

RASQUACHE PEDAGOGY, OR WHAT QUEBRADITA DANCING TAUGHT ME

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines quebradita dancing, a Mexican/Mexican American social dance form first cultivated during the 1990s through transborder exchanges, as a tool for the development of *rasquache* pedagogy. Engaging Chicano Studies scholar Tomás Ybarra-Frausto's definition of rasquachismo as a DIY, underdog sensibility employed by Chicanx communities to repurpose the intended use value of materials, I examine how quebradita dancing teaches participants to strategically hybridize aesthetics in order to reshape the world around them. I contend that *rasquache* pedagogy is an affectively embodied lesson of/for belonging that Brown, working-class peoples engage to cope with the instability of the US-Mexico border and times of crisis. Moreover, I examine how these creative strategies are utilized by bodies to reclaim subjectivity during moments that national il/legalities dehumanize their existence and connections. In doing so, I consider how my own interaction with and embodiment of quebradita dancing provided me the tools to shape my Mexican American identity as well as my approaches to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Chicanx/Latine, dance studies, migrations, social dance, pedagogy, rasquachismo, transborder.

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On a hot summer day in 1998, the effervescent sounds of Banda Machos¹ "La Culebra" play on loop in the background as my eight-year-old body meticulously deliberates through a series of hip, torso, and foot movements that could combine well with the lyrics of the song; a Britney Spears arm here, a salsa shimmy there, and a swing of the hips similar to my *tía's* (aunt's) "*curvas peligrosas*" (dangerous curves as she called them) to finish my solo and match lead singer Arturo Garcia's long outstretching of the word "íbamos" (we were going) in the music. In my head, I hear *mi mamá's* (my mother's) voice enthusiastically instructing, "*bríncale mi'jo*" (bounce it, *mi'jo*) as I navigate the awkward length of my limbs attempting to shake an immense amount of invisible fringe on my body, striking my worn *botas* (boots) into and out of our cracked pavement. Each swipe, flick, and stomp delivers a new blow to their fading leather, stretching and wrinkling its surface faster than the dying nopal pieces littering our garden. My tiny frame oscillates back and forth in space, engaging a bounce rooted in Mexican *banda* movements and *caballito* (little horse) dancing. I was not aware at that moment, but like the *primos/as/xs*

(cousins) who I spent hours hanging out and listening to *tecnobanda*² with, I was learning to delicately sew a series of movements together to produce quebradita dancing, conjuring Brown joy by catalyzing my body's archive as mobility. From a young age, I was putting to work lessons for Brown *movidas*³ that could re-imagine my situation, and remake the world around me, transforming our dusty slab of backyard concrete into a concert stage.

1. QUEBRADITA'S RASQUACHE BEGINNINGS

Sparked by the introduction of *tecnobanda* music, quebradita (Spanish for "little break"), a Mexican/Mexican American social dance form, first made waves during the 1990s and continues to present day. *Tecnobanda*, produced in Guadalajara, Mexico in the late 1980s, had combined traditional Mexican *banda* elements with techno music and Caribbean rhythms.⁴ This new hybrid musical style offered the opportunity for enthusiasts on both sides of the US-Mexico border to experiment with *banda*'s newly developed high-speed tempo. To respond to these beats, Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Mexican immigrants used a common practice of hybridization, combining elements from hip hop culture, country line dancing, and swing⁵ to Mexican folk forms that included *zapateado*, *calabaceado*, and *el caballito*, as a process for creating what would become known as quebradita dancing.

Quebradita is marked by recognizable features that creatively play with spatial configurations. These include: the back-and-forth basic step that bounces couples across space to the tunes of hybrid Mexican techno beats, an embrace that interlinks bodies on the dance floor and taught me to find connection to a transnational community of groovers, a cyclical bounce used to feel the array of *tecnobanda* rhythms, and *quebradas* (or breaks) that couples used to flip the script on the verticality of partnered, social dancing by having the leading partner "break" their following companion at their hip by bending them backwards, dangling them inches, sometimes centimeters, from the floor. The ingenuity that Brown, working-class dancers had to use their bodies to daringly attune to each other on and off the dance floor by reimagining the relationship between bodies and space is the process by which I conceptualize *rasquache* pedagogy, or the methodology of teaching resourceful

resistance through play with hybridized movement, embodiment, and experimentation.

