Folklórico Pedagogy: Empowering Youth through Embodied & Counter-Hegemonic Practices of Danza Folklórica

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Abstract:
This paper explores the possibilities of danza folklórica as a pedagogical tool of self-empowerment for youth intimately experiencing the embodied effects of hegemonic educational systems. Embodied methodologies are practiced to gesture towards the creation of a new pedagogy that is uniquely informed by the histories/realities of power discontents between Black and Indigenous communities and the empires and its complicit subjects responsible for the sustenance of the nationalized, appropriative dance of Ballet Folklórico de Mexico. By unveiling the invisibilized, yet ever-present, ghosts of this colonized dance practice, practitioners of folklórico pedagogies are able to generate a transgenerational consciousness that critically transform how oppression can be addressed and challenged in the body and its worldly relations. These pedagogical interventions were directly inspired by the knowledges crafted within the summer program, Camp Folklórico, sponsored by Junta for Progressive Action during the summer of 2021. Due to the geopolitical and sociocultural context of where these learnings had arisen, a critical, historical analysis of the neighborhood of Fair Haven and its contested communities are reviewed and supplemented with an analysis of embodied and educational conditions currently endured by youth that anchored the curricular programming.

Word count: 12,972


This capstone is a work of Yale student research. The arguments and research in the project are those of the individual student. They are not endorsed by Yale, nor are they official university positions or statements.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Primero, le doy gracias a dios, al creador, que ha guiado mis comunidades por milenia, así como lo ha hecho conmigo a lo largo de mi camino educativo. A seguir, quiero dedicar gracias a:

Mi Mami y Papi, Edna Lorena y Juan Antonio Torres, que me han enseñado como vivir la vida con amor, compacion, y alegría. Sin su apoyo, no estaré aquí, persiguiendo las cosas que amo.

My bros, Juanantonio and Giancarlo Torres, who offer me reset during turbulent times and inspire me to work harder.

Mi amor, Jesús Estrada-Martinez por cuidarme cuando yo solo no podía y también por animarme a pensar críticamente y amar radicalmente. Te amo hasta la luna.

Mis queridas familias: Salguero y Angulo de Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, México y mis ancestros en Ponce, Puerto Rico. Mis familias en San Diego: La Familia Zamora-Salguero, La Familia Bautista-Dojaquez. La Familia Batiz. La Familia Guzman. Mis primos y mejor amigos: siempre las tengo en mi corazón.

Mi familia en New Haven: Lucy Duran Camacho, Eddy Tzintzun-Tapia, Kimberly Abarca, Arianna Jiron-Villanueva, Sandí Amezcua-Rocha, y Peter Tran. Your love, encouragement, and laughter has nurtured my soul during every step of this journey.

Mi familia de Ballet Folklórico Mexicano de Yale; you have all made BF the radically special place it is and have completely shaped my ideas of community, togetherness, and embodied care.

My mentors, Dr. Talya Zemach-Bersin and Professor Daniel Wei HoSang; your abounding knowledge has realized this work and risen it to levels I only hoped of reach earlier last year. One day, I aspire to become the thoughtful, giving, and dedicated educators that you both are. I am sincerely grateful for your mentorship, patience, and love.

Y finalmente, pero sin duda las personas más importante: mi familia de parte de Junta para Accion Progresiva: Bruni y Daniel Pizarro, Cheila Serrano, Rosaida Maldonado, Loribeth Rodriguez, Rafael Ramos (de pare de Bregamos Community Theatre), mi pareja de enseñanza Alex Rocha-Alvarez, y los estudiantes del primer Campamento de Folklórico que actualizaron los enseñanzas con amor y pasión. Estoy eternamente agradecido por la oportunidad de soñar y organizar juntos. Espero construir mas futuros imaginativos.
FORWARD

This project has allowed me to (re)turn to my body. My dancing body. My wounded body. My resilient body. My loved body. Our bodies are always with us, yet how have they been so neglected and undervalued? I used this project as a means of healing, because at certain points throughout the year it was all I could muster. My fragile body. My moody body. My empowered body. My educational journey has made it crystal-clear to me that I can no longer set aside my body and its needs/callings/signals. Luckily, as I endured the last few weeks of my last year here, it was as if dance saved me once again, like it did many times during my youth. Simultaneously, while writing this paper, I practiced for Ballet Folklórico Mexicano de Yale’s first Spring Show in nearly three years. I escaped writing for a bit in nightly practices at the Stiles/Morse Crescent Theater and engaged directly with the pedagogies that I write about in this paper. I don’t think I could have completed this project without dancing it first. So, let this project be a celebration of the body!

Though, as a dancer, the written form of communication exercised for this paper is completely influenced with how I relationally interact with the world. At times, sentences become unwinding thoughts that spin and spin and spin uncontrollably until messages become unclear. I try my best to correct this whenever I can as to not lose sight of the reason I write, and the reason I dance for that matter.

As a self-identified Latinx, non-Indigenous and non-Black author, it is my responsibility to accurately portray the practices, experiences, and values of distinct Indigenous and Black communities. Accurate portrayals require time and effort that, in my case, have been dedicated to center Black and Indigenous scholars and epistemologies within the fields that have inspired my methodologies and analyses. During many occasions, their words could better portray the concepts I aimed to drive. I explicitly share them with the reader throughout the paper.

I refer to the popular dancing practices of Indigenous, African, and European descent as danzas or danzas folklóricas as an attempt to move away from the hegemony reproduced through Ballet Folklórico. Danza folklórica is a critical pedagogical tool, whereas Ballet Folklórico, through my study, remains a practice tainted by violent histories.

Lastly, and most crucial to the reading of this paper, the curriculum referred to throughout this paper was created for a pilot summer program, “Camp Folklórico” sponsored by Junta for Progressive Action, the oldest Latinx-led social service organization located in Fair Haven, Connecticut. The curriculum sought to involve youth in a community and embodied practice of healing as needed to overcome periods of disengagement, isolation, and emotional hardships wrought out by the COVID-19 pandemic. The curriculum was designed to lead youth through regional dance lessons of danza folklórica and also supplement these practices with historical and cultural lessons of danza folklórica throughout the rise of the Mexican nation-state and as it transverses borders into America. In its current state, it is belonging solely to Junta and its Youth Department for possible future iterations which I hope to continue develop after my time here. I designed the curriculum as intended for the unique use by the students whose families are served by Junta. Thus, it is will not be included in this iteration of the paper, which may be published, until a consensus is made about the future of the curriculum and how it can be best utilized to serve Junta’s mission of transforming educational services for youth. I dedicate this paper as a labor of love to Junta and the families they serve.
PART I

The Land, Her People, & Their Practices
A CRITICAL HISTORY OF FAIR HAVEN, CONNECTICUT
AND ITS CONTESTED COMMUNITIES, 1600s-2000s

Introduction

Our curriculum invites students to engage with troublesome histories. The lessons attempt to capture the changes of the land of Mexico, her peoples, and their practices some hundreds of years ago. The students who first interacted with these lessons sat in a classroom nearly three thousand miles away from the land of these global happenings. Distant in both time and space, it was imperative for our students to make links from these histories to histories, and realities, more familiar to them. Together, we threaded a communal knowledge by recalling the histories of danza folklórica and its thematic parallels in our everyday lives: our changing neighborhoods, our intersecting communities, our intrinsic values. To continue weaving this multigenerational thread of knowledge that our curriculum had started, it is now my attempt to recall into consciousness the changes that the land, peoples, and cultures of Fair Haven have endured across history. My hope is to bring this history to the living present to serve the multigenerational communities of Fair Haven in their pursuits of social and educational justice, particularly through collaborative work with the social service organization Junta for Progressive Action.

This chapter begins by analyzing confrontations of power in space and resources on Quinnipiac land throughout American colonization and industrialization: a land that many call home, a land that many call Fair Haven. Focalizing the land in this analysis and its relationship with Native Quinnipiac peoples prior to colonization is crucial to our practice of centering Indigenous
ways of knowing.\textsuperscript{1} Through colonization, this land has endured momentous shifts in its agricultural, economic, and communal systems, resulting in a loss of relationality in knowledge production that has helped cultivate the land and all of its inhabitants for centuries.

The land of Fair Haven has homed generations of communities that have imprinted its soil with dynamic changes and unique social conditions. The following section aims to grasp the unique conditions of immigrant communities that began to populate Fair Haven at the turn of the nineteenth century and the subjugation they faced by dominant European communities who first invaded the land. The colonial frameworks that have guided the rise of the American empire are analyzed to contextualize the unique socioeconomic conditions faced by European and non-European immigrant communities alike. Thus, with the influx of Latinx immigrants during the mid-twentieth century, I attempt to trace the unique and uneven conditions of the Latinx community within Fair Haven throughout the last century. Because identities of communities and their experiences are constantly evolving, often in response to institutional pressures, more emphasis is placed on temporally and geographically specific communities and their unique conditions bred by an expanding empire. Particular attention will be paid to the micro-political dynamics of Puerto Rican communities in Fair Haven amidst structural inequities such as imperialism and displaced migration. Not only do Puerto Ricans make up almost half of the Latinx population in the greater New Haven area,\textsuperscript{2} but the students that informed the design of the curriculum and participated in the learnings of our summer pilot program were all of Puerto Rican descent. It is crucial to situate their unique experiences and the histories they confront as community members, public school students, and young peoples in order to meaningfully address the factors limiting their access to transformative services within their lives, as built upon in Part II and III.

