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BUSCANDO LA ARMONÍA: PERFORMANCE, EMBODIMENT, AND INDIGENEITY IN *LA DANZA AZTECA*

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Elisa Diana Huerta

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The Dissertation of Elisa Diana Huerta
is approved:

_____
Professor Olga Nájera-Ramírez, chair

_____
Professor Nancy Chen

_____
Professor Donald Brenneis

_____
Quentin Williams
Acting Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

Buscando la armonía: Performance, Embodiment, and Indigeneity in *la danza azteca*
Elisa Diana Huerta

This dissertation explores ceremonial and performative aspects of the dance tradition *danza azteca* in the United States and Mexico. Engaging questions of authenticity, representation, and identity formation within this transnational expressive cultural production, this study is interested in public and private articulations of indigeneity as expressed through embodied practice and performance. Specifically, this study engages with the ways in which the body becomes a key site through which *danzantes* (dancers) negotiate and construct indigeneity for themselves and others.

A dance tradition rooted in communities located in the central valleys of present-day Mexico, the heart of which is the ever-expanding urban hub of Mexico City, *danza azteca* is a synergetic dance tradition; an amalgamation of pre-Columbian and contemporary choreographies, Mexica (Azteca) and Roman Catholic iconographies, ceremony and spectacle, ritual prayer and public performance. Despite severe and often violent restrictions placed on indigenous social and religious practices during the Spanish Colonial period, it is possible to trace the evolution of *danza azteca* from pre-Columbian times to today. Of particular interest to this study is the adoption and performance of *danza azteca* by individuals and communities affiliated, directly or indirectly, with the Chicano Civil Rights Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, a time of heightened political, social and cultural activism among persons of Mexican heritage living in the (southwestern) United States. During this time, an explicit politic of indigeneity proved

central to cultural nationalist responses formulated by Chicanas and Chicanos to oppressive and exploitative processes of marginalization affecting communities throughout Greater Mexico. A fully embodied form, *danza azteca* provides a unique space in which dancers are able to explicitly claim and articulate indigenous belief systems through movement. Even as social and political gains have been made in and for many communities, Chicana/o nationalist discourses continually fall short of breaking with hegemonic notions of gender and racial formations and in many cases, serve to further marginalize sectors of the Chicana/o and Mexican/o communities, namely women and indigenous peoples.

Through the use of ethnographic methods, such as participant-observation, interviews, and reflexive analysis, this multi-sited study traces the embodied expressive cultural form of *danza azteca* as an important and contested site of identity formation, corporeal epistemology, and healing for communities throughout Greater Mexico.

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Tlazocamati huel miac

CHAPTER ONE
Aperturas y entradas: Frameworks for the Study of *Danza Azteca* in the U.S. and México

Metro Zócalo (2005)

As the doors of the new, streamlined, semi-air conditioned trains slide open, I move, or perhaps more accurately, am moved, out into the humid and chaotic metro station in a mass exodus of vendors, students, business people, and overwhelmed tourists. The sounds of laughing, shouting, singing, and talking reverberate off of the station's tiled walls and travel with me as I ascend a staircase that I hope will lead me out onto *la Plaza de la Constitución*, or *"el Zócalo*." The *Zócalo*, a large brick plaza, sits at the heart of Mexico City's *Centro Histórico*. As I emerge from the underground metro station into the bright openness of the *Zócalo*, my eyes fixate on the huge Mexican flag hanging from the plaza's soaring central flagpole and the fabric's reluctant movements in the early afternoon breeze. The sounds and smells of the metro station quickly fade into the cacophony of activity on the open-air platform. Cars maneuver their way around stopped taxis, tourists, and mobile venders in a counter-clockwise motion on the three-lane street that encircles the *Zócalo*. Across this busy street, sit government buildings and what is now deemed an "archeological" site, the *Templo Mayor*. It was once better known as *Huey Teocalli*, the principle temple first built by the *Mexica* shortly after their arrival and founding of Tenochtitlan. Later, I am told that the foundation for the *Zócalo* itself is provided by the *Templo Mayor*, large parts of which the Spanish deconstructed for use in building the Metropolitan Cathedral, the seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of *México*, located just west of the *Templo Mayor* museum. This collection of structures,

governmental buildings, cathedral, plaza, and temple remind me of what Uruguayan author, Eduardo Galeano (1997) calls "the open veins of Latin America." This is a place of remnants and monuments of settlement, colonialism, and governmental power: doings, undoings, re-doings.

Walking through the *Zócalo*, I attempt to catalog the activities around me: an encampment in front of the *Palacio Municipal* of agricultural workers from Oaxaca protesting recent military violence in their home villages, an old man giving *limpias* (cleansings) to waiting customers for a suggested donation of twenty pesos, young men pushing carts selling fruit and potato chips covered in *chile* and lime juice, a sea of impromptu vendors selling everything from music and hand-made jewelry to out-of-print books and t-shirts. And, above everything, there is the sound of a drum. I'm wrong, there is more than one drum. I quickly scan the plaza in an attempt to locate myself in relation to the drumming. I am able to recognize three distinct groupings of dancers along the sides of the plaza facing the Cathedral and *Palacio Municipal*. At the center of each gathering, it is possible to see the movement of long feathers and the sound of hand and ankle rattles rising up to meet the sound of the drums. With each of my visits here, I have begun to slowly teach myself how to decipher the rhythm of one drum from another, especially as the rhythms blend into each other and, in turn, get lost in the hundreds of conversations and shouting matches simultaneously taking place. Joining the closest gathering of spectators, I see a small group of *danzantes* in motion and wonder how this *danza* is related to the *danza* I am already familiar with back home, the *danza* at public

protests and graduation ceremonies, and the *danza* of private ceremonies whose long history on this continent is unknown to the many people who continue to practice it.

* * *

Project Overview and Rationale

Danza azteca exists as a significant mode of expressive cultural production throughout México and the United States. In this dissertation, I interrogate participation in *danza azteca* to illuminate processes of representation, identification, and historical and cultural recuperation in relation to theories of cultural performance and embodiment. I contend that the multi-layered practices involved in the performance of *danza azteca* offer particularly rich sites for examining the articulation, negotiation, and contestation of cultural citizenship (Rosaldo 1997), belonging, and articulations of indigeneity[1] throughout Greater México (Paredes 1977). Central to this project is the conceptualization of constructions and performances of indigeneity through and within *danza* spaces as complex configurations of cultural-national sentiments, oppositional consciousness toward racist objectification, and a means of to respond to *desbalances sociales*, socio-cultural disparities. My rationale in seeking to understand the social, cultural, and political implications of constructions and performances of indigeneity is two-fold: (1) to flesh out pedagogical discourses and praxis that crystalize and characterize discourses of indigeneity in Greater Mexico, especially as they affect gender

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I use the term "indigeneity" to refer to representations, actions, and performances rooted in and expressing "indigenous" identities.

relations, representations of sexuality, and articulations of cultural pluralism,[2] and (2) to further problematize the legacy and possible futures for the term Chicana/o as an identity category.[3]

Since the U.S. Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, the celebration and recuperation of indigenous ancestries have been central to the formulation of counter-hegemonic socio-political projects. In many cases, Chicana/o ancestries have been traced back to the *Azteca-Mexica* civilizations occupying the central valley of *México* at the time of European invasion. While this particular genealogical construction has been vigorously questioned, especially in terms of cultural essentialism and pervasive patriarchal ideologies, it remains a dominant narrative within many communities, as it was foundational to classic Chicano nationalist philosophies.

Touted as a critical space for the development of oppositional consciousness and a sense of belonging, *danza azteca* groups emphasize the importance for Chicanas and Chicanos to recuperate what they understand as an indigenous heritage and identity. For this reason, and because *danza azteca* has a rich public life (e.g. celebrations, community ceremonies, graduations, protests, etc), the tradition of *danza azteca* is an important medium through which dancers and non-dancers alike lay claim to and embody collective

[2] Anna Nieto-Gómez, Marta Cotera, and Alma García's (1997) anthology *Chicana feminist thought: the basic historical writings*, have made important interventions and critiques of sexist and heterosexist discourses with Chicano nationalisms that inform my formulation of this project.

[3] Much work has been done to both problematize and refigure the term Chicana/o, which has been contested and redefined for decades. Originally deployed in the battle to claim the right to self-determination and as a means to call attention to the oppressive and racist practices openly occurring in the U.S. (Zavella 1997, 45), the term also took on problematic sentiments of paternalism, homophobia, sexism and nationalism. Here, I draw on the work of Norma Alarcón (1990), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Cherríe Moraga (1993), Patricia Zavella (1997) and José Limón (1981).

Indigenous ancestry[4]. *Danza azteca* participants sensually embody (Stoller 1997)—through their physical movements, *trajes* (regalia), music, the ceremonial burning of copal and sage—their understandings of indigeneity. Key to *danza azteca* epistemologies is the concept of knowing, learning, and praying through the body, which I will further examine in subsequent sections.

In this dissertation, I contextualize Chicana/o indigeneity within various social phenomena, such as migration, transnational cultural production, and issues of self-determination and sovereignty that were evident in the late 1960s, but in recent years have become more salient and pervasive. Specifically, heightened anti-immigrant discourses on an international level, the continued disenfranchisement of and violence against indigenous communities, especially indigenous women, and a return to conservative, xenophobic educational[5] curricula throughout the U.S. Driving forces behind this project have been my own experiences as a cultural activist as well as the stark lack of academic resources directly engaged with my central areas of inquiry. While there are some videos that address this topic, relatively few scholarly articles, and even fewer monographs,[6] have been dedicated to the subject of *danza azteca* in relation to Chicana/o indigeneity.

[4] The question of indigenous ancestry, its meanings, rights and privileges, is highly contested throughout the Ámericas; since "first" European contact, throughout the colonial period, and well into today. This topic is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.
[5] As an example, the Texas State Board of Education's decision to create new educational standards in 2010 that lead to highly politicized and conservative leaning revisions to statewide curriculum (e.g. minimizing/erasing any negative effects of slavery, discrediting Native American rights, stereotypic and xenophobic depictions of Mexicans, etc).
[6] Please see the bibliography for specific references.

My investigation is three-fold: first, I explore the evolution of *danza* practices in the United States and Mexico through a cross-border analysis that excavates the social, political and historical contexts in which it has developed; second, I examine how *danza azteca*, as an embodied practice, serves as a rubric for knowledge and cultural production; and third, I consider how various groups (Mexican *danzantes*, Native American dancers, Chicana/o *danzantes*, audience members, etc.) experience, engage, and disengage with discourses of indigeneity through *danza*.

Eschewing questions that interrogate the validity of claims to indigenous ancestries, my overarching research concern is to explore how and for what reasons Chicanas/os and Mexicanas/os have mobilized various representations of indigeneity through the practice of *danza azteca*. Research questions that are central to this project are:

1) How does the practice and performance of *danza* azteca create and re-create understandings and articulations of indigeneity *within Greater México, particularly for* Chicana/os?
2) What are the epistemological connections between physical body movements and social movements?
3) What are the social and political implications for the formulation of Chicana/o subjectivities? Specifically, how have *Azteca-Mexica* origin narratives been used to push forward political agendas? And where are they being deployed in

ways that reify static understandings --"museumization" [7]--of indigenous communities?

A critical site of inquiry for this line of questioning would be the various processes of socialization within *danza azteca* groups, especially as they monitor and restrict the roles women can take in the dances and accompanying ceremonies. At times, *Azteca-Mexica* philosophical tenets have been inaccurately used to reinforce the relegation of women to marginal roles within *danzas* and ceremonies. The cultural, political, and social landscapes in Greater Mexico[8] have changed tremendously since *danza azteca* was first popularized and these shifts have encouraged the production of new problematics. For this reason, I have found it necessary to draw upon a diverse set of literatures for theoretical and methodological grounding. I will primarily engage with scholarship across Cultural Anthropology, Latin American Studies, Native American Studies, and Cultural Studies.

***Danza Azteca*: Praxis and Theory**

> Systems of classification and representation enable different traditions or fragments of traditions to be retrieved and reformulated in different contexts as discourses, and then to be played out in systems of power and domination, with real material consequences for colonized peoples.
>
> -Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999, 44)

[7] The term "museumization" references the notion that while "past" indigenous populations have been "honored" through displays in places like museums, contemporary communities continue to be largely disenfranchised. This results in dominant discourses that perpetuate stereotypical, stagnant and often uni-dimensional understandings of indigenous peoples. See Saldaña-Portillo (2001).

[8] Now referred to more often as the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Greater Mexico captures the cultural, social, and political uniqueness and connectedness of communities within the U.S. southwest and northern Mexico. This term and its importance is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

In this dissertation, I engage with *danza azteca* practices and performances in two principal ways. In the first instance, I am interested in the practice of *danza azteca* itself and how those who participate in *danza azteca* understand the practice. How do *danzantes* and non-*danzantes* define *danza azteca*? What do particular choreographies signify socially and culturally? How do participants understand *danza azteca* as affecting other parts of their lives? What brought them to *danza*? If they've been involved for a long time, why have they continued to dance? Do *danzantes* differentiate between performance and spiritual practice and beliefs? This line of inquiry resonates more closely with traditional anthropological and performance studies that tend to focus on issues of choreography (Kaeppler 1978, Reed 1998, Sklar 2001) and ritual (Turner 1995).

In the second instance, I am interested in how *danza azteca* has figured and continues to figure into the creation and maintenance of indigenous subjectivities, specifically Chicana/o. Thus, I consider how, through *danza azteca*, dancers and non-dancers alike, express what it means to claim an indigenous heritage. These kinds of conversations have most often been taken up in literary and poetic form (e.g., Anzaldúa 1987; Gonzales 2003; Gonzales and Rodriguez 1997). Such works are important to this project as they have been a central medium through which Chicanas and Chicanos articulate, claim, and express indigenous ancestry. *Danza azteca* is also an important expressive form in that it allows for different articulations of indigeneity that add nuance to our understanding of Chicana/o indigenous formations, primarily in terms of issues of embodiment.

With this project, I explore a number of socio-cultural and political tensions and conceptual issues that exist within the praxis and theoretical understandings of *danza azteca* in both the U.S. and Mexico. These include: (1) the creation of sites of differential oppositional consciousness (Sandoval 1991); (2) issues of representation and authenticity (Paredes 1977); (3) the exploration of culture as process (culture as unbounded, fluid, ever-changing and diverse, Rosaldo 1993); and (4) the politics of embodiment (Csordas 1990; Chen 2003).

Performing Culture: The social significance of performance

The anthropological work on performance is expansive. Performance as enactment (Abrahms 1977), aesthetic practices (Bourdieu 1990; Kapchan 1995) and social constructions (Schieffelin 1985) are among the most ubiquitous metaphors within anthropological writings on performance. A central, and basic, contention of performance theory is that performances are meaningful (Schieffelin 1985; Kapchan 1995; Mendoza 2000; Morris 1995; Sklar 2001a; Bauman & Briggs 1990). However, the ways in which they are meaningful and how meaning is made vary widely and are dependent on a variety of factors, including how and for whom they are produced. Performances, in general, are rich sites through which social meaning is both conveyed and constructed (Bauman 1986; Flores 1995). Key to this point is Kapchan's (1995) insistence that performances are intersubjective (483) and intertextual (482), therefore engendering negotiations within the politics of identity.

In the fields of anthropology and folklore, Richard Bauman (1986) outlines a useful and succinct way of understanding performance that consists of three categories: (1) performance as practice; (2) poetics and oral performance; (3) and cultural performance (132-140). The first category, performance as practice, consists of both informal or "everyday" acts and practices, and formal, or purposeful practices (Bauman 1986). Scholars who utilize the performance-as-practice model often theoretically ground their writings in the work of Bourdieu (1990). Practices in this case can include "patterns of behavior, ways of speaking, [and] manners of bodily comportment" (Kapchan 1995, 479). Bauman acknowledges the work of Clifford Geertz (1973) and his use of the term "performance" to discuss a range of symbolic and aesthetic forms and the symbolic constitution of social life (Bauman 1986, 131-132).

In the 1970's, anthropological and folkloristic studies of linguistics and language began to employ the notion of performance in their work (Paredes 1977, 1979; Abrahams 1977). The theoretical resonations of this shift continue to the present day. Bauman and Briggs (1990) call for the shift from studying "poetics and politics of performative acts" to studying "poetics of discourse" (60-63). This change of focus allows for a number of theoretical shifts to occur; namely, it allows speech and other performative acts to be historicized; it enables the situation of local performances with nexuses of power; and finally it illuminates discursive practices that mediate between institutional structures and situated performances (79-80). Other scholars contributing to this field of study are Donald Brenneis (1987) in his ethnographic analysis of non-discursive features of performance genres in Bhatgaon; Roger Abrahams (1981) on display events in Texas;

and the work of Jonathan Xavier Inda (2000) on speech acts and utterance as discursively tied to the racialization of bodies.

The third category of performance that Bauman (1986) outlines is that of cultural performances. Such performances are a means for members of a community or society to display their culture for both themselves and others (133). Cultural performances, as coined by Martin Singer (1972, 10-75), are symbolic forms through which fundamental meanings and values are acted out and embodied. They include forms such as festivals, fairs, ceremonies, rituals and other spectacles and are both reflexive (ibid.) and repetitive (Kapchan 1995, 479). These repetitions and reflections are highly stylized and speak to social understandings of "nationalism, ethnicity, class status or gender" (ibid). To this list I would add, notions of sexuality and sexual comportment.