Ethnomusicologist Sydney Hutchinson, in her examination on quebradita dancing, has associated quebradita's multicultural constructions to Tomás Ybarra Frausto's concept of *rasquachismo*, a Chicana sensibility and attitude that is informed by an "underdog" epistemology and built through bicultural amalgamations.⁶ This is to say that Chicana *rasquache* perspectives (and by extension, art) is fashioned through disparate parts coming together to yield new artistic creations that defy and re-accommodate aspects of class and race.⁷ Chicana communities repurpose the use-value of objects to redefine their worth, altering their sense of self and their relationship to these objects in the process. Ybarra-Frausto specifies *rasquachismo* as "the aesthetic sensibility of *los de abajo*, of the underdog," creating a "visceral response to lived reality" (Ybarra-Frausto et al. 4). At its core, then, *rasquachismo*, as an "aesthetic sensibility," is always ready to respond emotionally, aesthetically, and physically to the everyday experiences of working-class, Mexicans, Mexican immigrants, and Mexican Americans. The concept points to a hybridized cultural, social, and political inventiveness necessary to make place, identity, and, more importantly, to survive, through the process of crafting and customizing. Hutchinson pinpoints the significance of *rasquachismo*'s relationship to quebradita, citing its ability to inform identity for Mexican American youth (Hutchinson 81). She argues that *rasquache* aesthetics in quebradita surged out of dancers building their steps (tricks) out of whatever means they could, grabbing influence from their daily interactions with other cultural groups and mainstream television. This practice first inspired *quebradorxs*⁸ of the 1990s during the rise of *tecnobanda* music and continues to catalyze a fervent generation of dancers in the new millennium, what *quebradorxs* refer to as "la nueva escuela"⁹ ("the new school"), which is notably marked by high-flying acrobatic stunts. As such, *quebradorxs* have consistently built a daring youth culture founded on their parents' Mexican traditions while adding their own twist and flavor to the mix.

As I theorize the concept of *rasquache* pedagogy throughout this essay, I consider how quebradita dancers' lived realities, embodied archives of information,¹⁰ and strategic transborder exchanges are

used to produce lessons for belonging differently, particularly by learning to conjure and feel *alegría Mexicana* (Mexican joy), or Brown pleasure as process for coping and resisting. This form of feeling highlights performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz's conceptualization of Brownness, which he defines as a "feeling [of] difference"¹¹ that is marked by a commonality amongst people who are and have been made Brown both through their "suffering" and by "striving" together. Similarly, I argue that *rasquache* quebradita formations, as an aesthetic and ways of being and feeling, exists as a common practice of and for Brownness, a conscious methodology that is used by participants to recognize belonging and realize alternative modes of existing. In examining *rasquache* pedagogical practices, I oscillate between various contexts of quebradita dancing, temporally and sociopolitically to unpack how Latine Brown, working-class bodies use hybridization practices to construct pleasure as a form of resistance through time. While references, aesthetics, and desires may shift, the common practice of *rasquache* transmissions remains key to building Brown joy amongst *quebradorxs*. I take into account how quebradita dancing imbues bodies with tactics for feeling connected across the US-Mexico border in ways that teaches us to reclaim our sense of belonging and our ability to cope with crises, owning our difference in ways that release us from the bounds of national imaginaries on the dance floor, in academia, and beyond. The meanings that *quebradorxs* embody and their play with time and space offer a site to examine how Brown creativity is a catalyst for world-making.

2. PIECING TOGETHER COMMUNITY ACROSS BORDERS

Since the onset of quebradita dancing and its rise to mainstream popularity, US policies and rhetoric surrounding admittance of peoples in the 1990s and 2000s have portrayed Mexican immigrants, their U.S-born children, and their culture as excess to the national imaginary. In 1998, Proposition 227 banned bilingual education in Californian public classrooms. This effectively worked to uphold the argument that bilingual students were not learning the English language quickly enough because of spending too much time practicing their native tongue¹² (Campbell et al. 134). The Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigrant Control Act of

2005 (H.R. 4437) implemented stricter rules on border security while raising fines on undocumented immigrants who were forcibly moved through deportation proceedings¹³ (Barberena et al. 43). The 2015 DHS Appropriations Act increased the number of for-profit detention centers and detainees under the leadership of US President Barack Obama, who was given the moniker of “Deporter in Chief” among members of the immigrant community. And more recently in 2016 and 2020, campaigns by Donald Trump labeled Mexican migrants as “rapists,” “bad hombres,” and “hardened criminals” while implementing harsh policies that affected immigrants and their families. At the same time, Trump’s polemic dialogue regarding children of migrant parents as so-called “anchor babies,” undeserving of US citizenship, promoted a depiction of migrant families and their subsequent generations as unfit for US belonging. This xenophobic, anti-immigrant rhetoric was used to seek support for a border wall project, while enforcing and justifying the removal of Latin American immigrants from the country and the separation of migrant families at the border. The Trump administration’s immigration policies enforced an era of traumatic separation between migrant parents and their children who were detained at the border. This regulation was used to deter the number of people who came from Latin America to seek asylum in the US.¹⁴ As of December 2020, there are still an approximated 628 migrant children who have not been reunited with their families due to the lack of kinship records that exist for people detained at the border.¹⁵ Dancing in my backyard pushed back against these realities, creatively mixing to affectively practice Brown joy. My tattered boots could somehow heal the pain lingering on my tongue, exhausted from teachers pushing me to smooth out my Spanish accent. Although il/legalities¹⁶ are created by nation-states as policies, processes, and bureaucracies that citizens and non-citizens must negotiate, their implementation configure very real restrictions that police Brown bodies. To circumvent these regulations, quebradita dancers highlight alternate processes that re-imagine transborder flows on their own accord. In learning to dance quebradita, embodying a back-and-forth flow of movement that relies on transborder information, knowledge, and flows of people, dancers stimulate new means of affiliating across borders in ways that highlight their porous nature.

