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Embodied Refusals: Performance and Transnational Feminist Witnessing in the Face of Gendered Violence

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the entanglements of performed refusals and witnessing practices in the face of gendered violences. I analyze how contemporary artists use staged performance to generate new modes for witnessing histories of gendered violence across temporal and national boundaries. In particular, I investigate four performances addressing local histories of gendered violence in unique geopolitical locales: Regina José Galindo's *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia*, both of which grapple with the epidemic of feminicide in Guatemala, Nigerian-American choreographer Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room*, a diasporic choreography inspired by the 1929 Women's War and the 2014 Boko Haram kidnappings of schoolgirls, and Moroccan choreographer Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux,* which stages public, vocalized mourning performed by Moroccan elders and younger women who join the cast in each local touring site. I argue that each of these embodied works enact modes of refusal that remix how witnessing occurs on and offstage, and I analyze how their transnational investments contribute to new modes of reckoning with lineages of patriarchal violences.

My research sits at the intersections of performance studies, critical dance studies, and Black, Women of Color, and transnational feminisms. I employ a mixed methodological approach to attend to the nuanced data which each case study offers, including analysis of secondary literature and archival evidence, reception and rhetorical analysis, critical ethnography, and choreographic analysis, which I employ in order to attend to performance sites, sound, costuming, and lighting, amongst other embodied and aesthetic elements. Using these methods, I analyze each work's distinct modes of performed refusal, including privacy, withholding, and nonexposure, and I elucidate how each performance reveals the transnational divides and cross-cultural (mis)translations threaded in the projects of both performance and

redress. My research traces these acts of refusal as I analyze how their modes of evasion contest expectations of divulgence common in redressive action around gendered violence. Ultimately, I argue for each performance's embodied practices of refusal as generating new analytics for understanding the enduring grasp of gendered violences.

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INTRODUCTION

It is midway through the 2017 Time Based Arts Festival, an international, experimental performance festival presented by Portland Institute for Contemporary Art —and audiences appear to be experiencing fatigue despite their committed attendance. The ten day festival includes mainstage and late night performances, workshops, artist talks, and visual exhibitions, and artists and art lovers alike have been dashing from one event to another for days now. Despite any exhaustion, the room at PICA's headquarters in downtown Portland is abuzz with anticipation to hear Moroccan choreographer Bouchra Ouizguen talk about her latest work *Corbeaux*, which will be performed the following weekend of the festival. As a performer in the work, I too am filled with anticipation. Rehearsals have been intense over a short period of time. Much of the work's conceptual skeleton remains mysterious to myself and other local cast members, despite its choreography being so immediately and deeply ingrained in our musculature.

I find a seat in the back of the room and hear bits and pieces of conversations around me that express curiosity about *Corbeaux*'s meaning, audience member's expectant desires, and questions surrounding Ouizguen's artistic choices in creating the work. Ouizguen takes her seat with then artistic director Angela Mattox and they discuss Ouizguen's history, approaches to collaboration, and thoughts on touring the globe with her central cast of collaborators, Moroccan women primarily in their 60s, 70s, and 80s. When Mattox invites questions from the audience, they are unending and seem to announce an expectation of translation of the work's choreographic and artistic meaning. Ouizguen dodges these queries skillfully. She jumps to another topic, ignores the question at hand, or emphasizes a different point. From my place in the crowd, I write notes on refusal, withholding, and mistranslation on my pad of paper.

Weeks later, the social media feeds of many artists in Portland are still flourishing with critiques of a Dance Week article released to promote *Corbeaux*'s tour schedule. Titled "A Striking Living Sculpture is Invading the U.S.," local artists and activists have been denouncing the xenophobic use of the term "invasion" to describe a cast of Moroccan performers. The brief preview of the work, written by Camille LeFevre, drips with universalism: "It conveys the urgency of female experience en masse, while tapping into the ferocity that drives all attempts at greater individual agency."[1] LeFevre notes the cast's performance as "animalism" and designates the work as "primal." These words suggest the work as ahistorical and non developed, contributing to a long line of violences suggesting African bodies as primitive, threatening, and other. The curatorial team at PICA joins the chorus of voices in Portland's artistic community denouncing the racist and xenophobic stance of the preview.

Years later, as I return to interviewing audience members present for the 2017 performances of *Corbeaux*, the power of the work remains clear. Numerous shed tears as they describe their experience or note that the performance has been one of the most compelling that they have witnessed. Many detail the power of the feminine and the political work of the choreography: a cast of femme performers, both Moroccan and local, stand with eyes shut and feverishly throw their heads and necks backwards and forwards while vocalizing guttural sounds for the majority of the full length performance. Audiences describe the emotional intensity of this collective wailing that occurs in primarily public spaces. Themes of gender, coalition, protest, and mourning sprinkle comments. Ouizguen herself notes the power of connection across geocultural divides, detailing *Corbeaux* as "a kind of aesthetic challenge that calls for confrontation…or simply a human relationship, the objective being to meet a community and

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[1] LeFevre, Camille, "A Striking Living Sculpture is Invading the U.S," Dance Magazine, September 2017, Accessed March 2018, https://www.dancemagazine.com/season-preview-2017/

link together geographical spaces."[2] Ouizguen's inspiration to generate gendered alliance is entangled with bridging cultural or geopolitical divides, mysteries, assumptions, and expectations.

These three moments across *Corbeaux*'s performance history express various layers of reception, assumption, and refusal tied to contemporary performances focused on histories of violence. In doing so, they illuminate central themes of this dissertation: choreographies that address histories of gendered violence and coalitional redress under the umbrella of gender, the role which embodied refusals in performance play in putting pressure on expectations generated by cross-cultural difference, as well as how refusal might create alternate understandings of gendered violence and coalition; and finally, the ways in which witnessing practices across transnational lines are entangled with registers of violence. Put simply, this dissertation explores the entanglements of performance and redress in the face of gendered violences. In doing so, I pay attention to how transnational divides and cross-cultural (mis)translations are threaded in the projects of performance and redress. I elucidate how the artists and performances which I center utilize forms of refusal— including privacy, withholding, withdrawal, and nonexposure— to both unveil and reject expectations to show, give, or tell all as they additionally generate alternate approaches for remembrance and redress in response to histories of violence. Ultimately, this dissertation argues for the unique ways in which the included performances, through the body, ask us to witness histories of gendered violence.

Violence pulses throughout this dissertation. I consider the ways in which gender itself is a project of violence, and in the following pages of this introduction, I theorize gender as both emergent and emergency. I consider the localized histories of violences which each of the central

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[2] Ouizguen, Bouchra, "Corbeaux" Bouchra Ouizguen Website, Accessed March 2020, https://www.bouchraouizguen.com/corbeaux

performances in this dissertation address. I examine the ways in which remedial attempts generate their own forms of violence,[3] especially when they are wedded to expectations for those who have experienced trauma or been marked by their otherness to recount their experience or translate aspects of their subjectivities. As I detail in the first chapter of this dissertation, forms of narrative and testimonial are often turned to in order to document and prove the occurrence of violence. These forms of redress often put pressure on those *already* experiencing trauma to perform revelatory, narrative depictions for witnesses, which Kimberly Theidon refers to as "narrative capital."[4] These formalized responses to histories of gendered violence emphasize the pressure to have experiences of harm translated and consumed by witnesses as part of a rubric for documentation.

This expectation of narrative performance in the face of gendered violence also extends to the theatrical stage. There is a lineage of performance in which the aesthetic tradition of narrative explanation and testimony has been reified as a mode for recounting histories of trauma, specifically in the genre of testimonial theater.[5] The performances which I include in this dissertation, however, put pressure on these traditions of narrating violence. Instead, I argue, they each approach these histories by staging embodiments of refusal. In doing so, they reveal the expectations, mistranslations, and assumptions that accompany witnessing gendered violence, especially when witnessing occurs across cultural divides, either on or offstage. Because

[3] Saidiya Hartman has written extensively on the complexities of addressing violent histories. While her work is dedicated to grappling with legacies of antiBlack violence and the TransAtlantic slave trade, her questions around the reproduction of violence in redressive work is critical to my research. For more see Hartman's "Venus in Two Acts," *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, and *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006).
[4] Kimberly Theidon, "Gender in Transition: Common Sense, Women, and War," *Journal of Human Rights* 6, No. 4 (2007): 455.
[5] There is an extensive body of research dedicated to the modes of testimonial theater. See: Cécile Canut and Alioune Sow's "Testimonial Theater and Migration Performance," Amanda Stuart Fisher's *Performing the Testimonial: Rethinking Verbatim Dramaturgies*, Ana Elena Puga's *Memory, Allegory, and Testimony in South American Theater: Upstaging Dictatorship*, Miri Peleg, Rachel Lev-Wiesel, and Dani Yaniv's "Reconstruction of Self-Identity of Holocaust Survivors in 'Testimony Theater,'" and Teya Sepinuck's *Theatre of Witness: Finding the Medicine in Stories of Suffering, Transformation, and Peace.*

witnessing practices are embedded in both the reception of violence transnationally, as well as the form of performance, I argue for how performance might teach new modes of witnessing histories of gendered violence. Across this dissertation, I specifically analyze how acts of refusal within performance put pressure on traditional frameworks for redress that require divulgence, narrative revisitation, or retraumatization of survivors and proximate communities. Ultimately, I argue for the ways in which performance —via its embodied refusals —can offer new redressive routes that challenge requirements for subjects to re-narrate their trauma. At the center of this dissertation are the following research questions: How does the role of refusal in performance differently communicate, document, or contest gendered violences? How are the forms of witnessing sparked by these performances tied to digesting violence on larger scales? How does the transnational movement of performances reveal assumptions, projections, and expectations of witnessing audiences? And, how might the contemporary performances in this dissertation uniquely shift witnessing practices to differently understand histories of gendered violence and redressive labor in their wake?

This dissertation specifically attends to the embodied, aesthetic, and affective dimensions of four staged performances: Regina José Galindo's *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia*, Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*, and Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room*. This collection of performances address uniquely different histories, sites, and cultural contexts. Yet each, I argue, employs tactics of refusal within performance to contest the ways in which gendered violences and gendered resistances countering them are read, translated, and understood. I propose gendered violence as not just a political issue, but a systemic and cultural one. Thus, I turn to these performances for the ways in which they differently ask witnessing audiences to sense, feel, and digest histories of violence. Engaging the fields of performance studies, critical dance

studies, and Black, Women of Color, and Transnational feminisms, this dissertation is a comparative study, and each chapter analyzes one of the three included artists to demonstrate the ways in which the embodied nature of performance might offer new tools for grappling with violences instigated by the project of gender, even as each does so distinctly. I have gathered these four performances because they each a) address a history of gendered violence b) employ embodied or aesthetic forms of refusal with which witnesses must grapple and c) invest in transnational affiliations that exist outside of the boundaries of a nation state. Each of the included works is a part of a contemporary circuit of global performance and thus encounters varied localities and cultural contexts as it moves. The included artists also consider transnational relationships between violence, gender, and geocultural sites within performance, including diasporic orientations to violence and lineage (Okpokwasili), tethers between the state and localized violences across transnational sites (Galindo), and how performance engages intercultural actors— and their assumptions— in the project of resisting gendered erasures (Ouizguen).

This dissertation thus considers geocultural location as a critical element in gendered violence and resistance. In analyzing the geocultural inflections of each performance, I explicate how they reveal the ways in which violence might be witnessed and consumed across distance and difference. Each performance included in this dissertation has ties to international and cross-national modes of violence, including militarized investments in state governments to protect imperialist interests, colonialist interventions and warfare, and the repercussions of Westernization. And, each addresses questions of geography and temporality, as well as the relationships that occur across them. I analyze how these performances blend embodied and aesthetic elements that put pressure on the binary of global and local, instead playing with scales

of relationality and affiliation that span time and space in unique ways, revealing how gendered affiliations within sites of performance might grapple with histories of violence despite and because of transnational relationships.

Ultimately, this dissertation's central argument is that performances that wager in embodied refusals in the face of gendered violences offer new modes for understanding these histories of violence. Pushing against the assumption that narrative, verbal, or textual disclosure must be the primary mode of redress for these histories on or off stage, my research instead traces acts of refusal, withholding, and nondisclosure across each performance. I analyze how their modes of evasion contest requirements of divulgence as part of a rubric for proof and instead provide new hermeneutics for how violence and gender are entangled, how relational ties might form across transnational settings, and how transnational understandings of gendered violence bring their own sets of expectations and assumptions. By centering performance, I underscore the practice of witnessing both bodies on stage nearby and bodies in duress afar. I analyze how the affects, sensations, and embodied textures which these central performances stage differently communicate the past, present, and future stakes of gendered violences, especially because of their approaches to witnessing. In the following pages of this introduction, I begin by articulating the definitional stances, theoretical lineages, and contemporary stakes that accompany this dissertation's keywords, including gender, transnationalism, performance, witnessing, dance, refusal, and violence. I conclude by offering a roadmap of the central investments and arguments of each chapter in addition to my research methods. As this dissertation weaves the included performances, histories, affiliations, and registers of violence, it holds performance as a critical, cultural contributor and, at times, a perpetrator of violence. Tensions therefore flow throughout my research: the tension between local and global, violence

and coalition, witnessing and consumption, and gender and power. I continue to center performance because it both troubles and instigates some of these fraught tensions, unveiling structures of power across subjects invested in redress amongst gendered lineages of violence. And, I turn to these specific performances and their embodied refusals because they offer new ways of encountering and witnessing histories of gendered violence.

The Category of Womanhood

The term woman appears often in this dissertation, and it is perhaps the term that I hold the most ambivalence towards. The artists and subjects across this dissertation turn to the category of woman for what it mobilizes: the affiliations, coalitions, and redressive work which it might inspire. Womanhood is also marked by violence across these performances and the histories which they address. This project stems from an investment in centering the ways in which the very category of womanhood is tethered to exclusion of certain subjects along lines of race, sexuality, and more, just as I am simultaneously invested in how those who I write about in this dissertation work under the category of gender against legacies of violence. In other words, my research is based in questioning the violences that fall under the project and categorization of gender itself: I approach the notion of "womanhood" with recognition of the exclusionary histories that are tethered to this category. Simultaneously, I hold space for the work that gender is doing for my interlocutors across the performances and gendered histories which this dissertation illuminates. I consider the project of gender and its varied categorical tendencies as simultaneously a phenomenon that reveals poignant contours of subjectivity, an identificatory site that holds possibility for affiliation for those performing redressive labor, as well as an emergency. By emergency, I refer to the ways in which gender has been utilized by those holding masculinized power including anyone from individual subjects to nation states, as the source,

collaborator, and articulator of various scales of violence, including colonialism, state-waged and militarized violences, economic marginalization, and the physicalized, psychic, and cultural waging of patriarchal violence.

My research is anchored by frameworks for thinking around gender that unveil fault lines and fractures. This includes the ways in which biological essentialism has restricted the ways in which subjects feel, construct, and remix their gender, as well as the acknowledgment of gender as unstable and non-fixed.[6] Additionally, the category of womanhood has ousted subjects to the margins, particularly women of color. Black and Women of Color feminisms have rigorously documented and resisted the ways in which the category of woman has been exclusionary along lines of race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality, positioning them as excessive subjects. Sojourner Truth's question delivered at the 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, "And ain't I a woman?" provides an apt example of Black feminist thinking around the categorical nature of gender and its production of outsiderness.[7] Hortense Spillers' lauded work "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" documents the ways in which the Transatlantic slave trade enforced a process of ungendering on the Black body as its violent subjugation turned it into what she conceives of as "flesh."[8] Additionally, the Combahee River Collective Statement states, "Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both

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[6] Judith Butler famously notes, "Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time —an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self." While I concur with scholars who have put pressure on the collapsing way in which Butler articulates gender as performance because of the way it suggests a kind of putting on of gender that discounts the depths and realities of gender identifications. See Butler, Judith, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, No. 4 (1988): 519.
[7] Truth, Sojourner, "Ain't I A Woman? Look At Me," *Guardian News and Media Limited* (London: The Guardian, 1992), 25.
[8] Spillers, Hortense, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, No. 2 (1987): 65-81.

outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation."[9] In *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherríe Moraga notes a turn:

> *toward* the process of discerning the multilayered and intersecting sites of identity and struggle—distinct and shared—among women of color across the globe. In recent years, even our understanding of how gender and 'womanhood' are defined has been challenged by young trans women and men of color. They've required us to look more deeply into some of our fiercest feminist convictions about queer desire and female identity.[10]

These fraught relationships put generative pressure on categories of womanhood or assumptions of a generalizable sisterhood that has become overdetermined and too easily assumed.[11]

The category of woman also sparks tensions because of the ways that gender and its social construction have been noted as a western or colonial lineage of thought. In considering gender as an emergency, my research attends to the ways in which gendering becomes an act of utility in the project of domination, especially along north-south axes. I situate my work within a genealogy of thought theorizing the entanglements between the project of gender and its usefulness within structures of subjugation. In "Patriarchy from Margin to Center: Discipline, Territoriality, and Cruelty in the Apocalyptic Phase of Capital," Rita Segato argues that the "village world" and its communal logics have been shattered by what she defines as "colonial modernity" or "the current rapid expansion of the state-business-media-Christianity front."[12] Focusing on violences across sites in Latin America —from feminicide in Ayotzinapa to

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[9] Combahee River Collective, "Combahee River Collective Statement," In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, edited by Barbara Smith, (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983): 2.

[10]Moraga, Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, fourth edition, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015): xvi.

[11] Kai M. Green notes that "To center Black and women of color as a group to organize around is necessary when the category of woman as a political category, perpetually and almost pathologically, centers white cisgender (heterosexual) women" (439). This vexed relationship between what is often centered under the project of dominant feminisms or the project of womanhood and marginalized subjects begs Green's important question: "If the category 'woman' becomes more inclusive so as to include Black and women of color, and queer and transgender women, then does the category still function in a way that is useful?" Bey, Marquis and Kai M. Green, "Where Black Feminist Thought and Trans* Feminism Meet: A Conversation," *Souls*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2017, pp. 438-454: 439.

[12] Rita Segato, "Patriarchy from Margin to Center," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, No. 3 (2016): 615.

extractive, agricultural practices in Chile— Segato emphasizes that colonial impact on gender has pushed femme subjects to marginal spaces, stripped communal logics of their ontological values, and produced an oppositional framework that mobilizes a "pedagogy of cruelty," in which a penchant for embodied brutality is rehearsed via feminicide.[13] Segato's work notes the ways in which the generation of the privileged central perspective —identified as male— is what has mobilized colonial power.

Differently, Nigerian scholar Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí has written about the unresolvable tension between Nigerian indigenous communities and constructions of gender in the west:

> In the Western experience, social construction and biological determinism have been two sides of the same coin, since both ideas continue to reinforce each other. When social categories like gender are constructed, new biologies of difference can be invented. When biological interpretations are found to be compelling, social categories do derive their legitimacy and power from biology. In short, the social and the biological feed on each other …the most important part is not that gender is socially constructed but the extent to which biology itself is socially constructed and therefore inseparable from the social.[14]

Oyěwùmí's work articulates gender as a category that is already inflected by cultural imperialism and often ill-fitting because of its ties to biological essentialism. For indigenous Nigerian communities, specifically in their forms prior to a colonial presence, gender roles have been documented as being organized in complimentary as opposed to hierarchical ways.[15] Nigerian scholar Ifi Amadiume has written extensively on the non-resolvable differences between western concepts of gender and the social practices of the Nnobi people in eastern Nigeria. This includes social roles in Nnobi culture, including "male daughters" and "female husbands."[16] These roles exist to support the continuation of lineage and organization of familial proceedings. Hershini Bhana Young notes that, "While she is forced to use language that is deeply embedded in the

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[13] Ibid, 623.
[14] Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: The Regents of the University of Minnesota, 1997), 8-9
[15] See Mba 1982 and 1992.
[16] Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society* (London: Zed Books, 1987).

very notions of gender that she criticizes, Amadiume's desire to embed understandings of gender in African cultural realities is crucial."[17] The work of scholars including Mba, Amadiume, and Oyěwùmí documents the socially constructed categories of gender as well as the ties between the social and biological realms, which could prove disruptive to lineages of thought within western approaches to gender studies. They note the imposition of gender onto local contexts in which they do not translate, illuminating this imposition as part of an imperialist logic along north-south axes of power. My own research emphasizes the redressive and coalitional possibilities of gendered affiliation just as I hold a critical reminder from these scholars: even amidst western attempts to destabilize systems of domination within the realms of gender and sexuality, oppressive injury still occurs via geopolitical axes of power.

Rather than being invested in the category of "woman" as the anchor to the case studies which my research analyzes, I instead prioritize the violences of gender in the consideration of how *patriarchal* power is waged and how affiliations unfold in response to that gendered power. This research thus considers gender through the various registers of violence which it enables. I define gendered violence as structures of pain relying on the *objectifying utility* of bodies that depart from masculinized, patriarchal forms in service of a cultural and political purpose that reifies the actor's power while severing the subject from its desired or liberatory potential. I consider gendered violence as marked by a doubling of brutalities. It both inflicts bodily or psychic pain on subjects *and* absences logics of recognition and documentation of these forces, thus ousting the trauma and its subject from cultural spheres of acknowledgment. This project understands gendered violence as entangled within structures of colonial and capitalist ramification, and I follow Segato's reminder that the "colonial-modern patriarchy purges

[17] Hershini Bhana Young, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text, and the Black Diasporic Body*, (Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 23.

everything that does not duly recognize its way of structuring and disciplining life."[18] I definitionally expand violence to forms of erasure to argue that systems of patriarchy, heterosexuality, colonialism, and capitalism produce nuanced and combinatorial possibilities of pain for femme subjects, even when dominant frameworks of recognition might not validate them. In the face of these expansive and tethered forms of violences, I argue for the ways in which performance and its embodied refusals might alternately point to the ways in which absence and erasure occur, just as it offers new modes for understanding and acknowledging histories of gendered violences through remixed practices of witnessing.

While the artists and some events which their choreographies respond to ("The Women's War") include self-identification or designation of central subjects as "women," I move between this term and "femme" to disrupt a fixed and binarized gender *categorization* and to move towards a *descriptor* of gender expression.[19] Following scholars within Black feminisms, Queer Studies, and Trans Studies who put pressure on the category of "woman," I frequently employ the term "femme" to approximate the textures, sensations, and feelings of the "*work* that we do *as* the identities that come to subjectivate us, rather than presuming that identity is an immutable possession."[20] Critical to my employment of the term "femme" is Rhea Ashley Hoskin's conceptualization that "femme has many features, as an affect, as a way of relating and nurturing one another, as an esthetic, an erotic, and a politic….what femme *does* is employ various approaches to resist patriarchal norms of of femininity, particularly those that restrict, exclude, and limit expressions across intersectional axes."[21]

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[18] Segato, Rita, "Patriarchy from Margin to Center," 619.
[19] Following this, I additionally employ the term "masc" across this dissertation to continue the practice of de-essentializing naming practices in relation to gender.
[20] Bey, Marquis and Kai M. Green, "Where Black Feminist Thought and Trans* Feminism Meet: A Conversation," *Souls*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2017: 442.
[21] Hoskin, Rhea Ashley. "Can Femme be Theory? Exploring the Epistemological and Methodological Possibilities of Femme," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 25, No. 1 (2021): 8.

My research reads the "work" and "doing" to which Bey, Green, and Hoskin refer as tied to the affective, embodied, and political site of performance. Performance becomes an analytic that helps note the labor, emotion, and sensations of gender, as "the citationality of performance works in tandem with its experienced material grounding."[22] E. Patrick Johnson notes that performance "not only highlights the discursive effects of acts, it also points to how these acts are historically situated."[23] As a scholar invested in the intersections between dance and performance studies and gender and sexuality studies, the body and its potential for both citational and resistant practices becomes a critical site for understanding how gender is both sedimented, rearticulated, and refused. I thus approach gender as both "emergent" (non-fixed) and "emergency" because of the various ways in which it ruptures, resists, and returns to sedimented cultural symbols, comes into shape through embodiment and affect, and becomes a utility co-opted within other structures of subjugation. The contours of gender's construction and utility are part of what fuel the gendered histories which the performances at the heart of this dissertation address. In turning to these artistic works, I argue for the ways in which their refusals trouble dominant frameworks of translation, divulgence, and proof across lines of gendered affiliation and difference. Simultaneously, the performances that anchor this dissertation generate new affects, sensations, and forms of relationality for understanding gendered violence and subsequent possibilities of redress.

Transnationalism and Its Feminisms

Throughout this dissertation, I am invested in two definitional registers of the term "transnational." I use the transnational to refer to the layered entanglements of subjects,

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[22] Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad*, 28.
[23] E. Patrick Johnson, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 21, No. 1 (2001): 10.

embodiments, ideologies, and resources that are enacted across borders and outside of the nation state. My research utilizes analytics within transnational studies to unveil and disrupt the structures that render the state a naturalized or stable phenomenon. I embrace Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way's theorization of the transnational as an "acid" that eats away at the construction of the sturdy image of the nation, thus implicating hegemonic forces deployed in the spirit of national viability, including "histories or analyses that take national boundaries as fixed, implicitly timeless, or even always meaningful."[24] Deprioritizing the nation state, I thus utilize the term transnational to refer to the multivalent circulation of people and resources across borders, the embodied and affective encounters that unfold because of these circulatory patterns, and the uneven, relational power structures which those encounters produce. My research prioritizes the ways in which the transnational becomes an analytic for understanding affiliation and coalition outside of the framing of the nation. In doing so, I take interest in what those transnational affiliations might reveal, including the hierarchies, assumptions, and expectations which unfold across cultural or geopolitical distinction. Thus, the transnational is less of a celebratory term and more an analytic frame which I consider to do important political work in the revelation of how power flows across subjects and their embodied and affective engagements.[25]

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[24] Briggs, Laura, Gladys McCormick, and J.T. Way, "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis," *American Quarterly* 60, No. 3 (2008): 627.

[25] While the transnational opens up generative spaces for critical thought around migration, translation, and encounter, it has also proven as a dirty word in some contexts. The transnational has ties to the project of neoliberalism, including the reduction of state regulation which favors private, global interests, the mobilization of multinational corporations, and the advancement of global inequity occurring especially across the dividing line of the Global North and South. Marcela Fuentes notes that, "neoliberal regimes favor national and transnational capital, working in tandem with financial networks, international lending institutions, and multinational corporations to ensure the legal and pressive resources needed to safeguard specific trade interests." As I center transnational frameworks, I also acknowledge the potential for violence which the term and its varied movements allows space for. See Marcela Fuentes, *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 9.

This dissertation approaches contemporary performance and the transnational pathways which the artists in this research travel as forming new relational structures as they circulate. The artistic works upon which my research focuses work outside of the frame of the purified or stable nation state by approaching the histories of gendered violence which each performance centers as tied to transnational flows of capital, relationalities, and power. They respond in part to structures of neoliberal and militarized investment by the Global North (Regina José Galindo), intercultural relationalities (Bouchra Ouizguen), and diaspora (Okwui Okpokwasili). I consider these performances as transnational phenomena not solely because they travel across borders but because they additionally initiate shared yet divergent experiences through the witnessing practices which their live forms catalyze across and between audiences and performers. I consider the affiliations that unfold in the making and performance of each of the four works included in my research as relationships that tie subjects together outside of simply a national context. In each chapter, I consider how the transnational contours of witnessing these histories of gendered violences hold stakes that are underscored by the frame of performance, in which audiences are part and parcel of the form's exchange. I consider the power structures that are embedded within the kind of witnessing which each performance instigates, especially across audiences within and outside of the local context from which each performance— or the gendered history which it addresses— derives. Thus, I argue that each work differently puts pressure on the power dynamics at play in questions of consuming gendered histories of violence as they simultaneously generate redressive possibilities via alternate understandings and practices of witnessing.

Each of the performances foregrounded in the following pages enunciate different transnational registers of affiliation and encounter. When making work in sites outside of

Guatemala, Galindo is known for her practice of generating performances that address local sociopolitical conditions, including histories of gendered violences in the specific city or region in which she performs. In *Presencia*, Galindo stands still for hours wearing the clothing of murdered femme Guatemalan subjects in intentionally selected and often public sites. The work is dedicated to and inspired by the lives of thirteen women, and Galindo's performance of *Presencia* outside of Guatemala was inspired by and constructed in response to some of the included women's transnational migration and desire to travel. Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* instigates coalition through its casting structures that deprioritizes national ties in favor of gendered affiliation. In doing so, her casting of femme subjects from Morocco and localized contexts prompts my exploration of how cross-cultural desire and projection are part and parcel of transnational relationalities.

My chapter on Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room* considers the tethers between diaspora and the transnational. I approach diasporic formations as transnationally inflected because of the ways that both frameworks consider the movement and circulation of subjects. Diaspora has traditionally been formulated as more closely tethered to the nation state in that it "has been often used to denote religious or national groups living outside an (imagined) homeland."[26] In other words, diaspora and its anchoring "homeland" is often framed as the subjects who reside within and outside of a nation. However, I put pressure on the approach of the diasporic as a framework bound to national connectivity. Instead, my research considers diaspora as a generative site to think about the relationships that form when the nation is *not* the epistemological boundary. I approach diaspora, while tethered often to a certain imagined, known, or felt place of origin, as doing work that both eats away at the fixity of the nation or

[26] Thomas Faist, *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories, and Methods* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 10

unveils the structures which seek to privilege the nation as subjects form new relational structures and contours of subjectivity outside of originary national boundaries. My chapter on Okpokwasili's work reveals the nuanced layers of diasporic connections that unfold in the making of *Poor People's TV Room*. While Okpokwasili is of Nigerian descent, her collaborators are not. And while the cast is comprised of Black femmes —both African and African American—I understand Okpokwasili's work as opening up new questions surrounding how diasporic labor, imagination, and affiliation might not necessarily be bound to the nation of Nigeria, and instead to a gendered history, an African subjectivity, and to a laboring towards ancestral connections.

Each of these included artists perform these works outside of their originary contexts in a global circuit of performance primarily driven by Westernized funding structures. In considering how the influence of the West and Global North structures the choreographic projects of artists narrating histories of gendered violence, I echo Amy Swanson's vital questions on subjectivity, the power of the colonial, and aesthetic choices within contemporary dance and performance in her study of Senegalese dance practices, queerness, and the entanglements with colonial French power over funding and presenting structures. Swanson emphasizes Ananya Chatterjea's reminder that colonialism and imperialism conditions forms of belonging as "possible only under certain pre-approved conditions," as she then asks " in what ways do African artists create and perform meaningful works that do not simply aim to appeal to an external gaze?[27] How do they navigate the coloniality of power from colonized locations?" Swanson's line of questioning is particularly pertinent as my research unveils how each of the performances I include put pressure

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[27] Amy Swanson, *Illegible Bodies: Contemporary Dance, Transnationalism, and Queer Possibility in Senegal*, Forthcoming.

on the cultural (mis)translations, projections, and expectations which witnessing audiences might place onto them.

This project argues for how the included performances and their practices of embodied refusals offer alternate approaches to witnessing gendered histories. In doing so, it is invested in how each performance might negotiate forms of gendered affiliation across geopolitical differences in response to histories of violence. I turn to a lineage of transnational feminist thought because of its disciplinary investments in questions of coalition and solidarity across uneven grounds of power, including concurrent coalitional fault lines and potential for redress. Transnational feminist genealogies have troubled the notion of even power formations in the construction of gender, instead unveiling how gender is understood, produced, and utilized across disparate structures of power and geopolitical conditions. The centrality of unevenness to transnational feminist thought has also been applied to questions of solidarity within gendered experiences and in the face of gendered oppressions, and there is a rich genealogy of questions asked around how a "sisterhood" might form across such geopolitical so called "differences."

The term transnational feminism holds multivalent and contested meanings, though my investment in it stems from an increase in U.S.-based feminist politics from the 1980s onwards which considered how gender is uniquely constructed and articulated through localized conditions that are often flattened under the project and histories of dominant, Western, and white feminist lineages. As I analyze contemporary performances that address histories of gendered violences and potential gendered affiliations, I consider gender to be marked by its highly conditional entanglements in structures of violence that unfold under localized conditions and which intersect with particular expressions of class, race, sect, religion, and more. Transnational feminisms provide a framework for understanding how gender is contoured within

localities always marked by complex webs of power. It also offers analytics for parsing how gender is entangled in the simultaneous (mis)understandings, (mis)translations, cultural projections, *and* potential for coalitional resistances that occur across geopolitical distance. In other words, transnational feminist analytics anchor my research on how gender contributes to violence *and* resistance against it across registers of geopolitical difference.

