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Danzas Fronterizas: Contemporary Dance at the U.S.-Mexican Borderland

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

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Critical Dance Studies

by

Minerva Tapia

December 2014

Dissertation Committee:

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The Dissertation of Minerva Tapia is approved:

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DEDICATION

It is dedicated to the dancers with whom I worked in *danzas fronterizas*. This dissertation is also dedicated to my family. I would specifically like to dedicate this project to my mother, Margarita Robles, who taught me through both lived examples and her passion that dance practice and dance studies are important. Last, but not least, I dedicate this work to my husband, Juan Cedeño, who encourages me every day.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Danzas Fronterizas: Contemporary Dance at the U.S. Mexican Borderland

by

Minerva Tapia

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Critical Dance Studies
University of California, Riverside, December 2014
Dr. Marta E. Savigliano, Chairperson

My research addresses how embodying the border informs contemporary dance around the Tijuana-San Diego region. I explore what we can learn about choreography, collaboration, nation-states, and citizenship by using the border as both a critical lens and a frame of reference. I have been interested in how (im)migration, racism, smuggling, narcotrafficking, and identity on both sides of the border inform and interfere with binational dance collaborations and choreographies to produce a genre of dance I call *danzas fronterizas* (border dances). An analysis of *danzas fronterizas* contributes to border studies from a choreographic perspective, foregrounding the body as a site of politics and economics along the U.S.-Mexican border.

This dissertation first studies the influential artistic work of José Limón and Anna Sokolow during the 1930s and 1950s as choreographers who laid the foundation for what later became *danzas fronterizas*. Chapters two and three analyze today's Tijuana-San

Diego dance scene, looking first at the artists' experiences of border crossing and collaboration, and presenting movement/choreographic analyses of selected *danzas fronterizas*. I have applied archival, auto-ethnographic, and ethnographic work (participant observation and interviews) as well as movement and choreographic analysis to this research. My project seeks to contemplate scholarly and artistic perspectives from both sides of the border. I interviewed choreographers, dancers, and directors of binational dance festivals; I analyze writings from both Mexican and U.S. sources; and my self-reflections connect my own work as a choreographer of *danzas fronterizas* to those dancers and choreographers who learn about the border by experiencing it.

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INTRODUCTION:

Contemporary Dance at the U.S.-Mexican Borderland

As a regular border crosser at the Tijuana-San Diego region and as a choreographer I create *danzas fronterizas* (border dances). Understanding the production of *danzas fronterizas* was the initial impulse to start my research. My dissertation examines how border activities and conflicts have been thematized in choreographic works contributing to the establishment of a unique border culture, which I understand as *border dance culture/cultura de la danza fronteriza*.

My research investigates how embodying the border informs the contemporary dance community around the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically in the Tijuana-San Diego region. I ask what we can learn about choreography, about collaboration, about nation-states, and about citizenship, by using the border as a way of looking. I address how the border's social, economic, and political circumstances inform activities such as binational dance collaborations and choreographies. I argue that issues with (im)migration, racism, smuggling, narco-trafficking, and identity on both sides of the border produce a genre of dance I call *danzas fronterizas* (border dance). This dissertation examines the critical formation of *danzas fronterizas*. It first studies the influential artistic work of José Limón and Anna Sokolow during the 1930s and 1950s, whose work laid the groundwork for

what would later become *danzas fronterizas*.¹ It then examines today's dance scene, specifically the 1990s to present day, in relation to *danzas fronterizas*.

Border scholars have done much important investigation into U.S.-Mexico border culture, and their research certainly nurtures my understanding. However, to date, there has been little published on the border conducted from a choreographic perspective.² Thus, I propose *danzas fronterizas* as a term that can address this lack of research on contemporary border dance and make dance a site for analysis of the U.S.-Mexican border. Dance studies can contribute to the study and understanding of the U.S.-Mexican border and border dance culture by exploring how the border is represented in creative works as the site of forced encounters, and through investigation of the conflicts and possibilities that this proximity generates.

In the 1990s choreographers started to create *danzas fronterizas*, which are testimonies and reflections of the experiences of those affected by the borderland, whether allowed or not to cross the border. *Danzas fronterizas* are transborder choreographies that make reference to a political and social problem relevant to the borderland region, and to the experience of physically crossing the geopolitical border. *Danzas fronterizas* are hybrid dances composed of movements, cultural gestures, and in many cases music, voice, and border-evocative objects and uses of space. Although *danzas fronterizas* have been rendered in various dance genres such as ballet and different Mexican folk traditional dances, my research focuses in *danzas fronterizas* that

¹ Elements of their work would later be incorporated in *danzas fronterizas*.

² See Polkinhorn 1994, Valenzuela 2011, and Valenzuela 2012.

adopt contemporary dance as their main movement language. The border is usually represented and interpreted according to which side of the border artists choose for positioning themselves.

The *danzas fronterizas* I investigate here have been created within three complex cultural spaces: (1) that of the transborder choreographer whose experience of the border is from South to North, (2) that of the choreographer whose transborder experiences move from North to South, and (3) that of those who have never crossed the border but somehow are affected by it. For example, choreographers from San Diego who create *danzas fronterizas* may have similar perspectives as those of Tijuana-based artists, but their position as U.S. citizens could alter their approach to creating a *danza fronteriza* about immigration. Tijuana artists may take a different approach to works about identity and culture than that of their colleagues North of the border. Tijuana's artists, when creating work about narcotrafficking, could have not only a different perspective but also deal with different repercussions.³ Those who create from Tijuana have their perspectives constantly nourished by the daily images of people waiting near the border with the hope of crossing the border. These direct images are part of *danzas fronterizas*. I recall one experience of tension when working on the topic of immigration with dancers whose family origins were from a few different countries.⁴ One dancer talked about being ashamed of being confused with an undocumented person. He was a Mexican-American who did not approve of undocumented migration, and he was concerned that his

³ I explore this idea in chapter three.

⁴ When staging *Danza indocumentada* with dancers from UCI (University of California-Irvine).

participation in the choreography could be interpreted as approval of undocumented migration. But as we worked, he began to understand other perspectives about immigration and migrants, instead of the negative perspectives shown in the media.⁵ The difficult topics of *danzas fronterizas* can cause tensions for the artists on both sides of the border, even without focusing on the legal facts about citizenship and border crossing.

The Border as the Choreographer

During the process of drafting this dissertation, I have related political and economic events in the United States and in México to the everyday life of the regular border crosser. I have asked how the shared history and unshared stories of these two countries have affected the Tijuana-San Diego region. Central to how the border is constructed are the two governments' respective economic and national concerns. In this project, I suggest that the border is a kind of choreographer whose constructed geography moves and shapes—or, choreographs—the lives and experiences for borderland dwellers. The borderland's effects on these dwellers reverberate on the artistic stage. In this way, the borderland is a kind of metaphor with choreographer-like qualities. This metaphor foregrounds the diverse experiences and desires of those both invested in and affected by its political movements. This idea has guided my research into understanding *danzas fronterizas*.

Danzas fronterizas exist so border citizens (artists and the public) can try to process the problems caused by the border. These dances propose a way to reflect on

⁵ In chapter two, I examine *Danza indocumentada*.

what the border generates. I think that as long as economic, political, racial, and social issues continue to affect border citizens, *danzas fronterizas* will continue to be produced along the U.S-Mexico border. The methods used to undertake this project include archival research (border literature, performance programs, and newspaper reviews); ethnographic work (participant observation and interviews); juxtaposition (texts and practices); and movement and choreographic analysis. I use biographic and ethnographic approaches to examine how our borderland experiences shape our work as dance-makers. I write from and about the border as an artist/scholar haunted by border-crossing occurrences and who reflects on the impact of our transborder experiences in the making of concert contemporary dance.⁶ My own inspiration comes from the experience of living on a border, transiting from one side to other, circulating in this space and the knowledge that the border is only made complete by two moving sides. This is why, for my interviews, I have tried to balance the quantity of participants from both sides of the border. Between December 2013 and August 2014, I interviewed six artists from Tijuana and five from San Diego. In most of the interviews we talked for approximately two hours. I have also been particularly aware of providing the pertinent cultural translation from Spanish into English. Through my analysis of the intersections of the border and dance, and drawing on frameworks provided by Joan W. Scott and Thomas C. Holt, I pay close attention to experiences of the artists that I have interviewed, as well as to my own. This project intertwines sequences of auto-ethnographic and ethnographic inquiry.

⁶ Other contemporary choreographers who have created at least one *danza fronteriza*: Nancy McCaleb, Isaacs, Patricia Rincon, Allyson Green, Jaciel Neri, Henry Torres and Ángel Arámbura. I discuss their works in chapter three.

Reflecting on the different border experiences that come from the North and South of the U.S.-Mexico borderland, I argue that the notion of experience helps generate a complex and productive understanding of border crossing. First, I find inspirational the approach of Shahram Khosravi and Dorinne K. Kondo in the use of experience as a method to obtain evidence to define *danzas fronterizas*. In chapter three, I draw inspiration from Khosravi's and Kondo's embodiment experiences of borders.

Second, in order to complement my study and ground my discussion of experience within scholarly literature, I borrow from Joan W. Scott's article "The Evidence of Experience," in which she reveals in which ways experience is used in writing history. She argues that too much reliance on experience as evidence is problematic, but at the same time she states that experience is so much part of everyday language that "it seems futile to argue for its expulsion." (Scott 1994: 387). Instead, Scott's aim is to revise the notion of experience because she does not agree with how some people have used the term, especially the idea of unmediated experience. She's asking for a more critical study of experience, explicitly taking into consideration subjectivity, context, and history. Furthermore, Scott notes that the preferable approach to experience is "not the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience, but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself" (Scott 1994: 387). In keeping with this orientation towards experience, most of my work is related to the physical crossing and the impact of the border on borderland dwellers. For example, in terms of experience, the border is perceived differently from the North than from the South—traveling North to South is very different than traveling from South to

North, and this furthermore affects how people write and create dance. [In other words, experiences are always shaped by politics and history, and an accurate, robust understanding of border crossing, and the cultural products related to it, needs to include both perspectives]. Those experiences are related to what kinds of border crossers one is discussing—even whether one walks or drives is significant, and even which kind of border crossing pass one is capable of obtaining. To analyze experiences is the key to understand how the border is constructed and changed, and these experiences need to be observed in the light of what time they happen.

However, this emphasis on the complexity of experiences in border crossing must be balanced with an emphasis on the specifics of place—in this case, the San Diego-Tijuana region. To that end, I also use Thomas C. Holt’s “Experience and the Politics of Intellectual Inquiry” (1994) article. As a response to Joan W. Scott’s essay on experience, Holt’s analysis shows the way in which experiences serve as tools for the production of knowledge. He further claims that we must understand not only experience as a complex concept, but also its material and lived conditions (Holt 1994: 391). The border is defined by many people, and it is a complex place. The experience depends on who is crossing the border—some are U.S. citizens living in México—so we need to go to a specific case to better understand this area. In contrast, my experience of interviewing an undocumented person before he crossed the border, and the way he was physically waiting, allowed me to know about border crossing and surviving.

The first difficulty I encountered when writing about this topic was the constant reminder of my own positionality as a border citizen and a regular border crosser. For

example, my body's memory reminds me that I was in a place in Tijuana and then I describe it as if I were there, even when I am actually on the other side of the border. In my ethnographic process, as a participant observer, I was initially concerned about trying to maintain a critical/scholarly distance because my history as border scholar seems to bring ghosts of previous experiences as a border crosser. As a choreographer, I was concerned that the people I interviewed for this project were Tijuana-San Diego region dancers and choreographers with whom I had worked and collaborated before and whom I will probably continue to see. Seeing how interested my colleagues were in the topic and trying to see the process of crossing the border in a new light as well as accepting my past experiences in order to compare them to new ones, helped me to undo my concerns.

To articulate my idea of how we regular border crossers live these processes, I draw on Néstor García Canclini's perspective on deterritorialization and reterritorialization as "the loss of the 'natural' relation of culture to geographical and social territories and, at the same time, certain relative, partial territorial relocalizations of old and new symbolic productions" (1995: 229). I noticed that deterritorialization and reterritorialization do not work particularly well for regular border crossers from this region, since we are in constant physical and social contact with the other side of the border. In other words, we regular border crossers are not torn from our roots; we are constantly aware of a territorial divide that is political, symbolic and affective.

Border-Crossing Dancers and Choreographers

Some of San Diego's choreographers and dancers have wanted to participate in dance events in Tijuana. Specifically, those in the contemporary dance field are interested because this genre is driven by the aim of recreating social context. With respect to the exploration of movement, which is an essential part of contemporary dance, some choreographers and dancers from San Diego also have found it attractive to interact with other choreographers and dancers, who perhaps have different dance aesthetic practices.⁷ For the choreographers and dancers in Tijuana, the motivations are similar, but other inspiration could be, for instance, the hope of finding jobs in San Diego as artists.

Frontera Versus Border

If border choreographers use the border as a theme of inspiration, what kind of border do they use? In “¿Fronteras políticas versus fronteras culturales?” Alejandro Grimson writes that the concept of border remains somewhat vague in diplomatic rhetoric as in most social texts and cultural studies (2000a: 9). He believes that this is because the concept of “border” has dual characteristics, since the border is simultaneously an object/concept and a concept/metaphor (2000a: 9). In “La teoría de frontera version norteamericana: Una crítica desde la etnografía” Pablo Vila notes that several Mexican academics who had studied the Mexican side of the border for over twenty years do not

⁷ In chapter two, I discuss the long hours of waiting at the San Ysidro Port of Entry, and how it negatively affects choreographers on both sides who wish to cross the border to collaborate. Nonetheless, there is still an interest in cross-border connecting from artists on both sides of the border. In some cases, I also have observed artists interested in working and collaborating in other works so as to place their craft on other scenarios, such as in a binational or international stage.

feel represented by such a boundary as conceptualized by the current version of hegemonic American border studies (2000: 103). Vila observes that in the last few decades the tendency to study the border differs on either side of the Mexican-American border. In the United States, books by border scholars such as *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) by Gloria Anzaldúa, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (1989) by Renato Rosaldo, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (1991) by D. Emily Hicks, and *Criticism in the Borderlands* (1991) compiled by Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar, privilege the use of metaphors, literary criticism and emphasize theoretical approaches to the study of the border (2000: 100). On the Mexican side of the border, scholars, while also paying attention to the contributions of the American scholars mentioned above, focus their attention on the previous research done by these authors, and their approach relies more on empirical studies (2000: 100). Some of the scholars from the North of México, whose approach to the study of the border has bilateral and multilateral perspectives, conduct their research at the *Colegio de la Frontera Norte*. This Tijuana-based research center was established in 1982. The research center's objectives are to research social, economic, cultural, demographic, gender, political, urban, and environmental issues occurring in the United States-Mexican border region.

Vila writes that the border scholars Eduardo Barrera and Maria Socorro Tabuenca Córdova believe that the Mexican perspective of the border is not represented in the United States in what is defined as *border literature* or *border writing*. I agree with Vila, Tabuenca and Barrera. During the process of my research I have encountered three types

of bibliography: one is written in English or Spanglish by writers living mostly in the United States' side of the border with México (including Chicanos), another is by academics in Mexico City, and a third comes from scholars who write in Spanish and live near the United States-Mexican border.⁸ These three groups of border writers made an important contribution to the study of the Mexican-American border, and for that reason I take a close look at their research findings. In relation to what kind of border is represented by dancers and choreographers, I pay attention to the work of scholars on both sides of the border. Vila notes that the majority of these books represent the U.S.-Mexican border in a sophisticated way, but little is related to the border that Mexican scholars experience.

Tabuenca Córdoba writes that what we define as *border literature* or *border writing*, in most cases refers to concepts more than to a geographical region. However, for those who do such studies on the Mexican side, we often find that it is difficult to think about the border only as a metaphor (2000: 103).

The study of the border can be affected by which side of the border the scholar is located, as indicated in the writings of Grimson, Vila and Córdoba. As such, their work allows me to understand the many borders that are part of the U.S.-Mexican border, how its complexity produced the diverse approaches to studying it, and the importance of including the voices of dancers and choreographers on both side of the border in order to

⁸ There are exceptions that are worth mentioning here. From Mexico City, Carlos Monsiváis and Néstor García Canclini both had paid attention to the academic voices near the border. In another words, they read and wrote about them. They have also had a close relationship with these border scholars from the Tijuana-San Diego region.

articulate the border dance experiences. The metaphors allow me to study the cultural borders and the hybridity of the border dwellers in a more general way. But, as the anthropologist Néstor García Canclini notes, “not all borders are reducible to the same type of metaphor” (Grimson 2000: 22). This is why I also employ more empirical methods. These empirical methods offer direct answers to the question of what the U.S.-Mexican border is from the experience of living it and from the practice of being a regular border crosser.

That Border Fence is Ours / *Ese borde que veo no es de nosotros*

Since the border fence does not belong to the Mexicans, its material presence in the everyday lives of the borderland citizens is a reminder that the people on the South side of the fence are not free to transit. For the people on the North, not only is it not close to the major city of San Diego, the fence is a sign of protection. If the fence has such connotations for some of the local artists in San Diego and Tijuana, I suggest that their production of *danzas fronterizas* has or could have different approaches in the theme of these dances. For example, the topic of (im)migration could be approached in a different way North and South of the border since the choreographers’ local positions are affected by their countries’ political and economic situations and policies. In chapter three, I examine a *danza fronteriza* that observes undocumented immigration and uses the border fence as a choreographic and iconic tool.

While thinking about the definitions of the border and borderland as they relate to the Tijuana-San Diego region, three images run through my mind: (1) the people near the

fence looking North as far as they can, (2) the long lines of cars at the San Ysidro Port of Entry, and (3) an old road sign that depicts the silhouette of a father, mother, and a little girl running and the word “Caution.”⁹ The first and second images are related to the imaginary and material possibilities of crossing the border. The third image is related to the way the United States wants us to think about immigration. It is a way of looking at immigration as an always-present risk for American society. In *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (2006), Alicia Arrizón suggests that, in the mid-1980s, this road sign was put up because “many immigrants were killed accidentally by drivers who failed to stop in time” (2006: 51). Even though this happened a long time ago, the road sign remains. I agree with Arrizón’s statement that the road sign remains to mark the “perils of the contact zone” (2006: 52). The road sign creates and reinforces the image of “the Mexican” and helps to build, strengthen, and perpetuate a sense of shame of being an immigrant. Arrizón suggests that the road sign has become “an iconic symbol—in a positive and negative light depending on how one feels about undocumented immigration and immigrants in general” (2006: 198).¹⁰

The image used in this sign has additional meanings in Mexican culture. When I was a child in Tijuana, I heard people say: when you cross a street running, you look like an Indigenous “bajado de la sierra a tamborazos” (who came from the mountains by drumbeats). This phrase is a commonly-used, racist expression meant to denigrate Indigenous people. Specifically, this phrase dehumanizes Indigenous people and

⁹ The sign was placed by Caltrans along the San Diego freeways to alert the drivers of possible undocumented people running on the freeway (Arrizón 2006: 51).

¹⁰ Currently the image is found in diverse places, such as on t-shirts. I also integrate this image into *danzas fronterizas*.

imagines them as lower class. This image of the running people on the sign is not always imagined in this way. However, for some people this sign is always already a sign of shame¹¹ as I explore later in my discussion of my dance practices that integrate imagery from this sign. For many Latin Americans and Mexicans, the roadside sign causes the sense of being an outsider and shame because the people who are represented in the photo are imagined to be them. With signs like this, the border is made everyday. It is naturalized. In the process of creating a *danza fronteriza* called *Danza indocumentada* (that I discuss in chapter two), I reflected deeply upon this image, finding it commonly linked to feelings of shame for people engaged in (im)migration across the southern border.

Regular Border Crossers

My research considers current, regular border crossers who are dancers and choreographers in the Tijuana-San Diego region in relation to those regular border crossers who formerly traveled between New York and México City. A regular border crosser belongs to both sides of the border, even though in many cases practices of inclusion and exclusion exist on both sides of the border. The regular border crosser negotiates his/her projects according to what happens at the border. The regular border crosser represents a minority of borderland dwellers; he/she has developed a unique and

¹¹ While driving on the East coast, I have seen highway safety signs about animals, and my mind goes back to those signs near the border. The association of the signs of “beware of the animals” and “be aware of the immigrants” creates an uncomfortable feeling for those who know both signs.

sometimes productive way of living. Among these border crossers are dancers and choreographers who recurrently and legally transit between the border cities of Tijuana and San Diego. Regular border crossers not only transit the U.S.-Mexico border physically and culturally, but also create a new space where border culture is common practice. A regular border crosser has more or less important reasons to cross the border, including those related to the economy, family, friends, or as this research investigates, to dance. Scholars have investigated the border and the borderland, but not many have focused on regular border crossers in the Tijuana-San Diego region.

In *Cultura e Identidad en la Frontera Mexico-Estados Unidos* (2009), Héctor Padilla and Consuelo Pequeño write that when talking about the border between México and the United States, it is clear that people who cross it from South to North have a very different perspective on the experience than do those who cross it from North to South. In both cases, the definition of the border may be different because they live and perceive, enjoy, or suffer, in different ways (2009: 5). Border practices reveal crucial aspects of border life and history and the asymmetrical relationship between México and the United States (2009: 7).

The reality of the regular border crossers in the Tijuana-San Diego region is as invisibilized as those of the people crossing the U.S.-Mexican international bridges studied by Héctor Padilla and Consuelo Pequeño. Padilla and Pequeño tells us that this reality seems to be overshadowed by the main themes of the relationship between México and the United States such as undocumented immigration of Mexicans to the United States and drug trafficking, as well as the saga of violence and death that accompanies it

(2009: 7). Padilla notes that the historical and structural asymmetry between México and the United States as well as the essentially racist nature of the U.S.'s security policies are also obscured (2009: 8), and I would add that so are the legal border crossings of Mexican-Americans.

For the study and identification of transborder students, Guillermo Alonso-Meneses uses the term "transnational citizenship" (Padilla and Pequeño 2009: 8). Alonso-Meneses works with a group of students from Tijuana who go to schools across the border in San Ysidro or San Diego. Hoping the results of his research will invite readers to rethink current definitions of "national identity," the author proposes "cultural centaur" as a metaphor to refer to those individuals whose border experience, which is daily and is central to crucial aspects of their training as individuals and citizens, becomes the trademark of significant lifestyles, habits and world visions. Consequently, they are true binational citizens, bearers of a border culture often misunderstood and uncomfortable for those with a narrow nationalist perspective (Padilla and Pequeño 2009: 8). *Danzas fronterizas* reverberates with Meneses' idea and image of the centaur, since these dances refer always to the other side of the border. Like the centaur, *danzas fronterizas* are caught between two natures/nations. The transnational nature of these dances highlights the problematic relationship of a nation to its borders. Padilla's and Meneses' ideas are both giving visibility to other ways of crossing the border, such as the experiences of those dancers and choreographers in the Tijuana-San Diego region.

Dual Nationality at the Borderland

The experiences of the Mexican-American Martita Abril, a dancer and choreographer, gives light to regular border crossers who have a dual nationality. Martita Abril has family in Tijuana, has lived and studied in San Diego, and now lives in New York. Abril graduated in 2009 with a BFA in Dance from San Diego State University. The week that I interviewed her she received honors as an Outstanding Alumnus in Dance. Abril's experiences with the Tijuana-San Diego region are informed by her status as a dual citizen of México and the United States. Her testimonies about crossing the border, unlike the bitter experiences of other regular border crossers or the inspirational but sad opinions about the border written by Gloria Anzaldúa, are flexible. It even seems that for Abril these experiences have been positive and beneficial.

Abril's invitation to be part of this research not only came because she is a local dancer and choreographer, but because of a message she posted on social media. On May 2, 2014, she wrote on Facebook the following: "after almost 2 years of not going home to Cali/Tijuas, I'm on my way to see my family and friends and I get to go to my alma mater! See you soon my Tijuana." The message caught my attention, because the note echoes with my own experiences. In the interview, Abril remembered when she lived in San Diego and had to cross the border to see her family in Tijuana. She also had other reasons to cross the border. She took dance lessons in Tijuana and collaborated with artists living there. Abril says that thanks to the recently instituted SENTRI¹² Card the

¹² The SENTRI (Secure Electronic Network for Travelers Rapid Inspection) program, launched by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, incorporates dedicated commuter lanes where prescreened applicants and vehicles are allowed to cross the border northbound

crossing today is faster and a more pleasant experience than in the past.¹³ As Abril explained, "With the SENTRI Card, I was able to be more involved in both countries, I could be, and I was working in two countries in one day." She says that having dual citizenship and access to two passports has also been helpful when traveling internationally. For example, in France she might use her Mexican passport to avoid the negative stereotypes that American tourists have. For countries that charge visa fees for Mexican citizens but not for Americans, she travels as an American.

On May 16, 2014, Abril posted a photo of a poster she found adhered to a pillar at the Otay Port of Entry. The message in the poster listed the following points and information:

Pledge to Travelers

We pledge to cordially greet and welcome you to the United States.

We pledge to treat you with courtesy, dignity, and respect.

We pledge to explain the CBP process to you.

We pledge to have a supervisor listen to your comments.

We pledge to accept and respond to your comments in written, verbal, or electronic form.

We pledge to provide reasonable assistance due to delay or disability.

Comments may be provided to: 1-877-CBP-5511

www.cbp.gov

Abril wrote her opinions about the poster's message on her Facebook page: "puras mentiras!" [all lies]. The comment contrasts with the opinions Abril shared during our interview and with her initial positive note on Facebook about arriving in the region. This is not necessarily a contradiction, but her response to the list of points in the *Pledge to*

into the United States, usually more quickly and efficiently. SENTRI was first implemented at the Otay Mesa, California Port of Entry on November 1, 1995.

<http://www.cbp.gov/travel/trusted-traveler-programs/sentri>

¹³ Her answers contrasted with most of the responses of the other interviewees (see chapter three).

Travelers demonstrated her critical sense of the treatment of others crossing the border, including perhaps those of people close to her who are not dual citizens. Abril's opinions and written thoughts on Facebook give testimony of to the diversity of feelings about the border and occasionally changing perspectives of a border citizen.

The Tijuana-San Diego Region or the San Diego-Tijuana Region

“A retired military officer with loyalties and sentiments that bridged the border, Santiago died in Tijuana in 1862 and was buried in San Diego. Diplomatic formalities may have split the estate but not the family or the communities. The Argüelles saw Tijuana and San Diego as one, as do many in the region today.”

– *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murdered, Martyr, Saint* by Paul J. Vanderwood (2004: 79).

One term that resonates in both academia and in the media is the used of the term “region.” Both in everyday speech and in their local media, Tijuana and San Diego are commonly referred to as a region. As I will discuss, this term is contested, as it denotes both productive and limiting factors. Within the different perspectives about the border and about the relationship between Tijuana and San Diego, some scholars question the term “region” to talk about Tijuana and San Diego. Nonetheless, in this research, to discuss the space of Tijuana and San Diego, I also describe it as a region understanding that such a framework indicates a critical closeness, community, and mutual influence that cannot overlook the very real challenges involved in border crossing.

In *Metrópolis transfronteriza: revisión de la hipótesis y evidencias de Tijuana, México y San Diego, Estados Unidos* (2009), border scholar Tito Alegría aims to assess if Tijuana and San Diego, two interrelated and contiguous cities separated by the U.S.-Mexico border, form two different cities instead of a metropolitan trans-border unit

(2009: 5). Alegría says that although it is obvious to some that Tijuana and San Diego make two different and separate cities, to others it seems clear that the two cities are part of a single urban transborder region (2009: 7). Alegría concludes that we are not dealing with a transborder metropolitan city but two neighboring cities with different urban forms, different ways of generating the urban form and a tendency to structural divergence (2009: 352). This is in contrast to the predominant scholarly approach and popular understanding of the Tijuana-San Diego region, which elides the difficulty of crossing the border.

Since childhood I have heard the geographical area of Tijuana and San Diego referred to as a “region,” suggesting that we are united.¹⁴ Although the term is used on both sides of the border, it is often attached to issues of culture, narratives full of goodwill, and trade interests. Another perception of this region is that San Diego is a safe city and that Tijuana is not. In my investigation, some interviewees in San Diego spoke about Tijuana’s reputation, and that of México in general, as a place that offers little security. Scholars on both sides of the border likewise often write about issues such as the lack of security, the effects of the drug trade, health risks, and insecurity for women in places like Ciudad Juárez.

In 2004, I started to choreograph *La Familia Juárez* about the femicide of very young women from the United States-Mexico border, specifically those occurring in and around Ciudad Juárez. It was difficult to deal with this topic in dance, since I did not want to re-produce the pain that the young women experienced, but instead the pain that

¹⁴ In chapter two, I further explore thoughts on the term "region."

their families and citizens of this region are suffering. My goal in this piece was to examine my own feelings of solidarity with the mothers of these young women and reflect on the larger problem shaping their experiences of loss. At this point, 10 years after the premiere of this choreography, I am in the process of restaging this piece and sadly I see the danger remains present for these women living in Ciudad Juárez. The intent of *La Familia Juárez* is to give light to these young women, especially when their bodies are apparently “left” with no way to identify them. José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, writes in *Sed de Mal* (2012b) that the bodies of the victims include a great number of women whose bodies are young, poor, tortured, unidentified, anonymous, ungrieved, unnamed and unnamable, and disappeared (2012b: 15).

In addition to reports in the media, the multiple risks of the border exist in the social imaginary, in similar ways as in *danzas fronterizas*, and in border texts produced on both sides of the border. In relation to risks at the borderland, Tapen Sinha and Bradley Condon, in *El análisis del riesgo y riesgos de frontera: aportes desde las ciencias sociales* (2013), argue that it is unlikely that Mexicans living in the United States had been the cause of the spread of viruses, such as A (H1N1), in 2009 (2013: 207).¹⁵ Globalization and the A (H1N1) virus are issues of interest to both border scholars and to the creators of *danzas fronterizas*. The virus A (H1N1) and globalization have proved that the border could be porous. The A (H1N1) epidemic demonstrated the porosity of the U.S.-Mexican border, at least in the Tijuana-San Diego region. This experience also tested and proved strategies of collaboration between the two countries.

¹⁵ The theme of the virus A (H1N1) and globalization are examined in chapter two.

Political Aftershocks at the San Ysidro Port of Entry

Crossing the border via the San Ysidro Port of Entry can be challenging since "[an] average of 50,000 cars and 25,000 people cross into the U.S. at the San Ysidro border crossing each day, according to the General Services Administration."¹⁶ People waiting in cars have to wait among the heat and gas fumes, losing several hours of the day waiting.¹⁷ In the context of conducting my research and writing my dissertation, the multiple physical changes at the San Ysidro Port of Entry have affected more border crossers than before 9/11. During the construction of the new San Ysidro Port of Entry into the United States, the unpredictable and unannounced changes occurred on both sides of the border. This caused stress to automobile passengers and to pedestrians in both countries as well as in Tijuana, close to the border gate. Since then, I have noticed how passengers in cars, including adults and kids, have had to urinate in bottles because they cannot leave the line. It is more than difficult to exit one's car when it is in the middle of the lanes of cars waiting to go through the port of entry. Once you are close to the gate, there is no space for a U-turn. Even the people in other cars will not allow you to get into their lanes in order to find an exit. In other words, it is difficult to leave one's car when physically close to crossing the border. These are embarrassing experiences, especially for those who do not know that this could happen during the crossing by car. It is also a good reason to not become a regular border crosser. This chaotic space is the product of random changes at the border and fears about undocumented immigration in the United

¹⁶ See Halverstadt: <http://voiceofsandiego.org/2014/07/17/3-projects-that-could-dramatically-change-cross-border-travel/>

¹⁷ See chapter two.

States. The authorities do not seem to notice or care what people (Americans, Mexicans, and everyone else) experience at this place.¹⁸

In an article published on July 17, 2014 for *The Voice of San Diego*, Lisa Halverstadt describes the new projects that aim to streamline the border crossing process: "Slow-moving cross-border travel may finally accelerate if a handful of makeover plans ever materialize. This week Congress voted to set aside \$216 million for the final phase of the bustling San Ysidro border crossing that had long been stalled and developers building a pedestrian bridge to the Tijuana airport announced construction is under way."¹⁹ For border citizens, more changes underway aim to improve the situation and fulfill the promised goals of accelerated transit. Each change is accompanied by questions and complaints from those living on the border. As a user of this checkpoint, I can say that a central change has been the SENTRI lines. For a fee and a background check we have the "privilege" to access a faster crossing. This privilege does not exempt us from occasional interviews or being X-rayed at the border²⁰. Even with a SENTRI card, travelers encounter numerous intimidating machines that photograph travelers, their documents, their vehicles, and their belongings. This process of moving between the two countries is regularly the "punishment" that I (we) have to endure to be a regular border crosser.

¹⁸ Examined in chapter two.

¹⁹ <http://voiceofsandiego.org/2014/07/17/3-projects-that-could-dramatically-change-cross-border-travel/>

²⁰ As a regular border crosser health concerns of being X-rayed are always present.

Examining Border Dances

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that uses dance and border discourses to examine the production of *danzas fronterizas*. It examines dancers and choreographers who are regular border crossers to explore how we can think about dance through the U.S.-Mexican border and about the U.S.-Mexican border through contemporary dance. Each chapter acknowledges the regular border crosser as the pivotal subject to understand border dance culture. Chapters are arranged in chronological order.

In chapter one, the artistic contributions and border relations of two historical figures of modern dance are analyzed. José Limón and Anna Sokolow are examined as precedents to today's border dance experiences. Each of these artists had multiple roles in the production of dance—as dancers, teachers, and choreographers, and their work is influential in both the U.S. and México. Their artistic practices embody multiple forms of border-crossing including crossings related to migration and geopolitical borders, movements through temporal realms of modernity and tradition, various aesthetics and artistic techniques, ideological positions, and classed and racialized barriers. In this chapter I also examine the dance work of Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba Tovar in relation to the legacy of José Limón. Currently, Ruvalcaba is a member of the Limón Dance Company, where he continues the process of investigating dance in relation to border crossing.