\textsuperscript{1} Greenwood & Lindsay, 2019
\textsuperscript{2} Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2014
Lastly, I will highlight examples of the practices of resistance Puerto Rican communities have nurtured over time and characterized by collective advancement and transformative change amidst institutional neglect. I attempt to reveal the tactics prominent within these practices of resistance that have been established by community leaders who sought to cement agency and power through mutual aid, strategic organizing, and labor mobilizations. By providing a synthesis of the multifaceted conditions of the Latinx community in Fair Haven—rooted in the histories of power imbalances between Indigenous, Black, and Immigrant communities and American empire—this chapter underlines the significance of the curriculum for communities residing on this land that can recall into consciousness the past struggles into contemporary times. I argue, then, that centering these cross-generational narratives in the present allows opportunities for agency, resistance, and power for Latinx, immigrant communities and, more broadly, all communities that are targets of political and economic apparatuses of a hegemonic empire.
I.I. The Land:
The Loss of Relationality through the
Colonization of Native Quinnipiac Land

This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth.
All things are connected like the blood that unites us all.
Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it.
Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Chief Seattle, 1854

A few centuries ago, the neighborhood many know as Fair Haven was a prominent marshy
oasis home to the Native Quinnipiac peoples who nourished and cultivated the land and its
biodiversity of agriculture, plant life, and land animals. Tucked in a sound connecting rivers to the
vast ocean, this land has remained geographically important for communities who have built mutual
relationships with and, in contrast, invaded and capitalized off its natural resources and location. I
aim to trace the histories of power imbalances over the space, resources, and resulting knowledge
systems of the land of Fair Haven during colonization to outline a narrative of subjugation and
displacement that Indigenous peoples and following contested communities have endured.
Furthermore, it is my aim to call for the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge and practices
engendered in spite of and before the violence of colonization to meaningfully confront the
hegemonic orders that threaten these communities’ collective survival.

For a few hundred years before European invasion in the mid 1600s, the Quinnipiac peoples
had strategically developed the land of Fair Haven in utilizing the marsh-areas birthed by the
surrounding River Quinnipiac. Foundational principles of Indigenous knowledge have recognized
bodies of water as sacred, living entities relational to all life on Earth. Thus, these waters made it so

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3 Greenwood & Lindsay, 2019
4 The following content is adapted from a Yale-New Haven Teacher's Institute curriculum; Kass, 1979
5 Kass, 1979
6 Greenwood & Lindsay, 2019
Indigenous peoples could not only benefit from the life birthed by it, but form significant spiritual and epistemological relationships that would shape their agricultural structures, intrinsic community values, and identity formations. The River Quinnipiac in particular is of utmost significance to the land of Fair Haven, such that the “development and changes of the Quinnipiac River are interwoven with the history of [it].” Both bodies of earth and water have provided the Native communities with living essentials, such as transportation and dietary needs, that have grown the community and further progressed the cultivation of the land for centuries. For similar reasons, the land was favored by English colonizers in the mid seventeenth century. A one-sided treaty establishing the acquisition of the land in 1638 resulted in the creation of the first ‘reservation’ in American history that pushed the Quinnipiac peoples outside of their lands. The Quinnipiac peoples’ original land had seen a 95% decrease of their native population over a hundred-year period following this invasion, reversing a century worth of steady growth of their communities and resources. As a result, the early and violent stages of settlement by invaders completely disrupted the developing relationships between the land, her peoples, and, ultimately, their practices, knowledge, and overall health; engendering the first instances of eurocentrism and hegemony on native soils that greatly impacted Indigenous prosperity. The ignorance of relationality by Western ideologies had left the land without a cultivator—one who would tend to its needs and learn from its natural processes—ensuing a cataclysmic change for all lives who depended on it.

What followed English settlement during the early eighteenth century was a rapid appropriation of relational knowledge for sustaining the land and agriculture into a farming economy that profited off the previously harvested land by the Quinnipiac community. As colonizers took unfounded ownership of the surrounding lands and waters, particularly the River Quinnipiac, micro-

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7 Kass, 1979
8 The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
9 Kass, 1979
industries of commerce formed commencing the industrialization of the land. The same clay deposits of the River Quinnipiac used by the Quinnipiac peoples for pottery appliances were unearthed by white farmers in the 1800s, enabling a brickyard industry that would soon replace the forestry of Fair Haven with factories, railroads, and housing for a growing population of European settlers. Devastatingly, the factories on the outskirts of the town began polluting the waters of the River Quinnipiac, restricting its capacity for sustaining varying life-forms and cultivating necessary resources that do not rely on extraction and scarcity.\(^{10}\)

The invasion, settlement, and subsequent industrialization of Fair Haven was a ploy of a greater national project intending to constitute a new hegemonic order that relied on the displacement of Indigenous communities, complete control over the land, and profit of previously cultivated resources. The racist ideologies that initially encouraged colonialism necessitated the stripping of power and authority of Native communities, especially in their ways of knowing and being. The subjugation of Indigenous peoples and practices would allow the rising nation-state to employ top-down socioeconomic tactics that upheld their hegemonic order. A growing capitalist economy would soon replace the relational protocols that once governed the land and her Native peoples and promoted their collective survival. It is within these early abuses of power by European colonizers over Indigenous peoples, space, resources, and knowledge systems that have allowed for the subjugation of communities that threatened the Western hegemonic order, especially within the workforce. This narrative of subjugation offers a framework to understand the conditions of contested communities that demographically make up the space at the turn of the nineteenth century. As we trace this history of oppression for communities at the peril of racist projects like colonialism and capitalism, it is important to (re)turn to the relational and land-based knowledge

\(^{10}\) Kass, 1979
systems that threatened these very systems and offer an opportunity of individual empowerment and collective survival.

I.II. Her Peoples:
European Immigration, Nativism, and the Influence of the Empire’s Economy

The conclusion of the American Civil War drastically expanded industrial capitalism to promote the large-scale production, transportation, and trade of manufactured goods intranationally for a growing American Empire and its diversifying populations.\textsuperscript{11} The early industrialization of the northeast prior to the Civil War accelerated the development of wealthy manufacturing cities, enlarging wealth gaps and depraved living conditions of working class families. This was the case for New Haven: “by the middle of the 19th century [New Haven] was one of the most important manufacturing centers in the United States.”\textsuperscript{12} Unfair wages and working conditions characterized this industrial period for many women and children at the time. By the end of the Civil War, nearly half of all workers in New Haven were women and children, with women receiving the lowest pay and job status compared to their male counterparts. The demands for cheap, manual labor arisen from the Civil War enticed migration into the area. Immigrants during the middle of the 19th century were predominantly English and Scottish and worked in firearm and hardware industries.\textsuperscript{13}

With the influx of immigrants in industrialized cities within the northeast, Connecticut quickly became the state with the largest population of immigrants and duly profited off of the dramatically underpaid labor these communities were subjected to. Immigrants in Connecticut were consistently found in factories requiring arduous manual labor with the lowest possible wages. Upon

\textsuperscript{11} The following is adapted from the Yale-New Haven Teacher's Institute curriculum; Polino, 1979
\textsuperscript{12} Polino, 1979
\textsuperscript{13} The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
arrival to America, immigrants encountered virtually no “immigrant entry ports offer[ing] any kind of public assistance to either immigrants seeking jobs or employers looking for workers.”

Outside of the workplace, the living conditions of immigrant, working class communities were characterized by inadequate housing and poor sanitary conditions. In parallel to the ideologies and necessities of colonialism, the progress of capitalism required the subjugation and profiting of contested groups. During this period, immigrant communities were the ones who faced the brunt of these hegemonic ideologies.

Nativist sentiment has run rampant throughout the course of American history, and it has served as a theoretical basis for justifying the exploitation and maltreatment of foreign communities. By the 1860s, the rise of Irish and German immigrant communities elicited large detestations of foreign-born privileges throughout the country. New Haven residents and politicians alike vocalized joint efforts to limit the migration of the “known criminals and professional paupers of Europe.”

Nativist ideologies were cemented in the empire’s constitution and had created natural distinctions between native-born citizens and the foreign immigrant as a way to guarantee rights and protections for those belonging or native to the land. The valued citizen would be threatened by the criminal foreigner due to rhetoric like the loss of socioeconomic opportunities that are still prevalent to this day. At its core, these policies served as a way for the American citizen to be protected by potential tragedies of displacement, enslavement, and erasure; outlining a fear recognized and detested by the empire of potential harms that can be inflicted on groups that desire power over the other.