The transnational increasingly became a key word for the field of women's studies and feminist politics in the U.S. throughout the 1980s and early to mid-1990s as appeals were made for an "international feminism" to "connect US feminisms with the 'many regions of the world,' that would analyze the global context in which feminist work unfolds" and to "undo the violent traces of racism and colonialism from feminist practice."[28] As Jennifer C. Nash outlines, the transnational and its ethical promises became an important site for US feminisms to grapple with the racialized and colonial violences entangled in their own projects.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's rejection of a universal womanhood in her 1984 essay "Under Western Eyes" takes US feminisms as part of its analytical object. In the essay, Mohanty examines "the production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts.[29]" Mohanty argues for vigilance around how western feminist investment in sexual difference can simultaneously perform coloniality in their assumption that patriarchal power is cast as "that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppressed most if not all the women in these countries."[30] Moreover, this generalization of the identity of "women" produces the notion of womanhood as "a stable category of analysis" which "assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination"

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[28] Jennifer C. Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 82.
[29] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," *boundary 2* 12, No. 3 (1984): 333.
[30] Ibid, 334-335.

and thus "limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity."[31] The work of Mohanty and others increasingly engaging the transnational directed itself specifically at the sphere of US-based feminism, catalyzing a turn inwards for the field and an uptick use of analytics of race, colonialism, and flows of global power. As Nash notes, the "global" became a remedial space for how US feminisms reckoned with their own expressions of power.

From the mid- to late 1990s, the influx of feminist investment in transnational analytics and discourse continued, with this keyword promising "a feminism that could meaningfully engage geopolitical difference, a feminism that could speak in the plural but always with a singular emphasis on human rights."[32] This increasing attention towards the transnational within the landscape of U.S. feminist politics illuminates "contexts that make particular concepts desirable in certain moments —when the academic and political practices of feminism were fundamentally remade by a newfound interest in questions of the global."[33] This period saw an influx of scholars producing anthologies with an interest in how to take "a multinational and multilocational approach to questions of gender."[34] In their 1994 anthology *Scattered Hegemonies*, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan describe an impetus to "broaden and deepen the analysis of gender in relation to a multiplicity of issues that affect women's lives."[35] Grewal and Kaplan's work argued that gender be analyzed in conjunction with multivalent registers of subjectivity driven by locality. This effort aimed at resisting the hegemonic, universalizing forces of western-centric feminisms who largely point to the Global North as their site, exemplary object, and epistemological source. Grewal and Kaplan joined other transnational feminists in describing scholarly production from the Global North as leading to an essentializing of the

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[31] Ibid, 334.
[32] Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 91.
[33] Ibid, 91.
[34] Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3.
[35] Ibid, 1.

category of "woman." Their work urged for this critical eye towards power to be used by western feminisms self-reflexively and to consider what Grewal has theorized as "scattered hegemonies," defined as the "effects of mobile capital as well as the multiple subjectivities that replace the European unitary subject."[36] Grewal and Kaplan thus perform a suspicion of analytical frameworks that position the non-western subject as useful and which deconstruct power along lines of gendered experiences constrained to their own experiences without considering the universalizing harm of their localized analytics.

My project argues for performance as a site that offers the sensations of these tricky negotiations of power, witnessing, and universalizing assumptions. My research finds the pressure which transnational feminisms have put on universalizing assumptions about gendered oppression to be generative as I map the ways that the included performances help us feel into the expectations, desires, and projections that we carry regarding how the body might perform histories of gendered violence. I approach these performances as articulating, through their embodied refusals, how expectations and desires filter into witnessing gendered histories and thus, coalitional possibility for witnessing anew. I turn to transnational feminist thought because of its investment in elucidating the cracks in any form of global sisterhood while it concurrently does not abandon the quest for redressive, gendered affiliations.

My research thus makes contributions to transnational feminist thinking by centering bodily sensations as a key site for understanding the desires, expectations, and projections that arise when witnessing histories of gendered violences, as well as a powerful tool in negotiating the uneven grounds of power that are part and parcel of gendered affiliation. Performance becomes a site upon which witnessing practices are rehearsed, giving it the potential to remix how gendered violences are witnessed on larger registers. My work thus contributes to

[36] Ibid, 7.

transnational feminist lineages by drawing connections between the role of the feminist witness positioned from afar, as well as her potential presumptions, and the ways in which expectations of divulgence can occur while witnessing performance. In other words, my work across these chapters considers the tethers between the witness to performances addressing histories of gendered violence and the witness to gendered violences occurring across geopolitical distance.

Specifically, this dissertation is invested in how performance gives us sensations of our own expectations that can carry to redressive work outside of the realm of performance. It considers how embodied sensation might help us ask questions including: How might we be requiring those experiencing or performing histories of violence to fulfill certain roles or expectations? How might we expect pain and oppression to be expressed? How are our own desires generating oppressive rubrics for understanding and responding to these histories of violence? I position the act of witnessing as entangled in both the perpetuation and potential redress of gendered violence, especially when the witness is located at a distance. I articulate how the form of performance might reveal the missteps, labors, and possibilities associated with the act of witnessing histories of gendered violences across temporal and geographic distances. Transnational feminist lineages express the tensions between the coalitional, redressive work of feminist projects and the ways that the uneven power structures within geopolitical and cultural difference instantiates its own violences. My project asks the same questions of feminist witnessing, and I consider how the act of witnessing holds capabilities for both redress and harm.

In turning to lineages of feminist labor contending with solidarity, difference, and violence, I also take interest in the ways in which these lineages —specifically, transnational, Black, and Women of Color feminisms — have negotiated their own diverging projects, desires, and subjects of focus. Perhaps one of the largest critiques of the transnational by feminist

projects[37] has been that it casts attention abroad and away from "problems at home,"[38] including racialized violence and the work that Black feminists have done to address it. This turn towards the global has in some ways driven a "wedge"[39] between Black and transnational feminisms.

My dissertation proposes performance and its witnessing practices as sites that encourage more scalar thinking which puts pressure on the binary between home and away. My work is interested in how feminist praxis across Black, transnational, and Women of Color lineages might speak further with one another in placing pressure on how histories of violence are expected to be performed and how affiliations might be constructed across difference. In considering these varying feminist lineages to be in *generative* communication with one another, especially in the ways in which they put pressure on one another to think about proximity and difference, my research asks us to think in scalar modes rather than through the lens of "home" versus the "global." This dissertation wants to trouble this binary of here versus away, instead thinking about how the proximity of witnessing performance is entangled with witnessing across further scales and registers of distance. Rather than requiring distance for transnational feminisms to be applicable, I consider how the transnational might also be invoked in tight and intimate proximities, including the experience of seeing bodies in motion at the site of performance. I ask us to think about how scales of distance and difference are entangled in one another and how attuning to the ways in which we practice witnessing at a close proximity

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[37] Feminist scholars have, in part, critiqued how the remedial work of the transnational which Nash describes has fallen upon the backs of othered subjects. Leela Fernandes has written that transnational feminism "emerged within and is shaped in central ways by models of multicultural education that are specific to the context of the United States….Dominant paradigms of multiculturalism often continue to cast transnationalism as another marker of identity so that the inclusion of transnational perspectives simply means the inclusion of one more category of the 'other.'" Jennifer Suchland adds that "the most common internationalizing formula is global woman = third world woman à global South = location of transnational feminist analysis." See Leela Fernandes, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, Power* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 168; Jennifer Suchland,"Is Postsocialism Transnational?," *Signs* 36, No. 4, 2011: 838.

[38] Barnard Center for Research on Women, "The Legacy of Scattered Hegemonies," YouTube Video, 1:37:25, March 3, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHnO4Jxr5LA

[39] Nash, *Black Feminism Reimagined*, 96.

impacts how it unfolds across growing spatial expanses. In other words, while this dissertation focuses on witnessing across geopolitical and temporal gaps, its lessons do not exclude more intimate proximities. In fact, this project aims to provide tools for sensing desire and projection that can be felt in tight quarters and close to home as well as across larger geographic distances.

On Performance

In the following pages, I analyze four performances addressing local histories of gendered violence in unique geopolitical locales: Regina José Galindo's *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia*, both of which grapple with the epidemic of feminicide in Guatemala, Nigerian-American choreographer Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room*, a diasporic choreography inspired by the 1929 Women's War and the 2014 Boko Haram kidnappings of schoolgirls, and Moroccan choreographer Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*, which stages public, vocalized mourning performed by Moroccan elders and younger femmes who join the cast in each local touring site. I argue that these performances place pressure on expectations of divulgence and in doing so, develop alternate possibilities for witnessing gendered histories. Additionally, I articulate broader cultural stakes of witnessing differently in the frame of performance, specifically in how it might impact witnessing violence offstage and across transnational lines. This dissertation is thus invested in the tethers between performance and refusal, witnessing, and violence.

Each staged performance that I analyze centers a history that is both gendered and entangled with the violences of patriarchal power: feminicide and militarized violence in Guatemala, the denial of access to public practices, including mourning, for femme subjects in Morocco, the British destruction of indigenous women's ways of life in colonial Nigeria, and the explicit targeting of young schoolgirls in 2014 by Boko Haram. While each included

performance takes inspiration from vastly different forms of violence as well as geopolitical locales and histories, I argue for the ways in which they each perform a redressive labor because of their ability to uniquely contour how we witness histories of gendered violences. These are by no means the only performances addressing the topic of gendered violence. Yet, I link them in this dissertation because they each, as I argue, are invested in the stakes and registers of witnessing. Additionally, I explore in each chapter how the labor, difficulty, or assumptions that can accompany the relationship between the performer and witness is remixed through embodied refusals within each performance. By centering analysis of these refusals, I articulate how witnessing itself is both underscored and implicated as part of the unevenness of power relations which are described and enacted by each performance.

My research turns attention to these performances for their shared investment in distinct techniques of withholding as a mode for generating response to histories of gendered violences. Rather than narrating or representing these histories of violence onstage, the included performances enact affective registers of response as they simultaneously put pressure on expectations of revelation as the sole mode for addressing lineages of gendered violences. The witnessing practices staged by the four performances which I center in this dissertation — and which I argue are emphasized through each performance's specific forms of embodied refusal — articulate matrices of power between audiences and performers. My work asks how the embodied refusals performed in each work might unveil expectations around disclosure as they offer alternate modes for recognizing histories of gendered violences.

As noted, narrative disclosure has been reified in redressive traditions responding to patriarchal violence. This includes asking survivors to narrate their experiences through testimony in political and judicial realms, as well as normalizing narration as a form of

remembrance or resistance in onstage performance traditions, in which performers often retell occurrences of violence as part of the work's affective impact. In discussing formal redressive actions responding to gendered atrocities in the judicial or political sphere, including truth commissions, testimonial genres, and focus groups, Kimberly Theidon writes, "The incitement to speech hinges on a belief that talking is intrinsically healing…this was at odds with the women's insistence on forgetting."[40] I follow Theidon's emphasis on the violence generated *within* modes of redress, even those that are well intentioned, when she critically asks: "What if part of recovery is taking back some sense of the private, of the intimate sphere that was violated?"[41] I turn to the included performances in this dissertation for their alternate approaches to histories of gendered violences. I note the ways in which their distinct embodied refusals unveil and push back on expectations of disclosure and translation, especially those directed at subjects living in uneven structures of geopolitical and cultural power. Particularly, I argue for the ways in which the included performances uniquely offer new modes of witnessing gendered violences that center and catalyze affective and sensory-based experiences rather than relying on narrative disclosure.

By following Performance Studies' embrace of an expansive understanding of performance, this dissertation makes a case for performance as an intervening site from which to witness histories of gendered violence anew.[42] Performance holds the capacity to become "an event and a heuristic tool that illuminates the presentational and representational elements of culture…As event or as heuristic, performance makes and does things, in addition to describing

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[40] Theidon, "Gender in Transition," 463.
[41] Ibid, 474.
[42] Marcela Fuentes notes that performance is "a sort of 'theater of life' where social actors engage with an explicit or implicit audience, adhering to or subverting social markers such as gender identity, national allegiance, familial roles, and race." See Fuentes, *Performance Constellations*, 11.

how they are made or done."[43] Across my case studies, I extend the term performance off of the stage to cultural and political phenomena, including how gendered violence is witnessed from afar and across geopolitical power differentials, how modes of redress like protest or testimonial are staged and constructed, and how colonial and state-waged violences are gendered in nature. In other words, the political and sociocultural histories that mobilize each performance become sites of analysis *as* performance. And, the embodied act of witnessing itself is analyzed through the terms of performance in order to articulate the political stakes and interventions that each staged performance makes possible in witnessing larger scales of violence.

While histories of gendered violences have been extensively researched and redress has been attempted across various sectors, including public policy, the judicial sphere, and the social sciences, I instead turn to performance for its capacity to communicate through registers of witnessing, embodiment, and affect. I attend to the performances in this dissertation in part because their live form kicks off relational power structures between witnesses and performers. I argue for the ways in which each performance tests structures of power initiated by the act of witnessing, and I articulate how these witnessing practices might have broader stakes for witnessing gendered violence transnationally. The performances that make up this research move through varied "stages" — galleries, public streets, parks and town squares, and proscenium theaters. I articulate the ways in which Galindo, Ouizguen, and Okpokwasili approach these sites and their cultural and aesthetic components to show how each of these works specifically implicates the role of the witnessing audience member, including her expectations, projections, and desires, and their impact on how each performance is received. For example, in my chapter on Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*, I demonstrate how the work utilizes

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[43] Judith Hamera, *Opening Acts: Performance In/As Communication and Cultural Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 6.

refusal to unveil how witnessing audiences project onto performers, especially those marked by difference along lines of race, ethnicity, nationality and more. My work does not take a purely celebratory stance of performance. Instead, I articulate the ways that the included performances unveil how power *flows* within acts of witnessing, as well as how shifting witnessing practices holds broader stakes for how violence is received offstage and across lines of geocultural difference.

Performance and Witnessing

The presence of a witness, which is the term I use throughout this dissertation to refer to both audience members in performance as well as those observing gendered violences offstage, is a crucial ingredient in the live structure of these performances. My work is informed by questions of how circulation impacts the reception of performance amongst witnessing audiences, and I frame the included performances as anchored by the liveness of the body-to-body encounters of performers and witnesses, in which both a "performer acts in expectation of recognition and feedback from her spectators"[44] and a witnessing audience member is conscious of their role as an observer. While I include audience and media reception to different degrees in each chapter, I attend carefully in each of them to the ways in which embodied refusals performed onstage put pressure on expectations of how histories of gendered violences must be expressed.

In referring throughout this dissertation to audiences as witnesses, I follow Elizabeth Jelin's articulation of two understandings of the witness: first, as "a person who lived through an experience or event and can, at a later moment, narrate it or 'give testimony'" and second, as "an observer, someone who was present at the moment of an event as an onlooker, who saw

[44] Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad*, 33.

something but who did not participate directly or was not directly involved in the event. His or her testimony can be used to verify that the event actually occurred."[45] Jelin's work underscores the critical role of the witness in authenticating and giving social, cultural, and political value to the meaning of an event. Jelin articulates the value of the witness as tethered to the testimonial form, in which narrative description concretizes an experience or an event in state-based, juridical spheres.

I extend Jelin's theorization to those witnessing histories of gendered violence outside of this sphere and its testimonial forms to the site of performance. Different from the practice of simply watching, which I consider to include an element of unidirectional consumption, witnessing indicates a multi-directional relationship between an audience member and the performance, performer, or included history. The witness is folded into how the event or experience onstage is understood, valued, and confirmed within — in addition to juridical sites — social and cultural spheres. While I follow Jelin's notion that the witness' very live presence and observation matters to the recognition of the event itself, I also consider the relationship between a history and its witness as mutually constitutive.[46]

I introduce the term "witnessing practices" to turn our attention to the ways in which the act of witnessing takes shape through expectations or desires which the witness might bring to the history itself. I refer to audiences as witnesses to underscore the critical role which witnessing practices play in determining how a history of violence is understood, framed, and addressed. I refer to witnessing practices as moments in which the witness becomes aware of herself within the frame of the event, including the expectations, desires, or projections which she might carry. I see performance as a cultural site in which witnessing is rehearsed and new

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[45] Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 61.

[46] For more on how the role of the witness has been problematized, see Taylor, 1997, 25-27.

witnessing practices are introduced, and I specifically center performances which hold the potential to make audiences aware of their expectations through the embodied refusals which they stage. In doing so, I argue that part of each of these performances' approaches to histories of violence are the witnessing practices which they stage, and I consider their broader implications for witnessing histories of gendered violences.

My research evidences acts of refusal, withholding, and privacy within these staged works. Each artist uses techniques of embodied refusal to address audience presumptions about how legacies of patriarchal violence will be represented, including the expectation to reveal contextual or narrative context, to narratively disclose stories of gendered violence, or to unveil the bodies of performers in specific ways. My argument rests not only on how each of these staged works turns to performance as a critical mode for addressing gendered violence but in how they each specifically remix witnessing through modes of aesthetic and compositional withholding. I argue for the ways that each of the artists anchoring this dissertation simultaneously put pressure on audience expectations for what they might "get" from the artists onstage as they address gendered violences while noting that each performance's remixing of witnessing practices also emphasizes the critical importance of the witness themself in oppressive histories.

Redressive Embodiment

This dissertation builds upon performance scholarship by theorists Catherine Cole, Diana Taylor, and Elizabeth W. Son, each of whom attend to performance as an analytic that expands understanding of how gendered violence is felt, performed, and countered. Each of these scholars additionally contribute understanding of how analyzing the linkages between performance, witnessing, and gendered violence illuminate the mechanisms of violence waged by the state, as

well as put pressure on the confines of state-based remedy. My work extends this body of literature by considering how the staged performances which I include differently approach histories of gendered violence —via their refusals — in ways that alleviate some of the laborious re-telling of memory that the juridical sphere often requires, instead approaching these histories through alternate sensations and framings.

Cole's *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission* argues for the critical contributions of analyzing state-based remedial response through the lens of performance. She asks how the "performative conventions, modes of address, and expressive embodiment" of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission informed "the experience for both participants and spectators."[47] My work responds to Cole's call for further scholarly attendance to the "public, performed dimensions" of redressive action within sites of transitional justice by considering how the artists included in this dissertation center histories of gendered brutality without mobilizing expectations of re-narrativizing atrocity that state-based performances of redress often require.[48] My first chapter on Galindo is particularly indebted to Cole's work for her urge to read the testimonial form used in state-based approaches to transitional justice *as* performance. In doing so, my work notes the formal, repeated elements that become expected from narrative testimonial, which often serves as part and parcel of the project of national healing. I argue that Galindo's work puts pressure on the expectations of narrative divulgence, instead opting for performances that offer new modes for being in relation to histories of violence.

Taylor's consideration of the entanglements of violence and sight is particularly critical to my research. She considers the entanglements of witnessing and performance in Argentina's "Dirty War," specifically looking at "how a small group of power brokers (in this case the

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[47] Catherine M. Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of Transition*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), xv.
[48] Ibid, xiv.

military) engenders and controls a viewing public through the performance of national identity, traditions, and goals," as well as the junta's "use of theatricality to terrorize its population."[49] In particular, Taylor's articulation of "the various registers of violence that informed the "politics of looking, 'just looking,' dangerous seeing, and percepticide in order to make active spectators, or witnesses, of us all" lays the groundwork for understanding the ways in which the act of witnessing can both wage and risk violence.[50] Taylor's conception of percepticide accounts for how seeing was "the trap that destroyed communal cohesion."[51] She notes the perils of witnessing: "*Dangerous* seeing, seeing that which was not given-to-be-seen, put people at risk in a society that policed the look…Functioning within the surveilling gaze, people dared not be caught seeing, be seen pretending not to see. Better cultivate a careful blindness."[52] Taylor notes this "self-blinding of the general population" as percepticide.[53] While Taylor's work unveils how the theatrical is mechanized in state-waged violence, as well as how the control of seeing becomes part of this machine of violence, my work expands upon her call for understanding the potential violence of witnessing by considering the expectations and assumptions that witnesses can project onto histories of gendered violence. In centering the embodied refusals of the artists included in this dissertation, I elucidate the ways in which those presumptions and desires are unveiled. This brings the witness and her expectations into the frame of violence, positioning her as an active agent in the processing of histories of violence, rather than a passive outsider.

My work is particularly invested in witnessing as holding potential for both redress and harm, and this dissertation illuminates how the included artists' embodied practices of refusal underscore the expectations that witnesses can bring to histories of violence. My investment in

[49] Diana Taylor, *Disappearing Acts* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), ix.
[50] Ibid, xii.
[51] Ibid, 122.
[52] Ibid, 122.
[53] Ibid, 123.

how embodied refusals might remix witnessing practices is in part derived from the potential that witnessing holds for redressive affiliation that exceeds what Elizabeth W. Son notes as "nation-bound negotiations of violent pasts."[54] I follow Son's turn to embodied acts of redress as interventions in the narrow definitions of state-based remedy. Pushing against logo-centric articulations of violent histories, Son turns our attention to the embodied, public, and transnational redressive acts that differently grapple with brutality. I contribute the role of the engaged performance witness to Son's articulation of redress, which she notes as "embodied practices that involve multiple audiences in actively reengaging with traumatic pasts to work toward social, political, cultural, and epistemological change."[55] I approach the witness as an active player in the sensations, remembrance, and continuation of violence, and I consider how the pressure that embodied refusals place onto the expectations of the witness might help her remain vigilant around her own fallacies. Simultaneously, I consider the vigilant witness to be in the frame of the event and as an active agent in the potential for redressive change.

Performance, Affect, and Erasure

In addition to the function of the witnessing audience, my work across the following chapters takes interest in the ways that the performances which I include underscore intersections between histories of violence, memory, affect, and erasure. Peggy Phelan has famously noted the ways in which performance "becomes itself through disappearance."[56] Performance's ability to evade consumptive capture — which Phelan ties to the impetus of late stage capitalism —is part of its political project. I argue for performance as a site of redress in response to gendered violences because it offers an ephemeral experience which allows performers — be them

[54] Elizabeth W. Son, *Embodied Reckonings: "Comfort Women," Performance, and Transpacific Redress* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 15.
[55] Ibid, 3.
[56] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

activists on the street, artists onstage, or others — to flicker in and out of recognition. The gendered and violent histories addressed in this dissertation — feminicide, colonial stripping of social value, kidnapping, and barring from social spheres — forces subjects experiencing harm and staging redressive acts in their face to stay nimble. Because the performances which I center address histories of violence and thus engage some level of risk, I take interest in the form of performance's ephemeral nature, which allows it to persist, shapeshift, and stay on the move amongst violent conditions. For especially Regina José Galindo, the threat of performing in response to the Guatemalan state's role in enduring violence, including the epidemic of feminicide, remains high and risky. Performance's quality of evasion thus infuses it with a political viability, specifically under conditions of violence in which other forms of resistance prove more perilous.

As much as the performances which this dissertation attends to are shaped by their ephemeral form, they are also contoured by their potential for transmitting affect and sensation. I situate my work in a lineage of feminist scholars within performance studies who detail the entanglements of violence, performance's staying power, and resistant modes.[57] These performances' ability to generate affective responses to the histories of gendered violences which they underscore spark my framing of their redressive capabilities.[58] As noted, many offstage redressive forms and onstage lineages of theatrical production center narrative retelling of violent histories and emphasize documentary or archival approaches to history. These traditions counter the threat of forgetting by disclosing the conditions and events of violences. Performance Studies

[57] Rebecca Schneider notes that, "This body, given to performance, is...not only disappearing but resiliently eruptive, remaining through performance like so many ghosts at the door marked 'disappeared.' In this sense performance becomes itself through messy and eruptive reappearance, challenging, via the performance trace, any neat antimony between appearance and disappearance." Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 103.

[58] For more, see Dwight Conquergood's theorization that performance is "associated with feelings, emotions, and the body." Dwight Conquergood, "Performance, Theory, Hmong Shamans, and Cultural Politics, *Critical Theory and Performance*, eds. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 57.

has invested in noting the difference between how history and memory is transmitted via material collections versus embodied practices, specifically via Diana Taylor's distinction between the archive and the repertoire.[59] While Taylor notes that the embodied form of performance disseminates a more ephemeral, non-consumptive form of knowledge, my work intervenes by considering the distinctions between archival or documentary performances and those which I include here. As I have noted, performance lineages have tackled the subject of violence through modes of testimonial theater and narrative or documentary impulses for restaging histories of atrocities. While still an embodied form, my work asks how consumption and expectation are still attached to these staging approaches. Instead, my work asks how performances like the ones at the heart of this dissertation might approach gendered violences and the erasures which they spark by transmitting affects and sensations, specifically to the witness. In each chapter, I argue that the sensory-based work of each performance generates new affective relationships to the role of witnessing as well as the history of violence being staged.

My research thus asks critical questions about how performance —in its simultaneous ephemeral and remaining capacities — becomes a practice of recognition, remembrance, and resistance in the face of erasure. If forgetting is the threat, the performances which I analyze offer a space where sensations, affects, and new orientations of and to the past are made possible. The performances which I include traffic in affect and embodiment, and I elucidate how each generates specific sensations that hold the potential to remix a witness' ability to feel the presence of the past legacies of violence. More specifically, this includes: using duration, visual

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[59] "Archival memory," Taylor notes, "exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change."# This form of memory allows for more historical fixity: even with objects aging over time, they are far less itinerant than forms of social memory which shift in what and how they remember over time. On the other hand, the repertoire "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing — in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge." Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

withholding, and sound to perform the temporality of a violence and its ensuing grief that are continuous and persistent rather than fixed in the past (Galindo's *Presencia* and *(279) Golpes*); generating a sense of mystery and confusion through refusing to narrate the work's layers of context and thus making audiences aware of their own projections of meaning onto a performed gendered mourning (Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*); refusing to visually expose performers' bodies in favor of what I deem a "relationally entangled" form of pronunciation in order to transmit the labor of diasporic relationally as a historic practice in the face of violence (Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room*).

As noted, this dissertation argues for the redressive work of the included performances because of how they ask us to differently witness histories of gendered violences. Performance's ability to flicker in and out of sight and feeling — its eruptive qualities, as Phelan notes —also make it a well made match to express the ways in which violence endures, lingers, and remixes the structures of quotidian life. For example, my chapter on Galindo's use of duration takes particular interest in the enduring presence of violence, even as it is itinerant and reappears in varied forms. At the heart of this dissertation are central research questions invested in history and the performing body: *How does the present body turn to performance to differently document, narrate, or transmit the reality and endurance of gendered violence? How does the form and its investment in sensation, affect, and live encounter suggest alternate forms of witnessing, registering, and recognizing gendered histories of violence?* I note the ways in which registers of violence within witnessing —the ways that we watch across uneven power formations and the brutality of turning a blind eye— are also implicated in the relational structures which performance itself initiates. Throughout this dissertation, I argue for the particular ways in which performance, including its affective imprints, modes of refusal, and

witnessing practices, generate a site for alternate forms of recognition and redress for gendered violences.

On Dance, Politics, and Contemporaneity

Throughout this dissertation, my training in critical dance studies has shaped the expansive way in which I approach concepts of choreography. While I utilize choreographic analysis to attend to the staged embodiments included in each of the included performances, I also consider choreography as a term referring to broader registers of planned or shaped movement, or as Ramon Rivera Servera notes, "how approaches to movement on the stage, the street, or the dance floor rehearse both normative and interventionary notions of embodiment."[60] Thus, my use of the choreographic applies not just to how bodies are dancing onstage but to how bodies and embodied experiences are directed, molded, and practiced through the works which I center. This includes how performances shift the very sites which they are performed in by including local subjects and audiences in their embodied affects, how the experience of witnessing is choreographed by the work, and in how the works evoke the experiences of "actors" entangled in the originary sets of violences which each performance addresses, including but not limited to those in close proximity to the brutality of feminicide and the femme subjects who protested in the 1929 Women's Revolt in Oloko, Nigeria. I follow dance studies scholar Aimee Meredith Cox in her note that the term choreography suggests that moving bodies shift their environment just as environmental factors influence how subjects navigate space.[61] San San Kwan's work additionally details the mutual constitution and influence between subjects in motion and their social, political, and cultural surroundings, noting: "space can be an agent that determines movement…bodies become choreographed by a collectivity of animate and

[60] Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad*, 31.
[61] Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 29.

inanimate objects in space."[62] I orient towards the choreographic as a way to understand how bodies move together, why they move, and what approaches to embodied practice support their objectives.

My turn to the choreographic is also a turn to political stakes. As Randy Martin has noted, to move together is already political.[63] Martin and others have illuminated the tethers of choreographic analysis and politics. Ramón Rivera-Servera, following Martin, has detailed "that a critical engagement with movement might offer a more accurate picture of political participation that is aware of the fact that despite the overwhelming emphasis in political analysis on representation (how a political message is communicated) it is not until bodies are mobilized into action that the very possibilities of the political materialize"[64] Susan Foster's attention to the embodied practices of protestors provides an excellent example of how approaching the choreographic through a capacious lens allows the term to do salient political work.[65]

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to the staged performances which I center as "contemporary" choreographies. The category of contemporary dance refers, in this case, to both the temporal marking of the works (they are both contemporaries of one another and continue to circulate globally in the contemporary moment in which I write this introduction) as well as a genre of dance that is both contested and "fraught."[66] Myriad scholars have written about how the term contemporary both tethers the work to the Global North or Western world, tends to allude to "avant-garde performances by white bodies"[67] and "encompasses a wide range of

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[62] SanSan Kwan, *Kinesthetic City: Dance and Movement in Chinese Urban Spaces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.
[63] Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics* (Durham and London:Duke University Press, 1998).
[64] Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad*, 31.
[65] Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55, No. 3 (2003): 395-412.
[66] Fortuna, Victoria, *Moving Otherwise: Dance, Violence, and Memory in Buenos Aires,* (New York: Oxford, 2019), 10.
[67] Swanson, *Illegible Bodies,* 14.

practices that draw on modern, postmodern, ballet, German expressionism, release technique, dance theater (variously defined), *expresión corporal* (corporal expression…), and conceptual choreography."[68] The term contemporary has both been a highly contested, umbrella term meant to hold various practices, and used to hold choreographies that are both marked by their whiteness and western centrism, as well as those that self-referentially trouble those lineages.[69]

I utilize the term "contemporary performance" or "contemporary choreography" throughout this dissertation mainly because of the global circuit of performance by which all three artists that I center are frequently funded and presented. Okpokwasili, Galindo, and Ouizguen— while certainly occupying their own subtly different corners of global contemporary performance — are often presented by "high art" institutions like modern art museums or performance presenters who are most widely known globally for their presentation of currently produced work. Most of these institutions are situated in the global north or west. Additionally, I note these artists as creating "contemporary" performance for the ways in which their work circulates, often amongst white audiences from contexts far from the locales each performance centers. To note them as contemporary is not an acceptance of these white, western frames, but instead to emphasize the contested and fraught space of not only contemporary performance but additionally, the reception of performances of divergent locales located in the Global South as they are received by high art audiences in the Global North. The uneven power structures that infuse witnessing practices are marked by this term "contemporary," as is the circuit of performance and the aesthetics it prefers (often self-referential, conceptual, and research-based). Finally, the term contemporary additionally refers to their ongoing nature. Each included

[68] Fortuna, *Moving Otherwise*, 11.
[69] For more, see choreographer Trajal Harrell's provocation in his series of works *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at the Judson Church* (2009-2017): "What would have happened in 1963 if someone from the voguing ball scene in Harlem had come downtown to perform alongside the early postmoderns at Judson Church?"; Also see Cvejić, 2015 and Burt, 2017 for analysis of the category of contemporary in the European dance context. See Lepecki, 2016 for a comparative analysis of the term across the United States and European contexts.

performance continues to circulate, meaning that audiences continue to witness them and that their meaning is continuously made anew as each tours to new locales.

Embodied Refusals

In a workshop with artist K.J. Holmes in 2018, she encouraged us to wag our heads "no" as we danced through space. In doing so, she urged us to consider this act of saying no as a scanning of the horizon for other possibilities. This embodied memory has stuck with me as I have traced the stakes of the ways in which negation or rejection has appeared in each of the performances included in my research. This dissertation is anchored by the concept of refusal, which I approach as an umbrella term that can hold varied registers of embodied acts pressing against any expectations around narration, translation, visibility, or revelation. I utilize the term refusal to note how expectations of clarity or disclosure are rejected in ways that both unveil these presumptions and suggest alternate modes of witnessing. This includes disavowal, withholding, opacity,[70] concealment, and privacy. While each of these terms holds specific definitional meaning, I consider them to be distinct forms under a broader category of refusal.