Speaking on the idea of the social significance of cultural performances, Olga Nájera-Ramírez (1997a) writes, in reference to the festival of *Los Tastoanes*, "[s]ince cultural performances involve intense participation in the display, reflection, and interpretation of the central meanings and values of a group, cultural performances also constitute important sites for analyzing the cultural process" (6). Richard Flores' (1994) work on the folk drama *Los Pastores* is also relevant here. In his ethnographic analysis, Flores argues that struggles over the production and reproduction of culture are situated in the social formation contextually evoked by performances. This would suggest that social meaning can be understood both within the texts of the performance as well as the events that happen around the performance (Flores 1994, 270). In the case of this research, I am interested in what, how, where, and why *danza* evokes memory, re-

memberings, tension, and possibility through its choreographies, public/private life, as well as through the dancers themselves and the families and communities that provide the infrastructure for its persistence.

Performance & Embodiment: a Consideration of the Anthropology of Dance

While my project seeks to interrogate the notion of embodiment through all the senses, the ways in which anthropologists theorize embodiment in relation to movement in dance is centrally important. The majority of recent ethnographies on dance focus on movement (as opposed to and/or only sometimes in relation to other senses) as a primary form of embodiment (Sklar 2001a; Cowan 1990; Desmond 1994; Novack 1990; Foster 1992). These works mark a significant shift in the anthropology of dance. In her book *The Anthropology of Dance*, Royce (1977) outlines how dance was mentioned in early ethnographic text only if it was directly related to the psychological state of individuals, as in Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1971, 25). Royce marks the 1930s as a watershed time in the anthropology of dance as more and more scholars began to consider dance a "treasure chest" of cultural knowledge (1977, 27). This shift is marked by the juxtaposition of dance and work being done on social drama (ibid). In these texts, we see a heightened awareness of the social context within which dance is occurring and, in some instances, the context, rather than the technical aspects of the dance, is the central focus of the ethnographic analysis (Royce 1977, 36; Mitchell 1956; Cowan 1990). Turning back to more recent works on dance, the emphasis has been to document and analyze specific physical movements. Jane Desmond (1994) argues that anthropologists

of dance must take seriously the dance moves themselves before they are able to do a credible socio-cultural analysis (44).

Following Margaret Lock's (1993) criticism of the lack of theorization of bodies, Susan Reed (1998) challenges the peripheral positioning of *moving* bodies within anthropological literatures (504). Movement analysis is indeed critical to understanding how embodied social and cultural knowledges are produced and preformed. For example, Desmond's (1994) work on dance highlights the ways in which class and region are embodied in movement (43). It must also be noted that, throughout the Spanish colonial era, indigenous dance and movement were considered both socially immoral and politically threatening (Reed 1998, 504).

Dance can be theorized in any number of ways, but the social significance of dance movements is clear when we take into consideration how particular bodies come to stand in for nationalist discourses, as in the case of the *tango* or *samba* (Reed 1998, 511). Dance can be understood as an embodied discourse, through which notions of identity, culture, gender, individuality, and collectivity can be articulated (Foster 1992, 362). Cynthia Novack's (1990) work on contact improvisation offers a rich case study of the relationship between audience and performer that signals a shared set of cultural expectations for both groups (Novack 1990, 24), a phenomenon that resonates with Brenneis' (1987) work in Bhatgaon.

Anthropology of the Body: Theories of Embodiment

Anthropological research on the body has deepened over the past few decades. Even as the body has long been an interest of anthropologists, Lock (1993) reminds us that, while there has been much anthropological work on topics that "implicate the body," few take the next step of actually theorizing the body (133-134).

Embodiment has been used in anthropological literature to refer to the historical, cultural, and social aliveness of bodies (Lock 1993). Csordas (1990) argues that embodiment is an important paradigm for anthropological theorization on culture and the self (Csordas 1990, 5). He argues that the body is not an object to be studied, but it should instead be considered as a subject of culture (ibid). Speaking against the Cartesian mind-body distinction, Csordas argues that personal perception of the body and its sensations allows attention to our situatedness in collective practices, thus inspiring new anthropological questions about experience, culture, and perception (ibid 42). Treating embodiment as an anthropological paradigm enables anthropologists to break down sharp nature-culture divides by situating perception and "self processes" within cultural contexts (Geurts 2002, 250).

Bourdieu's rearticulation of Mauss' concept of *habitus* is conceptualized through and in the repetition of bodily practices (Lock 1993, 137). It is within this connection between everyday life and body practices that theories of embodiment are grounded. Citing Jackson's (1983) work on Kuranko initiation rites, Lock argues that body practices mediate individual realizations of social values (ibid). In addition to phenomenological studies based on the work of scholars such as Merleau-Ponty (1962), ethnographic work

on embodiment in terms of felt experiences and the senses (Feld 1991; Howes 1991; Kuipers 1991) are important to my understanding of theories of embodiment as they relate to my dissertation project.

The body can be an important site for the expression of political consciousness (Comaroff 1985; Kondo 1990). But, to ethnographers, not only are the bodies of the people being studied important. So, too, are the bodies of ethnographers themselves and the ways in which we sense and perceive (Paredes 1977; Nájera-Ramírez 1999). These must also be considered within embodied methodologies. Deploying embodiment theory in the realm of ethnographic practice, Stoller (1993 and 1997) argues that anthropologists have lost their senses and are disconnected from the worlds they seek to portray (Stoller 1993, 635). He challenges the West's extreme emphasis on the visual and urges a shift to a sensual ethnography that evokes the smells, sounds, tastes, and movements that anthropologists represent (Stoller 1997; Geurts 2002). With his model of "sensuous scholarship," Paul Stoller "attempt(s) to reawaken profoundly the scholar's body" (xv). He argues:

> In anthropology…it is especially important to incorporate into ethnographic works the sensuous body-its smells, tastes, textures and sensations. Such inclusion is especially paramount in the ethnographic description of societies in which Eurocentric notions of text- and of textual interpretations- is not important (xv).

Sklar (1994) proposes to put the researcher's own body at the "point of access to corporeal knowledge in cultural practice" (Sklar 1994, 11). This body-centered ethnographic approach is an attempt to understand the intertwining of cultural knowledge, corporeality, and emotion through a methodology she calls *kinesthetic*

empathy (12-15). Kinesthetic empathy is the capacity to participate in another's movements and embody their experiences in order to understand the immediate knowledge and experience of the bodily expressions (14). Recent anthropological scholarship work on the body has both deepened and expanded conversations and approached to understanding "the body" in important ways. For example, Sarah Horton's work on the Affordable Care Act (2014), Zoë Wool's work on war and post-traumatic stress syndrome (2015), and Seth Holm's on embodied ethnic hierarchies of farm work (2013) each offer, detailed tracings of the impact and structures of trauma and injury, as well as the need and opportunities for care and possibilities of healing.

In relation to these anthropological approaches to embodiment, Diana Taylor's work on memory and cultural performance in the Americas reminds us of the profound violence colonial policies had and continue to have on spiritual, cultural, and historical productions of knowledge. She identifies this violence as being fundamentally rooted in a rift between the "archive and the repertoire, where the archive consists of "supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones)" and a *repertoire* "of embodied practice/knowledge (ie. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual" (19). In this dichotomy, the "archivable" is privileged over the experiential and embodied. Taylor notes, "Nonverbal practices- such as dance, ritual, and cooking, to name a few-that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory, were not considered valid forms of knowledge" (18). *Danza azteca* is just such a practice.

Field Sites & Methodology

> All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others.
>
> - Renato Rosaldo,*Culture and Truth* (1993, 8)

* * *

> *How does one begin to write about danza? Before pen hits paper, the slightest of hesitation comes as my gaze moves from the concentric circle of dancers and community members, to my notebook. What, of this complex and composite embodied ritual, can be written? How does one translate to paper the way that the drum pulls at your chest and copal shifts your breath? The goal here cannot be for completeness; instead an optimistic hope prevails that the moments, evocations that can be held for the slightest and longest of moments can help to create an ethnographic assemblage that brings reader, writer, dancer that much closer to the geography of dissonance and harmony generated by the dance.*
>
> *(Fieldnotes, Santa Cruz, 2005)*

* * *

Me: *Me das permiso para usar nuestra conversacion para mi tésis doctoral?*

Luna: *En que sentido?*
Me: *La información y la plát…*
Luna: *Mira, todo lo que estoy compartiendo aquí lo puedes usar. Lo único que te pido es que no cambies las cosas.*

Me: Do you give me permission to use our conversation for my dissertation?
Luna: In what sense?
Me: The information and convers…
Luna: Look, you can use everything that I'm sharing here. The only thing that I ask is that you don't change things.

(Interview, Summer 2005, San Antonio)

* * *

We are long out of the age where anthropologists and ethnographers exist in monographs and studies solely as objective vessels through which information is

transmitted, and rarely interrupted. As Luna[9] notes at the beginning of our interview (excerpt above), she is open to sharing her story, as long as I do not change it. This request, and warning, is one that I encountered frequently throughout my research. Most, if not all, of the *danzantes* and community members I interviewed had strong understandings, and critiques, of who anthropologists are, what they do, and what (harm) they have done, particularly in terms of European colonial and imperial projects throughout the Ámericas. At the same time, I had few people deny my request for an interview. In fact, many interviewees made priceless introductions and connections for me to other community members and dancers, which both greatly facilitated my research process and helped me to better understand the inner workings of relationships and networks. Everyone that I conducted formal interviews with were generous with their time, stories, re-directions, and encouragements for me and the project. They also often reminded me that often work done in the name of "research" has had detrimental effects on the communities within which anthropologists (and other scholars) circulate, especially when research agendas come in direct conflict with community needs and scholarly analyses lead to misrepresentations of sacred practices and traditions. In many conversations I answered as many questions as I asked; often questions centered around my own experiences in *danza,* my experiences as a Chicana in graduate school, and my experience as a Mexicana in the U.S.

Ethnographic methodologies are central to the conceptualization and deployment of this project. When coupled with other methodological approaches, such as archival

[9] Pseudonym

research and oral history, ethnography allows for qualitative analytical nuance. As a researcher, I find ethnographic methods to be simultaneously compelling and fraught. In one instance, it is compelling for the possibilities it creates for collaborative research between researcher and informants. Additionally, ethnographic methods and analyses allow for the complexities of experiences, fluidity of cultural production, and contradictions within lived experiences to exist within texts. In many ways, because of exactly such possibilities, ethnographic approaches can be equally fraught. Throughout the course of this research, I experienced many moments of internal and external tension. The hyper-presence of seminar and panel debates and dialogues about the (im)possibility of objectivity; the ever-shifting gap between "participant" and "observer" within participant observation were my constant companions at field sites and in conversations with my interlocutors. The meanings of my own identity as a queer, Chicana activist and scholar shifted continually and acutely in and with each field site. Additionally, I shifted from a non-dancer to a regular participant in *danza ensayo* and ceremony to a drummer and back to a non-dancer. These were necessary shifts, perhaps, and as I'll explain in later chapters, came at the invitation of and were encouraged by *danzantes* I met through this research, as well as long-time friends. What has become clear to me is that these tensions are important to this narrative; I am inextricably *in* this story. Referencing Deleuze and Guattari (1972), Alex E. Chavez (2017) eloquently writes, "my ethnographic process thus acknowledges the lack of division between the subjectivity of the ethnographer, ethnographic writing, and the world itself" (22).

In an attempt to be attentive to the complexity of doing ethnographic research within both the U.S. and Mexico as a Chicana, I have found the work of Patricia Zavella (1993) and Olga Nájera-Ramírez (1997 to be invaluable. Upon reflecting on her multiple experiences of being a Chicana ethnographer doing work with "Chicana informants," Zavella (1993) offers valuable insight to the complications of identification and assumed similarities between the researcher and her informants. She writes, "In contesting the dominant discourses about women … we must not be seduced into thinking that our work is without its own contradictions" (56). Additionally, Zavella's conception of Chicana feminist ethnography plays a central role in my configuration of this project. As such, I hope to "present more nuanced, fully contextualized, pluralistic self-identities of women, both as informants and as researchers" (Zavella 1993, 57). In her writing on personal encounters in fieldwork, Nájera-Ramírez (1997) also speaks to the complications of "insider" fieldwork. Drawing on the work of Américo Paredes (1977), Nájera-Ramírez addresses the ways in which her multiple identities (Mexican American, "single" woman, teacher, researcher) both facilitated and complicated her ability to conduct research in Jocotán.

Throughout this research, and now in my writing, I have struggled at times to embrace an approach that both acknowledges and centers multiplicity and incompleteness. In her book *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994), Kamala Visweswaran, my first professor of Anthropology as an undergraduate at UT Austin, writes, "Ethnography, like fiction, no matter its pretense to present a self-contained narrative or cultural whole, remains incomplete and detached from the realms to which it

points" (1). My attempt in this research is to offer moments of interactions, connections, dis-connections, across and within particular times and places, in order to answer many of my own questions about identity and belonging.

Methodologically, I employ the practice of processual analysis throughout my research. Rosaldo (1993) describes it this way: "Processual analysis resists frameworks that claim a monopoly on truth. It emphasizes that culture requires study from a number of perspectives, and that these perspectives cannot necessarily be added together into a unified summation" (93). Within his urging to study culture from a variety of perspectives, I find the rationale for the configuration of my own project that seeks to study, from a variety of perspectives, expressive cultural productions and the communities that participate in their formulation. Furthering this notion of processual analysis, Sampaio and Vélez-Ibáñez (2002) explain, "By 'processual' we mean focusing on unfolding historical relations between and with populations and within social fields and arenas that may be local, regional, national, and transnational without necessarily reducing the analysis to physical boundaries" (15). Again, this idea of processual analysis is key in my conceptualization of this project as multi-sited—an issue I will take up in the remainder of this section.

For this project I attended *danza azteca* ceremonies and practice sessions and conducted formal and informal interviews with *danzantes*. In addition to observing participants and conducting interviews, I also employed other forms of data collection that gave me insight into *danza azteca* performances and the activities that surround them. My goal in this project has not been to document or diagram the particular *pasos*

(steps) of each *danza*, but instead to collect information about spatial constructions and details of *trajes* (costumes), etc. as they relate to body practices and epistemologies of the body. As *danza azteca* gatherings are in most cases both performances and ceremonies, various forms of documentation—including photographing, filming, and sound recording—were limited. The photographs and recordings that I *have* collected were taken only with the permissions of the dancers.

The research for this dissertation took place over an 18-month period (2004-2005) and involved a cross-state, cross-national border ethnographic investigation of the intersection of self-identified Chicana/os, *danza azteca*, and notions of indigeneity. As I am interested in how Chicana/os represent themselves as indigenous peoples—and to what political and social ends—this project is necessarily multi-sited. From my preliminary research, it became evident that *danza azteca* traditions vary regionally and from group to group with regard to repertoire, gender participation, philosophical teachings, and accessibility of participation. To better understand the kinds of contradictions and variations that exist, it is necessary to conduct fieldwork in multiple geographical sites. To that end, I selected three sites to visit: first, Santa Cruz County and the San Francisco Bay Area; second, central Mexico—primarily Mexico City; and third, central Texas (San Antonio and Austin) and New Mexico (Albuquerque and Santa Fe areas). These field sites are important both for their historical and contemporary significance in the formulation of Chicana and Chicano indigeneity and for their particular socio-cultural regional histories. I formulated this structure for my research

project to highlight local, autochthonous meanings and practices as well as the ways that cultural productions and networks of *danza* develop transnationally.

Dissertation Style and Structure

As a stylistic note to the reader, non-English words and phrases (primarily Spanish and indigenous language Nahuatl) have been italicized in order help track the shift in language and hopefully, to help with readability. Additionally, an English translation of terms is provided in parenthesis when they first appear in the text. Also important to note is the use of grammatical gender in this dissertation. When this research was originally conducted (2005-2007), the use of "a/o" at the end of the terms (e.g. "Chicana/o" and "Mexicana/o") was a widely adopted practice incorporated in both spoken and written works to break from the grammatically "correct," as articulated by the Royal Spanish Academy, yet exclusive practice of using the grammatically male version of terms as a default when describing or addressing a group of people, regardless of their gender identities. For example, when addressing an audience that includes both men and women, the standard, and again grammatically correct practice, would be to say "*Bienvenidos,"* a "welcome" that is marked by the male gendered "o." The new, more representative, practice was to use the welcome, "*Bienvenidas y bienvenidos,*" acknowledging that there are both men and women in the audience.

More recently, the use of "x" at the end of these terms (e.g. "Chicanx" and "Mexicanx") has gained popularity as it moves the practice of gender inclusion beyond the male/female binary and includes non-binary and gender non-conforming members of

these groups as well; it signifies a break or challenge to contemporary gender binaries. The "x" at the end is often also used as a way to incorporate the use of gender-neutral terms, again countering the grammatical gender binary of Spanish language terminology in a way that using both the "a" and "o" are unable to do. An additional evolving practice over the past fifteen years or so has also been to use an "x" at the beginning of the terms to signify a closer relationship with indigeneity. In this case the "x" references the Nahuatl root of many Mexican Spanish terms, such as "Mexico" itself, which is a derivative of the Nahuatl term "*Mexica*," the name the Nahuatl-speaking indigenous people of the Valley of Mexico called themselves in the pre-conquest era; the term "Azteca" was a term coined by the Spanish. The results of the additional "x" has created a variety of new and vital possibilities, as well as identity terms, including: Chicanx, Xicana, Xicano, and Xicanx. For the purposes of this dissertation, I primarily use the terms "Chicana and Chicano," "Mexicano and Mexicana," "Chicana/o," and "Mexicana/o" as they were the most salient terms used at the time of research, as well as by my interlocutors. There may, however be time when "Chicanx" is used when referencing more recent activities and/or community events.

