meaningful Indigenous

³⁶ I credit Beverley Diamond’s 2007 article in which she suggests that we focus on the diverse alliances that Indigenous musicians sound, to demonstrate how they are active agents in their varied performances. She reminds researchers to first “regard musical practices as theory not as objects to which we might apply theory”; and second, that relationships are central to any ethnomusicological study, for “our alliances produce our identities” (Diamond 2007, 170- 71).

community connections and kinship. An alliance studies approach to ethnography and Indigenous-centered methodologies in music research are crucial, especially in the case of Native communities, who are committed to the survival and production of cultural knowledge embedded in music and dance practice.

Dance and Embodied Ethnography

D. Soyini Madison describes method as “a conscious enactment of learning from entering into an ethnographic domain of immense possibilities” (2005, 39–40). I am learning more about Danza traditions week by week, since dancing with a local group in Ontario, California. As a *danzante*, I value this opportunity to let go of my researcher hat and *just be* in the field, letting the healing and restorative processes of dance and movement take effect. *What does it mean to “listen” with your whole body?* Listening is not simply an isolated process that happens when sound waves reverberate through the ear and are interpreted by the brain. Listening is much more powerful. When creating ethnographies, we should carve out time to pause and reflect on our own worldviews or matrices that we bring into our ethnographies; we are not empty, objective, perfect beings in our own self-contained worlds (Cruz 2006; Belcourt 2017). I consider how movement is thinking and meaning-making, and with my local Native communities in particular, world-making. In order to understand the underlying implications and what is meaningful, I practice deep reflection in everything from describing the scene, to reviewing audiovisual recordings, and past conversations. This includes listening deeply to our spiritual, emotional, physical, and psychological thoughts and reactions, and framing them as embodied knowledge that can inform our research (Conquergood 1991;

Sklar 2001; Facio and Lara 2014). Much like Deidre Sklar's approach, I use bodily intelligence, "the ability to articulate isolated muscles, to discern the structural and dynamic patterns of performers' movements, and to think/feel the relation between technical manipulation and somatic affect" (2001, 2). This qualitative movement analysis bridges the dancer (who learns via kinesthetic sensation) and the fieldworker (who learns via visual apprehension) and reveals that "ways of moving are ways of thinking" (4).

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and activist, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes her stories to have implications beyond the page; she actively embodies Indigeneity in her daily life, and through her stories encourage Indigenous audiences to take responsibility for recuperating Indigeneity through their own "reenactment and presencing" (2017, 203). Writing in the context of 'decolonial love', Simpson's stories confront the harsh reality of coloniality while radiating confidence in Indigeneity to "envision life beyond the state" (Simpson 2013; Corntassel, 2021). Through privileges acquired through many years of formal education, I have come to understand how power and oppression shapes my current circumstances. My life experiences are connected to an intersecting system of privilege and supremacy often registered as one's gender, ability, race, class, and more embedded in a superstructure of settler colonialism. One way of reframing these realities through a decolonizing, feminist lens is uplifting holistic embodied (mind-body-spirit) knowledge in academia. Danza, yoga, and meditation help restore my body-mind-spirit relationship through cultivating presence, introspection, and trust. The ability to listen to your body's many messages is a lifelong practice. When quieting down my racing, judgmental thoughts and unraveling the tensions absorbed in

my body, I have room for decolonial possibilities like embodying Indigeneity (explored further in Chapter 3). By bridging embodied learning and creative expression together, I weave decolonizing, feminist, and embodied praxes to center the ontological value of lived experiences.

Writing and thinking on dance used to feel unnatural to me. Changing something grounded in movement, time, and space to something stagnant on a page seemed impossible. To recreate the physical power of dance spaces, I sometimes play a soundtrack or have ethnographic recordings in the background while writing, helping me get back into the scene (at least sonically). However, it is almost impossible to dance while simultaneously writing a thorough description. I remember fondly learning about performance ethnography in my field methods course within the Dance department (my second course within the department). We spent the last hour of our seminar in the studio dancing, moving, and working through our ethnographies. At the time, I had only been dancing with my kapulli for a few weeks, so I could not recall any of the dances or know how to move my body. I thank my fellow classmates, veterans in dance studies, who were not afraid to move about the room. They gave me the courage to let myself process through movement: the memories of meeting Mrs. Cencalli and Mr. Cencalli Ramos, remembering the huehuetl drumbeats, and how my heart and whole-being were in those moments. There is something about moving and reliving memories and sensations that work its way to the mind. Listening inward helps in re-enacting the emotional, sensorial, and cerebral magic of music and dance. Sometimes words come as fleeting phrases, or

quotes, and I let them fall onto the page. Exploring poetry, memoir, stories, and other modes of writing helps bridge the stiffness of written prose.

Compassionate Listening, Autoethnographic Reflections, and Poetry

As a researcher, fellow student organizer, dancer, and activist, the boundaries of when I am in the field and not are ambiguous. Throughout this project, I learned to navigate these roles through open mindedness and learning by listening. Listening is our greatest tool in music studies and my work takes a fresh look at not only the way we listen but how we interpret our listening experiences. Building upon xwélméxw (Stó:lō) Professor Dylan Robinson's decolonial critique of "sonic encounters" (2020) between Indigenous traditions and Western music, I implement a kind of engaged listening process that attends to the relationship between listener and that person being listened to. By reorienting our listening relationship to what I call compassionate listening, my work reintroduces subjectivity and emotions into our musical scholarship, but also reverses the extractive legacy of historical research with Indigenous communities.

Compassionate listening is a particular decolonizing strategy where the intention of listening is not based on content or extraction of knowledge but creating genuine connections and letting interlocutors construct the research narrative. Sometimes this takes a lot of time and patience as Elders and others recount their stories in cycles, unchronological, and through metaphors. Through feedback processes with my collection of interviews, fieldnotes, and transcriptions, participants can intervene, reshare, or correct my listening and interpretations. In working with Native American communities, compassionate listening works to counter the hesitation these communities have towards

trusting traditional knowledge to outsiders. Compassionate listening provides space for dialogue with spiritual and nonhuman bodies, which I engage with through storytelling, poetry, and dance. Lastly, I practice compassionate listening as a sign of respect and gratitude to those who have opened their minds and hearts to me practicing and learning with them.

For clarity, I list what compassionate listening is and is not below:

Compassionate listening is:

- Deep, personal, engaged listening
- Reflective and insightful
- Safe
- Genuine and humble
- Multi-modal

Compassionate listening is NOT:

- Extractive, or without permission
- Putting the researcher's agenda first
- Sabotage
- Intolerant
- A one-way interaction

Compassionate listening leads to abductive reasoning, a method of logic uniquely connected to personal experience, subjectivity, and reflexivity (Kovach 2021, 34).

Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux education scholar Margaret Kovach focuses on interpretive, relational methodologies in her second edition of *Indigenous Methodologies:*

Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts (2021). She states, “Decolonizing

methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research” (Kovach 2021, 33). Building on Kovach’s

theories, my approach to anti-oppressive practices is foregrounded in critical reflexivity.

In qualitative research approaches, reflexivity often refers to the relational. Reflexivity is

the researcher's own self-reflection in the meaning-making process. One example of this is feminist inquiry as methodological approach (32). Anti-oppressive research approaches describe critical reflexivity, which gives space for the political examination of location and privilege (following Herising 2015, 136 in Kovach 2021, 33). In my case, I am always thinking about and reflecting on my privilege within the academy and working within these communities—these reflections appear throughout this dissertation. Furthermore, decolonizing methodologies demand a critical reflexive lens that acknowledges the politics of representation within Indigenous research (33). As readers learned earlier in the subsection on Indigeneity which explained the blood quantum issue, politics around representation within Indigenous research are complicated and under continuous scrutiny by scholars and Indigenous community members.

My theoretical perspective highly values 'self-in relation,' such as autoethnography, and incorporates reflexivity as a necessary method to actualize its approach, such as my letters to Grandma. Reflexivity is a method for theoretical transparency and thus associated with trustworthiness of research. I use a particular kind of critical autoethnography that incorporates both personal and cultural critique and ultimately seeks to shrink distance between researcher and those researched (Boylorn and Orbe 2017, 17-18). Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis et al. 2011, 273). The process of autoethnography is just as crucial as the product. Since the 1980s, scholars have increasingly resisted colonial, authoritative research impulses like joining a culture, exploiting cultural members, and

then recklessly leaving to turn the extracted knowledge into product for personal gain (Conquergood 1991; Ellis et al. 2011). Compassionate listening and learning in community take time, and as such, I approach my research and writing through a practice that is engaged, embodied, and decolonized.

Jennie Luna's use of ethnography and autoethnography is politically motivated, through methods that promote collective, qualitative research and "insertion of the self as an active participant in a collective process" (2012, 28). She argues that doing research within one's own community can be powerful and challenging, allowing "the researcher to reclaim decolonizing methods of work and new tools to transform how research is done and accepted in academia" (ibid.). Self-awareness is key to whether one is an insider, outsider, or somewhere in-between. For an in-betweener like myself floating between insider danzante and powwow organizer to outside the realms of recognizable Indigeneity and awareness that I am not right to claim these lands I work and reside on. Jennie Luna describes her constant reflexivity as an insider researcher: negotiating demands from one's own community and the academy, navigating specific protocols or silent understandings of a community, and most importantly, acknowledging one's own limitations to what one is allowed to see and understand (2012, 29-30). Like Luna I recognize that by documenting an area of work that perhaps was not meant to be under the gaze of the academy, we risk judgment and harsh critique. With courage, I speak my truths with compassion and humility and reaffirm that the personal as political (Luna 2012, Anzaldúa 2012).

Creative approaches like my poetry are vehicles for engaging ways of knowing and themes foregrounded through my community-centered experiences such as connection, self-awareness, and emotions. From an Indigenous perspective, poetry tells a story educating the body, mind, and spirit (Archibald 2008). In my classrooms as an icebreaker, I share Georgia Ellen Lyon's "Where I am from", and guide students in creating their own "I Am" poems that reflect on their lived experiences and what makes them the people they are. Students share their unexpectedness to engage with poetry outside English courses because they are not exposed to enough opportunities for creative self-reflection and introspection. While my poetry in this dissertation is not focused on myself, per se, it forces me to reflect and turn the gaze inwards to express my situations and relations.

Poetry is one way I reflect words and ideas on a page. Without the worry of structure or audience, I write for me and let my thoughts fall to the page as fast as I can write or type. Poetry is how I communicate with readers the ephemeral, experiential aspects of Danza and demonstrates autoethnographic connections between my mind, body, and spirit through the research and writing process. Cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo makes the case for poetic writing to explore the world nature, politics, society, psyche (Rosaldo 2013). Like an ethnographer, the "antropoeta" looks and looks, listens and listens, until she sees or hears what she did not apprehend at first (101-114). His poem from the perspective of the cliff from where his wife accidentally fell to her death is a wise and moving testimony to the power of poetry. I hope to bring in voices from the earthly elements and the spirits of my ancestors speaking through me.

What is Hybrid Ethnography?

Technological Mediations

Technological mediations of the powwow space include audio amplification, electric generators, and Powwows.com (a site where powwows committees can self-advertise throughout the US and Canada). While I am not concerned with Indigeneity and modernity specifically, I am interested in how Native Americans have utilized modern technologies to continually practice and recreate their traditions. According to longtime powwow scholar Christopher Scales, “recording culture” is both 1) the processes of powwow recording, which transform cultural practices into cultural products, and 2) the aesthetic concepts and musical lives of Native recording artists (2012, 3). As powwow moves from off the reservations to urban spaces and recording studios, powwow participants encounter mass media discourses, such as ethics, power, the relationship between modernity and tradition, as well as ethnicity and race relations (Scales 2012, 4). An examination of these macro- to micro- interactions helps researchers construct a holistic narrative of how Native American peoples see themselves, envision their traditions, and continually reimagine their livelihood.

It is important to note that online and digital media technologies like Facebook, Google, and Instagram have not diminished the importance of local places, but instead provide a medium to extend place-based interactions. For example, I am a member of several Facebook Groups that provide a setting for like-minded people to discuss issues and most online social networking groups are focused on a particular perspective on an issue (Evans-Cowley 2010, 208). Groups I subscribe to or organizations I follow on

Instagram are often oriented toward themes like Indigenous Activism, Danza, Powwow, and Chicana/Xicana Pride. Powwows.com, a longtime website for posting powwow ads, now livestreams major Native events using Facebook media services, and the creator Paul Gowder hosts a podcast that has about 30 episodes archived since 2015 but seems to be picking up momentum. The move towards two-way interfaces that allow for interactivity between sources, participants, and audiences has not only increased access to powwows for Native and non-Native peoples alike, but facilitates dialogue across cultures, time, and space.

Deborah Wong assumes technology as a cultural practice in her work with Vietnamese Americans in Orange County and shows that "an examination of technological practices in the context is the only way to get at what technology 'does'" (Wong 2003, 125). While some contend that the internet is democratic and has the potential for community building, Wong is critical, believing that with technology there are additional negotiations of access to consider. For example, the internet is perceived by general audiences as remarkably open, however, at the same time access to it is limited by those who have resources like computers, phones, and Wi-Fi. By monitoring various Facebook groups, actively following danzantes and other decolonizing agents (scholars, friends, community members), and commenting on critical posts, I gain valuable insights. I share how Danza and powwow communities have both adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic in another chapter, exploring these insights through questions such as: *Who is watching and listening to powwows with danzantes? Why? What advantages or disadvantages are there for investigating Danza-powwow*

interactions amongst diverse communities online? In what ways has digital media transformed Native peoples' aspirations towards self-determination?

Hybrid Ethnography

Lastly, I demonstrate how Native American peoples utilize modern technologies to continually come together, practice, and recreate their music and dance traditions through hybrid ethnography (Przybylski 2020). A hybrid project spans digital, physical, and digital-physical spaces thereby requiring a conceptual shift in the way we imagine space in relation to time. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic halted any research plans through ethnographic fieldwork because many of my powwows and proposed events were cancelled or moved online. Several powwow committees transitioned their programs to virtual hubs; these online spaces made room for powwow community members to interact, connect, share traditions and experiences. Later chapters examine various interactions and conversations, both positive and negative, that occurred in these online hubs.

As a Danza dancer exploring public powwow events, I was forced to rethink research projects that I had started more than a year earlier in 2018. Thankfully in building and maintaining relationships with powwow and Danza communities, I have been fortunate to conduct some interviews and interactions online: I recruited and conducted interviews both synchronously and asynchronously using electronic communications (e.g., Zoom, Facebook messenger). I asked for verbal permission or typed out permission for interviews, after reviewing consent forms online or over the phone. I even had the opportunity to volunteer for a powwow I have not had the chance

to attend and participate in due to previous budgetary and time constraints. During the pandemic, online and digital media technologies like Facebook, Google, and Instagram have not diminished the importance of local places, but instead provide communities a medium to extend place-based interactions.

Protocol and ethics remain at the forefront of this investigation, and while sentiments around recording Oral Traditions are changing in certain Native American communities, there are still strong understandings that those truly interested in learning require patience and active listening.³⁷ Severt Young Bear (Lakota), a long-time member of the Porcupine Singers, shares that the Lakota heritage/*Lakol wicoh'an* is an Oral Tradition, “that spoken word and the memory that catches and keeps it are at the center of our tradition” (Young Bear 1994, 16). He then follows with a story about his dad not letting him record songs or prayer because then it has lost its value and becomes underappreciated. Therefore, while technological mediation can help recreate significant traditions for future generations, there is still a responsibility for shared knowledge. “I’ve been taught in this way...” or “this was shared to me by...” has often been said to me by singers and dancers in my research. By grounding traditional Indigenous knowledge in their personal relationships, Native peoples willingly declare their personal understandings about song. Within Tribal Nation-specific settings, however, many Native peoples are careful to not overextend their knowledge to encompass or speak for the entire group (Lassiter 1998). This is less an issue in public intertribal events, like contemporary in-person powwows, which have grown more accustomed to photography,

³⁷ See Gregory Younging (2018) for why Oral Tradition is capitalized (79-80).

or in powwows produced for online audiences. However, there are still sacred elements that require permission, such as photographing people in regalia or prohibited entirely, such as entering or crossing through the powwow circle.

In my experience volunteering with powwow committees who have moved their ceremony and events online, it is the protocol committee who creates the guidelines for photography, screenshots, selfies, call for submissions, online interactions, and more. Powwow committees also decide whether (or not) to extend an invitation to Danza dancers. Further insight on how technological mediations and online interactivities expand Danza and powwow-based ethics before and throughout the pandemic are included in another chapter.

Further Chapters

The dissertation chapters are outlined as follows.

Chapter 2 illuminates the methods used in my approach to observing the powwows, Danza, and intertribal relations. It presents interviews with friends and interlocutors, demonstrating connections between Indigeneity and doing things *in a good way*. In the context of Danza in the southwestern U.S., choosing the talking circle as a primary entry into research was an effective strategy for revisiting contentious topics on Danza in powwows between powwow goers, powwow organizers, dancers, and danzantes. Conversations reveal Aztlan to hold multiple meanings, including the most basic reminder to reconnect. In an effort to decolonize methodologies via reconnection, talking circles and an Indigenous research model were employed. The talking circle provided a space for conflict resolution in terms of detribalization and questions of

Indigenous belonging among danzantes. In this chapter, I illustrate how I practice compassionate listening by writing autoethnographic reflections and poetry. Talking circle transcripts and critical analysis, translating songs and writing my own poems capture the ephemeral power of talking circles. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of my talking circles were virtual talking circles using Zoom. The particulars behind my adjusted technical mediations are further explained and detailed in that chapter.

Chapter 3 builds on themes from Chapter 2, including the necessary technical mediations made, and further virtual talking circles that investigate the nature and interpersonal dynamics of powwow and Danza. It focuses on women-centered gatherings rather than male-centered ones and explores refusal and embodiment in terms of Indigenous community and belonging. Chapter 3 examines NASP (Native American Student Programs) women's reflections on what powwow means to them and why they participate. It also considers the lack of a shared matrix or context for Indigeneity, noting how that lack leads to incommensurability in terms of conflicting ideas of belonging and Indigeneity. I expand discourse on Indigeneity and examine refusal as an avenue for Indigenous self-determination. In response to themes of detribalization and questions of Indigenous belonging among danzantes, I share reflexive letters to my grandmother, embodying detribalized struggle to understand my identity, purpose, and place. In conversation with additional talking circles and interviews, these letters also illustrate a larger, generational reframing; this shift is a transition from a perspective of concern for why powwow communities sometimes do not accept Danza into a recognition that danzantes should not be responsible for fighting battle of inclusion (or at least it should

not be their fight anymore). Chapter 3 is heavily based on research conducted in virtual talking circles using Zoom, digitizing IRB forms, transcription with Otter.ai then revisiting the transcripts. These methods are further explained in the chapter.

In Chapter 4, I examine themes of gendered ceremony at home. This chapter illuminates how dangers encountered in physical powwow space can leach into the online powwow (Social Distance Powwow) in the forms of gendered violence, homophobia, and transphobia. This chapter goes beyond powwows hosted in the southwestern US and explores extended Native hubs/spaces online, documenting a global network of powwow. Chapter 4 also demonstrates the need critical feminist and Two-Spirit perspectives in ethnographic research. This chapter heavily focuses on the margins of Indigeneity, using research mostly based on following communities online in a time of COVID-19 via social media (Facebook, Reddit, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube).

The final chapter, Chapter 5, returns to powwow field sites hosted in the southwestern US, focusing on relationality and reciprocity. Research comes from powwows across the Southwest, specifically Northern and Southern California, Albuquerque, New Mexico, and San Marcos, Texas. Chapter 5 explores how Indigenous worldviews and matrices are relational and reciprocal; this is shown via a collection of vignettes. For an example of embodied reconnection to homelands and heritage, I include a piece about my practicing a corn ceremony at home. This final chapter brings my reflective experience and engagement full circle from researcher to practitioner and community member. This chapter has both pre- and post-pandemic research, employing both traditional and hybrid (online/offline) ethnography. I close my dissertation with a

poem, just as I opened it with a poem, engaging in a decolonial praxis that is instrumental to my autoethnographic approach.

Concluding Thoughts



Figure 1.3: The 4th Annual Mexica New Year Celebration hosted by our Danza group, Kapulli Teuxihuitl, in Baldwin Park, CA. Danzantes from different groups dance together in concentric circles around the huehuetl drum players and an altar set up in the center. This musical and ceremonial practice is surrounded by various Native-owned vendors selling food like frybread and slushies, and hand-made items such as clothing, jewelry, soaps, and more. Photographed by Richard Buettner with permission on March 16, 2019.

While providing a glimpse into Native communities for spectators, powwow simultaneously creates space for intertribal dialogue and negotiations on more tensive subjects, such as homo/transphobia and blood quantum. I conclude this chapter with an ethnographic sketch and poem of myself dancing at a powwow with my kapulli to share my decolonizing approaches in action and as the final entry point into the rest of my dissertation.

Mother Earth radiates under the clear, sunny day as we gather at our local powwow. A hundred or so spectators—I once among them—clap, cheer, and record us on cellular devices as we file in, one-by-one from the Eastern opening of the powwow circle. My ayacaxtli containing 52 Mexican fan palm seeds, collides with a gourd grown from San Diego to create sounds that danzantes have danced with and carried with them for over 500 years. Every shake comes naturally from the steps, lifts, and twists taken to complete the various Danza dances. Instead of clapping our hands, we sometimes shake our rattles to sonically signal we agree of what was just said (like snaps at an open mic night) or to support someone who may need encouragement to finish their dance.

The smells of hot oil or grease and delicious fried food from the vendors become masked in a heavenly scent of burning copal as our teacher Mrs. Cencalli and her comadre (godmother) set up the altar. Most audiences are drawn to the dancer's colorful regalia, large feathered headdresses, and quick agility in the dance; however, I was drawn to the circle uniting member and women's leadership in Danza. Longtime participants may see past the glitz and glam of dancemanship and understand that we are not dancing for show or competition. We dance to heal and give thanks to the world around us.

Danzantes in the middle,
circles within circles,
prayers colliding, prayers combining,
colorful headdresses and shimmering regalia blur as bodies move

Together we remember.

Thundering huehuetl beats propels us,
we're planting and harvesting, again
returning to our roots, criss-crossing legs till the soil.
After shoveling dirt away with the strikes of our heels,
dancers drop to their knees as falling seeds.

We are the seeds our ancestors planted for safe-keeping.

Today we rise.

Only once we remember can we undo,
Undo hate, undo pain, undo colonialism.

Facing the center, we offer ourselves
Lifting our palms and arms up to the sky from their crossed positions,
over our chests, then back down, touch the heart, and up again.

Our energies merge to collectively cleanse,

Can you sense it?

We're dancing for you, growing and learning *in a good way*,
vibratory bodies guided by love and hope,

Can you imagine it?

The bouncing beats of the huehuetl drum lifts my spirits into dance. Blows from a conch shell and chirps from bird whistles towards the six directions signal we are closing and thankful for la Danza. To the East we turn in our circle and face the rising sun, spin around, take a bow, then turn across to the West we face the oceans, spin, bow, then turning South towards my ancestral homelands, turn around once more, bow, and then we face the mountains to the North, spin, bow, and at last we all face each other towards the center of our circle again with our arms and hearts up towards the heavens, spin, bow, now comes my favorite part at the end of a long practice or ceremony, we get down to the ground squatting, kneeling, or in child's pose, we thank our Mother Earth, the universe, our home.

I learned about the directions and their significance from helping construct our altar during our ceremony. These are the six directions we honor at the beginning and end of every dance performance and ceremony. As we exit the circle and end our practice, we turn and walk backwards, so that we stay facing the center. While this has never been explicitly explained to me, I wonder if this has to do with the altar that our group dances around. We always make our altar before dancing, sometimes this is a team effort amongst the children, other times it is the mothers and grandmothers. There is no wrong way to make an altar. The process of taking the elements, drawing on your creativity and feelings, is an honor. From objects in a box, to a centerpiece that we tap into with good energy. By the end of our practice, our bodies, minds, and souls fill with medicine. The combination of movement, prayer, music, creates a warm comfort I have not felt

elsewhere but imagine it is how those feel when going to church or receiving a hug from grandma.

After our dance we gather for our palabra, or group talk, in one big circle. We are always in circles, mimicking the cycles of the universe. Our leaders and invited guests normally speak, but everyone is given a turn. Most times I say Ometeo (thank you in Nahuatl) and pass it on. As we disperse and break the circle, I hear my teachers and the Gonzales family deciding on what Mexican place to go to for tacos. I was taught never to invite myself, so I stayed at the powwow and got some more fry bread or treated myself to some dessert. Sometimes I soak in my newly found danzante limelight and take pictures with curious and kind-hearted powwow dancers. I look forward to the day I enjoy some carne asada tacos with my kapulli.

2 (wih) Research A'chaqwen E'hichene *in a Good Way*: Decolonizing Research through Virtual Talking Circles and Indigenous Methodologies

In this chapter, I use autoethnographic approaches that weave storytelling, poetry, and compassionate listening. This presents a multisensorial narrative of talking circles as opportunities for decolonizing interview processes. I begin by tracing my journey in critically understanding and centering Indigenous approaches to music and dance research. In sharing my personal inspiration and careful attentiveness in how I bridge Indigenous methodologies, peoples, and voices, I demonstrate the weight of academic privileges with responsibilities to fellow communities, my ancestors, and future generations. This is lifelong homework. Decolonizing my livelihood, community, and beyond is an ongoing negotiation of how to do things *in a good way*.

Week by week, I am learning more about the history and complexities between Danza (an Indigenous music, dance, and spiritual group practice from México) and powwow (a North American intertribal music and dance celebration).³⁸ As a danzante (Danza dancer), I value my time in ceremony. I reframe my researcher prerogatives, *just*

³⁸ This normally happens at my weekly practice with my Danza group in Ontario, California. However, during the COVID-19 global pandemic we did not hold time and space together from March 6th, 2020 (my 27th birthday) until I returned to socially distanced practices on June 11th, 2021.

be in the field, letting the restorative processes of dance and movement take effect.³⁹ As a researcher, volunteer, dancer, and activist, the boundaries of my field sites are ambiguous. I quickly learned that my greatest decolonizing tool in music studies is listening. In April 2020, I asked four friends and interlocutors to join me for an online talking circle. The participants were: William Madrigal (Cahuilla, Luiseño), Cuauhtémoc Peranda (Mescalero-Apache/Mexica-Chichimeca), Joshua Thunder Little (Oglala Lakota), and Josh Gonzales (Xictlaka-Mexika). The participants and I joined the video call virtually from across Abya Yala / Turtle Island, particularly Luiseño, Serrano, Cahuilla, and Tongva lands, now widely known as Southern California, United States. These participants will be more deeply introduced later in this chapter in the context of the talking circle case study I will present.

A'chaqwen e'hichene, or *in a good way* in English, is a common expression across Indigenous Nations with varying personal and Nation-specific meanings. I titled this chapter in consultation with my Cahuilla language teacher and close colleague, William Madrigal, as a way of honoring and thanking the Íviatem (peoples) past, present, and future whose lands and waterways, I think, speak, and write from. For the five Indigenous people who participated in the first talking circle I hosted, which is investigated in this chapter, *in a good way* carries various meanings including to learn their culture, practice medicine, maintain reciprocity with the world, and ensure the next seven generations to come (Peranda et al. 2020). In sharing our conversation on what it

³⁹ I do not mean to reinforce a binary between research and Indigenous ways of doing and knowing, but hope to situate *sitting with* (ideas, questions, etc.) and being as research (Wilson 2008, Margolin 2021).

means to do things *in a good way*, I hope that readers take away that the expression has varying meanings. As Jessica Ball and Pauline Janyst assert, “An over-generalized, pan-Indigenous set of practices for enacting ethics in research involving Indigenous peoples is to be avoided; rather, each investigation should begin with relationship building and dialogue about how to proceed *in a good way*” (2008, 44, italics are my own). Many Nations have their own origins and understandings of *in a good way*, for me as a researcher, it is crucial to make those relations with the Indigenous communities in my area, so that I can ethically learn and practice appropriate protocol. For example, I learned Cahuilla language and culture and promoted Indigenous presence in events around campus.

This chapter is inspired by scholar and musician of Mohawk descent Dr. Dawn Avery and the research methodologies she models in her 2014 dissertation. As a hopeful undergraduate student embarking to graduate school, I witnessed her present the processes involved in developing her Indigenous Research Four Directions Wheel at a Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) panel alongside my mentor, Dr. Jessica Bissett Perea. Her Indigenous research framework, featured in the following section, was powerful because she centered Indigenous knowledge while using symbolism such as the turtle and ideology like the four directions. It was the first time I had ever seen this done; now that I’m a grad student, I critically reflect on that moment in time and how it inspired me. Dr. Bissett Perea, Dawn Avery, and the entire panel had an impact on me as a person and scholar. They were and are an example of how to change our discipline, even change the academy at large.

Before sharing insights into my talking circle research, I discuss my talking circles homework. In learning what they are and their significance in various contexts, I considered my own stance as a detribalized, fair-skinned, woman of color. For readers to gain a sense of the good energy that talking circles create, I have translated a song. I am transparent with participants on my intentions and how I adapt talking circles protocol into a roadmap for interviews. Additionally, I offer this roadmap with talking circle protocol and structure as a guide on incorporating talking circles in academe.

In a sketch with fellow talking circle participant and friend, Will Madrigal, I share my vulnerability in centering Indigenous approaches through the retelling of a phone call. This leads straight into a transcription of our group talking circle interview, which I am modeling after Diamond and Hoefnagel's edited volume *Aboriginal Music in Contemporary Canada* (2012). In a period of increased interactions between academic communities, culture bearers, creative artists, and Elders in Canada, the editors intentionally curate works that not only reflect these exchanges but highlight them as primary sources. Just as Diamond and Hoefnagels equate their conventionally scholarly written chapters to the chapters containing whole interview transcriptions, I value these exchanges with my friends and interlocutors.

Centering Indigenous Approaches in Music/Dance Research

This chapter, modeled after a talking circle, is a materialized envisioning of decolonizing writing and publishing. Since decolonization is a spectrum ranging from actionable matters such as returning the land/water/air/fire rights to Indigenous peoples and the sovereignty of Tribal Nations, to more intimate movements of hope and love, the

act of embodying decolonization requires tremendous imagination and resilience (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, Million 2009, Risling Baldy 2018). As it concerns research, Tuhiwai Smith (Māori) and Margaret Kovach (Néhiyaw and Saulteaux), recommend that researchers follow certain protocols to demonstrate recognition, consent, and respect (Tuhiwai Smith 1999/2012, Kovach 2009/2012). As a scholar of Indigenous mixed ancestry working within the bureaucracies of the academic institution, I hope to strengthen the links between decolonizing research and supporting Indigenous self-determination (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, Avery 2014, Risling-Baldy 2018).⁴⁰ My identity as a detribalized accomplice is grounded in conversations with community and trusted Elders who understand the complexity of Indigeneity for those of Mexican ancestry living in the United States. While I believe many of us are still healing from colonial wounds, I do recognize privileges like my adopted upbringing, fairer skin, and able body.

As previously mentioned, I am building upon Robinson's decolonial critique of "sonic encounters" (2020) between Indigenous traditions and Western music, by implementing an engaged listening process that focuses on the relationship between listener and the speaker. In *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice and Liberation* education theorist Laura I. Rendón argues that by listening, "we can experience a deep presence and recognize how at a very basic, even spiritual, level, sharing the stories of our humanity opens us to a deeper connection with

⁴⁰ The nuances between Indigenous and of Indigenous ancestry comes from Facebook friends' posts recirculating an Instagram original post by @kdeveryjacobs, a queer Mohawk actress "speaking about Indigenous identity within areas now known as 'Canada' and 'the US.'" This post was a direct response to an article from the CBC exposé written by kanhehsiiio & Jorge Barrera about Michelle Latimer's Indigenous ancestry" (Jacobs 2020).

others and ultimately with ourselves” (Rendón 2012, 51). This approach makes learning slower, but over time, through a song, over an Indian taco, in the Native student lounge, or before Danza practice, I have had the opportunity to learn the heart of what is at stake in my communities. Even those not a part of the communities they research feel a “felt” connection that compels them to act, an experience that Chinese American ethnomusicologist Deborah Wong attributes to the ethnographer’s attention to the politics of everyday experiences and the resulting moral imperatives for the communities they work with (2009, 7-8).

Compassionate listening is an indispensable decolonizing strategy. By reorienting our listening relationship to compassionate listening, we reintroduce reciprocity and emotions into our scholarship to counter the legacy of outside historical research with Indigenous communities. The way I think about compassionate listening mirrors how I theorize about *in a good way*. My autoethnographic approach is further informed by Margaret Kovach’s belief that “Determining an analytical framework means listening to the data, keeping one’s chosen theoretical positioning in mind, and being conscious of cultural and personal context” (2021, 227).

In her chapter “*Moving: From Performance to Performative Ethnography and Back Again*,” activist Deborah Wong addresses the relationship between ethnomusicology and ethnography. She argues that ethnomusicologists still need to engage in the practice of critical ethnography and “[create] performance ethnographies while acknowledging the place of autoethnography in our methodologies” (2008, 76). Pushing for more scholars in our field to consider where experience and interpretation

overlap, Wong shares how listening and participating in taiko, the focus of her research, are “co-constitutive,” with the aim of “[creating] something bigger than you” that “you literally *couldn't* do it by yourself” (87). I relate these ideas of co-creating in community and critical awareness of power dynamics in my research relationships to my compassionate listening practice.

I consider the work from [The Compassionate Listening Project](#) tangentially related to my work on compassionate listening because they both empower individuals and communities to transform conflict and create cultures of peace and healing. This project comes from Gene Knudsen Hoffman’s 1990s reconciliation work in Palestine and Israel, and the organization has created curriculum around peace building in everyday life in the United States since 1999. As a student of Buddhist monk and poet, Thich Nhat Hanh, Hoffman argued that compassionate listening required “non-judgmental listening and deepening, non-adversarial questions,” and where “listeners accept what others say as their perceptions, and validate the right to their own perceptions” (Green, “[A Brief History of the Compassionate Listening Project](#)”). This open-minded and open-hearted listening approach is useful in conflict resolution work. Furthermore, I want to place compassionate listening in the same threads as other Indigenous and decolonizing praxes.

Compassionate listening is a decolonizing strategy where the intention of listening is not focused on conversation content nor extracting knowledge from knowledge-bearers. Oftentimes, compassionate listening is one avenue to be *in a good way* in community with others. In my research and through compassionate listening I focus on creating mutual relationships—fostering an environment in which friends and interlocutors

can choose when, how or whether they lead the narrative. In working with Indigenous communities and communities of color, compassionate listening may counter hesitation that participants in the field may have in entrusting traditional knowledge to outsiders. For example, when participating in an experience like Danza, which requires physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional attention and presence, it is impossible to transcribe notes or jot down lists. However, taking the time afterwards to process and reflect on embodied knowledges can provide initial insights that morph into rich ethnography. For me, this practice of being fully present and then immediately recording my observations after the event provides me with a foundation to which I can add subsequent research, theories, and ideas.

Here's a brief, non-extensive list of techniques and embodied knowledge I learned via compassionate listening while at multiple Danza events over time:

- Wear a sports bra
- Hydrate beforehand
- Skirts are preferred but not mandated
- Always stretch, especially the ankles and thighs
- Movements are often repeated before the next move
- Before spinning there is a little lift in the body
- Hold the ayacaxtli in your right hand, and shake it with the beats of the drum
- Follow the center danzante
- It's okay to sweat with your bandana
- Never leave the circle without permission—unless your child is in danger
- Drums are a part of the inner circle, do not cut them off
- Bloated fingers

Readers may note that this list encompasses not only Danza-specific techniques but also practical knowledge. For me, compassionate listening entails listening deeply, dancing with the elements, feeling the spirits move around me, creating and maintaining our world.

While in the trawls of my own dissertation journey, I revisited Dawn Avery's scholarship for motivation and insights.

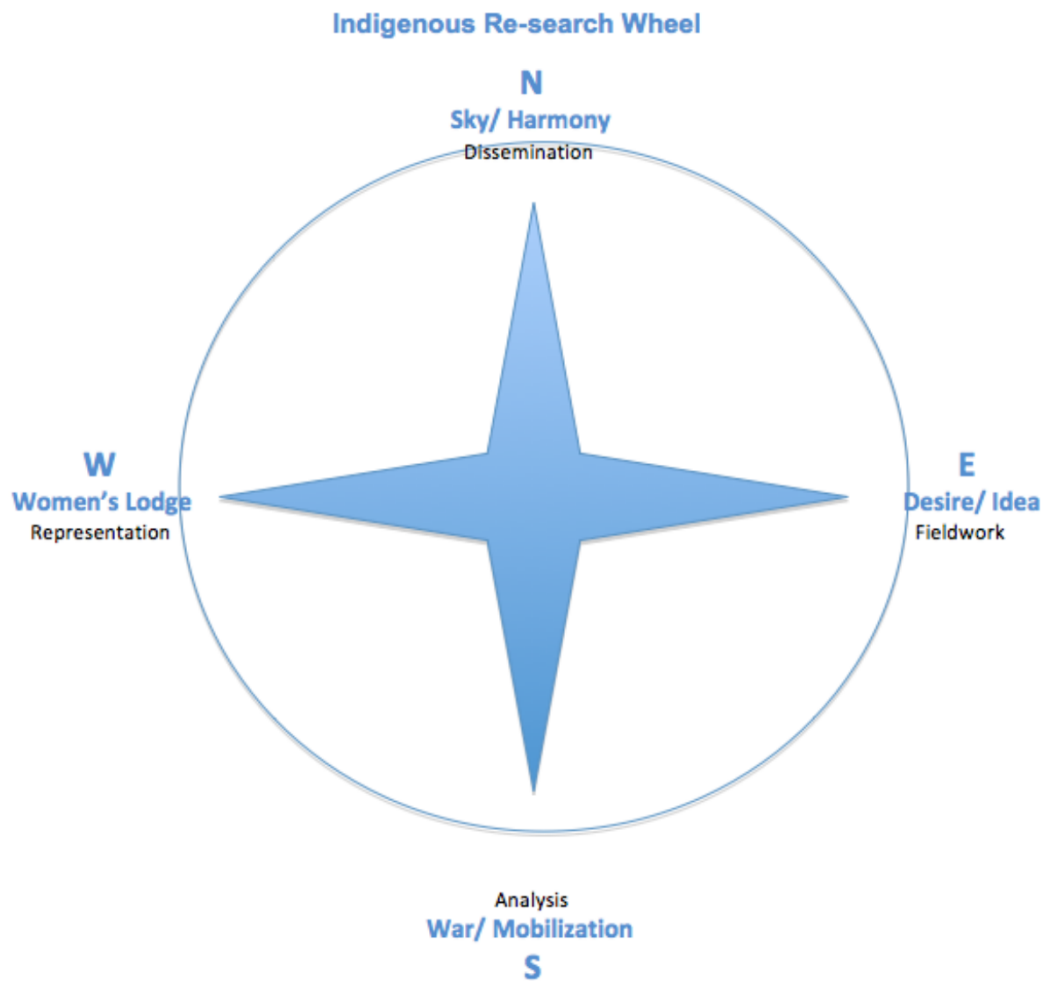


Figure 2.1: See Figure 2.2 caption for explanation.

Indigenous Research Four Directions Wheel

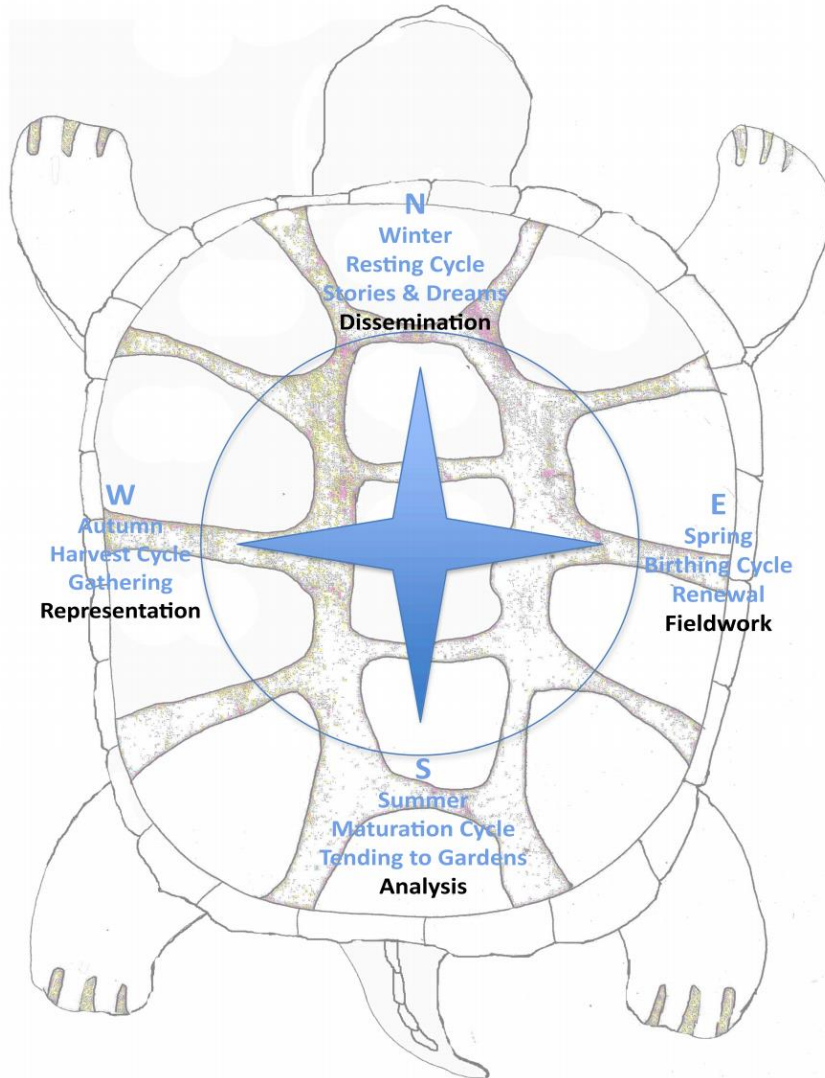


Figure 2.2: Following other scholars who have used the Medicine Wheel in their research, Avery describes her Indigenous Research Wheel graphics as “loosely based on the Plains Indian medicine wheel in that it begins in the east and moves in a cyclical nature through the different directions, illustrating the non-sequential process of research techniques applied by an Indigenous model...A multitude of Indigenous perspectives, concepts, and metaphorical signifiers can be applied to academic research processes. Rich with meaning, layers of interpretation may be explored through the use of Ndn symbology, enabling the research story to unfold.” (2014, 228-231).

Following her Indigenous Research Four Direction Wheel, the cyclical nature of research is not about a final product but experiencing a journey of learning and growth.

Avery explains:

“Transformation...as the commitment to conduct research with an Indigenous sensibility, integrity, and an inner strength...Decolonization may be the process of learning to use tools of research and creating new tools of research in an Indigenous way to present Native perspectives on issues that are central to Native history and life. This includes collaborations with communities on projects that are important to them, along with checking one’s work and process with Native elders and community members. Healing may refer to the scholar/researcher who digs deeper and deeper into their roots (Ieriho:kwats) to apply their own Indigenous knowledge to research. Mobilization may refer to the compilation of research, the sharing of those works, and seeing oneself as a creative academic who is first an Indian.” (2014, 223-224).

My knowledge of Indigeneity and belonging through music/dance-making in this dissertation was known, felt, embodied among the ancestors that have come before me. These ideas and ways of being may look completely different five, ten, hundred years from now. My dissertation is a translation (i.e., personal understanding of a set of research questions surrounding decolonizing approaches to autoethnography) written out on paper and validated before a committee of scholars for me to earn a doctoral degree. I understand they are my intended audience and may be the only ones to read this work in its entirety. My concern is writing down as much as I have learned—mistakes, failures, and all—so that if someone were to visit my dissertation, like I did with Dawn Avery’s and others, they leave inspired to make their own intervention.

This chapter began as an experiment in decolonial praxis, centering and promoting Indigenous ways of learning *in a good way*. I have heard this phrase since 2014, in community, at Native American student meetings, and powwows. While it was

not until delving into the protocols of talking circles that I took notice of this phrase, I do remember another scholar from my comprehensive exams investigating the phrase “Indian way” (Gilbert 1982).⁴¹ I had pushed that moment aside until writing this chapter.

Dawn Avery shares, “Indigenous symbols may serve as points for understanding concepts that are multi-layered with significance” (2014, 230). Circles, cyclical time, and themes of relationality and reciprocity embedded in my work come from community practice and understanding. I see both the symbolic and practical use of circles in both Danza and powwow cultures. Through my powwow engagement and practice, I envisioned the four concentric layers of the powwow combined with ethnomusicologist Beverley Diamond’s alliance studies model of understanding music-making by and for Native American communities (Gutierrez Masini 2018, Diamond 2007). Now, I again am drawn to circles.

Utilizing talking circles in group interviews with Native composers, Dawn Avery gave every member a chance to speak on a particular topic (2014). Observing this egalitarian way of learning and talking together made me think *what a great way to decolonize the group interview!* Then, I immediately thought, *wait, is this appropriate?*⁴² So, I started to do some homework (Visweswaran 1994).

⁴¹ Tamara Beth Gilbert’s master’s thesis in dance explores powwows in Los Angeles from dancers’ perspective and analytically studied complex overlapping identities that take place within the powwow tradition (1982). Though many contemporary dances serve as symbols of Indigenous survivance (survival and resilience), mixed urban powwows tend to reflect tribal specificity in the performance styles of individual dancers.

⁴² Readers will experience some of my inner thought processes through italicized sentences throughout this chapter.

Talking Circles Homework

I share in this section my labor in learning about talking circles, their power and protocol, and how I adapted this practice to my interview processes. In her chapter “Feminist Ethnography as Failure,” anthropologist Kamala Visweswaran decenters gender in feminist ethnography and “the field” in anthropology, by practicing homework rather than fieldwork (1994). She describes this as “anthropology in reverse”, which seems to build on feminist and decolonizing practices of positionality. This process considers one’s own methods of schooling, what constitutes an idea of home, including reterritorialization or the layered demographics of place, and examining one’s points of privilege, including communities in the academy. While feminist ethnography has made strides in addressing these issues, she says that decolonization necessitates the integration of gender with other axes of difference. Around the same time, Black female law scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality, giving everyone the language to talk about compounded discrimination across axes of difference (1991, 1244).

I perform and access particular lenses of difference through spiritual activism and research in my everyday life, and then, translate those interpersonal moments onto the page. Spiritual activism is, “a visionary, experientially based epistemology and ethics, a way of life, and a call to action” (Facio and Lara 2014, 16). Following Gloria Anzaldúa and other scholars navigating the lines between Indigenous and Mexican ancestry, spirituality is a guiding force for understanding our place in the world and beyond. Examples of my own spiritual practices include mindfulness, gardening, and Danza (ceremony), which have helped me understand myself, my communities, and my place in

this universe. Through spiritual activism, I have learned how identity is more than belonging, but also holds responsibilities and accountability to people, plants, and animals, to the elements, and to future generations. This is a lifelong praxis. Writing this dissertation, including poetry and story, is in and of itself a type of spiritual practice, where I dive into inner thoughts, lose time re-enacting the moments, and practice meditative concentration.

Talking circles have been utilized in the health and public policy sectors as a method of qualitative analysis (Picou 2000; Mehl-Madrona and Mainguy 2014; Brandenburger, Wells, and Stluka 2017) and in classrooms as a pedagogical tool for structuring class discussions both in-person and online (Brown and Di Lallo 2020; Cowan and Adams 2002; Winters n.d.). Considering how the current COVID-19 pandemic is already changing the ways research is conducted, this seemed like an opportune way to frame an online talking circle proposal.

Talking circles unfold in many ways depending upon the levels of experience and mastery among the people involved (Cowan and Adams 2002). Like sharing circles, talking circles necessitate dignity and respect given and received by all involved, which helps create a sense of community. They are tools to explore community tensions or resistance.⁴³

⁴³ Conversations on tense or heavy Indigenous subjects include coming out as 2SLGBTQIA+, the historical use of blood quantum erasing Indigenous peoples, belonging, and more. And by resistance, I mean participants' hesitation to respond or open up rather than collective resistance as a political notion.

Talking circles facilitate listening and learning together through four stages: building connection, piercing the surface, delving deeper, and reflecting and learning (Winters n.d.).⁴⁴ They begin with building connections: often there is an opening prayer or song, medicine is often offered (meaning sacred plants are burned), and we introduce ourselves or check in with one another.⁴⁵ The facilitator makes sure everyone agrees on protocol for the talking circle, and then we move to “piercing the surface.” In this round, the facilitator offers a topic, and everyone reveals personal connections to said topic, which often leads to storytelling. The next round delves deeper into community issues; it is a time to explore problems, entertain new ideas, or a space to grieve. Talking circles end with reflection, empowerment, and if necessary, conflict resolution, before the leader closes with another offering of medicine.