In 2014, I began a series of ethnographic investigations that situated the importance of *rasquache* embodiment and *enseñanzas* (lessons) as processes for learning to belong differently. My interviewees (re)routed me to various parts of Mexico and the US, both physically and through the stories, memorabilia, and videos that participants shared with me in our discussions, using their words, trainings, and invitations to creatively piece together a common practice for Brown joy. The participants ranged from *bailadorxs* (what the quebradita community refers to as non-professional dancers) in the 1990s to *bailarinxs* (professionally trained dancers) who compete in quebradita dance circuits in the new millennium. I was fascinated with *quebradorxs*' experiences that detailed a propensity for fusion and hybridity in their creative practices, as many recounted and explained how inspirations for their dancing, choreographies, tricks, and acrobatics ranged from something as small as images of luchadores (Mexican wrestlers) mid-battle to performances of Olympic figure skaters. The amalgamation of different aesthetics in quebradita dancing, oftentimes was described as a process that led to the development of "*alegría Mexicana*," joy and pleasure, as a product of imagination. Dancing quebradita developed a way of feeling pride for *lo mexicano* (that which is Mexican or has Mexican heritage) by positioning dancers as bodies in charge of directing and shaping how they could move and who they could be through whatever means they could. "*Me siento bien Mexicano/a/e*" ("I feel real Mexican"), were responses that theorized how the body-in-motion produced attachment to Mexican cultural identity as a felt, transnationally informed venture. *Quebradorxs* use these ways of being and feeling to connect to a community of others who creatively seek the same resourcefulness and sense of affiliation across the US-Mexico border.

Quebradita dancers from the 90s and new millennium reminded me that engaging these transborder creative connections was about learning to use their bodies in order to create social change through social dance. Chicagoan *quebrador* Fidel Delgado who headed one of the largest quebradita groups in the city explained, "*En ese entonces, el Mexicano trabajaba y se iba a casa. Era puro trabajar. Cuando llegó la quebradita, todo cambió*," ("Back then [in the 1990s], the Mexican worked and went home. It was all work. When la quebradita came, everything changed"). Fidel, who migrated to Illinois from Guerrero,

MX in the 90s, explained how important dancing became for Mexican migrant communities, citing *quebradita* as a hobby that was used to distract from the toll of daily work. In doing so, his words reinforced *quebradita* as a mechanism that brown, working-class bodies used to reclaim their labor. Similarly, Frine Garcia, a new school *quebradora* from Mexico City, MX, had also expressed similar sentiments, sharing that *quebradita* dancing brought much needed pleasure to her life, allowing her to take pride in her Mexican culture while learning to see her body as a tool for economic change, building a promising dance career out of her love for *quebradita* dance practices. For these dancers, engaging *quebradita* to affectively re-contextualize the Brown, working-class body came way by learning to piece together various sources of transborder information.

Participants I interviewed in Los Angeles, CA, Oakland, CA, Chicago, IL, and Mexico City, MX, who danced in the 1990s and in present day, distinctly remember sourcing from different aesthetics as a practice of developing unique movement formations. *Quebradorxs* noted that in the 1990s, before the advent of social media, dancers had to rely on VHS tapes, television, and pop culture references to pad their repertoire of movement. Dancers from the millennium used similar resources but also had the advantage of the Internet, using YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and other social media sites as potential outlets for creativity. These online platforms became tools for faster and wider communication and exchanges. Adan Ramos, owner of Cache con Banda a dance company and studio in Mexico City (CDMX), and a *quebrador* who started in the late 90s, remembers going to Neza (Nezahualcoytl) a city just outside of CDMX, and shopping in the *callejones* (street shops) for inspiration. There, he bought pirated VHS tapes containing footage of *quebradita* events, luchadores wrestling, and ice skating as frames of reference to build *cargadas* (lifts). Jason Ganimo, a Chicago-based *quebrador* who danced in the 90s and through the millennium, recalled watching cheerleading stunt videos, studying hip hop dancers, and wrestlers to develop what many in the *quebradita* community call *nudos*.¹⁷

Angela Marquez, who danced *quebradita* as part of different clubs in Los Angeles, CA during the 90s, attributes the development of her *quebradita* knowledge to her observation of dancers in spaces

such as “Leonardo’s, Pico Rivera Sports Arena, and a swap meet called Pico Swap Meet” (Marquez). She mentioned that many Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans gathered at swap meets to dance at *tardeadas*.¹⁸ In fact, it was there that she met her husband, Alvaro Marquez, who was the first person to introduce her to the genre. “*Él vino de Jalisco y me enseñó como bailaban allá*,” (“He came from Jalisco and taught me how they danced over there”) she explained. For dancers like Ramos, Ganimo, and Marquez, the unpredictable mixture of aesthetics and repertoires, weaving, rising, breaking, *torceando* (twisting), *uniendo* (uniting), *y arriesgando* (risking) have become foundational practices. *Quebradorxs* engage these methods to construct belonging and identify themselves, aesthetically and affectively, with members of their community.