In chapter two, I utilize archival sources to investigate the manner in which the U.S.-Mexican border has influenced the economy of the border region. In this chapter, I examine how the contemporary dance community understands and performs/embodies

the concept of the “border.” Here, using my own ethnographic fieldwork, I observe the crossing of dancers and choreographers through the San Ysidro Port of Entry. This chapter is devoted to regular border crossers who are dancers or choreographers. I focus on the Tijuana-San Diego region and argue that the difficulties entailed in crossing this border have shaped, and will continue to shape, the collaborations undertaken by the region’s dancers and choreographers. The second and third chapters, unlike chapter one that focuses on modern dance genre, examine contemporary dance.

In chapter three, I examine choreographies created in the last three decades in Tijuana and San Diego that take the border as their core theme by asking how culture and politics at the boundary can contribute to understanding the phenomena of the border. Understanding how the problem of (im)migration has shaped the field of contemporary dance in the region helps clarify its role in creating and also breaking down boundaries between cultures. Here, I use my own ethnographic fieldwork to analyze the production of *danzas fronterizas*.

The questions that guide my research are: How can looking at the U.S.- Mexico border through the lens of dance contribute to and complicate our understandings of border culture, and how can looking at dance through the lens of border theory contribute to our understanding of the contemporary dance landscape? Other pertinent questions are: How do current economic and political debates influence the production of *danzas fronterizas*? How in a region of power difference can dance collaborations across the border avoid replicating power difference? How do these power differences affect collaboration? My conclusion draws from the preceding chapters to reflect on how this

research has contributed to the study of *danzas fronterizas* and offers suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 1:

Borderless Memories: The Legacy of Sokolow and Limón in U.S.-Mexican Dance

I remember my house in the Cacho ward. The house was physically divided in two, home and school. It was a big three-story house with two staircases that took you to the front door. It was made up of more than five bedrooms and three bathrooms, plus a room on the roof and another one, forgotten and detached from the main structure. The house was painted light pink, with white window frames. Foremost I remember the temperatures in the house: it was both hot and cold as you moved through it. This house was different from the other houses on the block. Actually, it did not look like the other houses in Tijuana which are either cold or warm. The cold ones are built with cement blocks, and the warm ones are wheeled in to Tijuana from the U.S. and are built with wood²¹. This is why there are houses that look like sisters in San Diego. Due to its big size, our house seemed to be built of cement blocks, but its interior temperature seemed to indicate a hybrid building? Or perhaps some rooms were heated by the students' long hours of dancing. In this home-school I used to pass freely from the kitchen to the ballet class. I remember with fascination moving from the solitude of a cold room to a room warm and full of sweaty dancing students. I remember the most the Spanish classical dance classes, and the classical ballet and folk dance classes. I also remember the contrasting sounds in passing from silence to noise, and that rhythmic movement—and the almost stillness that accompanied me on several experiences of my life. It was in this house where I started as a regular border crosser.

A few days ago I drove by the house located at 281 Fresnillo Street, on the Cacho ward. The house has changed quite a bit. It no longer has those two staircases that join at the center where the front door was. I recognized it when I saw it from the side, because only the façade was remodeled. I could not stop from smiling, because I felt that that house was standing there half hidden from me. During my childhood we lived in three houses within this ward, but this house is the one that I remember the most as the other two came later because my mother could now afford another living space separated from the school. I do not remember much of them because I still spent most of the time in the big house, which now had more classrooms, no beds to sleep, the kitchen became cold, and there was only water to drink. In this home-school lived my mother, my sister and I. My brother was almost always in Los Angeles, California, that must be the reason why he never had accent when speaking English. I remember my grandparents, but I think they supported my mother' school principally in things related to the care of students. With the years I came to realize that this school-hogar was fundamental for the development of dance in Tijuana. It was at this school where academic dance classes were given for the first time in Baja California with the purpose to support the formation of dancers and professional dance teachers.

²¹ See Teddy Cruz 185-186.

During this time (1970s) my mother went to México City in order to pursue a career in the Escuela Nacional de Danza (National School of Dance) under the direction of writer and prominent cultural figure Nellie Campobello.²² As a child my mother worked as a classical Spanish dancer and eventually she financially supported the whole family. She danced Spanish classical dance and she remembers that in the city of Ensenada, Baja California, she danced in events where mostly adults performed and that she danced accompanied by an orchestra. In these times she remembers her excitement at seeing artists such as Humphrey Bogart and the Argentinean Amanda Ledesma at that time. She also remembers that while dancing in San Francisco California, she could only access the place where she was going to work through the back door, because Mexicans were not allowed to use the front door.

Students in this school-home were highly motivated to take dance as a profession. My mother used to say, "It is as important as medicine." Academic classes must be studied in addition to technical training in the studio. I remember that we used to drive to San Diego to see international dance personalities such as Rudolph Nureyev and Margot Fonteyn. At this school we used slippers, pointe shoes, and Spanish shoes that were ordered by mail at the beginning of the course from México City. My mother used to order them from a store called Miguelito, until she found a new store in San Diego named Capezio. So she began to cross the border to buy some of these items. Over the years the store Miguelito was left behind and only merchandise from Capezio was used. Currently the majority of the more than 20 dance spaces in Tijuana purchase online or come to San Diego to buy tights, dance shoes or hip-hop shoes, and most of the costumes for their dance concerts. People in Tijuana have tried to open a dance store in Tijuana but often they cannot compete with San Diego and close their businesses. At this school-hogar I have met many generations of dancers who now have opened their own schools, immigrated to the United States to dance in a company or to study at a university as I did. I do not have a clear memory of how my first class was since the school was founded in the year I was born and my mother took me to the school-hogar when I was a few days old. What I do remember is that my first performances at the Teatro del Seguro Social lasted five days in a row. This school is now located a few blocks from the school-home and currently my mother still directs the school.

I was interested since childhood in choreography because I used to daydream about how the dancers executed steps and would imagine designs in space. The funny thing is that when I did not like what I was "seeing-thinking" I started from the beginning all over again; it was like a kind of imagined rehearsal-montage. Rethinking on my

²² Nellie Campobello was a dancer; writer; interpreter of the Mexican Revolution; pioneer in the form of dance performance termed "mass dance"; and director of the National School of Dance and of the Mexico City Ballet (Ballet de la Ciudad de México), the first dance company to receive financial support from the government of Mexico in June, 1942 (Tapia 2006: vii, 32).

*career as a choreographer I see that there is a line that led me to make works that play with some sort of duality. I especially like contrast. In some cases it has been literal, like my works *Entre dos aguas* (Between two waters) and *Por la línea* (Over the Line.) In other cases, I realize it afterwards or during the choreographic process like in *Aura*, based on the novel by Carlos Fuentes, where what attracted me was the duality of the character *Aura*, who is young and elderly simultaneously.*

*Although I was a quiet child, I distinctively remember that for all my friends in this school-home talking about going *al otro lado*, to the other side (San Diego), was like going to the corner store. Many of them were born in the U.S. and lived in Tijuana, and this remains to be very common to this day. Almost everyone watched television in Spanish and English, and our breakfasts were unlike those of the center of México, they were rather light and similar to those of the restaurants in San Diego, or so it was at least in my house.*

In 2007 several Tijuanaenses-Americans that could go to live in San Diego did so for safety reasons. I remember that in that year, on some weekends, I got to hear the burst of gunshots that made me get away from the city, at least to sleep. Since then, I am even more of a regular border crosser. Sometimes I cross the border twice a day. Crossing the San Ysidro Port of Entry has had an impact in our lives, and with the time it has changed for the worse. Now there are lanes that facilitate crossing the border faster. But using those lanes has a monetary cost, which makes me think and know that the border costs, and that it is not the same experience for everyone, though we have a legal permit to cross it.

The United States and México have sustained an artistic relationship from the 1930s until today built around modern dance. I think about this relationship when I see the dancer and teacher Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba Tovar teach a class based on the José Limón technique. During the class, Ruvalcaba shows us how his body was masterfully trained in the Limón technique. We can recognize Limón's technique when we see Ruvalcaba move in class, doing movement phrases that have rebound and fall; suspension and fall done with fluidity. Among the dancers who take his class, including me, there is a clear sense that Ruvalcaba's excellence as a teacher is tied to his having been a member of the Limón Dance Company. Standing there watching this class, I realized how intimately connected the field of Mexican dance is with American modern dance. I reflected on how the field of Mexican dance is influenced by American modern dance and how Mexican culture was also part of this artistic movement in the United States.

Specifically, I reflected on how my research on *danzas fronterizas*—or, dances that aim to represent life at the U.S.-Mexican borderland—connects early modern dances with the border-crossing experience. For instance, it was evident to me that Ruvalcaba perpetuates, through these classes, the legacy of the Mexican-American choreographer José Limón as well as a parallel legacy of border history. During a subsequent interview with Ruvalcaba in Tijuana, I asked him to discuss his experience as a dancer in the Tijuana-San Diego region and his present involvement with the Limón Dance Company. He said that although he never formally met Limón, he knew him as an artist through his choreographies, and he felt that he knew Limón as a person and artist through mutual

acquaintances and colleagues. Ruvalcaba also shared that he knew Anna Sokolow while studying at Julliard. He described how enthusiastically Sokolow always greeted him and told him she had a strong connection to México because of her many years of working in México as a dancer, teacher and choreographer. Sokolow did not give classes to Ruvalcaba, because at that time she was more engaged with the drama department. Nonetheless, Sokolow influenced Ruvalcaba through her role as one of the pioneers in modern dance in México. Therefore, I contend that Ruvalcaba, as a dancer, is the product of the intersection of contemporary border dance and the history of modern dance in both México and the United States. As a member of the Limón Dance Company, Limón's influence is clear in Ruvalcaba's style, but we can also see the influence of Sokolow in his practice of modern dance in México.

Ruvalcaba not only is a representative of the legacy of these two dancers, his experiences as a regular border crosser resonates with their own border crossing experiences. In what follows, I examine the artistic U.S.-Mexican transborder experiences of American choreographers Anna Sokolow and José Limón. Sokolow and Limón function as historical precedents for future dance cross-border collaborations. Sokolow's and Limón's respective artistic practices embody multiple forms of border-crossing, including crossings related to migration and geopolitical borders, movements through temporal realms of modernity and tradition, various aesthetics and artistic techniques, ideological positions, and classed and racialized barriers. Their practices also cross into the bodies of new generations performing their works and training in their techniques.

These artists are important to my work not only because both had multiple roles in the production of dance - as dancers, teachers, and choreographers - but also because their work is influential in both the U.S. and México. Sokolow and Limón began their artistic careers in New York City during the 1930s, a decade in which modern dance was defined as an art (Graff 1997: 11-13). Both choreographers' careers began in earnest when they became part of a group of dancers in New York City which established the modern dance movement. In her 1997 study *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City 1928-1942*, Ellen Graff explains that politics is central to the spirit of modern dance. She writes that the influence of communist ideals permeated 1930s New York culture to its deepest core and dance played an important role in shaping both popular and high culture (1997: 3). Sokolow's work, in particular, was part of this landscape.

In her analysis, Graff primarily focuses on the modern dance movement's politically-charged artistic practices. However, she also notes that not all artists in this movement were as invested in integrating politics into their dance. Graff calls attention to the "leftist" political dimensions of this movement, while also recognizing that some modern dance artists were, within the movement itself, thought of as apolitical artists. She describes the dancers who incorporated leftist ideologies into their practices as "...revolutionary or radical dancers, clearly dedicated to a socialist vision that could be embodied in staged actions" (1997: 11). She distinguishes this group from those "dubbed arty and bourgeois by the leftist press...committed to an aesthetic vision that would be experienced as dance. One was movement, the other 'art'" (1997: 11-13). Within this context, Sokolow was categorized as a leftist, while Limón was categorized as an artist.

However, Sokolow managed to cross the border between these two groups. Dance scholar Susan Manning (2004) agrees with Graff that Sokolow managed to cross the border between leftist and modern dance practices. Manning writes that Sokolow both took a leadership position in leftist dances and danced for Martha Graham's company even though the two differed in their aims, organizational structures, and audiences (2004: 65). As I explore later, while Sokolow was privileged in that she could quite easily cross the border between political and modern dance, Limón had a different relationship to border crossing because of his racialized reception.

In order to examine these artists' lives from their early days as members of immigrant families in the United States to their careers as dance makers, first I turn to two key texts: Larry Warren's biography *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit* (1998) and Limón's autobiography, edited by Lynne Garafola, *José Limón: An Unfinished Memoir* (1998). In addition, I have consulted publications by Mexican dance scholars looking to present perspectives from the other side of the border in order to hear and reflect upon other voices who knew Limón's work personally. These scholars also help me trace how Limón's border-crossing experiences in México affected his work and persona.

Anna Sokolow

*"I do not call nationalism a profound feeling tied to the place where one was born, lives or breathes. I call nationalism something imposed: we must do this or this dance because it is necessary and convenient." "Why do people worry so much about being Mexican? One has to be bigger than the country you were born in."*²³
–Anna Sokolow, *Danza y Poder* by Margarita Tortajada (286-289).²⁴

In *Anna Sokolow: The Rebellious Spirit* (1998), Larry Warren writes that Sokolow had first-hand experience as a border-crosser since her parents and older sister emigrated in the 1910s from Europe to the United States.²⁵ Warren states that Sokolow's early life experiences as a child of immigrant Jews at the beginning of the century shaped her character, identity, political views, and artistic approach as a choreographer. He suggests that her experience as a member of an immigrant family helped her understand what it is to cross borders and cultures. He adds that feelings of cultural loss and integration mark her choreographic investments in issues related to immigration.

²³ All quotations from Elizabeth Cámara (2007), Alberto Dallal (1994), César Delgado Martínez (1997), Carlos Monsiváis (2010), Armando Ponce (2003), Margarita Tortajada Quiroz (1995, 2001, 2007), and José Manuel Valenzuela Arce (2012) are my own translation from Spanish.

²⁴ *"Yo no llamo nacionalismo al hecho de sentir profundamente el lugar donde uno nace, vive o respira. Llamo nacionalismo a lo impuesto: debemos hacer tal y tal danza porque es necesario y conveniente." "por qué se preocupan tanto por ser mexicanos? Uno tiene que ser más grande que el país en donde nace."* –Anna Sokolow, in *Danza y Poder* by Margarita Tortajada Quiroz (286-289).

²⁵ Anna Sokolow was born in Hartford, New York in 1910.

The Beginning of a Career in a New Dance Genre: Modern Dance

Graff's extended study of 1930s radical dance connects to the present time by reflecting on both how current politics shape dance and how American cultural identity is reshaped by the economy, immigration, and by the opinion of dance critics and dance scholars. She makes visible how immigrants constructed the American modern dance legacy. Graff states that she traces "some of the events of the 1940s and 1950s in hopes of better understanding the virtual exclusion of left-wing dancers from the increasingly prestigious and stable venues for modern dance that gradually replaced working-class and union patronage as well as the construction of an American dance history that largely ignored their contributions" (Graff 1997: 154). Graff's views on immigration elucidate how migrants shape modern dance, especially Eastern European Jews. Migration is a central subject in Graff's book, which addresses the Eastern European origins of dancers such as Sokolow, Dudley, Ocko, Maslow, and Graham; the migration of "Okie" land workers from Oklahoma to California; and the migration of the dance genre from Vaudeville to concert dance spaces. Graff also studies McCarthyism as an event that shaped choreographies of the time and opened international opportunities—though not as bi-national collaborations—for a number of American choreographers such as José Limón.

Graff believes that, during McCarthyism, the foremost question was, "Could those who had supported the Soviet Union still be considered American?" (Graff 1997: 158). I believe that this judgment haunted Sokolow's future as an artist, at least during the 1950s and 1960s. Sokolow divided her life in three places: New York, México, and

Israel. Sokolow was welcome in México and Israel and the dance community of Israel, in particular, recognized her as an important cultural hybrid figure who represented the United States and was a kind of prodigal daughter. Sokolow had a long, productive work life from 1931 to 1997. As a choreographer, she transitioned between several genres and styles such as modern dance, operas, musicals, stage plays, and movements for actors.²⁶ Sokolow is a border crosser not only because she actually crossed the U.S.-Mexican border several times, but also because her works were both staged and performed by companies in different countries. Moreover, she is a border crosser because her work transcends temporal borders and is valued by both her contemporaries and different generations of dance practitioners and agents. She also navigated the political upheavals in the U.S. and abroad from the 1930s to the 1950s, as she was recognized as a leftist dancer in the 1930s and as a choreographer of universal themes in the 1950s. Her art went beyond presenting political themes, as Margaret Lloyd notes: “Anna always managed to be more the artist than the agitator” (1949: 216). Lloyd also describes Sokolow as a “people’s dancer” (1949: 214). As Lloyd writes, in the context of the 1940s, “the motivation of her dances is sociological rather than psychological or psychiatric.”²⁷ Specifically, as a leftist choreographer, Sokolow transited between concerns for the collective during the 1930s to the concerns of the individual during the 1950s.

²⁶ In *The Borzoi Book of Modern Dance* (1949) Margaret Lloyd notes that Sokolow crosses a border when she, after criticizing ballet, ends up teaching it, perhaps because ballet offers another economic possibility for her at that time (1949: 215).

²⁷ Lloyd does not mention works such as *Rooms* (1955), because this work was created in later years (214-215).

An example of her concerns for the collective is *Strange American Funeral* (1935). According to Warren, Sokolow's choreography was inspired by a poem that tells "the true story of a well-liked Bohemian immigrant steel-worker who was killed when he fell into a vat of the molten metal" (1998: 50). The piece "furiously blamed the capitalist establishment for the wrongful death of hundreds of miners and steel workers" (Kosstrin 2013: 12). This work is colored by a sense of loss; a kind of loss that is, for many immigrants, tied to the loss of land and cultural identity. In this sense, I argue that *Strange American Funeral* addresses a cultural and spatial loss in relation to themes of border crossing.

Sokolow crossed an aesthetic border, from the collective concerns of *Strange American* to the individual concerns of the choreography of *Rooms* (1954). An example of her concerns for the individual is *Rooms*, which is a "suite of dances that depicts various types of men and women who are out of touch with themselves and cannot make contact with others" (Morris 2006: 98).

In terms of gender and its relationships to dance, Sokolow also crossed borders. Particularly, her early choreographies were created for women performers. However, later in her career, she created choreographies for both men and women performers (Warren 1998: 55). Even in her own personal life, Sokolow, as a woman and as an immigrant, crossed borders in terms of gender. In particular, Sokolow was able to move unaccompanied between different countries and places in ways that women confined by 1930s norms of femininity could not because of her relationship to dance. In terms of mobility, the fact that Sokolow could both visit her partner in Russia and travel to

countries and cities in the United States by herself indicates how her relationship to dance provided her freedom not available to other women.

Sokolow in México

Sokolow was first invited to México in 1939 to teach, choreograph, and present her company. In this same year, Sokolow and the American dancer Waldeen von Falkenstein Brooke were both invited by the Mexican government to create a new art form that could speak about a new México (Tortajada 2001: 340). Following a nationalist project, the Mexican government was interested in promoting new art that showed social commitment, that expressed the “people’s soul” and the principles of the Mexican Revolution (Tortajada 2001: 356). Carlos Mérida, a Mexican artist who saw her work while he was studying in New York, invited Sokolow to México. He later became the first director of the Dance Department in Mexico City’s *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA)*, or National Institute of Fine Arts. This institution often supported Sokolow during her many visits to México. During her first invited visit, Sokolow traveled to México with nine dancers, the composer and musical director Alex North, and the baritone Mordecai Bauman (Tortajada 1995: 108). Her debut was at the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Palace of Fine Arts) in México City on April 8, 1939; the troupe had twenty performances, sponsored by Mexican workers and students (Aulestia 2012a: 467). As in New York, Sokolow pursued relationships with unions and workers in México City. Sokolow returned to México City for a second time on September 14, 1939 to work and perform at the *Centro de Actividades de la Casa del Artista*. At this event, the *Cuerpo de*

Ballet de la Casa de la Cultura presented an exhibition of modern dance directed by Sokolow. According to Mexican dance scholar Patricia Aulestia, this event is noted as the beginning of the practice of modern dance in México and was organized by the Mexican government (Aulestia 2012a: 471). Following her invited visits, Sokolow began interacting with various writers and artists who had migrated to México from Spain. José Bergamín and Halffter helped her form a group that incorporated modern dance into México's dance scene.²⁸ She received financial assistance from both Mexican and Spanish cultural figures and then went on to form the group *La Paloma Azul* (The Blue Dove) in 1949 (Dallal 1994: 73; Ponce 2003: 399). With *La Paloma Azul*, Sokolow premiered choreographies with her Mexican pupils. Some of her first choreographies that were presented in 1940 at *Palacio de Bellas Artes* (Palace of Fine Arts) were *La Madrugada del Panadero*, *Antígona*, *Lluvia de toros*, and *El renacuajo paseador*.²⁹ *El renacuajo paseador* was based on a Mexican children's folk tale. According to Rosa Reyna, who was one of Sokolow's first dancers in México in 1940, this choreography was a revelation because it drew inspiration from a Mexican folk tradition unlike most folk-inspired choreographies, which drew from European tales. Moreover, Reyna observes how, in Sokolow's choreography, dancers perform with bare feet, not on pointe (Tortajada 2001: 362). Reyna, in other words, was excited that Sokolow grounded modern dance narratives and techniques in Mexican folk traditions.

²⁸ Popular dance genres in México at the time were ballet, folk dance, popular, ethnic dance, Spanish dance, and Vaudeville and Music Hall dances (Aulestia 2013: 10-11).

²⁹ *La Madrugada del Panadero* (*The Dawn of the Baker*); *Antígona* (*Antigone [symphony]*); *Lluvia de toros* (*Rain of Bulls*); and *El renacuajo paseador* (*The Wandering Tadpole*).

Sokolow and the Mexican Dancers

Sokolow worked with dancers of the *Escuela Nacional de Danza* (National School of Dance). The dancers selected to work with Sokolow were sisters Alicia and Rosa Reyna, Martha Bracho, the sisters Carmen and Raquel Gutiérrez, Ana Merida, Josefina Luna and Emma Ruiz (Aulestia 2013: 311). During a period of significant government encouragement of passionate nationalism in the arts, the Sokolovas showed a great dedication to dance, and modern dance specifically.³⁰ They defended it, despite initial resistance from the public, and supported modern dance as a new generation of warrior dancers discovered modern dance and endorsed it. Sokolow's first dancers were classical ballet dancers, who had no previous modern dance training. Up to that point, dancers had only been exposed to classical ballet (which had greater social acceptance) and modern dance was considered unattractive. Over time, these dancers became aware of dance as a profession and fought for its social recognition (Tortajada 2001: 256). The parents of the dancers viewed this new form of dance with suspicion, and so they were present at classes and rehearsals. These families were from the middle class, conservative and Catholic. Tortajada states that these families were cultured, otherwise they would never have allowed their daughters to practice this new dance form (Tortajada 2001: 360). The dancers of *La Paloma Azul* were: Raquel Gutiérrez, Ana Maria Merida, Isabel Gutiérrez, Alicia Ceballos, Delia Ruiz, Josefina Luna, Alicia Reyna, Rosa Reyna, Alba Estela Garfias, Marta Bracho, Emma Ruiz, Aurora Aristi, Delia Gonzalez, Antonio

³⁰ The *Sokolovas* were the first group of Mexican dancers who Sokolow worked with in México City.

Cordova, Alejandro Martinez, Mario Camberos, Ramon Riviero, Augusto Fernandez, Gustavo Salas (Warren 1998: 248). Sokolow worked in México with some dancers who came from families of well-known cultural figures. Such was the case of Adriana Siqueiros, daughter of the famous Mexican muralist, David Alfaro Siqueiros (Warren 1998: 302), and Ana Merida, daughter of the artist Carlos Merida who was in 1932 the first director of the School of Dance of the Department of Fine Arts. Carlos Merida was also the person who invited Anna Sokolow to México (Mendoza 2010: 237). This group of dancers would become important cultural figures in their own right.

The dancer Rosa Reyna describes how she perceived Sokolow's training: "Anna was not interested in teaching virtuosity. She was more interested in content. She was very strict in her concepts, she was very demanding. She required us to concentrate to achieve full expression through body control (Aulestia 2013: 311). Reyna adds that Sokolow initiated their training with a ballet *barre* technique and with Graham's technique on the floor and at the center. Then she worked on theatrical aspects of dance (Aulestia 2013: 311). Reyna said, "to my thinking, Sokolow's class was comprehensive" (Aulestia 2013: 312). Thus, the Mexican dancers started to practice these new techniques of modern dance.

Even though Sokolow had a relation with these dancers, it seems that Sokolow did not promote an exchange by bringing dancers from México City to New York City. It seem that Sokolow's approach to border crossing was more unilateral, since she was the one crossing the border, without investing energy in promoting collaborations with Mexican dancers in the United States. I have found one dancer, Carmen Gutiérrez, who

danced in New York in the musical *Candide* on December 1, 1956 choreographed by Sokolow (Warren 1998: 264-65). In contrast, José Limón engaged in a different kind of border collaboration by inviting Mexican dancers to study and perform in the United States. In 1951, José Limón invited Valentina Castro, Martha Castro, Beatriz Flores and Rocío Sagaón to Connecticut College, New London, to participate in the Fourth American Dance Festival. In 1952, they participated in the Dance Festival in Jacob's Pillow, Massachusetts, where they danced Limón's choreography *Tonantzintla*. They won scholarships to study in summer schools and received excellent reviews in *Dance Magazine*. In 1952, Rosa Reyna, Martha Bracho, Raquel Gutiérrez, Elena Noriega and Antonio de la Torre received INBA scholarships and Connecticut College scholarships. In addition to taking courses, they did choreography and were presented to reporters and critics from New York. Limón took Josefina Garcia, a kinesiology teacher, with him to México, who offered a scholarship to Guillermo Arriega to attend summer courses at Jacob's Pillow in 1952 (Tortajada 2007: 26).

Sokolow built relationships in México with both government institutions—such as the *Secretaria de Educación Pública* [Ministry of Public Education]—and independent artists—such as the *Ballet Independiente* [Independent Ballet]. Sokolow found in México a government that supported socialist-inspired art as well as a country that was looking to define an identity through the arts. In this context, her work was not only supported—both financially and otherwise—but also well-received. Hannah Kosstrin observes that Sokolow developed connections to México thanks to her Communist affiliations (2013: 7). During the 1930s, Kosstrin makes clear, México supported artists “who shared social and artistic

values of Communist ideology” (2013: 9). In 1937, Carlos Merida suggested that the Mexican *Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR)* [Revolutionary Writers and Artists League] should support the American Modern Dance movement and create an experimental dance school inspired by these new American techniques. According to Margarita Tortajada, this proposal prepared the way for the development of a Mexican modern dance. For this reason, Sokolow and Waldeen were both invited to México (Tortajada 1995: 90-92). While working in México, Sokolow had serious disagreements with Waldeen. The problems between them eventually transferred over to their respective dancers who later created two antagonistic groups; the *Sokolovas* and the *Waldenas*. During her visits to México, Sokolow encountered problems such as: a) the lack of economic support for herself and for her company *La Paloma Azul*, b) censorship, and c) criticism concerning her group, *La Paloma Azul*, on the basis of its “lack of Mexican-ness.”³¹ On July 2, 1956, in a famous reunion among the dance field in Mexico City,

³¹ Sokolow’s dancer Josefina Luna says that Sokolow was censored by Adela Formoso because she did not agree with Sokolow’s personification of a prostitute through dance (Tortajada 2001: 363). Sokolow’s Mexican company, *La Paloma Azul*, was under the patronage of Adela Formoso de Obregón Santacilia (Tortajada 2001: 361).

Sokolow openly critiqued Nationalism in México (Tortajada 2001: 362-383).³² Sokolow declared that to think of dance in terms of Mexican-ness was an artistic limitation and she openly critiqued Mexican Nationalism in choreographies. Her statements seem to point out the difficulties Sokolow was facing in trying to satisfy contradictory expectations. She had been invited to México because of her involvement with Martha Graham's dance company and her noted body of work as a modern dance choreographer and dancer. Her work also had clear ideological alignment with Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas del Río's nationalistic and revolutionary project. Cardenas supported the creation of art that resonated with the "pain of the people" and a "collective program" (Tortajada 2001: 356). Cardenas's government was against fascism and his cultural directors saw in Sokolow's work the potential to address social concerns (Tortajada 2001: 356). In this context, Sokolow selected some of the following choreographies to present during her 1939 visit to México: *Strange American Funeral* (1935), *Case History No. (1937)*, *Façade–Esposizione Italiana* (1937), *Opening Dance* (1937), and *The Exile* (1939) (Tortajada 1995: 108). In this chapter, I refer only to two of these choreographies—*The Strange American Funeral* (1935) and *Room* (1955). Both have elements of *danzas fronterizas*

³² The first time that Sokolow was in México was in 1939 when she presented her work with her own company. According to Warren, Sokolow visited México on the following dates: March 23, 1940; September 20, 1940; October 8, 1940; January 20, 1944; August 20, 1945; Summer 1948; August 7, 1953; September 20, 1969; October 20 1960; November 7, 196; November 13, 1961; June 29, 1968; July 24, 1973; August 24, 1980; September 11, 1980; October 6, 1982; September 25, 1984. These dates are related to the premieres of her choreographic works (Tortajada 2001: 239-311). Thus, these dates could not be the only times she was in México, since they only refer to the premiers of her works. Tortajada notes that she was in México during the whole month of June in 1957 teaching and staging a choreographic work (Tortajada 2001: 381). Sokolow also visited México when, while working in San Diego, California, in June of 1957, she crossed the border to visit Tijuana (Warren 1998: 129).

and, when compared to each other, they demonstrate how Sokolow crossed an artistic border. I would like to make clear here that all of Sokolow's works in this list foreground social critique and the concerns of everyday people.

In *How to Do Things with Dance: Performing Change In Postwar America* (2010), dance scholar Rebekah J. Kowal offers a reading of Sokolow's choreography in *Rooms* (1955). Kowal suggests that at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, Sokolow jumped an artistic border in her work as she moved away from themes of leftism to universalism and left behind the socialist and nationalist thematics of her previous work. Kowal believes that alienation and detachment are central to *Rooms*. In Kowal's words, *Rooms* "marked an aesthetic and political shift for Sokolow, while, at the same time, performing the struggles of the postwar subject" (2010: 115). Here, Kowal draws interesting parallels between the postwar housing shortage and the alienating effect of the recently constructed suburbs and high-rise housing complexes—parallels expressed in Sokolow's choreography in *Rooms*. However, I argue that her border crossing is much more complex. Specifically, I argue that Sokolow straddled the imagined divide between leftism and universalism. In "Inevitable Designs: Embodied Ideology in Anna Sokolow's Proletarian Dances," Hannah Kosstrin suggests that Sokolow made some adjustments in her work to "cross critical divides [which] speaks to her larger ability to navigate between working-class and elite representative spheres, and between being marked as a revolutionary Jewish Communist and being otherwise unmarked as a universal modern dance choreographer" (Kosstrin 2013: 5). Specifically, Kosstrin suggests that Sokolow's early "Communist ideology in these proletarian dances

solidified her reputation, attracted international attention, and sustained her career, yet it was also because of her Communist ideology that Sokolow had to reframe her reputation during the Cold War” (Kosstrin 2013: 18). Along the same lines as these two scholars, I agree that Sokolow crossed the border from creating dances with leftist themes to ones with universalist thematics. But, the complexity of her border crossing is best seen during the 1950s when Sokolow created *Rooms* in 1955 with a Universalist approach, while in 1956, Sokolow was asked to keep creating works with a Nationalist spirit in México.

Sokolow engaged with México thanks first to her talent and then to her social connections. In other words, Sokolow made good friends with important members of the Mexican cultural scene. Both her talent and social capital, specifically, made possible her continued visits to México City. Today’s cross border dance experiences are quite similar to those of Sokolow during her career in México. In particular, choreographers and dancers working in México today, much like during Sokolow’s career, require an official invitation from a cultural government office and or an invitation from influential acquaintances. Unlike the conflicts with the government that Sokolow experienced later in her career, today’s choreographers and dancers who are invited by the Mexican government do not need to align with the government’s political views or align with any political party to receive official support. Also unlike during Sokolow’s career, choreographers working today also have access to binational collaboration supported by binational grants.³³

³³ In chapter two, I will discuss current binational collaboration.

Sokolow returned to México from New York several times. During one of her trips to México, Sokolow worked with *Ballet Independiente*, a company founded by Raúl Flores Canelo in 1966. César Delgado Martínez, in his book *Raúl Flores Canelo: arrieros somos* (1996) writes that Raúl Flores Canelo admired and felt sympathy toward Sokolow.³⁴ Flores Canelo says about Sokolow: “I believe that when I saw how Anna composes, the world opened up to me. She did not respect any rule. It was a great discovery to work in Sokolow’s piece *Opus 60*” (1996: 65).³⁵ Canelo’s glowing review reflects how Sokolow was after many years still admired by Mexicans for her rebellious artistic attitude.³⁶ Her talent and friendship with some members of the Mexican dance community allowed her to cross the border of time and to continue her work in México. Artists who have long, artistically productive lives like Sokolow, have the ability to cross the border of time. The border of time challenges these artists with different political, aesthetics, and cultural beliefs and perceptions. She knew how to handle these “crossings” with her choreographic art. Her multiple border crossings (geographical, aesthetic, political) at the border of time allowed her to continue to be present in the United States-Mexico dance communities. I now turn to José Limón. I will put Sokolow and Limón into conversation in relation to their work and border crossing experiences.