This dissertation is structured so that this, Chapter One "*Aperturas y entradas*: Frameworks for the study *danza azteca* in the U.S. and México," serves as a broad overview of the geographic landscape, theoretical frameworks, and methodological practices that will be explored more in depth in following chapters. Chapter Two, "*Encontrando Raíces*: Embodiments and Imaginings of *Danza Azteca* in the U.S. and México," introduces the reader to a *danza* community gathering and begins the work of

unpack the ways in which *danza* serves as a critical site of corporeal and embodied knowledge and a rich and complex site for the negotiation and contestations of complex identity formation[10]. Chapter Three, "Transnational Cultivations of (*Mexica)nidad* in Greater Mexico," focuses on *danza azteca* in relation to discourses of indigeneity and mestizaje within Greater México for both Chicana/o and Mexicana/o *danzantes*. Chapter Four, "Dancing Dualities, Performing Identity: (Auto)Ethnographic *encuentros y desencuentros*," offers an autoethnographic analysis of my experience in the "field" in relation to the concepts of "kinesthetic empathy" and "corporeal knowledge." Finally, the epilogue "Dancing Identities and Embodiments of Memory and Resistance," serves to connect the previous chapters to the contemporary social, cultural, and political moment as well as offering a series of possibilities for future research.

[10] Portions of Chapter 2 have been previously published. Please see bibliography for full reference.

CHAPTER TWO
Encontrando Raíces: Embodiments and Imaginings of *Danza Azteca* in the U.S. and México

***La Entrada*: Invocation of the Senses**

Hurriedly pulling into the crowded parking lot of the Cultural Arts Center an hour later than scheduled, I am relieved to see a number of *danzantes* huddled around the backs of trucks and minivans talking and getting dressed—a good sign that the day's ceremony has not yet begun. Most are already wearing their *huipiles* (traditional embroidered dresses), *tilmas* (cape-like garment used by men) loincloths, and shoulder and chest pieces. Walking past them, I watch as a young *danzante* struggles to secure her *ayayotes* (seeded leg wraps) around her ankles, sending the seeds into a frantic percussive rhythm, and as another *danzante* gently arranges parrot, eagle, and white-tipped pheasant feathers into her *copilli* (head piece). Mothers, fathers, friends, and teachers paint designs on the faces, arms, and legs of younger *danzantes* in rich hues of red, green, white, blue, and black, modeling their designs after traditional Mesoamerican symbols and etchings. The sweet, smoky smell of sage and copal calls to all of us, telling us it is time to gather and dance.

Following a group of *danzantes* through the back gates of the Cultural Arts Center, I walk through an area where vendors have already set up their tables, into a large open-air, cobblestone plaza where the *danza* will soon be taking place. Approaching the gathering site, I sense the smells of copal and sage growing heavier and heavier in the air, compelling me to seek out the source. After only a moment, I focus my eyes on a steady trail of smoke rising from a *sahumadora* (a clay vessel for burning incense) located at the

center altar, and watch as the smoke dances in the wind. Copal and sage will be burned throughout the entirety of the *danza* gathering. Turning my attention back to the plaza, I see a thin circle of orange reflective tape, at least thirty feet in diameter, marking the area for the *danza* circle. This thin marker separates the ceremonial dance area from audience members, and all present respect its purpose. The only break in the circle is the *puerta*, an opening through which the *danzantes* enter and leave the circle, marked by a wide arch of fresh flowers, bamboo and palm leaves.

Sitting around the circle are community and family members, *danzantes*, and non-*danzantes*. This is a time for reunions. Some shake hands and give hugs. They catch up on each other's lives since the last time they talked, perhaps since the last time they had gathered around another *danza* circle. Others play games of avoidance, walking to opposite sides of the circle from people they would rather not see or talk to. The sounds of voices, hellos and goodbyes, rise and fall against the chaotic sounds of *ayayotes* and hand rattles, the tuning of drums, large and small, and the shuffling of bags and chairs.

The unmistakable deep, solid sound of the conch shell finally rings out over the crowd, signaling the beginning of the *danza,* and an excited calmness washes over everyone. *Danzantes* make their final preparations and begin to line up at the *entrada*, the opening in the ceremonial circle. As each person enters the ceremonial space, they are blessed with smoke by one of two women, each with her own *sahumadora*, and then directed to their position in the circle by the *jefes* (leaders) of the ceremony. Participants range in age from around five to fifty years old; the majority seem to be in their twenties and thirties and come from a variety of local *danza* groups. The drummers begin a steady

rhythm on the *huehuetls* (large, traditional, three-footed drums) flanking the center altar, and the *danza* begins.

* * *

A dance tradition with origins in communities located in the central valleys of present-day Mexico, the heart of which is the ever-growing urban hub of Mexico City, *danza azteca* is a contemporary manifestation of what anthropologists and dance scholars often categorize as *danzas precortisianas. Danza azteca* is but one of many dance forms drawing upon pre-Columbian choreographies and pedagogies that can be found in contemporary Mexico and, to a lesser extent in the United States. In their text, *Dances of Anáhuac*, Samuel Martí and Gertrude Kurath (1964) give a detailed genealogy of many of these dance forms in Mexico, most notably *los Voladores* (flying pole), *Danza de la Pluma* (feather dance), and *el Comelagotoazte* (small ferris wheel) (9). Often categorized as "folk dances" or *"danzas"* (versus *bailes*), these dance traditions are often a complex assembly of pre-Columbian practices and Catholicism (Pugh year, 11).

Generically, the term *"danza"* is used throughout Mexico to identify dances whose choreography draws heavily from autochthonous dance traditions. Within the *folklórico* tradition, *danzas* are distinguished from *bailes*. While there are a number of differences between *danzas* and *bailes*, the central distinctions made are: 1) *danzas* tend to utilize group formations, whereas *bailes* prioritize couples; 2) *danzas* most often have spiritual or religious foundations whereas *bailes* are primarily for performance,

entertainment or social purposes.[11] It is within this rich history that contemporary forms of *danza azteca* find their philosophical, spiritual, and choreographic foundations.

Performance, and especially dance, among the Mexica was utilized to transmit collective memory, values and belief systems (Taylor 2003, 40) and was, therefore, understood as a threat to both the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church during Mexico's colonial period. Early chroniclers of New Spain, like Bernardino de Sahagún (1558-1561) took a serious ethnographic interest in their documentation of cultural and religious practices with the intention of including as much detail as possible in their descriptions so that they would be able to understand such "devilish" practices in their entirety and thus be able to fully eradicate them. In many cases, cultural practices such as dance either went "underground" or were folded into the new dominant religious regime: Roman Catholicism.

While there are numerous variations of the *danza* tradition, as well as names for the dance tradition itself (*danza de los concheros*, *danza chichimeca*, *danza guerrera*, *danza de la conquista*, and *danza azteca*), there are two branches that were more widely adopted by Chicanos. Decisions made in terms of which tradition to follow marked significant differences, both politically and spiritually. The two traditions I am referring to undeniably overlap in ceremonial and ritual practices and simultaneously diverge from each other along political, spiritual, and religious affiliations.

[11] It is of value to note that folklórico groups often incorporate *danzas* in their repertoire, highlighting the performative, not religious or spiritual, aspects of the traditions. In this context, the meanings and symbolic movements of the *danzas* take on different cultural, social, and spiritual significance.

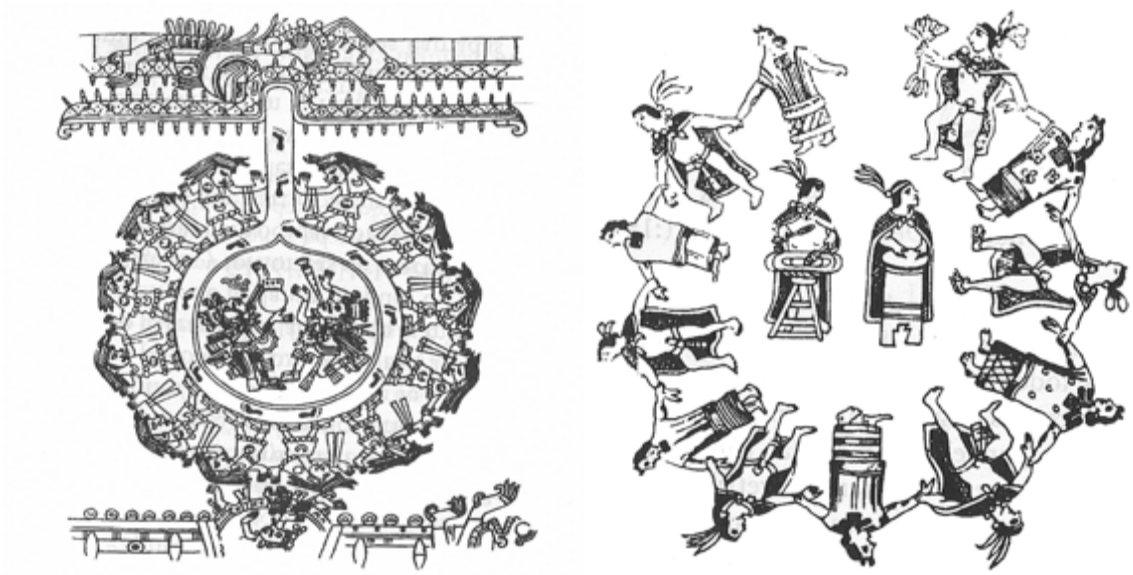

Figure 1 & 2 (on left) Depiction of dancing in Codex Borgia, a pre-contact codex (Plate 39). This plate is part of an eleven-plate series chronicling the ritual activity of Quetzalcóatl. **(on right)** Depiction of pre-Columbian dance from Codex Durán (chapter XXI), a post-contact manuscript compiled by Dominican Friar Diego Durán and published in the 19th century.

These traditions are: *la danza de los Concheros*[12] and Mexica *danza azteca*. *Conchero* dancers in both the U.S. and Mexico maintain a synergetic (Hérnandez-Ávila 2005) relationship between indigenous (specifically Mesoamerican) spiritual and philosophical belief systems and Catholicism. *Conchero* groups are named after saints who simultaneously evoke particular Catholic icons and refer to Aztec divine essences or deities. In her article, *"La danza de concheros: una tradición sagrada,"* María Angela González (1978) writes:

> In my opinion, the survival of this religious manifestation is a very special phenomenon that has been given to us under the vision of our ancestors, who formally reinterpreted it into the Catholic tradition. They took common religious

[12] The term "conchero" refers to the stringed instrument, resembling a guitar, played by dancers. It is traditionally made out of the shell (*concha*) of an armadillo.

> elements, changed the names of the ancient divinities and translated the songs; always struggling to maintain the ritual cycles and their objectives (21).

It is precisely on this issue of syncretism between indigenous belief systems and Catholicism that *conchero danza* and Mexica *danza* differ. While the Mexica tradition of *danza azteca* can be considered derivative of the *conchero* tradition, Mexica *danzantes* have widely disavowed affiliations and references to Catholicism that are highly visible in the *conchero* tradition. The latter relies on religious banners, ceremonies connected to Catholic feast/saint days, as well as the use of stringed instruments, including *conchas* and *mandolinas*—considered European impositions. Many Mexica *danzantes* make a point of using all-natural fibers and materials for all aspects of their ritual practices, including *trajes*, now more commonly found in practice by Chicana/o communities.

Danza azteca, a physically rigorous dance tradition consisting of rhythmic steps, deep squats, rapid turns, and other intensive acrobatic movements, is often said to have been introduced to the U.S. during the Chicana/o Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was then that Chicana/o social activists, scholars, artists and musicians collectively made concerted efforts to reclaim the indigenous histories and cultural traditions and practices that they felt had been denied to them through processes of conquest and imperialism. While it is true that contemporary manifestations of *danza azteca* in the U.S. can be placed in this time period, it is important to acknowledge that *danza azteca* and other indigenous dance and cultural traditions were practiced in the

Figure 3 Statue of el arcángel San Miguel (the Archangel Michael) dressed as *danzante* for the celebration of his saint's day, Mexico City, 2005 (photo by author).

U.S. long before the 1960s. In her interview with Harry Polkinhorn, Marylou Valencia (1994) says:

> The last time when I went to Querétaro and Zapopan I met a lot of people who were my elders, in their 60s and 70s, who spoke about being invited and coming to the U.S. to do *danza azteca* with the pow wows (13).

At the time of her visit, Valencia was already considered a *veterana*, as she had already been a *danzante* for over twenty-four years. Valencia's observations serve as a point of evidence that cultural contact across Greater Mexico, and hemispherically, has been a constant and consistent process over many decades; a long process which also lends itself to potential changes over time as traditions, practices, and ceremonies are shifted to meet contemporary community needs and remain relevant intergenerationally. Resonant in the

stories and oral histories Valencia references in her interview with Polkinhorn, is her noting the participation of *danzantes,* in this case from Mexico, in community and ceremonial gathering spaces of other indigenous communities. I also observed this, on several occasions throughout my fieldwork, including in the *danza* ceremony described in the opening and closing vignettes of this chapter. In the U.S., I also observed *danza azteca* being included in yearly sunrise ceremonies on Alcatraz Island, for Indigenous People's Day (a renaming of the October 14th observation of "Columbus Day") and Thanksgiving (the fourth Thursday in November), as well as at Stanford Powwow held each May. On these days, indigenous and non-indigenous communities gather on commemorate, to pray, to build community, and to rally against cultural and political erasure. In Mexico, during the *danza* for San Miguel (pictured above in figure 3) an intergenerational group of Wixáritati (Huichol) dancers joined the ceremony by offering a traditional song and dance. While the circumstances of each of these gatherings and encounters hold their own specificities, I offer them here as examples of the often unseen, or under referenced, individual and community-based relationships that exist between Indigenous peoples and tribes throughout Greater Mexico. These interactions add complexity to the landscape of ceremonial life and multi-layered, socio-political (dis)connections across and between geo-political borders, which I address in more detail in the following chapter.

The socio-cultural and material battles that were waged during the Chicana/o Movement created a moment, or perhaps a series of moments, that fostered a reincarnation of danza as a possibility for continued relationships between indigenous

peoples of the north and those of the south, between Chicana/os and Mexicanas/os. During this time, many newly-minted Chicanas/os began to make trips to Mexico with the hopes of piecing together a collective history that would inspire, and in some cases save them, from the oppression and repression enacted on their communities by U.S. government agencies and institutions. *Danza azteca* would prove to be one of the strongest and longest-lasting traditions that they would bring back to their communities and provide a way, through their bodies, to reproduce, reclaim and represent indigenous, non-European, belief systems. This cycle of returning and reclamation proves complicated when understood with the nexus of nationalism and nation building and is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. Even so, it was within this context that the teachings of maestros of *la danza azteca* from Mexico, in particular, Maestro Andrés Segura and Maestro Florencio Yescas, began weaving their way into the spiritual, cultural and political consciousness of many Chicanas/os. These particular maestros, Segura and Yescas, are widely considered to be two of the first Mexican practitioners of *danza azteca* to introduce the tradition to Chicanas/os in the United States and most contemporary groups still trace their *pabalabras* (sacred permission to lead a group) to one of these two maestros.

Figures 4–6 (left to right) Capitán General Andres Segura playing a *concha*; photographic portrait of Capitán Florencio Yescas; and a promotional poster for Festival Folklorico featuring his *danza azteca* group, *Esplendor Azteca*, along with other dance groups, 1977.

Un Encuentro // A Meeting

I have had the privilege of being in conversation with a series of *danzantes* in Northern California, Mexico, and Central Texas. These interviews have offered a rich and complex panoramic view of transnational *danza azteca* traditions. Of particular interest to me was a series of interviews that I conducted in January 2005 in Santa Cruz, California, with a mother and her two sons, all of whom were, at the time of the interviews, active participants in a *danza azteca* group in San Jose, California. Alma, a child psychologist and her two sons, Cuitláhuac and Tómas,[13] have been dancing for close to twelve years with various groups in San Jose and Santa Cruz County. As we began our conversation, Alma shared with me that she began to take her oldest son to

[13] Pseudonyms

danza azteca for very personal reasons. When he was four years old, he commented about not liking his hair, long and dark at the time and a style that he now wears proudly, and about being ugly. As they lived in what she described as a predominantly Anglo neighborhood at the time, Alma was eager to find a way to help her son have a positive self-image and connection to tradition. Continuing with the story, she shared the following,

> I had no idea what *danza* was about but I always liked it when I saw them dance and I was hoping that my son, my older son Cuitláhuac, would join. We would follow these dance groups all over San Jose, or whenever we'd see them advertised, we'd go to expose him to it because I had heard that's how you get somebody interested, especially little kids. But we had no idea until he actually joined…we found this group, [in San Jose] and Cuitláhuac was like four-and-a-half, and the maestro said to bring him to practice…It was free and we thought it was great, so he started at four and a half. Two years later I started to dance. It took me a long time to lose my embarrassment. Now I have no embarrassment, no shame, nada de nada.

Highly interested in the issues that Alma and other *danzantes* might have experienced as they first begin to dance, especially in terms of the physicality of the movements, I asked more about her process of entering the *danza* group. And so, she continued,

> Well I think, for two years I sat on the sidelines. One thing is that I had my little one, a challenging two year old. So I always had to be in back of him, so of course I used that also as an excuse, as a front. I'd say, 'oh I can't dance because I got to take care of him.' Well what happened is that everyone kept encouraging me, 'Get up, get up. Come on you can dance no matter what.' And in our group…we have an older woman, *una señora* who is 68, and, at that time, which was years ago, 12 years ago she was 50 something. She would dance and I would watch her dance and think *'Ay esa señora*, how can she dance,' you know and I always thought she was kind of like my role model. If she can dance, I can, and I was in my 30s, even then I felt really embarrassed. But, eventually the beat got so good and Tómas started to dance too and he used to go in-between the dancers, so I thought, 'well I'll go, I'll just follow him.' But, then we both got in the way and I figured that I could start dancing at the very end… once I got out there, though, it was hard to sit down ever again. And I'm not a very good dancer like per se like

> modern dance or rock 'n' roll, I mean I never thought of myself … except for cumbias, I'm a cumbia queen. Man I love cumbias. But other than that I really didn't know how to dance, you know, and I thought I had two left feet, but, I just stuck it in and like after a month I was hooked and everyone was so encouraging. *Perdí toda mi vergüenza*. I loved it so, so much that I just could never sit down again and just watch.

