

STAGING PRESENCE/EMBODYING ABSENCE:
PERFORMANCE AND PROTEST IN THE AMERICAS

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This dissertation examines theatre for social change in communities of crisis across the Americas, where the body is the site of contestation, transformation, and collective action. Analyzing the influences and effects of politics, war, globalization, tourism, immigration, ethnicity, indigeneity, and collective memory on performance and protest, my research is situated in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian Andes, the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, and the Southwestern United States. I am particularly interested in groups and artists that come from and work within marginalized communities: the minor within the minor. The subjects of these performances—including indigenous peoples, women, youth, and immigrants—stage a collective presence and embody those who are absent or invisible, in addition to striving for societal change and a recognition of alternative histories.

Boundaries and structures, whether real or imagined, exist throughout the Americas and define its inhabitants: First World and Third World; indigenous, ladino, and mestizo; male and female; urban and rural; legal and illegal; and lower, middle, and upper class, among others. In addition to these categories, citizens and artists of the Americas must also contend with differences that exist within their own socially conscious communities: race, culture, language, and religion. As a response to these

violent and oppressive divisions, the artists and activists that I examine are staging acts of urgency that work to give an active voice to those experiencing grievous social infractions. I am intrigued by the intersections of different performance structures and the ways that these linkages challenge and reinterpret the concepts of visibility/invisibility, marked/unmarked, and the disappeared. Through ethnographic, historical, and artistic analyses, I examine the works of Atempo Danza and Teatro Trono (Bolivia), Teatro Contraelviento (Ecuador), Sa'as Tun (Mexico), and Teatro Bravo (U.S.), in addition to other forms of performance that include popular protest, storytelling, staged tourism, and song. Through close readings of these artists' works, all created within the first decade of the 21st century, I argue that the margins, together with performance, offer a space in which these bodies can transform into sites of collective and popular resistance that offer alternative visions and versions of living and being.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jimmy A. Noriega is a theatre scholar and director, with interests in Latin American, Latina/o, and indigenous theatre and performance, in addition to performance studies, hemispheric studies, border studies, community-based theatre, and theatre for social change. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre, English, and Spanish from Missouri Southern State University in 2005, and a Masters degree in Theatre Studies from Cornell University in 2009. Since 2007, he has conducted extensive fieldwork throughout the Americas. Nationally, he has directed plays in Joplin, Missouri; Lawrence, Kansas; Ithaca, New York; and at the historic Pregones Theater in New York City. Internationally, Jimmy's plays have been staged in Israel, Mexico, and Ecuador. Some of his directing credits include: *Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez*, *References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot*, *Desiertos*, *Watsonville: Someplace Not Here*, *Dog Lady*, *La Mujer Que Cayó del Cielo*, *Beautiful Señoritas*, *With Mothers Like These*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *No Exit*.

Dedicated to my family:

Martha and Jim Noriega

and

Mark, Michelle, Steven, and Karena

y

Abuelita

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PREFACE

From March 27 to April 2, 2011, the Universidad Central de Ecuador hosted the *V Encuentro Internacional de Maestros y Escuelas de Teatro*. At this week-long gathering, ten groups from around the world came together to perform plays, participate in workshops, exchange ideas, and celebrate the art of theatre. The opening of the festival occurred on World Theatre Day and the 2011 World Theatre Day International Message, written by Jessica A. Kaahwa, from Uganda, was read at the opening ceremony.¹ In her message, Kaahwa urges the United Nations and other peacekeeping organizations to look to the theatre as an avenue for achieving peace, justice, and equality throughout the world. She says:

Theatre is a proven means of advocating and advancing ideas that we collectively hold and are willing to fight for when violated. To anticipate a peaceful future, we must begin by using peaceful means that seek to understand, respect and recognize the contributions of every human being in the enterprise of harnessing peace. Theatre is that universal language by which we can advance messages of peace and reconciliation. (ITI)

Calling attention to the ways theatre has already helped people living in war zones, exile, and poverty, Kaahwa acknowledges the artists who work to create a better world through their craft. But she takes her message one step further. She not only calls for a recognition

¹ The International Theatre Institute (ITI), which is now formally associated with UNESCO, created World Theatre Day in 1961. It is celebrated annually on March 27th with numerous international theatre events to mark the occasion. Each year the ITI selects a prominent international figure to write the World Theatre Day International Message, which reflects the ITI's theme of theatre as a form of culture and peace.

of the theatre's capacity to achieve peace, but also challenges the U.N. and her fellow artists and activists to take a stand:

It is therefore a travesty to keep quiet in times like ours, in the knowledge of the power of theatre, and let gun wielders and bomb launchers be the peacekeepers of our world [...] I urge you on this World Theatre Day to ponder this prospect and to put theatre forth as a universal tool for dialogue, social transformation and reform. (ITI)

At the end of the reading, the auditorium was energized with a sense of urgency and pride in our community and craft.

I was honored to be one of the speakers selected to read the World Theatre Day International Message that evening in Quito. Standing on the stage and reading these words before an audience comprised of hundreds of artists from different countries—Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Italy, Mexico, Spain, the United States, and Uruguay—I was empowered by Kaahwa's words and the sense of responsibility and obligation that we as theatre artists were asked to feel that evening. We were unified by our shared identity as performers, and our collective body seemed to transcend borders as we heard the message reverberate through the auditorium. We were asked to recognize and think about the different ways theatre, our craft, could positively affect society. It was, for me, a very profound moment.

After the opening ceremony, and throughout the rest of the week, I continued to share my thoughts on theatre's capacity to transform society. Two days after the opening ceremony, my four actresses and I presented *Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez*, by Mexican playwright Cristina Michaus. The play uses the theatre as a space to examine and speak

about the femicides taking place in Juárez, Mexico, where since 1993 over a thousand women have been brutally raped, tortured, and murdered. It offers a voice to the countless female victims whose murders remain unsolved; it also calls for immediate action to end the violence. Surprisingly, several of the festival participants were appalled by my decision to present this piece at the week-long celebration. I was criticized for being too aggressive and political. After all, as I was reminded, we were there to have fun and celebrate our lives in the theatre. As one director—a man—told me, “I am from Argentina. I have nothing to do with what is happening in Mexico.”

Kaawha’s message kept playing in my head: only two days before the auditorium was filled with applause and cheers after her words were read out loud. Now, it seemed, many were already ignoring her call. I surprisingly found myself challenged many more times by those who wished to keep artistry and politics separate. I offered as examples my fieldwork with other theatre groups throughout Latin America, as well as my own directing work in the U.S. on themes of immigration, racism, unfair labor practices in migrant communities, and gendered violence. On more than one occasion I found myself quoting Augusto Boal, whose theories on theatre of the oppressed are the foundation for many of my ideas, including the ones I present in this study. In his “Foreword” to the groundbreaking *Theatre of the Oppressed*, written while he was in exile in Buenos Aires, he explains: “This book attempts to show that all theater is necessarily political, because all activities of man are political and theater is one of them” (ix). My response to those who disapproved of *Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez* would have, I hope, made Boal proud.

Boal’s work with his pedagogy of the oppressed is focused on transformation: of the individual, society, and the theatre. By tracing the historical evolution of Western

drama—from Aristotle and Machiavelli to Hegel and Brecht—the Brazilian director argues that over time the power inherent in the theatrical form passed from the hands of the people into the hands of the oppressors. For Boal this genealogy turned theatre from an instrument of liberation into one of subjugation. His work was a theatrical revolution that sought to invert this historical development, placing theatre back in the service of those seeking freedom and change through performance. His call was a universal one: “all must act, all must be protagonists in the necessary transformation of society” (x). Kaahwa’s words in the World Theatre Day International Message seemed to develop directly out of Boal’s ideology; Boal is as relevant today—perhaps even more so, in the context of global war and violence—as he was when he first wrote those words in 1974.

Central to Boal’s work of revolution is the transformation of the spectator into a “spect-actor,” someone who actively participates in the performance, as opposed to the traditional spectator who just sits and watches. Boal states that the main objective of his process is, “to change the people—‘spectators,’ passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon—into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action” (122). This very transformation of the body into an agent of action allows those witnessing a performance to interject and alter the circumstances of the work created within the space. The performance or workshop, for Boal, is never a finished product; it is a process and all must become involved in order to investigate and discover the full range of possibilities.

At the core of Boal’s work is his belief that, “the theater is a weapon. A very efficient weapon” (ix). Through the course of his lifetime he continued to develop his theatrical philosophy and share his findings, offering workshops throughout the world, creating games and techniques for actors, publishing books, and giving lectures. He also

served as a city councilor in Rio de Janeiro from 1992-1996, where he used his “legislative theatre” process to allow voters an opportunity to propose solutions and legislation for their city’s problems. In an interview with theatre historian Jan Cohen-Cruz, Boal explains his method:

We would present the play and ask, “What is the solution that you want?” [...] But in this case we would add something different: could there be a *law* that would help solve this problem? And if so, what law? Then we go to another neighborhood—we do the same play, and then we compare the law that was proposed here with the law proposed there and we ask which one would be the best. We look at all the laws that come up. The idea is to make a forum that asks whether we can transform the situation by only our means within the existing law or if another law is needed to make the situation better. (Schutzman and Cohen-Cruz 234)

Utilizing this technique, Boal traveled throughout Rio de Janeiro during his term as a city councilor, staging scenarios and allowing the spect-actors to envision and act out new pieces of legislation. Working with this process, Boal proposed 40 laws during his term, 13 of which were approved. Through this “legislative theatre” technique Boal demonstrated that the theatre could, in fact, be used to initiate and create political change within the Brazilian government.

My primary interest as a scholar and director has always been in the efficacy of theatre to enact social change and in the ways that performance creates, challenges, and transforms identities. Kaahwa’s words on World Theatre Day (re)affirmed my commitment to socially engaged performance. My decision to stage *Mujeres de Ciudad*

Juárez was a politically conscious act that I hoped would bring attention and recognition to the violent acts being committed against women along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez uses the theatre as a space to examine, reflect on, and speak about the femicides taking place in the industrial city. Michaus offers a voice and a space for the countless female victims whose murders have been reduced to figures and a gross display of injustice. The play is not just poignant and heartbreaking; it is call for action. Showing multiple female perspectives of life in Juárez—from mothers and daughters, to factory workers and prostitutes—the production speaks out against all forms of violence against the female body and psyche. It weaves emotionally between horror and heartbreak, fragility and vulgarity, and anger and activism. In our staging of the show, four actresses took on the roles of the women, their families, and the officials investigating the murders.

The show, first presented in Ithaca, New York, at Cornell University on March 15 and 16, was enthusiastically received by the socially progressive and politically conscious audiences. The performance in Ecuador, a few weeks later, demonstrated that the reception of political theatre changes as the audience changes. In Ecuador, many men resisted the performance, feeling themselves unjustly blamed for the crimes being committed in Mexico. The women, on the other hand, thanked us for the performance, but usually in private. The audience reactions, it seemed, were dictated by the socially constructed atmosphere of machismo. But, as Michaus says in the script, “If the play does not touch, make contact with, and disturb the public, then the production has failed” (172). According to the playwright’s words, then, the production was a success. The lesson I learned through this show is that social change is not always about getting people

to agree with the message in the production. Sometimes, making the audience think, challenging them, and yes, disturbing them is all that one can do.

This dissertation sets forth with Boal as inspiration, looking at the way theatre and performance can be used as tools of revolution and change. I have traveled throughout the Americas—from Bolivia, to Ecuador, to Mexico, and into the United States—conducting fieldwork and working alongside theatre artists who are politically and socially engaged with their communities. I have merged my scholarly understanding of theatre—through the work of Boal and other theorists—with my practical and creative work. Together, my fieldwork, scholarship, and directing have pushed me to explore, and believe in, the possibilities for change inherent in live performance. Like *Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez*, I hope that this dissertation sparks interest, support, and even debate within my various audiences. If Jessica A. Kaawha understands theatre as “a universal tool for dialogue, social transformation and reform,” and Augusto Boal sees that, “the theater is a weapon. A very efficient weapon,” then I offer this dissertation as another voice in support of the theatre as a necessary tool for the transformation of society and as a weapon in the fight for social justice and equality.

CHAPTER ONE

ACTS OF URGENCY: PERFORMING SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE AMERICAS

In *Adiós Ayacucho*, the protagonist, Alfonso Cánepa, demands: “Give me back my body. Where have you taken my bones?” (Rubio 297). He is a victim of Peru’s Dirty War, tortured and murdered by the military, his body burned and mutilated. The play, created by Grupo Cultural Yuyachkani and performed by Augusto Casafranca, was first presented in 1990, at the height of the armed conflict between the Peruvian military and the guerilla forces known as *Sendero Luminoso*.² It was an attempt by Yuyachkani to make (re)appear on the stage those who had disappeared from actual life. These individuals, victims of state violence, not only vanished physically, but were also being erased from social memory. The national consciousness, according to Miguel Rubio, the group’s director, became “accustomed to the horror” (*Cuerpo* 15). Cánepa, left without a body—literally erased from society—vows: “Whatever happens, I’m going to Lima to recover what’s mine” (297).

Cánepa’s search for his bones, the archival evidence of his murder, sets him on a journey through Peru. On his way to the capital, he witnesses the effects of the civil war as survivors search for their loved ones and cope with the violence engulfing the nation. Even in death, Cánepa does not accept the circumstances under which he died: he demands recognition of his story and calls for justice, even going as far as delivering a letter to the President of Peru. For Cánepa, identity and memory are directly tied to the physical body. Without his body, there is no proof that a crime was committed, or even

² In Peru, the 1980s and 1990s were filled with violent clashes between the military and the Maoist guerrilla group *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path). Terrorizing the country between 1980 and 1992, the war between these forces tore apart the very fabric of Peruvian society. Caught in the middle was a population forced into silence. In this civil war it is estimated that at least 75,000 people were disappeared, many from the rural and indigenous areas of the nation. An additional one million people, mostly indigenous, were displaced.

that he ever existed at all. Writing about the play, Latin American theatre and performance scholar Diana Taylor notes, “Yuyachkani takes their acting process further by asking theater to make visible not just the characters but the conflicts and problems that have been disappeared through violent politics” (*Adiós* 293). In the context of the Dirty War, *Adiós Ayacucho* stages the physical presence of those disappeared and left in unmarked graves through the body of its lead actor, allowing him to simultaneously embody the thousands of victims, the violence and terrorism of the civil war, and its aftermath on the population. The play transforms the bones—what remains of the individual—from mere objects, into meaningful signifiers of Peru’s national identity. The disembodied protagonist, unlike the actual disappeared individuals, achieves a subjectivity and agency through the public performance, an act of defiance and empowerment in the face of Peru’s state-sponsored terrorism.

Adiós Ayacucho has been staged extensively throughout Peru: in major cities, in indigenous communities, at festivals, and even in front of the Government Palace in Lima. The members of Yuyachkani, as witnesses to war and horror, make it one of their most important goals to take their work to the different communities of Peru, especially those most affected by the violence. As Rubio puts it, “Why not go as a theatre group to those areas most devastated?” (*Cuerpo* 51). Yuyachkani’s performances labor to denounce their nation’s history of impunity and injustice. In “Resisting Amnesia: Yuyachkani, Performance, and the Postwar Reconstruction of Peru,” Latin American theatre scholar Francine A’ness sees the group’s performances as ways of exposing the “dehumanizing effects of the violence in a way that rendered it coherent and viewable” (400). But more than that, the theatre collective’s work is about keeping memory alive, honoring those lost, and offering a voice to those who have been silenced and disappeared. The spectators, transformed into active witnesses, restore individual and national memory as they watch Yuyachkani’s performances. Seeing and listening become acts of resistance and intervention against national amnesia: the audience, witnesses to

the horror presented onstage and on the bodies of the performers, become active agents in the restoration and transmission of memory and identity. Collective memory, Rubio says, “is written on the bodies of our actors” (*Cuerpo* 34).

Performance scholar Rebecca Schneider, in *The Explicit Body in Performance*, calls attention to “*the body as stage*” (6-7). She notes how performers “use their bodies as the stage across which they re-enact social dramas and traumas which have arbitrated cultural differentiations between truth and illusion, reality and dream, fact and fantasy, natural and unnatural, essential and constructed” (7). This dissertation examines performances that erupt from moments of crisis and urgency, where the body is the site of contestation, transformation, and collective action. Like Cánepa’s body in *Adiós Ayacucho*, the bodies under examination in the following chapters are caught in a struggle between hegemonic and abusive forces of power that marginalize and erase individuals, and the activists and artists who fight to stage their communities’ stories and social agendas during times of crisis and instability.

Analyzing the influences and effects of politics, ethnicity, war, resource privatization, globalization, tourism, gendered violence, and immigration policy on performance and protest, I focus my research on the Bolivian and Ecuadorian Andes, the Mayan regions of the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, and the Southwestern United States. I am particularly interested in those groups and artists that come from and work within marginalized communities throughout the Americas: the minor within the minor. These groups, in each of their geographical contexts, utilize the bodies of the performers as surrogates for the community. They stage a presence for those pushed into invisibility and embody the absence of those disappeared and erased from public view.

Throughout the following pages I examine an array of rich and diverse performances that have taken place in the first decade of the 21st century throughout the Americas, focusing on performances that explore issues associated with violence and conflict. By investigating various forms of expression—theatre, dance, oral tradition,

street performance, protest—I examine the ways artists across the hemisphere are utilizing performance as a form of resistance and as a tool for social transformation. In chapter two, I focus on Bolivia and the work of Atempo Danza, a dance collective based in Cochabamba, and Teatro Trono, a youth theatre ensemble formed in El Alto. Both groups created performances in the aftermath of the Water Wars, when water was privatized by an international consortium, causing the price of water to skyrocket and threatening the well-being of residents in Cochabamba in 2000. Chapter three looks at Ecuador and Teatro Contraelviento's play, *La flor de la Chukirawa*, which is a theatrical response to the U.S. War in Iraq and the use of private mercenary soldiers, in particular impoverished Latin American citizens, in the continued violence. The tourist industry of the Yucatán Peninsula informs my analysis of the play *Mestiza Power* in chapter four. The play, performed by Sa'as Tun, a Mayan female theatre group, challenges the dominant ideology created by the tourist industry, deconstructing the gaze of the non-indigenous spectator and creating a space for Mayan female agency and power. In chapter five, set in the Southwestern United States, I look at how street protest and theatre are working together to bring attention to the immigrant cause and how performers are using their bodies to promote progressive immigration reform.

I am intrigued by the intersections of different performance structures and the ways that these linkages challenge and reinterpret the concepts of visibility/invisibility, marked/unmarked, and the disappeared. The subjects of these performances—including native peoples, women, youth, and immigrants—stage a collective presence and embody those who are absent, which can be read as acts of empowerment and cultural agency. According to Latin American scholar Doris Sommer, “Culture enables agency. Where structures or conditions can seem intractable, creative practices add dangerous supplements that add angles for intervention and locate room for maneuver” (3). Through close readings of these artists' works, I argue that the margins and performance offer a

space in which these bodies can transform into sites of resistance that offer alternative visions and versions of living and being.

A Hemispheric Journey

The Western hemisphere, as a physical geography as well as an ideological construct, was first envisioned through an East to West framework that positioned Europe as subject and the Americas as object. But rather than write the Americas into history as an “Other” separate from its European counterpart, the conquerors of the New World scripted the land mass into the already existing genealogy of Europe. As Argentine literary theorist Walter D. Mignolo explains: “America, contrary to Asia and Africa, was included as part of Europe’s extension and not as its difference” (58). He adds, “Occidentalism was a transatlantic construction precisely in the sense that the Americas became conceptualized as the expansion of Europe” (58). Europe’s understanding of the Americas, including its inhabitants and their cultural practices, first came through the writings of the Spanish conquistadores and friars, including: Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, Cabeza de Vaca, Bartolomé de Las Casas, Bernardino de Sahagún, and Diego de Landa, among others. Their narratives and descriptions, what became the basis for defining this “New World,” framed the Americas within the epistemology and perspective of Spanish dominion. Additionally, in “Americanity as Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System,” Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano and American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein frame the idea of the Americas as a product of the sixteenth century and as the foundation for modernity:

The modern world-system was born in the long sixteenth century. The Americas as a geosocial construct were born in the long sixteenth century. The creation of this geosocial entity, the Americas, was the constitutive act of the modern world system. The Americas were not incorporated into an already existing capitalist

world-economy. There could not have been a capitalist world-economy without the Americas. (549)

Americanity, as these two scholars argue, is an essential element of what is understood to be modernity.

Mignolo, Quijano, and Wallerstein, however, note that the concept of the Americas in the world order took on new forms and positions as the colonial powers (re)defined and (re)constructed the continents. In his description of the chronological development and perception of the New World after the decline of the Spanish empire, Mignolo notes: “If America was conceived in the eighteenth century as the daughter and inheritor of Europe, that prospective future was only visible in ‘Anglo’ America. ‘Latin’ America suffered a second subalternization in the modern/colonial world imaginary, as a consequence of its colonial past in the hands of an empire in decay” (183). It is not surprising to see that Quijano and Wallerstein also recognize a continued subjugation of Latin America, now under the United States, in our new century:

The Americas are preparing to begin the twenty-first century with virtually the same inequalities as those with which they began the nineteenth. With one difference however: they will not begin it separately or follow separate paths, but as part of a single world order in which the US still occupies top place and Latin America a subordinate place, and is affected by the gravest crises of its post-colonial history. (556)

For these three scholars, the United States has taken over the position once occupied by Spain and Europe in the Western hemisphere. Dominion and control—in the forms of economic, political, and military influence—reside in North America, while everything south of the U.S. must grapple with questions of positionality, identity, and agency in relation to the United States and its sphere of influence.

In this dissertation I build upon hemispheric and transnational models to present my case for socially engaged theatre as acts of resistance and redress by marginalized

communities against abuses of power throughout the Americas. My attempt is to demonstrate the intellectual capacity of theatre studies to reverse the up-down/North-South approach that dominates scholarship in the United States, forcing scholars to rethink the ways we understand the relationship among the nations of the Americas and the ways performance functions throughout the hemisphere. As Diana Taylor notes in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*:

Hemispheric studies could potentially counter the Latin American studies of the mid-twentieth century by exploring histories of the north and south as profoundly intertwined. It allows us to connect histories of conquest, colonialism, slavery, indigenous rights, imperialism, migration, and globalization (to name some issues) throughout the Americas. (xvii-xviii)

She continues by advocating, “Now is a time for remapping the Americas” (277). For Taylor, decentering the U.S. as a mode of inquiry opens up the possibilities for more multidirectional and comparative analyses within the hemisphere. “Performance studies,” she puts forward, “can allow us to engage in a sustained historical analysis of the performance practices that both bind and fragment the Americas. As such, it plays a vital role in the remapping” (278).

Literary scholar Debra A. Castillo also calls for a redrawing of the map of the Americas. In her book, *Redreaming America: Toward a Bilingual American Culture*, she posits important and critical questions that aim to broaden the ways we define and understand Latina/o and Latin American literatures. Two of the most critical questions she poses are: “what would U.S. literature look like if we included literature from the United States in languages other than English?” and “what would Latin American literature look like if we understood the United States to be a Latin American country” (14). Both Taylor and Castillo propose a scholarly shift from the United States *as America*, to the United States *as part of America*, what Chicana playwright Cherrie Moraga calls “*América con Acento*” [“*América with Accent*”] (30).

Additionally, literary scholars Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire F. Fox advocate for “inter-Americas studies” as the collaborative model from which to investigate the hemisphere (6). They propose their model as a way of bridging the traditional fields of American, Canadian, and Latin American studies, by creating a “‘critical internationalist’ awareness of our own institutional locations so as to position the United States’ neighboring geographies and the fields that study them as protagonists rather than mere recipient sites of US policies and of US-based theoretical perspectives and comparative paradigms” (7). This approach, they suggest, will help inform an understanding of hemispheric matters that include: economic (globalization, neoliberalism), racial (ethnicity, indigeneity), and political (postcolonial, socialist, democratic) concerns. Sadowski-Smith and Fox state:

We hope that attention to historically divergent forms of nation-state formation and the intellectual analyses of nationalism in the Americas will enable scholars to examine the impact of neoliberalism on hemispheric cultures and on the academy, and to become active in policy debates concerning hemispheric citizenship, immigration law, language rights, foreign policy, educational reform, and territorial rights, among other issues. In its emphasis on such questions, an inter-Americas perspective can also interface with other emerging global or regionally organized models of study. (8)

The mission to create an alternative framework from which to understand the hemisphere—as challenging as it is promising—also means that multiple and divergent fields of study must learn to commingle, collide, and coexist as a part of this revisionist project.

Performance artists have taken up the task of reworking the map and paradigm of the hemisphere, many even before there was a call for such a move. In 1990, the performance piece *Norte: Sur (North: South)* was staged at the Mexican Museum in San Francisco as the main performance event of the city’s *Festival 2000*. It was created and

performed by Coco Fusco, the Cuban-American performance artist and scholar, and Guillermo Gomez-Peña, the self-described “nomadic Mexican artist/writer in the process of Chicanization” (Gomez-Peña i). An excerpt from the statement given to those entering the exhibit reveals the artistic and critical aims of the project:

America is not the United States. It is no longer the territory you imagine. Despite our hopes and fears, an incurable continental infection is spreading beyond our geopolitical boundaries. Latinoamerica lives and breathes in the U.S. and vice versa. What we buy, eat, watch, read, hear, and pay taxes for is transforming the North and South into an intercultural terrain. (qtd. in Conners 355)

The interdisciplinary installation mixed languages, stereotypes, and customs to create a critical commentary on the upcoming celebration of the 500-year anniversary of Columbus’s “discovery” of America.

In addition to the installation at the Mexican Museum, the artists presented a radio-performance version of the script which aired on National Public Radio that same year. It begins with a female voice introducing the show: “This is Norte: Sur. This is about America. America, not only the U.S., but America” (Fusco and Gomez-Peña 169). Next, the public hears:

AMERICAN RADIO ANNOUNCER: Greetings, friends, this is Meredith James, hostess of MPR’s weekly series, *Buscando América*. Today we are going to listen to some daring thoughts about America’s changing cultural identity. We have two people in our Miami studio who believe that the United States can no longer be conceived of as separate from Latin America and the Caribbean.

GUILLERMO GOMEZ-PEÑA: (*Interrupting*) In fact, American identity is a 500-year old wound that has never healed.

COCO FUSCO: The North and the South aren’t bipolar entities anymore. The First and Third worlds, English and Spanish—they are totally intertwined. (Fusco and Gomez-Peña 169)

After this introduction, Fusco and Gomez-Peña begin to speak about their identities as Latin Americans living within the U.S. The radio-show consists of Spanish, English, Spanglish, and Gomez-Peña speaking in tongues. This multilingual presentation is meant to create a mixed and complex version of “America” that resists translation: decipherability and accessibility are not the concerns of the artists. The voice on the airwaves warns the public, “This is bilingual radio a continental infection and there’s no antidote for it” (Fusco and Gomez-Peña 171). The project explores the cultural, political, and linguistic aspects of U.S.-Latin American relations by inserting “sound bytes” related to current events throughout the show: the U.S. influenced elections in Nicaragua, the “dollarization” of Panama, the exportation of Hollywood to impoverished Latin American nations, and other various news and pop culture references. The fact that this was a radio-performance only heightened the trans/inter-American potential of the voices to travel across national and state borders. Flying on the airwaves—disembodied but empowered—these voices presented and activated the call for a hemispheric model and identity.

Fusco and Gomez-Peña have collaborated on several other occasions, their most famous and written about performance being *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit...*, and its subsequent filmed version *The Couple in the Cage*. From 1992-1994, the two artists traveled to several cities around the world, including: Madrid, London, Washington D.C., New York, Chicago, Sydney, and Buenos Aires. In each location they performed the roles of newly discovered indigenous people, putting themselves on display as living objects in museums and plazas. Like *Norte: Sur*, the performance was meant as a critique of the celebrations surrounding Columbus and his ships’ landing in the New World. The performance was supposed to be a critical commentary on the popular practice of displaying exotic others for viewer consumption. The practice, famous during colonial times, reached new heights in the 19th and 20th centuries with public presentations in world fairs and freak shows. These displays of human bodies, applauded by scientists and

anthropologists, were meant to educate and entertain. According to Fusco, however entertaining to those outside the cage, these displays had another effect: [They] confirmed popular racial stereotypes and built support for domestic and foreign policies” (41). Most of those who were put on display had no choice but to be caged; colonization of the individual was often done for “their own good.”

Gomez-Peña and Fusco have also created independent solo projects on transnational identity in the Americas. *Border Brujo*, Gomez-Peña’s 1989 solo ritual, cast him as a cross-cultural shaman living on the U.S./Mexico border. *A Room of One’s Own: Women and Power in the New America* was performed by Fusco in 2006 as a commentary on women, sexuality, and war. Both Fusco and Gomez-Peña, in their collaborations as well as in their independent projects, are exemplary models of performance practice as scholarship and research. Fusco is the author of five books; Gomez-Peña has published seven books.

Gomez-Peña describes his second book, *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems & Locuras for the End of the Century*, as “a disnarrative ode to hybrid America—a new country in a new continent, yet to be named” (i). Throughout the book he presents the reader with poems, essays, performance stills and texts, and his own blend of lingual and social theory. In defining this “new world border,” he too calls for a repositioning of the way we define and understand our hemisphere:

For me, the solution lies in a paradigm shift: the recognition that we all are the protagonists in the creation of a new cultural topography and a new social order, one in which we all are “others,” and we need the other “others” to exist.

Hybridity is no longer up for discussion. It is a demographic, racial, social, and cultural fact. (70)

But he takes this paradigm shift one step further when he advocates for artists and cultural organizations as crucial and vital to the process in the revolutionary shift:

Artists can function as community brokers, citizen diplomats, ombudsmen, and border translators. And our art spaces can perform the multiple roles of sanctuaries, demilitarized zones, centers for activism against xenophobia, and informal think tanks for intercultural and transnational dialogue. Collaborative projects among artists from different communities and nationalities can send a strong message to the larger society: Yes, we can talk to one another. We can get along, despite our differences, our fear, and our rage. (70-71)

For Gomez-Peña, the artist and the arts are a necessary part of the solution in healing the wounds and anxieties created by colonialism, racism, interculturalism, and any other –ism that erupts when two or more cultures come face-to-face. In a published interview conducted by African American artist Mildred Thompson, Gomez-Peña defines his methodology by stating, “a lot of the work I do explores the territory of cultural misunderstanding” (qtd. in Harper 2). His performances are as much about exposing and bridging cultural differences as they are about discovering and promoting new models of identity and cross-fertilization.

For the most part, many of the artists and pieces that I write about in this dissertation have yet to be “discovered” within the circles of U.S. academia and theatre studies. Immediately, I recognize that the word “discovered” inappropriately suggests a colonial context. I am reminded of the 1992 performance *El Warrior for Gringostroika*, in which Gomez-Peña appears before the audience masked, with the words “Please don’t discover me!” written across his torso. As I explain in chapter four—which examines indigenous performance and representation in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico—in this performance Gomez-Peña steps in as a surrogate for the indigenous communities “discovered” by Columbus, emphasizing the very physical consequences of that historical moment. His plea demands cultural and individual agency. Like Gomez-Peña, the artists presented here do not wish to be discovered or exploited. Rather, they wish to invite academics to view, bear witness, and appreciate their works as creative products of

their cultures and communities. I, as a researcher, traveled and worked in the Americas not as a discoverer, but rather as a *coconspirator* with these artists who invited me to participate in their group activities and presentations, their acts of political and social intervention. In doing so, I discovered much about myself and my understanding of theatre and performance.

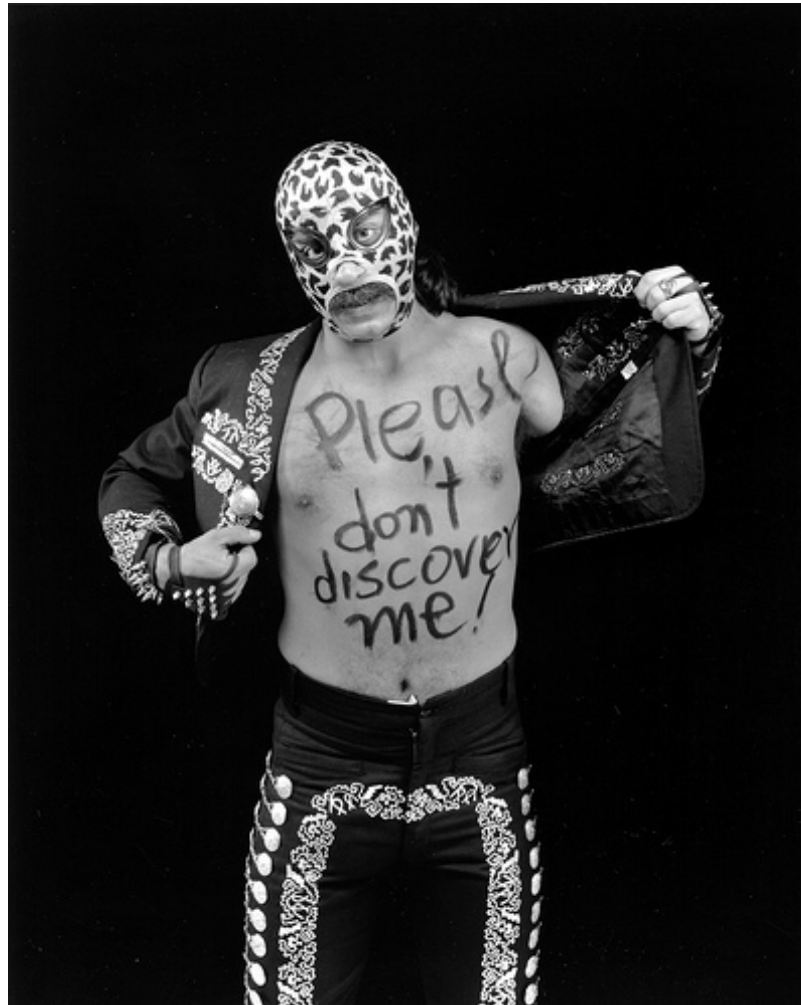


Figure 1. Guillermo Gomez-Peña in *El Warrior for Gringostroika*.

My research, undoubtedly, is informed by my position as a male who was born in the United States. Though I, too, am ethnically marked—even more so, I am from the

U.S.-Mexico border—my position of privilege within academia, and more specifically within the Ivy League system, sets me apart from my own Latina/o community. But traveling throughout the Americas, U.S. passport in hand, I was enthusiastically received in many of the places that I visited while conducting preliminary research for this project in 2007, partly because of my Latino identity and binlingualism, but mostly because I, too, am a theatre artist. It was this identitification—a fellow artist—which usually broke down any remaining barriers that existed between me and the individuals that I met as I traveled throughout the continents. My original route, in 2007, like most voyages from the U.S., followed a North to South trajectory: United States → Mexico → Panama → Colombia → Ecuador → Peru → Bolivia → Argentina → Uruguay.

I consciously reverse the route in this project, however, as the first step in challenging the North to South model. Additonally, the journey of this project mirrors the migratory patterns of the hundreds of thousands of Latin American immigrants, almost all of them undocumented, who risk their lives moving South to North to enter and work in the United States each year. It also reflects the movements of goods produced and imported at cheap cost from lesser developed nations in the South for sale and consumption by those living in the North. I strategically start in the landlocked nation of Bolivia, one of the lesser traveled and more impoverished nations of Latin America, to begin my analysis of performance in the Americas. Beginning the journey from this location—site of the water privitization wars where popular protest ousted a U.S. corporation from a foreign country for the first time in history—I position Bolivia as one of the prime locations in which to examine the ways performance and protest merge to transform society. The journey from there goes north into Ecuador, nestled between Peru

and Colombia, the two most studied and visited nations of the Andes. Then traveling up Mesoamerica, I make my way to the Mayan regions of Mexico, specifically the Yucatán Peninsula, which is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world. For this reason, scripted performances in the service of tourism are abundant, causing negative and lasting effects on local indigenous communities and identities. I end the journey in Phoenix, the capital of Arizona, where 2010 marked a crisis in anti-immigration legislation. Over the past four years, I have returned to these countries to work with the groups and artists that I present here, and each time I return I am introduced to new people and new performances that are being created as exemplary models of the intersection of art and politics.

My sites of inquiry—Bolivia, Ecuador, Mexico, and the United States—possess populations as varied and different as any of the other nations in the Americas, yet they are unique in many ways. According to population estimates, Bolivia possesses the highest percentage indigenous population of the Americas. The April 2011 estimates from *The CIA World Factbook* list 55% of the Bolivian population as self-identifying indigenous. After Peru (45%) and Guatemala (40.5%), Mexico possesses the fourth highest percentage of indigenous population in the hemisphere at 30% and Ecuador the fifth, with 25% of the population identifying as native (CIA). Though the percentage of the indigenous populations, when compared to the total populations of these nations, is significantly larger when compared to more economically prosperous countries in the hemisphere—the United States (0.97%), Canada (2%), Argentina (3%), Chile (4.6%)—the political and social conditions of their societies do not reflect these communities’

needs.³ In fact, in many of these nations the native communities lack representation in their government and for that reason cannot act as a political force within their own governing systems. The exceptions are Bolivia, with the 2005 election of Evo Morales as the first indigenous President of the nation, and the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, based in Chiapas, which has been engaged in a self-proclaimed war with the Mexican government since January 1, 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect. Additionally, in the United States, 15.1% of the population is designated Hispanic, which amounts to approximately 47.3 million people in the total population. And, according to a February 21, 2011 report from the Pew Research Center, 81% of the 11.2 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States are from Latin American nations, accounting for an additional 9.1 million people (Passel).

This study, however, is not only about indigenous and immigrant communities and their theatre, though indigeneity and immigration figure prominently in what follows. The groups and artists I examine are creating work within moments of crisis, or directly following moments of crisis, and have as their objective the transformation of their society. The subjects of this study include: orphaned and at-risk youth who previously lived in the streets of Bolivia; members of the working class in Ecuador that occupy the lowest level positions in their society; Mayan women in the Yucatán who face daily acts of violence and injustice because of unequal gender and race relations; and undocumented immigrants living in fear of deportation within the United States. Defined

³ The numbers above reflect the percentages of self-identifying individuals within each nation's population. The indigenous populations in these nations are estimated as follows: Bolivia (5,565,275), Peru (13,162,024), Guatemala (5,598,907), Mexico (34,117,267), Ecuador (3,751,835), United States (3,038,350), Canada (680,611), Argentina (1,253,091), and Chile (776,883).

by and scripted into the binaries that force them into the periphery—First World and Third World, indigenous and non-indigenous, male and female, urban and rural, legal and illegal, and lower and upper class, among others—these individuals are creating and inspiring performances that come from an overpowering need to address the severe moments of crises and urgency engulfing their communities. By analyzing performances created as responses to the Bolivian Water Wars, protests in Ecuador against the War in Iraq, exploitative relations between the tourist industry and Mayan culture in Mexico, and rallies and protests against anti-immigrant legislation in the United States, I argue that live performance in the Americas offers a voice to those who would otherwise be silenced and erased from the public sphere. Theatre, as a form of expression, allows these individuals the space from which to tell their stories, act out their dreams and desires, and perform what Augusto Boal defines, in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, as “rehearsals of revolution” (141) and what Richard Schechner, in *The Future of Ritual*, calls “rehearsals for the near future” (85).

Acts of Urgency: Performance, Crisis, and Social Change

I am especially interested in performances that engage and intervene in moments of social crisis, and the ways that performing bodies critique and affect the public sphere through their acts of presence. I call these performative responses *acts of urgency*. Produced during and after moments of crises, these acts are created as a response to grievous social infractions that threaten community and individual identities and well being. In many instances, these acts of urgency intervene against gross injustices that include violence, exploitation, erasure, and even death. Theatre and performance, as I will demonstrate, provide a necessary lifeline and platform to communities undergoing

crisis, allowing them to stage their stories and bodies in public spaces, as well as providing them the opportunity to create counternarratives to history and to validate their identity in the face of hegemonic control and abuse.