The empire’s baseless politics of belonging operate under similar deficit-based frameworks of racist policy that have displaced Native communities from their lands and subjugated Black communities to slavery. During this time, Black Americans living in Connecticut were refused

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14 Polino, 1979
15 Polino, 1979
positions in factory settings, limiting their opportunities of income and social mobilization that their white counterparts readily acquired. Racialized and gendered socioeconomic systems have upheld the White, male citizen above all other members of society, allowing mobilizing opportunities, although minimal and unequal, even for White, European, male immigrants at the time. Nonetheless, anti-foreigner sentiment, even along similar racial lines, persisted as a tool to “reinforce and sustain the culture of the homeland;” a culture characterized by hegemony. These projects were essential for the prosperity of the empire and would later disproportionately impact immigrant communities of color.

During the late nineteenth century, Fair Haven saw a rise in Polish and Ukrainian communities who sought refuge from the on-going threat of war, persecution, and military occupations within their home nations. They predominantly worked as farmers within the land, and established ethnic-specific societies that could cater to their unique linguistic and cultural identities through organizing work, religious services, and consistent congregation. These first instances of community-led initiatives of particular ethnic groups created accessible spaces in the absence of culturally-responsive services for diverse communities. Ultimately, these initiatives would serve as rubrics of organizing and political resistance led by the people against unjust social conditions bred by the empire.

With the expansion of America city populations into the hundreds of thousands, and as America’s imperial influence extended across its bordering seas, the first instances of non-European immigration were documented during the start of the twentieth century. The New Haven census from 1860 to 1900 reported the first Latin American immigrants to reside in New Haven, with the

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16 The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
17 Polino, 1979
18 The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
majority from the Caribbean islands of Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Cuba.\textsuperscript{19} Although consistently making far less than 1\% of the foreign-born population in New Haven, these first Latinx immigrants would witness a momentous shift of economic, racial, and social relations between the White American citizen and the \textit{inferior}, non-White foreigner.

\textbf{I.II. Her Peoples:}
\hspace{0.5cm} An Expanding Empire and Puerto Rican Displacement

Far south from the Long Island sound bordering Fair Haven, the Caribbean isla de encanto, roughly the size of Connecticut, was invaded and occupied by American troops during the Spanish American war in 1898.\textsuperscript{20} Prior to U.S. invasion, small farmlands operated under a small-scale plantation economy where crops could be cultivated in international markets. Jibaros were Puerto Rican sugarcane and tobacco farmers, usually of Native Taino descent, whom cultivated the countryside farmlands of rural Puerto Rico.\textsuperscript{21} After the U.S. took control of Puerto Rico from Spanish rule, the island experienced a drastic shift in economy and agriculture that left thousands of Puerto Ricans searching for employment opportunities outside of their homelands.\textsuperscript{22} With the passage of the Jones Act of 1917, Puerto Ricans were offered U.S. citizenship under promises of new colonial rule.\textsuperscript{23} Consequently, this period marked the first wave of Puerto Rican immigration into American states. Underpinning this wave of migration was the rampant industrialization of Puerto Rican plantation economies into large-scale manufacturing industries that had displaced many Jibaros and those employed in the agricultural sector.

The expansion of the American empire into Latin America would have unfathomable consequences for the socioeconomic stability of working-class communities within these lands. A

\textsuperscript{19} The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
\textsuperscript{20} Brás, 2011
\textsuperscript{21} Vázquez Calzada, 1988
\textsuperscript{22} The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
\textsuperscript{23} Brás, 2011
trend appeared in Western colonies throughout Latin America that promoted industrial transformations of present economic infrastructures that were unsuitable for the agrarian conditions of the lands. In Puerto Rico, this process was formalized under the project known as Operation Bootstrap in 1947 and ultimately resulted in the mass migration of working-class individuals into manufacturing cities within the continental United States. Before this, small waves of Puerto Rican migration were prevalent specifically within New England: New York City being one predominant destination for early Puerto Rican migrants. Yet, an upsurge of Puerto Rican migration beginning in 1950 was primarily influenced by the declining availability of jobs within the island thwarted by Operation Bootstrap. Moving into the mid twentieth century, Puerto Ricans migrating into the U.S. that once totaled 1,800 migrants a year during the early twentieth century now averaged 43,000 people per year. Upon their arrival to the states, many Puerto Rican immigrants endured similar living conditions, poor and unsanitary, and employment prospects, high-skilled and underpaid, as earlier European immigrant communities of the nineteenth century.

During mid-twentieth century Connecticut, local actors strategically promoted the influx of Puerto Ricans to their workforce, specifically in the tobacco industry. Through negotiations with the Puerto Rican Department of Labor, the Shade Tobacco Growers Association of Connecticut were able to contract workers from the island to work in the booming tobacco fields of northern Connecticut. These farm workers were often contracted to work 40 hour/week shifts yet typically endured 10-14 hours of work each day with no overtime pay. Working under arduous conditions in crowded fields and residing in barrack-like living quarters with little to no heating, these employment conditions were inextricably linked to the most readily available job opportunities for Puerto Rican

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24 Brás, 2011
25 Vázquez Calzada, 1988
26 The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
27 Lee-Murphy, 2017
farm workers that had been just displaced from their homelands. Not until the 1970s would Puerto Rican farmworkers, inspired by the unionization of Latinx laborers across the country, form associations to combat the unequitable social conditions they braved in the states.

The American empire’s desire to expand its dominion and economic control across North America during the nineteenth century had direct consequences on the peoples of the land. Agrarian by nature and unsuitable for crop industries requiring mass production, the island of Puerto Rico endured intensive reconstructions over its previous economic infrastructures. Puerto Ricans that made up the island’s agricultural workforce prior to American invasion were left with no viable opportunities for sustaining a stable life in their homelands. American industries took advantage of displaced migrant workers perilously seeking better economic opportunities and subjected them to low-wage, highly intensive labor that solely benefited their industrial corporations. Puerto Rican workers were displaced by the very empire that promised them citizenship: an opportunity to be recognized as deserving of constitutional protections. With a growing population in the states, Puerto Ricans turned to progressive action to reach their demands for fair living conditions and detest the oppressive, colonial rule haunting their social spheres on the mainland and in their island.

I.III. Their Practices:
Urban Renewal, Puerto Rican Resistance, and Junta for Progressive Action

By the 1960’s, Fair Haven specifically saw a rise in migration of Puerto Rican communities during a time of significant redevelopment projects that further displaced the communities seeking refuge from their homeland’s socioeconomic deteriorations. Urban renewal programs promoted by the current New Haven mayor at the time, Richard C. Lee, allowed private developers to purchase and rebuild properties throughout the city in accordance with the cities’ specifications.28 Through

28 Gambell, 2004
federal policies ensuring eminent domain, the city of New Haven was able to take ownership of previously private property for public use. Outranking nearly all other American cities, New Haven was able to secure more federal funds for large-scale redevelopments of their business and residential areas.\textsuperscript{20} Prior to these renewal projects, the poor socioeconomic conditions within New Haven urged politicians to take direct actions through redevelopment efforts that often consisted of developing new commercial buildings, highways, business spaces, hotels, and office towers, to name a few. Rather than incorporating the needs of community members into the revitalization process, specifically those enduring the poorest of living conditions, the city strategically discounted their inputs in order to push-out these communities from the most populated and disadvantaged city spaces. The evictions of thousands of residents and demolition of entire neighborhoods was necessary to attract wealthy, White residents into the downtown and surrounding areas. With the aid of private developers, a major one being Yale University, and backed by federal funding and policy, the racist projects of urban renewals in New Haven served to expel communities that were originally enticed to work in these areas for the city’s own economic development. In Fair Haven, urban renewal projects resulted in 107 households being displaced, characterizing a period of housing instability and unemployment for an increasing population of immigrant communities.\textsuperscript{30} Black, Brown, and Immigrant communities that made up this undervalued workforce met these conditions with gradual resistance, yet withstood prolonged repercussions of displacement towards the turn of the century.

During the late sixties and early seventies, Connecticut witnessed profound upsurges of organizing work inspired by grassroots movements at the time, like the Black Panther party. Particularly, the Young Lords, a Chicago-based Puerto Rican activist organization, saw its first

\textsuperscript{20} The following is adapted from the Yale-New Haven Teacher’s Institute curriculum; Montaga, 1979
\textsuperscript{30} Gambell, 2004.
chapters organized in Connecticut cities to advocate for housing rights, political education, and, most importantly, self-determination of all Puerto Ricans and colonized peoples\(^{31}\) (Grossman). Facilitating direct actions against displacement of Puerto Ricans in American cities, the Young Lords served a monumental role in providing these federally abandoned communities with the necessary political tactics to resist their current socioeconomic conditions. By 1972, Puerto Rican farm workers employed under the tobacco industry unionized into the Asociación de Trabajadores Agrícolas (Farm Workers Association) to advocate for fair wages and working conditions.\(^{32}\) During this period in Fair Haven, sixteen Puerto Rican community leaders would soon form the grassroots organization of Junta for Progressive Action in order to deal with rampant inequalities in the social sector. Living through the consequences of urban redevelopment that left many displaced and in search of employment, Junta’s goals were to target the factors that limited Latinx community advancement by providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services for a growing migrant community.