Across this dissertation, I trace the ways in which each of the included artists specifically refuse expectations of exposure, divulgence, or revelation as modes for remixing witnessing practices in the face of gendered violences. I thus approach the act of refusal as a generative one, in which dominant expectations are diverted in favor of alterity. My analysis of each of the performances which I include in this dissertation centers two specific aspects of each performance: their modes of refusal in regards to witnessing practices and the alternate sensations which those refusals allow. Each chapter traces these modes of refusal as I account for

[70] For more on my use of opacity, see Glissant's formulation of the term in *Poetics of Relation*, 1997.

the ways that witnessing —of performances and the historic violences they center —is emphasized as both critical to redress *and* implicated in structures of violence.

Across my work, I also approach refusal as a mode of critique or a corrective analytic for considering how dominant modes of retribution might enforce further labor or violence for those already subject to it. As noted earlier in this introduction, frameworks for justice in response to histories of violence —specifically those gendered in nature — are often accompanied by expectations of divulgence, narrative, and revelation.[71] My chapter on Regina José Galindo and her response to the epidemic of feminicide in Guatemala includes analysis of the form of testimonial and the ways in which global models for retribution often are accompanied by the requirements that survivors testify to their experiences of extreme violence as a way to document these lineages of brutality. Existing frameworks include the demands of re-telling violence which generates violence anew and expands and compounds past experiences of trauma as subjects are asked to remember, describe, and situate themselves back in time at the site of their own oppression. I seek modes of redressive relationalities that exceed these frameworks, and my research asks how redress might be possible without placing expectations on survivors to revisit and reimagine the barbarities which they have faced and continue to live amongst.

I turn to the performances here to think anew about these questions around redress, history, and gendered violence, particularly because of how they are able to mix and remix witnessing, liveness, and the body. Each performance generates sensations in response to it that do not require linear modes of narration or proceedings occurring in other formalized realms of redress, including the judicial sphere in which many calls for justice unfold. The performances which I analyze catalyze what Adrienne J. Cohen calls "resonance" in which performers are able

[71] See Theidon, 2007.

to "command space and feeling beyond the dimensions of their individual bodies."[72] While many calls for justice in the face of gendered violences demand a narrative recounting of the violences that have occurred by those who have suffered under their subjection, these performances open up alternate possibilities for feeling, understanding, and analyzing histories of brutality.

While my investment in performance is in part based on these political modes of social exchange and resistance which these works enable, I also analyze embodied performances because these exchanges can be marked by their own forms of violence. My research approaches the act of witnessing not from a purely celebratory place, but as a site of exchange that is fraught with systems of power. Performance scholars have noted the ways in which the form can mobilize objectification and consumption. Audiences can approach what unfolds on "stage" as purely entertainment or without political or cultural value, just as they can project expectations of exposure, visibility, and revelation onto performers. As I explicate across the following chapters, the artists at the heart of this dissertation perform modes of refusal that put pressure on expectations of divulgence, specifically when the focus of the work is a history of brutality. Within the potential violences which witnessing might manifest, I argue for how these performed refusals put pressure on assumptions of narrative retelling and open up new pathways for sitting with the performances unfurling onstage, the specific histories of violence at their core, and larger registers of violences offstage. In other words, I consider how these embodied refusals might intervene in how broader scales of atrocities are understood and processed, especially across national and geographic distance.

Refusal has been well documented as a form of political resistance. The act of refusing flickers throughout modes of protest, including across labor strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, and other

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[72] Adrienne J. Cohen, *Infinite Repertoire: On Dance and Urban Possibility in Postsocialist Guinea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 32.

forms of non-engagement. As Lilian G. Mengesha and Lakshmi Padmanabhan note, racialized and other minoritarian subjects have particularly embodied modes of refusal in protest settings as "racialized exhaustion accumulated over the years."[73] They continue, "The project of political recognition for minoritarian subjects is undergirded by a false promise of inclusion that consumes difference in service to assimilation." In response, Mengesha and Padmanabhan's research archives "the everyday forms of inaction, inscrutability, and non-productivity that mark the ways in which racialized life endures under current regimes of political violence."[74] As they note, refusal to labor or comply has been particularly utilized by subjects facing structural forms of oppression and violence, especially in modes that engage communal or mass modes of resistance.

I follow Mengesha and Padmanabhan's turn to the embodied sphere of performance to note the ways in which refusal performed on stage differently generates critique of expectations levied at performing subjects. Here, refusal becomes an embodied act that rejects expectations of exposure, revelation, objectification, and more. Mengesha and Padmanabhan state:

> Conceptions of performance contain a spectatorial relation by very definition: spectators are tasked to use bodily sensations to recognize a performance as such. Here, tactics of refusal that engage with opacity, illegibility, or occurring at a minor level such as a passing facial expression, or gesture of withdrawal, often occur without immediate recognition. At the same time, performance studies' critical engagement with embodied experience and the micropolitics of gesture allow us to approach questions of bodily inaction, silence, and non-speech *as* performances of refusal.[75]

In these moments, performers do not fulfill expectations which audiences may feel they are entitled to. Or, performers may not reveal or contextualize their embodied maneuvers in modes that provide full disclosure. I argue for these modes of refusal as resistant, redressive actions

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[73] Lilian G. Mengesha and Lakshmi Padmanabhan, "Introduction: Performing Refusal/Refusing to Perform," *Women and Performance* 29, no. 1 (2019): 1.
[74] Ibid, 2.
[75] Ibid, 4.

because of the ways in which they mark the very rubrics under which they are expected to perform.[76] Additionally, I consider how the decision to refuse a mode of performance or embodiment that is presumed as attached to, required by, or demanded of certain subjectivities —often marginalized ones— unveils the overdetermination and violence of those expectations.[77]

Each of the included chapters in this dissertation illuminates the different forms of expectations which accompany the artists in their specific contexts. As mentioned, my final chapter considers refusal through Regina José Galindo's withholding of her own body in the performances which she stages in the face of Guatemala's epidemic of feminicide. I read this withholding as putting pressure on the dominant forms of justice and proof which exist mainly in testimonial form. I consider how Galindo's performed refusals open up new modes of understanding the temporality of violence while refraining from reproducing forms of harm. My chapter on Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* considers her refusal to provide narrative context for gestures, costuming, and casting decisions in the work. As I argue, Ouizguen choreographs a sensation of the transnational based on her decision to cast performers in each new site where the work is staged. This cross-cultural mixing of new locality with a continuing Moroccan cast provokes questions and, often, projections for witnessing audiences as they read scales of difference across performers. Ouizguen's refusal to explain amidst these choreographed transnational collaborations and exchanges unveils how the transnational is understood aesthetically, as well as the violence and resistances which it might enable. My chapter on Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room* outlines expectations of hypervisibility well documented by Black feminist scholars working at the intersections of Black studies, visual studies, and performance. I elucidate how Okpokwasili's refusal to expose the body disavows expectations

[76] See Gaines, 2017; Macmillan, 2015.
[77] See Brooks, 2006; Fleetwood, 2011.

for Black women to perform under the guise of full exposure. Instead, I examine the ways in which the bodies of performers become known through their embodied relationships to others as the audience understands their presence through disrupted forms of visuality, including mirroring, blur, shadow, and darkness. These modes of visual opacity put pressure on expectations of hypervisibility as they also open up new modes of thinking relationally in response to histories of gendered violences.

Scalar Violences

Violence pulses throughout this dissertation across scalar registers. At the heart of the performances which I center are legacies of gendered violences with their own unique combinations of local and transnational entanglements. When utilizing the term gendered violence, I incorporate legacies, systems, and events in which gender is used as utility in a structure of harm. I definitionally approach violence in a scalar fashion: I define it across graduated ranges or levels of brutality, oppression, and pain. I consider violence as any single or combination of systemic, psychic, material, physical, economic, or social form(s) of harm. Given my investment in the affective work of performance, my research is specifically interested in psychic violences which unfold. By psychic violence, I refer to the ways in which pain and trauma reorganizes a subject or community's emotions or psyche. I consider violence as a temporal, durational phenomena, in which the impacts of violence, even if the originary event was temporally confined, has long lasting, social, cultural, and political impacts. I follow scholars such as Saidiya Hartman who theorize the "afterlives" of violent events.[78] Thus, violence encapsulates the durational, enduring, continuous impacts that are felt and sensed after originary events may be considered complete. Additionally, I consider violence as a mode of

[78] See Hartman, 2006.

harm that can traumatize an individual, a group, or a transnational community. Consequently, violence can be considered across this dissertation as engulfing subjects and communities not present for any originary event. In framing violence, my research quite literally jumps scales: between individual subjects to communities and lineages, across localized victims, survivors, or witnesses to those experiencing the impacts of that violence indirectly, across originary temporal moments to the afterlives of trauma that ensue, and across varied geographic proximities. I consider violence as a scalar phenomenon through the ways it can be experienced in singular, live moments to the modes in which it radiates across temporal and geographic boundaries.

Additionally, this dissertation is invested in analyzing the fraught ways in which coalitional or resistant efforts to remedy violences are also inflected by their own forms of harm. I employ transnational feminist analytics for considering how efforts at alliance can consume, erase, and marginalize certain subjects. This includes the ways in which conceptions of gender, structures of power across North-South or East-West axes, and other categories of subjectivity are generalized, universalized, assumed, or projected. In other words, my research is invested in untangling the complex webs of power structures and forms of violence that unfold even in the attempt to remedy, witness, or redress histories of gendered violences. This dissertation thus considers how violence is produced across structures of gender, coalition, witnessing, and performance just as it is simultaneously invested in the ways that redress *also* is entangled in these structures. This dissertation thus underscores the tensions between violence and modes of redress, and it attempts to linger in the ways in which dominant or traditional forms of redress for gendered violences might produce violences anew. I argue for performance as a unique form of redress in the consideration, documentation, and social understanding of violence *not* because performance is free of violence but because the artists and performances which I include in this

dissertation offer new modes of thinking through histories of violence via their staging of refusals. As I have articulated, these forms of withholding, nondisclosure, and refusal offer the potential to think anew about both the systems put in place for redress and alternate possibilities for sensing, feeling, and articulating the scalar impacts of violence.

Methods and Chapter Breakdown

Throughout this research, my own proximity to the artists, embodied gestures, geographic sites, and histories of gendered violences zooms in and out. This project started with an encounter in Portland, Oregon with Moroccan choreographer Meryem Jazouli after we were both invited to a gathering of local, national, and international dance artists, all of whom were gathering for the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's (PICA's) Time-Based Art Festival. Jazouli and I discussed our bodies of work and the local politics to which they responded. This conversation kicked off dialogue between us, including the intersections between performance, protest, gender, and violence in Casablanca, where Jazouli was based. We discussed translation across geopolitical distance and how questions around it came to the fore in watching each others' bodies move. We stayed in touch, and Jazouli introduced me to Ouizguen's work. At this moment, I knew I was interested in pursuing scholarly research related to both artists. Just months later, as I prepared to pursue a PhD in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, I received an email from PICA with an invitation to audition for Ouizguen's upcoming performance of *Corbeaux*. The synchronicity of this moment still feels striking. From there, research questions shifted, ultimately landing on those included in this dissertation. There is closeness in these friendships, collaborations, dialogues, memories, and embodied practices. The movement of *Corbeaux* that unfolded "on" and offstage still radiates through my physical

structure, and the conversations with Meryem about the puzzle of cross-cultural understanding continue to this day.

In most ways, however, I am an outsider to these histories, and this research stems from that positionality. The central questions of this research come from the scalar nature of these proximities. I can sit feet from a performance and simultaneously feel both an embodied proximity and an overwhelming distance from the histories to which it responds. My positionality and relationship to that distance informs this research. That distance will likely raise questions: Why not focus on the violences at home in the U.S., where there are overwhelming rates of violence against nonbinary, gender nonconforming, and femme subjects, especially Indigenous, trans*, and Black femmes? Why turn to performances responding to histories of violence "elsewhere" when the nation which I reside in continues to disregard feminicidal violence? Why not stay home?

I answer these questions with refusals. A refusal to sit quietly with the frame of the nation being the primary container for whom one should care about and where one should put their energy. I refuse to see gendered violences "abroad" as devoid of connections to gendered violences "at home," specifically when the U.S. is founded upon imperialist and colonialist ideologies. I refuse to prioritize the nation state as the dictator of relationalities. I follow Diana Taylor's reminder in her own work on the spectacle of terror during Argentina's "Dirty War": "Perhaps a debate on becoming informed and responsible members of a de facto international community that has felt the effects of fascist ideology throughout much of this century would prove more fruitful than the fight to establish who 'belongs' and who doesn't."[79] And while this is true, I am not exempt from the potential of rehearsing violence at all points along the way. This research is *about* that possibility and *in the face of* that possibility. I follow performance

[79] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 23.

studies scholars who consistently remind us of the critical work of self-reflexivity in relation to another.[80] I follow Shireen Roshanravan's concept of the "plurilogue" in which the central pursuit is of "dissimilarities to clarify the conceptual interventions made within Women of Color theorizing and the relationship among the different patterns of oppression that each intervention exposes."[81] And, I approach performance as a site that holds these simultaneous scales of proximity— of the near and far— as part of its form. I turn to it as a site to investigate the simultaneous scales of intimacy/distance, knowing/assumption, witnessing/consuming, and redress/violence. This project and my own positionality within it is less concerned with being on the "right" side of an ethical divide, but rather understanding these tense pairings, which performance helps bring to the fore, as critical sites of inquiry for understanding the affects, sensations, and experiences of witnessing histories of gendered violences.

In response to the lush data and research opportunities that my case studies offer, my project utilizes a multi-methods approach, with each of my case studies requiring different methodological mixtures. I analyze the embodied and aesthetic practices of each work, in addition to the forms of witnessing which each provokes, specifically within a transnational circuit of performance. Choreographic and aesthetic analysis are central methodologies within this project. I attend closely to choices made by artists in the creative and staging process, including embodied movements, gesture, duration, utilized materials, selected sites, sound and lighting design, and audience positioning. I analyze performance documentation provided by presenting institutions and artists' personal archives (video, photographs, performance programs, marketing materials, and rehearsal notes). I center perceptions of the directing artists and performers in interviews with myself and others to investigate the objectives and resulting

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[80] See Conquergood, 2013; Madison, 2010.
[81] Shireen Roshanravan, "Motivating Coalition: Women of Color and Epistemic Disobedience," *Hypatia* 29, No. 1 (2014): 41.

experiences of responding to histories of gendered violence in local, sociopolitical contexts. I additionally employ reception analysis to narrate how each work establishes critical, political stakes in cultural locales and across transnational sites. This includes both conducting audience interviews as well as carefully analyzing press and audience responses to included performances.

Because my project contextualizes each performance in the specific histories of gendered violence to which it responds, I turn to material archives and secondary sources to narrate these local histories, including the 1929 Women's War in Nigeria or militarized practices within the Guatemalan counterinsurgency war. Specifically, I rely on archival sources at Northwestern's Herskovits Library of African Studies, the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive at the University of Texas at Austin, the New York Public Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division, and materials provided by New York's New York Live Arts. Because my research is invested in the ways in which the included performances offer alternate modes of feeling into histories of gendered violence, I attend closely to the ways in which these archives and sources frame and narrate both the violences which they document, the terms of justice proposed as remedy, and how artists differently approach these histories. For example, my chapter on Galindo's *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia*, both of which address feminicide in Guatemala, analyzes documents representing truth, justice, and redress in the political sphere. This includes my analysis of the Commission for Historical Clarification's 1999 report, *Memory of Silence*, on Guatemala's counterinsurgency war, which initiated gendered violences that continued into the country's current feminicidal epidemic. In analyzing this document, as well as the speech used by artists and performers on and offstage and audiences in response to witnessed performances, I attend to the rhetoric used to describe histories of gendered violences, as well as opinions and beliefs

about forms of redress. In doing so, I theorize how contemporary performance supplements and intervenes in these primary or secondary sources.

My research considers performance as both an object of study and a method for theorizing its significance, and thus, my own embodied experiences pulse throughout this dissertation. In my chapter on Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux*, I deploy critical ethnographic tactics such as oral history interviews and coperformative witnessing based on my participation in included performances, time spent with the artists in auditions or rehearsal, and extensive interviews with the artists, casts, and Portland audiences of *Corbeaux.* This allows for embodied experience to serve as both data and method, and I underscore the affective and somatic experiences of my interlocutors in interviews, rehearsals, material practices, dance studios, and performance sites to unveil the political work of performance. I echo dance ethnographers stressing the critical and theoretical material produced via shared time and space within a rehearsal, performance, or interview.[82] Ethnographically, I follow Dwight Conquergood's emphasis on coperformative witnessing over participant observation in order to establish "a promiscuous traffic between different ways of knowing."[83] Donna Haraway differently emphasizes the potential of embodied experience in describing critical ethnography as a "view from a body" as opposed to a "view from above."[84] These critical practices infuse reflexivity into my methodological approach, especially in working with communities of which I am not a member.

Chapter one of this dissertation, "Durational Violence: The Political Work of Withholding in Regina José Galindo's *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia*," addresses Galindo's *Presencia* and *(279)*

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[82] See: Jackson, 2010; Rivera Servera, 2012; Savigliano, 1997; Sklar, 1991.
[83] Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *The Drama Review* 46, No. 2 (2002): 145.
[84] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, No. 3 (1988): 589.

Golpes. I illuminate how Guatemala's history of feminicide is tethered to practices of violence stemming from the state's counterinsurgency war that concluded with the signing of a peace accord in 1996. I contextualize Galindo's work in a history of expected testimonial disclosure to prove histories of gendered violence during this period, and I argue for the ways that both performances choreograph forms of sensory withholding that differently narrate the enduring affects spurred by feminicide. I begin by narrating the history of feminicide in Guatemala, and the relationship between feminicide and practices waged by the Guatemalan state. I particularly focus on the entanglement of gender and military practices established during the counterinsurgency war. I then take up key elements of Galindo's work— duration, sonic saturation, site specificity, and her work with skin, stillness, and silence —to analyze how this form of embodiment intervenes in narratives of feminicide. Ultimately, I argue for the ways in which Galindo's withholding works at the level of the senses to unveil the durational, seething, and persistent temporality for violence, destabilizing framings of this atrocity as fixed in the past and historic.

Chapter two, "Refusal's Resistance: Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* and Choreographing Transnational Feminist Witnessing" turns to Moroccan choreographer Bouchra Ouizguen's 2017 work *Corbeaux*, in which performers keep their eyes closed, repeatedly throw their heads and necks backwards and forwards, and release guttural, sonic bursts into the public performance site. Inspired by Persian literature centering the exclusionary treatment of the socially deemed figure of a "fool" and histories of femme subjects' prohibition from access to public space and practices, the work stages affectively heightened states performed by femme cast members in primarily public spaces as it tours. The work gathers a rotating cast of performers local to each international city that joins the core cast of Moroccan women. I narrate my experience as a

performer in *Corbeaux*, which I illuminate as staging a public mourning by a cast which Ouizguen explicitly designed as women-identifying. Throughout the chapter, I articulate the ways in which Ouizguen utilizes refusal to avoid pressures for easeful translation from local cast members and audiences, revealing projections, fantasies, and expectations for transparency that accompany this intercultural performance made up of bodies from varying geographic sites. Specifically, I analyze her use of sound, touch, and pain in the choreographic staging of the work which contribute to sensations of mystery that surround the work. By attending to the ways in which Ouizguen evades and refuses translation in her own interactions, as well as in the aesthetic practices staged in the performance, I argue for the ways that the affects of refusal unveil overdetermined expectations, assumptions, and projections that must be contended with amidst transnational feminist witnessing practices.

Chapter three, “Relational Presence, Diasporic Labor, and Practicing History in Okwui Okpokwasili’s *Poor People’s TV Room,*” focuses on Okwui Okpokwasili’s *Poor People’s TV Room*, which narrates two gendered histories in Nigeria: the Women’s Revolt and the 2014 Boko Haram kidnapping of schoolgirls. The Women’s Revolt of 1929 was a protest in which thousands of Nigerian femmes from Eastern towns traveled to the Southern site of Oloko to protest British colonial rule, impending taxation levied against women, and local Warrant Chiefs’ refusal to place women in governmental roles. Okpokwasili’s performance connects the Women’s Revolt to the 2014 kidnapping of school girls by jihadist militant terrorist organization, Boko Haram. The kidnapping launched an international response as the hashtag #bringbackourgirls went viral and then U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama was among other high profile figures demanding their return. In this chapter, I analyze Okpokwasili’s practice of withholding, interrupting, or manipulating visual clarity, including her use of shadow, blur, and visual mirroring. I explore

how these visual tricks perform an evasion of clarity that is intentional and aesthetically staged. In noting the withholding which Okpokwasili stages, I turn to Black feminist scholars' critical outlining of the violences caused by the linkages of the visual sector and Black women's subjectivity. Instead, I enunciate the ways in which performance provides a form to resist these liaisons and instead announce the presence of the Black femmes onstage through relational framing. Because *Poor People's TV Room* centers questions of history, remembrance, and diaspora, I elucidate how these relational tethers point to the ways in which figures cast into the archives of history might be pronounced, witnessed, and provided recognition through diasporic relationality. Ultimately, I argue for the ways in which Okpokwasili utilizes visual withholding to turn to relational understandings of the cast, including their labor to stay in diasporic relationships that counter the erasure of historic gendered violences.

The conclusion revisits themes of refusal, embodiment, and witnessing practices within performance and gendered histories of trauma. I consider the stakes of embodied refusals in this contemporary moment of global gendered violences, including the murder of Mahsa Amini by Iran's "morality police" in September, 2022 and the resistance movement which unfolded in response. I revisit my argument that performance is a powerful site for unveiling and negotiating modes of witnessing histories of gendered violences, especially across transnational and uneven structures of relationality. As an ensemble, this collection of chapters unveils the ways in which registers of refusal expose existing expectations and projections within cross-cultural witnessing. They mobilize new embodied tactics for understanding histories of gendered violences, potential frameworks for recognizing the tricky missteps made possible by transnational structures of power, and alternate practices of witnessing across lines of geopolitical distance.

CHAPTER ONE

Durational Violence: The Political Work of Withholding in Regina José Galindo's *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia*

Introduction

As you enter the dark performance space of (279) Golpes*, all that appears is a small rectangular structure at the back of the room. Throughout the course of the performance, the body is never visually revealed. As audience members enter the room, the lash of a body inside of the structure is sonically projected into the gallery space. You hear it hit her body, and at times, you can hear a slight moan in response. This lashing becomes louder over time, and its intensity is delivered by speakers placed throughout the space. The durational strike of the body and vocal response continues, penetrating the room with a disturbing familiarity. Where is the body? What body is this?*

In Presencia*, she appears vacant, empty. She stands in various sites, as if she is installed in them. Her body is fully visible and on display. And yet, it performs no individual expression, appearing instead as a canvas for something else happening. She is still and silent, and her subtle presence emphasizes the surrounding social world. Her own individuality is removed from her body, as she deflects attention to the relational exchanges unfolding in near proximity. There, but vacant of action.*

The performances in question — 2005's *(279) Golpes* and 2017's *Presencia*— are the work of Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo. Both are clear in their address of feminicide. The titular "279" refers to the number of "women" murdered that year in Guatemala at the time that the work was performed in June, 2005. "Golpes" translates to "hits" or "blows," and Galindo does just that, striking herself with a leather belt at a rapid pace throughout the performance. In *Presencia*, Galindo stands still for two hours at a time wearing the clothing of a victim of feminicide. There are thirteen performances of *Presencia*, each honoring a different woman, with Galindo wearing different clothing and performing in a new site. Each of the thirteen victims that the performance centers were selected by Galindo as she worked with their remaining family members in selecting clothing and staging the durational performance. During an interview I conducted with Galindo, she narrates a desire in *(279) Golpes* to remove herself from the work. Then, she describes herself as attempting to become a "medium" in *Presencia*. In both, Galindo's

body— despite being located in the performance space— is withheld. In one, she visually obstructs her body, preventing the audience from access to it. The ability to only hear her subtle, live, vocal responses to the lashes emphasize what we miss. *Where is the body? What body is this?* And in the other, her body is visually central, yet she appears empty, holding back motion, sound, or expression. *There, but vacant of action.* Galindo's body restrains, holds back, and refuses across these two performances. Rather than appearing as her individual self, Galindo conceals *her* body. She emphasizes it not as *hers*, but as a *site* across which actions that uniquely narrate the durational and persistent sensations of feminicide play out.

This chapter reads withholding across these two of Galindo's performances: she removes her body visually in one and, in the other, labors towards stillness and silence to hinder individual expression. In both, her body is restrained. I ask how these acts of withholding are generative of new ways of understanding— of *sensing*— the ongoing occurrence of feminicide in Guatemala. I am moved by the ways that Galindo holds aspects of bodily expression back in her work, specifically in how that is tethered to its address of gendered violence. The act of withholding does not mean that nothing happens. Instead, my work asks what withholding in embodied performance makes possible. How does restraint of movement or visual recognition of Galindo's individual body generate a recognition of something else? How does concealment of often expected aspects of performance (visuality and motion) give way to alternate sensory experiences? And, what does this alterity suggest about a complex history of violence that falls onto the bodies of Guatemalan women? In other words, this project is not simply interested in the experiential or aesthetic components of these works, but how those decisions tie back into historical formations of gendered violences. I argue for the ways that Galindo turns our sensory experience towards duration, endurance, and the simmering socialities that her performances

introduce around them, asking us to experience the ongoing sensations of violence rather than digesting them as historic, concluded, and fixed in the past.

Galindo's address of feminicide via the form of performance brings her political act into the space of liveness, in which embodiment, relationality, and the sensorial become possible ingredients in the narration of violence. These performances unfold in real time, with audiences standing alongside their occurrences. They are relational in that their sites and the other audiences in them are part of experiencing the work, as is the feeling of the body as it witnesses Galindo's performance. These sensations— often entangled in the liveness of performance— become tethered to how Galindo frames feminicide. In centering the body and its phenomenological and affective capabilities, she reminds us of the live continuation of gendered brutality and its persistent mourning. This challenges the dominant ways in which the histories of feminicide are often told. Gendered violence has reached the status of an epidemic in Guatemala, marking quotidian and social spaces with traces of brutality. The bodies of women are often found in public sites, and the occurrence of disappearance and murder is a frequent part of the country's social fabric. Feminicide is woven into a history of militarized violence that shook the country for decades and which formally "concluded" with a peace agreement in 1996. And yet, the onslaught of feminicide is directly connected to the patriarchal violence of the nation's militarized assault. While most state-driven action acknowledging this legacy of brutality positions it as fixed firmly in the past, Galindo's performances address this lineage of violence as continuing in the form of feminicide today.

This chapter is invested in how Galindo withholds aspects of her body in *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia* (its visuality, motion, or sound) in order to generate the *sensations* of a violence that is durational, ongoing, and persistent rather than situated in the past. I analyze Galindo as, in

part, facilitating an experience of this duration for audiences, in which violence and mourning linger in social space, even as they become overly familiar or easy to ignore. Her work centers the social body— her own, as well as audience members' bodies— as necessary for mapping the contours of this violence. This chapter traces the ways that withholding functions in *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia*, as it argues for what that restraint generates at the level of the senses. The giving over of her body in order to generate a social experience of feminicide is only possible because Galindo holds back from personal expression, sound, or motion that centers her body as an individual entity. Instead, I argue, her body becomes an instrument for expressing the social and relational realities of feminicide's persistence.

In the following pages, I begin by tracing entanglements of testimonial frameworks, notions of proof in national reckoning, and performance. I then detail how feminicide has been discursively theorized by feminist scholars in Latin America. I then outline the historic context for the epidemic of feminicide in Guatemala. I trace the legacies of militarized violence and Guatemala's state-waged counterinsurgency war, which especially targeted indigenous communities and established practices of gendered violence within the country's social sphere. I then analyze the formalized methods that have been used for remedy, including truth commissions and The Commission of Historical Clarification's revelatory report, *Memory of Silence*, which documents state-waged atrocities in Guatemala. After noting histories of feminist resistance within Latin America, as well as Galindo's own artistic history and body of work, I consider how bodily withholding in *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia* generates new frameworks for contending with the epidemic of feminicidal violence. Methodologically, I rely on choreographic, rhetorical, and reception analysis in this chapter. I closely attend to the embodied and artistic staging practices which Galindo utilizes, including her use of bodily strategies,

performance sites, costuming, sonic and lighting design, and positioning of audiences. My research is based on interviews which I conducted with Galindo in 2021, as well as analysis of performance documentation which the artist provided and performance materials supplied to me by archival staff at the Venice Biennale's Historical Archive of Contemporary Art. I additionally turn to press reviews and theoretical analysis of Galindo's work to explicate how her artistic work is contextualized within local and global circuits of performance. Finally, I analyze the language of The Commission of Historical Clarification's report *Memory of Silence*, as well as the Digital Archive of the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive, which is housed at the University of Texas at Austin, to contextualize how state-waged and gendered violence is discursively framed.

While my first central argument is that withholding is a key element of both performances, a second is that that restraint gives way to a new mode of understanding— of *sensing*— something about gendered violence in Guatemala. Specifically, I argue that both works put pressure on rubrics for spectatorship of violence. I contend that they challenge existing models of transitional justice that narrate violence as historic, concluded, and past. This narration mainly occurs through the form of testimony. Testimonials require a narrative disclosure— a *telling*— of atrocity. Disclosure has often been an expected ingredient for national healing. It is entangled in Guatemala's creation of a truth commission, which came about through national and international pressure to reckon with the country's history of violence. Through the act of testimonial, performances of disclosure are intertwined with national attempts at remediation. Galindo's work tells the sensations of feminicide differently, putting pressure on the requirement to "speak" of one's "past" trauma and instead, reminding us of the endurance of this violence. Her works prompt questions about how the body can unveil the affective, embodied residues of

violence without requiring its historic (as in, concluded) representation. This chapter asks how each of these performances frames withholding as a political critique of the rubrics that surround recognition of state-waged brutality. How does *non*disclosure underscore and challenge the expectation of revelation in the telling of history? What new political formations of history are made available through these various acts of privacy? How does Galindo's performance turn to the body to generate the sense of *ongoing* violence? And, how does this rearrange historic formations of feminicide?

Commissioning Truths

My investment in understanding how Galindo's performances challenge dominant models of telling history must be contextualized in those models of historical narration which frequently exist post-violence. I pause here to linger on a common form: testimonials. Testimony, defined as a formal, verbal statement acting as evidence of an event, is often a vital ingredient in reckoning with violence. Even more specifically, nation-states addressing their own recent histories of mass violence often turn to the form of testimonials to generate social, cultural, and political redress. Scholars have termed these state-led approaches to redress "transitional justice." This form of national change is often coupled with state-sponsored truth commissions that serve as formal, juridical spaces to offer testimonial evidence of past violences. Performance scholar Catherine Cole has noted the turn to truth commissions post-violence in governments seeking transitional justice, which she frames as an "'invented tradition' of the late twentieth century."[85] She continues: "Devised as a way to cope with the aftermath of systematic and large-scale violations of human rights, transitional justice has achieved its most notable impact via truth commissions. Such commissions grapple with the ultimate failure of traditional

[85] Cole's work analyzes entanglements of South Africa's post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, performance, and constructs of proof.

jurisprudence in the face of contending demands for justice, reparation, acknowledgement, mourning, healing, reconciliation, and the promulgation of public memory.[86]" As Cole notes, these commissions are intended as spaces of commemorating violence often perpetrated and overlooked by the state, marking them as sites that produce a structure of social affects around violence.

Commissions often center the testimony of those impacted by violence, thus emphasizing live, embodied narration as critical to redressive modes of documenting trauma. This presence of victims and witnesses initiates a mode of performance, in which the embodied expression of violence is integral to the process of recompense. My interest here is in the way that the action of narration acquires political value. Truth commissions become the sites at which survivors and witnesses are summoned as actors by the state through the telling of their trauma. Performance, framed as an embodied doing, is a critical part of how victims and witnesses recount their experiences of violence within the formal staging of truth commissions. Cole has importantly theorized the critical role of performance in South Africa's Truth Commission, writing "I simply assert that the commission was performance and that we need to understand how its performative dimensions operated: how the commission used restored behavior,[87] expressive embodiment, storytelling and retelling; how it called into being different audiences and arenas of witnessing;"[88] As Cole notes, attending to the frameworks of truth commissions *as* performance allows us to understand the modes in which past violences become documented within sociopolitical and cultural spheres. Specifically, we are able to see the formal (as in, the aesthetic

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[86] Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, xvi.
[87] Performance studies as a field often returns to Richard Schechner's notion of restored behavior, in which "Performance means: never for the first time…It means: for the second to the *n*th time. It means 'twice-behaved behavior.'" Schechner establishes the way that performance becomes a mode of social communication via its repetition. As embodied actions are performed again and again, they become citational and linked to cultural meaning.
[88] Cole, *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission*, xvi.

and embodied) elements that become entangled in notions of verifying and healing violence. By performance, I am not suggesting any form of inauthentic action but rather that the *form* of testimony becomes culturally, socially, or formally recognizable as an expression of truth around violence. Analyzing these moments of national reckoning as performances allows us to take apart the ways in which they construct a historical narrative, as well as how the body, its emotions, and its forms of social communication are frequently at play in the telling of painful histories.