³⁴ Flores Canelo met Sokolow in 1960 (Delgado Martínez 1996: 65).

³⁵ *Opus ‘60* was a further development of Sokolow’s “*Session ‘58* exploration of alienation and rebellion.” *Opus ‘60* “was Anna’s first work since her 1930 *Ballad in a Popular Style* to use Jazz in Mexico” (Warren 1998: 142).

³⁶ Larry Warren, Sokolow’s biographer, describes “the ferocity with which Anna attacks any perceived insincerity or placidity in rehearsal or classes has become legend” which demonstrates Sokolow’s strong character (1998: xvi). She was also known in México for her rebellious temper. Sokolow asked Mexican dancers to be both rebellious and disciplined in their art (Tortajada 2001: 383-396).

José Limón/José Arcadio Limón Traslaviña

“The Limón Company took up residence at Mexico City’s Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, whose dance department was then under the direction of the artist Miguel Covarrubias. Covarrubias became an important ally, and the association allowed Limón to explore various aspects of Mexico in six new works. Interestingly, while this was a notable chapter in Limón’s career, none of the six Mexican creations was included on his list of significant dances.”

—An Unfinished Memoir by José Limón (1998: 120-121).

José Limón was commissioned to write a book by the editor of Wesleyan University Press, William de la Torre Bueno, in the 1960s. Unfortunately, Limón died in 1972 without finishing the manuscript. In 1998 the editor Lynn Garafola was given the 281-page English manuscript and she finally turned it into a book: *José Limón: An Unfinished Memoir* (1998). In this book, Garafola makes clear to the reader that “the text is about as close to Limón’s voice as one can get” (1998: xix). Nevertheless, she explains that the manuscript was a first draft and that there were a few necessary changes to clarify Limón’s meaning. She also “occasionally changed the order of sentences and paragraphs, cut redundant or irrelevant passages, smoothed out awkward wording, [broke] up sentences to clarify meaning” (Limón 1998: xix). Garafola says that Limón had a “penchant for Latinate sentences, with their long periods and chains of subordinate clauses” (Limón 1998: xix). Garafola’s discussion about Limón’s work suggests that one of the first borders Limón crossed to become part of America’s cultural landscapes was a linguistic border—a border he crossed through learning English as a child.

It seems that Limón felt free as a dancer because dancing allowed him, as an artist, to travel without boundaries. He articulates this feeling of no boundaries in the following lines: “Human movement and gesture can cross oceans and mountains, rivers

and deserts, bridge national frontiers and parochialisms” (Limón 1998: 56). This indicates Limón struggles and contradictions at being seen as a stereotyped, racialized body and his interest in being accepted as an international (and thus, universal) artist.

In “Limón in Mexico; Mexico in Limón” (2002) Ann Vachon examines the life and work (1950s-1970s) of José Limón based on the experiences of those who worked with him, including herself. Vachon includes some of the passages of Limón’s unfinished autobiography that she “found most revealing about his relationship to his Mexican heritage” (2002: 72). She writes, “increasingly, I see him [Limón] as a man caught between cultures, for whom that very conflict made an essential contribution to his artistry” (Vachon 2002: 71). Vachon brings to light a kind of cultural border that Limón learned how to work in his choreographies. He was accepted as an artist and as a citizen in México as well in the United States. His physical appearance projected a double discourse, a discrepancy between his Indian-Mexican features and his superior English verbal skills. I believe that Limón’s sense of belonging is best understood as tied not to a physical territory but instead to an imaginary territory where he could jump from North (the United States) to South (México) and from South to North.

Identity is an important theme in Limon’s work. Noted scholar Ann Vachon is interested in giving light to Limón’s identity, Limón the cultural ambassador, Limón representing American Modern Dance around the world,³⁷ but at the same time to Limón

³⁷ In today’s political climate, José Limón may not have been given a similar opportunity to represent the U.S. abroad because of both his race and his relationship to citizenship. In the extreme, as the contra Latino policy Arizona SB 1070 currently demonstrates, persons who look like Latinos can be discriminated against based on their appearances.

who looks like a native and is welcomed in México like a lost prodigal son. In the long passages that Vachon selected from Limón's *An Unfinished Memoir* Limón writes, "At seven years of age I learned what I was to be for the rest of my life, a translator and conciliator. It was to be my task to translate, perpetually, within myself the tongue of Castile to that of the Anglo Saxons..." (2002: 74). Limón, felt that he was constantly translating between two cultures. He believes, that it was his tasks "...to reconcile many disparate and contradictory cultural habits and ways of living, and to resolve hostilities within and around me" (Limón 1998: 8). Limón and regular border crossers who are dancers and choreographers have a similar practice of constantly translating cultural codes. Limón statements show that translation was an important interest for him, but for regular border crossers today, this translation comes more automatically.

Rebekah J. Kowal examines this period of postwar concert dance in political terms. She observes how "Americans came to view and to use movement as a metaphor and a catalyst for social and political reform" (Limón 1998: 253). Kowal argues for the ability of dance to influence social change and disseminate ideologies such as nationalism and individualism. At the core of Kowal's argument is "the idea that the body's movement could reveal as well as conceal truths [that] terrified those who placed a high premium on discernment" (Kowal 2010: 84). She examines the connection between the artistic and the state apparatuses during the 1930's and 1960's, times of anxiety during

More subtle forms of profiling and discrimination exist in today's general political climate— forms that may prevent someone like Limón from sharing his art and participating in cultural ambassadorships. Some of the dance scholars who have lead the way in exploring the ways immigration law and racialization work in tandem and how dance could reveal and hide these issues include Anthea Kraut (2008), Yutian Wong (2010), and Priya Srinivasan (2011).

which some dance makers decided to employ universalism to attain financial support. Perhaps that was the reason that José Limón did not include in his significant list of dances the six new works that he created in México City (Limón 1998: 120-121). Kowal writes about Martha Graham and José Limón, the first two artists that were selected to represent American culture abroad through government support. The following statement by Limón, which is included in Kowal's work, addresses why Limón was selected: "A person not understanding one single English word would be able to tell...about Othello...merely by seeing how the human body functions" (Kowal 2010: 30). Kowal selects this statement to show Limón's universalist view applied to dance—views that appear in his famous choreographies *The Moor's Pavane* (1949) and *The Traitor* (1954). Limón said about *The Moor's Pavane* that "you will find that we have things to say there about love and jealousy, tenderness, foolishness, all of the emotions that you will find in the great tragedy, stated in a different way, not with words but with gestures" (Kowal 2010: 30). Modern dance as a social protest was under surveillance during the Communist containment in United States, and artists who had been socially and politically accepted during the 1930s, during the 1950s became persecuted and criticized for their artistic life because of their political views and sexual orientation. Kowal writes about how each choreographer negotiated with the prevalent anti-communist sentiments in the United States at that time, and the ways in which they dealt with ideological borders. Here, I notice how Sokolow could continue to create choreographies that had a social critique in México while Limón could not openly talk about his sexual preference

in a country like México who in those years criminalized these practices.³⁸ In México Limón could also not openly talk about his sentiments as homosexual, since Mexican Machismo supported his virile presence on stage.

The borders between political ideology and dance were blurred and porous under McCarthyism during 1950-1956. The tensions experienced by artists under this political period influenced their choreographic work, and in some cases the real significance(s) of the work was hidden. Such was the case of Limón's work *The Traitor*. In *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (2004), Susan Manning observes that this piece could be related to the Bible (as Limón states in program notes), the Red Scare, and the execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in June 1953. She also explores a queer subtext at which the photographs of *The Traitor* hint. I wonder whether perhaps there is another layer to explore, the one that could relate to *The Traitor* (is *La Malinche* a "traitor"?) to México. How did Limón feel after declining the invitation of Miguel Covarrubias to stay in México, as related in Limón's *An Unfinished Memoir*? Limón's home was the United States but in the 1950s he had the opportunity to return to México. Did Limón feel any doubts and remorse because he preferred to remain in the United States? The choreography *La Malinche* (1949) also worked around the theme of a traitor (1954), an Indigenous woman whose devotion served Cortez's cause to conquer México; in this choreography Limón played the Indian. Reading Limón's choreography one can only suspect the dilemmas he confronted, for example in *La Malinche* and in *The Traitor*. Although the work *The Traitor* alludes to the Cold War, both works address the subject

³⁸ Limón visited México during the 1950s and 1960s.

of a double agent, especially *La Malinche*,³⁹ the woman who supported another culture that sought to conquer hers. Did Limón hide his deep worries about his own relation to México behind these two works?

Susan Manning observes that Limón “always looked different from his peers in modern dance. But critics remarked on this difference only when Limón appeared in works that cast him in the role of an other” (2004: 193). Limón could dance in choreographies that “inhabited a culturally marked body and works in which Limón inhabited a universal or unmarked body” (Manning 2004: 193). I agree that Limón’s physical appearance often meant that dance critics saw him as an “outsider,” but he was also able to perform, in Manning’s words, as an “unmarked body.” Although Limón did not grow up in México, either as a citizen or as an artist, his body was a reminder that he was from México, but inside he was culturally marked by his life in the U.S. He was not only crossing metaphorical borders, but also crossing a physical and very real border as a citizen.

Limón re-creates literary themes in the choreographies he produced in the United States. His works were meant to address internationally-known dramas and convey human feelings. Unlike the works he produced in the U.S., the works he created in Mexico such as *Tonantzintla* (1951) examine contemporary life and are inspired by the

³⁹ In Limón’s notes: “Malintzin, and Indian princess, was given to Cortez on his arrival in Mexico. She became his interpreter and mouthpiece. Her astuteness and complete devotion served his cause so well that he conquered Mexico”...After her death popular legend made her repentant spirit return to lament her treachery. For her there was no peace while her people were not free. During their struggles for liberation she returned as the wild Malinche to expiate her ancient betrayal” (Limón 138-139).

places and people he knew in México. Limón's productive life as a choreographer lasted from 1930 to 1972. From the beginning, Limón recognized his cultural roots in the Spanish titles of his early choreographies such as: *Danza* (1931), *Canción y Danza* (1933), and *Danza de la Muerte* (1937). But it was not until the creation of the work *Danzas Mexicanas* (1939) that he decided to deal on stage with his Mexican origins (Limón 1998: 133-135). According to Ann Vachon, *Danzas Mexicanas* is a series of five solos, all performed by Limón, where he deals with issues of identity. She believes that Limón was struggling during his life to be accepted by his two cultures (Seed DVD).⁴⁰ In *Danzas Mexicanas* Limón tries to untangle and comprehend what it is to be "On the Line" by dancing five different aspects of the Mexican Man: the *Indio* (Indian), the *Conquistador* (conquistador), the *Peón* (peonage), the *Caballero* (gentleman) and the *Revolucionario* (revolutionary). Here Limón as a border crosser explores his cultural identities (Limón 1998: 135). In these dances, Limón depicted on stage two races: the powerful ones represented by the Spanish conquistador and the gentlemen, and next to them the Mexican indigene and the peonage. Limón's *Danzas Mexicanas* as *danzas fronterizas* represent on stage the separation of those in power from those in subaltern spaces. Here, Limón seems to suggest that a balance is made by a fifth character, the *revolucionario* (revolutionary). Limón in this choreography mixes modern dance with movements inspired by the characters and gestures of indigenes and peasants. I see *Danzas Mexicanas* as a pre-*danza fronteriza* because they deal with issues of nationalism and of local identities. These dances also address the crossing of geographical borders

⁴⁰ See Seed's DVD in the book *José Limón and La Malinche* (2008).

through the conquistador from Spain and the Indian from México, and engage with economic inequalities through representations of the peonage alongside the gentleman.

In *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (2002), Mark Franko studies the connections between dance and labor in the 1930s in the United States. Franko observes how in the 1930s race was the center stage of social problems (2002: 2). If race was at center stage, how did Limón manage to transit in this terrain without being discriminated? Perhaps his close connections to prominent white dance figures such as Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, universities venues, and modern dance helped him construct a bridge that saved him from being deported to México, since between 1929-1939 the “Mexican Repatriation” program forced those of Mexican descent to leave the United States.

Because of his reputation as a true American artist, Limón had the ability to freely transit between different venues and different countries. Moreover, he did not face the restrictions that African-Americans dancers encountered in being recognized as modern dancers. Franko makes note that, in the 1930s, African Americans were not recognized as modern dancers. Rather, their dance was marked as exotic and denied modernity (Franko 2002: 79). Franko’s insights into race make me think that Limón did cross racialized borders because of his access to modernity as well as to dance opportunities in venues reserved for white people.⁴¹

⁴¹ The following venues where Limón worked or performed were mostly used by White or high class artists and audiences: the Humphrey-Weidman Studio (1930), the New Amsterdam Theatre (1933), the Bennington School of the Dance (1935), the Jacob’s Pillow (1946), and in 1951 in the Palacio de Bellas Arts in México (Limón 1998: 63, 133-139).

Franko writes that radical modern dance⁴² as a metaphor for minstrelsy raises the question of the ethics of cultural cross-dressing in thirties dance performance (Franko 2002: 99).⁴³ The fact that during the 1930s white modern dancers appropriated African cultural production – such as Negro Spirituals as well as other ethnically and racially marked genres – sheds light on how Limón had the freedom to perform across ethnic and racial borders. Indeed, much like white modern dancers in the United States at this time, Limón was also able to appropriate “othered” cultural production. Limón was Mexican and looked like a Mexican with indigenous features who could also perform white, brown, and black roles, as he did in later years by portraying an African American in *The Emperor Jones* (1956). He also made use of European, Mexican, and American music in his choreography. Additionally, and as is made clear in his performance in *The Emperor Jones*, Limón crossed the borders of class and race on stage. As dance scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy also notes, “the U.S. government did not stress Limón’s racial or ethnic identity, instead presenting his work as exemplary of American modern dance and of the superiority of American democracy and cultural production in the context of the cold war” (Shea Murphy 2007: 169).

Dance historians and critics in the United States agree that Limón was a wonderful dancer, and most pay particular attention to his height, his Mexican facial characteristics, his majestic gaze, his dignity and his sexuality, the “macho” sexuality that

⁴² Radical modern dance “was part of a variety of dance forms with ideological positions on labor crystallized in thirties culture” (Franko 2002: 3). This new style of dance was performed by revolutionary or radical dancers whom, according to Ellen Graff, “...were developing what would come to be called modern dance (Graff 1997:11).

⁴³ Susan Manning characterizes the effect of white female dancers performing to Negro spirituals as “metaphorical minstrelsy” (Franko 2002: 91).

he performed and portrayed and that was also hidden in his work, especially during the 1950's when being a homosexual - or any stance of social critique - was banned.

Tortajada explains that Limón in México “re-established the greatness of the male dancer using the logic of defensive strategies: showed domination, power and aggression in the dance. That not only identifies males individually, but nationalist modern dance and themes that interested him.” Masculinity was a consistent image to the nation: 'the macho is México incarnated' “and in dance, it was the virile dancer who represented him. Who better than Limón to personify it” (Tortajada 2007: 28). After the revolution, México was looking for a new identity, and the political sector was looking for artists who could help form this new identity. Limón's presence on stage as a male dancer not only motivated other male dancers to join modern dance in México, but as a virile dancer on stage, he represented the strong man who was associated with social transformation. Through Limón's stories told in his unfinished biography, I read and imagine his reflections upon and emotional attention to his origins, his identity, and his link to his “native land.” Limón left México when he was seven years old, but he maintained his memories in his dancing body. Limón recalls that after many years living in the United States, after learning the English language as well as a native, he was surprised to realize that even though he was immersed in dance and the American culture, things could change drastically in a single day. “An Act of Congress now required that all aliens resident in the United States register and submit all pertinent data.... [w]ith a jolt I

realized that I was an alien” (Limón 1998: 97).⁴⁴ Limón’s work and life were connected to his identity as evident through his critical and scholarly work. Included is this realization that despite having spent many years living in the U.S. Limón was merely an alien in the United States and not considered an official citizen. As this study shows, the emphasis on his looks by the American and Mexican dance critics consistently call attention to his “race” and cultural roots. Limón lived in a constant transition, crossing borders that he and other people had construed in order to keep him connected and separated from México. The complexity of his origins made him feel Mexican on stage through his representations of Mexican historical figures, but on the other hand, after working in México City Limón returned to his home, New York.

México and Limón

The director of INBA, Carlos Chávez, sent an invitation to Limón to visit México City in 1950 to perform with his company. Chávez explained that Miguel Covarrubias had been appointed as the director of the INBA’s department of dance in México City (Limón 1998: 125). As the new director of the newly created dance department, Covarrubias considered it important to renovate the concept of modern dance in México. He wanted to end the antagonism of the groups led by Sokolow and Waldeen. He also

⁴⁴ Limón was not a U.S. citizen until he was required to register for citizenship. He articulates this citizenship requirement in these terms: “An act of congress now required that all aliens resident in the United States register and submit all pertinent data: data and port of entry, list of residences, occupations, etc., etc.” Once Limón supplied the required information for citizenship, he received his Alien Registration card, which made clear that, “[a]s an able-bodied alien male [he] was subject to the recently enacted draft law” (Limón 1998: 97).

wanted to offer a better economic scene for dancers and he wanted a teacher of more advanced dance techniques. For these reasons, the INBA hired an American dancer from the New Dance Group Xavier Francis (1928-2000) (Tortajada 2007: 9). During the 1950s and under the tutelage of Miguel Covarrubias as the director of the Dance Department of INBA (1950-1952), dance was able to follow the same pathway as painting and music. The new nationalist, revolutionary, and essentially indigenist pursuits were able to be expressed through a modern language (Monsiváis 2010: 223).

For Covarrubias it was important that the Mexican dancers show some connection to modern dance personalities; with this in mind, José Limón, together with his company and Doris Humphrey, arrived in México to teach classes and to perform (Tortajada 2007: 9). Before Limón arrived to México only a few foreign dance companies had performed in México, such as Michio Ito in 1934, Waldeen Falkenstein Brooke in 1939,⁴⁵ Dance Unit with Anna Sokolow (1939), and Katherine Dunham in 1947 (Tortajada 2007: 10). When Limón arrived in México City for the first time in 1950, the publication “Semanario Tiempo” legitimized Limón as a Mexican by the written statement of Martín Luis Guzmán. It read, "Despite his prolonged absence of 31 years, José Limón has never forgotten México. It is stated by his choreographies on Mexican themes, evidenced by his continued interest in the artistic expressions of México..." The announcement continued, “If physically Limón is a typical Mexican, so it is in his vigorous dancer style. The Yankee reviews have noticed that the best explanation of his style is his race, and Limón has openly said so" (Tortajada 2007: 10).

⁴⁵ Waldeen had visited México before with the company of Michio Ito in 1934.

During his stay Limón received the praise of various publications. Gabriel del Río of the newspaper *El Universal* referred to Limón by his humanism and his great contributions to the dance culture. Gabriel Del Río describes Limon's dance and his contribution to dance culture as "touching the sensibilities of people around the world who have consecrated him as the most important dance artist that Mexico has ever produced" (Tortajada 2007: 12). The music composer Rodolfo Halffter wrote: "México can be proud to count among its children with an artist of such high stature" (Tortajada 2007: 13). Eloquently Halffter praises the work of Limón, he only did not like the music of Norman Lloyd, and he wrote: "in *La Malinche*, José Limón was injured by the vulgar music of Norman Lloyd, which has a commercial and bad taste" (Tortajada 2007: 20). Most of the reviews of Limón's work were positive, but he also received negative critiques of his choreographies *La Malinche* and *Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (Tortajada 2007: 22). According to Tortajada, the negative comments were minimal and some came from those involved in the ballet world who were annoyed by the fact that the INBA authorities decided to present a whole season of modern dance (Tortajada 2007: 23). It is important to note that several of those who wrote excellent reviews of Limón's work later collaborated with him in México and had some kind of relationship with cultural dance institutions in México. For example, Halffter later orchestrated the music for *Tonantzintla*, Limón's choreography created in México with Mexican dancers and with costumes and scenography by Miguel Covarrubias (Tortajada 2007: 24).

Besides working in México as a dancer, choreographer and teacher, Limón also functioned as a promoter of Mexican art. He not only choreographed about México, he

also included in his choreography the work of Mexican composers such as Carlos Chávez, Antonio Soler, Silvestre Revueltas; texts by José Revueltas and Salvador Novo; set-designs and costumes by the artist Miguel Covarrubias; and dancers of the Academia de la Danza Mexicana, such as Valentina Castro, Marta Castro and Rocío Sagaón, among others (Limón 1998: 139-141). Limón also cast Mexican dancer Evelia Beristain in his choreography of *Los cuatro soles* (*The Four Suns*) in 1951 together with dance students of the Academia's regional dance department from the *Escuela de Educación Física* and members of the José Limón Company (Limón 1998: 139). In 1951's *Antígona* (*Antigone*), Limón worked with members of the *Academia de la Danza Mexicana*: Rosa Reyna, Guillermo Arriaga, Jesús Íñiguez, Guillermo Keys Arenas, Antonio de la Torre, Rosalío Ortega and Juan Casados. Also in 1951, Limón choreographed *Redes* (*Nets*) using twenty-five dancers from the *Academia de la Danza Mexicana*, among them Rachel Gutierrez, Marta Bracho, Nellie Happee. In *Redes*, José Limón also participated as a dancer (Limón 1998: 140). This extensive list of dancers who worked with Limón in México shows how he left an aesthetic experience in the work and body of these Mexican dancers. Limón's ability to utilize his bilingual skills when speaking to his dancers enabled a close and productive relationship. He created a bridge, transitioning between speaking English to his company dancers and Spanish to the Mexican artists.

In México, Limón had the opportunity to choreograph for students and for professional dancers who were members of the *Academia de la Danza Mexicana*. For the Mexican dancers, this was also an opportunity to share the stage with the José Limón Company and to work with Limón as choreographer, teacher and dancer. Limón was

important in the development of the careers of modern male dancers in Mexico, since at that time, male dancers and choreographers were a minority in the dance community, and did not have as much power as women in dance schools and companies (Tortajada 2001: 256).

In 1960 José Limón and his company arrived again in México to perform in a ten-performance season. Again Limón received negative and positive responses. Juan Vicente Melo, for example, recognized that Limón was a good choreographer but that his dance work was too classic.⁴⁶ Cristián Caballero thought of Limón's choreography *The Emperor Jones* (1956) that the use of pantomime was too exaggerated, and he also gave positive comments about *Para todo hay un tiempo*, *El Traidor*, and *Missa Brevis*, three choreographies that were presented in the same program (Tortajada 1995: 452-453).⁴⁷ In 1961 Sokolow and Limón both were invited to teach and stage their work in *Academia de la Danza Mexicana (ADM)* [Mexican Dance Academy]. This time Sokolow and Limón agreed to work in México but they would include their own conditions in the contract. They established that they would receive a monthly salary and secure the company dancers' salary. They also made clear that their companies should receive credit as guest companies (Tortajada 1995: 454). This demonstrates how Sokolow and Limón as two guest artists negotiated with Mexican cultural authorities their collaborations in México. Although Sokolow was one of the modern dance pioneers in México and Limón a sort of

⁴⁶ Melo notes that in Limón's company "we can see stereotypical attitudes, and classicism in the costumes and movement" (Tortajada 1995: 452).

⁴⁷ *Para todo hay un tiempo* (*For Everything There Is a Time*); *El traidor* (*The Traitor*); and *Missa Brevis*.

prodigal son, their relationship with Mexican authorities were not always in optimal conditions.

During Limón's four visits to México, he strongly influenced the modern dance movement in México (Tortajada 2001: 135) with his force, technique, and virile presence (Tortajada 2007: 23). Important Mexican dancers entered the dance community after being motivated by Limón's dance: such was the case of Farnesio de Bernal and Luis Faldiño (Tortajada 2007: 25). I believe that Limón's strongest influence in México came first as a choreographer, teacher and dancer, since those were the reasons Mexican authorities had invited him to work in the country. Currently, his influence is more as a teacher, since some dancers in México still prefer to teach or train in his dance technique. In México, the most popular dance technique is the Graham technique, but there is definitely still an interest in the Limón technique.⁴⁸ There is not much interest in restaging his choreographies, or that of other artists' at the time such as Graham's or Sokolow's works.

Nevertheless, Limón definitely had an impact in México's modern dance and as a tribute cultural authorities named after him the country's most important dance research center: *Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de la Danza: José Limón* [The Dance Research, Documentation, and Information National Center "José Limón"].⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Graham's technique has been an official dance technique taught in state sponsored dance schools.

⁴⁹ <http://www.cenidanza.bellasartes.gob.mx/>

Sokolow and Limón

“...José Limón, a truly great artist, has contributed to the world of Art.”

–*The Illustrated Dance Technique of José Limón by Daniel Lewis (Back Cover).*

“There was intense Anna Sokolow, even then as explosive as dynamite. These young contemporaries I was to know and cherish in future years. But now an insensate rivalry isolated us.”

–*José Limón: An Unfinished Memoir by José Limón (1998: 60-61).*

Sokolow and Limón: both were recognized as artists in the United States and in México. Limón and Sokolow had similar relationships to their respective cultural roots and how these roots’ shaped their identities. However, both artists recognized themselves as outsiders to the United States at some point in their lives.⁵⁰

The way Margaret Lloyd approaches the study of Limón and Sokolow diverges in some ways, though not in all. For example, in both cases she analyzes their choreography, their impact as teachers, and how the audience accepted their work. What I found different in her approach to analyzing these two artists is her comments about their race. In Sokolow’s case she only briefly describes her body in the following way “...Anna herself, with her beautiful inward composure and gracile strength, was a pleasure to watch” (1949: 217). In contrast Lloyd is particularly interested in pointing out the look of Limón in relation to race and gender, noting his “Aztec-Hispanic features, his dark eyes and straight black hair.” (Lloyd 1949: 198). Lloyd also comments about other features of his body, such as his height, virility, and broad shoulders. She also highlights how appropriate he looks as a Spaniard in the role of Ignacio Sánchez Mejías (Lloyd

⁵⁰ These artists at one point of their life felt as an ethnic, social and cultural outsider in the United States or in México as well.

1949: 198). The political context of this article is at the end of the 1940s, when African-Americans and Mexican-Americans were strongly discriminated against. It seems that Lloyd chooses to focus on social class border crossing when it comes to Sokolow, and to rely on racialized features, such strong markers that cannot be crossed, when contemplating Limón. Even in celebrating his dancing, Lloyd cannot help but fall back on stereotypical linkages between his appearance and his so-called “virility.”

The theme of exile or being away from home in Sokolow’s and Limón’s work is another connection between them as choreographers. Both were inspired by these cultural and political experiences. According to Warren, in *The Exile* (1939) Sokolow “had made her first and only significant reference to Jewish roots.” Warren also notices that it was in México that “she gained new insights that would help her to integrate her religious background in her art” (1998: 80). Sokolow in later years also remembers that in was in México City that an incident in the mid-1940s changed her artistic life. It was during a dinner with José Bergamin at his home that she noticed a painting of a Catholic saint. She asked to Benjamin “Why” and he responded “Why not?” Warren writes, that such “moments could make a deep and lasting impression on Anna” (Warren 1998: 80). In the following years Sokolow choreographed *Mexican Retablo*, which according to Margaret Lloyd, “dramatizes an emotional attitude toward the Virgin, in dark, impassioned contrast to the serene luster of “Our Lady” (Lloyd 1949: 222). And in 1945 she created *Kaddish* in “which she wrapped Orthodox Jewish prayer boxes, a piece where she explore her own religious background” (Warren 1998: 80). In José Limón’s *The Exiles* (1950), he writes in the program notes that “this piece of choreography was inspired by and dedicated to

those desolate ones who remember some lost paradise, or serenity, of innocence, or homeland.” In these choreographies both Sokolow and Limón explore misplacement, loss or change of cultural terrain tied to distinct religious beliefs and symbolism, as they connect their works to México in overlapping ways.

The figures of Sokolow and Limón illuminate the transit of contemporary choreographers in the context of new flows of artist migrations between the United States and México. Sokolow’s and Limón’s experiences allow us to see how dance has the ability to work as a vehicle for mediating between the socio-political and cultural constraints affecting artists working both in the United States and in México in the twentieth century. Crossing the border as dancers and choreographers allowed them to find loopholes on each side of the border to deftly negotiate their personal, political, and artistic practices. In doing so, as highly visible artistic figures and as dancers and teachers, they also created opportunities for other young artists and audiences to explore non-conformist ideas on both sides of the border.

The lives of Anna Sokolow and José Limón had many parallels: they both flourished as artists in New York contributing in important ways to modern dance despite their strong connections to foreign roots. Both of their parents emigrated to the United States, and both crossed from being modern dancers to being traditional modern dancers, as new generations of dancers relegate the previous one to the past. Both arrived to México City to create and develop a new Mexican dance through modern dance aesthetics and movement vocabulary; both left a legacy to México in their alumni. In

addition, both did work in San Diego⁵¹ where I am writing about them and about the paths new dancers transit following their steps. Such is the case of Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba Tovar, cited in the introduction of this chapter, and discussed in the following section. Currently Anna Sokolow is recognized by Mexicans as one of the two pioneers of modern dance in México, together with Waldeen. After José Limón died, his legacy continued in México through the teaching of his technique by American and Mexican teachers such as Alan Danielson, Daniel Lewis, Jim May, Lynn Wimmer, Stuart Gold, and Karen Muller from the United States; and Ana González, Ofelia Chavéz, Evelia Kochen, and Oscar Velázquez from México (Tortajada 2007: 55-56, 72-73).

Modern and contemporary choreographers and dancers have been inspired by the work of these artists. Anna Sokolow and José Limón created bridges that connect the United States to México and vice versa. Contemporary border dance creators find their artistic precedent in works by Sokolow such as *Strange American Funeral* and *The Exile* and by those of Limón such as *The Exiles* and *La Malinche*. Their works' thematics were path-breaking commentaries on border crossing. Anna Sokolow and José Limón, as I have shown, are present in the Mexican cultural arena and in the minds of Mexican dance scholars. In particular, Limón is seen as a significant figure in Mexican dance because he was a Mexican who became famous outside of Mexico and because of his status as a Mexican immigrant in the US. On both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border, the validity and legacy of José Limón remains a current topic of conversation among dancers and danc-

⁵¹ According to SDSU dance professor George Willis, José Limón came to San Diego at the end of the 1960s during his farewell tour to perform at Grossmont College. Sokolow visited San Diego in 1957 (Warren 1998: 128).

scholars of Mexican dance. In her book, *La danza: hojas de papel volando*, (2012), Aulestia compiled dance reviews and notes from the publication of *Cine Mundial* from 1953-1963. In this work, she includes a review from a French dance writer, Paul Bourcier, who wrote a critique of José Limón's performance in Paris. What catches my attention is that this Mexican newspaper included this review in the year 1957, which suggests that this publication considered it important to follow Limón's career in Europe and share it with readers. That Aulestia also included it in her 2012 book demonstrates sustained contemporary interest in Limón (Aulestia 2012b: 26).

And yet, as I write, Limón remains a controversial subject for the field of Mexican dance. In a recent conversation about Limón with dance critic César Delgado Martínez,⁵² Delgado Martínez remembered how the choreographer Guillermina Bravo questioned Limón's contributions to México, suggesting that she did not see them. Bravo also suggested that additional research should be done to study how Limón contributed to Mexican modern dance. I included Bravo's and Delgado's opinion here, since both are influential critical dance voices in México.

Dance and border studies shine different critical lights on how those involved in Mexican dance communities perceive Limón's subjectivity as a border crosser and legacy as an artist. How Limón is perceived depends on transnational political and economic shifts. These shifts color him for better or for worse, depending on different cultural climates in different cultural moments. Such shifts often make invisible the work of other artists and well-known people who, much like Limón, left México with his family

⁵² César Delgado Martínez, personal communication. Tijuana, México. April 14, 2014.

searching for a safer country.⁵³ This invisibility can play out in a variety of ways. For example, in the context of global communication, feelings of proximity can be exalted or imagined, when audiences do not have a clear sense of national borders or even if there are borders. A few years ago the work of artists or well-known people who left México was often made invisible in the artistic community. Nowadays, when global communication is affecting all employment sectors, when media encourages feelings of proximity, when T.V. channels and programs broadcast traditional Mexican T.V. shows outside of México, when Mexican artists' works reach US audiences through images, and in some cases physically, artists who have left México are no longer seen in the same way as ten years ago. The new perception is that those who leave the country are better. If they leave, they are no longer seen as traitors, but, rather, they are seen as privileged since they are believed to have access to fame or better employment opportunities. Similar kinds of changes in the political climate affected how Limón was and is perceived in México. These perceptions, as I explore here, take on special meanings in the context of the region I am primarily interested in: the Tijuana-San Diego border area. For regular border crossers the nearness of San Diego and Tijuana allows them to inhabit and make use of both spaces, without the idea that they are leaving either one for good.

⁵³ In 1915 the Limón family left México because the effects of the 1910 Mexican Revolution threatened their safety.

Limón's Bridge

I chose to interview the dancer Pablo Francisco Ruvalcaba Tovar because he is currently transiting the world as a dancer of the José Limón Company, but especially because he is a regular border crosser in the Tijuana-San Diego region. His family lives on both sides of the border. Ruvalcaba was born in San Diego and grew up in Tijuana. On Sunday January 29 of 2013 I met with Francisco at the Tijuana Cultural Center for two hours. Ruvalcaba started to dance when he was eighteen years old in Tijuana at *Casa de la Cultura* (House of Culture). Then he attended dance classes at Southwestern Community College in Chula Vista California. It was in this school that a dance professor advised him to go to New York to audition. He went to audition to the Julliard School where he was selected to join the dance program.