Theatre, as a social and reciprocal medium that brings humans together, can affect and transform other areas of human relations, including, but not limited to, politics, history, memory, ethnic, racial, religious and class divisions, as well as gender relations and identities. Throughout the Americas, especially in marginalized and disenfranchised communities, theatre has been successfully employed as a means of coping and healing during moments of crisis and instability, helping people to (re)imagine and (re)build their societies. Theatre has become essential to the formation of personal and group identities in times of crisis, and has become one of the tools by which silenced individuals (re)insert themselves into history and the public sphere. Within torn and troubled communities, performance really does matter and can make a difference, as anthropologist Dwight Conquergood notes of performance in Hmong refugee camps:

Between and between worlds, suspended between past and future, they fall back on the performance of their traditions as an empowering way of securing continuity and some semblance of stability. Moreover, through performative flexibility they can play with new identities, new strategies for adaptation and survival [...] Performance participates in the re-creation of self and society that emerges within refugee camps. Through its reflexive capacities, performance enables people to take stock of their situation and through this self-knowledge to cope better. There are good reasons why in the crucible of refugee crisis, performative behaviors intensify. (180)

Similarly, performance empowers and enables communities in the Americas to cope with their moments of crisis, where individuals occupy liminal zones and circumstances similar to the “betwixt and between worlds” of the refugee camps. For the artists in this study, theatre offers an opportunity to learn and to move forward. Bringing people together, these works create informed communities as audiences come together to witness their stories performed in public spaces.

For most of these marginalized individuals, becoming a spectator allows them to become witness to their own history of oppression and exploitation, heightening their cognitive awareness of the injustices they experience. At times foreign, and at others all too close, the content of these plays is presented as a way of transferring memory, passing on knowledge, and preventing unwanted repetition of past abuses. As Diana Taylor notes, “Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” (*Archive 2*). Often working from the effects of memory and loss, performance and protest allow individuals to cope with trauma, and at the same time use communally shared feelings to create a collective sense of responsibility and belonging. Victims of political crimes or those related to victims of crimes utilize theatre as acts of defiance that help them remember and cope with their personal suffering. Performance, in this way, ensures that those lost will not be rendered invisible, while at the same time empowering those who do remain visible. Emerging from these moments of trauma and crisis—demanding public space, enhanced visibility, awareness of the issues at hand, local and global accountability, social and government reform, and a public of engaged witnesses—these performances are intended to question and/or alter the dominant organization of power. For individuals living in communities of crisis across the

Americas, marginalized into positions of invisibility and exploited by oppressive and violent forces, theatre is vital to the development and implementation of social and political progress and reform.

Social change in this context can take on many forms—some plays aim to directly affect politics and legislation, while others seek to challenge authority, alienate passive viewers, bring people to tears, expose injustice, memorialize and honor victims, create a socially conscious community, stage alternative histories, and/or make a call to action. At other times, these plays are acts of public mourning and remembrance. In truth, these plays may not always bring about the immediate change that their creators and audiences desire, but they nonetheless make a difference in the ways that the community copes with its history and identity. Performance challenges people's inability to act. It helps audiences grasp a better understanding of the violent worlds in which they live and provides insight into human behavior. In many instances, as this dissertation demonstrates, theatre operates between the lines of life and death, where crisis is pushed to its limits.

Jürgen Habermas, in *Legitimation Crisis*, begins his analysis of crisis as it relates to capitalism by going back to the original Greek use of the term in the context of medicine. According to the famed German philosopher and sociologist, a crisis “refers to the phase of an illness in which it is decided whether or not the organism's self-healing powers are sufficient for recovery” (1). Crisis, he continues, “cannot be separated from the viewpoint of the one who is undergoing it—the patient experiences his powerlessness *vis-à-vis* the objectivity of the illness only because he is a subject condemned to passivity and temporarily deprived of the possibility of being a subject in full possession of his

powers” (1). For Habermas, the illness—understood as the crisis—appears as an outside force that is depriving the subject of her subjectivity. Under these conditions, agency is challenged, and even denied. He adds, “the resolution of a crisis effects a liberation of the subject caught up in it” (1). It is not until the illness is overcome that subjectivity is returned to the patient. In terms of illness, crisis can only be resolved through life or death.

Habermas also explores the idea of crisis through the dramaturgical use of the term, likening crisis to the “turning-point” in Greek drama. In his *Poetics*, the Greek philosopher Aristotle claims, “Every tragedy falls into two parts—Complication and Unraveling or Denouement” (35). This complication—the spark of the crisis—according to Aristotle, “extends from the beginning of the action to the part which marks the turning-point to good or bad fortune” (35). Similar to use of the term in medicine, crisis in classical drama resolves itself in the protagonist either positively (good fortune) or negatively (bad fortune). Through the lens of medicine and classic tragedy, there seems to be no middle ground for the resolution of crisis: it is either life or death, or good or bad fortune. For the artists and communities that I present in the following chapters, resolutions to crisis offered the same extreme: the crises that unfolded in their communities would either be resolved positively (they would be successful in their demands for social justice and change) or negatively (they would succumb to the oppressive forces of exploitation and violence, and some would even die).

The geographies that I examine in the following chapters are undergoing moments of upheaval that are similar to what anthropologist Victor Turner calls “social dramas.” He defines these as “a sequence of social interactions of a conflictive,

competitive, or agonistic type” (*Anthropology* 33). According to Turner, social dramas are at the root of every society. He divides the social drama into four distinct phases: breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration or schism. According to Turner,

A social drama first manifests itself as the breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom or etiquette in some public arena. This breach may be deliberately, even calculatedly, contrived by a person or party disposed to demonstrate or challenge entrenched authority. (*Ritual* 70)

Following the initial breach, a crisis ensues. It is during this crisis period, according to Turner, that “sides are taken, factions are formed, and unless the conflict can be sealed off quickly within a limited area of social interaction, there is a tendency for the breach to widen and spread (*Ritual* 70).

The third phase of social drama, redress, is an attempt to resolve this conflict: “In order to limit the contagious spread of *breach* certain adjustive and redressive mechanisms, informal and formal, are brought into operation by leading members of the disturbed group” (*Ritual* 70). The different approaches to redress depend on the group affected by the breach, the impact and significance of the crisis, and the wider social relations at play in the social drama. Those most interested in containing crisis, the ones who control redress, are usually those in power. After redressive action has been taken, the final step in Turner’s social drama consists of either “the reintegration of the disturbed social group,” or “the social recognition of irreparable breach between the contesting parties, sometimes leading to their spatial separation” (*Ritual* 71). This process of reintegration, in most instances, is a reification of the status quo and the power of the majority, though relations are undoubtedly changed between the groups. Many times, a

schism remains, further alienating the communities from one another and opening up the possibility for further crisis.

Turner claims that, “the roots of theatre are in social drama” (*Ritual* 11). Specifically, he states that theatre comes out of the third phase, redressive action, as “an attempt to ascribe meaning to ‘social dramatic’ events” (*Ritual* 12). These redressive actions, therefore, are acts of meaning-making. They can take on many forms, including theatre, but also storytelling, dance, speeches, debates, marches, rallies, ceremonies, trials, executions, and other forms of public performance.

Perhaps the greatest social drama in human history is the colonization of the Americas. Colonization can be understood, utilizing Turner’s model of the four distinct phases, as: breach (the arrival of the Spanish); crisis (the ensuing violence of the conquest); redressive action (efforts by indigenous and non-indigenous people to find a way of coexisting); and schism (the inability of the two groups to live together equally). It can be argued that the social drama that began with the arrival of the Spanish is still in process. For many indigenous communities, the breach and crisis may have taken place, but there has been no effective redressive action. As Turner notes, “redressive procedures may break down, with reversion to crisis” (*Ritual* 71). The Americas, it can be argued, is a hemisphere that has perpetually been in crisis since the late 15th century.

Diana Taylor’s *Theatre of Crisis: Drama and Politics in Latin America* (1991) was one of the first full-length studies of Latin American theatre to be published in English. “The theatre of crisis,” she says, “proposes more questions than answers [...] it scrutinizes both the violent societies that gave it rise and its own violence, its own role in the highly theatricalized societies” (7). She identifies this period of crisis as occurring in

Latin America from 1965-1970, “during which theatrical activity was most heatedly contested” (6). She begins by providing a brief introduction to Spanish-American theatre history—beginning with the Conquest—and then goes on to examine the work of five major Latin American dramatists: Enrique Buenaventura (Colombia), Emilio Carballido (Mexico), Griselda Gambaro (Argentina), José Triana (Cuba), and Egon Wolff (Chile). In her analyses of these playwrights’ most important works of the period, she explores the relationship between theatre and historical documentation (Buenaventura), theatre and transculturation (Carballido), theatre and terror (Gambaro), theatre and revolution (Triana), and theatre and disintegration (Wolff). She concludes by calling the theatre of crisis, “a *radical* theatre; it goes to the roots of the matter. It is a theatre that questions itself, its own ideology, its own blind spots. It is a theatre of crisis because it has not progressed beyond the dismantling to a remantling. That is not a weakness; one could argue that therein lies its strength, its sense of urgency, its complexity” (223). The plays that Taylor presents are written texts, created by some of Latin America’s leading literary figures. Her historical analyses and close readings elucidate much about the dramatists and nations she examines and offer an important perspective of theatre as critical intervention in the ideology and actions of the nation. Taylor’s definition of crisis, more restrictive than Turner’s, is situated in the intersection between politics and violence. She focuses her analyses of theatre on its relation to hegemonic power and state oppression, suggesting that the theatre of crisis “explores the critical situation with all its ruptures and contradictions, with all its political dangers and ideological blindspots” (9). For Taylor, there are no answers in the “theatre of crisis.” Rather, theatre only operates as an intervention in the status quo and as an opportunity for reflection.

As acts of urgency, I situate the performances in this study as a part of the theatrical tradition of theatre as social change. Theatre scholar Marvin Carlson, in *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, writes that, “The performance of identity [is concerned] with providing a voice to previously silenced individuals or groups” (179). By providing silenced individuals a space in the public sphere, these performances give communities in crisis a space and voice from which to act out against aggression and exploitation. Performance validates and instills pride within these communities, offering them the hope and energy needed to face and cope with acts oppression. By allowing people previously rendered invisible to become visible, these performances transform the once powerless communities into public bodies who can speak out against social injustice. Performance also creates public spectators—witnesses, who perhaps remained out of public view in the past, who in the act of watching become public figures in their own right. These acts of intervention are vital to the identity and well-being of the community.

In *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*, performance scholar David Román calls attention to the ways that individuals used performance in the early years of the AIDS epidemic “as the primary means to raise money, educate those perceived to be at risk, and grieve for the dead” (xxix). For Román, these early acts were crucial to the way the gay community created itself as a public in reaction to the epidemic, and how they utilized their public image and body to intervene in the health crisis. He says:

The intervention had less to do with the representation or content imbedded in the performance proper—the song, the dance, the act—and more to do with the

performance's potential to bring people together into the space of the performance. And once people are gathered in the space of performance the possibility of intervention proliferates. (8)

In his analysis of candlelight vigils, marches, cabaret acts, solo performance, and small and large scale theatrical productions, Román examines the relationship between performance, AIDS, activism, official history, memory, and hope. Like Román, I see the acts performed by the individuals in this study as critical interventions in historic and life-changing moments. They are being staged by minoritarian subjects at critical moments when other public figures are not recognizing, or are even perpetuating, the social infractions that are negatively affecting these communities. Román draws attention to the myriad types of performance that can offer critical responses to a community's needs, validating these often peripheral and alternative practices that are produced within marginalized communities. As acts of urgency, the different performance structures that I examine in the following pages bring these communities across the Americas together, creating a space for action, dialogue, and hope.

Finding hope at the theater is what theatre scholar Jill Dolan seeks in her book *Utopia in Performance* (2005). In her introduction she claims that "live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world" (2). She examines solo performance, feminist theatre, slam poetry, choreography, and full-scale productions, including *The Laramie Project* and *Metamorphoses*, in her search for "moments in which audiences feel themselves allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of public, in which social

discourse articulates the possible, rather than the insurmountable obstacles to human potential” (2). She proposes her concept of “utopian performatives,” which she describes as: “small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense” (5). It is Dolan’s claim that these small moments, though sometimes fleeting and definitely rare, are what can motivate people to walk out of the theatre with a desire to recapture that hope and create social change. It is the community-building aspect of theatre, where people can come together to experience positive emotions, that gives it its social power: “Being moved at the theater allows us to realize that such feeling is possible, even desirable, elsewhere” (15). The performances Dolan engages, and the audience’s ability to recognize in them the possibility of a better future, “aren’t iterations of what *is*, but transformative doings of what *if*” (141).

These hopes for a better world and future are similar to performance scholar José Esteban Muñoz’s claim that “minoritarian performance labors to make worlds—worlds of transformative politics and possibilities” (195). In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz introduces the idea of “worldmaking,” He argues:

[W]orldmaking delineates the ways in which performances—both theatrical and everyday rituals—have the ability to establish alternative views of the world.

These alternative vistas are more than simply views or perspectives; they are

oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes or “truth” that subjugate minoritarian people. (195)

Whereas Dolan relies on an audience whose hope is formed through an emotionally uplifting theatrical moment, Muñoz looks toward oppositional counterpublics “enabled by visions, ‘worldviews,’ that reshape as they deconstruct reality” (196). His audience’s active disidentification—“a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously”—allows them to tear down the world they see and (re)create a new one (5). As Muñoz claims, “Disidentification uses the majoritarian culture as raw material to make a new world” (196). The act of worldmaking, according to Muñoz, is as much about aggressive resistance and revolution, as it is about transformation and hope.

The performances presented in this project strive to intervene in crises, aspire for utopia, and seek ways of remaking the world in their benefit. In the following chapters I follow the examples of Diana Taylor, David Román, Jill Dolan, and Jose Esteban Muñoz as a way of understanding the multiple ways varying forms of theatre and performance can attempt to transform society: through social commentary, acts of intervention, visions of utopia, and a refusal to live within and be defined by a dominant and restrictive world order. I see theatre and performance as avenues by which marginalized and exploited communities attempt to create new ways of understanding the world, secure an identity and voice in the public sphere, and create progressive change to help build and advance their communities in moments of crisis. Their acts of urgency come from moments of historical significance to their communities—ones that demand attention and immediate action. In Bolivia, the privatization of water threatened traditional irrigation and water

systems that had been in place since before the Conquest, in addition to endangering the lives of those residents who could not afford the resource as the price of water skyrocketed. In Ecuador, impoverished citizens were recruited by the U.S. to serve as hired guns in Iraq, putting their lives on the line for a foreign nation and political ideology they did not understand. Across the Yucatán women struggle daily to make money in the marketplace and as domestic servants, even as the tourist industry exploits their culture, image, and body in the name of profit. And in the United States, undocumented immigrants and their supporters react in disbelief as anti-immigrant fervor sweeps across the nation and writes into history laws that serve to further marginalize an already disadvantaged population. In each locale, artists and activists work within these moments of crisis to stage their communities' stories, perspectives, and bodies. The acts they perform are urgent and call for immediate action. With their futures threatened by oppression and violence, these individuals create artistic responses to their moments of crises as redressive means, demonstrating that theatre can serve to create dialogue, build a community, raise consciousness, and challenge opponents.

Creating New Visions and Versions of Being in the Americas

The artists that I present here are socially engaged individuals and collectives that stem from a politically charged genealogy of Latin American theatre. Often victims of violence themselves, or familiar with victims of this violence, these performers use their art as acts of defiance. Their pieces not only struggle to create societal change, but also strive to make individuals think, remember, dream, and hope. The plays, in these contexts of violence, are forms of coping and healing. Artists like Atempo Danza (Bolivia), Teatro Trono (Bolivia), Contraelviento (Ecuador), Sa'as Tun (Mexico), and Teatro Bravo (U.S.)

critically and courageously interject their world visions into the public arena, making visible the social inequality facing their communities, as well as their desires and needs. Like other politically charged troupes before them, these groups are members of the communities in which they create and perform. The groups and performers presented in this study generate works that are a combination of artistry and scholarship. By conducting research and interviews, and participating in local and popular cultural forms as a part of their creative process, these artists merge traditional conventions of the theatre with anthropological devices to stage performances uniquely suited for their communities' needs.

In chapter two, I examine the events of the Cochabamba Water Wars that took place in Bolivia in 2000 when water was privatized by a multinational consortium in the nation's third largest city. The performances I examine, Atempo Danza's *Lagun Mayu* and Teatro Trono's *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua*, emerged after the water wars and were created in response to the community's need to reclaim the historical event as an act of local and indigenous resistance. The plays call for a protection of natural resources, as well as demand governmental accountability for its indifference toward life during the crisis. These performances, created from anthropological and historical research, act as counternarratives to the official record that seeks to maintain the status quo. In Bolivia's case, there are two histories of water—the indigenous and the non-indigenous—and each one possesses and transmits a different collective memory and communal identity. These two performances also carry within them the social memory and knowledge of the protest events, providing examples for future acts of defiance. An analysis of these pieces not only reveals the historical and mythical dimensions of the

water crisis, but also allows for identification between different marginal groups and players in Bolivia. By looking at the street protests against the privatization as a performance that stems from this chronology of indigenous rebellion, I identify the indigenous body as the solution for combating neoliberalism in Bolivia today. By acting as agents of change against oppressive and alien systems of ownership and sale, the indigenous communities are (re)creating and (re)defining the way Bolivian society imagines itself in the 21st century.

Chapter three, “Performing Latin American Responses to 9/11 and Iraq: Political Theatre and Popular Resistance in the Age of ‘Terror,’” examines different performances that were created as reactions to 9/11 and the War in Iraq, including Anne Nelson’s *The Guys*, the popular song “*El Último Adiós*,” street protests, and anti-war graffiti. The second half of the chapter provides a close reading of *La flor de la Chukirawa* by Teatro Contraelviento of Ecuador, which tells the story of the War in Iraq from the perspective of an indigenous mother whose son signs up as a private contractor to fight alongside U.S. forces. By casting the indigenous body as central in this story of violence and exploitation, Contraelviento privileges the voices and perspectives of those living within Ecuador’s margins. Examining the way the group incorporates Andean ritual and cosmology in this performance, I argue that the play reinterprets the ideas of war, freedom, and nation, as well as the image of the hero. In the play, Contraelviento creates an oppositional view to the War in Iraq from a distinctly Andean point of view; this is especially significant in Latin America, where U.S. intervention has historically meant oppression and violence. Drawing on local customs and indigenous traditions to offer a counternarrative to the war, the characters in *La flor de la Chukirawa* embody the

ideological confrontation between Ecuador and the United States, North and South, feminine and masculine, imperial and subaltern.

The relationship between the indigenous populations of the Yucatán peninsula of Mexico and the tourist industry forms the basis of my fourth chapter. In it I examine the work of Sa'as Tun, a Mayan female theatre group based in Mérida, Mexico. The group, under the leadership of Concepción León, utilizes creation stories and tradition as a starting point for its work, incorporating local cultural elements as strategic forms of resistance to the hegemonic and oppressive powers of a nationalism, neoliberalism, globalization, and tourism, as they relate to indigenous identity on the Yucatán Peninsula. Rather than focus exclusively on traditional and fixed notions of indigeneity, Sa'as Tun blends old and new, expected and unexpected, to portray an indigenous identity that is in constant motion and transformation. In this chapter I introduce the concept of *echotourism*, which I define as scripted activity that projects tourists' preconceived ideas and images of a society onto the people and culture they are visiting, which is then reflected back to the viewer as an authentic encounter. The focus of the chapter is the play *Mestiza Power*, written and performed in 2005. Inserting itself between those inside the indigenous community and the others labeled as "outsiders," the play offers an alternative to the performances carefully scripted for tourist consumption. *Mestiza Power* demonstrates that the modern Mayan culture is not a relic of the past, but a very present and evolving force that negotiates daily with the conflicting powers of modernity. Pairing the image of the female native body with the social, racial, and economic violence that is regularly enacted upon these individuals, the play gives voice to the women of the

Yucatán and helps foster a needed dialogue about their social position within the state and their relationship to the tourist market.

In chapter five, “Rehearsing the New Nation: The Immigrant Body in U.S. Politics and Performance,” I explore artistic creations that strive for change by encouraging progressive immigration reform and a new model of performing the nation. I am intrigued by performances that engage in the contemporary concerns of border crossers and that speak from, and to, a multi-vocal perspective. Focusing on the body as a site of conflict, as well as its potential to transform, I look at the May 1, 2006 immigration protests alongside traditional theatre being created by Teatro Bravo of Phoenix, Arizona. I examine the ways these performances engage the public and the immigrant body in dialogue. The two performance models—street protest and theatre—utilize both the public sphere and the space of the traditional stage to prevent erasure and to challenge fixed notions of identity. Caught in between the public and the private, the artistic and the political, these bodies dare to perform their version of “America.” It is because the body is at the center of this crisis that performance offers a unique model from which to critique and explore the different reactions to illegal immigration. Performances that deal with the subject of immigration, like the act of crossing itself, emerge from a political struggle that is located within the U.S./Latin American history of citizenship, belonging, migration, and exile. For the Latina/o subject, performance becomes a ritualistic approach to dealing with the struggle, tragedy, and new identities that emerge from the act of crossing. These performances help people, in particular immigrants and those who identify with them, cope with their new sense of self and space

within the United States. For the invisible, deceased, and disappeared, these performances (re)insert the forgotten immigrant body into the public sphere.

The works I examine were created in the first ten years of this new century. Performance, as I will demonstrate, is essential to the development of relations across cultures, especially as technology, war, and capitalism continue to expand the idea of the global in the 21st century. The artists and performances discussed in this project are located in four different geographical, cultural, and political contexts, but they are influenced by larger transnational issues like immigration, capitalism, neoliberalism, tourism, indigenous rights, and gendered violence. These performances break a silence that in many cases has been going on for centuries. Most importantly, these artists utilize their local histories, peoples, and traditions to speak from a place of marginality. For them, the relationship between politics and performance in cases where human rights, citizenship, and justice are at stake is vital and necessary, and it is through these political acts of performance and public presence that humanity can be liberated from acts of oppression and exploitation. It is my hope that this project helps bring much needed attention to the artists creating this important work throughout the Americas.

CHAPTER TWO

EL AGUA ES NUESTRA, ¡¡CARAJO!!: WATER PRIVATIZATION, POPULAR PROTEST, AND THE COSMOS IN BOLIVIAN PERFORMANCE

Bolivia's indigenous social movements are considered the strongest and most radical in the Americas (Cordoba 2004). This tradition of revolution is part of a larger history of Bolivian resistance to hegemonic power and abuse that started with the Spanish colonization of Upper Peru, the area now known as Bolivia, in 1524. Under the control of the Viceroy of Lima, Upper Peru became the source of economic power for the Spanish Empire when the mining town of Potosí was founded in 1545. During the colonial period, as violence and abuse against native bodies increased and as attacks on local culture intensified, indigenous leaders sought to rally support against the Spanish. With tensions increasing and native populations struggling for cultural and physical survival, rebellion in the form of local and community uprisings was a frequent occurrence in the Andes highlands. These acts of redress, usually in the form of subsistence riots and protests against government officials and taxes, formed the foundation for all subsequent acts of resistance in Bolivia. Some of the earliest recorded instances of indigenous protest took place in Cochabamba and Oruro, major mining centers, in the 1730s.

The resistance movement reached a climax in 1780, when an insurgency that began in Potosí under the leadership of Tomás Katari sparked a series of other regional movements against the Crown. This rebellion, lasting from 1780-1781, became “the most powerful anti-colonial movement in Latin America prior to independence” (Hylton and Thomson 35). With over 100,000 rebel participants, the indigenous rebellion stretched

from the Cuzco area, throughout Upper Peru, and even as far away as northern Argentina. As historian Herbert S. Klein notes: “It was a multiclass, multicaste, and extremely well-led revolt that ultimately had as its aim the establishment of an autonomous region under control of the local classes to the exclusion of all Spaniards” (74). During that time, another indigenous leader, Túpac Katari⁴, led his followers in an unprecedented siege against the city of La Paz, holding Spanish citizens and loyalists hostage for 184 days. In the end, however, the indigenous rebels were defeated and their leader executed on November 13, 1781.

I begin with this brief introduction of the Great Rebellion because of its impact on early Bolivian history and its continuing influence on popular resistance movements throughout the centuries. The rebellion was the first independence movement against Spain in the New World, and as such became ingrained in both indigenous and non-indigenous memories as a cataclysmic and transformative moment. For the indigenous communities it represented hope, possibility, and a drive for change; for the non-indigenous populations the rebellion symbolized danger and a need for harsher rule over the native populations. The Katari legend, despite hegemonic control over written history, has passed on throughout the centuries in story, song, and dance. Even into the 21st century, collective memory of the Great Rebellion of 1781 fuels indigenous and non-indigenous interactions during moments of crisis in Bolivia. According to Oscar Oliveira, who would become one of the leaders of the Cochabamba Water Wars, “We felt motivated by our need to claim our water, lands, resources, and lives as our own. No one

⁴ Túpac Katari was born Julian Apasa Nina. He took the name Túpac Katari to honor two of the most revered leaders of native resistance against the Spanish Crown: Tomás Katari and Túpac Amaru II.

could silence us or stop us. Like Túpac Katari and every other hero who fought before us, we resisted because we had no other choice” (Oliveira interview).

In this chapter I will examine the events known as the Water Wars, which occurred when water in the city of Cochabamba was privatized and put under the control of an international consortium in 2000. By looking at the street protests against the privatization as a performance that stems from this chronology of indigenous rebellion, I identify the indigenous body as the solution for combating neoliberalism in Bolivia today. The indigenous communities, acting as agents of change against oppressive and alien systems of ownership and sale, are (re)creating and (re)defining the way Bolivian society imagines itself in the 21st century. By examining two theatrical pieces created as a response to the Water Wars—Atempo Danza’s *Lagun Mayu (River Lagoon)*⁵ and Teatro Trono’s *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua (The Assembly of the Water Gods)*—I claim that the body in performance transmits these histories of protest and critically engages the public by combining present-day stories with Andean history and tradition. These performances—the first a dance by a professional group of choreographers, the second a street performance by youth—reinterpret and resituate the events of the Water Wars within the genealogy and cosmology of Andean culture. In both performances there is a recognition and privileging of Bolivian tradition and epistemology, in addition to a call for indigenous agency. These artistic examples form a counternarrative to the historical record and the capitalist market by offering their audiences a (re)telling of the events from a local and culturally informed perspective. In both instances a resolution is possible

⁵ *Lagun* is derived from the Spanish word *laguna*, which translates to “lagoon.” *Mayu* in Quechua means “river.” The title of the play, then, can be translated to *River Lagoon*. This doubled reference to natural water sources reflects the dance troupe’s emphasis on making the dance about all natural water resources in Bolivia, not just the water systems of Cochabamba.

only because of the indigenous body—the agent of resistance and change—first immortalized by Katari and later reborn in Cochabamba. If the Aymara leader’s opponent was colonialism in the 18th century, then neoliberalism represents the modern antagonist to the indigenous populations of Bolivia in the 21st century.

The Water Wars in Cochabamba represent one of the most extreme consequences of neoliberal and free market reform in Latin America. Negotiated in secret and in benefit of foreign interests and investments, the privatization of water resources in Cochabamba moved forward without concern for the physical and social welfare of the people who would be most affected by the shift in policy. In *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*, Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing note that during the time water was privatized in Cochabamba, “Poor families, with access to water only two or three hours a day, saw their bills increase by as much as 200 per cent and some found themselves paying 20 per cent of their monthly income for water” (165). Neoliberal reform in Cochabamba meant profit above basic human necessities, and opponents to neoliberalism view the Bolivian case as a warning, not an exception, about the injustices inherent in the global practice.

According to anthropologist Lesley Gill, who has conducted extensive research throughout Bolivia:

Broadly conceived, neoliberalism, like its older nineteenth-century variant, is an economic, political, and moral doctrine that posits the individual as the fundamental basis of society. More specifically, this ideology is rhetorically antistate and places unlimited faith in the “magic of the market” to resolve all social problems. The most compelling aspect of this ideology lies in the

conceptualization of the market as a neutral, even beneficent, arbiter rather than a metaphor for capitalist processes. (3)

Though the individual is privileged in this definition, it is important to note that the “magic of the market” also contributes to class divisions, social inequality, and labor exploitation. Within the neoliberal market, position in society is determined by wealth and access to economic power. Gill continues by expanding on Latin American administrations that have implanted neoliberal policies by adding: “Their reforms include public spending cuts and the privatization of state enterprises, the reduction of tariff barriers to encourage foreign investment, the ‘freeing’ of financial markets, and debilitating attacks on labor [...] The effects of these reforms on daily life is profound” (3). She continues to explain the disparities and consequences created under neoliberalism by adding:

After more than a decade of neoliberal economic restructuring in Bolivia, more people have become irrelevant to global and national processes of capital accumulation, while they have been losing other means of supporting themselves. At the same time, the provision of social welfare services by the state has diminished, and vulnerable low-income people are increasingly exposed to economic forces biased against them. One consequence is that social life has grown increasingly precarious for the majority of Bolivians.

(3-4)

The introduction and implementation of neoliberal policies into impoverished nations are seen by free-market economists as the keys to success in the global market. But for Gill, these changes have affected and transformed individual lives in Bolivia

negatively and without regard for the human cost of market expansion and profit.

Neoliberalism in many ways resembles the practices of colonialism. Exploitation of local labor sources and the extraction of native resources for the capital gain of foreign corporations read like *déjà vu* in the collective memory of the Bolivian indigenous populations.

Bolivia's national trajectory in the final decades of the 20th century followed many of the same patterns of early relations between those who identify as indigenous and those who categorize themselves as European in descent. Foreign governments and businesses—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and U.S. government, to name just a few—increasingly interfered with Bolivian autonomy as globalization grew increasingly important to the world market.⁶ With neoliberal policies reshaping Bolivian society and the war against drugs interfering in small business and private lands⁷, the nation's economy was being controlled by foreign forces, leaving the citizens of Bolivia “teetering on the rim” (Gill 2000).

On August 29, 1985, President Víctor Paz Estenssoro, reelected after the fall of the Banzer dictatorship and the subsequent *coups d'états*, signed into law Supreme Decree 21060, also known as the New Economic Policy (NEP). With the NEP, neoliberalism arrived to Bolivia, causing increased poverty and dependence on foreign

⁶ The U.S. supported several dictatorships in Bolivia, as well as provided military training to Bolivian officials and soldiers through the School of the Americas. Additionally, the IMF and World Bank, as part of their requirements for making loans to Bolivia, required the country to de-nationalize resources and open its market to private investment and trade. For more information read: Lesley Gill's *Teetering on the Rim* (Columbia UP, 2000) and *The School of the Americas* (Duke UP, 2004); Herbert S. Klein's *A Concise History of Bolivia* (Cambridge UP, 2003); and Benjamin Kohl and Linda Farthing's *Impasse in Bolivia* (Zed Books, 2006).

⁷ The U.S. “war on drugs” targets coca growers in Bolivia as one of the steps in ending drug trafficking from Latin America the U.S. The coca plant, a traditional component of Andean life and one of the leading sources of income for small farmers in Bolivia, is inaccurately labeled the “cocaine plant,” and for this reason coca crops are periodically destroyed by government officials throughout Bolivia to demonstrate compliance with U.S. regulations.

aid and investment. The entrance of neoliberalism and privatization of natural resources into the Bolivian sphere caused increased unemployment, harsher working conditions for those able to find work, and general animosity from the people toward their government.

Beginning in 1990, the World Bank required third world countries to privatize public resources in order to receive loans. Corporations and consortiums quickly responded by evaluating resources in underdeveloped nations, seeking out locales that would yield the greatest profits. In June 1999, the World Bank issued a report on water resources in Cochabamba, putting into motion the chain of events that would culminate in the Water Wars. The World Bank pressured the country to privatize the water system of its third largest city, and in the report the World Bank recommended that, “No public subsidies should be given to ameliorate the increase in water tariffs in Cochabamba” (Gonzalez & McCarthy). Making water privatization a condition for loans, and with increasing pressure from Washington, D.C. and international corporations, the Bolivian government passed Law 2029 on October 29, 1999. The law heavily regulated water resources and opened up public water systems to foreign control. With a stroke of the pen water resources became the property of foreign investors.

This was all part of a carefully devised plan to privatize water without having to consult with the residents of Cochabamba or having to put the measure to a vote. Earlier that year, on September 3, the government signed a contract with Aguas del Tunari, giving the corporation full control of the region’s water resources. Aguas del Tunari was a consortium of companies from Bolivia, England, Italy, Spain, and the United States; the U.S. Bechtel Corporation was the majority interest holder. Unsurprisingly, no other bids were offered on the sale: “When Aguas del Tunari took over the \$200 million municipal

water system with an initial investment of only \$15,635, the deal so poorly protected the interests of *Cochabambinos* (people from Cochabamba) that even the normally conservative middle class moved into the opposition camp” (Farthing & Kohl 164). On November 1, the day Law 2029 went into effect, Aguas del Tunari began to operate full control over all waters in Cochabamba.

Overnight the water systems, some traditionally held by communities for centuries, came under the control of the foreign investors. The privatization included *all* water resources in the city—including communal wells, ponds, rivers, and even rainwater. The switch from collective and traditional sharing of water ran against the epistemology of the native culture. According to Kohl and Farthing:

Before 1999, most water companies were either cooperatives or publicly owned, and privately owned wells and irrigation systems coexisted with large public systems. Water was considered a public resource and social good rather than a market commodity. The Water Law reversed this, permitting firms exclusive rights within a given area, forcing all water users to enter contracts with the concession holder. (163)

The passing of Law 2029 made community wells and traditional watering systems illegal. It also made the collection of rainwater a crime. In addition, a steep price hike sent the citizens of Cochabamba into a frenzy. According to Oscar Oliveira, spokesperson for the citizens of Cochabamba during the crisis, some water bills, “skyrocketed as much as 300 percent” (*Cochabamba* 10). The needs of the residents of Cochabamba seemed less important than the profits to be made. The more than 600,000 residents of Cochabamba, no longer divided by class or race, panicked as their water bills continued to rise.

In December 1999, the Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (Coalition for the Defense of Water and Life) was formed as a community organization whose aim was to counter the water privatization and to rally on behalf of the residents of the city. Factory workers, farmers, and other labor unions came together under the Coordinadora to mobilize the people of Cochabamba. Organizing strikes, protests, and blockades, the Coordinadora, along with tens of thousands of protestors, took over the Plaza 14 de Septiembre in January, drawing national and international attention to their plight. By February, with no changes or concessions made by the government, the Coordinadora organized another strike. The Banzer government immediately labeled the protest illegal and sent 1,200 armed soldiers to suppress the rally. By the end of the strike, 175 people had been wounded.

The crisis continued to escalate into April when the Coordinadora organized a last attempt to overthrow Aguas del Tunari. By the fourth day of protests the government declared martial law and arrested leaders of the Coordinadora. When a seven-year old boy was killed the following day by a soldier firing into a crowd, the crisis reached a heated climax. On April 4, between 50,000 and 100,000 protestors gathered in the central plaza, while other marchers barricaded streets and faced armed government soldiers (Hylton & Thompson 103).

Negotiations between Coordinadora representatives, relying on the support of the local citizens, attempted a reconciliation, but not at the expense of local opinion:

“Decisions taken were then discussed in open-air meetings or *cabildos* of 50,000-70,000 people—crowds too large to fit anywhere except public *plazas*” (Hylton & Thompson 104). This democratic form of negotiation and decision-making reflected the strategies

that made the popular mobilization so successful: it was a bottom-up approach that made the leaders accountable to the masses. On April 8, five months after the international consortium took control of the water, Aguas del Tunari was thrown out of Cochabamba, the contract terminated by popular protest. A few days later, on April 11, the law privatizing water was overturned. Aguas del Tunari was effectively disbanded and the U.S. Bechtel Cooperation left the country. Control of water resources was given to SEMAPA, a collective enterprise in Cochabamba. These events mark the only instance when a U.S. corporation has been ousted from a foreign country because of popular protest.

The overthrow of the international company was a blow to neoliberal policy in Bolivia and was echoed worldwide as a symbol of popular rebellion. It also set the stage for subsequent protests in the Andean nation, most notably the Gas Wars of 2003, and for the restructuring of the Bolivian government. This included the rise of the political party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), the party responsible for the election of Evo Morales in 2005. Morales's victory, becoming the first indigenous president of Bolivia, was seen as the culmination of the popular movement that drew its strength from the nearly 60% of the population that identifies as indigenous. The movement also called for a new constitutional assembly that would redefine the nation.

This sense of strength and pride, drawn from a new valuation of indigeneity, inspired writers, artists, and musicians to create a body of work that reflects the popular spirit of Bolivian resistance. Central to this image of the new Bolivia are the Water Wars, which were the impetus for the movement. Bolivian artists rushed to portray the events in their work, creating paintings, poems, and musical scores inspired by Cochabamba's

success. Two performance collectives, in particular—Atempo Danza (a dance collective) and Teatro Trono (a youth theatre collective)—utilized the events of the Water Wars as raw material for their works. Challenging the idea of privatization by creating pieces that privilege the idea of community—an idea further advanced by the collective creation process of the groups—these pieces offer a distinctly Andean response to the Water Wars. Cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, writing about performances that are based on social crisis, says: “what began as an empirical social drama may continue both as an entertainment and a metasocial commentary on the lives and times of the given community” (*Anthropology* 39). Understood as a product of this drama, these performances transform moments of crisis into performances of reconciliation and hope.

Atempo Danza: Dancing the Story of Water in Cochabamba

In 2001, the Bolivian dance collective, Atempo Danza, was established in the city of Cochabamba. The founding members—Ana Cecilia Moreno, Patricia Sejas, and Jhonny Pérez—are formally trained in modern dance, with a heavy emphasis on the technique of Martha Graham, as well as in physical improvisation and gymnastics. Although billed as a “*Compañía de Danza Contemporánea*” (Modern Dance Company), Atempo Danza’s creations fuse modern dance forms with indigenous and traditional gestures and practices. The company makes a concentrated effort to base their pieces on local and cultural sources, reflecting the group’s commitment to the social and cultural history of their nation. The incorporation of local and indigenous expression in their performances highlight the founders’ commitment to the Cochabamba community and region. The group operates in and around the city of Cochabamba and their work focuses on the possibilities of expression through movement and the body. In addition to their

collective creations, the members teach dance classes and yoga to community members, both urban and rural, and have used their training with the body to create a wellness and health program for the elderly.

The members of Atempo Danza are aware of their role as social actors and have used this position as a way of investigating the local themes that are most important to their home city. Experimenting with contemporary techniques and traditional forms, the dancers explore and create new movements that are best suited for the transmission of their creative investigations. Their use of *danza-teatro* to tell stories of their community follows a tradition that has dominated Latin American dance since the 1980s, when “Modern dance begins to be designated ‘danza-teatro’ and becomes a part of the repertoire of the Latin American performing arts” (Rizk 185).

To date Atempo Danza has created six original full-length pieces that have been successfully performed in both urban and rural communities throughout Bolivia: *Ovillo* (2002), *Lagun Mayu* (2004), *Vientre Mineral* (2006), *tejer, tejerse, me tejen* (2007), *Paseacalleando* (2008), and *Los Aguayos* (2009). Although their first work incorporated local elements in the performance, it wasn’t until their second project that the group began to incorporate research, interviews with locals, and travel to site-specific locations into their creative process. For their piece *Lagun Mayu*, which is about the history of water in the region and the ancestral wells that are rooted in local tradition, the members met and worked with an organization of indigenous *regantes* (water irrigators) in preparation for their creative work. In the final version of the performance, one of the *regantes* performed onstage with the dancers.

Lagun Mayu developed as a result of this interaction between the dancers and the regantes of the Tiquipaya region. For their research for the danza-teatro, the members of Atempo Danza investigated the watering systems of the area, focusing on the irrigation systems that are based on pre-Columbian techniques. Combining their hands-on experiences at these watering sites with their interviews with the regantes, the dancers were able to combine anthropological inquiry with an exploration of the different possibilities of movement associated with the watering system in the creation of their piece.