Alma's narrative of joining a *danza* group is illuminating for a number of reasons. First, her identification and discussion of the socio-cultural difficulties she experienced in raising her son in a predominantly Anglo neighborhood motivated her to find a way to connect him and herself to a community that would provide a space of identification for her young son, and second, her hesitation to actually begin dancing because of the physicality of the movements. This latter issue has surfaced as a common thread throughout a number of my conversations with *danzantes*. But, as I discuss in the following section of this chapter, it is these same movements that are, to *danzantes*, a rubric of embodied knowledge based in philosophical, spiritual, and scientific Mesoamerican traditions.

Notably, Alma identifies as Mexicana and Apache, but she also identifies politically as Chicana. When asked about her Mexicana-Apache identities, she responded as follows,

> We were always brought up in my family *que somos indios*, *pero, 'shhh, no le digas a nadie'* because we knew that other Mexicanos look down at *'indios.'* They would say, *'eres indio'* and we'd say *'no,no!'* We'd get all scared because my mom and dad always taught us to say no. Whereas of course, my kids don't say that now. We're like, yeah we are.
>
> They're raised in a certain way because we're both, we can't separate it. We acknowledge both sides. We do know that we don't know enough about the Apache side because we've been living so far away, but they're starting to get to know more things … As far as they're raised, I mean, this is how they've been

> raised since Cuitláhuac was four and Tómas was like one and a half, so they don't know any different. I don't know, we incorporate all the things that we learn in *danza* and in pow wows.

The silencing that Alma experienced growing up, and that she has worked against in raising her sons, is unfortunately a common narrative within Mexicana/o and Chicana/o communities. Here, Alma speaks to the imbricated relationship of *azteca* and Apache traditions within her life. In our conversations, it has become clear that *danza azteca* has offered a kind of bridge to enter into conversations with her sons about an "indianness" that was silenced for her, that is, her Apache heritage. Through their participation in *danza,* she and her sons have also entered into activist relationships with other indigenous peoples in California. As *danzantes*, they have participated in pow wows, which in turn exposed Cuitláhuac and Tómas to other forms of indigenous dance, which they are currently beginning to learn. I pick up the conversation about indigeneity and *mestizaje* in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Corporeal Recuperation & Embodied Knowledge

An initial draw to *danza azteca*, as discussed by Alma in the previous section and her subsequent desire to continue in the tradition, can be understood in a number of ways. I propose that the embodied knowledges within the execution and performance of *danza azteca* provide important spaces for community building and personal identification—two aspects that Alma signaled as important for her and her sons as they entered into their *danza* group. As each dance corresponds to a particular philosophical-scientific principle within Aztec/Mexica thought, I have chosen to highlight a few examples within *danza*

azteca practices to help clarify the ways in which I am employing the concepts of embodied knowledge and corporeal epistemologies in this research.

The visual power and energy of *danza azteca* is highly sensuous. As with other expressive forms such as theatre, poetry, and music, *danza azteca* allows Chicanas/os to articulate cultural knowledge and indigenous legacies. Additionally, it allows for an embodiment of indigeneity. I believe this is an important point and speaks directly to the notion of "knowing through the body"—an alternative epistemological possibility for knowledge production and perpetuation. Even more to the point, Sklar (1999) argues that, "embodied knowledge is as important as verbal knowledge in cultural communication" (17). The five senses (sight, touch, hearing, taste, smell) are important in the various ways people can understand themselves as "being-in-the-world" (Geurts 2002, 3). Operationalizing Geurts' assertion that the senses are "ways of embodying cultural categories" (10), we can then consider the collection of sensorial practices within and around *danza azteca* to explore how they might or might not inform, create, and cultivate collective epistemological possibilities and productions.

It is clear that within *danza* practices, dancers embody their indigeneity and learn through movement in a variety of ways and in multiple physical and philosophical registers. At its most fundamental level, *danza azteca* is an embodied prayer that occurs within ceremonial and ritual spaces. Joann Kealiinohomoku (1997) describes rituals and ceremonies as "extraordinary events" as they "are interpreters of culture, express shared world view, and provide meaningful information because myths are the great storage and retrieval systems for cultural information. Myths are the software and performed rituals

are the hard copies" (70). Spiritual, social, and scientific knowledge is communicated through *danzantes* to community members on multiple levels, from the burning of *copal* (resin) to the donning of *trajes* (regalia), with each drumbeat and in each *paso* (dance step). *Danza azteca* makes explicit particular philosophical or spiritual frameworks that are central to community organization and survival.

Let us take a moment for a sensuous consideration of typical elements of a *danza traje* (regalia), which most often includes the following elements: a *copilli* (a head piece made of turkey, pheasant, peacock, parrot, and/or eagle feathers), a *manta* (material that covers the body, which can come in a variety of styles, usually decided upon by the leader of the group and varies along gender lines); *ayayotes* (seeded leg wraps); and a *sonaja* (a seed filled rattle). The visibility and aesthetic markings of indigeneity employed in *danza* create powerful possibilities for sensuous identification. According to Marylou Valencia (1994), *danza azteca* "had a big impact in the Chicano movement in that it gave Chicanos something that was very visible, something that was very beautiful to identify with insofar as the cultural past was concerned" (50). In addition to its visually stunning impact, the performance and practice of *danza azteca* is an invocation of all the senses. Almost every element of even the most humble *traje*—from the feathers in the *copilli* to the hand-held *sonaja* to bare feet on moving pavement—contributes to sensuous information and communication within and amongst dancers and observers. (it would be good to be specific by stating a few examples as you did in previous versions:

For example, the distinctive sounds of *danza azteca* consist of multi-layered percussive rhythms that at any given moment include: the deep, resonating sound of the

huehuetl, the staccato sound of hollowed-out seeds of *chachayotes* hitting against each other as *danzantes* walk, step, jump, turn and spin, sonajas, hand drums, *teponaztli*, etc. In addition to the sights and smells of *danza* is the ubiquitous smell of copal and sage. During interviews and informal conversations, *danzantes* and people associated with *danza* often referred to the ways in which the sounds and smells of ceremonies would draw them into ceremonial spaces. Specifically, they would reference how sound of the drums and smell of the smoke travels across distances and that they were often able to hear and smell the *danza* before they were able to see it.

In his book, *Matemática y simbolismo en la danza autóctona de México*, Everardo Lara González (1999), a mathematician and *danzante,* meticulously explores the interconnection of mathematical, astronomical, and nature-based symbols within *danza* and its component parts. Lara González writes,

> *En la danza autóctona de México se observa la permanente creación artística derivada de concepciones místicas, de observaciones de los fenómenos naturales y la vocación y desarrollo matemático de los pueblos; concepciones que traducen en mensajes por medio de símbolos a través del movimiento corporal, que conforma un auténtico código o lenguaje, para que lo entiendan o comprendan, tanto los danzantes (o macehuallis), como las comunidades observadoras.*
>
> [In the autochthonous *danza* of Mexico we observe a permanent artistic creation derived from mystical concepts, observations of natural phenomena, and the mathematical vocation and development of communities; concepts that translate into symbolic messages through corporeal movement, which form an authentic code or language to understand and be understood by both dancers (or *machehuallies*) as well as communities of observers] (11).

Lara González demonstrates this interconnection through a dual mathematical and astronomical analysis for a number of dances, including *Tonantzin* (Mother Earth). Most

danzas consist of both a *paso base* (base step) and a *paso cambio* (change step). The base step, usually the first choreography of a dance, marks the initial rhythm and steps, and is returned to throughout the dance. The change step, often indicated by a literal change in rhythm, may mark a variation on the base or a completely new step. In *Tonantzin*, both the *pasos bases* (base steps) and the *pasos cambios* (change steps), while consisting of different rhythms, contain four counts of nine, totaling thirty-six each. During *Tonantzin*, dancers complete five iterations of both the *pasos base*s and *pasos cambios*, equaling 180 (five x thirty-six) each. Added together, the total steps (and beats) equal 360, which is roughly the number of days the earth takes to rotate around the sun in a solar year, thus providing an embodied marking of the relationship between *Tonantzin* (Mother Earth) and the sun (74).

Danza azteca, as an expressive cultural form based on the movements of the sun, moon and planets, reflects an important shift within Azteca-Mexica social organization and scientific knowledge production that came with a shift from a lunar to a solar calendar (León-Portilla 1963). While lunar cycles remain an important aspect of everyday practices, especially in terms of ritual and agricultural cycles, the solar calendar took on added importance during the height of the Aztec civilization. The vast majority of dances within the *danza azteca* tradition take place in a circle, or a series of concentric circles, with one *danzante* (or representatives from a participating group) leading the dance in the center near the main altar. This formation is directly linked to the sun and the movement of the planets, with the "lead" *danzante* representing the centrality of the sun, along with the drum, and the other *danzantes* representing the moving planets around the sun.

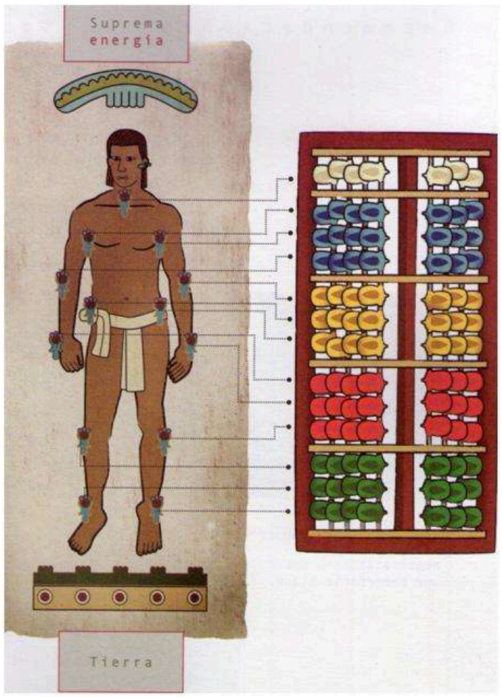

Figure 7 Illustration by Iñaki Garrido Frizzi connecting the thirteen energetic areas of the body with a corresponding area on the *nepohualtzintzin,* a pre-Columbian device for calculation. Lara breaks down the term into the following component parts to demonstrate the intrinsic embodied nature of this mathematical device: *Ne*: the person, *Pohualli:* calculation, and *Tzinzin*: to be transcendental (Lara González and Flores Sandoval, 2010).

In most circles, each *danzante* has the opportunity to lead a dance, with the option of passing their turn if they feel they are not yet ready to lead a dance or for any other reason that they do not feel ready to offer a dance (21-22).

This physical embodiment of the sun and moon is recognition of the advanced astronomical understandings that Mesoamerican societies had, as well as a means of enacting cosmic or universal movement. In this way, the *danzantes* themselves not only recognize a heliocentric model of the solar system, but also embody the cosmos itself. The rotation of *danzantes* into the center of the circle is also an active acknowledgement

of each person's participation as a *danzante* in the ceremony and speaks to the centrality of respect and balance in *danza azteca* philosophy. Luz,[14] a long-time *danzante*, elaborates on this point in one of our late-night conversations. She tells me,

> *Danza* is a representation of the movement of the solar system in which all of the planets rotate around the sun. In *danza*, the sun is our drum, it is your heart, your center. The dancers are placed around the drum, like the planets. Each planet rotates around its own axis. They must rotate in harmony because if they do not, what will happen? They will collide! It is the same in *la danza*. From the moment you begin to play the *concha* and move your feet, there is a tremendous sense of coordination. How do you move so you do not harm yourself or collide with others? This is a lesson you apply to your whole life.

In a similar vein, it is possible to find metaphors for or mimetic representations of everyday activities in many *danza* choreographies (Lara Gonzalez 1999). For example, a number of the dances include *pasos*, or a series of steps, that represent the growing, harvesting, and preparation of corn for consumption. For many urban dwelling communities, the planting of corn is something that is not a part of everyday life. The inclusion of such movements allows *danzantes* to physically embody a process that is central to understandings about the environment and nutrition. María Sten (1990) also makes this same point of connection in her discussion of *danza azteca* as a vehicle for social understanding. Corn, in particular, holds an important place within Native cultures throughout the Americas. For many Mesoamerican groups, corn was and remains the foundation of nutritional intake, and so the marking and tracking of the various stages of its growth, from seed to harvest, is vital. As such, this life cycle of corn is an excellent example of how it plays a key role in creation mythologies. During these movements,

[14] Pseudonym

danzantes are creating and performing themselves as workers of the land, as generators of energy and as storytellers (20).

A final example of corporeal recuperation of indigenous beliefs for *danzantes* is the concept of death and rebirth as a constant throughout Azteca-Mexica philosophical thought and culture. Death was thought of as another part of life, one that a person would prepare for with all of her/his heart. For *danzantes,* the idea of death and rebirth is constant in their ways of knowing through the body. One example of this is their understanding of self-sacrifice and discipline. The shedding of skin, from calluses, for example, and pain from dancing for hours, if not days, is literally a physical understanding of the concept and processes of regeneration. Their bodies regenerate themselves, as life regenerates itself through death. It is important to note that this kind of embodiment and knowing through the body is highly individualized, but it also has strong reverberations through the collective. Self-sacrifice and discipline are central principles for *danzantes*.

Importantly, each of these forms of knowing through the body are meaningful on both the individual and collective levels. *Danzantes* simultaneously explore teachings through their own body movements, their unique processes of learning the *pasos* of each dance, their correlating philosophical teachings, and through their relation with other *danzantes* and the social, cultural and political contexts within which they dance. In the following section, I explore this particular phenomenon of individual and collective embodied knowledges through a discussion of cultural performance and the politics of belonging.

Politics of Belonging and Cultural Performance

> Cultural resistance is not a totalizing affair, but one based on particular struggles and negotiations waged on turf that, in the grander scheme of things, may appear to be of little consequence. But this negotiation cannot be ignored. Producing a place in which one's collective identity is forged to a principle of solidarity affects, quite significantly, the social construction of reality. The purpose of such activity is to control one's world and oppose those who may have other plans.
>
> -Richard Flores, *Los Pastores* (1995, 165)

Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities is useful in thinking about how Chicanas/os and Mexicanas/os in the U.S. imagine themselves as indigenous people and their relationship with other indigenous people. For Anderson, the nation is "an imagined political community" (6). Elaborating on the concept of communities, he writes, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). According to Bauman (1986), this imagining is particularly important within a discussion of cultural performance where "members of society put their culture on display for themselves and others" (133). Connecting Anderson's (1983) theory to the question of *danza*, Susanna Rosta (1996) writes, "In Anderson's terms the *Concheros* are very much an imagined or 'imaged' community drawing on the cultural capital available to them of 'Mexicanness,' which is historical, political, mythological, artistic, and literary" (209).

Anderson's (1983) work on "imagining" in relation to contemporary anthropological work on cultural performance has been useful in my analysis of the political and social implications of *danza azteca* practices and the narratives created and embodied by *danzantes*. Cultural performances involve intense and purposeful action and

participation. I suggest that the cultural performance of *danza azteca* is a means for participants to express important information about their communities "for themselves and others" (Bauman 1986, 133), including notions of belonging. Particularly generative is the discursive shift from thinking about communities as easily identifiable and recognizable to Anderson's point that even in the smallest communities, and especially in those that number in the thousands of people, it is unlikely that an individual will know everyone else in the community. So then, in any community there is at least some aspect of imagining.

Transnational imaginings are central to many *danzantes*' understanding of belonging, namely because many have ceremonial family and community on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition to the construction and imaginings of community across geographical space and location, *danza azteca* also allows for and calls forward the possibility of creating and imagining relationship across time. I would argue that the autochthonous practices within and around ceremonial space encourage relational imaginings that transcend this material time-space. The smoke from a *sahumadora*, for instance, created from burning sage and copal, connects and creates space in multiple ways, including calling people together (as described above), serving as spiritual protection for the circle of dancers, and also as a conduit between this world and the next, between dancers and their ancestors.

In her essay, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," Chandra Mohanty (2003) has radicalized Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities" and offers yet another possibility for imaginings. She writes,

> I am suggesting, then, an "imagined community" of Third World oppositional struggle—"imagined" not because it is not "real" but because it suggests potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries, and "community" because in spite of internal hierarchies within Third World contexts, it nevertheless suggests a significant, deep commitment to what Benedict Anderson, in referring to the idea of the nation, calls "horizontal comradeship." The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of Third World feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance (46).

Mohanty urges us towards a solidarity that is not based on biology, but instead on a radical politics that allows for us to work from difference, and I argue, acknowledge the complicated and diverse effects of colonization. This urging away from biological belonging, allows for possibilities of connection to be somewhat disentangled from the fraught category of "authenticity" that plagues many conversations about belonging for *danzantes* and indigenous communities throughout the Americas.