As with many regular border crossers who legally transit between México and the United States, Ruvalcaba's English and Spanish are clear and articulate. When we saw each other we started to talk in Spanish, but the interview was conducted in English because he felt more comfortable to talk about dance and José Limón's technique and choreographic work in English. While I am listening to Francisco's voice in English in the recorded audio, I am taking notes in Spanish, knowing that I will translate again as I write my dissertation in English. Ruvalcaba told me that his father says that it is better to speak either in English or Spanish and not to mix both languages. It is a common practice for regular border crossers not to mix both languages in a conversation. D. Emily Hicks observes that "[s]ome Chicanas and Chicanos, but not all, are bilingual. Not all Mexicans living in the U.S.Mexico border region speak English; relatively few Anglos living in the

region speak Spanish” (Hicks 1991: 109-110). I have also noticed that some Chicanos are known for using Spanglish, but regular border crossers tend to either use one or the other. In some cases, even though they live very close to San Diego and frequently cross the border, some people from Tijuana do not speak English. Conversely, it is not uncommon that even frequent border crossers from the United States do not speak Spanish. I think observing how borderland people use these two languages reveal the level of deep participation or interested in what happened on the other side of the border or how collaborations and communication among the dance fields of the Tijuana-San Diego region have work. In this particular case Ruvalcaba, is accepted as an American because his English has no accent and his Spanish is also excellent, so in México he is seen as a local who travels to or lives in San Diego or New York. As Limón, Ruvalcaba can be accepted because his use of the two languages Spanish and English are as a local. This gives him the opportunity to be included in both cultures and also provides him a sense of belonging.

Ruvalcaba first heard the name José Limón in a history of dance class at Southwestern College. He does not recall if he paid attention to the fact that Limón was Mexican since most of the students at this college were Mexicans, so it seemed normal to discuss a Mexican artist. Ruvalcaba graduated with a BFA in Dance in 1996 from the Julliard School. During his four years at Julliard, Carla Maxwell was invited to stage a work by Limón, and Ruvalcaba participated as a student. Maxwell asked him if he wanted to join the José Limón Dance Company and in 1996 he started regularly to dance Limón’s repertoire.

Ruvalcaba felt that he had a different association to the company than other dancers because when he arrived to Julliard he had been dancing only for about two years. His fellow dancers at Julliard had previous intensive training and had beautiful technique. He did not know many of the steps' names. He was feeling strange and he thought he did not belong there. Of the stories that Ruvalcaba shared during this interview, I liked best his way of using Limón's choreography to understand the artist's experiences in life. In doing so, Ruvalcaba suggested that he could understand certain things about Limón's feelings through his choreographies. When dancing *Missa Brevis*, for instance, Ruvalcaba explained that he felt that he understood Limón's thinking on the importance of the individual in a group.

During the first semester at the Julliard School, Ruvalcaba participated in Limón's choreography for the first part of *Missa Brevis* (1958). Ruvalcaba explained how the first steps of this choreography were realized in a tightly-packed group. Although the movement itself was very simple, performing it was difficult because all the dancers are connected by holding each other's shoulders and feet in first position. Because this was a synchronized movement, if one dancer did not align, the entire group's performance could be thrown off. While doing these movements, maneuvering to be close to all, holding a girl's hand and a boy's shoulder in order to help him align, Ruvalcaba understood why he was there. "I get it! It is not about the steps. It is about the importance of the individual in a group. You see if I wasn't here, if I wasn't in this group, this cluster would never happen. Maybe a different one, but not this one." From this experience with Limón's choreography, Ruvalcaba understood that he could be different;

he could be valued for his individual contribution. As a direct result of this conversation with Ruvalcaba, I came to value the importance of face to face interviews, (in contrast to written interviews) since I could see him moving as he explained the conflicts he experienced.

Like Limón, Ruvalcaba, the artist, was born anew in New York City, and like his teacher, made his most important dance work in this city. Currently, Ruvalcaba travels to many different places to teach Limón technique.⁵⁴ Besides teaching Limón technique and dancing Limón's choreographies, Ruvalcaba also gives lecture demonstrations and talks about Limón's work. In a paper that he presented for the Congress on Research in Dance in 2007 in New York, Ruvalcaba argued that he would like "to speculate on the influences that José Limón, an immigrant to this country, has had on the shaping of modern dance history." His paper makes a valuable connection between Ruvalcaba's experiences as a dancer of the José Limón Dance Company and his relation to Limón's work and persona. This is due to the fact that Ruvalcaba is a Mexican-American and a regular border crosser between the Mexican and the American culture. When Ruvalcaba reads Limón choreography, in a way he sees a mirror, he sees himself in some characters identifying himself as the other, the migrant and the one in perpetual cultural translation.

⁵⁴ I recently took a class with him in San Diego before he went to Mexico City to teach Limón technique in a private school owned by one of his friends. The Limón technique has the principles of recovery-fall of the choreographer Doris Humphrey. According to Ana González, a practitioner of the Limón-Humphrey technique in México City, the core of the technique consisted of not fixing or making rigid the principles of movement (Cámara 2007: 56). Daniel Lewis also noted that Limón's "dancers learn to think about movement in terms of *alignment, succession, opposition, potential and kinetic energy, fall, weight, recovery and rebound, and suspension*" (1984: 36).

Ruvalcaba's artistic and scholarly work reflects Limón's influence on current transborder modern dancers. Furthermore, Ruvalcaba tries from different positions to construct and continue Limón's work and legacy. He writes that Limón often "spoke of love, loss, desire, joy even hate but most notable in his work was the theme of exclusion. This concept of an ill-fitting element within a mostly harmonious group is ever present within the body of Limon's choreographic work. The realization that one thing is different from those around it is perhaps no innovation in the world of 20th century dance. It is however the affinity and complexity with which Limón explored that theme that sets his work apart." To talk about Limón's work in more depth, Ruvalcaba selected *The Moor's Pavane* (1949), *The Traitor* (1954), and *Missa Brevis* (1958).

Ruvalcaba recalls that Limón once said "all dance, all choreography is autobiographical whether one knows it, likes it or intends it" and "in composing dances I tend to turn to my own experiences." Ruvalcaba suggests that in these choreographies, we can find something about Limón's life and experiences. For example, Ruvalcaba writes that the choreography *The Moor's Pavane* is "Limon's Othello, the story of a man that is a stranger in a strange land and that driven by the machinations of things unfamiliar gives in to base instinct and is lost. It can be stated that José Limón understood what it was to be a foreigner in a foreign land. As might be well known he was born in México and brought to the United States at age seven" (Ruvalcaba 2007: 1). Ruvalcaba's observation about Limón, shows how he also understand and can recognize the sentiment of living in a foreign country; he identifies the feelings of a Mexican-American and a cultural border-crosser, since he is one himself.

Ruvalcaba also describes the humiliation that accompanied Limon's first attempt to read English in elementary school: "[t]he terrible knowledge had transfixed me [Limón]. I was an alien. An exile. The wound inflicted that day would take years to heal. But when wounds do not kill they form a cicatrix, which is good tough tissue. That day I resolved to learn this impossible language better than any of those who had jeered at me." For Ruvalcaba this declaration was a "realization of a powerful 'otherness' within him that could be channeled or, if left be, could injure."

According to Ruvalcaba, Limón described *The Traitor* as the story of the great betrayal of Judas Iscariot. *The Traitor* was "a symbol of those tormented men who, loving too much must hate; these men that to our own day must turn against their loyalties, friends and fatherlands and in some fearful cataclysm of the spirit betray them to the enemy." Ruvalcaba notes that Limón was also commenting on the McCarthy hearings of the 1950s. Ruvalcaba further argues that *The Traitor* had personal meaning for Limón as well. The oldest of twelve siblings in deeply Catholic family, Limón's mother died in childbirth, an act which "he held his father accountable for it, compounding an already tense relationship between them, a relationship not unlike the one between Jesus and Judas—a man at odds with his leader; with his father" (Ruvalcaba 2007: 2).

The third of Limón's choreography analyzed by Ruvalcaba is *Missa Brevis*, or as Ruvalcaba calls it, "Limon's kinetic Mass." Ruvalcaba states that this story "speaks of the man in search of understanding. The stranger peeking in through the window wanting

desperately to join in yet does not.” According to Ruvalcaba, *Missa Brevis* was created in response to the Limón Company’s visit to war-torn Poland in the late 1950’s as part of the first U. S. State Department touring program. In his report back to the United States, José Limón wrote, “Against a background of cities still lying eviscerated by the savagery of war, I met human beings of courage, serenity, nobility. There was no rancor, no bitterness. Only a tremendous resolution, a sense of the future. Poland had to rebuild. I am in awe of these brave people, of their passionate love for their identity, their tradition, their beautiful survival but above all their unspeakable courage” (Ruvalcaba 2007: 3). In *Missa Brevis*, José Limón dances the part of the “outsider” or the stranger. Ruvalcaba argues that this performance represents a search for belonging; “it is a quest for identity, for tradition, for beautiful survival and for unspeakable courage; the outsider is the outward manifestation of Jose’s vision of what it is to be an artist, of what it is to discover what stirs within, deep layered and ephemeral” (Ruvalcaba 2007: 3). Finally, for Ruvalcaba the influence of José Limón on the development of modern dance history was tied to his Mexican identity. It was tied to “the lineage of the American Impetus as [promoted] by [Isadora] Duncan and exemplified by [Doris] Humphrey, Limón added the problem of identity” (Ruvalcaba 2007: 4).

Ruvalcaba sometimes refers to José Limón as “José” instead of “Limón,” which reveals Ruvalcaba’s familiarity with José Limón’s persona and work. During our interview, I asked Ruvalcaba if anyone commented on his being Mexican like José Limón, and if he believes that connection gave him more attention. He responded that he never thought about this. “Perhaps because he [Limón] did not talk about being Mexican,

he talked about being human, and it happened that his colors came from México, but he was still drawing on a universal picture.” However, Ruvalcaba said that while doing *Recordare*, a piece by the choreographer Lar Lubovitch based on the *calacas* (skeletons, the small figures of the Day of the Dead), he got to dance *el catrín* (dude). This *catrín* was inspired by the images of the Mexican political printmaker and engraver, José Guadalupe Posada. Ruvalcaba found in this work a connection to his cultural roots, his memories and to the Mexican celebration of the Day of the Dead. Ruvalcaba had a lot of fun, he did not know if people comprehended that he was Mexican. But Ruvalcaba understood what they were dancing about through his own connections with the traditions. He said “I was asked to do something funny, but what I was doing was something serious, profound and yes funny too; as we Mexicans understand the dead.” Ruvalcaba said that his Mexican side really helped him to perform this piece.

I grew up seeing how words that are accented in Spanish, often lose the *acento* (accent) when written in English. So seeing the accent in the name of the Limón Dance Company gives me the feeling that they respect the cultural origins of the founder of the company. The company was founded in 1946, “after Limón’s death in 1972 the company pioneered the idea that it was possible to survive the death of its founder, setting an example for the entire dance field.”⁵⁵ In homage to Limón, every year national and international dance makers who have devoted their lives to the advancement of the discipline of dance may be nominated as worthy of *The National Contemporary Dance*

⁵⁵ <http://limon.org/>

*Prize "José Limón."*⁵⁶ Now after Limón's death, his company⁵⁷ and his new dancers, such as Ruvalcaba, transit in circular paths between the United States and México.

Ruvalcaba's interview as a contemporary border-crossing dancer describes how he travels between the United States and México with the help of Limón's artistic legacy. In New York, he is a Mexican-American who speaks English and is recognized as a member of the Limón Dance Company. In Tijuana, he has his family and walks in his native city as a local. Dance is his way of connecting to New York and to other Mexican cities where he is invited to dance or to teach Limón's technique.

⁵⁶ This is one of the few prizes in México for which the recipients receive 40 thousand pesos. http://www.sic.gob.mx/ficha.php?table=convocatoria&table_id=588

⁵⁷ The company also offers the possibility to obtain the Licensing to stage Limón's work and offer Limón teachers. <http://limon.org/licensing-dances/>

CHAPTER 2:

Transborder Choreographies and Tijuana-San Diego Collaborations

I remember calling Casa del Túnel: Art Center to ask if I could use its facilities for a dance performance. Somebody had already suggested to me that I create and/or present a performance in this space, but I had decided not to do it at that time. In November 2012, however, I changed my mind as I traveled to Tijuana through the new border crossing entrance of El Chaparral. Highways I-5 and I-805 used to take travelers directly to the México port of entry, but now a metal door blocked all the lanes towards México and a detour forced traffic through a fenced corridor towards a new border checkpoint, located to the right of the former entry.

The first time I used El Chaparral to cross the border I was astonished by the sharp, 90 degree turn of the highway. Just before that turn, the speed limit is 70 mph and the new road demands drivers make almost a complete stop before turning the wheel to the right. After turning to the right and entering the road to the Mexican inspection door, Casa del Túnel appears on the left. It is on the Mexican side, separated from the American side just by a concrete wall. Since then, every time I crossed to Tijuana I could see people in the Casa del Túnel. They were cleaning, or talking, or watching us, the border crossers, who from inside of our cars looked back at them while driving to our immediate destination: Tijuana.

It was then when I decided that I did have a dance piece for that space, “Danzas vecinas” (Neighbor Dances), a work which people from both sides of the US-México border could see. In Tijuana, people could watch the performance from their homes, from inside the Casa del Túnel building, and from some of the Mexican border inspection facilities. In the United States, people could see the same performance from the San Ysidro parking lot and from the American check point but mainly they would be able to see the performance from their cars as the spectators transiting the border corridor drove by the Casa del Túnel. The audience would be separated from the performance by a medium sized concrete wall instead of a proscenium. People in transition could see us dancing while waiting to cross the border.

Five performances were held on Friday, August 16th, 2013. Throughout the day, the lines to cross into México became longer and longer, as is usual for Friday afternoons. Scheduling several performances on a Friday gave us access to more potential spectators in cars. Some of the passersby honked from their cars while people in neighboring houses set up chairs to watch the second or third show comfortably.

We used the roof-top of the building for the performance. The dance piece was very simple, without jumps or complicated choreographic designs. Some of the chosen movements were slow and in unison, which are two types of movements that I always see

when I cross the border. No matter which lane I use (either by foot or by car in the regular lane, the Sentry Lane, or the Ready Lane), I sense that, without exception, we all are exposed and vulnerable. Dance phrases in unison, which I generally do not use in my choreographies, aimed to capture this collective experience.

When I first chose La Casa del Túnel I did not know two things. First, the house contains one of the first tunnels used to smuggle drugs into the United States (hence the name, although I thought it was because of the elongated footprint of the building). Second, the administrator of that facility was a kind and dynamic American woman who also was a host for a radio show in Tijuana and managed a cultural venue in San Diego, California called World Beat Cultural Center; her name was Makeda Dread Cheaton. I met Dread in San Diego at the World Beat Cultural Center. She seemed very enthusiastic about our dance project, since at La Casa del Túnel most of the current activities were related to Music and Literature. I found it interesting that an American citizen was the director of a cultural center in San Diego and also one in Tijuana. Our experiences with Dread and the people who work at the venue were constructive.

As the five shows ended, we stayed to chat and contemplate the sunset over the flow of cars that transited the border beside us. We agreed to email each other our reflections on this event, but this suggestion made the dancers start exchanging impressions immediately: Did you hear how somebody was arguing from his car with people in another car?

One of the participants/dancers, Ivone Morales, commented that what caught her attention was the contrasting situation of the spectators at the Casa del Túnel with the ones who were driving down the road. Audiences at the Casa del Túnel could see the dancers in more detail, while the drivers could only watch fragments of the piece. Drivers could see that there was somebody moving on a rooftop, although they could not clearly determine who, or what, it was. Perhaps they could only tell that in Tijuana there were people dancing. Spectators in transit looked at us, turned their heads and watched again and again, trying to discern what was happening.

Ivone continued telling us that it was fascinating to pick a driver and follow him or her driving by the site. When that person looked back at the dancer, a connection was instantly made. This did not always happen, but it did happen to Ivone. She also told us that at the end of the piece, when the dancers made a slow and suspended movement with raised arms, people watching from the Casa del Túnel assumed that the piece was over, while spectators passing by might have thought that we were waving them good-bye, or even saying hello! Sometimes they waved back at us, maybe thinking we were saying good-bye as they left the United States or that we were welcoming them as they were about to enter México. Making this gesture had multiple meanings depending on the spectators' vantage points, which was the whole point of this kind of choreographic work staged at this border site.

Gustavo Nava, one of the only two male dancers who participated, commented that he noticed a person watching the dance from the pedestrian bridge on the U.S. side: “that person kept still and attentive, with his body turned toward us, watching the dance from several feet away and from a different country.” Gustavo told us that while dancing the contrasting images surrounding him caught his attention: “on the American side, I could see people walking, cars in a parking lot, the U.S. border gates under construction, and a uninhabited hill; while on the Mexican side I could see numerous houses, dense populated hills, a Mexican flag, commercial spaces and some people from the neighboring houses taking pictures.”

Melissa Loza, another dancer, had gone with me to see the Casa del Túnel for the first time to decide which part of the house we would use for the dance. I had left the place worried about possible difficulties with the immigration authorities because we could distract the drivers. I shared my concerns with Melissa because I was not sure if we would be able to move ahead with the project. But after being there, I changed some of the movements in the choreography, especially the rhythm and tempo, so as to slow everything down. Slower movements, I thought, would be less surprising for the drivers. When I mentioned this concern to others, they told me: “hopefully they [the customs officers] don’t give you a hard time.” In the end, I thought of the reggae music performances already held at the Casa del Túnel’s terrace, and decided that if they had not faced any problems, we would not either. However, the nature of the dancers’ moving bodies and our intention of establishing a back and forth communication between the two sides of the border could make our experience different.

Once we were there, I placed the dancers at the terrace’s center and not along the building’s edges as I had originally planned. I thought that moving away from the street that runs along the border fence would be less challenging to the American authorities. I realized that a choreographer’s decisions on the uses of space attain new meanings at the border where power relations are clearly at stake. The choreographic process showed us how we negotiated our right to be there, in the middle, unsure about how physical and visual space are divided by a border.

Melissa recalled the comments of the spectators in the Casa del Túnel, scattered between the site and the neighboring houses: “I heard that the Casa del Túnel employees commented that after they saw us waving our arm towards the American side, a child visiting the Casa stood next to the handrail we used for the performance. The first thing he did was that very same movement, because of his father, an undocumented alien who he hadn’t seen in a long time. While waiting to see if he was greeted back the kid explained: ‘I am waving hoping my father could see me!’” Melissa also mentioned noticing the contrast between the spectators in transit passing by on the American side and those who, as traffic increased later in the day, spent more time watching the performance.

For Melissa the performances at la Casa del Túnel were a true learning experience: “I enjoyed it, and without being able to see, literally (maybe because of the sun’s glare), I could feel the drivers gazing at us. At some point I forgot the steps, I just danced for me, for them... and dance erased any geographic wall between the two neighbor countries, because at that particular moment we all were free to express ourselves, to watch, to dance.” Her opinion sounds noble to me, especially in relation to my worries about having a possible conflict with the immigration agents. As I reflect on my own experiences as a border-crosser, both positive and negative, I hope that the feelings and opinions Melissa and the dancers felt and projected could help those who watch us, so they can perceive us (or see each other) on the border not as a conflict, but as a bridge that unites people on both sides of the border.

While I wait in my car in line to cross the border from Tijuana, México to San Diego, California I have ample time to think about my day, listen to music, and observe the immigration agents guiding trained contraband-sniffing dogs around crossing cars—a stark contrast to the stray dogs that weave in and out among the vehicles. I see pharmacies and huge electronic billboards that are illuminated twenty-four hours a day advertising *quinceañera*⁵⁸ dresses, Mexican and American phone services, and even plastic surgeons. I smell and see emissions escaping through exhaust pipes of old and new cars. I see Mexican vendors selling magazines, bottles of water, and blankets; old and new regulations in English and Spanish; plaster figurines of Disney characters; and children, women and older men who sell chewing gum and ask for handouts.

In this space, where surveillance cameras seem to multiply every day, I hear a “globalization” of sounds: reverberations of construction, a multiplicity of voices, and besides my music, others of diverse tastes. The San Ysidro Port of Entry is a visually and aurally busy space.⁵⁹ But most of all, I see the people who, like me, sit in their cars waiting to cross the border to “*el otro lado*.”⁶⁰ Although the complexity of this border space makes it difficult to describe, my continuous waits to cross from Tijuana to San Diego have allowed me to observe the regular activities and physical transformations at this site. In this space, purportedly an area of safety, many people have had jolting experiences, such as hearing gunshots or seeing U.S. officials suddenly take unsuspecting

⁵⁸ Girls celebrating their fifteenth birthday, a kind of “coming of age” affair in México.

⁵⁹ The San Ysidro Port of Entry, where currently more than 40 million people cross the border each year, making it the busiest land border in the world.

⁶⁰ People in Tijuana refer to the crossing as “*ir al otro lado*”—to go to the other side of the border.

passengers from their cars in handcuffs.⁶¹ Adding to this instability is the border's paradoxical relationship to movement; the border implies a stop of flow, a stop of movement, yet at the same time it is where people and things are in constant motion, moving slowly but always forward to cross the border. Here, thousands of us are present together; we undergo different and penetrating transborder experiences that leave a ghostly trail.

In this chapter, I examine how embodying the border informs the contemporary dance community around the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically in the Tijuana-San Diego region. Here, I address how the border's economic and political circumstances inform binational dance collaborations and choreographies. Issues with (im)migration, racism, smuggling, and narcotrafficking have shaped the interactions amongst members of the dance communities on both sides of the border, leading to the production of *danzas fronterizas* (border dances) while diminishing border collaborations.

As someone who grew up in these borderlands, and as a choreographer who regularly crosses the border to work with other border crossing dancers, I use biographic and ethnographic approaches to examine how borderland experiences shape the work of dance-makers. I write from and about the border, as an artist/scholar haunted by border-crossing occurrences and reflect on the impact of transborder experiences in the making

⁶¹ “The top four cities in America with the lowest rates of violent crime are all in border states: San Diego, Phoenix, El Paso and Austin, according to a new FBI report.” The Huffington Post, September 5, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/03us-mexico-border-safety-a_n_598825.html

of contemporary concert dance.⁶² I argue that the act of crossing the border and the difficulties therein determine the character and fate of collaborations between the dance communities of the Tijuana-San Diego region.

The Economic Factor at the U.S.-Mexico borderland

The Tijuana-San Diego region is complex because it is most defined by its relationships to change, especially the economic change that affects lives on both sides of the border.⁶³ Here, I examine economic aspects because they are, in many ways, central to understanding how the border is constructed. The economic change is not balanced amongst residents living on the border, it is important to note, as each nation has very different relationships to power and economics. As Paul Hirt discusses in the prologue of *El muro fronterizo entre México y Estados Unidos: Espacios, instrumentos y actores para un diálogo constructivo* (2012: 15), “no one knowledgeable about—at least on some level—recent events at the Mexico-U.S. border can deny that we experience difficulties.” Hirt makes clear that, as two neighboring nations with a shared history and extensive economic ties, México and the United States, have an often problematic relationship. This international tension is exacerbated greatly by social trends and policies on both sides of the border. For example, the post-September 11, 2001 culture of fear for national

⁶² Other contemporary choreographers who have created at least one *danza fronteriza*: Nancy McCaleb, Isaacs, Patricia Rincon, Allyson Green, Jaciel Neri, Henry Torres and Ángel Arámbura. I discuss their work in chapter three.

⁶³ In chapter one, I discussed one specific case and how the dance community has been affected by economic factors at the border in the Tijuana-San Diego region.

security and the U.S.'s war on drugs that often focuses on Mexican organized crime and drug trafficking creates much tension between these nations. Moreover, this tension is intensified by the most recent global financial crisis brought on by, amongst other things, the economic bubble bursting (2012: 15).

Mireille Linares corroborates Hirt's story about the complex economic landscape at the border. She makes clear in her article "Espacios binacionales formales de interacción en la frontera México-Estados Unidos y la inclusión del tema del muro fronterizo" (2012) that the common border between México and the U.S., which is home to more than 12 million people, is one of the most complex places in North America primarily because of its commercial and economic dynamism (2012: 51-52). Rachel St. John, in *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border* (2011), also suggests that, although borders are "located at the periphery of the nation, this [the U.S.-Mexican] border, like boundaries all over the world, was central to state projects of ... economic development ..." (2011: 6).⁶⁴ St. John highlights how the economic relationship between the U.S. and Mexico has been central to how this border—as well as other borders—has been defined. The U.S.-Mexico border has a long history tied to economic factors—factors that are not the only reason people either cross or want to cross the border, but that play a significant role. Hirt, Linares and St. John, suggest that the

⁶⁴ At the end of the 1880s, the railroad construction through the borderland helped develop transborder commerce. St. John articulates this commerce as such: "transborder rail lines would bear a southbound traffic of trade goods, tools, and capitalists into Mexico and carry ore, agricultural products, and laborers north to the United States, linking the U.S. and Mexican borderlands in an integrated transborder economy" (2011: 67-68).

economy at the U.S. Mexican borderland is complex, not only because it is shaped by local social and political processes, but also related to state interests.

Tijuana and San Diego share a history—a history that is similar to that of Juarez-El Paso, and of Nuevo Laredo-Laredo. St. John describes the latter’s history as such: “El Paso and Laredo had long histories of settlement that predated the creation of the U.S.-Mexico boundary line, the twin towns of the desert border were a product of the boundary line itself. The founding of those towns after 1880 reflected the growing importance of the border in the emerging transborder economy” (St. John 2011: 83). While it is true that the history between Tijuana and San Diego is shaped by economics, this history is also shaped by the entertainment industry.

San Diego, originally in Mexican territory, was founded on July 16, 1769 before being incorporated into the United States on March 27, 1859. Tijuana was founded years later on July 11, 1889. Despite the gap between their formations, the historical ties between San Diego and Tijuana are, nevertheless, longstanding. In terms of the performing arts, and border crossing, beginning in the 1920s, Tijuana became a destination for artists from Hollywood (Monsiváis 2005: 25). In this context, the performing arts flourished and, beginning in the 1930s, concert dance, in particular, became an art form that regularly crossed the Tijuana-San Diego border. Although my project does not focus on this early border crossing, I would like to mention a popular figure that exemplifies this kind of early concert dance in the region: Los Angeles artist

Margarita Carmen Cansino, or Rita Hayworth.⁶⁵ Hayworth's experiences with concert dance and border crossings were shaped by the prohibition of alcohol in the U.S. She regularly crossed from San Diego to Tijuana to perform at *Casino Agua Caliente*.⁶⁶ In the 1930s, Tijuana's nightlife was thriving due to the absence of alcohol in America and prohibition laws drove many U.S. citizens—including international artists like Hayworth—to cross the border into Mexico (Vanderwood 2004: 92, 142).⁶⁷

Dancers and Choreographers as Regular Border Crossers

In the previous chapter, I discussed the lives and dance works of two border crossers: Anna Sokolow and José Limón. Both choreographers traveled between New York and México City. In what follows, I examine dancers and choreographers who are regular border crossers in the Tijuana-San Diego region. My goal in examining these

⁶⁵ Rita Hayworth was born in New York City but moved early on in her life to Los Angeles. Her father was a Spanish-born dancer and her mother was a Ziegfeld Follies showgirl. Hayworth, while dancing at the Agua Caliente in Tijuana, was discovered by a Los Angeles film producer who hired her to dance in Hollywood movies (Vanderwood 2010: 39).

⁶⁶ The *Agua Caliente* “consisted of a five-hundred-room hotel, casino, spa, swimming pool, golf course, gardens, private radio station, airport, and both greyhound and horse racing tracks. Benefiting from proximity to the booming populations in San Diego and Los Angeles, Tijuana was popular with both average Americans, like the Peteets, and celebrities and mobsters, including Buster Keaton, Gloria Swanson, Clark Gable, Charlie Chaplin, Jack Dempsey, Bugsy Siegel, and Al Capone” (St. John 2011: 152-153).

⁶⁷ The National Prohibition Act took place from 1920 to 1933.

regular border crossers is to articulate how different relationships to time (e.g., *regularly* crossing the border, as opposed to *sometimes* crossing it), artistic practices, and place intersect to shape border-crossing experiences.

A regular border crosser belongs to both sides of the border, even though in many cases, practices of inclusion and exclusion exist on both sides of the border. The regular border crosser negotiates his/her projects according to what happens at the border. The regular border crosser represents a minority of borderland dwellers; he/she has developed a unique and sometimes productive way of living; among these people are dancers and choreographers. The dancers and choreographers who are regular border crossers who frequently and legally transit between the border cities of Tijuana and San Diego is a person who not only transits the U.S.-Mexico border physically and culturally but one whose transition creates a new space where border culture is common practice. With its heterogeneous conditions the border has been creating *fronterizos* (border people) who feel at home in a region that permeably adapts to different cultural codes and new politics that affect border crossers' time in this region. A regular border crosser has a variety of reasons, some more important than others, to cross the border. Most of the reasons to cross the border are related to the economy, family, friends, or as this research investigates, in relation to dance. The idea that borderland people are in constant mobility does not help us understand what they are creating.

Border scholars have argued that the borderland is an “in-between” space. As the “mother” of border thinking Gloria Anzaldúa writes “It’s not a comfortable territory to

live in, this place of contradictions. Hatred anger and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape” (2007: 19). For Anzaldúa, the borderland is “a vague and undetermined place....” (Anzaldúa 2007: 25). Others have suggested that the U.S.-Mexican border is a place where old and new tensions constantly resurface along the 3,000 kilometers of longitude, and where in each area the impact of the limited is felt different (Corona 2008: 9). But, I would add that it is a place that is difficult to divide, especially for the borderland population (regular border crossers) who call this place home.

Recently, because of the increasing tension between the U.S. and México over immigration, drug cartels, and various economic concerns, I have asked myself “What if they close the border? What would happen if we regular border crossers cannot cross the border? How would I feel?” These are questions that those who have become American citizens are forced to think about when they declare under oath that they will defend their country (the U.S.) against others (including against México or the new citizen’s country of origin). These regular border crossers have adapted in different ways to the political climate caused by the difficulties and bitter histories of the United States and México. Some regular border crossers adapt in different ways to this region. The following examples are simple but they are part of a whole tactic of becoming a borderland citizen. For instance, when their kids are born, their parents have to think of names for their kids that could easily adjust to both sides of the border, names like Christian, Claudia, Abigail, Olivia, or they may give their kids two names, such as John Elias. In terms of education, regular border crossers tend to matriculate their kids for a few years in San Diego and

then a few years in Tijuana, so their kids can learn Spanish, English, and the histories of both countries. These strategies are reflected in the themes of *danzas fronterizas*, which can range from the dramatic to a softer approach to the border and can include black humor or the small situations of daily life.

In the following section, two border scholars exemplify and inform my thinking about how borderland people, such as migrants and regular border crossers, are often differently labeled. In “Telling the Difference between the Border and the Borderland: Materiality and Theoretical Practice” (2002), Manuel Luis Martinez observes that in the postwar period the borderland has been figured as a magical space, focusing on the cultural effects of globalization at the U.S.–Mexico border. His work addresses border narratives of undocumented and displaced migrant workers, and he pays special attention to theories that place the migrant in a constant state of transition, explaining that such theories, instead of offering freedom, condemn border dwellers to circulate forever (2002: 59). In contrast, Martinez argues that these narratives “show us that migrants seek ‘to arrive’ and to deploy their full civil rights within a responsive public sphere in a way that renews the idea of *Americanismo*” (Martinez 2002: 54). His purpose “is to point out ways in which borderlands criticism, in attempting to displace hegemonic, monologic cultural practices of the nation- state, ironically keep the border ‘migrant’ moving, en route” (Martinez 2002: 54). These ideas are important because they echo the experience of dancers and choreographers, who many times are figuratively re-located to their place of origin. For example, in the company that I direct the Minerva Tapia Dance Group we have dancers who are Mexican and Mexican-Americans, some live in Tijuana and some

in San Diego. Nevertheless, in the media, the group is always announced as a Tijuana based group.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who describes himself as a performance artist and theoretical writer, argues that his life around the border shows the complexity of the relations between boundary, identity, and positionality in the shadows of the United States and México. When Gómez-Peña defines himself and his work companion Roberto Sifuentes, he notes that “Two important borders separate Roberto and I: cultural and generational. He is a Chicano in the process of Mexicanization ...and I am a Mexican in the process of Chicanization. (Will I ever become a ‘real’ Chicano? Will I ever ‘arrive’? Will ‘they’—the border guards of identity— ever let me?) ... These borders have become raw material for our performance adventures and fractured memories” (2000: 12). Gómez-Peña’s preoccupations about his work as a border artist, an academic, and a Mexican from México City resonate with Martinez’s idea that migrants never “arrive.”

The writings of Martinez and Gómez-Peña perspectives allow me to understand how Mexican-Americans who are regular border crossers must deal with the challenging practice of removing these kinds of labels in order to be productive and creative as artists. Gómez-Peña’s view as a migrant (in México), immigrant (in the United States) and a regular border crosser of the Tijuana-San Diego region, exemplifies the complex experiences of regular border crossers.

Inequalities and Time at the Borderland

For as long as I can remember, I have been a regular border crosser at the San Ysidro Port of Entry. At a very early age, I learned to take note of the time spent, wasted, endured, and lost at the San Ysidro Port of Entry. Every decision I make must consider the time it takes to cross the border. I have been curious about what people do during the long waits, the portion of our lives spent waiting at the border, how each of us practices this journey, the imprints that border crossings leave on our bodies, our perceptions of this border. On some occasions, I have used the time in line to reflect on what it means to “live” the border and how to express it through choreography. The realization that while I am sitting in my car, waiting to cross the border, other people are dying in their attempts to move across is disturbing, uncanny. Meanwhile, I am crossing through the expedited SENTRI lanes, reflecting on disparity, painful contrast and inequality in this space.