Lagun Mayu is an expression of Andean cosmology and tradition: the native philosophy based on the oral tradition that includes creation stories, explanations of the structure of the universe, the importance of the spirits and deities, the birth of man, and the laws that govern interactions between living creatures, ancestors, and the gods. *Lagun Mayu* is a communal appreciation and understanding of water and its relation to the land and its inhabitants. The dance is meant to awaken the consciousness of the community to the historical antecedents of water, irrigation techniques, and community needs. The dance begins its story with the very moment water was created and stretches across time to the events that took place in Cochabamba in 2000. Engaging the viewer in this story of water, through a mythical and inclusive narration of movement, the piece bridges the gap between space and time: the modern problems associated with water privatization are directly connected to the birth of water. The work fuses dance with photographs of local water sources, as well as the Water Wars, with original music to tell a story of water and community. Imagery and movement in the piece are inspired by the ancestral water systems that are still in use in Bolivia today—the very wells that were privatized by the

actions of Aguas del Tunari. Additionally, the group also incorporated into their dance the personal stories they heard from the regantes whose lives were put at risk by the increase of the cost of water and the subsequent limited access to the natural resource.

The dance begins with a representation of a *q'oa*, an Andean ritual which most often consists of a burnt offering (usually sage) made to a saint or god. At the opening of the dance, the regante enters, dressed in a traditional *punchu* (poncho) and hat, spreading the smoke of the burnt offering across the stage. This act is symbolic both within the performance and within the performance space: it is the performance of a real ceremony, which in turn transforms the stage into a space of sacredness and offering. The image of a local water source is projected onto the space as the regante moves about the stage, accompanied by traditional Andean flute and drum music.



Figure 2. The *q'o* is performed by the regante as Pachamama and Wiracocha embrace.

A woman and man are onstage: they portray the roles of Pachamama (Earth Mother) and Wiracocha (Creator God). The regante next performs the *challada*, a payment made to the Pachamama for permission to inhabit her and to take resources from her. The ritual of the *challada* is common in Bolivia, where daily offerings of drink and food are made to the earth goddess before any human consumption takes place. In Atempo Danza's performance, it is especially important that the regante perform the rituals of the q'oa and the *challada*. The regante is someone who practices traditional watering techniques and belongs to a rural community immersed in Andean tradition, and his acts elevate the performance from simple mimesis to sacred ceremony. Once the ceremonies are complete, the regante exits and the two gods dance together in a mixture of poetic and gesticular moves, epic and sexual in nature. Their union brings forth the release of water into the world.

After the deities exit, a landscape of blue covers the back wall. Two female dancers perform the role of water, fluidly moving together onstage, accompanied by the sounds of a flowing river. Their bodies mix and turn about the stage, like the sound of water in the music. The scene changes and pictures of local irrigation systems begin to appear as projections in the background: canals, water gauges, valves, and irrigation trenches depict life in the rural areas of Cochabamba. A solo male dancer moves before these images, acting out the role of the irrigation worker: he turns the valve and moves around the ducts as the images continue to change in the background. These photos were taken at the locations where the regantes live and where the members of Atempo Danza conducted their research. Mountains and vegetation become the background for this rural

life. As more dancers enter the scene their bodies physically become the tools used by the male dancer to work the land.

The sequence of movements by the male dancer, utilizing mechanics and technology to irrigate his crops, is followed by a sequence titled “*Larq’a Pichay*.” In Quechua *larq’a* means “irrigation ditch” and *pichay* means “to sweep/to cleanse/to erase.” A solo female dancer takes possession of the stage, accompanied by tranquil and calming music. Her body moves about the space fluidly. There are no projections; her shadow accompanies her along the backdrop. Moving slowly, she rolls across the stage. According to company member Ana Cecilia Moreno, “This scene represents the need to clean our canals and water. As the dancer moves across the stage she becomes the tool for this cleansing” (Moreno interview). Her fluid movements allow the dancer to move poetically across the stage. Her dance is an attempt by the human body to return nature to an unspoiled condition. As she exits, the background comes to life once more, a clear, blue pool of water. She has succeeded in her cleansing ritual.

Immediately after her exit, however, the music intensifies, changing from a calm melody to a mechanical and ominous tone. This next section of the dance is titled “*Guerra del Agua*” (“The Water War”). Suddenly, two dancers—Moreno and Pérez—enter. They are dressed in business suits and carry business plans and long rolls of papers underneath their arms. The two rub the rolls against the water that is projected onto the scrim and suddenly the image of the water is replaced with a profitability graph: *U\$* appears on the vertical side, *Eficiencia* (Efficiency) is written across the horizontal line. The two dancers unfold the rolls of paper and reveal that they are covered with large dollar signs. These papers of profit are torn and stuffed inside the dancers’ clothes as they

slyly and villainously move around the stage, stuffing themselves with the money. The image of the projection changes to *H2O*, showing that in business, the image of water is not based on nature, but rather on how it can be represented in simplest form: a symbol for profit. The two dancers play with each other on stage merrily, eating and devouring the business papers, stuffing themselves with the dollar sign-filled rolls. Representing the greedy corporations that privatize water, *Eficiencia* continues to fall as the business dancers get fatter and fatter, unable to move around the stage. Pregnant with profit and with paper popping out of their clothes, the two begin to walk offstage as the residents of Cochabamba take their place.



Figure 3. Moreno and Pérez perform the role of corporate greed.

Quickly, a projection of one of the most famous pictures from the Cochabamba Water Wars appears on the backdrop. The picture shows protestors standing in the central

plaza, Bolivian flags and traditional *wiphalas* (the rainbow-colored banners of native self-determination) signaling the united efforts of Cochabambinos during the protests.

Stretching across the main building in the plaza is the famous red banner declaring: “*El Agua es Nuestra ¡¡CARAJÓ!!*” [“The water is ours !!DAMMIT!!”]. The dancers onstage, joined by the regante, watch as the businessmen exit.



Figure 4. Atempo Danza performers stand before a photo of the famous banner of the Water Wars

At this moment in the dance it is important to remember that all the dancers experienced the crisis of the Water Wars firsthand. As residents of Cochabamba, the performers faced an uncertain future when their access to water was being determined by foreign companies. Standing onstage before the image of the protests is not merely an

act; it is a recreation of a role they played in 2000. Their performance—an act of both remembering and reliving the event—can be understood as what performance critic Richard Schechner calls, in *Between Theatre & Anthropology*, “twice-behaved behavior” or “restored behavior.” As Schechner explains:

Performance behavior isn’t free and easy. Performance behavior is known and/or practiced behavior [...] either rehearsed, previously known, learned by osmosis since early childhood, revealed during the performance by masters, guides, gurus, or elders, or generated by rules that govern the outcomes, as in improvisatory theater or sports. (118)

Not only are the dancers of Atempo Danza (re)creating a rehearsed and previously known/lived moment, they are also staging practices passed down by elders and traditions governed by rules. The dance is a newly created performance based on several performances previously staged and practiced within the Cochabamba community.

Photos documenting the protests continue to be projected onto the screen: the plazas and streets filled with tens of thousands of protestors; the solo *cholita* throwing a rock at police; the line of armed forces on motorcycles; people with masks over their faces; gas bombs being thrown into crowds; fire acting as street blockades; and political graffiti. Dancing in front of these images, the dancers begin to throw their bodies about the stage violently: jumping, running, hiding, falling, holding each other up, and working as a mob to (re)create the actions of the protestors. Then, in unison, they begin to pantomime the throwing of rocks. In the final sequence of the scene, all the dancers onstage raise their hands in anger, stop suddenly, then walk offstage quietly. Two dancers then enter with a red banner that they beautifully and slowly unravel. In large, red letters

that spread across the expanse of the stage, the banner reads: “*EL AGUA ES NUESTRA ¡¡CARAJO!!*”

After the Water Wars and the chaos unleashed on the stage by the recreation of the crisis, the danza-teatro finishes with two final sequences: “*La Parcela*” and “*La Cosecha*.” “*La Parcela*” (“The Plot of Land”) is designed to represent the people’s return to their land after Aguas del Tunari surrenders its ownership of Cochabamba’s water resources. The dancers enter the stage, ready to work the land and water their crops. This scene is acted out by the women, as opposed to the earlier work scene which was danced by the only male in the company. Here, the women play out their traditional roles as field workers. The image of the *cochabambina cholita* (indigenous female from Cochabamba) working the fields, wearing her traditional dress, is projected behind the female dancers. Their dance is methodical. The dancers move about the stage planting seeds, watering crops, and working the land; the progression of sowing and caring for the crops that occurs onstage mirrors the images in the projections, showing the passage of time and the growth of the plants. This segment about the people’s relation to the water is about kinship. The regante enters at the end with food and the entire dance troupe comes together to share this meal as a community: they wash, eat, and rest as one in their final tableaux.

“*La Cosecha*” (“The Harvest”) is the final scene in this story of water. The final dance is a solo and is accompanied by projections of native flowers of all colors. The female dancer’s movements are like those of a butterfly and bee, moving before the images of nature and the harvest, dancing from flower to flower as the pictures change. Traditional Andean flute and drum music accompanies the harvest sequence. The dancer

ends her scene by posing before a flower. As the lights go out and the danza-teatro comes to an end, another dancer emerges from the shadows. He carries a large container over his shoulder, and as he slowly walks across the stage water pours from it onto the ground. The sight and sound of real water in the live performance, as opposed to the projected images of before, make a final and profound impact on the story of water. In *Lagun Mayu*, water, a communal resource, takes the final bow.

Utilizing a universal language that is not textually based, Atempo Danza allows the body to carry the message of water rights and communal usage into the public sphere. The body of the dancer is the focal point of their work—the dancers onstage are the embodiment of the community. Through the multiple possibilities of expression afforded through dance, the performance takes on multiple layers of meaning. Latin American theatre scholar Beatriz Rizk, says: “Dance has always been used as a metaphor for life” (167). She adds, “Dance is the ritual that accompanies primitive man/woman and their descendants in almost all of their important festivals and celebrations” (168). Atempo Danza, offering their piece to the public, is creating a celebration of life, dance, community, and culture. Their dance, as much as it celebrates the history of water, also celebrates the community’s victory against the foreign corporations. *Lagun Mayu* is a ritual and a memory for those who experienced the protests, as well as a story of creation and collective action for those who did not.

For Atempo Danza, the piece is based on the local. Within the choreography, the social life of the community is the priority. In their pieces one can find the rites, rituals, myths, and local themes and colors of the Cochabamba community. Their choreography and techniques are a mixture of rigid training and methodology and an exploration of

local/natural forms and inspirations. According to Moreno, “Our bodies, which are conditioned by our training, are opened up to the natural forms of the Andean culture through our research and experiences in our culture. These exist and play together within our bodies and for our audiences” (Moreno interview). For Atempo Daza, the body becomes the site of union for ethnographic research and cultural expression; their dance is the vehicle for their lived experiences. As Latin American theatre scholar Diana Taylor notes in another context, “we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices” (xvi). Atempo Danza, embodying both the traditional creation stories and the events of the Water Wars, transmit their experiences and findings to their audience, inviting them to participate in and learn about the history of water within their community.

Teatro Trono: Youth, Street Theatre, and Water in El Alto

The impact and consequences of the Water Wars were not restricted to the city of Cochabamba. The Cochabamba Valley system, because of its temperature and topography, has been the breadbasket of the nation since colonial times. For this reason, water privatization not only threatened the local population, but also became a concern for the nation as a whole. In addition to the protests that took place in Cochabamba during those four months, a series of other rallies and marches were staged in other cities throughout Bolivia.

Though privatization was eventually reversed in 2000, it was not the last time that a foreign corporation attempted to gain control of water resources in Bolivia. In 2005 a series of events popularly referred to as the “Second Water Wars” broke out in El Alto, the city that literally surrounds the capital. Though the city had been experiencing water

privatization concerns since 2003, it wasn't until 2005 that the deal neared an end and residents reached their breaking point. The city has a population of over 900,000 and houses one of the most politically active forces in all of Bolivia. El Alto, the location from which Túpac Katari staged his siege on La Paz in 1781, and the site of many of Bolivia's great strikes of the 20th and 21st centuries, builds its strength from the collective memory and actions of its indigenous population. The protests of the "Second Water Wars" culminated in a three-day strike that shut down the capital and led to the cancellation of the government's contract with Aguas de Illimani, a subsidiary of the multinational Suez Corporation that wanted full control of the waters in El Alto and La Paz.

It is in El Alto that Teatro Trono, a youth theatre collective, creates pieces that reflect the lives of its members, as well as Bolivian society as a whole. Teatro Trono began as an initiative to empower and recover the youth of the streets of El Alto. In 1989, Iván Nogales began to work with a group of boys inside the Centro Diagnóstico Terapia Varones (a juvenile detention center for boys), utilizing theatre as a form of rehabilitation therapy. The group eventually became independent of the center and began to dedicate itself to the production of original pieces by the young boys. The collective focuses on popular entertainment by, for, and about the at-risk youth of the altiplano city. Their themes include poverty, sickness, drug and alcohol abuse, crime, police brutality, and what it means to be an orphan. Trono's work allows these performers to reinsert themselves into the public view by taking their stories back to the streets and the public that rendered them invisible. Acting out their urban reality, Trono works to bring awareness and change to a city that has literally been pushed to the margins.

In order to understand the work of Teatro Trono, it is important to first look at the city in which the members create their original pieces. The city of El Alto is located in the altiplano highlands of Bolivia. At 13,615 feet above sea level, it is one of the highest cities in the world. Several thousand feet below, La Paz, Bolivia's capital, is protected in a canyon, with high-rise buildings, colonial architecture, and all the benefits of a modern city. El Alto, in contrast, is literally built on the margins. Pushed into the periphery by the capital city, its inhabitants are met daily with harsh winds, searing sunrays, and a cold climate that reaches the 60s in the summertime and freezing temperatures at night. The residents of El Alto come from all areas of Bolivia: they are mostly rural and indigenous people who have migrated to the city in search of employment. The nearly 900,000 residents of the settlement city, a population equal to that of the capital below, recognize their locale as nothing more than what Jorge Morales, a labor union organizer, calls: "*la ciudad de la marginalidad*" ("the city of marginality") (Morales interview).

Within this fast and congested city, Teatro Trono has been producing original work over the past twenty years. Their performances take place in plazas, on street corners, and in neighborhood parks. These public spaces, which are occupied by crowds during moments of crisis and protest, carry within them the capacity to create a connected and energized community. Much like the masses that occupy these spaces during civil protests, the audiences of Trono's performances carry with them a collective memory of resistance, revolution, and massive mobilization, in addition to their pride and sense of cultural agency. The spectators, impoverished and marginalized like the young performers, gather in these public spaces to watch Trono comment on the social questions

that affect the lives of El Alto's residents: poverty, racism, gender inequality, government corruption, human rights violations, the effects of globalization on local communities, and the consequences of neoliberal policies on Bolivian society.

Teatro Trono, inspired by the events of the Cochabamba Water Wars, created an original piece, *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua*, as a response to their growing concerns over water privatization in their own city. Performed in 2003, the play is a form of street theatre that also draws upon Andean cosmology to comment on the issue of water rights. Staged in different public areas of El Alto and in front of a number of audiences, the traveling piece was both a call to arms for its spectators and a reminder of what many had already experienced in the fight against neoliberal reform and free-market trade. In Trono's staged mythology of water, the forces of global capitalism and the Andean cosmos come face-to-face as water resources are threatened and exploited for economic gain.

Issues of ownership and distribution are key themes of the piece, echoing the controversies that appeared in the popular marches against water privatization in Cochabamba and El Alto. In *Impasse in Bolivia: Neoliberal Hegemony and Popular Resistance*, Kohl and Farthing quote a Cochabamba woman who says, "If God gave us water, no human being should take it away" (164). This same rationale and way of thinking guides the central question of *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua*: should water be owned by businessmen for profit or should it be available to the community for daily needs and usage? Trono uses the play to speak about the social issues that are of concern to the population, and it does so with humor, spectacle, and mass appeal. Most *alteños* (residents of El Alto) are illiterate, but they are keenly aware of the social issues and

problems that affect their lives on a daily basis. Almost all residents of El Alto are members of neighborhood unions that keep them informed and organized during moments of crisis and urgency. This network of unions has successfully been used to rapidly and efficiently connect and mobilize the hundreds of thousands of residents of El Alto during these protests. Alteños, socially conscious and ready for action, form the perfect audience for Trono's in-your-face and didactic performance style.

Trono's aesthetic is one that mixes politics and social issues with a whole lot of fun, chaos, and entertainment. Before the show begins a large truck pulls into the public area where the performance will take place. Children, teenagers, and adults work together to unload the costumes, bicycles, drums, and giant puppets that are used to create the spectacle of *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua*. In the performance there are seven giant water gods, each one of them with an extravagant costume that stands at least six feet tall; it takes two or three actors to move some of the puppets. The cast is made up of 30 performers in colorful and exaggerated makeup and costumes designed to catch public attention.

Throughout the performance live music is played by the actors. The play begins with the sound of a *quena*, a traditional Bolivian flute. Four young actors enter the performance space, carrying a long, blue cloth that represents water. The actors dance around the space, moving about freely and creating a visual image of a river caught in twists, turns, and the wind. After a few minutes they set the fabric down. Suddenly there is a thunderous roar of drums and cymbals—this type of lively opening to the performance is one of Trono's signature moments. The actors begin to dance and sing loudly, running around the public space and energizing the onlookers. These actors

interact with audience members, leading them in cheers and dances as they create an atmosphere of carnival and fun. As performers and spectators sing and dance together, another group of actors enters the space and begins to create a collage of images that represents the daily uses of water in the city: washing clothes, brushing teeth, splashing water onto one another, and taking big drinks of water.



Figure 5. Teatro Trono members perform before an audience in a plaza in El Alto.

When the sequence of life in the city ends, the music changes and the scene is transformed into the shore of a rural river. A young boy enters and begins to play in the water. He carries a container and runs throughout the audience, offering a drink of water to anyone who wants one. According to Iván Nogales, audience members drink the water enthusiastically: “The people do drink what the actors offer. They become connected to the performance and participate fully by drinking what we share with them” (Nogales interview).

Suddenly the joyous and generous atmosphere is broken with loud drumbeats as an actor portraying the comic *empresario* (businessman) enters the scene. The young actor performs a caricature, warping his body and transforming his walk and stance into a hunched and eerie portrayal of a selfish businessman. He points to the river and asks the villagers/audience, “How much does it cost? How much is it worth?” (1). Without giving them time to answer, the businessman pulls out a small amount of money; the actors onstage hold out their hands and accept it without hesitation. In this small act of transfer—one that he defines and controls—the businessman becomes the sole owner of the river and all the water that it contains. The man then calls one of the actresses to his side and whispers into her ear. Her costume is made of dozens of bottles that hang around her body. She walks to the river and begins to fill her bottles. When done, she walks among the crowd yelling, “Fresh water! Fresh water for sale!” (1). The audience can no longer drink freely; they must now pay for the right to drink the water that was only earlier given to them in an act of community and generosity.

When the actress exits the scene the *empresario* reaches down and grabs the blue sheet. Grasping it firmly in his hand he begins to pull up the river and bunches it into a ball that he holds tightly against his body. He now owns the water: “Mine, mine, mine. The water is mine” (1). Quickly the villagers reenter the scene and ask for a drink of water. Without hesitation the *empresario* exclaims loudly: “You have to pay!” (1). Desperate and in need of a drink, the villagers have no choice but to comply with the man’s demands. One girl removes her golden earrings and gives them to the businessman. He takes a tiny cup out of his pocket and fills it with water from the river. All of the villagers must share this small drink of water since they are unable to come up with more payment. Like the

multinational corporations that control water resources under neoliberal policy, the businessman is only concerned with profit. He ends the scene by peeing into the river.



Figure 6. A young Teatro Trono actor in costume poses for the camera.

In another rush of sound and dance, the stage is suddenly occupied by seven large puppets that emerge from behind the truck and stage. The villagers and the river are swept away in the commotion and join the public watching the spectacle. The large puppets are the gods of water, bearers of Andean culture, tradition, and life. One actor shouts and announces the first goddess, Lluvia, as she enters the stage: “Divinity that comes from the sky in the form of water, watering our lands and bodies.... RAIN!” (1).

Then another large puppet enters on top of a fruit cart—she is Lidia, the goddess of amniotic fluid. As the music continues and as each is announced, the other gods take their places in the space: Are, goddess of springs and reflections; Granizo, god of ice; Negrón, the god of pollution; and Botellón, god of bottled water. The final deity to enter is Saldulmi, the goddess of all waters. The gods have gathered in an assembly to decide how to deal with the villagers and businessman.

The villagers reenter the space and are transported to a place outside of human reality. With the gods towering over them they are put on trial for their misuse of water. As the gods begin to discuss the type of punishment that will be handed down, another large puppet—Hidrofobia (Rabies)—enters as the announcer shouts: “The desert is her home. She is happy when there are pain and tears throughout the land” (2). Hidrofobia convinces the gods that the villagers must be harshly punished and that the only remedy is to take the water away from them. The blue sheet is brought back onto the stage and is placed in Saldulmi’s hands. The punishment—drought—has been decided. But even as the gods exit the stage, Saldulmi walks over to the young boy who shared water with the public at the opening of the play and gives him a small cup of water. After Saldulmi exits, however, Hidrofobia immediately walks over to the boy and takes the water, laughing as the god throws it onto the ground and the boy exits crying.

The punishment handed down to the humans is not done as an act of cruelty, but as a lesson to be learned—the gods want the humans to respect nature and keep the water resources clean. They demand that the water be returned to communal usage and not to be sold for profit. The gods explain that the water will not be returned to the people until they learn this valuable lesson. However, the gods Hidrofobia, Negrón, and Botellón seek

revenge and death as a punishment. They are the evil trinity of water and according to Nogales “are the gods born from modernity and the womb of man” (Nogales interview). These gods did not exist in the cosmic order until humans began to allow greed to dictate the relations between nature and humanity. Suffering the wrath of the newly empowered deities, the villagers begin to writhe about the stage, sick and dying because of their lack of water. In an attempt to please the gods, the villagers dance about the stage, offering prayers to the gods to show they have learned their lesson. But rather than accept the prayers, Negrón transforms the clean rain water into acid rain. With the help of Botellón, the humans are transformed into grotesque figures—half-animal and half-human—as they become surrounded by the polluted waters. As the three evil gods continue to devastate the village, the other gods come to the humans’ rescue. Are, goddess of springs and reflections, enters courageously to save the villagers. She challenges the grotesque figures, seducing them with her reflective and shimmering costume. Once she is close enough to the half-human creatures she calls forth a spring, throwing fresh water onto the grotesque semi-humans. The creatures take a sip of the fresh water and in this ritual of cleansing are reborn into humans.

Botellón, Hidrofobia, and Negrón see this transformation and become enraged. The three antagonists begin to spin in circles, violently and loudly, moving to attack the goddess of spring water. At the end of the dance Are and Hidrofobia are locked in a death-match. As the percussion instruments pound with intensity, Are traps Hidrofobia within her hands; the goddess is going to be the victor in this battle. Suddenly, and without warning, Negrón attacks Are from behind, spraying her with acid rain. Are falls and dies and the three villains exit triumphantly.

Silence falls across the performance space and the young boy from the beginning of the play runs to the side of the fallen goddess. In a ritual of tears, the humans slowly enter and surround Are to pay her respect. They lift her and carry her off, mourning and crying at the loss of one of their creators. This meeting of the water gods has become a vicious war—humanity is on the line and deities will fall. The musician-actors that surround the playing space pound their drums and cymbals as the gods of pollution, rabies, and trapped-water move around the stage once again raining acid onto their counterparts. In an awesome display of spectacle—one of Teatro Trono’s famous trademarks—fire-jugglers parade around the space, throwing and playing with fire, exciting the spectators with their mastery over the flames. The three gods, surrounded by the spectacle of brimstone and fire, enact a display of power meant to intimidate the remaining gods and humans. The villagers, recognizing this as the final battle, perform ritualistic offerings that will give strength to their protectors. As they prepare for war, the humans and the rain gods dance and sprinkle water onto one another in a communal ceremony of traditional offering and reciprocity. With this public performance of ritual, Lidia, Lluvia, and Granizo—protectors of human life—are given the strength to fight.

At the end of the battle the villains are victorious. The empresario enters, followed by the saleswoman. Hidrofobia lifts the long, blue cloth off of the ground and hands it over to the woman. She walks around the space, wrapped in its blue color, and displays the river to the audience. She holds a sign that reads: “*EN VENTA*” [“FOR SALE”]. Together, the woman, the empresario, and the three evil gods laugh and celebrate their triumph.



Figure 7. Teatro Trono actors perform the war of the water gods using large puppets.

Once again, a loud crash of drums begins and the villagers rush onto the space from all sides. They create a street scene, marching in solidarity and protesting the sale of the water. Waving signs and chanting in unison, they are now the popular resistance to water privatization. The empresario takes out of his coat small plastic toys—airplanes and guns—and begins to wave them around the stage and against the protestors. Botellón climbs onto the large truck that has served as the backdrop to the performance and aims a large gun at the crowd. Together the empresario and the god of bottled-water wage war

on the Bolivian community and its water gods. By the end of the sequence, the gods Lidia, Lluvia, and Granizo fall, victims to the business and war machines.

The protestors attempt to reorganize themselves, but with a simple wave of the hand the businessman stops their protest and they fall to the ground. When they rise to march again, the greedy businessman lights a bomb and throws it into the crowd. This moment, a commentary on the government's use of violence against civil protest, draws jeers and shouts from the audience. As Nogales notes of the public:

Our audiences are very smart and aware of the politics of our shows. They get involved, angered, and excited when we represent real moments of government abuse. They see themselves in our plays and know that we speak for the community. Even though the actors are young, the audience sees the future of Bolivia in each of the performers. What happens during the shows is as real for the audience as any other public event. (Nogales interview)

After falling a third time the villagers rise again against the empresario. They are marching and mobilizing to regain control of their river. Echoing the violence that occurred in Cochabamba during the Water Wars, the play reflects the reality of mobilizing against business and government forces in order to ensure communal access to natural resources. They are unable, however, to defeat their foes without aid.

Beaten and hopeless the villagers lie across the floor. Granizo—god of hail—enters and begins to reprimand them, furious that humans could ever take control of and sell any natural resource. The young boy walks up to Granizo and asks for help. Realizing that these villagers are the victims of corporate and government greed and abuse, Granizo promises to help them. The god begins to dance, asking the villagers to

join him. They are remembering and performing the final ritual that will bring the goddess Saldulmi to their aid.

When the villagers have completed the proper ritual performance, Saldulmi enters in a splendid display of awe and wonder. She calls upon the evil gods and confronts them. When it is the young boy's turn to voice his opinion to the evil trinity, they react by stomping all over him. Saldulmi, angered, takes the waters from Negrón. She then walks over to the fallen boy, steps over him, and covers him with her large costume. Before the audience the young boy is reborn, emerging from the womb of the water goddess. To the cheers of the audience, the young boy climbs atop the truck. High above everyone, and strengthened by the deity, the young boy holds a water bomb in his hands. With a scream the boy throws the bomb of fresh water at Botellón, Negrón, and Hidrofobia. The evil gods fall, weakened. The boy jumps down from the truck and runs to the goddess Lidia. He caresses her womb and from within the folds of her costumes emerges a rainbow. The long colorful fabrics begin to surround the three evil gods. As the colors of the rainbow dance across the stage and enliven the scene, the three evil gods exit—they have finally been defeated.

The villagers and the remaining gods pay their respect to the rainbow. They then take the blue river from the hands of the empresario and spread it across the ground of the performance space. The businessman seems apologetic for his actions and even helps to clean up the river. At the end of the play everyone onstage takes a drink of water and the audience cheers loudly as the villagers and the gods exit. But the last image is that of the empresario. He sneaks back onto the stage, carrying another blue river underneath his

arm. He is followed by Negrón and a performer who is spinning a burning stick of fire. The evil god and the businessman stop, smile at the audience, then exit from the space.

This problematic and disturbing ending, however pessimistic it may seem, does not make the play a tragedy. The fact is that there is a resolution in the end for the villagers. Although the empresario reenters at the end of the play, clear that he is going to exploit and abuse another village, the lesson learned cannot be undone. Like the residents of Cochabamba, the villagers in the play successfully overpowered the businessman and his greed. The audience, witness to the empresario's actions, know that he is attempting to take water from another location. The audience knows what will happen and are ready for it, poised for the fight.

Like Brecht's epic theatre, Trono wants its audience to adopt a critical perspective in order to see the social injustice and exploitation presented in their shows. Both Brecht and Trono recognize this moment of audience alienation and distancing as the key to having them move forth from the performance ready and willing to effect social change. For Brecht, this change occurs on the outside of the theatre; for Trono, the change will take place in the same streets in which the play was performed. For Trono, the audience members usually happen upon the performance and did not ask to be pulled into the play, yet they often walk away from the show engaged and informed. For them the performance becomes a new urban act, one that reflects the needs of the disenfranchised. In El Alto, where an onslaught of posters advertise political faces, names, and party slogans, this appropriation of public locations by Teatro Trono returns the spaces of power to those who live in the streets, not just those who aim to control them.

As theatre scholar Harry J. Elam notes: “social protest performances [...] direct their audiences to social action” (vi). He continues by explaining: “My definition presupposes that social protest performances emerge solely from marginalized peoples and oppositional struggles. [They] function as counterhegemonic strategies through which underrepresented groups challenge the dominant social order and agitate for change” (vi). The work of Teatro Trono is a prime example of street theatre activism and social protest performance. Staged in public spaces, Trono’s presentations are followed by the opportunity for the crowd and actors to interact and share stories and ideas. *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua* was often followed by informal discussions of politics, traditional watering practices, and comments on the effects of neoliberalism and globalization. As the performances came to an end, the onlookers would converse among themselves and the performers, telling stories about their experiences in the mass mobilizations against water privatization, as well as their stories of struggle to find enough drinking water to satisfy their needs. Seeing their stories portrayed on the very streets in which they marched, the spectators felt empowered by the performances. The spectators, a part of history, were watching the same history—*their* history—play out before their eyes. Trono is not only educating the masses, but also embodying their stories

La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua connects the political and environmental struggle over water to the deeper, underlying forces in the natural world and in Bolivian cosmology. Teatro Trono, in creating this piece, looked deep into its local culture and environment for source material. Inspired by the indigenous belief systems of the Andes, the members of Trono conducted research by reading about Andean gods and creation

stories, interviewing farmers in the El Alto region, and visiting Lake Titicaca, the site in Andean mythology of the creation of man. Conducting anthropological research as a part of their creative process, the young actors learned about a history that for many was unknown. Their production process not only educated the public watching the performance, but also served as a form of self education. Inspired by ritual and myth, the members of Trono fused their street theatre style with traditional ideology to create a piece that bridges time and space. *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua* is more than a street performance—it is a new and modern tale of the mythical dimensions of water.

Teatro Trono is about possibility, imagination, and alternatives. Apart from their play *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua*, Teatro Trono creates pieces based on oppression, exploitation, violence, and poverty. The collective is also about community-building, with an emphasis on progressive social change. To date, the theatre group has performed in 39 Bolivian theatre festivals and in 12 different countries, taking its social messages to the masses. Creating pieces on the subjects of mining, popular protests, neoliberalism, and government corruption, the members of Trono take their stories to the streets as a way of rallying the people and educating them about social injustices. No longer invisible, the performers of Teatro Trono are greeted by loud cheers and whistles as they march in parades, perform in plazas, and travel across their country. Speaking for themselves, and for the other residents of El Alto, Trono has seen its work and practice change the social circumstances of its city. Trono has opened up cultural centers in 3 other Bolivian cities, and their main center in El Alto is seven stories high, one of the tallest buildings in the city. The group, originally created to change the lives of its members, has now changed the landscape of its very own neighborhood: homes are

reflecting the aesthetics of the cultural center, murals are being painted on walls surrounding the performance spaces, and park benches are being placed on sidewalks so people can sit to watch Trono perform. The group also travels annually throughout Bolivia in its *teatro camion*, a large semi-truck that carries everything needed to mount full productions across the Andean nation.

Conclusion

In both of the performances discussed in this chapter—*Lagun Mayu* and *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua*—the collectives employed Andean cosmology and ritual as a way of approaching the controversy and crisis created by water privatization. Latin American scholar Doris Sommer notes: “Culture enables agency. Where structures or conditions can seem intractable, creative practices add dangerous supplements that add angles for intervention and locate room for maneuver” (3). Employing local culture and tradition in their pieces, Atempo Danza and Teatro Trono are creating works that make room for local agency, intervention, and popular resistance, all while proclaiming the indigenous body as the answer to the oppressive forces of neoliberalism. The role these types of performances play in continuing a dialogue of resistance, and in their contribution to collective pride and memory, make the performers active agents for social change in Bolivian society today. In utilizing Andean culture and tradition to create and stage their shows, the moving body in performance becomes the site of cosmic and earthly space, reminding audiences that the struggle for natural resources is as much an individual responsibility as it is a communal and sacred one. These performances combine storytelling and movement with the transmission of history to tell the Bolivian story of water.

Both performances rely on visual images more than script. Although Trono's street theatre contains dialogue, the spectacle and movement in the performance space is its central component. Atempo Danza's work, though based on dialogue and the oral tradition, utilizes the dancers' bodies as the vehicle for the story. These creations, presented before live audiences, become the continuation and enactment of these traditional forms of storytelling and the transmission of social memory. Mixed with other practices and performative approaches—ritual, ceremony, song, and storytelling—the works become new vehicles for tradition and resonate with their local audiences. In the two pieces, dance and street theatre are blending modern and traditional performance techniques to create new and hybrid models of performance that inform social memory and political consciousness. The bodies of the dancers and street performers are at the center of this new energy and artistic form: the body is the simultaneous site of the text and culture. No longer colonized, the body steps out of the historical constraints of oppression and exploitation and becomes a new vehicle for indigenous and popular reform. Although not all of the dancers and actors identify as indigenous, their commitment to collective action and social progress demonstrates their participation in and acceptance of the Andean kinship system. Taking to the streets and working with residents of rural and urban areas of Bolivia, these performers counter hegemony and division based on class and race.

Crisis in Bolivia has traditionally been centered on the fight for natural resources—from the earliest examples of forced colonial labor in the mines of Potosí to the fight for communal access to water and gas in the 21st century. The indigenous struggle for autonomy and equality has continued, and repeated itself on the indigenous

body, since the arrival of the Spanish into Upper Peru in 1524. Popular resistance and collective memory in Bolivia today are working to bring the Andean communities out of this history of oppression and into a new era of equality and social reform. *Pachakuti*, in the Quechua-Aymara tradition means, “a profound turning or transformation of the world (space and time)” (Hylton & Thomson 28). The first great pachakuti occurred when the Spanish arrived in the Andes—the indigenous world was turned upside-down. The native populations have since been awaiting the next pachakuti, which they hope will (re)transform the world in their favor. The election of Evo Morales in 2005, for many, signaled the beginning of this new pachakuti. The election of the country’s first indigenous President seemed like a new revolution. However, as Hylton and Thomson note of the election: “In our own historical view, the election of Evo Morales did not bring about a revolution. It was a revolution that brought about the government of Evo Morales” (17).

Morales’s entrance into the genealogy of indigenous leaders who resisted and fought against foreign subjugation inspired the masses. Morales himself was keenly aware of his role within this historical genealogy. The day before his inauguration, on January 21, 2006, he met with tens of thousands of indigenous people at Tiwanaku, the ancient capital of the Andean civilization. There he performed a traditional ceremony, symbolically inaugurating himself as a leader of the native people of Bolivia. The next day, at the official inauguration in La Paz, Morales called for a moment of silence to honor those who died in the struggle against Bolivia’s history of oppression and exploitation, including Túpac Katari and Túpac Amaru.

With the election of Morales it seemed like the great revolution of Túpac Katari had finally reached its full potential. The Water Wars in 2000, the Gas Wars in 2003, and the subsequent takeover of the Bolivian government by the indigenous identifying political party, MAS, are the most effective acts of redress taken to end the social drama of continued colonization in Bolivia. With the political, social, and cultural agency gained by the indigenous populations of Bolivia in the past decade, the pachakuti, for many, seems to have finally arrived.

Collective resistance and collective memory were, and continue to be, instrumental to these changes. As Diana Taylor notes in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, “Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity” (2). The performances created about the Water Wars—*Lagun Mayu* and *La Asamblea de los Dioses del Agua*—carry within them the social memory and knowledge that has become a part of the new indigenous identity. Theatre and performance in Bolivia today are as much about transmitting knowledge into the collective memory as they are about acting as a force of resistance. Within the context of the Water Wars, Atempo Danza and Teatro Trono are inserting themselves into the social dialogue and memory of the nation. With the continuing crises of the mines, natural resource privatization, the constitutional assembly, and opposition to indigenous governance, performance offers alternative avenues for education, resistance, and activism. Drawing their inspiration from traditional customs and contributing to the promotion and survival of indigenous cultural practices, Atempo Danze, Teatro Trono, and other performance collectives are creating a new form of cultural agency in the Andean nation. The art formed as a response to these moments of crisis reflect an

indigenous viewpoint and community-oriented process of production. Within the framework of these performances, the indigenous body, or the actors inspired by the indigenous traditions, act as the solution to neoliberalism, free market reform, labor and resource exploitation, and the growing disparity in class division. The audiences' enthusiastic reception of these pieces signals not only a desire for theatrical performance, but a social need for theatre's ability to reflect on, create, and enact change within Bolivian society today.

CHAPTER THREE

PERFORMING LATIN AMERICAN RESPONSES TO 9/11 AND IRAQ: POLITICAL THEATRE AND POPULAR RESISTANCE IN THE AGE OF ‘TERROR’

<i>Hijo de mi alma</i>	Son of my soul
<i>De mi alma hijo mío</i>	Of my soul my son
<i>Donde existes no te veo</i>	Where are you I can't see you
<i>No te oigo dónde estás</i>	I can't hear you where are you
<i>Contesta a tu viejita</i>	Answer your mother
<i>Que te llama y no respondes</i>	Who calls you and you don't answer
<i>Al cariño de tu madre</i>	To the love of your mother
<i>Ni a la voz del corazón</i>	Nor to the voice of the heart

She picks up the rocks and throws them, shouting:

*Ullika shamungui! (Come back to me quickly!)*⁸

Teatro Contraelviento, founded in 1991, is one of Ecuador's leading theatre troupes. Since its formation, the group has created nine original works and has had over 3000 public performances.⁹ According to the director, Patricio Vallejo Aristizábal, the group dedicates itself to “exploring local life through the body of the actor and the world of the stage, and reflecting on social conditions that are often divided in life but present in the theatre” (Vallejo interview). Based in Quito, the group is the recipient of several Latin American drama awards.¹⁰ *La Flor de la Chukirawa (The Flower of the Chukirawa)*, the group's most successful play to date, was first staged in Ecuador in June 2007. Since its premier the play has been performed more than 400 times, including presentations at over a dozen international theatre festivals.¹¹ The play's lead actress, Verónica Falconí, has

⁸ Patricio Vallejo Aristizábal, *La flor de la Chukirawa*, unpublished 2007. Quote from page 2 of script.

⁹ Contraelviento's work has been seen in nine different countries throughout the Americas and Europe.

¹⁰ The group has received 9 awards to date, at festivals in Ecuador, Argentina, Peru, and Colombia, including Best Directing and Best Acting (X International Festival of Experimental Theatre, Ecuador). The group also received an honorary award in recognition of its work and trajectory from the Ruta Intercambio Teatral (RIT) in Colombia in 2008.

¹¹ To date the group has had 74 international performances, including presentations in Argentina, Cuba, Colombia, Denmark, Mexico, Spain, and Uruguay.

been hailed for her portrayal of the indigenous mother, who is the central character in the play, and has received the Best Actress award at a number of festivals.¹²

La flor de la Chukirawa tells the story of an indigenous man from Ecuador who has become another faceless victim of the global War on Terror. The play is staged as an interview with the man's mother, who tells the story of her son's tragic journey to Iraq to fight alongside U.S. forces as a privately paid contractor; an angel-like figure, representing the media/nation, conducts the interview. The interview, to the dismay of the journalist, becomes an open dialogue as the mother asks questions that do not occur to the journalist (and, through association, the nation). Trying to find the connection between Ecuador and the War in Iraq, and her son and his role in the U.S. forces, the mother points out the absurdities of the events leading to her son's death. The mother's narration weaves between different worlds—past and present, hers and his, Latin American and Middle Eastern—as her words bring her son and his story to life on the stage. It is through her memory that the son's death retains meaning, resisting the erasure of the individual, which too often becomes the norm during times of war.