Key to understandings of imagined communities and ways of belonging for *danzantes* is their everyday practices and rituals. These practices are often centered on the self, the individual *danzante* (but not necessarily the *danzante* as individual). Nancy Chen's (2003) book on *qigong* practices in contemporary China has been crucial to my understanding of how individual actions can potentially have far-reaching societal and cultural reverberations. In *Breathing Spaces* (2003), she interrogates "the ways in which practices of self-cultivation in certain times and places enabled the transformations of existing spaces and even transcendence of spatial and institutional boundaries" (18). The practice of *qigong*, which is centered in breathing practices and self-cultivation, is both a healing practice and a response to shifting political and social realities marked by the post-Maoist economic shift to a market economy. The imbrications of self-healing and

political readjustment speak directly to how the d*anza* practices of self-discipline and self-sacrifice (elaborated in the previous section) create a sense of collective belonging, a space for the development of cultural and political consciousness and identity. It is necessary to contextualize how work on the "self" can and does have political ramifications (Chen 2003, xi) and how body practices can be important in the (self-) positioning of individuals within community contexts.

The work of both Anderson (1983) and Chen (2003) are useful for analyzing Chicana/o participation in *danza azteca*. In the first instance, the visual power and energy of *danza azteca* is deeply emotive. I argue that this emotive, visual quality is directly linked with the ways in which *danzantes* imagine themselves as part of a community, specifically an indigenous community. Since its introduction to Chicana/o communities in the early 1960s, *danza azteca* has served as a vehicle for Chicana/os to embody their own indigeneity, which they had already been exploring through poetry, music, curriculum development, and art. To this point, Enrique Maestas (1997, Jan/Feb) wrote the following in *RazaTeca* magazine:

> Chicano's danza is how many of us come to know ourselves as indigenous people of these American continents…when we make our ceremony, we are indigenous people making indigenous ceremony in honor of all those who serviced to give birth to us and have taught us to stand our ground as indigenous people (45).

Here, *danza* is constructed as a place of indigenous "knowing" through the body and through dance. Thinking about *danza* as a space in which identity and knowing are constructed opens up a range of possibilities for Chicanas/os who participate in it. The performative aspects of *danza*, then and now, allow for corporeal articulations of

oppositional consciousness, and potentially, although not necessarily, for progressive politics.

La Salida: Closing Invocations of Indigeneity

As the *danzantes* are gathered in the circle and the ceremony is in full swing, my eyes acclimate themselves to the quick movements and rainbow of colors and designs. I am able to discern variations in the wide array of *trajes* that *danzantes* are wearing. A few *danzantes* are dressed simply: beige cotton dresses or cloaks and small headpieces, if they have one at all. These *danzantes* carry either a single feather or a *sonaja* (hand rattle) in their hands. Other *danzantes* are dressed in highly elaborate, ornate *trajes* made out of multi-colored synthetic materials. Two men are dressed in full leopard print body suits and carry large, painted shields. Black lipstick and intricate designs cover faces, arms and legs. Feathers dangle from labrets (piercings just below the lip), noses and ears. Some *copillis* are fashioned in the shape of animal heads and others are so large that their feathers extend well past the fingertips of outstretched arms. Common to all the *danzantes* is the use of *ayayotes*, although some only have a few seeds hanging from the strings attached to the leather ankle wrap, making a soft tapping sound as the *danzantes* move. Others have *ayayotes* that are so densely seeded that it is virtually impossible to see the leather backing at all. These make thunderous, sounds with the slightest movement of the *danzantes*. Even on the cobbled plaza, the majority of *danzantes* do not wear shoes, and those who *do* wear thin-soled *huaraches* (leather sandals).

Watching the *danza*, I am captivated by the synchronized movements of the dancers. Although they come from many different groups, most *danzantes* are able to follow the person who leads the dance, a responsibility that rotates throughout the ceremony among the different leaders from each participating group. The up-and-down motion, the jumps and stomps, set the seeded leg wrappings of each *danzante* in motion, adding another layer of percussion to the large center drums and hand rattles that lay the foundation of the *danza* rhythms. Two hours into the *danza* the *jefes* invite three other groups to join the circle: Zuni dancers, four Apache dancers, and two young female fancy dancers (define "fancy dancers"). Each group takes its turn in the middle of the circle as the *danzantes* move gently with them to the rhythm of the new drum in the circle, adding their own quiet rhythms with their rattles and *ayayotes*. While this is my first experience witnessing the blending of *danza azteca* ceremonial practices with those of other indigenous communities, I would, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, find over the course of my research that these invitations and co-creation of ceremonial space occurred frequently throughout Greater Mexico. As the fancy dancers end their dance the sound of the *huehuetl* rings out again and the *danzantes* resume their dance for another two hours.

Throughout the four hours of dancing, the weather seems to change a hundred different times. Clouds, in one minute, are blocking the sun, covering the plaza in a cool shade, and in the next, they quickly disappear exposing us to the brightness and warmth of the sun. As the morning turns into afternoon, the sun bears down on the *danzantes* and the clouds become fewer and farther between. The wind rises up now and again, carrying feathers from hands and headpieces, and sending the smoke from the *sahumadora* into a

frenzy. The sun remains hot and bright until the last half hour of the *danza* when clouds reappear, this time heavy with rain. Intermittent sprinkles soon become a heavy downpour, and throughout it all, the *danza* continues.

At the end of the *danza,* the emotionally charged, physically exhausted, and rain-soaked *danzantes* gather in the center of the plaza for *palabra,* a talking circle. Each *danzante* is given the opportunity to speak, even as the rain pounds harder against them. As the talking circle ends, the *danzantes* quickly file out of the circle through the *entrada* change, put away their rattles and feathers and join their group members, friends and families for *pozole* (stew) in a nearby building.

Building from the concepts of embodied identity formations and the creation and imagined community explored in this chapter, the following chapter offers a more in-depth exploration of the socio-political landscape in which the categories of mestizaje and indigeneity are delineate, enacted, and contested. Specifically, Chapter Three will offer a transnational analysis of identity formations within Greater Mexico, interrogating the concepts of mestizaje and indigeneity, while illuminating the connections and tensions that are negotiated within *danza* spaces and practices.

CHAPTER THREE
Transnational Cultivations of (*Mexica)nidad* in Greater Mexico

Chapters 1 and 2 have already established *danza azteca* as a vital and rich site for the negotiations and contentions of complex identity formation and embodied knowledge. Chapter 3, then, is specifically concerned with the interaction of nation-making in Greater Mexico and its effects on discursive articulations and embodiments of indigeneity. A major controversy that surrounds *danza azteca,* in both the U.S. and Mexico, is whether or not *danzantes* are truly indigenous peoples. Tensions that arise from this debate circulate in various spaces, particularly when Chicana/o *danzantes* and Native American/indigenous populations share public and ceremonial space with one another, which is quite often. Moreover, the recent increase of Mexican indigenous migrants in the U.S. (Blackwell, Lopez, Urrieta 2017) has also shifted the cultural and political contexts for Chicana/o indigeneity.

While many scholars argue either for or against authenticity, my primary concern is rendering visible the complex and fraught landscape upon which discourses and notions of indigeneity, belonging, and disenfranchisement interact within Greater Mexico, particularly in relation to the question: Who and where are the "Mexica" in *Mexicanidad*? Specifically, this chapter traces, historically and through ethnographic encounters, the ways in which the "*indigenismo*" of early twentieth century Mexico produced a *Mexica*-centric national mythology, a *mexicanidad*, much of which centered on anachronistic characterizations of indigenous peoples. It is this same mythology that

many Chicana/os would adopt, articulate, and re-articulate in the latter half of the twentieth century in their fight for social justice and liberation.

Transnational Considerations

As many Chicanas/os trace their indigenous heritage to ancient (including the U.S. Southwest) and contemporary Mexico (Anaya and Lomelí 1989), the geographic scope of this dissertation is broadly the United States and Mexico, and more specifically that geographic place that renowned folklorist, ethnographer, and poet Américo Paredes named "Greater Mexico" (1976, xiv). Now referred to more often as the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, Greater Mexico captures the cultural, social, and political uniqueness and connectedness of communities within the U.S. southwest and northern Mexico. While the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848), a war motivated by the United States' unyielding project of Manifest Destiny and fueled by its economics of slavery, ended in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, disputes about the location of the actual physical border and citizenship rights raged on well into the twentieth century. Some argue that the U.S.-Mexico War, the United States' first armed conflict fought primarily on foreign land, should more aptly be referred to as "The U.S. War Against Mexico" (Velasco Marquez 1997) due to the antagonistic nature of the conflict. Notwithstanding a naming debate, the result of the war was devastating for Mexico and had life altering effects for people living within the once Mexican, now United States, territories, setting the stage for continued conflicts, tension, and violence along the newly established U.S.-Mexico border, many of which continue into the present moment.

It is important to note that Indigenous and Mexican communities living in lands ceded to the U.S. were granted citizenship and land rights through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in name, but this was unevenly enforced and honored. More often than not, former Mexican citizens, both *mestizo* and indigenous, lost their land and full citizenship rights. Specifically, U.S. settlers who inundated the "new" territory after the war saw indigenous communities as foreigners and trespassers. In many instances, indigenous people were denied citizen rights straight out and many made the decision to "pass" as Mexican in order not to be doubly targeted and denied rights.

This active disenfranchisement and cultivation of contentious and tenuous relationships serves as a historical underpinning for continued present-day marginalization, poverty, and violence along the U.S.-Mexico border. Not only did Mexico cede almost the entirety of its northern territories to the United States after the war, but indigenous nations along the newly created U.S.-Mexico border (e.g., Tohono O'odham, Kumeyaay, Quechan, Apache) also had many of their traditional territories split in two. Of course, this is not the first time that such a process has taken place in the Americas. As we will see throughout the chapter, the process of disenfranchisement of indigenous communities, the writing and re-writing of history in service to the nation, and the simultaneous re-inscription of national myths is a constant process throughout Greater Mexico and is one that can be traced in and through cultural performances such as *danza azteca* (Paredes 1993, Flores 1994, Romero 2017). The persistence and resurgence of *danza azteca* throughout Greater Mexico offers an important counter narrative to processes of cultural, social, and political erasure connected to new, and what

can be experienced as indiscriminate, border-making, such as the one between the U.S. and Mexico following the U.S.-Mexico War. As a cultural practice, *danza* troubles nearsighted narratives that inscribe political borders as natural or innate. The persistence of *danza* and other cultural practices in Greater Mexico allow us to trace a long-standing rootedness, continuity, and connection to a land base irrespective of shifting geo-political borders. Of course, borders, their paths, their cutting off and through land and communities, matter, and have great material effect on the lived experiences of individuals living on both sides, and especially within the borderlands.

As an expressive cultural production, *danza azteca* and those who participate in it have always crossed borders. A central argument of my project is that *danzantes* in both the U.S. and Mexico imagine themselves in transnational communities, that is, communities that extend past their respective national borders. I have chosen to consider *danza azteca* and indigeneity transnationally as a focus on a specific locality or region that would yield a limited analysis, especially in terms of the various ways people move in and out of locations (e.g., recent migration trends, the movement of *maestros* (teachers) and students). A transnational analysis allows for the tracking not only of people, but also the ways in which identity categories shift socially and politically—a process that is central to my dissertation project.

A transnational focus enables a nuanced investigation of discursive productions of indigeneity within various academic traditions, particularly as it has been constructed and deployed in relation to race-, class-, gender- and sexuality-axes of power. Discussions of indigeneity in a transnational context are central to understanding Chicana/o identity

formations as both material and philosophical movements across the U.S.-Mexico border inform their socio-cultural perception of the world. The categories of *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* shift meaning historically and as they move both transnationally and from community to community. In the U.S., many political activists and feminists have reclaimed *mestizaje* in order to combat Eurocentric identity categories (e.g., Hispanic), whereas, in much of Latin America, many indigenous groups consider it a hegemonic and oppressive discourse. I find this dissonance to be both theoretically productive, in that it calls for rigorous attention to the variability of identity politics, and painfully real, as such discord has caused serious political and social rifts within and between communities.

Indigenismo and Mestizaje in Post-Revolution Mexico

As Ivonne del Valle (2015) notes, there is a great amount of ambivalence captured in this inscription, etched in bold letters on a stone monument marking what is not only the site of one of the last battles between Cortés and Cuauhtémoc, but also the site of the 1968 student massacre. She writes,

> The ambivalence opens the future to uneasy, fraught interactions whose resolution is postponed—as if in their striving to achieve an outcome the Spaniards and their allies were forced to continue on their winning path, and the fall of Tlatelolco were to drag on indefinitely, forever stumbling, but never quite down (2015, 1).

A primary goal of Mexican anthropology in the early twentieth century was, I would argue, the attempt to address and quiet this long-standing ambivalence through the integration of indigenous peoples, or "Indians," into the nation-state (Wright 1988, 370). Prior to the Mexican Revolution, however, this integration was not the case. Under

Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911), the overwhelming sentiment about Indians was that they acted as barriers to economic and social progress and that they needed to be segregated from the "civilized" population, and if they were to participate in Mexican society they would need to shed all their "tribal" ways (Powell 1968, 19-22). This belief compounded the long-held social hierarchy of Spanish colonialism (1521-1821) and its intricate "casta" or caste system that enumerated categories of racial mixture (European/Spanish, Indigenous, and African); each category was linked tightly to legal and political status and social implications. In post-revolution Mexico (1910-1917), discourses about Mexico's Indian population shifted from segregation to integration, redemption, and assimilation (24). The term *indigenismo*, understood as the movement to defend Indian cultures (Bonfil Batalla 1996, 115), was used both popularly as well as in official discourse within Mexico during this time period and resulted in a paternalistic relationship between the government and indigenous populations (Friedlander 1975). A cultural relativist and Mexico's first anthropologist, Manuel Gamio is considered the father of *indigenismo* (Friedlander 1975). Elaborated in his text *Forjando Patria* (1916), policies of *indigenismo* became the official mechanisms through which the Mexican government sought to place indigenous populations into revolutionary Mexico (Knight 1990, 71). Other Mexican thinkers, such as José Vasconcelos (*La Raza Cósmica* 1912), and later, Alfonso Caso and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, were also proponents and contributors to thought and policy founded in the concepts of *indigenismo* (Knight 1990, 71).

Even though Gamio was a cultural relativist, the foundational principle of *indigenismo* was that Indians could be redeemed through education and contact with

more civilized and advanced groups (Powell 1968, 22). According to Jane Hindley (1996), there were two fundamental principles that guided most of the policies associated with *indigenismo*. First, there was a recognition on the part of the government of the extreme poverty under which the majority of Mexico's indigenous population live, although this poverty was attributed in large part not to their socio-economic positioning, but instead to their socio-cultural inferiority. The second principle was the understanding that the existence of a large multi-lingual, multi-cultural indigenous population was a major obstacle to national unity and progress, the solution to which would be the integration of *all* Mexicans into a national *mestizo* culture (Hindley 1996, 2-26). This can also be read as a purposeful continued erasure and interruption (beginning with Spanish colonization) of Indigenous people's autonomy and self-determination for the sake of "progress"; progress as in approximation to Europe and whiteness. Under *indigenismo,* to be Indian or indigenous was both a cultural as well as a social class marking, both of which could, and should, be altered with the proper education and cultural contact (Knight 1990, 72; Powell 1968, 24; Colmenares 1964, 12; Caso 1958, 40; Nolasco Armas 1984, 127). Thus, considering Indians as pre-civilized cemented the position of the *mestizo*, someone of mixed blood, as the revolutionary citizen in that it created the familiar paradigm of Indian as heroic past and *mestizo* as progressive present and future (Saldana-Portillo 2003, 212). This framework has been inscribed and re-inscribed as often as possible, from the early twentieth century to the present, through mass education campaigns, national myths regarding the founding of Mexico, and national policies of

integration that stressed a unity of racial and cultural descent, even amidst a widely heterogenous population (Gutiérrez 1999, 2-4).

Under *indigenismo* thought and policy, the Indian is exalted within the public sphere for providing the continuity to a heroic past and allows for some redeemability within contemporary society (Bonfil Batalla 1996, 53). To this point, María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2003) writes, "Indians may be Mexico's ideal ancestors, but *mestizos* are Mexico's ideal citizens" (212). She continues, citing Bonfil Batalla, "*Mestizaje* as a theory of racial admixture adopted by these nationalist elites, however, also allowed them to claim an Indian ancestor while distancing themselves from their contemporary Indian counterparts, seen as fallen, decadent descendants of these ancestral warriors (405)."

So then, *indigenismo* allowed for the recovery of Mexico's indigenous past rather than an acknowledgement of the vibrant existence and agency of its contemporary, and historically always present, indigenous populations. In recent years, in an attempt to distance themselves from *indigenismo*, many Mexican indigenous activists have begun to refer to themselves and their movements with the term "Indianist" rather than "Indigenist" (Saldaña-Portillo 2001, 410; Childs and Delgado-P 1999, 212). As a self-determined term, "Indianist" centers the Native/Indian perspective and articulations of self, whereas the term "Indigenist" pulls from nationalist projects of *indigenismo* where-in indigenous people are primarily objects of study instead of self-articulating subjects.

Intergenerational Experiences of Indigeneity, Mestizaje, and Dance

The historical consideration and implications of war, ambivalent conquest, and national myths resonate deeply within my conversations with *danzantes* in both the U.S. and México. Here, I'd like to offer a more in-depth listening moment with Luna, the *danzante* with whom we only met briefly in Chapter One and who rightly reminded me not to "change things" that she shared with me, as journalists and anthropologist are apt to do. Before offering her *testimonio* (Behar 1993, Menchú 1983, Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, Carmona 2012) here, let me offer a bit of context for our conversation. Luna and I met at her house in San Antonio, Texas, in the summer of 2005. Mutual friends from the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center introduced me to her, where she would dance now and then with the local *danza* group, Teocalli. Luna, born in Morelos, Mexico, moved to California from Cuernavaca with her husband, a *capitán* with the danza group, Xinaxtli, which Andrés Segura started in San Juan Bautista, California, in the late 1980s. She then moved to San Antonio in the mid-1990s. Her familial story, including her connection and re-connection with *danza* offer an insight into the lived experiences of policies based in *indigenismo*. Luna also offers us as well an opportunity to consider the long life cycle of traditional practices, even as they may at times exist in hiding or experience interruption generation to generation.