Inequality here is founded historically on the building of a fence between the two countries. In signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe in 1848, the United States gained a huge portion of Mexican territory and a new borderline was drawn (St. John 2011: 14). Populations along the redrawn border perceived the resulting inequalities in various ways.⁶⁸

The most dramatic inequalities began with the rules governing those allowed and those unfit to cross. Border scholars have stressed that the meaning of the border fence is

⁶⁸ Border related differences have become so routine that border residents barely notice them, including Spanish-English language switching and dollar-peso currency conversions.

tightly linked to a form of inequality. In Anzaldúa's words, borders "are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*" (Anzaldúa 2007: 25). Ramón H. Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young add that depending on where one resides, "it is to be domestic or foreign, home or abroad, insider or outsider, citizen or immigrant, at rest or on the move" (2011: 1). And José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, writing from the Southern side of the border, states that "to speak from the border is to place oneself within a context that denies centrality, given that border equates with periphery. A border line is the beginning and the end, rupture and continuity" (2012a: 78). These border scholars' ideas about the meaning of the fence and its relation to a form of inequality, resonate highly with the most recurrent images and topics in *danzas fronterizas*.

Dancing the Borderland: *Danzas Fronterizas*

As a choreographer living the two sides of the border, I am motivated to uncover these current-day inequalities and turn them into movement—something that the process of choreographing allows me to do.⁶⁹ While in line at the San Ysidro Port of Entry, I observe, take notes on, and imagine the kinds of movements, music, and other aspects of dance I might create. Specifically, I imagine how I might use space, the length of the dance piece, how many participants I may need to use, and what the costumes will look like. Above all, I imagine how I will portray the realities of border experiences through

⁶⁹ The wait in the borderline also forms part of my choreographic process, because this is where I find elements of my work.

my choreography. Here, in this border space I imagine a dance: *danza fronteriza*.

In the 1990s, choreographers started to create what I call *danzas fronterizas* (border dances), testimonies and reflections of the experiences of those affected by the borderland, whether allowed or not to cross the border.⁷⁰ These choreographies address the social, economic, and political problems affecting the area, such as racism, femicide, issues with (im)migration, and narco-trafficking, as well as the geographical experiences of physically crossing the border. These activities have enabled and hindered the emergence of choreographers and dancers on both sides of the border as well as communications between us. I examine how border activities and conflicts have been thematized in choreographic works, contributing to the establishment of a unique culture, which I understand as *border dance culture/cultura de la danza fronteriza*.

I started to work in *danzas fronterizas* in 1995 with a group of dancers from both sides of the border, who have been gathering in Tijuana for rehearsals and events for nineteen years. In the following section, I examine two *danzas fronterizas*: *Danza indocumentada* (Undocumented Dance, 2005) and *Globótica* (2010). Prior to beginning *Danza indocumentada*, the images of people on the Mexican side looking toward the

⁷⁰ The first *danza fronteriza* that I created for my group was in 1995 called *Entre dos aguas* (Between Two Waters). The piece shows encounter of two forces. The piece has smooth and tense movements and the dancers keep asking for water, directing their gaze to both sides of the stage right and left. The title *Entre dos aguas*, did not suggest any stress and awkward contraction as for example the popular Spanish saying “between the sword and the wall.” This piece could be perceived first as a dance that is based on culture clashes in the San Diego-Tijuana area, but the development and conclusion suggest more of a coalition than a clash.

North as they waited for a chance to cross resonated in my imagination as I myself was crossing the border. Waiting safely in my car I imagined these people who risked their lives in order to cross. I looked at my passport and drew a connection between this document and the deaths of thousands of people who did not have one. This led me to contemplate how documents encapsulate power and how I could transport and translate this reflection about opportunity and death into choreography.

Danza indocumentada is my attempt to re-humanize border-crossers robbed of their very personhood by economic, political, and/ or racist forces. The dance starts with two women, and three men, who are in front of a painting by Roberto Rosique.⁷¹ The painting shows two individuals sitting beside the border fence, a third is in the process of climbing the fence, while the fourth sits with his back to the viewer. On the U.S.-side (the North side), we see the Statue of Liberty and a sign that warns “Don’t Cross.” The dancers’ first movements are derived from images I routinely witnessed along the border. On one occasion, I spoke with one of the would-be crossers and asked him why he placed his hand on his forehead while laying down to rest. He responded that he did so to block the sun, but also to hide the fact that he was asleep. By pretending to be awake, he could “keep watch” for anyone trying to steal his belongings. The dancers emerge from the poses, and through a combination of contemporary dance movements and steps drawn from folk dances of Northern México, they tell a story about the stresses born out of fear and desire, the perceptions and dreams that hold every migrant. I wish to show the corporeal positions, hunting gazes, gestures denoting furtive conditions, fears, and

⁷¹ Roberto Rosique is a border artist that lives and works in Tijuana.

vulnerabilities, while at the same time addressing border crossers' hopefulness—the thrust that leads them to cross the border. In the corporeal movement of *Danza indocumentada* the idea of transitions, running, and flux prevails over a static position even in the waiting to cross the border. This is what I sense when I cross the border at the San Ysidro Port of Entry.

At the end of the piece, *Danza indocumentada* reveals different experiences that an undocumented person could have in his or her attempt to cross the border. The last movement phase shows the five dancers placed on different levels in an asymmetric manner. One of the dancers depicts a fatigued undocumented person crossing the border; another one crosses the border, but at the last moment he is returned; a third goes back to the original position where he is sitting down and looking North; a fourth dancer, a woman, shows her vulnerability as a sexual subject, showing concern for her female anatomy, since there have been many cases of sexual assault; finally, another female dancer keeps looking forward, facing the fence in an ongoing simulation of running—she “runs” without traveling forward, also facing North.

Danza indocumentada has been performed in México and in the United States during an epoch of increased tension at the border when immigration issues greatly impacted the lives of undocumented people on U.S. soil, and when the governments of México and the United States do not agree on how to approach the problem.⁷² Two

⁷² Some of the places that *Danza indocumentada* (2005) have been performed include the following: New York's Joyce SoHo in 2009, UCR's University Theatre during the 16th *Annual Noche Cultural* in 2009, Northern Arizona University's Orpheum Theater in 2009, Tijuana's 10th annual *Muestra Internacional de Danza "Cuerpos en Tránsito"* in

events, 9/11 and the catastrophic economic recession, have made immigrants more susceptible to being seen as threats. Although perceiving immigrants as potentially threatening is part of border history, with time attitudes towards immigrants have become more hostile. The language has shifted, describing immigrants as “newcomers” and then as “illegals,” as “natives” and then as “undesirable aliens.”⁷³ In “Reading across Diaspora: Chinese and Mexican Undocumented Immigration across U.S. Land Borders” (2002), Claudia Sadowski-Smith examines the ways in which the rhetoric connecting terrorism to foreigners interrupted the flow of bodies across the Mexican and Canadian borders after the violent events of September 11, 2001, along with the creation of new immigration policies to stop the undocumented entrance of Chinese and Mexicans. The dancers and choreographers who are regular border crossers also worked under the tense environment created by the Arizona law SB1070, where Latinos and, specifically, Mexicans are criminalized because of their looks.

Dancers who for years had crossed the border to enroll in dance classes (paying tuition) or those who regularly had been invited to perform now experience the scrutinizing eye of those who work for the immigration agency and who now see regular border crossers as criminals. The Arizona law SB 1070 is also a consequence of the historical discriminatory racial formation that is translated into immigration policies and vice versa. The law is the strictest anti-illegal immigration law in United States history,

2008, Los Angeles’ Frida Kahlo Theater in 2008, and my MFA thesis concert at University of California, in 2006.

⁷³ Leo R. Chavez observes that “through the media, politicians desiring to restrict immigration have been able to represent undocumented immigrants as undeserving criminals and possible terrorists” (2008: 9).

and its enforcement is critically racializing Mexican people and those who look like them. Racial physiognomy is now a social problem that affects more states than Arizona. Even though this situation is not as problematic in the Tijuana/San Diego region as it is in Arizona, race and immigration status have certainly affected dancers' transnational labor in the US for a long time.⁷⁴

Sadowski-Smith examines the parallel between the historical accounts of Mexican and Chinese migrants into the United States and observes a new formulation of immigrants as an increasing number of individuals who maintain dual lives because they speak two languages, usually have homes in two countries, and maintain contact across borders regularly (Sadowski-Smith 2002: 77). Sadowski-Smith sheds light on the lives of regular border crossers who set a unique precedent as persons with dual citizenship, such as some members of my dance group. I observed that, independent of their citizenship; the dancing bodies used in *Danza indocumentada* are border bodies in origin.⁷⁵ Even if the dancers are U.S. citizens, they could still cause tension due to the theme of the choreography and their border bodies.

Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut emphasize that the United States has become a country of immigration. Because the majority of the immigrants come from third world countries, Portes and Rumbaut suggest, "many Americans believe that the

⁷⁴ This is not a phenomenon limited to the Mexican-American dance. For an example of how racism and immigration laws have played an important role historically in the Indian Diaspora, please see Priya Srinivasan. *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance and Transnational Labor*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011.

⁷⁵ Border bodies are those who have to cultures in constant redefinition. In this project I use border bodies to refer specifically to Latino bodies meeting these cultural conditions.

immigrants themselves are uniformly poor and uneducated” (2006: 12-13). David Bacon observes that the use of the word *illegal* to talk about people without American immigration documents has “deep racist roots” (Portes and Rumbaut 2006: V). Mae M. Ngai, much like Bacon, observes that the phrase *illegal alien* “carries pejorative connotations” and “suggests a diminution of personhood [...] associated with racism towards Mexicans and other Latinos and Latinas” (2004: XIX). In the context of this toxic social imaginary of immigration, I, as a choreographer, want to focus on how the art of dance allows audiences to reimagine undocumented immigrants. Some of the dancers who have performed *Danza indocumentada* are U.S. citizens (born or naturalized), Mexican citizens, or have both nationalities. The professional dancers in *Danza indocumentada*—through their trained, disciplined, and strong bodies—highlight how political choreography can be read in multiple and complex ways that critically engage with racist discourses of *the* “illegal” body.

When *Danza indocumentada* is performed in Tijuana or San Diego, it is difficult to tell how the audience’s political positions, especially in regards to immigration issues, affects their decision to applaud for the performers. This kind of choreography addresses, then, issues of immigration in ways that are different from more traditional forms of political-activist discourse—like public marches and written manifestos—because it retains some of the more traditional concert conventions. For example, this kind of performance retains certain conventions like applause, a kind of applause that is not necessarily tied to whether or not audience members agree with the staged politics but, rather, the concert conventions that generally require audience members to show appreciation for a staged

performance. These performance conventions do not make staged politics through choreography any less effective. Choreography is a unique political lens through which dancers—and audiences—can engage activism and address social injustices. *Danza indocumentada* functions as this kind of critical lens by foregrounding how certain racist economic and political forces, for example, shape undocumented immigrants' border experiences. This choreography elucidates the racist discourses that both dehumanize undocumented immigrants and deny them personhood based on their relationships—or lack thereof—to paperwork, offering audiences critical images of citizenship. *Danza indocumentada* reflects upon who people are beyond their citizenship and residence statuses to explore this kind of dehumanization and denial of personhood. These performances, then, ultimately attempt to re-humanize border crossers robbed of their humanity.

Each one of the participants in *Danza indocumentada* allude to a particular case of immigrant experience. Through their bodies and movements, the dancers communicate their personal histories, motivations, and feelings about the immigration experience. The music evokes a human heartbeat, and in one of the sections the dancers are running, like if they were getting away from their hunters. This suggests a predator and prey relationship bound up with poverty, highlighting the often-inhumane violence of the immigration patrol, American and Mexican. After their running, the performers' gazes draw together with the gaze of the audience, hoping to engage. As these examples demonstrate, dance offers the possibility to focus more on the human bodies of immigrant subjects, rather than on numbers, as the media mostly refer to immigrants.

In *Globótica* I wanted to highlight some aspects of globalization and to disturbing, yet humorous, situations along the border. This piece references the effects of the influenza A virus (H1N1) in Mexico in 2009. My inspiration came when the Mexican government declared that all Mexicans should wear masks to control the spread of the epidemic, so people in Tijuana had to wear masks, but not those in San Diego. While most public activities were canceled in Tijuana because of health concerns, this was not true in San Diego, and many people crossed the border to attend shows and events in the United States. The situation at the border was bizarre: people wearing masks in Tijuana shed them as soon as they crossed the border. This experience highlights the incongruity of border politics, where a region is cut in two.

For this piece I asked Mexican border poet Estela Alicia López Lomas to create a text for the movement, which a solo dancer delivers on stage. Standing up center right, the dancer reads the following: "...I e-mail the world, and the cold-bug answers: I am the future of dreams...(Sneezes)—Excuse me. Come, dream a dream with me! I am a Maquila Girl, Tijuana Girl, dreaming...."⁷⁶ The dancer moves to center stage and looks directly at the audience with a wry face, almost a smile. Silently, she begins to move her body in an undulating motion, mainly by moving her spine, challenging the audience with an expression that could be read as projecting security, sarcasm, and authority. The music begins as she extends her body and limbs, in various directions while glancing over the space. The dancer returns to center stage, she shifts abruptly from side to side,

⁷⁶ This is a fragment of the text created by the Mexican poet Estela Alicia López Lomas for *Globótica*.

where a light now divides the stage. She appears to enter into conversation with someone, but is actually in conversation with herself. Her stooped body and hand moves suggest money counting. She repeatedly moves from one side of the stage to the other, reversing position so quickly that she seems to be having a conversation with the wake of her own movements. Sitting down, she extends her arms like tentacles, collecting fruit from various points. She devours a piece in hungry bites. She stands up and walks slowly to the center-front of the stage, and while the dancer's eyes attempt to lock onto the audience, her arms are next to her waist. Then, unexpectedly, she raises her right knee, while doing a hop with her left leg and lifting her jaw up (lifting her head abruptly). This is a traditional Northern Mexican step or gesture that is associated with pride, character and determination, and is traditionally used to mark the end of the dance. With this movement, the piece is finished.

In selecting the music for these two pieces, I was primarily concerned with the identity that music brings to the choreography. In *Danza indocumentada*, I had the opportunity to work with Aaron Huisenfeldt, an American composer born in Minneapolis, Minnesota and raised in Texas. I explained to Huisenfeldt my idea: I wanted to hear the sounds of the body under stress. I explained that this piece was about migration, about undocumented immigration. His first draft was a surprise because it had a type of music that I hear in Hollywood movies, that of a guitar, a Spanish guitar. It was beautiful but it was a stereotype. In the following draft, the guitar was not there and I was very pleased to hear the music that would help the movement and the idea of *Danza indocumentada* come to life.

The contemporary music of *Globótica* shows the influence of the tango, one of the most easily identified globalized music and dance, which serves as a background for conveying “globalization” as border experience. In *Globótica*’s case, I had a few reasons to use a tango-influenced musical theme with no lyrics composed by Juan Campodónico for the choreography. First, it was an aesthetic choice that came from early childhood memories.⁷⁷ When I started as a choreographer of my own group,⁷⁸ a few of my works were performed to the music of the Argentinean Astor Piazzolla. Second, I believe the bandoneon instrument has the ability to provoke sadness in some cases, and certainly *danzas fronterizas* rarely deal with happy themes. Third, tango has been associated with the drama of love, but in my work I use it in relation to social drama. Fourth, I was inspired by the work of the Argentinean Carlos Libedinsky on his CD *Narcotango*, for my choreography of *Cuerpitos Fronterizos*⁷⁹ (2008) a piece that deals with narco-trafficking. He gave me permission to use his music and since that time I have used his work in other projects and in my own classes. Both Libedinsky and Campodónico are young composers with an electronic approach to traditional music. In 2010, as a graduate student at the University of California, Riverside, I started to choreograph *Globótica* and this time, I decided to use a new piece by Campodónico. This piece also had tango influences, and a similar sound where tango meets electronic music.

⁷⁷ Most Mexicans in Mexico grow up watching films from the golden epoch of the Mexican film industry when actresses such as the Argentinean Libertad Lamarque sang tangos.

⁷⁸ (1995).

⁷⁹ One of the sections of the choreography *Cuerpitos Fronterizos* is about *mulas*, women who transport drugs in their bodies and about young girls who perform aesthetic surgeries on their bodies to enlarge their breasts.

While I was working on this piece, I read *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* (1995) by Marta E. Savigliano. Her insightful work gave more reasons to use tango in *Globótica*, since both tango and globalization convey a sense of dealing with borders. On this occasion, I had also the opportunity to create a dance work using my tools as choreographer and as a scholar. Savigliano writes that “tango expresses exile...tango is a spectacle of traumatic encounters” (1995: xiv). During a conversation I had with Savigliano, she adds that tango, as such a spectacle, also conveys danger, threat, as well as attraction in the popular imagination. These experiences, and especially feelings of being threatened, are similar to those felt because of the effects of globalization, such as the people who need a better job who leave México looking for a better life in the United States. This experience became even more common after NAFTA⁸⁰ displaced countless Mexican workers, and the effects of this continue to be felt today.⁸¹

The *danza fronteriza Globótica* was created after another choreography that also explores the effects of globalization, *Ellas danzan solas/Illegal Border* (2005). This choreography depicts how the displacement of Mexican workers who immigrated to the United States generates a multitude of separations—husbands from wives, parents from children. The reality of separation is intensely present in diverse Mexican towns and villages and is identifiable because of the predominance of women living on their own.

⁸⁰ NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement (1994).

⁸¹ The effect of NAFTA on Mexican wages as a factor in undocumented migration from Mexico is relevant...the migration for these individuals is not so much about escaping abject poverty as it is about improving their economic situation in the new NAFTA economy (Hing 2010: 15).

On a personal level, I have seen couples holding hands through the fence from both sides of the border. These couples are meeting each other on special days and their reunion is a difficult thing to see and more difficult to forget because it reminds me of the complex and often difficult lived realities created by the border. By the time I finished choreographing *Globótica*, I had spent more than fifteen years creating *danzas fronterizas*, including a piece called *La maquinita de Juana* (2003). *La maquinita de Juana* examines problems faced by young girls who work in the maquiladoras in Tijuana.⁸² These two pieces—*Ellas danzan solas* and *La maquinita de Juana*—explore the negative effects of globalization at the U.S.-Mexican border and later informed my creation of *Globótica*. In other words, while my earlier pieces focused on the immediate and local effects of globalization, my later piece built upon this early work to examine the larger picture of what is globalization and its large-scale effects.

The movement I used in *Globótica* fuses contemporary dance, Middle Eastern dance, and Mexican Folk dances from northern México. Contemporary dance is the main language in this piece. However, the dancer's intermittent use of Middle Eastern movements come through in how she uses her hip and neck in one short section. Moreover, some other small sections foreground movements and attitudes from Mexican folk dances such as *norteño*, *calabaceado* and *quebradita*.

In *Danza indocumentada* and *Globótica*, I attempt to capture slices of what is shaping border dance culture. These *danzas fronterizas* focus on my personal experiences involved with crossing the border and with the loss of thousands of lives as they attempt

⁸² Maquiladoras are low-wage assembly factories that produce consumer items for export (Sadowski-Smith 2002: 2).

to cross the U.S.-Mexican border. In the process of choreographing and writing about border experiences, I have noticed how each contributes to address the border. Movement analysis allows for richer readings of the border problems from an embodied perspective, such as when I asked the dancer qua migrant the following: “Why do you place your hand on your forehead?” His movement choices allowed access to other aspects of life at the border, as in how to survive in this place—the thoughts are read throughout his body language. His body language captured the fears and dangers involved in border crossing. In *Globótica*, the choreographic process of two previous dance works (*La maquinita de Juana and Ellas danzas solas/Illegal border*) allow me to articulate the realities of globalization. These early processes, then, later nourished the choreography in *Globótica*.

Danza y Frontera/Dance and Border

My discussion of the Tijuana-San Diego border throughout this chapter is influenced by critical voices that examine the border as a site of ambiguity. Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa have long discussed the idea that people from the borderlands live in a space in-between, an open wound in constant movement. Anzaldúa articulates this notion in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, suggesting that “[a] borderland is a vague undetermined place” (2006: 25). It is in this place that “tension grips the inhabitants of the borderland like a virus,” and “[a]mbivalence and unrest reside there and death is no stranger” (Anzaldúa 2006: 26). Anzaldúa characterizes those who live near the border as ambiguous and their experiences most often end in pain and resentment. I do not deny these experiences of pain, but I also want to suggest throughout this project that those

shaped by their borderland experiences lead much more complex lives than first meets the eye.

Other border scholars, including those who are border dwellers like Anzaldúa, have different perspectives of the borderlands. For example, border scholar Norma Iglesias Prieto, who is a regular border crosser in the Tijuana-San Diego region, observes that the metallic border fence is an impenetrable barrier that could even take the life of someone who tried to cross it. For others, the border, although it produces tension, simply involves taking some time from their daily routine circulation in both countries.⁸³ These very different perspectives of the border have helped me to better understand the many ways in which people experience the border.

In *Border Matters*, José David Saldívar explores how border-crossers use cultural practices to negotiate their transnational experiences. His work also sheds light on the different approaches used in texts about the U.S.-Mexican border. He observes, “Chicano writers from the (extended) U.S.-Mexico borderland have drawn quite different cognitive maps of Tijuana and San Diego (1997: 134). Thus, even scholars of the U.S.-Mexico border find themselves reflecting and reproducing in their academic work the complexities of the border region. While Anzaldúa and Saldívar have analyzed the borderland in light of the Chicano experience, in *Nor-tec Rifa!*, Alejandro L. Madrid takes a Mexican-American approach that is deeply connected to the Mexican territory, similar to Iglesias's approach. He started his early border experience from the Mexican

⁸³ See Norma Iglesias Prieto in <http://www.arquine.com/blog/tijuana-provocadora-tranfronteridad-y-procesos-creativos/>

side. His intention “is to show how individuals in liminal circumstances continuously negotiate their identities, their past, their presents, and their imaginary futures, in the production, regulation, and consumption of cultural goods (2008: 3). The literary work of both sides of the border showed me the complexities of the border and how they are interpreted by border scholars-dwellers on the U.S.-Mexican border. The multiple research topics about the border such as Immigration, NAFTA, drug trafficking, and those who focus on issues related to identity, also reverberate with the choreographic topic about the border; such are the choreographic pieces: *Danza indocumentada*, and *Globótica*. In chapter three, I examine other *danzas fronterizas* by other choreographers who have included these topics in their works.

Both dance and border studies intertwine and complement my approach to create *danzas fronterizas*. Before entering academia, what I included in a *danza fronteriza* came directly from my own experiences with the border, my research as a choreographer, and what other people, including friends, dancers, and family experienced in the borderland. The tools of dance and border studies now allow me to see not only “my border” but also others.’ My new vision as a choreographer and academic, who is nurtured from practice and theory, lets me understand how the U.S.-Mexico borderland works in multiple ways in our lives.

Tijuana-San Diego Dance Collaborations

“Tijuana and San Diego refer to a condition of indissoluble neighborhood, with intense links that have marked economic, social and cultural processes on both sides, but they do not love each other.”

– *Invisible Tijuanas: Of Dreams, Fears and Desires* by José Manuel Valenzuela Arce (2012c: 19).

Since the 1970s, dancers and choreographers from both sides of the border have shown an interest in engaging in collaboration⁸⁴, to know and experience their crafts, and to relate to each other as artists and participants in the field of dance.⁸⁵ The first dance collaborations between Tijuana and San Diego started in the field of ballet in the 1970s between the California Ballet School and Company directed by Maxine Mahon, and the *Escuela de Danza Gloria Campobello*, and the *Ballet del Noroeste de México* directed by Margarita Robles; the performance took place in Tijuana. And on October 1983, Robles arrived in San Diego to perform with her school and company.⁸⁶ This section focuses on the 1990s to the present, during which time classical and contemporary choreographers, teachers, and dancers from the cities of Tijuana and San Diego began distinctive collaborations. Bi-national dance collaborations and activities such as festivals, performances, and special events have been affected by the political and social problems

⁸⁴ The cross-border collaborations in the Tijuana-San Diego region have been taking place since the implementation of the border. The collaborations are varied and take place on several levels. “The cross border cooperation is focused on specific regional development issues, including first of all economic development, cultural and educational matters, urban development, local democracy, environmental issues, security issues, border crossing wait time, etc.” By Adina Moloman.

<http://www.madeinmexicoinc.com/cultural-bi-national-collaboration/>

⁸⁵ Margarita Robles, Maxine Mahon, and George Willis.

⁸⁶ Dates these institutions were founded: California Ballet School and Company (1968), *Escuela de Danza Gloria Campobello* (1963), and the *Ballet del Noroeste de México* (1982).

of both countries. The very act of crossing the border and the difficulties involved in the process certainly determine the fluidity and future of collaborations between the two dance scenes.

Tijuana and San Diego share a long history of collaboration as they experience similar political and social issues, but, at the same time, inequalities are visible and experienced by many. The stories about these two cities are not similar, for Tijuana is infamous as a site of narcotrafficking, prostitution, and illegal migration while, on the other side of the border, the city of San Diego often has been called “America’s Finest City.” Living under such disparate social imaginaries, in an atmosphere of opposing stereotypes, bi-national dance collaborations entailed careful negotiations.

As I noted before, Anzaldúa writes that the “borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (2007: 25). She also suggests that the Mexican-American borderland is an interstitial region, a third space that is in constant transformation. How do regular border crossers from this third space fit into bi-national artistic projects? How is this fluid place constituted as a “region”? Does it make sense to talk about a bi-national culture at the borderlands? In “Frontera México-Estados Unidos: Reflexiones para un marco teórico,” Jorge A. Bustamante writes that his objective is to contribute to the understanding of the regionalist border relations between two nations with unequal economic development in a way that is congruent with the global context of bilateral or multilateral relations between borderline countries (2004: 151). He observes that there are

those who do not accept that the border can be treated as a region because of this heterogeneous condition, while others question if the border can be delimited accurately because, at times, it seems to go so deep inside each national territory that it is hard to tell apart the regional from the national (Bustamante 2004: 153). The prefix bi- makes reference to two, but in the context of the U.S.-Mexico border I find the prefix complex and uneven, as is the term region. I understand the term in relation to nature, but this can turn complex when in the same region the government approach between México and the United States is totally different in confronting health and social issues, as is the case of the influenza A (H1N1) virus previously discussed. On September 8th 2011, the states of California and Arizona experienced a blackout, and no one was surprised that the lights also went off in the Mexican cities of Tijuana and Mexicali, showing again that this border region shares more than just the weather. While the term bi-national can be applied in cases like this, we need to remember that the border is created. The term region also is not clear when applied to problems such as drug and gun trafficking in the area. It may seem that these are problems emanating only from México, as the two countries do not seem to resolve the problem bi- nationally but unilaterally. This again raises the question of how the experience of living in a complex “region” such as Tijuana-San Diego affects a dancer’s approach to connecting with those from the other side of the border.

The stories of dancing bodies transiting this region also raise the question of influence. Border dancers consciously allow or negate ways of moving or dancing used by dancers from the other side of the border. Currently, it is difficult to talk about dances

that do not have precursors, but the influences at the borderlands mostly come from national practices. For example, dancers from San Diego usually seek inspiration from New York; dancers from Tijuana look to New York but also to Mexican national aesthetics. The aesthetic influences from New York are almost inevitable because contemporary dance discourse is, at its roots, American. The following observation by dance scholar César Delgado Martínez gives evidence of cross-border influences: “what I observed in the BCF’s⁸⁷ performance at *Teatro Universitario* was a substantial change in Ricardo Peralta’s choreographic creations: from a Neoclassical style to a search for his own expression, influenced by the ensemble Isaacs, McCaleb and Dancers of San Diego, in which he also performs” (Polkinhorn 1994: 104).⁸⁸ I suggest that dancers at the borderland try to achieve a way of doing things that make them different and not completely swayed by tendencies from Mexico City or New York. In my case, I have taken inspirations from the *norteño* dances from the northern region of México. Part of my work entails translating Mexican folk dances into contemporary dance and exploring the boundaries between these two dance genres.

What does it mean in movement to translate? In most of my contemporary dance work, I include moments that belong to other dance genres, specifically steps used in the Northern Mexican folk dances. I begin by showing the folk steps to the dancers using the music that belongs to the movement. After the dancers and I move to the rhythm, I

⁸⁷ *Ballet Cámara de la Frontera*

⁸⁸ The regular border crosser Ricardo Peralta was a ballet dancer, later a modern dancer, and then an active contemporary dancer and choreographer on both sides of border. In chapter three, I explore the work of the choreographers Jean Isaacs and Nancy McCaleb and their dance relationship to Peralta.

silence the music, hoping to see the rhythm and movement of the music as it remains in their bodies. In other words, I would like to “see” the rhythms in their dancing bodies even if there is no music. Next, I ask the dancers to adapt some of their movements to those of contemporary dance and to relate them to the themes of the choreography. I hope to see the fusion of a) the sounds of folk music, b) contemporary dance, c) vestiges of folk dance, and d) the interpretation of the choreography throughout their whole dancing bodies. The dancers whom I work with the most often have in their corporeal memories some experiences with Mexican popular dance and Mexican folk, making my work of translating into contemporary dance easier.

Long Waits at the Border

Dancers’ and choreographers’ stories about their experiences at the San Ysidro Port of Entry reveals how the border shapes the relationships among artistic communities in the region. These artists suggest that the long wait at this gateway—especially the wait coming from México and into the U.S.—impact their relationships with the border. They often note that dance collaborations are either put on-hold or discontinued because of the time constraints caused by the long wait at the border. The choreographer Jean Isaacs, for example, used to be what I call a regular border crosser.⁸⁹ The majority of my dance

⁸⁹ I had the opportunity to work with Isaacs during the following projects during which she was a regular border crosser: the 1999 dance production *Within Limits*, the 2009 Binational Choreographic Showcase, and the 2003 and 2011 productions of *Trolley Dances*.

activities in the Tijuana-San Diego region are, much like Isaacs, determined by the time I imagine it will take to cross the border. The long waits at the border also determine the continuity of border collaborations. They also shape, in some cases, the duration of collaborations and the length of choreographies that are created, since the longer the piece, the longer the collaborations, and the more times the participants will need to cross the border.

Isaacs, who has long been interested in border alliances between dance communities on both sides of the border, suggested during an interview with me that crossing the border is a difficult task. She stated that she spent many years crossing the border to either participate in or to attend performances and that the process of waiting so many hours at the San Ysidro Port of Entry influenced how often she now visits Tijuana.

One of the choreographers I interviewed, unnamed here to protect privacy, narrated a specific difficult moment experienced at the border. During this border-crossing experience, the necessity to use the restroom arose. This individual sat in the car with an increasing sense of anxiety, and the long row of cars ahead seemed to be not moving at all. As regular border crossers, we both had heard of people feeling this kind of anxiety.

On one occasion, I gave my car to a young boy who was asking for money for a drug rehabilitation house. He was surprised that I would trust my car to him, but I was not going to let the process of crossing the border make me feel ashamed or uncomfortable because I had a human physiological necessity. David Octavio Velarde, a young dance student who lives in Tijuana, described how excited he was when he went to

participate in his first performance in San Diego. He remembers a particularly long wait at the San Ysidro Port of Entry while traveling to attend a rehearsal in San Diego. The construction of the remodeled immigration building led to a collapse which injured people and damaged cars. For that reason he was stuck at the border longer than the time that it normally took for him to cross the border. After finally crossing the border, he went to the rehearsal and because he was late to an important rehearsal, he was asked not to participate in the production. He believes that they did not believe him about the delay because they knew how difficult it could be to cross the border and so they had told him to plan extra time for the journey. He understood their concerns, but the frustration about the border and the loss of an opportunity were connected.

On February 22, 2014, I interviewed Erica Buechner at Dance Place after her choreography class. A local to San Diego, Buechner began performing professionally in 1999. She attended San Diego State University where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance. She recently returned to San Diego after obtaining her MFA in Dance from Hollins University/American Dance Festival in 2013. I met Buechner at the *Muestra Coreográfica Binacional* (MCB) as a dance student of SDSU and later as a choreographer. Many years had passed since then before we met again for the interview in San Diego. While in school, she knew that the choreographer Isaacs did cross-border work, so Buechner was aware that people were doing cross-border collaborations. She remembered her participation at the MCB as a good experience because she loved traveling and performing with new people. “I remember how we saw each other’s work, talked and went to a dinner where all the participants had more time to share their stories

about the recent performance and to get to know each other in a different environment that at the theatre. I even went to the movies after one performance” (Buechner). In remembering how participating artists interacted during the whole day in the MCB, Buechner said that by sharing a performance, one can learn more than by sharing only a class, since there is more intimacy and the participants can have a conversation. “I remember we went to have dinner and I drank a great café, it was made in an old way, and eating a grasshopper.” That was stepping out of her comfort zone. Even though Tijuana is only 20 minutes away, she noted that there is something about shifting one’s environment. She also enjoyed the challenges of travel, like having a language barrier. She said, “I love having a conversation, figuring out as we go, trying to be understood or understand someone is something good about the process. There is something so satisfying about learning in these experiences.” Buechner danced a *danza fronteriza* created by the Mexican choreographer Jorge Dominguez. This piece was created for the Trolley Dances⁹⁰ and was performed near the border; but shortly before the performance was scheduled to begin, they were asked to go to another place. “I think some papers and permissions did not go through; so we ended up moving the movement to another place, also near the border” (Buechner). Buechner was surprised to learn later that around 40% of the audience decided not to see the performance since their site was too close to the border: “not everybody came all the way to the border.” Buechner does not remember

⁹⁰ The annual dance project Trolley Dances began in 1997 as a production of Isaacs San Diego Dance Theater. The project encourages the creation of original site-specific work along the trolley line. Local choreographers create dances for places such as fountains, stairs, swimming pools, car dealers, libraries, trolley stops, restaurants, and other unlikely sites.

specifically what the piece was about but she does remember that the process had a lot of elements related to the border.