Considering testimony as performance allows us to notice the formal elements that become *expected* in processes of verifying and healing violence. Performance becomes the process through which narration of violence becomes sedimented in specific modes of telling. Testimonials rely on the viewership of the witness's body in live space and the verbal accounting of how events unfolded. They require a telling of suffering that is linked to the past. Kimberly Theidon refers to this as "narrative capital,"[89] in which oral depiction is entangled with value for the state as it seeks to perform remedial gestures. Within truth commissions, those testifying can take on immense political value for state documentation. Victims and witnesses recount personal experiences of atrocities for specific publics— audiences— as a means of reckoning. This individual disclosure thus becomes a *requirement for healing en masse* in the wake of state violence. This value is hinted at in their name: commissioning "truth" provides authentication of the past and a chance at healing not just for the individual, but for the nation.

What are the stakes of requiring disclosure via this performance of public telling? Or, what expectations does the testimonial form reify? I find great potential for strength, healing, and processing in the enunciation of the past. And yet, my work proposes that the expectations around *how* veracity is confirmed and performed must always be examined, pressured, and

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[89] Theidon, "Gender in Transition," 455.

contested in the hope of opening up more capacious modes for telling memories, unveiling experiences of violence, and performing embodied memorial. How might we think otherwise about narrating gendered atrocity? What alternate possibilities exist for witnessing its persistence? How might memory and its reverberations live differently on the body that *does not disclose*, that withholds information from its witnesses? And, how does emphasis on the felt, sensory-based experience of witnessing open new pathways for framing violence? This chapter takes a different approach to these questions as it considers Galindo's performances. In tracing acts of withholding, I also outline how new sensations become possible in relation to structures of violence. I argue that avoiding fixing violence in the past reroutes the experience of witnessing it. It opens up sensations of its continuation via the live and present body. Specifically, I argue that Galindo's acts of withholding allow the time of violence and its afterlives to be felt as ongoing, durational, and persistent. This resistant, temporal framing of violence is critical in a context in which the "end" of Guatemala's counterinsurgency war and the ensuing truth commission are often positioned as concluding bouts of violence. In other words, Galindo's work pushes back on notions of violence being "history," instead unveiling it as happening in the contemporary moment. Galindo challenges the ways that the durational nature of violence makes its recognition slippery. Instead, she gives us ways of *noticing*— through embodied sensation— the present time of current violence.

On Definitions

In utilizing the term "feminicide" instead of "femicide," I follow Marcela Lagarde y de los Rios in her attempt to "name the ensemble of violations of women's human rights, which contain the crimes against and the disappearances of women" rather than "solely..the homicide of

women."[90] The term feminicide narrates patriarchal violence as structural rather than as an event. In doing so, it points to the role of a state-sponsored culture of impunity and the multiplicitous ways in which socialized gendered norms mobilize violence. It takes a capacious approach to forms of violence, accounting for "the whole set of violent misogynist acts against women that involve a violation of their human rights, represent an attack on their safety, and endanger their lives."[91] Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano have also pointed to the ways that utilizing the term feminicide (instead of femicide) gestures to the theoretical contributions of Latin American feminists and avoids "merely derivative" translation from "femicide," a term developed primarily by U.S.-based scholars. This definitional practice points to the culturally discursive nature of language, acknowledging that "translation yields different understandings about how concepts, theories, and knowledges are transformed in their travels to other geographic contexts."[92] Localized formulations of gendered violence in Guatemala are tethered to considerations of the role of state violence and the dichotomy between the public and private spheres. The term feminicide references the ways that patriarchal violence is relegated to the domestic arena (rather than being acknowledged as a public, systemic problem). It puts pressure on this binarized formation of relational space— "public" versus "private"— and accounts for the complex entanglements of social, public, and state-based spheres in propelling gendered violence.

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[90] Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, "Preface: Feminist Keys for Understanding Feminicide," In *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas*, edited by Cynthia Bejarano, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, and Mercedes Olivera (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xvi.
[91] Ibid, xiii.
[92] Cynthia Bejarano and Rosa Linda Fregoso, "Introduction: A Cartography of Feminicide in the Américas," In *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Americas*, edited by Cynthia Bejarano, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, and Mercedes Olivera (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

Guatemala's Counterinsurgency War

On December 29, 1996, members of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity or UNRG), as well as the Guatemalan government under President Álvaro Arzú, signed a peace accord that ended a thirty-six year counterinsurgency war. During this period, the Guatemalan state targeted leftist guerrilla forces. Military counterinsurgency campaigns specifically unleashed violence upon Guatemala's indigenous communities, including the heavily brutalized Ixil Maya population. This span of time is often referred to in Guatemala as "La Violencia" ("The Violence"). While widely noted as a "civil war" occurring between Guatemalan state and guerilla movements, the overwhelming majority of violence was caused by the counterinsurgency projects headed by the government's armed forces. This militarized project was buttressed by U.S. interests, with the U.S. providing financial and training-based support for Guatemalan troops and leadership as they fought various guerrilla groups throughout the country.

La Violencia was a period of state-waged violence that followed an enduring legacy of instability during the 20th century: multiple attempted and successful coups occurred between 1954 and 1986, and arrangements of power between the president and military leaders changed with each new head of state.[93] In 1954, a U.S. backed coup overthrew Jacobo Árbenz (Arévalo's successor) from office. The U.S. supported the coup due to its anti-Communist stance and concerns over Guatemalan ties to Cuba, as well as its opposition to the leftist labor policies of

[93] The shifting arrangements of power between the president and military contributed over time to stages of violence. Prior to 1944, Guatemala was under dictatorial rule where "the military was used as an instrument by its dictator to 'divide and conquer.'" (Schirmer, 10). Between 1944-1954, Juan José Arévalo was president after long-awaited civilian elections placed him in office. While Arévalo's presidency was marked by more liberal policies than the country had seen in recent years, he also signed Decree 17, a policy that was meant to protect the military from the "whims of the government" (Schirmer, 11). Ironically, the decree infused military forces with increased and expansive strength, making the Chief of the Armed Forces into what Schirmer notes as a "parallel president" with little institutionalized accountability or potential for removal. For more: Schirmer, Jennifer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

Arévalo and Árbenz. The Central Intelligence Agency played a key role in organizing the coup and installing Carlos Castillos Armas as the next Guatemalan president.

In 1960, junior military officers revolted, angered by government corruption and the government's allowance of the U.S. into Guatemala to train forces used in the Bay of Pigs invasion. While this event has been flagged as the "start" of the war, guerrilla organizing, divisions amongst junior and senior military officers, and the heightening violence of the military's counterinsurgency programs had been increasing in years prior. Guerrilla forces strengthened their organization through the 1970s, as groups like Movimiento Revolucionario 13 Noviembre (MR-13) joined with the Guatemalan Labor Party, Edgar Ibarra Guerrilla Front, and other rebel groups comprised of indigenous and ladino[94] members, students, and working class Guatemalans. Militarized counterinsurgency grew increasingly violent, leading to mass casualties and the destruction of villages in Guatemala's rural highlands (where many guerrilla groups and Indigenous communities were based).

The 1980s brought what the United Nations now recognizes as a government-generated genocide targeting guerrilla groups and indigenous populations seen as both a threat to military movement and important pawns in the state's strategy for amassing power. This period of genocide was termed the "scorched-earth policy" by the state. Under the dictatorship of Efraín Ríos Montt, 626 villages were massacred, 200,000 citizens were murdered, and 1.5 million were displaced, including over 150,000 refugees who fled to Mexico during La Violencia.[95] In 1986, a new constitution was enacted and Vinicio Cerezo, a member of the Guatemalan Christian Democracy, took office in the first democratic election since Arévalo's presidency. Many narrate this election as a turning point leading to the "conclusion" of decades of brutal conflict.

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[94] Ladino is a term for those of mixed Indigenous and Spanish lineages.

[95] Commission for Historical Clarification, *Guatemala Memory of Silence: Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions and Recommendations,* Commission for Historical Clarification, February 1999.

In 1996, peace accords were signed at the National Palace in Guatemala City. Following the signing, Guatemala established a national truth commission known as the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), signaling a state-sponsored investment in transitional justice. The CEH was supported by national, international, and religious interests, including by the Guatemalan state itself, the Guatemalan archdiocese, and financial and political backing from countries including Germany, Austria, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The United States declassified documents contributing to the commission's findings, and the United Nations played a significant role in support of the commission. These international superpowers, with the Guatemalan state, kicked off a period in Guatemalan history that promised national reckoning.

Memory of Silence

In February 1999, the Commission for Historical Clarification presented their findings in a report to members of the Guatemalan government and Kofi Annan, the then UN Secretary General. The commission's report, *Memory of Silence*, was divided into twelve volumes and included an introduction, conclusion, and recommendations. The commission's primary methodology in compiling the report was written documentation and verbal testimony from over 20,000 people.[96] The rhetoric of this document indicates how the commission conceived of violences committed, the significance of the moment in which the report was generated, the commission and report's roles in national transition, and the path forward to remediation. In other words, *Memory of Silence*'s rhetoric tells a story of how violence in Guatemala was approached, framed, and narrated. In its introduction, it states, "Knowing the truth of what happened will make it easier to achieve national reconciliation so that in the future Guatemalans may live in an authentic democracy without forgetting that the rule of justice as the means for

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[96] Ibid, 12.

creating a new State has been and remains the general objective of all."[97] The report's language holds the sacred promise of a new chapter for Guatemala, suggesting that the violence it addresses can be framed in past tense, which the language of the report quite literally employs. *Memory of Silence*'s introduction makes this connection between repair and positioning violence in the past, stating, "There is no doubt that the truth is of benefit to everyone, both victims and transgressors. The victims, whose past has been degraded and manipulated, will be dignified; the perpetrators, through the recognition of their immoral and criminal acts, will be able to recover the dignity of which they had deprived themselves."[98] The process of healing is named often, suggesting that the violence in question is over and that this new curative era can officially begin.

Memory of Silence also appears to promise objective approaches to authenticating this violent past. It states that its own purpose was to "clarify with objectivity, equity and impartiality, the human rights violations and acts of violence connected with the armed confrontation that caused suffering among the Guatemalan people." It continues that its aim was not to judge but "rather to clarify the history of the events of more than three decades of fratricidal war."[99] Its language emphasizes the report as a mechanism of truth telling and healing. It repeatedly frames its actions as "clarifying," or, in other words, adding coherence to violences of the past in order to more sufficiently narrate their happenings. The sheer number of testimonies collected[100] speak

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[97] Ibid, 12.
[98] Ibid, 12.
[99] Ibid, 8.
[100] Across these testimonies, differences emerge. The report comments directly on conflicting narratives:

> We received thousands of testimonies; we accompanied the survivors at such moving moments as the exhumation of their loved ones from clandestine cemeteries; we listened to former heads of State and the high command of both the Army and the guerrillas; we read thousands of pages of documents received from a full range of civil society's organisations. The Commission's Report has considered all the versions and takes into account what we have heard, seen and read regarding the many atrocities and brutalities.

Their listing of likely conflicting narrators of this duration of violence suggests a weighing and measuring of opposing stories. Here, objectivity is achieved via this evaluation of heterogeneity. The multiplicity of stories, especially those literally in contrast with one another (the military's perspective versus a survivor experiencing violence at the hands of the military) insinuates that the truth is revealed through the *comparison* of difference, followed by an *objective* evaluation of proof. This comparative approach puts pressure on testimonies, positioning them as content to verify rather than as complex expressions of trauma, grief, memory, and survival.

to the value of personal narration of violence for the commission and its report. The report's statement about maintaining objectivity suggests that these findings are infused with a kind of veracity around the telling of concluded violence.

My point here is not to position *Memory of Silence* as a detrimental, incorrect, or unimportant document. Its statements about violence in Guatemala, as well as its recommendations, are of huge critical import. Instead, I linger in this document and its rhetoric to demonstrate the ways that disclosure has been turned to as a *principal* form of historical confirmation. Testimony is linked to fixing violence in the past, when in fact, the continuation of it in the form of feminicidal violence is grossly underacknowledged.

Gender and Disclosure

Gender is a vital analytic in understanding the nuances of how disclosure appears and reappears in Guatemala's histories of violence. Gender and disclosure are uniquely linked, both as a strategic tactic utilized by the military, as well as in how gendered subjects are expected to narrate their trauma in the aftermath of brutality. Understanding how gendered bodies were specifically targeted, as well as how gender is a crucial part of constructing subjects that serve in a role of national healing is critical to understanding how violence itself is perpetuated.

Gendered violence became a strategic tactic utilized by the military as a weapon of war, a commodity brokered to eradicate assumed threats of insurgency, and a tool to populate fear amongst civilians. During the counterinsurgency— specifically from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s— rape and murder were used frequently as military tactics by the Guatemalan military. As Carol Hollander notes, the sexual and physical abuse of femmes as a form of state terror "represents a kind of ritual sport which has the important function of strengthening the male bonds of military domination through the enactment of traditional forms of patriarchal

control over and willful violation of women's bodies."[101] While their bodies become the site upon which patriarchal masculinity in the act of war was shored up, this type of violence additionally forced them to render their bodies as objects in negotiations for familial and communal protection. Femme subjects would often be pressured to exchange their bodies for release of their loved ones or succumb to sexual abuse by one soldier to prevent being abused by a larger group. Adrianne Aron comments on this trafficking of women's bodies as part of a wartime economy: "Thus, while men may trade in cigarettes or male prestige when seeking favors, women more often must resort to the coin of flesh."[102] These violences were posed as threats if women did not report their knowledge of guerrilla movement. Witness testimonials link revelation to this economy of violence. Women were often those managing domestic spaces in villages in the highlands targeted by the Guatemalan military. The act of revelation— which put loved ones and members of the community at risk— could be exchanged to avoid sexual abuse and torture. Disclosure of information thus became an object of barter within this economy that served to undo relational ties across communities. It was inextricably linked to the fetishization of gendered subjects. Femmes became entangled with the value of information, and their bodies were weaponized as a mode for extracting knowledge.

Disclosure also plays a role in how the valuable subject of the witness is constructed and how processes of national healing intersect with questions of gender. Kimberly Theidon has examined the intersections of gender and testimony in Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Her work notes the ways that women were specifically urged to reveal their experiences of violence during this period, as well as how refusal was handled: "The incitement

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[101] Nancy Caro Hollander, "The Gendering of Human Rights: Women and the Latin American Terrorist State," *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 63.
[102] Adrianne Aron et al., "The Gender-Specific Terror of El Salvador and Guatemala," *Women's Studies International Forum* 14, no. 1-2 (1991): 37-47.

to speech hinges on a belief that talking is intrinsically healing, and thus participating in the focus group would provide the women 'some relief.' This was at odds with the women's insistence on forgetting, and certainly at odds with the woman who finally told the facilitators that she was 'afraid to talk.'"[103] In studying the entanglement of gender in what she calls an "era of confessional obsession," Theidon vitally states: "In their use of more flexible evidentiary standards, commissions are effective in offering alternative histories generally at odds with official versions of what happened–particularly when agents of the state were key perpetrators. However, their focus on categories of victimization–combined with the highly gendered nature of victim imagery–may unintentionally construct other silences."[104] Theidon's point here is urgent. During Guatemala's grappling with its lineages of bloodshed, the act of disclosure does not just narrate gendered violence, it is itself gendered. Her work underscores how femme subjects are most often positioned as bearing the weight of communal trauma given the ways in which "a gendering of memory" exists.[105] She notes that commissions often take a "gender-sensitive" approach to telling history, which Theidon notes as meaning a woman-centered approach. This positions men's histories as the dominant, given, and fixed formulation of past violences rather than fully shaped by constructions of gender. This

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[103] Theidon, "Gender in Transition," 463.
[104] Ibid, 474.
[105] *Memory of Silence* points out the gendered impacts of the state's counterinsurgency war in one sub-section of its "Conclusions." The language of the report demonstrates the ways that gendered subjects are tied to serving solely as communal actors there to narrate social trauma and enact healing. The report describes violences towards women as always in relation to other members of their communities: "Thousands of women lost their husbands, becoming widows and the sole breadwinners for their children, often with no material resources after the scorched earth policies resulted in the destruction of their homes and crops. Their efforts to reconstruct their lives and support their families deserve special recognition." (Item 29 of conclusions) This section concludes with the following statement: "The CEH recognises the fact that women, the majority of them relatives of victims, played an exemplary role in the defence of human rights during the armed confrontation, promoting and directing organisations for relatives of the disappeared and for the struggle against impunity." (Item 30 of conclusions). Both of these findings position women as communal subjects. They are noted as being in relation to those experiencing violence, defending the human rights of a larger group, and as targeted for their "social participation." Even in a report specifically seeking to understand marginalized histories (including alongside lines of gender), women are framed as important arbiters of history *because of* their relation to others rather than as their own subjects and central to the history of violence being narrated. For more on memory as gendered, see Elizabeth Jelin's *State Repression and the Labors of Memory.*

expectation of women to perform communal roles in documenting and healing violence reduces recognition of their individual, personal experiences with violence. It contributes to a culture in which the live and present violences faced in quotidian life go unmarked, ignored, and threatened by erasure.

Latin American Feminist Activism

Before moving to Galindo's work, it is important to situate her artistic practice in long and complex lineages of Latin American feminist activism commenting on feminicide specifically, or state-waged violence more broadly. Arguing that women's resistance movements mobilized further in the 1970s and 1980s "as a significant political actor in the struggle against authoritarianism and militarization," María Elena Valenzuela notes how women challenged the presumption of a gendered division between the public and private spheres, instead bringing issues of state-enforced disappearance, feminicide, and reproductive rights into public sites. "The Mothers' movement in El Salvador, Argentina, and Chile developed different forms of protest. Wearing white scarves and carrying photographs of their 'disappeared' relatives, they became symbols of peace and resistance against the culture of fear."[106] Valenzuela joins many Latin American feminist scholars analyzing the material, visual, and embodied cultures that have been mobilized by women to make demands in the face of state authoritarianism.[107]

Marcela Fuentes' work on Argentinian collective Ni Una Menos (translating to "Not One (Woman) Less") specifically attends to how embodiment and performance-based tactics have

[106] María Elena Valenzuela, "Gender, Democracy and Peace: The Role of the Women's Movement in Latin America," *Towards a Women's Agenda for a Culture of Peace*, eds. Ingeborg Breines, Dorota Gierycz, and Betty A Reardon (Paris: United Nations Educational, 1999), 158.
[107] For more, see: Cynthia Bejarano, "Las Super Madres de Latino America: Transforming Motherhood and Contesting State Violence through Subversive Icons"; Jane Jaquette (ed.), *The Women's Movement in Latin America*; Hank Johnston and Paul Almeida, *Latin American Social Movements: Globalization, Democratization, and Transnational Networks;* Jennifer Schirmer, "The Seeking of Truth and the Gendering of Consciousness: The CoMadres of El Salvador and the Convaigua Widows of Guatemala."; Lynn Stephens, *Women and Social Movements in Latin America*;

been infused in Latin American feminist activism. She notes how their embodied gestures "cultivate protest as a durational genre that moves bodies beyond the personal toward collective-world making."[108] Reinforcing the public presence of collective, gendered subjects challenges a "context marked by the neoliberal logic of subtractive calculus and individual salvation."[109] This embodied, public form of presence has offered new tactics against what Fuentes notes as the "spectacularization of women's murders by their perpetrators and the mass media work as pedagogies of cruelty[110] that seek to shock and at the same time neutralize responses to women's vulnerability."[111] These constellations of feminist activist networks have introduced particularly salient ways of demonstrating the continuing, quotidian violence that target women's bodies, as well as the structural conditions— combinations of state-waged violence, neoliberalism, extractavist policies, and sedimented patriarchal values— which perpetuate them.

In Guatemala, women's roles in political movements have a long history. Ana Lorena Carrillo and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla note that while the generation of feminist theory from a localized perspective has been more recent, this "does not mean that women only recently became actors in Guatemalan history."[112] Women— and particularly indigenous women— played vital roles in revolutionary resistance against state violence. Organizing was not only squashed

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[108] Fuentes, Marcela, "Critical Performances: The Scream, the Green Tide, and the Spider as Embodied Feminist Articulations," *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Latin American Literary and Cultural Forms*, eds. Guillermina De Ferrari and Mariano Siskind (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 467.
[109] Ibid, 5.
[110] Rita Segato has termed "pedagogies of cruelty" conditions in which coloniality's late stage of capitalism has trained towards what she deems psychopathic predilection for non-relationality, dehumanization, and "a limitless capacity for bodies and territories to be preyed upon and reduced to remains." Rita Segato, "Patriarchy from Margin to Center," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 115, No. 3, 2016: 623.
[111] Fuentes, "Critical Performances," 19.
[112] Ana Lorena Carrillo and Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, "From Urban Elite to Peasant Organizing: Agendas, Accomplishments, and Challenges of Thirty-plus Years of Guatemalan Feminism, 1975-2007," *Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean: Engendering Social Justice, Democratizing Citizenship*, eds. Elizabeth Maier and Nathalie Lebon (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press and Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte A.C., 2010), 140.

by state repression that "restricted the free circulation of ideas, silenced debate, and kept cultural revolutions within certain limits," but also the "notoriously conservative dominant culture of Guatemalan elites and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, as well as the hegemony of orthodox leftists who resisted theoretical and practical challenges to the primacy of social class."[113]

Today, the work of Guatemalan feminist activism urgently seeks to tie feminicidal violence to histories of state violence, gendered brutalities, and the targeting of indigenous communities waged during the counterinsurgency war. Feminist organizing has also widely emphasized a culture of juridical impunity as a culprit in feminicide, in which little attention is paid to the murder of femmes and accountability is rarely sought. This includes a lack of investigative resources, communication with families, and reporting. Victoria Sanford writes, "we must explore contemporary social cleansing and historic structures of impunity in order to understand feminicide…Understanding the state's role enables us to interrogate the official explanations of the killing of women that, in turn, leads us back to the historic role of the state using terror as a primary recourse of power guaranteed by impunity from the genocide of the 1980s to social cleansing and feminicide today."[114] Sanford urges for a different reading of feminicide's logics, one which tethers enduring violence to systems of past horror. This connection between *current* gendered violence and state brutality (noted as "historic") is one of the most urgent issues raised by Guatemalan feminists and scholars today. In the face of feminicide, the public sphere has become an increasing site of feminist vigilance and resistance, with collective protests marking the streets as the rate of violence has swelled. Guatemalan feminist responses have continued to labor towards showing the links between indigeneity, class,

[113] Ibid, 142.
[114] Victoria Sanford, "From Genocide to Feminicide: Impunity and Human Rights in Twenty-First Century Guatemala," *Journal of Human Rights* 7, No. 2 (2008): 106.

and gender within the country's history of violence, as well as how the epidemic of feminicide is tied to militarized practices and the prevalence of social blindness.

Regina José Galindo

Galindo's work utilizes the body as a unique mechanism to critique histories of violence in her country. Growing up in Guatemala as the daughter of a judge, she has acute awareness of political moments representing a hope for change in the country, including the signing of the peace treaty in 1996. Galindo began her artistic trajectory as a poet, and she notes her turn to the body as a continuation of her poetry: "I started being a poet before being an artist, and the word led me to the action. My first engagement with the artistic process was with the words. I had too much energy, and once I understood that, once I comprehended that, once I grasped performance, I realized I had the body, the words, and the anger."[115] Galindo didn't have the funds to afford large amounts of material to make visual work or studio space for rehearsing larger scale performances. To this day, her work responds to its economic conditions: she works with what she has.

Galindo turned to the form of performance after being invited to perform in a group show by friends Maria Adela Diaz and Jessica Lagunas, with whom Galindo worked at an advertising agency. Alongside Diaz and Lagunas, established local performance artists, Galindo began performing in Guatemala City. Galindo, Diaz, and Lagunas were noted as central figures locally as "the emergence of performance work in Guatemala, particularly in 1999 and 2000, was unparalleled in the region."[116] Candice Amich describes central themes tying their work together: "These feminist performers responded to the amnesia of Guatemala's postdictatorship culture

[115] Galindo, Regina José. In discussion with the author. May 2022.
[116] Pérez-Ratton, Virginia, "Performance and Action Work in Central America, 1960-2000: A Political and Aesthetic Choice." *Arte ≠ Vida: Actions by Artists of the americas, 1960-2000*, ed. Deborah Cullen (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2008), 211.

with extreme bodily metaphors and acts."[117] As Amich details, Galindo often inflicts pain, or its possibility, onto her own body as part of her process. In *La Verdad* (*The Truth*), she read the testimonies of victims from state-sponsored genocide as a dentist gave her repeated injections to numb her mouth as she spoke. In *Tierra* (*Earth*), she stood above ground as a bulldozer carved the earth away from under her at a dangerous rate, representing the excavation needed to bury those murdered during La Violencia. In *¿Quién puede borrar las huellas?* (*Who Can Erase the Traces?*), she dipped her feet in human blood and walked from Guatemala City's Constitutional Court to the National Palace, where the 1996 peace accords were signed, in "rejection of the presidential candidacy" of Ríos Montt.[118] Her work is political, confrontational, and historically informed. She involves sites linked to moments of terror, invoking the place of violence as part of its traces.

Galindo is based out of Guatemala City, where she performs often. Her work has also entered a global sphere of performance, and she is frequently presented in elite, institutional spaces invested in visuality (Documenta 14 or the Venice Biennale, for example), rather than explicitly choreographic or performance-centric arenas. Funding for Galindo's work mainly flows from institutional spaces of the Global North. Though she performs often in Guatemala City, she has noted the ways in which lack of local funding has influenced her strategy for her artistic practice. She relies on public sites or free or low-cost visual art spaces, including community galleries, to produce her performances. She works out of her own home, and when we meet on Zoom, evidence of her visual notes for new performances dots the wall. Galindo's scrappy approach to producing work locally in Guatemala City sits in stark distinction to the high art circuit which she has entered globally. After performing one of the two works which I

[117] Amich, Candice, *Precarious Forms: Performing Utopia in the Neoliberal Americas*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 136.
[118] Galindo, Regina José. *Website*: "Regina José Galindo." http://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/home-en/

center in this chapter, *(279) Golpes*, at the Venice Biennale, Galindo was awarded the Golden Lion award, catapulting her into visibility in the visual art world, especially with its investment in body-based work. Galindo's work has been commissioned by institutionalized spaces in the Global North, including Cornell University (United States), the Guggenheim Museum (United States), Modern Art Oxford (Britain), the Ruhrtriennale Festival of the Arts (Germany), Museum voor Moderne Kunst (Netherlands), and the Museum of Latin American Art (United States). In addition to the Golden Lion prize, Galindo was also awarded the Grand Prize Award at the Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia.[119] In this chapter, I center two specific works by Galindo: 2005's *(279) Golpes* and 2017's *Presencia*. *(279) Golpes* was performed only once at the 2005 Venice Biennale. *Presencia* has been performed thirteen times. Eleven of those performances occurred in Guatemala City in sites including galleries and public sidewalks, with the other two occurring in Spain and Greece (as part of the exhibition Documenta 14).

Galindo's performances are transnational on multiple levels, including her work's circulation in a global performance arena. In our interview, she reiterates how important it is to her that people understand the localized history of violence in Guatemala. In other international performances, she addresses violences local to the country she performs in. For example, her 2019 *Die Feirer/La Celebracion* in Vienna addresses the Nazism ingrained in the history of the country's lauded New Year's Philharmonic concert, a celebrated tradition, by having performers dance to the music in mud, slowly covering themselves with filth. Galindo's responses to violence in Guatemala expose the transnational vectors of power at play in these lineages. La Violencia is a transnational event, unveiling the interconnectedness of nation states and chipping away at their oft performed individualistic solidity: the U.S. installed new power in Guatemala

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[119] Guggenheim Museum Artist Biographies, "Regina José Galindo," https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/regina-jose-galindo

and trained the military in its counterinsurgency efforts, the shape of retribution in the country after peace accords were signed was deeply influenced by international pressure and directives, the United States' extractivist policies have depleted natural resources in the country, and neoliberal interests in Guatemala have rearranged labor conditions. Galindo's performances also consider place and travel as intricate ingredients in her performances' narratives. In describing one of the women she honored in *Presencia*, Galindo tells me that she was trying to escape her husband by fleeing to Spain with her son: "She goes to prison to tell her ex-husband, who had tried to kill her in the past, and tells him that she's going to Spain, and so the ex-husband puts out an order to have her killed."[120] Galindo performed this installment of *Presencia* in Spain, invoking the woman's hope for safe passage as part of the ritual of mourning her.

Globally, Galindo has entered into a discourse of body art, in which the body is turned to as a site of political commentary. Much of the existing scholarship on Galindo's practices emphasize its representation of violence, focusing on how it speaks for the body in pain to witnessing audiences. Jane Lavery and Sarah Bowskill, for example, attend to Galindo's multimedia practices that include performance, poetry, and digital blog posts and argue that her performance of the grotesque forces audiences to engage with the infliction of violence which Galindo depicts rather than turning away from it. They state that "Galindo's performances advocate that the body should be allowed to speak for itself and force the viewer to confront violence and its consequences."[121] Other scholars, including Amich, have noted how Galindo's work performs outside of state-based responses to violence, including the testimonial form. Describing the relationship between who she refers to as "victim" and "audience," Amich argues that "Galindo's performances collapse this distance so that the spectator is implicated in the

[120] Galindo, Regina José, In discussion with the author, May 2022.
[121] Bowskill, Sarah and Jane Lavery, "The Representation of the Female Body in the Multimedia Works of Regina José Galindo," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 31, No. 1 (2012): 63.

violence the artist depicts."[122] Amich analyzes one of the works which I include here, *(279) Golpes*, reading its duration as "making audible what the neoliberal sensorium denies"[123] and reading the work as a performance of "injurability" that "unites artist and spectator."[124] While I follow Amich's delineation of Galindo's embodied modalities from the confines of the testimonial form, my work diverges from these readings of Galindo's work, attending to the modes in which Galindo resists strictly representational performances of violence. I intervene in this literature by elucidating the ways in which Galindo performs a withholding of her *individual* body, instead turning to the body as a site which can enact the durational, persistent sensations of continuous violence.

In considering the link between her artistic practice and Guatemala's histories of violence she comments: "I think that an artist talks about their own context," she says. To talk about Guatemala is to talk about "its dark sides." [125] Both of the performances analyzed here focus on the epidemic of feminicide that marks Guatemala's contemporary context. On Galindo's website, she notes its prevalence: "According to figures from The National Institute of Forensic Sciences of Guatemala... over a five year period 3,585 cases of murdered women were reported in Guatemala. Many of these crimes were committed by a woman's partner or ex-partner. The majority of these cases remain in states of impunity."[126] The country's rate of feminicide is three times the global average, and according to Galindo, the visual representation of the murder of women occurs in the streets, entering a repetitive, quotidian zone. In an interview with BOMB Magazine, Galindo described witnessing the dismembered body of a murdered woman in the

[122] Amich, *Precarious Forms*, 135.
[123] Ibid, 150.
[124] Ibid, 151.
[125] Galindo, Regina José, In discussion with the author, May 2022.
[126] Galindo, Regina José, *Website*: "Regina José Galindo," Accessed January 2022, http://www.reginajosegalindo.com/en/home-en/

street: "Nobody paid any attention to them at all."[127] Galindo's work centers the body and pain in performance as a mechanism for differently directing social attention and for narrating violence anew.

(279) Golpes

Galindo's work *(279) Golpes* was created and performed in 2005 in Venice, Italy for the Venice Biennale. In the work, a rectangular structure sits in the back of one of the Arsenale exhibition spaces, which is dimly lit and otherwise empty. The light in the room comes from fixtures not attached to the performance. Their light just so happens to fall onto the wall of the structure, drawing the viewer's eye to its blank space. The informal lighting of this two-dimensional surface makes it appear as if it is in the spotlight. One's eye draws towards the wall as if it will soon frame the performance's action. A different light source shines behind the rectangular structure, illuminating a spatial background and, via contrast, emphasizing the frontal wall of the structure as if it were a stage or gallery wall. The anticipatory effect of this lighting never comes to fruition, however. Upon entering the space, audiences hear the amplified sound of something being struck from inside of the structure. If you listen carefully, you notice that the object being hit is a human body enclosed inside of the rectangular box. Some audience members may have read contextual information in the biennale's program. In that case, one would know that this work is framed as a "sound performance" conceptually linked to the persistence of feminicide, and that the sound of lashing is Galindo whipping herself inside of the cube. The program also specified that Galindo's own subtle, sonic responses to the painful lash are amplified through microphones and projected for the audience to hear. It emphasizes that the lashing occurs at Galindo's own hand, and that she is alone inside of this structure. As the

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[127] Galindo, Regina José and Francisco Goldman, "Regina José Galindo with Francisco Goldman," *BOMB*, Issue 94, 2006, 43.

performance unfolds, the intensity of the thrust behind the belt grows, and the sound of the lashing becomes louder. Audiences depart the room, and Galindo's body is never revealed.