The cultural institution of Junta for Progressive Action was built as a response to calls from immigrant communities pushed to the margins of society. Community organizers at Junta served to directly respond to and name social injustices in the face of institutional neglect. At the time, the Latinx population only made up less than 4% of the general population of New Haven, yet poor socioeconomic conditions disproportionately affected those migrating to cities like New Haven that took advantage of their underpaid labor.\(^{33}\) Social service workers at Junta are the crux of the organization’s ability to promote community mobilization. In meeting with community members at intake, these workers are able to direct clients to necessary social services, whether that be through rent funds, meal assistance, legal immigration support, workforce development, and even youth

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\(^{31}\) Grossman, 2018  
\(^{32}\) Lee-Murphy, 2017  
\(^{33}\) The Ethnic Heritage Center, n.d.
programming. With open doors at the heart of Fair Haven, Junta serves as a beaconing multi-service agency that has enabled personal and community agency amidst structural disregard by government-related social institutions. In serving the greater Latinx community of New Haven for over 50 years, Junta has fostered the necessary partnerships lacking in other government institutions to meaningfully respond to and serve community needs with appropriate material resources.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Latinx community gradually made-up a bit less than 10% of the general population in Connecticut, with Puerto Ricans making the majority, 60%, of their Latinx community.³⁴ The Latinx population of Connecticut steadily grew to nearly 14% leading into the first decade of the twenty-first century. Puerto Ricans, still comprising the majority nationality of Latinx communities, were joined by an increasing number of Mexican and South American communities. Compared to all Puerto Rican residents in the U.S. at the time, Puerto Rican families in Connecticut had significantly lower household incomes, $10K less, and were predominantly led by single mothers, 54.6% in Connecticut compared to 49.7% for the remainder of stateside Puerto Ricans. The conditions of Puerto Rican families in New Haven, which made up consistently a third of the Puerto Rican population of Connecticut throughout the early twenty-first century, were characterized by “inordinately high poverty rates by any measure or comparative context.”³⁵ Put together, as a consequence of imperial and capitalist projects of a hegemonic empire, disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions were subjected to communities seeking opportunity in Fair Haven and escaping displacement in their homelands. Organizations like Junta for Progressive Action, which predominantly serve Latina heads of households and migrant workers, have highlighted the resistance practiced by these communities to organize for social advancement amidst structural inequities.

³⁴ Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2014
³⁵ Center for Puerto Rican Studies, 2014
CHAPTER 2

Developing Under Hegemony:
EXISTENT CONDITIONS OF OUR YOUTH WITHIN COLONIAL SCHOOLING SPACES

Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale behind our curriculums’ intended audience: the populations and their unique conditions that our programming seeks to address. The youth being centered in this chapter are often referred to in popular academic literature by their ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, and other identity-based epithets to make generalized assumptions of their present conditions, i.e., “HISPANIC STUDENTS ARE FALLING BEHIND.”36 This follows a construct in Western scholarship that attempts to explain social disparities by targeting their observable symptoms, i.e., discrimination or low graduation rates, and attributing these findings to fixed individual and communal identities like those aforementioned.37 Empirical methodologies have driven social science research from the early to mid-twentieth century. These paradigms, or conceptual frameworks of social inquiry, are often referred to as positivist and post-positivist paradigms. They have been adapted from methodologies of the natural sciences which emphasize logical, theory-backed explanations of social phenomena through experiments that allow for manipulations of variables in controlled environments. Intentionally fixating on individual differences rather than “invisible” external influences within an environment, these reductionist paradigms have profoundly underserved the communities they study. The communities for which this curriculum is intended experience multifaceted social realities and oppressed conditions that are unable to be reproduced in a clinical setting nor can they be accurately represented through

36 Grant, 2004
37 Kabouh, 2008
empirical works produced within a university. This chapter enacts methodologies that more accurately and respectfully trace these conditions with a critical eye by engaging in non-Western practices that have been severely underrepresented in social science research.

Towards the twenty-first century, methodologies of qualitative social science research have evolved to incorporate new paradigms that have been increasingly positioned away from dominant and into marginalized areas of study. Though, these paradigms were not always designed to be mutually beneficial between the researcher and the researched. Particularly, research scientists acting under colonial ideologies sought to examine Indigenous land, communities, and their practices through exploitative measures. Predominantly white, social science researchers used research as another tool to extract knowledge and practices from these communities to further national agendas of assimilation and dispossession. Indigenous researchers and activists during these times initiated counter-hegemonic research methodologies that were grounded by Indigenous experiences and epistemologies: those that value the relational nature of knowledge-making and attempt to construct understandings based on them. These actions of outspoken Indigenous researchers have authored a movement of decolonization within academic spaces. Decolonizing methodologies “promote spaces of recovery, healing, and development” that allow researchers to step outside of oppressor positionalities and work collaboratively throughout the research process towards liberatory futures.

Employing decolonizing research methods was an essential first step when designing the curriculum and crafting this written report. The communities this curriculum intends to serve, and those that have influenced its design, must be given opportunity to challenge dominant discourses concerning their present realities and reclaim the narratives that have been so senselessly captured

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38 Held, 2019  
39 Smith, 2005  
40 Held, 2019  
41 Zavala, 2013
and extracted by Western research. I intend to represent and analyze these realities without reproducing Western paradigms that have produced monolithic identities by generalizing a community's diverse and dynamic realities. By understanding that individual and collective identities are consequences, rather than causes, of oppressive conditions, I am able to meaningfully address these multifaceted conditions and identities in direct tie to the faculties and mechanisms of their oppressor(s).

The racialized nature of how colonialism operates calls for the centering of race and other constructed and contested identities in these discourses. I intentionally center Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and low-income-background youth for reasons forementioned, yet, to steer away from reductionist paradigms, I will not be referring to these youth solely by their identities. These constructed ethnoracial identities hold power only in reference to the systems that have devised these classifications and utilized them to create disadvantaged realities. Otherwise, I find it more important to center the susceptible stages of early, formative years, both within and outside of schools, rather than identities that are constantly changing in response to evolving social surroundings. I refer to the intended audience of this curriculum by using the adjective “our”. Our youth, our students, and our communities. Using our, defined as belonging to or associated with a speaker, allows me to construct a new identity that I define as being united by a shared experience of institutional neglect and disservice, and the practices of resistance engendered in spite of it. This terminological stance is enacted to promote belonging in spaces hyper-defined by exclusion for any individual who shares these experiences: myself, my brother, the students I practiced danza with, and the youth I have yet to teach. Thus, all instances of the use of “our” throughout the paper are transgenerational: referring to all those who find communality in the experience of exclusion by the empire transcending time and space.
Referring to these populations in accordance to the nature of their developmental stages, “youth” and “young peoples”, captures the sensitive, explorative, susceptible, curious, often reactionary experiences they face in their daily lives. Moreover, centering their identities as “students” places significance on the young person’s call and capacity for constructing knowledge systems and using these systems to holistically address present and past realities. Our student’s capacity of constructing transformative, relational knowledge has been severely limited by hegemonic schooling institutions. In turn, niche educational conditions have been actualized by politics of power of a nation-state and its schooling apparatuses that severely disregard the educational advancement and healthy development of our young peoples.

I begin the chapter by reviewing national and local educational outcomes that characterize the common schooling experiences of our youth as deduced by scholars in the field of Psychology, public health, and education studies. These outcomes are highlighted through statistical analyses and educational progress reports that shed insight into the traumatic realities our youth endure which Western educational researchers have consistently attributed to individual, communal, and cultural deficiencies students enter their classrooms with.42

The last aim of this chapter is to understand these outcomes as embodied conditions that are enacted by our students through lived, daily schooling experiences. By employing necessary methodologies that are able to contextualize these conditions under larger hegemonic initiatives of an empire, I will attempt to grasp the full impact that hegemonic spaces have on the course of development for our youth. Essentially, my goal is to trace the traumatic, embodied impacts our students battle under hegemony and set up the need for curricular interventions that not only center these impacts, but equip youth with transformative, pedagogical tools that meaningfully address and challenge their current conditions respective to their own lives.

42 Ford et al., 2002
II. I. Educational Conditions:
National Analysis

National reports of educational progress in K-12 schools have been popularized in the latter half of the twentieth century during a time of heightened global competition in educational standards and student achievement. Due to fears of American superiority in the sciences falling short compared to their Eastern enemy empires during the Eisenhower administration, standardized assessments were created with the intent of measuring student progress and talent on valued subject areas for interstate and international comparison. Colloquially known as the nation’s report card, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) was created in 1969 and has undergone considerable “technical innovation” to accurately estimate group performance and present more digestible reports to stakeholders and the general public. I attempt to summarize some of the alarming statistics produced by these national outcome reports on student performance with the end goal of contextualizing what has been accepted as generalizable knowledge regarding the condition of youth that are “ethnically, racially, and economically marginalized.” This is by no means to validate the methodological approaches used by the NAEP nor the philosophies behind valuing students solely for their academic performance; this has only violently restricted educational progress for both schools and our youth over the decades. These statistical trends outline patterns, although distinguished by limiting categories, that may offer insight into the racialized and economic dynamics that engender disadvantaged educational conditions that our youth are likely to endure within schooling spaces. Later, I also provide insight into how these national trends compare to outcomes found within the New Haven Public School (NHPS) systems. Many of the youth who reside in Fair Haven and all youth that shaped the curriculum attended NHPS, making it a site of critical importance for the rise and importance of our programming.