By casting the indigenous body as central in this story of violence and exploitation, Contraelviento privileges the voices and perspectives of those living within Ecuador's margins. Examining the way the group incorporates Andean ritual and cosmology in this performance, I argue that the play reinterprets the ideas of war, freedom, and nation, as well as the image of the hero. In its performance, Contraelviento creates an oppositional view to the war in Iraq from a distinctly Andean point of view, which is especially significant in Latin America, where U.S. intervention has historically

¹² Best Female Performance, II Festival Iberoamericano de Teatro, Argentina; Best Actress, XI Festival Internacional de Teatro Experimental, Ecuador.

meant oppression and violence.¹³ Drawing on local customs and indigenous tradition to offer a counternarrative to the war, the characters in *La flor de la Chukirawa* embody the ideological confrontation between Ecuador and the United States, North and South, feminine and masculine, imperial and subaltern.

La flor de la Chukirawa, as a reaction to the War in Iraq, situates itself between artistic creativity and politics: the poetic language of the play and its stylized movements blend effortlessly with the political and social conditions of its characters to present an Ecuador caught between the impulse for national autonomy and the consequences of global and corporate exploitation and terror. Ecuador, with a mestizo population of 65% and an indigenous population of 25%, is marked by a significant presence of Incan and Kichwa tradition and thought. The urban centers and rural communities of Ecuador are tied together by this indigenous philosophy, which has had to (re)define and (re)negotiate its presence over the past 500 years as a response to continued violence and oppression.

Incan cosmology conceives of the cosmos as divided into three different parts—*hanaq pacha* (the world above), *kay pacha* (this world), and *ukhu pacha* (the world below). The Incas expressed the belief that ordinary people went to *ukhu pacha* when they died regardless of their virtue, while members of the nobility were said to go to *hanaq pacha* after death. In both cases life seemed to continue much as it had on earth. There was also the belief that the land of the dead was periodically bridged to the living world and that during these times communication was possible between the living and the deceased.

¹³ For more on the role the U.S. military played in Latin America during the 20th and 21st centuries, read Lesley Gill's *The School of the Americas* (Duke UP, 2004).

On stage, the three characters in the play—the mother, the son, and the reporter—create a powerful triangle that represents these three distinct, yet connected worlds of Andean cosmology: the mother, center stage, is in *kay pacha*; the son, dead, resides in *ukhu pacha*; and the reporter, who represents the nation and the media, exists in *hanaq pacha*. Within the space of the stage, the ritualistic communion between these worlds is acted out before an audience; communication between the living, the dead, and the gods exists as a dialogue.



Figure 8. The three characters in *La flor de la Chukirawa* inhabit the three worlds of Andean cosmology

The play opens with the image of an indigenous woman, hammer and rocks in hand, sitting on a small stool. She is a *palliri*,¹⁴ a woman who works in the mine pits, using her bare hands to break piles of rocks into small pieces in order to salvage any

¹⁴ The word *palliri* refers to female miners in Bolivia. In the past few years, however, the name has come to represent the work and plight of all female miners throughout the Andes.

remaining trace of minerals. Her life is difficult, working in the high altitude and blazing sun of the Andes. Even within the mining communities, the work of the palliri ranks low:

Ignored by all, these poor women cling to life with resignation, and tirelessly working like ants, they remove soil without pause, break hard stones, transport heavy metal sacks, never complaining, in order to support their children, several in most cases, and to take advantage of the sole right they are entitled to, survival.

(Van Hoecke 267)

Brutal and painful, and with little reward for the amount of labor it takes to smash open rocks for miniscule amounts of metals for the market, the palliri embodies both capitalist and gender exploitation.

The practice of mining, associated with masculinity, relegates the women to the outside. The palliri, herself a liminal being within the feminine world, is either an unmarried young woman or a widow (Absi 64). Subject to the brutal world of the mines, the palliri is also proud of the self-determination afforded her as a worker. Like the palliris in the mines, the mother in *La flor de la Chukirawa* redefines the feminine within her work space. Her very presence in the site allows her subjectivity in a world dominated by the masculine. In the play, the mines and the war, machines of destruction associated with men, become destabilized by the mother's presence. She is unwilling to allow herself to be subjugated within the context of either; she works hard to maintain her presence and voice within these spaces of extreme violence. Like the flower of the title, the mother is colorful and vibrant, with roots grounded firmly in Andean tradition and culture. The flower, however beautiful, is also thick and covered in thorns, able to protect itself from the harsh world in which it lives.

That Contraelviento chose a palliri as the central character in this story is significant because of the historical and cultural context associated with the female miner. Palliris, always women, are mostly native, and as such reside in multiple liminal zones: female, indigenous, and lower-class. It is powerful to see the mother in the play, occupying one of the lowest positions in modern Andean society, demand subjectivity and agency when confronted with agents of power.

The character of the mother can also be understood within Incan cosmology as an extension of the *Pachamama*. Translated as “Mother Earth” or “Mother World,” the Pachamama is one of the most benevolent deities in Andean religion. She is physically manifested in everyday life in the Andes and without her life would not be possible:

[W]e live and work on her. She nurses us and raises us like our mother... She has bones and blood. She has hair too. The grass is her hair. Her blood is in the ground. She always bleeds when she is plowed... We give her seeds and she gives birth... We give offerings to Pachamama for our produce and for our animals, so that the animals don't become sick and so that the harvest will be good. (qtd in Classen 109)

Revered as a good mother, the relationship between the Pachamama and man is one of reciprocity and benevolence. Sacrifices and offerings in her honor are daily occurrences throughout the Andes. As such, the *ch'alla*, a burnt or sprinkled offering to the goddess, is the most important ritual in Andean culture (Merlino and Rabey: 1992). In the play, the mother enacts two ritualistic moments of *ch'alla*: she lights a fire in a small bowl and also pours water on the stage. A picture of her son, in a frame, rests on her stool as she does this. Her stylized use of water and fire in the performance, symbolic of the ritualistic

offering, intensifies her association with the Andean goddess, as well as the play's identification with Andean ceremony and sacrifice.

The mother embodies the world of the Pachamama in two distinct ways: not only is she a mother herself, but she works in the mines, referred to in indigenous lore as the vaginal openings of the goddess:

The image of the mountain as female is fused with that of *Pachamama*, the Andean deity of earthly fertility and the symbol of mining activity, which is deeply steeped in agricultural rationale. Inside the belly of the mountain, Pachamama, ores combine and ripen [...] Within this context, to expose her wealth is equivalent to lifting the layers of the mountain's petticoats one by one. (Absi 61)

Both the mother of men and a source of wealth to be exploited, the image of the Pachamama dominates life in the mines. The palliri, as a miner who does not enter the mountains, occupies a similar space of exploitation within the mining world. The palliri and the Pachamama are simultaneously symbols of feminine power and unequal gender relations. But just as the Pachamama has the ability to hide her wealth from the miners, or even the power to cause death within her layers, the palliri too possesses qualities of strength and survival.

Life and death are intertwined with the Pachamama because she encompasses all. In Andean culture, life springs forth from Mother Earth and returns to her in a cyclical manner, thus ensuring the continuity of life. It is from the goddess that the indigenous cultures of the Andes take their nourishment and it is also to her that their bodies are returned in death: "Pachamama gives us life, she nourishes us throughout our existence

on this earth and when we die, we go back to our Pachamama from where we will rise again” (qtd. in Bolin 32). The son in the play, who abandons both mother figures to fight in Iraq, is never returned to the soil of his home and culture. In the context of *La flor de la Chukirawa*, leaving the Andes to fight as a private contractor alongside U.S. forces is not only risking life, but also the afterlife.

In Contraelviento’s play, the United States represents death and waste as an unsympathetic destructive force. Outsiders who venture into the war become collateral damage in the name of “American” freedom. For the subaltern, objects and not subjects of the war, death transforms them into heroic images to be used for propaganda purposes. In death, just as in life, these recruits exert no power or control over their own bodies. In *La flor de la Chukirawa*, however, control over the image and memory of the son is seized from U.S. interests and transferred back to Ecuador. Pachamama, embodied by the mother, as the bearer and guardian of Andean culture and its people, does not accept the son’s death as necessary in the war against terrorism. Instead, she condemns American military and business practices, accusing the U.S. of perpetrating its own form of global abuse and terror. She is the voice of those oppressed by U.S. power and aggression, challenging both the military and the capitalist market in their hostile control over international affairs.

Although the majority of military personnel involved in Operation Iraqi Freedom hailed from the U.S. and its NATO allies, private security firms, contracted by the U.S. government, turned to the third world’s impoverished citizens as a source of physical

labor and military combat.¹⁵ Lured by money, these recruits, like the indigenous son in *La flor de la Chukirawa*, became part of the global machine to fight Terror. U.S. companies—like Blackwater, Triple Canopy, 3D Global Solutions, and Your Solutions (to name just a few of the larger ones)—actively recruited foreign “civilian contractors” with an average pay of \$1000 a month to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. By comparison, private U.S. citizens contracted by Blackwater received a pay of \$500 or more a day (McDonnell). In this business of war, citizenship determines pay scale.

A January 28, 2008 *Los Angeles Times* headline read: “Iraq contractors tap into Latin America’s needy: thousands with limited opportunities at home are lured by pay; but for some who are injured or disabled, the cost is high” (McDonnell). This news article, one of the few to discuss the role of non-citizens in the U.S. armed forces abroad, gives several examples of recruits who were seriously injured while working in Iraq; many were having difficulty adjusting to life back in their home country. One of the recruits, Calixto, 27, from Peru, described his injury: “We were running for cover, and I heard the mortar round as it passed by [...] Then there was a very loud explosion. I began to scream. I looked at my leg and there was a lot of blood. I could see the bone. But I never passed out.... That was something that really impressed my supervisors” (McDonnell). The article continues to explain how Calixto has had a very difficult time filing insurance claims with contractor Triple Canopy. Maimed and deaf in one ear as a result of the explosion, he is living off of \$492 a month in disability payments that will soon come to an end. In addition to that, he says he is still owed two months’ worth of

¹⁵ The practice of utilizing civilians as private mercenaries is not a new phenomenon; it develops from a long historical precedent. Although citizens from across the globe were recruited into the War in Iraq, this paper will focus primarily on the recruitment of Latin American citizens.

back pay. As the article explains: “The injury has seriously limited his prospects in a country where the maimed can often be found begging in the streets” (McDonnell).

According to journalist Jeremy Scahill, “When US tanks rolled into Iraq in March 2003, they brought with them the largest army of ‘private contractors’ ever deployed in a war” (*The Guardian*). In 2005, there were over 20,000 private security contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan; approximately 1,200 of those were Latin American citizens (McDonnell). Reports from 2007 indicate that there were well over 48,000 security contractors in Iraq, adding that, “There are now 630 companies working in Iraq on contract for the US government, with personnel from more than 100 countries offering services ranging from cooking and driving to the protection of high-ranking army officers. Their 180,000 employees now outnumber America’s 160,000 official troops” (Scahill). In 2008, news sources cited “several thousand” Latin American civilian guards in the Middle East, most guarding sites and officers in Baghdad’s Green Zone (Scahill). Although most of the Latin American contractors were former soldiers and police officers with experience fighting rebels in their home countries, many of them came from the margins and poorer circles of their societies. This business model, which relies on poorly paid workers from third world countries to staff operations, is a highly profitable one. Recruiting civilians as guns-for-hire, U.S. companies privatized, and made a killing off of, the War on Terror.

These practices not only raise concerns over the hiring of civilians for private armies, but also call into question the use of impoverished populations to fight wars orchestrated by powerful global forces like the United States and its multi-billion dollar corporations. A Peruvian official questioned the legality of these practices back in 2005,

stating: “Our country is a signatory of the Geneva Convention, which prohibits hiring persons to involve them in foreign conflicts” (qtd. in McDonnell). Even at home politicians questioned the practice. Dennis Kucinich, who opposed military action in Iraq from the very beginning, questioned the use of mercenaries during a House investigation: “To have half of your army be contractors, I don't know that there's a precedent for that” (qtd. in Scahill).

These responses, from both South and North America, expose the shared apprehension created by the privatized war practice; politics and policy, however, drive the motives of each speaker. In *La flor de la Chukirawa*, the voice of the mother joins these protests, personalizing the story and allowing the marginalized a voice of their own within this debate. More importantly, the image of dead son takes center stage as the events and consequences of his life are exposed for all to see.

Residing in the world below, the son occupies the ukhu pacha space of the stage. Acting out his military training through a series of movements in a scene entitled “War,” the son aimlessly obeys commands. Standing at attention, saluting, and piling sand bags, he ends each physical movement with a loud: “Yes ser” (9). Deliberately mispronounced, his response to the commands only intensifies his misplacement in Iraq. At the end of the scene he begins to run frantically as the sound of war fills the stage. In the instant he is shot, he cries out, “Mamaaa!” Unheard, he falls to the floor, dead. Neither his mother nor the Earth Mother, in the kay pacha of the stage, can help him; he will never be returned to his mother or the Pachamama of his native Ecuador. Because he served for less than a week alongside the army, the U.S. government withheld payment for his services and refused to transport his body home, instead burying him in Iraq. Killed by a bullet, the

“hero” lies in an unmarked grave; his becomes just another subaltern body lost to the ravages of war.



Figure 9. The son cries “Mamaaa!” as he is shot.

Privatized practices promote the abuse of Latin American and other foreign recruits in times of war. Like the son in the play, those who sign up to make money become faceless and expendable. They are only valuable so long as they help return a profit, and with a seemingly limitless supply of impoverished citizens across the globe to recruit from, these capitalist corporate machines can continue to place profit above humanity. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels remind us of capital, laborers “who must sell themselves piece-meal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce,”

losing “all individual character” and becoming “an appendage of the machine” (25). In the context of Iraq, the bodies of these Latin American recruits become part of the war machine. For many, appendages, limbs, and bodies are lost in the process.

These Latin American recruits are not only at the mercy of capital, but also subject to the oppressive forces of writing (in this instance, written contracts). Diana Taylor, in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, notes the historical use of writing in the Americas as a form of oppression that began with colonization:

Writing now assured that Power, with a capital P, as [Angel] Rama puts it, could be developed and enforced without the input of the great majority of the population, the indigenous and marginal populations of the colonial period without access to systematic writing [...] Those who controlled writing, first the friars, then the *letrados* (literally, “lettered”), gained an inordinate amount of power. Writing also allowed European imperial centers—Spain and Portugal—to control their colonial populations from abroad. (18)

The power of written edicts, laws, and contracts to exploit and control a population has continued well into the 21st century, and with literacy rates still low in the Americas, not everyone has fair and equal access to the archive. Noting Taylor’s genealogy of writing as power, from the friars to the *letrados*, and understanding the way governments have used writing as a means of oppressing minority groups within their borders over the centuries, it seems that capitalist corporations have inherited the power of the written word passed on through Latin America since the time of the Conquest.

The parallel between imperial Spain and Portugal during colonial rule, and the capitalist corporations currently based in the U.S., indicates that writing from abroad continues to threaten and limit individual freedom and agency within Latin America today. The Triple Canopy work contract, for example, states that the signatory “exempts the government of the United States, the hiring company and its subsidiaries from all responsibility for each of the claims, losses, damages and injuries that may occur” (Paz). Some companies do offer compensation for serious injuries, but the largest complaint by human rights organizations is access to these services. In order to gain benefits it is necessary for the recruits to navigate an overwhelming system of paperwork. The inability of many of them to read and write, necessary skills in this exchange of documentation, becomes a disadvantage and liability, further opening them to the possibility of exploitation.

In addition to the ethics involved in these contracts, there is a moral concern associated with placing a monetary value on human life. The questions that stem from these practices seem endless: Is this business or war? Are these contractors civilians or part of the military? Who holds responsibility for them—the U.S. or the corporation? Can a business contract put a price on life? Will these practices continue and will they change the future of war? And, most importantly for this paper, what are the ethical issues associated with a first world nation hiring third world people to fight a war in its name in a different third world nation?

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the War on Terror—defined and orchestrated by the Bush Administration—called for an international response that allowed the U.S. almost limitless absolution from its military action against those it labeled “the enemies

of freedom.”¹⁶ The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent war in Iraq were supported by the Western superpowers: the United Kingdom, NATO, the U.N, and countless other nations justified the response as a matter of international security. Surprisingly, support also came from a number of “peripheral” nations. Latin American support for the invasion of Iraq included military support from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, and political support from Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica (Tokatlian 7). Whether through empathy, pity, or fear—or perhaps even a cathartic combination of all three—the reaction from abroad allowed the U.S. virtual global hegemonic military control.¹⁷

The lack of a discovery of weapons of mass destruction signaled a turn in international support of the U.S. presence in Iraq. In Latin America—with its history of military dictatorships, civil war, and abuse by the U.S. military—the anti-war sentiment was strong. At home the Bush Administration was able to contain/erase the images of the deceased bodies from the war, but in Latin America news sources had no such limitations. As the number of dead soldiers and civilians continued to rise, and as these images flooded the news circuits, popular opposition to the U.S. and its occupation of Iraq intensified. The citizens of Latin America were enraged by the abuses taking place in the privatized, false war. Responses ranged from petitions and boycotts to rallies and mass civil disobedience. In March 2007, as President Bush conducted a five-nation tour

¹⁶ President George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 31, 2006.

¹⁷ Before the war turned to corporate business practice, the Bush Administration first reached out to its allies and neighbors using an almost universal rhetoric of fear and compassion. Within our own hemisphere, the immediate response to 9/11 was one of solidarity with the United States. As mentioned above, several Latin American nations provided ground support for the invasion of Iraq. But the support offered to the U.S. was not only military. Support came in a variety of forms and from different locations, political and artistic, surprising and expected. In Cuba, for example, billboards of Fidel Castro with the slogan “*Cuba contra el terrorismo*” (“Cuba against terrorism”) appeared immediately after the attacks. This public rejection of terrorism and assurance that the Cuban government stood against the actions of 9/11, demonstrates, surprisingly, Castro’s affinity with the U.S.

of Latin America, protests broke out in Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico, along with over 30,000 people taking to the streets in Brazil (Democracy Now).



Figure 10. Graffiti on the streets of Quito in 2007.

In Ecuador, popular forms of resistance and opposition to the War in Iraq were manifested in many ways. One of the more expressive and democratic art forms, graffiti, began to appear as a type of guerrilla art in the streets of Quito. Slogans that read “*Fuera Yanquis de America Latina*” (“Yankees Get Out of Latin America”) and “*Bush=Diablo*” (“Bush=Devil”) drew upon the historic imperial tendencies of the U.S. in their critiques. Portraits of Bush with “*Asesino*” (“Murderer”) as the subtitle, one of the more common graffiti works, appeared extensively throughout Quito in 2007. One graffiti artist I interviewed noted the parallel between his work in Ecuador and the war-inspired

paintings of Pablo Picasso and Oswaldo Guayasamín (Rios interview). Picasso's famous words on the relationship between art and politics—"No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy"—and the graffiti artist's identification with the famed painter, allow for an informed and more inclusive reading of graffiti as political art (Picasso 487). Picasso, appalled and inspired to react against the Spanish Civil War, saw his work as a politically necessary response to violence. The graffiti created by the Ecuadorian street artists took on this same meaning, bringing the message to the public sphere and to the attention of the people.

Contraelviento, inspired by these events, turned to theatre as a way of coping with the war and the Latin American responses to terror. Vallejo, speaking of Contraelviento's work, says: "Theatre, as we have come to understand it, can create an appropriate space to explore ideological confrontation and struggle" (Vallejo interview). Like fellow Latin American theatre practitioners, including Augusto Boal, Enrique Buenaventura, Yuyachkani, and Griselda Gambaro, Contraelviento is utilizing theatre for social critique, public discourse, popular resistance, and the implementation of ideology within its oppressive and violent society. As Boal says, "the theater is a weapon. A very efficient weapon [...] in the necessary transformation of society" (Boal ix-x). Doris Sommer, along the same lines, looks to creativity grounded in culture as a popular means of resistance. She calls this "cultural agency," and defines it as "creative reflection that amounts to civic contribution" (Sommer 3).

La flor de la Chukirawa, stemming from this Latin American trajectory of theatre as a tool of resistance, gives voice to the marginalized, abused, and forgotten segments of Ecuador's society. What makes this play unique, however, is that it operates on multiple

levels of subjectivity, each originating from within a different marginal/liminal space. The play interrogates the practices of the War on Terror, as well as the imperial and capitalist forces driving the war, from Latin American, Andean, indigenous, working-class, and feminist perspectives. This five-tiered critique, interweaving and resituating the different socio-historical-economic contexts of these sites, creates multiple positionalities from which to interrogate and challenge the authority of the United States. Teatro Contraelviento, in their play, chooses an unlikely protagonist that uses her multiple references of marginality as a way of (re)negotiating her place between the local and the global. Within the global theatre of war that abused the Latin American body, Teatro Contraelviento created a piece that resisted a Western model of responding to terror. As a form of multi-vocal critique, the play stands in opposition to the first set of artistic responses that immediately followed 9/11. Without departing too far from *La flor de la Chukirawa*, I would like to look briefly at two pieces containing Latin American perspectives that were created in the United States shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

“*El Ultimo Adios*” (“The Last Goodbye”), a song that quickly rose to the top of the Spanish music charts, was released on September 20, 2001. It was written by Peruvian singer Gian Marco and producer Emilio Estefan, Jr. Over 40 of the most popular Latina/o recording artists from across Latin America came together to record the single as an act of solidarity with the residents of New York and the people of the United States.¹⁸ The song is dedicated to the families who lost loved ones in the terrorist attacks. The performance, a polyphonic and artistic union of U.S.-Latina/o and Latin American

¹⁸ Some of the more popular artists in the recording include: Ricky Martin, Celia Cruz, Gloria Estefan, Paulina Rubio, Thalía, Alicia Villarreal, José Feliciano, Alejandro Sanz, Ana Gabriel, Carlos Vives, Jennifer Lopez, Ana Bárbara, Shakira, Gian Marco, Miguel Bosé, Los Tigres del Norte, and Christina Aguilera.

citizens, transcended borders as it reminded the listening public that, “*Nadie va a cambiarnos / Nadie nos va hacer perder la fé / Nadie va a callarnos / Nuestra fuerza vuelve a renacer.*” [“Nobody will change us / Nobody will make us lose faith / Nobody will silence us / Our strength will be born again”]. The song continues by reassuring the public, “*Y estamos unidos por amor*” [“And we are united by love”]. The artists, united with the public through this love, perform the global pain and suffering activated by the terrorist attacks (and endlessly perpetuated by the media). For the recording artists, the path toward healing was to be found in performance, camaraderie, and faith. The song, however, also contains a few lines that can be read as a call for a peaceful reaction to the terrorist attacks: “*Ni todo el rencor, ni la venganza / Nos va a poder calmar las ganas / De ver de nuevo aquellas caras.*” [“Not all the resentment, or revenge / Will calm our desires / To once again see those faces”]. These lyrics are especially revealing when taken into account that some of the artists involved in the recording came from Argentina, Chile, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Peru—nations that experienced severe forms of state-sponsored terrorism that resulted in the murder and disappearance of hundreds of thousands of Latin American civilians. That these artists would advocate against violence indicates that reactions to terrorism, still very present in the Latin American collective memory, can take on many forms. The U.S. reaction—the War in Iraq—developed from a need to heal into a need for revenge. The different artistic responses from within Latin America challenge this dominant ideology and offer alternative histories to 9/11 and Iraq.

On the stage, Anne Nelson’s *The Guys* was one of the first American plays to deal with the aftermath of 9/11. First performed at the Flea Theater in New York City on

December 4, 2001, the play, like *La flor de la Chukirawa*, stages its plot as a dialogue between a reporter and a witness. In *The Guys*, Joan, an editor, is asked to help a fire captain write the eulogies he must deliver about the men in his station that lost their lives in the chaos that followed the attacks. Throughout the play, discussions of patriotism, heroism, and duty find their way into the personal stories of the firemen. Memorializing and honoring the deceased, *The Guys* is as much about coping with pain and suffering as it is about reifying American patriotism.

The monologue I am most interested in, however, is Joan's recollection of a trip she took to Argentina shortly after the terrorist attacks. Her interactions with the Argentine writers she meets bring up the subject of censorship: "'The United States is living under total military censorship,' they said. [...] 'The military won't let the newspapers publish pictures of the bodies'" (Nelson 29). Greatly disturbed by the comments, Joan explains, "People don't need pictures. People don't *need* pictures" (30). But to an Argentine public who survived the violence of the "Dirty War," pictures of the disappeared were necessary to make visible the victims of terror. The physical evidence of photographs was also an assurance that their bodies would make it into the archive. Within an Argentine national context, the absence of pictures could easily mean an absence of a crime. Evidence—bodies—were necessary. Joan, coming from a U.S. point of view, cannot understand the Argentine reactions from within their historical context.¹⁹

This complex issue of (mis)identification, a trope that continues to appear in *La flor de la Chukirawa*, reveals itself again in a conversation Joan has with an Argentine female. The woman, a mother of one of the disappeared, told the newspapers that she felt

¹⁹ For more on the relationship between performance and the "Dirty War" in Argentina, see Diana Taylor's *Disappearing Acts* (Duke UP, 1997).

glad when the planes hit the towers: “We all know who was in those towers, she said. American imperialists... had it coming” (30). The mother’s critical stance toward U.S. imperialism abroad, and probably more specifically about its interventionist history in Latin America, alienates her and does not allow for a more compassionate reaction—she sees the attacks not as an isolated event but as a reaction to a series of events.

Unlike the Latina/o recording artists who felt pain, empathy, and a sense of *communitas* with U.S. citizens through the attacks, this woman felt satisfaction because in her eyes the U.S. deserved what happened on 9/11. Joan, reflecting on the woman’s accusations, says: “But I kept thinking about it. I realized that everything the Argentines were saying was about their own war twenty years ago. They thought it was about them. Everybody, all over the world, was talking about it. Writing about it. And they all—they all—thought it was about them! But it’s not. It’s about us! Isn’t it?” (Nelson 30). Joan initially feels that the Argentine people she encountered, and perhaps even the world, are misinterpreting the events of 9/11. She is angered that they would draw comparisons between the terrorist attacks in the U.S. and their own histories of terror. For Joan, the tragedy belongs to “us”—U.S. citizens. But in the conversations that took place in Argentina, both sides looked at the event through their own national discourse and history. Unable to remove themselves from their local context, a miscommunication occurred, leaving both sides frustrated and angry.

The Argentine mother may have seemed like the exception to Joan, but many people did in fact see the events of 9/11 as a direct result of American imperial

interests.²⁰ American poet/playwright Amiri Baraka, in his poem “Somebody Blew Up America,” lists a number of human rights abuses he sees as a result of U.S. violence and oppression over the centuries; he places blame for the terrorist attacks back onto the U.S. government. In October 2001, after the poem’s publication, controversy exploded. In addition to Baraka, other forms of resistance to Iraq developed into public outcries of controversy and betrayal. Both at home and abroad, criticism directed toward the U.S. was understood as antagonistic and inflammatory. To paraphrase the Bush doctrine, and the general public reaction following 9/11: you are either with us or against us.

But Joan’s final question in her monologue—“Isn’t it?”—reveals the uncertainty created when two distinct and competing perspectives converge. By decentering the U.S. from the events of 9/11 (a move that still seems impossible today), and taking into account the reactions from multiple sites, we can achieve a polyphonic understanding of the attacks as an international event and global game changer. Without this decentering it may be impossible to fully understand the reactions to 9/11 from outside our borders.

Immediately following the terrorist attacks, the U.S. was trying to cope with the tragedy, but it also demanded foreign “charity” and “solidarity” in the form of military support. *The Guys*, as an artistic response, offered New York City theatergoers one way to respond to the loss as a community. But as Jodi Kanter says about 9/11: “The World Trade Center Site [...] is exhibit A of our inability to mourn collectively in America. Before the towers were finished falling, it had been transformed from a site of grief into a site of war—indeed, the very center or “ground zero” of global retaliation” (1). Kanter’s

²⁰ It is not the point of this paper to determine the accuracy of such responses, but rather to explore the artistic reactions to this modality of thinking, relating these reactions to 9/11 and the War in Iraq, as well as the use of foreign civilians in combat.

assertion that we possess an “inability to mourn collectively in America,” may help explain our violent reaction to 9/11.

The Latin American responses to 9/11 and Iraq, beginning with empathy and solidarity and ending in resentment and outrage, were a reflection of this inability to mourn. In *La flor de la Chukirawa*, a play about a mother mourning the loss of her son, the U.S. reaction to terrorism is more about revenge than loss. Justifying the need for a quick and violent response to terror, the interviewer defends the need for more violence: “The thing is that in this world there are wars, that freedom is always in danger, that some people want to plant the seeds of terrorism and disturb order. What we want is peace” (Vallejo 5). Unable to understand how military violence will lead to peace, the mother questions the reporter’s defense of the war.

Rather than answer her questions, however, the reporter turns to the topics of modernity and civilization, two of the chief goals of modern Ecuador. As such, the nation turns to outside its borders for its inspiration. Seeing the U.S. as a powerful global force and role model, Ecuador, like other nations of the Americas, falls under its control while at the same time trying to emulate its power. The 2002 “Dollarization” of Ecuador’s economy, just to give one example, exposes the danger between trying to emulate U.S. success and falling under its oppressive influence. Ecuador, caught between its desire for national autonomy and power, has to suffer the consequences of these desires, which manifest in the form of U.S. exploitation. The reporter justifies the war as a logical step in civilization’s triumph over the primitive:

To modernize the country is to learn from others who are successful and civilized, that simple. [...] Sooner or later civilization is going to triumph against barbarism.

Ah, true, true, true! Mesopotamia is the cradle of civilization, it has ancient ruins, and its culture made good things for a long time. But they've forgotten that. (7)

Referencing both Mesopotamia and the current situation of Iraq as "barbaric," the play suggests that Iraq's history of civilization and progress is now enveloped by its new role as a site of U.S. dominion. Similarly, the parallel between the Mesopotamian and Incan civilizations and the power the U.S. exerts over the modern nations of Iraq and Ecuador indicate that what is happening in Iraq may not be too distant or too different from what is happening, and may continue to happen, in the Andean nation.

Although the reporter continues to justify the war to the mother, the indigenous woman does not relent. She continues to question the role her son played in the foreign war, demanding an explanation for her great loss. In her frustration, the mother is unable to remember the names of the key players in the War on Terror:

What is the name of the country of the gringos anyway? I don't know too much, but what I do know is that they speak differently than we do. How can my son be a hero if he didn't even understand what they were telling him? Surely they must have told him one thing and he must have understood another. (5)

Through her questions the mother turns this global theatre of war into something unfamiliar. Not only does she decenter the power of the U.S. by not remembering its name, she also reverses its position by calling into question its identity from a Latin American perspective, referring to the U.S. as "*gringos*." Her questions concerning language and communication point to the problems of translation. How can someone fully understand their role in a war if they cannot even understand the language of those in charge?



Figure 11. The mother questions the reporter about her son's role in Iraq.

As she has done throughout the interview, the mother challenges the legitimacy of the media and its role as voice of the nation. She continues to ask the questions that do not occur to the journalist, and in doing so forces the audience to ask the same questions. Reflecting on nationality and service to one's country, the mother inquires:

That is something else I do not understand. The army here, all of the soldiers know the national anthem, because they are all from here. They sing the anthem because since they were children they were taught to sing it. Over in that desert, how does it work? If the people in the army are not from there, but from here,

how do they know what national anthem to sing? They don't know the gringo's national anthem, and that is the army that they are in. If they don't even know how to speak their language, then of course they're not even going to know their anthem. Do they still make them sing it? Or do they just send them off to war to fight without an anthem? (8)

Calling into question the fundamental ideals of patriotism and national belonging, the mother's questions challenge the use of foreign nationals in the War in Iraq. She also calls into question U.S. military hegemony over its Latin American employees and the blind obedience offered by the recruits. The aftermath of 9/11 was filled with images of the American flag and the sounds of the National Anthem—powerfully infused with a patriotic fervor that swept through the U.S. But in this dialogue the mother strips them of their essentialism, contesting their meaning. Without translation, and without a personal connection to the recruits, the anthem becomes meaningless. What, then, is left? Without an anthem is there still patriotism? Can it exist outside of citizenship? What happens to war when the ideals of the nation are not inscribed on the bodies, or in the voices, of its soldiers/recruits? And, within the context of Iraq, what happens when segments of the U.S. presence do not identify with the U.S.?

Although there is no actor that performs the role of the United States in the play, the mother weaves the government into the story by telling the reporter of a visit she received from a U.S. embassy official. He visits her to tell her that six days after signing his contract, her son was killed in Iraq. Not having worked long enough to earn a paycheck, and because transporting his body would have been too expensive, the son was buried in the foreign desert. She retells the story in the official's broken Spanish: "Don't

even dream of compensation, or anything. The money is needed to fight the evil of this world and to fight for our continued security. That's what he told me, that they're fighting for me, for my security" (9). Later in the play she recalls the visit once more. The official, through the voice of the mother, continues, "We feel bad for what happened to your son. In the name of the most powerful nation in the world, tanquiu" (11). As she laughs, she repeats the last words of the official, performing the failed pronunciation—"Tanquiu." Her inability to completely understand his words leaves them empty and without meaning. The United States, before the mother, presents itself as her guardian and protector; the embassy official's only condolences are the words she does not understand.

It is important to note that the U.S. can only communicate in the play with the mother as intermediary. Decentering and reshaping the practice of U.S. primacy and its foreign relations practices, the meeting between the mother and embassy official becomes a reversal of power. Though the official comes from a position of authority, and though his news and attitude can be read as acts of oppression, the mother's lack of understanding interrupts his performance of power. Furthermore, since the reporter/spectator only hears the voice of the official through the mother, he exerts little, if any, authority within the space of the theatre. Through the voice and body of an older, indigenous woman, the strong, masculine, and military presence of the U.S. is undermined on the stage.

In addition to (re)defining U.S. positionality within her locale, the mother's narration also (re)defines the hero, a theme repeated several times throughout the performance. Reflecting on the use of the word *hero* to describe her son, the mother says,

“I am proud of my son. What he did was heroic. But it was also stupid” (4). She reveals that her son signed up to work in Iraq as a way of escaping his responsibilities in Ecuador, enticed by the chance to see the world and find the answer to “what lies beyond the mountains?” (5). He joined the army without listening to his mother’s warnings: “Very stupid, I told him very clearly not to go, that over here he could help me working the earth. But he was very dumb, or very pigheaded, and wanted to get out” (5).

Nationalistic discourse in the U.S. and abroad transformed those who died in the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan into exalted heroes. Although the word was commonly used as a way of memorializing the dead, the application of the term *hero* to the deceased had an additional and alternate affect. If those who died in the War on Terror were *heroes*, then this thinking positively propelled the image of that hero, as a representative of the U.S., into the international world. A hero is someone good, a protector and savior. Doubting the war meant doubting the heroics of the dead. Built into the discourse of nation and empire, the government’s management of the war in the media capitalized on the image of the fallen. Within the play, however, the mother joins the word *hero* with the adjectives *stupid*, *dumb*, and *pigheaded*, stripping the image of its elevated status and opening it up to contradiction and critique.

By the end of the play the mother is frustrated by the continued discussion of her son’s heroic death. Finishing the interview, the reporter tells the mother that she should be happy her son died a hero and asks the older woman to smile for the camera. Unable to contain herself, the mother yells:

Now you come here with this cameraman and tell me that he was a hero, that I should be proud, to smile for the camera, that freedom of expression is secure because of fighters like him, to look at the camera when I talk and to speak slowly. And I say, why is everyone happy? The people from the embassy are happy, you and your cameraman are happy, the nation is happy, the world is happy. And I am the only stupid one who is unhappy because they killed my son, in a war that is nothing but shit, in a desert that is nothing but shit. Please no more, you can all go to hell. (9)

Unyielding and without restriction, the mother steps out of the bounds of normative behavior and creates her own reaction to the war and its consequences. Unable to hold in the rage she feels toward the injustices that have taken place, the Latin American, Ecuadorian, indigenous, female, and working-class voices combine into one as she challenges the ideology of the nation and its dissemination through the media. In the climax of the play, the mother strips the authority from the superpowers and exerts her own form of control and supremacy in a manner rarely seen in interactions between the U.S. and those living under its sphere of influence. Although not exactly what Jill Dolan had in mind, the staged moment becomes a “utopian performative,” which Dolan says, “make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better” (Dolan 6). From the multiple perspectives offered through the body of the mother, this moment is what makes *La flor de la Chukirawa* different than the other theatrical responses to U.S. supremacy and its role in Iraq.

As the interview winds down the mother begins to narrate the everyday events of her life, but the media is no longer listening to her. The reporter has the portion of the

story that she is interested in and is now looking forward to covering the events of the Miss Universe competition. After a pause the mother asks, “Did you know that when somebody gives you the flower of the Chukirawa, they mean to tell you good luck?” She puts her ear to the floor and listens carefully; the reporter does the same. “Feel it, they’re the dead that move among us. When one doesn’t have anyone to bring them one, they are the ones that bring you the flower of the Chukirawa” (11). Native to the high mountains of the Andes, the flower is connected to the land, the Pachamama, and the dead. The ancestors, who come from *ukhu pacha*, ensure that the flower circulates among the living in *kay pacha*.

At the end of the play, the mother runs over to her dead son and covers him. A ritualistic communion between the worlds has occurred. The mother picks a flower that has grown from her son’s body—it is the flower of the Chukirawa. She offers it to the journalist, but the reporter ignores her. The mother yells at her, then whispers to herself as if telling a secret, “The flower of the Chukirawa is beautiful and attractive, but it cannot be touched because it is hard and covered in thorns” (12). As the lights go down she lifts her hammer and goes back to work, breaking rocks into pebbles that will be sold for export.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NEW MESTIZA AESTHETIC: SA'AS TUN, ECHOTOURISM, AND THE MAYAN WOMEN OF THE YUCATÁN

It was a hot day in August and I was with two of the actresses from Sa'as Tun, a female Mayan theatre group based in Mérida, Mexico. The three of us were sitting on the steps of the Nunnery Quadrangle at the ruins of Uxmal, in the Yucatán peninsula. We had spent the day exploring the churches, ruins, and *cenotes*²¹ throughout the state, and this last stop at the ancient Mayan city was to be the climactic end to our day. We were eagerly exploring the vast ruins and taking in the many sights and sounds of the ancient city; it was as if walking through the remains was a way of connecting to the “authentic” Yucatec culture and past. The booth out front where we bought our tickets had promised just that: “A journey to the past. The home of the Mayan legend and people.” Like the thousands of tourists who visit the city each year, I was amazed by the beauty and grandeur of the site, and though my hosts self-identify as Mayan, the visit to Uxmal also cast them in the role of tourists. Although they had visited the site several times before, the two women stood in awe of the large stone structures, taking pictures and noticing details of the carvings that they had not seen on previous visits.

As tourists, we followed the paths and walkways that were designed to keep us within the allowed parameters of the site. At each major structure we stopped to pose for photos, and though we were interested in the history of the city, it seemed that we were sometimes more interested in the pictures, as if the photographs were proof that we

²¹ *Cenotes* are underground caves filled with water that are popular among tourists and locals. In the play *Mestiza Power*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the final scene is based on a story that describes the creation of one of these cenotes.

experienced the Mayan past. As art historian Cheryl Finley notes, “Photography is the leading authenticating action among tourists” (121). Finley, writing about tourism at colonial castles and forts in Ghana, explains: “[T]ourists initiate a number of authenticating actions that serve to validate their experiences there. Such actions, whether conscious or unconscious, endorse their positions as stake holders, enhance the way they experience the monuments and provide material evidence of their fleeting presence” (121). Moreover, Susan Sontag, in *On Photography*, notes, “It seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along. Photographs will offer indisputable evidence that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had” (9).