In today's interconnected world, people's different values and beliefs are brought together, and they may clash due to incommensurability. This is often because modern infrastructures in Western society are not set up to sincerely listen (Cowan and Adams 2002). A talking circle practice establishes a very different style of communication. According to First Nations Pedagogy Online, when everyone has their turn to speak and all voices are heard in a respectful and attentive way, “the learning atmosphere becomes a rich source of information, identity, and interaction” (2009). Rather than focus on my

⁴⁴ This structure comes from communication specialist Alaina Winters in a public document online on using talking circles in the classroom. Alaina Winters, [*Using Talking Circles in the Classroom*](#). (Normal, IL), n.d.

⁴⁵ Different kinds of medicine may be offered depending on person, location, and season, but some examples are (white) sage, tobacco, cedar, rosemary, lavender, and copal.

desires and needs as a researcher in the interview, I facilitated a dialogic process that builds trust, relationships, and good energy.

There is an entire section of the edited anthology on Xicanx and Latinx spiritual expression and healing practices dedicated to talking circles (Medina & Gonzales eds 2019). That section explores the powers and honor of being in a talking circle, which are often difficult to describe in academic prose; sometimes this articulation can be easier in other modes like storytelling, poetry, and song. Ann Hidalgo embodied the good energy within talking circles in a Spanish-language song in *Voices from the Ancestors* after reflecting on her digital experiences with a circle of “womxn [sic]” in Santiago, Chile (2019).⁴⁶ Feminist/political women’s talking circles took an important form in the 1970s called “Consciousness raising group,” and were very healing in allowing women to share their voice in fighting against oppression, bringing communities of women together and changing politics and laws.⁴⁷ Hidalgo’s group first began to gather in circles to create their own ritual outside of patriarchal spaces, which is a function still consistent in some talking circles today.⁴⁸ According to the song’s creator:

⁴⁶ I use women here; however, Hidalgo described her circle group in her chapter as “womxn”, which I believe is meant to be an inclusive term to speak to women of all kinds. In the 1970s, “womxn” grew from the second wave feminist movement and is described by Dr. Cornelia Lahmann as a way to “liberate themselves from male forms and norms, to avoid the relationship with ‘man.’ (Karpinski 2020). However, some have argued that using ‘womxn’ to refer to trans women could imply that trans women not actually women. I do not promote this othering, nor do I reject all manhood or ideas of men because Two Spirit(s) teachings dictate we need females, males, and two spirits for worldly balance.

⁴⁷ I credit and thank Dr. Dawn Avery for sharing this knowledge with me.

⁴⁸ I have personally experienced two kinds of virtual talking circles with similar purposes. Including a one-time women’s circle conducted by my Danza teacher, Mrs. Cencalli, to emulate sweat lodge ceremony together during COVID-19 and an annual virtual talking circle sponsored by the Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits (BAAITS) Powwow (2020-2023).

"The song introduces the concept of a circle ritual in which women share stories of their experiences and encounters with the sacred in their lives." "En este círculo (In this Circle)" acknowledges that everyone has a story to tell and invites participants to share their stories, dreams, joys, and sorrows in the circle of wisdom and love. Just as feminist theologians rigorously analyze scripture and religious traditions to distinguish elements that are life giving from those that are oppressive, this song invites women to consider their inherited traditions-- religious, cultural, and social --to identify which are helpful and which are harmful. The circle is a place of healing in which tears can be shed and where conversation, laughter, and solidarity can inspire dreams of a better future" (Hidalgo 2019, 382).

Ann Hidalgo's introduction is the only information accompanying her song in this anthology. I believe this is because experiencing the song itself, listening to the lyrics with the pulsing chords of the piano provides embodied knowledge. Hidalgo composed "En este Círculo (In this Circle)" for one voice with piano accompaniment and appears like any other sheet music. While I am a doctoral candidate in music, seeing musical transcription still freaks me out, instantly taking me back to my musicianship courses that I struggled with as an undergraduate. I try to accurately read the melody from fat black dots across the staffed pages, but I am going so slowly that I cannot feel the rhythm. I imagine the strophic music sounds lovely. *Maybe I can find someone to play it for me someday.* Instead, I focus on translating the Spanish-language lyrics for English speaking audiences here to comprehend and appreciate:

Abuela, amiga, compañera,
Cuéntanos de tu vida:
Las historias y los sueños
Que animan tus días.

Todas traemos cuentos De alegrías
y sufrimientos
Para compartir en este círculo
De sabiduría y de amor.

En este círculo escuchamos el
pasado,
Distinguiendo verdades de
mentiras,
Recogiendo perlas de sabiduría, Y
cortando las redes que atrapan.

Cuentos nos enseñan quienes
somos y crean lo que queremos ser.
De las historias de las generaciones
Heredamos fuerza, esperanza y fe.

Abuela, amiga, compañera,
Cuéntanos de tu vida:
Las historias y los sueños
Que animan tus días.

Todas traemos cuentos De alegrías
y sufrimientos
Para compartir en este círculo
De sabiduría y de amor.

En este círculo lamentamos las
penas,
Recordando los sueños olvidados.
Oímos lo que nunca se ha contado
Y honramos vidas despreciadas.

Así la sanación empieza.
Al compartir se alivia el dolor.
Las lágrimas sanan las heridas la
solidaridad nos fortalece.

Abuela, amiga, compañera,
Cuéntanos de tu vida:
Las historias y los sueños
Que animan tus días.

Todas traemos cuentos De alegrías
y sufrimientos
Para compartir en este círculo
De sabiduría y de amor.

En este círculo celebramos juntas,
La unión es más profunda
Que lo que nos puede separar.

Conversando surgen las ideas;
Riendo brota la inspiración. De
nuestro tiempo compartido
Nace la comunidad de amor.

(Hidalgo 2019, 383-386). My own
translation of the song below:

Grandma, friend, companion,
Tell us your life:
The stories/histories and the
dreams
That encourage your days.

[We] All have stories of joy and
suffering
To share in this circle
Of wisdom and love.

In this circle we listen to the past,
Distinguishing truths from lies,
Collecting pearls (jewels/gems) of
wisdom, And cutting the nets that
catch them.

Stories teach us who we are and
believe who we want to be.
From the histories of generations,
we inherit strength, hope, and faith.

Grandma, friend, companion,
Tell us your life:
The stories/histories and the
dreams
That encourage your days.

[We] All have stories of joy and
suffering
To share in this circle
Of wisdom and love.

In this circle we grieve the
hardships/sorrow,
Remembering the dreams, we have
forgotten.
We hear what we have never been
told

And we honor lives that are looked
down on.
Like that healing starts.
To share it alleviates pain.
The tears cure the wounds
And our solidarity uplifts us.

Grandma, friend, companion,
Tell us your life:
The stories/histories and the
dreams
That encourage your days.

[We] All have stories of joy and
suffering
To share in this circle
Of wisdom and love.

In this circle we celebrate together,

Dreaming a better world.
The union is deeper
Than what can separate us.

Conversing emerges ideas;
Laughing sprouts inspiration.
Of our time sharing
Births the community of love.

Grandma, friend, companion,
Tell us your life:
The stories/histories and the
dreams
That encourage your days.

[We] All have stories of joy and
suffering
To share in this circle
Of wisdom and love

Having lost my paternal grandmother (followed by my uncle, great uncle, and grandpa) during the COVID-19 pandemic, Hidalgo's iterations of connecting to family, friends, and past generations resonate with my experiences in the virtual talking circles with my friends and colleagues. As we each openly shared, we gave not only a piece of ourselves but a little about where we each come from (e.g., community, perspective). Her song evokes how talking circles create reciprocal, warm relationships, making us all forever connected.

Ending this section on talking circles homework, I share adapting talking circle protocol online. After familiarizing myself with various talking circles structures, I considered this egalitarian way of delving into and out of a topic in my group and one-on-one interviews. When organizing interviews, I offer participants a "roadmap" that includes my talking circle approach protocol and proposed interview questions structured

as a talking circle. For my group talking circle interview, I wanted to allow for flexibility on questions and discussion topics, while still maintaining focus on specifically why I was bringing in these voices together again. In developing this guideline, I also decided what traditional elements would and would not work while engaging online.

In my autoethnographic approach, it is vital to be transparent and adapt talking circle protocols to one's specific community. Readers should note this is an adaptation; therefore, neither the facilitator nor participants need to identify as Indigenous. However, the facilitator should be transparent with participants that this is not for spirituality or medicine. This is a brave experiment in decolonizing the interview process through Indigenous methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith 1999/2012, Kovach 2021):

- This is an interview for my dissertation and ideally recorded (This is completely up to participants and is not required).
- Only the person designated to talk can talk. If you are conducting the interview virtually and have no talking stick to pass, the facilitator should invite people to speak one at a time, trying to mix up who speaks first and last.
- All the rest listen to the one designated to talk.
- A person talks until they are finished, being respectful of time and everyone involved.
- The circle talk is complete when everyone has had a chance to speak.
- A person may pass without speaking if they so wish.
- If desired, the group may go around the speaking circle again.
- A circle is used to discuss important issues.
- Talking circles are extremely respectful of everyone as individuals and what they have to say.
- Ideally, talking circles are confidential; however, with permission and transparency they may be integrated for research. Check-in with everyone at the end of the session, and if they wish for anything in the circle to not be shared, please keep it in the circle. Honor everyone present, first and foremost.

Part of my ethnographic approach is to create research models in community with enthusiastic, consenting participants. I hope future scholars will find this practice of

Indigenous protocol useful for their own practices, and as a means of decolonizing academic practices.

Talking Circle Participants

On April 15th, 2020, I emailed this roadmap and interview questions in a proposal to four friends and interlocutors for an online group interview. In 2017, I met William Madrigal (Cahuilla, Luiseño), Cuauhtémoc Peranda (Mescalero-Apache/Mexica-Chichimeca), Joshua Thunder Little (Oglala Lakota), and Josh Gonzales (Xictlaka-Mexika) through Native Student Programs (NASP) at UC Riverside. On university campuses, centers like the NASP office act as Native American hubs: providing students with opportunities and resources for learning, both in the classroom and about themselves, around a supportive Indigenous-centered community (Ramirez 2007). Will, Josh, Joshua, and Cuauhtémoc were prominent voices in my master's thesis (Gutierrez Masini 2018). However, due to limited time and resources, I did not have the chance to bring them all together to discuss some of the tensions brought up in separate interviews around transnational understandings of Indigeneity. I was grateful to take the opportunity to bring them together for my dissertation. Most important to me as a researcher is this process of checking in and re-listening to my generous friends who have taught me so much these past six years. Dawn Avery's words from her dissertation encourage me that this is a good path: "Relationships are fostered throughout a lifetime. Being an Indigenous researcher means I have gathered a lifetime of experience through dreams, family, friends, teachers, and enculturation, even though I came to most of my cultural teachings as a young adult" (Avery 2014, 222). We keep in touch through volunteering,

supporting each other's events, casual encounters around UCR's campus, and singing or dancing together to shared Indigenous traditions such as Danza, Cahuilla Bird Songs, and powwow. I am weaving in community and Indigenous-centered activism with our lives in academe. Below readers will find photos and short bios of invited participants, to gain a sense of where each of us is coming from and how we relate.



Figure 2.3: Will Madrigal

Will Madrigal (Cahuilla, Luiseño) is currently a doctoral candidate in Native American Studies at UC Riverside. He identifies with both Cahuilla and Luiseño Nations but grew up on the Cahuilla reservation in Anza. In 2017, he started graduate school the same year as Josh Little, and a year after me. The three of us have taken graduate seminars together, cowritten a grant application, and Joshua and I were the first cohort to complete the new Cahuilla language, culture, and history series Will taught. Photograph taken from his Facebook profile picture with permission.



Figure 2.4: Cuauhtémoc Peranda

Overall, Prince Dante Lauren, of the House of Lauren, International, also known as Cuauhtémoc Peranda (Mescalero/Apache/Mexica-Chichimeca) is a doctoral candidate in Critical Dance Studies at UC Riverside.⁴⁹ As a self-identified Two-Spirits Butch Queen Voguer from Santa Cruz and lifelong Danza practitioner, they have longstanding relationships with diverse “Urban Indian” communities around the globe. After meeting at NASP events, Cuauhtémoc and I quickly bonded over tackling coursework, exams, and dissertation writing as queer brown peoples in academia. Photography by George Ochoa and Glam by Vivian Lauren; photo provided by Peranda.

⁴⁹ “House of Lauren” refers to the International Ballroom family that Cuauhtémoc belongs to, which they define as “Black, Latinx, and Indigenous LGBTQ+ Vogue / House Ballroom Scene”.



Figure 2.5: Joshua Thunder Little

Joshua Thunder Little (Oglala Lakota) is currently a doctoral candidate in History at UC Riverside. While Joshua was completing his two bachelor's degrees at UCR, we became friends after enrolling in a new Ethnic Studies course where everyone picked a Native American language of their choice to study. Since then, we've taken other Indigenous-centered courses together including Will Madrigal's Cahuilla language series, collaborated for campus events like #IndigenizeUCR, and we now keep connected through social media. Photograph taken from his Facebook profile picture with permission.



Figure 2.6: Josh Gonzales

Josh Gonzales (Xictlaka/ Mexika) is a UCR alum and has served as the Director for Native American Student Programs office since 2005. While hanging at the office and volunteering at events, I had the opportunity to learn from Josh about his life experiences and ideas regarding Indigeneity across the U.S./ México border. By coincidence (or perhaps destiny), I joined the same Danza group as Josh Gonzales. For over thirty years, Josh has been practicing Danza, the last fifteen with Kapulli Teuxihuitl with his wife,

learning Nahuatl language, and raising their two children in ceremony. Photograph taken with permission from NASP office homepage.

Ask. Listen. Learn.

Protocol is always at the forefront of my mind. I constantly questioned myself “Would talking circles be appropriate *or appropriative?*” I demonstrate my anxiety and openness in navigating this question through a written sketch between myself and Will Madrigal in May 2020.

Will Madrigal was the first to respond to my proposal and called me the following afternoon. I answered the phone with my thumping heart in my chest. *Was he offended or felt called out from his comment in my thesis? Did I ruin our friendship and rapport by suggesting a talking circle?*

"Miyaxwe Will, how's it going?" I greeted him timidly in a mix of Cahuilla and English language. His cheerful reply that he and his family were doing all right immediately pushed back my initial fears. Our classes at the University of California, Riverside had all recently been moved online, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Will shared how the Cahuilla language lessons he had been teaching on campus –a four course language series I had just completed with him –were easily transferable online. Except for the loss of vocal participation and immersion, he quickly adds, jogging my memory to him and John Preckwinkle (a guest teacher) gathering us in a circle and teaching the tertiary introductory class a Cahuilla gambling game to review our numbers.

Will brought me back to the present, "So hey, the reason I am calling is about your email yesterday."

A lump in my throat made it hard to swallow so I mumbled back, "mmhmm".

"So, I wanted to talk to you about the talking circle; have you ever been in one?"

*This is it; he is going to call me out on being appropriative. Why didn't I attend any of the talking circles started this year in NASP?*⁵⁰ After a pause, I admitted that I have ever been to one and felt the need to reinforce that I have been learning extensively on their pedagogical use in classrooms. I rambled on that I did not see myself as an expert or spiritual leader, however, I hoped that this approach to sharing, listening, and learning together could guide our conversations.⁵¹ I didn't breathe as I waited for his commentary.

Will shared that he has been to a few, then went on to explain the talking circle process, which is supposed to be a spiritual or psychological exercise together. "It's a lot like what was on the First Nations Pedagogy site you showed. We are in a circle, there is a talking stick and whoever is holding it gets to talk; and it is the responsibility of everyone participating to listen and of the teacher or Elder to facilitate." *Of course, this is too sacred for an interview, what was I thinking?! I hope I can fix this situation.* He compared the talking circle to a peace pipe or sweat lodge ceremony, asking if I have been to one of those, but I shyly replied, "I have not".

He continued, "There is no expectation of expressions, some cry, there is protocol, often prayer and smudging; it is a very emotional-interpersonal thing."

⁵⁰ While I had not attended any in-person talking circles at the time of our phone call, a week or so later I attended a virtual talking circle hosted by UCR's Native American Student Programs (NASP) in preparation for my talking circle interview.

⁵¹ Conversations on a tense subject such as the historical use of Aztlán erasing local Indigenous peoples of the southwest and does Danza belong in powwows.

I thanked Will for sharing with me and that I would rethink our group interview because my honest intentions were to check-in and follow up "in a good way" with them.

Will said, " I think it's appropriate for a follow-up."

"The talking circle?" I asked, hopeful.

"Yeah, it reaffirms Indigenous teachings and ways of knowing and doing, at the same time you are using this in a good way." Hot tears began to stream down my cheeks. It felt like a boulder had been lifted off my chest and the lump in my throat cleared. Breathing steadily again, I shared my gratitude for his words and blessing. I was so nervous that he or the others would scoff at the idea. Will reassured me we were good, and I could imagine his smile on the other line as he explained how Elders teach us a "humble-heart approach." Our phone conversation ended soon afterwards, and I sat there relieved in warmth and love.

Doing Research *in a Good Way*...

The scene I just shared demonstrates the fears and insecurities of fieldwork often left out or unedited due to informality. Or perhaps it is the perpetual anxiety of my own imperfections that I am afraid to commit to paper. However, I push these obstacles aside because I believe this vulnerability and doing things *in a good way* is what Will referenced in our phone call.

Our talking circle group interview took place May 15th, 2020. One of the most enlightening (and unplanned) experiences from the talking circle interview, which then became the inspiration for this chapter, was discussing what it means to do things *in a good way*. I have always wanted to dedicate time to understanding this phrase so often

spoken among my community. Near the end of our opening round of conversation, Will Madrigal introduced the phrase *in a good way* at the end of his turn. The next round, “piercing the surface” was intended to reflect on a Danza in powwow clip I had recorded from the 2018 UC Riverside powwow we had all coordinated and participated in together. Instead, it became this very reflexive moment between the five of us on what doing things *in a good way* meant to each of us.

Setting the Scene

Below are excerpts from the first talking circle group interview I conducted –with Will Madrigal, Joshua Little, Josh Gonzales, and Cuauhtémoc Peranda. By reading the following transcription, I hope readers are able to experience how talking circles can decolonize the group interview by decentering extractive or harmful research dynamics and centering the needs, interests and desires of the participants. During this specific talking circle, for example, readers will see a group of Indigenous people working through conflicts, disagreements, and varying perspectives on Indigeneity. If this were a presentation, I would have snippets of our interview for audiences to experience. Instead, I encourage readers to practice compassionate listening by taking time and space to read our dialogue. Consider this an opportunity to practice compassionate reading. Before transcribing this interview, I listened to our recording again, fighting off the academic urge to take notes. If you happen to be reading this chapter for inspiration on methodology, please take a break from highlighting and scanning for important points.

A note on my transcription: the parts in bold throughout the interview transcript are for guiding readers to the most definitive parts within the dialogue, as well as points

relevant to the question posed for that talking circle round. Sentences in-between asterisks “*” describe movement or physical descriptions in the moment of the interview, whereas sentences in-between brackets “[]” describe post-interview reactions at the time of transcription, or comments that offer additional comprehension and analysis. Providing readers with descriptions of my observations of each speakers’ physical actions as well as my post-interview thoughts is key to translating the value of Oral Tradition into text. Lastly, dialogue is written out without quotes because everyone is speaking in a talking circle transcription, however, there are inner quotes ‘ ’ to indicate when a person is replicating another voice, referring to a saying or phrase, or when speaking as another person.

Oral Tradition is so much more than words. Listening and being in talking circles necessitates those kinds of interactions and observations, which is why I included them in the transcripts in this chapter. I use these same conventions for all interviews and talking circles in this dissertation.

*Computer screen is colorful with a ‘90s-inspired clip art underwater zebra background. I am wearing a colorful flower romper and my hair up to show off my purple Frida earrings that my grandma bought me in the barrio near her home. I am figuring out how to set up the recording as friends join the call. *

Jessica

And you all should be getting a pop-up; I think for permission.

*Will Madrigal flashes on screen, sitting in his kitchen wearing a cool grey T-shirt and wireless white earbuds. *

Will Madrigal

Uh-huh.

*Screen flashes to Josh Little chilling on a virtual beach with palm trees blowing. He is adjusting his camera, sitting up close to the screen, and his hair in two fine braids. *

*I come back on screen. *

Jessica

Okay. Thank you so much. So, I'm just going to go over talking [circle] protocol that I am sort of adapting... [I have so much uncertainty in myself and in my choice of language that I never notice until I am sitting here transcribing my own words to text]. Again, I am not claiming to be a spiritual healer or any sort of expert in talking circles. I just really like the way they layer conversations and give everyone a chance to speak or/and listen to each other. So that's why I have chosen to go this route. And thank you for kind of helping me adapt it to an online situation.

*Looking over at my notes on my other monitor, I pause and take a deep breath before going over the protocol with them. *

Piercing the Surface

Moving forward in the circle to when we begin discussing *in a good way*; Will is sharing advice for my research and beyond.

Will Madrigal

And so when you want to try and do things, you want to have a **heightened- awareness** whenever you're trying to do these things. And that's not to discourage you or scare you away from doing them, just so you know that **there's a protocol and those are set guidelines to help YOU tell the story *in a good way*, right? That's what we always say as Indian people, to do things *in a good way*.** That's what we're talking about: **taking responsibility, having heightened awareness, and collaborating effectively** and lawful with those knowledge-keepers, and those Elders that are here to help you, to encourage you. So that's my take and what I know.

[Upon re-reading this section, though it didn't occur to me during the talking circle, Will and other Indigenous scholars are pushing back against old, traditional ethnography.

When researchers tended to distance themselves from the *discovered*, thereby positioning themselves as experts and focusing attention unilaterally towards the *subjects* to be understood (Ball and Janyst 2008, 38, emphasis is their own).]

Jessica

Thank you. And thank you for that concrete advice, really all of you because again I am still learning, and I want to do things *in a good way*. I wonder what doing things *in a good way* means to each one of you. Will you talk about it for you, but you know I hear that phrase a lot: doing things *in a good way*. So maybe this is another question that can take us around. What does that mean to do things, *in a good way*?

*Cuauhtémoc's face appears up-close in front of a green screened image of two backlit dancers, looks like maybe Fancy Dancers. His long black hair is tied back, wearing black framed box glasses, and a grey T-shirt. *

Cuauhtémoc Peranda

What does it mean to do things *in a good way*? **Well, the simple answer is I was taught how to do things with medicine.** But then you must define medicine, right? Then, what is 'doing,' what is 'with,' you know? **That's not a simple answer.** To do things *in a good way* was not something –like **if I was to teach that in a class, it would be very difficult to do.**”

Because– *They make a concentrated face, with a hard crease in the middle of their forehead. *

I learned it growing up: how to respect Elders, how to respect children. –I was tested on it –how to respect women, how to protect men, how to live amongst the Two-Spirits.⁵² I

⁵² Two-Spirits describes an identity at the intersections of Indigeneity and persons who embody both the female and male spirits. For some, it is an “umbrella term” or “placeholder” as specific terms for these roles differ across Nations.

was brought up learning those ways. I had my ceremony, my Warrior Ceremony⁵³ and I was tested on it: how to build the fire, how to do the sweat, how to sing a song, how to respect the spirits of things, how to listen. To the river? How to dance in the ocean, you know? **To do things *in a good way* means to do things with protocol, but not just because you know the protocol and know it's important, but to understand the layers of it.**

Land acknowledgements—before there were land acknowledgements, there was asking for permission, there was engagement with another tribe. **There was AND there still is, what am I saying there was! There's a way to talk to people. And the goal is to build more, more relationships, more peace, the goal is to create!**

I mean that's how I think of it. Doing things *in a good way* is to follow the will of Creator, and not in a Christian sense 'the way of God'. Not doing things out of fear, or the Devil. Those aren't even factors, it is simply to be in **this idea of 'life-giving,' of creation, that's the good way.** At least that's how I understand it.

[Cuahtémoc's connections between *in a good way*, concepts of relationality, and Indigeneity's ability to create and connect alludes to Mary Louise Pratt's afterword in *Indigenous Experience Today* (2007). Both recognize the umbrella term Indigenous as

⁵³ In Danza, a Warrior Ceremony is a sort of coming of age and training process that adolescents accomplish, with details varying between kapulli to kapulli. When first hearing about it, I liken it in some ways to a boy scout's Eagle Project because it involves an outreach project for the benefit of the community. Peranda shares his Ocelotl Ceremony, created and supervised under California danzante legend Chuy "The Jefe" (The Boss), who "transformed youth...to young men through a platform from which to look into manhood critically via a traditional Aztec/Mexica praxis" (Castillo and Guido 2020).

complicated but useful in academic and activist contexts because it brings to light the histories of resistance and the interconnectedness of regional, national, and global issues confronting Indigenous populations.]

Joshua Little

From what I understand **it doesn't always have to be inherently tied to culture, because not everyone is brought up in their traditional teachings because of the conditions of colonization.** People have had to respond by trying to survive and not everyone has the opportunity to be connected to those things and automatically know. You know, what medicines to use, and what not to use—**they can learn, and over time they will, and that's a part of being *in a good way* is being able to listen to each other and have basic respect for one another and hear everybody.**

You know, communication, transparency, so that's really important to understand that everybody's in/at a difference place, at a different time. **As long as they have the understanding and conversing with and treating people –just listening and talking back with them, maintaining that type of relationship.** I think that's what it means to be *in a good way*. Just to know everybody's own situation, and their life and their path, and sometimes people have a bad path, and you don't want to ridicule them, you just let them be. Just kind of step away for a second, unless you need to respond or address some situation, because that's a part of it too. Maybe they'll come back later in your life, and vice versa, so I think that's what it means to me.

*Josh Gonzales, wearing one of his famous cool Native graphic t-shirts; this one is black with a blue deer or elk graphic. Josh, like Joshua, is also sitting in on a virtual beach front, except no trees and more warm sunset tones. His hair is braided back in a single braid, wearing black stud earrings, and his goatee is starting to grow out. *

Josh Gonzales

You know for me growing up, from the ceremony, you have an understanding of the different things that need to be done. Some of what folks have already mentioned is obviously **being respectful and understanding, and really getting that advice from the Elders. You are doing your due diligence of going out and learning from the Elders.** When you do things in a good way, you're praying about it, thinking about it, getting advice from the Elders, **you're taking that advice and taking it with every step and every breath that you take with that.**

*He pauses for a second to think, then continues. *

How you present yourself. You try to do that in a good way, that's what we say. **And so, you're always constantly thinking about those things from the teachings and lessons that you learn from your Elder, from your community, from your children.**

Praying about it, thinking about it in that way. That's always been my thing that I grew up with. Try to do things in a good way. I think that's more or less what it is.

There's a lot more to that but you know, like folks mentioned the common things of being respectful and really just doing your best. Being with those lessons that you learn or are continuing to learn. **But also learning to be humble about it.** Be willing to learn

and take those lessons. That's how we learn, right? **We do something wrong, we learn from that mistake, or you seek that advice and try to make that understanding. But you don't do the same thing over and over again. You try to learn from those mistakes and do things in a good way.**"

Jessica

Thank you, Josh [Gonzales]. Will, do you want to add to anything? Also, I know you mentioned something called a **humble-heart approach** when we talked on our phone call. I don't know if you want to talk a little bit about that as well.

Will Madrigal speaks over his two young boys' voices playing and laughing in the background

Will

Yea, lots of great words from everybody. And while you guys were talking, I was thinking about how *doing things in a good way* can **allow for an Indigenous Futurity**. And building a future, a viable, sovereign, future for our next 7 generations to come. So, if you're in that stage of spiritual awareness and doing things in a good way, **then you learn throughout your life, accumulating knowledge to be passed to the next 7 generations to ensure that there are a next 7 generations to come. And that their future is built on what you learn from ancestors 7 generations in the past. Not to be**

exactly like them or to live in the past but to learn from the knowledge of the past, to bring it into the future, is what I was told by the Elders.

[When hearing Will introduce the phrase, Indigenous Futurity, I think of my first encounter in Karyn Recollet's 2016 article, where she explores the concept through the processes of remixing to transcend the containments and erasures of settler colonialisms. Indigenous futurity is a growing topic with Indigenous communities. For example, this year's Medicine Ways Conference (May 2023) annually hosted by UCR NASP, the students chose the theme of Indigenous Futurity, which they defined as "a movement consisting of art, literature, comics, games, and other forms of media which express Indigenous perspectives of the future, past, and present in the context of science fiction and related sub-genres." Indigenous Futurity is also apparent in popular culture such as the many iterations of memes depicting Baby Yoda wrapped in a Pendleton blanket and burning white sage.]

Will

Knowing that that knowledge is there to help you in your unique situations, whether it's a crisis, the good times, whether it's the bad times, times of loss, losing loved ones, the hard times that we're going through with this COVID pandemic. We know that what we do today will ensure the next 7 generations to come and the tools and the knowledge to carry on. And I think that that also **translates to and is akin to doing things with a humble heart**. You do things with a humble heart, I was told, you will be recognized for

it even though that's not your intention. **Your intention is to uplift others. To celebrate others who can contribute to the knowledge base that you are accumulating as a human being throughout your life. It is synonymous, with doing things in a good way, doing things with a humble heart, doing things for others, doing things that you know are gonna benefit others,** was my take from what the Elders have passed. The knowledge they passed to me. I hope that that kind of explains what you wanted me to explain about it?

*He smiles. *

Jessica

Thank you so much for just taking a moment to all think through with me. Because hearing you all share, it's kind of what I think about when I hear that phrase. **I think of listening, and I think of putting your heart out there, not doing it for yourself but for community. I really like how people mentioned not only to listen and respect your Elders but also to think about the generations, like children. You can learn from your children, and young people, all the different age groups are important to consider.** When so often we think about ancestors and Elders, but we can learn from everyone in the community, you know everyone has something to contribute...

Will *in the middle of laughs* "Yeah! When we're not busy spanking our kids!"

I begin to laugh

Jessica

We can learn from them.

*I hear others join in laughing. *

Will

Sometimes that's how we interact with them, you know it's like you said, it's the approach. You know even parenting with a humble heart, you can learn a lot, and I have. **You know sometimes it's hard, you want to whoop your kids for being a shit, but that's what I mean by heightened awareness, spiritual awareness. You can learn from your kids, other adults you might have just met,** maybe you're exploring a new friendship or connection with a colleague, or professor, mentor. I think that that all translates to doing things *in a good way*. The continual pursuit of knowledge, right?

*He pauses and I wait patiently not knowing if he is finished speaking. * [This patience is a vital part of Indigenous talking circles and sharing of any kind.]

To better yourself and better your community, not for the sake of knowledge or institutionalized academic prestige that we all have to fight in academia and in the institution. For me, that's more fulfilling, that gives me a better understanding of why and what motivates me to continue in the institution to get that PhD. I'm always thinking **'What am I going to do with it'**. It's not the end all just to get that degree, it's a high

mountain to climb, it's a tough project. **But what are we gonna do, what am I gonna do for the next 7 generations? And how do I do that in a humble way; not to be self-serving, egotistical, that type of living.**

Thinking to myself and processing Will's last words

Jessica

Mmm

I was processing, then realize everyone is waiting for me

Does anyone else have anything to add, or final comments on this subject? I want to transition to the next round of questions.

Josh Little

I think it's awesome that collectively, or really anybody in the world, when we say **do things *in a good way*, everybody has their own way of saying that in their language.** Some people do know the language, some people don't, so by people all having this **collective understanding of being respectful towards one another. Just shows the respect that cultures have within humanity and in themselves, how they meet newcomers, whether or not they've had relationships before, or they're just developing new ones, it's just a commonality that people have within their ways of knowing.**

Jessica

Good. Yeah. Thank you for bringing up the language. You're right, there's **so many different ways to say *in a good way* or ways to think about it and imagine it in the language.**

*I look at the time, noting about an hour has passed since we started. I ask everyone if they need a break, but no one needed it. We move onward, deeper in our talking circle conversation. *

Delving Deeper

Jessica

I am going to move onto our next part, it's a little bit—

*I get nervous; now is the moment of truth. My lips pierced together as I scan the virtual roadmap page for the “delving deeper” portion of our talking circle. *

—I don't mean it as a

*I start over. *

I don't know how I want to talk about what I wrote about in my thesis.

I take another deep breath

So, I had a chance to speak with each of you and each of you are in my thesis at some point.

*Playing nervously with my industrial earring between my thumb and forefinger, I continue. *

In my journey of understanding ‘What is Danza doing in powwow?’ I am just going to highlight what I learned from each of your interviews, and then, what I concluded. Just so

you know, this is about the whole Aztlán thing with powwow and Danza and what does it mean when they [danzantes] say Aztlán, and how it is a contentious, or a point of tension [between people and perspectives] in my thesis. Okay so, I am just going to share, and then, because I never had a chance to follow up with all of you for my thesis, I want to have that time now for any comments or questions or talk throughs.

I take a deep breath and dive in.

So back in January 2018, I spoke with Josh Gonzales, and he gave me info on NASP, the UCR Powwow, his personal history in relation to Danza, as well as some introductions into the complexities of Indigeneity in the U.S. for those with Mexican ancestry. Later on, around Spring, I talk about Will and Joshua L. calling Aztlán ‘bogus.’

I use air quotes with my two hands around “bogus.”

And its impacts on my understandings of Indigeneity, land acknowledgements, and how Native American/Indigenous relations...

*I hold out my hands separated. *

Can sometimes come in conflict...

My hands come together

With how Chicana/Xicana relations...

I sway outwards with hands

Are put forth.

*I make a fist motion down, like I am putting a flag in the ground. *

And then, I had a 2-hour interview with Cuauhtémoc; this still was Spring or maybe early summer of 2018. And I share my sentiments from my conversation with Will and Joshua [Little] and other Josh [Gonzales]. And then, Cuauhtémoc and I had a conversation on what Aztlán meant to them, to Cuauhtémoc. And then I end this part of my thesis by reflecting on what does Aztlán mean? I try reframing it as a symbol of this homelands and spirituality of practice and not this sort of—

I motion thinking and pointing with my hand

What you [typically] think of when you think of Aztlán; as that map of México when they had that whole land they just rewrote as Aztlán. So, I write in my thesis that it is not a place in our realm but something else, that is embodied knowledge. And that we're all still trying to figure out who we are as Native peoples because of all these layers of colonization that have clouded who we are as peoples and how we understand ourselves.

[In this moment, I was recalling Jennie Luna's scholarship in virtual presentations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 500 years of colonization Indigenous peoples have been renamed (indios), mislabeled (mestizo), and erased (Mexican Americans), but in the last few decades we have begun to rename ourselves (Chicano, Xicana, Indigenous).]

And that's how I end it; we are all still trying to figure this out and this is how it shows up in the field. I thought Aztlán was this territory claim thing **Thinking about the 1960s-70s Chicano movement in United States and its legacy**

And then I find out that it erases Indigenous peoples!

*I make mind blown actions with fingertips expanding from my scalp. *

Duh! So, it was just this whole learning process for me on what Aztlán meant and is doing in the powwow space and how it's doing something else that's not doing what people may have thought it is doing like how it was historically with,

*I motion my fist like I am putting a stake in the ground. *

'This is Aztlán; this is our land!'

Will

Yeah. *Roaring kid sounds in the background. * It's funny, I should have asked you before, but I don't remember saying Aztlán is bogus.

*He chuckles. *

Maybe I did. **I apologize if I did because it's not what I meant quite** [sic]. I think that my experience with this ideology/philosophy/belief system is limited too. **I'd like to learn more.** I have only heard a bit from others and like you explained the same claiming territories over other Indigenous Nations that have existed and continue to exist as a Nation on their homelands. So, to claim another tribe's homelands for whatever gain—I don't know.

*Josh Gonzales pops on screen with his head bent down and hand on his head in thought or listening in closely. *

Will

But I just wanted to let you guys know that that's the extent to my understanding and exposure to this. From what I've also heard, it also has some connections to the Chicano movement. **There was a political movement, a social movement. The Chicano movement to explore the identities of the Chicano people, who they were, and their relations to space, and in relations to geography, and in relations to Indigenous identity. And I think that this ideology of Aztlán has a connection to that.** But I am not educated enough to make a comment on... but yeah, I don't remember saying it was bogus. I am just not educated on that ideology, but I'd like to know more, and I'd like to know your thoughts on that and how it's connected to Danza, and powwow, right? Okay.

Joshua Little

Yeah so what I understand, Aztlán is the ancestral home of the Aztec peoples, from what I hear. I took Chicano studies in sophomore year of undergrad, and I remember learning a little bit about that and I responded to the professor at the time when I was taking the class, saying 'hey but isn't this an issue of contention between Indigenous peoples from México and Indigenous peoples in the United States?' Because a lot of the academic texts I have read, more so some of the cultural context through Public History [his emphasis through the Public Policy program here at UCR] and images, artwork also, tends to say that Aztlán or people of Mexican Indigenous ancestry would say that the current—and I am going to say the political states and borders right now.

He looks up in thought while counting on his fingers

“–It would be like California, Utah, Arizona, New México, I don’t remember all of them –but nonetheless that’s from my understanding of it. And maybe they did call that place Aztlán, ‘cause you know, I know that all those hundreds of tribes that lived in all those current politically colonially defined states and they had many different languages and maybe they did call it Aztlán. [Note that Aztlán is a Nahuatl name which comes from the Uto-Nahuatl or Uto-Aztec language family which covers over 30 languages from the Northern tip of Wyoming through the Southwest and Greater Mexico borderlands, down through Mexico.] And maybe they did share this place and traveled to and from the borders. I am sure it happened all these years ago and I don’t know enough about the migration or stories, so maybe they did call it, but they have to understand that there are hundreds of territories and tribes that existed there. So my response to this kind of idea is that you can’t colonize an area, it is a shared space if your people were there at one point in time.

*Josh Gonzales has a hard thinking or concentration face, turned the side. *

Josh Gonzales

Umm...I think it’s ...you know some folks...

*His voice trails off searching for words to begin. *

There’s a lot that comes with this idea of Aztlán; from my understanding and teachings as well, it’s a little bit different than some of the interpretations that have come along with it. From my understanding, again it is kind of **similar to that Eagle and Condor, this rebirth or this re-ignition of people trying to get back to their Indigenous ways.** And

so, I think that was taken on a little bit more, you know in the '60s there was that identity and folks that were trying to reconnect. **Especially folks that were living up here [By here he could mean Southwest or the U.S.], but from México or what we know now as México. From my understanding, I mean if you looked at the name Aztlán, it's a breakdown. If you understand the language, 'the place of the herons.'**

There are places –I have been to places down south in México where they call it Aztlán. But I don't know if it's because of that, you know they're naming it that. But I think it took on another formation once it was used in the '60s. You know that was something that I know a lot of people took it [Aztlán] to another place. **And I think that's kind of going back to that place of storytelling, 'well this is what this means.'**

And then you have a whole group of like, 'well this is what it means,' but in reality it took away from the actual meaning of it. And so, you have folks that were not truly understanding. You know, even with the word Chicano, and I am not too familiar with Chicano but I kind of started hearing it more with Chicano. That's another kind of **continuing that displacement of the language.** I think when they tried to—in the '60s—**folks were trying to understand and make those connections with their Indigenous side.** Because if you look at it, they use Chicano, Chicana, and that's using Spanish right? **It was trying to blend two identities in a sense.**⁵⁴

And for me, I think we grow, and you start to learn, like 'oh, wow, okay,' and you identify within –Like I said for me growing up, I have heard of the word [Aztlán] and I

⁵⁴ This displacement, detribalization, de-Indianism of those of blurred Mexican or lost Indigenous ancestry is messy and complex but has been transcribed and felt through art, literature, and scholarship.

have heard the statement, but for me it was **an acknowledgment of getting back to our ways and understandings and learning about an Indigenous background. It was never about claiming of space.** But! You might run into somebody who is claiming a space and it's like no, that's wrong.

*Shaking his head, then he immediately raises both his hands and shoulders up like 'am I right?' I nod my head in agreement. *

Josh Gonzales

It is totally wrong. **For me growing up, it [Aztlán] was a matter of, you know, it is this place in your heart—**

*He places his hand onto his chest. *

That you carry with you, but it's like that understanding of going back and relearning your language, relearning your traditions, and being in that state of mind. Rather than colonial terms, and I think for all folks, right? For Native folks, for all Indigenous folks, a lot has been lost. **And so, within our own Nations, we've had to overcome some of these colonial, historical pasts, this trauma that has occurred.** So, I think this is just one way of a Nation or a group of people trying to **reclaim in the sense of their identity—who they are.** And like I said for me growing up, I never understood it [Aztlán] or took it to the point of reclaiming, taking places over, it was just that thing. **And as you may know, as folks traveled through the areas, there's certain maps of places where people traveled around.**

*He is making swirling, trailing motions with his finger. *

That's been out there [the migration maps], with like, 'this is where folks from down here traveled up and down.' And you know those are the trade lines, those are things that occurred.

[As introduced in the last chapter, the late Bobby Whitebird (Cheyenne) and longtime Emcee for our UCR Powwow often spoke about these trade routes and connections between Indigenous Nations from the North to the South of the United States borders.]

Josh Gonzales

Again, another interpretation is that—

*He uses both hands to make swooping up and sweeping outward motion. *

'Well, that's Aztlán'

Then, he makes an 'I don't know' shrug with his shoulders and chuckles

And so, it's another interpretation. It's taken to another level, especially when you get like, I don't know what Professor you're taking [to Joshua Little] **but I know there's just some people that really are not knowledgeable of the history and the actualities.**

And then, they interpret it and take it. They copy someone else's—

*He signals the word copy in air quotes. *

Theory and ideology and they can be wrong. It's just like 'well you didn't do the due diligence and you didn't do your *good way* of really understanding. You're just taking another person's interpretation. And so yeah, that's why you find a lot of levels

of, I would say **consciousness**. It exists within all our Nations and Tribes. We might have someone that—

*He stops himself. *

We can go into it, but that's a whole 'nother conversation. I don't know how it really—

*A confused expression appears on his face. *

It kind of pertains to Danza, but I think it comes back to more the identity and place. I don't know how that [sic] fits into your thesis in regards to Danza and powwow, but that's a little bit of my take on it. There's a lot more to that too; I could be here all day.

*He chuckles. *

Jessica

Thank you for sharing that Josh [Gonzales]. And thank you for your questions, Joshua [Little] and Will. This is the learning; we are all learning together so it's—

I lose my train of thought in processing everything being said

This is truthful. Thank you. I am seeing connections with Danza and Powwow.

I put my fingers to my temple in thought.

But they're not really intellectual to share right now [sic].

[Transcribing this now is painful, because I wish I had opened up and shared my initial thoughts no matter how incoherent. I wanted to help connect some of those dots I was seeing between Aztlán, Danza, powwow, and Indigeneity. Maybe I am making a bigger

deal out of the whole Aztlán situation than still exists today. Danza excluded from powwow seems to be more of a consideration between differing powwow committees' traditions and participants of the powwow themselves. I digress.]

Joshua Little

Just one more thing.

*I normally would let Joshua Little say what he needed to say. However, I remembered that in my talking circle protocol, I would allow everyone to speak on a particular topic first, then circle back around for follow-ups. *

Jessica

I want to give Cuauhtémoc a chance to speak.

*I hold out my pointer finger then make a circling motion, continue. *

But hold onto that Josh [Little] and I will let you before we move on. Cuauhtémoc, do you have anything?

Cuauhtémoc

Umm yeah, I'll say this about Aztlán. Aztlán is a character in *The Lion, Witch, & The Wardrobe*, it's the Lion. Aztlán has been co-opted by many different kinds of people.

Apparently—

* They lift and swing their right wrist out in front like they're spilling the tea. *

There's an Aztlán in fucking Wisconsin, so I just learned about that. There's a place, a temple place that is misnamed Aztlán. So that's hilarious.

*They say in the driest toned voice possible. *

Aztlán is as bogus and as invalid as Two-Spirit. Like Two-Spirit as an idea is bogus and Two-Spirit as an identity is really important and sacred to some people. There are powwows named Two-Spirit. Aztlán is like a story, it's a myth, it's been made up, but at the same time it has unified people and has created organizations. Yeah, I'll leave it there because **I don't think that Aztlán can't be all of those things.** In fact, **it becomes more powerful and has more significance as a bogus thing, a truthful thing, a story, a goal, all those things. I think it needs to be all that.** Otherwise, we start getting lost in assumptions. **And I think tracing the roots is the work of academe or for a decolonized intellectual practice.** That –like what Will was pointing out –find Elders and find stories, like be honest about where you're hearing these stories or these memes, they have significance. And though it seems like it might not, it's important.

As far as I am concerned, I have never seen a military action by any people who claim Aztlán to hurt other Indigenous people or Black people, or Americans in a way that has caused a war or even a battle. And **that makes me angry, because if you're—or if people are really going to claim that then do some kind of fucking violent action!** **And I have not seen that. I am very for violent action. Like there needs to be destruction, if it's gonna have any kind of political power.**⁵⁵ And what are you

⁵⁵ I find it important to note this conversation takes place at a time in the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 when Black Lives Matter protestors and others in solidarity took the streets across the United States after the wrongful murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by city police.

destroying? Are you destroying Black communities? Are you destroying white institutions? Or are you just destroying other Indigenous people? Or are you just saying shit and—

They shake their head side to side

I don't give a fuck.

*They chuckle. *

You know, **I think where it connects with Danza—**

*They look intently into the camera, back at us. *

Is that it is creating something, right? Like if people are under the banner of Aztlán, they're dancing, well then, creating dance you're creating a practice, you're doing something, you're making journeys. Okay now it's interesting.

*The inside of me is screaming, yes! That's exactly why I am mesmerized by this cross-cultural intersection! There is some sort of conflict resolution happening between Nations, generations, and colonial histories between powwow organizers and Danza practitioners invited to participate. *

Cuauhtémoc

You know it is not just words. So, I don't know what has been created with Aztlán, maybe it's with Danza, I don't know. But that's where it's interesting.

Jessica

Thank you. Josh Little, did you want to comment?

Joshua Little:

Yeah Josh [Gonzales] was saying about ideology and speaking to students from the MeChA⁵⁶ organization within recent years, and yeah, a lot of them or people in recent years, and a lot of them are you know undergraduate—3rd and 4th years, 1st years, whenever they start to join an organization. Within the past few years, **it's been more of an ideology [Aztlán] on how to treat people and not of a specific place.** So, it's kind of their version of *in a good way and how they interpret it, from what I understand. **So, I just wanted to add to that, from what I have heard from more recent years from the youths who are involved in that organization.***

Jessica

Thank you, Josh, [Little] for bringing up MeChA. I don't know if you [all] know about MeChA, but it was started in the Chicano movement times.

As I try to recall the Mexican American, Chicana, and Mestiza lineage of history that I had been learning bits and pieces of over the years

But it's about students trying **to use Aztlán ideology to get, yeah, it's about land claim, but also about equal rights and opportunities.** Because of what they see [and experience] in the educational system as Mexicans were basically treated like Natives,

⁵⁶ MeChA is an acronym that stands for Movimiento Estudiantil Chicax de Aztlán or Chicano Student Movement of Aztlán and is a United States Mexican American/Chicax student organization that began in the late 1960s to combat segregation and discrimination in education. In 2019, the organization decided to drop references to “Chicano” and “Aztlán” from the name over concerns that these terms are homophobic, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Black.

they were classified as Natives (in California and other parts of what we call the Southwest). **And so, they had separate education systems.**

*I part my hands apart to emphasize segregation. *

And obviously they were poor education systems, compared to the Whites. **So, I am kind of coming from that era and then also you're right it is used as a land claim, with the maps that you see, and in the language of, 'this is our land.' You see all the images and the stories that are passed down. But now, you know, talking about generations and time, changes, there are different interpretations happening of what Aztlán means and is doing for people, and that's what I am interested in. How it's moving away, and maybe how if you un-layer all these interpretations, then maybe you can have a better understanding of what's happening** [through the 500 years of colonization]. **And not come in with conflict, of 'Oh look at them! Look at them [danzantes] creating another circle within our circle, like why are they doing that?'** So that's where I am coming at with this and I didn't paint anyone in a bad light. Yes, I did mention that you called it bogus, Will and Josh [Little]. But how I wrote about it was that it was really an eye-opening experience for me because like I was also kind of on that bandwagon with the Chicano movement, and learning, 'Oh yeah, we're Indigenous!' and learning and doing it in a very, **we see it's a very machismo way of how it was practiced and done.**⁵⁷ **You know, not thinking about the local [Indigenous] communities and just thinking about certain [individual] agendas. So yeah, this is**

⁵⁷ Machismo is described as aggressive masculine behavior among Latin American cultures. For more information on this point see Daniel G. Solorzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal (2001).

where I am all coming from, and I did not mean to make it seem negative or on any one person.

*Reading Will's face, I see he wants to say something. *

Will, would you like to speak?

Will

Yeah, and to that effect, the way I have kind of grappled with it. In terms of narrative, I think that Indigenous communities have had a long history of battling dominant narratives—the narratives that erase us—the narratives that justify our subjection, our poverty, our living conditions, the suppression of Native rights, etc. **So, when we hear another narrative that's attempting to be politically, socially dominant, we get very apprehensive.** And it might have been that day we were talking about it **and I apologize for that. But that's just how I have been grappling with it, I think. Now that I think about it a little bit more, during our conversation...**

*His voice trails off for a moment. *

When narratives tend to be dominant over other narratives or other Indigenous peoples' communities, there's gonna be some apprehension.