43 Beaton et al., 2011
One of the more recent reports on national educational outcomes has analyzed a decade’s worth of individual student data collected by the NAEP with respect to school metrics (i.e., funding received, make-up of student population, etc.) and student characteristics (i.e., ethnicity, socioeconomic status). In selecting data from K-12 schools categorized as “high-poverty” schools, the Economic Policy Institute found that, by 2013, more than 40% of Black and Hispanic students nationally attended these schools compared to 7% of White students. Cumulatively, all students, specifically those in the fourth and eighth grades, attending high-poverty schools reported lower mathematics and reading levels despite any racial or ethnic differences. A 2020 analysis of the NAEP reported that Native American students, consistently since 1994, have reported the lowest reading and math scores in the nation at these grade levels.

Continuing this national analysis of educational conditions, The National Center for Education Statistics represents itself as a “federal entity…report[ing] full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States.” Their 2016 report on the educational progress of students based on their racial and ethnic groups highlights statistics marking disparities and exclusions of our youth, their “behaviors and persistence” and post-secondary outcomes. By 2012, the NCES reports that nearly half (48.3%) of all Black male students nation-wide had been suspended from their schools compared to 22.6% and 21.4% of Hispanic and White students, respectively. For Black female students, a similar trend was noted: 29% had experienced suspension from schools at least once compared to 11.8% of Hispanic and 9.4% of White students. High school dropout rates were reported to be highest for Hispanic students during this time, with Guatemalan students experiencing significantly higher dropout rate than other Hispanic subgroups, totaling at 27% of students across states. With respect to degree attainments, the largest ethnic group of 18–24-

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44 Carnoy & Garcia, 2017
45 Cai, 2020
46 Musu-Gillette et al., 2016
year-olds who had not completed high school were Native American. In 2013, Native students also reported the highest percentage, 18%, of students who have been threatened or injured with a weapon on school grounds, while Black and Hispanic students made up the second highest rates of 8%.

II. I. Educational Conditions:
Local (New Haven/Connecticut) Analysis

Connecticut has been consistently highly rated in state educational standards, ranking second in the nation for quality and ninth for safety concerning their public-school systems. A recent meta-analysis using a plethora of educational metrics, both national and local, ranked the quality and safety of American public-school education by each state. Their 2021 report—which quantified graduation rates, college readiness metrics, math and reading scores, number of violent incidents within schools, and even bullying incidence rates—gave insight into the conditions within Connecticut’s public-school systems that I aim to analyze alongside local data from the New Haven Public School systems, and larger national trends earlier described.

Concerning their student’s overall academic performance, Connecticut has the third-highest reading test scores and highest median ACT scores in the nation. This state also has one of the highest expenditure rates per student, totaling $18,958. Another report compiled by the non-profit news organization and their independent research center, Education Week, has placed Connecticut’s’ K-12 school as third best in the nation concerning their school’s “chance-for-success”, finances, and K-12 achievement. These state-wide educational standards have consistently glorified the success of Connecticut’s K-12 schooling systems, much of which does not translate to the educational conditions found within the New Haven Public School Districts (NHPS).

47 McCann, 2021
48 State of Connecticut; The Office of Governor Ned Lamont, 2020
The following data is pulled from the Connecticut State Department of Education’s New Haven Public School District Profile and Performance Report for the 2018-19 school year.\(^4^9\) Compared to Connecticut’s state-wide reading and math NEAP scores, NHPS consistently scored at least 5 points lower and at most 14 scores lower in 2019 and 2013 assessments for 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students. For the 2017-18 school year, the district’s four-year high school graduation rate was 10% less than the state average, 78.9% compared to 88.3%, where the following cohorts, Black or African American students (79.2%), Hispanic or Latino student of any race (75.2%), English learner students (72.4%), students eligible for free- or reduced-meals (78.6%), and students with disabilities (64%), had the highest rates of not completing high school within four years. The percentages of Black and Latinx students that met benchmarks on at least one college readiness exam, like the SAT, ACT, or AP exams, where 9.7% and 14.6% respectively, compared to a total of 44.8% of White students who did meet at least one of these benchmarks. The following college entrance rates for the class of 2018, Black or African American students (57.3%), Hispanic or Latino student of any race (52.7%), English learner students (38.1%), students eligible for free- or reduced-meals (55.5%), and students with disabilities (33.3%), ranked significantly lower compared to White students in the same class who attended college, 75.9%. Lastly, suspension and expulsion rates measure the percentage of students who received at least one in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension or expulsion during the 2018-19 school year. Students with disabilities comprised the highest rate of suspensions/expulsions (11.7% or 426 students) for a defined cohort of students while Black students comprised the second highest rating of 11.5%, 946 students to be exact. The lowest rate of suspension/expulsions within a defined cohort were reported for White students (4% or 114 students). Toward the end of this report, direct initiatives led by the NHPS district to “reduce racial,
ethnic, and economic isolation” included “recruitment of educators of color, school-based cultural celebrations, STEM nights, and international Read Aloud Day.”

The NHPS district has historically experienced disconnects with meaningfully serving students from “culturally diverse” backgrounds. One example of this can be seen in the district’s response to the influx of Puerto Rican students who enrolled in Connecticut schools after relocating to New Haven from Puerto Rico due to the onset and destruction of Hurricane Maria. During this time, the enrollment rates of Puerto Rican students within Connecticut school districts increased 54%. Close to 600 students from Puerto Rico experiencing climate-induced displacement had to quickly adapt to new classroom dynamics within the NHPS district and bear the emotional and physical burdens of leaving their homelands. Monica Burton, a bilingual second-grade teacher in Fair Haven, described the “profound sadness” that Puerto Rican students, which made up half of her class that year, endured throughout the term and the little guidance teacher’s received to “address the trauma of the hurricane.” Put together, the NHPS has continuously underserved our youth and the disparate educational outcomes that have been made evident through the analysis of progress reports and generative statistical trends for “marginalized” and “diverse” students.

These national progress reports and statistical trends of schooling systems appear on headlines and academic literature as markers of the failure of schools in America, both nationally and locally. Not only are these markers inherently limiting due to the nature of their categories (i.e., individuals of Hispanic descent, an ethnic identifier, can also be racially White or Black), they fail to fully capture the ubiquitous conditions of our youth that may offer more insight as to why American schools are failing. Educational outcomes, like those aforementioned, are tangible and easily

50 Hinojosa, Román, & Meléndez, 2018
51 Lee-Murphy, 2017
52 Lee-Murphy, 2017
53 Birks, 2019
measured, consistent with Western paradigms that value the observable to measure efficacy. Graduation rates, test scores, and academic performance are factors which schools are assessed upon and thus are often conflated with our students’ innate ability to succeed. Yet, such little attention is given to the embodied effects that exclusion, school-sanctioned violence, and reported underperformance has on the young peoples, their well-being, their capacity for resilience, and their ever-changing developmental trajectories. The following section briefly summarizes some of the major psychological, behavioral, and embodied conditions endured by our youth that are causally tied to, or at least influenced, by their educational conditions.

II. II. Embodied Conditions

The racialized nature of the disparaging educational outcomes requires thoughtful interrogation of how school settings and personnel author racial discrimination and the direct impact this has on educational outcomes and its embodied consequences on our youth. Though there is a significant lack in literature concerning the prevalence of mental health disparities due to discrimination and exclusion within K-12 schools, schools have been reported to be the most common setting students experience racism and related identity-based discrimination. Systematic reviews on the impact racism has on young children’s mental health have consistently found its disproportionate effects on the development of depression and symptoms of loneliness. Additionally, chronic stress in youth, like that of racial discrimination and poverty, is linked to an increased risk for mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and other immune-related conditions like cardiometabolic illnesses. Specifically, it has been reported that low-income-background, African-

54 Priest et al., 2013
55 Mansouri & Jenkins, 2010
56 Priest et al., 2013
57 Cogburn et al., 2011
58 Brody et al., 2016
American youth are more likely to suffer from higher allostatic loads and poor cardiometabolic health. These health concerns have disproportionately affected students who are likely to underperform in respect to national outcomes, and likely to be targets of disciplinary action due to their behavioral enactment of psychological distress. At large, empirical studies have highlighted common academic underachievement-related behaviors in school-aged populations, including but not limited to cognitive disturbances, disengagement, hyperactivity, restlessness, anxiety, depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, aggression, delinquency, and disruptiveness. Put together, our youth face institutionally-authored oppressive conditions that often negatively influence their self-concept, or how students perceive their behaviors, abilities, and characteristics. Next, I aim to situate these educational and embodied outcomes as oppressive conditions that are reproduced by hegemonic schooling spaces.