These hybridization practices were evident in the various VHS recordings I sorted through and the online videos dancers had uploaded to the World Wide Web. For instance, a YouTube video entitled “QUEBRADITA” uploaded by user *israeleggato*, depicts a couple of *quebradorxs* grooving at the Sun Valley swap meet in California. The dancers, clad in *vaquero* (cowboy) hats, leather boots, and jean fringe bounce playfully through space, improvising to the thunderous *tecnobanda* trumpets in the background. The couple in the frame flicks and stomps their feet, shifting between heels striking the pavement to windmill-like revolutions, rapidly swiping the ground in a circular motion similar to footwork found within *calabaceado* in Mexican ballet folklórico. Their leather-clad feet instantaneously melt into foot play reminiscent of house dancing, shuffling and sliding into and out of the floor, gathering specks of dust before locking hips and catching an embrace. The male companion tenderly places his left arm on the woman’s lower back, her curls ricochet across his wrist, almost wrapping in their own embrace with her companion’s fingers. They momentarily minimize the space of their bouncing feet, testing the right moment to dip into a *quebrada* (break), where the male partner lowers the female partner on his thigh, inching her dangerously close the ground. While edging towards the floor, the woman signals a readiness to come up, pressing her face and neck towards the sky, fully engaging her core to maintain balance for both of their frames. In a split second, the man grabs her waist and momentarily lingers

her vertically upright in the air before swinging her horizontally towards his right hip, then left, then right, then left again. The woman, legs tightly gathered, shoots her body linearly in each direction, ready to catch the aerial oscillation while pressing her boots towards the angle of faces in the crowd. This lift is one that many in the quebradita community have attributed to lindy hop dance influences, known often within the community as “*la media luna*” or the half moon. Beyond the dedicated time to corporeal play in this VHS recording is the presence of pleasure and community. Amid the couple’s dancing, the crowd cheers and witnesses the performance of toying, mixing, and experimenting through various sources of information, communally working to generate acts of joy, or *alegría Mexicana*, offering respite to their lived realities.

Through time, quebradita dancers boldly create place and construct corporeal belonging despite the boundaries that US-Mexico regulations present. The practices of mixing, *torciendo* (twisting), *arriesgando* (risking), and fusing to develop Brown practices of joy, as seen within the various configurations of blended US American and Mexican aesthetics and pop references in quebradita dancing, are undergirded by a method by which we teach and learn to reframe the use-value of objects to catalyze subjects, riskfully and playfully remembering to reclaim repurpose and reconnect in ways previously unknown to us. That is, in the 90s my parents, family members, and other quebradita aficionados shifted the rhetoric of their bodies as cheap labor, for labor, and wage labor, creatively catalyzing new ways of moving in ways that taught me to do the same. It was these frameworks and perspectives that spectacularly catalyzed Brown resourcefulness for decades, as dancers used references to pop culture and upended them to visibilize themselves in different ways across the borders. Yet it was also this practice that rooted them to using creativity to contest borders in a *chingón* (badass) way, trading and exchanging ways of moving, styles, information, knowledge through the Internet, VHS tapes, postcards, and letters. Learning to make due and community with what we had.

Angela Marquez, who I mentioned earlier, is a first-generation, self-described Mexican American whose quebradita dancing experience highlighted these Brown creative practices. She recalled crafting and embodying *cargadas* that her husband had learned

in his native state of Jalisco as a force behind her affective sense of identity. In an interview, she explained to me the process of mixing that contributed to her quebradita participation during the 1990s. “Dije, quebradita me quieres dar tú con esas cargadas” (“I said, a little break is what you will give me with those lifts”), she laughed, “pero poco a poco fui aprendiendo, y luego... ah... se combinaban con estilos que aprendíamos de otras parejas” (“but little-by-little I learned and later... uh... they were combined with other styles that we learned from other couples”). Angela further described how the *cargadas* that her husband practiced with her were ones he had learned in Mexico prior to his migration to the US.

In our interview, Angela detailed moments of transmission between bodies who learned from one another within Pico Rivera’s crowded swap meet. She explained how she would keenly observe others’ creativity to borrow inspiration for her next moment on the dance floor. Angela listed her influences/influencers, stating “I also got a lot of information from dance groups, clubs. *Habían muchísimos* (there were many). *Unos nombres eran* (some names [of the clubs] were) “Huerfanitos,” “Mousser,” “Vaqueros Musical” y “Invasión Musical.” At the same time, the duo would learn from watching other dancers in movies and at *tardeadas*. As Angela recounted, “*También había un muchacho que siempre andaba en los bailes* (There was also a guy that was always at the dances) and he even came out in quebradita movies, low budget movies. *Le decían “El Califas” era un gordito, bien bailador* (They called him “El Califas,” he was a chubby, good dancer). They all showed up and danced some of the best *cargadas* and tricks. We would take little things from them and then me and my husband would make our own moves *de lo que mirábamos* (from what we saw). But many people liked my husband’s *cargadas*” (Marquez). Places, like the Pico Swap Meet in California, came alive with the sounds of “Banda el Mexicano, Banda Machos.... *Todas las buenas*” (“... all the good ones.”) Her memories demonstrated the powerful potential for quebradita *movidas* to transform participants’ surrounding landscapes. Bodies bounced, intertwined, sought, and traded creativity within the open gravel, mixing to produce a Brown sociality that was all their own.