*I wait for him, not sure if he is finished. But after 30 seconds or so I see that Will was indeed finished. *

Jessica

Definitely. Thank you. I want to open it up to anyone else who wants to share anything on this subject.

*I pause for a few moments and look around patiently, smiling. *

Okay I don't see anyone. I just want to thank everyone again for taking this time with me.

*I place my hand on my chest where my heart beats. *

I am just so appreciative.

*Now my eyes start to tear up. *

—like I am trying not to cry, but I am just really happy to be with you all.

[Tears form again as I am transcribing, remembering the ephemeral experiences of compassionately listening and learning together.]

Yeah, I am just really grateful.

*My face is now rosy, warm, and puffy from fallen tears. *

So, thank you.

*I turn away and fan myself, trying to pull myself together though I know mentally that tears are okay, and I am in a safe space. *

(Gutierrez Masini et al. 2020, 46:28-1:28:11).

Reflecting Over a Year Later

Our circle was successful in reconnecting with each other, diving into research questions, and talking and thinking through the complexities and responsibilities associated with an Indigenous identity. I teared up, not quite crying, but eyes swelling with tears twice, both in the beginning when talking about my grandma's recent passing and near the end expressing my gratitude for them taking the time out of their lives and

schedules to meet and speak with me. I am continually humbled and admire their trust in me and in my research process. While these were my friends and colleagues and it mostly felt like a conversation in Cahuilla class or in the NASP office, I struggled to fully relax in the moment. I am grateful for their trust and agreeing that I could record so that I could practice compassionate listening and be present with them in the talking circle.

With more time in the talking circle, I would have liked to discuss the videos of UCR Powwow and Danza, however, I do not want to burden the participants right now in this pandemic. At the time, I did not feel comfortable enough to sing for them. In the few talking circles that I have experienced, the facilitator offers a prayer, song, or story. In our talking circle, I decided to share a story over a song because it was something that I created and not from somewhere or someone else. It also would be a chance for them to check in on my theorizing and understanding of the Eagle and Condor legend I so often hear referenced in cross-cultural Danza and powwow situations.⁵⁸ Will, Joshua, Josh, and Cuauhtémoc were at first very kind, appreciating elements of my story, then after getting more into it they were more critical of my story telling. Through this process of checking in, I am second-guessing whether I want to incorporate or build upon my creative interpretation of the Eagle and the Condor legend. I do know how to move forward *in a good way*: finding an Elder, hearing the stories and learning the heart of the lesson.

I acknowledge that these findings may be from one or two talking circles with friends, but “focus on the potency of the small and partial momentary...seems particularly necessary given its potential to counter prevalent discourses around

⁵⁸ See Gutierrez Masini 2018 conclusion for an example with a popular meme.

Indigeneity as partial” argues Jacqueline Shea Murphy (2022, 21-22). In her new book, *Dancing Indigenous Worlds*, she positions “resurge-instances” or small, momentary moments that “regenerate teachings, language, and knowledge” (ibid.). Drawing from a discussion by Kahnawà:ke Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, Shea Murphy calls for “witnessing what may seem ‘statistically insignificant’ but are part of an ongoing arch of Indigenous enactments beyond settler-colonial structures” (Shea Murphy 2022, 8). For these reasons, I see compassionate listening and slowing down the research process by reflecting and learning in conversation as crucial to bringing these “resurge-instances” forward.

While I am relieved that the pressure is over, I also miss their presence. The talk on Danza and their interview excerpts coming into dialogue was better than I imagined. Despite Will’s initial apprehension by using the term bogus to describe Aztlán, I felt that by resharing and opening a dialogue between all of us, participants could reconcile and work through more vexing areas of Indigenous relations between those from present-day Mexico and the United States. During the circle and readers engaging afterwards can witness that it was a learning moment for all of us when Will called Aztlán out. I had intended to make a clear connection between Aztlán and Danza in the powwow space, however, our conversation led to embodied connections together by creating multiple layers of meaning making. From sharing my research with them, I am more careful now than ever on the ways I relay stories that I hear from Elders or people in the field. Not any single individual is the ultimate culture bearer because everyone has different interpretations of a moment in history and all those stories and perspectives can be

valuable. With more time, I would have given the other talking circle participants an opportunity for questions of their own because near the end it felt a little rushed.⁵⁹ In closing our talking circle interview, each of us had the opportunity to share lessons learned in this time together and advice to take with us moving forward.

Upon reflection on this experience over a year later, I am still convinced of the benefits that talking circles (with proper preparation, permission, and humility) have in approaching group interviews. While I cannot speak to every research or interview situation, I believe that decentering the researcher as investigator and participants as knowledge-bearers aids in creating a multi-layered meaning-making experience that everyone can contribute to and learn from. By focusing on the persons and non-persons being listened to, rather than the results of my interview, I practiced compassionate understanding and sitting with our knowledge sharing process.⁶⁰ I do not mean to reinforce a binary between research and Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, but I understand *sitting with* (considering ideas, questions, etc. over time) and *being as* research (Wilson 2008, Margolin 2021). Additionally, I acknowledge that talking circles only work in a community built on mutual respect and trust. To avoid overstepping any boundaries, I recommend leading a talking circle after establishing healthy relationships with participants and attending a talking circle in your community.

⁵⁹ In future research endeavors, I would love another talking circle with participants in this dissertation able to ask me questions, and our reflections of participating in this learning journey together.

⁶⁰ By non-persons, I am acknowledging the ancestors are with us in our talking circle, including human generations and cosmological teachings from the elements and universe. While knowledge may be shared verbally by human participants, wisdom comes from previous experiences and the world around us.

Based on our conversations that day, doing research *in a good way* (to us) involves consulting with community (including children and young people) and Elders, offering gifts and reciprocity (from listening and taking time to understand someone's story, to monetary gifts and giving credit where credit is due), following Indigenous protocols (and understanding why they are in place), and medicine (in both the Western and Indigenous sense of the word). I want to reiterate that I don't advocate for a pan-Indigenous translation to doing things *in a good way*, but rather offer our specific and personal interpretations of the expression.

Many readers may have even heard the phrase *in a good way*. It is often used colloquially to justify negative language used in a positive manner, like "this movie made me cry, but in a good way" (Avalos 2021).⁶¹ This qualifier to say a probably offensive and not funny joke does not compute with any of the ways that I have heard it used in my everyday life across Native communities. I recognize that my understanding of doing things *in a good way* in this chapter is heavily male-influenced, considering that three of the five talking circle participants are cis-men and one is "Two-Spirits Butch Queen". As a balance, I dedicate the subsequent chapter to women, and in other chapters include my own decolonizing feminist lens, and perspectives from Two-Spirit people.

Let us return now to the anthology *Voices from the Ancestors*, which opens and closes with two poems (Medina & Gonzales eds 2019). The first by Dr. Sara Salazar, a second-generation Chicana and Religious and Philosophy Studies educator, offers strong

⁶¹ The example in this sentence was created in conversation by friend and colleague Claudine Avalos (2021).

imagery through accessing the healing energy of listening and recognizing our own pain. Meanwhile the second poem by Chicana poet, educator, and activist Dr. Naomi Helena Quiñonez, is an expression of her deep knowledge of the power of “womxn” gathering in circle (375-376).⁶² These women inspire me to write my own poem, telling my interpersonal and multisensory experiences within talking circles. In closing this chapter with this poem, I aspire to add to their canonical conversation of listening and decolonizing.

An Ode to Talking Circles

Talking circles
Sharing circles
Healing circles

Clear-headed and present

Opening prayer and medicine
Sage, Cedar, Tobacco, and Sweetgrass

To set good intentions

Yes
But also,
 Song and Dance
 Reciprocity
 Love
 Time, encircled together.

All Medicine as precious as Mother Earth

Talking circles
Sharing circles
Healing circles
Co-create a safe space

⁶² It is unclear from the short passage whether the author includes cis-women and girls or inclusive of non-binary participants in their use of “womxn”.

To...
Slow...
Down
 Time together

Talking circles
Ancestral gifts
Of Interconnectedness
 Support
 Truth-telling
 Mourning
 Compassion
Compassionate Listening
Passing a talking stick
Listening
Taking turns
Listening
From the heart
 Deep, deep
 Reflection
Listening

Talking circles
Sharing circles
Healing circles

I learn to learn.

Grounding myself
Gaining perspective
Gathering accomplices
To face
Challenges of Yesterday,
Today,
And Tomorrow

Making the world, our world
One group of lives
Stronger
One circle
At a time.

3 (pah) Embodying Indigeneity: Refusal, Self-Determination, and the Body

Introduction

I begin this chapter with this comment below because Jess Delgado encapsulates the complicated, intertwined nature of embodying Indigeneity and the contradictions, nuances, and distinctions that are encompassed in that idea. Readers may feel as though they are reading parts of a jigsaw puzzle and I encourage you to sit with that sense of wonder.

Jess “Tzapotl Flores” Delgado identifies as an Aztec-Pipil whose “mama's land” (as she says) is El Salvador and has lineage from the Choctaw nation in San Francisco, California. She is an educator, archivist, author, and graduate student at Claremont Graduate University. During our talking circle, she shared the following:

With this conversation and writing that I feel **reflecting is healing and community is definitely healing**. So, moving forward, embracing that, and putting those two things at the intersections of everything that I do. And **being able to do things as much as possible in a slow burns sort of format because it's hard to really slow down when things are due, when we have timelines, and we have 1,000,001 things that need to get done**. And so, for me writing and having these sorts of conversations—in Two-Spirit talking circles as well. **It's very, very energizing and healing and, I could feel the energy in my body changing and feeling enlightened and better after having these conversations and talking these things out**. It's almost like, I remember I took a writing course or [in] a writing group. And they said that **when you write things out, you hold everything in the body and [at] a neurological level**. So, when you write it out, it's like getting poison out of your body if you have negative. And so, I feel the same way **with talking things out; talking circles are sacred and**

important. And so that engages with community and reflection and hitting those hard things that sometimes we don't want to talk about. Like we're talking about powwows and the issues that have come up or the positive experiences that we've had. So, **it's good to acknowledge the duality of things [both good and bad] and to just talk things out in general.** So that's, that's something that's really sticks with me...And just continuing to know that I don't know everything; I think a lot of us in the circle can say that. So, it's been really rewarding to do that, and continuing spiritual practices and engaging in more communities and reflection as healing, is very helpful... (Jess "Tzapotl Flores" Delgado, August 15th, 2022, bolding is my own for emphasis on embodied knowledge).

September 2021

Dear Grandma, I am writing a series of letters inspired from a poetry piece performance that I was blessed to witness a couple of days ago at the Two Spirits Weaving Festival.⁶³ And right now, in this ongoing pandemic, it's really hard to write. So, I'm dedicating time to writing what I am working through in my dissertation, in hopes of understanding, processing, through these letters to you. I know you never spoke English other than a little bit (like when grandpa joked about understanding English), but I am hoping that wherever you are transcends languages and you understand this. I really want to talk about these things with someone, especially you. You understand, because you also grew up away from our birth family, only to reconnect again. I hope to also spend the rest of my life learning about and loving where we come from.

The stylistic choices of Shawn Wilson in *Research is Ceremony* influenced me to choose a non-traditional format for this chapter (2008). In letters to his sons, Wilson shares personal motivations for conducting research with the hopes that they “serve as a medium for [us] to develop a deeper relationship with [him] through the already strong relationships” he shares with them (12). Following this idea that relationality requires intimate knowledge of myself and motivations, it is my hope that this chapter aids readers

⁶³ On September 18, 2021, Weaving Spirits Festival of Two-Spirit Performance co-presented, Dr. Jennifer Lisa Vest's “(Re)Counting (Wo)Man; “a one-person show that explores indigeneity, sexuality, queerness, history, ancestral traditions, anti-black racism, and strategies of survival in a mixed media tapestry of poetry, storytelling, images, and film.” Dr. Jennifer Lisa Vest identifies as a mixed blood Florida Mikasuki Seminole poet, philosopher, performance artist, and healer from Chicago ([Vest 2021](#)).

in understanding my autoethnographic research. By weaving in these *Dear Grandma* letters between interview segments with Itztli Arteaga, I share myself processing the interview alongside my own autoethnographic embodied experiences. I play with form throughout my dissertation as intervention, but particularly in this chapter to mimic Danza's rupture of settler colonialism.⁶⁴

Why did I bring these women together?

After my first conversation with Itztli Arteaga, I began composing letters to my grandmother. I am processing ethnographic experiences and conversations through a series of letters to my late paternal grandmother, Margarita Gutierrez Ortiz. Though written after talking with Itztli, some letters are dated before that conversation, as I challenged myself to write missives on behalf of my (not-so-past) past self to my grandma. I believe connecting, even posthumously, with my grandmother through writing is an important part of the work she herself began as an adoptee searching for her roots.⁶⁵ Furthermore, it is my own way of practicing rematriation—an important

⁶⁴ For some examples involving disruption of form, see Sally Ann Ness, "Dancing in the Field: Notes from Memory," *Corporealities*, Routledge, 1995; Susan L. Foster, "[Choreographies of Writing](#)." Online lecture performance, The Live Arts Studio, Philadelphia, March 22, 2011; And Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, "Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 32.

⁶⁵ Reconnecting with my birth family coincides with my beginnings of graduate school in 2016. I do not know whether it was the young ethnographer in me or premonition, knowing time with my grandparents would not be forever. During a summer visit, I decided to interview my grandparents for two hours and recorded it with their permission. This recording is one of my most precious recordings; I asked them about their lives growing up, how they met, the story of my birth parents, and everything up to their lives today. This is how I learned that my grandmother was separated from her family (parents and brothers) as a child and worked as an indentured servant.

Indigenous feminist movement.⁶⁶ Letters enrich reflexive ethnographic description for readers to understand me because I, too, am a person with biases. My family's interests in Indigeneity could be seen as part of a long lineage of Mexican nationalism as mentioned in my introductory chapter (are they reconnecting *in a good way* or also stuck romanticizing the past). Though my conversation with her is one-sided in these letters, I find myself walking a similar path to the one my grandmother initiated in her own time.

In addition to the letters and speaking at length in one-on-one conversations with Itzli Arteaga, I also conducted an all-female talking circle with Arteaga and five other Indigenous women from UC Riverside. I have included more female perspectives in my current research because in my M.A. research, I was passively hearing, as opposed to compassionately listening, to those who most often share in powwow spaces and are given the most speaking time. This passive listening approach led to a cis-male-dominated point of view of powwow and Danza intersections. Without practicing critical self-reflexivity, I did not pay close attention to how some Native hubs and spaces were and are still influenced by colonial structures like cis-heteropatriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia.

Focusing on women and Two-Spirit perspectives requires active perseverance and critical attention to the gendering of spaces. In centering my own feminist, decolonizing lens, I share relations made along the way; how our minds, bodies, and spirits make sense

⁶⁶ Rematriation is an Indigenous women's led movement and reengaging in a spiritual and intellectual way of life with respect for Mother Earth. In some cases, such as in the Bay Area of California, rematriation mostly means giving back the land (Sogorea Te' Landtrust, "[What is Rematriation?](#)")

of our lived experiences, and processes in embodying Indigeneity. I believe in this vulnerability. I believe in mending broken ties. I believe this needs to be written and seen beyond the worlds of powwow and Danza. The talking circle participants in this chapter also are longtime friends and colleagues who entrust me to listen and tell their story *in a good way*. This chapter's analysis is built primarily from two separate talking circles—participants will be introduced when their relevant interview is introduced in the text.

A reminder on my transcription style: parts in between asterisks “ * ” indicate gesture or additional gesture in the moment of the interview, while parts in between brackets “ [] ” provide additional clarification and analysis. I begin with Itztli Arteaga's photo and introduction from our productive dialogue, so that readers can associate her face and body along with her words in this chapter. Trying to not disembodify the intimacies of our conversations, I am still limited to the digital dissertation medium. If this were a presentation, I would play (with permission) snippets of our interview recordings for audiences to experience the voices of my friends and interlocutors. You'll note some additional phrases are bolded; this is my selection to help highlight key *felt* and analytical moments during the conversation that link back to chapter themes.

Drawing on an online interview with Itztli Arteaga, a young female danzante, and the oral history of her kapulli (family and Danza group), I demonstrate a deeper understanding of the politics of building Danza and powwow community relations in

Southern California. Since my first powwow in 2014, I had been so enveloped in the unexpectedness of Danza and the endless debates of their Indigenous belonging that until my interview with Itztli I had not thought much beyond this incommensurable phenomenon. Based on that conversation, I am less interested in the blurred lines of who is and isn't Indigenous. This attitude shift (more so among my generation and the youth) along with service and scholarship from colleagues in Native American Programs across California campuses has transformed my research direction.

I examine embodied Indigeneity and self-determination through the rejection of external categorizations and through building relations between and across all Nations. In this chapter, I explore what it means to embody Indigeneity; what it means to hold onto truths since time immemorial throughout your body, mind, and spirits; and what it means for danzantes to choose refusal rather than recognition as a path to self-determination.

Embodied Ethnography

“Body is the *central* space in which knowing is embedded” (Manulani Aluli Meyer 2008, 223).

Dance studies and Indigenous studies come together in relation to embodied knowing, argues critical dance scholar and cofounder of “Indigenous Choreographers at Riverside” Jacqueline Shea Murphy (2022). Both respect the centrality of sensory knowledge, or “the ideas that your body is a *source of vital knowledge* and that what you feel, sense, or perceive through it is an *act of knowing* recurs readily in both fields” (59,

emphasis by the author). Embodiment is the double sense of the body as both experiencing living in the world and as a context for knowing about the world (H. Ritenburg et al 2014, 69). Therefore, embodied autoethnography as a method involves myself and my body moving, investigating, and learning the dance I am writing about in relation to other bodies and their lived experiences.

Colonization has changed everyone, whether colonizer or the colonized. The effects of colonization are present in my body and expressed by the bodies of those with whom I engage, and therefore colonialism affects our thinking, our actions, and our relations. The effects of ongoing colonialism are not necessarily felt by everyone, but that does not deny the fact that some groups of peoples are investigating and reconnecting to Indigenous traditional knowledge to decolonize. Revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and expression through dance ceremonies is not unique to Danza in the United States and Mexico, as evidenced by Grupo Sotz'il from the highlands of Guatemala. In their multidisciplinary and collaboratively written article, Guarcax, Firmino-Castillo, and Brito-Bernal elaborate on the theory/practice of relationality, or Ruximik qak'u'x, that is the heart of Grupo Sotz'il's practice (Guarcax, Firmino-Castillo, and Brito-Bernal 2019). Grupo Sotz'il is an eight-member group of intergenerational Kaqchikel and Mam multidisciplinary artists with the restless desire to deepen their knowledge of Mayan philosophies and spiritualities. Their voices, images, and movements are interwoven and continue the traditional stories and knowledges of their ancestors. The authors explain Grupo Sotz'il's reconnecting process as, "Dialoguing among ourselves, we can dialogue once again with the stones, and also the stars, the moon, the volcanoes, and a multitude of

terrestrial and celestial beings, of all dimensions in space and time” (113). For danzantes, learning through movement is a scholarly, political, and historical act, therefore embodiment is critical to theorizing about themselves and their relations to the world.

Hupa writer, educator, and activist Cutcha Risling Baldy is a model for decolonial praxes in academia and in community, particularly with regards to embodied ethnography. I have been following her career and scholarship since witnessing her dissertation presentations at University of California, Davis where she began investigating Hupa women’s ceremonies, addressing gendered issues introduced by colonization, and showing how coming-of-age ceremonies are powerful relational embodiments of Indigenous gendered ways of being. One key example of bridging community-based work with research is through Risling Baldy’s embodied ethnography, which is a powerful recognition that “revitalization of women’s coming-of-age ceremonies [intervenes] in this discourse tangibly recapitulating Native feminisms not only in modern context but also as foundational to Native cultures and societies” (2018, 7). By positioning coming-of-age ceremonies as powerful embodiments of Indigenous gendered ways of being, Risling Baldy argues that academic discourse and definitions of Native feminism, self-determination and decolonization are truly modern-day praxes or “reinscriptions” of ceremony. Her embodied decolonial praxes through scholarship and work within academia is evidenced in her actions and presence as an activist, dancer, educator, and feminist.⁶⁷ My commitment to centering the body in the process of

⁶⁷ Cutcha Risling-Baldy’s fearlessness in calling out settler colonial practices in academia is evidenced in scholarship, pedagogy, and everyday practice. For an example see her lecture,

decolonization and relations to Indigeneity is an affirmation of bodily wisdom and experience as critical component of Indigenous methodologies (Risling Baldy 2018).

A couple months after defending my dissertation, stepping away to process revisions, and then returning, I made deeper connections between talking circles and Danza while dancing together with my kapulli. I thought about how both (talking circle and Danza) gather our bodies together in a circle, facing each other, calling in the ancestors and our more than human kin. Reconnecting. Sharing our energies. This Friday was a particularly smaller practice. Fewer attendees gave us more time to explain steps and significance of our dance for Water, Agua, ātl. Through the acts of processing the knowledge behind our steps, feeling the ground beneath in synergy with beats of the huehue, the shells, and rattles, the entire experience all comes together as embodied knowledge.

Witnessing our young leader invite anyone to lead, not just those with their full regalia and dances, instantly felt familiar. Like a talking circle. We each can take turns to share our experiences and good energy. However, we don't have to. In Danza practice you can always pass, but I have never seen this in larger, formal ceremonies. When you choose to be in the middle, you are the center of attention. Dancers follow, drummers follow, and everyone recalibrates to a new leader and their style. Just like when it is someone's turn to share in a talking circle and we all hold space for them. Holding space is related to my ideas of compassionate listening because they nurture an environment

“Every time I give this talk somebody ends up writing me a letter trying to explain why they can't give stolen land back: decolonial musings, radical imagination, and building Indigenized futures” (2020).

where there is no judgment, just unconditional support and love. The embodied visions and voices while navigating intergenerational trauma explained in Chapter 1 are but one example. This embodiment of our Indigenous futurities through relationship-building, holding annual ceremonies, and teaching future generations encompasses another facet. Just as our steps mimicking the ocean waves and river ripples remind danzantes of our relations to water. In Danza, together our good energy facilitates reconnection to Mesoamerican roots, healing, and reciprocal relations. These are some examples of the Indigenous frameworks embodied in Danza practice.

Theorizing Refusal as Indigenous Self-Determination

Refusal can mean more than saying no. Emerging scholarship traces how refusal can be generative and strategic, illuminate limits and possibilities, and yet, different from theories of resistance (McGranahan 2016). In their opening collection, McGranahan et al theorize and approach refusal as ethnographic subject and mode, in both formal and everyday relations, in ways that “stake claims to the sociality that underlies all relationships, including political ones.” (2016, 320). The authors go further and declare, “Refusal is often a part of political action, of movements for decolonization and self-determination, for rights and recognition, for rejecting specific structures and systems.” (320).

Self-determination takes on many forms. In international laws according to the United Nations, “All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development” (United Nations General Assembly, 1966a, Article 1, 1966b,

Article 1). Historically in both the United States and Canada, Indigenous peoples have been recognized through political practices such as treaties, blood quantum, and civil liberties. Settler societies are driven by the need to eliminate Indigenous peoples to secure their land, and eventually dominate all ways of life (Wolfe 2006).

Native American philosophies show but do not present arguments; instead, they open up a space for engaged listeners and learners to find meaning and understanding without making or declaring truth or meaning for them (Cordova 2007). I honor and show respect for this way of unfolding complicated ideas by also acknowledging the risks of false claims to Indigeneity. There are two pieces in a special issue of *Wicazo Sa Review* (Spring 1998) that reflect on the complexities of Indigenous self-determination: Jack Forbes's provocative piece, "Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Implications for Native Studies and for Native Intellectual," and Vine Deloria, Jr.'s analysis in conversation with Forbes entitled, "Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Looking at the Windmills in Our Minds" (1998). Jack Forbes (of Powhatan-Renapé and Lenape descent) traces the beginnings of Native American Studies, including the establishment of the first Indigenous-controlled colleges and Native Studies programs, and how founding members deliberately placed academic discourse about self-determination, liberation, and decolonization, as both "political and economic liberation for our communities and nations" (1998, 13). There was both optimism and concern for the development of institutionalized Native intelligentsia. Forbes encourages Native intervention in academia because "Intellectual self-determination allows us, I would think, to reclaim and/or examine *all* of our indigenous heritage, including that part that

does not fit in so well with the standard stereotypes held by white society, and now by most of us as well” (Forbes 1998, 21, emphasis by author). My intellectual journey including learning more about my own personal identities and history coincides with the Native American and Indigenous legacies left for us to follow at the University of California, Davis and Riverside. It is a skill of careful balance because it is an intellectual struggle to break through myths created by the United States, Canadian, and other governments, however I acknowledge that the institution functions to reproduce structures of hierarchical power (one where Indigenous values were nonexistent).

Not only is it an immense effort to dismantle long-standing colonial theories and ideas, but Standing Rock Sioux historian and activist Vine Deloria, Jr. highlights a trend (in the 1990s) among “white wanna-bes” to claim Indigeneity through unenrolled grandparents who preserved ancient traditions while in White society (1998). This abuse of self-determination creates a situation where “being Indian is a state of mind,” a perception even among “urban Indians” who “come to believe that powwows and parades are what distinguishes Indians from other people” (30). Speaking to the current generation in 1998, Deloria Jr. warns that “*individual self-determination and intellectual sovereignty* can be scary concepts because they mean that a whole generation of Indians are not going to be responsible to Indian people, they are simply going to be isolated individuals playing with the symbols of Indians” (28, emphasis by the author). Both Forbes and Deloria Jr. encourage future scholars to center actions like clan or kinship responsibilities and continued commitment to community, so that the practices of self-determination do not become solely an intellectual endeavor with the mind. Instead,

scholars advocating for Indigenous self-determination should maintain a relationship of checks and balances with Indigenous peoples throughout their praxis.

Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson has been pivotal to understanding the force and consequences of governance through space, time, and bodies (2014, 2017). At a time when electoralism in the United States, predicated on the idea that political will is communicated via a vote, is heavily questioned, Simpson argues for refusal rather than recognition as an option for producing and maintaining alternative structures (2017, 19). She outlines how law in colonial contexts enforced Indigenous dispossession and then built a structure that granted freedom through legal tricks like consent or citizenship as justice (20). Drawing on treaties, interpersonal Kahnawà:ke history, and literature, Simpson demonstrates refusal as mode of analysis, a political practice, and what “holds on to a truth, structures this truth as stance, and as the revenge of consent (26).⁶⁸

If there is a structure of settler colonialism, there is also a structure of refusal. In the words of Audra Simpson, “that refusal is simply to disappear, a refusal to be on the other end of Patrick Wolfe’s critical, comparative history—to be ‘eliminated’ (2014, 22). Danzantes refuse to stop dancing or musicking and therefore refuse to break that relationship to land. And especially for me as a danzante away from her ancestral homelands, I acknowledge my responsibilities to original and current caretakers in the spaces I occupy. For far too long, settlers have been privileged with defining Indigeneity

⁶⁸ Simpson clarifies that revenge in this sense is “an act of historical consciousness, of asserting this against the grain and this, avenging the prior of wrongdoing” (Simpson 2017, 26).

as an ethnic or racial marker of difference, or in ways convenient for Indigenous erasure.

In the *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*, Maylei Blackwell summarizes this well:

Many government officials and policy makers have based Indigeneity on continuity to a territorial framework, which fails to acknowledge that many Indigenous groups had territorial bases that included seasonal settlement and migrations based on hunting, social and ceremonial gatherings, and trade. Other Indigenous pueblos and nations have been falsely divided by colonial borders. Relationships to land are at the heart of Indigenous political and spiritual beliefs and practices, and yet, there is a growing recognition of how even when Indigenous communities are deterritorialized, they retain their cosmovisions, civic and political structures, and relationships to their ancestral homelands.
(2017, 100-101)

This is another reminder that despite attempts to break Indigenous ways (e.g., migration and international relations) through centuries of cis-heteropatriarchal, settler colonial thinking and dominance, that embodied connection never ceased to exist.

Following Audra Simpson, “if Indigeneity is taken to be a social political fact, all other arguments based on right to land are rendered spurious” (2017, 19). In other words, just like there is an agreed-upon nature of voting as an expression of political will, accepting and engaging with Indigenous peoples as sovereign is an expression of political will.

Refusal as a political strategy has the generative capacity to redress historical exclusion and marginality.

The processes of embodying Indigeneity are simultaneously refused and reconfigured in relation to time, place, and society. Those surviving relocation eras and the residential boarding school system in the United States experienced differing processes of assimilation and genocide than those surviving Spanish then Mexican settler colonialism. Ethnic studies professor Evelyn Glenn highlights Walter Hixson who argues

that the British settler colonial project in North America was similar to the Spanish and the French in that the English ‘embraced patriarchy, private property, and Christianity, but the emphasis on the settlements of families and communities distinguished them’ (Hixson 2013, 29; Glenn 2015, 55). While French and Spanish settlers were mainly men and took in Indigenous lovers and wives, English forced out Indigenous Nations through family-based colonization and westward expansion. In the still expanding, early United States, genocidal raids and warfare resulted in the enslavement and human trafficking of some Indigenous Nations, while other Indigenous Nations adopted the culture and ways of life of white settlers (including ownership of black slaves) to survive. The Underground Railroad that provided freedom to those enslaved in the United States ran both north and south into Mexico, which abolished slavery in 1849, yet started placing restrictions as early as the 1820s. What emerged out of compounded European, United States, and Mexican settler colonialism is a racialized and gendered national identity that normalized male whiteness (Glenn 2015, 58).

For *danzantes*—whose bodies transverse boundaries and generations—*Danza* is that unbroken musical, corporeal, spiritual connection to Indigeneity. As Kristina Nielsen elaborates on the embodying Indigeneity in her 2017 dissertation: “...[Adolfo] Arteaga identifies as Native but not as Aztec; nonetheless, there remains a strong sense of pride in an Aztec-ness that can function as synonymous with Mexican as an Indigenous national identity....When Arteaga speaks historically regarding ‘our people’ —a phrase commonly heard in *Danza*—it refers to all Indigenous peoples in Mexico, and, in some instances, even across all the Americas....however, for *danzantes* in the diaspora, they

create a practical way to compose new communities open to anyone who identifies with Mexican or Indigenous cultures in Mesoamerica" (Nielsen 2017, 69-70). Arteaga's refusal of external labeling and subsequent self-determination is a generational process. After I conducted my fieldwork and revisiting literature, I realized Nielsen's interlocutor was the father of one of my interlocutors; in the above text and in the entire subsection, Nielsen upholds him as an example of a Danza leader who has learned the tradition in the United States (Nielsen 2017, 63-70). I continue the Arteaga family story here by sharing his daughter's experience with Danza.

In our interview conversation, Itztli Arteaga explains this embodied Indigeneity when I ask about her identity:

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

I never asked you [but we were nearing the end of our interview and I didn't want to mislabel or assume her identity]; do you identify as Indigenous?

Itztli Arteaga

I'm not sure. I don't think I've touched on this, or I've kind of been touching on it a little bit—with myself, I was like, 'do I?' I think I do?

She says hesitantly

Indigenous? I'm not sure. Yeah, I'm still in the process of dissecting what those words mean, exactly. But I also haven't taken the time to really, sit down, and think about it.

Because I'm like, 'Well, I know.'

I feel I'm Native. I feel like I'm Indigenous. I feel, Danza has given me the ability to be a lot of stuff as well, you know? I mean, yeah, I don't know. **It's hard to narrow down what I am into one single category, because I feel it's—I'm not really too sure.**

Because being born here [in the United States]. It's definitely a little more confusing.

Maybe if I was born in Mexico, I'd be like, 'Oh yeah, I'm Indigenous.' [That's] there; but being [and having] been here. I feel kind of Native. I'm not sure. It's just yeah, **it's something that I need to explore a little more.**

[Itztli Arteaga's reluctance to identify as Native or Indigenous during our first conversation was not apparent in our follow-up talking circle with other women. Though I have not had an opportunity to verify why this change occurred with Itztli herself, I note similarities to my own experience in being reluctant to identify at one point in my life and feeling more comfortable later. These fluctuations in identity reflect the complicated nature of what it means to embrace self-determination and embodied Indigeneity.]

Jessica

I guess I kind of assumed [your identity] because I met you through NASP (Native American Student Programs) and most danzantes [who I have met] identify as Indigenous or Mexican. Or Catholic sometimes.

[This segmentation of identity (e.g., identifying as Indigenous, Mexican, or Catholic) reflects the impact of colonization and its insistence on assimilation and therefore subjugation to various group identities. Truly embracing and embodying Indigeneity requires showing people in their full, complex humanity.]

Itztli

Yeah.

Jessica

But okay. Yeah, I guess I wanted to clarify. You're still finding your way. And I'm still finding my way. I literally just figured out what detribalized means [a couple years ago]. And I identify as a detribalized accomplice. And so yeah, we're all finding, finding ourselves, because colonization has separated us from our histories, right?

Itztli Arteaga

Yeah, which is another reason why I'm not too stressed about finding out. It's because I feel like 'well, all these labels.' **They benefit us, and we have a way to kind of take them back, to take a stand. But in the end, in another sense, it's like, 'well I rather *just be*, than try and put a label on it.'**

And yeah, 'cuz I feel it's just, it's a very societal thing now to put labels on what you are, who you are. Which is a great thing, 'if you want to label, take a label!' There's many of them out there, you know.

[This resonated with me upon reviewing later because Arteaga is speaking to the way identity can feel like social capital now. Diversity statements and diversity hires are prime examples of this practice in my everyday life in academia. I feel expected to prove my identity, which I view as a complex amalgam and extension of my unique relations and experiences, despite being required to articulate “my fit” at a given institution or program.]

Itzli Arteaga

But **I feel I'd rather *feel what I am* instead of put something on.** So, while I'm still exploring and learning, the more information I get, the more I'm gonna adapt and evolve. But yeah, I feel I haven't really sat down and thought about it too hard, because it's like, **'well, I like being in the moment of who I am.'** And **I don't want to interrupt that right now with a label because I feel it also puts you in a box. And yeah, I don't think I'm meant to be put in a box.**

Jessica

I understand. And this is why I hate the census, because I don't know what the hell to mark on—

Itzli

Right, right.

Jessica

Thank you for sharing that.

Itzli Arteaga's attitude on labeling herself is refreshing because rather than focusing on labels she gains confidence (re: self-determination) from feeling and becoming who she is. In a similar vein, she is open to adapting as she continues to learn and grow. I remember one of her first NASP meetings because of her bubbly personality and in the back of my mind wondering how some NASP folks seemed to know her already. It wouldn't be until coordinating my first UCR powwow later that year (2017) that I came to learn their legacy and witness the labor of the Arteaga family. Itzli Arteaga's oral history of her Danza journey, including her coming-of-age ceremony, the production of a short video, and the refusal of her father, demonstrate different facets of embodying Indigeneity.⁶⁹

September 2017

Dear Grandma, I met a woman my junior year of college in a historic Native American Music and Dance course that Dr. Jessica Bissett Perea and I brought back to UC Davis.⁷⁰ She was a Mescalero Apache, Chicana woman named Maggie Steele and her and her mom Betty taught us how to make a powwow hand drum and sing powwow

⁶⁹ This would take another re-checking in with Itzli Arteaga that goes beyond our current capacities, but it may be possible that she is able to be more comfortable with the idea of not labeling. This could be another powerful example of refusal and self-determination.

⁷⁰ For further discussion on this course and its connection to reciprocity see chapter 5.

songs. Steele participated in *The Mankillers*, a legendary female drum group from the 1990s led by the late Cherokee Chief Wilma Mankiller. I lost touch with her, with those songs, and process due to prevalence of cis heteropatriarchy in the powwow space. At the same time, I understand that it depends on the community you're in and their protocols. Learning powwow protocol and observing how most Nations that seem to powwow, women aren't supposed to sing and drum.

I felt weird about it, Grandma. You know, I had my original community where I learned those things in Northern California, on Patwin lands, and when I came down to Riverside, I started all over with that local Native community. That required learning again, lots of listening and observing, what does powwow mean here, what does Danza mean here?

April 2020

Dear Grandma, in the pandemic I've reconnected with Maggie Steele and our songs she taught during my junior year of college. Thanks to Facebook and email, I now have recordings, which I can re-learn and learn again. I'm no longer afraid because am I supported by Elders and mentors who I can return to for guidance. About six years after birthing my drum and after learning of other woman drum groups in the area, I take on my responsibility to sing.⁷¹⁷² Although I understand the gender roles in the powwow space and do not put myself out there or insert myself, I still sing the songs in safe, accepting spaces (e.g., workshops, in talking circles, alone).

July 2021

Dear Grandma, on July 15th, 2021, I was blessed with an opportunity to interview Itztlí Arteaga just after she completed her Bachelors in Dance Studies. This was my second formal interview using talking circle theory and approaches. While there was just the two of us, I used the structure and protocols associated with talking circles to formulate my research road map and questions.⁷³ Something was different Grandma. With the two of us women, the tone of our talking circle changed from my first experience with Will Madrigal, Joshua Little, Joshua Gonzales, and Cuauhtémoc Peranda (three cis men and one Two-Spirits Butch Queen). Whether it was our conversational flow or freedom from the heteropatriarchal structures in our mainstream American society, this time the talking circle felt distinctly different. The magnitude and power of us two female

⁷¹ Two examples of local female drum groups are the White Rose Singers at Sherman Indian High School in Riverside, CA and [One Drumm](#) in Claremont, CA.

⁷² In my previous chapter on decolonizing research through talking circles, I discuss how they often open and close with a prayer, and examples of this offering practice can be burning medicine, sharing a story, or singing and playing a song.

⁷³ We have published a guide on incorporating talking circle practices in academe found [here](#) (Gutierrez Masini et.al. 2022).

*danzantes sharing traditional perspectives of womanhood and spirituality was guided by our ancestors.*⁷⁴

I sang a powwow song for an interview as a way to share. Because if I'm going to ask folks to share their knowledge and wisdom with me, I want to give something back. And so, I share this song. It's a round dance song, which is meant for all—intertribal.⁷⁵ All tribes together; not as one, but together.

In other talking circles I have attended as a virtual guest, the facilitator would begin by welcoming everyone and offering medicine (sometimes a song, story, prayer, or combination). Following this practice, I began sharing my gratitude for her time and the opportunity to learn about her and her family.⁷⁶ As a gesture of appreciation and taking on my role as facilitator opening the circle, I pushed through the uncomfortability (pushed through settler colonial layers) to sing. While I started the song sitting at the desk near the microphone, I got up after the opening verse to side-step along because it did not feel complete to sing without moving around.

When listening to the recording afterwards, I felt tinges of embarrassment because I side-stepped too far away from the microphone nearly negating my gift to the Itzli Arteaga, to our circle, and to the ancestors. Upon returning to our virtual circle, catching my breath, and slowing my heart rate, Arteaga offered positive feedback and appreciation for the reverberation effect created from my singing and dancing around the room. Despite not being able to hear clearly, this proves that the medicine of dancing and musicking was still working.

Conversation with Itzli Arteaga

In *As We Have Always Done*, Leanne Simpson acknowledges that “‘Theory’ is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community, and generation of people. Theory isn't just an intellectual pursuit...It is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal with individuals and themselves

⁷⁴ By our ancestors here, I am honoring all the spirits and relatives that brought us to this moment here together and made us who we are today.

⁷⁵ As round dance songs are social songs and sometimes welcome non-Indigenous spectators to the dance along at the powwow, I sang a round dance song passed down to me called, “All People in Unity.”

⁷⁶ Trying to avoid fangirling too much, I gushed about admiring their family for a long time, first from afar, then dancing together in ceremony or powwows, and now finally getting a moment to speak with them.

holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives” (2017, 151). Through formal education and lived experiences, I have learned how to name and theorize colonial structures of oppression. As a critical autoethnographer I am both witness and take part of this collective effort to decolonize academia. Situating my research in university settings opens an opportunity to embody theory as praxis and witness the deep knowledge that resides in those around me. Knowing that I am not alone in navigating and dismantling these colonial structures is a powerfully motivating force in the process of Indigenizing academia.

My interview with Itztli Arteaga demonstrates that despite childhood exposure to Indigenous practices like Danza, some people, like Itztli, pull away from their traditions as young adults, only to return to them later with renewed appreciation. As someone who did not grow up with these practices, I was initially surprised at her rebellion and her return to the Danza practice, given that my own rebellion against family cultural practices (i.e., Catholicism and attending Catholic church) did not lead me back to the same practices of my youth. To me, Itztli and her family’s path represents an example of refusal and Indigenous self-determination. Below are excerpts from that interview.



Figure 3.1: Itztli Arteaga

Itztli Arteaga

My full name is Itztli Xochitl Arteaga. I've just graduated UCR; I'm an alum. I'm doing really great. I'm excited to be talking with you. I'm a little nervous. Just because I feel a lot of stuff I would really have to think about, because it's [Danza] **been my everyday practice every day. It becomes so normalized.** So now I really have to think about everything and, dig deeper, but I'm excited for doing that because that's not something I do every day. I guess I should say, 'cuz I know people say, I've been dancing for these

many years. Well, I'm 23 now. So, I've been doing it [Danza] for 23 years. My whole life. And I guess that's a little background that might be useful in this moment.

[This is an example of embodiment in Danza because it is highly sensorial, allowing danzantes to explore through five senses (sight, touch, hearing, taste, and smell) how they may understand themselves as beings and as part of the universe. From burning copal resin and wearing feathers and traditional regalia, to the movement of our dance steps and taste of salt from my own sweat, Danza embodies collective ontological possibilities and productions (Huerta 2019).]

Jessica

I hear a lot of people say, 'I grew up in ceremony.' I'm jealous because I wish I had that. But I'm also very grateful that I was able to find that in my early, mid 20s because I still have the rest of my life too. I really like learning with the kids; it's fun.

Okay, well, since we're already talking about Danza, I want to start with our first question, **what does Danza mean to you? Why do you do it?**

Itzli

If I'm being honest, growing up, **Danza was just something that I had to do.** It was something we did throughout the week, every weekend at ceremonies. So, it was a little bit of a burden. Danza was a burden to me growing up, I think because **I was too young**

to understand what it really meant, or how it would impact me, and my life, and who I am.

She pauses before continuing

But yeah, going away to university having that little bit of separation. I was, ‘Oh, I get it now.’ It clicked! **It finally clicked as to why I sacrifice all the blood, sweat, tears, hours of just, you know, prayers, and ceremony.** So, it's hard to explain, but I guess Danza means...

Her voice trails off

It is hard to explain just because **I feel like it doesn't mean one thing.** You know, it means for me, I just can't be, ‘oh it means spirituality’. Or ‘it means my love for dance or ceremony’. Like **it means, everything—life.**

I would say, you know, not to get all deep here. But yeah, thinking about it. **I don't think I could separate my life with Danza because *it is a way of life.*** If that makes sense.

Jessica

Oh, that totally makes sense. And I hear that a lot from people. I like that you say that it could be more than one thing. And you personally have your own definitions and connections to it.

February 2019

Dear Grandma, I joined a Danza group. I didn't mean to join this group, but it ended up being a perfect group because I already had some acquaintances from UC Riverside. I'm learning to dance in traditional ways of knowing and being. I am at peace, or at least more peace than I was before joining. I originally meant to join the kapulli or Danza group hosted at a counseling center called Corazon Counseling. However, I kept missing them or maybe they just didn't hold a regular weekly practice. And then I received a text message (from Claudia, who was the woman I was trying to meet with and join her group at the center) that there was another group that they were joining that week on Wednesday. That group would become my refuge; Kapulli Teuxihuitl, meaning precious turquoise family in Nahuatl. I've come to learn that this intermingling practice is a tradition done by many kapullis. They go and visit each other, go to each other's ceremonies in hopes that other kapullis will come to theirs. And this is how we have a whole network of kapullis in California today. I can only imagine how many there are where you are right now. Sometimes I imagine you are learning alongside me or in the fire we dance around. I feel you with us.

Celebration and Honor in Coming-of-Age Ceremonies

When arranging my interview with Itztli Arteaga, I did not plan on talking about coming-of-age ceremonies in Danza. However, while sharing each other's Danza experiences and memories at UC Riverside's powwow, led to the following Native feminist dialogue.

Jessica

Do you have or did you have a warrior ceremony? Or a coming-into-age process?⁷⁷

⁷⁷ This wasn't a planned question in my preparation, but instead came from listening to her share. Having only experienced my kapulli as an adult, I hoped to learn how her kapulli celebrated her life stages.

Itztli

I did. Yeah, I had the **Xilone(n) ceremony**. I'm not sure if you're familiar. Xilone(n) means young corn [in Nahuatl language]. So basically, it's when the corn matures. I did that when usually girls do it; when they start their periods. And so, I think I was 12, 14? 12? So that was 2010, really a long time ago. And now that I really think about it, I'm like, oh my God, that was 11 years ago!

So, we did ours in Watsonville. The whole process was just kind of leading up to it. I was actually a very late bloomer. That ceremony in Watsonville is hosted by White Hawk.⁷⁸ And yeah, they usually have it the first weekend of July. And I got my period at the very end of June. And so, my parents called very quickly, and were like, 'do we still have a shot?'

And they're like, 'yeah, for sure.'

So, we worked very fast on my traje [outfit], very fast, and then kind of was over. And it was a really nice experience. It really felt like being a princess for a day. The whole

⁷⁸ Almost a year after this interview, I virtually connected with the White Hawk Indian Council for Children through their Facebook Page. According to their About Me, "Our circle of Ixtatutli/White Hawk has been in existence here in the Pajaro Valley since 1983. Our fire is kindled and supported by many different circles of danza, including the people of the Temescalli and Teocalli Tlanezi Mexica, living throughout the state of California, Arizona and also Mexico. We have a continuous flow of visitors and devoted supporters that frequent our activities at temporary facilities. Since Ixtatutli/White Hawk's inception we have committed ourselves to provide the youth of our community, the opportunities to both learn and experience the culture and traditions of our ancestors. This is accomplished through danza, mural projects, drumming and singing, along with many other forms of artistic and cultural expression, locally and throughout the state. At the same time, we advocate care for the Earth, its creatures and its natural resources. The group is primarily aimed at engaging local youth who are searching for an identity. We remind them of their connection to their indigenous roots and the Earth. We provide them with support, encouragement, safety, a sense of belonging, and a family like atmosphere. We would like to stress that all our events are drug and alcohol free" ([Wiser Directory](#)).

Quinceañera aspect was almost the same.⁷⁹ I mean, obviously, there's differences, but that feeling of, 'Oh, this is just me,' even though I'm doing it with 20 other girls. It was really nice. And then building **The Sisterhood** of who basically is my class that I did it with. That was really nice also. So yeah, I did go through something like that.

Jessica

Yeah, that's so awesome! And just thinking about, if I had had that, for my first menstruation cycle time, it would have been such a joyous (rather than) embarrassing taboo moment. I just, I really honor that. And I wondered what the female version was because I've only heard Cuauhtémoc share with me their Ocelot ceremony [the name for the male coming-of-age in Danza] when they were 13 years old.⁸⁰ And so, I was like, hmm, I've never heard a female perspective.

Itztli

⁷⁹ According to Norma E. Cantú: Many young Latin American ladies traditionally celebrate their 15th birthday with a semi-secular and religious event called a quinceañera; the term refers both to the young lady being honored and to the celebration itself. "The essential components of the quinceañera are a religious celebration (usually a Catholic mass) and a dance. Other elements of the celebration testify to deep roots in European and Indigenous ritual; the quinceañera includes vestiges of both the Spanish court's presentation of the daughters of the nobility and the menses rituals of Indigenous groups such as those found in the Lipan Apache. These references to life's passage find contemporary expression in objects that the young woman carries and wears during the celebration, signifying her transition from childhood to adulthood" (Cantú 2011, 176).

⁸⁰ For more information on this coming-of age Ocelot ceremony in Danza see their recent publication: Cuauhtémoc Peranda, "Overall Prince, Now Father Lauren: On Becoming a Two-Spirit Butch Queen Father," in *Fathers, Fathering, and Fatherhood: Queer Chicano/Mexicano Desire and Belonging*, ed. Adelaida R. Del Castillo and Gibrán Güido (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 49–62.

Yeah, it's really nice. **You go through ceremony, starting out in a white dress. You go, they have an altar for each direction. And they appoint a person to give advice. So, they'll have a man for the male side, an Elder, someone for the children. And you go, and everybody gives you advice.** And they give really honest advice. Very, very honest. It's not kind of flowery. You know, it is a little bit but for the most part –like for me, I remember, on the male side, the guy being like, ‘you know what, y'all know what goes on? **You got to respect yourself.** Because if you don't know, well... **You really got to take the time to learn everybody, and every man or woman, whoever you're going to be with.**’

And that was just—I mean hearing that at 12, I was like, ‘Woah.’