The last time Buechner was in Tijuana was 10 years ago. The reasons for this are various: she does not have people around her that think about going to Tijuana and she is a little concerned about safety issues because people have told her that it is dangerous to go to Tijuana. Also, she has not been invited to dance in Tijuana during the last 10 years, but the most important reason is the time that it takes to cross the border on the way back to San Diego. Her experience crossing the San Ysidro Port of Entry was intense, since she believes that some people take their positions of power too far. “I am one of those people who will resist those moments. I am not good with authorities, so I think, what if I feel nervous, and what if I say something wrong, what if they suspect something is wrong? I feel if they are trying to push their power on me, I probably will try to resist, and I think the border is not the place to do that. She also is concerned about the quality of life the people (including the immigration officers) are experiencing while waiting at the border, smelling the smog of all the cars. She also wonders what the officers think about the quality of life they have to experience working at this place, and then she thinks “I do not have to do this (being at the border).” Buechner’s opinions about the San Ysidro Port of Entry contrast with the answers of those previously interviewed. She brings to light not the experiences of those who regularly cross the border, but those who work and live mere hours from the border gate. But at the same time that she thinks about them, she is very clear that she does not like the authority and the vulnerability of “what if.”

Buechner also commented on how we benefitted from the encounter of collaborations. She said “binational collaborations are important, since we get to learn about what is important to people when it comes in creating art. Because, what is important to me, it may not be important to you. But, if I experience what is important to you, maybe I can understand a little bit more, and maybe I can understand and learn different ways of viewing, it is going to open my perspective; it could expand my spectrum of life and art” (Buechner). Buechner hopes that binational collaborations continue since they strengthen our communities because without them we tend to create a border, a separation. She said “because, if we do not expose ourselves to things that are different, a different language, a different area, a different way of creating art, then, sometimes we ignore and maybe think that is separate from us. But once we experience, we realize, that is just a slightly different version of what we are, now we can embrace and add to my experience and what I can offer, because I had that collaboration.”

Muestra Coreográfica Binacional/The Binational Dance Showcase

On January 25, 2014, I interviewed George Willis, the co-founder of the MCB and a professor Emeritus at San Diego State University. Willis has been an important cross border collaborator on many projects.⁹¹ At the end of the 1970s, Willis worked with Professor Rubén Vizcaíno Valencia, an important cultural figure and cultural promoter in

⁹¹ George Willis worked in Tijuana for the first time in 1978. He gave a modern dance workshop at the *Universidad Autónoma de Baja California*.

Tijuana. Willis and Vizcaíno worked on projects through the *Universidad Autónoma de Baja California* and the San Diego State University. Later, Willis collaborated with the dance professor Margarita Robles, director of the Escuela de Danza Gloria Campobello. On this occasion, Willis brought dancers from this school to perform in San Diego. The poster that I found says that the performances took place not only in San Diego but also in the cities of Tijuana, Ensenada and Mexicali during the month of October 1983. This event was sponsored by *La Dirección de Asuntos Culturales del Gobierno del Estado de Baja California* [The Department of Cultural Affairs of the Government of the State of Baja California] and the San Diego Educational Cultural Complex.

In my conversation with Willis, he said that he had been asked to perform and invited to dance rehearsals and performances in Tijuana. He has also been invited to be a judge for a dance competition, and has witnessed how the dance community in Tijuana had grown. He made friends among the ballet and contemporary groups. He is a regular border crosser, who has a SENTRI pass in order to spend less time in line at the San Ysidro Port of Entry. He is familiar with the roads and the driving; he has been to many restaurants in the area. I first met him many years ago during one of the performances of the Escuela de Danza Gloria Campobello. Willis and Isaacs are two active members of the dance community who produce and enjoy cross border dance collaborations.

One of the events and collaborations between San Diego and Tijuana that had a strong presence in the region Tijuana-San Diego was the *Muestra Coreográfica Binacional MCB* (1999) [Binational Dance Showcase], which was sponsored by the

Department of Music and Dance at the San Diego State University for 12 years.⁹² This Tijuana-San Diego collaboration lasted from 1997 to 2008. For the first eleven years, the MCB was held in Tijuana, while the most recent, and only, was presented in San Diego. I remember when I received the call from Willis inviting me to organize a performance so that the students from the SDSU could go to Tijuana and share a performance with my company. The money from the tickets was given to *Casa de Menores en Recuperación A.C.* “Niños de la Calle” (The House of Minors in Recuperation, or “Kids from the Street,” a non-profit organization). The minors from *Casa de Menores en Recuperación* participated as ushers and handed out the programs to the audience. The following year Willis asked me again to organize a performance. I was so excited that I suggested to Willis the performance be called *II Muestra Coreográfica Binacional* because after the performance the previous year, during dinner all the participants had time to share their stories about the recent performance. In following years, we added even more activities

⁹² Two other binational contemporary dance festivals were running during the first years of the MCB: *Festival of Mexican Contemporary Dance* in San Diego, and *Entre Líneas/Between the Lines* in Tijuana. For both festivals, Isaacs was one of the founders and an instrumental part of the production. For the *Festival of Mexican Contemporary Dance* at San Diego State University, Isaacs received awards from UC Mexus, the US/Mexico Fund for Culture, Arts International, and the UC Civic Collaborative for her work. This festival was realized as part of SDSU’s “Master of the Living Arts” series. <http://www.sandiegodancetheater.org/faculty.jeanisaacs.html>. *Entre Líneas/Between Lines* was co-directed by Isaacs and Jorge Dominguez. This festival was sponsored by the US/Mexico Fund for Culture and the UCSD Civic Collaborative, with additional support from the City of San Diego/Commission for Arts and Culture, the County of San Diego, the National Endowment of the Arts, the California Arts Council, the Johan and Beverly Stauffer Foundation, the Mandel Weiss Charitable Trust, and private donors (*Entre Líneas*, Publicity Flyer).

to the concert. I invited, with Willis's agreement, more dance groups besides my company, and the profits from the performance went to the participating artists. Many of the dancers became friends and, in later years, many also became collaborators. We also invited dance groups from universities and schools in Tijuana, such as the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC), Escuela de Danza Gloria Campobello (EDGC), Cetys Universidad, and Universidad Iberoamericana (UI). The UABC sent some groups and offered extra credit if students attended the performance. With the proceeds from ticket sales, Cetys was able to purchase a boom box for dance classes.

During those eleven years, we all shared our ideas about dance and paid attention to how the dancers from SDSU and from Tijuana moved during rehearsal. The performances came to an end when Professor Willis retired from SDSU. I talked to Willis about the possibility of continuing the MCB without the help of the SDSU because the costs were low and the rents of the theatres were symbolic. I showed him information about the *Culture Contact: Endowment for Culture Mexico-U.S.*⁹³ Willis suggested that I talk to the choreographer Isaacs. She agreed and applied for the grant. In 2009, we scheduled not one performance, but two. This time, the MCB grew beyond the

⁹³ In September 1991, the *Culture Contact: endowment for Culture Mexico-U.S.* was created as a result of collaboration between the National Fund for Culture and the Arts (Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, FONCA), the Bancomer Cultural Fund (Fundación Cultural Bancomer), and the Rockefeller Foundation. Their objective was to “enrich cultural exchange and collaboration between Mexico and the United States, to promote and support creative dialogue between the artistic and cultural communities in both countries.” “The program *Cultural Contact* is an original model where public, private and philanthropic participation from Mexico and the United States are integrated to promote cultural development and exchange between the two countries.” www.oei.es/euroamericano/ponencias_identidad_fideicomiso.php

performances as we (the new directors of the MCB: George Willis, Jean Isaacs and myself) included dance classes with choreographers and a conference with professors from both side of the border. Isaacs invited three companies from San Diego and I invited one company from Hermosillo, Sonora; one company from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon; and my company from Tijuana. We spent two long and dynamic days at the new site, *Dance Place*. The experience was wonderful for the three of us who worked to organize it. The MCB lasted 12 years, but during the last year, even though the MCB's activities were very attractive, very few people from Tijuana attended. Some told me that they decided not to attend because of the long lines to cross the border during the weekend.

In addition to the SDSU students, the choreographers and professors from San Diego who participated in the MCB were: Allyson Green, Ericka Moore, Faith Jensen-Ismay, George Willis, Graham Hempel, Isaacs, Mary Reich, Melissa Nunn, Patricia Sandback, Peter Kalivas, and Terry Shipman. The Tijuana groups that participated were: *Subterráneo Danza Contemporánea*, *Lux Boreal*, *Susana López*, *Grupo de Danza Minerva Tapia* and *Luna Luna* from Mexicali. During one of these performances and late at dinner, I met Professor Allyson Green who had just arrived from New York to work at SDSU and later at UCSD. She was also interested in border crossing and eventually created a *danza fronterizas* of her own, which I will examine in Chapter three. After reviewing the programs, searching my memories of the performances, and asking some of the participants, I was unable to find *danzas fronterizas* at the *Muestra Coreográfica Binacional* that were created by the choreographers who participated as part of the School of Music and Dance of the San Diego State University. I believe that the main

reason for this is that during the time frame in which this festival was presented, *danzas fronterizas* were just emerging. This does not mean that there were not choreographers in San Diego creating *danzas fronterizas*; we have the works of Nancy McCaleb and my own, for example. I presented *danzas fronterizas* in this festival but with the Minerva Tapia Dance Group that is based in Tijuana, with members from both sides of the border.

Over the course of the long day of the MCB, many participants made new friends and future collaborators. Some remember the activities with interest, as is the case with Erica Buechner. One of the reasons the MCB did not continue, aside from the demands of my graduate studies, is that I realized that although the event was appreciated by the participants, I clearly saw how the Tijuana audience was diminishing further every year. Sometime later, some of the people who had regularly attended previous MCBs, told me that they had not attended the most recent one because they did not have a visa or because of the long waits at the border. If we make plans for the thirteenth MCB, we will need to take into consideration that if it is in San Diego, the audience from Tijuana will need a visa to attend but if held in Tijuana, no visas will be needed in order to attend the event.

Other Transborder Collaborations

Transborder collaboration in the Tijuana-San Diego region currently have diverse, and sometimes unexpected, participants.⁹⁴ For example, Tijuana's weekly newspaper *Semanario Zeta* it is a well-known publication that has been attacked by the narcos.⁹⁵ One of its editors, Sergio Haro, states that *Zeta* newspaper is know “for its detailed, incorruptible coverage of the Mexican border drug trade and for unveiling corruption within the political and law enforcement agencies of Baja California since its foundation in 1980.”⁹⁶ *Zeta* has uncovered who is part of the narco-trafficking network. For this reason, those associated with the newspaper have been the target of many attacks and threats by the narcos. A few have even died in the attempt to keep writing about the narcos. During one of my visits to a conferences organized by the Institute of The Americas at the University of California, San Diego, I attended the panel “Freedom of expression and persecution of journalists.” To my surprise, Adela Navarro, the director of the *Semanario Zeta*, said that the newspaper was printed in San Diego. The reason was soon clear. Since the paper declared that the Mexican government had been involved in illegal acts, allowing narcos to act with impunity, the publication has experienced many anonymous attacks. They decided to collaborate with a San Diego press, “although the

⁹⁴ Some of the most relevant events with an international and binational character are: *inSITE binational art festival, Tijuana Innovadora and Mainly Mozart Binacional*.
<http://modernlatinamericanart.wordpress.com/tag/mexico-u-s-border/>
<http://www.tijuanainnovadora.com/>
<http://mozartbinacional.org/mainly-mozart-binacional/>

⁹⁵ People involved in organized crime, specifically in the production and sale of narcotics.

⁹⁶ <http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/imperial/sergio-haro-zeta-weekly-documentary-film-reportero.html>

paper is based in Tijuana, it is printed in the United States and imported into México to ensure that no press is ever stopped and no reportage is censored.”⁹⁷ The ability to weekly print and distribute *Zeta* on both sides of the border shows not only that it could be done, but the freedom of speech could be “guaranteed” by the closeness of the local cross border collaborations in the Tijuana-San Diego region. This collaboration also exemplifies the economic relationship between these two cities.

San Diego’s Mainly Mozart Festival and Tijuana’s *Centro de Artes Musicales* have agreed to join forces in a collaboration to create the first binational youth orchestra in the United States. James Chute writes that according to Jack McGrory, president of Mainly Mozart’s board and the CEO of La Jolla MJ Management, “it’s a symbol of what should be a higher level of collaboration and cooperation between the two cities.” McGrory adds, “In this post-9/11 era, it’s been very difficult to accomplish this kind of relationship. But by working with our federal governments on both sides of the border, and with the two local cities,” the project establishes that there will be performances on both side of the border. But the note does not say where the rehearsal will take place. The co-founder and executive director of the program, Nancy Latruno Bojanic, adds: “[w]e’ve been a persistent and strong presence in Tijuana... We’ve worked with the conservatory, we’ve presented concerts, and we’ve taken artists down to Tijuana for master classes over the years. To be able to institutionalize the sorts of things we were

⁹⁷ <http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/imperial/sergio-haro-zeta-weekly-documentary-film-reportero.html>

doing casually seems a natural evolution.”⁹⁸ However, artistic collaborations have been negatively impacted by the news, imaginary, and changes to the processes of border crossing, especially the long waits at the San Ysidro Port of Entry and the recent advent of border checks when entering México by the *Garita del Chaparral*.

⁹⁸ <http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/May/12/tp-san-diego-tijuana-collaboration-results-in/>

CHAPTER 3:

Danzas Fronterizas: Border Dance Culture

Just after crossing the border into Tijuana, México, about five minutes from the border there is a sphere-shaped building that houses the Centro Cultural Tijuana (cecut).⁹⁹ The building's shape and sandy color has become Tijuana's icon. The cecut was built on October 20, 1982. Since that day, I have been somehow connected to this building, as have many other border people from the Tijuana-San Diego region. The cecut is the only institution of the National Council for Culture and the Arts outside Mexico City. But one of its structures is more present in my life and memories: the theatre of the cecut. The capacity of the theatre is 995 persons, and this is where I grew up as a person and as an artist. I remember how nervous I was to perform as well as the time spent in rehearsals. I have seen dancers turn from artists into audiences. This space has experienced a few transformations and renovations. One of my memories: I am walking in front of the dressing rooms and I spot a striped shirt. I tell one of the technicians I had just left my bag in one of the open dressing rooms, but not in the one with a striped shirt. He says this is good because it belongs to Marcel Marceau and he is in rehearsal.¹⁰⁰ Tijuana's history is filled with the presence of famous artists such as Rita Hayworth, Humphrey Bogart and Charlie Chaplin, as well as new celebrities. The theatre of the cecut is a big space that has been welcoming music, ballet, and theatre performances, but danzas fronterizas are not traditional entertainment. Thanks to new administrators of this space, contemporary dance has found a place to present its ideas and, as in my case, movement.

In 2007, we were ready to open the curtain to perform La cobija when one of the participants unexpectedly decided not to perform. It was Bulmaro León Matus, a technician from a theater in Tijuana, México. As we were getting ready to wrap him up in a blanket for his part of the performance, his face turned pale, he cast his eyes down to the floor, and he became extremely sweaty. It was obvious that something was changing in his system; he was in a panic.

La cobija is a contemporary dance that addresses drug trafficking in México and which I now always associate with León Matus and the incident that occurred on stage the day of the premiere. This stage "representation," or enactment, led to one performer's refusal to participate. His refusal to perform allowed me to see what stage dance—often seen as not "real" and as mere "representation"—in fact does.

A traditional Mexican blanket, with its brightly colored stripes, recalls my childhood. But after seeing these blankets on TV news programs and in newspapers, a

⁹⁹ <http://www.cecut.gob.mx>

¹⁰⁰ http://articles.latimes.com/1987-09-30/entertainment/ca-7103_1_mexico-city

new image of them has taken root in my mind. This new image came via the continuous news coverage of dead bodies wrapped in these blankets. Drug traffickers have incorporated the blankets into a near ritual, in which they wrap their victims in a blanket and then seal the “package” with duct tape around the head and feet. Narcos leave the wrapped bodies as signs of a “settling of accounts.”¹⁰¹

These images regularly appear in newspapers and on TV news programs and are not from far away, in another country. When I see these bodies on TV, I can sometimes recognize their location. The backdrops of these bodies were streets that I had travelled. These were familiar scenes; places I knew. These bodies were dropped in a city that I know very well, and thus the image connects very powerfully to my feelings. Those images provoked fear and other emotional responses from those who saw them, but they are especially powerful for those who make connections to the space where the bodies are left by the narcos.

*Those familiar spaces and the bodies wrapped in blankets gave me the first impulse to start the piece. On the day before the performance, we had an early rehearsal during which I asked three theater technicians that I had known for a long time if they would participate in *La cobija as encobijados*.¹⁰² I explained to them that the task was easy, and that each of them would only participate at the end of the piece as an encobijado. They would only have to roll onto the stage, and I pointed out the spot where they should stop rolling. The three of them said “Yes, it sounds easy.” But right before the curtain was to open, at the very moment of asking the theater technician volunteers to lie on the floor to be wrapped up in the blankets, León Matus, one of the theater technicians, told us in a panicky and quiet voice that he had decided not to participate in the piece. For him, the act of representation was doing something other than “just” performing.¹⁰³ What León Matus had witnessed before he decided not to participate was the other two technicians being wrapped up in blankets.*

*I argue that the act of performing can alter the participant physically and mentally, especially when dealing with situations of fear and with histories of trauma. The stage can transform a “regular” performance into a situation that acts upon, and is experienced in, the whole body. When I started to work on *La cobija*, I knew that I wanted to use music that was popular among narcos. I wanted the piece to be very short, and I wanted to invite a dancer who lives in San Diego, Sadie. When I explained the story of the piece to Sadie, she was concerned that narcos might be present in the theater. She had heard in the news and from other San Diegans that narcos were killing not only other narcos but also civilians and artists. I told her that I could not know the answer to*

¹⁰¹ *Narcos* is Spanish for drug dealers.

¹⁰² *Encobijado* is the person wrapped up in a blanket.

¹⁰³ Susan Leigh Foster explains the development of the term “empathy” and says that empathy replacing sympathy became a process through which one experienced muscularly as well as psychically the dynamics of what was being witnessed (2011: 177).

her question, but anything was possible. I explained to her that I thought the problem of drug trafficking is a concern for people on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and that La cobija could reflect our views on this issue; we could work those feelings and ideas into the piece. She agreed to dance and also to collaborate in the creation of some movements.

On the morning of April 20, 2007, while we were in rehearsal, I explained in more detail the characteristics of their participation to the piece's three new members. They all seemed to be ready, so I called the dancers to do a last rehearsal with the encobijados but without using the blankets and duct tape, only paying attention to the space, music, light and their cues for when to start rolling and when to stop once that they reached their place on stage. They all seemed to understand, not only because it was a simple task, but also because they all had been working for many years in theater. They certainly understood about cues and felt comfortable in this space. During our lunchtime, they made jokes about how their first experience as dancers was going to be as dead bodies. The program had no intermission and my wish was to have no gaps or long pauses between dances.

That afternoon, a few moments before the performance started, I stood on the side of the stage next to the black fabric theater wings, observing those large pieces of cloth and the large roles of marley dance floor which were extended over the stage and taped together. At that moment, I realized that the lamps on the ceiling were changing in color and intensity, so I called the lighting designer to ask if everything was going well with the lighting board. Then, I remembered when Sadie had asked me if narcos attended the theater. The lights dimmed and it was time to start the performance. La cobija was the fourth piece in the program, and until that moment everything was going smoothly. The dancers and helpers passed by me with their blankets. I noticed two of the helpers on the other side of the stage kneeling in front of Leon's blanket, waving their arms as if quietly yelling, desperately trying to get his attention, while León stood like a statue, completely paralyzed and unresponsive. I ran over to them and I could not hear his voice at first. He was insensible to the helpers after seeing how the other two participants were being wrapped up in blankets and duct taped. Then, as one of the dancers and myself approached him, we could hear him very clearly saying "No! No! I am not going to do it." We tried to persuade him while the passing seconds felt like hours. The audience was waiting. He finally moved from his static position and agreed to participate, but we did not put any duct tape around him.

Why did León Matus feel so much panic and such a strong resistance to perform? León Matus experienced physically and emotionally something we are not "supposed to" feel "just" by performing. As studies of motor neurons suggest, witnessing is an act of experiencing; a connection exists between action and perception¹⁰⁴ Did León Matus, by

¹⁰⁴ See the 1996 research on mirror neurons by Giacomo Rizzolatti and colleagues.

observing how the other two bodies were wrapped up in blankets with duct tape, feel that he could become one of the real encobijados? (Rizzolatti 2006: 9).

La cobija begins with a woman under a heavy colorful blanket dancing her way on to the stage to a rhythmic Banda music from the north of México. The dancer plays and dances with the blanket for a few minutes; then, while she is still enjoying the blanket, the music mixes the Banda sounds with gun shots. Soon, all we can hear are a few distorted sounds. The dance combines contemporary dance movements with some steps inspired by the popular dances of the North of México. With the distorted sounds, the dancer loses her connection with the blanket, and the same dance turns into a heavy grounded dance with diminished gestures of confusion. At the end, with no music and no sounds, she stops and looks to the floor for a few seconds; the lights slowly fade away. While this is happening, the first encobijado appears on the floor, then the second and third at the same time. By now, the dancer is facing away from the audience, and the choreography is finished. On the day of the premiere, I was focused on the “body” of León Matus. Then, I realized that the piece had finished. There was only silence, no applause, not a single sound. It was not until the curtain went down and touched the floor that the audience reacted and started to applaud.

Since that day, I have only scheduled La cobija three times, and each time I cannot help but remember and re-experience the anxiety of that first day. What León Matus felt was transmitted somehow to the people backstage, but something also happened to the audience. What made them pause before reacting to the piece? They applauded after a few seconds, and then people started talking. I think that La cobija communicates a collective fear involving the people in Tijuana or those who have a similar social imaginary. Did the audience feel a different empathy with the bodies on the floor than the one experienced by León Matus while watching the other two bodies being wrapped up in blankets and duct tape? I agree with Foster that empathic connections occur in multiple and diverse ways (2011: 218). While Foster notes that “Art thus provided a pleasure free from the actual danger that would be part of real experience ... occasionally, a viewer might be so transported by a performance as to cry out or gesture involuntarily, but this only demonstrated a momentary lapse of awareness of the appropriate conduct in public, for the performance was only a copy of life” (2011: 133).

After seeing the physical and emotional reactions of León Matus and the chain of reactions to the narcos killing artists, I have come to realize that stage performance can also have dangerous consequences if performed at certain times, places, and contexts. In the last decade, there has been a chain of assassinations; artists have lost their lives because their work addressed the illegal actions of the drug cartels. So while our dancers may feel free from the actual danger, the danger could still become real.

Even though *La cobija* premiered in 2007, I only started to receive some feedback from the media in 2010. I got a call from a Mexican national newspaper, *Reforma*. They wanted to ask me a few questions about *La cobija*. The newspaper was conducting research about what artists were creating in relation to *narcos*. Silvia Isabel Gámez is one of the many Mexican reporters risking their lives to shine a light onto *narcos*. She has shown how *narcos* have infiltrated and are very present in México's society (and in the United States) and how this issue is affecting the arts in México. I find it interesting to see how this phenomenon is also changing the way writers use certain words in their texts, and how these words evoke the *narco* problem. For example, they may use words in a text unrelated to *narcos*, but the words do relate, such "detonated their attention" and "burst of applause." The extended article published by Gámez in *Reforma* shows how the media is analyzing and paying attention to the arts and their potential to do something.

*"El sociólogo vaticina una presencia
cada vez mayor del narco
en el arte y la literatura en la medida
que aporte historias e imágenes
que conmuevan por su dramatismo,
y se comprenda que no
es una realidad aparte."*

The above is a reflection of the sociologist José Manuel Valenzuela¹⁰⁵ who states in Gámez's article that the presence of the *narcos* in arts and in literature will be more evident in the next few years. This will continue as long as the *narcos* indirectly supply artists with dramatic stories and images that influence and affect the society. This art does not reflect a different reality. Of the questions the reporter asked me, I find three worth mentioning here: (1) "Why choreograph about *narcos*?" (2) "Whom do you think the problem of *narcos* impacts the most: those touched directly or those seeing the problem from far away?" and (3) "Did you think that it was risky to choreograph about the *narcos*?"¹⁰⁶ I believe that these questions also reflect how empathy works in art and in life. I close my thoughts about this *danza fronteriza* called *La cobija* by asking how much choreographers should take into account what the stage does to the participants and to audiences.

¹⁰⁵ See Silvia Isabel Gámez article.

¹⁰⁶ These questions were asked by Gámez.

In this chapter, I examine the experiences and testimonies of contemporary choreographers and dancers who are regular border crossers in the Tijuana-San Diego region to analyze border dance culture. These dancers and choreographers have either participated in or created a *danza fronteriza* (border dance). This chapter examines how these dancers and choreographers both view the border in relation to their artistic practices and translate their experiences of the border into *danzas fronterizas*. This chapter observes how these dance practices illuminate the complexities of the U.S.-México border as a phenomenon.

In Shahram Khosravi's article "The 'illegal' traveller: an auto-ethnography of borders" (2007), the author examines her own "illegal" experiences as an undocumented citizen in this contemporary world. Based on her own journey as an "illegal" migrant, she offers a "narrative of the polysemic nature of borders" (2007: 321).¹⁰⁷ Even though the borders that Khosravi studies are far from the U.S.-Mexican border, she describes two issues that are similar to the ones in my study: undocumented immigrations and narcotrafficking. Although each border has its own character, depending also on which country is on each side, the connections between Khosravi's autobiographic research and my own suggest that borders share common concern with illegality and the crossings of goods and people.

Tijuana-San Diego residents are constantly fed by images related to undocumented people. On both sides of the border, the local news constantly shows images related to migration (Tijuana) and immigration (San Diego). In San Diego, it is

¹⁰⁷ She crosses borders in the Middle East, Asia and Europe. Her journey in this article starts in Iran and finishes in Sweden.

common to see border patrol cars and unexpected checkpoints stopping traffic to check for driver licenses. These constant images intensify an atmosphere and cultural imagination of fear. Such fears circulate as popular discourse in media portrayals such as the U.S. nationwide T.V. program *Border Wars*, where cameras follow border patrol agents “and officers that protect the U.S.-Mexico border in their battle against narco-trafficking, illegal immigration and terrorism.”¹⁰⁸ Undocumented immigration and narcotrafficking has been also a common thematic in the last decade in the academic study of the U.S.- Mexican border (Chavez 2008; Ngai 2004; Bacon 2008; Hing 2010; Hernandez 2010). It is also a recurrent thematic in the production of *danzas fronterizas*, as I address later in this chapter and in chapter two.

According to Khosravi, the Pakistan-Afghanistan border in the Baluchistan province is one “of the most profitable borders for smugglers, traffickers and corrupt border guards in the world. A combination of human smuggling and trafficking and drug smuggling has made this border a lucrative space” (2007: 322). As Khosravi examines, human smuggling and drug trafficking have made the activities of the “coyote” smugglers increasingly profitable and prolific¹⁰⁹ (Khosravi 2007: 3; Hernández 2010: 90). The use of the Mexican term “coyote” to refer to human smugglers in the text of Khosravi suggests the popularity of the term in the international media and in the academic studies. This similarity highlights how, people in disparate border territories are

¹⁰⁸ National Geographic Channel: <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/channel/border-wars/>

¹⁰⁹ *Coyote* is the nickname for human smugglers on the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. Migrants pay a fee to the coyotes (also known as *polleros*) to guide them across the United States.

making money on the backs of vulnerable “illegal migrants”. As Khosravi notes, “[a]n illegal traveller is in a space of lawlessness, outside the protection of the law. This is the main aspect of contemporary border politics” (Khosravi 2007: 324). This theme of raw vulnerability has been approached by *danzas fronterizas* since the 1990s, but until now, mainly in the choreographies created in México.

Khosravi observes that in an “auto-ethnographic text the distinctions between ethnographer and Others is not clear. It challenges imposed identities and boundaries” (Khosravi 2007: 322). Thus, it is important to pause here to outline my own position as a regular border crosser and as an ethnographer (observer, participant, writer and artist) of border culture. Not as a scholar first, but as a choreographer, or even before that, as a border-crosser and citizen. Having grown up in the Tijuana-San Diego region, I have been living and learning the border my whole life. At the same time, I have been a constant member of contemporary dance communities on both sides of the border. As a dancer and choreographer, the people I interviewed for this chapter were not only my informants from both sides of the border, but also my colleagues. In José E. Limón’s words “...I am born and bred on the place I study” (1991: 116).

My experiences are evidence of a way of learning, a way of knowing and a way of dealing with the issues that I confront in my relationship with the border. I use my experiences to guide me and as methods to reflect upon those experiences. I borrow from anthropologist Dorinne K. Kondo, who uses auto-ethnography to examine her own experiences as a Japanese-American ethnographer in Japan. Like Khosravi, Kondo uses her own experiences as a method of inquiry. Kondo believes it is important to recognize

various modes of knowing that are part of what we do as ethnographers. She states, “[w]e must recognize that our emotions and sympathies are inevitably implicated in our foreunderstandings. These too can be legitimately productive of knowledge, for knowledge is not purely cognitive. It is also the product of our emotional sensibilities and affinities” (Kondo1986: 85). Kondo clarifies that she is not “suggesting that anthropologists attempt a Romantic fusion with the Other, for this is not only impossible but merely perpetuates the two poles of our own conceptual oppositions: tight-lipped reason and *Sturm und Drang* emotion, objectivity and subjectivity, mind and body” (Kondo1986: 85). What she is suggesting “is that knowing involves the whole self (at least as we define it), and not simply what we think of as ‘the intellect.’” (Kondo1986: 85). Khosravi’s and Kondo’s statements inspire my own auto ethnographic practice and experience.

The dancers and choreographers I include as informants and colleagues shared with me their different understandings and perceptions of the border, and their choreographic work makes the complexity of the border visible. For many of us, the border is like a wall that has the ability to rapidly become thick or thin, depending on the economic and political strategies of México and the United States. Although I include insights into Tijuana-San Diego *danzas fronterizas* from a wide variety of artists in this chapter, I specifically examine two *danzas fronterizas*: one by the San Diegan choreographer Jean Isaacs and a work by *Péndulo Cero*, a group based in Tijuana. I have known these artists for several years, and witnessed their choreographic accounts of the border in person. These artists’ respective voices shed light on the border dance culture of

the last decade and reveal how cultural practices like choreography can embody different relational positionalities to the U.S.-México border. By focusing on these comparative examples of choreography, I mean to reveal a heterogeneity of contemporary border life. As much as I was enthusiastic when I decided to research contemporary dances that have the U.S.-México border as a core theme, I was concerned by the idea of beginning a project on a topic with such scarce bibliographic traces in the Tijuana-San Diego region. Scholars such as Harry Polkinhorn and José Manuel Valenzuela Arce have written about contemporary dance at the U.S.-Mexican border, specifically about the Alta and Baja California region. Harry Polkinhorn, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz and Rogelio Reyes are the editors of *Bodies beyond Borders: Dance on the U.S.-Mexico Border* (1994). The book is a broadly conceived and executed collection of interviews, articles, and essays focused on the state of dance on the U.S.-Mexico border as seen by critics, dancers, and choreographers from both sides. Still, Polkinhorn, Trujillo and Reyes's text does not consider the effects of the border on performance art. The authors offer a bilingual book to the readers on both sides of the border, including both English and Spanish versions of each chapter. The research focuses on Mexicali, México and San Diego, United States, primarily analyzing the Binational Dance Festival in Mexicali and the participation of choreographers from San Diego and Los Angeles who have worked extensively in Mexicali as artists. Within the context of the Binational Dance Festival, authors Patricia Cardona, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, Sergio Gómez Montero, César Delgado Martínez, Luz Mercedes López Barrera and Harry Polkinshorn mainly examine contemporary dance in

Mexicali as exemplified by the dance company Paralelo 32 and two relevant dance companies from San Diego: California Ballet Company and Isaacs, McCaleb & Dancers.

In *Nosotros: Arte, cultura e identidad en la frontera México-Estados Unidos* (2012) and in *Performance in the Borderlands* (2011), Valenzuela includes articles about contemporary dance in the U.S.-Mexico borderland. As Ramón Rivera-Servera and Harvey Young point out, Valenzuela “alternates between contextual narratives of violence and cultural responses to it at the border region between Tijuana, Baja California and San Diego, California” (2011:12). These texts have been a bibliographic point of departure for my project, but I also had to draw on my own personal experiences and those of my colleagues to figure out *danzas fronterizas*. There also has been important research about popular dance in relation to the U.S.-Mexican borderland and about transnational dances that migrated to the United States; I certainly paid attention to these authors, but I focused on a variety of contemporary dances performed in a concert-setting mode.¹¹⁰

Another aspect of *danza fronteriza* practices that I found challenging was that these dances often touch nerves—racism and border politics, for example—that many do not want to acknowledge.¹¹¹ On a personal level, I witnessed this discomfort when I was invited to give a radio interview in Tijuana.¹¹² The radio announcer asked me, in a cold tone, why I create dances that perhaps glorify or create an *apologia* for

¹¹⁰ Writers that have examined popular dance in the U.S.-México borderlands: Alejandro L. Madrid (2008) and José E. Limón (1994).

¹¹¹ Some cases are examined in chapter two.