II. III. Theoretical Analysis of Conditions: Using Systemic Frameworks of Educational Hegemony-Induced Traumatic Stress

Educational outcomes reported through meta-analysis of national data have consistently categorized their findings based on the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic characteristics of students. These reports operate under assumptions that “some young people are more disciplined and willing to work harder in school than others.” They reach racist conclusions like “race and ethnicity continue to be important factors in explaining achievement differences” and “students’ inherent characteristics-such as race, gender, or parents’ economic and social capital-systematically affect their school outcomes.” These statistical research analyses fail to accurately represent the unique and

59 Brody et al., 2016
60 Cokley et al., 2014
61 Goodman & Wes-Olatunji, 2010
62 Carnoy & Garcia, 2017
63 Carnoy & Garcia, 2017
subjective experiences our youth endure as a product of their multifaceted, contested identities in hegemonic schooling spaces. Furthermore, the outcomes aforementioned have upheld Western research paradigms that generalize individual experiences into fixed assumptions of performance. Nevertheless, alarming results have been elicited through these reports that call for a way to use these statistical insights for radical change.

The reality is that our youth are less likely to complete their educational trajectories on time, or continue to higher education if desired for self-determination. Our youth are more likely to be injured or threatened on school grounds. Our youth have not met Western standards of academic achievement. Our youth are pushed out of schooling spaces. In attempts to diagnose the mechanisms that breed such disparities, I engage with critical psychological literature that may offer insight into the role institutions have in authoring exclusionary and unresponsive spaces for our youth. Scholars from the fields of Psychology and education studies have historically provided minimal discourses on the structural and exclusionary forces that promote the conditions aforementioned. Recent critical psychological literature has turned to understanding how educational hegemony can induce traumatic stress, specifically within Black and Latinx students. Through ecosystemic frameworks, Goodman & West-Olatunji identify the sociopolitical contexts students endure through schools to highlight injustices directly impacting their bodies and wellbeing.

As reviewed by Goodman & West-Olatunji\(^\text{64}\), hegemonic educational experiences often result in “disengagement from school, deviant behaviors, fewer opportunities in life, and difficulty earning a living wage.” These deleterious effects of hegemony are characterized by a traumatic stress that is endured and embodied by marginalized students. Informed by healing-centered approaches of trauma studies and Indigenous-derived restorative practice, trauma scholars have developed key

\(^{64}\) Goodman & Wes-Olatunji, 2010
approaches to meaningfully address traumatic stress and institutionally-induced oppression within schools, beginning with a recognition of its constant presence for marginalized students.

Addressing traumatic stress is reported to promote resilience within marginalized students especially when paired with practices of deconstruction: the culturally-sensitive examination of traumatic events and its ecosystemic influences. One example of deconstruction described by Goodman & West-Olatunji is that of crafting counternarratives “that foster increased understanding of contextual realities.” Following deconstruction tactics is that of reintegration: the ability to make meaning of newly developed understandings to influence one’s self-concept. Through an intimate understanding of the roots of hegemony, students can further understand its impacts on self-concept. Practices of reintegration include “writing autobiographies, regaining authority over narratives, sharing cultural artifacts and defining worth outside of hegemonic values.” Lastly, transformation occurs when a student’s able to develop a resilient sense of self. The ability to articulate the conditions produced by hegemony and share counternarratives unique to the student can provide transformative power that are further crystallized with student-centered and culturally-sensitive approaches. Goodman & West-Olatunji conclude with discourses on how we can specifically nurture self-reflection through “creative art activities that help the [student] visualize newly constructed knowledge and understanding.” The knowledge constructed through these counter-hegemonic approaches can begin to elucidate new pedagogies that can have the ability to holistically transform the oppressive conditions faced by our youth. The following chapter describes the pedagogical frameworks needed to equip youth with emancipatory tools through the practice of danza folklórica.

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65 Goodman & Wes-Olatunji, 2010
PART III

Toward a Folklórico Pedagogy:
ADDRESSING THE HAUNTED AFTERLIFE OF COLONIALISM IN BALLET FOLKLÓRICO TO TRANSFORM AND RE-MEMBER EMPOWERED FUTURES

Introduction

Our curriculum is intended to (re)engage students with their bodies. Our youth face a dangerous and debilitating state in educational spaces that calls for drastic interventions that meaningfully center their health and wellbeing; the aspects of their bodies that have been damaged by American schooling institutions. Throughout this chapter, my first aim is to outline how colonial schooling spaces have necessitated and normalized a disengagement of youth from their bodies, building from the statistical reports and critical interrogation of youth and their current educational conditions from Part II. Following this analysis, this chapter also serves to differentiate the content learned through dance and performance education compared to the common forms of pedagogy and instruction more traditionally found in American schooling spaces. A brief overview of the history of danza folklórica, folklórico dance, within the land of México will be presented to grasp the knowledge learned, performed, and passed on through this traditional practice. I present discourses on the trivial nature of traditional, folkloric dance practiced by popular performance groups throughout North America to outline how national actors have appropriated and degraded Indigenous and African roots of danza for their hegemonic agendas. My last aim is to outline the possibilities of new pedagogies that incorporate the unique learning content produced by the generational power discontents found within danza folklórica.
Critical to our writing is the employment of embodied methodologies predominantly used by dance scholars and within performance studies. Embodied research departs from the “machines and technologies” that have been developed over time to conduct and analyze traditional research. In departing from constructs that treat bodies as instruments, or as a means for gathering social inquiry, embodied research hyper-focuses on the body itself and what the body can do. Furthermore, embodied research methodologies place bodies as the primary objects of investigations for questions concerning the possibilities and potentials of bodies, individually and collectively.

In Part I, our discourses on Puerto Rican practices of resistance shed light on the tangible expressions communities used to guard themselves from the invading hands of oppression and as tools for self-determination. In a similar vein, embodied research directly engages with practices, defined as the “lived experiences of day-to-day activities, events, that enlist the body to complete certain goals.” The plurality and flux of the practices diverse communities engage in make studying this single concept very difficult, similar to the study of identities and cultures. On the other hand, techniques, referring to “knowledges that link one practice to another,” are fundamental concepts in embodied research that can be used to understand how practices are passed down, replicated, and taught to convey similar, or universal, knowledges.

Dance scholar Rosemarie Roberts describes dance as a site where “troubled past and present coverage in a moment of production.” Thus, techniques, as aforementioned, can be cultural, historical, and narrative in nature and are enlisted within every movement of the performing body. Our ability to (re)generate knowledge through our moving bodies—whether through carretillas, triplets, skirt movements, and stage formations (typical folkloric gestures)—offers dance a

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66 Spatz, 2017
67 Spatz, 2017
68 Spatz, 2017
69 Roberts, 2011
remarkable pedagogical power. This power is essential to the analysis of our curriculum in understanding what can be transferable through dance, whether that be resistance, histories, or cultural identities. Throughout the chapter, these methodological approaches help us answer questions of how techniques remain the same throughout history, how they may be extracted, misinterpreted, and appropriated, and how they may lead us to new transformative pedagogies.

III.I. Embodied Knowledge Within the Classroom:
A Pedagogical Response to Embodied Oppression

“Without and beyond words, the body is a site of learning and processing. Yet how many classrooms are set up and designed this way: We have heads and shoulders facing forward; Knees and toes tucked under desks. This is what it looks like to learn. This is what it looks like to be smart. This is what it looks like to be a good student. This is what it looks like to be good.”

Ayesha Upchurch, 2019

Colonization has drastically restricted the forms of knowledge production and educational pathways that are practiced and valued within society. The formalized K-12 school settings have inherited and reproduced colonized ways of practicing education, instilling unto their malleable students limited ideas of relationality and devaluing the ever-present styles of learning found in our interactions within the land and our communities. Academic institutions yielded by the American empire have upheld the notion that proper education can only be actualized through schools, and this type of education is one hyper-defined by mentalistic theories. Separating the mind from the

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70 Upchurch, 2019
71 Macedonia, 2019
body, mentalistic approaches to education require students to interact with content through reading, watching, listening, and writing; later reproducing learned content as educational metrics of success and progress. Furthermore, the common student engages in compulsory learning: memorizing facts and formulas from textbooks only to be applied to academic subjects that, on most occasions, are severely dissociated from the student’s own experiences, interests, and curiosities. In these instances, students’ bodies are only valued for what they can produce for the institution and are respectively trained to maximize the efficiency of this production.

Although mental capacities are inherently tied to our bodies’ interactions with surrounding environments, the fixation of these mentalistic approaches in classrooms have left our youth disengaged from their bodies. This disengagement has reduced our body’s capacity to be exercised as a relational compass to understand the self and the world around them. The colonial schooling space, one that affirms and reproduces the hegemonic apparatuses of the empire, has overhauled literary pedagogy as the dominant means of learning and teaching.72 In turn, dance, or any practices of the body in movement for that matter, have been severely “undervalued for exploring the self and the social world of specialized knowledge.”73 To understand how dance can act as a means of relating to the self, others, and the world, the innate abilities of the body will be interrogated in the context of inherently embodied experiences and relationships. When considering bodies as “subjects of their world” rather than “objects to be trained,”74 somatic possibilities of the body are enlightened. Our sensory abilities facilitate unique and subjective experiences of the world; creating a deeply intrinsic system where our ideas are naturalized, processed, and given meaning.75 This process is inherent to our bodies. Through dance, somatic experiences can be processed, reflected upon,
expressed, and transformed rather than neglected. Centralizing the somatic, that is the unique experiences and relations of students, within the classroom can offer students a renewed sense of autonomy over their body; a space which colonialism has attempted to intimately infiltrate.