I mean, I kind of already know this. **But for someone to really be holding copal⁸¹, you have a bunch of girls around you, you have your padrino's [godparents'] parents, everybody, they're just hearing all of that.** It's like, ‘oh, okay, cool.’ You know, this is a thing; I need to respect myself.

And everybody agrees with that because that's honestly something hard to find nowadays. So yeah, that was like, very impactful.

Jessica

⁸¹ Copal is a tree resin from the Protium Copal Tree and Mesoamerican cultures use this aromatic resin as incense and medicine.

Yeah. And it's good for the men to be [there]. I didn't know that the men were a part of it. But that's good that they have that interaction and knowledge of like, 'Oh, this is what the women go through.'

[This ceremony demonstrates sacredness of our menstruation and women's coming-of-age, but not in the delicate-flower-you-gotta-save kind of way, more reminding everyone in community to honor (some) women's power as life givers]

Itztli

Yeah!

Jessica

Wow! Yes, there's so many things about Danza that I love and admire. And I'm so grateful to be learning in my weekly Friday practices with my kapulli.

August 2021

Dear Grandma, before Danza and powwow, I had a traumatic relationship to my menstruation cycle. I had developed breasts early in third or fourth grade and so my aunt-figure at the time/now adoptive mother explained it to me very scientifically: my egg dropping every month to be fertilized and when no sex, then the egg dissolves and you bleed for 5-7 days. No one had prepared me for the bloating, mood swings, and cramps so painful I could barely move. But I think what started this tumultuous relationship was how it all began. At the age of 13, my birthfather had chaperoned my first trip out to see family in Leon, MX since I was a toddler for my aunt's (his youngest sister) wedding. While I had had the talk and had attended sexual education courses, I did not think this trip would be the beginning of my monthly moon time. I can't remember if I had started on the plane ride there already or my first night there. I do remember being too embarrassed or just did not know how to ask Papi (my dad) to buy me some pads or

tampons. I do remember coming out of my grandparent's downstairs bedroom (the last room I saw you in, grandma), sleepy-eyed. I remember seeing worried looks and my aunts and grandma asking me if I felt sick. I remember saying yes, not understanding what cramps were at the time, and then one of them pointing out behind me that I had bloodied my PJ bottoms. I remember them asking if it was my time of menstruation and I just nodded and cried from shame. They told Papi, who then ran out to the store to buy my first tampons and pads.

While I was prepared in the sense that I knew what was happening, I was not prepared emotionally, spiritually, or psychologically to experience my first menstruation, nonetheless in my grandparents' home. It made me think about my first experience with blood there as a young toddler. Out in the front yard there was an old mechanic's hole where their friend worked on cars. As a kid I thought the hole was the size of a swimming pool, but upon returning I realized that my childhood memories had deceived me because it wasn't bigger than a car (which I suppose makes sense, otherwise they wouldn't be able to drive over it to examine the car). I remember running around the hole, playing with my cousins, and holding a red paleta. Somehow, I lost my footing and fell in; I remember my older brother taking me to the nearby clinic and telling me that the blood on my head was paleta. "Es paleta Yessie, no llores" his words were comforting.⁸²

This blood is not paleta and there is no clinic I can go to for period pains. I wish I could remember any advice my aunts and grandma probably shared about our particular womanhood (because not all women menstruate). Before powwow and Danza, Western taboo inhibited critical dialogue because I believed it was inappropriate to ask even family or friends about their period experiences. The first few years after my first menstruations were tough; instead of the typical 5-7 day period, every month, I experienced heavy bleeding and cramps for about two weeks, 5-7 times a year. Western medicine will tell you that it takes time for a young woman's cycle to regulate, so I believed I was just one of those unfortunate souls with painstaking cramps and violent mood swings. At the age of 16, after surgery for my appendix which two doctors were 90% sure would burst, they admitted they were wrong. During the surgery they instead found numerous cysts on my ovaries and diagnosed me with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS). I immediately thought of my birth mother who had survived ovarian cancer through surgery; would I be doomed to repeat this history?

Through Danza and powwow teachings, I have learned to be patient with myself through nurturing my body, mind, and spirit. My moon time is sacred; I treat it as my monthly ceremony. I am gentle with my own expectations and limitations of what I can do. Out of respect for and to honor the powers within myself, I do not powwow drum. That is my own choice, not that of powwow pressures. However, I go to Danza practice and dance with extra white sage and a sash around my waist. Without my weekly

⁸² In English my brother was saying "It's a popsicle Jessica, don't cry."

*practice, my monthly ceremony would not be complete. I refuse to feel shame and weakness during my moon time. Moon time is my time.*⁸³

This section on female danzantes' coming-of-age-ceremony serves as a reminder to honor our bodies and ceremonial moon time. In practicing this ceremony, Itztli Arteaga and her community refuse to let settler colonial peer pressure erase or cloud their Indigenous youth's understanding of menstruation. My own reframing of menstruation and the actions I have taken to educate myself about reproductive health and resources, is another example of self-determination through living in ceremony and healing. In a time when reproductive healthcare in the United States is not guaranteed and women's rights are constantly questioned and debated, it makes sense for some Indigenous and other communities to be taking this back into their hands.⁸⁴

Following Cutcha Risling-Baldy, the reclamation of our ceremonies and simultaneous refusing of settler colonialism are tangible recapitulations of Native feminisms. As she explains:

“At the root of this revitalization is the engagement of a self-determination that embraces Native feminisms. The root of self-determination is a deep respect and connection to one's own body and to the community that is created during this ceremony. Our revitalizations, when built with Native feminisms, disrupt settler colonial and heteropatriarchal intrusions in our contemporary cultures. As we look to women's coming-of-age ceremonies as key to our continued movement toward decolonization, we must understand how our renewal is tied to the renewal of our Native feminisms and gender equality. This reclamation of Native feminisms is important to our

⁸³ Taking this time to honor menstruation is an act of Indigenist feminism. See Cutcha Risling-Baldy, “Mini-k'iwh'e:N (For That Purpose—I Consider Things): (Re)Writing and (Re)Righting Indigenous Menstrual Practices to Intervene on Contemporary Menstrual Discourse and the Politics of Taboo,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 1 (February 2017): 21–29.

⁸⁴ I say some because I acknowledge that there are communities in which Elders have kept practices and knowledge intact.

futures because it helps to dismantle a heteropatriarchal and heteropaternal system of oppression that attempts to divest Native people of their rightful claims to culture, ceremony, and lands. Coming-of-age ceremonies help demonstrate how women are integral to culture and how our cultures embody feminism.” (2018, 50).

Here, Risling Baldy is referring to her own Hupa coming-of-age ceremonies, specifically the Flower Dance, and its praxes in instilling the next generation with honor and respect for young women during puberty. Our Native feminist dialogue, Itztli Arteaga’s Xilone(n) ceremony, and my own reframing of menstruation are clear demonstrations that settler colonialism has not erased the ways of our ancestors. Even contemporary “(re)writing and (re)righting” of Indigenous perspectives on gender equality and balance are “dismissed as utopian re-visions,” but Cutchá Risling-Baldy demonstrates how a feminist analysis can intervene and provide “decolonized understandings” (2017, 6). I take up her call to intervene in contemporary menstrual discourse and I encourage those who menstruate to celebrate rather than treat it as some unclean disorder or burden. Itztli’s personal experience is an illustrative example of Risling-Baldy’s feminist theory; both are consequences of the fact that menstruation and women-led praxes were once seen by colonizers as dangerous, uncivilized, and reason to dominate Indigenous populations. Dedicating space in this dissertation to women’s bodies and coming-of-age is an act of Indigenous refusal.

Since this interview, I have witnessed a couple of *danzantes* in my *kapulli* go through their Xilone or Ocelot ceremony. As this is a private, family ceremony in my *kapulli* I cannot share details of their ceremony. However, I tell you that some children go through ceremonies blending multiple Nations’ traditions and others may never go through them. According to my teacher, in the Mexica tradition a child is not a full adult

until 26 years old, when the brain is fully developed. While I may have missed my coming-of-age ceremony, I know my children will grow up in this way. That brings me (and my ancestors) peace.

Series of Refusal: The Legend of Danza Azteca Xochipilli and Adolfo Arteaga, pioneer



Figure 3.2: Arteaga family kapulli, Danza Azteca Xochipilli, at the Tu Tu Dance Show. Shared with permission from Itztli Arteaga; her dad, Adolfo Arteaga is centered in the middle.

Adolfo Arteaga, father of Itztli, has made a living as a danzante and vendor in the greater Inland Empire and Los Angeles area for over 31 years. The legacy of Adolfo Arteaga, his kapulli Danza Azteca Xochipilli, the years of labor involved in establishing acceptance and strong relations is a testament of Indigenous resistance, refusal, and

resilience. Rather than getting lost in the blurred history and complexities of Indigeneity as a danzante in the United States, a stronger, decolonial force was at play.

Jessica

You mentioned your dad or your family earlier. And I remember that they're vendors, right. So, they're not just dancing, they're making a living at these events. And I've also kind of wondered: how does a kapulli choose what events to go to? Were you always in powwow spaces?

Itzli

Not always. Definitely in the past, like 10 years, I would say we started doing powwows. Before it was ceremonies every single weekend. And then, different Day of the Dead events, but that was more my parents would find different events that they think would be really cool. And they would always go and be like, 'Hey, we do Danza too. Is there any way we can kind of bring that to you? And then also help us out with the booth a little bit?' You know because that's one of the biggest differences. Everyone else kind of has a job, you know, they have their day jobs, or they just go to ceremony just to go, and they don't have to really worry about having been asked [to host], just being in ceremony. And for us, it was **my parents chose to make this their entire life; meaning you know, they**

wanted the freedom to go to different ceremonies, go to different places, and not have a nine to five job to like, pull them back, hold them down.⁸⁵

So yeah, being a vendor changed the aspect of being a danzante as well. But I think...

She pauses

See these are the questions that are **a little hard because I've gone to these ceremonies for years growing up, and it's the same ones every single year that I'm like, 'how do we choose to go there?'** I feel that was before my time. And now it's just kind of gone. **But wherever we get invited in or available to go, we try to go to support everyone.**

As well as to kind of, in all honesty, you go and support in hopes of, when your family comes [that] they come and support you as well. And it's like that's how you build community.⁸⁶

So yeah, some of these [ceremonies] have been in place for like 30 years, that we've gone to. I don't know why we go, you know, but others are new ones. And we're like, 'Okay, well, we don't have anything that day, weekend, luckily; let's go check it out!' You know,

⁸⁵ Itztli Arteaga is describing the spectrum of Danza responsibilities and participants, when it comes to Danza groups in the United States. Her parents make a living from vending and Danza, whereas other leaders hold other jobs outside of Danza or a nomadic merchant lifestyle. Some danzantes are participants who come in and out of Danza practice, without obligations of leading a group.

⁸⁶ This practice of a kapulli holding a ceremony and inviting other kapullis occurs throughout California. Sometimes before in the week before the ceremony, members of other Danza groups or their leaders join our weekly practice, and our leaders have described attending other's practices or ceremonies. This exchange invites danzantes to share information, exposure to different dance styles, and learning more about Danza history and culture from one another.

let's go share some space. So yeah, so it's a tough question because I'm like, 'I know, but I also don't know but I know.'

Jessica

Do your parents make the decisions or does your kapulli? Or is your kapulli just your family or is it more members?

Itztli

I'm going back, from starting way back, then long story short. My kapulli used to just be my family, just my family for a really long time. For years and years, every Tuesday, Thursday practice was just my parents, my two sisters, myself and my little brother. And that was it. And it was hard, just us going.

And I used to be like, **'there's literally no one here. Why are we still doing this?'**

And my dad would always be like, 'well, cool, we're not doing it for anybody else.

I'm not doing it for others; we're doing it for ourselves.'

...And so, for a long time, we just never had anybody; it was just us. And we really focused on prayer, **we're really very serious about it. We don't like to play, mess around,** in any type of way. I mean, obviously, it's fun; there's fun aspects.

But you know, when you get down to it, it's like, **you gotta have all the respect, or nothing,** basically.

So, after that time, we started getting a group again. We get people trickle in. Some people last only the summers, some people last a couple years. For a while, we had

students and members that were for 10 years. But being the kapulli heads, it's interesting to see how everybody kind of cycles in and cycles out. And then happens every year and happens every couple years, where you get a good batch, you stay with them, and then whatever reason, they're ready to go. And then it's like, 'Alright, cool'.

And now we're cycling out of the last batch and into our new one. And we have all new students, completely new, maybe like one or two alumni, but all are new. And we're like, 'Alright, so we start again. Let's go!'

Our group is open to anyone and everyone. And so, **it's a little hard to really kind of put down [how many members] because some people go, and life happens.** It's hard, but yeah. Consistently, at the moment, we have maybe aside from my family, like three to four members at the moment. And those are the consistent coming out with time, every ceremony. When you count the new people, or those that come kind of rarely, that's more like 20 people here and there. Yeah. So, it depends.

Jessica

I had no idea how intimate your kapulli was. But that kind of makes sense why your dance moves are so intense. Like your family has such spectacular moves; the fastest, extra twirls, extra little...I've noticed it and I'm like, 'oh, like that's cool.' I always thought it was because maybe you were an older group. But I guess in my kapulli, where you have the people coming in and out and, a lot of parents and children. I think, yeah, we stick to more, 'easy songs.'

Itztli

Yeah.

Jessica

And so, when we come together with other kapullis, I'm like, 'oh shit, okay!' This is what real dancing is. Alright, gotta go!

I face sideways and pretend run with my arms, mimicking how I tried to keep up with them. We both laugh

Okay, I'm gonna move onto some of the deeper parts of this interview. And I don't know if you knew this, but you were in my thesis already. A very brief paragraph about when I met you [at the 2018 UCR annual powwow], about seeing and hearing you talk about your dad being a pioneer. I was like, 'wow, this is fascinating!' Here, here I am with this girl [young woman] who is part of this legendary [Danza] history. And so, I have always wanted to talk to you more.

This is all I've gotten so far from that conversation with you, three years ago now. So, I guess my understanding of Danza in powwow spaces kind of has to do with...

I lose my words and start again

When I see conflict, like, ‘Oh, what is Danza doing?’ or, ‘why are they doing that circle within our powwow circle?’ I see [am understanding] that as leftover conflict from the Chicano movement and sort of like Aztlán.⁸⁷ Sort of that staking claims over the Southwest, you know, *that* movement. And then how that kind of erased all the Tribal peoples [Nations] that were there. And they [the Tribal Nations of the current Southwestern United States] are like, ‘hey, wait, you can’t call this all Aztlan!’ I think I am saying that it [this conflict of Danza not belonging] is coming from that sort of sentiments and mentality. And I guess I wanted to know, what your thoughts on that was? What are your thoughts on Danza in the powwow space? If you would like to share? Maybe personal stories? Or if you want to share more about your dad? But this is a space for you to speak on whatever you have to say about this topic.

Itztli

Yeah, I agree with you. I feel the conflict and tension that there is between Natives and danzantes is just very-

She pauses

⁸⁷ Aztlán is the ancestral homeland of the Mexica People. During the 1960s-70s, Aztlán became a symbol of the Chicano movement as an initiative to remember their history and reclaim their lands and language. The problem is that most images of Aztlán remap the entire Southwest (or lands that were once Mexico before the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848) and the entire country of present-day Mexico as Aztlán. This erases the hundreds of distinct Nations, including their languages and cultures, whose resiliency continues to thrive despite generations of settler colonialism.

I don't feel it's *our* conflict. I feel like, 'yeah, why are we? What is the reason for this?' This isn't like, 'I don't want-- I don't not like you,' you know? It's always been very confusing to me. **And very much feels like we got colonized. And this is *that*. That conflict is what is sitting in between us, but it's not you or it's not me. It's whatever *this* is.**

She uses her hand to gesture a swirling, all-encompassing motion

It used to be really bad. Because I mean, growing up, we started doing powwow. I know there were other groups that did powwows along with my dad at the same time, I should say. **I think the biggest thing that set us apart a little bit –and where we started paving the way for everyone –was the fact that my dad would make it a point to be at every Grand Entry, to do every single intertribal, every [single] one,** the whole amount of time, because sometimes they do them real long, and it's hot.⁸⁸ You had to be in there [the powwow circle or arena], all of us.

And yeah, for the exit, and giving thanks, and the closing of the ceremony. It was a point to do all of that. And I know most danzantes kind of just show up for their time to dance. And then once they're done, they're like, 'bye,' which is fine. That's, you know if that's what you're doing, that's great. But my dad was like, 'Oh, I'm not a show.'

Cuz we do dance at dinner time.

⁸⁸ Grand Entry is the opening processional at a powwow, during which all assembled dancers dance into the arena together. Line-up order is determined by local protocol as mediated by the Arena Director (Perea 2014, 112).

He's like, **'I'm not an entertainment aspect for the powwow. I'm part of the powwow; and I'm gonna make it known that I'm part of the powwow!'**

And I remember being really small and just kind of like, maybe not too small. But yeah, being in there, and thinking, okay, they're saying [referring to the Emcee or voice of the powwow], 'oh here come the jingle dancer, here is a golden age, the traditional,' this that. Then, they get to us and it's like, 'and that's all the dancers! Everybody give them a round of applause and [then her, Itztli] being like, 'why?!'

*I can hear the frustration (maybe even hurt) in her voice as she recalls these experiences. I continue compassionately listening. *

Like and just for years! And I would ask my dad, **'why do we keep going? They don't respect us; then why do we keep going?'** Everybody's giving us dirty looks; everybody doesn't talk to us. We are the outsiders. Why?

And he's like, **'no, it's not about them. It's not about them. We're here for our own thing, for prayer, for ceremony. It's not about them.'**

I remember thinking, but it's them [powwow folks] that's doing it! And never understood it.

Now I get it, you know. But the more we did it, they [powwow folks] just got used to us, I would say. **And then we started building relationships. And then we became friends. And then, here we are really warm, [and] welcome.** You know, they [the Emcee] make it a point to give us a little shout out which now, every time I hear that, I'm

always like, 'Oh, that's really nice.' Because we never had that before or in Intertribal when they kind of start naming people a little bit. Even that I'm like, 'wow!' Even to the end of powwows, you kind of go around and you shake everybody's hand, **we would go out and we were always the last ones to go. And people be like, 'nope.'**⁸⁹

And it was like, we'd go, go keep going. And some people would, you know, kind of give a little, weak one.

She demonstrates a weak handshake with her hand scrunched together, flopping around

Yeah, just like, 'huh,' you know? But we did it. And yeah, it's been hard. It's hard. And I'm glad that other, again, not all, but other [Danza] groups have kind of caught on to, 'maybe we should be in Grand Entry.' Maybe, you know? And I haven't seen too many like that [that include danzantes in Grand Entry]. But at least I've seen some [danzantes] doing the Intertribals.⁹⁰ Every Intertribal going, every other Intertribal going, you know? So, while we're still consistently doing every single one, **I'm glad there's a small change, and people are kind of getting it.** We have a long way to go with everyone else. But I think another thing that really set my dad apart, and us as well, was just the

⁸⁹ Powwow community refused to acknowledge the Arteaga family's handshakes and gratitude.

⁹⁰ Intertribal, as opposed to pan-Indian, is a term derived from powwow practice to describe the various processes of cultural exchange that inform powwow practices (Perea 2014, 113). Intertribal here in Arteaga's statement is referring to a time in the powwow when a certain repertoire of songs is used for social dancing and all dance styles may participate together.

fact that **my dad makes it a point to talk to everyone**. He'll take time and stop by and be like, 'Hi, good afternoon. Good evening.' No response [from those he greeted].

She goes on speaking as her father in a deep, cheerful tone

'Good evening!'

Like he really is like, 'Oh, I'm demanding attention right now. And you're going to give it to me!' Yeah.

And then, **doing friendship dance** more than anything. Everyone is like, 'why is it a friendship dance?'

'Well, y'all are laughing and whoever you're standing next to, you just became friends!' You're friends with everyone in the Circle. So, we made it a point to do that as well. And before, there was not a lot of people that would come out. But not a lot, maybe one, two, maybe just the kids. And then, as we started going consistently every year to powwows. I mean, people remembered it, and were like, 'Oh, that looked fun last year.' And so maybe they'll join. And **now going to powwows, people are like, 'I've waited all year for this! You're doing the [friendship] dance, right?'**

We're like, yes, we're gonna do it. Yes.

And they're like, blowing their minds like 'I'm ready.'

So that's also nice to see. And then nice to have, you know, the Native [powwow] dancers as well come out for that and participate, and not just have it be spectators. So yeah, it's been a long journey. But that's like this short little overview of it.

Jessica

That is,

I pause, speechless

Wow.

I take a few more breaths processing the Arteagas' journey

I learned so much right now. I love hearing your testimony of, like, this is what's happened, and this is what it is. And I think you're—**I love that you said this is not our fight. I think that's so powerful.** And [I] never really—I'm so into this conflict [more like debate]. Like, 'Why are these people saying these things?' And now I'm like, wait a minute, there are also people who don't care about this [or don't see this conflict as the problem]. And that is so true. And I definitely see that as, I guess it'd be our generation: the new gen.

Itztli

Yeah!

Jessica

Yeah, I'm glad you said those things because what I see- or you see- at our UCR powwow, I know this is really special. And I do notice your family. I think it may just be UCR like it's the only one [powwow in California thus far] I see kapullis actually in Grand Entry. The morning Grand Entry and not just the second Grand Entry that after the dinner break. Usually, sometimes danzantes are still around; they can go do that.

Itzli

Yeah.

Jessica

And our powwow [at UCR], we save food for the danzantes intentionally.

Itzli

Yeah.

Jessica

How often do you get fed at other powwows?

Itzli

Now, we do. Before as the smallest of courtesy, they'd be like, 'oh, there's food over there.'

And we'd go and a lot of it [the food] would be done.

Now, I mean, it's still a little hard. But **now at certain powwows that we really build connections with, they will make plates and save for us;** which is again, always really nice. Or they'll ensure and be like, 'okay, nobody can have seconds until they're done [the danzantes].'

Again, we danced during dinner breaks, so we miss the food [mealtime] completely. But now, it's gone a lot better. Every powwow, they'll be like, 'hey, foods over there.'

And we're like, 'Cool thanks.' **Sometimes there's a lot, sometimes not too much. But, I mean, we don't really take it personally.** We always come prepared with our own foods and our own stuff. And very funny because we make a full-on meal.

Every powwow we go to, my mom has her stove, and we're just kind of going. And then it's very funny that [powwow] dancers will be like, 'hey, what you got?'

And **we're never gonna deny food to anybody. That's our thing. Even if we have a little bit** and we have to cut it into eighths, everybody's going to get some. So that's another way we built connections, because people [powwow folk] would be in our booth and be like, 'hey, that smells really good.'

And [we would] be like, 'Oh, you want some? Okay.' You know?

And they're like, 'Huh.'

Then they taste it. And it's like, amazing, you know? So now when we do that. Some of the Natives will come and be like, 'what you got today? What you got going? You got some breakfast?' And I'm always like, 'donations?'

She puts out her hand with an open palm then rubs her fore fingers together. We both laugh

You know, it's all jokes. And it's a lot of fun. So yeah, we do get fed. And we feed and it just goes both ways.

Jessica

Mhmm. **And it takes 30 years of your family, and others like your family, making those efforts, being in those spaces to get where we are today. I'm so mad [sometimes] that I didn't know what Danza was** and Danza Azteca. I had to find out when I'm an undergrad at UC Davis and seeing [Danza] in a powwow like that. That's like—Mind blown.

I emphasize this with an explosion motion with both hands coming off my skull

I'm so upset [sometimes] that I didn't know about these things. And the first time hearing it [Danza]. The drum, the huehue calls to me.⁹¹ And I feel like, 'I found my place, and I'm so happy.'

And **I'm just sad that others [like me] with this blurred ancestry, who don't know who they are.** I'm adopted, like I was raised Mexican [for five years], but then adopted

⁹¹ The huehue or huehuetl is an upright log drum usually located in the center of Danza circles or as part of the inner ring. While other instruments may accompany Danza, the huehuetl is always present.

White. So, **I don't know who I am. But this [Danza] is my way of trying to connect with that piece of me and who I am [who my ancestors were].**

I realized I am going on a tangent of my own self-discovery and return to our circle

Okay, I guess that's all I have for that part. Do you have any questions for me?

Itztli Arteaga

No.

I contrast these longing feelings in reconnecting to Indigeneity to earlier ideas of mestizo mourning or nostalgia in the introduction. Mestizo mourning has been described by Latin American scholars as the desires by those of Mexican or mixed ancestry to claim Indigeneity, often grappling with Indigenous loss that leads to melancholy (Blackwell 2017, Cotera and Saldaña-Portillo 2015). In examining the role of mestiza intermediaries in P'urhepecha tourist interactions, negotiations, and transactions during the Days of the Dead/ Día de los Muertos, Spears-Rico postulates Mestizo melancholia drawing from Mexican American anthropologist Renato Rosaldo's ideas of "imperialist nostalgia" (1989).⁹² Rosaldo chooses nostalgia because "nostalgia is a particularly appropriate emotion to invoke in attempting to establish one's innocence and at the same

⁹² In *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (1989), Renato Rosaldo explains how agents of colonialism (officials, missionaries, anthropologists) often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was 'traditionally' (meaning when they first encountered it); Ironically yearning for the very livelihoods they destroyed (69). This imperialist nostalgia referred to pathological conditions of homesickness dates to back the late seventeenth century, when Swiss sociologist and physician coined the term, "from the Greek 'nostos', a return home, and 'algos', a painful condition).

time talk about what one has destroyed” (Rosaldo 1993, 108). He concludes that mestizos experience a “deep melancholia as they encounter indigenous people and that this melancholia dangerously approximates racism although such racism is not queried by mestizos or by Mexican understandings of race and ethnicity” (2015, 30). Approaches like Renato Rosaldo’s that homogenize thousands of Indigenous Nations in North America vis a vis settler colonialism, have created a problem that Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd (2011) calls minoritization, which makes racial what is truly international. Indigenous peoples are Nations, with their own bodies, space, and rights, distinguishing their self-determination from inter-racial politics of the U.S.; continued conflation of these issues is problematic and inaccurate.

Scholarly writing refers to individual tribal affiliations, but also an emerging global movement of Indigenous people—what Ronald Neizen, professor of legal and political anthropology at McGill University refers to as a relatively new designation in North America (Neizen 2003). Philip J. Deloria, Professor of American Culture at the University of Michigan, discusses the rewriting of tribal histories, leaving us to wonder how one might do justice to the variation among hundreds of Indigenous Nations and community histories while at the same time reaching for general patterns concerning such things as colonialism and empire in North America (Deloria 2004, 11-12). Only recently have historians turned toward cultural analysis as a possible ground for considering relations across Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in broad terms. Further stating the case for a larger Indigenous framework, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Professor of

Indigenous Education at the University of Waikato in New Zealand, explores the concept of sovereign Nations as part of an international shared community (1999/2012).

Tuhiwai Smith explains that Indigeneity as an Indigenous international community that is a social movement reflecting both a huge diversity of interests and objects, of approaches and ways of working, and a unity of spirit and purpose. The movement has developed a shared international language or discourse that enables Indigenous activists to talk to each other across their cultural differences while maintaining and taking their directions from their own communities or Nations. The international social movement of Indigenous peoples is at all levels highly political. (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 110).

With this transnational understanding of Indigenous politics, let us now return to Spears-Rico (2015). I see two main differences between Spears-Rico's study and my own. First, his involvement in touristic consumption of P'urhepecha culture and traditions by Mestizos in Mexico emphasizes middle- and upper-class consumers. Unlike the cultural tourism moments that Spears-Rico focuses on I look at powwows, which are still not part of the mainstream United States imaginary, nor marketed as United States tourism. While some powwows and Day of the Dead events have become commercialized and large annual events in their respective locations, they are often attended by those within and outside the powwow communities; this differs from the events that Spears-Rico analyzes in that his events appear to be motivated not by community and cultural caretaking, but rather by economic necessity grounded in tourism. Simply put: powwows are made for the community, by the community, and the

events Spears-Rico looks at are events made by the community for outsiders. The second difference is Spears-Rico's treatment of mestizo peoples as a homogenous population who romanticize the "pre-colonial Indian" past while simultaneously rejecting contemporary Indigenous people (2015, 32). When describing *danzantes*, Indigenous peoples, and *Mestizas* I do not treat them as pertaining to any sort of monolithic qualities or sentiments.

Like Spears-Rico, some scholars view *danzantes*' claim to Indigeneity as replicating the Mexican state project of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* by *danzantes* occupying Indigenous spaces through mestizo mourning. Given the history of colonization, other scholars see a sad irony that Chicanas/ Mexicans would seek a connection to Indigenous roots through the ways that *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* detribalized them in the first place (Contreras 2008). By focusing on Nahuatl and Mexica traditional knowledge, for example, rather than grapple with the painful recovery from colonization and the historical trauma of loss, Chicanas/ Mexican descendants are stuck either mourning unrecoverable cultural losses or stuck in questions about authentic Indigenous identity (Blackwell et. al. 2017). I describe this feeling as one of being "stuck"; this represents the navigation of Indigenous refusal of colonial structures, an alternative interpretation of what Spears-Rico saw as mestizo mourning.

Even though other scholars have observed this phenomenon and attempted to name it, there is not a singular way to define this stuckness. Without an empirical or evidence-based way of seeing this cultural trauma, the traditional structures of the academy make it easy to dismiss the Indigenous connections *danzantes* embody. While

mestizo mourning is commonly used to describe this perpetual sense of loss in many circles, another avenue to explain this phenomenon that inhibits danzantes' Indigenous recognition is palimpsest. Mestizo mourning cycles through only four of the five stages of grief: depression, anger, denial, and bargaining—but it never embodies acceptance. And acceptance is critical. What is happening in Danza is hopeful and not only about loss. Palimpsest more closely captures this concept because it speaks to danzantes' embodying Indigeneity; while incorporating the idea of loss, palimpsest also includes recuperation, which takes us beyond the grief of mestizo mourning.

Colín explores the origins and uses of palimpsest across disciplines and in popular culture. He pinpoints original text, erasure, and recomposition as three essential components to its definition. For Colín, palimpsest is one of the ways to describe the layered history of Danza and its transformative effects on his body over time. He notes:

“It is appealing to conceive of Danza as a palimpsest. Embodied dance is a text, with a lexicon, syntax, and semantics. It is a living and performative text reauthored by each dancer. Much of the language of Danza has been erased, but not all, and danzantes gather their heritage and reassemble rites in creative and powerful ways.

As I examine my 19 years in Danza while holding present the definitions of palimpsest, I see a match. Danza and the cosmo-vision it embodies was and continues to be a ubiquitous part of the fabric of life in Anahuac.⁹³ It was taught in the *cuicacalli* and *mixcoacalli* and was part of everyday life, both at special ceremonies and as part of the everyday. Sixteenth-century European invasion promoted an eradication campaign of the culture of Mesoamerica, restricting dance, burning libraries, disrupting social organization, and imposing language, religion, and a new world order. History and culture were (partially) erased and rewritten with foreign words and worldviews. The extended passage of time, along with a modern-day migration to a completely different context in [the]

⁹³ Anahuac is a Nahuatl term Colín uses for North America, and “is roughly translated as, 'land that on its four sides is surrounded by water.' Anahuac is the Mexica term that includes the modern state of Mexico. I [Colín] use the term in place of the terms such as North America, Mesoamerica, Aridoamerica, and Oasisamerica.” (notes p.223).

United States, compounded the erasure of Danza. Nevertheless, the genocide and ethnocide were incomplete and the culture endured, strategically and creatively. Syncretic dances emerged (as in the tradition of the *Concheros*), and the keepers of the knowledge waited and protected the traditions. (Colín 2014, xx).”

Now with growing numbers of teachers, dancers, musicians, authors, and lineages

of Danza across the United States and Mexico, I in addition to Colín, Luna, Nielsen, and

Huerta document this blossoming phenomenon in our own ways but they speak to the

larger historical context layered underneath.⁹⁴ Danza is sprouting.

Reflecting on my own connection to Indigeneity

July 2019

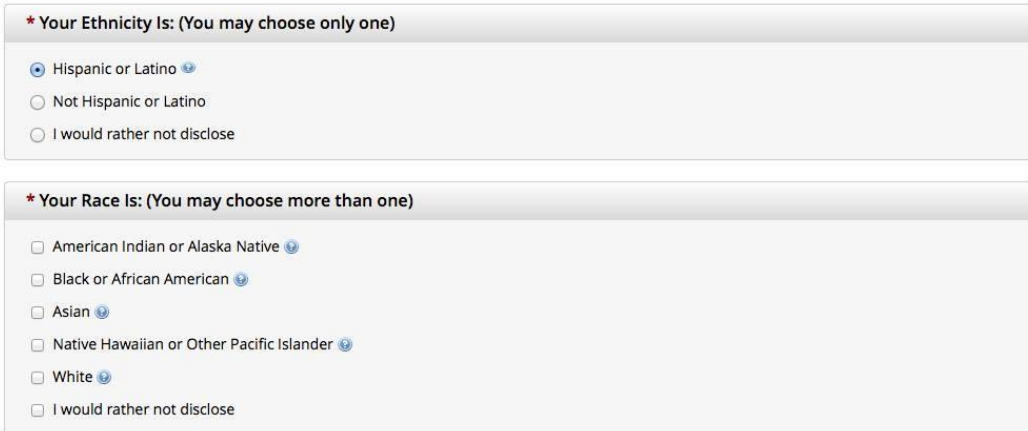
Dear Grandma, I'm learning my first dance called Paloma. I remember it's a bird or pigeon. I was there a little early to practice and so Mr. Cencalli took me after warming up and before families were there, started going through the dance steps and teaching me about the Flower and the Base and how each song has flower and base and they each get elaborated upon in the rounds and it's really up to the dancer in the middle on how long you go. It was nice to take some time. It will be years before I am knowledgeable on these dances. But I have the time and I excitedly wait to take on this journey ahead.

Unlike Itztli who found herself as she transitioned to adulthood, it has taken me 28 years to find peace and pride in who I am and where I come from. As a longtime member of Native American Student Programs at UC Davis and Riverside, I always

⁹⁴ I provide a brief list, across the disciplines of education, Native American Studies, ethnomusicology, and anthropology that document how Danza is emerging as a decolonizing movement through embodiment and reconnections to Indigeneity in the United States.: Ernesto Colín, *Indigenous Education through Dance and Ceremony: A Mexica Palimpsest* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).; Jennie Marie Luna, “Danza Mexica: Indigenous Identity, Spirituality, Activism, and Performance” (Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2012).; Kristina Frances Nielsen, “Composing Histories: The Transmission and Creation of Historicity, Music and Dance in the Los Angeles Danza Community” (Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2017).; Elisa Diana Huerta, “Buscando La Armonía: Performance, Embodiment, and Indigeneity in La Danza Azteca” (Dissertation, University of California, Santa Cruz, 2019).

questioned what to place inside the parenthetical citation, grammatically read as one's Tribal Nation. Even before my engagement in Native American/Indigenous hubs, encountering school forms and census questions concerning race gave me pause.

This past year in quarantine (2020-2021), Facebook Memories reminded me of a post I made back in 2014 as a third-year undergraduate student.⁹⁵ While I had just taken my first Native American studies courses, I was just beginning to make connections between course content and my own lived experiences. In this post, I share a screenshot of two census questions with the caption, "I don't understand what I'm supposed to choose..." ([Gutierrez Masini 2014](#)).



The image shows two screenshots of a Facebook post. The first screenshot is titled "* Your Ethnicity Is: (You may choose only one)" and contains three radio button options: "Hispanic or Latino" (which is selected), "Not Hispanic or Latino", and "I would rather not disclose". The second screenshot is titled "* Your Race Is: (You may choose more than one)" and contains six checkbox options: "American Indian or Alaska Native", "Black or African American", "Asian", "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander", "White", and "I would rather not disclose".

Figure 3.3: My Facebook post from February 6th, 2014. While I can no longer remember the context of these questions—maybe an application form or demographics for my school—but it gave me much pause.

Pushing aside the fact that I am not even sure I understood race versus ethnicity at this time...

⁹⁵ Facebook has a feature called Memories, which include things such as your posts and others' posts you're tagged in, major life events, and when you became friends with someone on Facebook. I remember the nostalgia craze originally created by Timehop in the mid-2010s that led many companies like Facebook to implement copycat features (personal experience, Constine 2015).

Much like the historical and social movements of naming among those with mixed or unknown Mexican ancestry while living in the United States, I went through several phases. Growing up I inherited my birthmother's shame for Spanish language because I witnessed her get made fun of for her accent and experiencing growing anti-Mexican rhetoric. In high school, I enrolled in Spanish classes but fell somewhere in between the new language learners and the Native-speakers class. I decided to take the easy route and it was one of my favorite classes for two years. They do this thing in Spanish classes in high school, where you get to pick your Spanish name and I always went by Margarita (my middle name). It was a nice little taste of my culture, in one 52-minute class period out of three years.

As an undergraduate, I took my first Chicano studies and Mexican history courses and began to identify as mixed race or Chicano. I was angry that my history was only taught to me from a colonizer (Spanish or US) perspective and spent coursework relearning. Following my first encounter with Danza in powwow and research on a Zapotec and Mexican song, I began to wonder about the boundaries of Indigenous identity politics. I have documented finding my way to Xicana understanding and heritage via Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in my master's thesis and continue my journey today on connecting to my ancestors and where I call home.

I remember first hearing someone refer to themselves as detribalized. In my Chicana/o Education seminar, the instructor Dr. Yosso introduced herself with this term and as a light-skinned Chicana. Since then, I learned and witnessed parallels in Mexican ethnography through my qualifying exams with Batalla Bonfil's de-indianization.

As a person with intergenerational trauma, I am learning to express my pain through dance, music, and gardening. I will speak and be guided with the ancestors. As a survivor of sexual abuse, I am reclaiming my body and learning to feel less shame. Period power. As one who has never known their identity because one has always been placed upon them, I have never felt so close and connected than I do right now. As a detribalized accomplice, this is my stance.

August 2022

Dear Grandma, I miss you. But everything I'm learning brings me closer to you, to our family, our ancestors and homelands. I may never have a name, have names, or places but I have cultural knowledge that I'm processing. I have memories, with you, and imagined relations. I call myself a Detribalized Accomplice which has taken me years to understand. Maybe next time I write to you in three, four, or five years, I will have another name for myself. Maybe in the language of our ancestors. All I know is I'm not a single entity. I am not white. I am not Native. Well, I am Native. This is where I get stuck in blood quantum and back into what our family believes in. I am a proud Mexican. I am a privileged American, privileged United Statesian. I guess also American, somos Americanos. But I am scared, Grandma. I'm scared I will not be accepted for who I am or who I know to be. I know you would accept me though. The plants accept me. My dog accepts me. My kapulli accepts me. I have strength. Thank you for this strength, Grandma. Somos indígenas.

Con todo mi corazón, Jessica Margarita⁹⁶

⁹⁶ If I had my way, I would go by Jessica Margarita because my middle name holds much more value in my heart. It was the name of my paternal grandmother, the lover of plants and a sweet tooth like mine. Now the matriarchal title of Margarita is held by one of her daughters, my aunt. Many in my family joke that that is why I was grandma's favorite grandchild. Though, I found that hard to believe because we lived our whole lives in two different countries, thousands of miles apart. Now that she is gone, I miss her and feel her closer than ever. Before I learned of the alcoholic beverage, I believed Margarita was a flower. However, in my young adolescence, US mainstream culture and peer pressure caused me to grow embarrassed of my middle name. Reflecting on those moments now, I am sure I was fighting stereotypes of the Mexican or Native drunk. Now I reclaim my name, our name, Margarita.

UCR NASP Women's Talking Circle

As a further step in my research, I conducted a larger talking circle almost a year after speaking with Itztli Arteaga. She was also a participant in this “follow-up” talking circle, along with four other women who are community members in UCR NASP. I express profound gratitude towards Itztli for sharing in our one-on-one interview that questions of who does and does not belong in the powwow are not our battle. That perspective shifted the scope of some of my questions around belonging to focus more on self-determination.

On August 15th, 2022, I invited five women (including Itztli Arteaga) who I had come to grow, learn, and work with in various spaces on and off UC Riverside's campus. We each shared personal connections to powwows in general and working on or witnessing the UCR powwow specifically. I came to learn that two women, Itztli Arteaga and Kat Warren (our UCR Powwow Princess from 2018-2022) had grown to love and recognize each other as family from years on the powwow circuit. Their relationship is a testament that Danza and powwow intertribal relations, although incommensurable, can find peace and bloom (to use Itztli Arteaga's metaphor). To honor some requests from participants, names have been changed.

You'll note that this transcription is rather long and uninterrupted by my own reflection and analysis; with five participants you will note the fluid, active reflection that occurred through compassionate listening and sharing different perspectives. What we do in both powwow spaces and in these talking circles is embodying self-determination as Indigenous peoples. I do reflect and analyze this talking circle and its contents at the end

of chapter. I not only chose this format because of the aforementioned fluidity, but also because this transcript demonstrates Native feminist intellectual traditions and I wanted to present that in its unbroken form. This transcript and its format are an invitation to readers to engage in compassionate listening (by reading) while witnessing the act and impact of compassionate listening.



Figure 3.4: Kat Warren

Kat Warren (UCR Princess 2018-2022)

Hi, everyone. My name is Kat. My pronouns are she, hers. I'm Diné. My family comes from the very southeast corner of Utah. I'm 23 years old and I'm very excited to be a part of this. **I've participated heavily in the powwow circle since I was a little girl, since I was nine years old. And I've progressed over time with my regalia, my dancing skills, and my connections with the powwow circle.**

Itztli Arteaga

Hi, everybody. My name is Itztli Xochitl Arteaga. Um, I go by she, her. I am Chichimeca-Mexica.

My experience in the powwow circle has been very interesting. It's been a long one. But I think **it's the most pleasing out of all the experiences I've had in Danza. Because it really does feel like it keeps blooming almost like a flower.** So. Yeah, I have a lot of love for it.



Figure 3.5: Kali Simmons before her dissertation defense. She is now Dr. Kali Simmons.

Kali Simmons

Hi, I'm Kali. pronouns are she, her, hers. I'm a non-enrolled Oglala Lakota from Pine Ridge, South Dakota. That's where my family is from. I grew up away from the community in Oregon, and I'm currently back in Oregon for my job [Assistant Professor of Indigenous Nations Studies at Portland State University]. So, this is kind of the place I call home.

Let's see what else in terms of powwow I am. **I'm fairly new to it. I knew about powwows growing up. But the first ones that I really attended were the ones at**

UCR. And once I started going, I kind of started volunteering every year. So, in terms of being a participant, I did make the coffee for a few years. That's about it. Important though.

Folks in the zoom talking circle, along with myself share verbal agreement with mhmmms and yeahs.

Yeah, I'm doing okay today. I had to do some writing this morning. That was kind of difficult. If anyone's watching *Reservation Dogs*, just a trigger warning that there's been some Elder death in the new episode. So, it was a hard morning to have to write about. So, I'm glad to see everyone.

N

Hello everyone, my name is N, my pronouns are she, her, hers. And I am a graduate student in the English Department. And I'm Kanaka Maoli—Native Hawaiian—from the island of Oahu in Hawai'i.⁹⁷ And so great to see you all. It's a little early, that's why I'm chugging this coffee. It just turned nine o'clock here.

But in terms of powwows...I moved to Riverside back in 2018 to start my grad program, and **I didn't really know anything about powwows UCR Powwow was my first experience with that.** And it was really great to be introduced to that and have that

⁹⁷ According to N, Kanaka Maoli is used when talking about individual and no kahako or diacritical and Kānaka Maoli when talking about Native Hawai'ians in general with the diacritical over the "a". Another term they prefer is Great Ocean Peoples to refer to Indigenous communities across the Pasifika or Oceanic region.

strong sense of community. Like everything was new to me. And I'm like, 'this is beautiful!'

Like the dances, the vendors, the community showing up, and then even learning the history about, how long the powwows have been going on, and then hearing about, how **there's different powwows across the country and things like that.** It was really great to kind of just take it [in]; I mostly like I helped but I also like wanting [sic] to learn more. **So, a lot of listening.**

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

Yeah, that's awesome. And I had no idea that—for a few of you—UCR was your first powwow. **That really resonates with me because UC Davis's powwow (My undergrad) that was my [first] powwow. And to see, I think it made an impact for me to see Danza at a powwow** and learning about powwow in class, but then not ever talking about Danza, and then going to one [powwow] live and then seeing one [a Danza performance]. And then I was like—I **was just really confused. But also like, 'wow, there's no..., the borders do not affect the powwow space here!'** And it's really cool to see.

I see we're already talking about powwow. And I know, some people didn't get a chance to speak. So, I just wanted to go around again this time thinking about: what does powwow mean to you? Any sort of experiences you want to share; why do you go?

Let's just take this time to kind of dive deeper, to speak to whatever you want to speak to.⁹⁸

Kali Simmons

Okay, yeah, to echo what N said, I think when I, at least the powwows that I attended at UCR, were **very community oriented**. And especially, at least in the ways I experienced it very kind of **youth community oriented, which was really cool. Because that's one of the few spaces I've ever encountered, where I just got to hang out with other Native people that were my age**. And we had goals, we had various things we needed to do. But it wasn't, like, you know, being in a class together or being in school together. Like there wasn't that similar kind of structure.

Kali Simmons

So, I attended the UCR powwow for three years, because I think the last two years I was there [attending], they weren't able to [host a powwow] because of COVID. And, yeah, it was really great. The first year I went, it was at the time, I was living like a few blocks away from the park where we held it. And then ever since you know, me and my partner, who isn't wearing his powwow shirt today, but he does wear the UCR powwow shirts on the regular [when] we're out and about, which is pretty cute.

⁹⁸ To alleviate confusion on where we are in this talking circle structure (discussed in Chapter 2): we started and went through “building connections” or introductions and conversation was beginning to “pierce the surface” or reveal personal connections. Later in the talking circle we move to “delving deeper,” where we explore problems or entertain new possibilities (Winters n.d.). Note that in this talking circle some folks joined later or left early, so the distinctions between phases of the talking circle as not clearly distinguishable.

We would come and volunteer and help set up and break down because again, we're just down the street. And so, we could roll up and help people pack stuff up. And yeah, **it's a really cool way to be around my peers in a less, you know, scholarly space. And to get to interact with the vendors or get to interact with Elders, you get to see like youth running around with really little youth running around.** I haven't gone to the one up here in Portland State. Just because it's traditionally held in an arena. So, it was indoors and so I didn't really feel okay with COVID going. So, I'm interested to see what it's like here. Yeah, I think that's that.

Kat Warren

I like that your partner wears his shirt all the time. It's pretty cool. I swear my closet is always filled with powwow shirts or black T shirts. There's no in-between really. Either powwow shirts or nothing. So, I'm trying to make my wardrobe a little fancier than that. But, yeah, what does powwow mean to me? For so long I was going as a spectator growing up. And so, it wasn't till I was like 13-14 that **I became a dancer.** And so, for me **powwow, the meaning of it has changed over time.** And so, for me **right now it's really resonating as an outlet.**

I love dancing more than anything. It's something that I do homework for. I practice for and I really put a lot of work into it. Because **I make my own regalia.** I bead my pieces, and I'm always beading pieces for my siblings as well, or people who are really close to my family. And it's something that I really, really love. And I like to

branch out on [grow], and I feel like it's something that it's always going to be a learning experience.

And so, for me, it's an **outlet, because living in this way of life... Capitalism**, I'm working two jobs and just trying to make rent every month, you know, living paycheck to paycheck right now. And **then I can just go to a powwow over the weekend, and not have to worry about that, at that time in space, because I'm surrounded by family and surrounded by the community, then it's always that reminder of who I am, you know, and keeps me going.** So that's why it's an outlet for me at the powwow. Because it's also a way for me to keep up and in terms of my health and making sure I'm fit enough to dance. Because you know, it's really tiresome sometimes...

I was really thinking about what you guys were saying about your very first powwow, I can't even remember my first powwow. I just remember really seeing, because how we started was, we were powwow vendors. And so, we would play underneath the tables at a powwow, and we would hear the dances. And when we go sit—**my siblings and I would go sit at the edge [of the powwow circle]—and we watch. And then over time we were given certain things. So, at one point we were giving shawls and we'd go out there and spin around in circles, you know, the small little kids that we see nowadays.** It was how it was.

My first regalia, it's actually a traditional Navajo outfit. So, I was out there with my moccasins, and everyone was just looking at me like, 'why is this girl like dressed up traditional [but] dancing fancy?' It doesn't mix well. Because usually, when you see someone with a full Navajo [regalia], like tradish [sic] they're doing Southern Traditional

style dancing, and I was all out there twirling, kicking like, it was a sight to see.⁹⁹ And so **that's my experience, really, it's just progressing over time and trying to do my best to be the best that I could be.**

And why do I go? I think I kind of touched on that. I go because I like to go and dance.

And be with my family. Because I do live separately from my family now, because I go to UC Riverside here and my family lives in Palmdale.

And so, I always be like, 'Hey, what powwow are you going to do? Let's meet up'.