* * *

Luna:
Mi bisabuela era danzante. Ella me contaba que la danza cuando ella era niña estaba escondida. Ella murió de 106 anos de edad. A ella le tocó el centenario de la independencia de México. Es decir, 1910. Así que en ese centenario de la independencia de México, relaciona a los españoles, por primera vez en muchos años la danza azteca

salió en un desfile en la ciudad de México. A mero enfrente, no, como una manera de recordar y reconocer a los danzantes. Y mi bisabuela fue danzante y ella participó en esa marcha. Pero ella era del lo que es el Estado de México ahora, de la área de Coyoacán. Se casó con un indígena del estado de Morelos y fue para Morelos. Y allí se hizo su familia.

*Cuando se mueve, tu sabes las danzas con mesas, pertenece a diferentes comunidades. Así que a moverse de su comunidad pues obviamente se desgrana de su mesa. Y ya no recuerdo si ella siguió danzando en Morelos, pero obviamente ya no lo continuó igual. Así que para mí, todo esto de la danza y todas esas imágenes, pues, nazco con ellas crezco con ellas. No es algo folclórico ni exuberante o exótico, es parte de "*surroundings,*" la vida cotidiana. Se pierde la tradición de la danza a través de mi abuela, o sea la hija de mi bisabuela. Yo me crié con mis abuelas y mi mamá tampoco la practica. Mi mamá es una mezcla muy interesante porque mi madre es hija de india y del negro—india por parte de mi abuela y su papá de mi mamá, o sea mi abuelo, era un negro. Entonces se da una mezcla muy interesante en mi familia. Y mi mamá, más que manejar las cosas aztecas, trabaja más la tradición negra por parte de su papá, que ellos también tienen sus propios bailes y sus propios rituales.*

Es conmigo que retomo yo lo que es la tradición de la danza azteca y me integro… realmente empiezo como artista, porque yo soy artista. Soy teatrera. Inicié mi carera como teatrera muy joven y es muy interesante porque la vida te lleva de repente a situaciones de que ni te esperas y de otra manera están conectadas. Resulta que en el grupo de contacto de teatro, el director de este grupo era muy amigo de general Andrés Segura. Y una vez Andrés bajó a Cuernavaca para invitar al grupo a que participaren en lo que se llamaba una ceremonia de la defensa heroica de la Gran México-Tenochtitlán para el 13 de agosto. Y se conmemoraba la defensa heroica de la Gran Tenochtitlán que es dándole un giro diferente a lo que los españoles le decían la noche triste. Nosotros lo consideramos que es la noche de la victoria para la indianidad. Y nosotros no decimos que es la derrota del señor Cuauhtémoc sino la defensa heroica de la Gran México-Tenochtitlán. Y entonces esto fue, déjame hacer memoria, alrededor de los principios de los 80s. Entonces le pide que participemos como grupo de teatro porque están organizando una semana de eventos en donde hay una abundancia de materiales y de información, películas, conferencias, y por supuesto se clausura la semana con la gran velación en Templo Mayor, y la danza al día siguiente también en Templo Mayor y la Plaza de la Constitución. Estamos hablando de lo que es el Zócalo de la cuidad, de la Gran Tenochtitlán. Y así es como yo me reconecto.

Como joven que yo era en aquel entonces pues participando en la cuestión de teatro y la política yo quería como esconder mi cuestión indígena porque el español es mi segundo idioma. Mi primero idioma es el macehual a través de mis abuelas. Mi mamá si habla las dos lenguas porque mi mamá tenía que salir a trabajar en la cuidad. Y entonces ella aprende un español más de sobrevivencia. Pero nos enseña. Y ya nosotros también movemos del pueblo para la ciudad y integramos a lo que es la comunidad de la ciudad,

la cultural urbana. Cuando tú te integras como una indígena a lo que es la ciudad siempre hay una gran discriminación. Es como el fenómeno, bueno, de todos los pueblos colonizados, que ustedes los Chicanos no son ajenos a ello, no? El hecho de que no hablas bien la lengua del pueblo que domina, de que tienes otra forma de vestir y comer, y que por supuesto eres más pobre.

* * *

Luna:
My great grandmother was a danzante. She would tell me that *danza* was hidden when she was a young girl. She died at 106 years old. She had the opportunity to experience the centennial celebration of Mexico's independence. That would be in 1910. It's in that centennial celebration of Mexico's independence, from the Spanish, that for the first time in many years *la danza azteca* appeared in the parade in Mexico City. Right out in front, no, as a way of acknowledging and recognizing the *danzantes*. My great grandmother was a *danzante* and she participated in that march. But she was from the state of Mexico, which today is Coyoacán. She married an indigenous man from the state of Morelos and moved there. That's where she had her family.

When she moved, you know about the *danza mesas*, they are connected to different communities. Therefore, when she moved from her community she obviously separated from her *mesa*. I don't remember if she continued dancing in Morelos, but obviously, it was not the same. So then for me, in terms of everything that is *la danza* and its images, I was born into them and I grew up with them. They are not folklore or over the top or exotic, they are part of my surroundings, everyday life. We lost the tradition of *la danza* through my grandmother, that's to say my great grandmother's daughter. I was raised with my grandmothers and my mom also did not dance. My mother is an interesting mix because she is the daughter of an indigenous woman and a black man. This makes a very interesting mix in my family. My mother, instead of holding Aztec practices, was more involved with black traditions through her father, which have their own dances and rituals.

It's with me that the tradition of *la danza azteca* is brought back…really, I started as an artist, because I am an artist. I'm trained in the theater. I started my training very young and it's so interesting because life moves you suddenly into situations that you don't expect and at the same time that are very connected. It turns out that the director of the theater group that I was a part of was very good friends with general Andrés Segura. One time, Andrés came down to Cuernavaca to invite our group to participate in what he called a ceremony for the heroic defense of *la Gran México-Tenochtitlán* for the thirteenth of August. It was a commemoration of the heroic defense of *la Gran Tenochtitlán* that was a different twist on what the Spanish call the sad night. We consider it a night of victory for indigenous people. We do not say that it was the defeat of Cuauhtémoc, but the heroic defense of *la Gran México-Tenochtitlán.* That was in, let me remember, around the early 80s. So, he asked us to participate in a theater group

because they were organizing a week of events where there was an abundance of materials, information, movies, panels, and of course the closing event for the week was a large vigil at the Templo Mayor followed by a *danza* the next day at the Templo Mayor and the Plaza de la Constitución. We're talking about the Zócalo in the city, la *Gran Tenochtitlán.* This is how I reconnect.

As the young person who I was in those times, participating in theater and politics, I wanted to hide my indigenous identity because Spanish was my second language. My first language is *macehual*, through my grandmothers. My mother spoke both languages because she had to live and work in the city. She learned more of a survival Spanish. But she taught us. We also moved from our town to the city and integrated into the flow of the city, urban culture. When you, as an indigenous person, integrate into city life, there's always a great amount of discrimination. That's the phenomenon, well, in all colonized places, and you, Chicanos aren't so unfamiliar with it, no? Just the fact that you may not speak the dominant language well, that you have another way of dressing, and because you're poorer.

* * *

Luna's testimonio illuminates the intergenerational lived realities of many indigenous people in Mexico throughout the twentieth century. Her great grandmother's participation, as a *danzante* in centennial festivities marking Mexico's independence from Spain, marks the ways in which indigenous communities have had to simultaneously hide many of their traditional practices (e.g., ritual dance) for fear of punishment and/or death and were also asked to perform them in specific, highly visible ways to fortify national myths and state-making. This need and/or survival strategy, of simultaneously hiding and performing "indianness" is an important example of the double bind that Indigenous people and communities had, and continue to have, to navigate under the social and political hierarchy established by Spanish colonization. This strategy is underscored, again, in Luna's attempt to "esconder mi cuestión indígena" or hide her indigenous identity in order to better navigate urban life when she moves

from Morelos into Mexico City. Again, Luna's decision to strategically hide mirrors strategies used by Indigenous people and communities along the U.S.-Mexico border after the U.S.-Mexico War, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Her testimonio lays bare the ways in which movement and re-location, even within relatively short distances (e.g., between Coyoacán and Morelos), can uproot and interrupt the continuity of traditional practices. Considering this example, it is easy to see the ways in which dislocation, including cross-border movement, especially when by force, can and has had a devastating effect on the continuity of community-based practices and ritual life. Even Luna, a self-identified Macehual woman, who speaks her native language and can directly trace *danza* practices to her great grandmother, refers to her own practice of *danza* as a "a returning to. So, even within a short time period, the shifting of familial and community infrastructure due to primarily economic forces, incited both physical movement, from Coyoacan to Morelos to Mexico City, as well as disconnection to traditional cultural practices, such as *danza*. As Luna says, when her great grandmother made the decision to leave Coyoacan, she also left her *mesa* and the social and cultural support it offered for her practice of and intergenerational learning of *danza*.

Legacies and Rearticulations of Indigeneity and Mestizaje

> …I am a Mestizo. I am the physical proof of the violent transformation suffered by Native peoples on this continent in the last five hundred years. My face, my body, my soul are in constant turmoil.
>
> - Francisco X. Alarcón,
> *"Reclaiming Ourselves, Reclaiming America"* (1992, 30)

> As long as the majority of mestizos/mestizas refuse to acknowledge the face and heart of the Indian man or woman inside themselves (again, *not to the exclusion* of the other aspects of their being and cultural heritage), they will not be able to realize themselves as complete human beings, in the sense of knowing their own origins, much less give true value to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas or to the other autochthonous peoples of the world…
>
> - Inés Hernández-Avila,
> *"An Open Letter to Chicanas: On the Power and Politics of Origin"* (1997, 240)

The notion of *mestizaje* has been central to the construction of Chicana/o subjectivities (Anaya and Lomelí 1989) In her text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) reclaims and re-articulates the notion of *mestizaje*. In contrast to the ways in with policies of *indigenismo* were implemented throughout Mexico post-revolution, she proposes mestizaje as a key component of a radical subjectivity that she describes as a "new mestiza consciousness." This new mestiza is the epitome of a hybridized subject who has learned how to tolerate contradictions and ambiguities (Anzaldúa 1987, 79). Anzaldúa's work draws from her own experiences living on the U.S side of the U.S.-Mexico border, specifically in the Texas-Mexico borderlands. It is also "grounded in the Indian woman's history of resistance" (21). These two aspects of her work, both her geographic location of north of the U.S.-Mexico border and her

rootedness in Indigenous women's resistance, positions her project of mestizo consciousness as a very different kind of social project than that of *indigenismo.* Even so, their central questions of identity formation and meaning remain in deep conversation with one another; their reckoning with and work to articulate the meaning of identity formations resultant from the, often violent, collision of cultures within Greater Mexico highlight important and divergent viewpoints on the meaning of *mestizaje* and indigeneity. Through Anzaldúa's *mestizaje*, mestizas/os learn "to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view…to operate in a pluralistic mode" (79). This formulation of the *mestiza/o* subject is an epistemic shift away from turn-of-the-twentieth-century notions of *mestizaje* discussed in the previous section. Anzaldúa's mestizaje articulates a liminal space that she refers to as "*nepantla,"* a nahuatl word meaning "middle" or "in the middle of."

Anzaldúa's notion of a new *mestiza* consciousness has provoked a number of responses within Chicana/o and non-Chicana/o intellectual communities. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, a Chicana scholar, for example, argues that Chicana/o appropriations of discourses of *mestizaje*, which she traces back to the early 1970s, is a residual affect of early twentieth century Mexican nationalism (Saldaña-Portillo 2001, 413). While she applauds Anzaldúa's vision and her insertion of both female and queer subjectivities into Chicana/o discursive productions, she argues that the category of *mestizaje* is still complicit, even in Anzaldúa's formulation, in the placing of indigenous history in the past versus the present (415). On a fundamental level, she argues that Anzaldúa's access to the pantheon of female-Azteca deities that she uses throughout her text is a result of

post-revolutionary state policies to recover and preserve "defunct" indigenous cultures to the detriment of living ones (417). In a 2003 article, Saldaña-Portillo underscores her position, writing "in our Chicana/o reappropriation of the biologized terms of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* we are also always recuperating the Indian as an ancestral past rather than recognizing contemporary Indians as coinhabitants not only of this continent abstractly conceived but of the neighborhoods and streets of hundreds of U.S. cities and towns" (Saldaña-Portillo 2003, 279).

Sandy Marie Anglás Grande, an indigenous (Quechua) scholar, also articulates a wariness of Anzaldúa's radical *mestizaje* (2000). Her central argument is that the promotion and reformulation of *mestizaje* does not fully consider indigenous struggles, specifically in terms of sustaining the cultural and political integrity of Native American communities (3). Although Anglás Grande is inspired by the spirit of Anzaldúa's project, she is careful to remind her readers that "postcolonial notions of hybridity" function in relation to the realities of identity appropriation, cultural commodification and issues of indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (6). Interestingly, both Saldaña-Portillo and Anglás Grande fail to acknowledge the insights Anzaldúa offers within her formulation of the new mestiza regarding the imbrication of gender, sexuality, and class within discourses of indigeneity. Additionally, the possibilities of how and when articulations of *mestizaje* are used as a counter to Euro-centric identity formations within Mexican and Chicana/o communities, with the purpose lifting up Indigenous and African identities and experiences, are also summarily discounted. These conversations and debates around the reformulation of *mestizaje* can be useful to illuminate the tensions that

Chicanas/os, as well as Mexicanas/os, have had to navigate regarding the recuperation and articulation of indigenous heritage within a matrix of socio-political push-pulls towards mainstream acculturation and rampant, large-scale cultural appropriation of Indigenous practices.

The debate about mestizaje, its potential possibilities and erasures, is central to identity formation and articulation throughout Greater Mexico. Renya Ramirez's (2002) work offers an important intervention into this discussion of the varying political, social, and cultural ways that indigeneity resonates in a transnational context. In this ethnographic article, Ramirez discusses how Indian identity varies in the Mexican and U.S. contexts. She argues that in the U.S., being Indian is primarily an issue of ethnicity, while in Mexico it is more an issue of culture and social class (Ramirez 2002, 70). Through the analysis of an interview she conducted with Julia Sanchez, a woman who identifies as both Mexican and Native American, Ramirez highlights the complexities of citizenship, the politics of authenticity and issues of belonging as Julia moves back and forth through Native American, Mexican, and Mexican American communities. Ramirez argues that conversations between Chicanas/os and Native American can help to dispel homogeneous notions of authenticity within both groups (Ramirez, 77). Ramirez's consideration of the ways in which indigeneity functions and is understood differently in the U.S. and Mexico demonstrates the ways in which the geographical and cultural construct of Greater Mexico is useful as a third or alternative space that allows for a more complex analysis of mestizaje and indigeneity. Namely, Ramirez's distinction between indigeneity as ethnicity (U.S.) and indigeneity as culture and social class (Mexico) sheds

a light on both the divergent ways in which nation-states, their laws and social structures, articulate social categories and the variation of lived experiences and social stratification for communities throughout Greater Mexico.

Perhaps more to the heart of things, Chicana and Nimipu scholar and poet, Inés Hernández-Avila (1992) articulates her embodied experience of living in and through the complex ambivalence of cross-border notions of both indigeneity and *mestizaje*. She writes,

> I have always been stubborn in my insistence that what is most precious about the Chicana/Chicano psyche is our originality. As orphans, because that has been our (mis)fortune (of course, for reasons expressly historic), we have had to dig out of our own insides what is ours—because there was no one who would accept us, much less teach us. Scorned by the Anglo-Saxon world, where we continue to drop out of schools in record numbers, and by much of the Mexican world, where frequently we are condemned for our mocho-pochoness, or assumed lack of sophistication, the Chicana and the Chicano have had to strengthen and develop ourselves in our own way—that is, we have had to recover and reevaluate what our culture is, not only through formal investigation and research, but also, and in great part, through our intuitions and the dictates of our heart (241-242).

Ramirez and Hernandez-Avila's work remind us that questions of belonging, identity, and recognition function at multiple levels: political, social, cultural, and personal. *Danza* and *danza* spaces throughout Greater México exist as important arenas for both public and private negotiations of identity and belonging for dancers and non-dancers alike. Hernandez-Avila's articulation of Chicana/os' "(mis)fortune" that leads to having to "recover and reevaluate what our culture is" is a concept that resonates throughout this research and is echoed by many of my interlocutors. Historical consideration and tensions of nation-building myths and policies based in *indigenismo* serve as an important backdrop for the complex negotiations happening within and

around *danza.* They also speak to the imbricated experiences of social and cultural interruptions of practice and what seem to be the ever-present tensions of remembering and recovering traditional practices, like *danza*.

Bringing the cross-border articulations and dis-articulations of mestizaje and indigenity back to *danza,* I would like to share a portion of a conversation that I had with Romaria in the Spring of 2005 in Santa Cruz, California. Born in Watsonville, Romaria lived in Colima, Mexico for around 5 years, then moved to the California Central Valley for middle school, and then returned to Watsonville for high school. Romaria's story of becoming a *danzante* with the Ixtatutli/White hawk Indian Council offers a further example of how cultural recuperation through *danza* intersects with broader discourses of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* in Greater Mexico.