¹¹² Fusión 102.5 FM.

narcotraffic.¹¹³ The announcer oversimplified *danzas fronterizas*, overlooking the complexities of border choreographers' depictions of and reflections on border lives.

On Both Sides: Tijuana-San Diego Dances

In my understanding of *danzas fronterizas*, choreographies function as testimonies about or reflections upon the experiences of those affected by the borderland.¹¹⁴ This includes those who are and those who are not allowed to cross the border. Some of the creators of *danzas fronterizas* have not crossed the U.S.-Mexican border for various reasons. For example, some do not have a visa or legal permission to cross the border, some do not feel secure or interested in crossing the border, and some simply do not want to cross. That said, most borderland citizens do cross the border in some way, even if through cross-cultural activities, events, and bilingualism. In my study of *danzas fronterizas*, I have drawn attention not only to those who have created these dances on both sides of the border but those local choreographers who have decided not to include the border as a theme in their choreography. The “reverberations” of the border still affect those artists in some way or another. Although these choreographic works do not talk about the border directly, it still shapes them to some extent. For example, choreographers in San Diego frequently include dancers of Mexican origins in their work. Some other examples in the case of San Diego are the various signs written in Spanish or cars with Mexican license plates, overheard conversations in Spanish, menus

¹¹³ Such as in the *danza fronteriza La cobija* (2007). *La cobija* is a contemporary dance that addresses drug trafficking in México.

¹¹⁴ In chapter two, I define *danzas fronterizas*.

written in Spanish and in English, and the various local Spanish radio stations, where we can hear information about the wait times at the two border entries: the San Ysidro Port of Entry and the Otay Port of Entry. In other words, these choreographers do not need to cross the border to realize that there is a border.

My research primarily examines the experiences of those who are regular, bodily border crossers. *Danzas fronterizas*, in particular, embody images, desires, and the individual histories of those who cross the border (geographical, psychological, and cultural) and those who hope to do so one day. Central to my discussion of *danzas fronterizas* in this chapter is the complex affective landscape of borderland choreography. As I mentioned before, *danzas fronterizas* are testimonies and reflections of the experiences of those affected by the borderland, whether allowed or not to cross the border. Some of these choreographies address the social, economic, and political problems affecting the area, such as racism, femicide, immigration, and narco-trafficking, as part of the geographical experience of physically crossing the border. While many *danzas fronterizas* are a serious and dark reflection of border life, others use humor, sometimes black humor, to explore issues related to the border including questions of identity. The *danzas fronterizas* created by the San Diegan choreographer Nancy McCaleb, in particular, make use of black humor.¹¹⁵ Serious and humorous *danzas*

¹¹⁵ A part of the spirit of *danzas fronterizas* created in San Diego and Tijuana inevitably addresses the other side of the border. McCaleb's themes also go beyond the border; she was inspired by the work of artists like actress Dolores del Rio to create the choreography *Dolores of the River* (2001). She also included the work of the Belgian native who now lives and works in México, Francis Alys, in *The Impersonation of Mr. Peacock* (2002) and that of the Mexican Nobel prizewinner Octavio Paz in *Octavio's Garden* (2003). She was also inspired by Baja California's scenery, such as La Rumorosa, in her piece *La*

fronterizas tend to address the same border crossing problems, such as those related to (im)migration and narcotrafficking.

McCaleb is one of the first San Diegans to create more than one *danza fronteriza*. Her artistic statement states her interest in “the alchemy created when crossing borders, mixing genres, and making connections between disparate elements. The range of work reflects the diversity of contemporary society, places and characters real and imagined, and the extraordinary cultural cross-roads found in a city on the border between México and the United States” (McCaleb’s artistic statement).¹¹⁶ In her *danzas fronterizas*, humor and parody are central to her depiction of the borderlands. The issues she chooses to present are related to identity and (im)migration. Another of McCaleb’s *danza fronteriza* that deploys humor and parody is *Zona Rio* (1996). According to dance reviewer Eileen Sondak, *Zona Rio* is “a hilarious romp that lampooned cultural contrast and crossed genders” (*Dance Magazine* Volume LXX #4). Anne Marie Welsh echoes *Dance Magazine*’s sentiments when she writes in *The San Diego Union Tribune* that *Zona Rio* is “a thrilling and funny collage of sound” (Tuesday January 16, 1996).

In McCaleb’s work the use of humor, black humor and parody offers her a space for critical reflection. In *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (1985), Linda Hutcheon observes how parody is also a form of imitation. Her

Rumorosa (2005). The impressive scenery of La Rumorosa was also inspiration for Margarita Robles who created a choreography also about *La Rumorosa* in 1983. Both artists have left us a dance legacy about La Rumorosa on both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. In 1983, Margarita Robles choreographed *La Rumorosa* with text by Rubén Vizcaíno Valencia. This piece was danced throughout the 1980s in San Diego and Tijuana, and more recently the piece was re-stage in Tijuana in 2004 and 2012.

¹¹⁶ Nancy McCaleb. Personal interview. September 23, 2014.

definition of parody does not see it as a ridiculing imitation (1985: 5-6). Hutcheon observes that “what is remarkable in modern parody is its range of intent—from the ironic and playful to the scornful and ridiculing” (Hutcheon 1985: 6). She also argues that parody may also be read as homage (Hutcheon 1985: 10). In *Zona Rio*, the use of dancers’ vocals, exaggerated gestures, and a dancer speaking in Spanish gives the choreography a parodic tone about Tijuana’s culture. The title of this choreography makes reference to a place in Tijuana, but it is dancer Ricardo Peralta who is imitating, recalling, and parodying Mexican gestures. I asked McCaleb how the audience in San Diego received this section in Spanish. She responded that *Zona Rio* was welcomed on both sides of the border. Dance offers a vehicle for her ideas, without the problem of language translation. But what is worth noting is that humor and parody offer the space for reflecting on issues related to identity and (im)migration.

In partnership with Isaacs, Nancy McCaleb created a dance company called Isaacs/McCaleb & Dancers. During the 1990s, this company offered presentations in the border cities of Mexicali, Tijuana and Ensenada, making them regular border crossers (Polkinhorn 1994: 179). Both choreographers are well known among dance communities in Mexicali and Tijuana, but Isaacs’s connection to the border-dance community remains active today. Isaacs is currently the director of the contemporary dance company Isaacs’ San Diego Dance Theater (1972). She also taught at the University of California, San Diego in the Department of Theatre and Dance for 25 years. Isaacs is well known in the region as a modern dance teacher, choreographer, creator of the Trolley Dances, and for

her interest in cross-border collaborations.¹¹⁷ She is one of the few artists in San Diego who has a strong relationship with Tijuana and with other cities in México. Isaacs has been crossing to México since she first arrived in San Diego a few decades ago. In recent years, her presence in México has diminished but has not ended. In interviews, Isaacs is very direct in her criticism of the politics of the U.S. and México, especially how those politics affect dance. I have known her since the 1990s and on December 26, 2013, I met with Isaacs at her studio in Dance Place San Diego. Her studio is located in Liberty Station, a former Naval Training Center in Point Loma, San Diego, and is now home to several performing art companies and other cultural organizations. She received me in the Green Room where we began the interview. We discussed her contributions to San Diego, her life, and most of all her connections and experiences performing in and visiting Tijuana. Of the *danzas fronterizas* she has created, I will examine her piece *My/Your Border* (2009) later in this chapter.

Ricardo Peralta, who passed away in 2001, was a Mexican dancer, choreographer and regular border crosser in the Tijuana-San Diego region. He directed his own companies, *Ballet Cámara de la Frontera* and *Ricardo Peralta Danza Performa*. He lived for many years in Tijuana, but worked with several ballet and contemporary companies in San Diego, including the Isaacs/McCaleb and Dancers. He was an important figure in McCaleb's *danzas fronterizas*. His bold presence was valued by the company. In a recent phone conversation, Nancy McCaleb said “. . . I was privileged to

¹¹⁷ In the annual Trolley Dances (1998) project, patrons visit trolley stops along the MTS line to see site-specific dance.

have Tijuana's artist Ricardo Peralta as a company member in both of [my] companies, for over a decade." In the following lines that Eileen Sondak wrote for the *San Diego Union Tribune* we can sense that the presence of Peralta in the company was appreciated and needed: "Ricardo Peralta, the troupe's leading male dancer (and one of only three men in the eight-member company), was a victim of the federal government's shutdown, sidelined in his native Mexico until the eleventh hour. Seasoned professional that he is, Peralta performed with a week's rehearsal and with very little loss of polish" (*San Diego Union Tribune*, Tuesday January 16, 1996). Peralta contributed as a creator and as a dancer because his technique and presence on stage was relevant. He filled the stage with his personality. He participated in many *danzas fronterizas* of choreographers with his energy and experiences as a Mexican and border resident. He likewise gave inspiration to many choreographers, including Nancy McCaleb.

In an interview of Isaacs by Harry Polkinhorn, Isaacs states in her peculiar and direct way of communicating that Peralta was selected and invited to participate in Isaacs/McCaleb & Dancers because he was the best among a group of dancers in *La Casa de la Cultura* in Tijuana. She notes that he was an oddly shaped dancer, noting that "he is a small, round, bald-headed dancer, but he was beautiful trained by the *Compañía Nacional de Danza* [in México City] and he's got a face like an angel on stage" (Polkinhorn 1994: 216-217). Isaacs also observes that in McCaleb's choreography, the *Serpent's Tongue*, in which Ricardo participated, "there's a section in there where Ricardo is doing the tango with the women of the company, and speaking in an Argentinian kind of accent. In the last review...she [the writer] singled out Ricardo for

special mention...what a great asset he is..." (Polkinhorn 1994: 216-217). Polkinhorn next asks how much Peralta participated in the choreography (as creator), if he participated at all. Isaacs responds, "everybody participates in the choreography, although Nancy and I are the choreographers. There are many, many, times when they all make suggestions, and he has a good input as a choreographer. So that's how he got involved. He made it by auditioning for it. He was the best guy." Despite Peralta's importance to the company, border-politics restricted his ability to collaborate with them effectively.

In this interview, Isaacs discusses the difficulties of getting a green card for Peralta and about the efforts the company made on his behalf, especially the financial efforts, to find a way that he could live and work in San Diego. Ricardo continued to live in Tijuana and cross the border regularly to attend rehearsal, and in those years the company found a way to reimburse him for his work. This was easier to do in the 1990s than it is today after 9/11. Currently, I know of no dancers working without legal documentation. The collaborations between Peralta and choreographers Isaacs and McCaleb exemplify how artists on both sides of the border connect artistic, personal, and political tensions around citizenship in different ways.

In 1994 Isaacs and Nancy McCaleb had the support of the NEA.¹¹⁸ According to Isaacs, "they support us in large measure because of the work we do with Mexico and because of the fact that we have a company that's racially diverse and we're part of the region. We have a board with Mexican Americans on it" (Polkinhorn 1994: 213). Isaacs has tried to continue to do bi-national collaborations. She thinks that if her company is

¹¹⁸ National Education Association.

invited to México to dance, her counterparts in México should also come to the United States. For this reason she has looked for grants that support binational collaborations.¹¹⁹ Isaacs remains interested in continuing to do dance projects in different ways and with diverse casts on both sides of the border. But dance at the U.S.-Mexican borderland is stunted by the legal process of documentation for dancers and choreographers. When dancers from México are invited to perform in San Diego and their visas are expired, there is no guarantee that the visa will be ready on time for the performance. If the visa does not arrive in time, the company will need to find and teach the choreographies to another dancer. This has caused last minute changes to the program, provoking all kinds of anxieties in the company members.

Danzas Fronterizas

While most of the *danzas fronterizas* have found a home in contemporary dance aesthetics, they are also at home in other dance styles. Such is the case of the ballet, *La Rumorosa*, by Margarita Robles.¹²⁰ And as I addressed in chapter one, the pre-*danzas fronterizas* created by Anna Sokolow and José Limón were created thorough the movement language of modern dance. Modern dance and contemporary dance are often suitable vehicles for *danzas fronterizas*.¹²¹ Modern dance history reveals that political

¹¹⁹ See chapter two for binational dance collaboration in the Tijuana-San Diego region.

¹²⁰ I write about Margarita Robles in chapter two.

¹²¹ The term “modern dance” is related to the period between the 1930s and the 1970s on both side of the border. Nancy Lee Ruyter observes that “[i]n the early years of its development in the United States, ‘modern dance’ was the preferred term. In Mexico and much of Latin America ‘la danza contemporánea’ [contemporary dance] is usually used” (271). In this study, I examine contemporary dance as the principle vehicle for *danzas*

themes are deeply rooted in the form. Modern dance was born during the 1930s when “in the midst of the Great Depression the United States underwent a period of economic and political upheaval” (Graff 1997: 3). Since then, modern dance and, later contemporary dance, has reflected the times and different artistic trends. Even though I appreciate many dance genres, contemporary dance allows me to include in a *danza fronteriza* certain movement elements that another dance genre will not, such as classical ballet. In some cases, I use spoken word or video technology. I use alternative spaces like a house next to the border or a sidewalk in addition to the traditional theater. I blend contemporary dance with folk moves from the North of México. In other words, I fuse tradition and modern concert dance vocabulary like many choreographers do, but my work encapsulates feelings, emotions, social and political reflections, images, and the cultural contacts of the Tijuana-San Diego region.

Contemporary dance provides good tools for creating dances about my experiences at the U.S.-México border and the experiences of others living in this region. Dance and crossing the border have accompanied me all my life. I have learned to look at the U.S.-México border through the lens of dance. It is dance that makes me process the problems of crossing the border so regularly. Even though common experiences like vulnerability are real for many people crossing borders, especially from México to the United States, my work aims to emphasize a diversity of lived experiences.

fronterizas in which elements such as voice, video, and the fusion of contemporary movement such as release technique are used.

Danzas fronterizas are currently emerging in colleges along the U.S.- México border. One key example occurred in the department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Texas at El Paso with the premier of an original choreography called *Shallow Waters Bury Me Deep*. The piece was choreographed by faculty members Lisa Smith and Emily Morgan along with nine student choreographers and was performed by a cast of 24.¹²² According to Smith, the “piece originated as a response to a lot of the ongoing feelings and discussions among our faculty and dancers about the relationship to México and Juárez, especially in these recent times of cartel and femicidal brutalities”¹²³ Another recent *danza fronteriza* was presented from November 14 to November 16, 2013 by the Dance Department at Southwestern Community College in Chula Vista, California. Former student Daniel Flores in collaboration with current students created the choreography, called *Nomansland*.

Since 1998, Isaacs has facilitated an annual site-specific dance project called Trolley Dances, which invites choreographers and dancers get together to dance in the multi-location dance project that takes San Diegans on an artistic tour while the audience travels by trolley to several performance stops. This project is possible with the support of the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System. On several occasions, Isaacs has invited Tijuana’s dancers and choreographers to participate in the Trolley Dances. In 2009, the stops of the trolley were closer than in previous years to the U.S.-Mexican border and

¹²² Performances ran from September 21 to September 24, 2011 at the Studio Theatre at the University of Texas

¹²³ <http://admin.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=703490>

next to the San Ysidro Port of Entry.¹²⁴ For her choreography, Isaacs selected the closest area to México, the wall of the immigration administrative offices used by people who want to walk into the United States. The information that her company sent to the Metropolitan Transit System states: “The audience, led by volunteer guides, will get on and off the trolley at specific stations to view the dances. Each dance is original and in some way responds to the physical environment or interprets the culture, history or intended use of the outdoor location. I want to celebrate the bi-cultural nature of San Diego and the South Bay and help demystify the border.”¹²⁵ If the Trolley Dances project returns to the blue line, which is the line with the stop closest to the international border, it could bring back the dances with themes related to the U.S.-Mexican border.

My/Your Border, created by Isaacs in 2009, is a dance piece performed by eight female dancers. The dancers are dressed in pants, shirts in solid colors such as black, brown, red, green, or blue, and all wear white gloves. All are white and one is a tall Mexican-American, who can pass as white; all are good dancers.¹²⁶ The dancers lean against the wall of the building. Two initiate their movement from the floor, which is a section of green grass. Their faces also touch the wall, as if they were creeping vines. Gradually, they move to exchange places. The recorded music is an original score by

¹²⁴ <http://www.sdmts.com/marketing/TrolleyDances09.asp> Trolley Dances 2009 visits unique locations along the Trolley line with stops/performances at Palomar Street in Chula Vista and the San Ysidro Transit Center. The dances will showcase the work of an international slate of choreographers, including: Peter Chu from Santa Monica, California; Miroslava Wilson from Tijuana, Mexico; Elfi Schafer-Schäfroth from Zurich, Switzerland; and Kim Epifano from San Francisco, California.

¹²⁵ <http://www.sdmts.com/marketing/TrolleyDances09.asp>

¹²⁶ Jessica Curiel, Amanda Daly, Courtney Delaney, Jennifer Fait, Cecily Holcombe, Sarah Larson, Drea Sobke and Bernadette Torres. (DVD produced by San Diego Dance Theatre).

Steve Baker. The mood of the music could be related to nature¹²⁷ but it also has the harsh sounds of metal-working, the sounds of the steel industry. We, the audience, also heard a whispering female voice that says in Spanish “quiero agua” (I want water), “tengo sed” (I am thirsty). Meanwhile, the dancers seem to help each other; they lift each other’s bodies. They keep holding onto the wall with a sense of dependency. The wall looks like extensive fossae of soil but instead it is a vast horizontal piece of cement. The individuals of this dancing group appear to find their own fate as a group. In *danzas fronterizas*, this group sensibility is common characteristic, suggesting some kind of solidarity.

There is another voice that can be heard, but I cannot distinguish what it is whispering. At the same time, the voices of people watching the performance sound amused by the unexpected nature of a site-specific event. In my later interview with Isaacs, she told me that in this piece they used a long rain sticks as percussive musical instrument and as props. I can also hear the sounds of ambulances, but these are not part of the recorded music. The dancers keep slowly moving. They climb onto each other’s backs, but they do not seem to want to climb over an 18-foot fence in order to jump across the U.S. border. They just pretend to climb; after all, what is on the other side is México.¹²⁸ These dancers on the US side keep slowly moving until they all help one dancer try to jump across the wall, and we again hear the female voice saying “ayúdenme” (help me, all of you). For a moment, they stop while she is as high as they could help her climb. Afterwards, they all go away from the wall and strew themselves

¹²⁷ Sounds of wind and rudimentary musical instruments.

¹²⁸ One case of border jumping: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2300308/Mexican-immigrant-scales-18-foot-fence-jumps-US-border-just-yards-away-US-senators-fact-finding-tour.html>

on the grass. They then slowly pick up long rain sticks from the floor. While some dancers lie on the grass holding the sticks with both hands, others hold the sticks by the edges and make movements similar to rowing. In unison, the dancers begin a modern dance phrase, during which they all display their good dance technique: *attitude derrière*, *attitude à la seconde*, *passé*, deep *plié à la seconde*, *passé*, *arabesque*, turns, the leg sustained in *passé*, high legs, control in *attitudes*. It is not common to see this kind of movement control in a *danza fronteriza*. The emphasis on technical prowess appears to miss the sense of anguish, fear and desolations that dancers on the other side of the border convey in representations of undocumented people trying to cross the border. In Isaacs's work, the dancers portray undocumented people with a notable degree of control that lacks the inspiration of *danzas fronterizas* more typical of the Tijuana aesthetic.

Later, dancers perform their own variations, including playing, moving, and slowly manipulating the stick. One dancer lies on the floor. Her movement is controlled by two dancers who place their sticks on her body to turn her. The dancer on the floor is turned onto her stomach as she is manipulated by the sticks of the other two dancers. The dancer on the floor holds onto the three sticks and she is dragged for a few feet. For a brief moment the dancers are set in pairs, using their sticks as defense against the other dancer. Then, they all go to one tree and place their sticks on the tree's trunk. Next, they all turn in one direction and walk around the tree until the dancers run one by one to find their own tree. They each place one edge of the stick against their stomachs and the other side to the trees' trunks, and slowly raise their arms and gaze into the sky.

The choreographic choices in *My/Your Border* suggest that this *danza fronteriza*, like other *danzas fronterizas*, is closely related to its location. The dance makes reference to the space of performance. For example, dancers make use of the wall, of the center that is divided, of a limit, etc. The use of spatial relations is fundamental to *danzas fronterizas*. The piece *My/Your Border* is about one of the two most common topics in *danzas fronterizas*: migration and immigration.¹²⁹ Here, even though the movement depicts undocumented people, the organized movements, the controlled and calmed movements (doing complex balances in attitude and arabesque), and the lack of emotions or expressions on the dancers faces, suggest more about immigration than migration. The movement here suggests other perspectives—a U.S. perspective, a postmodern aesthetic perspective, and a kind of expressive neutrality—different than the one in the Tijuana dance. In the *danzas fronterizas* from the Mexican side as I suggested before, the movements often suggest despair, desolation, hopelessness, and stress that is made perceptible in their whole bodies, including in their facial expressions. In *My/Your Border* the voice that we hear “quiero agua” (I want water) exemplified location. When many undocumented people arrive (and sometimes die in the desert) in the United States via difficult geographies like the Arizona desert, water is the most important element of survival for crossing the border. In a piece called *Entre dos aguas* (between two waters) that I choreographed in 1995, the dancers yell “agua!” Here, we can barely hear the voice. It is a whisper, a soft whisper. This comparison shows a different approach to the same topic. The voice from the South is desperate and could be related to the reality of

¹²⁹ The other most common topic is narcotraffic (at least at this time).

border people, migrants trying to cross the border, while the one from the North is almost inaudible and is not as related to dying of thirst in a desert.

Bodies are Not Borders

Miroslava Wilson is the co-director of the Tijuana-based company *Péndulo Cero Danza Contemporánea*, created in 2007. On February 8, 2014, I interviewed her for my dissertation project. Months before, Wilson offered me a video with a *danza fronteriza* called *Bodies are not Borders* created by Jaciel Neri for her company. The members of this company, except for one, came from different parts of México. According to Wilson, this makes them view the complexity of the border in different ways. For example, the dancer born in Tijuana was accustomed to seeing people waiting for an opportunity to cross the border without documents with relaxed gazes, something that contrasted with the perception of the other dancers. In 2009, Isaacs invited Wilson via the recommendation of George Willis who saw this group at *Casa de Cultura*, to choreograph one piece for the Trolley Dance project. Wilson explained that this was her first experience creating a *danza fronteriza*. In 2009, many of the choreographies presented in the Trolley Dances project were *danzas fronterizas*. Wilson said that, during this process, no one from the group had a U.S. visa. Therefore, she was the only one from *Péndulo Cero* (from the original cast) who could participate in this invitation. During the annual audition for Trolley Dances, she selected six American dancers and four from Mexico who come from Tijuana. After this experience, some of the Tijuana participants and one dancer from San Diego were asked to join *Péndulo Cero*. The dancer, Matthew

Armstrong, started to cross the border regularly into Tijuana in order to attend the company's rehearsals. This process shaped the future of this Tijuana's company by integrating new members from both sides of the border. Although the purpose of the Trolley Dances is not to form companies, that was the result in this occasion. Isaacs suggested to the participant choreographers that since the border was the first site, they could use the border as an inspirational theme. Wilson acknowledged that this collaboration opened many doors for her company and for herself. Sadly, due to the problems with getting a U.S. visa for the other members of the company and the difficulties in creating a viable schedule due to the long waits at the San Ysidro Port of Entry, their "conversation" with the dance community from the other side was impaired.

At Trolley Dances, Wilson met U.S. dancer Matthew Armstrong. Armstrong was later invited to participate in a production by *Péndulo Cero* in México City. David Mariano and Iliana Jimenez, two Mexican dancers who live in Tijuana, also joined the company. Thus, after Wilson's collaboration with Trolley Dances, she started to work with Mariano, Jimenez and Armstrong. In 2010, five members of the company began working with the Mexican choreographer Jaciel Neri, who, like most of the members, is not from northern México or from near a border. According to his webpage, Neri is a dancer, choreographer and facilitator. He is also an artistic promoter and has a B.A in Tourism. He was born in San Pedro Tlaltizapan, in the State of México. Even though Neri is not from Tijuana or another border city, he is from one of the cities where many of the male citizens migrate to the North and try to cross the border into the United States.

As is the case for Neri, I believe most Mexicans are related to the migration phenomenon in some way, either by knowing someone who emigrated or by listening to the news.

According to one review of the piece written in Spanish, *Bodies are not Borders* (2010) “refleja una parte de la realidad cotidiana de aquellos que van y vienen en el cruce de sus propias fronteras” (reflects one part of the quotidian reality of those that go and come in the cross of their own borders). Most *danzas fronterizas* I have seen make reference to a physical border. But the piece also alludes to a symbolic border. In the case of a physical border, for example, there may be a line that separates a space into two areas, a line that divides or connects. In the theater, the line or border fence is represented and replaced by scenography or by theatre lights. In the case of *Bodies are not Borders*, scenography was used to simulate the fence in Tijuana, the Mexican side of the U.S.-Mexican border. The scenography looks like a portion of the real border fence, a solid metal barrier that local audiences could recognize. In the case of *My/Your Border* by Isaacs, the border fence was represented by one of the walls of the United States immigration building. The wall was part of the building that is also a gate to cross into the United States. The participants in *Bodies are not Borders* seem to have the same issue of trying to cross a border. These *danzas fronterizas* have in common that the dancers are together as a group until a moment in which dancers appear immersed in his or her own space, as if isolated from the ensemble.

In both choreographies, the group helps someone to reach the edge of the fence, as if the dancer were going to climb the structure in order to cross to the other side. Seeing Mexican dancers in Tijuana simulating the act of climbing a fence is a situation

related to their own reality, but seeing an American dancer intending to cross into México has a different reading, more like science fiction, because it is not common that Americans have the urgent need to migrate to México. In this case, both the U.S.-based and the Tijuana-based choreographers are interested in showing the Mexican border-crossing perspective due to the dramatic results of crossing the border without documents.

The Choreographic Process of *Bodies are Not Borders*

Once the choreographer Neri arrived in Tijuana, the group began their choreographic research by asking questions. They asked themselves: “What is the meaning of a limit?” “How do you live the fact that you are walking on the beach and then you cannot pass because there is a wall?” and “What does it mean to you that in order to see a friend you need to wait for about three hours or more at the San Ysidro Port of Entry?” These reflections generated a few things in their bodies. For example, Wilson felt the need to draw on the floor. She wanted to draw different territories and then erase them. For Armstrong, according to Wilson, “it was strange. He is very tall and his gaze was from above, and from far away.” Armstrong also shared with them how different it was for him to work in Tijuana and with the dancer’s body. His perspective of taking the bus and entering to Tijuana from San Diego was very different from what he used to perceive as a dancer living in San Diego. Ileana, the only one from the group who was born in Tijuana, shared her memories of her grandmother telling her stories about how she used to walk on the beach all the way to San Diego (there was no fence across the

beach then). Iliana also seems to suggest that waiting at the border is normal. On this, Wilson commented that for Iliana these things were part of this region, “like nothing happened.” She argues that she did not have a critical stance like the rest of the dancers who were not border natives. Iliana did not get mad while waiting at the border, for instance. Carlos, Wilson explains, had a different perspective since he was trained as a dancer in the United States, but without a visa he could not stay there or see his partner any longer. David, from México City, also had a different way of perceiving Tijuana in relationship to the border. The piece also talks about serial production, as in *maquila* plants, in which the workers experienced fatigue, social changes that crumble people, and how they (we) recuperate. Wilson says that this recuperation is similar to the one in the Ave Fenix (the Phoenix bird) experiment, and it is also a recuperation through movement. After the presentation of this choreography, Carlos and Wilson decided to establish themselves in Tijuana. According to the text of the theatre program, *Bodies are not Borders* is about identity, collectivity, migration and the need to belong. Until now, migrations have been one of the most recurrent themes in *danzas fronterizas*. This is understandable since borders were born with the ability to regulate or prevent migration. All borders have histories, and these histories affect the current realities of border regions and the states they bound (Diener and Hagen 11). In the context of the U.S.-Mexican border, I also noted that the notion of “nation, nationality, [and] nationalism – all have proved notoriously difficult to define...” (Anderson 2010: 3).

Bodies are not Borders is a choreography that recreates a familiar social context in a region of contact zones. Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces

where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in context of highly asymmetrical relations of power...” (2008: 7). Some of the dancers in this choreography represent Mexican or Latino migrants. This depiction alludes to a second wave of people trying to cross the border into the United States. The “‘old’ immigration was overwhelmingly European and white, whereas the present inflow is, to a large extent, non-white and comes from countries of the Third World” (Portes and G. Rumbaut 2006: 12). In *Bodies are not Borders*, the dancers wear modest clothing, they do not have any luggage, and they look exhausted and preoccupied as if they were being hunted. In this piece, the use of lights draws our attention, especially an intense light that could be interpreted as the light of the border patrol. We do not see any dancers as border patrol agents on stage, but we can sense that those bright lights are related to the guards of the fence, the border patrol.¹³⁰

In *Bodies are not Borders*, dancers Iliana Jiménez, Miroslava Wilson, Matthew Armstrong, David Mariano and Carlos A. González begin the choreography sitting next to the fence. The theatre lights continuously pass in front of their rapt and suspended gazes. Wilson crawls along the floor on her back until she reaches the middle of the stage. She starts to dance with continual movements interrupted by accents that physicalize an anxiety I understand as reflective of the uncertainty of not knowing if her future is in Mexico or on the other side of the border. Meanwhile, the three dancers

¹³⁰ The border patrol was established in May 1924 and “was created to enforce U.S. immigration restrictions comprehensively by preventing unauthorized border crossing and policing borderland regions to detect and arrest persons defined as unauthorized immigrants” (Hernández 2010: 2).

facing front turn their heads back to observe her. She starts to laugh and returns to her place next to the fence. One of the dancers looks through a hole in the fence to the other side, but Wilson returns to the stage to draw on the floor with a piece of chalk. She draws lines that later she will dance over by following the chalk traces. She lets us know that the borders in a map are made and not natural. She draws and erases the traces with her body.

One body stands out from the other four dancers because he is tall and white. The dancer is the American Matthew, the one who Wilson met one year before at Trolley Dances. Wilson and Armstrong are close together, slowly walking backwards in a diagonal. They walk with one behind the other. A fifth dancer gets up to initiate a movement phrase that looks like a self-centered dance more than a collective dance. They are together but alone. Wilson and Armstrong dance a duet of cause and effect, action-reaction, a dance of manipulating extremities, a fluid dance interrupted by moments of tense movement. In the duet, Wilson represents herself as a dancer living in Tijuana, and Armstrong represents an idea: the transgression, the limit, the difference, the expansion and the risks. Perhaps he also represents an authority such as a U.S. immigration officer. Using Armstrong in *danza fronteriza* raises the question of race. Are the choreographer and the rest of the group recognizing that Armstrong's appearance suggests that he should be in a different place than the rest of the dancers? Do Armstrong's looks decide his place in the choreography? Did the group feel uncomfortable with his looks in a choreography that addresses class and race issues such as the topic of (im)migration between a Third World country and a First World country?

While this duet continues, the other dancers are hitting the fence hard enough to make it shake. They perform a rhythmic and thunderous dance until they all stop abruptly and look at the tall white man. They all look at him and then hold each other in a collective hug. He continues to dance under an intense light. By now, all the dancers are on the floor while one of the two female dancers starts to run, and with the permission that postmodern dance gives to contemporary dance, the dancers speak. She runs and runs while saying “in the 1980s we could run from Playas de Tijuana to the beach of Coronado and the immigration officers only look at us.”¹³¹ The dancer who delivers this spoken history was born in Tijuana, so she is representing herself as a border citizen who remembers her history. Throughout the choreographic process, the dancers use their own experiences as borders residents and citizens. Iliana has authority to say her lines, and though its likely that not all of the audiences know this, her background and experiences help make her dancing more expressive and believable.

Now Armstrong confronts one of the male dancers. The other dancer looks like he is trying to pass by him, but Armstrong stops him over and over again. While the dancer keeps trying to go past Armstrong, other dancers use words to encourage him to keep going, but Armstrong is always successful at stopping him. The dancers keep saying “Vamos” (Let’s go), with the hope that whatever Armstrong represents will disappear or vanish. The dancers talk louder and louder, and soon scream, repeating “Vamos!” “Vamos!” until Armstrong holds the dancer like a puppet. Then Armstrong holds his hand, as if he wanted to take off his arm and launch it far away. Armstrong and Wilson

¹³¹ Coronado was incorporated in 1890. <http://www.coronado.ca.us/>

initiate a long duet of fluid lifts, but at the same time with intense, rough affection. Then the dancer falls from his partner's arms. The other dancer who was telling him encouraging words is now yelling: "Arriba!" (Get up), "Vamos!" (Let's go), "Recuerda!" (Remember) Carlos! His real name is Carlos, and again the action of the dance shows how their own experiences in the borderland were included in the choreographic process.

Carlos is held and supported by Armstrong while the other dancers insist on encouraging him: "Respira!" (Breathe!), "Muévete!" (Move!), "A que venimos!" (What do we come for!), "Por favor, Carlos!" (Please, Carlos!). It looks like Carlos is recovering his energy, but his body is still manipulated by the arms and lifts of Armstrong. The dancer now goes with Wilson, who by now is crying. The dancer calls her "Miros" (her nickname). Now both women are weeping while a video of people's bodies is projected onto the fence behind them. Four of the dancers in line develop movement phrases in unison, one behind the other. The fifth dancer, now that he has recuperated, goes to the fence. His energy allows him to yell "Basta!" (Enough!) several times. His energy reaches a crescendo while the dancers execute a phrase of frenetic individual movements. The fence looks more bold and illuminated than before. Now all dancers are facing the fence, the wall, the limit, the border. The theatre lights gleam brightly on the fence as the projected image gets smaller and smaller until it vanishes.