And so, I go see them there. And also, **a lot of the community members that have become family members at this point**, you know, **I'm always like, Hey, that's my cousin. And that's my uncle over there.** So, stuff like that, that's really why I like to go is more of the social interaction. I also used to be a **Powwow Princess. And so that was kind of my job, in a sense going to powwows to be a representative.** And so now **really being there for that cultural exchange and learning other cultures of Indigenous people**, because it's not just here in Southern California, especially if you go up North, the patterns are different. If you go out of state, it's definitely different. And so, it's different cultures I like being exposed to. So that was my long explanation of each of those questions.

⁹⁹ Kat Warren is recounting memories from 10 to 15 years ago. Since her reign as our Powwow Princess in 2018, I haven't witnessed this sort of resentment or negative judgement over her regalia and dance category. Abigail Wightman's work on Plains Apache peoples and powwow helps better understand this clash of Indigenous worldviews or matrices (2012). In her ethnographic research from 2006-2009 in Oklahoma, she explores attitudes from powwow participants that marginalize Plains Apache because of their non-participation. While there are sometimes jokes still in the powwow sphere like, "[insert Nation] doesn't powwow," I personally have not come across this attitude between individuals at any of my field sites.

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

Well, it's okay to say what you need to also for clarity, Kat does have to go to work. So, I will be calling on her to preference a little bit.

Why do you powwow? Any experiences? What does it mean to you?

N

Hey everybody that just joined. I'll just share my thoughts really quick. So, I have just been thinking about what everybody has been saying. And **there is a special energy at the powwow**. And to me, since going to my first ones at UCR like **the music, I feel I can even just hear it in my head right now**. Like the energy of the music and the food. I think that at the powwows like that was the first time I ever tried fried bread and I really liked [it]. I don't think we have an equivalent to powwows in Hawai'i, like the closest thing that I could think of was a ho'olaule'a, which is kind of just like a gathering with music, community, and food.¹⁰⁰ So, I think there's something similar there across Indigenous cultures, where there's like, those kinds of things like bring us together. And **to have a way to express our culture together with others who are Native, maybe not Native in the space, I think is so important**. And then I'm just remembering, one of my first ever jobs way before grad school. I used to have this boss that would be—he wasn't Native—and every single time we would have a meeting. He would be like, 'let's have a powwow,' and [it was] so problematic, so problematic.

¹⁰⁰ In the Hawai'ian language, ho'olaule'a translates to festival or celebration ([Hawaiian Dictionary](#)). N added in a follow-up conversation that it is a Hawai'ian celebration or big gathering outside with food, vendors, music, and hula.

Itzli Arteaga

Yeah, so for me, I feel in my recollection of powwow I just remember going and being there. I remember just being at powwows, [but] I don't remember how it started or where or the first time or anything like that. I've always spoken about my experience in the beginning being hard, and it was always tough [I think, relating to her sharing Danza experience in our first interview].

I relate to Kat in that me [sic] having my parents be vendors, I would play under the tables, and sleep under the tables. I'd be so tired. And I remember I was asleep, and my dad has a story where I was knocked out [sleeping]. And I was rolling out from under the table, and he had to roll me back under the table. I was like, 'oh my god,'

Yeah, it's funny. For what I think of powwow, I think of sleeping **and being really relaxed, and in a place of peace**. That's because I think a lot of **times I would read and listen to the music and feel the energy and get lost; and be so like, Zen and calm, [and] cool**, because it was the most that **like Kat says, like it really takes you away from whatever's going on**.

I grew up going to powwows my entire life; what feels like my entire life. And I remember doing homework at powwows. And yeah, the same thing, listening to everything and **being like, I don't understand this. And now, over time, gaining community and powwow and relationships**, then going to different people and being like, 'I have math homework, can you help me? Do you get this?'

So having that be a funny thing as well for me. So yeah, it definitely feels like a family; no matter who it's with, who goes, who doesn't know, **you feel the energy of everybody every time.**

So yeah, it [powwow] **feels a lot like family, like home. And like I said before, it keeps blooming. And it keeps getting better. And the flower keeps growing.** Yeah. And then, now I haven't been as active in powwow, because I've been so busy. And I work on the weekends, in the morning and at night. And **I do feel like the wear and tear on my body or my soul a little bit.** You know, from not being there. But I'm hoping soon to kind of get back into it, you know, find some time, carve out that time...I'm hoping, praying that I'll be able to go back because yeah, I very much do miss it.

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

Thank you. I want to recognize Jessica, and Emily, for joining us. We have been sharing a little bit about powwow. But I want to give you two the space to introduce yourselves [and] how you would like to be recognized here in the circle.

Emily Meyers

Sure. Hello, everyone. Glad to meet you all. Thanks for holding the space. Sorry, it's a little late. My name is Emily Meyers. And I am well as you all probably know—or maybe not—a Ph.D. candidate here at UCR. And I'm working—well trying to get my oral defense going. So, at any rate, so powwow. Just talk about it, just a general comment about powwow? Or?

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

Yeah, the question was: what does it mean to you? any experience you want to share? Or why do you powwow? Those are open, so whatever you want to speak to.

Emily Meyers

Okay, yeah. So, I grew up here in the urban area in San Bernardino. **And I grew up going to powwow and dancing. And it was a really big part of my childhood growing up.** We also did presentations for different public schools, on the different dance styles of the powwow. And so, we would do, yeah, it was my dad's kind of homemade company was called Spirit Warrior Productions. And so, we would go around and give these presentations. **And so, I always grew up with it as a part of, you know; it was something that we did. And so, I didn't really know, until later, that it was like something that I should think of as being *really special*. I was just in it, you know,** when I was little.

And then as I grew up, I danced into high school. And my dad, unfortunately, he got diagnosed with cancer. And so, it was really hard, because **a lot of the time that we spent while going to powwow and stuff was really with my dad.** And so, I remember the last time that he danced was at a powwow up in the High Desert, it was called the Black Oaks Powwow. **And I think that powwow was really special for me for many reasons.** Because the powwow has gotten so big, you know, especially in Southern California. It's such a big atmosphere [and] environment. And the old-style powwows

that we used to go to like, that [Black Oaks] was one of the old-style ones. And they used to give every dancer some money to come, even if it was just \$5. They fed everybody. And they really took care of us out there; [it] was really a big family environment. And it was a really special powwow. I don't think they have it going on anymore. But it was really a special one.

So, after my dad passed, I had stepped away from doing powwow or going to powwow as a dancer. And I miss it a lot. When we were growing up my dad, he made all his regalia. So, we grew up making regalia as well. And so—and my mom did too [her mom chimes in and Emily emphasizes her words for us]. Yeah. And so, **it was something to unify our family in a lot of ways**, like we all kind of were on the same page.

And so **now that I have my son, I want to bring him up with powwow too.** So, I'm thinking about making his first regalia and bringing him into dancing and stuff, because **I felt it gave me a notion of who I was, you know? Especially being young, just kind of always growing up with that sense of knowing and belonging.** I think that's important. And **I also want to raise him with our traditional Navajo ways as well.** And so, **he always grows up knowing who he is.**

Dancing was really important to my dad, he went to the boarding schools, and when he was at the boarding schools, that's where he learned to dance. **He taught himself really and he started his own little dance troupe at the boarding school. They would do presentations and stuff like that.** So, my dad, he was part of the early powwow community here. And in Los Angeles, he started one of the organizations called, The

Drum and Feather Club.¹⁰¹ And they were a first kind of powwow community in L.A., after he had come back from the Vietnam War. And so yeah, that's just a little bit about me. And about my connection to powwow growing up; **it was a big part of my life.**

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

Wow, thank you for sharing that, Emily. And, yeah, thank you, I'm learning so much. And this is a good group. Honestly, I brought you all together, because I know you all and I don't feel so scared showing you [IRB] forms and stuff that the university makes me do so. But honestly, I love everyone's varied experiences. **And it [powwow] could be a social thing. But it could also be a very sacred thing. And I think that's really special to the powwow. Powwows as you know (emphasizing the plural), people are talking about all different kinds of powwows.** I kind of want to get into a little bit deeper. I know Jessica, left, if she comes back, we can reel her back in. But I want to talk a little bit about my dissertation.

It has kind of shifted [away] from, why do powwows not include Danza? And why are some people seen as Native and some are not? And it's moved to like, who cares about the regulations and more, **what are people doing to be Native. Like what does being Native mean and look like in these spaces?** And sometimes there's exclusions when

¹⁰¹ According to the Southern California Indian Center, Inc. website, “The Road Runner Club and Drum and Feather Club were the first powwow clubs that assisted the Indian Center with the dissemination of job leads, food, housing, and social activities. In the City of Stanton, many powwows took place at Hobby City and then later at Stanton's Recreation Center. In the 1970's Orange County Indian Center provided Social Services, Employment and Training, and Senior Services, as well as an annual powwow in Orange County.”
(<https://www.ocindiancenter.org/about-scic.html>)

trying to regulate who is and who isn't. And I started with Danza. But I've also noticed, you know, Two-Spirit communities. Which if you don't know, those are people who identify as Native and LGBTQIA+, and also are committed to the Two-Spirit community. So, there's those aspects.

If anyone wants to kind of speak to those kinds of tensions. What do they feel about them? Maybe if you don't want to speak to a conflict, maybe you can share what a powwow looks like without Danza? Something that I wanted to do for my dissertation was go to more powwows that don't have Danza, don't have Two-Spirits [sic] and, what does that look like? But then the pandemic hit and I really couldn't go to as many powwows as I wanted. So yeah, if anyone wants to speak to those tensions.

Itzli Arteaga

Speaking personally from my experience, there was a lot of, like I said, growing up in the beginning, there was a lot of tension. **And I feel like a lot of that just stemmed because it [Danza] was just something different. Something new that was coming in. I don't really know where the conflict lied.** I remember there being lots of conflicts, you know? Yeah, no, not conflict, more tensions, like, way, way, way in the beginning.

But I'm happy that **we pushed through to really show respect.** And I think that was the biggest thing on our part, as danzantes was to show respect to the powwow we were at—to the customs at hand—**to really show we want to be a part of this and be with you guys.** And not like an added on [performance] or anything else. Because we notice a lot of the dancers. A lot of those danzantes were just going for their part. And then, that was

it, you know? So, my dad felt that way. He was like, ‘Well, I mean, I'd feel offended if they came to our ceremony and they did one dance, or they did their little part and then that was it’.

And I was like, wait, well this is a whole ceremony here. Like, why are we [danzantes] picking and choosing what we want to be a part of? And so, growing up I really didn't understand that.

I was like, ‘Oh my God. We have to get there early. We got to do Grand Entry and dance at every intertribal.’ We had to be a part of every single one! We danced in our section, and it was a lot—just us.

But I'm glad my dad pushed us to keep respecting being a part of everything—even when taking the colors out, making sure to be there.¹⁰² That was really important.

And so, I feel showing that respect helped us be a part of the community instead of being outsiders, which I mean I get it, like, I get why there was tensions, because well, there wasn't really a lot of respect [in the beginning] in my opinion.

And now we try and push to do [practice respect], and our efforts have been very visible, you know. Like Kat I've known for a million years now, which does not feel like it at all.

Yeah, just over the years. And we've been able to make powwow, the powwow life, you know, like a family. **It's just family that you got.** Like everybody in powwow, **I saw them more than I saw my actual family. Every weekend, when I saw Kat, her**

¹⁰² By taking the colors out, Itzli is describing the ceremonial powwow tradition of carrying out the flag during Grand Entry (see chapter 1). Usually, flags vary depending on the powwow, but we always see an Eagle Staff, and Prisoners of War (POW) flag, with one or two representing other Nation-states (e.g., United States, Mexico, or California flag), and occasionally others (e.g., LBGTQIA+ flag or the Bolivian Wiphala flag).

sisters, her mom, I saw them more than I saw my cousins. And that's how it became so more and more, like what I'm saying that it's the community, this familial aspect.

The growth in just **releasing tensions** about so much of that, at least in my experience, and it's been really nice. And so, I like that. Again, as a child, I didn't appreciate it. I was like, I don't want to do this [Danza]. But being older and seeing what has come from all our dedications, to showing respect, **that's been something I've been really grateful for, and it's taught me a big lesson on how to interact with people.** And yeah, and like all types of setting and work relationships, like friendships and anything. I can't come in here and just demand that we're cool. **I gotta put in the work first, I gotta see where you stand. Like, we got to get to know each other,** you know? And so yeah, there's been a balance of both.

Kat Warren

Same thing; I've seen Itztli more than I've ever seen my cousins as well. To be fair, they are in like, Utah, and Colorado and New Mexico areas. But I see Itztli more every weekend, I swear. We'd be like, 'Oh, see you next weekend'. And then they [Arteaga family] even came up to Palmdale at one point, a few times for the new museum events that we have. Yeah, we're always running into each other every time. **And it is because of Itztli's family that I've learned the ways of Danza.**

Yeah, honestly, the tensions growing up for me, was more I feel here in Southern California, I believe a lot of—I still believe it to this day that the atmosphere and the community can be pretty harsh on quote unquote, 'outsiders'. They are very close-knit,

and it takes a long time to bring in somebody. And they are for some reason, **it feels like they are about all about the Indigenous identity. Like you have to be fully native, you have to be totally knowledgeable about your culture, you must speak the language, you have to know the ways, you have to be born on the rez, you know, be seen as something.** And that was my experience in this area down here. And so, I felt growing up, it was truly—Danza was seen as the dinner eat [community feed entertainment] and 'experience something else'. You know, it was always different, separate. And **I always thought that was weird growing up because 'why?'** Because for a while you've never seen them [danzantes] come in [the circle], but even when they do come in, they're [powwow people] always like, 'Oh, the Aztec dancers are coming in guys.'

She says, mimicking a mocking tone.

It's very, very strange. So, you just felt kind of uncomfortable about it. **And because it was uncomfortable it was that separation, especially with Two Spirited people as well. Even the powwows themselves are Anti-Black. It's just so deep rooted into the idea of how we should fit into a certain mold and how our Indigenous identity should be and how it should be presented.**

And so that's why I felt it was very, very, very rigid—the tensions between people. And I know for a fact that a lot of the people in the community here in Southern California are extremely homophobic, extremely transphobic. And it's hard to navigate these spaces sometimes because of that. And so, now I feel like—well, it's kind of hard to tell because of the pandemic—I've only been to a few powwows since then. But **I feel now it's a little**

bit more comforting, in a sense, but I think it's only because we haven't seen each other for so long. And everyone's just like, 'Oh, what the heck, you know, we're back to the powwow.'

So right now, it feels pretty, like, what we're doing together. But honestly, **I feel Itztli's family has played a major role and impact, like bringing into that space and breaking that boundary.** Because for a long time, it was a deep separation. And that's something I saw growing up...But I feel now it's a little bit better.

But we'll see it's always dismantling these things. Take a while, unfortunately, especially when it is so deep rooted within your own community, because it's like, oh, come on now. Who are we really against here?

[I want to take a moment and acknowledge the embodied persistence and resurgence of Indigeneity and intertribal Indigenous ideas of relationality articulated by these women. In *Sound Relations*, Jessica Bissett Perea reminds us that “depending on the context, some Native American individuals and collectives use terms such as ‘tribe,’ ‘clan,’ ‘band,’ ‘people,’ ‘group,’ ‘community,’ and ‘nation’ interchangeable, and they often signal, create, and maintain personal and communal relationships that bridge temporal, geographic, social, and political boundaries” (2021, 226-227). After years of encountering each other at various Native-centered events, Kat and Itztli brought their intimate relationship into being, as evidenced by them using words like “family” and “community.”]

Emily Meyers

When I was growing up in the powwow scene, my dad, he had been around before, you know, he had met my mom and our family was created. He had been involved in the powwow scene for many years. **And he kind of always cautioned us about how closely we get involved with, like, some of the leadership or the super popular families and dancers and stuff**, because—my mom's here, she says he called them ‘cronies. Crony, something like that.’

Anyways, I just think that that kind of warning that my dad gave me or, **cautioning that he gave me as I was a young person kind of helped me to kind of develop my own way about being involved in the powwow; that it wasn't really for anybody else it was for me for my family, for dancing**. And to get involved in all of these because there's, there's a lot of really, you know, **painful politics involved in identity and belonging, and who is more traditional than the other person and who's been in the powwow longer, and all these kinds of things**. And I think **that detracts from the reason why you come to the powwow in the first place, which is for yourself, and for your family, or whatever your reasons are, you know, you're there for a specific reason**. And it's not to necessarily, well, some people do—get really, you know, ensconced within the very well-known families and things like that.

I mean, it's for everybody to own, each of their own, you know? But my dad always said, ‘it's not about trying to be the most popular person here. It's about you, and coming out here, and taking some time out to celebrate your culture, spend time as a family, and meet other people.’

Yeah, have community in the ways that you can have it. So, **I think it's a misnomer to say that the powwow itself is a united community because everybody is coming to it for their own reasons and there's this own sort of politics or get involved and stuff like that.** And so, **you find family, you find community, within the powwow you meet people that resonate with you.** And I think that that's the biggest thing, especially when it comes to the powwow. Or in these things about inclusion, you know, have danzantes or Two-Spirit people into the powwow and stuff. And I think it's one of those things that's going to take time, I think it's already changed since I started dancing, and it will continue to, and it should.

N

Oh, wow. Emily's story about her dad, that's—I'm still processing those words. Yeah, I think that's true. Everybody probably does come to the powwow for their own reasons. And kind of centering, and even hearing Kat and Itztli talk about [it]. Like, it is ceremony, it is sacred, but then also, **there's these really complicated questions about identity.** And so, I can't speak to—the UCR Powwow a couple years ago was my first one. So, I'm not an expert at all, I am there to learn. And so, **there's always these questions, these really complicated notions of, how traditional are you? Like, how—what is Indigeneity? Who gets to be considered part of it? And I think it's really good that these spaces are opening up** because, even in my own community, having māhū or queer people involved in sacred spaces, it's part of our culture, but **due to all**

these really painful histories, there's a lot of prejudice against people.¹⁰³ Queer people, even though, if you go back to our histories and to what our ancestors believed it was totally not. It's different now.

And yeah, I can't really speak to Danza being included, either. But it sounds—from my experience, **a lot of people who aren't considered Native American are trying to get in touch with their Indigeneity and it's a complicated road to figuring that out. So having that chance to be part of powwow and engage with other [Indigenous] cultures is important.** And because I was so new to what powwows were, I had to ask, ‘what is the history of powwows?’ like other native peoples.

It sounds like it's changed a lot since the first ones, like hundreds of years ago. So, I think that is **how Indigenous cultures continued to change and move throughout time.** I mean, **isn't it natural to continue to be growing in different ways?**

Kali Simmons

It's been interesting to hear Kat and Itztli talk about some of the tensions in the powwow community because to be honest, as someone who just went for three years, I didn't really get to see that, particularly at the UCR powwow. **It speaks to the power of having a progressive and radical leadership. And how much that can shift this space.** Because I can't tell you how many times I have been up here.

¹⁰³ Kānaka Maoli acknowledge a third gender—the māhū or “the in-between”—who did not simply identify as male or female. This term is used to characterize someone who embodies both kāne (male) and wahine (female) spirits. ([Ravida 2018](#))

At Portland State, the institution I'm at now, unfortunately, the guy who's in charge of our Native Cultural Center is not a very welcoming person, to Two-Spirit people and to trans people. And, you know, he's from a federally recognized—enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. And **if you don't really fit *that* mold, he's also not very welcoming** to that either. And **it really impacts the vibe at our cultural events.** I remember the first time I went to—we have Salmon Bakes up here, because **we're in Chinook territory and that's a thing we do is we have Salmon Bakes.** And I remember, I was there, I was new faculty, I introduced myself, and maybe, you know, five minutes later, I was talking to another Native person. **And they asked me, oh, 'well, where do you go to ceremony?'**

And I was like, 'this is an incredibly loaded question.'

And, I mean, at least with the folks I was spending time with at the UCR powwow. I don't think that's the type of question we were taught to ask the person we just met.

Because I think all of us knew that that was a loaded question. For any number of reasons, you know?

You might not go to ceremony because you're Two-Spirit and you don't want to have to wear a skirt, right? Or you might not go to ceremony because you're like me, and I grew up away from my homelands. And I have never been able to go back. Right? And so, I kind of brag—I've been bragging up the UCR community because, you know, we didn't really, we disagreed about stuff... **We would disagree, we can have disagreements about you know, different things, but we didn't really—at least in spaces like the**

UCR Powwow—I didn't feel like we were scrutinizing each other's identities in these ways that can be really, really harmful, and that I'm seeing a lot up here.

And so, over the course of this conversation—I think a lot of it has to do with the leadership and people like Jessica [she is referring to myself], you ran the volunteer program for a long time. And folks like Josh [Gonzales], who run the Native Student Programs up there who I disagree with Josh about some things, but I never—I don't ever think Josh ever looked at me and said, 'You aren't native enough,' right? and I don't think he ever did that to any of us. And if he did, tell me, now he'll be in trouble.¹⁰⁴

And so I want to share that I think for other folks who've seen these changes happen over a longer period of time, **my wonder is: if it** [these changes in powwow over time] has to do with kind of **shifts in leadership and maybe shifts in awareness among participants** and **particularly the youth are the ones that are going to be in charge later**; in just being conscientious of all of this stuff and maybe in a way that people weren't before; Because I think a lot of us come see these different experiences, and know them, and we've become friends with each other, **and that opens up our hearts to being a little more generous with each other** in all these important ways.

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

So beautiful; everyone's just saying such wonderful, beautiful things—powerful things. I'm just like...just thank you everyone for speaking your truths or your opinions, or just how

¹⁰⁴ I admire Kali Simmons saying this and I believe it is a demonstration of the strong sisterhood that our time in our circle has created.

you see it. Everyone here is an expert of their own experiences. **Everything you say is valid.** I also want to recognize, hello Jessica, you are coming in today and using the chat. Are you able to unmute? If not, that's okay.



Figure 3.6: Jess “Tzapotl Flores” Delgado (left) and I (right) at the 37th Annual UCR Powwow on May 26th, 2018. Photography by Denis Thorp. Our mutual friend Cuauhtémoc Peranda took our hands, and encouraged us to join them in the circle for Intertribal–loaning us their instruments to carry.

Jess Delgado¹⁰⁵

Hi y'all! Beautiful to hear everyone's experiences; thank you for sharing. I am a Two-Spirit, pansexual Latina y Chicana who is also a curandera (a natural healer) that listens primarily to the wind and water. My people come from the lineage of Aztec-Pipil peoples in the small town of Cojutepeque in the Cuscatlán department of El Salvador on my mother's side and Aguas Calientes regions in Mexico, Choctaw nations in San Francisco, and some Cahuilla and Gabrieleño tribes from occupied Tongva lands on my father's side.

And there have been times that because I'm a Two-Spirited person a queer person, there have been weird conversations that **I felt uncomfortable hearing or being a part of**, and now I can speak up during them. **Being asked to leave powwows just because I'm a third person** is so bizarre to have that experience. Because as a performer, queer people are everywhere. If you're in the performing arts, and there's no queer people, there's something up. That's usually a red flag for me if I see that. So, yeah, it's an interesting

¹⁰⁵ In the Zoom chat, Jess Delgado shared her connections to powwow that I want to add to this circle transcript. However, she also retells some moments while speaking so I put them in the footnote here: "Powwow is a deeply personal and spiritual gathering place for me. It holds a lot of sacred ceremony and is a great place to be amongst relatives from different lands and have a good time listening/ connecting to the drum. It's a reminder of the stories, histories and morals taught to me by my late Uncle Peter, whose son and other relatives brought the drum to the front yard of my Great Grandmother Pepper's house, to hold ceremony and prayer. My experiences have mostly been positive, especially in helping to volunteer in making pow wows possible, especially at UCR; there was one time when I was asked to leave a pow wow because I was Two-Spirit, which was absolutely devastating to me, but our visibility grows strong and things are slowly getting better. I go because I uphold those parts of my uncle that have made me who I am today and to always remember my roots. It is important as an academic and a professional to take care of oneself and connect with the ancestors and other relatives and keep our traditions alive."

juxtaposition, going into different performing arts spaces and things of that nature, but being asked to leave is sometimes really traumatizing.

It is sad that the cult and poison of colonization has grasped some of our Indigenous relatives so fiercely that they think these danzantes and other relatives are not needed in the powwows. **It is important to be integral in acknowledging that we are not singular peoples who lived isolated but often had relations, even if in spirit and not in the flesh.** As a Two-Spirit, it is deeply upsetting that homo/ transphobia is so prominent, as anti-queerness is the work of the colonial enemy. To know that these relatives are willing to partake in violence that many ancestors would be ashamed of is painful; I don't agree with this at all but am so grateful that places like Two-Spirit talking circles and the BAAITS Powwow exists!

In short, **to live isolated and under the curse of colonialism is not the way and we need to stray away from that; we are peoples of connection** even if there may have been issues or rivalries in the past. **We are not each other's enemies**, and must realize that imperialism, patriotism, colonialism and capitalism that founded this country do nothing but violate our very spirits and destroy our being.

But luckily, like **Kali and Jessica went to UCR. And we were able to be on the same page on a lot of different things.** And that includes the powwow and so we're grateful for that experience, at least because **that laid the foundation for intersectionality and powwow and true diversity** and not diversity, Mickey Mouse [diversity] with a TM right, that's capitalized. It's truly embraced there [at UC Riverside]. So, I'm grateful for that.

After taking a couple breaths Jess continues

Yeah, really, really happy to be here. So, thank you all for listening.

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

Thank you, Jess. Um, I just, um, I want to give you another opportunity to speak. But I also want to give Kat the chance to maybe say goodbye to us all and give us any last remaining thoughts.

Kat Warren

Yeah, sorry, y'all I'm in a rush. So very good talking circle. And like Jessica [myself] said, we are all very valid and experienced. And **even though some of us have more experience in powwows, it's still that sense of community, that is something that we all experienced**, you know? Doesn't matter where we come from, where we are right now, it's something that we're always facing, you know, colonization runs deep within most of these communities here. And so, it's something that we're always going against. **I thank everyone here for their time, and their words here. Pretty interesting to hear these experiences. And it's, it's been really helpful for me here personally, because it's good to hear other experiences outside your own and give you that outside perspective.** And I'm really touched that y'all have really enjoyed the UCR powwow. And something that we're really working on right now is rewording **the UCR Powwow Princess application and making sure it's more inclusive, and making sure that we**

are not discriminating in our powwow circle.¹⁰⁶ And because of something I wanted to move forward with—considering growing up seeing all those tensions and hearing it from community members that I really care for and they're saying these things. **These words are a reflection of myself.** You know, they reflect upon me and how would you feel if you were saying these things to my friends? **It's something that I always have to keep in mind. Because I always want to do better and be the best that I can. I want to have our community be the best that they can.** Because growing up, I felt like there was a big, big barrier in the powwow community, like Emily was saying earlier. My—a lot of people have said the same thing. **You're not there for other people.** And sometimes, **those politics, they weigh heavy on you.** And for me, myself, **I've experienced a lot of traumatizing things from those things.** And so that's why, like I said, **I try to move forward, and do the best that I can, and be the best that I can for our community. Because we deserve the best.**

And so, I have to go to work now. But thank you so much for the time, and I look forward to talking with everybody here later, you know, sharing our words or experiences and our stories, and I look forward to working together. Bye [sic]!

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

¹⁰⁶ [Speaking to the progressive leadership that Kali mentioned earlier] When joining the UCR Powwow Princess Committee last year (2022-2022), I was proud to be part of and witness this change. For example, we removed the gender and sex requirement, opened it up to any dance styles, and reworded the tribal verification to “be of Native American descent.” UC Riverside was already considered progressive by not requiring UCR Powwow Princess applicants to be unmarried, childless or no dependents, and extending our age range to 30 years of age.

Thank you, Kat. Bye [sic]!

I want to give everyone a chance to **reflect. Considering all that has been shared today, give yourself like a piece of advice, or something to take into the future.**

All of us have something that we can take away from each other, or maybe something that we said that we'd never even thought about until we said it out loud right now. So, I want to give that time for what speaks to you. What is your takeaway?

Jess Delgado

Yeah, thanks. Great reflecting question. I have to say I love this question. Really great opportunity for us to kind of wrap things up. But also **think about how we're going to put this into action. Or think about how to do that.**

Two-Spirits and danzantes have firstly been able to make people question, as audience members particularly who have not encountered these types of ceremony before. Often, they allow for intertribal relations that may have once been at odds or not known to each other to be in [the] circle and [they] begin to heal colonial wounds from the past.

For those watching, this may feel like unfamiliar territory and make audiences question where they come from, their relations to other relatives and cultures, and what their ceremonies might have been. For queer people, we are weaving many looms of identity that are sacred and important in these spaces to provide additional spirits and voices to see life in different ways. Often **as queer people, our life**

experiences bring a different angle at life and into ceremony- our very existence and presence can help shift these spaces to be geared more towards equity and love...

So, it's good to acknowledge the duality of things and to talk things out in general.

So that's something that really sticks with me. And if I have students I'm working with, I embrace that. And continuing to know that I don't know everything; I think a lot of us in the circle can say that. It's been really rewarding to do that and continuing spiritual practices and engaging in more communities and reflection as healing is very helpful. And so, yeah, that's all that I could speak on. It's been great to be able to engage in all types of different work through that lens and I'm really grateful to do so.

N

Yes, some future advice; definitely what Emily's dad said. I feel like you come to powwows for your own reasons. But also, I feel like that's good advice for other things as well. Like in life. Thinking about that, of course. **How you relate to others, but also like that kind of protection for yourself.** And even just for myself trying to do traditional surf [surfing], or ceremonial things. **It always feels complicated,** but just remember: **we are Indigenous enough, you are enough,** wherever we are in our own journeys is enough. **However you come to it, as long as you're coming to it in a good way.** Then that's the first step. Right? So that got me thinking and I just learned so much about Danza from you, Jessica [myself]. So next time I go to a powwow, UCR's Powwow, I'm gonna be on the lookout for Danza, how that's going and also how Two-Spirit peoples are being treated.

That's just--Yeah, I think it's really expanded my knowledge on what happens at powwows. So, I learned a lot.

Itztli Arteaga

One thing that kind of stuck on me. Because it kind of makes sense. And it's obvious, but like, when you, Kat, hearing Kat's perspective, and then really seeing that and then reflecting on her perspective on Danza. Like, it does make sense why it [Danza] was seen as performance based. No ceremony, no spiritual aspect to it. Because yeah, when I was younger, **I remember being like the dinnertime entertainment. And that was something that we *dealt with*.**

Going back and just making the connection of like, wow, putting that work in, like pushing that aside and showing the spirituality of it. And the fact that we want to contribute to community, to ceremony, to powwow. Um, so that's one thing that I was like, 'Huh? That's cool!'

Those dots connected for me, which is gonna help me like I said, reinforce this idea of like, **always going into everything with the most understanding as possible, being willing to ask questions** and if you get in trouble for something instead of being like, 'Oh, my God, screw this!'

Being like, no, okay, **I'm gonna learn this lesson that I did something wrong. And that's it, we're gonna learn from it and move forward.** Because that's happened many times, you not knowing and it builds—I feel it builds up the trust within the **community, so that if you do make a mistake, it's not an immediate reprimand.**

That's it and you don't take it as an attack. But it's more like, 'Hey, cool, like, let me teach you.'

And then it's more like receiving it well, and being like, 'Alright, cool. Thanks for letting me know. I'm sorry.' I got it down there for next time. So yeah, trying to push that as much as possible. And **that connection [she made earlier] really reinforced that idea of just being as understanding and creating the space where we are able to make mistakes and learn from them respectfully, and not have it be just so like, set in stone.**

Kali Simmons

I'm still thinking about Kat saying, **we're trying to do the best for our communities, because our communities deserve the best.** And centering that in these types of conversations as we're trying to move forward is helpful. And yeah, thinking about Emily sharing stories about her dad too and the advice he had, and to **make sure that you're keeping yourself grounded** and this is really important, because I think it is a way for you to, like Itzli said, 'take any lessons in a little bit easier.' Because **if you're confident in your own motivations, you can say, 'Okay, I know I was trying to do the right thing.'** And if it didn't work out, that was okay.

Another thing I want to share is **I'm hopeful; to hear from all these stories, how much things have progressed, and it gives me hope that things can continue to change.**

And for the **spaces to become more and more welcoming,** and for that to be more consistent across different places. And yeah, again, **I want to reiterate, a lot of it has to**

do with the leadership acting from a good place. Because I think that sets the tone for the whole event. And so, people come into the event sort of already oriented towards those certain practices or [a] respectful environment. And I hope that that's something that continues to change.

Because sometimes, I'm just like, 'Come on, everybody, let's move on, can we just get over this already!' I think we can have--think of all the other stuff we could be doing [if it wasn't] for rehashing the same old argument over. But, you know, **some people have to listen to it a little bit longer before they get it.**

[I invite readers to pause and witness this moment that emphasizes the extensive power of compassionate listening because the talking circle is simultaneously engaging in and discussing the power of this strategic decolonizing method.]

Jessica Gutierrez Masini

That's such a gentle way of putting it. I love it.

And I really love how everyone honors youth. We are the youth, **but we honor that we have intelligence and the power to change things.** And I like that everyone's talking about their Elders and what they've taught them. I love all the generations. We always think about Elders always being the knowledge keepers, and so **having us honoring each other and honoring like what you said Kali about it being the youth that made this progress. It's really beautiful.**

And I have to be honest, I don't know if anyone knows what happened with the Kamloopa powwow?

I paused and saw if anyone had, but only head shakes indicating 'noes,' so I continued.

There was a powwow that had put on their stuff [rules and regulations] online that said no mixed-blood Natives, or you have to at least be one-quarter with verification.¹⁰⁷ And no Two Spirits [sic]; it says you have to 'dance the correct gender'. And it kind of blew up online and I thought like, 'oh, nothing's going to change. They're not going to do anything,'

And actually [I was wrong], it got so much blow up and people saying things that they [Kamloopa powwow committee] actually did change the rules!

At first, they [a Kamloopa powwow committee member went live on Facebook sharing] were like 'well that have been the rules since 1993 and 1992 and so it is what it is', but then no [it didn't stop there]. People kept pushing back [sponsors and Head staff pulled out], and then they [powwow committee] took away those rules and did some changes.

It's moving in the right direction—I don't think it's as good as like a Two-Spirit Powwow

I mimic fake cough sounds, cough cough.

or UCR *cough cough. *

But I was so shocked. I was like, 'Wow, maybe it took till like 2022 for us to finally...'—like for people to care! For a whole committee to change a decade's long rules [these rules were as old as I was: almost 30 years old!].

¹⁰⁷ Neely Bardwell, "[Kamloopa Powwow Society Under Fire After Registration Rules Dictating Blood Quantum & 'Correct Gender' Go Viral](#)," *Native News Online*, July 14, 2022.

So, I do see hope. Like the hope in what we're saying, and the hope in what's going on in the community. So yeah, I want to thank you all again. **I'm so grateful. And I'm learning a lot. And I'm also terrified because like, a lot of this is personal and I am sharing a lot...** So, these spaces [cultivated with these community members] and the way I incorporate talking circle sort of methods in my interviews, it's a way to do things *in a good way like everyone is saying*. I really thank everyone, and I will follow up with each of you about financial compensation because you all deserve it. And I want to give you this money that I applied for to give to interviewees, so I will be reaching out to you.

Making Sense of this chapter

My theorization of Danza's relationship to powwow continues to grow and nuance—first when I moved from first-time powwow spectator to volunteer, and now through my participation as powwow organizer or invited danzante. Since 2014, I have been feeling, witnessing, and envisioning how Indigeneity gets bound, literally and in the imaginary. In the literal sense, divisions between who may or may not enter and are invited to participate in the inner circles of the powwow (singing, dancing, drumming), create boundaries. For over five hundred years, Danza scholars and practitioners have refused to let changing borders divide, erase, or steal their traditional, embodied knowledges and livelihoods. By borders here I am discussing multiple borders danzantes encounter including, but not limited to geopolitical borders, socioeconomic barriers such as language or status, and colonial categories. Danza's ability to transcend both literal

and figurative borders is a testament to the survivance of Indigenous relations and ways of being and thinking since time immemorial.¹⁰⁸

Last night (February 2023) during our opening welcome and Two-Spirit talking circle—that has become a BAAITS tradition since 2020—we grieved together several Two-Spirit relatives and Elders. One person shared a lesson that I will always carry with me from the late Two Spirit Cheyenne Elder, Marlon Fixico Blackkettle. Western, Euro-American LGBTQIA+ cultures have this idea of coming out, whereas Indigenous ideas of Two-Spiritedness is about coming into. As a detribalized, queer, bisexual, polyamorous woman, I understood the feeling closeted from society, hiding a part of myself. Now following Two Spirit teachings, I instead am reframing my almost thirty years of experiences as coming into the person I am meant to be. And this is forever a work in progress.

In her piece “Coming Home to Danza,” Jennie Luna describes herself as a “product of the Danza Mexica spiritual ‘movement,’ [meaning] ...the actual physical moving of the body and also a political, cultural, and social movement...In many ways it was Danza that led me to an academic path and to become a life-long learner...It was Danza that shaped my epistemology or way of knowing and it was the entrance, not only to my own sensibilities, dispositions of wisdom, and passion, but also to a Native way of being” (Luna 2014, 68). Luna describes a moment that impacted her life and began her journey to critical theory through her Xicana Feminist lens. As a young, budding

¹⁰⁸ Indigenous survivance is “an active process of cultural survival,” –a term coined by Gerald Vizenor combining “survival” and “resistance” to describe how Native peoples learned to “shift between worlds” (2008, 5).

MEChistA at UC Berkeley, she was leading a sunrise ceremony for a national conference. During the palabra circle together, one Chicana said in a loud, firm voice, “Ella es Dios” (She is God) (Luna 2014, 69).¹⁰⁹ It was then that she questioned the patriarchal notions that had been normalized by always saying, “El es Dios.” This moment of decolonial praxes through reflexivity and self-introspection inspired my autoethnographic writing. I recognize that I am part of a new generation of danzantes and activists with woman and Two-Spirit centered spiritual practice, and this builds upon the Mexicayotl movement.

Itztli Arteaga shared her kapulli’s story of rebuilding relations and communities torn apart by genocide and impermeable borders. Both talking circles between Itztli and I and when bringing us together with four other women from UCR’s Native American Student Programs (NASP) provide space for readers to compassionately listen to critical conversations among educated, young female powwow organizers, goers, dancers, and danzantes. Our talking-circles also gave insights into Danza performance practices such as burning copal, personal coming-of-age ceremonies, how Danza ceremonies spread throughout California, and eventually became an annual tradition for our UCR Powwow.

As the first component of analyzing the above transcript, I want to draw attention to Kali’s and others’ observations on the powwow space and how those spaces serve as Native hubs. Scholar Reyna Ramirez shows how while many Native Americans live

¹⁰⁹ Palabra, meaning “word” in Spanish, is a closing prayer practice done at the end of a Danza ceremony. In our kapulli we do this at the end of every practice, and everyone has a chance to share gratitude in your own words, request prayers for loved ones, or pass it along by saying “Ometeo” (thank you).

away from reservations in urban areas, they still hold cultural ties and create communities across Nations and geographies (2007). She highlights how a hub is a gendered concept, “a Native woman’s conceptual frame of mobility between urban and reservation settings; a mechanism for Native culture, community, and identity transmission; a political vision of how to organize across difference and geographic distance while living deterritorialized (200). What we are all witnessing and embodying while organizing and participating in the UCR Powwow is our Indigenous values and ways that are often subsumed by colonial structures (i.e., the academic institution, city life in the United States).

I also want to point out how Kat Warren, of powwow spaces, and Itztli Arteaga, a danzante, saw themselves as cousins during this conversation. That moment reflects how Indigenous peoples conceive themselves in relation to one another. Regardless of their individual cultural practices, their continued coming together in powwow spaces along with their families helped construct this familial relationship between them. Similar to Itztli, Kat’s journey shows a transition from attending with her parents as vendors to participating fully and engaging traditions. While Kat’s path was through regalia, inspired by her gifted shawl, and Itztli’s path was more through sharing her family’s food with other powwow goers, both women found their way to Indigenous traditional practices through communal engagement and belonging.

Emily’s story of her family going to powwow included her witnessing and heeding her father’s warning about exclusionary powwow attitudes towards people like danzantes or Two-Spirit people. This attitude takes away from the inclusive power of

belonging that powwow spaces can extend when they fully embrace all participants. Native hubs only flourish when they allow for different matrices and worldviews to coexist; without that freedom of expression, historically excluded Indigenous peoples do not have the space and ability to embody self-determination. In their everyday lives, Indigenous peoples are not often given the space or time to even think or debate these kinds of issues. The powwow provides that critical time and space to engage in decolonial practices, like Kat's beading or Emily's desire to raise her son within her family's powwow traditions, all of which embodies their Indigeneity in different but vital ways.

My conversation with Itztli surfaced memories of inner conflict and outsidership in understanding myself as a queer, adopted, brown woman raised in a heteronormative Western neighborhood and school system. While anger and sadness tend to take over me when reflecting on these moments, the empath in me remembers that I need to be gentle with my younger self. I did not know what I know now. And it is all part of the journey. More importantly, and what I am realizing more and more since witnessing others embodying Indigeneity in Danza and powwow spaces is that it's less about who is and isn't Indigenous (though that is still a debate), but rather, it's about what you do with that self-determination.¹¹⁰ For example, *how do you carry yourself*—thinking back to how Josh

¹¹⁰ I honor the Indigenous scholars and discourse on Indigenous self-determination through actions and being. For more information see Eva Marie Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and Survival of Native America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Stephanie Nohelani Teves *Defiant Indigeneity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2018); Leanne Betasamosake Simpson *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2017).

Gonzales described learning how to do things *in a good way* through many years in Danza. And not in that “act professional” or “dress appropriate” nonsense, but *how do you want to be seen, received, remembered?* The closer I am to understanding who I am, the more weight of the world I carry on my shoulders, and honestly, that’s a beautiful thing to be a part of what is going to sustain the next seven generations to come.

4 (wichiw) Gendered Ceremony at Home: A tale of virtual powwows

Introductory Literature on Gendering Story

This chapter was conceptualized and written in unceded Íviatem (Cahuilla), Máara'yam (Serrano), Payómkawichum (“People of the West”), Tongva, and Kizh (Gabrieleño) territories now known as Riverside, California, and Ramaytush Ohlone territory now known as San Francisco, California. Acknowledging the lands, waters, and history of forcefully displaced Indigenous Peoples are the first steps in decolonial processes and is a vital component because, “peoples have bodies and bodies have stories,” argues Poarch Creek Two-Spirit Indigequeer sex therapist and educator Roger Kuhn (2021, 67). Storytelling humanizes and gives people and places voice.¹¹¹

Woven throughout this story are concerns and issues around the relationship between Indigeneity, gender, sexuality, and community. More importantly, my retelling of the Social Distance Powwow scandal demonstrates what happens when women are silenced and sexual predators allowed. Educational spaces like a classroom or powwow are supposed to be a safe space to learn and grow as people. If our society succumbs to the forces of colonization that continue placing sexual predators on unbreakable pedestals, it propagates settler colonialism’s impact on ours and future generations. While we are finally in a celebratory, decolonizing time of renaming places and buildings to

¹¹¹ I believe that storytelling is not exclusive to humans. By compassionately listening, I can listen to the stories and learn from the lived knowledges of plants, animals, and earthly and cosmic elements.

Indigenous names, eliminating racist mascots, and tearing down Junípero Serra statues, why are we still fighting for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit equity?

Colonialism's strongest defense is silence, which functions to reproduce colonial violence against Indigenous women (Million 2009, 57-58). For centuries women (and Two-Spirit people) have lost their important and valued roles in community, and as a result their social status has also diminished, making them more vulnerable to exclusion. A range of therapeutic interventions developed in Indigenous communities over the 1970s such as The Red Road (Indigenous versions of Alcoholics Anonymous that employs worldview and culture); Tribal Courts; community health discussions; and language and culture revitalization. However, women still needed to create their own space in sovereignty movements. Movements like the American Indian movement and the Chicano movement had internalized colonization in the form of cis-heteropatriarchal and human-centered agendas (Langston 2003; Rojas Durazo 2014).

As Eve Tuck and Karyn Recollet explain, Native feminisms bring together critiques of settler colonialism (colonialism by which land is stolen and superseded by settlers) and heteropatriarchy (power structures to keep hetero men at the top, by strictly defining men and women) to create social change (Tuck and Recollet 2016, 16-17). Following Tuck and Recollet, two things important to note about Native feminisms are 1) it must be plural because there are many "iterations and formations of Indigenous feminist theories," and 2) "Indigenous historians remind us that Indigenous women have been critical of conquest from its start", making the genealogy of Indigenous feminist theory much longer than the five decades of literature (2016, 17). Coalitions of feminist

scholars of color (such as Third World Feminism or Antiracist Feminism) for generations have urged for intersectionality, not just in understanding fluid, complex, identities, but for examining the multiple struggles faced by many oppressed peoples (Crenshaw 1991; hooks 2000; Mohanty 2003; Kaur Sehdev 2010; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015; Davis 2016; Risling Baldy 2018). In her concluding chapter of *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Sara Ahmed argues for feminist and antiracist critique because “we need to understand how it is that the world takes shape by restricting the forms in which we gather. The time for this is now. We need this critique now if we are to learn *how not to reproduce what we inherit*” (2012, 182). Even the most “woke” of individuals can be unaware of their own ignorance and create racist, sexist, ableist comments, gestures, or actions. Even members from one of the most targeted populations of heteropatriarchal violence (Indigenous women), may inadvertently prioritize Indigenous solidarity over feminism or trans inclusion. This type of thinking will never amount to strong, loving, and thriving Indigenous communities. Ultimately, sovereignty, freedom, and liberation will never be attainable until every single person takes steps to decolonize their lives through feminist and antiracist actions (Tuhiwai Smith 2012; Davis 2016; Ahmed 2012).

In this chapter, I honor the holistic nature of story and storytelling through places, people, and action (Xiiem et al. 2019). In their edited anthology, Xiiem, David, Seed Pihama, and Behrendt, expand Indigenous storywork as methodology for decolonizing research (2019). For example, Sara Florence David shares how balancing ethical concerns standardized by her school’s IRB process and upholding Indigenous protocols,

required a methodology that allowed her to be her authentic, accountable self. Māori sexual educator Joeliee Seed-Pihama examines the importance of Māori personal names as expressions of language, identity, and as holders of their stories because the power and transformative potential of their names and stories are legitimate sources of knowledge in research. Remembering her culture's values and knowledges helped Larissa Behrendt overcome challenges as a young Eualayai/ Gamillarori Harvard law student and assert her sovereignty. Linda Tuhiwai Smith identifies twenty-five decolonizing projects taken on by Indigenous communities, of which storytelling and gendering are two. Following Tuhiwai Smith, gendering centers "issues arising from Indigenous men and women that have come about through colonialism" and recognizes destructive effects on Indigenous gender relations that affected all parts of Indigenous life (2012, 152-153). Queer and Two-Spirit people and scholars alike are expanding these ideas of gendering to also consider experiences from non-binary or gender fluid peoples. Their collective scholarship brings light to how storytelling plays a key role in Indigenous resilience. In the countering of colonial narratives, the colonial stories, which have spread across and dominated lands and peoples, they assert their sovereignty. I honor their stories by telling my story.

Brief History of Gendered Violence

Colonization is not a thing of the past; rather, it remains visible through the introduction, propagation, and support of systems of government that blatantly disregard the traditional leadership roles of women in Indigenous Nations (Risling-Baldy 2018; Million 2009; 2014). These male-dominated systems were prerequisites for recognition

as sovereign nations at the time of contact, and that legacy has continued in many communities today. Tanana Athabascan historian Dian Million traces in her book *Therapeutic Nations* a lineage of Indigenous women who have spoken and written powerfully from the experiences that they have lived or have chosen to relive through stories they choose to tell (2013). She declares, “our voices rock the boat, and perhaps the world. Our voices are dangerous. Knowing this, we must...” also mobilize in “global meshworks...to inform ourselves and our generations, to counter and intervene in a constantly morphing colonial system” (Million 2014, 57). Internalized colonization in the form of shame, fear, or self-hatred, afflicts individuals in subterranean levels of our being, and by sharing personal testimony and bearing witness, the colonial conditions of our lives become known, felt, and internalized.

Within the context of colonization of Native nations, sexual violence does not affect Indigenous men, women, and gender fluid people in the same way. When a Native woman suffers abuse, this abuse is not just an attack on her identity as a woman, but on her identity as Native. The issues of colonial, race, and gender oppression cannot be separated (Smith 2003). Attacks on Indigenous traditional roles and knowledge are attacks on the sovereignty of the Nation themselves. In our feminist and decolonial movements, we must remember the history of femicide and recognize continued violence against women, without losing our momentum towards Indigenous sovereignty and returning land/water rights (Hurtado 2003; Fregoso and Bejarano 2010). If more people in the United States remembered the strategic rape and were taught in public schools about the forced sterilization of millions of Indigenous women, the Civil Rights

movement may have looked differently in its embrace of Indigenous rights and led to different outcomes. Unfortunately, much of even current and very relevant struggles like the Women's March, Black Lives Matter, #MMIW, and #MeToo get quickly relegated to the back of public, mainstream society's memory as old news (Davis 2016; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (#MMIW) is a movement focused on bringing awareness to the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, sometimes referred to as MMIWG. On reservations in the United States, Native women are being killed at rates up to ten times higher than the national average (Indian Law Resource Center 2017). International sovereign territories do not end at the United States borders, and I acknowledge that gendered violence plagues all of Abya Yala / Turtle Island. Widely used in Mexico by activists and scholars, feminicidio (femicide) describes the epidemic of murders against women and the sociopolitical conditions that surround them (Brugger 2009; Fregoso and Bejarano 2010).