In this work, withholding occurs in multiple ways. The body in question is never disclosed, nor is the relationship between the lashing hand and receiving skin. The materiality of what is producing and taking on this brute force is not attached to visuality, and thus specific context remains mysterious. The restraint of the visual realm keeps distinctions between each lash private. These sensory-based elements perform nondisclosure and leave witnesses with affective sensations, even as information often revealed in the mode of performance is refused. The work's titular gesture denotes the number of murdered women in Guatemala between January 1st to June 9th, 2005, just prior to when the work was performed. The elements of performance generate a world in which Galindo's violence to her own body becomes both familiar and foreign. Particularly, Galindo's durational whipping, concealment of bodily visuality, turn to the sonic realm, and use of her own skin generates a world of affective inundation, in which violence is understood sensorially as that which endures, saturates, and maintains itself. In doing so, it performs a new mode of historicizing the epidemic of feminicide. The sensations of violence become quotidian rather than spectacular, ongoing rather than in the past, familiar (and thus, susceptible to blindness) rather than foreign. The work gives us these affective affiliations with this violence as it unveils the dogged continuation of feminicide.

Figure 1: Photo by Yasmin Hage, Regina José Galindo Website (www.reginajosegalindo.com).

Temporal Persistence: Disrupting Repetition

In an article for Los Angeles Review of Books, Elena Shtromberg offers her response to *(279) Golpes*: “What the audience can hear is the amplified sound of the strikes, growing in intensity as her body once again becomes the tableau for absorbing and reflecting the violence suffered by others.”[128] Shtromberg positions Galindo as taking on the violence of feminicide in a bodily manner, “absorbing” it from its histories of brutality, and “reflecting” it back into the room under the watch of witnessing audiences. Similarly, scholar Emilia Barbosa notes Galindo’s performance as “body talk” which “embodies feminicide victims’ pain and suffering as a counterdiscursive practice and as a resistant performance that challenges hegemonic convictions at their very roots. Rather than a venue for gratuitous sadistic contemplation, it is a resistant body.”[129] She reads Galindo’s body as performing something similar to Shtromberg’s

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[128] Elena Shtromberg, “Amnesty and Justice for All: The Art of Regina José Galindo,” *Los Angeles Review of Books,* February 21, 2015, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/amnesty-justice-art-regina-jose-galindo/

[129] Emilia Barbosa, “Regina José Galindo’s Body Talk: Performing Feminicide and Violence Against Women in “279 Golpes,” *Latin America Perspectives* 41, No. 1 (2014): 59-71.

notion of "absorption." Here, the body becomes a time traveler as it tries on the pain of another, stepping back in time, and delivering a charged sameness to the present moment. Barbosa continues, "Galindo reenacts the pain and suffering experienced by women in Guatemala in a markedly nondiscursive and nonlogical manner, thus making spectators her accomplices and joint witnesses of the deconstruction of ready-made narratives of women's vulnerability."[130] Shtromberg and Barbosa join many who read Galindo's work as a *re*doing or (to use Barbosa's term) reenactment, hailing cultural attention backwards in time to a violence that has been largely ignored. And yet, these analyses temporally frame acts of gendered violence as fixed in history, a critical move that runs the risk of erasing their *continuing* cultural presence.

To re-embody is to travel backwards. To repeat is to return to an original over and over again. What might be missed when feminicide is understood solely as an event tethered in past time, temporally bound, and relegated into historic completion? Reading the persistence of Galindo's blows to her own vulnerable body as durational rather than as a repetitious reenactment intervenes in these framings of feminicide in Guatemala. Rather than a repetition of the *same* moment of *past* violence, understanding the durational motor of *(279) Golpes* allows us to mark its performance of violence's enduring sensations. This intervention emphasizes violent persistence, avoiding deducing each instance of harm as a repetition of the same and instead, allowing for new temporal understanding of the systemic, structural, and continuing epidemic of gendered violence.

I want to start by outlining the myriad of ways that redoing, repetition, and reenactment might be read in *(279) Golpes* before turning to my divergent argument for a *durational* reading of the work. This serves as a rhetorical way of moving backwards from common analyses of the work to a fresh one. The lash of Galindo's hand-held whip strikes 279 times against her body,

[130] Ibid, 68.

adjusting its witnesses to the commonality of its presence. The blow is *familiar*. It is performed again and again, which could be read as a kind of rhythm run by the motor of repetition. Secondly, the performance borrows from an ecology of violent gestures that mark feminicide: the common striking of the body is expressed by bruising often found on victims' bodies. While Galindo does not literally recreate a violence ending in death, she does incorporate the gesture of the bodily blow, borrowing this physical mode of brutality from the repertoire of gendered violence in Guatemala.[131] This borrowing could suggest the kind of framed reenactment read often in Galindo's work, in which her own body becomes the "tableau" (to return to Shtromberg's turn of phrase) upon which the gesture lands.

Finally, the work's embodied form of performance has broader ties to the concept of repetition. Repetition is one of the most central terms to the way that the field of performance studies has framed its object of study. Embodiment's ability to make meaning relies on its repetition, its citationality. To cite is to, quite literally, do and do again until the doing itself acquires understood meaning. Performance theorist Rebecca Schneider's work on reenactment has this to say: "Indeed, looking even cursorily at reenactment as a practice one is soon hounded by the paradoxes of performativity and the fecund question…that all representational practice, and indeed all communicative behavior, is composed in reiteration, is engaged in citation, is *already* a practice of reenactment."[132] In other words, to perform is to make meaning through a combination of a doing and its citational value. Soyica Diggs Colbert, Douglas A. Jones, and Shane Vogel importantly summarize repetition's value in the field of performance studies and the ontology of its centered object, performance:

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[131] Diana Taylor has offered repertoire (in contrast to archive) as a term that references how bodies archive memories and circulate them via social transmission. For more see Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire.*

[132] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

> The simultaneity of sameness and difference that marks repetition, that is repetition's mark, is thus constitutive of performance, making performance an esteemed domain for the entrenchment of sociocultural norms as well as the production and articulation of critique…Because scholarly consensus regards it as the action that makes the conditions of performance's aesthetics and meanings possible, repetition is a God term in performance theory."[133]

Performance studies understands the social, cultural, and political value of performance as tied to both its citational thrust and its iterative manipulations. Galindo's choice to turn to performance as the form through which to consider feminicide thus carries a reiterative weight with it – performance, generally speaking, is thought to make meaning through citation.

While analysis of repetition is compelling in *(279) Golpes*, I return to my original question of what is missed when reading this historicization of violence as solely a reenactment. I follow Diggs Colbert, Jones, and Vogel in their vital question: "What models of temporality emerge instead of, alongside, or within repetition?" Specifically, I join them in their consideration of alternate heuristics for understanding difference than theories around repetition may encourage. Returning to the whip, we find that the lashing is singular each time. *This one seems to hit denser bodily territory. This one is softer. This one provokes a whimper. This one does not catalyze a sonic response.* This is not a linear repetition of an originary occurrence, but rather a persistent series. The tightness of Galindo's grip on the whip might shift. It might land on her upper thigh in one moment, yet reach towards her hip in the next. The belt might hit a part of her body more cushioned by fat or with denser bone. These slight bodily differences change its sound: the landing of the lash appears differently to the ear with each blow.

Further, while Galindo does borrow a gesture of violence from feminicide's repertoire, reenactment suggests an attempt towards complete and pure recreation, emphasizing what Rebecca Schneider calls "work that strives for literal precision rather than tries to avoid it with

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[133] Soyica Diggs Colbert, Douglas A. Jones, and Shane Vogel, "Introduction: Tidying Up After Repetition," *Race and Performance After Repetition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 7.

the rubric 'interpretation.'"[134] For Schneider, reenactment is "the effort to play one time in another time— the effort to find 'that was then' inside 'this is now.'"[135] While Schneider poignantly accounts for the temporal slippage in this attempt at the past, she also correctly tethers reenactment to its motion backwards towards an original. Galindo's performance resists these rubrics of past temporalities and repetition. Instead of duplicating an originary blow, she generates blow *after blow*, inundating the witness with the atrocious recognition of its lash. As familiarity shores up, distinction emerges. The frequency of the hit makes the listener so familiar with the whip that we are clued into the moments of difference between each lash. Knowing the bodily encounter and materiality of the whip's violence allows us to sense the subtleties of difference. Instead of bringing past to present, Galindo's work suggests alternate temporalities. Hers is the time of persistence, anticipation, and the affective charge of onslaught. The work suggests a continuation in which each singular moment of brutality is both unique in its horror, yet relationally tied, *across* time, and *between* moments.

I suggest that we understand *(279) Golpes* as generating temporal alterity in its divergence from repetition and move toward the durational not just to challenge common analyses but because it opens up new temporalities for the violence of feminicide via performance's affect. To feel the onslaught across one's own skin and heartbeat and soft tissue is to relate differently to its persistence. It is to refrain from reproduction or "authentic" *re*embodiment, and instead, to suggest something critically important about violence's temporal work on the bodies that it subsumes, *here and now*, through death and witnessing. The penetrating fierceness of feminicide's ongoing duration is what Galindo's persistent lash allows one to sense. The work withholds her body, refusing to visually represent violence in the way so

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[134] Schneider, *Performing Remains*, 16.
[135] Ibid, 10.

familiar to many living amongst feminicide's atrocity. Instead, her withheld body allows for anticipatory time, in which the body readies itself for the next and the next and the next.

Utterances: Sonic Proximities

The lashing of Galindo's body is produced only via the sonic realm, as her body is visually hidden behind the wall of the rectangular structure. The sound of the lash is both raw and mediated. The presence of a microphone and speakers translates the sound of embodied violence into the rest of the performance space. Sound is projected, meaning it is enlarged and cast out into a surrounding spatial configuration. Yet, it is raw in its liveness and proximity. The originary sounds— the hit against Galindo's body, as well as the following moans and breaths— occur in the same time as they are being heard, and their material presence resides only steps away from listening audiences. This live proximity generates an *alongsidedness* that the audience might easily sense. The listening body is next to, parallel, or *with* Galindo's body in the literal room in which the performance unfolds. And yet, the speakers generate an auditory throwing of sound that takes it into the entirety of the performance space and outside of its natural range of projection. Sound is thrown further by this technological mediation, interrupting any primal state of Galindo's vocal response. The body is withheld visually in order to intensify its sonic throw. Galindo refuses to reproduce the visual registers of violence that so often mark feminicide in Guatemala, in which the bodies of murdered femmes are often doubly objectified as reminders of the violence that they endured. Here, there is no visual grasp of the body in pain. The lack of body leaves audiences with *only* sound to take in, heightening its importance. Galindo's lash and its projection increase in volume throughout the work, intensifying the affective presence of violence. This tension between the closeness of Galindo's body, its visual restraint, and its sonic projection generates a saturation that gives the sense of feminicide's

proximate, ongoing, durational violence. I argue for attention to be paid towards this sensory-based saturation— via the turn to the sonic realm— in order to understand how *(279) Golpes* frames gendered violence and its assault by way of its familiar endurance rather than its spectacularity.

Galindo's turn to sonic utterance results in a distinct sensorial hold over audiences, specifically in comparison to the impact of visuality. The aural is more untethered than the visual. It fills the spatial realm more than the ocular does. To look at something is to focus the eye on it or to narrow into a specific focal point. The sonic realm operates differently. Sound expands into space. The listening body feels the sense of being surrounded rather than having to pinpoint an image to digest it. In his work *Listening*, Jean-Luc Nancy describes the sonic realm as "omnipresent."[136] He continues, "its presence is never a simple being-there or how things stand, but is always at once an advance, penetration, insistence, obsession, or possession."[137] Nancy critically positions the sonorous as "methexic," meaning it is always entangled with "participation, sharing, or contagion."[138] Nancy's language is infused with motion. Sound fills a space and is itself marked by a penetrative spread or advancement. To sound is to sound *outwards*, and this experience of projection sits affectively in the body in unique ways. Nancy has formulated that sound "that penetrates through the ear propagates throughout the entire body something of its effects." For Nancy, this "could not be said to occur in the same way with the visual signal."[139] Sound not only surrounds the body and fills the space, it permeates the container of the body. The vibratory nature of sound is understood through our own bodies, alerting us to its presence through our felt adjustments to it. Lisa Coulthard has articulated the

[136] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 15.
[137] Ibid, 15
[138] Ibid, 21.
[139] Ibid, 14.

manner in which "air acts directly on the ear and creates resonances and vibrations throughout the body."[140] This experience of sound requires the body to act as a conduit in which the sonic realm is allowed to flow through it. The body is punctured by the sonic, generating an entanglement between the sounds produced and the listening body that distinguishes the sonic realm from that of the visual.

Galindo's decision to refrain from a visual unveiling of her own body in *(279) Golpes* allows the sonic to be the centered sensory experience of the performance. In emphasizing sound over visual images, Galindo generates a saturation through familiarity. The listening body is catalyzed as an actor and required as a conduit for sound to be processed. This turn to sound thus hails the audience into the time and place of the performance. They are surrounded by the sounds of a body, up close and personal. Their bodies are tethered to hers. This sonic, vibrational entanglement generates what scholar Eugenia Brinkema notes as an "exteriority without distance."[141] Coulthard reads Brinkema in this way: "This 'coming-too-close' is inseparable from a sense of 'going-too-far' and both are yoked to the close-up, a formal device of disturbing over-proximity and 'unwelcome nearness.'"[142] As Coulthard and Brinkema both note, the pervasiveness of sound generates a familiarity with potentially disturbing qualities due to its excessive closeness. Galindo's use of sound generates this "over-proximity" as she whips. Listeners cannot escape her body, as these noises continue to fill the space of performance.

(279) Golpes importantly prioritizes sounds that reside outside of marked linguistic formations, emphasizing a relationship between the body, its sonicity, and violence. Much has been theorized about the relationship between the body undergoing violence and its lack of

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[140] Lisa Coulthard, "Acoustic Disgust: Sound, Affect, and Cinematic Violence," *The Palgrave Handbook of Sound Design and Music in Screen Media: Integrated Soundtracks*, Eds. Lisa Coulthard, Liz Greene, and Danijela Kulezic-Wilson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 187.
[141] Eugenia Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 131.
[142] Coulthard, "Acoustic Disgust," 187.

words. Elaine Scarry has postulated that pain undoes language, taking up concerns with "the political consequences of pain's inexpressibility."[143] She writes, "whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language."[144] Alex Weheliye summarizes Scarry: "For some, extreme suffering resides outside the grasp of intelligibility, causing the victims of political violence to regress to the 'pre-language of cries and groans,' which becomes indicative of and bears witness to the annihilation of the world.'"[145] Yet, Weheliye takes issue with this casting of pain as inexpressible. This requirement of language for translation is tied to power formations that make and unmake subjects. While writing about the screams of those enslaved by Nazi soldiers, Weheliye gives us this:

> While this form of communication does not necessarily conform to the standard definition of linguistic utterance, to hear the [screams] merely as pre- or nonlanguage delegates the responsibility of bearing witness to a force outside the human…what is at stake is not so much the lack of 'language' per se or a jargon of authenticity, but the kinds of dialects available to the subjected, since these languages, imaginaries, dreams, shrieks, etc. sound nothing less than differently pitched humanities.[146]

Weheliye's is a reminder that the question of humanity — which enduring violence pricks and prods — is tied to what is considered expressible or available for translation. Fred Moten adds that a consideration of the sonic production of bodies in pain "opens the possibility of a critique of the valuation of meaning over content and the reduction of phonic matter and syntactic 'degeneracy' in the early modern search for a universal language and the late modern search for a universal science of language."[147] Moten and Weheliye's work are specific to the ties between

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[143] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, 11.
[144] Ibid, 4.
[145] Alexander G. Weheliye, "After Man," *American Literary History* 20, No. 1/2 (2008): 331.
[146] Ibid, 332.
[147] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 7.

the sonic realm, violence, performance, and particular racialized or ethnic identities,[148] and thus, their words can't be divorced or translated away from these localized sites and subjectivities. Yet, I include them here because they remind us that the assumption of non-translation is related to what is presumed to be listenable. They suggest that attending to the sonic expression of pain is not only possible, but that the insinuation of their excessive (to language) non-translatability is yet another mode of violent devaluation of human life. It suggests that some can be heard, while others cannot.

(279) Golpes thus not only performs a kind of spatial onslaught in its turn to sound over image, but it makes the nonlinguistic *hit* and *moan* its central ingredients. Galindo's aesthetic—*sonic*— choices raise questions about how the body's sounding through pain might shift how attention is paid to violence. As mentioned, the epidemic of feminicide has been culturally marked through visuality: images of maimed women appear across media or even in the streets. Its representation through the visual realm has also meant that one can turn away from it. Galindo's use of sound marks this ability to stop paying attention. She emphasizes for audiences the moments in which the saturation of her bodily enunciation becomes so familiar that listening stops. This sonic inundation generates a potential site of disengagement, mirroring the social blindness that has endured around conditions of ongoing feminicide in Guatemala. Her lashes and moans do not emphasize a zone of non translation, but rather point to the sheer expression of violence itself. Instead of translating her own experience of violence to the tidiness of narrative linearity, we only can have access to the sonic experience of a body in destruction. Galindo performs a refusal to maintain our attention. Instead, the witness must feel the surround of violence and its undoings. They must notice the moments when saturation leads to familiarity

[148] Both Moten and Weheliye's work addresses ontological questions around Black performance and sonic recognition. In the citation, Weheliye is also addressing the screams of Muslims enslaved by Nazi soldiers.

leads to turning away. This proposes a new relationship to feminicide, in which it is sensed by and through the vibrations of the body rather than a telling of past events that has been prepared for digestion. The body's presence in the space suggests a present-ness of this violence, as onlookers must feel transitions from confrontational onslaught to avoidable familiarity.

Susceptible Bodies

Galindo's bodily pain stems from her own hand as it grips the belt. As speakers enunciate this bodily encounter with this common material object, this meeting of weapon and skin unfolds over time. Galindo's self-infliction of bodily pain, as well as her use of her own skin as the receptacle of this violence fragment her body. It performs a kind of susceptibility that makes it vulnerable to those outside of itself. Her skin – the organ that contains us from others— is damaged and broken down over time. Galindo's choice to focus on this part of her body undoes her body— not just through a general presence of violence but because of a specific turn to the skin, a bodily container that maintains our sense of somatic wholeness and anatomical togetherness. Galindo's choice to inflict pain on herself makes her own body the doer and receiver, avoiding binaries of those who are "violent" and those who are "victims." Instead, Galindo performs a kind of cyclicality, in which the actor is the recipient is the actor… This cycle of *whip and response and whip and response* fills the space of the performance with a systemic refrain. This pain is relational and tethered to other forms of violence. Galindo's performance of susceptibility gestures at the links between acts of feminicide and ongoing, entangled conditions, including military violence, a status quo infused with patriarchal norms, neoliberalism, impunity, and more. Here, the susceptible body is not just the murdered body, it is the potential of *any* body in a culture where violent conditions are present, thus illuminating

feminicide as a systemic issue woven throughout a complex, social conditioning towards violence.

The first contact that the belt makes with Galindo's body is with her skin, the threshold between the body's inner contents and the exterior world. The skin is the largest organ in the body. It holds the insides in and keeps the outsides out. This flexible organ not only keeps blood, tendons, nerves, and bones internal, it also holds them in place with its durability and ability to expand and constrict. The tension of the skin contributes to its function. Galindo's whipping of her skin threatens it. Laceration, scarring, and general wear all are made more possible via this self-infliction. In considering the role of the skin in *(279) Golpes*, I follow Sarah Ahmed and Jackie Stacey in their invitation to think "through" the skin rather than to just think about it as object. To think through the skin is to think through thresholds. In their introduction to their edited volume, Ahmed and Stacey write, "These diverse approaches to thinking about the skin as a boundary-object, and as a site of exposure or connectedness, invite the reader to consider how the borders between bodies are unstable and how such borders are already crossed by differences that refuse to be contained on the 'inside' or the 'outside' of bodies."[149] As the bodily container, the skin becomes its last defense, as well as its site of revelation and possible physical entanglement with others. The skin is not purely a fixed border, but a porous bodily threshold with the ability to be punctured. This tension between the defensive and the vulnerable makes Galindo's emphasis on the skin in *(279) Golpes* critical. For Ahmed and Stacey, "skins, as well as other bodily surfaces and folds, expose bodies to other bodies, rather than simply containing 'the body' as such."[150] We can thus read Galindo's violencing of her own skin as both reiteration

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[149] Sarah Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 2.
[150] Ibid, 4.

of the bodily vulnerability that the skin's laceration provokes, as well as the entanglement of bodies with other bodies that is at its most heightened in acts of violence like feminicide.

Galindo's performance complicates simplistic notions of doers versus receivers, instead portraying a violence in which cyclicality and susceptibility are central. Her own hand generates the violence to her own body, creating a loop of perpetuation and reception that is contained within her own physical frame. This cyclical role complicates understandings of violence, shifting it from something that is binaried (*either* done or done to) to something that is structural. Galindo often questions agency and violence in her work. In an interview with the Guggenheim museum, she states,

> In my work, it seems, superficially, very easy to locate the victim. I am the victim. But when you do a deeper analysis, you understand that as well as being the victim, I was also the mastermind of the action. Usually, I hire a volunteer, a third person, or other people who participate in the action. I get involved in the process with them. The people perform an action, under my command. The intellectual 'actor' goes unnoticed, but that is where we should focus our attention. In fact, the blame falls on the event. Every victimizer was at some point a victim.[151]

Here, Galindo emphasizes violence as something that produces a state of susceptibility, in which the "victim" can become "victimizer."

This play with agential roles of the doer and the receiver does not just function conceptually within *(279) Golpes* but additionally works at an affective level. As discussed, the sonic saturation of the belt and Galindo's voice fill the space and generate a cyclical, expanding rhythm. The saturation which I argued for in the description of the work's sonic elements is emphasized through the presence of the whip and the skin. Galindo's blows fall into such a persistent rhythm that the delineation between each sound starts to melt away as listeners expect the back and forth. The durational aspect of the work makes it meditative, seductive, and

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[151] Regina José Galindo, *Regina José Galindo: La Víctima y el Victimario*, By Guggenheim Museum. Guggenheim, August 4, 2015.

habitual. The listening body takes in this looping quality as it adjusts to its familiarity. As this rhythm persists— swallowing the space with its intensity— the sound of the whip and the sound of the skin feeling the whip – become less distinct. They grow in their enmeshment, becoming part of the same cyclical system of cause and effect as familiarity settles into the space.

Both Galindo's use of the skin and play with the roles of "victim" and "victimizer" establish an affiliation between violence and the *susceptible* subject. The durational harm of the whip gestures at feminicide's enduring persistence and its enmeshment in larger systems of power, including state waged violence, cultures of impunity, and conservative, patriarchal cultural norms. Galindo's work positions the body as integral in persistent violence because it is the site in which attention heightens and passes. It is the site at which horror and forgetfulness are felt. Placing the body— both her own and her audience— into this durational violence done to the skin generates a breaking down of distinct thresholds between body (audience) and body (hers), whip and moan, subject and violence, and attention and its slippage.

Enduring the Durational

Galindo's *(279) Golpes* might not stand out to all just because of its use of duration, sound, and skin. Many performances play with temporal, sonic, and bodily elements simultaneously, especially in the landscape of contemporary performance-based art. Yet, when the issue at hand is the question of feminicide and its temporal framing, *its time*, these elements of performance begin to do specific affective work with unique stakes. Galindo's subtle yet felt play with the durational violence of the belt in her hand generates a kind of bodily familiarity that sneakily reminds us just how easy it is to become acclimated to the sound of violence. Her soundscore— composed only of the painful lash and her responsive moans— is meant to be relentless. In an interview with Galindo, I ask her about the relationship that she understands in

the work between sound and the violence it gestures to. Her right hand folds at its wrist and laterally punctures the space in front of it repeatedly, as if making sure the point is heard over and over again. “The sound is supposed to function as a counter,” she states. “Rather than visually representing the violence, I wanted to have the audience’s experience be one of counting.”[152] For Galindo, the duration of *(279) Golpes* is not just about time passing but the cyclicality that leads to recognition that leads to familiarity that leads to forgetting. The more the lash punctures skin, the more you are used to it.

In his analysis of performances unfolding in close proximity in the dark, Martin Welton comments on what the removal of the visual realm does for audiences: “By enclosing them in an auditory manner the performance situated them *within* the action.”[153] Welton’s comment gestures back to my notion of sonic saturation, in which the removal of the visual focus envelops the receiving body into the performance’s expansive territory. For Welton, audiences are *within* the frame, players in the action. Galindo’s use of this counting sonic device subsumes the listener, making the experience of accumulating violence overly familiar. Her turn to her own skin as the canvas of her action is visceral. We all have skin, and we all know the skin of another. This sensorial threshold performs vulnerability for those that feel their way through the work. Galindo’s lacerated skin is not far from their own in the performance space.

These aesthetic elements in performance generate an affect of endurance, by which I mean that they generate a space in which *getting through* something difficult becomes an inherent part of the work. Jennifer Doyle has noted performances that work with bodies and violence as “difficult,” by which she understands as work that “confronts” its audience with an “affectively overdetermined experience that she might experience as an act of aggression.” Doyle

[152] Galindo, Regina José, In discussion with the author, May 2022.
[153] Martin Welton, “Seeing Nothing: Now Hear This…” *The Senses in Performance*, eds. Sally Banes and André Lepecki (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 153.

continues, "In visual art, bringing 'the noise of the body' into one's work presents a multisensory, concrete challenge to the basic protocols by which art is identified as such."[154] This challenge to the realm of visual art, as well as its audiences, resonates with the conditions for viewing *(279) Golpes*. The Venice Biennale is one of the most highly regarded spaces for seeing visual artwork in the world. Galindo's work certainly pushes on rubrics for attending art events that major exhibitions like the Venice Biennale reinforce. The sense of being trespassed, or of experiencing an act of aggression at the hand of the artist, comes from this sense of bleeding, proximate sound.

And yet, this sensation of simultaneous saturation and the turn away from it gets closer to a telling of feminicide that is lacking in current discourse. Galindo is not recreating the act of violence that ends a woman's life. Experiencing her work is not the same as experiencing bodily torture, nor will it ever approximate that violence. This is not reenactment. Instead, the work asks us to sit with *the time* of feminicide and its ongoing duration. To count is to figure the total of something, and yet the parentheses around the "(279)" remind us that this number is in flux and on the move *right now*. Galindo's work generates— via the body and its sensorial possibilities— an experience of time that redoes historicization of the epidemic of feminicide. It confronts us with the persistence of bodily violence and its non-exhaustion. It generates a cueing system through the body: the body responds to pain *on cue*. Here, bodies are entangled and enmeshed. The stakes of *(279) Golpes* lie not in its representational force but in its affective argument about the temporal framing of feminicide. It is the time of violence, not the violence itself.

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[154] Jennifer Doyle, *Hold it Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 23.

Presencia

In Galindo's 2017 work *Presencia,* she stands nearly still for two hours in front of audiences. She wears a single piece of clothing from the wardrobe of thirteen murdered Guatemalan women. The work and its accompanying title evoke gestures of memorial, witnessing, and invocation. *Presencia* is really thirteen unique performances housed under the same project. Each installment was performed separately in different sites across Guatemala, Spain, and Greece. Galindo performed for each woman once. The loved ones of each woman collaborated with Galindo in the selection of her specific article of clothing— usually the clothing was chosen pragmatically, because it was part of what little items remained years after their murders. Galindo tells me that she knew some of these families prior to making the work. Others she met through Supervivientes ("Survivors"), a Guatemalan foundation serving families who have lost someone to feminicide. Each piece of clothing is varied in its aesthetics, genderings, and nods toward particular uses: one is the uniform of a police officer, another a girlish dress with a puffy collar. The sites of performance also vary. In one, Galindo stands inside of a lofty room with the gazing audience seated far from her singular body. In another, she stands directly in front of a street vendor as members of the public pass in front of her, seemingly without notice.

Figures 2 and 3: Photos by Ameno Córdoba, Regina José Galindo Website (www.reginajosegalindo.com).

While the work has been presented within a global circuit of performance,[155] it also carries particular meaning in Guatemala City. Galindo's relationships with victims' families has grown more intimate through their work together. There is tension here between Galindo's notoriety in the international art world and her localized relationships with families or intimacy with the quotidian nature of feminicide. In our interview, Galindo continuously emphasizes the work as being for the surviving family members. She was attempting to become a medium, she tells me, specifically for families to carry out relational rituals around mourning and grief. She describes her attempt at transforming her body into a conduit for social grief as emptying herself. She hints at a removal of her individual, felt sensation, as if the core gesture of *Presencia* is the attempt to evacuate her own body to make it of use to the witnessing families. She emphasizes all of the moments that surprised her in which families talked to their lost daughters, mothers, and friends *through* her body. This is an act of withholding, of expelling the self. Galindo's

[155] Her performances at Venice Biennale in 2005 and Documenta14 in 2017 serve as examples.

attempt to become a container removes her own bodily impulse from the site of performance. *Presencia* refuses many aesthetic elements often associated with performance. There is no added motion or sound. The work approximates stillness and silence. In what follows, I analyze the presence of both, as well as Galindo's selection of specific sites as I consider how *Presencia* marks an enduring mourning in the social sphere. If *(279) Golpes* gave the time of feminicidal violence, *Presencia* gives the time of persistent grief, of violence's continuation through survivors. While the latter narrates how brutality makes its force known in quotidian ways, *Presencia* enunciates the endurance of grief. In doing so, it illuminates the afterlives[156] of feminicide, again framing this structure of violence as everyday, inundating, and non-exhausting.

Remains: Stillness + Silence

Galindo's performance of durational standing centers the choreographic action of remaining still. In each of the thirteen installments of *Presencia*, she assumes the same position – feet are planted an inch or two apart from one another, her chest protrudes forward slightly, her arms hang naturally at her sides, and her neck is lifted. There is a slight formality to Galindo's stance in that it is both repeated and presentational. Her eyes appear fixed in the distance. They do not meet audience gazes in relational contact. Instead, her vision appears far away, impenetrable. This sense of formality is emphasized by the duration of her pose. Galindo does not move, committing to the choice of stillness and emphasizing it over and over again as a formal decision. In other words, formality comes from her loyalty to this still form.

Stillness challenges another "God term" (like Colbert, Douglas, and Vogel's note on the term repetition) in performance studies— movement. Of course, the body is never fully still. Muscles rearrange themselves as we stand "still." At times, they flex to hold the body in place

[156] For more on how the afterlives of violence are conceived, see Hartman, *Lose Your Mother, 6*.

and prevent falling. At other times, they release as balance is found through rearranging the placement of bodily weight. Blood flows through veins, breath circulates, and the organs complete their tasks rhythmically. There is always movement. And yet, stillness challenges the expectation of *visible* motion that performance often promises, instead asserting a choreographic task (remaining still or "not" moving) that takes hidden bodily work. To stay still— to remain— requires immense labor.

Galindo's choice of durational stillness emphasizes this gesture's political work. Outside of the framing of performance, movement is a concept often tied to political resistance (as in, political "movements"). To move against is thought of as the *choreography* of resistance. Dance scholar Randy Martin directly ties the choreographic project— anchored in its motion— to political resistance. He emphasizes the *requirement* to move as a part of politics' dance:

> Theories of politics are full of ideas, but they have been least successful in articulating how the concrete labor of participation necessary to execute those ideas is gathered through movement of bodies in social time and space. Politics goes nowhere without movement. It is not simply an idea, decision, or choice taken at a moment but also a transfigurative process that makes and occupies space. When politics is treated merely as an idea or ideology, it occurs in stillness, awaiting something that will bring people to action or mobilize them.[157]

Martin suggests the requirement of motion for political organizing because of its material traces. To move is to rearrange space, he reminds us. I am compelled by Martin's understanding of the political stakes of motion. To move in the world is *to do work on it*. And yet, how might this binding of political meaning and motion actually overlook the political contributions of stillness? How might we take the still body— its remaining— on its own terms? In the discourse of dance studies, movement has also been tied to the colonial impetus of modernity. Andre Lepecki writes, "As the kinetic project of modernity becomes modernity's ontology (its inescapable reality, its foundational truth), so the project of Western dance becomes more and more aligned

[157] Randy Martin, *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics,* (Durham: Duke University Press), 3.

with the production and display of a body and a subjectivity fit to perform this unstoppable motility."[158] Lepecki unveils linkages between lineages of Western concert dance and notions of virtuosity— all framed by an expectation of perpetual motion— to projects of imperialism in the name of modern "progress." Understanding motion as an expectation coupled with both performance and political resistance adds extra weight to asking what stillness might reveal in its embodied labor.