* * *

Romaria:

> A really good friend in high school invited me so I started to go to meetings. One of the big components of the Brown Berets is cultural awareness and participation. And so, in Watsonville we've had the White Hawk Aztec dance group for I don't know how long. The group is really consistent. They meet every Tuesday and Thursday with hardly any breaks, unless it's a school vacation because that's the facilities that they use; either a gym or a cafeteria. During the summer we also practice. So, it was really consistent and I was able to go to practices twice a week, but just to watch. I did that for a year, year and a half. I just sat on the outskirts and watched. I would always get invited to *palabra* at the very end and for some reason that really intimidated me. I think back and I try to figure out why. I think a lot of it was that I just didn't feel…well, first of all, I didn't know what Indian or indigenous was. The only Indian I know was like Indians and cowboys. I didn't know that *Mexicanos* or Chicanos have Indian blood. I had never encountered that. So, I learned about that in the Brown Berets and when I would go to danza practice, I'd take off right before *palabra* because I'd get nervous.

* * *

Figure 8 *Ixtatutli* (White Hawk) dancers offering dances in a school auditorium, Watsonville, California, 2003 (photo by Steve Nava).

Romaria's hesitance and nervousness to enter the *danza*, even at practice for *palabra,* the closing circle where dancers are invited to share anything that is on their hearts or minds or to offer gratitude, is reflective of the uneven and fraught understandings of mestizaje and indigeneity that circulate throughout Greater Mexico. Romaria's confession that she did not even know that "Mexicanos or Chicanos have Indian blood" underscores this and demonstrates the ways that hegemonic discourses of identity, in both the U.S. and Mexico have been somewhat successful in erasing indigenous histories and the practice of indigenous traditions, except where it serves larger processes of nation-making. Unlike Luna, Romaria's connection with indigeneity

was largely mediated through her experience with the Brown Berets, an organization born out of the Chicano Movement that advocates for worker's rights and educational reform as well as organizes against war and police brutality. Before the Brown Berets and her introduction to White Hawk, Romaria articulates that her only understanding of what it means to be Indian is through "cowboys and Indians." As our conversation continued, Romaria shared with me the ways in which her understanding of *danza* began to shift as her relationship to it and participation in it deepened.

* * *

Romaria:

> At first, I didn't consider *danza* as ceremony. Now, going to practice is ceremony because the fire is on and we're there. When I got my *ayoyotes*, and it took me a really long time, because I knew and I felt that I didn't yet understand what it meant to be in *danza*. It was just this really strong feeling for me to be cautious about what it was. I knew it was important, it felt really important, but I couldn't totally connect with why or how it was important. So through time, you know, more than anything, seeing how people in *danza* behave and act with each other, how they respect each other, more than people telling me about it is how I really slowly decided that I would get my *ayoyotes*. I cried when I was congratulated that day. Part of the reason it took me so long too is because I knew it was a big commitment, in modern times. I didn't just want to get my *ayoyotes* and disappear, which is what some *danzantes* do. And then all these things that go along with earning your *ayoyotes* which are, at least for our group, learning four *danzas*, the name, what it means and how to do them on your own.
>
> But I didn't just want to know the four *danza*s. I wanted to know about the fire, why we have to smoke off when we came in and left and really I was beginning to sense a change in how I saw the world and I was feeling better inside of myself. I could really accept myself, the color of my skin and my hair type and my family, who they are, where I came from. I accepted what I am and what I'm not. I'm not indigenous. I don't speak an indigenous language. I accept that. I'm Chicana, you know. I accept that. At times, I would negate that. To be Chicana and to be a *danzantes*, that's really a packed concept right there. So for me, getting my *ayoyotes* was more than just putting them on and making my own *traje*, it was about a whole perspective change. The perspective is just the way that we know

that things are really and truly connected, not just words that come out of our mouths. I can really know and see and can feel that things are connected.

* * *

While Romaria's connection with indigeneity is quite different from Luna's, who is able to trace her connection as a *Macehual* woman directly through her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, their deliberate processes for building relationships with themselves and their wider communities and histories through *danza* bear resonance. Romaria's *testimonio* about receiving her *ayayotes* is meaningful in many ways. Specifically, she negotiates and articulated her own identity as Chicana through the embodied act of *danza*. She is not attempting to take on an Indigenous identity out right, but instead works from her own, self-reflexive, self-articulated location towards her own embodied understanding of identity and place.

Figure 9 White Hawk's *Xilonen,* "young corn" coming of age ceremony for young girls. Watsonville, CA, summer 2005 (photo by Gabriel Santos).

Transnational Practices of Indigeneity in *Danza Azteca* Encounters

The geographic and cultural landscape of Greater Mexico, as introduced by Paredes, encourages a historical consideration, both in relation to, and beyond current borders in order to render more complex understandings of cultural practices and quotidian life. Additionally, it re-locates narratives of "newness" and "foreignness" away from people and practices moving north across the U.S.-Mexico borderlands by reminding us of life and national boundaries before 1846. It also offers an invitation to consider the history of Greater Mexico in what the French historian Fernand Braudel (2009) refers to as the *longue durée*, the long view of history, inspiring questions about life in these lands before Mexico was Mexico, before Spanish invasion, and beyond. Through the *testimonios* offered in this chapter by Luna and Romaria, we are able to gain a better understanding of the ways in which both discourses and lived realities of *mestizaje* and indigeneity are articulated and re-articulated throughout Greater Mexico.

Debates, dialogues, and arguments about *mestizaje* and indigeneity, and the rights associated with each, rage on and the stakes, political, socially, culturally, are high. It would be a mistake to characterize these debates as primarily discursive in nature as they have real, material, legal, and political consequences. Articulations of *mestizaje* and indigeneity are closely tied to social and political barriers to access (e.g. political participation, voting rights, ownership rights), as well as cultural rights, sovereignty, and self-determination, especially in terms of self-governance and ceremonial practice. Examining the ways in which these conversations surface and are negotiated

transnationally within and through *danza azteca* offers an additional dimension, an embodied consideration, of enactments of belonging and otherness.

Throughout Greater Mexico, *danza azteca* spaces create rich and dynamic sites for the embodied negotiations and articulations of *mestizaje* and indigeneity. It is, I argue, a crucial space for both Chicana/os and Mexicana/os to, in the words of Hernandez-Avila cited above, "dig out of our own insides what is ours" (1992). Luna and Romaria's *testimonios* offer examples of the ways in which *danza* has facilitated their own diggings, their own negotiations of belonging, (re)membering, and relationship to (*mexica)nidad* within fraught and contested times. These negotiations are rarely easy and *danza* spaces are not immune to divisiveness rooted in discourses of belonging and authenticity. They do, however offer important entryways and opportunities for *danzantes* and non-*danzantes* alike to engage in the complex, often treacherous, terrain of identity formations throughout Greater Mexico. In the following chapter, I offer an autoethnography of my own experiences, negotiations, and navigations of the socio-cultural, political, and personal topographies surfaced this chapter in order to further elucidate the possibilities and entanglements I experienced and observed throughout my research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dancing Dualities, Performing Identity: (Auto)Ethnographic *encuentros y desencuentros*

> A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives — our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings — all fuse to create a politic born of necessity.
>
> - Cherríe Moraga, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981, 23)

> It may help if we view "the field" as both methodological ideal and a concrete *place* of professional activity. The anthropologist's field is defined as a site of displaced dwelling and productive work, a practice of participant observation.
>
> -James Clifford, *Routes* (1997, 21)

When I first started this research, I had not made up my mind as to what my personal, physical, emotional, spiritual, interaction with *danza* would be. For years, I had participated in ceremonies and gatherings with *danzantes* as part of my own political and spiritual commitments in both Texas and California. Even as I was always deeply moved by *danza*, I never felt ready to make a serious commitment to the practice—a sentiment that was shared and echoed time and again by friends and interlocutors throughout this research process. I also harbored deeper, personal questions about what entering a *danza* circle would mean. As I began this project, I focused my primary attention on the public performance of *danza azteca*, as a representation and expression of indigeneity within Chicana/o, Mexican, and Indigenous Mexican communities. The public dance gatherings and offerings that take place at festivals, graduations, marches, and protests served as the most visible, most readily accessible component of a larger ceremonial *danza* landscape. More private and intimate were the *velaciones* (all night vigils), *peregrinaciones* (ritual pilgrimages), *ensayos* (rehearsals) and in some cases, *temezcallis* (ritual sweats). In each

of these situations, and as often as possible, I worked to be transparent and open about my multiple roles and positionalities as a Chicana, an anthropologist and scholar-activist, a non-*danzante*, a de-tribalized person with strong family ties to Chihuahua, Mexico, and what is now the U.S. Southwest, and an often tongue-tied, somewhat-native Spanish speaker. While Spanish was in fact my first language, I quickly lost fluency when I began elementary school in Texas. Although both of my parents are bilingual, English became our go-to, day-to-day language. In school, I was identified early as a "gifted" student, which also meant that I would be separated from Spanish speaking classmates; in fact, I would be one of only a few Chicana students in my classrooms until I reached college. This experience is, of course, not specific to me. While I was accorded many privileges as a gifted student, being separated from other Spanish speaking students also meant that I simply spoke Spanish less, the result of which is that by the time I enrolled in Spanish classes in high school, it did in fact feel like a foreign language that I had the rhythm and heart for, but not the pronunciation for or mastery of. I worked to regain my command of Spanish through college and into graduate school, to great success. Even so, I learned quickly once in Mexico City the ways in which regionality (e.g. Northern Mexico versus Central Mexico) of language also plays a vital role to insider-outsider positionality.

There were moments when my identity as a Chicana offered me access to spaces and conversations that my identity as an anthropologist did not, and vice versa. *Danzantes* would sometimes joke that I could not be an anthropologist from the U.S. because I am not a *gringo* (white man) and at other time I would be asked to *prove* that I was a University student and not from the Mexican government because I was asking too

many questions. The latter concern was usually assuaged quickly when my pronunciation of a word or two was off or when I offered my own family's story of migration to the U.S. The question and location of my credibility was dynamic and even shaky at times. In these moments, I worked to offer any opening for connection possible to mixed success; a perpetual state for a liminal subject. Most salient, perhaps, of all the inquiries about me was the question of whether or not I myself was a *danzante* (i.e., if I had made an explicit commitment as a dancer) and/or if I had ever even participated in *danza* as a dancer, even if just in an *ensayo*. These were questions that would prove to have a life of their own and be of great importance for me both personally and professionally in this research.

Figure 10 Día de la raza march, San Antonio, Texas, 1999 (photograph by author)

Figure 11 Día de los muertos celebration in the rain at the University of Texas, Austin, 2001 (photograph by author)

Many things about me also went unsaid or more interestingly, unquestioned, throughout my time in the field; namely my gender identity (assumed and read as female) and my sexuality. I chose not to out myself as a queer, non-binary person while in the field for personal reasons. In part, this decision was a desire for simplification within a research process that was already traveling across and through multiple geographic and identity-based borders, including linguistic, cultural, generational, and national ones. It was also, in part out of my uncertainty around safety and reception. Although there are some who would argue that homophobia did not exist within indigenous communities pre-contact with the Spanish, and more specifically with the Catholic Church, through my own experiences as an activist and organizer I had already witnessed and experienced a tremendous amount of homophobia and heterosexism. While not it did happen in every

conversation, I had several interactions in my preliminary research that caused me significant pause and worry. Specifically, questions about gender roles and questions that engaged with the concept of sacred duality yielded responses that either reinforced dominant, binary gender categories or called into question my intention as a researcher. With some dancers, those with whom I shared multiple community ties and spaces, I was able to converse more freely about my multiple identities and how they came into play in *danza* spaces. While many scholars, especially unmarried women, as I was perceived to be, often make note of the high frequency of inquiries they received about partners and relationships throughout their time "in the field," there was primarily silence about my relationship status. These questions were a risk of sorts and in the end, I felt underprepared to negotiate their consequences, the result of which was that I rarely offered information about my own identities.

In both formal and informal conversations and interactions, broader questions about my family and its trajectory in the U.S., as well as questions about my educational journeys and day-to-day life, were common and constant companions to my own litany of research questions. I carried a persistent worry about when the questions about my relationship status might emerge. I worried that if I was "outed" that it would not only potentially affect my ability to conduct and complete my fieldwork, but that it could also put me in harms way, which did not every really happen. The worry is an all too familiar reflex for many queer and non-binary people because the material consequences of homophobia and heterosexism can be literally life threatening. The question, however, never really came. This was a welcome relief that eventually turned into wonder and

wonderings. As relationship connections played a vital role in this project, who I was, why I was writing notes and taking pictures, how and where I was present were, rightly, all up for question and were regularly answered by way of a relationship connection. More often than not, these connections were through non-academic and non-romantic relationships, through my mother, and specifically during my time in San Antonio, through *danzantes* or shared community connections.

As I re-center my attention on my time in the field and my overarching questions about identity expression through the embodied experience of *danza*, my own body and personhood is inextricably linked to each ethnographic moment. As my time and interaction near and with *danza* circles and *danzantes* deepened, so did my interaction with the more intimate aspects and arenas of ceremonial life. My research questions were often intersected by personal ones; methodological practices were influenced by my own affinities and (dis)abilities. Whether to take on the role of participant or observer was a ubiquitous, ever-present, and in-the-moment decision to be made due to the impossibility, in my experience, of simultaneously observing and participating in ritual and sacred space.

In this chapter, I offer critical reflections from my experience in the field and critical questions that maintain their deep resonance so many years later. It is important to say that this research had a profound impact on not only my life as an anthropologist, but also had a personal impact on the ways in which I understood myself, my own body, my own corporeal knowledge. Operationalizing Reed-Danahay's (1997) definition of autoethnography as "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context"

(9), I begin with a series of short vignettes. I start with my first meeting with a group of *danzantes* in Mexico City who invited me to join them for their weekly *ensayo.* My relationship with these same *danzantes*, in addition to their generosity, openness, and care of me, would greatly shape my experience of *danza*.

* * *

First Ensayo

Figure 12 Cruz and myself with Oscar, small *danza* ensayo in Mexico City (photo by Everardo Lara González, 2005)

I had been in Mexico City for two months when I was invited to my first *ensayo* by Everardo Lara Gonzaléz a mathematician and cultural expert on pre-Columbian calculating devices, including the *neopohualtzintzin*. I met Everardo through a mutual friend from San Antonio who had invited Everardo to Texas to offer workshops for youth

on pre-Columbian mathematics and cosmovision. I was excited to have the opportunity to interact with dancers in a more intimate setting instead of the larger, public, ad hoc *danzas* that I had been attending for several weeks. On the day of practice, I arrived a little early, hoping to have a chance to talk with the *maestros* and meet some of the dancers before *ensayo* began. Early on in our conversations, it became clear to me that I had been invited to dance, not to observe. I was surprised, but not completely. As my research progressed and, as I spent more and more time learning and thinking about the ideological frameworks employed and embodied by *danzantes,* I knew I would have to decide as to whether I would enter a dance circle or not, even if only for a practice session. On the one hand, I was unsure of the methodological implications of my participation and how it might affect my subsequent interactions with other *danzantes* who were not members of this particular group. On the other hand, as a self-identified Chicana, I was simultaneously curious and anxious to see, in crude terms, what the fuss was all about. In this particular moment however, I did not have the time to sort through the various emotional and scholarly questions that were flooding my brain. In the end, I decided to practice with the group, first, because the *maestros* were insistent about their invitation and, second, because the other dancers were really trying to *animarme* (encourage me). I felt compelled.

After the *ensayo* was over, I had a short conversation with a few of the dancers who asked me about my experience. “How did it feel?” they asked. I was tired but my head was clear. I felt like I had missed every step, even when we went through them slowly. I was unsure if my legs would be able to carry me the eight blocks to the nearest

Metro station and then the additional three blocks from my stop to my tiny apartment. But how did it *feel*? That was a question that I did now know how to answer in the moment. I realized quickly that I did not have the words to express how I felt nor the experience to parse it out. I could identify objectively how I felt I did (not so great), but could not locate a way to locate the embodied sensation of dancing. Sensing my hesitation, one *danzante* reassured me that it takes time to get used to the rhythms and movements and told me that they would be practicing again in a couple of days and it would be good to see me again. This was the moment in which I became aware of the role my body would play in my research.

I returned often to the *danza ensayo* and continued to dance with the group for the remainder of my stay in Mexico City. As I participated in more practices and public and private *danza* ceremonies, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the stories and experiences that the *danzantes* shared with me through my own bodily and sensory experiences of dancing.

Preparing for Tlaltelolco

Only a few days after my first *ensayo*, I was invited to dance with the small group at Tlaltelolco or *La Plaza de las Tres Culturas*. It was July and the *danza* gathering at Tlaltelolco marks one of the four largest ritual gatherings that *danzantes de compromiso* (dancers who have made a formal commitment to dance) in Mexico attend as part of their ceremonial calendar (the other three gatherings take place in Amecameca, los Remedios, and Tepeyac/la Basilica de Guadalupe). Tlaltelolco is not only am important ritual site for

danzantes. It is also a place that looms in the collective Mexican memory as the location of two violent encounters. The first is *la noche triste* (the night of sorrows) or *la noche victoriosa* (the night of victory), depending on which side of the battle you were on, that Luna discusses in the previous chapter as the night that Hernán Cortés was driven out of Tenochtilán, only to regain control a short time later. The second is the "Tlaltelolco Massacre," that occurred on October 2, 1968 when Mexican armed forced opened fire on unarmed civilians protesting the 1968 Mexico City Olympics.