At Uxmal that day, the click of the camera seemed almost instinctual. The photos we were taking would become archival proof of our visit: evidence that positioned and framed our bodies within a place of prominence among the vast ruins of the ancient city. Like the Spanish chroniclers in the New World who wrote about the places they visited and conquered, we were framing the location through our own experiences and epistemology; through the framing of the photographs we controlled the gaze. We were not just “walking in the footsteps of the Maya,” as one of the flyers for the site advertised; we were documenting the location through our own individual lenses, both literally and metaphorically. We were authenticating our actions, and were also acting as if our pictures were a part of this authentic Mayan history—one created by the tourist industry for our own pleasure and consumption. Even as I recall the experience, I recognize that I am inserting my story into the history of the ancient city, positioning myself as the subject—the one who conquered—and Uxmal as the object—that which needed to be conquered.

Uxmal, one of the region's largest pre-Columbian cities, lies 78 kilometers south of Mérida. Founded in approximately 500 A.D., the city was the capital of the Mayan civilization from around 850 to 925. Along with Chichen Itza, its grand structures and elaborate carvings are some of the highest achievements of the Late Classic Period. It wasn't until 1838, however, that the first details of the site were made available to the public when the French chronicler and explorer, Jean Frederic Waldeck, published his illustrations and descriptions of the Mayan city. Since then, visitors from outside the region have been fascinated with the expansive and elaborate stone structures that stand as archival evidence of the vastness of the Mayan civilization.

Uxmal was famously visited by Carlota, the Empress of Mexico, in 1865.²² In an attempt to bolster public opinion in favor of French rule, Carlota undertook a tour of her new home as a demonstration of her connection to the Mexican people and land. Though her tour was meant to help identify her as sympathetic to Mexican history and culture, her visit to Uxmal can be read as yet another instance of European exploitation and violence. Mesoamerican culture, like Greek and Roman antiquity, was replete with sexual references that included depictions of nudity, sexual activity, and phallic structures. But unlike Greek and Roman cultures, regarded by Europeans as the foundations of Western civilization, Mesoamerican culture was barbarous and needed to be civilized. In preparation for Carlota's arrival, a large phallic structure which stood in the quadrangle was removed to avoid embarrassment and offense to the European royal. Unfortunately,

²² On September 16, 1810, Mexico declared independence from Spain. After years of war, representatives of the Spanish Crown officially signed the treaty that granted independence to Mexico in 1821. However, in the 1860s, Mexico was occupied by the French military of Napoleon III. French control lasted from 1864-1867, the period known as the "Second Mexican Empire." Napoleon hoped the new empire and monarchy would help relieve French debt, restage the grandeur of French prominence in Europe, and promote the interests of France in the Americas. Appointed by Napoleon III, Maximilian and Carlota arrived in Mexico in 1864 to become Emperor and Empress of Mexico. Defeated by Mexican forces, Maximilian was executed on June 19, 1867.

there is no record as to what happened to this stone structure after it was removed; it became just another lost and forgotten piece of Mayan civilization and culture.

In a time when Mexico—in fact, most of Latin America—was rejecting European dominion, the Mayan ruins symbolized anti-colonial sentiment; the emptiness of the barren cities represented the devastation brought to the Americas by Europe. As a European dignitary transplanted to the New World, Carlota was sitting on a throne that was not grounded in the history of its locale. An outsider living within, she was a royal descendant removed from her site of power. Visiting the city of Uxmal, the Empress must have been eclipsed by the Mayan royalty that once lived and ruled there, even if only through the remains of their once expansive city.

Carlota's visit was historic. She was the first European dignitary to tour Uxmal, but she was not the last. On February 27, 1975, Queen Elizabeth II sat at the quadrangle to witness the inauguration of the new sound and light show. This technological spectacle was developed and designed by state tourism experts to draw visitors to the locale. It was a modern updating of the ancient city in the service of tourism and capital. The hope was, ironically, to utilize 20th century technology to invoke awe and wonder in those tourists coming to explore the ruins as a part of the Mayan past. As the story goes, in what has now become popular legend throughout the Yucatán, at the point in the show where the pre-recorded voices began to call out in unison to their rain god—"Chaac! Chaac!"—it actually began to rain. As one indigenous storyteller remarked, "The god Chaac, before the European queen, showed himself still to be more powerful and present in Uxmal than anyone else. After all these years, Chaac spoke and commanded the clouds to rain down on her" (Robles interview).

Like the Empress Carlota and Queen Elizabeth II, I walked among the vast ruins of Uxmal on that musky summer night. I, too, was there to experience the grandeur of the ancient Mayan city, and although far from royalty, like them I was also a visitor in the Yucatán—an outsider. It was my first time visiting Uxmal and my two hosts were eager to show me everything the site had to offer. In addition to taking photos, the actresses acted as guides, pointing out details about the structures and narrating historical events for my benefit. More incredibly, they told me stories from their culture, merging the touristic aspects of the visit with their own acts of storytelling that came from their own lived experiences. I was an outsider, but I was granted access to Mayan culture by those living within it. On several occasions, as we made our way through the expansive site, other tourists joined us to hear what these women had to say about Uxmal and their culture.

These tourists were from the United States, Spain, Germany, Italy, and other countries, as well as a number of Mexican nationals. Like us, they traveled to the ruins to experience a part of Mayan history. Uxmal, built more than 1400 years ago, was ours to explore and take in—for a small fee. As we sat on the temple steps overlooking the stone structures and carvings, I tried to imagine what Uxmal must have looked like at the time of its glory. I was admiring the detailed stonework that had survived the centuries, but I could also see the cords, lights, and speakers that were affixed to the ruins, an odd merging of the ancient and the modern. Uxmal, in the 21st century, was decorated with state-of-the-art light and sound equipment; the artisans working the site were now the technical crew and staff.

As the light show began, and as the score echoed through the quadrangle, the feeling of awe mixed with a sensation of the melodramatic. The soundtrack, with the sounds of insects and wind, overpowered actual nature as red, blue, green, yellow, and white lights lit up the different stone structures. The narration and stories—prerecorded voices meant to portray the Mayan people of the past—proceeded to give the audience a general overview of the history of the city. The script and design invited the spectator to get carried away by the scenes and the characters. I looked around at the tourists who were wearing earphones for translations, and it struck me that the Mayan people of Uxmal, in 2010, were speaking Spanish, English, and French. The voices and remnants of the Mayan past were conveniently and strategically put on display for consumption by these tourists.

Completely subsumed by the theatricality of the spectacle, the audience was left with little opportunity for reflection or critique; the grand sound and light show at Uxmal left the spectators no room for Brechtian intervention. Although the evidence and effects of the Conquest could be found throughout the Yucatán on the bodies of the indigenous people living there, visitors to the Mexican peninsula are escorted through pre-scripted routes by the tourist industry. These outsiders are often not allowed to see, or do not want to see, the realities of indigenous life in Mexico today. Tourism in Mexico, especially the ethnotourism built around the Mesoamerican culture and people, is based on a fascination with the past—the *what was*. It does not allow the tourists to see *what is*. Throughout the Yucatán the tourist industry creates and promotes an idealized and unrealistic vision and version of the Mayan culture and past, which at its core, is an exploitation of the Mayan identity.

On the drive back to Mérida I shared my thoughts about the sound and light show with my hosts. For me, the wonder and the majesty of the ruins did not eclipse the history of conquest and destruction wrought upon the indigenous cultures of the Americas over the past 500 years. Sitting before the temples of this great civilization, I could only hear the *voices* of the Mayan people, played by actors, telling stories and echoing throughout the empty spaces where people once lived. There were no Mayan *bodies* in the show; there was no physical presence other than the large stone structures. This lack of embodiment created a convenient erasure of violence and exploitation in the name of tourism. The viewer was asked to substitute the live Mayan bodies of the Yucatán, marked by centuries of poverty, oppression, and exploitation, with the disembodied voices that echoed throughout the site. One of my hosts replied, “Yes, there were no Mayan bodies in the sound and light show. But *we* were there.” She smiled and nudged me with her elbow, pointing out that the two actresses—who self-identify as mestizas—were the very Mayan bodies that were not present in the grand spectacle. Since they were not scripted into the show, the women’s presence opened up a space for challenging the performance as an inauthentic product of tourism. Though the tourist industry attempts to make visible and invisible certain indigenous bodies, depending on whether or not they engender profit, it cannot control all bodies within its sphere of influence.

In this chapter I am interested in the ways that two distinct types of performance—tourism and traditional theatre—construct and project the image of the Mayan body in Mexico, in particular in the Yucatán, and the ways outsiders interact with the concept of indigeneity through these staged scenarios of contact. By framing the Mayan body within the tourist industry, I demonstrate the ways that these individuals

become objects carefully scripted for advertisement, sale, and consumption by market forces in the benefit of tourism. Understanding that these practices began with conquest and colonialism—from Columbus’s scripting of the indigenous body into a performance of transatlantic consumption, to the practice of putting indigenous bodies on display for scientific and entertainment purposes—I examine the present relations between the indigenous communities of the Yucatán and the outsiders who (mis)read and (mis)label these individuals at almost every encounter.

Scripted Performance: Mayan Bodies and Echotourism

I begin my analysis by examining tourism as performance. In her book *Destination Culture*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes the case for reading tourism through the lens of performance studies, noting that both are live actions. For her, tourism operates as way of understanding past and present society (1998). My own visit to Uxmal with the actresses was premised on my desire for a “live” encounter with the past. The tourist industry, exploiting this desire, markets interactions between indigenous and non-indigenous individuals in the Yucatán. Whether it is a visit to archaeological sites, witnessing a weaving or cooking demonstration, touring a village or home, interacting with individuals in shops and markets, or viewing a dance or music performance, these activities are scripted and mediated by the tourist industry in the service of capital. The indigenous bodies performing before the tourists gain value through the profits they help to generate.

I am especially interested in performances that engage and subvert these popular and scripted notions of indigeneity by deconstructing history and allowing the indigenous voice its own space in the public sphere. With a focus on the body—both from an outside

and inside perspective—the performances I analyze complicate the power of the gaze and the concepts of visibility and invisibility. I examine the work of Sa’as Tun, a female indigenous theatre group from Mérida, under the leadership of Concepción León, as one of these acts of urgency. León’s plays speak from an engaged and informed image of the female Mayan body, utilizing ethnographic research, creation stories, and traditional rituals and ceremonies as source material and inspiration. In particular, her play *Mestiza Power* gives voice and visibility to the Mayan female community, generating discourse on gendered discrimination and violence, as well as the exploitative effects of globalization and capitalism on indigenous women in the Yucatán. The play can also be understood as a theatrical response to what I am calling *echotourism*

I define *echotourism* as scripted activity that projects tourists’ preconceived ideas and images of a society onto the people and culture they are visiting, which is then reflected back to the viewer as an authentic encounter. Like an echo—the reflection of a sound—the images and experiences returning to the tourists are a reflection of the tourists’ own creation, or one implanted in them by the tourist industry. In either case, the encounter is predetermined by scripting and expectation—in service of the tourist and the tourist industry—and most often at the expense of the society being visited. Like photographs taken at sites like Uxmal, the image and experience of the culture is determined and framed by the tourist’s position and point of view at the time the snapshot is created. The tourist chooses what to include and not to include in the pictures, and these photos reflect and document the experiences from a position of privilege. Within the structures of echotourism, locations, cultural practices, and native bodies are not

allowed agency or subjectivity; they are merely objects available for the consumption and pleasure of the tourist classes, which in turn fuel and feed the capital market of tourism.

Caught within this cyclical pattern of exploitation, the Mayan bodies of the Yucatán are scripted as objects and symbols in a performance of “discovery,” where the tourist gets to play the role of *conquistador* on a journey to a new world, ready to discover and conquer the land, culture, and people. These instances of contact between tourists and the communities they visit are similar to what Diana Taylor, in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, calls “scenarios of discovery” (53). The legacy of conquering and exploiting the indigenous body, with the tourist as inheritor, has been passed on through the centuries, beginning with Columbus and the arrival of the Spanish. For Taylor, “The scenario of discovery is theatrical indeed” (56). The elaborate and carefully scripted performances by Columbus and the other conquistadores that claimed the lands of the New World in the name of Spain were not only a legal formality, but also a performance of coercion and erasure. Taylor continues: “The ‘primitive’ body as object reaffirms the cultural supremacy and authority of the viewing subject, the one who is free to come and go (while the native stays fixed in place and time), the one who sees, interprets, and records. The native is the show; the civilized observer the privileged spectator” (53). In this scenario, the non-native is director and audience, staging the play and watching the native bodies perform their assigned roles. Over five hundred years later, the same power structure is in play under tourism: the outsiders (tourists and the tourist industry) control and observe while the insiders (natives) perform their roles of submission.

In his 1992 performance *El Warrior for Gringostroika*, Latino performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Peña appears onstage, masked, with the words “Please don’t discover

me!” written on his torso (See figure 1). Stepping in as a surrogate for the indigenous communities “discovered” by Columbus, he marks his plea on his body, emphasizing the very physical and violent consequences that moment had on the indigenous populations of the Americas. More powerful than spoken or written dialogue, the visual image of the ethnic body marked in this way recalls the history of genocide experienced by native communities through colonialism. In early colonial times, native people were marked as different, and given less value, because of the way they looked. Gomez-Peña, dressed in a *mariachi* outfit and wearing a leopard-print wrestling mask, creates a distorted image of the objectified ethnic individual, whose face is hidden but body is on display. Not much has changed in this history—the native body is still an “other” in need of definition and civilization, and the dominant non-native culture still has a difficult time marking itself against these differences. Today, indigenous bodies, for the most part, are ignored in the public sphere. In Mexico, as in many other nations across Latin America, native communities are additionally exploited in the name of tourism. It isn’t until accusations of mass murder and genocide are made that these bodies begin to take on a different meaning. This, however, means that only in death does the native body count. And, of course, this would not help promote tourism. Gomez-Peña’s “Please don’t discover me!” demands an audience and a response. But it is also an empty plea. Discovery cannot be undone; the past cannot be changed. It can be rewritten, however, but rarely in the benefit of the indigenous communities.

Within Mexican national history, indigenous identity is constantly transformed and redesigned in the name of the nation and its citizenry. Even more so, the Mayan body becomes destabilized in the context of the tourist industry, where the performed

“authentic” versions of Mexico are put on display for outsider viewing and pleasure.

Within the structure of echotourism, what the tourist wants to see is what the tourist gets to see. With every misinformed encounter between the indigenous and the non-indigenous, a space is created for a restaging of the Conquest.

My own inability to recognize my hosts’ bodies while witnessing the inauthentic spectacle of commercial tourism built around the image of Uxmal reflects the damaging and exploitative results of the commodification of Mayan culture. Though I knew that these women were Mayan, the sound and light show created an atmosphere of essentialism. Being surrounded by the grandeur of the ruins, I was carried away by the spectacle that claimed itself as the vehicle for my “authentic” and “live” experience of Mayan culture. The show so effectively omitted Mayan bodies from the experience that I couldn’t even recognize the visible bodies sitting next to me. Such spectacles, like the sound and light show, contribute to the erasure of the Mayan identity within the context of the global market. Either erased entirely from the public gaze, or confined within a narrow rubric of permitted behavior, the indigenous body is both a liability and an asset to tourism. Throughout Mexico, officials and members of the tourist industry work to keep impoverished individuals and their communities out of view. This “out of sight, out of mind” mentality allows tourists to experience a sanitized and comfortable vacation experience, without having to reflect on the social conditions and economic inequalities of those living within the zones that intersect the tourist routes. For the visitor, Mexico is a destination, a vacation and a fantasy; it does not have to be experienced as reality.

Getting to know the “locals,” however, is as much a desired part of the tourist experience as visits to beaches, museums, and archaeological sites. The indigenous

populations of the country, in particular, are one of the most popular aspects of tourism in Mexico. As Walter E. Little explains in *Mayas in the Marketplace: Tourism, Globalization, and Cultural Identity*, “Mayas who perform life for tourists’ consumption are selling a package that includes the handicraft, the life behind the handicraft, a place, and their cultural identity” (267). Stops and visits in local villages allow visitors to purchase handcrafted goods, including textiles, stonework, and woodwork, in addition to mass produced items like t-shirts, mugs, magnets, and figurines. Sold by indigenous hands, these items seem more “authentic” to the buyer. Stops in restaurants outside popular Mayan ruins include meals and “traditional” performances by indigenous singers and dancers, most often women and children. The image of the Mayan body in beautiful and ornately woven dresses and shirts presents a safe and clean version of the Mayan reality. As Rigoberta Menchú, the Mayan Nobel Prize winner, observes, “What hurts Indians most is that our costumes are considered beautiful, but it’s as if the person wearing it didn’t exist” (204). These individuals, donning costumes and acting out a sanitized script for their audience, return to a less glamorous lifestyle once they return home from their workplace.

For these performers—whose daily act of playing out their expected roles for tourists is a means of survival—the line between the public and the private spaces of their lives becomes blurred. Little, describing the lives of Mayan women in Mexico and Guatemala, calls them “public figures,” though it can be argued that their public visibility is also predicated on their invisibility. He continues:

Their images are featured in hotels, restaurants, airports, and other places frequented by tourists [...] not only are Maya women represented in tourism

brochures, guidebooks, postcards, and advertising campaigns, their images are used in newspaper articles on crime, the economy, and health reports that are not related to handicrafts sales. (276)

Reduced to images and a generalized representation of their culture, these indigenous individuals are defined by the photographs and statistics archived in public advertisements and documents. For them, agency is not possible; the embodiment of their culture belongs to those who manage their image within public spaces: the tourist industry, media, nation, and political parties, just to name a few of the forces that control the representation of Mayan life in the public sphere.

For theatre and performance scholars, the indigenous body merits special attention. In her book *Contemporary Theatre in Mayan Mexico: Death-Defying Acts*, Tamara L. Underiner recalls a billboard advertisement she saw in 1996 inside a Mexico City subway stop. The advertisement read, “More than a news item, Chiapas is...” (45). As Underiner recalls, the advertisement described the flora and fauna used to entice visitors to the southern Mexican state, which had dominated news headlines as the site of the armed Zapatista revolution, which began on January 1, 1994, the day NAFTA went into effect. She recalls:

The billboard assured travelers that Chiapas was still the unspoiled wilderness of exotic creatures—including the Maya—they might have heard so much about, before those irksome Zapatistas came, with their ski masks and their bullet belts, and scared everyone away. Here, the Maya of Chiapas were presented as linked to the natural, uncivilized world of wonders—much as the New World was presented to Europe in the first century after its discovery. (45)

The billboard was as much about the colonial encounter of the sixteenth-century as it was about getting tourists to return to the indigenous sites of Chiapas. The scenario of discovery and contact was being advertised and sold as a desirable escape into the past.

The desire to be a part of this past, like my visit to Uxmal, is fueled by what Kirschenblatt-Gimblett calls “heritage tourism,” which she describes as a “‘value added’ industry” (150). Heritage organizations, she continues, “ensure that places and practices in danger of disappearing because they are no longer occupied or functioning or valued will survive. It does this by adding the value of pastness, exhibition, difference, and, where possible, indigeneity” (150). Like other aspects of the tourist industry, heritage tourism strives for capital. As scholar Myra Shackley, who has theorized the notion of heritage, notes: “Myths and legends are often used as the basis for a heritage tourism product and create powerful and romantic subliminal images. When reinforced by heritage themes, these are widely used to create images in advertising and may be combined into powerful marketing devices for tourism” (318). These constructed and romanticized images of the past erase the current realities of Mayan individuals and mask them in a culture of timelessness and myth.

This fascination with the past, an almost obsessive desire to experience and consume the Mayan people and culture, is a continuing crisis in the indigenous communities of the Americas. The fact that the Yucatec Maya have been able to resist centuries of extermination, oppression, and exploitation is a testament to the native spirit of resistance and change. But even as awareness of indigenous rights and identity grows at an international level, so too does the demand for indigenous-centered tourism. This fascination with an accessible and universal Mayan culture—one reified through

echotourism—is not always centered on Mayan bodies. Popular obsession with 2012 as the end of the Mayan calendar, which many believe predicts the end of the world, for example, comes from a deep misunderstanding of Mayan identity and history—one that does not even concern itself with the bodies of these people or their modern conditions. As Underiner rightly notes:

Even when contemporary Maya are mentioned, they are portrayed as the scattered descendants of their glorious progenitors—living clues to ancient mysteries—or as the suppliers of collectible handicrafts produced according to age-old traditions. Rarely is the current social, political, and economic situation considered in invocations of these peoples, who are situated squarely within—and interactive with—capitalist systems on a global scale. (xii)

When seen as objects and commodities that link tourists to the past, the bodies of these individuals do not matter. They are merely intermediaries that provide “authentic” and “mythical” experiences to those who can afford them. In her analysis of the tourist gaze, Underiner points to Jacinto Arias, the Mayan intellectual and writer, who coined the term “idiophagy.” For Arias, idiophagy describes the “gobbling up of Indian products [as] a symbolic act that reflects the real intention of swallowing the Indian people” (28).

Tourism, as consumption of the native body in the 21st century, is a surrogate for the genocidal project that began in the 15th century under colonialism.

Sa’as Tun: The Female Mayan Body and Mestiza Power

Underiner sees the contemporary theatre being created by Mayan artists in Mexico as a key to challenging this violence and exploitation: “Taken seriously as art and as action, theatre in Mayan Mexico—an area of cultural contestation, contradiction, and

collaboration—can be seen as emblematic of ongoing struggles indigenous artists face in neocolonial contexts everywhere” (xiii-xiv). The struggle to stage themselves and their stories, for many Mayan artists, has led to the creation of performances that serve as cultural interventions on behalf of the Mayan people and history. In the Yucatán, these types of performances are challenging and confronting the dominance and effects of echotourism. From regional theatre that utilizes mestizas and mestizos as protagonists, to song, dance, and storytelling events created by indigenous individuals, performances being created by and about the Yucatec Mayan communities are restaging their own stories within Mexico’s complicated history of indigenous and non-indigenous relations.²³ One of the groups creating this type of work is Sa’as Tun, a collective of theatre women whose works are inspired by the Mayan culture of the Yucatán. Sa’as Tun is redefining the way that the Mayan female body is being presented and received in the public sphere, and their presentations at local, national, and international theatres challenge the inaccurate representations of their culture outside of indigenous communities and Mexico.

In 2005 Concepción León Mora formed the group Sa’as Tun. Using Mérida as its home base, and the people and culture of the Yucatán as inspiration for their shows, Sa’as Tun has staged six original pieces written by León: *Mestiza Power* (2005), *Las creyentes*

²³ Though I recognize that scholars—including Octavio Paz, Gloria Anzaldúa, Alicia Arrizón, and Ellen Gil-Gomez—have famously theorized *mestizaje* and the *mestiza/o*, this chapter will focus on the term as it relates to indigenous individuals in the Yucatán. The term *mestiza* in the Yucatán does not carry the same signification that it does in other areas of the Americas that were colonized by Spain and Portugal, where *mestizaje* refers to people of mixed European and indigenous descent. In the Yucatán, mestizas and mestizos are people of indigenous background and heritage. Throughout the Yucatán, mestizas walk around wearing *huipiles*, colorful and traditional dresses indicative of the Mayan female identity. Most of these women travel daily from their towns to the larger cities to sell fruit and other goods at the market. The mestiza woman is the subject of the play *Mestiza Power*, which will be analyzed later in this chapter. I thank Conchi León, author of the play, for this explanation of the different uses of the word throughout Mexico

(2006), *Santificaras las fiestas* (2008), *Puch de amor* (2009), *La ropa sucia* (2009), and *Las Huiras de la Sierra Papakal* (2009). Utilizing the folk culture of the Yucatán as a premise and source for her plays, León weaves together visual and oral stories of the beauty and history of the Mexican peninsula with commentary on gender and social relations. León takes this a step further, positioning the individual bodies of those that make up the cultural source of the Yucatán above the constraints of majoritarian culture and society. Her characters take center stage in her productions because they often cannot in life. Focusing on the indigenous population, and in particular its women, Sa'as Tun is the voice of those whose images are ingrained in the visual story of the area, but who often fall under the control of tourism and capital. Although the actresses in the group come and go as other theatrical obligations take the women to different stages throughout Mexico, the current group, and the one who has staged the most work together includes: León, Salomé Sansores Lopez, and Laura Zubieta Rodriguez. According to Zubieta, “The three of us work to produce high-quality theatre and to maintain a constant Yucatec presence, locally and nationally, in Mexican theatre” (Zubieta interview).

León, known to her friends as Conchi, is one of Mexico's newest and most creative theatre practitioners. Born in 1973, she is a playwright, director, and actress, and her shows have been staged throughout Mexico, as well as in the United States, Spain, Peru, and the Philippines. She has also acted in over 70 productions throughout Mexico. León studied children's theatre, literature, folk culture, and journalism before committing herself to playwriting. From 1994-2003 she was an instructor of Creative Dramatics and Bodily Expression in the Centro Cultural del Niño Yucateco (CECUNY), where she began to form her ideas on Mayan creative expressivity, corporal language, and the use of

Yucatán culture on the stage. During her time with CECUNY she received several grants, including *Alas y Raíces a los Niños Yucatecos*, with which she conceived and staged works related to youth culture around her home state. One of the most transformational experiences of this collaboration was her work with deaf children. Utilizing the theatre as a social tool and as an avenue for those often left out of the artistic experience, León began to recognize the role that theatre could play in advancing the platform and the image of the marginalized, invisible, and forgotten within Mexican society.

León describes Sa'as Tun as emerging from “the need to create a theatrical language that speaks from the life of the Yucatán, and that is influenced by the mysticism, beauty, and memory of the indigenous people who lived and now live here” (León interview). The name of the group—Sa'as Tun—which translates from Mayan to “rock of light,” was the name given to the magical rocks that were used by the Mayan mystics to see into the past and the future. León founded the group as a way of using theatre to accomplish the same task. For her, the work arises out of the necessity to develop a theatrical language that speaks about the mysticism and memory of the indigenous Mayas of the Yucatán. Sa'as Tun presents without romanticism, sensationalism, or conventionalism, a testimony of life and dignity of the contemporary Mayan woman.

The plays of Sa'as Tun portray the indigenous female body as more than agents of cultural preservation. In her work, León incorporates local elements as strategic forms of resistance to the hegemonic and oppressive powers of nationalism, globalization, and tourism. Rather than focus exclusively on traditional and fixed notions of indigenous identity, the group blends old and new, expected and unexpected, to portray an

indigenous identity that is in constant motion and transformation. Additionally, their plays, created from and within the Mayan spaces of the Yucatán, demonstrate that modern Mayan culture is not a relic of the past, but a very present and evolving force that negotiates daily with the conflicting powers of modernity. Pairing the image of the native body with the social, racial, and economic violence that is regularly enacted upon these individuals, these works give voice to indigenous communities and create a social agenda for their audiences.

Mestiza Power is León's most successful play to date. Written in 2005, it has been performed throughout Mexico, including a performance at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Additionally, the play has been received internationally, with performances in Lima, Peru; Washington D.C.; Chicago, IL; Ithaca, NY; and Amherst, MA. The show celebrated its 500th performance in Mérida on November 30, 2010, and was attended by the state's female governor, Ivonne Ortega Pacheco, who presented the group with a commemorative plaque for their success and accomplishments.

Mestiza Power, León's first work of testimonial and ethnographic theatre, is based on interviews she conducted with indigenous women working in and around the city of Mérida. One day, after getting off a bus in the city, León saw a mestiza selling fruits on the street. As she recalls:

This mestiza I saw was wearing Ray Ban sunglasses. She really caught my attention. People were looking at her and poking fun at her for wearing them. I walked up to her and started speaking to her, asking about her fruits, her sunglasses, and her life. We started talking and I realized that she had an entire story to share and one that no one else was going to hear. That is what motivated

me to write the play. (León interview)

In that moment of (mis)recognition, León, also a mestiza—but one who lives in the city and does not embody the essentialist image of the indigenous woman—realized that this misunderstanding was only occurring because people did not want to listen to the stories of the people they were used to treating as invisible. León met with this women many times during her writing process and the two remain friends to this day. As León states in the preface to her play, “I continued ‘interviewing’ mestizas. As a way of getting to know their voice, and because of my enormous admiration for them, I created this script, which seeks to be nothing more than an homage to their dignity and our Culture” (1). The play gives voice to the marginalized community of mestiza women and gives the power of the title to them by allowing them space and prominence on the public stage; it generates a visual and oral story of struggle and survival. The play is divided into two parts: a series of interweaving dialogues between different market women around the Yucatán, and three monologues which include a domestic worker, a street vendor, and a mystic herbalist.

Mestiza Power can be read as a theatrical response to echotourism. Like tourists venturing into the Mayan areas of the Yucatán to experience the “authenticity” of native culture offered through tourism, the public viewing the play also ventures into the theatre to experience the mestiza world. However, in the context of the theatre, it is the mestizas who control the gaze; the public sees what the actresses want them to see. Whereas echotourism allows spectators to frame and define the tourist experience from within their own point of view and epistemology, Sa’as Tun, in *Mestiza Power*, possesses an agency and control that frames and stages its own versions of Mayan stories and images.

The audience, invited as tourists into the theatre to witness and experience the show, become *spec-tourists*. Like Boal's "spect-actors"—audience members actively engaged in the action taking place in the performance—the spec-tourist is asked to take on a dual role. Spec-tourists are spectators in the theatrical sense of the word, but they are also cast into the role of tourists, outsiders entering a “foreign” culture or locale for pleasure and entertainment. The mestizas in *Mestiza Power* readily embrace the touristic nature of their audiences, choosing to work within the system of tourism rather than reject it completely. This strategy, employing people's fascination with Mayan culture and history, allows the actresses to (re)create and (re)define the scenario of contact from their own perspective and in their own benefit.

For León, the image of the mestiza walking through the streets in her *huipil* is that of beauty and art: “Mestizas are walking poetry” (León interview). In Mérida, mestizas are part of the everyday landscape. Many of them come from their rural towns and villages to sell fruit and merchandise in the streets of the large city. These women passionately treasure their indigenous education: its rites, myths, and dignity. Within the play their dialect is a Mayan and Spanish mix, reflecting the lingual reality of these women's lives. León notes in the script, “Generally, they are very talkative and friendly” (1). The opening scene of the play is meant to reflect the interactions that take place among mestiza women in the marketplace—those not heard by tourists and outsiders. The spec-tourists, watching this scene, are supposed to experience the dialogue as if they were walking through a market, picking up bits and pieces of these conversations as they pass through the zones that these women occupy. The actresses embody many different types of women, becoming a chorus of those that they are meant to represent. As the

three women continue to interact with each other, the audience is allowed to eavesdrop for brief moments of time, but never entirely. In this scene, the spec-tourist is not granted an all-access pass. Rather than an echo, it is the voices of these women that reach the audience, but only the parts that women want to be heard.

At the start of the play three figures walk slowly onto the stage. There is no sound and the dim lighting allows the audience to make out only the forms of the three actresses. As the lights begin to come up, the three women stand across the stage, motionless. They are wearing huipiles—traditional hand-sewn Mayan dresses—and long colorful scarves. On top of each woman's head is a metal water basin. They balance these with precision as they begin to move about the stage in a stylized, almost ritualistic, sequence. Along the backdrop of the stage, hanging in the shadows, are gourds of various sizes: they represent the traditional water containers of the Mayan culture. The mestiza aesthetic created on the stage is a Yucatec inspired representation created from León's fieldwork, not through the imagery propagated through the tourist industry.

As the three actresses take turns lowering and placing their basins onto the stage, they pause and look into the containers. This moment of thought and reflection—as if they are looking into a pool of water—will be repeated at the end of the play when the women bathe themselves ritualistically before the spec-tourists. This brief moment also invokes the looking stones—the *sa'as tun* of the Maya—and the insight and foresight that come from the ability to see and to be seen. As León explains of the play, “The mestizas that you see on the stage possess the ability to see themselves in an individual and community context. They see where they come from and where they are, where they are

going. They are also being seen at all times, but they know it and they use it to their advantage” (León interview).

As the women transform from one mestiza to another, the rebozos that they wear act as signifiers for their characters. The ways they wear and hold their colorful woven scarves reflect the manner and style of each woman, at times even becoming an entirely different costume. At one point in the scene the women use the rebozos to cover their heads in reverence while they pray, and at another they comically throw them about as they get into an argument, using the costumes as a source of intimidation and power. Above all, the women demonstrate that the way they wear their clothing is not confined within the limits of expected behavior. The indigenous female body, on this stage, is free to express herself in any way that she sees fit and necessary.

The actresses begin by playing market women who are speaking about their health problems, the customary chatter between older workers in the market. One woman complains about her mouth “going crooked” and admits that the traditional cure of rubbing baby’s urine on her ailment did not work. The women then begin to talk about her options:

MESTIZA #3: Aren’t you going to public support?

MESTIZA #2: No way! They’ll think I’m starving to death, that I’ve got no money.

MESTIZA #3: But you don’t have no money.

MESTIZA #2: Yes, but they don’t have to know.

MESTIZA #3: How horrible! You’re prouder than me. Me, I’m going cause I don’t have a husband to support me.

MESTIZA #1: The government helps you. They give you a tiny little house, like a bird's house, but anyway, they give it for free. (3)

This quick exchange, which starts the play, establishes the tension that exists between indigenous culture and identity and the Mexican state. Immediately one mestiza suggests public support as an alternative to the failing traditional cure, but she is quickly rebuked by the woman who is ill. Rather than admit her poverty and need for assistance, the mestiza would rather suffer in silence. Her friend accuses her of too much pride, but we never hear the mestiza's response. What the audience gets instead is commentary on the other mestizas' lives: one takes government assistance because she is not married and the other has received a small plot of land. From the onset of the play, the Mayan women's history, tradition, and identities are juxtaposed with the economic, political, and social conditions present in their everyday lives in the Yucatán. This interaction reveals the reality not shown in the carefully scripted encounters of the tourist industry.

As the actresses transform from one character to another the audience continues to hear pieces of dialogue. The voices heard onstage belong to women only, allowing the spec-tourist into the female sphere, but as guests, not subjects. The women continue to speak about relationships and men. One recalls the way her mother harshly prepared her for the future: "You're a woman, tomorrow or the day after you'll get married, you'll end up with a bad husband. What will you do for your children?" (3). The daughters of the mestiza culture, from this perspective, are destined to become wives and mothers and nothing else. Trained from an early age to cook and clean, the mestizas of the Yucatán must put the needs of men and children above their own.



Figure 12. The three actresses in *Mestiza Power* play the roles of various market women in the opening scene.

The topics of men and marriage continue later in the scene, demonstrating that oppression and exploitation of the female body is also generated from within the indigenous sphere. During one exchange the women speak about their own marriages:

MESTIZA #1: When I was twelve my husband asked my papá if I could make babies with him. At first he said, 'No! She's too young to get married.' Later he said it was okay. I didn't know my husband to be. They told me: 'That's him.' And I got married and made babies.

MESTIZA #3: As for me, my husband came in and turned out to be a drunkard. When he comes to hit me, I tell him, you hit me, I endure, you fall asleep, and I

hit you. I waited for him to go to sleep, picked up the machete, and cut that hammock down. (5-6)

Though the women laugh riotously at this act of confrontation and defense, the reality is that they remain under the control of men. Marriages for these women are arranged at young ages by their fathers, and often they are expected to bear children immediately. The expectations placed on women are unavoidable, but for the men there is no real expectation or responsibility for them in relation to the family.

As the actresses move about the stage, one picks up the metal container that she entered with and begins to mix the ingredients that sit inside of it. The other mestizas do the same, each working as they continue to play their parts. One says, “When she, my mamá taught me to make tortillas, I’d flip the tortilla and break off one piece, *uas*, then another, *uas*, until she turned around, saw it, and took my hand and burned it on the *comal*. Look how quickly I learned” (3). For the young mestiza speaking, her labor as a cook did not entitle her to eat the food. The three mestizas continue to flatten out their dough, moving about the stage as they make tortillas: the sight and sound of the women preparing the traditional food transforms the auditorium into a powerful image of the female domestic sphere. It also recreates, on its own terms, the acts many indigenous women are asked to perform before tourists on visits to homes and villages. In this play, however, the women are free to speak as they please, exchanging words that would never be spoken in front of tourists taking pictures of them as they cook. It is on the stage of *Mestiza Power* that the (re)presentation of the Mayan woman is released from a strictly scripted performance created in the service of tourism.

After a few minutes the actresses stop and put down their metal containers. They take on the forms of more characters and speak about school, parents, and learning. Then, taking on the role of younger mestizas, they begin to speak about education:

MESTIZA #3: I went to school. I quit after fourth grade cause I was old, 12 years old in fourth grade, I said, better off married, why continue if I'm already so old.

MESTIZA #2: Hey, you don't know how to read!

MESTIZA #3: Who told you that? I know how to add and subtract, I can read almost everything I see. (4)

Proud of her education, though it was limited, the mestiza recognizes that she possesses abilities that are rare for women in her community. Though she chose marriage as a more successful and socially acceptable option, she recognizes and finds pride in her schooling. As the conversations in the market continue, another mestiza speaks up:

MESTIZA #1: Back then parents didn't let you study, they thought you only wanted to learn how to write so you could write letters to your boyfriend.

MESTIZA #3: They told you, don't learn anything, you'll end up supporting your man and he's the one who's supposed to support the woman, she has to make due with whatever he can come up with. (4)

Recognizing the gendered bias that exists in relation to access to education, the women have been taught that learning is either a path toward promiscuity or a lazy husband. Either way, the woman's future is tied to a man and her education brings her closer to an undesirable, but necessary, male. But one woman quickly points out that her mother wanted her to learn: "My mamá wanted me to study, but I hated it. I didn't go back to school and my mamá wouldn't let me back in the house" (4). For this young mestiza, her

refusal to get an education was the cause of her losing her home and family. For her there is no mention of a man; the market is the next logical step toward self-sustenance and survival.

By the end of the scene the spec-tourists have heard pieces of conversations from dozens of mestizas in the marketplace. The opening sequence allowed the audience to wander through these women's lives and stories, taking in the voices in a manner similar to a tourist walking through the spaces of the Yucatec markets. Never getting to know the particular women in any substantial form, the audience is presented with small facts about these women's lives: poverty, abuse, racism, and exploitation. Like the millions of tourists who visit the Yucatán each year, the spec-tourist experiences brief encounters with these mestizas, never knowing their pasts or their futures. These brief encounters, like the photos taken by tourists, exist as a moment of time.

The next scenes, however, allow the audience to get to know these women on a more personal and in depth level. In the three monologues that comprise the majority of the play, León presents the Mayan point of view through multiple generations. These monologues present three very different mestizas, each coming from a place of marginalization. In each instance the woman is presented as powerful and strong: though she is placed in circumstances of difficulty, she has made a choice to act as she sees fit, despite the expectations placed on her by society. Each woman tells her own story; the audience (outsider) can only listen.

The first monologue, "*Cuando las chachas se van*" ("When the *chachas* leave")²⁴, introduces the audience to Adrelaidina, a mestiza who has just quit her job. Her

²⁴ In Mexico, *chacha* is short for *muchacha* ("girl"). It is the name used to refer to domestic workers, who are mostly of indigenous descent.

employer, referred to in the text as a “*Señora Elegante*” (Elegant Lady), has come to Adrelaidina’s village to bring her back to work in Mérida:

Tell her, that’s not the way it’s done. It’s not possible for her to leave without even telling me, to leave with the dishes not even washed... In my house we treat her very well. She has her own room with her own TV. Why doesn’t she want to come out? Why won’t she show her face? She better not have stolen my jewelry! But I’m not leaving, I’ll wait here at the door, until she gets her things and we go back to Mérida. (9)

The voice of her employer, yelling from offstage, does not disturb Adrelaidina who lies rocking in her hammock. The young mestiza, in a symbolic act of indigenous agency, left her position as a hired servant in the city to return to her village. She quit the job that pays her very little and the family that treats her without respect. Though she is now unemployed and it remains unclear how she will support herself, she is proud of her decision. As Adrelaidina explains, “No, I’m not going back with that lady, she pays very little, and that lady, sometimes she pays you, sometimes she doesn’t” (9).