The dancers in this piece represent those who need to cross the border, both physically and mentally. They represent Mexican border-crossers and emphasize the emotions of the experience. This contrasts with the American dancers in *My/Your Border*, which also addressed the experiences of Mexican border-crossers. But these dancers on

the American side do not emphasize emotions. As I mentioned earlier, their dancing shows control and serenity, while the ones in *Bodies are Not Borders* take emotional risks. It could be distinguished in these pieces that *My/Your Border* is a modern dance piece and *Bodies are Not Borders* is a postmodern dance piece because it uses more elements that are identified as postmodern (the use of spoken words, improvisation, and use of *release* as movement style).

According to Wilson, before working on *Bodies are not Borders*, the members of the group also worked independently on other projects but with this choreography they wanted to fully engage as a company. They wanted to use a theme that would help them get together, which is why they started to think of a project that would reflect on concepts such as “exclusion,” “belonging” and about hybrid bodies. Wilson says “we were a new group with the integration of David, Iliana, and Matthew who was from San Diego. We invited a young choreographer who could help us to amalgamate, to unite!” They were looking for a choreography that would bring them together, and for this objective they selected a *danza fronteriza*.

Crossing into Tijuana or Choosing the Other Side of the Coin

In 2010, Matthew collaborated with *Péndulo Cero* in the performance of *Bodies are not Borders* presented in México City during the festival *Premio Nacional de Coreografía* (National Award for Choreography) where he won the prize of *Mejor Bailarín* (Best Male Performer). He also started to collaborate with other groups in Tijuana besides *Péndulo Cero*. In Tijuana, he won another award in The Second

Choreography Contest for Intimate Spaces organized by *La Alborada* Cultural Center. He also continued to collaborate in San Diego with the dance company Wallpaper Performance Company, under the direction of Alicia Peterson Baskel, which premiered *SpaceBetween*, both in México and in the United States.¹³² In the same year, Armstrong began working with the contemporary dance company Lux boreal as an invited dancer and in 2012 he became part of the company full time. Since then, he has actively worked in Tijuana as a teacher, dancer, and citizen since he is a permanent resident of this city. In the interview, Armstrong told me that he was pleased to live and work in Tijuana. He says that his classes are conducted in English and Spanish. I asked him if his friends and family asked him why he was living and working in Tijuana. He answered that, yes, they frequently ask that and wonder if he likes living in Tijuana. I believe that Armstrong has found a place where he can explore as a young dancer and teacher his beliefs as an artist. He also found a place that recognizes his talents, as shown by the two prizes and awards. He found two companies with which he has traveled nationally and internationally.

The first time that I saw him was in a gigantic picture attached to a wall of the Centro Cultural Tijuana, which I believe was also a kind of recognition of his work as a dancer. After graduating in 2011 from the University of California, San Diego with a Bachelor of Arts degree, he was quickly integrated into a dynamic and intense life of dance in Tijuana. In the Tijuana-San Diego region, there is a small population of American citizens living on the coast or in the cities of Tijuana and Ensenada. He is not the only American artist who works in Tijuana, but his case definitely stands out, because

¹³² Information selected from his resume.

there are not many in the dance field. We often see or hear of Mexican dancers finding or looking for opportunities in the United States but seldom the opposite.

Peeled (2010) is a twenty-one-minute *danza fronteriza* created by choreographer and UCSD professor Patricia Rincon. The piece is based “on research and interviews conducted by Rincon and Zacharias in Central México, Los Angeles, and San Diego about immigration to America and different people’s ideas of the American Dream.” One of the piece’s sections examines the concerns of crossing the border via the San Ysidro Port of Entry, as do other *danzas fronterizas*. In this piece, the dancers first come together to form a row. This “waiting in line” reveals one of the most common tensions of crossing the border by the U.S. gates. This piece is about undocumented immigration but also about crossing the border with documents. *Peeled* portrays both legal and illegal ways of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Other dancers running quickly across the stage represent the chaos and fear of those who live at the border, in contrast to the dancers waiting in line in order to cross who are disciplined and forced to move slowly by the entry gates.

In Rincon’s work *Peeled*, staged by UCSD dance students, white dancing bodies run on stage, simulating the actions of the people wanting to cross the border. There are also Mexicans or Mexican-Americans performing in this piece, though I cannot be sure by looking. I can imagine how this same piece about immigration could be danced by the Tijuana dancers, and how differently it would be perceived. If danced by Mexican dancers, the reading fits with the social imaginary, but if it is performed in San Diego with a blond, white dancer as an undocumented person, it would catch the eye as it does

mine in this case. Even as I defend the right for people to perform any subject on stage, it is my stance that *danzas fronterizas* reveal what society teaches us to think. Media images continually show only one kind of undocumented person, making a stereotype of how an “illegal” is supposed to look; but in those images there are no blonde undocumented people.

In the process of writing my dissertation and conducting these interviews, I have found that *danzas fronterizas* are of interest to dancers and choreographers. Some have done only one and not returned, at least not yet, but others are starting to pay attention to this subject. While tending to share certain staging conventions, such as a wall or fence to delineate a physical barrier between “sides,” each choreography of *danzas fronterizas* is diverse in its appearance, in its aesthetic and in its approach to the subject of the border. When the dancers and choreographers are asked what they see in *danzas fronterizas*, which have been created on both sides of the border, their responses are diverse and contrasting. For example, Wilson suggests that choreographies created in Tijuana are more intense. She states: “I believe that in our dances we tend to take more risks that what I have seen in San Diego. The ones created in San Diego have a beautiful technique but they do not take risks.” For Jorge Domínguez, a dancer, choreographer, cultural promoter and current director of *Casa de Cultura* in *Playas de Tijuana*, the main issue is the aesthetics of *danzas fronterizas*. He says the American influence on Mexican dance is renowned. In our interview conducted on January 17, 2014, Domínguez noted that he could not deny the American influence on his work. Domínguez studied in New York for one year. He received a grant from the famous Amalia Hernández, the director and

founder of *Ballet Folklórico de México*. He explained that the history of modern and contemporary dance in México is filled with the teachings of American artists, such as [Anna] Sokolow, [Falkenstein] Waldeen, [José] Limón, Xavier Francis, and the dancers of the Martha Graham Dance Company. But he also recognized that during the 1980s in México there “existed a body of autonomous thoughts” in terms of creative ways of performing. In the 1980s, “we used the movement material as we wished.” “Currently, we still have other influences from the United States as ways of moving as in the case of the *release* technique, to give an example.” Domínguez added, “we can use the techniques but in the choreography we see the difference; there is a tone, a flavor, and aroma that is more Mexican.” Domínguez believes that choreographers tend to repeat forms because they like the movement, but those movements were at one time filled with ideas. Those forms that we repeat sometimes became techniques, a technique that is an empty shell. So we learn the movement without its philosophic spirit or meaning. We need to reinvent the movement vocabulary’s purposes. We need to add something that gives it substance. Currently, if Mexican choreographers adopt the technique *release*,¹³³ they move according to their own ideology. They use different forms of training concurrent with their own artistic necessities. Domínguez acknowledges the influences in contemporary dance from other countries, especially from the United States, and suggests that in the future the Mexican dancer will find his/her own technique. I do not differ from this, but I argue that *danzas fronterizas*’ essence is comprised of two cultures, and they perhaps can never be completely independent.

¹³³ *Release* is a contemporary movement technique that has U.S./European influences.

Choreographer and former professor at the University of California, San Diego, Allyson Green, created a *danza fronteriza* with the support of the Tijuana-based group Lux boreal. Green previously had some interest and experience in working across cultures. She has been particularly influenced by her teaching and choreographic research in East/Central Europe.¹³⁴ In an interview recorded for University of California Television (UCTV), Green narrates how she began to choreograph *Nada que declarar — but everything to say* (2006), “set to J.S. Bach’s Cello Suite No. 6 in D Major and mingled with Tijuana street sounds. The piece reflects upon Green’s years of border crossing.” The piece was performed by cellist Felix Fan and the Lux boreal dance group.¹³⁵ Green began to think about the piece while waiting at the border on her way to conduct and stage a piece for Lux boreal. While waiting, she paid particular attention to a sign that reads *Nada que declarar* (Nothing to declare). She adds, “nothing to declare but everything to say; I do not want to make a political statement, but I am thinking about this.” Because she was working with Bach’s music and dealing with this topic (the border) Green said that she wanted to show them (the Mexican dancers) as real people doing contemporary dance, not as Mexicans dancers doing *folklórico*. “It was not about place. It is about these artists who work, dream, live, sweat and do all the things that I do. The only difference is that they were born there (México) and I was born here (United States), and there is six inches between us that change how our lives will unfold.” Although Green said that she does not want to make a political statement, *danzas fronterizas* are politically charged.

¹³⁴ <http://www-theatre.ucsd.edu/people/faculty/AllysonGreen/>

¹³⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBaT9CP40tk>

I have noticed that in the *danzas fronterizas* that are created in the United States, most of the time there is a Mexican body as a dancer in the piece, either a Mexican citizen or a Mexican-American. The presence of these brown-skinned dancers reminds audiences of the presence of the border, such as in the following cases. In Isaacs's piece, the Mexican-American dancer Bernadette Torres performs. In McCaleb's piece, Peralta and Elizabeth Licea perform. Green uses one American white dancer who represents herself on stage and six members who are Mexicans from a Tijuana dance company. In Rincon's choreography, we can only assume that there are Latinos dancing because of the way they look. In most of the images I have seen of these *danzas fronterizas* in San Diego, there are dancers of Mexican or Latina/o origin participating in the choreography. It is too soon in my project to say that this is the general rule, especially when I have seen that in Wilson's piece the white, American dancer Matthew participates in a *danza fronterizas* created in Tijuana. Armstrong performs in a *danza fronteriza* choreographed in Tijuana, and the piece is about migration, but Armstrong is not representing an undocumented person, he represents difference and power. On both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, *danzas fronterizas* have elements that represent the other side of the border.

A Difficult Theme in *Danzas Fronterizas*

Another group from Tijuana that has created a *danza fronteriza* is the one directed by Henry Torres Blanco and Ángel Arámbula, named Lux boreal. The name of the piece is *Flor de siete hojas* (Flower of seven leaves). The piece was created in 2005 and is

about the emotions of a drug dealer and the people who witness a *narco* atmosphere.¹³⁶ To approach this cultural phenomenon, the company Lux boreal used black humor. During the first decade of the 2000s, México as a nation experienced terrifying acts by the *narcos*. Soon, both well-known and new artists started to express this problem throughout their artistic work. Although it affects people in different ways, this topic concerns most people in México and across the border(s). In 2010, the Mexican national newspaper *Reforma* (reform) published an article about arts and narco trafficking. It was not common for this newspaper to write about a dance group from a city that is not México City. But in 2010, the newspaper decided to include an article about the relationship between narco trafficking and arts. The article also included the perspectives of the directors of two dance companies including Torres and Arámbula, who choreographed *Flor de siete hojas*, and myself, who choreographed *La cobija* (The Blanket) in 2007. Both works addressed the role of narco trafficking through the language of contemporary dance.¹³⁷

The reporter from *Reforma*, Silvia Isabel Gámez, interviewed and/or cited the work of various artists who created work with a narco thematic. Gámez writes “from the news, it jumped to the cinema and literature, but today it is ‘protagonist’ in theater, dance and visual arts. The element of drug trafficking is transformed by creators into art and protest.” She included works by moviemakers such as Steven Soderbergh, who created the film *Traffic* in 2000, to the writer Carlos Fuentes, who wrote the novel *Adán en Edén*

¹³⁶ The title of the piece makes reference to the flower of the marijuana plant.

¹³⁷ At the end of this chapter I write about a peculiar experience that I had with the choreography *La cobija* (2007). Previous, to this piece I had worked on the narco thematic in a piece called *De aquí somos* in 2002.

(*Adam in Eden*) in 2009. Such a national social problem in México, suggested the inclusion of artists on the border where the problem gets transnational attention and infamy. Lux boreal represented the narco trafficking with a flower of seven leaves, a flower that never withered. They explained to Gámez that in the piece's choreography, a fairy represents narco trafficking, and that the wicked and sweet fairies manipulate destiny. But in the end, no one wins.

Gabriela Polit-Dueñas, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin whose academic research focuses on representations of illegal drug traffic and violence in the region, suggests that it “is important to pay attention to what the artists are saying about the narco problem.” She affirmed in this interview that “*Sólo ahora que el narco nos afecta a todos, necesitamos escuchar las voces de estos artistas, considerar su mirada sobre el fenómeno, aprender de ellos*” (now that the narco is affecting everyone, we need to listen to the voices of these artists, consider their views on this phenomena, and learn from them). Polit-Dueñas adds that “only now that the narco trafficking is (also) marketable, authors, writers, visual artist from the North [of México] gain visibility.” Before, they were in the periphery. The sociologist José Manuel Valenzuela Arce, who was also interviewed, predicts a growing presence of the narco in the arts and literature to the extent that it provides stories and images that move us for its drama while understanding that it is not a separate reality. For Valenzuela, it is clear that in today's México, the stories that emerge from narco traffic have meaning and make sense. "They tell us much about the country that we are building." Under this scenario, *danzas*

fronterizas become a place where choreographers, dancers and audiences can relate and give meaning to our turbulent society under the influence of fear and desire.

Making connections among politics, violence produced by narcos, and representation led me to look carefully at the ways in which the traffic of illegal drugs is portrayed in dance. In these choreographies, some elements of narco culture are included, such as *narco corridos*, *narco* clothes and jewelry, which make narcos recognizable on stage. *Danzas fronterizas* that address the *narcos*, such as *Flor the siete hojas* and *La cobija*, cross the borders of contemporary dance, popular dance, art, and narco culture. For the local audiences of these pieces, the characters occupy a different place in their psyche since the narco fear is present in most border-dwellers. Border people are familiar with narco culture.

Audiences and *Danzas Fronterizas*

The capacities that dance or dancers in movement have for embodying social issues and explaining them on stage allow the audience to decipher in their own way the problems presented. Audiences tend to be more open to considering controversial subjects when presented through dance instead of through bodies protesting about immigration laws on streets. That makes *danzas fronterizas* more suitable to understanding the problem.

Since the 1930s, dance scholars have tried to understand the connection between dancers and audiences. Such is the case of the dance critic and theorist John Martin. He examines the relationship between dancer and viewer and an “equally basic connection

between movement and emotion” (Foster 2011: 2). Martin used the word “metakinesis,” to exemplify the connection between the physical and the psychical. He writes “movement, then, in and of itself is a medium for the transference of an aesthetic and emotional concept from the consciousness of one individual to that of another” (Martin 1965: 13). Dance scholar Susan L. Foster further observes how at the “beginning of the twenty-first century neurophysiologists are likewise claiming an intrinsic connectivity between dancer and viewer based on the discovery of mirror neurons—synaptic connections in the cortex that fire both when one sees and action and when one does that action” (2011: 1). The recent research of scientists such as Rizzolatti Giacomo, Leonardo Fogassi, and Vittorio Gallese, the research of choreographers Susan L. Foster and Hagendoorn Ivar, and the neuroscientific approach such as that used by Irving Massey have opened connections between movement, gesture and reception in their own fields of study (Rizzolatti 2006: 54-61; Foster 2011: 1-2; Hagendoorn 2003: 1-12; Massey 2009: 4-28).

In her book *Choreographing Empathy* (2011), Foster’s “study foregrounds the differences in claims such as Martin’s and those of contemporary neuroscience in order to challenge the assumptions of natural or spontaneous connections between the dancing body and the viewer’s body. It seeks to demonstrate that what is often experienced as unmediated is, in fact, carefully constructed” (2011: 2).

On both sides of the border, *danzas fronterizas* are created. These dances cannot exist without addressing the other side of the border. Even though *danzas fronterizas* are created on both sides of the border, my observations suggest that the approach to

choreographing a *danza fronteriza* is different on each side of the border. The tendency on the Mexican side is to be more dramatic, intense, and to involve more facial expression while in the United States, there seems to be more investment in virtuoso performances and aesthetic details. I am not saying that in México there is no use of virtuoso movements in *danzas fronterizas*. Perhaps this is because on the Mexican side themes such as immigration and narcotrafficking are problems that directly affect most of the population in very dramatic and direct ways. A sense of humor, black humor and parody is present in border choreographies from both sides, in particular as stereotypes about Mexicans are well known and thematized in *danzas fronterizas* coming from either side. In Mexico there is a tradition to deal with problems through a bitter laugh. The *danzas fronterizas* examined here have shown that the dancers' race complicates the choreographic process.

CONCLUSION

Danzar la Frontera: Performing the Borderland

One morning while waiting for my car at a mechanic's shop, one of the customers sitting near me, asked: are you a teacher? In response I asked how he knew. Smiling, he responded to me and to the clerk who was also in the waiting room that his work was to tell what people do for a living. Then the clerk said, "OK, what is my second job?" The muscular African American man responded: "Probably you are a guard or something like that." The clerk answered, "Amazing, very close."

The man then asked me, "Where do you work? You are probably tenured." I told him I was a graduate student at the University of California, Riverside. Then we both turned our gaze to our smart phones and for a while silence occupied the space. Suddenly he asked if I could guess *his* occupation. "Immigration officer," I replied. He looked at me directly, and it seemed that he had more questions. Then he asked how I knew.

I feigned surprise and said, "Well, aren't you an immigration officer?" He replied yes, and then he said quietly, "Well something along the lines." Then I explained to him that in learning dance studies and choreography we also study and interpret the meaning of movements. I realized he wanted to change the subject when he asked me what book I was reading. I turned the book over and showed him the front cover. He looked at the book and read, "Border Matters." Then he got up and left.

I live not far from the U.S-Mexico border and seeing immigration officers is common. That man at the shop was not dressed like one and his car was not from the

Border Patrol. I was correct in answering that he was an immigration officer, mainly because he said that his job was to study people and discern their occupations. In other words, he sees people and “can tell who they are.” It was an interesting experience to be writing about dance and the U.S.-Mexican border and have this encounter at the mechanic’s shop. Driving home I began making connections, between dance training and that of immigrations officers, reflecting on how both read the body’s movements. For me it was an uncomfortable and unexpected moment of realizing the similarity of our methods in such dissimilar occupations.

Since I was a child it was popular to believe that immigration officers could tell if you were lying just by looking at your eyes and the way you moved. As a dance scholar and choreographer I can use as a method of research movement/choreographic analysis that he as an immigration officer is also using as a method for corporeal movement analysis to prevent undocumented or criminal persons from entering the United States.

In the early stages of this project I have examined and written that: “issues of immigration, racism, smuggling, and narcotrafficking have generated problematic effects in interactions amongst members of dance communities on both sides of the border.” In the above statement placing the word immigration next to racism, smuggling, and narcotrafficking brings to mind the thought that these border practices reverberate in the significance of immigration by suggesting that immigration is negative. In the past decades, largely due to state discourses about immigration, that is what we often thought. We are part of a generation that forgot that there are other more benevolent meanings for immigration.

The Process of my Research

In this dissertation, I have presented and reflected about the production of *danzas fronterizas*. These dances expose the multiple narratives of social, economic, and political perspectives of the U.S.- Mexico borderland. My dissertation research has put into conversation dance studies with transborder studies from the perspective of a regular border crosser. This research included the *danzas fronterizas* that are produced and performed by choreographers and dancers in the San Diego-Tijuana region. These artists, regardless of how often they personally cross the border, show and document in their dances their experiences and perspectives as border artists. *Danzas fronterizas* on the stage reflect not only their social, economic, and political contexts but also occasionally rethink the border from the perspectives of the regional artists.

The movements and choreographic designs allude to and recreate the impact of the border in artistic productions and in the lives of border dwellers. The performers of these *danzas fronterizas* are often permeated by two cultures, thus creating a border dance culture. *Danzas fronterizas* can be seen as acts of resistance demonstrating that they argue against nationalistic tendencies, as I suggested in chapter two. By examining the cultural commentary of *danzas fronterizas*, I have tried to decipher how these dances are an insightful tool for understanding the U.S.-Mexican borderland.

I have set in conversation dance and border studies with the experiences of choreographers and dancers who regularly cross the border to explore what we can learn about choreography, collaboration, nation-states, and citizenship by using the border as a way of looking. The results of this research also suggest that border writers are interested

in different ways to approach the study of the border. In a video recorded by Christina L. Sisk, an associate professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston, the border scholar Maria Socorro Tabuenca Córdova noted that the tendency in the United States is to exclude the scholarly work produced about the U.S-Mexican border from those who write from México.¹³⁸ The following case supports Tabuenca's statement. Very early in my research I found online a Portable Document File, better known as a PDF, created by the University of California Santa Barbara. The document of thirty-eight pages is a bibliography of border studies. I saved the document thinking that it could be used for bibliographic guidance. Although most of my bibliography came from other recommended sources, this list serves to demonstrate that most of the recommended border bibliography in the United States comes from those who write from the American side of the border. I noted that most of the bibliography is written from the U.S. perspective because only 47 of the 504 works on this list were written by Mexican scholars from the North of Mexico.¹³⁹ Nonetheless, border scholars on both sides of the border and *danza fronteriza* artists are interested in topics related to the border, such as migration, immigration, narco-trafficking and violence. Other topics that are not as common in dance as in border studies are those related to health and urban development.

One of the reasons that border scholars in the United States do not often cite literature from Mexican border scholars is that in many cases they confront the problem

¹³⁸ Maria Socorro Tabuenca is the Academic Director for the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies and Professor of Spanish at The University of Texas at El Paso. Her recent research is on Juárez femicide and its impact on the media.

<http://vimeo.com/43013736>

¹³⁹ <http://www.research.ucsb.edu/ccs/biblio.pdf>

that not all are fully bilingual. Here danzas fronterizas could offer a cultural reading whereby enabling scholars to interpret the body movement.

Throughout this dissertation, I have emphasized the effects of the physical crossing of the border on the choreographers and dancers who are regular border crossers. As I have shown, the future of dance collaborations is at stake if the experience of physical border crossing becomes more difficult or exhausting. In the last few months, civil organizations in Mexico have demonstrated interest in binational collaborations. Cultural organizations in Tijuana have also shown renewed interest in connecting with artists from United States. Two examples are the *Festival Entijuanarte*, which this year is preparing their tenth anniversary, inviting the United States as guests to participate. One of the principal activities of the festival is to bring Robert Moses Kin, a contemporary choreographer from San Francisco to teach a workshop for 25 participants.¹⁴⁰

Additionally, the Orchestra of Baja California (OBC) has recently participated in a project called *Música sin Fronteras* (Music without Borders).¹⁴¹ In collaboration with San Diego Symphony, they played together at the Friendship Park near the U.S.-Mexico border. The event was organized to demonstrate how people and artists of different nationalities could come together, in addition to raising funds to help migrant children. This collaboration had a unique and telling scenario. Although each orchestra was playing on its own side of the border, they played together, because sound could travel to

¹⁴⁰ Entijuanarte is an annual cultural festival organized by a civil society.
<http://www.rotativo.com.mx/entretenimiento/cultura/326262-entijuanarte-2014-preparacion-lance-binacional-de-danza-contemporanea/>

¹⁴¹ <http://www.kusi.com/story/25951695/border-angels-and-history-making-concert-at-us-mexico-borders-friendship-park>

the other side of the border. But, by placing the orchestras on separate sides of the metal border fence, this performance showed how binational collaborations are still far from being a dynamic reality. The members of each company did not cross the border to play together. This performance also recalls how some *danzas fronterizas* have as a choreographic component a simulacrum of the metal border fence or an imaginary fence on stage.

Family at the Borderland

The experiences of my family and the artistic work of border dancers and choreographers have permeated this dissertation. I have paid attention to how our relation with the border across time has been impacted by the political relations between the United States and Mexico. From the time of my grandfathers, thanks to their sharing of oral histories, I have examined how the border has influenced their activities. My mother told me about her experiences as a classical Spanish dancer in San Francisco. Her story as a regular border crosser and mine are similar, but different in relation to the political and racially discriminatory conditions of our day-to-day lives. In her days, she remembers that Mexican-Americans could not enter restaurants. She recalls a sign at the entrance of the place where she worked in San Francisco, which said: “No dogs, No Blacks, No Mexicans.” She and the musicians could dance and play the instruments, but those of Mexican origin could not dine. Dance is what allowed my mother to cross the border in those racist times. Now, as a regular border crosser, I have a different experience even though racism is still present in this region: it works in different ways but it still exists.

New Latino comers, new immigrants, and undocumented persons are the new target. In chapter two, I explored how nowadays racism and the economy are related. My mother's experiences and mine show how a change in border culture has occurred, which has taken shape particularly in relationship to economics and immigration policy.

It is important to remember that once there were other ways of crossing the border. I remember my grandfather's stories of when, in 1950, his friend Angel gave a letter to the immigration officers to ask permission to enter the American territory to attend a reunion in Los Angeles, California, or when schools in Baja California would ask for a collective permit (for groups of students) to enter the United States so students could visit Disneyland, or when American citizens could cross the border only by declaring that they were American Citizens, no paper (document), no visa, no passports, only declaring that you are an "American Citizen." I believe that most people told the truth about this because their border crossing rights were at stake. My generation experienced the trust of the immigration officers who believed us when we said we were American citizens. Because of 9/11 however, American citizens now need a passport to be allowed to enter through the San Ysidro Port of Entry and all ports of entry. The political and economic relations that the government of the United States has developed with some Middle East countries and the acts of terrorism, like the Al Qaeda attack on September 11, 2001, have caused a profound change in border crossing. In what I have argued, the new, more complicated legal form of border crossing has diminished the collaborations between dancers and other artists living on either side of the Tijuana-San

Diego border, but at the same time it has encouraged the productions of *danzas fronterizas*.

Changes During my Research: *In Proceso* (In Process) and *La Familia Juárez* (The Juárez Family)

Through *danzas fronterizas* and the process of creating them, I came to understand situations about the border. For example, recall my discussion in chapter two of my experiences observing a few potential undocumented migrants lying down in similar way.¹⁴² When asked, one man's response indicated that migrants create ways of survival. In this case, the pose is intended to help migrants stay safe while sleeping by prompting the spectators to question whether they are asleep or awake. Also, the men laying down with their right arm over their eyes or forehead, and bending one knee, allows them to rest; however, at the same time they are ready to run, in case they need to chase a thief who took away their belongings. From my perspective, it was like seeing choreography, in which these men performed the pose of a future migrant waiting to cross the border. Analyzing their movement and pose gave me the opportunity to learn more about the culture at the border and to understand the bodies' coded cultural meaning.

While working on my dissertation, I participated in two events that gave me opportunities to reconsider my approach to border topics through dance: First, while

¹⁴² During the process of creating *Danza indocumentada*.

creating my recent choreography named *In Proceso* (2013), my change seemed radical because I did not ask the dancers to interpret “someone else,” for example, an (im)migrant. In previous dances they have portrayed, for instance, a woman staying home while her husband or son leaves to seek work in the United States. This time I asked the dancers to be themselves, to dance their experiences as border crossers.¹⁴³

Subsequently the dancers in rehearsal each reflected on the concept of *danzas fronterizas*. The dancer Ivone Morales suggested that *danzas fronterizas* offer unlimited forms of expression in contemporary dance, which ironically has no limits. She says that the recent productions of *danzas fronterizas* opened a space to reflect on the border. Now with the presentation of these dances, it is easier to understand the physical, emotional and the political issues related to the borders, whereas previously we saw them primarily through academic books about the border. *Danzas fronterizas* offered a framework of life on the border. Morales also saw the accessibility of dance to diverse audiences. The youngest dancer of the group, Tania Adame, believes that essentially *danzas fronterizas* challenge the dancers who will represent with their bodies the daily problems lived in border cities. She believes that to dance a *danza fronteriza* is a great responsibility since the topics may be related to someone in our family or at least the subjects near to us. She adds that because she is used to living near the border she pays little attention, but that *danzas fronterizas* make her see and understand border images in relation to the economy and politics of Mexico and the United States. As a dancer, Adame says that “*danzas fronterizas* allow me to feel empathy towards those who I am representing on the stage.

¹⁴³ On April 2013, I started to choreograph *In Proceso* in Tijuana.

The simple fact of living in the city of Tijuana causes me to have an intense relationship with *danzas fronterizas* and their subjects.” The dancer Melissa Loza believes that *danzas fronterizas* challenge the viewer, the choreographer, the dancer, and our society. Loza says that with these dances she is challenged as a performer and adds that dance is the means that gives her tools with which she will communicate a social event about the border.

She feels challenged by how her body, movement, and interpretation could have the power to lead the audience towards reflection. Loza was born in Tijuana, and believes that she has a relationship with *danzas fronterizas* because she is a product of the border. The dancer Gustavo Nava says that *danzas fronterizas* exist because borders exist and because there are artists with sensitivity to communicate topics about the border. Nava said that he first heard the term *danzas fronterizas* in the context of Tapia’s work. Nava adds that dancing *danzas fronterizas* caused him to analyze other aspects of his life through the lens of the border. Hearing his opinions about *danzas fronterizas*, and thinking about their relation to the border has helped me recognize the relation that I have to the border, which most of the time speaks from the South. I also see how American choreographers in San Diego gave light to the problems faced by Mexicans, such is the case of Nancy McCaleb in *La Rumorosa* (see chapter three).

The second event was the task of re-staging a *danza fronteriza* called *La familia Juárez* (the Juárez family). This piece premiered in 2004 and deals with the social problem of female homicides in the Mexican border city of Ciudad Juárez. During the process of re-staging this piece, I asked how this dance’s thematic has changed. What

about the presentation of this topic needed to be adjusted to match the current reality? On the other side, in relation to the aesthetic I did feel the need to adjust some sections of the choreography's movement for it to remain relevant for a new generation of dancers who now participate in my group. On stage, *La familia Juárez* shows the women of Juárez alive. I wanted to remember them when they were alive, before they were victims of femicide. Through this representation of the women of Juárez, the corporeal dancing suggests the victim's current presence as a way of reminding the audience that those young women once had a future. Dance allows me to exalt their humanity and their potential as young women. The vivacity of jumps, turns, glances, suggests their materiality. The many deaths of these women and the little effort the government has made to solve their problem of *feminicidios*, suggests that these women are still seen as less than human beings. The images of their dead bodies, dumped in desolated places, do not occupy a space in my work although those images initially provoked my interest on this problem. In presenting this border dance, I suggest with movement that these women are not dead, while the problem still persists.

With the re-staging of *La familia Juárez* I began to ask how cultural tastes changed, dance aesthetics changed, and most importantly how did the social, economic, and political issues addressed by this work changed and could be re-enforced in this new production. Working in this *danza fronteriza* has given me the opportunity to re-think my aesthetic changes, to make changes in the production, and re-evaluate the topic in a new context, paying attention to the culturally specific contexts of production.

In the previous version of *La familia Juárez*, I had focused my attention in the women of Juárez, but in this second version I have added a male dancer to the choreography. I wanted to address how men had a responsibility in this social issue. The male in this choreography represents two things: (1) the invisibility of the fathers of the victims and (2) the representation of a patriarchal society in which powerful men in government pay little attention to the issue.

The thematic of gender violence related to the women of Juárez has been addressed in multiple academic and non-academic works on both sides of the borderland (Lugo 2008; Valenzuela 2012b). While reconstructing this *danza fronteriza*, sadly, I saw that the female homicides (femicides) in Ciudad Juárez had not stopped; not only that, the problem has spread to other cities in México, as the national news of México recently declared. In *Sed de Mal* (2012b), José Manuel Valenzuela Arce suggests that the problem of the femicide can persist only if there is a patriarchal order, one which perpetuates this violence with the implied complicity of the State (2012b: 52). Valenzuela writes that border scenarios during the last three decades have been characterized by the creation of conditions of exclusion, vulnerability, insecurity and helplessness. Many people were pushed into prostration and abandonment, marginal situations that rendered them expendable and disposable; this is especially true of the women and adolescent victims of violent femicide and juvenicida that grew uncontrollably in the country (2012b: 39). Still, ten years after the premiere of *La familia Juárez*, its content reverberates with Valenzuela's 2012 research.

Valenzuela adds that femicides question the biological and sexual conditions as causes of women's oppression, which is a position that places the historical and social construction of inequalities between men and women. Femicides also highlight the economic structures that generate specific social processes marked by the social division of labor, the lack of redistribution of economic surplus and the creation of new social divisions and antagonisms, where the family is seen as an institution that reflects and reproduces class dominance (2012b: 40).

Future Inquiry: *Tolerancia Amnésica* or Not Remembering as a Tool of Surviving Border Crossing

During the writing of this dissertation, I have continuously crossed the San Ysidro Port of Entry and I have witnessed the multiple changes at this site. The space has diverse types of mechanisms to stop you from entering the United States. There are spikes on the ground, gigantic doors into secondary inspection zones, and the one that gives me a feeling that I have been damaged—the x-rays. All this in addition to the traditional long lines of cars waiting for hours to cross the border, and the many other types of mechanisms to stop the “border people” from entering or to allow them to be scrutinized by an immigration officer.¹⁴⁴ Under the x-ray machine I feel so hopeless, sad and worried, but as soon as I pass through it, there is no more thinking about this humiliating process. This idea of “amnesia” as a tool for surviving the border is one that could be investigated by other scholars in the future and myself. I believe that regular border

¹⁴⁴ “Border people” is how Américo Paredes named those who remained in the interstium between México and the United States (Besserer 2008: 21).

crossers are able to keep crossing the U.S.-Mexican border without increasing feelings of sadness and resentment because we forget our experiences. I believe that while it may be necessary to forget, it is also important to remember, not with the purpose of recreating the bad feelings, but with the purpose of examining the characteristics of the border that choreographers and dancers later could re-evaluate in their art. *Danzas fronterizas* are a form of remembering the effects of the border on both, those who cross the border and those who do not.

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