Figure 13 *Danzantes* preparing to dance at Tlatelolco, La Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Mexico City, July 2005. Engraved inscription reads: *El 13 de agosto de 1521 heroicamente defendido por Cuauhtémoc, cayó Tlatelolco en poder de Hernán Cortés. No fue triunfo, ni derrota. Fue el doloroso nacimiento del pueblo mestizo que es el México de hoy.* [The 13th of August of 1521 heroically defended by Cuauhtémoc, Tlaltelolco fell to Hernán Cortés. It was neither triumph, nor defeat. It was the painful birth of the mestizo pueblo that is Mexico today.] (photo by the author)

In preparation for this, my first very public *danza*, I was instructed to find an all-white outfit, skirt and top, made of *manta* (cotton). This outfit would mark me as a *principiante*, a beginner, which would signal to other *danzantes* that I might not understand all the intricacies of the ceremony and that I was not prepared to be invited into the middle of the circle to lead a dance. Both indicators were absolutely true. I was concerned about finding an appropriate outfit on two levels: 1) I had been unlucky in previous shopping trips for clothing in Mexico City, especially when looking for traditional embroidered tops because of my size, and 2), I was in a time crunch. I had less than a week to try to find an outfit that would work—something that not only fit and was plain white, but something I could also dance in. Compelled by the maestro and maestras' invitation to "just come and see how it feels" (referencing the forthcoming gathering at Tlaltelolco), I had committed to participate and, thus, had also committed to finding that very important, all-white outfit.

There are few times in my life that I have been excited to or welcomed having to wear a skirt. This ended up being one of them. Skirts, I found, especially long flowing ones, are forgiving. Although I also considered looking for a pair of pants that might work, that plan was quickly abandoned as I envisioned the one pair that *almost* fit me splitting at the seams during a jumping or squatting move in the middle of a very public ceremony. After countless awkward conversations with many kind, yet insistent, shop owners swearing they had a top that would fit me as they searched to the bottom of seemingly endless piles of blouses, I had decided that I would just try to just find a plain

white t-shirt and hope that it would suffice. Resigned to that decision, I began to leave the small market place, when one last shop owner yelled, "*Gordita, sí tengo algo que te quedará*" ("Chubby girl, I do have something that will fit you").

I had, as this point, become relatively numb to the names that people would yell out trying to get my attention, especially vendors who wanted me to make a purchase. Vendors would weave in a "*gringa*" (how did they know I was from the U.S.?) or "*gordita*" (a name I had been called all my life) into their descriptions about their fruit or CD selections, how their tacos were the best in México, or how their products were one of a kind, not to be found anywhere else. I was confused by this tactic. How was using a soft insult meant to encourage patronage? Close Mexican friends often laughed at what they called my Chicana observations and questions. Their regular responses—"It's just how it is!" or "You can just tell!" or "How were the tacos?"—were tally marks of how non-Mexican Chicanas can be. In this case, the shopkeeper, a *gordita* herself, did in fact have a top for me. It was made of light *manta* and had soft blue embroidery. If it fit, it would be perfect. I purchased it without trying it on for fear of not being able to take it off. I thanked the shopkeeper and she gave me a blessing as I was her first sale of the day. I shared with her that it was for a *danza* ceremony, which started a short conversation about her pueblo, the gathering the following weekend in Tlaltelolco, and her short explanation of how to take out the stitching down the sides of the shirt in case I wanted to let it out or add more material.

Each dancer has their own journey to their *traje*; this was my journey to mine.


Figures 14 & 15 (left) Arrival at the Basilica de Guadalupe for *la peregrinación de las danzas*, a ritual dancing pilgrimage that begins at Tlaltelolco, approx 5.3km (photographer unknown). **(right)** With Deyanira, Oscar, and Everardo at a traditional *danza* ceremony in Tetelcingo, Cuautla, Morelos I am pictured in my first *danza* traje in both photos (photograph by Laura Huerta Migus).

¡*Te va a entrar un aire!*// You're going to get sick!

I was hot after four hours of dancing in Tlaltelolco. It was a sunny July day and we were taking a small break before returning to the *danza* circle to finish the ceremony. Remembering a trick I had learned during my Texas soccer-playing days, I wet down a handkerchief with cool water and placed it on my inner elbow joints, alternating the handkerchief now and then to behind my knees. This action caught the attention of folks and began a lively conversation about the most effective ways to cool down when overheated. Opinions were many, but when I suggested that what I really wanted to do was pour a bucket of ice water over my head, there was an audible gasp.

¡Elisa, no! ¡Te va a entrar un aire!

While there was little consensus about the most effective way to cool down, pouring ice-cold water on your head was clearly considered a death wish. I shrugged and said that it's something my family does all the time, especially on those hot, hot desert days, but I

promised not to do it anymore. In my experience, "*aires*" (literally, "airs") are often identified as the root cause of ailments, especially earaches, fevers and sore throats. The rules and guidelines about how and where one would "catch a bad air" were never quite clear to me. At that time, I associated warnings about *aires* with corrections to children's behavior, like, let's say, when they/we are running in and out of an air-conditioned house on a hot day.

A few days after the ceremony, I recounted this moment to my mother. Our exchange went something like this,

Elisa: Mom, why didn't you ever tell me not to wet my head when I'm sweaty? I could have died! (jokingly)

Mom: Well, what can I tell you? I thought sending you off with some hand sanitizer and holy water would be enough.

Interviewer and Interviewed // **And you, how was it for you? What did you feel?**

In one of my final interviews in Mexico City, I sat down with the *maestra* (Deyanira) and *maestro* (Oscar) of the *danza* circle that I had joined along with one other dancer, Cruz, who had started around the same time I did. Unbeknownst to me, Tlaltelolco had also been her first large, public *danza* gathering. I had assumed, incorrectly, that I was the only newbie in the group. Throughout the interview, all three took turns addressing my questions, asked questions of each other, and made a lot of jokes, as evidenced by the laughter on the interview tapes. As we approached what I thought would be the end of the interview, Cruz stopped me as I began to thank them for their time and *palabra*.

Figure 16 With Deyanira and Oscar, my *danza* maestra and maestro in Coyoacán (photographer unknown, 2005) insert numbers

Cruz: *Pero Elisa, tú, ¿qué piensas? //* But Elisa, what do you think?"
Elisa: About what?
Cruz: De todo // Everything

This was not the first time that I, as interviewer, had been asked questions during formal interviews. It was, however, the first time I had been asked so many questions. This one pause and redirection turned into an hour-long conversation about all the ways that I felt seen and unseen, in and out of place simultaneously. At the end of this conversation Deyanira was sure to remind me that I belong because I had the *voluntad*, the will, to ask the questions, to travel, to ask, and to dance, however hesitantly or haltingly or unsure my

engagement was. I was a part of their daily life, including their *danza* life for a brief, but meaningful time.

* * *

How close can an anthropologist really get to their subject? Is there such a thing as being *too* close? In her essay, "Can Bodylore be Brought to its Senses," Deidre Sklar (1994) argues that "embodied experiences, and movement in particular, provide our most fundamental grounds of knowing and conceptualizing the world" (9). Using two examples from her research on religious ceremony—the first, a celebration of the Jewish holiday of Purim in New York City and, the second, focusing on the annual Tortugas fiesta in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe in southern New Mexico—Sklar explores how spiritual and social information is transmitted through the body of participants. Ultimately, she argues that anthropologists should rely on their "own body and body intelligence as a point of study of cultural practice as corporeal knowledge" (9) and employ a methodological technique she terms "kinesthetic empathy," or "the capacity to participate with another's movement or another's sensory experience of movement" by approximating what they perceive "visually, aurally, or tactilely" (13). Importantly, Sklar notes, although somewhat in passing, that her sensorial and embodied experiences during her veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe would "strike a different cord" with community members who had participated in the celebration for many, many years, even if she was able to perfectly mime their actions. When using such methods in my own research process, I worked to be mindful not to make the mistake of creating generalities about individual and group experiences. Open ended questions that allowed interlocutors to

locate themselves was central to this approach. Embodied methods, whether through kinesthetic empathy or body intelligence, are important tools that help to explore the deep meanings and complex processes at work in the rituals, ceremonies, and communities.

Throughout my time in the field, I held both Sklar's (1994) concept of kinesthetic empathy and Stoller's (1997) concept of sensuous scholarship close to me as I made decisions and observations about my roles as participant-observer and cultural inside-outsider. Additionally, uncertainty about *how* to feel my body, as well as honing in on what my body felt was an ever-looming challenge. How does one gain this self-reflexivity? What was my journey to kinesthetic understanding of myself, especially as a person whose body was constantly commented on for its size? I quickly realized that in order to engage in kinesthetic empathy and sensuous scholarship, I would first have to find a way to approach an embodied knowing of myself in a way that I had never done before. This is a moment where the research took an extraordinarily personal turn, as the topic and scope necessitated a more holistic engagement by me, the researcher.

The vignettes that I offer in this chapter mark multiple moments of *encuentros y desencuentros* (encounters and dis-encounters), moments of belonging and recognition right alongside moments of misunderstanding and missed connections. In one way, the invitation to dance at Tlaltelolco was a welcoming gesture as well as a pedagogical move by Deyanira and Oscar. After all, how was I going to understand what a large, public *danza* felt like from the outside? They held no worry about how long I would last or how well I would dance. In the end, their confidence surprised me perhaps most because I was able to dance the entire six hours of the ceremony—not well, but well enough. How were

they to know that the greatest challenge for me would be just finding plain, white clothing that would fit? Or that the most salient moment of cultural mis-alignment would be about wanting to pour cool water on my head?

What I do *not* want to do in this analysis is the very thing that Renato Rosaldo (1993) warns against in *Culture and Truth* when he writes, "If classic ethnography's vice was the slippage from the ideal of detachment to actual indifference, that of present-day reflexivity is the tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other" (7). What I have found is that my own subjectivities and identities as a queer, fat, non-binary Chicana non-*danzante* who did enter a *danza* circle for a time, shaped the core nature of this research. My research questions, my interactions with my interlocuters, the friction caused as I moved in and between spaces "show up" throughout this research. In particular, my experiences with *danza* highlight questions that, even as a laboratory practice for many, *danza* may still be unable to reckon with challenges of otherness, not along racial-ethnic lines, but within evolving matrices of gender, sexuality, and ability.

In the end, it is clear that the question of whether or not I would have personal, physical, emotional interaction with *danza* during my fieldwork, as I describe at the beginning of this chapter, was perhaps a foregone conclusion. The practice of ethnography, of participant observation, necessarily positions the ethnographer within the storyline of their research. How, why, and whether these experiences of personal connection and experience are rendered visible or not in our written work varies widely. This chapter has been an effort to unpack the ways in which the nature of my experiences

in the field, the ways in which I was drawn in and invited to dance, the surfacing of my ambivalences, and my moments of silence provide an additional and important contextualizing foundation for this overall research. My individual and interconnected identities as a queer, fat, Chicana anthropologist played variable, yet salient roles in the ways in which I was understood and interacted with, as well as how I, as both a researcher and person, navigated "the field" and *danza* spaces. I believe that it is methodologically and theoretically compelling and valuable to explore these experiences through an autoethnographic lens in order to delve into the texture of experience of *the doing* of ethnographic work.

EPILOGUE
Dancing Identities and Embodiments of Memory and Resistance

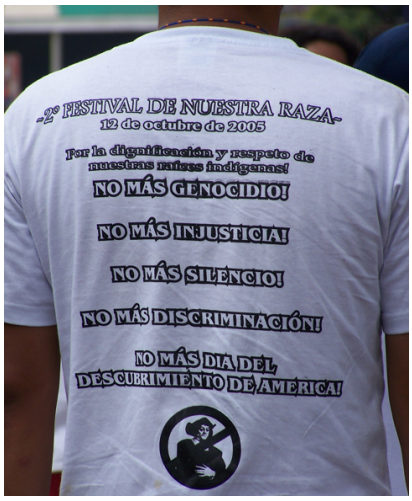

Figure 17 & 18 Danzantes in Coyoacán celebrating Día de la Raza. The back of the t-shirt reads, "2nd Festival of our Raza // October 12, 2005 // For the dignity and respect of our indigenous roots // NO MORE GENOCIDE // NO MORE INJUSTICE // NO MORE SILENCE // NO MORE DISCRIMINATION // NO MORE DAY OF THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA" and includes a crossed out figure of Christopher Columbus (photograph by the author, 2005)

Now, almost fifteen years after I first began my fieldwork, the landscapes—political, social, and cultural—have both shifted tremendously and remained constant. Constant is the tension and power structures throughout Greater Mexico. Increased militarization at the U.S.-Mexico border can be traced in many ways to the Clinton years in the White House, although the vitriolic rhetoric of the current Trump presidency makes it easy to think that the hate is new. Politics of identity feel particularly biting and divisive these days. Many of the issues of social, political, and educational access and reform fought for during the Chicana/o Movement and student protests of the late 60s and early 70s remain, especially as many of the wins such as access to basic and higher

education, labor rights, and affordable health care have receded or been chipped away at by legal challenges together with federal and state congressional orders.

Changed are the demographics, political and social articulations of *mexicanidad* and indigeneity. In California, for instance, the number of Mexican Indigenous people, many of whom come from Oaxaca, has grown tremendously over the past two decades. So, too, has the number of Central Americans, many from Indigenous communities, who now call the state home. As the demographic landscape changes, so, too, does the experience and expression of identity, especially as more people enter the conversation and bring their own lived experience of belonging and disenfranchisement into dialogue. Questions of authenticity and erasure remain with larger social systems that move towards acculturation and cultural hegemony; it is a palimpsestic relationship. Daniel Alarcón (1997) describes a palimpsest in this way,

> a site where texts have been superimposed onto others in an attempt to displace earlier or competing histories. Significantly, such displacement is never total; the suppressed material often remains legible, however faintly, challenging the dominant text with an alternate version of events. Even when the erasure appears total, important evidence of the textual removal remains that should prompt us to view the dominant discourse in a critical light, just as the walls of the Aztec palace transformed by the conquistadors into a blank slate remain a crucial marker of a silenced indigenous presence and suggest a ubiquitous but hidden wealth that generated the Spanish texts superimposed on them (xiv).

In the case of *danza azteca,* the superimposition of texts that Alarcón describes helps to understand the ways that the tradition has existed and persisted over time, even when in hiding, even as it has transformed. The process, the excavations and (re)connections, is what, I hope, my research demonstrates. *Danza azteca* is but one practice that many Chicana/os and Mexicana/os have "dug for," in the words of Inés

Hernández-Avila, in order to bring to the surface long-submerged cultural knowledge and practices. *Danza azteca*, along with other cultural practices and performances within Greater Mexico, act as resurgent and insurgent places of movement and memory that push against narratives of erasure and conquest. This process is both in resistance to dominant cultural narratives of erasure and marginalization and an effort at collective world-making, a revival and re-creation, outside of Western structures even while surrounded by them. While at times fraught, especially at the intersections of contemporary understandings of gender and sexuality, the practice of *danza azteca* is embodied memory in motion. Serving as a site for continued traditional practice, as well as re-connection and re-membering, *danza* spaces create unique opportunities for Chicana/os and Mexicana/os to create alternative spaces of meaning and expression, not only in response to, but also outside of hegemonic processes of assimilation and erasure.

While more research on *danza azteca* has been published in the years since I began this work (Scolieri 2013; Colín 2014; De La Torre and Gutierrez Zuñiga 2017), a transnational and hemispheric approach to considering *danza azteca* has yet to be robustly adopted; most of the research, even while enlightening and rigorous, stays on one side of the U.S.-Mexico border or the other. Taking up the complicated relationship between Chicana/o and Mexicana/o identity formations in relation to discourses of mestizaje and indigeneity on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico as negotiated within and through *danza azteca* spaces, as I have done in this dissertation, lends a unique approach to the research topic. Specifically, it allows for the elucidation of both micro-, interpersonal, day-to-day, experiences of and in *danza* as well as offers context for macro

processes; my approach offers an understanding of how local, community-based *danza* gatherings (Chapter 2) interact, effect, and respond to larger socio-political processes that cross nation-state borders (Chapter 3). Additionally, the act of researching *danza azteca* as an embodied practice has itself been an embodied, insider-outsider, self-reflective process for me as a scholar and researcher, which has enabled a unique approach to this subject matter (Chapter 4).

This research is especially poignant and timely for the field of Anthropology as I, and the field, continue to work through questions of authority, positionality, and voice. My work is an attempt to carve out space for not-quite-insider, not-quite-outsider ethnographers who experience their subject matter and provide analysis in simultaneously personal and academic registers. Working from the intersections of Performance Studies, embodiment theory, Dance Studies, and Ethnic Studies, this research project lays the groundwork for understanding *danza azteca* as an amalgamation of cultural performance, political resistance, space of identity (re)formation, and continuation of ancestral knowledge; it situates *danza* as a critical touch point for individuals and communities living and surviving under colonial power structures that continually marginalize and denigrate indigenous, non-Western, philosophies and practices.

The journey of this research has opened a number of new and exciting pathways for future work. As a highly visible, almost ubiquitous, part of many Chicana/o and Mexicana/o communities, *danza* ceremonies and *danzantes* themselves create and inform understandings, including community values and mores. Specifically, this dissertation sets the groundwork for more expansive examinations of the ways tradition and

ceremony themselves act and enact spaces of both possibility and harm; specifically, the ways in which discourses of traditional authority can have adverse effects on individual and community sustainability. Connected to this, there is so much more to be studied and said about the ways in which the categories of every day gender and sexuality are structured, monitored, and embodied within *danza* spaces. I look forward to these expansions and future research projects.

Ometeotl

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