Within colonial societies, the devaluation of dance as a collective practice of knowledge-making has created unique “epistemological tensions” that have been “legislated or controlled by dominant political systems.”\textsuperscript{76} African-derived dance and danza used in spiritual ceremony are sites that have been regulated by colonial powers seeking dominion over non-Western and non-White bodies and their ways of being. Critical dance scholar Ayesha Upchurch explains, “we are dealing with the residue of colonized ways of thinking about bodies, body parts, and dance styles that were considered proper and appropriate.”\textsuperscript{77} In spite of this power discontent, the collective sustenance of dancing practices by oppressed communities have nurtured its survival amidst institutional control. This practice of resistance has cultivated a technique of self-determination found within the direct engagement of our bodies with these histories. When dancers “come to know their bodies as possible actors in history, as well as repositories of history,” the possibilities of dance as a transformative education tool are extended even further.\textsuperscript{78} These possibilities lie in the creation of a collective, critical consciousness when danza is fostered as a counter-hegemonic practice. This consciousness can serve the “reinvention of identity and culture that alleviates oppression”\textsuperscript{79} and return to our students the authority over their bodies and how they interact, how they connect, how they create, and how they learn. The unique histories of danza folklórica discussed in the following section gesture towards the futures of pedagogical interventions targeted for students battling and enacting the colonial hegemony in their schooling spaces.

\textsuperscript{76} Banks, 2009
\textsuperscript{77} Upchurch, 2019
\textsuperscript{78} Shapiro, 2002
\textsuperscript{79} Banks, 2009
III.II. A Critical Interrogation of Ballet Folklórico de México: The Creation of a Nationalist Dance through the Explicit Erasure of Blackness and Indigeneity

The colonial mechanisms used to extract knowledge and practices from Black and Indigenous communities are often unrecognized in the popular traditions and teachings of Ballet Folklórico across North America. Throughout the chapter and embedded in historical lessons of the curriculum, experiences of Black and Native communities of México are highlighted as related to their subordination by and retaliations against the rising nation-state. The dissertation “Mexican Baile Folklórico: Dancing with Empire and Expressing the Nation” by Dr. Trisha Martinez and the book, “Dancing Across Borders: Danzas y Bailes Mexicanos”, edited by Olga Nájera-Ramírez, Norma Cantú, and Brenda Romero are seminal texts referred to throughout this section to trace the influences of empire on danza folklórica and the creation of a mestizo, nationalist dance in México.

Martinez begins by asserting folklórico as a cultural practice on both sides of the US/Mexican border, yet she distinguishes unique ways that this practice has been shaped by both national and local actors in each setting. After Mexico’s independence from Spain, folkloric dance was utilized by national actors, like the National Mexican Counsel of Culture and Arts, to engender a national identity through newfound Mexican citizens and their performances. As Martinez describes, the wave of “post-revolutionary romanticism” that soon fueled Mexico’s industrial/modern era sought desperately to rebrand itself apart from Spanish rule and hegemony. National actors were compelled to cultivate this identity through practices, like that of dance, that would seemingly represent the diverse communities and cultures of the nation-state.

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80 Martinez, n.d.
81 Nájera-Ramírez, 2009
82 Martinez, n.d.
83 Nájera-Ramírez, 2009
84 Martinez, n.d.
At a time before dances were limited as regional folkloric performances, danzas were practiced by communities of Indigenous, African, and European descent as common cultural traditions for religious ceremony, social gatherings, and historical storytelling of the like.\textsuperscript{85} The regional dances of Ballet Folklórico de México, a dance troupe created by an esteemed choreographer Amelia Hernández, began to appear on national stages, rather than local expressions, as theatrical performances infused with “high-class” techniques.\textsuperscript{86} Stripping these practices, and subsequent knowledge, from Black and Indigenous communities to serve nation building projects allowed Mexican rule to promote a new, racialized, mestizo culture through performance. These state-sponsored appropriation of these cultural traditions were operations of a larger oppression and colonial subordination that Mexican and Spanish rule had inflicted onto these communities since their violent invasion of the land.

Martinez establishes the role Mexico has had to create new norms of belonging that influenced the creation of their national identity. Norms of violence, erasure, and appropriation were not only necessary to the prosperity of the nation-state, but as a prosocial act: one healthy and necessary for society. Building off of the literature of race and ethnicity scholars like Mae Ngai\textsuperscript{87} and Patrick Wolfe,\textsuperscript{88} Martinez unweaves the intricate, racialized impacts that colonization has had on these communities, “Essential to the structure of colonialism, race has been utilized to discriminate, disempower, and dispossess.”\textsuperscript{89} The creation of mestizaje is rooted in a false perception of solidarity between all racial groups of the Mexican nation-state. In turn, the creation of Ballet Folklórico realized these dynamics by coalescing communities’ practices and knowledges without authenticating, materially providing for, or addressing the colonial violence of said communities.

\textsuperscript{85} Nájera-Ramírez, 2009
\textsuperscript{86} Martinez, n.d.
\textsuperscript{87} Ngai, 2004
\textsuperscript{88} Wolfe, 2006
\textsuperscript{89} Martinez, n.d.
Indigenismo, a practice that attempted to “include and preserve” customs of Native peoples of México, were tactics used by the Mexican empire to superficially and peripherally value Indigeneity. Simultaneously, the empire continued to disempower Indigenous communities through political and economic tactics bred by past European control.

As Indigenous practices became adopted in national folklórico repertoire, non-Indigenous actors, dancers and sponsors alike, romanticized and obscured the significance of danza by portraying Native peoples, their land, and their practice as inferior, or in service, to Mexican power. “Moreover,” Martinez argues, “the African influence in folklórico [was] often made invisible by the symbolic significance attributed to mestizaje, as a process informed by Spanish and Indigenous cultural hybridity.” At the same time the Mexican government denied citizenship to Afro-Indigenous peoples during their post-revolutionary period, they sponsored the first folklórico group, Ballet Folklórico de México, that based choreography and direction on pre-Columbian symbology: staging Black and Native customs as prehistoric and erasing the very present and oppressed realities of these peoples. With a troupe that toured all over Mexico and throughout Europe, folklórico became popularized as a Mexican cultural dance that bolstered the “tourist economy” and even was embedded in school curricula throughout Mexico. The active erasure and appropriation of Indigenous and Black peoples and their practices alike were necessary to the formation of Ballet Folklórico. When these histories are left in the past, folklórico performance groups across North America are in service to the empire and its hegemonic control.

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90 Nájera-Ramírez, 2009
91 Martinez, n.d.
92 Hutchinson, 2009
93 Martinez, n.d.
III.III. Folklórico as Protest: The Sociocultural and Political Context of Danza Folklórica in the United States

Conversely, in the United States, Martinez stresses folklórico as a “counter-hegemonic expression” by understanding the United States as a colonial empire that devalues the practices of oppressed groups to legitimize the “integrity of whiteness”: a staple American practice of power. The creation of the American nation-state also required establishing norms of inclusion and exclusion that influenced national identities and ideologies, as discussed through the philosophies of nativism in Part I. At the conclusion of the Mexican-American war, both the U.S. and Mexico sought to distinguish themselves from each other, both physically at the borderlands, but as nations with distinct demographics and customs. The United States also equipped tools of racialization to solidify this divide, and proceeded to exclude non-White communities through violent policing, border patrolling, forced assimilation through schools, and instilling nativist and racist rhetoric through policy and ideology.

For Hispanic-Americans, a long and complicated history of racialization ensued: Anglo Hispanic elites that claimed their Spanish heritage quickly gained American citizenship throughout the newly conquered Southwest border region. In contrast, Indigenous peoples of México were continuously excluded from citizenship but allowed to reside in America only for the sake of low-wage labor through policies enacted for colonial projects, like that of the Bracero Program. As these politics of belonging played out in the U.S./Mexico border, the increasing presence of Mexican-American communities in these areas inherited these dynamics and dabbled between their positionalities as non/citizens with mixed heritage.

94 Martinez, n.d.
95 Martinez, n.d.
New Mexican-American communities brought practices from their homelands into policed and hegemonic territories. While the U.S. government sought to exert dominion over Mexican-American communities by limiting the cultivation of their practices and subjugating them to an arduous, underpaid workforce, these very communities resisted the forces of hegemony that pervaded every aspect of their life. Most notable through Chicanx movements in California and Texas during the late twentieth century, Chicanx activists displayed their cultural heritage through performances of folklórico at large rallies as an “opposition to cultural assimilation and other discriminatory practices to which they were subjected.”

Chicanx communities have cultivated danza folklórica as a means of protest against the invading hegemony found within their social world, particularly their schooling spaces, that disregarded their heritage practices and its ability to empower disadvantaged youth. Through celebration and performance of generational practices, these communities have generated joy and resistance through collective remembering and engagement. Although Chicanx communities generally regard Ballet Folklórico as this counter-hegemonic practice, the transformative power of danza is found in a pedagogy that does not promote ideologies and actualities of exclusion and hegemony inherently embedded in the practice of Ballet Folklórico. The following section will develop the pedagogical frameworks necessary for danza folklórica to have its agentive ability to restore power for our youth and their bodies.