Angela’s stories provided a routed, *rasquache* journey, tracking the points of creativity and emotions that led to her own identification

as Mexican American. The *cargada* took on various migrations. Her husband, Alvaro, had clarified for me that his knowledge of these crafted lifts came from rodeos he attended while living in Jalisco; watching, practicing, and giving it his own “*tocadita*” (touch). The pathway of inventive corporeal productions began in rodeos in Jalisco, Mexico where Alvaro learned to dance before passing it to Angela, whose own creative labor registered those moves in her body. At the same time, the routine of learning from dancers that Angela and her husband encountered at clubs and at the Pico Rivera swap meet added to the mixture of influences the two used in their movements. This back-and-forth mode of transmission, across geographies and temporalities, from body-to-body in person and virtually informs dancing bodies who construct transnational identities through *quebradita*. For Angela, learning and piecing these techniques developed a palpable connection to her own version of transborder belonging, adopting her identity as Mexican American while simultaneously shaping the world around it. She explained, “I remember having so much fun dancing it. Me and my husband, we would put all these ideas together... *Sentía mi sangre de Zacatecas, pero que felicidad bailar música Mexicana...* I was born in the US, *pero tengo sangre Zacatecana.*” (...I felt my blood from Zacatecas, what happiness it was to dance to Mexican music... I was born in the US, but I have Zacatecan blood) (Marquez).

The *quebradora's* words hit me faster than the speedy, circular motions of a “*helicoptero*”¹⁹ leg striking the ground beneath it. By dancing *quebradita* she cultivated a felt connection to her parents’ home state of Zacatecas, MX. Her understanding of these experiences as ways of being and feeling, described as “*sangre Zacatecana,*” had been awakened and deeply felt as *felicidad*, or *alegría Mexicana*. Angela admits that *quebradita* became the vehicle with which she came to appreciate her Mexican roots. Her memories theorize *quebradita* as a tool for linking affective cultural repertoires both nationally and transnationally in order to feel attached to sites (un) known. She could link and situate herself in more than one space by feeling like a part of Mexico was in her blood, grooving back and forth between nations by embodying multi-sited histories and aesthetics.

3. QUEBRANDO (BREAKING) ON-AND-OFFLINE

The practice of transborder embodiment constructed pleasure that could be used to craft transnational belonging. Ethnic affinity as a formulation of identity can be considered an affective connection with a “homeland”²⁰ (Jean-Paul Baldacchino 81). Angela’s felt relation to her parent’s hometown of Zacatecas reveals *quebradorxs*’ ability to incorporate external sites into their affective repertoires of movement. Dancing an embodied array of multi-sited influence allowed her to make a mark on the Pico Rivera swap meet and to develop a practice of feeling and defining her identity as a transnationally situated sensation. Despite the very real geographical location she grooved on (Pico Rivera, CA), Angela could dance into Zacatecas, oscillating back and forth between embodied archives of information. The incorporation of a transnationally built resourcefulness, used to build Mexican American identity, is demonstrative of the re-signification processes present within quebradita fusions. Dancers use a transnational flow of corporeal codes to define an affective sense of belonging, rooting themselves in localities while simultaneously uprooting towards topographies beyond the border. The body defines its sensibility by designing quebradita. *Rasquache* pedagogy highlights how it is that external influences are fashioned to inscribe a sense of transnational identity and place for *quebradorxs*.

In accessing these felt connections, Angela prides herself in feeling her complexity as a woman born in the US with roots in Mexico. She is Mexican American while feeling transnational by working upon *rasquache* pedagogies to affectively make a shift within her body. This practice, as a felt transnational belonging, underscores what historian Benedict Anderson terms as “long-distance” nationalism, or a sense of connection and attachment that someone feels for their parents’ country of origin.²¹ Within the social transmission of transnational flows of information, *quebradorxs* learn to embody, share, and mix as a common practice to claim cultural connections. In my research, I had come across other dancers who used quebradita dancing to feel association to *el otro lado* (the other side of the border), some without ever having left their countries of residence. The embodiment of transborder archives of information was used by dancers to fashion ways of being and feeling that could connect them to sites beyond the border. They came to know and feel connected to other Brown,

working-class dancers by articulating these sensibilities with their bodies. Angela reminded me that dancing quebradita in Pico Rivera was about getting to feel pride in her Mexican American identity as a citizen within the US. I contend that the transnational situation of Brown belonging that *quebradorxs'* *rasquache* pedagogical practices generate offers the interconnected sense of information, people, and histories that are used to define transborder identities. Angela's dancing could produce a way of understanding herself beyond the "limits" and "sovereignty" of a nation²², using a transnationally situated affectivity to unsettle its bounds.