Before moving to the contributions of stillness, I want to visit another concept of performance often framed with overdetermined politics: silence. Silence has been a key word in discussions of subjectivities and their subjugation. Silence often equates to being *silenced*. When Gayatri Spivak famously asked if the subaltern could speak, the linguistic realm was once again tethered to formations of power.[159] Stillness is often read along a binarized line dividing those that can speak and those who cannot. Within many feminist lineages, gender is conceived of along this dividing line. Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar note that, "Silence was regarded as a sign of weakness, particularly for women, and the ability to speak out for women's rights, especially in public became a litmus test for women's liberation and agency."[160] This binary plays out not just along lines of gender but along intersections of power, including the "talkative" West/North and the "silenced" East/South. The underlying message is clear— to speak back, or, to speak at all— is a performance of power with intense cultural signification.

And yet, Galindo's silence— the withholding of her voice or other formal sound in the work— opens up the possibility of doing other work, of thinking alternately about what silence

[158] André Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
[159] See Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," *Can the Subaltern Speak: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, eds. Rosalind C. Morris and Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
[160] Jane L. Parpart and Swati Parashar, "Introduction," *Rethinking Silence, Voice, and Agency in Contested Gendered Terrains* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 1. See also: Tillie Olsen, *Silences*, 1978.

means. Reading silence or stillness as the negative space of speaking back or political activation overdetermines choreographic, *and political*, gestures ripe with critical contribution in the face of enduring violence. Rather than the absence of activation or communication, these gestures offer new sensations of enduring violence, particularly in the way that they shift attention to relational structures of grief unfolding in the social worlds around Galindo's body. *Presencia*'s stillness works temporally to slow time. When I ask her why she chose to perform each installment of the work for two hours, she states, "These are moments of profound reflection where generally time moves very slowly…the passage of time produces an important reflection." [161] As audiences settled into the endurance of the work, they began to unveil actions of grief in relation to Galindo's body, including speaking to the murdered women or caressing her body. Galindo's stillness shifts attention to these social choreographies of grief. Her still body and its temporal play directs attention to the micro-motions and affective responses unfolding around her.

Understanding stillness not as a lack of something, but as a reflection of something often overlooked gives us a new heuristic for reading the endurance of grief. Nadia Serematakis details what this reflection might offer: "There is a stillness in the material culture of historicity; those things, spaces, gestures, and tales that signify the perceptual capacity for elemental historical creation. Stillness is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from historical dust."[162] Serematakis' "dust" gestures to a form of social erasure or that which has become unnoticeable. Galindo's still body rejects the distracting capabilities of motion. To move the body, just as to move through social actions, often hints at perpetual introductions of shift. *I move my hip and your focus goes there. I dance to this corner of the stage and your attention*

[161] Galindo, Regina José, In discussion with the author, May 2022.
[162] Nadia Seremetakis, *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 12.

follows. Her stillness catalyzes a kind of settling or remaining of the body. As she stands still, she still stands. Stillness can be critically linked with a choreography of remaining. To still stand or stand still is to remain in space and time. *To stand still is to endure. To stand still is to pay new attention to endurance.* This endurance gives way to the sensation of what remains as the body (of Galindo and her witnessing audience) quite literally settles into this temporal commitment.

Galindo's performance works at the level of attention, directing it to grief that might be peripheral, slow, subtle, and at risk of being ignored. She works in the face of what Diana Taylor has theorized as "percepticide," in which a self-blinding of the general population in the public sphere occurred so as to avoid the risk of seeing, and of being *seen* seeing. Galindo's stillness withholds her individualism.[163] This still body is not necessarily gesturing at the labor of stillness, despite the legitimate effort required to *still stand*. Micro movements enter her kinetic sphere. Her gaze subtly shifts. A tear falls from her eye. Her shoulders relax and drop in ways that go easily unnoticed. *Presencia* is not the performance of fixity. Instead, it allows the conditions that it stands still amongst to be pronounced. Like Seremetakis' notion of dust rising to the surface, the surrounding world of violence is made noticeable by Galindo's still body.

As this stillness endures, Galindo is quiet. Formal or aesthetic sound is withheld, giving way to a kind of silence that heightens ambient sounds around her. In her indoor performance at Casa de la Memoria, the billowy acoustics of the room heighten the sobbing of someone in the audience. The sonic realm has long been important to mourning rituals. Much has been theorized about the ways that the feminized body has often been the site upon which verbalized grief has played out.[164] Steven Feld has noted discourse on lamentation as "women's work" and "the

[163] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 10 and 122.

[164] For more see Joel Sherzer, "A Diversity of Voices: Men's and Women's Speech in Ethnographic Perspective," in *Language, Gender, and Sex in Comparative Perspective*, Ed. Philips, Steele, and Tanz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

position of lament as a largely women's genre."[165] The gendered nature of vocalized grief also points to the relational labor amidst grief with which women are often tasked. Given this gendering of social roles and mourning, Galindo's silence in *Presencia* performs mourning differently. Galindo has consistently noted her refusal to attempt representation of the victims of feminicide. When I ask her about the pain experienced in *her* body, she refuses my question. "It's not about my pain." And later: "I fully give myself. I give myself so fully that with the energy, I transform myself into a medium."[166] Galindo's silence is not a representation of the silencing of victims. She is disinterested in the violence of *re*-performance. Instead, her silence— the withholding of formalized sound in the work— makes way for the acoustics of relational mourning. *A sniffle here, a sob there.* The sounds of grief mark the work. They are not composed as aesthetics. Instead, the work gives way to the experience of social grief via the sonicity of these wails. Galindo positions her act of silence as a communal one, in which social lamentation is centered and the duration of loss sonically marks the space.

Galindo's performance of stillness and silence is really a performance of new attentiveness to grief. Through these choreographic acts, Galindo's body withholds a kind of individuality in which *her* body communicates *her* message. Instead, she positions her body as a conduit— a "medium," she calls it— upon which the realities of grief can be reflected. Witnesses must sit in the slowed temporality and the subtlety of perception that stillness heightens. Her silence turns attention to lamentation, refusing the distractions of the socially dense world all too blind to it.

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[165] Steven Feld, "Wept Thoughts: The Voicing of Kaluli Memories," *Oral Tradition* 5, No. 2-3 (1990): 242, 258.
[166] Galindo, Regina José, In discussion with the author, May 2022.

On Site

Presencia's occurrence marks geographic sites with memorial forms. Its framing as performance means that a live, communal, and embodied ritual occurs across time and in space. It is temporal because it becomes itself by passing through the bodies of Galindo and audience members. And once it's done, it's done. Leslie Hill comments on the especially ephemeral nature of site-specific performance in her work *Performance and Place*: "They happened. And then they were over. You really had to be there."[167] The "there" of performance deeply matters. *There* is not simply a fixed space. *There* is the geographic contours of performance's communion, of its passing. *There* is also the material site constructed by this gathering. *There* can occur in the time of performance ("live") or in the memories of witnesses. Sites— as in the places of performance— become entangled with the relational bodies at play within them, even as these entanglements are fleeting and recognized in uneven ways.

Sites and the social relations that unfold in them mutually constitute. Feminist and critical geographer Doreen Massey writes, "The 'spatial' then…can be seen as constructed out of the multiplicity of social relations across all spatial scales…It is a view of space opposed to that which sees it as a flat, immobilized surface, as stasis…which is to see space as the opposite of History…The spatial is both open to, and a necessary element in, politics in the broadest sense of the word."[168] The cultural meaning of places are fully entangled in the social functions, memories, and *tensions* that arise in and across them. Space is entangled with power. Subjects experience spaces differently, and this unevenness derives from power differentials that play out within the social realm. These variations, intersections, and differences construct space, giving it its constellations of intersecting meanings. Massey's emphasis of spatial dynamism is a result of

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[167] Leslie Hill, "Mapping the Territory: Introduction," *Performance and Place*, ed. Leslie Hill and Helen Paris (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 6.
[168] Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 4.

embodied engagement with it, and this can be thought of choreographically. Dance Studies scholars Aimee Meredith Cox and San San Kwan both consider choreography in relation to space. Cox states, "Choreography suggests that there is a map of movement or plan for how the body interacts with its environment, but it also suggests that by the body's placement in a space, the nature of that space changes."[169] The choreographic thus is at once the body's decisions in response to space but also the way in which that interaction shapes its surroundings. Kwan discursively weighs in, asking: "How do places choreograph identities and how do identities choreograph places?"[170] The production of subjects and sites are entangled— each a tool in the other's making— and the imprint of bodies on space and space on bodies is a critical contribution of performance's social function, especially when performance's "place" is chosen specifically.

Presencia's sites are fully entangled in how the work makes its social meaning. They specifically emphasize the relational realm of grief in the way that they highlight the ongoing, yet often overlooked, nature of mourning around feminicide. Galindo has performed nine times in Guatemala, once in Spain, and once in Greece. As Galindo shifts to another life lost, so too does the site of performance. The locations she selects thus are both specific and highly varied (sometimes the work is performed outside on the street and at other times, it takes shelter inside). In Greece, Galindo performed *Presencia* at Documenta 14 on Thelpidos Street, an area known for its sex work. When I asked her the connection between Greece and her work, she described the woman the work was performed for as always having wanted to go to Greece. "I got to take her,"[171] she explained. For Galindo, Greece represents something stolen from this victim. Each

[169] Aimee Meredith Cox, *Shapeshifters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.
[170] Kwan, San San. *Kinesthetic City*, 4.
[171] Galindo, Regina José, In discussion with the author, May 2022.

performance site is tethered in some way to the felt loss of each woman. Despite their variation, they emphasize the relational mourning marking each death. Rather than a complete event fixed in the past, the work uses its sites to illuminate the grasp that this grief has on the cultural sphere by centering the social worlds unfolding around the performance itself.

Two examples of *Presencia*'s performance sites allow for closer analysis. In the first, Galindo stands in a large indoor structure with lofted ceilings. Patricia Samayoa was known for bringing "art to zones where violence reigned." Galindo performed her ritual for Patricia accordingly, in Casa de la Memoria, a gallery space often meant for art exhibits and named for art's entanglement with memory. As she stands, the billowy acoustics of the large room take center stage. The space's interior is constructed of hard, dense materials that make acoustics bounce. Ambient sounds become part of the work, marking audience members as active agents in its meanings: a cough erupts, the shuffle of a foot's sole squeaks, and the closing of the door is abrupt. Here, everything is amplified, and focus is shifted to the relational acoustics that Galindo's silence makes way for.

The materiality of this site is what allows for this amplification. Sound studies scholar Benjamin Tausig pushes back on the notion that sound can permeate *everything* and *everyone*, instead noting the materiality's constraint of sonic pathways. He writes, "The 'things' that sound runs into thus depends on how sound is understood, described, practiced, and heard in context. Sound, like political movements, is caught in webs of significance that prevent it from moving freely. Sound is transduced, refracted, and circulated *simultaneously* within architectures of concrete and semantics."[172] Tausig understands sonic meaning as entangled in the materiality of an environment, and vice versa. Sound rearranges the material world, just as the material world

[172] Benjamin Tausig, *Bangkok is Ringing: Sound, Protest, and Constraint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3.

directs the possibilities of sound. As Tausig reminds, the materiality of Casa de la Memoria contributes social significance to *Presencia*. As Galindo stands, we begin to hear the sobs of surrounding witnesses. The site's material attributes generate the sonic experience of the work, allowing for these collective moans and laments to become its central doings.

Figure 4: Photo by Ameno Córdoba, Regina José Galindo Website (www.reginajosegalindo.com).

A separate installment of *Presencia* occurs in an outdoor market in Guatemala City. Galindo's body is installed in front of a vendor selling dresses. When I ask her if this performance had a lot of passersby stumble upon it, she tells me that most of the people in the audience explicitly knew about it, arriving at it intentionally. As she takes her position in the open air, the breeze, birds, and traffic mark the "background" of performance and become entangled in its signification. In these moments outdoors, the performance marks the public realm with the grief of feminicide as it is contrasted by the carriage of usual life around it. Those walking by tend to ignore the performance, pausing only briefly if at all. While family members

in attendance mourn their loved one, bodies traverse the public space surrounding the ritual with little knowledge of the work. Galindo describes *Presencia* as playing a "service role" because "some of the members of the families would talk to me during the performance as if they were saying goodbye to their dead."[173] And yet, this occurrence stands in stark distinction to the normalcy of the day for those passing by. The market emphasizes this contrast, bringing this continuing duration of grief into the fabric of the easily ignored. Mourning is set against the backdrop of the ordinary. Here, public space becomes a setting which overlooks not just the onslaught of violence, but its affective traces in the lives of those who remain without their loved ones.

Figure 5: Photo by Ameno Córdoba, Regina José Galindo Website (www.reginajosegalindo.com).

In our interview, Galindo returns to describing herself as a medium: "Nothing happened more than people being able to see me in these clothes that had the energy that my body assimilated and transmuted." She positions the wearing of these clothes in sites charged with both recognition and erasure as an energetic exchange, noting the ways that the dead might cling

[173] Galindo, Regina José, In discussion with the author, May 2022.

onto, reappear, or revisit. Galindo's presence gestures to the possibility of the ghostly, which Avery Gordon describes as "often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities."[174] While I do not read Galindo as *necessarily* being visited by the ghosts of these women, I do read her own social presence in the relational sites chosen for *Presencia* as ghostly. She inserts the traces of their lives into publics that often overlook them, allowing the sobs and moanings of those left behind to finally take center stage. Gordon's notion of "meddling" is an important one, as Galindo's selections of sites both amplify relational loss as well as the erasure and blindness that contributes to the endurance of feminicide. These sites—their *materiality* and their *sociality*— generate Gordon's ghostly spaces. The ghostly entails a presence that is undeniable because it contrasts with the mundane: it stands out amongst the common habit of ignoring, overlooking, and passing by. Galindo places these histories into the social fabric of sites, just as the sites of this ritualized mourning mark their social importance. To be memorialized publicly is to, in some ways, undo the public forgetting that marks feminicide. And, to have that memorialization take up acoustic, visual, and embodied space is to make it undeniable, central, and beyond the realm of doubt.

Endurance and Mourning

The title of *Presencia* raises questions. What type of presence is invoked? Who is present? Where? Galindo's language around the work suggests a kind of getting out of the way, a moment of "fully giving" her body. Galindo's individualism as a performer is withheld here, making way for something larger than the contours of the individual. Galindo's withholding of her own expression in *Presencia* quite literally makes room, slows time, and gives attention over to something larger than itself. Her stillness and silence become conductors of audience

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[174] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8.

attention. *Look over there. Pay attention. Did you hear that?* The ear and eye and body become more finely attuned to the small shifts around us. Galindo describes these formal decisions as doing temporal work, of slowing time enough to reflect. These combinations of aesthetic, choreographic, or artistically formal choices converge with the aim of generating an experience thick with affective care and heightened attention.

Galindo's stillness and silence challenge the notion of performing opposite to motion and sound. Stillness is not the absence of motion and silence is not the lack of sound. Bodily stillness requires *something*. There are subtle, micro-shifts happening, and the attempt to be still requires huge labor. Similarly, silence is a practice, not an absence. When what is expected at the site of performance— perhaps a musical composition or vocal expression— is withheld, it gives way to other subtle sounds. Stillness and silence take labor, and they work with attention. In *Presencia*, Galindo directs our focus to the subtle shifts— sonic, bodily, haptic, and more— unfolding around us. Her quieter kinesthetic approach allows us to attune to the periphery, and that is where we find what Gordon refers to as a "seething" presence of grief.

Violence is not the only continuous mark that feminicide leaves on the world. Mourning endures too. It reorganizes families, traveling intergenerationally and wounding communities in ways that never fully reveal themselves. The raw pain of violence may heal, but it always leaves scars vulnerable to being opened up again. Mourning is embodied, and it becomes a process of moving through time and space with the carriage of loss' sharp pain. In Guatemala, the lineages of violence that have played out across the bodies and lives of femmes persist. They are carried by the living, who walk with them through quotidian spaces. These spaces— full of other lives and their experiences— often teach us to look away. *Presencia* confronts this, instead installing mourning in sites in ways that allow it to be enunciated in new ways. This enunciation occurs

amidst distraction. Unexpecting passersby arrive at the performance with confusion and then depart. Little in their day may have changed. *Presencia* does the work of slowing time, of sensitizing attention, and of asking us to notice both the undeniability of grief and the ease with which it is ignored. As Massey tells us, sites are made of intersecting, uneven, and often, conflicting experiences. Those conflicts tell us something about power. *Who has to carry this violence? Who does not?* A site is a place in which something is constructed and, as mentioned, space and sociality are entangled in one another's becoming. Galindo's stillness and silence direct attention to the periphery, to *elsewhere*. And then, suddenly, we notice it all. The tears, the sobs, the caress of the family member, the whispering of goodbye to their dead. This deflection of attention away from Galindo's individualized expression leads it to the social sphere and the more nuanced inner workings of grief. The sites selected enhance relationality. Their materiality turns up the volume of grief's presence, just as they amplify awareness of how it is overlooked. *Presencia* subtly choreographs social attention, reminding us that just because something is overlooked on the surface, does not mean that it is not enduring, insistent, and, to use Gordon's phrase, seething.

Conclusion

Galindo's performances make you do work. They make you pay attention, extend your sensory awareness, and stick with them. They are demanding of your engagement, and they also provide you the option to opt out. In audio documentation for *(279) Golpes*, you can hear the whispers of audience members turn to full on chatter, as if audiences slowly begin to ignore the lashing of Galindo's body. Both *(279) Golpes* and *Presencia* allow for the possibility that the audience will indeed turn away from them. And yet, this is part of their political work. As families sob amidst *Presencia*'s passing, others walk by casually. As the intensity of the belt's

whip increases, so too might boredom or impatience. These are part of the sensations of violence— both its extreme, ferocious, and persistent presence, as well as its ability to be so easily ignored. My work is informed by a body of literature grappling with Galindo's work as representing violence, as well as the forms of political response which it generates through spectatorship.[175] My project intervenes by asking us to consider Galindo's withholding in both performances as generating a sensation, a *time*, of violence and the way it takes hold of those who remain. They give us the sense of familiarity as we who witness have to stick with these sensations to stay in the zone of the performance. They remind us that the performance is not over just yet. *Will attention be paid?*

Both works do not require that we do pay attention, but they demand that we confront that decision. *(279) Golpes*— through its duration, sound, and play with the threshold of the skin— perform the ways that violence can at once saturate a room and never stop, while simultaneously becoming the mundane. *Presencia* does similar work for the traces of violence, for its grief. It installs rituals of mourning in architectural and geographic sites that show this deep contrast between recognition and erasure. Both works give its audiences a sense of unstoppable alongsidedness, in which we will always be next to violence and its grasps.

Considering what it means to be alongside of violence is one of the most critical questions that scholarly lineages responding to violence— including transnational feminisms and performance studies scholarship centering redress and state-waged violences— can explore. Distance poses challenges to recognition or localized translation of violence, and it proves seductive, to say the least, in its call to jump to conclusions. The transnational and its scalar proximities are woven into Galindo's work on multiple levels, and her demands of audiences are included in this. Diana Taylor describes Galindo's performance, *Earth,* as exposing how "the

[175] For more see: Amich, 2020; Barbosa, 2014; Bowsill and Lavery, 2012; Mengesha, 2017; Nyong'o, 2019.

disappearance and disposability of populations constitutes an unending moneymaking, transnational event."[176] I join Taylor in reading Galindo's work as responding to a geopolitically expansive understanding of violence. This is not an isolated event, a concluded history, or brutality confined within national limits. The implications of La Violencia, as well as the epidemic of feminicide implicate many. They are entangled in transnational webs of brutalities against femme subjects, and the continuation of disappearance, erasure, and mystery that anchor gendered violences. They are transnational not only in who their political players are, but how witnessing is conducted. Galindo's performances— in which we are positioned alongside, *always alongside*, of violence— mimic the sensation of witnessing violence from afar. And this alongsidedness is marked by a ferocious endurance that never seems to tire and which her work provokes our bodies to *sense*.

These sensations give us new histories of feminicide. My argument throughout this chapter has been that the gesture of withholding within the form of performance allows for new ways to understand feminicide and its lineages. These alternate heuristics push back on the ways that registers of state-waged violence have been framed as fixed in history or disconnected from the contemporary onslaught of feminicide. They also resist the expectation to fully disclose or revisit personal trauma, which the form of testimony runs the risk of doing. Performance gives us live, relational, and embodied pathways towards feeling. It allows us to sense patterns of violence that the form and reception of narrative testimonials often miss. Galindo's performances of withholding challenge imperatives often found in staged performance: Move! Sound! Repeat! Instead, *Presencia* gives us a body that is still, silent, and woven into sites and their social formations. And in *(279) Golpes*, she refuses visual representation, instead asking us to sit with

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[176] Diana Taylor, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 124.

new sensations of violence's duration. In doing so, Galindo's work puts pressure on performance's demands, as well as narrative formations of violence. It reminds us of performance's possibilities to give something new in understanding the endurance of violence. *How do we witness the durational? How do we make sense of that which we are always alongside?* Galindo's work allows us to sense this troubling proximity in our own bodily structures and in our complex geopolitical relationalities. Even as she reminds us of the continuous ferocity of violence and its seething grief, she also shows us our out and makes this choice of attention part of the choreography of response.

CHAPTER TWO

Refusal's Resistance: Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* and Choreographing Transnational Feminist Witnessing

Adorned in black clothing and white headscarves, the cast arrives appearing as a flock. Audience members, arranged in an organic circle, have waited patiently for them. Their entrance is quiet but full of anticipation. They stand there intensely, attempting stillness, and maintaining close proximity to their audience while announcing their difference. As the audience adjusts to their presence, they remain still with their gazes intently focused on the interior of the circle. Are they mourning? Enraged? Publicly protesting? Questions surround the work before the eruption of an embodied beginning takes hold.

The above scene initiates choreographer Bouchra Ouizguen's 2014 work *Corbeaux* (meaning "crows" in French). The work delivers its cast of performers to often public, non-proscenium sites where passersby pause to take in the unfolding scene. The work's French title combined with Ouizguen's Moroccan origins nod at France's colonization of Morocco until its formal independence in 1956. *Corbeaux*'s title directly refers to a species of bird known for its communal grieving practices, and the cast's black clothing suggests visual affiliation to its title's namesakes.[177] The titular designation of the bird is pluralized, emphasizing some importance of the group. Their visual unity suggests this form of communion as they stand silently and still for minutes post-entrance.

Even as the cast lands at its performance site, there is an interplay —perhaps, tension— between communal ties and questions of difference amongst performers. While *Corbeaux*'s cast is composed of members all identifying as femmes, differences in ethnicity, race, and age stand out. Ouizguen's principal cast —that which tours with the work globally —is made up of Moroccan women who have been longtime collaborators. The majority of these performers are in their fifties, sixties, and seventies. As the work circulates, local performers audition and join

[177] Crows are known to gather around their dead as part of the species' mourning practices, as well as a mode to collect information about potential sources of danger. Kaeli Swift, "Why Crows Gather Around Their Dead," Corvid Research, September, 2015, Accessed April 2, 2023, https://corvidresearch.blog/2015/09/26/why-crows-gather-around-their-dead/

Corbeaux in each new performance site. A 2017 casting call for workshop-based auditions read: "Anyone who is curious about the project, identifies as a woman, and is 15-45 years of age is welcome to attend."[178] Those joining locally are generally younger than the Moroccan cast, and as the work tours to mainly Western spaces, the overall whiteness of joining locals distinguishes most new performers from the work's central figures. As *Corbeaux* unfolds, its core physical gesture consists of cast members standing with their eyes closed and repeatedly throwing their heads and necks backwards and forwards as they release guttural sounds. As I discuss later in this chapter, the work responds to the ousting of gendered subjects from the public sphere. By staging this raw enunciation in public, Ouizguen offers a form of resistance against these gendered restrictions. The effort and exhaustion that this motion demands becomes apparent through its repetition and thirty minute duration. While this embodied and sonic gesture shares a basic form across performers, the variation of the vocal cords and physical grappling of each cast member is evident as they labor through the choreographic task.

The varied differences on display within the cast— age, ethnicity, race, body type, physicality, vocality, and more —mark their gendered, transnational entanglements. The presence of white headscarves —possibly nodding to Muslim veiling practices for women— on primarily non-Muslim subjects raises questions of Ouizguen's intentions. One audience member named the curiosities that quickly erupted in her head as she watched the work's inauguration: "How do I translate this? Or what is the significance of this? Or what is this signifying?...What do I think or feel about that being on people that are not Muslim? Is Bouchra Muslim? Is this a style that I don't know?"[179] These questions travel with the work, shifting in content as they change localities. While *Corbeaux* has been performed in Morocco, its primary onstage life

[178] Casting call for Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* from Erin Boberg Doughton (Artistic Director and Curator of Performance, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art), Portland, Oregon, February 21, 2017.
[179] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 3, 2021.

exists in a global circuit of contemporary performance. The majority of its occurrences have taken place in Western Europe, and its U.S. premiere transpired in 2017. The work thus takes transnational relationalities (the organization of social associations) and responses as part of its choreographic ingredients, as it delivers questions around appropriation, [mis]translation, colonization, and the [dis]placement of bodily practices to public sites around the globe.

Corbeaux concludes with a moment of joyous, improvised dancing by the cast. After a long period of toiling through this choreography of the head and neck, they arrive at stillness for several minutes, followed by a surprising burst into a celebratory moment of dancing together. Hands clap, voices holler, bodies move around the circular "stage" generated by the boundary of onlooking bodies. Performers follow one another around the circle together with a straggler here or there shaking her hips and appearing lost in her danced finale. And, just like that, the cast departs. The often public nature of *Corbeaux*'s performance sites support the sensation of a sudden encounter —condensed and intimate in nature —that is over as soon as it emerges. The work's title reifies this process of touching down, then taking flight. Unexpecting witnesses stumble upon this scene, as those knowingly attending soak up its sonic and choreographic elements amidst the surrounding architecture, open air, or locally significant spaces, including parks or city squares. Ouizguen's work spills into these spaces with intensity, bringing various casts, spectators, and locals into relationality, just as it choreographs the meeting of the human, environmental, and architectural as a persistent backdrop for the work before this choreography departs with few questions answered.

As displayed by the audience member quoted above, these unanswered questions are catalyzed by the transnational differences amongst the cast. Elements which *could* be perceived as embodied signifiers of cultural meaning (the choreographic gesture, sonic components,

costuming, and more) are staged to be front and center as they are displaced across new, localized bodies. They appear both out of place on these new bodies, as well as highly contextualized on *Corbeaux*'s circulating cast. The work leaves this sense of the unexplained in its dust. Ouizguen's mode of interaction with cast and audiences doubles down on this form of evasiveness. Often peppered with queries about meaning or intention during rehearsal or in public facing interviews, she is tight-lipped: her answers avoid completing the narratives of those asking and invoke a form of refusal. In an artist talk for 2017 performances, Ouizguen responds to an audience's specific question about *Corbeaux*'s narrative in the following way: "I like this idea of disobeying, of people who are not obeying."[180] Her response suggests an intentional play with refusing the inquiries coming her way, even amidst the institutional demands to divulge that can accompany an artist talk. During rehearsals for the same set of performances, a local cast member asks about the significance of the gesture she is performing. Ouizguen evades response by asking the cast to stand and practice the choreography yet again. Her elusive approach to the myriad of questions that swarm *Corbeaux* in its new contexts is not confined to Ouizguen's personal communication with casts or spectators. Instead, the work itself utilizes layers of refusal to emphasize the transnational within its aesthetic and choreographic structures.

In what follows, I center the ways that refusal and the transnational duet in *Corbeaux*, as I consider what the choreographic turn to refusal might suggest for transnational feminist witnessing and coalitional redress. I consider how Ouizguen utilizes affective, embodied, and aesthetic aspects of performance to generate a felt sense of the transnational differences and alliances that unfold. In staging the transnational, I then illuminate how Ouizguen's modes of refusal —including on- and offstage choices to withhold, deny, take back, and "fail" as instrumental choreographic particles that infuse the work —dial up the mysteries and questions

[180] Bouchra Ouizguen, Artist Talk (PICA's TBA Festival, PICA, Portland, Oregon, 2017).

that accompany practices of witnessing transnational distinctions in performance. I consider how this refusal performs critical commentary on the relational matrices that emerge when bodies move through choreographies differently, yet communally, across cultural and geographic divides. Throughout, I consider the ways in which questions not only go unanswered, but are *staged to do so.* This explicit staging of both the transnational elements of the work and performed refusals becomes a choreography not just of the body, but of transnational relationships in response to gendered bodies moving together in public.

By offering a hermeneutic for reading all that refuses, stops short of, or eludes, the concept of "failure" that I invoke has a winkish intonation behind it. *Corbeaux* moves against expectations rather than being unsuccessful at fulfilling them. In other words, what may be perceived as "failure" here is actually the work intentionally evading rubrics for disclosure that surround its transnational mysteries. This refusal to fulfill offers insight into how witnessing across transnational lines puts pressure on the dancing body to perform. I consider how Ouizguen's refusal redirects this pressure to viewers by making the demands of transnational witnessing visible and felt. These demands are complicated by the work's gathering of femme bodies performing in difference publicly. What is shared in this work? How does gender announce a communion? What happens to that tether across lines of transnational differences? And what might it mean for this gendered, transnational communion – marked by its many refusals – to unfurl in public? Ultimately, I argue for the ways in which *Corbeaux* marks transnational difference through a choreography of refusal unveiled through the witnessing practices which the performance instigates. In doing so, *Corbeaux* reveals the fault lines with which transnational feminist alliances must grapple.

This chapter takes up interest in the *doings* of refusal. Dance and Performance Studies scholar Ariel Osterweiss reminds us that the act of disavowal in performance offers up something, as it "functions as a promise of an alternative, an acknowledgment of normative visual regimes followed by movements that escape their hold."[181] Here, refusal does not just disavow, it highlights the projection of expectation that specifically occurs in the visual, aural, and kinaesthetic context of spectatorship. That which is refused is undergirded by demands placed by spectators onto the moving body. In *Corbeaux*'s context, those demands are constructed by the way the work is both marked by transnational casting structures and global circulation, as well as how Ouizguen emphasizes the transnational through choreographic and aesthetic functions that highlight differences across the cast. Here, I consider how the work suggests negation as a generative tool for thinking otherwise within transnational witnessing, specifically as it reveals the projections, assumptions, and expectations through which transnational, feminist witnessing practices must labor.

Following a conception of refusal that generates alternate modes for recognizing the entanglements of projection and expectation with witnessing across transnational lines, this chapter is specifically focused on how sonic, choreographic, and haptic aspects of the work stage evasiveness. Across these elements of performance, refusal announces itself differently. Sonically, I consider how the performers' vocalizations spread the affective resonances of the work. This spread circulates amongst both present audience members and unknowing passersby. I explore how this affect is detached from a visual confirmation of the sonic source's location, generating a state of unknowing for witnesses that catalyzes projection and fantasy, aiming them at the work and its cast. In considering the central choreographic gesture of *Corbeaux*, my

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[181] Ariel Osterweis, "Disavowing Virtuosity, Performing Aspiration: Choreographies of Anticlimax in the Work of Yve Laris Cohen, Narcissister, and John Jasperse," *Future of Dance Studies,* ed. Susan Manning, Janice Ross, and Rebecca Schneider (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 442.

analysis focuses on how the labor of the head and neck challenges notions of full-bodied virtuosity while also raising painful stakes for performers. This pain works on bodies differently, highlighting varied levels of (un)familiarity and (dis)comfort across members of the cast. I consider how this differentiation of cast members is one way in which transnational distinction is unveiled through the choreographic functions of *Corbeaux*. The final embodied and aesthetic element which I analyze is the role of touch in the cast's offstage rituals. I explore how the haptic replaces semiotic communication across performers as linguistic translation is refused via transnational casting structures. I question how this exchange initiates a negotiation of violence that is part of the work's relational choreography. By emphasizing these sonic, choreographic, and haptic elements of *Corbeaux*, I unearth the ways in which *Corbeaux*'s varied modes of refusal unveil how projection, fantasy, and negotiation of incompletion and difference are ingrained within witnessing practices amongst transnational, feminist relationalities. This performance stages these qualities, bringing them to fruition via artistic and aesthetic devices. As it stages them, it both reveals the tensions which pulse throughout feminist affiliation amongst transnational difference, urging for consideration of how transnational socialities might differently grapple with them in their coalitional resistances.