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96 Nájera-Ramírez, 2009
III.IV. Toward a Folklórico Pedagogy:  
Addressing the Haunted Afterlife of Colonialism in Ballet Folklórico  
To Transform and Re-member Empowered Futures

The revolution's call has not been realized.  
It must continue to be re-membered.  

_Dana Chapman, 2016_97

Critical pedagogical interventions are necessary to dismantle the Western epistemologies induced through educational apparatuses of colonization that undermine our student’s inherent ability to produce knowledge within their bodies through their unique experiences, relationships, and histories. Throughout the last section of this paper, I gesture towards pedagogies that are unique to the knowledge and practice of danza folklórica that have been actualized by power discontents between peoples and institutions. Due to the obscuration and erasure of Indigenous and African practices, and in turn knowledge and values, in Ballet Folklórico, I actively call for the dismantling of any system, including the _traditional_ practice of Ballet Folklórico, which upholds the empire’s oppressive agendas towards non-White communities. This inherently decolonized approach to pedagogy requires critical formulations in the way we instruct and represent the lived realities and histories of oppressed peoples. I build on the approaches of Black critical dance scholars Rosemarie Roberts and Dana Chapman to develop a pedagogical framework that will catalyze danza folklórica as a transformative, counter-hegemonic tool for social change and youth empowerment.

Through her article, “Facing and Transforming Haunting of Race through the Arts,” Roberts examines the pedagogical processes through which dance practice and performance embody issues of social injustice from prominent Black dancers and choreographers like Katherine Dunham and Ronald K Brown.98 Both Dunham and Brown, as Roberts argues, have used dance to “trace the haunting issues of social injustice and to conjure up and embody ghosts in order to reveal and to

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98 Roberts, R. (2011)
challenge their presence.” The analogies of ghosts, or social ghosts, have been used by critical race scholars to describe the invisibilized, yet ever-present, dynamics of oppression that are taught to and internalized by individuals along with the hegemony induced by social institutions that pervade every-day life of oppressed peoples. These social ghosts, although silenced through the denial of the empire, “hover in the shadows ready to be conjured up” by individuals willing to name and confront their presence, especially through embodied practices.

The body’s importance in conjuring and facing these social ghosts is emphasized through embodied pedagogies in its engagement of the body as an apparatus of relation-making and analysis between the individual and historical/social instances of oppression. Embodied pedagogy, as defined by Roberts, refers to the instructional tools and performance practices used by dance educators to provoke critical consciousness across time, audiences, and encounter settings. Encounter settings can be experienced through teaching lessons of dance in practice or through performances. These encounters serve as sites of interactions between social ghosts and individual dancers. When dancers form relations between their subjective, embodied experiences and social ghosts, an intimate space (consciousness) is created where dancers “embody and feel the story from the inside.” Through practice, an intimate consciousness of ancestral knowledge and experiences of oppression and resistance is generated within the individual through the guidance of knowledge repositories (i.e., curricula, instructors of critical histories). Through performance, a collective consciousness between audience and performers are created which share knowledge capable of transforming injustices.

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99 Roberts, R. (2011)
100 Bell, L. A. (2007)
102 Roberts, R. (2011)
103 Roberts, R. (2011)
104 Roberts, R. (2011)
At times, this transference of knowledge through collective consciousness of performance may occur through the dance alone, but, as Roberts delineates, “neither language nor dance alone is as powerful as they are together to name and call attention to the social ghosts of injustice.”

Embodied pedagogies enlist all aspects of the body, including voice and thought. As a central tenet of social justice education, naming social ghosts, that is identifying the embodied impacts of oppression and its oppressor, is critical to revealing and confronting their practices within our lives and society. Yet, practicing this naming alone, as Roberts argues, is “insufficient to transform racial injustice.” Critical pedagogies must name and enact social ghosts through embodied practices to fully activate the transformative power for individual and collective bodies.

Confronting and transforming social ghosts through dance ultimately requires the active remembering and cultivation of African- and Indigenous-derived dance practices. Choreographers like Dunham and Brown have used African-derived techniques within their performance works as means of bringing attention to practices so senselessly extracted and appropriated by colonial tools. By physicalizing the histories of oppressed peoples through dance practice and performance and naming these injustices through shared and taught knowledge, dancers can create a time-bending consciousness that centers the past to challenge the present and transform material, embodied futures. Here is where the dancing body is capable of reaching its fullest potentials; potentials not realized by colonialism. When enacting intergenerational practices of both oppression and resistance through dance, a transformative power is animated that allows all those engaged in the dance to imagine futures untainted by oppression.

Our folklórico pedagogy must enact both the body and language to address, resist, and heal from the multidimensional and multigenerational forms of oppression endured by Black,

105 Roberts, R. (2011)
106 Roberts, R. (2011)
Indigenous, and Latinx communities at the hands of a hegemonic empire. By instructing about the many colonial apparatuses used to disempower Black and Indigenous communities, practices, and knowledge, folklórico pedagogies conjure the hidden social ghosts of Ballet Folklórico and equip youth with critical knowledge of their oppressors. By centering Black and Indigenous practices of love, empowerment, celebration, ceremony, and resistance found in danza, folklórico pedagogies invite students to exercise these practices and challenge the hegemonic forces within their lives. By forming relationships between social/historical instances of oppression with a dancer’s intimate experiences of oppression, folklórico pedagogies promote a collective consciousness and memory capable of dreaming new futures outside of colonial conditions.

Critical dance scholar Dana Chapman, in her discussion of Jean Appolon’s teaching of Afro-Haitian dance classes, offers insight into the nature of folkloric dances which have generated precarious conditions of colonized practices and further complicate the pedagogies we gesture towards in this section. Haitian dance performed in the twenty-first century is still referred to as folkloric dance, signaling a sort of universal practice and experience that is rooted in unchanging tradition. The reference of folklore and folkloric practices is a direct consequence of colonial ideologies that desire to antiquate and generalize Indigeneity and Blackness. Yet, as Chapman argues, folklore is “continuously re-made” through an individual’s own recreation and reinterpretation of these practices; as necessitated by the relational nature of embodied knowledge. Chapman begins to tease out the unique conditions produced by folkloric pedagogies in writing:

“In the performance/practice of the [folkloric] dance forms in contemporary creative contexts, however, separation doesn’t always hold: delineations between dance and trance, religion and ritual, specific spirits (lwa) and “spirit” are constantly transgressed and confused. These blurred lines create the conditions of possibility for Appolon's classes.”

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Here, Chapman outlines how restricted folkloric dances are in their attempts to differentiate *what was once* from *what is now*. Our folklórico pedagogies interact with a similar battle; the practice of danza through Indigenous ceremony, for example, cannot meaningfully and accurately be represented in our contemporary renditions of the dance. Though, as to not be limited by what the oppressor has desired to be true, folkloric pedagogies can find renewed possibilities within these conditions that “institutes a new type of space.”

By engaging our bodies in consciousness that transcend limitations of time and space, danza is dealt the weighted task of deriving action from diasporic, transgenerational memories. It is within the body, through the body, and by the body that we are called to “disassemble and reconfigure space and time.” Folklórico pedagogies enact students to re-member—recall to restructure—the pain and the joy of the ancestor and the self: forever intertwined, forever in relation to one another. The revolution desired by our communities is one that must be re-membered by all practitioners of critical pedagogies. For folklórico pedagogies, where Haiti represents the collective spirit, struggle, and state of our peoples:

“...this danced re-membering is always ephemeral and always unfinished, a paradoxical performative that calls for the repeated practice of dancing, together as an ensemble. Haiti is here, Haiti is not here; Haiti is felt, and it is yet to come.”

CONCLUSION: FOLKLÓRICO FUTURES

Colonialism has strategically attempted to disengage us from our bodies only to engage us with limited pedagogies in fears of us actualizing our fullest potentials. The empire fears us. It threatens to restructure its protocols for our demise, enlists its politics for our exclusion, claim ownership over our bodies. All because it fears that we will do what it has done unto us. Through danza, we have the power to unearth histories, confront social ghosts, analyze them, detest them; all in a space impenetrable by the invading hands of oppression. Danza returns us our control. Not only can we learn, experience, and embody the stories of our ancestors, but we can create new narratives through danza folklórica that represent the realities inherently true to us. I dream in danza: a space outside of colonial spacial and temporal restrictions where I am free to express my most authentic self with my pasados y futuros.

With the recent passage of state-wide mandate requiring all Connecticut high schools to offer course in Black, Puerto Rican, and Latinx Studies, I began dreaming of folklórico futures. I imagine the classrooms that will evoke transgenerational spirits that will guide, heal, connect, nourish, and motivate. I picture a younger Vic who lost their voice within a classroom, who dreamed only of returning home during school, who overstayed their recesses time to choreograph a dance with their best friends. Who would I be today if I could engage with these studies at that age? I’d certainly be dancing the same path, but maybe even more empowered to do so.

When I dream of folklórico futures, I can only imagine the love that will be cultivated in these spaces where critical pedagogies can flourish unrestricted. I hope that they find all those in desperate need of it.
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