The Elegant Lady continues to yell from offstage about how well her family treated the mestiza: “She never went without, I gave her many gifts” (9). But even as her voice echoes throughout the stage, all the audience can see is Adrelaidina rolling around her hammock, twirling her fingers around the threads, and poking her toes through the small openings between the triangular knitting. In this scene the mestiza is at the center and all other figures are peripheral. In her room—her own private space—Adrelaidina can feel free from the constraints of the outside world. She is at home in her hammock, an unmistakable symbol of Yucatán life and culture. The colorful hammock onstage

evokes images of warm weather, relaxation, and calm. Draped across the stage, León uses the hammock as a contrast to the physical labor that the indigenous woman was expected to undertake in the city. Finally free from the job that drained her of energy and exploited her as cheap labor, Adrelaidina can relax within the space of her village and home.

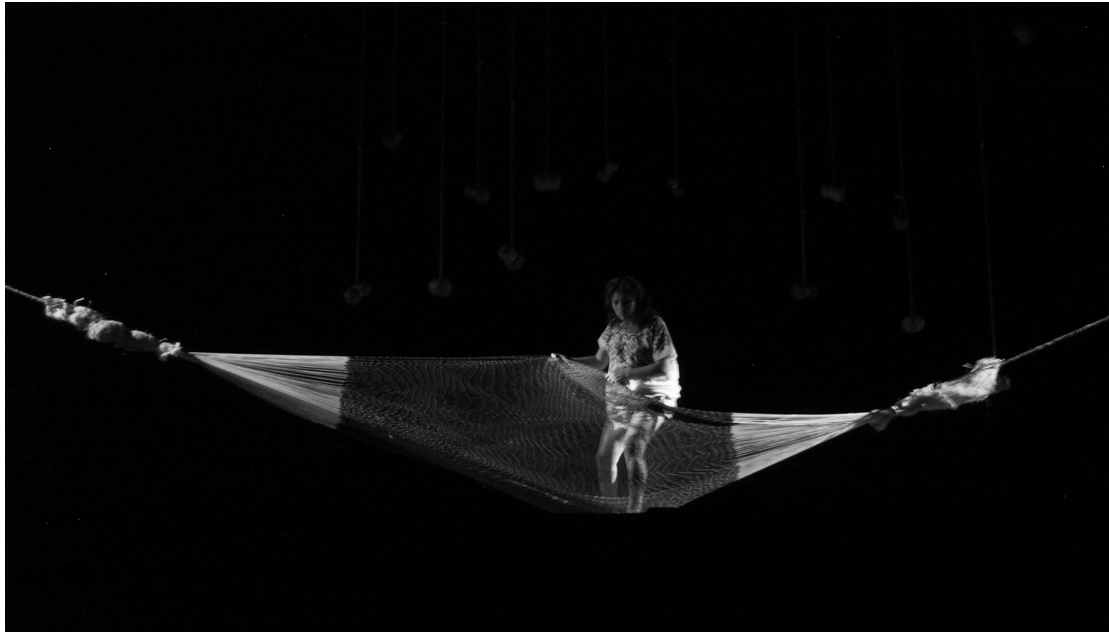


Figure 13. Salomé Sansores, as Adrelaidina, demonstrates great control and artistry as she manipulates the hammock.

The actress, in this monologue, demonstrates a meticulous, artistic, and complete control of the hammock, perhaps the only thing in her life she possesses such power over. Her style and movement is reminiscent of acrobatic and gymnastic athleticism and precision, but the ease with which she maneuvers the hammock evokes charm, comfort, and tranquility. The hammock transforms onstage: at one instant it is a womb that protects the actress, at others it is a horse and a bed. Within her hammock she is confident

and assertive, a master of her own space. She is also physically agile and unafraid of the sensuality that emerges from her *Hamaca Sutra* dance.

Adrelaidina's embodiment of female sexuality, understood within the context of the gendered violence that is common in many indigenous communities throughout Mexico, becomes a positive portrayal of the female body unafraid to reveal its own sensual nature. Though she winds and turns within the folds of the hammock, she is never objectified or put on display for consumption by the male gaze. Alone in her room, she allows her body the freedom to define itself. Before the audience she controls the spectators' gaze, just as she does her hammock.

The mestiza, now freed from her former employer, begins to tell stories of other moments when she asserted control over her life. Inevitably she begins to reminisce about her romantic encounters with men, but quickly interjects, "I'd rather be alone. I can't take men. I don't like them ordering me around. Are they going to support you? Nope" (10). Distancing herself from male authority and exploitation, and pointing out the inadequacy and failure that the *machista* attitude promotes, she proclaims, "Better off alone, I'm happy" (10). Her declaration, like the play itself, is an act of indigenous female empowerment. As León explains about the absence of men in the play, "The male has so much power over almost all aspects of life in Mexico that the play has to make a stand against the idea that it is true. This is a play about the life of the mestiza and it is only their voices and perspectives we hear" (León interview).

But Adrelaidina continues to tell stories of her encounters with men, demonstrating that although absent physically in the play, they are still a force in the lives of the women. In fact, all three women with monologues in the play—Adrelaidina, the

street vendor, and the mystic—allow the actions of the men in their lives to alter their behavior and attitudes of self. Adrelaidina is the most vocal about these relationships, allowing the audience to see her moments of weakness and vulnerability, though she later transforms them into memories of empowerment. She recalls:

Truth is, I've had boyfriends, but every last one of them ending up telling me, they're married, they have kids, this and that, and so I broke up with them. There was one I ended up loving more. I almost married him. I'd even started making my dress and everything when he suddenly told me, 'You know, I'm not going to marry you. If you want, let's go, I'll give you everything, a house, jewelry, but you stay the way you are. I'll give you everything but I won't marry you' (10)

Her relationships with men, all under false pretenses—"they're married, they have kids, this and that"—ended of her own accord, at least in the version that she tells the audience. If in Adrelaidina's fantasy the ending is supposed to be a heteronormative marriage, she never encounters the possibility, even when she begins making her dress for the wedding. Though the man offered her gifts and a promise of fidelity, he could not offer what she wanted—marriage. His refusal to marry her, in the monologue, is one of Adrelaidina's lowest and most vulnerable memories.

But in the world that she inhabits marriage is not as important as the ability to generate an income. Though many indigenous women in Mexico marry as a means of survival, Adrelaidina was not satisfied with her boyfriend's offer. Speaking about her ability to sell goods at the market and the freedom that being a market woman will allow her, she says: "I prefer being alone. If I make a sale, I eat. If I don't make a sale, I don't eat. I've got no schedule, nobody telling me do this, do that" (11). In fact, within the

space of the market, like in her own home, she does not play a part. She is proud to say that she says what she wants and acts without pretense in all her encounters: “With me, if I don’t like you, I won’t fake it, you’re going to see it in my face. You should see the face I make!” (11). At this point in the monologue the audience is well aware of her blunt honesty, laughing at her jokes and reveling in her careless, but powerful, attitude toward her position in life.

Ironically, though she speaks about her ability to make money in the market, in the present she is unemployed. Her ex-employer is no longer shouting outside and the young mestiza is basking in her newfound freedom, much like she did in the past when she broke up with her boyfriends. Back on her hammock, she smiles and laughs as she swings and plays, away from the city of Mérida and all that it represents in her life. Not once has she stepped off her hammock in her monologue and she wants it that way:

When I get home, not even the Holy Father can get me out of my blessed hammock. I’ve got no husband to look after, no crying kids, I don’t have to clean up the house, nothing, just my hammock. I’m happy this way. Rocking, rocking in my hammock.... my mamá on one side, chatting, rocking, rocking...I’ve got everything I need. (11)

She is happy and that is the most important thing to her. As Salomé Sansores, the actress who plays the part of Adrelaidina, explains, “Being happy is such a powerful act in the world of the mestiza. With all the pressures and oppression that surrounds these women, being happy is their form of resistance” (Sansores interview). Adrelaidina has claimed a dual independence in her monologue—economically from her former employer and emotionally from the men of her past. She is no longer an object to be governed and

defined within the systems of capitalism and masculinity. In fact, all she wants to do at the end of her monologue is lay in her hammock, swinging happily as she reclines in comfort.

Suddenly, blasted out of the speakers, is Queen's "I Wanna Break Free." The two other mestizas enter the stage to the beat of the music, taking turns posing in dramatic rock-and-roll fashion. One mestiza, León, puts on a pair of Ray Ban sunglasses and struts across the front of the stage. She commands the audience's attention with her sharp movements and style—a mixture of rock-and-roll attitude and mestiza power. She climbs on top of the small crate sitting stage right and dramatically throws off her rebozo. Then, in sync with the music, she leans over toward the audience and places her hands inside her huipil in a suggestive and sexual manner. To the amusement of the audience she pulls out of her brassier a large knife. She thrusts the knife in the air playfully and erotically, unafraid of displaying her body in a hypersexual tone. Atop the box and with knife in hand, she is in control of her sensuality and the gaze that would usually consume her within other locations and encounters. This mestiza is reveling in the power of the song and the control she exerts over her audience. The spec-tourists watch with joy, and a bit of caution thanks to the large knife, as she sets up the following scene.

She then steps off the box and picks up a large grapefruit—which we will later come to understand is the source of her income in the marketplace—and sits on the crate. She stabs the knife into the box, faces the audience, and strikes a dramatic pose: sunglasses on and grapefruit under her chin. The other two actresses begin to take the hammock down, rolling it as they throw the mestiza wearing sunglasses dirty looks, teasing her: "You look good in glasses. You look very modern!" yells one. The other

laughs at her, “Are they new? Is this the latest mestiza style?” (12). Playing the parts of the non-indigenous community in Mérida—they could even be tourists—the actresses continue to tease the woman as they exit the stage. Their preconceived idea of what a mestiza woman should look like is a narrowly defined image created by essentialism and echotourism. For them, her identity as a mestiza should be confined to expected forms of behavior and dress, an attitude that makes indigenous women in the area self-conscious and objects of ridicule.



Figure 14. Conchi León plays the role of the Ray Ban Mestiza.

In the space of the theatre, this mestiza challenges the spec-tourists’ preconceived notions of Mayan identity; her body onstage opens up the space for Brechtian intervention. Her image is surprising and disturbing—perhaps even alienating—to those

used to viewing the indigenous body as it has been constructed through history, from the colonial encounter to the commodification by the tourist industry, and everything in between. She embodies a new image of Yucatec Mayan identity. Her strut, her sunglasses, and her attitude do not seem to match her traditional clothing or the rural atmosphere created by the setting. She jokes and has fun, giving in entirely to the music and her control over the space and her audience.

The woman begins peeling her grapefruit. She is Soco Soyoc, a 54 year-old mestiza who travels to Mérida everyday to sell her fruits in the market. She begins her monologue; it is a dialogue between the mestiza and someone on the street. The audience, of course, only hears Soco's side of the conversation. She is being asked questions and she responds readily and openly about her work and family. In this scene León is (re)creating on the stage the very interaction that inspired her to write the play. Now, before the audience, the playwright steps into the role of her muse, appropriating and embodying the market woman's voice and story. Soco's monologue is performed as a dialogue and the audience occupies the role that León played in the actual street scene.

Commenting on her sunglasses and the women's criticism of her wearing them, the older mestiza tells the audience, "No, the thing is, I've got cataracts. I have to avoid the sun. Yesterday they operated me on my eye. I'm not supposed to go out, but if I can't sell, what am I supposed to do?" (12). With these words, the energy and the comedy of the scene transitions into a moment of shock and empathy. The women who teased her did not stay to hear the explanation for the sunglasses. For them, the mestiza's marginalized position places her in the street for their pleasure, use, and amusement. They should not be expected to listen to, or even care about, her side of the story. Those

who pass by the Ray Ban mestiza in the market only comment on her looks because she stands out as odd. The people who care to listen—León in her own lived experience and now the spec-tourists that comprise the audience—discover that behind those sunglasses is a story to be told. Soco continues:

You know what happened? My husband chair-smashed my face. When I felt the blow, boom, I fell to the ground and said, this is it. I stayed there, but I didn't die, just ended up with the cataract. The doctor operated on me, and as long as I wear my glasses, all right. That's it. (12)

She tells the story of violence with a matter-of-fact attitude that seems to absolve her husband of culpability for the abuse.

She never explains why her husband was angry or if it was the first time he ever hit her with a chair, but instead uses the memory as a starting off point to speak about her family, in particular her son: "They took my son off to jail, he got himself together there" (12). Her son, once again arrested for public drunkenness, is always in trouble with the law and expects his mother to bail him out of jail. Soco's sister has continuously advised her to allow the police to take her son away, but all the mother can say is, "No, I don't have the heart to do it cause he's my son" (12). Though she explains that her son is now a student and is learning, it is clear that he still remains a burden to his mother.

Coming back to the subject of her husband, who we discover has passed away, Soco tells more stories of the violence she endured while married to him:

He was a son of a bitch, he'd come running after me. In the morning I'd wake up with a black eye. My hair—that's why I'm bald—he'd grab it and pull it back.

That's how he did things. My daughter would say: 'Mom look at your face.' But I couldn't see it because my eyes were closed by the beatings. (13)

Abused and violated by the man, she and her daughter experienced gendered violence as a norm in their household. Soco's recollection of the bruises and violence are not just memories; she physically carries the effects of the abuse on her body, archived by her missing hair and the cataracts in her eyes.

This acceptance of patriarchal oppression was also passed onto her son at an early age. As she explains, "That's why my son started hitting me when he was little, my husband taught him how. He'd pull my hair, pull everything. I didn't hit back, it hurt me, he's my son: it hurt me in my mother's heart" (13). Not only does the father pass on the idea that women are objects to be controlled and abused, but the mother also does not challenge this idea. For Soco, the blame rests completely on the father. Unwilling to reprimand her son because it hurts her in her "mother's heart," she continued to suffer abuse from both her husband and her son. Even in the present, she allows her son to take advantage of her, allowing her understanding of her role as a giving and suffering mother to eclipse the rights that she should possess as a woman.

As she recalls the first time that she had to bail her son out of jail, she focuses on the money: "4800 pesos to get him out. How can I get him out if I don't have any money?" (13). For a market woman, especially an indigenous one who has to travel to the city daily to sell her goods, that is a lot of money—it is the equivalent of about 360 U.S. dollars. But she continues to excuse her son and his actions, "Since it was for being drunk, I didn't pay so much" (13). When asked if she ever put her husband in jail, she responds sharply, "What? No! I never put my husband in jail. Why would I? We'd work

things out and all would be forgotten” (13). For Soco, the key to working things out is the forgetting. Offering her daughter’s story as a lesson to be learned, she says, “My daughter put her husband in jail, ah, but he messed up her eye for life. But she got him out quick cause her mother-in-law and my son-in-law threatened her. He told her: ‘Every day I spend in jail is a bullet I’m going to shoot you with.’ She got him out quick, she was scared” (13). For the women in this family, abuse by the men in their lives is common and expected, and any actions to protect or retaliate against these acts of violence are met with more violence. The daughter’s failed attempt at justice became an invitation for further violence, even from another woman—her own husband’s mother.

For Soco, the real violence she endured was her husband’s psychological abuse caused by his infidelity: “The things my husband did. He used to have a lot of lovers. I never fought him over them” (13). However, as her story continues, she reveals moments where she stood up to her husband, first vocally and later physically: “The most I told him was: ‘Just great, I’ll do the same, when men come up to me in the street, I’ll go off with them. See how you like that, eh?’” (13). Although she was never unfaithful to her husband these words were an enormous act of resistance and protest, especially given that she never spoke against his acts of violence towards her. She continues proudly, “One day I found him sitting in the park with a lady. I smacked him, I punched him, he never did that again” (13). Her act of violence, a reaction to his infidelity, surprisingly did not invoke further violence on his part, though she continues, “His obsession was getting women pregnant and not supporting them” (13).

This last point, that her husband would not support the women he was involved with or even his own children, is what led Soco into the market: “I started selling cause

he wouldn't give me a single peso. Children don't ask, they open their mouths and want to eat" (13). Unable to depend on her husband for support, and unwilling to go to the government for assistance, Soco, like many other indigenous women in Mexico, turns to the market as a source of income and survival. Within her world, the responsibility to support the children falls onto the mother. As she soon discovers, however, the world of the marketplace is a space controlled by women. She admits, "I'm happier selling" (14). For her, a life in the marketplace is a world where she is in charge—a world where female agency is possible and even encouraged. She concludes, "I'm 54, but I'm not looking for a man, I'm old, I'm tired, why would I bother myself over a man? No! Better to sell. If I make due, I eat. If I don't, I don't eat" (15). Reminiscent of Adrelaidina's words in the previous monologue, Soco demonstrates that the freedom found in the marketplace—even when she does not make enough money—is empowering and satisfying.

At the end of her monologue Soco stops suddenly. The interviewer has asked her a personal question. Though she has been storytelling freely about her family and life as a mestiza woman, she responds:

Hmmm? Me? No! I'm not talking about myself! I was talking about my family, my sister, her husband, my son, my daughter, my late husband...but not about myself. Why not? Cause I don't like to. No, no, never...Besides...I'm not here!

You don't even see me cause I'm not here. If I close my eyes you disappear. (15)

Soco then covers her eyes with her hands and turns away. She has decided not to speak anymore and she will not be forced to acknowledge anyone's presence; in this scenario, she controls erasure. Soco throws her rebozo over her shoulder and "I Want to Break

Free” pumps through the auditorium once again. This time, a younger mestiza enters from the opposite side of the stage. She is wearing a huipil, a purple rebozo, and a pair of reflective sunglasses, and she is lip-synching the words to the song. She and Soco begin to strut about as they rearrange the stage for the next monologue. Once they have finished setting the scene, Soco walks over to the younger mestiza and removes her sunglasses—the first time she has done so—and hands them over to the young woman. The younger mestiza puts the sunglasses on over the ones she already has on, appropriating Soco’s attitude. She then walks offstage, empowered by the older mestiza’s symbolic transfer of power. Soco, alone onstage and with her back to the audience, begins to rock her hips to the beat of the music. She then walks upstage and strikes a Freddy Mercury pose, fist in the air, as the music blasts and the audience cheers her on. She is Mestiza Power.

Slowly the music begins to fade into a low melodic sound and a blue hue transforms the space from a rock concert auditorium to the domestic space of a Mayan spiritualist. The home belongs to a mestiza named Rosa Amen: her monologue is titled “*El gran poder*” (“The Great Power”). Her power is a healing one— she is a seer who carries within her the old traditions of the Mayan culture, transferring her knowledge and power onto those who come to her for help. In her capacity as healer, she mediates between the community and the other powers of nature—both good and evil. Rosa explains about her capacity to channel her power, “Yes, you can do damage like this, but I only cure, I don’t do evil. I’m asked to cause damage and I say, no. They offer me good money. I don’t accept it, even though I need it. They say that we who truly are curers never get rich” (16).

Despite Rosa's deep connection to the community and the necessary role that she fills as healer, she is surprisingly ridiculed and unappreciated by the other women in her village. At the beginning of the scene she says "Hello" and "Good evening" to the other mestizas on the stage, but each time all she receives in return are dirty looks and silence (16). Rosa even tries to get near these other women, but they react with disgust. Rosa tells the audience, "They don't get along with me, it's pure envy. My husband cured people, and now that he's dead and I've got the gift, my neighbors don't talk to me. There's hate in their hearts but not in mine" (16). Alone in her home, she sits and watches as the women pass through the streets. Rosa is keenly aware of her marginalized position in her community, surprised by the treatment that she receives from those who come to her for help. Hurt and insulted by the comments of those who mistreat her, Rosa recognizes that she could use her power to get even: "Sometimes I feel like sending them an evil wind and finishing them off. I could do it! (15). But, of course, she does not. For Rosa, her power is greater than whatever animosity or anger she may feel.

Throughout her monologue Rosa recalls the experiences of those she has encountered: those she has cured, the children she has helped bring into this world, and the desperate people who came to her for help when they had nowhere else to turn. She ritualistically moves around the stage as she tells these stories, interacting with the tools of her trade: a deck of tarot cards, rice, herbs, and small gourds of water. One moment she is shuffling the cards, demonstrating the way she reads fortunes, and the next she is throwing rice across a blue rebozo that covers the floor, explaining how she reads the messages in the ways that the grains land. Through her stories the audience becomes familiar with the other inhabitants of her village: children, parents, young lovers, and

married couples. Rosa inhabits a central role in her community and she knows almost everyone and everyone's story. She carries within her a trace of those she has cured.

One story in particular reveals the attitudes of the villagers, as well as the emotional tension that Rosa feels between her work and her community. She begins by setting up the story with, "they don't remember.... they quickly forget" (16). Rosa, of course, does not forget and she begins to tell the story of a mother who came to her with a sick daughter. The mother, baby in arms, begged the healer for help: "Ay Rosamen, cure my child, I took the trouble of taking her to the doctor and she didn't get better, she vomits day and night...I'm going to lose her" (16). Quickly Rosa went to work on the daughter, using her cards and abilities as a seer to diagnose the young indigenous child. It becomes clear to Rosa that the girl is gravely ill and only has days to live. Upon hearing the devastating news the mother gets desperate, but Rosa, strong and in command, says:

What are you crying for? You have to trust. Let's find where this evil spirit's coming from.... hmmm...You live in a house without a wall, and a large patio. In the middle of the patio is a plum bush. Your daughter was playing there. She dug up some earth trying to hide a toy, and an evil wind suddenly went into her mouth and swallowed her spirit. It didn't take her body, but it's carrying her spirit far, far away... until she dies. (17)

Over the course of several days Rosa worked on curing the child until she was able to save the young girl's life.

However, the mother of the child got frightened that the wind had come from her home and did not want to return to live there again. Rather than thank Rosa for saving her child, the mother left her home and husband, blaming the seer for the problems. Rosa's

next door neighbor, the mother-in-law, became angered at the healer: “Ever since then my neighbor doesn’t talk to me. She says I spread rumors that made the girl leave her son, but that isn’t why they took off. Who cares. I cured the child, she’s 18 years old now, pretty” (17). Rosa is proud that she saved the innocent girl from the evil wind, but her smile slowly fades as she continues: “When she passes by, she doesn’t talk to me, she even spits on my land. Who knows what they tell her in her house, but there’s hate in her heart, not in mine” (17). Unappreciated for the work that she performs, and scorned by her community, Rosa cannot help but feel disappointed and sad. The animosity that the community feels toward her, whether through fear or jealousy, is strong. Rosa—hero when she is needed and enemy at all other times—occupies the precarious position of mediator between the past and present.

The vicious attitudes of the villagers are also manifested in spells and curses. As the lights dim on the stage, Rosa tells about the time her neighbor tried to steal her power: “Now my neighbor’s screwing me over. She worked it so I can’t cure anymore, she sent a strong wind, but I stopped it—I can do that—I caught that wind. And I’m not giving it back to her. And I didn’t just leave it blowing so it could burden someone else. I have it locked up. Do you want see it?” (17). Rosa walks slowly to the left side of the stage where she stands before a large gourd that hangs alone. As she approaches the beautiful object, the lights fade to black. Rosa begins to talk and she places her hands on the gourd. It starts to glow bright and strong, illuminating the black stage and throwing light onto the mestiza’s body. Holding the glowing object she continues: “Sometimes it begs like a demon to be let out, but I won’t let it. I control it. It gives off light, it shakes the wall, it screams. But no. I control it” (17). Proving herself to be the most powerful of the women

in the village, Rosa contains the evil wind and protects the villagers from it. Her act is not just self-serving—it is another instance of Rosa’s unselfish act of goodwill toward her community. Once again, she goes unrecognized for her actions.

In the Mayan culture, the power of the wind can carry in it different spirits. As Zubieta, the actress who plays Rosa explains, “These winds, good and bad, travel throughout the world. The evil winds cause harm and sometimes people are not even aware that these evil forces are around them. When they get in them, they eat at their lives and bodies” (Zubieta interview). Rosa, in the monologue, continues: “Winds are powerful, it all depends where you grab them. Like the last breath of a decapitated hen, that little wind of its breath is enough to do some work” (17). Traveling through the world, looking for unsuspecting and vulnerable victims, these winds can cause death and it is people like Rosa, with knowledge passed onto them from the past, that can combat and expunge the evil. Sometimes, as the healer explains, the winds take on physical forms. The evil winds are everywhere and without shamans like Rosa the community would be in danger.

Although Rosa is not appreciated within her own village, her legend and stories are known throughout the Mayan regions of Mexico. People come from all around to see Rosa, but as she says, jealousy continues to motivate her neighbors:

They’re real bitches. When they come asking for me, they say: ‘I don’t know her.’ They come looking for me from Chetumal, Campeche, even from México City. They deny me. It’s their ignorance. But people find me and I cure them. There are illnesses you can’t cure, but you can bring relief to the person so they live a few more years, better years. (18).

At the end of the monologue Rosa stands before the audience, proud and strong. Despite the hate people feel toward her and the uncomfortable position she occupies within her own village, she knows that her power is necessary for the continuity of her community and culture. She declares: “I am Rosamen. If you search carefully and you are fated to heal, you’ll find me, but if death has already cleared a path to find you and take you away, I can’t cure you [...] I can’t beat death” (18).

Rosa takes this moment to look directly into the audience and warns them about the power of the winds: “The winds are in all places, all you have to do is listen for it to know when it is coming.... when it is coming for you” (18). With this prophetic warning, the lesson she gives also reaffirms her role in the community. The spec-actors, granted special access into her home and cultural practices, are now beneficiaries of her power. She then tells a story about her own childhood, recounting a ritual her mother undertook to protect her when she was threatened by a wind:

I remember how they put me in a barrel. They mixed the water with rue, basil, rosemary, and mint. In the patio my mamá warmed the water a little in a large barrel, this big. I remember the petals falling into the water, the leaves in my lukewarm bath water. I remember clearly the water turning colors, taking on a green hue—like mint tea—letting itself be perfumed by the roses, the gourd dipping in and out of the barrel filling up with flower water, the drops falling little by little onto my naked body. This magic water of leaves protects me from the bad wind, turns me to petals, flowers, leaves, gourd... It protects me, makes me strong against the wind, keeps me away from bad winds. I remember the leaves

that covered me, the water falling, the wind surrounding me, my mother singing
and I could hear the voices. (18)

She then begins to sing, her voice echoing low and melodically throughout the auditorium. From offstage the voices of the other actresses join in with Rosa's. As she continues singing, the mystic picks up her rebozo and lays it before the metal container that has been sitting at downstage center throughout the play. After carefully doing this, she exits, still singing.

The other two mestizas enter, singing the song:

On the wings of the wounded wind

Our *tunkul*²⁵ no longer resounds

If my beloved no longer resounds

It's not that we've forgotten your blue sky (18)

As they sing the song, a popular folk tradition in the Yucatán, the women prepare for the next scene. The younger mestiza carries roses and stalks of herbs, including rue, rosemary, and basil. The two women are preparing the same bath that Rosa just described from her childhood. As the young mestiza sets her ingredients at each of the three large buckets, the other mestiza follows, pouring hot water into the metal containers. Rosa then reenters the stage and begins to prepare herself before the bucket at center stage. All three voices are now singing together in the dimly lit space, accompanied by the sound of pouring water. The three women are no longer just actresses playing a part; they are preparing for a ceremony that will be performed before the spec-tourists. Their voices carry the words of the song in Spanish and their own Mayan dialect; their bodies are ready to receive the ceremonial cleansing and protection of their culture. The spec-

²⁵ A *tunkul* is a horizontal wooden drum commonly used in Mesoamerican indigenous music.

tourists watching the production are about to experience an authentic Mayan ritual, but outside of the confines of the tourist industry and the distortions created by echotourism. This is no longer just a theatrical performance; it is a ritual and a ceremony.

As they kneel on the rebozos that lie behind each wash basin, the women begin to let their hair down, removing hair decorations and letting out their braids and ponytails. They get comfortable in their space as they take on the role of cultural storytellers. Throughout the play the women have been telling the stories of modern Mayan women, those León interviewed who represent the countless women struggling to survive within the economically and socially oppressive atmosphere of the Yucatán. But the story they are about to tell, and the woman it is about, comes from legend and history, passed on through the ages through the oral tradition. The actresses on stage, in the play's finale, will take turns as they tell the audience the legend of *Las Aguadas* ("The Cave-Lakes" or "Cenotes"), a popular story in the Yucatán.

But the women do not just tell the story to the audience; they also interact with one another, using each other as interlocutors in the story. As a dialogue between the actors the story becomes more alive for the audience. The story is shared between the women and their public: the mestizas as inheritors of the story are now passing it onto the spectators, outsiders who are allowed a personal invitation into the women's history and culture.

The tale of *Las Aguadas* is about a mother who fled into the jungle when she was pregnant, escaping an unknown danger. Once she was safe, she built a house where she could give birth and raise her child. Alone and without a man, she was safe in her home one night relaxing on a hammock when a dog came up to her. Though the dog was skinny

and looked sick, the woman let the animal stay with her in her home. Three months later the woman gave birth, with much difficulty. As the story says:

It felt like a mouth was opening, more and more, she felt like she was becoming a cenote, she had to hang onto the hammock and see what had changed down there, what had become an ancient vessel, a deep well with a diminutive creature trapped inside, waiting to be rescued. (20)

Once the child is born, however, all the pain disappeared and the mother and son lived happily in the jungle with the old female dog.

The next part of the story recalls three different occasions when the mother left her home to collect drinking water in her gourd. The first two times, as she is returning home, she hears the child screaming. Both times she runs home, scared, and finds her son sitting in the hammock crying. The dog just lays inside the house doing nothing. The first time the woman yells at the animal, “Damn dog, instead of singing to the boy so he won’t be frightened, you just lie there” (19). The second time she is even more furious and kicks the dog, yelling: “Lazy dog, why can’t you sing to the boy?” (20).

On the third occasion, the mother hesitates but still has to go collect water. On her way home she hears the boy crying but suddenly hears him stop. Then the woman hears a gentle voice singing throughout the jungle. She rushes home to see who is with her child: “When she got there, the boy was smiling. The female dog was standing on its hind legs, rocking the boy’s hammock with its forelegs while it sang to him” (20). As the story goes, the woman was so scared by the sight of the singing animal that she dropped her gourds filled with water, flooding her house: “The house began to flood, and the water

rose until it covered the dog, the boy, and the woman. They say the water rose so much that on that spot there is now a cenote” (20).

The women take turns telling the story and playing the parts of the mother and the dog, interacting with each other to bring the story to life. As they share this tale, they break the herbs and flowers apart, tearing the plants into pieces and dropping them into the warm water in front of them. As they do this the smells of the herbs travel into the audience. The mestizas continue their story, in soft and soothing sounds as they continue to rip apart the plants, creating a bath of roses, leaves, and herbs.

As the story nears an end the young mestiza begins to speak the part of the mother in her own Yucatec dialect. When it comes to the part of the story where the dog begins to sing, a song plays throughout the auditorium. The women are surprised and listen attentively as the song continues, mixing in the last bits of their plants into the water. They then begin to bathe themselves, slowly at first, covering their bodies with the ceremonial and healing waters. The women extend their legs and arms as they rub the water onto their bodies and on their necks and faces. The sound of splashing water and the smells of the herbs join the actresses’ voices as they tell the story and enact this ritual of cleansing and protection.

At the end of the story one of the mestizas says, “And those who know say the one who finds the lagoon and throws a kernel of corn into the water can see the dog, the boy, and the woman in its depths and can even hear the voice singing” (20). Telling the audience how one of their sacred sites was created, and letting them in on the secret to discovering the cenote and the characters in the creation story, the women end the play. They start to cover themselves in the water more and more quickly; their bodies, huipiles,

and hair are soaked. As music fills the stage and as the lights begin to fade to black, the women continue to bathe themselves in the rose water. One of the last images of the women is their heads submerged in the buckets. By the end of their ritual they are completely soaked and bathed in the water.



Figure 15. The three actresses perform a ritual cleansing onstage.

In the blackout the audience can still hear the water dripping and smell the scent of the special bath. The smell of roses and herbs transcends the limits of the stage, arousing the senses of those in the audience. The play's stimulation of the audience's olfactory senses breaks the alienation created by the stage in this final moment. Brought into the ritual through the smell and the aromatic effects of the healing waters, the spectators become a part of the ritual, witnesses to a tradition that has been passed on through the centuries. At the end of the performance, in their curtain call, the three actresses stand before the audience, soaked in water and covered in herbs and petals. *Mestiza Power* ends with a ritual bathing that reaffirms the indigenous tradition but also challenges the audience's expectations of Mayan female public behavior.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, *Mestiza Power* capitalizes on the concept of tourism, drawing its audience in like tourists to the Yucatán, but never releasing control of the gaze. Though the play presents Mayan bodies on the stage for viewer pleasure and entertainment, the actresses are not consumed or swallowed, as Arias suggests occurs through idiophagy. Rather, the women play with the audience and its expectations and beliefs. Like the Ray Ban mestiza, the women and the play do not present themselves as essentialist representations of a culture created through echotourism and narrow definitions of expected behavior. The play itself embodies the global and popular phenomenon of tourism. In the performance, the audience sees and hears the unexpected traces of the tourist and global markets: sunglasses, Freddie Mercury, Coca Cola, and tarot cards, to name a few of the elements that the audience would not expect to see in a play about Mayan women. The title of the play, *Mestiza Power*, immediately informs the audience that this play is about the strength of these women. The use of English in the title also indicates that this play will not conform to preconceived ideas of language and geographical borders. These mestizas are able to function and strive in a global world where multilinguality and lingual border crossing are forms of cultural agency and power.

Above all, the bodies of the actresses themselves embody the tourist spirit. Crossing borders to stage their plays, the women have performed across Mexico and the globe. As they travel to new locations, they themselves become tourists; they are outsiders who enter new spaces as representatives of the Yucatec culture and people. The women transcend the tourist divide in the space of the theatre. As they perform, they

invite the audience into their world, but are careful not to let go of the controls. Demonstrating their awareness of cultural difference and the power of a shared space, the actresses prefer to let the culture of the local audiences mix into the play a few times during the performance. In different locations throughout Mexico, the actresses incorporate local sites and popular sayings into their dialogue. In their performance in Peru, Coca Cola became Inka Cola and references to Yucatec cuisine included *ceviche*, *cuy*, and *pisco*. And at their presentation at Cornell University, the mestizas had a lot of fun as they translated key words of the play into English and even replaced the name of the son in the play with my own name—the audience laughed as they heard “Jimmy” mentioned several times in the Ray Ban mestiza’s monologue. In each of these instances, the actresses and audience are brought together in a shared experience of mutual and amicable contact. There is no echo and no essentialism; a reciprocal exchange occurs in these moments of culture crossing.

These instances of adapting and changing the script to better accommodate each location and audience reflect the mestizas’ desire to openly invite the audience into their show. Rather than stage an aggressive resistance to the commodification of Mayan culture and the damaging effects of globalization and echotourism, the women choose to play with their audiences, focusing on bridging the differences that exist between them. Sa’as Tun recognizes the ways that humor can bring cultures together. Though the stories they tell onstage are serious and demonstrate the violence and oppression experienced by Mayan women in the Yucatán, the play prefers to give voice to these women while also being inviting. *Mestiza Power* presents the stories of mestiza women, allowing the audience not only to listen and watch, but also to learn. The play is an attempt to improve

the relations between the indigenous and the non-indigenous, giving the mestiza control of her image in the public space.

The theatre of Sa'as Tun, like other performances by indigenous artists, is being employed as one of the many efforts designed to help solve some of the problems that occur during encounters between the indigenous communities of the Yucatán and outsiders. The play stands in direct opposition to the stories and images created about the Yucatec Mayans by the tourist industry. Sa'as Tun physically recreates these encounters on the stage, reminding audiences that indigenous bodies are more than just objects to be discovered and consumed; these indigenous individuals have stories that need to be heard. By allowing people previously rendered invisible to become nationally and even globally visible, these performances transform the stage into a space where ordinarily forgotten individuals can speak out against the violence and exploitation that they face daily. As demonstrated in *Mestiza Power*, action is often accomplished just by the act of informed witnessing and listening. This is especially important since silencing, often in the form of erasure, is one of the tools used by the tourist industry in the Yucatán to promote tourism and profit.

The crisis that the indigenous communities of Mexico are undergoing is one that has been repeating and recreating itself since the time of the Conquest. This repetition of oppression and exploitation has been revived in many forms throughout the centuries—from state and church sanctioned murder, sterilization, and violence, to lack of access to healthcare and education, to the commodification of Mayan culture in the tourist industry. Not only is this form of violence repeated in oppressive laws and attitudes, but it has also been acted out on the same types of bodies across the centuries. Within their own

territories and ancestral lands, within the tourist and global marketplace, and within the labor community, these Mayan individuals are confined to scripts that distort, manipulate, and exploit their bodies.

For artists like Sa'as Tun who work within this context, theatre offers an opportunity to educate the public and critique the hegemonic forces that continue to marginalize indigenous communities in Mexico. Bringing together outsiders and insiders within the performance space, these theatrical works create their own communities of spec-tourists, forced to bear witness to unheard stories and also to recognize the individual bodies that exist today. At times foreign to the audience, and at others all too close, the content of these plays is presented as a way of transferring memory, passing on knowledge, and preventing a repetition of the past. Understood as acts of urgency, the presentation of these individuals' lives on the stage are acts that aspire for a more accurate image of the Yucatec Mayan body and positive relations between insiders and outsiders, tourists and natives.

CHAPTER FIVE

REHEARSING THE NEW NATION: THE LATINA/O IMMIGRANT BODY IN U.S. POLITICS AND PERFORMANCE

On April 23, 2010, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer signed into law one of the most contentious pieces of immigration legislation in recent U.S. history. The *Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act*, known as SB1070, dominated news headlines and sparked a series of national debates and protests when the Arizona Senate first passed the bill in February. Pundits and activists on both sides of the immigration debate argued over the legality and necessity of such legislation. The controversy centered on the power given law enforcement to detain and question persons that they *suspect* to be illegal immigrants. Racial profiling became the focal point of this controversy with one central question: Who will law enforcement suspect of being an illegal immigrant and how will race play, or not play, a part in this? In a state with a Latino population of 30%, many feared that civil rights would be violated and that citizens and legal residents would become targets of suspicion.

Opponents of the bill pointed out that appearance and language would be the indicators used by law enforcement in the execution of this new law, and that in addition to racial profiling, the bill targeted people of Mexican descent in particular. Under SB1070 *looking* or *acting* Mexican would be enough to cause suspicion. Since the bill also requires immigrants to carry legal identification and proof of legal residency at all times, those without documentation would be subject to arrest until they could provide proof of citizenship or legal immigrant status. “Show me your papers” became the mantra

of opponents wanting to link the law's language with the Nazi practice that forced Jewish people to carry identification at all times.

At the press conference held during the signing of SB1070, Brewer defended her actions by stating:

There is no higher priority than protecting the citizens of Arizona. We cannot sacrifice our safety to the murderous greed of drug cartels. We cannot stand idly by as drug houses, kidnappings and violence compromise our quality of life. We cannot delay while the destruction happening south of our international border creeps its way north. (Brewer)

But even as her language of fear and anxiety pointed to Mexico, and by association Mexicans, as the source of Arizona's problems, the governor reassured those who claimed the legislation amounted to racism by adding, "I will NOT tolerate racial discrimination or racial profiling in Arizona" (Brewer).

But is the governor's reassurance enough? The questions continued to be asked, and depending on who was doing the answering there seemed to be no consensus. How would authorities tell the difference between a U.S. citizen and an undocumented immigrant? What, other than skin color, appearance, and language, would raise reasonable suspicion about a person's legal status in the United States? To what extent can legislators use fear and the law to limit civil liberties? Does the bill, at its very core, promote the use of racial profiling? And in the current debate over illegal immigration, where the Latina/o body represents the nation's anxiety, was the bill designed to target one ethnic group?

In this chapter I am interested in artistic creations that strive for social change by encouraging a progressive immigration reform and a new model of performing the nation. I am interested in performances that engage in the contemporary concerns of border crossers and that speak from, and to, a multi-vocal perspective. Focusing on the immigrant body as a site of conflict, as well its potential to transform, I focus on the May 1, 2006 immigration protests and the more traditional theatre being created by Teatro Bravo of Phoenix, Arizona, and the ways these performances engage the public and the immigrant body in dialogue. The two performance models I engage—protest and theatre—utilize both the public sphere and the space of the traditional stage to prevent erasure and challenge fixed notions of identity. Caught in between the public and the private, the artistic and the political, the bodies under investigation dare to perform their version of “America.”