Sometimes I am filled with hope that we are finally on the cusp of progress: in 2019 the California Governor Newsom officially apologized to California Indian peoples on behalf of the state of California for its history of government subsidized genocide; and in 2022 the Pope made a historic apology to Indigenous Peoples for the centuries of abuse they suffered in Canada's Catholic-run residential schools. While in other ways, we in the United States are regressing because in the last three years, reversing *Roe v. Wade* (U.S. Supreme Court case legalizing reproductive rights like abortion).¹¹² Through Native

¹¹² When I first wrote this section, a dozen states across the South of the United States had passed or were passing anti-abortion laws. The decision dismantling nearly 50 years of legal protection

feminisms, the underlying effects of settler colonialism like heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism (“the presumption that heteropatriarchal nuclear-domestic arrangements, in which the father is both center and leader/boss, should serve as the model for social arrangements of the state and its institutions”), may be recognized, deconstructed, and reimagined (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013, 13).

One of the reasons Indigenous women have historically been the target of violence is their ability to bring forth future generations of their people—generations that will exercise sovereignty over Indigenous lands. As Nez Perce/Tejana scholar Inés Hernández-Avila notes, “It is because of a Native American woman’s sex that she is hunted down and slaughtered, in fact, singled out, because she has the potential through childbirth to assure the continuation of the people” (1993/2005, 386). Therefore, colonizers such as U.S President Andrew Jackson recommended that troops systematically kill Native women and children in an attempt at complete extermination (Cave 2017). At the same time in Mexico and throughout Latin America, the logic of sexual violence structured governmental policies toward Indigenous Peoples that has led to modern day murder and rape culture of brown women (Lozano 2007). For over 500 years Indigenous women and homelands across Abya Yala/ Turtle Island have been stolen, raped, sold, silenced, and exterminated. *Will the violence ever end?*

Why does a subjective record of these experiences matter? Emotions and feelings are a vital part of my research and fieldwork experience. According to Dian Million, “to

for reproductive rights occurred during the final stages of writing this dissertation. For more information about this historic verdict, see Nina Totenberg and Sarah McCammon’s [“Supreme Court Overturns Roe v. Wade, Ending Right to Abortion Upheld for Decades.”](#)

‘decolonize’ means to understand as fully as possible the forms colonialism takes in our own time,” and that includes feeling our histories just as much as thinking about them (2009, 54-55). Carrying the stories of two specific virtual powwows and sharing the importance of felt experiences provides another path toward understanding the connections between emotion, knowledge, and lived experiences. In *Spiral to the Stars*, Laura Harjo refocuses and centers aspects of community, social relations, and the recognition of relationality with all forms of kin, that situates ways of knowing rooted in people, practices, and spatialities that are dynamically felt when we collectively engage with those elements (2019, 24). She identifies felt knowledge (which is experienced and embodied) as one way the body operates as an archive for holding memories and energy. Smelt knowledge, activated through olfactory senses interacting with foods, burning medicine, or specific locals provides instant knowledge (84-85).

Colonization by ways of forced extermination, sterilization, and assimilation under the guise of Christianization and Western education attempted to erase the spectrum of Indigenous worldviews on gender, love, kinship, and cultural expression. For example, gender roles within some Nations were about balance, harmony, and complementing, rather than dominance.¹¹³ While not reinforcing the binary between males and females or insinuating that there are only two gender expressions, I have come to learn from women and Two-Spirits to honor my empathic strengths and the felt knowledges of our experiences. As an autoethnographer, I have struggled to internalize that strength and knowledge. It’s taken a lot of unlearning as a child who was told they

¹¹³ Some Indigenous Nations practice more than two genders.

cried too much or called a ‘drama queen’ as a teenager. Family and friends tried to lessen my sensitivity with “tough love,” when I really wish they could understand, sympathize. Among the many lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have learned to give myself just as much compassion and nurturing that I give out into the world.

Virtual Powwows

I will examine two virtual powwows¹¹⁴ that fortunately gave me the opportunity to continue research and learning online in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic: The Social Distance Powwow (SDP) on Facebook and the virtual productions of the 10th and 11th Annual Bay Area American Two-Spirits (BAAITS) Powwows. One way that Indigenous communities in North America came together was the creation of a Social Distance Powwow (SDP) via a fast-growing, global-reaching Facebook Group. It was created Tuesday, March 17th, 2020, by Dan Simonds and as of April 14, 2022, it has over 300,700 members. At Simonds’ side since the formation of the Facebook Group is Whitney Rencountre, who acts as the Master of Ceremonies (MC) and Stephanie Hebert who takes care of behind-the-scenes admin (registering dancers, singers, vendors, spectators, press announcements, rules and regulations, Facebook group moderation, etc.). I will refer to these three collectively as the SDP committee, as they are the ones organizing and making the decisions for the Social Distance Powwow.

Whereas I participated actively and with a “research mindset” for about 4 months (March-June 2020) with the Social Distance Powwow groups and members at the start of

¹¹⁴ One powwow is examined more in-depth than the other given the context. Reasons for this will be explained in later sections in this chapter.

the pandemic, I have spent the last two years (since the summer of 2020) engaging with the Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits (BAAITS) Powwow. My lived experience and deep engagement within these two virtual spaces intersects the lives of thousands of virtual participants. As participant observer and powwow organizer, my engagement varied depending on my role and the needs of the community, but I practiced some new, unique ways of powwowing such as: tuning into livestreams, chatting in the comments, reacting or replying to posts, organizing dance contests, registering dancers virtually with Google Forms, committee meetings over Zoom, hiring American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, and preparing contest prize envelopes.

While witnessing an incident that will be outlined in this chapter, I saw that the SDP was beginning to parallel real powwows where sometimes sexual predators are allowed to participate and, in this case, are glorified. But then, as fate would have it, my friend and colleague Cuauhtémoc Peranda invited me to my first BAAITS powwow committee planning meeting where I began my journey into a thriving Two-Spirit community.

In a writing session with Peranda, we gabbed after I returned from my trip producing the BAAITS 11th annual powwow for a livestreamed audience. I remember them sharing that [Bay American Indian Two-Spirits](#) Co-chair, Landa Lakes (Miko Thomas) defines Two-Spirit best, or as it was shared to them: Two-Spirit is 1) being Native (Indigenous), 2) being gay, trans, or gender non-conforming or what-have-you,

and 3) being committed to [Two-Spirit] community.¹¹⁵ It's important to note that this is not the only definition for Two-Spirit peoples and problems may arise when one definition is taken on as *the definition* (Laing 2021, 3-4).

In her book, *Urban Indigenous Youth Reframing Two-Spirit*, queer writer and educator Marie Laing argues the ways people understand Two-Spirit as rigidly defined or as an umbrella for distinct understandings of gender, sexuality, and community roles, are impacted by “the places they are, the history of the term, and the state of Indigenous knowledges within the settler-colonial present” (2021, 39). She dedicates an entire chapter explaining her refusal to answer what Two-Spirit is, as well as her own refusals in the research process and academic knowledge production more broadly. Laing centers conversations and participants’ focus on the political significance and applications of the term. In shifting away from imperialist research practices, she found out it was more important to them the ways in which their fellow trans, Two-Spirit, and queer Indigenous people build communities, support one another, do ceremony, and create livable futures together. Citing Eve Tuck and Wang Yang, Marie Laing refuses the theory of change pervasive in scholarly research that aims to remedy social inequity through development of white majority’s knowledge of the other and invests a theory of change that locates power and agency within trans, two-spirit [sic], and queer Indigenous communities (Laing 2021, 40; Tuck 2009; Tuck & Yang 2014).

¹¹⁵ See more about the Largest Two Spirit Powwow in the Nation on YouTube [here](#) (Wilbur 2018).

Since The Social Distance Powwow had been conceptualized in the 21st century, after the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and intertwined with global digital communities, I had envisioned a more forward-thinking powwow. By that I mean, breaking powwow boundaries that have been created due to cis-heteropatriarchal, Western-American influences such as standardized powwow dance categories that are often divided by gender, male only MCs, some powwow princess competitions, and not accepting Two-Spirit people or others who do not fit into these notions of the powwow standard.

As a way of centering virtual powwow experiences where Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people thrived, I briefly share the story of how the BAAITS powwow transitioned to online in the time of COVID-19. BAAITS as an organization and powwow showcases something beautiful and powerful within Indigenous communities that I expand on further in the fifth chapter.¹¹⁶ I share the longer, more in-depth story of the SDP as an example of how the presence and uplifting of sexual predators continued from the physical space to an online space, that is, from in-person powwow to virtual powwow. As a community member, I followed the community online during COVID-19. I do not mean to offer these two powwows as a comparison because they were conceptualized over a decade apart, in different mediums, and with differing missions.

¹¹⁶ Former BAAITS Chair and boards member for seven years, Roger Kuhn uses the Muscogee word for community love, *vnokecv* (pronounced –aw-no-geh-che-kuh), to describe the Two Spirit love at the BAAITS Powwow. See Roger Kuhn, “Vnokecety: Two-Spirit Love at the BAAITS Powwow,” in *Critical Sexual Literacy: Forecasting Trends in Sexual Politics, Diversity and Pedagogy*, ed. Gilbert Herdt, Michelle Marzullo, and Nicole Polen Petit (Anthem Press, 2021), p.67-72.

Furthermore, the SDP provides a particularly compelling case study in regard to settler colonial and gendered violence. In retelling these stories, I demonstrate a spectrum of Indigeneity and powwow intergroup relations not often brought to light. Taking in these stories, and holding space for once-silenced voices, I validate these experiences.

Setting the Scene: Powwows during COVID-19 Pandemic

In the background of these stories is the very real global COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹⁷ In some Indigenous circles this became known as The Grand Pause. Elders shared that this was our moment to get back to our traditional roots, to heal, and to protect ourselves and communities. While the world seemed to temporarily shut down in spring of 2020, Indigenous communities continued ceremonies at home. Along with Grand Pause, “Ceremony at home” became another popular phrase and hot topic of conversation. For me and my partner that meant constructing a compost bin behind our house, which eventually became nutrient-rich soil that inspired a backyard full of homegrown fruit and vegetables.

Time during the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to operate on a different scale. Our air and waters were cleaner and animal species thriving once again from the world temporarily halting capitalistic enterprises that contribute to climate change. Out here in southern California, the 60 freeway that gave our area a constant hum of traffic had silenced. Time had slowed, yet there was no feeling calm. We were suspended in a moment of global history when no one quite knows what is going to happen next or

¹¹⁷ I feel the need to emphasize the realness and seriousness of the pandemic because to this day (March 22nd, 2022), populations in the United States still refuse to vaccinate, mask up, or social distance from one another.

when. It appears we were all watching and waiting. As an apocalyptic film enthusiast, I thought we were in that point of a film where we know the problem, but not how to solve it, yet we are coming together collectively as a human race. This moment lasted maybe the month or so before my faith in our humanity had dissipated into hopelessness with the rise of anti-vaxxers, blue lives matter propaganda, and increasing shame from being governed by such a misogynistic, racist, and narcissistic President.

Reconnecting to ceremony at home through gardening, talking circles, and honoring my moon time kept me going.¹¹⁸ Planting, caring for, and then eating corn from our backyard became my own little ceremony honoring my ancestors.¹¹⁹ Growing up transversing the United States and México borderlands, I learned through many cultural references that those of Mexican Indigenous ancestry are children of the corn. This embodied connection reminds me that our relationship to land should not be defined by greed, but by reciprocity and generosity. Time in quarantine and returning to the garden gave me opportunity to reconnect to the elements (air, fire, water, and earth). Mother Earth herself offers the lessons encompassed in Danza movements and procedures.¹²⁰ For example, I understand now that when our kapulli honors the six directions from East to West, South to North, and then Upward and Downward, we are following the Sun and its change in colors as it moves across the sky. This also paints a picture of how research and

¹¹⁸ By moon time, I am referring to the days on which I am menstruating. In many cultures, and in my own belief, the moon is female. Some examples are in Cahuilla language (Meníl), Spanish language, (la Luna), and Nahuatl language (Metztli).

¹¹⁹ In particular, the relationship between corn and individuals (like me) and/or the greater community will be explored in-depth in Chapter 5.

¹²⁰ Danza is a multigenerational music, dance, and spiritual group practice that draws from intertribal rite of passage ceremonies and Conchero traditions found in present-day México (Luna 2012, Nielsen 2017).

ceremony are intertwined for me as a young female danzante and powwow organizer, volunteer, or attendee (Wilson 2008).

We, the public, were told by health experts and most United States government officials to follow the World Health Organization (WHO) or The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for the most accurate and up-to-date information on managing in the COVID-19 pandemic. The CDC website acknowledges that tribal ceremonies such as sweat lodge, seasonal ceremonies, and larger social gatherings such as powwows, are vital parts of cultural identity, and their recommendations are meant to “support rather than replace tribal laws, rules, and regulations” aimed protecting Indigenous communities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2021, [“Recommendations for Tribal Ceremonies & Gatherings”](#)). Protecting our Elders and keeping our communities safe became common justifications within powwow and Danza worlds, advocating for changes or protections of traditions. There was no one single way that powwow committees or danzantes adapted. Some chose to cancel their annual large gatherings entirely, while others implemented mask mandates, limited participation or sharing of items. And those more fortunate with the resources (e.g., time, mental/emotional/physical/fiscal capacity, technology, or labor) moved the entire event or ceremony to online in some way, shape, or form.

Although powwow traditions encompass cultural protocol from various Native American Plains communities, it has become tradition to invite local Indigenous communities to that area to offer an opening blessing. For example, here at the UC Riverside powwow we open with Cahuilla Bird Songs and down south in at UC San

Diego and San Diego State powwows they open with Kumeyaay Bird Songs.¹²¹ Since inception the BAAITS Powwow committee, which takes place in San Francisco, or occupied Ohlone territories and waters, has invited the Ohlone Sisters, Carla and Desiree Muñoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe) to open the event. They are cultural bearers for their Nation and work as facilitators of past and present Ohlone knowledge through offering prayers and songs. Normally, the MCs ask participants not to photograph or take video recordings during the Opening Prayer because of its sacredness and recording is often seen as disrespectful. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some communities decided to temporarily uplift these kinds of restrictions to broadcast the entire powwow event.

On February 7th, 2020, I tuned into the livestream viewing on YouTube of the 10th Annual BAAITS Powwow that I had spent the past seven months planning and organizing. Whereas the Ohlone Sisters would normally be in the center of the powwow arena singing and explaining some of their songs, here, they were in an undisclosed location (for protection of their sacred sites). It was a surreal experience to witness and feel their prayers while sitting miles away on my living couch. We (the viewers) could see them under the shade, standing on rocky earth along a running river or stream, each holding wooden clapper sticks. Desiree Muñoz shares:

“We are wishing that we could be there with you all but unfortunately, we're all getting used to this Zoom virtual thing. And so, we want to make sure everyone's staying safe out there with their families, making sure they're keeping their Elders safe and their people in their

¹²¹ Bird Songs is a designation of songs that talk about the creation of the first peoples, their travels across southern California or around the globe, and their transformations into animal forms. These songs are sung from a variety of Nations including the Hualapai peoples near the Grand Canyon, up to the Cocopah peoples in northern Mexico, in the California inland among the Cahuilla peoples all the way out the west coast with the Kumeyaay peoples in San Diego.

community safe. And so, with that we want to honor with the highest Mountain Eagle Cry Song and we're going to honor the eagle and we're gonna sing that song to carry those prayers to not only protect you all at home, but to protect us and our family and our way of life. But to continue to protect us in the future. And to shake off this virus you know, let us stand together. And let us overcome this virus that is keeping us all indoors from sharing love with one another. And we hope to see you all again next year. And we want to thank you all so much for giving us this time to honor the 10th Annual Two-Spirit Powwow. And so, we are very happy and grateful that you all chose us, and to give us as much time as we wanted; to pick any place that we want to go. And we decided to bring you to our beautiful homeland and to enjoy this background and to be here and hear all these beautiful sounds so thank you so much with that this is Eagle Cry song.”¹²²

During their prayer songs, and throughout the whole BAAITS stream, Gregorio,

one of the two Two-Spirit American Sign Language interpreters hired for the event, signed the constant rhythmic beats as the Ohlone Sisters clapped their sticks in their palms. Many folks were grateful and impressed with Nicole (the other interpreter) and Gregorio's ability to quickly sign for most of our virtual events leading up to the powwow. I was particularly amused at how they would move and really get into the drumbeats, both dancing and smiling during non-verbal interludes. While noticing a rise in ASL interpreters at virtual events across the pandemic, BAAITS (to my knowledge) has been the only scene to make powwow accessible to non-hearing audiences.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, much of my research has taken a more reflexive and autoethnographic turn. As I increasingly utilized online platforms to keep socially engaged and informed of the world around me, I could no

¹²² From the *BAAITS 10th Anniversary Two-Spirit Powwow Stream*, on YouTube [here](#) (BAAITS Powwow 2021). I encourage you to watch this virtual powwow or check out their Youtube channel to explore their other archived powwow week events: Hand Drum Contest, Indigiqueer Drag Show, Food Demos, BAAITS Documentary Screening, and more.

longer separate my research agendas from my personal social media feeds. Upon reflection, my social media has been more and more influenced by my professional life as well as my human yearning to learn and connect.¹²³ As shared in my introductory chapter, powwows are more than just dancing and singing events, they are a celebration of life, seeing friends and family, and offering prayers and blessings. In more recent years, they also are a way many vendors and powwow communities make a living income.

Both the social distance powwow and the 10th and 11th Annual BAAITS powwows are significant in expanding global recognition of powwow traditions and culture, from featuring Two-Spirit people in Vogue Magazine to international and local news coverage of the Social Distance Powwow.¹²⁴ My own documentation of powwow cultures online transformation is not representative of every powwow community, nor every possible virtual powwow experience, but as my engagement in comments and reactions demonstrates, shows a snapshot of these intergroup relations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social Distance Powwow 2020

With a vast majority of powwow canceled, including the Gathering of Nations, thousands of powwow vendors, dancers, and drummers were left without income. The

¹²³ An example of research goals influencing my social media practice was the creation of my Instagram account to follow powwow vendors and dancers I connected to in the field who did not have a website or Facebook account.

¹²⁴ Some examples include Christian Allaire, "[How Indigenous Two-Spirits Marked Pride Month This Year](#)," Vogue, July 2, 2021; and Rory Taylor, "[Indigenous Communities Have Moved Powwows to the Internet](#)," Vox, June 17, 2020.

Social Distance powwow group was established as a space for Indigenous peoples to maintain their powwow traditions and cultures amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, the SDP committee's mission is "to foster a space for community and cultural preservation, to retain cultural knowledge through indigenous songs, dance and arts. Bringing our marginalized perspectives to the world for future generations." ([Social Distance Powwow](#), "About this group"). The MC encourages folks via posts and shoutouts to go LIVE, which means that you are broadcasting a video in real time to the Facebook group. As if I was at the powwow, I sit at the computer and listen/watch their stories, dances, and songs. I have made several new Facebook friends with powwow goers, which I would have never had the chance to meet on my planned powwow trail in the Southwest. This online platform in a global pandemic gave many people the chance to meet and come together online.

The powwows, advertised in Mountain Standard Time, started on the weekend of March 21-22, 2020, with about 40,000 members. Organizers established a separate Facebook Group titled "The Social Distance Marketplace" for "North American and Canadian Indigenous Artists, Vendors and Business's to sell their work and products to the general public and collectors" ([The Social Distance Powwow Marketplace](#), "About this group").¹²⁵ I remember there were some livestream discussions dedicated to vendors.

¹²⁵ I find it interesting the SDP committee distinguishes Canada from North America in their description of the group, while simultaneously advertising they are compliant with the [Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990](#) in the United States (and link to the U.S. Department of the Interior page for reference). As protocol for their page, they require members to list their Nation on every post for transparency and we see Indigenous Nations from all over Abya Yala / Turtle Island represented.

Simonds, who is the creator and seller of Wampum Wear, shared that he spent \$6-8,000 in fees and permits for big powwows like The Gathering of Nations and Denver March powwows, and never received refunds from their cancellations. There is also an official Social Distance Powwow T-shirt, designed by Dan Simonds, and proceeds would go back to the powwow “for giveaways and whatnot” according to Whitney Rencountre and Dan Simonds in posts. At the time I would try to imagine what kinds of overhead costs there would be and hoped that they would give more details. Now after my experience with BAAITS, I know there are expenses like honorariums, studio or technological fees for streaming, and Facebook advertising or sometimes permit fees. Dan Simonds and MC Rencountre went LIVE, occasionally updating audiences on family culture, powwow swag, and promotional videos for their future powwows or SDP sponsored events. The page almost doubled in population by the following week, and that’s when the SDP committee announced that there would be another powwow again every weekend.

The SDP kept many powwow traditions like collecting donations from vendors for the powwow committee to raffle off, inviting host northern and southern drums, and competition between dance styles divided by age and gender. In the early months of the pandemic (March -May) the founders would “pin” an announcement to the top of the Facebook group, creating a theme every week (e.g., Storytellers, creation stories, healing, art), and then members would go on LIVE to share their stories and knowledge. This was set up around the idea that powwow is education, especially since all the kids were out of school. During the COVID-19 pandemic, K-12 schools and day cares were closed and unprepared for online or remote learning so many children were at home, isolated.

The SDP Facebook group was populated by several danzantes and powwow-goers who I have continued to connect with after powwows or Danza ceremonies. I set up notifications on the Facebook app when select Facebook friends engaged in the group (posting, commenting, or watching a livestream), so I could stay up to date. When I saw someone comment or join a livestream, I followed and participated as a spectator alongside them. I engaged in this manner of deep, participant observation until June 2020.¹²⁶ By that time, I had developed both screen fatigue and my immersion in the BAAITS powwow committee provided refuge from the cis-heteropatriarchy structures in the larger powwow world.

Some beautiful things happened from March to June. A few danzantes would occasionally post photos of their regalia and they were welcomed with hundreds of thank-yous in various Indigenous languages and overall positive comments. On March 29th, 2020, MC Recountre announced that with the Facebook group at 100K, members of the SDP are now seeing regalia from all over the world. This brought a sense of relief and excitement that Indigenous peoples and their traditions from present-day México are accepted into the virtual powwow circle. Relief because an online platform seemed unaffected by typical obstacles for danzantes and powwow interrelations such as limited time, resources, and nationalist ideologies (more discussed in the following chapter). As

¹²⁶ I want to emphasize that my methods for community engagement and connection is not particularly unique in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, it felt like a collective experience of everything spending time and effort online.

shown in Figure 4.1, I commented with gratitude on danzantes' posts, which received "Love" reactions and positive affirmations.



Figure 4.1: Two screenshots side by side from my mobile phone on March 25, 2020 . On the left is the first post made by a danzante, J. On the right is my conversation with the Original Poster (OP).

The post from Figure 4.1 received the most engagement to date than any other Danza-themed post in this Facebook group with over 7.5k reactions, 384 comments, and over 900 shares. Despite being a post about Danza in a powwow social media group, this post did have record high engagement levels. However, the reasons for the popularity of this post are difficult to determine due to the changing algorithms on social media

platforms. After the first few months of SDP, it was difficult for posts to get lots of traction because the group rapidly grew to hundreds of thousands of members.

Without even meeting these danzantes, I felt the same warmth as if dancing with them at a powwow. The openness and healing throughout the page were beautiful and uplifted many people's spirits. In terms of expanding intertribal relations among Indigenous Nations, the Social Distance Powwow recognized and promoted music and dance traditions from across the globe. During the first six months of the page's inception, the page expanded from featuring Plains' music and dance styles to Native American music and dance practices like Danza, to some from all over the world. When the SDP committee created their weekly powwow programs, I commented on posts if there would be consideration for Danza. Stephanie Hebert followed up with me in a private message that the SDP was open to putting a Special on the program if I was willing to sponsor one.

I realized that there was some misunderstanding on what I had meant by Special, and the type of Special Stephanie was offering. What I had referred to by Special, is more of an umbrella term for Native American music and dance traditions that are given a spot in the powwow program but not part of the standardized powwow dances; this is how powwow scholars typically refer to the inclusion of Danza in powwow (references to Danza are often found in footnotes in books and articles). This miscommunication inspires more questions, such as: If Danza is included annually in powwows, yet is always referred to as Special, are danzantes still being marginalized in a powwow space, even when their practice is included? MCs have a lot of power in how the participants

and audiences understand and engage with powwow as Indigenous peoples (consider Chapter 3 and how Itztl discusses how her family's kapulli was not acknowledged during the Grand Entry). The power to affect how participants and audiences see Danza as part of powwow—or not—lies heavily with MCs and powwow committee.

Therefore, it's important to note how dances are “standardized,” is a manner of powwow committee preference and tradition, and these “standards” may or may not change as members of the committee come and go. For example, there are California university powwows that do invite danzantes to perform in their powwow circle, most often during dinner break. Meanwhile, other powwows may not include Danza in any programming, but instead may provide that space and time during dinner break to other Native American traditions like Hoop Dancers or Miwok Dancers. The Sacred Springs Powwow and BAAITS Powwow both feature Danza for about the same amount of time as other powwow dance categories. However, only the Sacred Springs Powwow invites danzantes to compete for money, an important and for some controversial intersection of economic opportunity and cultural practice.

As a new Danza practitioner, I did not feel comfortable hosting and judging, especially since my kapulli did not see Danza as a competitive practice. In addition to ethical concerns, I did not have the finances at the time to fund such an event. Indigenous protocol dictates we go back and check in with Elders, and so I scheduled a phone call with my kapulli teacher. We talked about the Social Distance Powwow and how it was a cool way to stay connected and keep traditions going. I confided that I was hoping that the SDP would include Danza and that they were open to it, but I wasn't the one to do it.

Mrs. Cencalli shared that she didn't believe that Danza should be danced for money or show. To her and her family, it is prayer and something sacred between themselves, the ancestors, and the elements (fire, water, earth, air, death, and life). I thanked her for the advice and decided not to take my ideas for a Danza Special in the SDP any further. I have made my peace that not everyone will believe that Danza can belong in powwow circles, however my engagement planted the seed.

SDP Silencing Women

In addition to the above interactions, some not so beautiful things happened at the Social Distance Powwow. On April 26th, 2020, the Social Distance Powwow disgraced viewers because they hosted Sherman Alexie on a *Smoke Signals* (1998) Q&A and then, subsequently censored SDP members who advocated for him to be taken off. The SDP committee took down the video, which hasn't yet resurfaced, but at the time, I was there live, frantically note-taking, and screenshotting.¹²⁷

Smoke Signals (1998) is a Canadian-American independent film and Native American classic with screenplay by Sherman Alexie adapted from a short story from his book, *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. To provide further context for the outrage, Sherman Alexie has a known history of sexual assault claims lodged against him. On February 28th, 2018, Alexie released a Press Release statement rejecting “outright falsehoods made by Litsa Dremousis,” and saying that her accusations were

¹²⁷ The only remanence of this video is a 2-minute clip from the ending of the video stream that has been documented for an Indianz.com article with the trigger warning, “The following video contains footage of a person accused of sexual harassment. The source video broadcast on social media, then removed, by administrators of the Social Distance Powwow group” ([Abourezk 2020](#)).

“based on rumors and hearsay and quoting anonymous sources” (Alexie 2018).

According to a long testimonial post made on Dremousis’ Facebook page, she defended herself against Alexie’s own false accusations that she harassed his wife. Additionally, Dremousis shares that has been contacted by 43 media outlets and spent hours retelling personal trauma to put it out here and stop him from harming other women (SLJ Staff 2018). Three days after that, on March 5th, 2018, NPR publicly reported multiple women who came forward with testimonials of inappropriate comments or advances from Sherman Alexie.¹²⁸

SDP hosts invited leading actors Adam Beach and Evan Adams for the segment, and that is how it was advertised on flyers (see Figure 4.2).

¹²⁸ In the aftermath of the SDP scandal, I learned from women sharing that NPR vetted hundreds of claims by Sherman Alexie survivors and that the public radio outlet spoke to ten women, though only three are mentioned by name in the article/podcast.

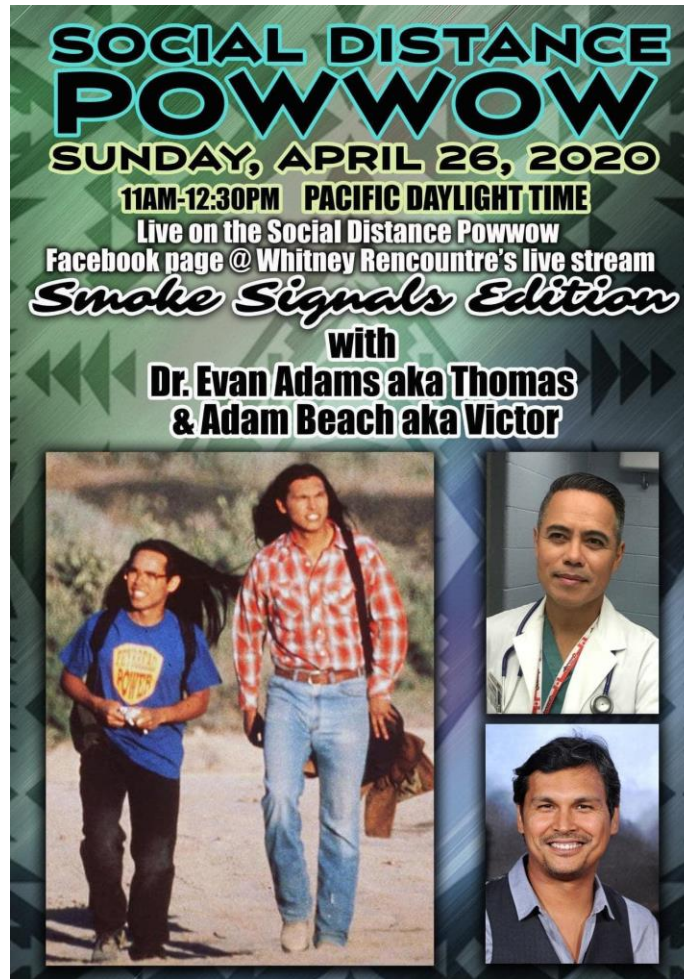


Figure 4.2: Social Distance Powwow promotional poster for a special live stream event called, Smoke Signals Edition, with Dr. Evans Adams aka Thomas & Adam Beach aka Victor. Hosted by Whitney Rencountre on Sunday, April 26, 2020, 11am-12:30pm PDT.

One of the stars had invited Sherman Alexie to join the zoom meeting and the host MC Rencountre claimed to have not known about accusations against Alexie two years prior. I remember encountering this in an undergraduate Contemporary Native American Music course I had enrolled in my second year of graduate school. The established White male instructor and our graduate advisor at the time, confessed to knowing about Sherman Alexie accusations and had struggled with keeping his 1995 novel, *Reservation Blues*, on the syllabus. He decided to leave it in and dispersed the

novels' ten chapters over two and a half weeks with other readings and course materials.

To the instructor's credit, when the day came to discuss the book in class, he began saying it was a "safe space" and gave time for students to express their opinions.¹²⁹

However, I don't think there was anything he could have said to take away the blatant layers of privilege he had held over the students. To many of the undergraduates, the professor did not look like them, think like them, nor come from the same socio-economic backgrounds that they do. As a brown queer woman in the room I thought, *how could our professor understand the extent of gendered violence we experience daily?*

My own traumas hinder me from remembering if students had spoken up. I remember silence, and maybe a short discussion on whether one can separate art from artists. I was in a classroom, a supposed safe space, but I must have been inhibited in some way because my detailed notetaking became non-existent for one of my favorite course subjects. I juxtapose my classroom experience here for two reasons: (1) to frame my personal experiences, feelings, and reactions to the inclusion of Sherman Alexie in SDP programming and; (2) to illustrate the ongoing impact on spaces—both in-person and virtual—of including sexual assailants in syllabi, programming, and other societal and cultural praxes.

Returning to the SDP, I almost did not watch the event but received a notification that my Danza teacher was watching, and she had posted a funny meme about "Indians watching Indians," (popular selfies in the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic). When I

¹²⁹ I use safe space in quotes here because Alexie was already welcomed into the classroom by being assigned.

had joined the livestream (with almost two thousand viewers and counting), I could see that it was light-hearted as actor Adam Beach was sporting a short reddish-brown bob-cut wig on and speaking in a higher-pitched voice. As I had not ever seen the movie *Smoke Signals* (1998), I was not sure if this actor played two characters or was reprising a role from another famous Native American work. Those frequently commentating appeared to be women, as captured in the screenshot below. Most seemed to be enjoying the show that was now at almost 2,500 viewers.

LIVE 2.4K

Whitney Rencountre Sherman Alexie

Evan Adams adam beach

LIVE VIDEO COMMENTS **WATCH PARTY COMMENTS**

Lmao

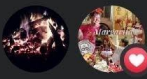
N [redacted]
Thomas..let the hair down and put the glasses on

D [redacted]
Nooooo

R [redacted]
I'd buy a shirt

D [redacted]
Oh lord

M [redacted]
OMG this is frickin awesome!!!
Thanks guys!! Indian Humour is absolutely the best!!!!

 **2**








      

Figure 4.3: Trigger warning as this image depicts a sexual assailant laughing. Screenshot from my mobile phone of the SDP Smoke Signals Edition Live stream event, in portrait view with live video comments below. I emotionally labored over providing this screenshot because I recognize the pain and trauma this man's image may evoke. However, at the same time this image demonstrates that despite his menacing laughter, everyone seemed to be going along with the program.

I had been engaging with likes and heart emojis to emulate the in-person experience of cheering and laughing along, demonstrating that I was appreciating the program. My kapulli teacher was doing the same. I noticed her profile picture bubble at the bottom right edge of my screen sending up hearts indicating her amusement. It wasn't until Navajo and Yankton Dakota journalist and activist, Jacqueline Keeler spoke up in the comments, "ICYMI: Sherman Alexie's #MeToo allegations #TimesUp #COVID19 #SocialDistancePowwow <https://www.npr.org/2018/03/05/589909379/it-just-felt-very-wrong-sherman-alexies-accusers-go-on-the-record>." Keeler was referring to NPR's 2018 piece with interviews from three women who came forward on the record to share their stories about abuse of power. This was the same media piece that my instructor was referring to that had almost changed his decision to assign Alexie's novel. I wondered if this "scandal" would be enough for him to reevaluate. *Do we not see as a society that by giving abusers a pass (or another chance or what-have-you), we are continually turning our backs and letting survivors down?* I wish I raised this question when our professor had given us the opportunity, but I also remembered how intimidating my first years of graduate school were among a cohort of eight older white males with master's degrees already in hand. I lacked the courage Keeler had speaking up now.

I want to pause and recognize this moment one during which I experienced the bystander effect. As feminist social media activism professor Carrie Rentschler claims,

contemporary social movements increasingly see bystanders as significant social change agents (Rentschler 2017, 565). Although I was not the first to speak up, I liked and replied with positive affirmations to those who did. In the end, my deceptive complacency prevented me from getting blocked so that I could witness, archive, and share this story.

Returning to the Livestream, after Keeler posted, another Facebook viewer replied, “bump” to Keeler’s comment, which is an old school social media technique for getting a comment back to the top and an acronym for “bump up my post.” As a person always wishing folks stepped in or stood up for me throughout my bullying trauma, I pushed through the bystander effect and replied to the post, “Thanks for speaking up!”

Three minutes later another female-presenting person commented to the comment stream, “I thought Sherman Alexie was canceled tho? #MeTooIndianCountry.”

Admittedly there were good moments from the interview for example, healing Indian Humor like when one of the guests said, “we had to make up a word for COVID in our language. It means the day that snagging died”. Vine Deloria Jr. in *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* dedicates an entire chapter to humor as it has been essential to Native Nations’ survival (1969). But making folks laugh did not make up for ignoring and subsequently deleting these women’s commentary. Like another person shared, “That awkward moment you [invite?] Sherman Alexie after the #metoo movement...” These comments would only appear for a minute or so because they were being removed. The MC and host’s wife, Jessie TakenAlive Rencountre warned viewers

in (gendered) toxic comments like, “Please keep the positive energy here guys. Not the place for that,” and “Please leave if you don’t like...leave negativity out.”

By “that” she was referring to the women speaking up about Sherman Alexie’s sexual assault allegations and asking for accountability and support from the Social Distance Powwow organizers. It was a devastating feeling to see a woman silencing fellow women. It reminded me of the stories and scholarship documenting all the time Indigenous women have had to choose between supporting sovereignty based on Tribal Nation or gender.¹³⁰

At the time 2.7k viewers were witnessing this. Using my screenshots as evidence, I amplify their voices here. Below, I include a sampling of comments that illustrate the breadth of what was said against Alexie. This does not include every negative comment made against Alexie that day; I selected a variety of comments that illustrate how this incident evoked visceral anger, hurt, and confusion. These comments represent a minority of SDP participants—the majority were commenting in support of Alexie or simply continued engaging with the livestream, unfazed by the clearly upset participants. Given that many comments like the below were deleted by organizers, I feel it is important to include them here. After this day, the video itself was deleted by SDP organizers, which in turn deleted all the comments below, so they can no longer be found

¹³⁰ In Canada, the Indian Act of 1867 declared that Indigenous women who married someone without Indian status lost their sovereignty, while men were not affected in the same way. Even when the Act was amended in 1985 to remedy this, the Act still privileged male lines of descent (Carlson and Steinhauer 2013). The Indigenous-owned and operated apparel brand, [The Rez Life](#), has exploded in popularity with their new collection entitled BURN SAGE SWEETGRASS & THE INDIAN ACT™, which adorned the slogan on T-shirts, hats, mugs, and more.

online. Please note that names have been anonymized to a single letter to maintain confidentiality as I was not given permission to share these now-deleted, publicly posted comments. However, by speaking out on a public Facebook livestreamed forum, I err on the side that these people chose to be seen and heard. Below, I have created an amalgam of the conversation wherein I have anonymized sources and summarized comments to provide readers a creative and artistic snapshot of the interactions I witnessed. I support those brave enough to question like **L** asking, “Why are we allowing abusers a platform? Just curious,” and **P** adding, “Sherman Alexie. How did you get past the #MeToo... sum [sic] of us Don’t forget what you did.”

I stand with feminists like **V** who said, “No to predators,” and **A** directly calling out, “Sherman is an abuser.”

I could see that by speaking up, they were breaking through others ignorance, like **S1** who commented, “Ok guess I need to know about Sherman...”

M made audience members think by asking, “Why isn’t [sic] any of women actors here?...I was taught women are supposed to be at the table speaking. Not just only men,” as did **R**, “Can we bring in the ladies of this movie,” and **J**, “Women? Anyone? What happened to the women and women’s voices?”

Angered and pained from the reawakening of inter-generational gendered trauma, some comments trying to break through before being blocked: **A** returns cursing, “Stfu (shut the fuck up) Sherman” and continues on with a reply to their own comment, “Abuse is never ok and should always be called out/ What if it was your daughter? Would you be silent then too?/ Sick mofos [sic]”.

S2 outlined the nuances of the situation in a reply to **A**, “She and others have raised the issue of the serious accusations of sexual abuse leveled at Sherman Alexie in the comments here. He’s a complicated person, one who was given voice to amazing experiences from Indian Country not [sic] one who also silenced the voice of some Native women authors and was involved in some terrible actions in relationships with others. There is a lot into on this issue [sic] & what really happened is still being sorted out.”

Clear and adamant were numerous demands like **D**’s to, “Please get him off of there!” Helpful suggestions that did not clearly accuse Alexie like Mari’s, “I would love for us to talk about the healing of native women who have gone thru sexual assault and domestic violence committed by men in this room,” were left unscathed (meaning not removed).

One of the few male presenting members who supported the cause commented, “Sick to see all these men in support of Abuser Sherman,” perhaps not realizing that some supporters were also women.

I am unsure if this user’s comment was intended in solidarity or in context to the Live show interview, which had been going on for over an hour seemingly unphased by the Facebook chat callouts. Regardless, I still find **C**’s comment, “Čn es lemti” or “I am doomed” in Lithuanian, encompasses the feeling from those being silenced or triggered by Alexie.

Meanwhile determined posters who were not yet blocked from the group would post the NPR article link or commenting on the likeness of Alexie to our (then) United

States President. For example, one member wrote, “Coding known abusers is disgusting...So like Trump if you have a following you can abuse all the women you want just need some men to keep backing you up [sic]” interspersed between overflowing comments of gratitude from *Smoke Signals* fans for the SDP hosting such an intimate interview.

D consistently posting adds, “With all the good that you have done with this page why would you ever sneak Sherman Alexie on here and not say a word about it. I’m the Director of MMIW (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women) USA and us [sic] and just about every mmiw advocates are so upset [sic]. This is so hard for our women and families to see.”¹³¹

One of the founders, Dan Simonds replied to **D**, “please hit the live button on top our page whenever you are able to have your voice heard thanks.” This was delivered as if her going LIVE would remedy the gender bias and undo the harm they had all just facilitated. While I am not positive if males or females post more on the SDP Facebook group, men generally receive more engagement as authority figures and tradition keepers, particularly in powwow music traditions.¹³²

¹³¹ “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women USA was founded in 2015 by Deborah Maytubee Denton (Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma) after the murder of 2 of her friends, Andrea Begay and Sharon Gorman (Navajo) in Gallup, New Mexico. It started as a simple page on Facebook but year by year the scope of MMIW USA's work widened and became a non-profit” For more information and to support stopping the violence against Native women please see their website at <https://mmiwusastore.com/>.

¹³² Some prominent examples are how powwow protocol teaches men to sit at the drum while women stand behind and sing, or how many Drum keepers (the person designated to take care of the Drum) are often male.

At this point in the livestream, I didn't know if members were still being banned as the livestream interview was closing out. Numerous thankful comments, some neutral or sympathetic to the situation, as one new member shares, "Thank you men. Social Distance Powwow can fer [sic] a panel of Native women talking about healing..." and T seconds earlier comments, "Can't wait to see women who were a pivotal part of the film highlighted."

Immediately after the incident, I reached out to some of these women who spoke out by requesting to be Facebook friends, and privately messaged them thanking them for speaking up. One of them was Deborah Maytubee Denton, the Director for the MMIW in the United States, who said she planned to go LIVE on the page later to advocate for this shared point of view. Being able to speak to folks like Deborah was an opportunity for me to prevent more victims and a reminder to trust people's words. I wanted to give Deborah and others the space to talk about what she wanted. Only a couple of these individuals accepted my Facebook requests or responded to my comments.

The Aftershocks

Later that same day, about an hour and a half after the event, co-founder Stephanie Hebert posted an announcement and pinned it to the top of the Facebook group on behalf of the Social Distance Powwow (see Figure 4.4).

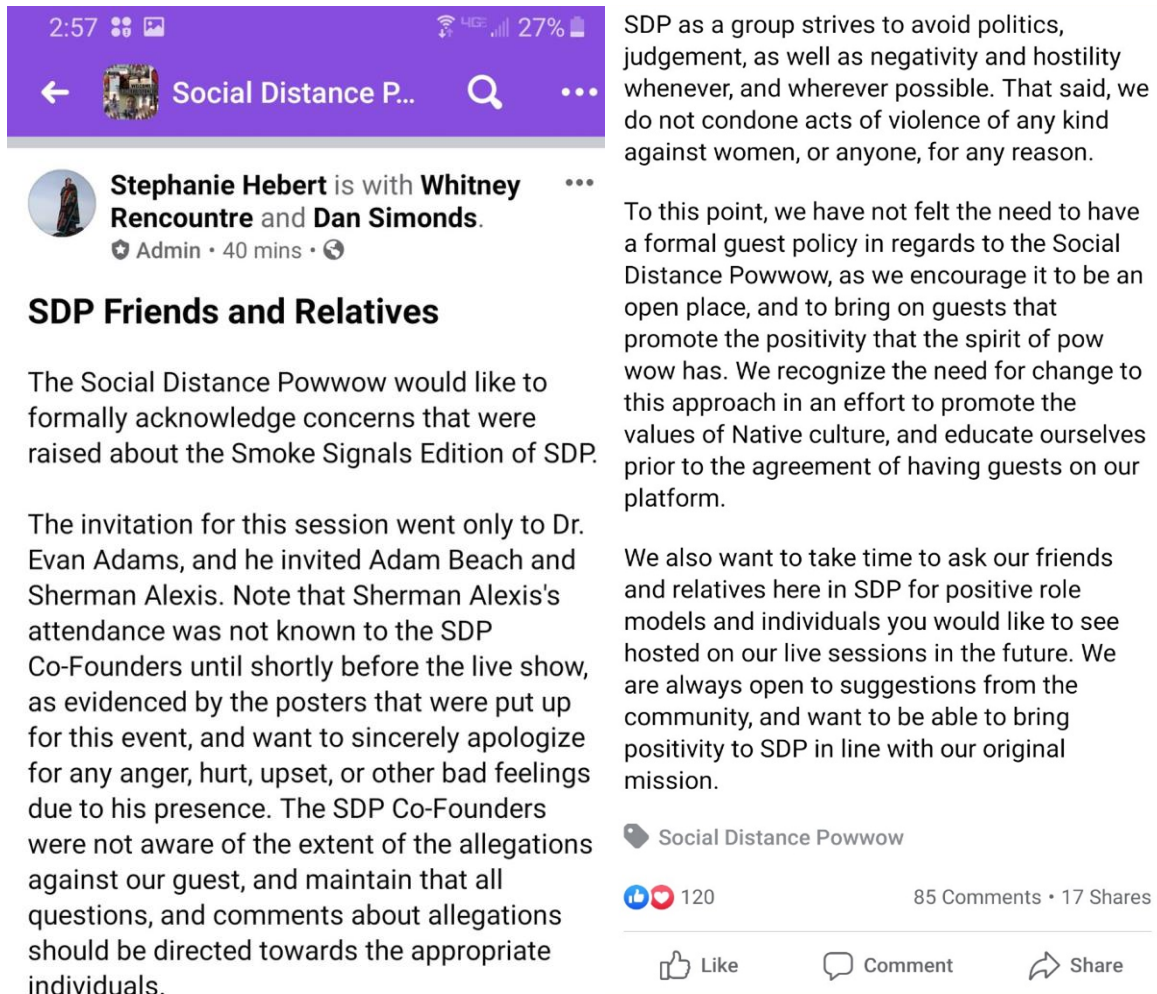


Figure 4.4: Two screenshots side by side depicting a pinned post made by Stephanie Herbert on behalf of the Social Distance Powwow committee.

My immediate reactions were positive because the Social Distance Powwow had clearly admitted how they handled the situation was wrong. However, seeing this narrative of ignorance as an excuse always leaves me with unsettled feelings and questions about how far ignorance can be tolerated. Maybe it was their phrase, “we have not felt the need,” when regarding the creation of a guest policy and I want to know what the organizers are *feeling* now that is driving them to create one: Do they feel sick or experience any visceral reactions to Sherman Alexie now that they know? Do they feel shame for

silencing and banning women who spoke up? Do they feel heavier with greater responsibility and accountability to keep us safe moving forward?

Members quickly read and engaged with Hebert's post and within the first 40 minutes accumulated over 200 reactions, and about half as many comments and counting. Many questioned what had happened, to which Dan Simonds and activists spent hours commenting and replying with the NPR link and testimonials. It was disheartening to experience so many negative comments claiming that feminist killjoys ruined others' chance to experience the video.

Sara Ahmed, who coined the term and founded a blog under the name "feminist killjoy," argues, "to be a feminist killjoy, to be willing to receive this assignment, is to become a complainer, heard as negative for not wanting to reproduce the same thing, heard as destructive for the same reason" ("[After Complaint](#)," 2022). In other words, the feminist killjoy is a person, of any gender(s), sexuality, or status, who feels uncomfortable with the status quo in society and more importantly, speaks up or does something about it.

So-called feminist killjoys are truth-tellers who name the inequalities that are in our world like racism, transphobia, and misogyny and work to change them so that the world is more equitable for everyone. The courageous people who spoke out against Sherman Alexie seemed to be labeled as killjoys by SDP organizers and *Smoke Signals* fans because they were ruining positive atmosphere. This situation felt familiar to when those who remembered rape allegations against the late Koby Bryant in spoke out in memorial posts after his helicopter crash or the series of #MeToo celebrity confessions

that prevailed over the 2018 Oscars / Academy Awards. I remember the shock and painful irony during a Teaching and Pedagogy Seminar taught by a senior Asian American woman scholar, when a male student questioned if the professor had data that backed up the fact that women teachers face bias from students. Me and the only other woman in the class gave each other “is this really happening?” looks.