This *rasquache* tactic of survival and expansion of border limits was carried into the new millennium as dancers used the availability of the Internet to strengthen bonds of kinship and transborder practices online. When I bounced into archival analysis in 2014, I found an Internet community of avid quebradita fans. I quickly realized that social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook had started to act as archives, with date-stamped postings by quebradita enthusiasts and dancers who were seeking to connect, represent, and share their identities as *quebradorxs* online. The large presence of dancers in the virtual space of the web elucidated the sense of place that social media had granted participants. Their digitizing of transnational affectivity and kinship connections offered me a unique exploration of membership within the extended space of the Internet. As an expansion of the physical realm, this online community produces a space where participants can reconnect, remember, and re-member quebradita.

Online, quebradita dancers claim virtual topographies of being and belonging. They connect to disparate locations on the web and share their imaginative creations, opinions, histories, and ideas with one another. Through the combination of physical and virtual creativity, dancers expand their consciousness and the reach of their community across the border in order to foster kinship ties and develop new ways of learning. For quebradita dancers, the space of the geographical border was re-contextualized in the millennium, as the il/legalities of traveling between the US and Mexico did not pertain to dancers sharing information at expedited speeds online. This virtual space became a key site for *quebradorxs* of *la nueva escuela*, what dancers refer to as the new school of

quebradita dancing after 2006. They began uploading their dancing, videos, group pages, and class/festival/event announcements, using online platforms to tactfully dance into an age of globalization and technology, while making virtual place for dancers who could not physically be together in person. Online communities served to uphold a form of communication that allowed *quebradorxs* around the globe and across the US-Mexico border to feel a transnational sense of belonging and learn to hybridize beyond the confines of the local. Virtual classes, events, sharings, and postings became ways of piecing together a binational presence and transborder togetherness that was first started by quebradita dancers in the 90s.

4. PANDEMIC LEARNINGS: ENGAGING RASQUACHE PEDAGOGY IN TIMES OF COVID-19

In considering participants' stories surrounding quebradita's *rasquachismo* as pedagogy, I thought to myself how dancing had taught me that it was not necessarily the precision or mechanics that were of utmost value to crafting quebradita bodies. Instead, since my childhood, I was being taught to experiment with community beyond physical, virtual, and manmade borders by learning to creatively attune to and interpellate into a community of bouncing, Brown working-class bodies who shared in *alegría Mexicana*. This affectivity could be used to situate and maintain a diasporic dance floor where bodies could traverse, exchange, and dance back and forth between, across, and beyond the US-Mexico border. In doing so, we produce ways of feeling and *maneras de ser* (ways of being) that could be used in times of crisis within the real world.

Fast forward to 2020, and again I found myself relying on the radical pedagogy of *rasquachismo* to maneuver ongoing racial and rising viral pandemics the US faced. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I was inundated by social media posts that came from dance teacher friends of mine who lamented the physical contact needed to make a dance class work. As a dance activist and professor in academia, I was also hit with questions and anxiety regarding the ability to transmit dance knowledge virtually. However, I also had to consider the privilege I had been holding. I was clinging onto panic for the "sanctity" of the studio. Instead, I reminded myself about the diasporic dance floor I grew up on. That, while our dusty

slab of concrete had relied on bodies palpably connecting with each other in person, embracing and gingerly oscillating across my backyard, this *pista* (dance floor) had also been maintained virtually since the 1990s by Brown, undocumented dancers who continuously renegotiated the idea of il/legalites in order to dance across the US-Mexico border. That is, the plethora of quebradita participants buying VHS videos at the flea market, engaging creative, *rasquache* practices by consistently rewinding and looping videos of ice skaters, gymnastics Olympians, and taped quebradita dance shows to develop spectacular, acrobatic tricks had been a way of connecting to creativity across virtual and physical landscapes; a way of learning to dance, using a *rasquache* connection to affiliate with other bodies who employed this practice.

As an instructor, it became important for me to highlight for my students how their lived experiences and corporeal archives were valuable forms of knowledge that could be mutably engaged to generate change and spark resistance. As instructors lamented the ability to correctly have students learn ballet barre and vocabulary through laptop screens, I switched gears to emphasize the importance of play and connection amid times of crisis. Online, we shared our favorite dance videos, taught one another new moves to try out, learned each other's histories and lineages, and held weekly dance parties. The lesson on our minds was the body as a tool for pleasure, learning to move with each other and hold each other through the unknown. This *rasquache* pedagogical approach became a way to disrupt the rigidity of academic dance practices that have historically been based on white supremacist concepts of physique, technique, and discipline. As an online community fostering connection, we had to re-evaluate what our bodies could do within the space of dance in academia and how we could belong in times of crises, committing to the learnings and growings I had so fortunately been taught through social dances like quebradita. The dancing that took place in my family's backyard fiestas was not focused on learning correct placement, corporeal alignment, or other technical details. We were dancing to remember, re-member, and catalyze community through pleasure. These teachings were necessary as we navigated immigration policies, xenophobia, and economic instability, crises that were and continue to be ameliorated through dance. The

growing presence of the COVID-19 virus ravaged the US while racial pandemics continued to afflict Black and Brown populations in our country. Teachers in academia were forced to confront the multiple crises we were in and re-imagine our roles as educators. Particularly, dance teachers and professors had to rethink how we placed values on dancing and the affect/effect our teaching had on minoritized bodies. These moments made me remember how many social dance forms and non-Eurocentric genres had already been doing the work that academic dance departments had so often overlooked; that there are dance forms and dancers who constantly move amid crisis. We had to confront the privilege of the academic studio when at this time we were relying on the tools that many social dance forms have used to survive, maintain kinship, and circulate through time.