Performances that deal with the subject of immigration, like the act of crossing itself, emerge from a political struggle that is located within the U.S./Latin American history of citizenship, belonging, migration, and exile. For the Latina/o subject, performance becomes a ritualistic approach to dealing with struggle, tragedy, and new identities that emerge from the act of crossing. These performances help people, in particular immigrants and those who identify with them, cope with their new sense of self and space within the United States. Additionally, for the invisible, deceased, and disappeared, these performances (re)insert the forgotten immigrant body into the public sphere.

Although undocumented immigrants crossing into the U.S. through the southern border come from a number of countries and backgrounds, the majority of U.S. citizens

assume that these individuals are “Mexican.” Because of the demographics of the immigrants and Mexico’s proximity to the U.S., this (mis)labeling is often excused. But associating immigrants with gang activity, drugs, crime, and violence, as Governor Brewer did, is a conscious decision to not only incorrectly mark these immigrants, but also to place the risk of danger directly onto their bodies. This rhetoric casts the immigrant as someone to fear—a security risk, an enemy. If U.S. citizens have to protect themselves from these undocumented immigrants, then stereotyping and violence against the “other” becomes justified.

The focal point of the immigration crisis *is* the immigrant body; physical presence is itself an illegal act. Destabilizing the notion of the individual, the body of the immigrant—regardless of history, age, gender, or any other identifying markers—represents a violation. The Latin American body, as a generic form of marked racial category, is seen within the U.S. as one that must be questioned and opened up to inspection. The illusion that there exist two distinct categories—citizenship and race—perpetuates this understanding that the ethnic body, and in particular the Latina/o body, must always be defined and legitimated within the discourse of U.S. national belonging.

This cultural anxiety concerning the body of the Latina/o immigrant becomes a public act of inclusion and exclusion. Under this type of thinking, “Who belongs here?” and “who doesn’t belong?” become legitimate questions to ask when walking down the street. The body of the immigrant, through these anxieties and laws, becomes subject to public criticism and scrutiny. Marked by the color of their skin and their physical features, immigrants’ “otherness” becomes a legitimate reason to fear and challenge their presence within the U.S.

Apart from race, the bodies of these immigrants are marked by politics, culture, and economics. Carrying on their bodies the physical evidence of their crossing, effects of grueling labor, and history of poverty, disadvantaged immigrants become commodified and objectified within the frame of U.S. capitalism. The presence of the immigrant body is either understood as a source of cheap labor or the beneficiary of rights and privileges not entitled to them as non-citizens. The female immigrant body represents the additional threat of procreation.

These (mis)identifications, (mis)labelings, and even gun (mis)fires are all excused in the name of the law. This scenario of “enemy of the people” becomes exacerbated by militia groups, conservatives who want to win reelection campaigns, and unemployed citizens who want to blame the immigrant for the current economic crisis. For these citizens, what is at risk is the very notion of U.S. citizenship and patriotic identity. For them, the living body of the undocumented immigrant threatens the very meaning of “America.”

It is because the body is at the center of this crisis that performance and theatre studies offer a useful model from which to critique and explore the different reactions to illegal immigration. The body—at its very nature performative—possesses the potential to create alternative visions and versions of the national subject. Actors position their bodies between the political and the public. In the theatre of immigration, the bodies of the actors become surrogates for the millions of undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S. Providing a voice for the immigrant, these performers stage the stories that are central to their communities. John McGrath, the Irish activist and playwright of popular, political theatre, looks to performance and ritual as a means to “enrich cultural identity,

amplify marginal voices, attack cultural homogeneity, increase community self-determination and challenge the dominant power structure” (qtd. in Geer 31). It is through performance that communities produce and understand their place within the public sphere.

In her groundbreaking *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestizaje*, Gloria Anzaldúa draws attention to the many nameless and faceless people who have been caught up in the violence of the U.S.-Mexico border, what she calls “*una herida abierta*” (“an open wound”) (25). For Anzaldúa, the pain brought upon the inhabitants of the borderlands is caused by division and separation: “Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. [...] The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (25). For Anzaldúa, the demarcation of the border exists as a way of protecting the *gringo*, the citizen, from the prohibited and the forbidden—the inhabitants of this region—those she refers to as, “*los atravesados*”²⁶ (25).

Understood from the U.S. perspective, the border becomes the physical barrier between the “first-world” and the “other” nations of Latin America. In Governor Jan Brewer’s terms, the border is the barrier between the U.S. citizens and the violent drug cartels and criminals south of the border. This us/them dichotomy (“us” being the North/U.S., them being the South/Latin America) transforms those who attempt to cross the border regions of Mexico into the U.S. into *others* and *aliens*, people *not like us*. These constructions strip the individual of identity and humanity. No longer a subject, the immigrant body, in the act of crossing, becomes an object of contestation, fear, and disgust.

²⁶ *Atravesados* can have two meanings. Literally, it can be translated as “the crossed.” But the negative connotation of the word, when used to refer to people, can also mean “those in the way.”

For the thousands of Latin American immigrants entering the U.S. illegally each year, this act of transfer and transformation—the crossing over—is a dangerous and deadly one. Along the 2000 miles of border, these *atravesados* must face natural dangers, including the desert heat, lack of water, unpredictable weather, rough terrain, and deadly animals. In addition, there are also the physical dangers put in place by the U.S. government: Border Patrol Agents, immigration checkpoints, fences, helicopters, and security cameras (to name just some of the technology being employed to prevent illegal crossings). Fearing being trapped, arrested, and deported by *la migra* (the Border Patrol), these border crossers traverse the dangerous space of the *frontera* (the border) in search of better opportunities: the mythic American Dream.

In addition to these dangers, border crossers also face vigilantism. With the emergence of border-patrolling white supremacist groups like the Minutemen, the Ku Klux Klan, and other militia organizations, undocumented immigrants go from hunting out a better living in the United States to actually *being the hunted*. With this new type of Anglo-nativism on the rise, new breeds of U.S. citizens are being generated and dispersed along the borderlands. Armed with patriotism, the security of citizenship, and Second Amendment gun rights, these volunteers patrol the dessert in search of immigrants. Similar in style to what Ghassan Hage calls the “white-and-very-worried-about-the-nation-subject,” these vigilantes act according to a “White nation fantasy” (18). Hage defines this as, “a fantasy of a nation governed by White people, a fantasy of White supremacy” (18). The immigrants, or more specifically the racialized immigrant bodies, represent the threat to this fantasy. In his scenario, Hage presents a society governed by a

“nationalist practice of exclusion,” where non-Anglos become “objects to be governed” (47, 17).

This governing takes on many forms, but most important to this study is the fact that the U.S. government has been able to militarize the U.S.-Mexico border through armed force with a doctrine that Timothy Dunn calls “low intensity conflict”²⁷ (148). This militarization—in other words a *war on undocumented immigrants*—advocates for a greater us/them divide: we belong here and they do not belong here. In an atmosphere of militarization, where the only goal is to stop border crossings, the death of individuals becomes nothing more than collateral damage. Developing out of a genealogy of exclusion, laws and programs like the Bracero Program, Operation Wetback, Operation Gatekeeper, Operation Blockade, and the USA Patriot Act make certain that the official history of immigration is written by and belongs to the U.S. government. In addition to these landmark pieces of immigration legislation, the U.S. government utilizes and relies on documentation and the archive to protect citizenship. Documents, rather than bodies, become the site of identification.

“Day without an Immigrant”: Anti-Immigrant Legislation and Popular Protest

Four years before Arizona’s SB1070 became an international lightning rod for the immigration debate, the fight over immigration history and legislation reached a crisis point when the House of Representatives passed *The Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005* (H.R. 4437) on December 16, 2005. The bill became the catalyst for the massive immigrant movement and ignited a series of protests

²⁷ Dunn includes in his description of “low intensity conflict”: “military surveillance equipped by police agencies,” including AHIS Cobra helicopter gunships, OC-85Cs reconnaissance helicopters, small airplanes with TV cameras and forward-looking infrared night-vision sensors, and a variety of seismic, magnetic, and acoustic sensors to detect movement, heat, and sound, all in addition to the chain link and industrial fencing set up along the border (148).

that culminated in the events of May 1, 2006. Introduced by Representative Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wisconsin), who also introduced the *USA PATRIOT Act* to the House in 2001, the bill sparked an explosion within the already tense debate over undocumented immigration. H.R. 4437, among other provisions, raised the penalties for illegal immigration into the U.S. and classified undocumented immigrants and those who helped them as felons. The bill also called for the construction of a 700-mile fence along the U.S.-Mexico border and mandated an inquiry into a potential border fence along the U.S.-Canada border.

Almost immediately, immigrant rights' groups and other activists staged protests across the country in an attempt to draw national attention to the plight of the immigrant and to prevent passing of the bill in the Senate. On February 14, in Philadelphia, one of the first rallies was staged when more than twelve hundred people took to the streets in support of comprehensive immigration reform (ACLU). Throughout March and April a series of protests continued to be staged in front of government and federal buildings in major cities throughout the U.S. On April 10, organizers in over 100 cities were able to stage a massive protest that mobilized hundreds of thousands who marched in the streets in support of immigrant rights. *The New York Times* estimates the crowd in New York City that day to be between 75,000 and 125,000 (Swarns). The march, which ended at the steps of City Hall, was followed by speeches from Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer. Other rally estimates for that day include 180,000 in Washington, 100,000 in Phoenix, 50,000 in Atlanta, and 50,000 in Houston (Alvarado).

The climax of these events occurred on May 1, 2006, when activists challenged the government's ownership of a written and exclusion-based history by staging the

largest nation-wide demonstrations in U.S. history. On this day, millions of people across the United States came together to rally under the banner: “Day without an Immigrant.” Working to draw attention to growing anti-immigrant legislation and sentiment, this campaign intended to demonstrate the presence of the immigrant community and its vital role in American society by urging supporters to boycott and refrain from participating in the economic sphere that day. “No work. No school. No buying. No selling,” read one of the flyers produced by the National Immigrant Solidarity Network in Los Angeles (NISN). This strategic performance of *absence* in the economic sphere was paired with an extraordinary performance of *presence* in the public sphere. Whereas daily life for most undocumented immigrants is focused on the concept of invisibility, “Day without an Immigrant” inverted the formula and promoted visibility. Performing presence and power, the rallies bordered on the carnivalesque, containing elements of both political protest and fiesta as people waved flags, played music, danced, and celebrated their collective presence in the streets.

The celebratory nature of the rallies was strategically staged so that the events could be inviting and inclusive. Organizers were keenly aware of the need for control over the mass mobilization, careful not to portray a negative image of the immigrant. According to Beth Baker-Cristales, the May 1st events were designed to avoid confrontation: “Media outlets uniformly promoted certain acts of protest and carefully sanctioned others, helping to set the boundaries of the march participants’ and media consumers’ understanding of resistance, rights, legality and legitimacy” (61). Not only were the protests supposed to create a sense of camaraderie and empowerment within the immigrant community, but they were also supposed to demonstrate to non-immigrants

that, in fact, both groups shared the same values and concerns. Activists worked to organize and control the tone of the day, but there was no way of predicting how the performance would be received by the non-immigrant population. Alfonso Gonzales, writing specifically about the Los Angeles protests, notes that: “The national discourse went from one in which members of the dominant Anglo-American society would speak about migrants as criminals, gang members, drug dealers and a burden to the economy, to one in which major newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* featured positive headlines about them” (49). At the end of the day activists achieved one of their main goals: the creation and dissemination of a positive immigrant image in the media.

The mass mobilization, however, was more than just performing within the allowed boundaries and creating a positive image of the undocumented immigrant. The day-long spectacle was about the future—the transformation and revolution possible thorough the public staging of these previously invisible bodies. By reading the May 1st protests as a celebration of nationality and belonging, I argue that the participants performed a new sense of nation in the streets that day. Through this performance of presence, participants utilized the theatricality of the event to claim a space, create public awareness, challenge discrimination, create a united community, and promote a progressive immigrant agenda.

The significance of May 1st as the day of protest was a strategic choice that aligned the immigrants with the image of the popular worker. May 1st, celebrated throughout the world as May Day, or International Workers’ Day, celebrates the social

and economic achievements of the international labor movement.²⁸ By casting the immigrant protestors as laborers and workers, the rallies highlighted the contributions of the immigrant population in U.S. society and inserted them into the genealogy of the worldwide labor movement.²⁹ This casting also maximized the goal of the boycott by symbolically affecting the economic sphere.

The rallies that day took under many names (“Day without an Immigrant,” “The Great American Boycott,” “*El Gran Paro Estadounidense*”), but the message was simple and clear: take to the streets and be seen. The response was overwhelming and the following day the Associated Press reported that police departments in a dozen cities estimated a total of 1.1 million participants in the rallies (Flaccus). *Democracy Now* reported over 1.5 million participants, calling the event the largest day of protest in U.S. history (DN). *The Village Voice* reported that in New York City, “hundreds of thousands” marched in a crowd that stretched for 26 blocks, led by the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, and the President of the Transit Workers Union (Ferguson). *The Los Angeles Times* estimated more than a half million people in the streets, making it the largest demonstration to take place in the history of L.A. (Watanabe). Other reports estimate: 400,000 in Chicago; 75,000 in Denver; 55,000 in San Francisco; 50,000 in San Jose; 30,000 in Florida; 15,000 in Houston (Flaccus); 70,000 in Milwaukee (Pabst); 65,000 in Seattle (Seattle Times); and 10,000 in Las Vegas (Lawrence). In many of these cities,

²⁸ International Workers’ Day commemorates the 1886 Haymarket Massacre in Chicago. On that day, Chicago police opened fire on workers who were on strike. Several demonstrators and police officers were killed in the confrontation. In 1889, May Day was formally recognized as an annual event at the meeting of the Second International, an organization of leftist social and labor parties formed in Paris. Subsequently, the working classes fought to make May Day an official holiday. International Workers’ Day has historically been the focal point for protests and rallies by socialist and leftist groups.

²⁹ Of the 11.5-12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States in 2006, 7.2 million were employed, comprising 4.9% of the total U.S. labor force. Within specific labor categories, undocumented immigrants accounted for 17% of those employed in the cleaning industry, 14% in construction, 12% in the food industry, and 24% of all people employed in farming (Passel 2006).

businesses shut down for the day as a sign of solidarity with the immigrant community, while other companies were forced to shut down despite warnings to employees who were planning on skipping work for the boycott.³⁰ Even the U.S.-Mexico border at San Diego/Tijuana was shut down when 1,000 protestors managed to block traffic on both sides of the border at the San Ysidro port of entry (Gorman).

The staging of the “Day without an Immigrant” contained all the elements of theatre and performance: actors, spectators, text, props, costumes, and music. The rally participants took center stage as actors in a script that was staged for the entire nation to watch. Media, cameras, and news reporters aided in the transmission of these images to the citizenry. Rally supporters’ dialogue included chants of “*Si, se puede*” (“Yes, we can”), “*Amnistia para todos*” (“Amnesty for all”), “*Obreros, unidos, jamás serán vencidos*” (“The workers, united, will never be defeated”), and “U-S-A! U-S-A!” The flags that they waved in the streets represented their cultural homes (across the world) and their new home (the United States). Signs and banners carried the words: “We’re all Americans,” “No Human is Illegal,” “Immigration Built this Country,” “We are not Terrorists,” “Today we March, Tomorrow we Vote,” and “We are not Criminals, Give us a Chance for a Better Life.” Throughout the streets were the voices of the many calling out for reform and change. But alongside this heavily political scripting were the sounds and sights of celebration and fiesta: people danced in the streets to Tejano, cumbia, and reggaeton music, and drummers played as the marchers smiled and laughed with one another. Rally participants were urged to wear white as a sign of solidarity and create an

³⁰ Goya, the largest Hispanic-owned food chain in the U.S., shut down delivery for the day in support of the boycott (everywhere, except Florida). Tyson Foods was forced to shut down operations in a dozen of their plants and Cargill Meat Solutions was forced to close its factories in six states. Perdue Farms, Gold Kist, and McDonald’s also reported closings, reduced staff, and limited operations throughout the day (CNN).

“ocean of white T-shirts with our political demands from east coast to west coast”
(NISN).



Figure 16. Marchers take to the streets of Los Angeles on May 1, 2006.

This ocean of white T-shirts was accompanied by a flood of red, white, and blue. Although many of the immigrants at the rallies waved flags from their home countries, the U.S. flag became the unifying object around which the participants assembled. Staging themselves as patriotic and proud residents of the United States, the protestors marked themselves as similar to the American citizens watching the spectacles unfold. Although immigrants come from different backgrounds, and although they struggle to

retain elements of their culture, the flag waving represented a desire to be included within the United States. The millions of U.S. flags waved that day by Latina/o, Asian, African, and other immigrant hands represented a new nation defined by inclusiveness. Belonging and nationhood as performed on the streets May 1st meant that the American flag could be waved alongside Mexican, Honduran, Cuban, Chinese, Korean, and all other flags. It meant that the American symbols on parade that day, like the Statue of Liberty and Uncle Sam, could be accompanied by salsa music, *mariachis*, *sombreros*, and the Spanish, Chinese, and Korean languages. The message was that immigrants in this nation could pledge allegiance to more than one flag and not have to give up the ties to their culture and heritage.

This idea of a *new* United States nation, un-divided by language and identity, was further promoted when a Spanish version of “The Star-Spangled Banner” was released just a few days before the May 1st rallies. Written by Adam Kidron, a British music producer, the song, “*Nuestro Himno*” (“Our Anthem”), was created to honor America’s immigrants and allow them to actively participate in American patriotism despite the language barrier. In an interview with the Associated Press on April 28, 2006, Kidron explains that his song “affords those immigrants that have not yet learned the English language the opportunity to fully understand the character of the Star-Spangled Banner, the American flag, and the ideals of freedom that they represent” (AP). Using the anthem as a symbol of national pride and identity, Kidron hoped his song would help unite the people of the United States. The irony, of course, is that Kidron, a British citizen, was the source of this national effort. But his nationality—not a U.S. citizen—also speaks to the transnational goals of the rallies that day. The Star-Spangled Banner, (re)interpreted by a

British citizen, was being sung in Spanish on the streets of the United States by both U.S. citizens and non-citizens. The strict code of assimilated belonging was broken, a new version was given voice, and the patriotic symbol of national pride and unity was allowed to take on more than one form. Opponents of the Spanish version quickly criticized it as un-American.

Modeled after the marches that took place during the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam War rallies, and protests by the LGBT community, the May 1st marches were a call for equality and inclusiveness. Although the African American, queer, and immigrant communities share many similarities with the Latina/o community as minority and marginalized groups, the difficulty in this comparison is that in the previous movements citizenship could not be contested. For the immigration protests, the fact remained that many of the participants were living in the United States illegally and opponents were claiming that as justification for denying rights to non-citizens. Nonetheless, the campaign moved forward, asking legal immigrants and allies to march alongside their undocumented comrades. In fact, no distinction was made between rally participants that day: there was no way of knowing whether the people in the streets were legally or illegally in the country. As Peggy Phelan asserts in her groundbreaking *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, “there is real power in remaining unmarked” (6).

The day’s performance of presence and power was symbolic in its representation of the whole immigrant community. The Pew Hispanic Center, a nonpartisan research group in Washington, estimated that there were 11.5 to 12 million unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in March 2006. Basing their numbers on 2005

population surveys and census reports, the group also reported that 6.2 million (56%) of the unauthorized population was from Mexico and that 2.5 million (22%) of the total unauthorized population was from the rest of Latin America (Passel 2006). These figures indicate that 78%, or roughly three out of every four immigrants in the United States are from Latin America, which accounts for the public opinion that all “illegal” immigrants are Latina/os. It also accounts for the heavy Latina/o turnout at the May 1st rallies.

Within the United States, undocumented immigrants are what Victor Turner calls “liminal *personae*”: “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (“Liminality and Communitas” 79). They possess neither status nor rank to afford them the rights and freedoms of citizenship. Susan Bibler Coutin, in her study of Salvadoran immigrants in the U.S., calls the zones they occupy, “spaces of nonexistence” (27). For the undocumented immigrant, crossing outside of these zones always entails a risk; remaining within the liminal space is the key to survival.

The May 1st “Day without an Immigrant” protests inverted this scenario. On that day undocumented immigrants were urged to flood the streets *to create a scene* in order *to be seen*. Joined by documented immigrants and allies, undocumented individuals expanded their “spaces of nonexistence” to include the public sphere. In his chapter titled “The Street is the Stage,” in *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, Richard Schechner comments on street theatre’s capability to transform official space: “A big part of the celebration is experiencing the transformation of work space, or traffic space, or some kind of official space into a playfield” (49). The streets, spaces dominated

by law and regulation, became sites of celebration and playfulness during this day of political protest.

Public streets—with traffic signs to command yields and pauses, signals that tell people when to stop and go, and lines drawn to contain and regulate direction and movement—are instruments of the state, controlling the daily flow of traffic and people within the public sphere. The atmosphere of fiesta and carnival that day broke all these rules and the street became a stage on which to act out identity, belonging, and social change. During this brief suspension of the status quo, “illegal” immigrants were no longer being hunted on the streets for deportation; they were the rulers of these streets, making their own rules and playing their own games.

This temporary suspension of the rules made the “Day without an Immigrant” campaign a form of carnival. The problem often expressed with carnival, however, is that it only exists within a limited and defined moment of time. The reversal of the established order and the momentary utopia possible in carnival almost always end when the festivities are over, and in most cases the final result is a reaffirmation of the status quo. Expanding on this limited capacity of carnival, Baz Kershaw explains that in the end, “the prevailing order is strengthened [...] the revelers return to a living whose rules are set by the dominant ideologies, with energies dissipated and their sense of the liberality of the regime re-animated” (73). Although carnival may give a glimpse of a different future, it is rarely the cause of that future. As Schechner notes, it is “the difference between temporary and permanent change [that] distinguishes carnival from revolution” (*Future* 83).

Although many theorists of carnival view its reversal as temporal and non-permanent, on the “Day without an Immigrant” it was the possibility of change and the chance to create a new political vision of the U.S. that gave the movement its strength. This inversion of the everyday norm gave the immigrant community a power they were not usually afforded within public spaces. Mikhail Bakhtin, in his analysis of carnival, hails its power to transform society. He argues that “carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. [It] was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal” (10). The inversion of hierarchy and suspension of the norm are what make carnival attractive to minoritarian subjects. These shifts in the power structure and the possibility to perform a different role are what drew the over 1.5 million people into the streets on May 1, 2006. Those participating in the immigrant rallies were moved by the power to (re)create and (re)define their worlds.

The May 1st street performances can be read as what Augusto Boal defines as “rehearsals of revolution” (141) and what Richard Schechner calls “rehearsals for the near future” (85). Inherent in both these descriptions is the element of change—the transformation that comes as a result of the rehearsals. In the social drama that is the U.S. immigration debate, the “Day without an Immigrant” campaign can be understood as one of these rehearsals. The revolution and near future that they speak about is the birth of a *new nation*: one where immigrants are no longer liminal beings subjected to the margins.

In the state of topsy-turvydom, where celebration, music, and revelry filled the streets, there was the chance, “to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative

nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (Bakhtin 34). This glimpse into a new world is what the organizers of the “Day without an Immigrant” rallies wanted the American public—and its legislature—to see. Within this new order of things, immigrants were not objects to be hunted and legislated; they were subjects with agency and demands. Carnival permitted what Congress was making impermissible. The protests created a new sense of being and belonging that day. The inhabitants of the United States, especially those living without legal documentation, could walk in the streets freely, putting their bodies on display without fear of being marked “alien” and “other.” The protests were a celebration of diversity, regardless of residence status. Although the new nation was a momentary act, the protestors hoped that those in power (Congress) would be moved to enact legislation to make their performance a reality.

In our “society of the spectacle,” to borrow Guy Debord’s term, the immigrants were able to assemble in masses to make their numbers seen and heard. Using their bodies to carry their message, the protestors effectively used performance as a tool in the struggle for change and equality in the face of government authority and public acts of racism. Despite things going back to “business as usual” on May 2nd, the “Day without an Immigrant” had some success. At the end of the day, the campaign achieved its two biggest goals: 1) the massive turnout sent a message to the U.S. government and its citizens, that the immigrants of this nation demand to be recognized and treated as human beings, and 2) the community atmosphere created throughout the day demonstrated to fellow immigrants the importance and power of solidarity and union for social change.

The immigrant protests that took place in 2006 were staged as acts of resistance to H.R. 4437, which was being debated in the Senate. Ultimately, the bill did not pass,

perhaps an indication of the success of those earlier rallies. On May 25, the *Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006* (S. 2611) was passed by the Senate. The new bill, which was introduced on April 7, was heavily contested, and the immigrant rallies surely added to the debate. Considered the liberal version of H.R. 4437, S. 2611 proposed an increase of security along some of the U.S.-Mexico border, although not as extensively as the House bill. It also provided a path to legal status for long-term “illegal” immigrants and called for an increase in the number of guest workers permitted into the country each year. Most importantly, the Senate bill did not mandate that illegal residency and aid to undocumented workers be classified as felony offenses (the most controversial aspect of H.R. 4437). Although the bill did pass the Senate, it would never become law, indicating that the new nation performed on May 1st would not come to fruition. The period of carnival had concluded and with it all visions of utopia came to an end.

Or did they? The street performances offered on the “Day without an Immigrant” were powerful acts of presence and belonging in numbers never before seen in our nation’s history. Carnavalesque and revolutionary in style, the celebration of the immigrant community was in fact a catalyst for change. Even though the result was not immediate comprehensive immigration reform, the rallies empowered the immigrant communities to unite and take a stand for equality and justice. By taking advantage of the power of protest, and through performing a cultural identity and presence, the immigrant community in the U.S. successfully utilized spectacle and the media to draw attention and awareness to their cause. The possibility for future change and utopia, for that *new nation*, continues.

Of course, the passing of SB1070 in Arizona brings about a whole new set of questions and strategies for how to achieve that new nation. Visibility, for many, continues to be the solution. In both political protest and on the theatrical stage, being seen is essential in the campaign for progressive immigration reform. But for the undocumented immigrant there is a very complicated relationship between political visibility and invisibility, being marked and unmarked. Surely for the undocumented immigrant community, everyday visibility does not lead to political power: the key to survival is not being seen. So if being seen can lead to deportation, and the push for progressive immigration reform depends on increasing visibility, then how do immigrants and activists achieve their agenda?

Looking and *seeing* take on new meanings within the power relations at play in U.S. immigration policy. But there is another side to being unmarked, one that carries with it a risk and danger. Immigrants crossing illegally into the U.S., without identification or someone back home who knows their exact whereabouts, run the risk of transforming from bodies that are *unmarked* into bodies that are *disappeared*. This vanishing, erasure from the public sphere, has become all too common along the U.S.-Mexico border. Disappearance is the result of failed immigration policy, an absent international response to the growing needs of the lower classes, and a lack of a humanitarian agenda along the borderlands. The disappearances happening in the expanse of the southern U.S. border represent the invisible and too often ignored immigrant perspective. As Diana Taylor notes, “[D]isappeared bodies are the linchpin in different, often ideologically opposed narratives that tie into, or run into, the national fantasy founded on radical differentiation” (*Disappearing* 147). Although Taylor is

speaking about the disappeared of Argentina's "Dirty War," the same is true about the disappeared in the borderlands. When found or accounted for, these deceased bodies become objects in the debate over illegal immigration. The bodies become (re)constructed and used in the ideological battle over the definitions of nation, citizenship, and belonging.

Bodies on Display: Headlines, Theatre, and Teatro Bravo

In the media, the bodies of the deceased, or too often the markers that stand in their place, become symbolic of the growing immigration crisis. But even when accounted for in local news, the national media usually ignores stories of *individual* deaths along the U.S.-Mexico border. Mass deaths, more spectacular and newsworthy, however, do catch national attention and fuel the debate over illegal immigration. A July 3, 1987 *New York Times* article read: "18 Aliens, Trapped in a Boxcar, Die in Bungled Smuggling Attempt." Occurring one year after Ronald Reagan's amnesty for undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. before 1982, the massive death indicated that the immigration crisis was nowhere near an end. Sixteen years later, a CNN news story would announce a similar tragedy, "18 human cargo deaths in Texas." By the next day, the death toll reached 19 in Victoria, Texas, after a driver abandoned a semi-truck with at least 67 people locked in the back for at least half a day. In 2001, the *Washington Post* ran a story that read: "14 Illegal Immigrants Die in Desert." These news headlines, covering only the more dramatic stories of mass death, generate additional controversy within the U.S. population. But what are these bodies? Visible? Invisible? Unmarked? Disappeared? In death, the immigrant body becomes a site of contestation.

What do these news headlines have in common? Apart from the obvious—that they all report incidents of abuse, death, and violence—the subjects of these news reports remain nameless. Each incident, reported as tragedy, still manages to somehow erase the individual from the story. In all, the term “alien” is used a total of fifteen times in these three news articles. Further complicating the notion of individuality is the strategic use of the terms: “migrants,” “illegals,” “bodies,” and “brown-skinned.” Stripped of a human identity, these victims of violence become unrecognizable—in fact, *alien*—to the consumers of these U.S. news agencies. Reduced to statistics, the bodies of Latin Americans who die crossing the border into the United States become forgotten in the national fight against illegal immigration.

These incidents of human rights abuses have one more thing in common: they have inspired playwrights to create texts that revive the memories of these victims, allowing the actors on stage to embody—physically and symbolically—the stories of those individuals who dared cross the dangerous border in hope of a better future.³¹ While the debates surrounding the nation—national identity, national borders, national security—continue to escalate, the response by artists to U.S. immigration policy is the creation of a body of work among Latin American and Latina/o theatre artists that gives voice to the too often ignored immigrant perspective.

Traditional theatre, like protest, can foster the conditions that work toward the immigrant agenda: a public platform, energized performing bodies, an engaged audience, and a sense of *communitas*. Victor Turner, writing about *communitas*, describes it as an experience of unity that brings people together, but also “preserves individual

³¹ The 1987 tragedy inspired Sylvia Gonzales S. to write *El Vagón*; the Victoria, Texas event was the central story in Mexican playwright Hugo Alfredo Hinojosa Diaz’s *Desiertos*; and the death of the 14 immigrants in Arizona was the catalyst for José Casas to write *14*.

distinctiveness” (*Ritual* 45). The sense of *communitas* engendered in performances dealing with the subject of immigration—the ability to embody the community’s story, create a sense of unity, and challenge the erasure of the individual—is exactly what activists are seeking. Just as the immigrant rallies created *communitas* among the protestors, actors and actresses performing on the stage can achieve *communitas* between themselves and their audiences.

As Jill Dolan notes in *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, it is moments of shared intimacy that contain the potential to produce feelings of belonging, even if for a brief moment. Commenting on the political potential created by audiences coming together, she notes that “such spectatorship might encourage them to be active in other public spheres, to participate in civic conversations that performance perhaps begins” (11). Dolan coins the term “utopian performatives,” which she defines as:

small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. (5)

She claims that the theatre can create this powerful and motivating affect, where performance and theatre “can be a transformative experience useful in other realms of social life” (15). This ability to be moved and transformed by emotion and belonging, similar to what occurred on May 1, 2006, is essential in the campaign for progressive immigration reform. Motivated by the bodies they saw in the streets during the rallies,

theatre practitioners are creating additional spaces—artistic ones—where the immigrant body can demand recognition and attention.

The work being created by these artists as a reaction to the immigration debate develops out of a rich genealogy of political theatre by Latina/os in the southwestern United States. The most influential works, of course, are those of El Teatro Campesino, founded by Luis Valdez in 1965. El Teatro Campesino and other theatre collectives with an activist agenda emerged from this decade of rebellion and were responsible for “creating decentralized, antiestablishment theatre in alternative spaces for popular audiences throughout the Western world” (Van Erven 1).

For the migrant farmworkers of the Southwest, the struggle for freedoms and rights culminated in the public street acts of the United Farm Workers (UFW). Led by César Chávez, the UFW fought against the exploitation of laborers, abuse of child labor, use of pesticides, and substandard living conditions. Creating a spirit of activism that had not existed before in the Chicana/o community, the protests of the UFW sought justice for those who faced “a life expectancy of 54 years, an hourly wage of 85 cents, annual income well below the poverty level, [and] the indignity of racial and sexual harassment” (Broyles-Gonzalez xi).

Chávez and the other organizers recognized the ability of performance to mobilize the masses and spread their activist message. Under the leadership of the UFW in Delano, California, El Teatro Campesino was conceived as a “union tool for organizing, fund-raising, and politicizing” (Broyles-Gonzalez xii). Valdez, a child of migrant farmworkers, committed himself and his work to the political agenda of the UFW. Having worked previously with the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Valdez learned a great deal about

political performance through R.G. Davis and other members of the renowned and influential group.

Valdez and the members of El Teatro Campesino created improvisational skits, or *actos*, that would express the problems and conditions of the farmworkers. The original actors and members of the collective were farmworkers, and they based their pieces on the lives of its members and audiences. The first performances of their actos were staged on the back of flatbed trucks in the middle of produce fields throughout California. Taking their plays and message to the people, the farmworkers' theatre was committed to garnering support for the union. The troupe began by entertaining farmworkers, but they soon began to raise funds for the strikers. Although they continued their commitment to the union, their subsequent pieces began to reflect other concerns of the Chicana/o community: racism, stereotypes, education, poverty, and the Vietnam War, among others.

Luis Valdez and El Teatro Campesino envisioned a thriving theatre where Latina/o artists and audiences could come together to stage the lives of *la raza*. The call had two parts, and each was necessary for the political and artistic life of the *teatros*: "If the raza will not come to the theatre, then the theatre must go to the raza." The second part read, "We challenge Chicanos to become involved in the art, the life style, the political and religious act of doing teatro" (Valdez 10). Heeding the call, and continuing in the footsteps of their predecessors, Teatro Bravo, a bilingual theatre company, was established in the summer of 2000 by Guillermo Reyes, Daniel Enrique Pérez, and Trino Sandoval. In his "Preface" to the anthology of plays produced by Teatro Bravo, *Borders on Stage*, Sandoval outlines the goals of the theatre:

The mission of Teatro Bravo would be to produce quality Latino-themed plays in English and Spanish. We wanted to promote the complex portrait of the Latin American populations in the United States and to entertain and enlighten with diverse, unpredictable, sometimes confrontational, but always caring and engaged theater. We wanted to reach audiences of all ages and all cultures, and to invite audiences to learn about the triumphs and troubles of Latin American culture through theater (ix).

Responding to the lack of theatre by and about Latina/os in the Phoenix area, this professional theatre company has become a success with the large Latina/o population (they have also traveled to Nevada to stage their shows). A venue for new Latina/o artists and works, Teatro Bravo is engaging Latina/o and non-Latina/o audiences with local and national issues related to the Latina/o community, including: immigration, racism, gendered violence, sexuality, politics, and identity.

Teatro Bravo stages classic, contemporary, and original plays. Productions have included works by Pablo Neruda, Federico Garcia Lorca, Miguel Sabido, Antonio Serrano, Guillermo Reyes, Culture Clash, and even a Spanish translation of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. Each of the plays selected is socially conscious and presents a perspective on the Latina/o as a cultural agent and individual. What is most important to note of Teatro Bravo is that it is a community-based theatre. Jan Cohen-Cruz, in *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*, says that the "source of community-based performance is not the singular artist but a 'community' constituted by virtue of a shared primary identity based in place, ethnicity, class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation" (2). Teatro Bravo, drawing its

inspiration and stories—as well as its artists, actors, and playwrights—from its community, stages before its multi-identity audience the realities of residing within the borderlands.

The work of Teatro Bravo can be read as a vehicle for education, a catalyst for community building, and an agent of change. By presenting Latina/o lives and stories—and the bodies of the actors—on the stage, Teatro Bravo projects into the community a positive image of the Latina/o. Watching their stories played out before them, Latina/o audiences gain a deeper appreciation and sense of pride in their cultural background. Non-Latina/o audience members witness an alternate point of view and an image of the Latina/o that challenges the stereotype. Furthermore, the auditorium becomes a space where both the Latina/o and non-Latina/o can come together for an evening to witness an artistic commentary on society, and perhaps even share in a moment of joy and *communitas*, the hope and utopia Dolan describes.

Speaking on the topic of immigration, Sandoval notes, “At Teatro Bravo, we believe it was, and is, our moral responsibility and obligation to bring to the stage these sensitive and sometimes confrontational issues” (x). In September 2003, Teatro Bravo staged José Casas’s *14. Casas*, a graduate of Arizona State University’s M.F.A. in Creative Writing (Playwrighting) Program, based the play on interviews he conducted with different people around Arizona. The play, a series of monologues, takes as its departure point the death of fourteen immigrants in Yuma, Arizona, who died while trying to cross into the U.S. (their *coyote* abandoned them in the desert). The play later became a 2004 finalist for the Nuestra Voces National Playwrighting Competition. Casas, who has won several awards for his writing, is a self-identified Chicano and his work has

been staged across the Southwest. In his book *Ethnodrama: An Anthology of Reality Theatre*, Johnny Saldaña calls Casas, “one of the nation’s most exciting new Latino voices in theatre” (46).

The death of the fourteen immigrants garnered national media attention and renewed the debate over illegal immigration into the United States. The reaction to the deaths varied from sympathy for the immigrants to anger at the increasing number of undocumented people entering the U.S. through the Mexican border. With a grant provided by Arizona State University’s Department of Chicano and Chicana Studies, Casas decided to write a play about the debate, offering a variety of perspectives that reflected Arizona’s different reactions to the crisis. Although the play is specifically situated within Arizona—incorporating interviews from residents of Yuma, Flagstaff, Sedona, Guadalupe, Chandler, Goodyear, Scottsdale, Douglas, Tucson, Tempe, Mesa, and Phoenix—the perspectives and opinions reflect the dialogue taking place on the national level. *14* is a play that comes from and operates within the specific needs of the community, informing the national from a local point of view.

The play opens with a series of projections that read:

may 19, 2001

a smuggling guide abandons more
than 30 mexicans crossing
east of yuma.

dehydration kills 14.

their deaths trigger renewed

binational debate over immigration.

the dead are:

lorenzo hernandez ortiz

raymundo barreda landa,

reynaldo bartolo

ario castillo fernandez,

enrique landero

raymundo barreda maruri,

julian mabros malaga,

claudio marin alejandro,

arnulfo flores badilla,

edgar adrian martinez colorado,

efrain gonzalez manzano

heriberto tapia baldillo.

two others have yet

to be identified. (77)

The first projection, reminiscent of the news headlines announcing mass deaths of undocumented immigrants, focuses on the facts. Individual slides with each of the victims' names, however, follow. The slides, projected onto the dark stage and with pauses between each, allow the audience time to absorb and react to the list of names, something rarely provided in the news stories. This use of individual names departs from the scenario of immigrant deaths as mass tragedy. Rather, each slide recasts the deceased bodies from group to individual, invisible to visible. Even the final slide, listing two unidentified individuals, allows the victims a moment and space within the public sphere.

The following scene, “welcome to the jungle,” is the only one in the play where two actors share the space of the stage at the same time. Although the two characters are speaking from different locations, their lines become a dialogue. Marta Ramirez, a Chicana, and Roger Tate, a white business owner, offer their opinions on an upcoming murder trial. As the two narrate the details of the events, it is revealed that Tate’s son, and other members of the high school football team, are being charged with the murder of two Mexican teenagers. Tate, irritated by the attention his family is receiving because of the deaths, cannot wait until “this whole thing’s blown over” (79).