At some point the organizers decided to turn off comments to the April 26th, 2020, post because members were making violent threats to other members and their families, and the SDP clearly did not condone nor tolerate this kind of violence or hostility. The post on the page with its 734 reactions (516 likes, 147 hearts, 28 shock or wows, 11 sad faces, 9 angry faces, and 3 laughing), 453 comments, and 73 shares is now a relic from this contentious but pivotal moment for the Social Distance Powwow.¹³³ Looking through almost two years after the incident, I notice a wide spectrum of comments from fellow SDP members including, disdain at the event, to regrets for missing, support and disagreement with taking down the video, questions about what happened, links to Sherman Alexie’s sexual allegations coverage, and mixed comments from fans wanting to separate the art from the artist (see Figure 4.3). At the time, I engaged in some moments of solidarity by liking comments that shared a similar perspective to my own, like A’s comment in the image below about not separating art from violent artists.

¹³³ Current posts on this page receive an average of 1,000-3,000 reactions—the post in Figure 4.4 is clearly an outlier at the time. It’s important to note that users can change their preferences for how comments are sorted and appear on the newsfeed of the Facebook group: suggested default for showing comments in an order that encourages group engagement, top comments for showing most engaging comments first, most recent for showing newest comments first, and all comments for showing all comments in chronological order. I have mine set to default.

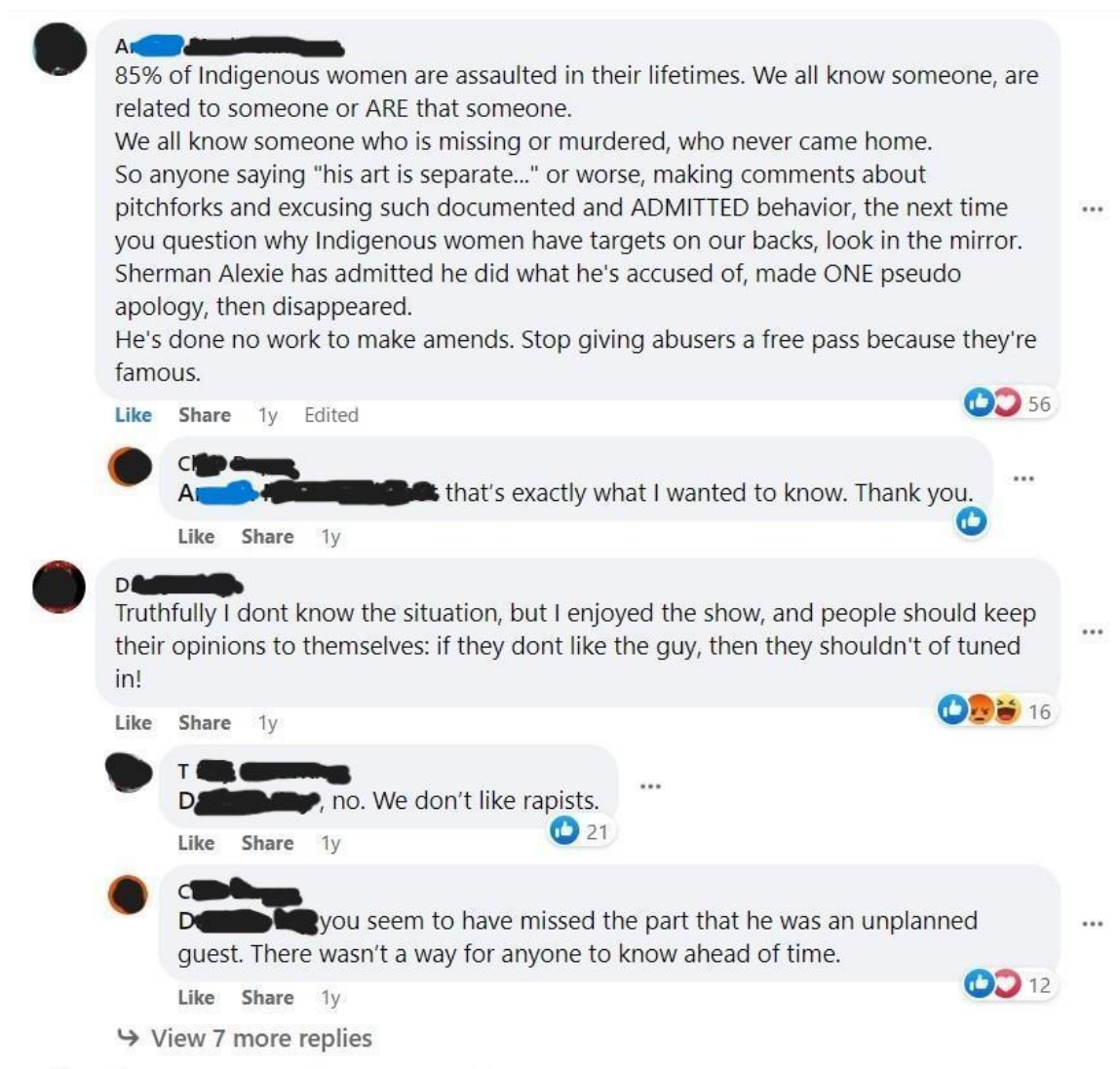


Figure 4.5: Screenshot of a portion of the comments from Stephanie Hebert's post on behalf of the Social Distance Powwow. I liked in support a post by A saying: "85% of Indigenous women are assaulted in their lifetimes. We all know someone, are related to someone or ARE that someone. We all know someone who is missing or murdered, who never came home. So anyone saying "his art is separate..." or worse, making comments about pitchforks and excusing such documented and ADMITTED behavior, the next time you question why Indigenous women have targets on our backs, look in the mirror. Sherman Alexie has admitted he did what he's accused of, made ONE pseudo apology, then disappeared. He's done no work to make amends. Stop giving abusers a free pass because they're famous."

From a critical feminist standpoint watching these events unfold, apart from silencing and censoring "feminist killjoys" from the SDP group, the organizers seem to

have placed much of the burden of “damage control” on their only women organizer, Stephanie Hebert. The next day, she went LIVE on Facebook on behalf of the SDP, explaining that if they had known, they might have handled the situation differently and were learning to move forward. Her heartfelt apology was broken up by tears and some of the 100-200 women watching shared supportive comments. It was honestly hard to watch her take on the burden of acknowledging and educating the public all alone.

After Herbert’s apology she introduced three women leaders from the page that she’ll be interviewing one on one. She explained that they intended to make space this evening “for our women,” and would be speaking on issues of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), domestic violence, sex trafficking and human trafficking across Indian country.



Figure 4.6: Screenshot from my computer of the Social Distance Powwow Monday with Leaders in MMIW on April 27th, 2020, hosted by Stephanie Hebert (top right). On the top left is Deborah Maytubee Denton (Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Cherokee), who is founder of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women USA, which assists families, tries to locate these women, and works with law enforcement on behalf of families. On the bottom left is Jacqueline Keeler

(Yankton Dakota and Navajo), who is a writer and activist who cofounded Eradicating Offensive Native Mascotry (EONM). On the bottom right is journalist for powwows.com Corinne Rice (Lakota) and the Executive Director for the BUFFALO Project, which stands for Brothers United For Feeling And Leading Openness.

While more than 2,700 people witnessed the Smoke Signals interview, this video stream *for and by women* topped at around 250 people at any one time. I sensed urgency that everyone in the powwow community online and at large should watch this video and I was not the only one. As the first comment in Figure 4.6 reads, “We All can share this live stream out even if it is to one Friend....it will be shared again. One small we [sic] way we can help get the info out. I shared and Loved the live stream so that we get into the FB news feed. So, please everyone...Like/Love and Share.”

Until a few days ago, this video was still available on the Social Distance Powwow group for almost two years, however, as of May 6th, 2022, the link takes you to a broken Facebook page that reads, “This content isn't available right now. When this happens, it's usually because the owner only shared it with a small group of people, changed who can see it or it's been deleted.” I would have not known if Deborah Denton had not posted on my Facebook newsfeed, “look what came up” with nothing showing. This launched a whole discussion between the two of us on Facebook messenger reflecting on what happened two years ago.

As I began drafting this chapter, I downloaded the video because I had scribbled moments and quotes from the interview that I had hoped to use. Like Denton’s closing statement, “You know, so every time he [Sherman Alexie] does this, he needs to expect that he's going to get called out and until he does the right thing, make the proper reparations to these people that he's harmed. And, in closing, that's where I'll leave it—

you ain't gonna do this on our watch! It's not happening.” Or sharing the importance of healthy men like in Corinne Rice’s work with the BUFFALO Project. Rice explains, “The idea is, if you have healthy men, you won't have as many domestic violence situations or you won't have this need for women, children, or LGBTQ persons who have been trafficked to feed that need. So that was the inspiration for the program. And how it was rooted in MMIW and this desire to roundabout way, attack the issue. From a position that I felt was not necessarily super popular.” This moment really resonated with me because as much as we need women’s spaces, we also need to look at the roots of the problem. This approach to social justice praxes reminds me of the analogy about constantly pulling bodies out of the stream, but what really needs to happen is looking up the river on how people keep falling into the stream and drowning.

While watching this interview, I constantly wondered and others brought up in the comments asking, why weren’t Dan Simonds and Whitney Rencountre in this video apology. According to a post from Whitney Rencountre two days later on April 28th, 2020, him and Dan Simonds planned to go LIVE later that evening to address the steps to continue moving the Social Distance Powwow forward *in a good way*. They thanked Hebert for leading some of the female perspectives yesterday with her guests. “After pausing, praying, and listening to the feedback from this past weekend, with encouragement of SDP members and their teachers, they’ll continue the SDP mission to help inspire and encourage all with the great talents of the dancers, singers, artists, entrepreneurs, language teachers, and so on.”

Concluding Reflections

Almost two years to the day after the incident, I was scrolling down my Facebook newsfeed and came across a colleague's post, "Multiple students in my class today didn't know about Sherman Alexie being a serial abuser. It's wild to me." I was frozen after reading. My mind was immediately transported back to this moment with the Social Distance Powwow. At that time, August 2022, the only records of the incident were a single Indianz.com and the apology announcement post made on the Facebook group (Abourezk 2020). This happened two years after Alexie's sexual assault allegations were made public, and now that another couple of years have gone by, I hope this toxic cycle ends.

I share this story so that our children and our children's children don't have to be fighting the same colonial obstacles that we are facing. I share because gendered violence is still happening in these communities and everywhere (MMIWG2S show structural violence against women, girls, and Two Spirits). Look at what happens when it's in our own communities and communities for Indigenous peoples. Sherman Alexie was invited to the powwow, women were trying to speak up against this, but were met with violence and to *shut up* about it. This should not have happened. The evidence is there.

Decolonization means looking at our own communities and how they perpetuate harm. I saw recently around Facebook and Reddit a post recognizing famous *Price is Right* gameshow TV host, Bob Barker, was one-eighth Rosebud Sioux. I remembered my parents trying to get on the show numerous times and watching with my birth mother when I was too sick to go to school. Then I remembered something else, the numerous

sexual harassment and discrimination charges around him. Though the first lawsuits were as early as 1994, Bob Barker was never convicted and stayed hosting *Price is Right* until Drew Carrey took over in 2007. While I was only fourteen at the time, I still remember the news stories. The allegations are public and are even documented on his own Wikipedia page, reaching thousands of viewers.

Following the brave women who spoke up against Sherman Alexie, I have commented on some of these public posts, and on my friends' posts who have shared them. I posted, "Are we forgetting that he harassed and probably sexually assaulted women? He's a friend to animals yet has done nothing to reconcile with those women. #JustAnotherAlexie?"¹³⁴ As of August 2022, I had not received much engagement, a couple likes or upvotes. A couple of people have replied asking what happened to Alexie, to which I would provide the link to 2018 NPR article. I liked one person's reply, "Well shit...Mahalo for the link. Totally missed this old terrible news." So as readers can see this harmful cycle will happen again and again, without intervention, without documenting and sharing these stories.

I did pursue follow-up research with SDP participants who had spoken up online; however, few of them responded. I was able to follow up with the Director of Missing and Murdered USA, Deborah Denton, who I have been able to share drafts of this chapter

¹³⁴ I recognize that without a conviction calling out Barker can be a slippery slope, but then again, this would assume that the United States judicial and prison system functioned honestly and justly. From excessive police force to separating children from parents, injustice permeates throughout United States history and disproportionately affects BIPOC communities (Davis 2016, Varghese 2019). Since several women were able to build cases against him, only to be thrown out, but I wonder if they had happened 10 to 23 years later in the heights of the #MeToo movement.

with, making space for her feedback and ensuring that I had her permission to quote her from video and online sources. Compassionate, careful research praxes, and receiving clear permission from interlocutors is a crucial part of my decolonizing approach. Even though I connected with her to discuss the Sherman Alexie incident, Denton chose to talk about her work with missing and murdered Indigenous women at large, as well as other current struggles she was experiencing in her work. Our conversation was no longer about Sherman Alexie in particular, it was about larger systemic issues and patterns we face as women in Indigenous communities. Deborah Denton shared with me how trust is a challenge to navigate in new relationships. With running her organization, she can only do so much on her own but has been scammed by sponsors claiming to support women. One of the biggest takeaways from our informal conversations was Denton's encouragement to act and hold abusers accountable.

The replication of existing harmful structures from in-person praxes to virtual spaces illustrates the pervasive nature of oppression. Native feminist approach calls for interrogating these cis-heteropatriarchal and heteropaternal structures that lead us to mistreat and oppress women. In the following chapter, I interrogate relationality and reciprocity, how those values take form in everyday life and experiences, and how individuals can impact oppressive structures by embracing decolonial relational praxes.

5 (nemakwanang) A Sprouting Era: Sound Relations and Reciprocity Vignettes

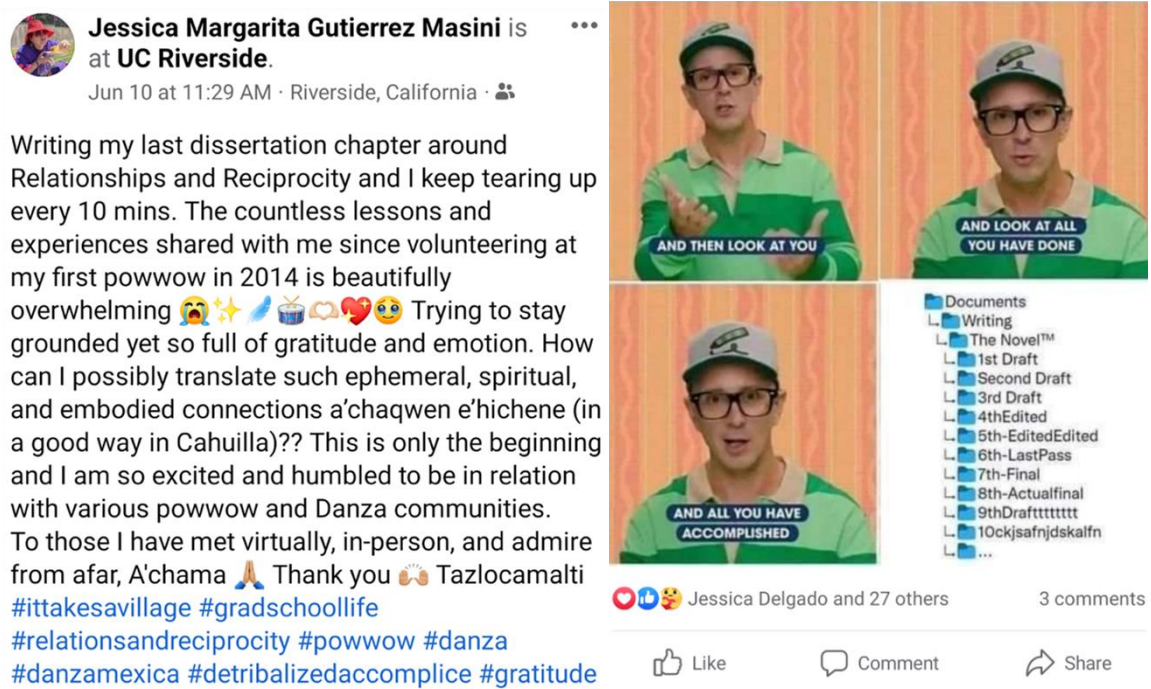


Figure 5.1: Screenshots of my Facebook post made on June 10th, 2022, from my mobile phone. My profile picture is of me eating an Indian Taco for the first time since the pandemic at the 37th Annual UCLA Powwow on May 7th, 2022.

I have posted on social media throughout my graduate school journey. The overwhelming feelings that come from balancing grant applications, reading lists, teaching, and more, the excitement in overcoming academic hurdles like comprehensive and qualifying exams, the frustrations in dealing with misogynistic, racist, classist individuals, and every emotion in between. On Facebook you can attach feelings to any post, and following influencers discussed in earlier chapters, such as Dian Million’s “felt theory,” I believe feeling and experiencing the world through our senses is as informative as theorizing about it because sound and movement produce energy and feeling. At first

these posts were to keep followers like family and friends informed and connected as I embarked on an unknown seven year-path for my doctoral education. As I came more and more into my own person with their own opinions, posting on social media became a way to openly share my growing political beliefs and social justice goals. Like other feminist and decolonizing scholars in my networks, I use Facebook to share memories or ideas close to my heart like critical race theory, mental health care, and about my own identities. These are interspersed between pictures with my partner and our dog, comical musings, and memes of all kinds, because the platform is also a source of entertainment.

This opening post (Figure 5.1) demonstrates the genuine, emotional, and lasting connections created from eight years of doing research from the heart. In other words, learning more about the questions that keep me up at night through volunteering, compassionate listening, laughing, dancing, and learning together with communities across the Southwestern United States. At the same time, I share my difficulty with honoring the power of intangible connections and embodied knowledge in written language. I feel it while swaying my hips and bouncing on my toes to the rhythms of the Cahuilla Bird Singers or reflecting on the stories Elders take the time to share with me as I volunteer. How can these powerful lessons be understood to someone reading years and distances later? Art is typically imagined as beauty or talent in space, but music and dance are unique in that they carry through both time and space. They move into the air, unable to be captured in the same way. One cannot hang it in a museum, read it in a book, or store it in an archive other than through the body, spirit, and memory. To me, this one

social media post and its subsequent engagement is a small example of how I've created sound relations and reciprocity in my everyday life.

How I envision reciprocity is not the only way to envision it because reciprocity can carry different meanings to differing communities at different times. My goals were to listen to my local Indigenous communities and create meaningful ways to *give back* and have my work benefit them. I have consciously worked towards dismantling some of the power dynamics between myself as a researcher and those I am learning with and from. As Jessica Bissett Perea, Dena'ina [Alaska Native] musicologist and mentor in Native American Studies at the University of California (UC) Davis, teaches students, "Native ways of doing music history listens for audible structures of Indigeneity to uplift Native survivance, resurgence, and community relations" (Bissett Perea 2021, 267). Her "sound relations approach advances a more Indigenized sound studies and a more sounded Indigenous studies that works to move beyond colonial questions of containment— 'who counts as Native' and 'who decides'— and colonial questions measurement— 'what exactly is 'Native' about Native music?'— and toward an aesthetics of self- determination and resurgent world- making." (6). Despite settler colonial policies and border formations that sought to eradicate Indigenous peoples, oral and written languages are just one way they assert their presence and worldviews (263). This sound relations approach not only reframes colonial questions of authenticity and hierarchical categorizations to center structures of Indigeneity as "dense and intertwined articulations," but also argues for "more relational and radical understandings of why resurgent world-making matters for all entities" (6-7). I embodied this shift in reframing

Indigenous music research by compassionately listening to friends and participants in talking circles and sharing lived experiences with local Danza and powwow communities. This chapter is a series of vignettes exploring structures of Indigeneity as dense and intertwined relations, all focused on forms of reciprocity.¹³⁵

As I learned various meanings of living life *in a good way* that were discussed in chapter 2, my understandings of reciprocity and how to *give back* grew out from Native American/Indigenous scholarship, workshops, in ceremony, and taking part in Indigenous cultural traditions. Traditionally, reciprocity is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit. While I acknowledge that this is the most basic understanding of reciprocity, to me, reciprocity also means:

- Land Back, Water Back, Clean Air¹³⁶;
- Compassionate Listening;
- Love;
- Volunteering time and labor to make Indigenous events successful, especially set up and clean up;
- Co-authorship;
- Honorariums and Financial compensation;
- Supporting Indigenous businesses (such as buying food and gifts at a powwow, promoting vendors and dancers' businesses, especially during gift-giving seasons);

¹³⁵ I attribute Dr. Jessica Bissett Perea for the word density for describing Indigeneity. By using density “to critique how ‘difference’ or ‘diversity’ tends to homogenize Native American and Indigenous Peoples,” Bissett Perea instead signals “a recognition of the inextricably intertwined realities of Indigeneity and coloniality; for without the arrival of settler societies there would be no English language category of ‘Indigenous’” (2021, 8).

¹³⁶ #Landback is a movement to return land and water rights to Indigenous Peoples, as climate change and polluted waters and air is more than enough evidence what happens without their stewardship. Some resources and examples include www.landback.org, www.ienearth.org, www.stopline3.org, <http://apache-stronghold.com/save-oak-flat-act.html>, and <https://ndncollective.org/ndn-collective-landback-campaign-launching-on-indigenous-peoples-day-2020/>.

- Accomplice to Indigenous causes (such as freeing Leonard Peltier¹³⁷, standing ground to save sacred sites, signing and sharing petitions, and donating money)
- Building and maintaining mutually beneficial relations with local Indigenous communities (such as learning their names, the language, or attending public workshops or events);
- Centering Indigenous peoples, values, tradition, and culture including rematriation¹³⁸

These vignettes centered around relations and reciprocity make that connection felt and known. Some of the aforementioned bullets defining reciprocity are demonstrated in these concluding vignettes; others are still in progress, some for the rest of my life. While I hope that the generations that come after us will not have to fight the same battles that we face, I have come to realize that that is not a guarantee. I still face the same prejudices my mother and grandmothers faced just by being who I am. When settler colonial forces seem too heavy, I remember that I am the sprout from the seeds our ancestors planted. In the last 5 years, I have seen lots of references to this idea that “they [colonizers] tried to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds.” Though originally coined by Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos, this phrase has been frequently used by Indigenous activists and poets; since the 1990s, I have seen it on numerous protest signs

¹³⁷ Leonard Peltier, noted Indigenous activist, was sentenced to two life terms in 1977. Current activists seek to overturn his conviction ([Walker 2022](#)).

¹³⁸ Rematriation is an Indigenous women’s led movement and reengaging in a spiritual and intellectual way of life with respect for Mother Earth. For an online example is [Rematriation.com](#) a digital safe space to tell stories and receive support from other Indigenous women. I also think of Swinomish and Tulalip photographer, Matika Wilbur’s words at our 40th Annual Medicine Ways Conference that the way we treat the land is a direct reflection of how we treat women, so the first and last bullet points are related (Wilbur, personal experience May 15th, 2022).

and posters, articles, art and other media the speak to decolonizing.¹³⁹ The “we” varies depending on context, sometimes in reference to brown women, Indigenous peoples, Mexicans, Chicanos, but the “they” is always in reference to colonizers, sometimes interpreted as white supremacy. I believe that this moment in time, 2020-2022 maybe even as early as 2016 for some, has been our time to rise out of the dirt, and towards the sun.¹⁴⁰ Gathering our energy, it may be small now but it’s growing. A concrete example to this metaphor is that for over 500 years my ancestors were assimilated and indoctrinated into the Catholic Church. I was indoctrinated myself as my Mexican birth parents were married the same day of my baptism. Then my Italian American adoptive mother took me through the other 11 sacraments until I went away to college. But as an adult I realized I only participated in Church and Jesus-centered thinking because it made my parents happy, and the practice was and is upheld by mainstream society. I saw/felt signs that something wasn’t all right with Catholicism before my wokeness, like when the church we attended every week pushed against same-sex marriage. I believe my personal journey mirrors current decolonial praxes in that we are no longer merely seeds, but we are beginning to sprout. Turning my back on Catholicism and growing to learn Nahuatl

¹³⁹ There are other sources that attribute the phrase “they tried to bury us, but they didn’t know we were seeds” to Christianopoulos, but in a 2016 Medium article by Ash Poders, a commenter brings attention to how this phrase became popular in Latin America. Elizabeth J commented two years ago, “‘They thought they buried you, but what they did was bury a seed’ was written in the 1950’s by Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenas as part of a poem, an epitaph for Adolfo Báez Bone, who died in 1954, during an organized attempt to overthrow the dictator. See the last lines of the poem: <https://www.poeticous.com/ernesto-cardenal/epitafio-para-la-tumba-de-adolfo-baez-bone>.” She shares three other sources for further information on Ernesto Cardenal and Adolfo Báez Bone and claims that may be a proverb from the region of Nicaragua ([Ponders 2016](#)).

¹⁴⁰ Consider the political unrest resulting in rise of protests (e.g., #BlackLivesMatter, No DAPL, Women’s March) throughout the United States.

teachings about the world is part of my growth from seed to sprout.¹⁴¹ The aforementioned vignettes that appear throughout this chapter demonstrate this sprouting in action guided by relationship-building and reciprocity.

Though they may not have used the term ‘sprouting’, other scholars have noted that we are on the cusp of transformation even in terms of research; in her article, “Experiencing People: Relationships, Responsibility, and Reciprocity,” ethnomusicologist Ruth Hellier-Tinoco reviews how in the fields of anthropology, ethnomusicology, and folklore studies, human relations in fieldwork contexts have shifted towards more collaborative projects that focus on experience rather than data collecting (2003). She suggests that there remains imbalance between informants and researchers in the complexities of planning and being in the field as she shares her own field work experiences in Mexico. For example, at the time she had the financial resources and time to travel to Mexico but upon returning the UK an ongoing reciprocal relationship became hard to sustain despite technological advancement and commitments on both sides.

Truly, the shift from seed to sprout began decades ago, in the 1970s and 1980s when Indigenous scholars first began doing and publishing widespread research on Indigenous issues (Cook-Lynn 1997, Forbes 1998). For example, since 1999, Māori educator Linda Tuhiwai Smith and her twenty-five projects have played a significant role

¹⁴¹ This is my spiritual, decolonial awakening and is like danzante Michelle Téllez’s contribution in *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives* (2014, 150-156). However, this is not the view of all danzantes as some in my Danza group identify as Catholic and attend mass.

in decolonizing the way knowledge work can be conceptualized to create spaces for new, Indigenous research to emerge and thrive. Those twenty-five projects have influenced a generation of communities, non-profits, and scholars, and served as a catalyst for her to create more tools specifically designed to support Indigenous research (Tuhiwai Smith 2021, xiii). Consequentially, in the third and latest edition Tuhiwai Smith has added twenty new knowledge projects as underpinning multiple streams of transdisciplinary activities, curiosities, and critical engagement (2021, 187). After love, healing, and abandoning/letting go/walking away, she describes living in relation. Indigenous philosophies and values teach us that not only are all human beings related to each other, but to all things, animals, plants, stars, and because we are in relation, we hold a reciprocal responsibility for one another. The quality of this relationship matters and has “an activating responsibility that humans have to exercise to practice living in relation and that then invokes the principle of reciprocity such as a vibrant harvest” (Tuhiwai Smith 2021, 193). She critiques capitalistic, individualistic, and competitive societies, and argues that by understanding the idea of living in relation to practice of ceremony becomes an ethical protocol that seeks permission, balance, and gratitude. This also overlaps with her project of replanting/re-scaping and bringing plants and animals home to where they once flourished so that they can rediscover their own relationships and interdependencies—a flourishing that aligns with this sprouting boom that I have witnessed throughout my fieldwork in the Southwest U.S. Tuhiwai Smith’s work is only one example of the many pivotal moments currently happening in research and decolonial praxes that are transforming how Indigenous people see themselves.

Some of my fieldwork has been local in the sense that it was from my home and incorporated hybrid, international engagement online, additionally there was a whole powwow trail with danzantes in California I continue to keep in touch and dance with. I did feel this strain on relations and fieldwork naturally in the beginning of the pandemic when we were all isolated, quarantining in our homes. But in the upsurge of time on social media, I virtually reconnected with mentors like Maggie Steele (Chicana and Chircauhua Nde), her mother, and met other legendary members of The Mankillers (Drum). The radical resurgence and rematriation surrounding The Mankillers is a story for another time, but there are amazing women and Two-Spirit members who are pushing back against colonial boundaries of what it means to be an urban Native woman.¹⁴²

Hellier-Tinoco opens her essay arguing that “human relationships have always been foundational to ethnomusicological fieldwork contexts,” however, I wonder how much our field’s founding fathers thought of human relations to non-persons. Like Anthony Seeger learned from Suyá communities in the Amazon, Victoria Levine from Choctaw, Yuchi, Chickasaw, and other Woodland peoples, and Steven Feld from the local populations of New Guinea, my engagement in Native American/ Indigenous student communities in California and across the Southwest has broadened my understanding of human relations to the elements, rocks, bees, the Moon, and time. Now as a danzante who moves in prayer and respect for the world and cosmos, I reflect on my own human-centered biases. *The world is not meant for us*. As an undergraduate, I

¹⁴² Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirits (BAAITS) Co-chair, Landa Lakes (Miko Thomas) defines Two Spirits as 1) being Native (Indigenous), 2) being gay, trans, or gender non-conforming or what have you, and 3) being committed to [Two Spirit] community.

remember learning about these relations and the importance of reciprocity from making my powwow drum.

As briefly referenced in Chapter 3, in 2014 I assisted Dr. Jessica Bissett Perea in revitalizing a historic Native American Music and Dance course after a ten-year hiatus.¹⁴³ The course, NAS032: Native American Music and Dance, renewed Native American music and dance communities at UC Davis by (re)developing collaborative partnerships between the course, local Native American artists and musicians, and campus community organizers involved with UC Davis Powwow and Native American Culture Days programming. To this day, I host (and compensate) community practitioners in courses I teach because I have witnessed the power and benefits of such relations. Bissett Perea invited Maggie Steele and her mother, a Mexican and Numana Elder, to come and teach us how to construct our drums from drum kits. These kits were purchased from an Indigenous-owned company that gathered the raw drum making materials in a respectful, traditional way.

The Drum is more than a musical instrument that generates sound by hitting the membrane (usually made of animal hide) that is stretched over the top.¹⁴⁴ To some Nations—like the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Peoples—it holds great cultural and symbolic power. They believe the Drum has a life of its own, which includes its own

¹⁴³ The course had previously been on a ten-year hiatus since the retirement and subsequent passing of the late David Risling Jr., who had founded the department of Native American Studies at UC Davis in 1993 (UCIRA, n.d., <http://www.ucira.ucsb.edu/jessica-perea-revitalizing-native-american-music-and-dance-communities-at-uc-davis/>.)

¹⁴⁴ I capitalize Drum when referring to it as its own entity or name of the powwow group ensemble, like you would capitalize a person's name.

powerful spirit. Some Native American peoples describe the powwow drum as “the heartbeat of their Nation” or “the heartbeat of Mother Earth” because the sounds call the spirits and peoples together (Ellis et al. 2005). Note, that spirits in this context include spirits of people, animals, plants, and the Earthly elements. Each Drum designates a Drum Keeper who takes care of the drum during the powwow and then stores it for safekeeping when it is not in use. Some of the Drum Keeper’s responsibilities include blessing the drum before playing, offering it gifts like tobacco or other traditional plants, and ensuring that no one approaches or plays the drum under the influence of drugs or alcohol.¹⁴⁵ Additionally, nothing can be set on top of the drum, and you are not supposed to reach across it (Maggie Steele 2014-2015, personal experience).

First, we painted the wooden drum rings, pictured in a stack on the left of Figure 5.2. The drum rings were made from oak trees, and we were encouraged to paint inspirational messages and/or images on them. Having lost a close friend and mentor, I wrote their name with a dotted heart around it. I also included a personal mantra, “add a little rainbow to your zebra,” which represents overcoming those negative feelings of difference throughout adolescence, and now embracing who I am. I describe the drum making process in the caption below.

¹⁴⁵ In her book, Margaret Kovach cites how two researchers of Cree ancestry refer to the use of tobacco as a gift that signifies respect and reciprocity (2009, 127).



Figure 5.2: On the left is a stack of painted oak rings from students and invited guests and on the right is my hand drum drying in the sun. After we set the wooden rings in the sun and stored them away to dry, we returned the next day and learned how to stretch and weave elk hide tightly over the painted wooden rings. I remember slimy hide slipping through my fingers as I pulled it over the rim. Then using the intestine, we threaded it through pre-punctured holes like sewing with a long-wet pasta noodle, before tying the hide into one knot in the back. Some of the hides were dyed blue or red beforehand, while others kept their natural color.

We ended our two-day drum making workshop with a collective blessing led by Maggie Steele's Elderly mother. She acknowledged the oak trees, the deer, and elks, who gave their lives for our drums and instructed us that it was our responsibility to take care of our new drums and honor their lives. In reflecting on my workshops with Maggie Steele and her mother, I witnessed traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) that is embodied through the practice of traditional caretaking and treating the land as living relative. My practice of drum making is a praxis of reciprocity.

The greatest lesson from drum making is reciprocity with the Earth, plants, and animals past, present, and future. As mentioned in the introduction, reciprocity is the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit. This traditional definition is still useful as it means that both participants enjoy an advantage or gain something from the exchanging process. In practice, this means not taking more resources than you give back and this is seen in the way Native Americans create from and with Mother Earth. Reflecting on my powwow drum making experience reminds me to honor all living and non-living beings. Those woods, hides, and other natural materials are symbolic of the reciprocal relationship and responsibility between human beings, the environment, and the cosmos in which we are a part of. As it has been described to me, it's about learning from and honoring the seven generations before us that got us to today, then taking care of each other in the present to ensure that the next seven generations can not only survive, but thrive.

Listen to that corn; Náqma mayís: Corn Ceremony at Home

In May 2022, Dawn Avery invited me to collaborate on her composition/performative piece which prompted me to “Listen deeply” to my relationship with the sounds an image evokes (Avery forthcoming). This performative, embodied writing demonstrates practice in decentering humans for a moment in my dissertation. After providing 13 images with cultural/ Indigenous resonance Avery asks collaborators to “Listen deeply to your relationship with the sounds that the image evokes. This sounding may include sonic connections, cellular memories, past experiences, stories, teachings, art or something else entirely” (Avery forthcoming). That openness to *something else*

granted me permission away from form, genre, or content, so I focused on listening, and soaking in all the wisdom corn wanted to share. In preparing for this composition, I sat with the young corn in my garden, reflecting, and listening. The moments in italics are teachings from this time with the corn, as well as sonic connections to personal lived experiences and imagined relations.

Picture perfect corn. Bold, yellow kernels neatly lined and peeking through peeled husk. She is generous and ready for harvest. *Listen to that corn.* Náqma mayís in the Cahuilla language, and the language of the people whose lands I am writing from and reside.¹⁴⁶

Corn is an invaluable teacher. Like corn we as humans come in many colors, shapes, and sizes. Bright reds and yellows, deep purples and blues, or multicolor kernels create differing textures, tastes, and smells. Density of flavor profiles.

I recognize corn may be a deep cultural symbol for various Nations who each may hold their own meanings and history. As a Mexican born in the United States and adopted, my love for corn began to reconnect to my roots, following Mexican sentiments as “children of the corn” and enjoying corn in almost every Mexican dish. Later reconnecting and visiting birth family in León, I witnessed firsthand corn’s importance to Mexican daily life and economy. Flying in above and seeing acres upon acres of corn fields. Walking down the street every week to the local Tortillería, which was really two ladies in a little hole in the wall rolling and flattening out maize all day into warm tortillas. Tías (aunties) and abuela cooking all day to rancherías, bandas, boleros, bachatas, mariachi, salsas, reggaetón, and all kinds of Mexican popular music, so that we have the energy to dance and talk the night away.

The image of corn evokes connection to my ancestors, felt through our dance about the corn, and respects human relations to the elements that sustain the world around us. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I thought our dance steps in Maíze –mimicking tilling, planting, and harvesting –would be the closest I would be to performing a corn ceremony while living in suburbia. Week by week, my Danza group –an intertribal multigenerational Indigenous music, dance, and spiritual group practice from México – keeps me accountable and guides my learning through Nahuatl teachings and cosmologies. According to Jennie Luna, most interpretations have falsely asserted that danzantes (Danza dancers) practice “for ‘the gods,’ when in actuality, the term ‘gods,’ in reference to a polytheistic belief system, is misconstrued” (2012, 86). Her research and interviews point to a common understanding that these dances and ceremonies are for beings, spiritual, and cosmic forces that are alive and are important enough to be loved, thanked, and honored. For example, our young women’s coming of age ceremony is

¹⁴⁶ I use the spelling mayís for corn following my Cahuilla teacher at UC Riverside, William Madrigal Jr., but acknowledge that máys is also a common spelling.

called Xilone(n) or young corn in Nahuatl language and takes place in late spring or summer when corn is most powerful.

Time and ceremony at home have brought a special blessing and reconnection to our Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. Corn has been the basis of many Mesoamerican and Indigenous cultures located in what is now known as North America. Indigenous communities cultivated corn thousands of lifetimes ago and preserve how to grow and care for native strands to this day. The importance in Nahuatl cultures is evident in the language: cintli (dried ears of maize or corn), centli (corn on the cob), xoyahui (withered or mildewed corn), chachitl, (good luck stone known as corn kernel), totomochtli (dried corn husk), centlalilli (a pile of ears of corn), and tlaolcalco (corn exchange) are just to name a few.

Corn is life. Corn provides for a growing Nation. Growing corn has been an extremely spiritual experience for me. While it receives help from nutrient rich soil, our Sun, and pollination from bees, corn can regenerate itself without human intervention. Corn can be described as Two-Spirit with both female and male parts. Corn stages **mimic our life stages**: planting, germination, vegetation, and reproduction. There is an old farmer's saying that on a quiet night you can hear the corn growing. The stretching, breakage, and remodeling creates tiny crackling noises.

Colonization has damaged our relationship with corn. NAFTA threatens Mexico's 64 recognized strains, called landraces, and over 21,000 regionally adapted varieties of corn. Remember the Monsanto wars and witness greed that corporate capitalism spread throughout the world. Removing Indigenous relations to land and water thereby breaking ways to sovereign, thriving lives. Altering corn in ways so our bodies cannot healthily consume things like ethanol and high fructose corn syrup. Ultimately, killing and cutting the lives of poor, black and brown bodies short like biochemical warfare (Mihesuah 2003).

In 2020, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador passed a new law creating the Consejo Nacional de Maíz (National Corn Council) to document and establish relations with regions where native corn varieties are grown to ensure sustainable production. Over two-thirds of farmers today keep their seeds and are planting native strains; there is hope. Corn lives on in so many ways: steeped, cleaned, and shelled to eat, dried and ground into fiber to feed livestock or as a masa for tamales, refined into oil or syrup, and fermented as other byproducts.

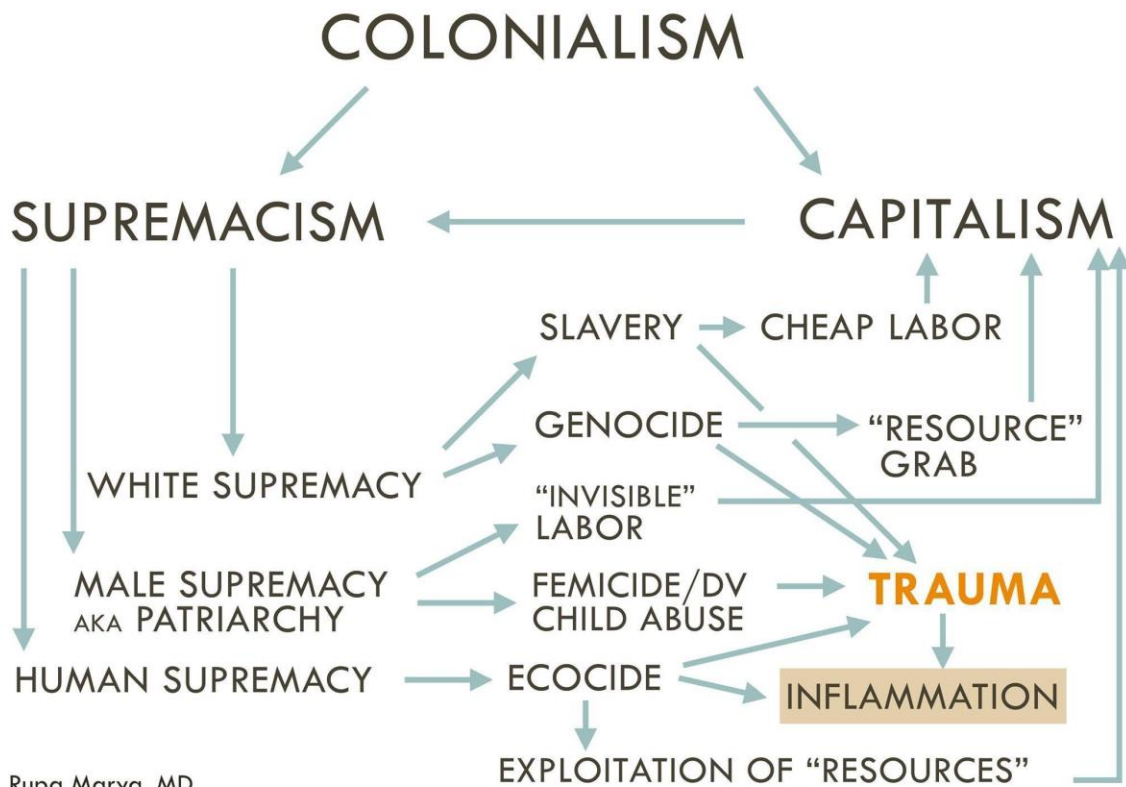
Care for corn because it takes care of us, sustains us. This image of corn encourages us to return to our gardens. Decolonize our diets or incorporate parts of a traditional lifestyle. Return to healthy people, culture, and cosmos. *Good health lends good feelings.* Listening and being in relation with Mother Earth destresses and fills my cup as a queer BIPOC woman academic. Tending to corn and other parts of our garden, I gain confidence, responsibility, and pride.

Corn teaches us we are limited alone. Sitting with the corn, I hear birds and squirrels who like us, consume corn and release seeds. Grubs and insects push the soil around corn kernels, that are then hydrated from midnight showers or morning dew. A wonderful little orchestra of mutuality and interdependence. Once a young sprout bursts through, the young corn soaks up sunlight and awaits its siblings. Weeding out unwanted

plants is a labor of love but eliminates possible threats to the corns' pollination process. In the fertilization process, gentle winds and buzzing creatures help each strand of corn hair become a juicy kernel. Magical, lifegiving fruit is ready for harvest and ceremony. *Twist and snap, twist, and snap* into your basket, all while humming a sweet little tune of gratitude and praise. Ometeotl; Tlazohcamati. A'chama. Blessings; Thank you (Nahuatl) / Thank you; Good feelings with you (Cahuilla).

This corn ceremony is included as practice in decentering humans, which I have come to believe is necessary in decolonizing one's critical consciousness. This practice with my garden, an extension of Mother Earth, is part of my land acknowledgment practice.¹⁴⁷ Indigenous peoples and other populations who cultivate reciprocal connections with Mother Earth understand this responsibility. Contrary to my Catholic upbringing (re: indoctrination), the world was not created for us humans. She is not an everlasting abundant resource for our consumption, as evidenced by climate change and the rise in endangered or extinct species.

¹⁴⁷ Land or Territory acknowledgement practices are a way that people bring awareness of Indigenous presence and land rights in everyday life and are often done in the beginning of ceremonies, lectures, or any public event. For a Guide to Indigenous Land Acknowledgement see [here](#).



Rupa Marya, MD

Figure 5.3: A powerful graphic that breaks down systems that contribute to ongoing settler colonialism. This image was originally introduced and explained to me from a Facebook post by Punjabi physician, activist, and musician Dr. Rupa Marya. However, it has since been deleted and reposted as her cover photo art with a new caption, “Root cause analysis. And very much a rough schematic of the book I’m writing with Raj Patel, Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice, out 2021 on Farrar, Straus, & Giroux and Allan Lane (Penguin Press)”.

Dr. Rupa Marya paints a powerful graphic that depicts how our relationship to land is destroyed by ongoing settler colonialism (re: supremacy and capitalism). In a Facebook post she explains how we, “see human supremacy, where people feel superior to the rest of living entities, thereby subjecting living soils, seeds, animals, plants and water to horrific treatment in the name of exploiting resources, which in turn feeds the capitalist need for ever-increasing profits. While this wheel of domination, exploitation, generation and sequestration of wealth continues, we experience as a byproduct and

common pathway TRAUMA and many studies have shown us that chronic stress and trauma create chronic inflammation."¹⁴⁸ May readers be inspired to return to the land and explore their responsibilities to the lands, waters, airs, they reside. In the long run, create reciprocal relations with their local Indigenous populations. Indigeneity starts with the land, and despite over five centuries of forced migration and assimilation, *we are still here*.

Reciprocity through Feathers: Following Danzantes on the Margins of the Gathering of Nations Powwow

My first trip to Albuquerque, New Mexico in Spring 2019 was to witness firsthand Danza's participation in the largest powwow on the continent, the 36th Annual Gathering of Nations Powwow. I learned about the history of the powwow, the competition for Miss Indian World (exclusive to Indigenous women from the United States or Canada), and the way the powwow functions and treats non-standard powwow dancers. Two Danza groups were invited to the Gathering of Nations: In Tlanextli Tlacopan Aztec Dancers and Xiuh Arte Aztec Dancers. For the two days of the main powwow April 26, 2019 – April 27, 2019, I followed these two groups around the powwow as they danced for participants and spectators outside the main arena. Tlanextli Tlacopan Aztec Dancers consisted of a family (mom, dad, and four children ages toddler

¹⁴⁸ For full explanation of this image see Dr. Rupa Marya's coauthored book *Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice* (2021) or the transcript from her 2018 Bioneers keynote presentation [here](#).

to teenagers) from Southern California, while Xiuh Arte Aztec Dancers were led by Luz, a local danzante and vendor from the Inland Empire. I had met Luz once before at my Danza group's weekly practice in Ontario, CA when she came to dance with us. At the Gathering of Nations Luz remembered me and I was able to informally interview herself and other danzantes who danced with her. Whereas the other group was a family who had been dancing for a few years there, Luz was like a point person for danzantes invited by the powwow since the mid-2000s. She then spread the word through Facebook and word-of-mouth and those who could make it showed. I met danzantes for the first time from all over California and a couple from Mexico City who had come to support Luz and dance as a group for Gathering of Nations.

Based on my observations, these children who *grow up in ceremony* belong to this budding Danza generation that is experiencing a transformation in their relationship to Indigeneity. This is a stark contrast to the limited relationship their parents and grandparents may have had, given that the earlier generations existed under laws and traumatic conditions that prohibited Indigenous traditions and then that negatively impacted those subsequent generations' relationship to Indigeneity. This more hopeful trend among children and young adults in Indigenous communities reflects what Itztli Arteaga described as blossoming in her interview with me in Chapter 3. Similarly, in the follow-up women's NASP talking circle, we also noted that this younger generation—despite different tribal affiliations, heritage and upbringing—is beginning to connect with and relate to each other as family. As part of my own ethnographic approach, I aim to nurture this garden of Indigenous understanding and resurgence as well as call attention

to how this sprouting era is crucial to how we as scholars, researchers and Indigenous peoples think about Indigeneity. Part of how I do this is engaging in ethical care, such as how I approached my research at the Gathering of Nations Powwow.

As I observed the danzantes, I was respectful of their regalia and did not take photos without their permission. This made me stand out from the tourist spectators who interrupted their palabras for pictures and asked questions before the ceremony was over. By the second day with Xiuh Arte I helped get them water, shared my ibuprofen, and was trusted to take care of their regalia when they went on breaks. As seen in Figure 5.4, not only did I make contacts for follow-up research questions and interviews, but I made lifelong friendships where I can learn and grow with others as the next generation of danzantes. In practicing transparency throughout the research process, I have shared all audiovisual recordings with these two groups over Google Photos and Gmail.



Figure 5.4: Danzante from Xiuh Arte Aztec Dancers whom I befriended at Gathering of Nations sharing feathers from her headdress with me for when I am given permission to make my regalia. This was an incredible honor.

I knew the feathers gifted to me by Blue were a powerful sign of friendship and reciprocity. In my kapulli, I later learned the significance of feathers in Danza practice. This past year, I have witnessed the children in our kapulli transition to teenagers when they were gifted macaw feathers. The type of feathers has significance. My kapulli teacher Mrs. Cencalli shared with me that macaw or pheasant feathers are some of the

first feathers given. You can tell a danzante is more established when they adorn condor or eagle feathers. She began to tell me of a story that happened one time during our big ceremony. There was a young man who was all decked out with multiple feathers in his layered headdress and unique regalia to folks there. Donning such regalia, he was motioned to come into the inner circle of danzantes to lead a dance. When he couldn't do it, everyone witnessed that he had purchased his regalia.