In what follows, I begin my analysis of these artistic elements by contextualizing *Corbeaux* within Ouizguen's artistic background, conceptual investments, and the work's touring history. I then elaborate on how gender and the transnational are at play within *Corbeaux*, especially emphasizing how the work might be put in dialogue with critical transnational feminist discourses. This chapter comes to a close with a meditation on how this performed gathering of femmes might matter differently under the public eye. I question how notions of publics matter to transnational feminist thought, as well as how *Corbeaux* stages a resistance to

gendered ousting from the public sphere as it performs the communal, vulnerable, and "private" in publicly accessed sites. Throughout, this chapter elucidates the layered ways in which Ouizguen stages refusal through *Corbeaux*'s formal choices as it asks: *What does the act of refusal unveil about transnational relationalities? How does transnational spectatorship shift when refusal is choreographed? And, how do acts of refusal in performance generate new understandings for transnational feminist relationalities?*

Beginnings

Corbeaux's amalgamation of performers across localities signal an interest of the work in the entanglements of subjects and place. While common within global circuits of performance for works to travel outside of their originary regional or national contexts, *Corbeaux* differently incorporates locality by adding artists from communities which it tours to into its mix of embodied practices and collaborations. Ouizguen's decisions around casting her central collaborators parallel an interest in entanglements between identity and location. In searching for her core cast of collaborators, she puts emphasis on the spaces within Morocco from which they came, stating, "When I started looking for other artists, I looked inside of the contemporary dance small world….I didn't find people….so, I said then, I have to look for artists outside of the city, outside of Marrakech...I wanted people out of that, out of the fashion, out of the tourism...so then I looked for the countryside...people are surprised that you go there and that you find artists, and you find amazing artists, and I said this is going to take years."[182] Ouizguen marks her search with a durational intimacy that moves away from the rapid consumerism of urban, global markets of travel. Instead, she emphasizes the slow build of relationality across geographic

[182] Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, "Corbeaux (Cuervos). Bouchra Ouizguen, Compagnie O," YouTube Video, 8:01, October 17, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoLzt3JJG7M.

spaces often positioned on the margins as she focused on more rural sites such as Beni Mellal to locate artistic collaboration.

Growing up in Ouarzazate, a city bordering the High Atlas mountains in Morocco, Ouizguen is currently based in Marrakech,[183] where she works as a dancer and choreographer. As a child, Ouizguen danced locally and performed in her neighborhood every two weeks but did not receive any formal dance training. At the age of 20, she began creating staged works, and "her professional break came in 2006, when Jean-Paul Montanari, director of the Montpellier dance festival, commissioned two pieces after seeing a film of her work."[184] Since, she has made primarily ensemble-based works, and her collaborators have performance backgrounds from varied disciplines, including music, singing, and dance. She has made multiple full length works with this core set of women artists, including *Madame Plaza* (2008) and *Ha!* (2012), Ouizguen became interested in choreographing the face, head, and neck as she developed *Ha!*, and upon finishing the work, she took a particular gesture of the head from *Ha!* and centered it in her next work, *Corbeaux*. With its primary Moroccan cast and added participants in each city it travels to, *Corbeaux* is performed in sites selected by Ouizguen for their local significance. They are often outdoors, making public encounters more possible. As noted, *Corbeaux* has mainly been performed outside of Morocco, and it is often presented by contemporary art institutions.[185]

[183] I follow the spelling of Marrakech that Ouizguen employs (as opposed to the alternative "Marrakesh") .
[184] Roslyn Sulcas, "Bouchra Ouizguen, Finding the Difference in Sameness," New YorkTimes, September 26, 2017, Accessed August 2023.
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/26/arts/dance/bouchra-ouizguen-crows-brooklyn-museum.html
[185] *Corbeaux* was first performed at a dance festival in Marrakech, when Ouizguen was asked to perform *Ha!* but "did not have the necessary time and technical resources" to do so. She asked collaborators to perform only the movement of the head and neck. She was then invited by Kunsten Festival des Arts and Nouveau Théâtre de Montreuil to present the same work. Thus, *Corbeaux* was developed as it began to tour outside of Morocco.

Figure 6: Cast members of Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* resting backstage between performances at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2017, Photo by the author.

The sensation of *Corbeaux*'s central choreographic gesture— recoiling the upper body followed by its propulsion forward— is archived in my own body. I encountered this work as a performer in 2017 when it made its U.S. premiere at the Time Based Arts Festival in Portland, Oregon (it would later go on to be performed at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Brooklyn Museum in New York, amongst other U.S. institutions). Presented by Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA), *Corbeaux* was performed three times over the course of a September weekend. My experience throughout the processes of auditioning, rehearsing, performing, and sharing time offstage with Ouizguen and the cast, as well as being in overlapping artistic circles to many of the audience members that attended *Corbeaux* at the TBA Festival deeply inform this research. Additionally, I conducted interviews with over forty audience members in Portland, local cast members, and Ouizguen, and closely analyzed performance documentation. While original plans included traveling to Norway to attend newly staged performances of *Corbeaux* and Morocco to join Ouizguen's rehearsals and conduct interviews with her central Moroccan cast members, those plans for fieldwork were disrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.[186] Thus, I rely on analysis of documentation of performances in

[186] COVID-19 led to the cancellation of performances of *Corbeaux* in Norway.

Portland and five other sites.[187] My methodological use of critical ethnography in this chapter infuses it with an investment in bodily, affective, and relational experience from "inside" of the work as valuable modes for understanding the cultural stakes of performance.

On Refusal: Political Openings

What might a "no" mean? As I attended rehearsal after rehearsal, watched Ouizguen's subtle dodging of cast questions around meaning or local significance, and experienced the barrage of questions that audience members of the work had for me (one of its "locals"), this question returned time and time again. What are the political doings and makings of refusal? My interest here in refusal is two fold. On the one hand, I read it as a resistant move. Refusal directs our attention to inadequacies, unveiling them for what they lack. It is not simply a negation, but a revelation that that which is presumed falls short. However, I approach refusal not only as a form of negation but as an embodied *doing*. To disavow is generative. It makes an offering for otherwise. In noting thin description as a methodological tool that performs "gestures of nondisclosure," Tina Post reminds us that "it does disclose plenty in its own right."[188] Post's words remind us that the offerings of refusal must be taken on their own terms, *in their own right*. Reading refusal as generative rather than solely a form of negation is reliant upon the heuristics with which we approach it. As refusal disobeys, it unveils that which it rejects. This offering is affective— it makes something happen via emotional registers in which once can sense— uniquely amidst the clutch of dominant rubrics— an otherwise possibility. Refusal can catalyze many states in response to it: confusion, anger, defensiveness, self-deprecation, and

[187] In addition to analyzing the performances of *Corbeaux* at PICA in Portland in 2017, I additionally secured documentation of performances at Kunsten Festival des Arts (Brussels, Belgium), Fondation D'Entreprise Hermès (Paris, France), the Crossing the Line Festival (New York, U.S.), Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid, Spain), and the Wiener Festwochen (Vienna, Austria).
[188] Tina Post, "I Will Against Your Way: On Black Embodiment and Poetic Discomposure," *ASAP Journal* 6, No. 1 (2021): 131.

more. Affectively, it leaves those who it responds to lacking what they presumed would become theirs.

Perhaps a better question than *What might a 'no' mean?* is *What can it do? What does it make knowable?* Refusal's affective charge has leftovers: its resistance pushes back, then leaves those proximate to it with a sense of something falling short. At times, it allows those in its wake to sense the untenable nature of that which it disavows. Refusal is thus political, as it offers commentary on formations of power that arrive via expectations: to tell, to share, to make public, and to narrate. Its politics do not rely on how well or not the others involved understand. It generates critique in its very occurrence. Within the context of *Corbeaux*, refusal may appear as a failure to comply with certain expectations around completing the quest for the work's meaning, significance, and narrative that surface from eager witnesses. This failure to fulfill is also generative. Jack Halberstam has described the potential of failure in the following way: "And while failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life."[189] The critique that refusal, failure, and disavowal generate aims itself at the ways in which expectant demands operate on presumptions of fulfillment, agreement, positivity, and completion.

Ouizguen's refusal pushes back on these presumptions and their expectation to tell, always. What might it mean to refuse revelation, especially in the conditions under which *Corbeaux* is performed? The transnational motion of *Corbeaux* which comes alive in its touring structure and choreographic ingredients subjects the work, its cast, and Ouizguen to shifting expectations, guesses, and presumptions as it travels. One local cast member noted in awe that

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[189] Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

she wondered how it must feel to "be perceived so many times"[190] as the work moves locations. *Corbeaux* plays with its own outsiderness as it lands in new and specific contexts, especially as it mixes its primary cast with "locals." Thus, the layers of refusal pulsing throughout *Corbeaux* respond to conditions of its presumed otherness. In the face of this presumption, how does refusal generate alterity? Ouizguen's refusal across modes of *Corbeaux*'s production generate a new mode of telling that comes from the coy evasiveness, changes of subject, unanswered questions, and that which is not revealed, given to, or made consumable for its audiences. It generates modes of critiques for the social choreographies that unfold in response to it as this refusal plays out. Revealing the presumptions of witnesses, the work allows a transnational display of unknowns and how we handle them to be entangled in its aesthetic, experiential fabric. Just as the audience member quoted in my opening sentences revealed, her unanswered questions unveil her projections onto the work which shape her very experience with it. While some form of projection is always possible in witnessing other bodies performing, *Corbeaux* specifically reveals new insight into the entanglements of projection and transnational witnessing. It puts primarily Western audiences and their questions around cultural and gendered differences on full display. As I will evidence, the various artistic decisions made in the construction of the work contribute to generating layers of mystery within the work, thus further prompting these questions of cultural meaning across geographic differences. The work raises new questions around how disavowal might open up new affective negotiations by revealing the fault lines with which transnational, feminist witnessing must grapple.

[190] Anonymous cast member in discussion with the author, September 30, 2021

On Transnationalism and Gender

Before moving to exploring how the staging of sonic, choreographic, and haptic elements within *Corbeaux* perform refusal, I want to pause briefly to elaborate on how I read gender and the transnational as part of the work. As noted in the above stated casting call, Ouizguen works with local performers who "identify as women," and they join a Moroccan cast of all "women-identifying" performers. Many of the local cast members that I have continued relationships with approach gender fluidly or do not *only* identify as women. Thus, I read gender in the work as a complex site of subjectivity, in which Ouizguen's investment in a category of womanhood, the self-selection of local performers who respond to the audition call's language around the category of "woman," and the gender non-conforming identity of some performers demonstrate both the tensions at play in the category of womanhood, as well as the political possibilities of gendered coalition.

The work's gendered communing is staged in public spaces, and the collective vocalization of the cast generates a haunting presence. Critical questions are initiated by this gathering: What does this choreography of collectivity do for gendered concerns, especially in its transnational configuration? How does this femme communion signify differently in public? How does their collective wailing respond to histories of gendered ousting from public space? What form(s) does it take? Testimony? Mourning? Protest?

The gendered nature of the work cannot be disentangled from its transnational elements, which I approach within *Corbeaux* as a structure or affiliation that unfolds outside of the boundaries of the nation. The touring of this central Moroccan cast puts them in new relationalities with local femmes as the work circulates. In each new site, the embodied practices that *Corbeaux* deposits in the bodies of local cast members via mentorship from its Moroccan

cast culturally signify differently. While contemporary performances often travel globally, this joining of locality to the circulating Moroccan cast marks the transnational as a specific ingredient of *Corbeaux*. These embodied practices are not simply re-located into new spaces and onto new physicalities. In each space, they produce new sociocultural meanings and questions based on the convergences of meanings perceived in each locality. The work's meaning thus comes, in part, from how it is embodied locally. This transnational circulation of choreography is archived in new, local bodily memories as it touches down. This expands *Corbeaux*'s archival impulses across national borders. The bodies of these local performers become the archive for the work, along with its locally produced significance. This archival amalgamation across bodies is made possible by relational structures between these groups of femme subjects. Because these shifting, relational entanglements are generated by *Corbeaux*'s highly intentional casting structure, the work choreographs not only the danced practices of bodies but transnational, femme relationalities across cast members as well.

The communal tethers of *Corbeaux* center a dance between what is shared, what is different, and how those differences generate a relational contrast amongst performers. Apparent difference abounds. Local additions are younger than the overall elder Moroccan cast. Having locals join the cast in each new site of performance— and their distinction from the primary Moroccan cast— brings questions of geographic or national difference into play. The placement of a headscarf onto local bodies (some of whom are Muslim, while the majority are not) raises the question of *dis*- or *mis*placement of cultural signifiers— including what could be perceived as a veil— onto new bodies. These bodies are local to the site of performance, meaning they are *in* place (geographically), yet appear out of place wearing this headscarf. The majority of the local performers in the performances which I analyzed are white, though not all. This contrast between

the primary and local casts is made apparent via visual, aural, and kinaesthetic distinction between these bodies (age, race, ethnicity, and more). It also shows itself in how each group moves through *Corbeaux*'s choreographic tasks. Familiarity and strength within the motion and sounding of the work are more apparent on the Moroccan cast than they are on locals, who strain and struggle to labor through until they reach the finale.

While these various distinctions between the Moroccan and local casts are apparent, the work also choreographs shared characteristics between these performers. Gender is a point of affiliation amongst the cast. In the opening moment of the work, the layered configuration of performers in a triangular clump visually ties them to one another. To see one, you must look around or beside another. A composite visual is generated as views of individuals are interrupted by this collective, choreographic stance. Costumes are all in black (with slight differences only recognizable upon closer look), constructing some form of uniformity. Headscarves remove bangs, hair color, and the shape of the forehead from each face, making individuation more difficult. Multiple audiences in Portland reflected on the strain they experienced to recognize their local friends in the work. The visual labor that audiences must undergo to differentiate cast members is constructed via these costuming and choreographic choices. Throughout the work, there is a constant interplay between the individual and the collective, the local and the transnational, and the shared and the distinct.

In considering *Corbeaux* through a transnational feminist lens, I am not arguing that the work declares itself as transnational or feminist. Instead, I'm interested in how it opens up critical questions for transnational feminist thought. As discussed in my introduction, this lineage of scholars has catalyzed discourse around what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call "theories of travel," in which they hope to "explore how we come to do feminist work across

cultural divides."[191] Their interest in understanding gender as entangled in localized power formations with specific expressions implicates western feminist concepts of "sisterhood" and the uneven power structures *within* the category of womanhood that this concept glosses over. They urge for coalitions that do not flatten localized conditions of gender and its tethers to other subject formations into Western conceptions. They show interest in transnational coalition and critique alongside localized specificity of how power impacts gender. *Corbeaux*'s mode of performing a gendered communion in public spaces is just as important as its interest in how embodied practices circulate and change outside of Morocco. It raises questions of how gendered coalition might be understood, troubled, and negotiated across transnational difference, and it does so at the site of the body. My work not only considers *Corbeaux* through transnational feminist genealogies, it intervenes in this discourse by considering how questions of transnational feminist coalition might be generated through and complicated by embodied and aesthetic practices in performance.

When I refer to the transnational throughout this chapter, I refer to a sense of affiliation that unfolds outside of and across national boundaries. I refer to how *Corbeaux* becomes a site where the transnational is both choreographed and emphasized. And, I refer to how this work can be a site to think in transnational, feminist ways about coalitional politics through and with the body. This project wages the stakes of transnational feminist relationality in an embodied form (as opposed to a semiotic or linguistic form). It mobilizes unique gendered and transnational relationalities, and it puts pressure on how we might witness women across transnational geographic gaps. Posing these questions through the embodied practice of performance is a form of *enacting*, of putting thought into motion via bodies moving through it, rehearsing it, and practicing its possibilities. And, by reading the practices of refusal in and across sonic, haptic,

[191] Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies,* 1.

and painful elements of *Corbeaux*, I consider how the work unveils the fraught negotiations that encompass transnational, feminist coalition.

Sonic Travel: On Excess

Moments of quiet pass once performers walk into the center of the circle and take their places. Then suddenly, a sonic wall of vocality erupts. They throw their heads forward as they unleash guttural wails. They recoil their necks backwards in a sinewy formation on their inhales, then release forward again. A repetitious exchange of vocal bursts is generated. Parts of the cast vocalize on the first beat, heads pulsing down, the tails of their white fabric flying overhead. Meanwhile, the rest of the cast wind their heads back in preparation to do the same. This repetitious exchange creates a sonic teeter totter that mobilizes a steady rhythm, even as the textures and aesthetics of their timbres shift. A desperate communal wail is established, even as moments of individual nuance punctuate the vocal landscape.

The sonic is a central component of *Corbeaux*, as its auditory composition drives the work's repetitive duration. Performers wail, then breathe, then wail again, as this pattern cycles continuously. The accompanying embodied choreography and vocalization are mutually supportive. The winding of the head and neck backwards catalyzes the thrust forward as the cast releases acoustically. Formally structured through this repetition, there is a tenuous quality as performers attempt to keep an internal group rhythm while also struggling with the exhaustion of vocalizing over time. In centering this vocality, Ouizguen has choreographed an embodied, vulnerable encounter. Audiences quite literally brush up against this powerful aural experience in performance sites that are either public or hold open air components in which sound is not enclosed. For those intentionally attending the performance, sound bursts out of perceived quiet and physical stillness— the performers stand calmly for nearly a minute before this primary section of the work erupts. For unassuming passersby, this guttural exchange becomes an unexpected encounter despite visual separation: those who hear the work as it spills out of the border of the performance space still experience this haunting wail despite an inability to see

performers. Ouizguen's embodied form of reckoning with another makes avoidance of this "other" difficult— even as visuality is cut off, the sonic presence of the work is persistent.

Corbeaux's aural arrangement stages refusal by performing varied forms of excess, in which the work evades different forms of containment and disclosure. Mainly staged in public spaces, sound travels not just outside of architectural containers, but sociocultural ones as well, as it leaves the space of performance in which it is more firmly introduced and contextualized and bleeds into unexpecting social environments on the street, in the city, in homes, and elsewhere. This fugitive noise generates different forms of unknowing and mystery, as it is detached from its context and marked by mystery. As I explain, this state of unknowing occurs for both unexpecting passersby, as well as intentional audience members, albeit in different ways. This state of mystery mobilizes the formation of imaginaries and projections which are directed onto the work and its vocalizing cast. In other words, *Corbeaux*'s sonic aesthetics and structures— as they exceed containment— generate a social desire to fill in the blanks and project narratives onto the work. By excess, I'm attending definitionally to "an amount of something that is more than necessary, permitted, or desirable."[192] *Corbeaux* stages a sonic world that supersedes containment as it spreads an affective charge to those within its range of impact. This charge, marked by mystery and the unknown, exposes the failures of neat identification— be it sonic, cultural, or locational— that are at play in the experience of witnessing the work. This refusal to be identified simultaneously takes witnesses' projections as part of its socially choreographed function: as voices ring out and evade multiple forms of identification, the social projections onto *Corbeaux* become a critical part of the work's choreographic endeavor.

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[192] *Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v.* "excess," accessed July 6, 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/excess

In considering how refusal is choreographed within *Corbeaux*, as well as how it unveils negotiations of difference for transnational femininst entanglements, my work is critically invested in how the sensation of performance contributes to relationalities among distinct and varied subjects. The experience of *Corbeaux*'s sound is not simply an aesthetic process, but a social one. The process of listening, hearing, and sounding is a corporeal practice processed at the level of the sensing body, thus forming the subject phenomenologically. Gayle Salaman considers phenomenology as a lineage of thinking that posits the body as "fundamentally important to subjectivity, vital and essential to it rather than a distraction from it….[It is] more than merely its materiality, emphasizing the importance of how one feels in and senses with and inhabits one's body." [193] Phenomenologically, feeling ourselves turn our ear in proximity to another alerts us to our place in the world. This feeling of ourselves is a relational orientation made possible by another and established at the bodily level. Anthony Gritten argues in his essay "Resonant Listening" that the "ontology of the subject is auditory; that the subject is constituted as (a) listening. This listening is rhythmic and is a matter of resonance before it becomes a matter of intentionality and thence signification and identity."[194] For Gritten, the resonance of auditory experience that flows through the subject generates a pattern of listening in, which catalyzes subject formation. Following Jean-Francois Lyotard, Gritten writes:

> To get (back) to timbre we need to consider what happens before listening becomes an activity of hermeneutic interpretation, before the contents of perception are transformed into a signifying object: before the semiotic turn. 'Before' in this context does not denote a moment of choice as such. It denotes the moment when sound is still timbre and yet to be assimilated and phrased in terms of meanings and significations, the moment when 'Sensation makes a break in an inert nonexistence.'"[195]

[193] Gayle Salaman, "Phenomenology," *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, No. 1-2 (2014): 154.
[194] Anthony Gritten, "Resonant Listening," *Performance Research* 15, No. 3 (2010): 116.
[195] Ibid, 116.

Gritten's "sound" exists prior to its semantic significance— it occurs as it is experienced corporeally as resonance, which he describes as catalyzing the subject's "listening in and overhearing, straining to hear something that is not quite fully within earshot."[196] In this process, "the subject, then, is self-reflexive and listens to itself, 'straining toward or in an approach to the self.'"[197] I follow this consideration of subjectivity as informed by the relational turn of *listening into*—of recognizing— another. The phenomenological experience of the sonic notifies the body of another and thus, of itself.

Corbeaux stages a form of vocality that alerts the audience to the presence of the humans standing before them, as it refrains from centering semiotics. Instead of words, the cast unleashes tonal utterances: "*Ha!," "Ho!," or "Ah!."* This collective volley of wails and hollers flies through the air, sending sonorous vibrations at and through the surrounding audience members. Gritten's understanding of "straining to hear" is evoked as those purposefully there for the work are confronted with this wall of sound, *and* as those unexpectedly within aural proximity come upon this vocal landscape from afar. *Corbeaux* overflows the boundaries of the visual. Soundwaves travel beyond seeable bodies and architectural restrictions, announcing the work's presence through and across physically dense materials that disrupt optical recognition. In his writings on vibrational affect and Jamaican dancehall, Julian Henriques writes: "Against the conventionally fixed boundaries of the individual, sound waves exhibit remarkable powers of diffusion— round corners, unlike the straight line of sight and even through objects, which are mostly impenetrable to light waves."[198] Henriques theorizes that the vibrations of sound waves have their own non-physical materiality, and that their propagation occurs "not only in the

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[196] Ibid, 117.
[197] Ibid, 118.
[198] Julian Henriques, "The Vibrations of Affect and their Propagation on a Night Out on Kingston's Dancehall Scene," *Body & Society* 16, No. 57 (2010): 59.

material medium of solids, liquids, and gases, but also...in *corporeal* and *sociocultural* media."[199] The body becomes a critical component to Henriques' argument that the spread of sonic vibrations "could serve as a better model for understanding the transmission of affect,"[200] thus theorizing the critical connection between the social force of affect to the spread of sound. As sound evades containment, its "propagation" of affect materializes its social impact within the body. Following Henriques, the centering of sonorous vibration in *Corbeaux* and the sites in which it is installed allows for a sociality that exceeds the physical demarcation of the performance site. The work overflows the often already established public nature of these sites, transmitting affective impulses outside of the performance's physical and social borders and putting pressure on any imagined containment of the work's relational force.

The emission of these sonic scapes generates an excessive surplus that extends beyond not just the performance location, but sites already marked by their unboundedness due to their public nature. This overflow intensifies the availability of this affective experience to passersby unaware of the performance's occurrence. The work is often performed in town squares, on sidewalks, or in natural spaces, including parks and greenways. It was performed in London's Kensington Gardens, North Commons Park in Minneapolis, and in a square outside Lisbon's Castelo de São Jorge (Saint George Castle). *Corbeaux*'s 2017 Portland performance sites (Peninsula Park and PICA's industrial space) were marked by publicness differently. The park – a nod to Portland's nickname, "The City of Roses" —has a density of communal engagements. One audience member described it as "a special place" with "so many convergences...there's so many different cultures coming together in so many different ways."[201] Differently, the

[199] Ibid, 59.
[200] Ibid, 57.
[201] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 3, 2021

large-scale doors on either side of PICA's space fully open the expansive room to surrounding neighborhoods with heavy pedestrian foot traffic.

For those unfamiliar with the occurrence of the performance, *Corbeaux*'s sonic landscape becomes sound unattached to an identifiable source, or what Pierre Schaeffer identifies as "acousmatic."[202] Michael Kane argues that the experience of acousmatic sounds allows the listener to separate sight from sound, as she "concentrates on the sound for its own sake, as sound object, independently of its causes or its meanings." For Kane, this emphasis on the sound "as sound object" exceeds the aesthetic or semiotic meanings of the sound. Instead, he describes the *experience* of acousmatic listening as a "cultural practice" marked by "a shared, intersubjective practice of attending to musical and nonmusical sounds, a way of listening to the soundscape that is cultivated when the source of sounds is beyond the horizon of visibility, uncertain, underdetermined, bracketed, or willfully and imaginatively suspended."[203] Kane's notion that this uncertainty of source and attention to sound as "object" generates intersubjectivity is helpful in considering the practice of listening that *Corbeaux* invokes as it withholds identification of each exact body producing each moment of vocality. The underdetermined source of sound – its incompleteness – is what allows for a mutually constituting subjectivity between producer and listener. For Kane, "disembodied voice" generates discomfort, thus "encourag[ing] the imaginative projection of a *sonic body.*"[204] This practice of hearing without identifying the source is generative— it kicks off construction of an imagined other, thus catalyzing a relational process in which the desires of the listener are implicated and drawn into the process. This imaginative process is thus one where the desires of

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[202] Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des Objets Musicaux* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 91.
[203] Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7.
[204] Ibid, 8.

the listener exceed the space of the real. The practice of acousmatic listening centers around filling in an underdetermined, *mysterious* gap in recognition. The endless possibilities of imagined explanations go beyond the actual, implicating the urges of the listener amidst performers' simultaneous expression. *Corbeaux*'s sonic design refuses to provide answers on the source and meaning of sound, opening up space for this relational projection.

For those immediately present for the work, vocalic mystery differently marks *Corbeaux*. Audiences can easily identify performers as the general sonic source. Yet, the specific performer responsible for each sound is muddied by the collective. In listening to the work, moments of hearing singular vocal textures occur, as Ouizguen does not train performers to blur into one another. In 2017, she emphasized minute details of our entrance walks that initiated the work, yet she provided little commentary on vocality, a central component of performance. She used abstract terms to articulate what she was looking for from our vocal practice, describing her interest as us "taking a ride."[205] While these distinct vocal qualities could be heard, the composition of the work made them difficult to trace back to an individual source, as sonic blur and overlap occurred organically. Here, Ouizguen makes the specificity of each timbre *more* apparent by staging its evasive quality. It appears and slips away, making its evasive moments of clear reappearance striking.

The communal overlap of voices is what allows for the prominence of the particular. Andrea Cavarero has theorized the singularity of each human voice in stating, "The voice is the equivalent of what the unique person has that is most hidden and most genuine. This is not an unreachable treasure, or an ineffable essence, or still less, a sort of secret nucleus of the self; rather it is a deep vitality of the unique being who takes pleasure in revealing herself through the

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[205] Bouchra Ouizguen, Rehearsal. Portland, Oregon. September 3, 2017.

emission of voice...pushing itself out with air, with concentric circles, toward another's ear."[206] This disclosure of the self that Cavarero pinpoints suggests a kind of turning of oneself inside out: the air inside of the body literally unveils itself outside of the body, suggesting a form of physicalized vulnerability. In *Corbeaux*, this revelation is staged through multiplicity: the collective here is not tied by their likeness, but rather casting out singularities simultaneously. Cavarero continues: "At stake here is not a closed-circuit communication between one's own voice and one's own ears, but rather a communication of one's own uniqueness that is, at the same time, a relation with another unique existence. It takes at least a duet, a calling and a responding — or, better, a reciprocal intention to listen, one that is already active in the vocal emission, and that reveals and communicates everyone to the other."[207] For Cavarero, the uniqueness of the voice becomes more apparent via a reciprocality with and the presence of another.

Corbeaux stages this relational form of performance which works with communion yet resists uniformity. This is akin to what Joshua Chambers Letson has termed "incommensurability"[208] and what José Munoz has called "identities-in-difference." Here, the individuals perform an allied communion that does not strip them of their differences. Contrast is not expelled by the communal: the varied qualities of individual vocals fade in and out as they are layered with others. The work is formally staged so that cast members are in trios and quartets. These smaller groups become who performers most closely listen to and vocalize with. These sub-groups are composed so that they face one another at varied angles, making hearing one another easier. These smaller groups are not obvious to the audience— their formation

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[206] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2005), 4.
[207] Ibid, 5.
[208] Joshua Chambers-Letson, *After the party : A manifesto for queer of color life* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 15.

blends into the larger composition. The privacy of that formal decision —as it exceeds visibility — allows for moments of sonic singularity that are then pulled back into the blur of the collective. It is the formal composition of these voices (unbeknownst to the audience) that teases their distinction— their incommensurability— as they vocalize collectively.

At multiple levels, *Corbeaux* stages forms of excess as the work overflows material and social boundaries. Not only is the work composed to sonically bleed outside of its geographic performance site, this transmission of sound also propagates unknowns. Following Henriques, the vibratory properties of soundwaves disseminate affective charges beyond expecting audiences. The faraway passerby experiences acousmatic listening, which includes the imaginative work of projection, as the listener engages in constructing the sonic body of the work from afar. This interpretation supersedes the event's reality: instead, the work invites this labor of the listener in response to its choreographed excess. For those closer by and consciously taking in the performance, the singularity of the voice is teased then blurred into the crowd, suggesting the bodily owner of each sound just enough for audiences to attempt, then fail, to map voices onto bodies. Even the formal container of the performance event is exceeded as the work is staged in public spaces where audience members can come and go as they please. These forms of excess (again defined as that which "is more than necessary, permitted, or desirable") are not simply effects of the work, but rather, choreographed components. These excessive qualities of *Corbeaux* are tethered to refusal: sound, as detailed, refuses its expected containers and instigates forms of projection and fantasy. *Corbeaux* stages these layers of excess through its aesthetic and compositional choices (site selection, use and type of vocal projection, and bodily arrangement). In performing excess, the work additionally stages layers of projection that occur, even as they result in failure. *The imagined sonic body is not so. The voice you thought you could trace*

cannot be mapped with clarity. Instead, the work performs a refusal to complete the questions it generates, as its sonic mysteries catalyze this play of projections. These teasing unknowns and ensuing fantasies become part of the social motor of the work, revealing the labor of imagination prompted by this sonic endeavor.

Physical Geographies: On Pain and Projection

On February 28, 2017, I find myself fully immersed in a workshop hosted by Ouizguen at a performance and rehearsal space in Portland called Studio 2. These workshops serve as both a way for local communities to experience her work, as well as auditions for September performances. Ouizguen initiates the process, stating "I'm going to teach you to dance Marrakech." We spend the majority of our time traveling in sinewy formations across the studio floor, mimicking Ouizguen's movements, which are often syncopated, staccato, undular, and involve the hips and spine. The actual choreography of Corbeaux *arrives only in the last 20 minutes of our time together. Ouizguen demonstrates throwing the head and neck forwards and backwards as a bodily pulse is established. She asks us to dive in with scarce direction minus that we close our eyes and release a sound on each propulsion forward. With little explanation or context, the room of curious participants lets the movement take hold.*

This key, physical gesture accompanies the sonic elements discussed above and is repeated over the course of around 30 minutes as performers keep their eyes shut. As the heaviness of the head falls back, the skin of the throat and bottom of the chin are exposed, making visible the physical labor that the performing body endures within the work. This individualized exposure is emphasized by a uniformity of monochromatic costumes fully covering the rest of the body – including the hair and scalp – and directing focus to this often deemphasized bodily geography of the head, neck, and throat. Multiple audience members commented on what one described as a "zooming out and in"[209] of attention, as the cast appeared both highly uniformed, yet simultaneously individualized. In what follows, I explore how this choreography enacts refusal in two critical ways. First, Ouizguen's zooming in on the head and neck rejects notions of virtuosity that require full bodiedness. Instead, Ouizguen centers visual

[209] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, July 30, 2021

attention on the area surrounding the face, positioning it as a mechanism for refusing to veil the body's labor. Second, *Corbeaux*'s choreographic structure disavows the precision and sameness of unison, instead letting the pain, labor, and strain of the repetitive movement work differently across each body. These varied negotiations with the physical movement unveil transnational delineations and raise questions around cultural significance for audience members. I additionally consider how the embodied labor of this gesture— in its many manifestations— prompts acts of substitution for audience members, in which they imagine their own bodies in lieu of the performers'. This reifies the manner in which *Corbeaux*'s performance of refusal mobilizes projection as part of its choreographic device, offering this act of projecting onto another as evidence of the realities of transnational relationalities.