As both Tate and Ramirez offer details of the event in question, it is clear that both sides have a very different understanding of how things transpired. Tate explains that his son and his friends on the football team were defending some young women who were being harassed by the two Mexican boys: “are you telling me those kids should have let those boys walk all over them? the one mexican kid grabbed that girl inappropriately. no one seems to mention that” (79). Tate continues by praising his son’s popularity and academic achievements, including his membership in the honor society, being captain of the football team, and his acceptance to the University of Utah on a sports scholarship. But Ramirez offers a different perspective to the situation, claiming that:

there were only two of them. two skinny little mexican boys against half a football team [...] six football players... three of them close to three hundred pounds [...] francisco and javier were held to the ground and kicked in the head while other kids watched and yelled, ‘kill the beaners!’ not one person lifted a finger to help them! (79).

Throughout the scene, as Tate and Ramirez go back and forth in their retelling of the events, it becomes clear that no one knows exactly what happened that night. Tate, defending his son, claims that the murders were justified; Ramirez blames the whole situation on race relations. As the two continue to speak, a clear “us” versus “them” dichotomy takes over the scene. Tate reinforces this when he reveals that “people all over town have been writing letters to the judge on his [son’s] behalf. the principle and some of his teachers. all of his friends and family, too. coach taylor even wrote to the university to reassure them that this whole incident was just one big misunderstanding” (81). Tate, a respected business owner and member of the city council, is able to afford “the best lawyer money can buy” (80). There is no mention at all of the family of the deceased or of their socioeconomic position in the community. In fact, the rest of the scene continues without offering a perspective into the lives of the two Mexican youths.

Casas, providing the audience with this interaction following the projections of the names of the deceased undocumented immigrants, offers another case where race and citizenship create a situation where death is not just a tragedy, but an event on which opinions and identities are at stake. The two characters stage the local and national debate over illegal immigration, and as each offers a perspective on the events, their own bodies and race become sites of contestation. Ramirez, a Chicana, demands justice and public accountability: “those boys ruined two lives. two families. they need to be punished. they need to know what they did was wrong...everyone in this city needs to know!” (81). Tate, playing more than the role of the father—as city council member he represents the government and as businessman represents the economy—claims the actions as justified. For him it is not an issue of race, because as he assures the audience, “i am not racist. my

son is not racist! some of my friends are mexican” (81). Both sides offer an opinion, and both sides get a voice in this exchange. As Christina Marín, director of the Teatro Bravo production explains, “each character in this play brings to the table their own cultural constructs which inform and define their words and actions. The beauty of *14* is that they are all sitting at *the same table*” (qtd. in Saldaña 46).

Throughout the play Casas provides the perspectives of a variety of characters: a rancher, artist, senator, cashier, actor, magazine editor, law student, nanny, ER doctor, soldier, kindergarten teacher, pastor, and immigrant day laborer. The characters are both Latina/o and non-Latina/o. Adding to this distinction is the playwright’s requirement that the casting must include: “one white actress, one latina, one white actor, one latino” (74). The physical requirement of racial difference onstage demands that the audience acknowledge and reflect on the actors’ bodies and race throughout the play. But as Casas demonstrates throughout *14*, the opinions and reactions of the characters to the issues of race and illegal immigration are not always aligned with the color of their skin. Some Latina/o characters, like Omar Castillo and Matthew Logan, do not associate their opinions with their own ethnic identities. For them, the issues of race and immigration are more personal than cultural.

Castillo, a State Senator of Arizona, uses his moment on stage as a way of justifying his position against bilingual education. His statements reflect the misconception that immigrants take advantage of social service programs and welfare, and that their presence in the state is an economic burden for the taxpayer. In his monologue he argues that it is not the responsibility of the education system to carry the burden of the immigrant children who attend Arizona’s schools. “[T]he Hispanic

community needs to rely less on the kindness of others” is his assessment of the situation in Arizona (82). Angry over the requests and necessity for bilingual education, he continues: “and... where does it stop!? spanish, vietnamese, chinese, french? what next? maybe gaelic? or latin?” (82). His illogical and absurd understanding of the effects of bilingual education reflects the type of reasoning used by opponents of the Spanish language. He supports his insistence that doing away with bilingual education is strictly a matter of economics. As a response to critics he adds, “cutting bilingual education is not about ignoring our students’ cultural roots” (82).

As Arizona has demonstrated several times in its history, however, the battle over language and ethnicity is decided in the legislature and often to the detriment of cultural roots. Although an Arizona judge struck down a 1986 referendum declaring English as the only language of the state, Proposition 106, passed by popular vote in 2006, declared English as the official language of Arizona. In addition to controversial SB1070, Governor Brewer also signed into law in 2010 a law that prohibits ethnic studies in schools that receive funds from the state. The law prohibits classes and materials that “promote the overthrow of the U.S. government, promote resentment of a particular race or class of people, are designed primarily for students of a particular ethnic group or advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals” (HB 2281). The inflammatory language in the bill targets ethnic studies as treason and (mis)defines the study of ethnic pride as divisive and damaging. Additionally, the Arizona Department of Education instructed schools to no longer allow teachers with “heavy” or “ungrammatical” accents to teach English classes. These types of law, in addition to Castillo in the play, embody Hage’s “White nation fantasy.”

The response given to opponents by supporters of this legislation is assimilation and the severing of cultural roots. But even as Castillo in the play denies such accusations, his identification as Latino complicates the situation. When accused of being anti-Latina/o, he responds, “i’m anything, but that” (82). He then continues to justify his political position by telling his own personal story. The son of a Latina housekeeper, he used to accompany his mother to work as a child. He attributes his mastery of the English language to the fact that he used to watch television as his mother worked: “my mother knew what was needed of me to survive here...and, that is exactly what i’ve done. my eyes glued to a t.v. set...well, that was just the beginning” (83). Simplifying the issue at hand and claiming that an act as simple as watching television can help eliminate the need for bilingual education, he concludes by stating: “you see, i’ve succeeded! there is no reason others shouldn’t be able to do likewise” (83). Placing the blame on the family, Castillo and the Arizona legislator can claim that they play no role in the growing disparity in education between Latina/o and non-Latina/o students.

The other character in the play who distances himself from his Latino identity is Matthew Logan. A native of Phoenix, Logan makes a living as an actor in Los Angeles. When asked about his choice to change his name from *Mateo Sanchez* to *Matthew Logan*, he responds, “same difference? it’s only a name; not who i am” (92). For Logan, the choice to be an actor also means the choice to discard his Latino identity for a more generic and malleable one. It is in this monologue where Casas’s position as interviewer/playwright takes on a more substantial role. Casas inserts himself into the play as a silent character. In each monologue the person being interviewed is speaking to Casas, who does not talk but maintains a strong presence. Casas’s reactions and role as

ethnographer inform and at times even alter the events of the interview. With Logan, Casas's identification as Chicano takes the interview into a different direction. Logan challenges Casas by stating, "my cousin warned me about you. she told me you were one of those chicano power militant types" (91). Up until this point in the play, Casas's identification and political persuasions were not an issue. But Logan, as a Latino defending his choice to assimilate, objects to Casas: "i don't see any reason to feel guilty. why should i? i didn't grow up with visions of becoming a revolutionary. all i ever wanted to do was act. it's that simple. the way i go about accomplishing this...is my business" (92).

Not only does Logan stand up to Casas's objections and accusations, but he defends his actions as a political choice, claiming that, "i do shakespeare because it challenges me. chekov. ibsen. i love them and i don't want anyone to tell me i can't do those plays because of my ethnicity" (93). For Logan, the choice not to be Latino in the theatre business is what allows him the opportunity to continue to do what he loves. Casas, a playwright and fellow theatre practitioner, however, has dedicated his work to the Latina/o cause. Faced with his Latino counterpart, Casas is challenged from within his own affinity group, not only ethnically but artistically as well. Logan, responding to a question from Casas, says, "luis valdez? ooh, how did i not see that coming? no...i've never done any of his work...sorry to disappoint you, but i can't say it bothers me very much either" (93). This meeting of the two sides of the politically/artistically informed male Latino identity spectrum—the militant Chicano and the assimilated Latino—ends in a draw.

The mention of Luis Valdez in the play, although dismissed by Logan, reminds the audience that *14* comes from a tradition that, as Jorge Huerta notes in his groundbreaking *Chicano Theater: Themes and Forms*, “was born of and remains a people’s theater” (3). Casas’s identification with Valdez situates him within the genealogy that developed from the politically charged actos of El Teatro Campesino. For Casas and Valdez, Chicano theatre is political theatre; staging the voices and stories of la raza is the primary goal of Chicano theatre. But what is most interesting in both cases is that the common antagonist is not always the non-Chicana/o. Huerta reminds us that, “If the politically active Chicano is the hero, the apolitical Mexican American is the villain” (47). Within the plays of Valdez, this antihero/villain was represented by the *vendido*: the sellout. Betraying his culture and people in the name of self-interest, the vendido is one of the most dangerous figures in the Latina/o fight for justice. Both Castillo and Logan, in *14*, embody this dangerous traitor. These two vendidos—political and artistic—offer an anti-immigrant and anti-Latina/o perspective that threatens the community from the inside.

The opinions of the non-Latina/o characters in the play also offer a variety of perspectives. Although race seems to be the obvious factor determining the attitudes of those being interviewed, most of the non-Latina/o citizens do not recognize race as the central issue. Lacey Williams, a local businesswoman from Scottsdale, says,

it isn’t a question of race. it’s a question of economics. arizona is already in a budget crunch as it is. add them. yes, that’s right. them! the immigrants you were talking about. add them to the equation and you’ll see that the solution to the problem is nowhere in sight. (111)

Employing the us/them divide in her language and reasoning, Williams continues to justify her views on immigration as a matter of economics and comfort. Defining Scottsdale as, “a community of like-minded people,” Williams corrects herself by asserting, “we want our property values to remain high. we want our children to attend the best schools [...] we don’t want what’s happening to places like tucson and yuma to happen here. that wouldn’t be acceptable” (112). For Williams, the importance of economic and class superiority overwhelms her image of the immigrant. As she lists the luxuries in her town—expensive hotels, restaurants, spas, golf courses—she ignores the economic inequalities that exist in Arizona, regardless of citizenship.

Understanding her anti-immigrant discourse as her way of protecting her life of comfort and luxury, Williams is quick to reassure the audience that she is not racist:

this isn’t about me disliking mexicans or anything like that. i love the mexican culture. I practically live at baja fresh. and...my nanny, rosa, is like a member of the family...and when i was a student at arizona state, my sorority sisters and i spent every spring break in mexico...my husband and i went there for our honeymoon so, you see, it’s not about disliking another group of people. it’s about the fact that there is not enough money to go around. (112)³²

Williams reduces Mexican culture and its people to a restaurant, nanny, and vacations in Mexico. Although she seems not to be able to comprehend the larger issues of economic disadvantage and racism, her own understanding of Mexican culture is dependent on economic superiority: her ability to afford eating out at restaurants, employing a nanny, and taking several vacations to Mexico informs her image of the Latina/o immigrant. She indicates and expresses concern that the needs of her community are being neglected

³² Baja Fresh is a chain of Tex-Mex restaurants.

because of immigrants: “is it wrong to believe our citizens should have the first right to the amenities entitled to us as taxpayers? education, social services, etc. is it fair that some foreigner has access to our resources?” (112). Although studies have shown that immigrants are less likely than native-born citizens to use public services, Williams maintains that the immigrant is at fault (La Voz Nueva). These misconceptions, fueled by anti-immigrant rhetoric, become the basis for much of the animosity toward the immigrant.

When Williams turns the conversation to the weather, she claims that it helps make Scottsdale the perfect place to live. She goes on, “i can’t say i have an answer for the heat, but that’s what air conditioners and pools were made for and, really...a little heat never hurt anybody” (113). But when Casas interjects, bringing the conversation back to the death of the immigrants in the desert, she answers, “yes, yes, the fourteen immigrants. simple. they should’ve brought along some more water” (113). Incredibly, Williams blames the immigrants for their own deaths, simplifying the issue and exhibiting not only ignorance, but a lack of humanity in relation to the deaths. Reacting to the interviewer’s fury as he writes in his notebook, Williams feels threatened and explains herself, “unlike you, i try to look at people...and, not race. nothing i’ve told you today has anything to do with that. it’s about maintaining standards. there’s no sin in that” (114).

Protecting standards and protecting property become the main justifications for those who oppose immigration reform. In a scene entitled “a man’s home,” Casas interviews Charlie Clarkson, a rancher from Douglas, Arizona. Clarkson is the leader of a group known as Voices for a Free Arizona, a consortium of ranchers who actively

combat immigration along the border. Armed with rifles and the Second Amendment, these ranchers are similar in style to the vigilante groups that include the Minutemen, Civil Homeland Defense, Ranch Rescue, Arizona Guard, and American Border Patrol (just to name a few of the civilian groups that have made it their duty to stand armed against the undocumented immigrants crossing the desert). Clarkson, playing with a small airplane drone, explains the necessity for such groups: “we need all the help we can get. times are changing. america is under siege. the world isn’t a safe place anymore” (100). Employing a radical outlook, Clarkson’s view of the immigration crisis reflects the legislation being passed in Arizona. For Clarkson and others like him, the answer to this “siege” is a military and legislative defense based on scare tactics and war rhetoric. In a clear us/them moment, Clarkson says, “if we don’t protect ourselves, no one else will” (101).

As the interview continues, and as Casas brings up the subject of the fourteen deceased immigrants, Clarkson responds, “it’s a shame what happened to those people. but, those are the chances you take, you know?” (101). As he continues to speak about the immigrants crossing the border, he shows a brief moment of understanding for the immigrants’ plight and the economic realities at play: “of course, i know why they come! i know they got families like me... that they want to make a living. feed their children” (101). But even this moment of clarity becomes obscured as he continues, “but who’s to say that one of the people crossing isn’t one of those drug dealers or terrorist fellas” (101). As able as he is to understand the reasons that immigrants cross illegally into the United States, he is unable to disconnect his thinking from the fear and overgeneralization associated with labeling immigrants as potential drug dealers and

terrorists, much as Governor Brewer did in her April 23 speech when she signed SB1070 into law.

The Reverend Clay Nash stands in juxtaposition to Clarkson in *14*. In an interview that takes place in the desert outskirts of Tucson, just two hours north of the Mexican border, Nash explains why the immigrants are risking their lives by crossing in the dangerous desert heat: “immigration is changing their policies; rerouting immigrants so that they have to travel the most treacherous geography you can imagine...now these poor folk are being forced to travel to god knows where...only to die...not to be apprehended. the powers that be know that all too well” (117). When Operation Gatekeeper and Operation Blockade went into effect in the 1990s, the U.S. government’s goal was to stop illegal immigration coming in from the large urban centers of El Paso/Ciudad Juarez and San Diego/Tijuana. The results were successful, with a reduction in the numbers of undocumented immigrants crossing into the U.S. via these entry points. However, there was a “funnel effect,” resulting in a change of migratory patterns that made the Arizona desert the alternate route for entry North. As traditional, less dangerous entry points are sealed, immigrants have to find alternate routes, often more dangerous and with a greater risk of death. In February 2010, the *Coalición de Derechos Humanos*, a human rights organization operating along the border, announced that more than 6,000 people have died crossing through these new routes created by the “funnel effect” since 1994, adding that approximately 500 more people die a year (Coalición).

Reverend Nash, during his interview with Casas, is filling up a water station for use by immigrants. Nash’s activities, as well as those of other human rights groups, are

under attack by many U.S. citizens for their support of the undocumented immigrant. As Nash explains:

what irritates me are those people who criticize what we're doing...saying that we are not only contributing, but encouraging illegal immigration...and i use the word, illegal, loosely. that word should be reserved for those who are truly breaking the law... rapists... murderers...that isn't the case here. the only thing these people are about is survival. (120)

Reflecting on the death of the Yuma fourteen, he explains, “it boggles my mind to see how desensitized civilization has become...the sight of fourteen deceased bodies on a dried up riverbed and the only thoughts that pass through their hollow mind is ‘we got to do something about illegal immigration. it’s getting out of hand’” (120). Nash’s words, as the final monologue in the play, stand against those spoken by Lacey Williams and Charlie Clarkson. Nash’s view of the crisis, truly seeing the deaths of the fourteen individuals as a tragedy, forces him to reflect on the humanitarian aspect of the immigration crisis. As citizens of Arizona rally against undocumented immigrants and as legislation passes that puts civil liberties in jeopardy—eerily reminiscent of a fascist state—the simple answer offered by Nash is to see the human aspect of these immigrant deaths.

In an educated and almost prophetic way, Nash offers a solution—or better yet, a new perspective—to the dispute over illegal immigration. He says, “we can no longer look at ourselves as two nations divided by a river or some fence. We have to look at ourselves as a region that’s going to live together, that’s going to work together, that’s going to make some damn progress together” (120). Invoking Anzaldúa’s image and

metaphor of the “*gran herida*,” Nash also identifies those living in the borderlands as *atravesados*. Unified by geography, Anzaldúa and Nash see the border region as a shared responsibility, a site that calls for new understanding and new identifications. It is a space that demands its inhabitants find new ways of living and being. As his scene comes to an end, Nash sees an immigrant in the desert and calls to him to offer some water. Although just an immigrant crossing the desert, because of Nash he does not become another faceless victim of the desert heat.

In the penultimate scene, an immigrant day laborer, Oscar García, talks to Casas while looking for work out in front of a Home Depot in Mesa. His monologue, entitled “*muñeca*,” is delivered in Spanish. García begins by telling Casas that he knew one of the fourteen victims that died in Yuma. Explaining the risk involved in crossing he says, “there’s always a chance we won’t make it. that shit is fucked-up, but there is no other way. mexico is a poor country, like its people” (125).³³ Aware of the dangers in crossing through the desert, and having previously taken the journey, García acknowledges that the immigrants face the myriad of dangers knowingly. His insistence that “there is no other way” only heightens the necessity and desperation of the immigrants and explains why so many attempt to cross when they know the risks involved. García continues by speaking about his family back in Mexico and the way that his money is helping them out. He explains how his goal is to buy his daughter, Estrella, “a real christmas present and a real birthday present [...] one of those american barbie dolls” (127). Calculating that buying the dolls, house, and paying for shipping will cost him almost two hundred

³³ Casas provides a translation of the two Spanish monologues with the script “as a courtesy,” but he emphasizes that “those pieces must be performed in spanish” (75). (Emphasis in original)

dollars, he shows determination to provide his daughter with the gift, which ironically is a symbol of the American white and economically advantaged community.

Embodying the immigrant voice in the play, he tells Casas, “i work hard” (128). Understanding his interviewer’s potential to speak on his behalf, García takes a moment to address the immigration debate and the opinions of those who mislabel and mistreat him and others like him:

i don’t steal or nothing like that. i am an honest man. it’s not fair what people say about me and my friends. they treat us like we’re animals and that’s not true! they do not know how we feel...how much we miss our families. i love mexico, but there are no jobs in mexico. i am only doing what i have to do. i’m not hurting anybody. you make sure to tell people that. we are not criminals! criminals don’t buy american barbie dolls. (128)

Challenging the dominant anti-immigrant rhetoric, García’s monologue is the third, usually silenced, voice in the immigration debate: opponents and supporters of immigrants—both citizens—get a voice in the media and in elections, but the immigrant voice is almost always ignored. As a site of contestation, the immigrant body is put on display, but remains voiceless in the public sphere. Anti-immigrant citizens use the live body of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. as evidence of a threat; pro-immigrant citizens use the dead body of the immigrant as evidence of a growing humanitarian disaster. In *14*, Casas allows the immigrant voice to be heard, in his/her native tongue, and for the immigrant body to be seen on his/her own terms, without a filter. In addition to García’s monologue, *14* provides the audience with another Spanish monologue, “*virgencita linda*,” delivered by an elderly woman, Luz Ortiz, who works as a hotel

cleaning lady. By providing the immigrant voice from differing gendered and generational points of view, Casas presents a wider spectrum of the immigrant perspective.

Johnny Saldaña, reflecting on the audience's reaction to watching *14* performed in Phoenix, recalls: "Latinos in the audience also voiced affirmative responses out loud to their *hermanos y hermanas* onstage when their monologues cut to the 'truth' of borderlands issues from their perspective" (46). This identification and need to vocally express solidarity with those onstage and also in the audience, is what gives *14* its power as a vehicle for change within the community. Although most Latina/os saw their stories, or the stories of those they knew, in the performance, Casas was careful to structure the play in a way that avoided a superficial recognition and response. One of the most moving, and perhaps difficult to understand, scenes in the play deals with the image of the Border Patrol Agent. Highly politicized, the Border Patrol Agent represents different things to different people: to the anti-immigrant citizens the agent represents the government, the first line of defense against the "invasion" from the South; for the immigrant, and many citizens who sympathize with their cause, the body of the agent represents the enemy.

The most contested body within the Border Patrol, however, is that of the Latina/o Border Patrol Agent. Seen as the ultimate symbol of assimilation—the most vilified version of the *vendido*—the Latina/o agent's body demands particular scrutiny within the discussion of race and immigration. In *14*, however, Casas presents the *absent body* of the Latina/o Border Patrol Agent. In the monologue "our song," Monica Flores, a kindergarten teacher, tells the story of her deceased husband, Pedro. It is only after she

has laid the foundation for his story that the audience discovers he was both Latino and a Border Patrol Agent. Telling of the conflict that existed between Pedro and her family—Monica’s father had been taken into custody during I.N.S. raids in Chandler a few years before—Flores begins to discuss her fights with her husband over his decision to apply to the Department of Immigration.

As Flores narrates the details of Pedro’s training and their growing conflict because of his career decision, she begins to show a more human and politically aware side to Pedro’s decision to join the Border Patrol:

you hear stories all the time about latino border patrol agents who are worse than the white officers...they’re so afraid of appearing weak that they go to the extremes to build a reputation...in the process, not only do they lose their souls, but they lose their dignity. pedro wasn’t like that. he treated every single person he stopped with respect. didn’t matter what color they were...because of that, he was respected by most, resented by others. (110)

Flores’ realization was that her husband’s role as a Border Patrol Agent was more complicated than people wish to understand. For Pedro, being an agent meant being able to enact change from within the system. As she recalls, “after a few years, i came to understand that pedro wasn’t there to hunt down people crossing the border. he was there making sure they would have another chance to try again” (110).

But as the audience already knows, Pedro’s story has ended in tragedy. Flores recalls the details surrounding her husband’s death. During an interaction with some men at a local bar, Pedro revealed that he was a Border Patrol Agent. Later, his body was found in the desert, murdered execution-style. “[T]hey found his badge laying on top of

his chest...for everyone to see,” Flores recalls (111). Pedro was not robbed. It is suspected that the men he encountered in the bar were *coyotes* (human smugglers). But Flores’ story is more than just another instance of violence against a Latina/o body along the U.S.-Mexico border. The story she tells casts the *coyote* as the symbol of violence. Through this story—the death of a U.S. official—it becomes clear why so many citizens see the issue of immigration as a crisis and threat against the nation. Unfortunately for the immigrant subject, association with the coyote—through race, geography, and the act of crossing—casts them into the role of the enemy.

The politics of Teatro Bravo are evident in their productions, but the stakes are heightened further because of the group’s location in Arizona. Because of Teatro Bravo, in a state where an English-only law exists as legislation, the Spanish language can take center stage in a public space, asserting its role and importance in the community. Latina/os in Arizona, relegated to marginal roles defined by the color of their skin, can become actors in productions and portray the roles of Latina/o heroes in stories that praise them as central to the history of this nation. And in a state where Latina/o culture and heritage have been eclipsed by the notions of assimilation and nativism, the stories of a cultural ancestry and collective memory are brought to life on the stage where audiences and artists alike can experience the acts that define their common identity.

Conclusion

“Performances open up new critical possibilities for thinking about migration and exile, citizenship and belonging, and the cost for those who traverse those borders and boundaries,” says performance scholar David Román (6). In this way, performance can be employed as one of the many efforts designed to help solve some of the problems

caused by this debate over illegal immigration. The Latina/o artists physically (re)creating these stories on the stage are reminding audiences that the undocumented immigrant is alive and human. These works depicting the act and consequences of border crossing—the *theatre of immigration*—depict a practice of cultural contestation and contradiction. If Román is correct in stating that performance, “engages the contemporary as a dialogue about the country, its people, and its history,” then these pieces have the capacity to (re)shape daily life (2).

According to Marvin Carlson, “The performance of identity [is concerned] with providing a voice to previously silenced individuals or groups” (179). By providing silenced communities a public stage and voice, these performances—the immigrant rallies and plays of Teatro Bravo—validate and instill pride in the immigrant community. By allowing people previously rendered invisible to become nationally—perhaps even internationally—visible, these performances transform the public into a space where seemingly ordinary citizens and actors can speak out against social injustice.

It is my claim that these performances—the immigration protests and the more traditional theatre of Teatro Bravo—need to be interpreted in the context of a larger framework of national belonging and exclusion and as a part of the ongoing national debate on immigration policy and reform. These rallies and plays work in dialogue with those activists seeking reform as a way of preventing violence and death along the border, as well as those overt acts of racism that occur daily. The performances ask the audience to identify with the immigrant subjects—their aspirations to find stable and reliable work, to provide for their families, to retain an identity of self and culture, and to be at home in their new nation.

These performances are political acts and are helping to prepare the ground for changes in policy and thinking. The commitment to diminishing the “low intensity conflict” of the borderlands includes the efforts of theatre artists and the ordinary individuals willing to sit in the auditorium or march in the streets as allies. Rallies, fiestas, protests, and theatre can all work to create a cultural awareness of and social context for the discussion of how best to confront, understand, and bridge the differences that exist in the national debate over illegal immigration. By staging the stories of the forgotten—the *alien*, *illegal*, and *undocumented*—these artists offer a counter narrative to the nativist view of the immigration crisis. In this context, the theatre and performance of immigration is about identity; it is about community and memory. These performances are about creating an alternative way of acting and being in public.

In 1989, Jorge Huerta called Chicano theatre a “necessary theatre” (*Necessary* 5). As he saw them, the pieces being created by Latina/o artists grew out of the “continuing struggle for cultural, linguistic, economic, spiritual and political survival” (5). As the debate over illegal immigration into the U.S. intensifies, and as legislation like Arizona SB1070 becomes law, performances that challenge the status quo and strive for change remain necessary. As the Latina/o population within the U.S. increases, and as hundreds continue to perish and disappear in the desert each year, activists and artists must continue to stage and voice the perspectives of those marginalized and demonized bodies. Within this new history of Latina/o migration, exile, and diaspora, performance offers an alternative definition of U.S. history and identity, and a new way of looking at, and performing, the nation.

CONCLUSION

Since the publication of her first book in 1982, *The House of Spirits*, Chilean novelist Isabel Allende has become, according to the *Latin American Herald Tribune*, “the world’s most widely read Spanish-language author” (LAHT). Additionally, the news source credits Allende as having her work translated into more than two dozen languages and selling over 51 million copies of her novels. She is the recipient of countless honors and awards and her books have inspired a whole new generation of Latin American female writers.

Allende, like Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Coco Fusco, is a transnational citizen with a hemispheric consciousness. She was born in Lima, Peru, in 1942, to Chilean parents; at the time, her father was the Chilean ambassador to Peru. After her father’s disappearance in 1945³⁴, she returned to Chile with her mother where she spent eight years before moving to Bolivia, and later Beirut; her stepfather was also a diplomat. She spent the first years of her career traveling between South America and Europe, but it was the Chilean *coup d’état* on September 11, 1973, that would permanently change her, as well as every Chilean citizen’s, life. She was placed on a blacklist by the Pinochet regime and escaped to Venezuela where she spent thirteen years living in exile. She married a U.S. citizen in 1989 and received U.S. citizenship in 2003. Her journey across the hemisphere, from daughter of a diplomat to political exile, reflects the turbulent and

³⁴ The exact details of her father’s disappearance are unknown. In her book *Paula* (1995), which is a memoir of her childhood in Chile and her exile in Venezuela, Allende explains: “For years, morbid explanations of my father’s disappearance rattled around in my head. I asked about him until finally I gave up, recognizing that there is a conspiracy of silence around him. Those who knew him describe him to me as a very intelligent man, and stop there. When I was young, I imagined him as a criminal, and later, when I learned about sexual perversions, I attributed all of them to him, but the facts suggest that nothing so dramatic colored his past; he merely had a cowardly soul. One day he found himself trapped by his lies; events were out of control, so he ran away. He left the Foreign Service and never again saw my mother or any of his family or friends. He simply vanished in smoke” (16-17).

violent nature of Latin American politics in the second half of the 20th century. Her transplant from South to North is also reminiscent of the immigrant journey, though Allende's reflects a more positive and privileged immigration story. Her cultural and literary creations, like the performances by artists in this study, reflect the possibility of art to transcend a history of terror, oppression, and exploitation, offering itself as an arbitrator between the violent past and the imagined and hoped for future.

In her essay, "Writing as an Act of Hope," Allende describes her work and ideology as a mixture of politics and philosophy. She describes the political literature that female writers in Latin America are creating as revolutionary and transformative acts: "Now, finally, women are breaking the rule of silence and raising a strong voice to question the world. This is a cataclysm. It is a new literature that dares to be optimistic [...] a literature that doesn't invent history or try to explain the world solely with reason, but also seeks knowledge through feelings and imagination" (54-55). This "cataclysmic" break from a narrative genealogy grounded in patriarchy and history is subversive, but does not seek oppression or revenge against its opponents. For Allende, a truly political literature gives "both women and men a chance to become better people and to share the heavy burden of this planet" (54). She continues by adding: "[W]e write—as an act of human solidarity and commitment to the future. We want to change the rules, even if we won't live long enough to see the results. We have to make real revolutions of the spirit, of values, of life. And to do so we have to begin dreaming them" (55-56). In Allende's vision of literature as social change, the focus is on the future, regardless of whether or not the writer gets to live that version of reality. Only through first imagining—in this case writing—can futures be created.

Allende's assertion—that writing is an act of hope—is similar to Jill Dolan's claim that “performance is an act of public dreaming” (92). Like Allende, Dolan sees the potential in art to intervene in the current social atmosphere in order to “dream” new possibilities of the future. Both women see art as communal acts of solidarity that are based in feeling and emotion. Dolan, in exploring the concept of “humanity,” says: “Despair could break us; theater might renew us, by inviting us to imagine—along with the material, fleshy, so vulnerable and mortal performers’ bodies that create fantasy-pictures for us, embellished with light and color and sound and depth—ways to be fully human together” (163). Both Allende and Dolan see affect as an effective measure for achieving positive societal change and transformation: Allende in the written word, and Dolan in the body of the performer.

The body, in performance, becomes the vehicle for ideology and progressive change within oppressive social structures and moments of crisis. In “The Death System,” Cuban writer Edmundo Desnoes, states: “Bodies have an effect and a meaning. They are practical weapons; they challenge the system. They resist the system; they fight the system” (40). He is writing about the photographs of dead bodies taken by Susan Meiselas in Nicaragua and El Salvador during the nations’ civil wars. The bodies in the pictures belong to those who resisted their oppressive governments and died in the process. He adds about the political nature of these photographs: “These photos are not in art, these photos are in history” (41). Similarly, Diana Taylor, in *Disappearing Acts*, writes about the pictures of the disappeared carried by the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. She says, “The photos, like magic fetishes, keep the dead and brutalized bodies forever ‘alive’” (142). In both instances, where state terror and violence have

silenced a population and murdered hundreds of thousands of civilians, photographs become the archival evidence of the crimes: in Central America the pictures show the actual deceased, while in Argentina the photographs become surrogates for the disappeared. The photos, displayed in public, transform these bodies—captured in “still” form—into sites of resistance and action. Both the structures of power and the masses of popular resistance look to these bodies as sources of meaning-making and legitimation for their causes. In this way, these bodies become what I have called throughout this study, sites of contestation, transformation, and collective action.

The performances I examined in the previous chapters developed out of moments of crisis. These acts of urgency, as I call them, are strategic public performances. The performers and protesters examined in this project are placing themselves between silence and the community, hoping that their public displays will inspire dialogue and create change, whether in the form of creating alternative histories, restoring collective memories, impacting legislation and politics, bringing attention to violence and exploitation, or offering a voice and platform for those marginalized into invisibility. These performances are created to ameliorate social, historic, economic, environmental, and political injustices. They are not just *representations* of the times; these performances are *products* of the times, emerging from a need to transform and progress society in the benefit of disadvantaged populations.

Moments of urgency can last a short period of time, or they can persist over decades, even centuries. In Cochabamba, Bolivia, the Water Wars lasted a few months, paralyzing the community and threatening lives by privatizing water resources. Without immediate redressive action, the crisis would have erupted into a disaster of epic

proportion. With the community engaged and poised for battle, the international consortium that controlled the water was defeated. However, aware that history can repeat itself for those who have forgotten the lessons of the past, Atempo Danza and Teatro Trono utilized performance to (re)tell the story of Cochabamba and (re)stage the acts of resistance embodied through the history of water. Their acts, created after the 2000 Water Wars, carried the message of privatization and popular resistance to the masses and offered Andean tradition and history as an alternative to neoliberal policy and thinking.

In Ecuador, Teatro Contrelviento created *La flor de la Chukirawa* as the story of one mother and son who fell victim to the U.S. global “War on Terror” and the exploitation of impoverished citizens as guns-for-hire in the War in Iraq. In the Ecuadorian version of the war, the indigenous body is the center of the story. Though he is buried in Iraq—deposited in an unmarked grave—this son’s story and memory live on through his mother, who resides in the mountains of Ecuador. She embodies the anti-war spirit, speaking out against the U.S. ambassador, its military, and private mercenary corporations. Contraelviento privileges the voices and perspectives of those living within Ecuador’s margins, offering the mother in the play as a voice of reason in the context of war and terror. By drawing on local customs and indigenous traditions to offer a counternarrative to the War in Iraq, the characters in *La flor de la Chukirawa* embody the ideological confrontation between Ecuador and the United States. As the military crisis in Iraq continues to decrease, and perhaps even come to an end, the play also offers an alternative perspective to U.S. intervention across the globe.

In the Yucatán Peninsula, it can be argued, the crisis of indigenous oppression and exploitation has been repeating itself since the time of the Conquest. As the tourist industry capitalizes on the image of the Mayan body in its pursuit of profit, the indigenous communities must negotiate daily with the global market and their own traditions and desire for self-representation and agency. One response to the marginalization of the Mayan body, in particular the Mayan female body, comes from the theatre group Sa'as Tun. By blending old and new with the expected and unexpected, Conchi León, in *Mestiza Power*, utilizes ethnography and her own knowledge of Mayan culture to portray an indigenous identity that is in constant motion and transformation. The play becomes an alternative to the performances that are carefully scripted for tourist consumption. It gives voice to the women of the Yucatán and helps to foster a necessary dialogue about the position of indigenous bodies within the state and their relationship to the tourist industry. As the struggle to maintain an indigenous identity and culture continues, with no apparent end in sight, Mayan individuals can utilize performance as one medium in their resistance against “outsider” (mis)representation and (mis)understanding of their culture and identity.

The final crisis that was presented in this study is centered on the immigrant body in U.S. politics. The immigration debate reached a climax in 2006 when millions of immigrants and their supporters took to the streets on May 1st to stage a collective presence and demand progressive immigration reform. Since then, the crisis has continued to escalate, with the passing of SB1070 in Arizona in April 2010, and more recently with the passing of House Bill 56 in Alabama on June 10, 2011, now considered the nation's toughest anti-immigrant legislation. The actors performing the stories of the

immigrants, in both political protest and the theatre of Teatro Bravo, are engaging the public and the immigrant body in dialogue. These performers, publicly displaying the immigrant story, are daring to perform their version of “America.” These acts of public display help the immigrants and those who identify with them cope with their new sense of self and space within the United States. Even more importantly, these performances (re)insert the forgotten, and often detested, immigrant body into the public sphere, offering a personal and human story in place of the faceless figure of the “alien” created by political rhetoric.

Although each Latin American nation possesses its own history and identity, it is violence—from the conquest of Columbus to the twentieth-century dictatorships—that has been a common link between the people of the Americas. Latin America, historically, has been plagued with a record of political instability, social injustice, violence, and crisis. In the 20th century, an international focus on commerce and globalization, in addition to government corruption, greed, and racism, resulted in a series of events throughout the two continents that challenged the basic ideas of human rights and questions of government accountability. In many instances the violence was denounced, while in others it became subsumed by national amnesia. Now, in the 21st century, growing global forces—including war, private industry and business, immigration, and tourism—are challenging the basic concepts of human rights, agency, and justice. As marginalized populations find themselves confronted by exploitative and oppressive forces, theatre offers one avenue from which to challenge hegemonic abuse and power, in addition to paving the way for consciousness-raising and community building.

What theatre and performance offer to this analysis is the “live” body, capable of transforming and acting out in the public sphere. The bodies of performers and protestors, as I have demonstrated, are creating live experiences that stir emotions within their spectators, embody their communities’ collective histories, and offer objections and counternarratives to hegemonic control during moments of crisis. The bodies of these performers—whether capturing the story of the Bolivian Water Wars, embodying the deceased Latin American recruit who died in Iraq, reclaiming the image of Mayan women in the Yucatán, or publicly displaying their bodies to be counted during the U.S. immigration rallies—are acting out new scripts that offer a voice to those who are marginalized into places of invisibility and silence. These bodies are creating, what I have called throughout the preceding pages, alternate visions and versions of being. Above all, these performers demonstrate that theatre can be used as an effective tool in creating dialogue and perhaps even initiating social change. The artists and performers offered here stage a collective presence for their communities and embody those who are absent from the public sphere, two acts of empowerment that can be the first steps toward greater change and a shift in the way that different social groups understand and interact with one another.

Of course, several questions arise when considering these types of performances: What happens once the visions and versions of being come to fruition? What becomes of theatre for social change once the desired reform has taken place? Are acts of resistance and alternate histories only capable of being performed on the bodies of marginalized persons? Is instilling hope within a population enough to be considered positive change? Do all moments of crisis spur acts of urgency? Does all theatre of crisis offer an avenue

for change? And if the performers control the vision of the spectators, do they truly inhabit the position of the masses?

With these questions in mind, it is important to remember that the cases in this project only offer examples of how specific communities have utilized performance and protest to enact reform and change within their societies. What works for Mayan women in the Yucatán may not work for all indigenous populations across the Americas. In the United States, legislation may define and script the immigrant body into a position of powerlessness, but in southern Mexico immigrants are also subject to deadly attacks by gangs: the acts of public presence and protest that worked across the U.S. on May 1, 2006, would only jeopardize the lives of immigrants along the Mexico-Guatemala border. Similarly, the graffiti and theatrical responses to the War in Iraq took time to reach a broad audience in Ecuador; the goals of these public displays were a recognition and awareness of the unjust practices against those who signed contracts with U.S. private security firms. In Bolivia, however, time was of the essence and an immediate reversal of the legislation was necessary to save the lives of almost every citizen in Cochabamba who would be denied water because of the high cost under the new law. Clearly, social change and theatre work in different ways considering the context, community, and immediacy of the situation.

Nonetheless, in these communities of crisis theatre is operating as one of the avenues by which usually silenced and ignored individuals can see their stories and struggles presented in the public sphere. As globalization continues to effect and affect communities across the Americas, I predict that theatre will continue to grow as an avenue from which to voice opposition to exploitative practices. Marginalized and

impoverished communities, as this dissertation has shown, find performance to be a successful and accessible tool around which to assemble communities and disperse ideology. As performers find new ways to embody their communities' presence and histories, it will be important for theatre scholars to document the ways that artists continue to utilize theatre as forms of expression and cultural agency across the Americas. As different forms of crisis and urgency erupt under the ever evolving conditions of neoliberal reform, global capital, and war and nationalism, theatre and performance offer unique entryways into understanding community building, resistance, history, and identity.

Live acts of performance, situated in the performer's body, transform that body from object to subject, script to scriptwriter. Our own acts of urgency, as theatre historians, are to recognize and document the importance of these performances before they recede into history, forgotten and unappreciated. Though Peggy Phelan states that performance "becomes itself through disappearance," we cannot allow these performances to disappear from the historical record, like the performance genealogies erased by the Conquest (146). If Phelan is correct that documenting performance makes it "something other than performance," then a next step in analyzing the efficacy of theatre for social change is figuring out the possibilities inherent in the newly documented form (146). This dissertation, a document of these theatrical endeavors, is an example of what these performances can become outside of their communities: lessons to be learned, stories to be told, ideologies to be passed on to others, and even perhaps, acts of dreaming and hope.

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