The use of eagle feathers by non-recognized tribes in the United States has become a point of contention between Indigenous communities and networks. Since the Bald and Golden Eagle Protect Act in 1940, “the United States government has outlawed the possession of both bald and golden eagle feathers in order to protect this treasured animal. One exception to this prohibition allows federally recognized Native American tribes to use eagle feathers for a bona fide religious purpose.” (Smith 2018, 1). The key to this exception is federal recognition, which leaves out many state-recognized tribes, individuals not enrolled or unable, and those with Indigenous connections to Nations outside the United States geopolitical borders. This acts as a barrier to many Indigenous peoples, though some can circumnavigate this through longtime relations.

For example, I have met some folks who were gifted eagle feathers, or they have relatives or close relationships with those who are allowed to own eagle feathers, and those with permission often hold them for those without permission. This sharing process can get messy when protocols get lost or removed from ceremonies, and then eagle feathers may show up in public places and cause upset. I witnessed this from afar in 2019 when the UC Davis Native American Studies Department, as well as Elders in the Davis

community, demanded the use of ceremonial objects be removed from a Xicanx Futurity exhibition (Bihn-Wallace 2019). Some were upset by the portrayal of religion and ceremony as art, and the misrepresentation of Indigenous identities while others asserted that the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP) does not extend protection to detribalized Indigenous peoples of the Americas, like Xicanxs (Bihn-Wallace 2019). Even though reciprocal relations between Danza and powwow community members may extend Indigeneity, the lack of legal protections and acknowledgement of detribalized peoples or peoples of Indigenous descent outside the U.S. leave many Indigenous people with little or no agency. In the case of the Xicanx Futurity art exhibition, two pieces were removed for having tobacco and eagle feathers respectively, and the campus created a Native American and Indigenous Student Advisory Committee to consult and report to the UC Davis Chancellor. Although the removal of the pieces was a step in the right direction to prevent future cultural oversight, what was most exciting was the coming together and solidarity between students from the Chicano Students Department and Native American Studies Department. They don't want to make these mistakes and it shows the future generation how we can work together in enacting our Indigeneity *in a good way*.

This particular incident aligns with the pattern of the ongoing sprouting era because of multiple factors. First, the local Indigenous community felt empowered to speak up and demand that local institutions act in sound relations with the community. Secondly, the pieces were actually removed. The fact that both of these steps were taken without significant, long-lasting negative fallout impacting either party shows how both

parties grew in understanding and were able to meet in the middle. This was yet another example of Indigenous communities coming together against the state, only this time the resolution was mostly positive. This is one small but important example of reciprocity, and a result that many might not have expected in earlier generations.

Remembering Relations: Sacred Springs aka Danza Powwow as Testament to Reciprocal Relations between Danzantes and Powwow Organizers

My trip to San Marcos, Texas in Fall 2019 was to witness the one and only Danza Powwow. The term Danza Powwow is my own naming for what is widely known as the Sacred Springs Powwow, because unlike other powwows there is an equal presence of traditional powwows dances (e.g., Gourd, Fancy, Jingle Dress, etc.) along with Danza at the event and representation in promotional materials (videos, flyers, program).

Additionally, instead of dinner entertainment, danzantes were welcomed into the circle as exhibition dancers, encouraged to participate in Grand Entry, and to stay afterward for other social dances (Round Dance then Intertribal) before the competition dances began. By receiving dedicated powwow resources and time in the main program, danzantes are not perceived as mere dinner entertainment, but instead, recognized and rewarded like any other competitive dancer in the powwow circuit. I am arguing for danzantes to have the same options and agency as other recognized dance styles in the powwow circuit, not that everyone should compete or that all powwows need to incorporate Danza. There are some groups that follow my teacher's philosophy, which does not encourage competition.

This whole trip to San Marcos was inspired by Tlaketekatl's 2017 blog post, "[Aztecs at the Pow Wow](#)" because I thought I was the only person talking about Danza and powwow.¹⁴⁹ I feel somewhat impertinent sharing this powwow because during the pandemic Sacred Springs still incorporated Danza, but they didn't have competition categories for them. Danzantes no longer have equal opportunity like they once had with other powwow dancers. While Tlaketekatl seems to have moved on from working with this community, the Sacred Springs Powwow organizers Dr. Mario Garza and his wife Maria Rocha, and the [Indigenous Cultures Institute](#) are still very much involved. Reframing ways of thinking about and understanding Indigeneity continues to be one of the Indigenous Cultures Institute's missions, and while maybe not in the powwow space, they enact other hubs through cultural programming and resources.

During my 2019 trip to the Danza Powwow, other kapullis were there from around Texas (Dallas, Houston, Austin), however, I was the only danzante from California. I danced in social dances with them, but I did not find it appropriate to compete in the competition dances.¹⁵⁰ Danzantes from these kapullis spoke with me as we rested and gathered around the only tree at the powwow. We shared our own personal stories and I learned that at the time the Sacred Springs powwow was nine years old, it had only had Danza categories for the last three years, and they constantly tweaked it

¹⁴⁹ I thank Dr. María Regina Firmino-Castillo for sharing this source with me after taking her Cultural Approaches to Dance seminar and discussing the beginnings of my dissertation questions in her office.

¹⁵⁰ I learned afterwards when sharing my trip experience with my kapulli teachers that traditionally a danzante asks for permission from their kapulli before dancing without them because you are a representative of that group. This confirms my hesitance and feelings that I needed to follow protocol before competing and dancing for prize money and recognition. I have now learned from my mistakes and do not dance without my kapulli or permission.

every year. In 2019, the competition held three categories (males, females, children) with monetary prizes for the first 4 places in adult categories and 3 places with children. On the second day, they needed another danzante judge, so they asked one of the older female danzante, but she didn't have a skirt, so I lent her mine without hesitation. Although two states away, I have made friends with the danzantes from UT Austin and UT San Marcos, and we continue to stay in touch over social media. I had hoped to return the next year, because of the unique co-existence of powwow and Danza worlds in one weekend event. Unfortunately, the pandemic had other plans.

Sadly, though the Sacred Springs Powwow did return to in-person events after a two-year shift to virtual powwows due to COVID-19, when they returned to in-person, they no longer featured danzantes as a powwow competition category. They were still invited to Grand Entry and Intertribal and given their own timeslot to dance that was not dinner break. Despite this change, the Sacred Springs powwow is still the only powwow to put danzantes in their promotional materials. However, the use of danzantes in those materials and the lack of their having dedicated financial prizes feels like a breakdown in sound relations and reciprocity between this powwow, its organizers (including the non-profit that sponsors the powwow), and danzante participants. It seems to me that in this challenging time of returning to in-person powwow, Danza was one of the first events to fall by the wayside. This powwow is sponsored and run by a non-profit group, and therefore differs from other school powwows that can rely on student bodies to help them fundraise and organize. Despite the era of sprouting that I have previously noted, this shift in focus and space for danzantes at the Sacred Springs Powwow seems like a

regression in terms of relations between powwow organizers and danzantes. That said, I am still invested in the potential sprouting that may occur in this community. In future, I would like to perform further research and investigation to learn if this change in treatment of danzantes at the Sacred Springs Powwow continues or returns to its earlier reciprocal relation; these relationships are fluid and ever changing.

Regardless of these changes, my autoethnographic approach to reciprocity means staying in touch with community. This community is not made of research subjects to me; these are my friends, teachers, and fellow danzantes. Thanks to Facebook and other social media platforms, I can still support their causes like signing petitions to protect sacred sites and buy handmade products from dancers who are also vendors.

Bay Area American Indian Two-Spirit Powwow

Let us turn now to the third bullet I listed in my definition of reciprocity: Love. My ideas of love have changed over time. My upbringing with two divorced women made me critical of love while a childhood with all things Disney left me longing for companionship. I liken my unlearning and reevaluating what love means to the way Muskogee/Cree musician and three-term Poet Laureate Joy Harjo describes in her contribution in *Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women* (Mankiller 2016).

"Love is about acceptance and compassion. It's about being able to see through the various levels of this Earth experience—through the violence, the striving, jealousy, anger, to the truth of it. I have experienced it through my babies and with people I am close to, and transcendentally, even through relative strangers...Last night I dreamed that a group of Native women

activists were all in a bus riding together. I was sitting at the back of the bus and I could see everyone. Toward the front, I could see this old Native woman, probably Hawaiian, and she was talking, but I soon realized nobody else could see her. She was a little angry, but compassionate, saying, "You know it is important that you remember to pray. You have to remember who you are. You need to go out and plant. You need to remember this is how you connect. This is how you will know who you are. You have to plan to be part of this. You have to remember these teachings whether you are Cherokee, Muscogee Creek, or Native Hawaiian." It's all about respect. It is about love, about understanding the continuum, and understanding how to respect one another. There is a certain decorum, or aloha, on how you treat other human beings." (138-9)

Volunteering with BAAITS and expanding my Two-Spirit networks has decolonized my views of love and sexuality. Learning from other sexual entities has opened my eyes to ways of loving. Similar to Roger Kuhn, former BAAITS Board member, sex therapist, and scholar in Human Sexuality, when he talks about Muscogee community love in his chapter, in contrast to this idea of "settler erotics," and how a Western Eurocentric idea of love has been standardized, by way of movies and media (2021). These heterosexual, monogamous fairy tale love stories have been put upon mainstream society. And so, for a long time in my life, I only understood love as romantic or as feelings you have for your family. When in reality it includes a spectrum of expressions and relations. As a child whose family tree projects always came out like a family bush, I understood that blood doesn't always make a family because it truly took a village to raise me.

The Two-Spirit people and the popularization of Two-Spirit powwows is an opportunity for everyone to witness Indigenous ideas of love and family. Alternative ideas of family are already prevalent in LGBTQIA+ communities in this idea of a

“chosen family” because sometimes we’re not accepted by our families and so create other family ensembles. This is not too unfamiliar for me. I still remember hearing my mother snap back, “that’s not a real thing” when I told her I was bisexual, along with the jokes made by peers and society at large that bisexuals are greedy or confused. However, I have never been kicked out of my home nor arrested for existing like some of our Two-Spirit or trans relatives. Acceptance of alternative forms of love and family are necessary and important for human survival, which is perhaps why BAAITS has an open attitude that welcomes all.

It might be easy to think that BAAITS is so revolutionary but that is not the result of a powwow event itself. Even though the powwow event does have power to establish what is considered “powwow tradition”, it is really about the Two-Spirit people –them thriving and connecting to supportive networks. As discussed in my introductory chapter, most powwows are social gatherings of intertribal Native American communities, open to the public, and centered around Indigenous musics, dances, foods, traditions, and more. It is also important having mentorship from Aunties and Elders who say, “it’s okay to be this way, and let me show you how.” And then our generation seeing things like degendered bathrooms and dance categories will be normalized. Everyone is comfortable being themselves, and then supporting the children and next generations, who enjoy the Two-Spirit Butch Queen in full regalia leading Grand Entry. That is the magic in this time and space made by BAAITS volunteers and the labor being done over the years, because a single powwow event is not going to change the world. But with time, continuing this practice of holding space, and a lot of love change is indeed ahead.

There were a lot of firsts for me as well as the powwow committee in producing a completely virtual powwow (BAAITS 2021) and then navigating an in-person production of a live streamed powwow event (BAAITS 2022). There was a lot of pivoting in the second year (2021-2022) with vaccine and mask mandates fluctuating month to month and changing between states, counties, and cities. My first year with them, I respectfully listened to conversations, took meeting notes, and executed on jobs delegated to me. After my first year with BAAITS, I noticed that much of the labor falls back on the shoulders of board members if volunteers in the committee did not step up. During the second year with a shrunken down powwow committee, I took on more leadership and would periodically ask co-Chairs Amelia or Landa what else I could do to help them. Powwows are a labor of love and it's a balance of knowing your own limitations while also carrying some of the load. This is another example of how to practice doing things *in a good way*, in regards to both the event and myself.

Powwows include both solemn and playful activities and when BAAITS debuted its documentary they did not record prayers or sacred dances out of respect. "For years at the edge of the San Francisco Bay, in Fort Mason's vast pier warehouse, an LGBTQI Native American nonprofit group has hosted a unique event...just across the water from Alcatraz Island" ([Two-Spirit Powwow](#) 2021 documentary). What separates their powwow from anywhere else in the world, is that it's organized and run by urban Two-Spirit people and accomplices (my preferred term over ally). When joining the BAAITS powwow committee, I noticed their meetings were held like talking circles opening and closing each meeting with a prayer, song, or other offerings. We always introduced

ourselves, sharing names, preferred pronouns, and what brought us to BAAITS. How BAAITS leaders held their committee meetings and coordinated their powwow event was a powerful example of gender inclusion in dance categories and space. I remember the impact on my psyche, close and intimate, taping up the urinal in the men's bathroom and relabeling the bathroom signs at Fort Mason (Occupied Ohlone territory where the powwow is annually held). I wondered, *why can't all bathrooms be this way?*

Besides proud, funny Indigiqueers, there are straight people involved in organizing and promotion of the powwow, and children, who dance in the Tiny Tots category (any dancer 5 years and older). In transitioning the dance competition part of a powwow to online in 2021, we as a BAAITS committee accepted all video submissions from the Tiny Tots category (5 years old and younger) and awarded them \$10 each. Ultimately like most powwows, they are for the community including Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

I was taken aback at how welcoming they were to someone they had never met before “infiltrating” their meetings.¹⁵¹ Now that I understand the ebbs and flows of the BAAITS community, I see that people come and go and the powwow committee has a revolving quality to it. Some may come for a meeting or two and pop in with ideas or take on a small task, others are there for years at every meeting, then slowly transition to

¹⁵¹ I use the word infiltrating because at that time (2020), I felt like an infiltrator; meaning I am not Two-Spirit, and I did not have Cuauhtémoc Peranda (a former BAAITS committee member and friend) there to introduce me. This personal sentiment is no longer applicable, as I am now called “relative” and honored with more powwow responsibilities.

honored guest or respected Elder. There are so many Aunties!¹⁵² In Two-Spirit communities, Aunties usually take on the responsibility of educating young people on what being Two-Spirit means in their culture. For example, experienced dancers sponsoring younger ones into the circle for their first dances involves showing them how to make their regalia, move in their chosen dance style, and gather positive community support for their debut. Sometimes Auntie is how Two-Spirit people name those who came together, organizing in the late 1980s and early 1990s to give them this gift (Laing 2021). These relationships are part of the “chosen families” built in 2SLGBTQI+ communities.

When I first joined the BAAITS organization, I scoped out their website and noticed a note for Researchers/Academics: “BAAITS is a very small, all-volunteer organization that exists primarily to serve our Two Spirit community. As such, we are unable to serve as a resource to scholars conducting research on Two-Spirit people or communities. Due to the high volume of requests we receive from researchers, BAAITS is not able to assist with connecting researchers to possible participants, or with academic resources related to Two-Spirit issues” (BAAITS, “[Resources](#)”). This reassured me that my intentions of coming in as a volunteer to help *in a good way* and make their powwow a success was the best approach. In my decolonized approach I always prioritize the needs of the community which doesn't always make for thrilling thick ethnography

¹⁵² Aunties can take on slightly different definitions depending on the community, for example LaWhore Vagistan explains in Southeast Asian Drag culture, they're women Elders who are not part of the nuclear family but feels very present and belongs there in the home and do the things your parents never would like gossip ([TEDx Tufts 2020](#)).

(setting up chairs, tables, and easy ups, taping the fire lanes, and picking up trash). My approach to volunteering and helping the community first, has built lasting, reciprocal connections.

In support of my research questions, I witnessed and listened to Danza and intertribal relations in a decade-old urban powwow centered on Two-Spirit empowerment. From compassionately listening in Two-Spirit talking circles and volunteering for two years with BAAITS is that like danzantes, Two-Spirit people are on the margins of the powwow imaginary or excluded entirely. Their Indigeneity is often questioned because of settler colonial domination and influence. In the 1980s, feminist and culture theorist bell hooks envisioned feminism built on compassion, respect, and integrity, pushing back on the ghettoization of the queer, black female perspective (hooks 1984/2000). Tuhiwai Smith traces the metaphor of the margin as a powerful analytic for understanding social inequality, oppression, disadvantage, and power. I remember reading her words as though she were speaking to me. “There are also researchers, scholars, and academics who actively choose the margins, who choose to study people marginalized by society, who themselves have come from the margins or who see their intellectual purpose as being scholars who work for, with, and alongside communities who occupy the margins of society” (2012, 205).

As the late bell hooks did for feminist theory and Linda Tuhiwai Smith did for education, I bring danzantes and Two-Spirit women from the margin to the center of my powwow narrative. What brilliant moments were the Danza category at the powwow October 15th, 2017, and the Trans Special at the BAAITS powwow February 12th,

2022.¹⁵³ Both were the culmination of relationship building, sharing, and listening to one another's experiences and ideas of Indigeneity. BAAITS compassion with Two-Spirit and trans experiences, like hearing trans parents' experiences, like danzantes not being questioned on their blood quantum or mixed heritage. People sometimes forget that social justice means compassion for one another. An illustrated and narrated video campaign entitled, "Everyone Loves Someone Who Had an Abortion" premiered in April of 2020 demonstrating that even overcoming political, financial, and physical barriers to reproductive healthcare in the United States, people choosing to end a pregnancy may feel afraid to tell even loved ones, so they endure the process alone. The National Network of Abortion Funds believes that compassion is a radical act and that love, and acceptance are part of activism. I adamantly believe this because without compassion and empathy, society writes off individuals' injustice as subjective or that they are making a big deal about things that don't matter. I am writing here to say that how we learn and express Indigeneity matters. My compassionate writing, love of community, and sharing of these lived experiences have the power to change conversations around Indigeneity. As Leslie Marmon Silko writes the "only way to get change is not through the courts or –

¹⁵³ As discussed briefly in chapter 3, in powwow culture the term Special can be used for Native American music and dance traditions that are given a spot in the powwow program but not part of the standardized, exhibition powwow dances. It is also used when members of the powwow committee, Head Staff, community at large want to hold a special timeslot in the powwow program for a particular cause. Some examples of powwow Specials I have witnessed are a head dancer hosting a special for a particular group (adolescent girls, children, Elders), honoring a sick or deceased relative or a Coming Out Special (this means that it is a dancers' first-time dancing in the powwow circle).

heaven forbid – the politicians, but through a change of human consciousness and through a change of heart.”¹⁵⁴

From the Margins to the Center: BAAITS Trans Special

Returning to my Two-Spirit friend and colleague Cuauhtémoc Peranda, with whom I shared my first in-person experiences at BAAITS over a virtual chat. We were in Maize writing group, a virtual space over Zoom for mutual composition support started by queer Indigenous writers.¹⁵⁵ I’ve come to this space to write, vent, cope, and learn with Cuauhtémoc over the last three years and it felt appropriate to finally thank them and share with them all I had learned (February 19, 2022). I share this way because this is how we share in community with one another.

Me: "I don't even know where to start. You dropped me into a committee meeting last year [two years in 2020] and then, here I am going—"
“First of all, just being in a space and being able to connect with people virtually and openly and, like building a whole year and a half of relationships without even meeting someone in person is like a beautiful thing. And I don't know if it's just because it's like the Two-Spirit based communities already so beautiful and loving? Or if it's just like, what happened in a time of COVID? Maybe both?"

¹⁵⁴ This sentence is a quote by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her third edition of *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021, 198). And there is no reference to the original source by Leslie Marmon Silko.

¹⁵⁵ While composing my embodied reflection of the corn ceremony, I asked Cuauhtémoc why they named their writing group Maize and they responded with the following explanation: “...about the Maize Writing group, there was a lot of planning involved: we wanted it to act like a digital CCNN [California Center for Native Nations]. We wanted it open to all, but always with Indigenous leadership. We didn't want to name the group like "two-spirits writing in tights" – nothing too ethnically or discipline specific. I grew up calling the plant [corn] Maiz... the women's coming of age ceremony is called the Maiz ceremonia. depending on the year, and the jefx (teacher/leader) of the ceremony changes...Corn, as it turns out, was the staple food of our tribes –and it represented group and clarity. So, we went with what was between us: corn. Rather than calling it the Corn Writing Group, or Maiz Writing Group, we used Maize Writing Group (so that it would look more foreign to some, piquing interest). Also, Maize sounds like Maze, and that is what the space is for, to help people through the maze of their own writing and ideas” (Personal experience, 2022).

Cuauhtémoc Peranda says, “definitely both” and we both laugh.

I continue rambling excitedly, “Pivoting a lot, you know, with the demands of COVID...the powwow Chairs, Amelia and Landa took a lot of the hits when we decided on the vaccination requirement only and then when we decided to make it no participants. But then still having people show up to help. I got to meet Two-Spirit icons that I've kind of been working with and idolizing like Roger, Landa, and Ruth from afar, for the last couple years. And these deep conversations that I've had with people when I ask, ‘Oh, how did you come to BAAITS? Or, what brings you here today?’ It's just about witnessing and taking that time hearing people's stories about how they reconnect to their traditions, identity, and culture. And I kind of realized the issues of being Two-Spirit like just kind of through [knowing and befriending] you, and through learning on my own. But it is nothing compared to being in a space that it [Two-Spiritness] is thriving! It is not just like going against the grain. It is thriving, and that is evidenced in moments like our Trans special.”

Cuauhtémoc Peranda starts clapping and cheerfully shouts, “Oh they finally did it! Good! Thank goodness. “

That’s when it hit me that the Trans Special was a big deal.

I reply, “Yes. Trudie held it.”

Cuauhtémoc says, “Oh that’s wonderful. I have been asking for that for a while but I, you know, I’m not trans. I’m like, I can’t lead this, but this is something that we need in our space.”

“Well, it finally happened! And it was-- people were weeping. It was beautiful,” I say reminiscing.

I feel the need to transition to more expository writing to better explain the beauty and power of the Trans Special. Let me transport you from a virtual conversation on Cahuilla, Luiseno, Serrano, and Tongva lands to a warehouse on the shores of unceded Ohlone territories.

Trans Special with Trudie Jackson

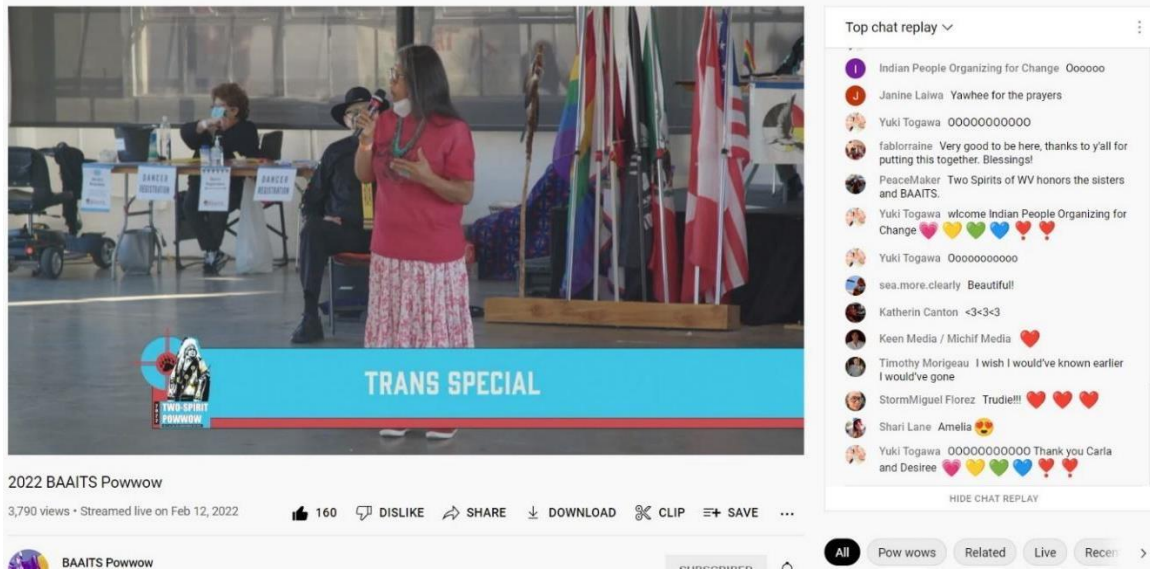


Figure 5.5: Screenshot from BAAITS Trans Special with Trudie Jackson holding a microphone in the center of powwow circle. Transcription below.


“Hello everyone. [introduction in Diné language?] Hello, everyone. I'm Trudie Jackson. I am born of the bitter water, born for the folded arms people and the Mexican people are my maternal grandparents and yucca strung out on a line are my paternal grandparents. I'm an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and this year is my first time coming to the BAAITS powwow.

In the past, I have always been intrigued over by how BAAITS gives back to the community, to the Two Spirit community. And one of the things I have always advocated in my community in Phoenix is the inclusion of transgender women of color. The average age for a transgender woman of color is 35 years old. I am very blessed to stand here. And say I am 55 years old.¹⁵⁶

I thought about this special to remember all trans individuals who lives were cut short due to stigma, discrimination, and transphobia whether it be in their community, their family, their relatives, but this was one thing that that I wanted to share. But also, I want to acknowledge in my community that of Phoenix, being a board member with the Phoenix Pride. I bring that Native voice to the table. I challenge a lot of white

¹⁵⁶ Trudie may have been referring to the statistics that show the average trans woman of color lives until 35.

gay spaces. And I asked them, 'Where is the native voice at?' And having to be here, re-energizes me to continue to do the work for my community, even though I may be the only person of color sitting in the room. So, with that, I wanted to dedicate this special but I also wanted to acknowledge the three Drum groups that are here because my nephews grew up in the powwow circuit. So, I'm not very too familiar. But one thing my late father always told me was, 'there is never a lock on a teepee door'. So, with that, with that saying I would like to ask the drum group the young drum group members over to do and honor song and to open up the space to anyone because I feel that this space is to honor our relatives. And to be a good relative in our community.”

Before publishing this chapter, I reached out to the BAAITS board and shared drafts of this chapter and asked for permission to share my experiences with the BAAITS powwow. The response came from a single board member, who did give permission and said “Hi. Thanks for sharing. This sounds beautiful. We know you come in a good way relative .”¹⁵⁷ Since the powwow was live streamed on the BAAITS YouTube, it is still available for viewing as well as last year’s completely virtual production. I did consider that this was a singular person giving permission for me to use the words of multiple people; however, given that the BAAITS community has left the video up on YouTube as of the publishing of this chapter, I take that public sharing as further permission to use these screenshots, names, and comments. The screenshots shared in this section were selected because of their demonstration of participants’ enthusiasm during key moments of the Special.

This Trans Special demonstrates love and relationships for the trans and Two-Spirit community from around the local Bay Area connecting to the global community of

¹⁵⁷ This person is referring to me as a relative, not in the sense of relatively in a good way.

Two-Spirit people and accomplices, reflecting broader community action mentioned in Chapter 4. I remember tearing up while listening to Trudie’s words. I was viewing from my phone outside the building because I was working on setting up the first aid, registration, and volunteer check in areas.

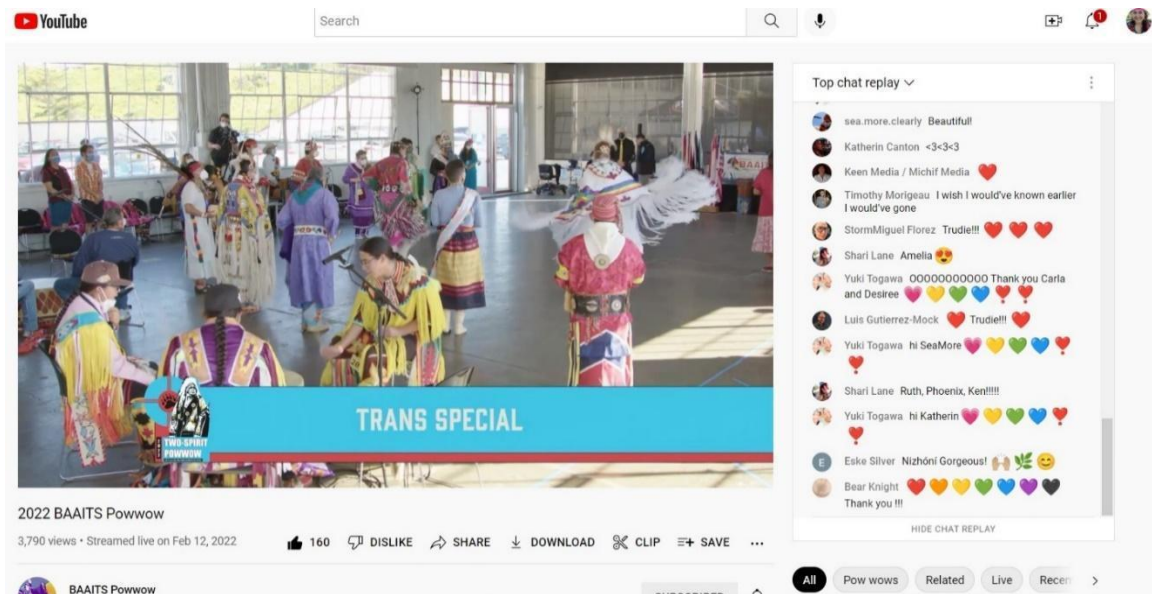


Figure 5.6: Screenshot of powwow participants joining and celebrating the Trans Special.

As Young Nation (Drum) sang and played a song for Trudie Jackson’s special, almost everyone in the powwow joined: some stood at the edge of the circle standing or dancing in place, others in their regalia danced their hearts out, and those of us that were outside setting up also took a moment to watch the special on our phones. We knew it was an important moment. As readers will notice in these screenshots, numerous virtual attendees were also praising and sharing love for Trudie and her Special through comments and colorful heart emojis. At the same time, Trudie came around and handed participants in the Special, including the ones on the edge single brown feathers. When

Young Nation finished their song, Trudie took the time to explain the significance of these feathers.

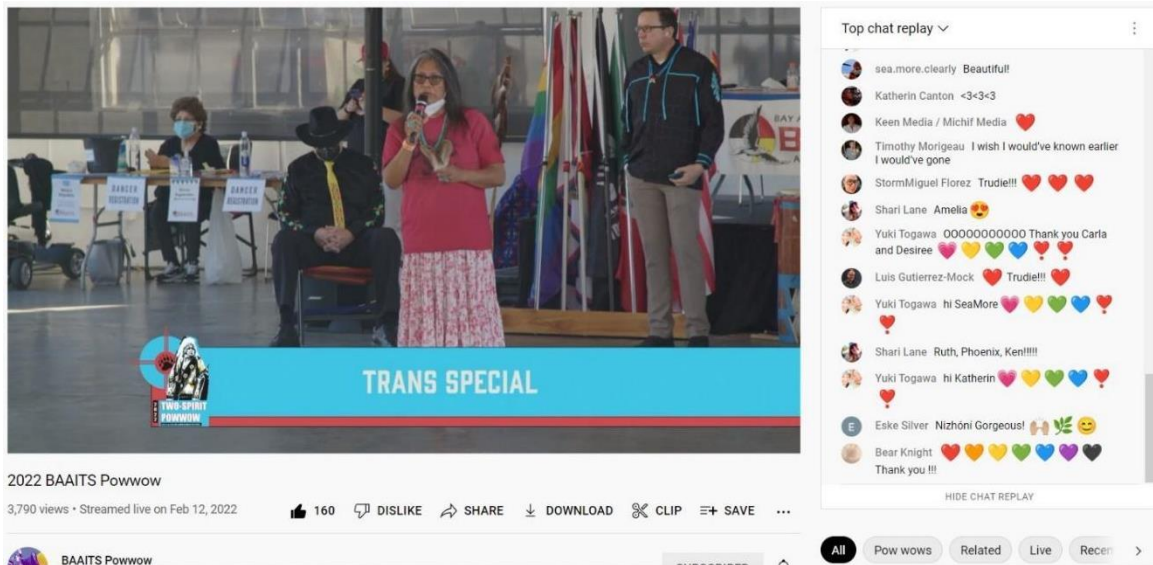


Figure 5.7: Screenshot from BAAITS Trans Special with Trudie Jackson holding a microphone in the center of powwow circle. Transcript of what she said follows.

“Hi, I just wanted to share is that the feathers that I gave out are from a red-tailed hawk. And when these were gifted to me, I thought about including it and one thing I was taught about feathers is feathers have a—they all have a life. So, wherever your journey is, please use the feather and bring it out and use it over in your circle. And I also want to acknowledge the organizers for allowing me over to have this space, but I also want to remember all of the individuals that are unable to come here just to let them know that you are in our thoughts and our prayers.”

Giftng these feathers, Trudie Jackson is supporting the next generations of the sprouting era through establishing sound relations, thus laying groundwork for future reciprocal generations.

As an advocate of listening to community as a form of learning, I promote being open minded to growing and having new experiences. Transphobia, homophobia, and xenophobia are very real. Given our current political climate in the United States, I feel

we need to continue finding ways to combat it. I am witnessing in this time that acceptance or tolerance is not enough. As an accomplice, it is not okay to be quietly accepting because we need to be LOUD. Similar to how the shift in rhetoric around anti-racism is changing activists' attitudes from tolerance of other races to actively destroying systems of racism, so too does anti-homophobic, anti-transphobic, and anti-xenophobic discourse.

Based on my fieldwork grounded in compassionate listening, myself, my peers, and other interlocutors feel a sense of urgency. To decolonize the academy, we don't need silent allies, we need accomplices to be with us, be vocal, and to take on some of that labor..¹⁵⁸ For those who are not Indigenous or Two-Spirit and have the resources, time, labor, and money to support BAAITS, #MMIW, or the Trevor Project, it will go a long way towards ensuring that the next seven generations thrive. Redistributing economic wealth is one way that readers today can initiate sound relations and join a complicated, reciprocal mission with the Indigenous peoples whose lands they occupy.

Mistakes and (Re)Building Relations as a Danzante

As any person who is growing and learning new things, I made some mistakes along the way. In one of my first ethnomusicology courses, I remember reading the late Bruno Nettl's story, "See you next Tuesday" in his famed Red Book (2005/2015). I admired Nettl not only as one of the founders of our field, but in his humility and grace

¹⁵⁸ For example, when I hear comments like, "Oh, that's so gay," or even "that's so feminine or masculine", I stand up and say, "hey that's inappropriate" or question them, "what do you mean by that?" It took some unlearning saying, "you guys" as Californian, and I changed my vocabulary, ultimately sounding more Southern, by using "folks".

towards fieldwork. Nettl describes not knowing who to talk to yet demonstrated his dedication by coming back and visiting an esteemed member of the community every Tuesday without any obligation or direct benefit. This spoke volumes to me as a graduate student because he did not force his research objectives upon a community. Following my exposure to this type of approach, I became an advocate in my fieldwork courses for more scholarship that highlighted the struggles or mistakes in ethnography. Sugarcoating ethnographies to only share positive outcomes or what worked is a dangerous game of cherry-picking that ultimately hurts young scholars looking to these fields as standards. In following this agenda, for a more holistic fieldwork experience and for others to learn from, I share about some mistakes and reparations in becoming a danzante.

Our kapulli's instrumentation during practice typically includes ayacaxtlis (gourd hand rattles) held by most danzantes, huehuetl drum (upright drum) played by a few members, ayoyotes (feet rattles made of hard seed pod shells) worn by more experienced danzantes, a conch (seashell horn) or two blown by the children at the beginning and end of practice, and sometimes our teacher pulls out various tlapitzalli (flutes made of clay, wood, or bone). Most of the instruments in our kapulli were made by Mr. Cencalli or by members themselves with his guidance. Since 2019, there has been little time to explore other instruments but one day our teacher started practice by having us sit around and listen to his introduction of the different instruments. Afterwards I had my first opportunity to play the huehuetl drum, an honor usually bestowed to more experienced dancers because drummers follow the dancers. While we are dancing, our movements may be in-sync with the drum, but all attention is on the center dancer leading the dance.

If they misremember steps to the dance, we all follow along with them. This supportive atmosphere of learning, including allowing mistakes without impunity, generates belonging. Sounding communities created through musicking together is an Indigenous framework for understanding relationality and how communities embodied Indigeneity. Perea uses the concept of “soundings,” “a theoretical lens through which to look and listen to recordings not as objects but as the product of social relationships between groups of people” (2014, 115) as a framework for exploring intertribal powwow music. Soundings both affirms and celebrates the communal ties that emerge through social activities of all powwow participants, spectators included. As explored in this chapter, sound relations are evidenced in both powwow and Danza communities.

In my kapulli, when you receive permission to make an ayacaxtli (hand-held rattle) it signifies that you’re a dedicated member. During the summer of 2019, Mr. and Mrs. Cencalli gave me permission and told me to start by looking for some Mexican fan palm seeds. They described them as small, dark brown seeds. So, for the next month or so, I would go and gather some seeds and bring them to practice on Wednesdays, hopeful. Mr. Cencalli would shake his head, “Nope, that’s not it,” about 3 or 4 times until finally I gathered the right ones. I learned there were many kinds of palms in Southern California, but I will never forget a Mexican Palm now.

At the next practice, Mr. Cencalli brought three gourds from San Diego to choose from. Similar to the experience of choosing my drum hide with Maggie Steele, I chose the one that looked a little beat up with some discoloration. I took it home, cleaned it with copper mesh, and scraped out the gourd guts with this malleable metal rod Mr. Cencalli

let me borrow. Finally, when my gourd was hollowed out enough, I was tasked with finding hard wood. Hard wood is not the easiest to find in a chaparral over summer, so I ended up going to a park in Orange County (where I am from) and found a large piece of Eucalyptus wood. After two months of gathering materials, my ayacaxtli came into being. This gourd rattle, along with my hand-made drum with Maggie Steel, are two of my most treasured items. Integrating Earth's elements into Danza practice reminds us practitioners that we as humans are not the center of our world, and that there is a spiritual interconnectedness amongst all beings and elements. These experiences have taught me values of commitment, consent, patience, and understanding when conducting this type of fieldwork. I could have bought seeds or regalia, but I knew the importance of making my own pieces and how that process would be a lesson in being a good relative to not only my teachers but also the land itself. Collecting seeds and learning to identify unique species is just one small way of connecting with Nahuatl teachings and engaging in decolonial praxes. Despite my cautious attempts to engage in sound relations and reciprocity, I can still make mistakes in my journey. These mistakes are part of my humanity and correcting them is part of my commitment to returning to sound relation anytime I found myself lost or confused, or without guidance. Pursuing sound relations and reciprocity keeps me grounded—and these themes continue to inform and transform my everchanging autoethnographic research approaches.

Around the holiday season in 2019, after defending my qualifying exams and dissertation prospectus to my committee, I had created a GoFundMe account for friends and relatives to donate towards my research. GoFundMe.com, like Experiment.com and

Kickstarter.com, is a public crowdfunding website for fundraising. I chose this website over others because of the company's mission to "inspire the world and turn compassion into action" and popularity (Gofundme.com, "[About Us](#)"). This was still at a time when my department did not guarantee students Teaching Assistantships or funding beyond the first year, and I had been struggling to finance my housing and schooling with part-time employment. Desperate to get back into the field and continue relations I had built at the Sacred Springs Powwow in San Marcos, Texas and Gathering of Nations Powwow in Albuquerque, New Mexico, I did not think through the implications of my actions.

In creating my fundraising campaign, I used prospectus materials which were meant for a very particular audience. In taking my exams and creating a dissertation prospectus, I realized the pressures of academia to constantly critique had crept into my language, and I was making statements that I did not realize I was making. For example, danzantes in powwows do not necessarily improve them and despite the diverse intertribal representation in some powwow spaces, powwow practice cannot represent all Indigenous music/dance practices in North America.

When sharing my GoFundMe on Facebook, I received an upset comment from one of my kapulli teachers, Mrs. Cencalli. I honestly cannot recall the message, but I remember my heart dropping to the pit of my stomach, heavy, then immediately deleting the Facebook post. I remember crying from the guilt of letting my community down.

Were they even my community anymore?

I remember the text that I sent immediately after deleting the post: "I'm so sorry [about] the GoFundMe. It was not my intention to profit in any way and I have deleted it.

It was an idea following an article about crowdsourcing your fieldwork when you don't have any funding to do your research. I am again so sorry and didn't mean to say danza should be for money but respected as other dances in the powwow space. If there's anything I can do to help, make the situation better, let me know."

I remember talking to Mrs. Cencalli on the phone sharing my side and hearing her explanations for what she said what she said. I remember learning why she and her husband taught the way they did and did not manage Danza like a business. Even after taking it down and talking it out on the phone, I felt awful and mentally beat myself up about it for weeks. What hurt the most was that I thought I permanently ruined my relations with my kapulli, my family. Growing up I was a good kid, with spankings from birthparents and disappointed silent treatments from my mom deterring me from getting in trouble. Feelings of "not good enough" haunted me throughout adolescence which was often remedied by self-harm, emo music, and isolation. The similar feelings of guilt and dishonor when upsetting those I most admired had returned. This shame carried through me all winter yet was slowly alleviated through time, growing commitment to Danza, and the blossoming gratitude built between myself and kapulli.

As an autoethnographer, I have learned that even an act that seems small, like properly apologizing in a respectful, honest way, is an opportunity to engage with and understand reconciliation. Navigating mistakes and making reparations with my kapulli shows my small part in making right the historical harm ethnography and research has done to 2SLGBTQI+ BIPOC communities.

Concluding Thoughts

"The exercise of decolonizing methodologies has to do more than critique colonialism. It has to open up possibilities for understanding and knowing the world differently and offering different solutions to problems caused by colonialism and the failure of power structures to address these historic conditions." (Linda Tuhiwai Smith 2021 edition, xiii).

Reflecting on my dissertation as a whole, I think about where I started, a first-time powwow-goer, volunteer, and student. For 8 years, I engaged in compassionate listening, learning, musicking, dancing, and manual labor as decolonizing methodologies to witness and understand Indigeneity. My pursuit of these decolonial praxes has undoubtedly opened my own understanding and knowing of the world, who I am, and my place in it.

Although somewhat non-traditional, there are occasional calls to action throughout this dissertation. Those calls to readers to take action beyond engaging with this dissertation are my invitation to other scholars to examine the academy, their place in it, and the impacts on BIPOC communities. Furthermore, I extend an invitation to consider solutions outside of the traditional white cis heteropatriarchal, human-centered supremacy that often dominates higher education institutions.

Tuhiwai Smith teaches, "Meaningful decolonizing practices are not all about theory or all about action, but they are all about praxis and the reflexivity that is necessary for the integrity of research and of the researcher themselves" (Tuhiwai Smith 2021, xiv). This quote powerfully reflects the project of this dissertation and its research. In the second chapter, I investigated how talking circles and Indigenous methodologies

empowered myself and other participants to decolonize the academy. These methods also provided an avenue for critical reflection, inspiring me to continue investigating these questions of belonging, Indigeneity, and research methodology.

Next, I continued to follow up on questions from my master's research, another form of engaging in reciprocity with and being accountable to my academic and Indigenous communities. The third chapter also demonstrates further decolonizing research praxes, with myself as a researcher and fellow UCR women as participants embodying Native feminisms during our talking circle. Being in a supportive space, I was able to navigate my own questions and confusions around Indigeneity. Supporting each other's self-determination was a beautiful example of the power of progressive youth leadership in this sprouting era that is addressed in this final chapter.

The fourth chapter presented significant difficulties for me as a woman and researcher because it brought up my own trauma. Reliving trauma with others often brings back intergenerational trauma, and this happened to me. Witnessing powwow organizers admit that they were wrong to include Sherman Alexie in their programming and wrong to kick out women and others who complained about his inclusion happening inspired some hope that people were taking this incident seriously; however, it was another reminder that without the sharing of painful stories, this violence will continue to happen, especially in Indigenous communities.

The vignettes shared in this final chapter call attention to how sound relations and reciprocity can be established interpersonally, within communities, with the land, and ultimately inspire new decolonial projects. I share cultural interventions, successes and

mistakes from my research with readers as well as with my community to give others inspiration to decolonize their own practices and communities.

Sharing also has the power to unveil colonial barriers of difference. Once my research began to dismantle these barriers, I began to understand that Indigeneity is less about who is and isn't recognized as Indigenous, but more about responsibility as an Indigenous person. *Have you introduced or built relations with the original and current caretakers of the place where you reside? Who are your community and how do you stay accountable to them? Are you protecting our Mother Earth? How do you practice ceremony?* Examining intertribal Indigenous relations, negotiations, and conflict, throughout the Southwest has been challenging. Since this area has been colonized by numerous entities over the past 500 years, Indigenous populations have been misunderstood, renamed, or erased for complete domination.

This is why this sprouting era is so exciting. I am compelled to write and talk about it because I knew and felt that something special was happening: witnessing danzantes and Two-Spirit people thrive in powwows or witnessing Indigenous women rise up against predators. I can see communities in solidarity with one another across identity politics. This solidarity can look like danzantes joining and supporting #BlackLivesMatter protests, Kumeyaay peoples protecting their lands on the U.S./Mexico border by protesting ICE detention centers, and Two-Spirit people voguing in ballroom scenes around the world.

When I step into my small garden, and I see how species work together, and how the land reciprocates the love and attention I put into it, I feel compelled to reconnect

with the land and, subsequently, with my ancestors. In that spirit, I hope this dissertation and my future contribute to the sprouting era by adding to the canon of decolonizing research praxes.

Like talking circles, I close the same way I began this dissertation with a poem reflecting our dedicated love and labor as a kapulli in Danza ceremony.

Fresh, local strawberries and flowers for ceremony

Fresh, local strawberries and flowers for ceremony
A bundle (not white ones)
From everyone for the altar
Everyone becomes a piece of the altar.
An offering for our ancestors,
those who have transitioned on
We offer framed photos of family
loved ones, and mentors
Adding too many from the pandemic.

Morning preparations.

Getting up before the sun,
indigestion, anxiety, excited anticipation,
gathering regalia, dog, and supplies,
Out the door on the road,
sun peeking over
mountain tops.

At De Anza

everyone picks up trash, checking for needles,
surveying the land for our circle
Our circle encompasses both
the altar and the circular space around it (where we dance).
Our circle built with iron rods, twine, and plant stems.
Sun greets and warms us.

Men and boys unload the trucks,
stacking wooden boxes atop one another
Forming a sort of three-layered box pyramid,
the base in the center a clearing
Here is the beginning of our altar.

Meanwhile with the women and girls,

I learn the art of flower preparation.

First, separate offerings into three piles
the marigolds or cempasúchils,
the non-cempasúchil flowers,
and the others
(large sunflower heads and rosemary branches).

We begin with the second pile,
cutting flowers 2-3 inches from their stem
The stems into a pile for our counterparts,
(the men) to decorate around the circle.
We gather flower heads of all colors, textures, and varieties
pink roses, white daisies, red tulips, and more
Then, we trim our most sacred flower
yellow, golden, and orange cempasúchils,
cut only an inch from the stem.
Flowers are prepared.

Next, we women set up the altar
Every time I learn more
Nahuatl history, values, and beliefs
Listening and witnessing how we set up the four directions.
I still have questions,
and will patiently learn *in a good way*
there is no standardized way to make an altar,
Luna argues that there is no wrong way.
Altars are creative, spiritual experiences
Made by the women.
Depending on those making it,
materials offered for prayer,
teachings passed onto them,
Altars look dramatically different
every time and between different groups

Following the rising Sun, we begin in the East
In the East, we have the males represented by white
From the brightness of dawn, we move to the West
In the West, we have women represented by red and little jars of water
From when the Sun is hottest overhead, to the afternoon dusk in the South
In the South, we have children and the earth represented by blue and a crocodile head
with a piece of black obsidian between its teeth
From dusk to the darkness of night, we move to the North
In the North, we have our Elders represented by the color black.

After placing sacred objects
honoring elements of the altar,
on the wooden base
We roll out white, red, blue, and black cloths,
Each from the base going out in its respective direction.

Sometimes we place food:
pan de Muertos,
corn,
or beans in various positions
around the altar.
So many pan dulces
some the size of my head
Kept, pristine, in boxes
other palm-sized ones
in plastic wrap.
One lonely naked pink concha, like someone's leftover breakfast.
Next is flower placement.

First, outline with rosemary
edges of our altar base and pathways made from colored fabrics
Then, place sunflowers and white sage around tiered altar levels.
Some sage is bundled with red yarn,
others were still loose
from last night's harvest
Next, scatter the non-cempasúchil flowers
upon the rosemary borders
Lastly, half our cempasúchils carefully interspersed upon the altar and around the edges
of the white, blue, and red fabrics.
Scatter the rest of the marigold flowers all over
black fabric representing the Elders and
on the northern outline of our circle.
Mrs. Cencalli explains this is our connection to our ancestors
We are trying to make it strong.
Lastly, framed photos of relatives in the places I feel they belong
I only have 2 photos—my adoptive grandparents, Mary and Alfred Masini, and another
with Abuelita Margarita and her brother Pancho.
With more time I would have picked up picture frames and
printed out my high school mentors,
uncle, my grandpa and my partner's grandpa who passed this last year.
I am relieved—not many photos on the children side,
Just one faded picture of two young boys.
On the men's side, I see a community member—

A couple months back we all danced at their memorial ceremony.

We finish the altar

Mrs. Cencalli burns copal in the middle,
releasing me and the other women
to go get ready.

Excited, we just remember to turn around and
walk out the Eastern-side aisle facing the center.

Look inwards.

Move backwards.

I haven't learned why we never turn our backs to the altar,
but even the young children know.

I am still growing

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