Yes, the physical presence of community, gathering, learning, and teaching is important to *all* dance forms, but we must understand that dancers and genres that have also relied on social media and virtual methods to learn, to teach, and to thrive (because of a lack of access to studio space, to institutions, to Others) is also pivotal to understanding and rethinking dance pedagogy. Pertinent to this time of crisis in academia and in the world was to consider the following:

- That social dance knowledges must have a place in academia.
- That dance teaching is more than technical formations and embodiments. It is feeling, resisting, coping, shifting, and transforming.
- That there is an importance and value to the dancer who got their training embodying Janet Jackson's "rhythm nation" after hours of rewinding, mimicking, and practicing alongside their siblings at home or the quebradita dancer who bought knock-off DVDs of popular Jet Li films to construct acrobatic tricks.
- That teaching also takes place when a dancer uploads their choreography online for others to learn.
- That there are dance forms that have always kept moving in times of crisis and were born out of the need to move.
- That minoritarian²³ dance forms are a multifaceted process where creativity is born and bred out of Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color who move to make their own world and who, as Muñoz reminds us, also dance because their feet are being shot at.

- That teaching dance is creatively flexing approaches that serve the sociopolitical times we are in.
- That social dance is social change.

5. DANCING QUEBRADITA, BECOMING MINORITARIAN

With this in mind, I considered how quebradita *rasquache* pedagogies had taught me not only to grasp and reach a community of people beyond my locality but also to embrace my sense of self as a transborder creative force to be reckoned with, lessons of/for *movidas* that all quebradita dancers embody and teachings I relay to my students. My job during these volatile times was to continuously remind groups of primarily Black and Brown, first-generation youth that I worked with that I was teaching them how to dance to survive, to thrive, to cope, and resist and find their own *movidas*. Teaching online, as Black and Brown communities face daily dealings with violence and death, meant that we had to remind ourselves about *why* we dance. As my *tíos* and *tías* taught me, we danced to remember joy and re-member community as processes to cope with the effects of immigration, undocumentedness, racism, violence, and working-class struggles. Tough times called for dance in order to utilize pleasure for self-activation. We were resourcefully transforming our bodies as agents for change, situating quebradita praxis as a methodological tool and using *rasquache* pedagogy to become minoritarian.

‘Becoming minoritarian’ refers to a process of empowerment, a shift from minoritized person to subject-in-control (of themselves). Becoming minoritarian entails the construction of oppositional stances, or ‘sensibilities’ to borrow from Ybarra-Frausto, that delink the body from oppressive systems that invisibilize, ostricize, and Other folx.²⁴ To become minoritarian is to learn and teach radical practices of resistance. *Rasquache* pedagogy teaches us to become minoritarian in order to transform our lived realities. These teachings are first learned on the dance floor through affective connections that experiment with how Brown bodies reclaim their labor and resist hegemonic conceptualizations of their use-values, practicing joy as a form of new belonging.

What I grew up dancing in my family’s backyard fiestas and what I came to witness online from quebradita enthusiasts, teachers, and

participants who shared videos of themselves daringly *quebrando* on Instagram and YouTube, was precisely this performance of joy. *Alegría Mexicana* manifested a network of kinship and a communal body of dancers who learned to use their body's creativity as a method of strategically belonging to cope with the displacement of our communities and ongoing waves of xenophobia and racism. From the undocumented dancers who made quebradita clubs (groups of youth who got together to compete and dance with one another) in the 1990s, creating over 800 in California alone²⁵, to the Mexico City participants who utilize the Internet as a means of transmitting their talent abroad, *quebradorxs* catalyze movement to produce transborder community by engaging the common practice of *rasquachismo*. These ways of being and belonging stood out as praxis that defined what it meant to teach, transmit, and exchange dance beyond the restrictions placed on Brown, working-class corporeality.

At the same time, when I danced with my *tías* (aunts) and *tíos* (uncles) who had just crossed the border, or when I took classes online, it was not necessarily about striking my heel correctly into the floor, or flexing my knees at a particular angle, but about what I could invoke for myself with the *enseñanzas* that allowed me to become minoritarian. These lessons of/for being awakened my place in the world by teaching me how to move and what this bouncing, swaying, and *rasquache* resourcefulness could do. In many ways, I was being taught not just to *quebrar* (break) my partner towards the floor, but to use Brown joy to break stigmas, break habits, break academia by infiltrating these spaces with practices of *alegría Mexicana*. In this regard, performance studies scholar Joshua Chambers-Letson reminds us that, “[minoritarian] pedagogy puts itself in the service of the emancipatory will, because the teacher is always, to some degree, teaching the student how to emancipate herself from the state of tutelage as she moves into the great, exploratory beyond that lies past the teacher's pointing finger” (Chambers-Letson 75). It is this very praxis, this *rasquache* quebradita pedagogy, that allowed me to re-evaluate what it means to transmit/engage dance across borders (in every sense of the word), in the 90s, in the time of COVID-19, and beyond. *Rasquache* pedagogy taught me how instances of Brown, working-class bodies bouncing rhythmically to *tecnobanda* beats

teach us to unapologetically hybridize, to feel transnational, to feel borderless, and to feel human. In doing so, we come to realize that sometimes diasporas, like the back-and-forth crossings I grew up with in my backyard, are actually dance floors.

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NOTES

- 1 Popular *tecnobanda* musical group first formed in the 1990s.
- 2 Musical genre developed in the late 1980s in Guadalajara, Mexico. The genre mixed traditional Mexican *banda* music. *Banda* is a musical genre made popular during the 1880s in the Mexican state of Sinaloa. Typically, it is composed of brass, percussive, and wind instruments, played by musicians who traveled the peripheries of Mexico. The genre is influenced by German polka music and regional Mexican music. The music has also produced a way of dancing that people refer to as “*banda*,” made up of bouncing and embraced steps between couples.
- 3 Tomás Ybarra-Frausto defines *movidas* as “coping strategies you use to gain time, to make options to retain hope.” (Ybarra-Frausto et al. 86).
- 4 Simonett, Helena. *Banda: Mexican Musical Life Across Borders*. Wesleyan University Press, 2001.
- 5 Hutchinson, Sydney. *From Quebradita to Duranguense: Dance in Mexican American Youth Culture*. University of Arizona Press, 2007.
- 6 Hutchinson, Sydney. *From Quebradita to Duranguense: Dance in Mexican American Youth Culture*. University of Arizona Press, 2007.
- 7 See Tomás Ybarra-Frausto et al. “Rasquachismo: A Chicano Sensibility”.
- 8 I utilize the term “quebradorxs” to be inclusive of all forms of gender identification within the community of quebradita dancers.
- 9 2006 is the estimated year of the burgeoning emergence of quebradita’s new school. The growing speed of interaction and visibility between *quebradorxs* online took off when social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube allowed dancers to find and grow their passion again for the form. This new era is also marked by high-flying acrobatic stunts where leading partners toss following partners into the air. *La nueva escuela* of quebradita dancing has focused on commercializing the dance form and have also generated transnational competition circuits.
- 10 I use the term “embodied archives of information” throughout this essay to refer to the various experiences, knowledges, trainings, and learnings housed and held within quebradita dancers’ bodies. I theorize that in their practices and performances, *quebradorxs* sift through various sources of information held within their body to tap into different memories and feelings.
- 11 See Jose Esteban Muñoz’s *The Sense of Brown*.
- 12 Campbell, Louise Andea, et al. “‘Racial Threat,’ Partisan, Climate, and Direct Democracy: Contextual Effects in Three California Initiatives.” *Political Behavior*, vol. 28, 2006, pp. 129.
- 13 Barbarena, Laura, et al. “‘It Just Happened’: Telescoping Anxiety, Defiance, and Emergent Collective Behavior in the Student Walkouts of 2006.” *Social Problems*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2014, pp. 42-60.

- 14 Ataiants, Janna, et al. "Unaccompanied Children at the United States Border, a Human Rights Crisis that can be Addressed with Policy Change." *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*. Aug 2018. Doi: 10.1007/s10903-017-0577-5.
- 15 Alvarez, Priscilla. "Parents of 628 Children separated at border still have not been found." *CNN Politics*. 2 Dec 2020.
- 16 I use "il/legalities" throughout this essay to contextualize the policies, laws, regulations, and bureaucracies that are enacted by nation-states, through policing practices, to define membership and construct its imaginary.
- 17 *Nudos*, Spanish for "knots," are a series of loops that quebradita dancers engage when dancing. The following partner coils around the leader's body in varying ways.
- 18 *Tardeadas* are daytime dance events that usually take place in swap meets. Music promoters generally set up an open-floor location where they play tunes to be sold.
- 19 *El helicóptero* is a quebradita dance move. It is a windmill action done with the leg, where the dancer strikes the floor beneath them with each revolution, usually in a fast pace.
- 20 Baldacchino, John Paul. "The Eidetic of Belonging: Towards a phenomenological psychology of affect and ethno-national identity." *Ethnicities*, vol. 11, 2011, pp. 80-106.
- 21 Anderson, Benedict. *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics*. CASA, 1992.
- 22 Benedict Anderson describes nationalism as "an imagined political community...both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 6). Key to this formation is its limited imaginary, as the nation learns to encompass what it is, and by default, what it is not. The nation-state's sovereign understanding is built around imagining itself as "free" and staking claim of its territorial stretch and boundaries. This "imagined community," as Anderson defines it, works upon maintaining a sense of belonging together among its citizens who have never necessarily encountered one another.
- 23 See José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*.
- 24 Seo, Diane. "Dancing Away From Trouble." *LA Times*, 3 Feb 1994.
- 25 See Chambers-Letson, Joshua. *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life*. NYU Press, 2018.