Figures 7 and 8: *Corbeaux* performers, 2017, Photo courtesy Anke Schüttler and Portland Institute for Contemporary Art.

The monochromatic sameness of costumes and the way that they covered the full body in black and white fabric left one general area of the body up for visual grabs: the head, face, and

neck. This visual emphasis centered a part of the body that expresses individual emotion and affective vulnerability. An audience member recounted seeing a "sea of open mouths"[210] laboring as a prominent image from the work. The mouth and throat— apparatuses which process air that the body requires in order to breathe— becomes the central choreographic space. Another audience member commented on the affective events generated across this bodily geography by "that sort of heaving, the opening of the throat...it's hard not to be worried when this vulnerable area is being repeatedly exposed..in a sort of writhing manner."[211] The centering of the head and face emphasize the work's concern with affective communication, as well as its interest in that affect having a genuine connection to, communication of, or commentary on the rest of the body. In her writing on hip hop and facial communication, dance scholar Sherril Dodds communicates a critical intervention within the field of Dance Studies: "Scarcely any scholarly work addresses the face as a choreographic device."[212] In my own consideration of *Corbeaux*'s facial choreography, I not only expand on an underserved physical site of analysis, but I additionally consider how the framing of the face rejects a privileging of notions of a full body virtuosity. By countering a propensity towards performing easefulness, distinctions across the cast's negotiations of this movement —mainly drawn across cultural lines — are made clear.

The western dance canon's interest in full bodiedness is tied to its understandings of the virtuosic. Ariel Osterweis offers the following definition of virtuosity: "In the proper use of the term, 'virtuosity' indicates something in excess of exceptional technical mastery that has been accumulated over time."[213] Osterweis reminds us that virtuosity is not *only* technique, but rather something that overflows it, as the virtuosic body performs an affectively charged detachment

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[210] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 3, 2021
[211] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 2, 2021
[212] Sherill Dodds, "Hip Hop Battles and Facial Intertexts," *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 34, No. 1 (2016): 63.
[213] Osterweis, "Disavowing Virtuosity, Performing Aspiration," 433.

from the labor of the task at hand. Osterweis also ties virtuosity to what she terms "mastery," which suggests not only *total* or *complete* command of the body but additionally, a command of the *total or complete body*. Virtuosity suggests a full bodiedness, in which the performer's *exceptional* ability is accompanied by an affective ease and a concealment of labor. By centering the head, throat, neck, and face, Ouizguen not only emphasizes a part of the body known for its ability to express emotional states: she also rejects this privileging of a full bodied or "masterful" ease. Zooming in on the face does not imply that the face is cut off from the rest of the body, but rather that it is able to convey, express, or comment on its state of physical labor. In articulating the potential that analyzing specific body parts carries for Dance Studies, Dodds writes: "Most interestingly for dance, the various body parts do not exist in isolation, but engender a dynamic choreographic relationship to the rest of the body."[214] Within *Corbeaux*, the head, neck, and face are not only sites of labor, but emoting apparatuses that communicate the performers' holistic, embodied experiences.

Labor is not only unveiled, it is used as a choreographic device to convey each performers' individual approach. The struggle through this labor becomes unique to each performer over time as the varied ways that cast members negotiate this struggle become apparent. Multiple audience members commented on noting differences across the central cast and local members. Commenting on the local cast, one stated: "There were some waify dancers, and I was like, 'I don't know if you're using your body in the way that they're using their body' or just really watching different— I don't want to say expertise— but different training...really just seeing that this choreography really requires such a specific training."[215] These distinctions in the way that each performer approached the work avoid Osterweis' notion that "virtuosity is

[214] Sherrill Dodds, "The Choreographic Composite," *Dance Research Journal* 46, No. 2 (2014): 1-3.
[215] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 3, 2021

characterized by nonchalance in the face of overachievement. Virtuosos conceal the effort that goes into their performance and appear *as if* their work were effortless and often *as if* they had not worked at all."[216] Rather than exuding an air of ease, Ouizguen's performers appear in a process of what one audience member called "coming undone."[217] Through the intensity of the movement, as well as the duration, each body struggles, sweats, and attempts endurance. Because this is not a trained aesthetic for all cast members, this undoing happens individually, yet simultaneously. The work refuses a technique of unison, instead opting to demonstrate how one might fall apart, yet persist, as the one next to them might appear on the edge of fully breaking. *Corbeaux* refuses to embrace the precision of unison. It also refuses the sheen of perfection that unison demands. To be in unison is to arrive at the same time, to hit an angle in the body in exacting ways so as not to pull attention from the choreography of sameness, or to perfect synchronicity with another body. Instead, Ouizguen gives us *individuals* in a collective effort. One's headscarf falls, legs stand various distances apart compared to their neighbors, and heads take on different approaches to the choreographic task.

Figure 9: *Corbeaux* performers, 2017, Photo courtesy Jonathan Raissi and Portland Institute for Contemporary Art.

[216] Osterweis, "Disavowing Virtuosity, Performing Aspiration," 434.
[217] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 2, 2021

This refusal to embrace the precision of unison redirects the work towards an expression of choreographic labor. In fact, *Corbeaux* stages labor as choreography, putting public emphasis on the fluid negotiation of pain. Considering the experiential qualities of labor, Hannah Arendt writes, “The word ‘labor,’ understood as a noun, never designates the finished product, the result of laboring, but remains a verbal noun to be classed with the gerund, whereas the product itself is invariably derived from the word for work.”[218] Within *Corbeaux*, the process of labor which Arendt underscores is in the service of a trance-like altered state. As we threw our heads back and forth— eyes clamped shut— many of the cast members (including myself) described a process of disorientation that overtook us. Fears of fainting overcame my own psyche multiple times throughout performances as my legs turned limp, my sense of balance evaded my grasp, and clinging to the repetition of the movement seemed to be the only straw to grasp. One audience member described the work as “minimal” with their hands forming ironic quotations as they articulated the actual *rigor* beneath this guise of simplicity. The labor of throwing the head and neck back and forth for sustained time in service of this performed state of alterity generated immense pain. Bodies with little practice of this are prone to severe pain, as they rely on muscles in the neck and shoulders that often go unused.

Scholars have begun to take up the critical analytic of pain and labor within Dance Studies. Anusha Kedhar reminds us that “pain and injury are undertheorized in dance studies scholarship” as her work “foregrounds the labor of dancers by making pain and injury visible to the scholarly eye.”[219] Priya Srinivasan’s work on “Indian women dancers as transnational laborers on the global stage” notes the “hidden labor of dance” as she considers how labor “can

[218] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 80.
[219] Anusha Kedhar, “Breaking Point? Flexibility, Pain, and the Calculus of Risk in Neoliberal Multiculturalism,” *Future of Dance Studies,* ed. Susan Manning, Janice Ross, and Rebecca Schneider (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 344.

still be seen through their sweat, blood, tears, slipping or stained saris, callused feet, missteps, or familiar gestures, such as giving the finger."[220] I follow Kedhar and Srinivasan's emphasis on the laboring, pained dancing body as one that tells us something critically profound about the survival, resistance, and negotiation required for it to complete its choreographic tasks.

Importantly, the painful work at hand for the body in motion can be *both* about the choreographic work, as well as about navigating structures of political, cultural, or social power. *Corbeaux* stages transnational labor in addition to bodily labor. It tells us something about how bodies out of their own locality— as they mingle with bodies in place— might negotiate in and through these relational choreographies at the bodily level and in the frame of performance. Ouizguen has posited that "the face could be a stage, the neck also."[221] This description of the face and neck as a "stage" suggests it as a locational site rather than simply a body part. It is the *space* of the head and neck that Ouizguen emphasizes, suggesting that what is important is not just what one can do with these physical areas, but what can happen *across* them. Instead of assuming focus on the entire body, the head and neck become a place, a "stage," which is simultaneously attached to the vulnerability of the body's necessity for intaking breath, as well as the relational exchange between the mover and the witness. By choreographing this bodily "stage" publicly, Ouizguen unveils this bodily gesture and the labor that urges its repetition to onlookers. She generates a stage out of this bodily site, across which social, cultural, and political exchanges play out. These witnesses are pulled into this vulnerable task. One recounted:

> It definitely made me feel like I was intruding on something very private, like intruding on a ritual. It made me feel yeah like I was intruding on something that was private, so that brought up feelings of like..even though it was presented publicly, I was having that experience, and I was experiencing that discomfort not just because of the pain that I assumed you all were experiencing on some level. ..Well, I was experiencing that

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[220] Priya Srinivisan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 8.
[221] Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, "Corbeaux (Cuervos). Bouchra Ouizguen, Compagnie O."

> discomfort as well, physically, not me physically but imagining that physical discomfort[222]

This audience member's discomfort of witnessing pain and labor becomes evident as they mention words like "intruding," "private," and "uncomfortable." The public staging of this pained choreography is thus not just about the effort of negotiating the movement. Instead, labor is generated by the witnesses consuming your experience as you endure it.[223]

Mark Franko accurately argues that "dance produced ideology but that this 'product' was not a commodity inasmuch as it constituted sensuous experience, which is precisely what made it ideologically effective."[224] What dance generates is processual, experiential, and relationally charged. The public staging of pain via the vulnerable bodily site of the throat, neck, and head constructs relational entanglements. The production of this dance becomes discomfort for some, as noted by the above audience member. Out of twenty audience members interviewed about their experience at the 2017 performances, all of them commented on the performers' labor, as well as their own fear, concern, or worry for the cast. One stated that she was highly "alerted to what the artist was asking of the performers and the kind of strain on the whole system and what I was being asked to condone as a viewer by watching people do that."[225] Another commented feeling that "there's no way this feels good...there was horror for me,"[226] and a third teared up as she noted that to survive the work performers had to negotiate "self-protection" onstage.[227] Multiple audience members projected themselves into the work, asking questions like "Could I

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[222] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 4, 2021
[223] This audience member's articulation reflect what John Martin refers to as "kinesthetic sympathy," which he describes in the following way: "When we see a human body moving, we see movement which is potentially produced by any human body and therefore by our own…through kinesthetic sympathy we actually reproduce it vicariously in our present muscular experience and awaken such associational connotations as might have been ours if the original movement had been of our own making." John Martin, *America Dancing: The Background and Personalities of the Modern Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1936), 117.
[224] Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 2.
[225] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, July 29, 2021.
[226] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 2, 2021.
[227] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, July 29, 2021.

do this?" or "How would that feel in my own body?" As many noted their sensations of discomfort watching the endurance of bodies labor, they described these experiences in the first person, positioning themselves as imagined performers. In doing so, they collectively reveal the ways in which the experience of another's effortful, rigorous labor holds implications of projection and substitution.

This projection of self into and onto the other is a relational engagement driven by the labor of performers. To superimpose one's self onto a distanced embodied experience is evidenced by audience members' comments about consuming this labor. In engaging in this projection, displacement occurs as the witnessing audience member imagines their own movement instead of the performer's. The labor endured by performers— including being the site of audience projection— is imbued with some layers of agency, given that performers have self-selected in their participation. Rather than ultimate forms of domination, what is staged is the commitment to labor through, to negotiate, and to endure the repetitious rigor for the communal act of intensity. As evident from audience responses, there is no getting around the pull— which some might describe as empathy— that this entanglement catalyzes between audience and performer. As noted in the previous chapter, Saidiya Hartman has urgently reminded us that empathetic projects engage in their own forms of violence and fetishization, and these communal pulls do not automatically suggest a purified form of relationality. [228] Yet, this refusal to perform a unison project of virtuosity, and to instead center the affective apparatus of the head and neck— a locus for somatic and emotional vulnerability— as well as to show the differentiated labor and pain of cast members is part of what drives this choreographic project. These elements generate projection. In this act of displacing self for performer, audiences cross

[228] In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman considers how racialized spectatorship to the violent subjugation provoked by the TransAtlantic slave trade generated the often undetected violence of empathy, asking "is not the difficulty of empathy related to both the devaluation and the valuation of black life?" See Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection,* 21.

spatial planes of sociality as they substitute themselves in for the bodies in front of them or pile assumptions onto the work. Audience members' notions of waifishness being attached to local performers (versus the Moroccan cast) or forms of naturalized ability to complete the choreography being attached to Moroccan dancers (instead of locals) are only some examples of how assumptions around what bodies from which geopolitical contexts are biologically conditioned for certain movements or bodily comportments showed up in audience responses to Portland performances. This is intensified by the evident differences across Moroccan cast members and "locals," as many audience members attributed the central cast's "ease" of the movement to something cultural, unveiling another projection of the western imaginary onto the work. This messy entanglement is part of *Corbeaux*'s choreography. Refraining from placating, valuing, or celebrating these attempts, the work instead sets up a relational sphere in which projection, assumption, and presumption are choreographed and center stage. Rather than celebrating them, the work unveils them, leaving questions of violence, power, and fetishization, unanswered but exposed.

Indentations: On Haptic Violence and its Negotiations

The pain of *Corbeaux* manifested in my own body in the mornings following rehearsals or performance. As preparatory time became more focused on practicing the throwing of the head and neck, Ouizguen would tell us vehemently to take care of our bodies: Arnica for muscle soreness around the back of the neck; hot water, lemon, ginger, and honey for the throat. Many members of the cast began to lose their voices, as others expressed severe pain radiating at the top of their shoulder girdle (the skeletal area connecting the arms to the rest of the bones in the torso). Recuperative gestures filled time and space within the rehearsal process more than refining specific movements did. During the mornings of each performance, a station with

provisions would be set up backstage. Various hands would grab cups for the aforementioned soothing drinks, moving through and around other performers to ensure each person had this liquid form of healing. Bodies moved efficiently, not preciously. Offstage sites were small, so navigating the sea of bodies and their gestures of care became its own choreographic enterprise. At PICA, we were clustered behind a compact, barricaded area of the sprawling, industrial space. Pillows and mats lined the floors, and cast members would rest their legs on one another's stomachs or their heads on another's thighs to maximize space. No hands rested — everything was in motion in order to ready the body.

Figure 10: *Corbeaux* performers massage each other's necks and rest pre-performance, 2017, Photo by the author.

This preparation was a form of physicalized care work – not necessarily out of demonstrating emotional orientation towards one another, but out of a pragmatic necessity for sustaining the body through performance. The throat required honey and ginger prepared by the hands of another, the scapula demanded the pressure of someone's palms. Without these gestures, the work wouldn't go. Haptic practices rooted these forms of care. The labor of the

hands in soothing, stretching, applying ointment, and preparing specific sites of the body was essential. Touch thus sustained the cast's ability to make it through intensive rehearsal and performance schedules, forming a critical aspect of the work. One cast member articulated: "That's a tough performance to do. It's a very specific motion, it's so repetitive. Those rehearsals were unreal, like how much we had to scale up over such a short period of time and really develop the musculature to do that and the ability to care for the musculature very quickly."[229] This haptic care work proved critical for what she described as a process of "scaling up" in preparation to perform. Here, I explore here how the choreography of touch as a reparative tool for performance doubled in its function as a method of communication and relational negotiation. This touch-based exchange occurred as the work refused linguistic translation across castmembers: because spoken languages differed, language failed to translate ideas and experiences.

Corbeaux's overall casting structure is marked by change: locations, bodies, and significance all shift. As its central cast travels from site to site, added performers infuse it with new localities: the movement and sounding land on new bodies, localized signification accumulates, and this constant tension between what is shared between cast members and what is distinct or non-translatable is reorganized. As this changing landscape of cast members occurs, language barriers mark the group's relational configurations: in Portland, the Moroccan cast spoke Arabic (with Ouizguen and one other central cast member speaking French), while the Portland cast relied on English (with a couple of cast members, including myself, utilizing varied skills with speaking French). Even the specificity of how these language barriers unfolded shifted based on locale: in Paris, the local cast members could converse with Ouizguen and the other central cast member in French, which local casts in other sites were less able to do. This

[229] Anonymous cast member in discussion with the author, September 28, 2021.

casting structure rejects a reliance on semiotic translation. As *Corbeaux* spills into new sites, verbal translation and discussion of the work's local meanings become nearly impossible. This refusal of linguistic communication— engrained in the designed casting structure and Ouizguen's refusal to offer neat explanations or translations—opens up new forms for sensing another body, where touch becomes a route of investigation and exchange with another moving organism. This haptic sense initiates a different process of touching and being touched. Relationality becomes embodied rather than linguistic, and the negotiation of self amongst others unfolds in sensory ways that rely on bodily contact.

One day early on in the rehearsal process, I followed Ouizguen's direction to stretch my upper thighs. Seated on the floor of FLOCK Dance Center in north Portland, I suddenly felt hands tightly gripping the base of my neck. Her touch was rigorous and deep. Seated behind me, her legs cradled mine. The thick sensation of being held— of feeling my own muscles collapse and relax slightly— came over me in response to her gesture. Offstage, these moments of haptic encounter could happen briskly, surprisingly. Physicalized orientations would emerge from chains of massaging cast members, only to disperse moments later. A cast member would walk by another and apply quick pressure to the shoulder, then continue on. As the priority for the cast became bodily sustenance, touch took on new critical meanings. It rendered language less necessary in these offstage moments as I realized that this haptic engagement was constructing and communicating new orientations towards one another. Touch became not only a form of healing, but a way of outwardly sensing and negotiating another.

The unique haptic indentation of touch quite literally materializes relationality and proximity. In my shoulders, I can feel the wart on your hand and the force of your forearm. You simultaneously feel the tightness of my raw back musculature. These processes of sensing one

another are entangled and leave an imprint on our skin: this process is mutually constituting via the sensory. Erin Manning writes that "The proposition is that touch— every act of reaching toward— enables the creation of worlds. This production is relational. I reach out to touch you in order to invent a relation that will, in turn, invent me. To touch is to engage in the potential of an individuation. Individuation is understood throughout as the capacity to become *beyond* identity. We individuate inventively."[230] Manning posits individuation as separate from the singular— to individuate is a process that requires another. *Corbeaux* requires touch for preservation of the body and prevention of further pain. Touch is not an additive, but a necessity. This necessity choreographs new ways of negotiation that work against the linearity and compartmentalization of the rational, Cartesian logic of the subject. Here, difference functions in tandem with another, and it unveils a sense of one's self at an affective level. For Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions. But the same double meaning, tactile plus emotional is already there in the single word 'touching'; equally it's internal to the word 'feeling.'"[231] To touch is to be touched. There is no denying the impact, the *affect*, of that reciprocal endeavor.

Touch is not utopic, however, far from it. Manning correctly posits that touch is *always* entangled with violence: "Can I suggest that touch as a movement of desire toward another is also a violent writing of the relationship between self and other? Touch inaugurates a violence since it compels us to write the relationship between self and other differently."[232] Touch enunciates forced change, a risky encounter, and a skin-to-skin contact that *always* holds potentially pain-inducing boundaries, even when the result is pleasure. The endeavor of

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[230] Erin Manning, *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xv.
[231] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 17.
[232] Manning, *Politics of Touch*, 56.

searching for that line is violent because it is unknown. Many times, the surprising and forceful hands of an elder cast member shocked, scared, or soothed me. The vigorous assertions of touch that Ouizguen's cast members both taught (her primary cast) and learned (local cast) were not haphazard incidents or individual impulses, but a bodily gesture ritualized by the work. They initiate encounters that, as Manning states, "make the decision to acknowledge a certain kind of violence."[233] This framework resists resolution —when it comes to the question of violence, there is no completion. Instead, the haptic commences an encounter where no one can leave *untouched*: agents of caressing force must be dented to dent, and this relational arrangement is true without requiring equity or shared experience. Pain does not require sameness of experience across bodies that give and receive. These entangled bodies can exist alongside one another or invoke "besidedness," which Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, "does not...depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations."[234] *Corbeaux* thus generates a mode of sensing other that resists frameworks of equity or sameness to articulate difference. It rejects the comparable, instead negotiating that painful, deeply touching experience of hands digging into raw muscular fibers, of the unavoidable and uneven exchange that is negotiated, tenuous, and made into practice offstage.

With a transnational cast, across which many planes of difference existed, this negotiation— made recognizable and symbolized within this haptic dance— took on new meaning. This choreography of touch becomes an embodied heuristic of distinction. It ousts modes of semiotic or visual recognition in which difference can be neatly classified. The haptic makes differentiation felt. It demands a *processual* negotiation of boundaried proximity between self and other. Collapsing of difference becomes impossible. The haptic becomes a new mode of

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[233] Ibid, 56.
[234] Kosofsky Sedwick, *Touching Feeling*, 8.

sensing distinction especially marked by the transnational nature of the cast, of feeling power's grasp. André Lepecki and Sally Banes describe how the mode of performance utilizes sensing to unveil otherwise: "No wonder then that performance practices become privileged means to investigate processes where history and body create unsuspected sensorial-perceptual realms, alternative modes for life to be lived."[235] Again, this "alternative" is not utopic. Instead, it becomes a new mode for sensing power, distinction, and the non-relatable. By refusing the semiotic, the haptic becomes a required, embodied, offstage choreography under which the cast must operate within to sustain the work. In doing so, *Corbeaux* is infused with a transnational negotiation at the level of the body that becomes an integral part of the work's choreographic endeavor.

Constructions of the Public: On Space, Gender, and Power

Corbeaux's stagings of refusal unfold in performance sites highly public in nature, generating questions for onlookers. As noted, the work's various performances of disavowal are entangled with the social publicness that the work lives within. What might we make of this collective of femme subjects descending upon public sites as they sound harrowing vocality, and labor through the strained choreographic task in front of them? The public facing nature of the locations *Corbeaux* takes as its home raises critical questions about the ways in which the work generates meaning through its performances of refusal being situated publicly, where other social happenings are unfolding and surprise encounters are catalyzed. As mentioned, the sites which Ouizguen selects for performance are highly intentional - they hold local significance as places for gathering, including parks, warehouses, and center squares. The 2017 performance sites at PICA's performance space and Peninsula Park are marked by encounter - the circulation and

[235] Sally Banes and André Lepecki, *The Senses in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.

potential of quite literally stumbling across an experience infuses them with a form of social possibility. This socially generated potential evidenced in her interest in public sites has guided Ouizguen's interests in generating *Corbeaux*. One of her conceptual starting points in crafting the work was Persian literature from the eighth to the eleventh century that centers the "community figure of the uncensored 'fool.'"[236] She has described her own curiosity around how this character— positioned as a madperson— is ousted from public life. This figure of the social outcast (after being designated as unfit) underscores the ways in which social organization wages power over certain subjects, threatening their visibility and recognition within daily communal life. The work's public sites point to not just the potential of surprise encounter, but to the social powers that marshals public recognition and erasure.

Ouizguen ties this narrative of social exclusion from the public to the feminine by casting *Corbeaux* with explicitly all "women-identifying" performers. In entangling the socially ousted subject to the femme subject, the work gestures to the ties between conceptualizations of publics and formations of gender, including how spectatorship, surveillance, visibility, and perceptibility are both constructed within the public imaginary and gendered in nature. One local cast member spoke to this tether between the more public site of the work at Peninsula Park and the gender of the cast: "I think I felt like we were more of a spectacle in the park. I felt like it was more of like 'these hysterical women,' sort of thing..I remember hearing people laughing...it could have been anyone in the park because *we were in the park*. So maybe it was just me being like 'Oh I feel like a spectacle, so that's why I'm projecting this onto others...It was very liberating in that way I think too...It felt very feminine...like we are these kind of like 'crazy' you know, cackling, guffawing women in this circular formation."[237] As noted by this performer, Ouizguen's choice

[236] Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. "Bouchra Ouizguen: Corbeaux (Morocco)." Program Notes for Bouchra Ouizguen's *Corbeaux* at the Time-Based Art Festival, presented by PICA, September, 2017, pp16-17.
[237] Anonymous cast member in discussion with the author, September 30, 2021.

to stage this feminine communing based in part on the figure of the ousted "fool" in public spaces catalyzes inquiries about what the work might tell us about entanglements of gender and the public sphere. How does this feminine communion signify differently in explicitly public spaces? What might this public staging do for gendered subjects and their concerns? How does this collective of women put pressure on notions of the public?

I want to pause here to consider the broader ties between gender and space, including how the "public" has been constructed. These questions have been an area of focus for feminist scholars as they have considered the politics of visibility and recognition within social worlds. The tethers between space and gendered arrangements of power are catalyzed by the very social constitution of space. The embodied circulation of subjects in and through spaces mutually construct: spaces direct, choreograph, and mark us, just as we condition, socialize, and form their layers of cultural signification. Dance scholar San San Kwan's work *Kinesthetic City* is grounded in this feedback loop between bodies and space. She writes, "I am interested in how looking at corporeal movement through specific places at precise historical moments can illuminate the production of those places and those moments, as well as of the bodies that move through them."[238] Importantly, Kwan emphasizes the production of space by the presence and motion of bodies, as well as the meanings produced by their encounters. Political geographer Edward Soja writes, "Spatiality exists ontologically as a product of a transformation process, but always remains open to further transformation in the contexts of material life. It is never primordially given or permanently fixed."[239] Soja's emphasis on space being ontologically derived from movement, as well as *on the move*, further entangles bodies in motion to the spaces that they produce and which produce them. Ouizguen's staging of this gendered communion in public

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[238] Kwan, *Kinesthetic City,* 1.
[239] Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London: Verson, 1989), 122.

sites does not just call upon the aesthetics of these spaces. Their very assertion of this expressive performance in public is mutually constituting for these femme subjects and the spaces in which they commune.

Of importance here is not just the ways in which the movement of human subjects and spatial definition mutually constitute, but additionally how the absencing of subjects from sites has helped support spatial construction. In other words, just as space is dependent on the social for its construction, certain spaces also come into cultural being based on the material and social *erasure* of certain bodies, subjects, and relational entanglements. Ouizguen's interest in the figure of the societal fool as entangled in a choreographic project for femme performers hints at these ties between social erasure, public space, and gender. Considering the history of gendered erasure within conceptualization of what might make a "public" illuminates the layers of significance mobilized by Ouizguen's choice to stage this communion in intentionally public sites.

Feminist scholars have critiqued theoretical lineages conceptualizing the public sphere for their masculinist assumptions. Jorgen Habermas is perhaps the most potent scholar to theorize the public sphere. He considered the public sphere as a response to the rise of the state in the post-war West, positioning it as "constituted in discussion" deemed "rational."[240] His work has been problematized for failing to acknowledge the social conditions that allow certain subjects more power than others, especially along lines of race, class, and gender. Elizabeth Fraser critiques his presumed neutralizing of identity and power formations She instead frames

[240] Craig Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), 9. For Habermas, publics became a discursive space in which rational debate was prioritized over status, and in which - through discursive mobilization - the state was dealt a mechanism of accountability. For Habermas, the public sphere was "constituted in discussion." Craig Calhoun summarizes a Habermasian public in stating, "Civil society came into existence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority...Educated elite came to think of itself as constituting the public and thereby transformed the abstract notion of the *publicum* as counterpart to public authority into a much more concrete set of practices."

this public as "the arena, the training ground, and eventually the power base of a stratum of bourgeois men who were coming to see themselves as a 'universal class' and preparing to assert their fitness to govern."[241] Fraser's contestation of Habermas' assumptions of a utopic and even public playing ground joins numerous voices considering the often unacknowledged configurations of power within publics.[242] These critiques importantly note that gender is not only abandoned as an analytic for conceptualizing publics, but that this abandonment is part of what infuses patriarchal positions with social power *via* the public sphere. Throughout transnational and decolonial feminist lineages, attention to the social constructions of space has catalyzed questions of access and erasure. Gender has been well documented as tethered to the ways subjects construct, contribute to, gain recognition in, and acquire access within the public sphere. Notions of "publics" thus rely on the social ousting of gendered subjects, whose disappearance is required to make these conceptions of the public go.

The relationship between recognition (or lack thereof) of certain subjects and spatial arrangements have led feminist lineages to add questions of how gendered power formations function in the service of colonialist notions of publics. In "Patriarchy from Margin to Center: Discipline, Territoriality, and Cruelty in the Apocalyptic Phase of Capital," Rita Segato argues that the colonial project drove a distinction of public space from the private, as it centered a universalized "One." This subject required a publicness to maintain colonial domination. She

[241] Elizabeth Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1992), 114.

[242] Fraser prods at "four assumptions that are central to the *bourgeois, masculinist* conception of the public sphere," including 1) "that is is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate *as if* they were social equals" 2) that "the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy" 3) that "discourse in public sphere should be restricted to deliberation about the common good" and 4) that "a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state" (Fraser, 1992, 117-118). For other critique of the Habermasian public sphere, see Mary Ryan, Joan Landes, and Geoff Eley)

thus importantly ties the colonial intervention in the “village world” to the generation of the gendered space of the “public,” writing:

> In the binary world of modernity, the other of the One is removed from its ontological fullness and reduced to fulfilling the function of alter or other regarding the One as a representative and referent of totality. This role of the – feminine, nonwhite, colonial, marginal, underdeveloped, deficient – other, as Edward Said and a generation of postcolonialist theorists have shown, represents the condition of possibility for the existence of the One: the universal subject, the generalizable Human...This is the process by which what was associated with a public space or masculine domain in the communitarian world got transformed into the so-called public sphere or universal domain. As we can see, the history and constitution of the public sphere participates in and is intertwined with the history of patriarchy and its structural mutation beginning with the modern-colonial capture of the village world.[243]

Segato’s work illuminates the ways in which the organization of space has both symbolically and materially been organized along lines that delineate larger power structures. For Segato, this division is gendered in nature *as required by* the colonial necessity of establishing the dominant domain of the universalist, masculinist “One.” She writes, “A tribute or gift of being that is exacted from the other flows to the center, the platform of the universal human subject, constructing and nurturing it.”[244] Segato’s claims make visible the colonialist legacies of the public sphere by examining the ties between the “other” and the “One.” She follows Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s reminder that “it is not the center that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the center.”[245] These are relational reminders. They invoke an inflexible dependency on otherness to uphold the promise of dominant power. Publicness is implicated as it becomes the sphere that spurs recognition, in which a generalized, fixed subjectivity (“the One”) is assumed to be situated at the helm. Concepts of who is recognized or ideologically permitted within the public sphere remind us that the consequences of its formation are gendered: publics rely on specific— gendered— forms of social ousting.

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[243] Segato, “Patriarchy from Margin to Center,” 617.
[244] Ibid, 617.
[245] Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes,” 353.

In considering the gendering of publics within local Moroccan contexts, scholars have examined how transition becomes possible through embodied practices. In her work *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and Revoicing Tradition*, Deborah Kapchan considers how the gendered space of the Moroccan market has shifted over time as women have utilized forms of orality to transform social roles. She documents "women's emergence into a discursive domain formerly dominated by men - the marketplace (*suq*)."[246] Kapchan ties shifts in publicness to hybrid forms of expression achieved through orality. As she attends to the vocalized, discursive practices which she considers "feminine testimony" in the public site of the market, she argues that these forms of performance— delivered through the embodied voice— reorganize and reuse socially accepted communication forms, thus relying on hybridity for social shift. These forms are not restrained to purely aesthetic realms. Instead, they function sociopolitically as they generate public awareness of gendered subjectivities. Tying performance to social transition, Kapchan states:

> The performances analyzed here create new roles and values within a modernizing and complex society by carving out unique discursive domains, giving new life to old usages, mixing categories, appropriating symbols, and revoicing expressive forms. These dynamics are apprehended in verbal and non-verbal genres such as marketplace oratory, ritual behavior, body-marking, gossip, and storytelling….Linguistically, hybridization is witnessed in the mixing of formally noncompatible genres and registers;...in the gender realm, it is exemplified in the redefinition of gendered space and new formulations of social authority.[247]

Here, Kapchan connects the social shifts in power catalyzed by the oral, sonic, and discursive to a critical transition for what the public realm can hold and recognize. Orality becomes a hybridized form that puts pressure on the fixity of genres which have imparted masculinized powers over the public site of the suq. Relying on performance as a mode for social transition,

[246] Deborah Kapchan, *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 2.
[247] Ibid, 3-4.

she argues that this expression of hybridity – via the sonic, oral, and embodied realms – is what puts in plain view new public subjectivities. These female orators mix, shift, and reinvent both oratory forms, as well as new hybridized categories of sociality. Kapchan's conception of a transitioning public sphere in which femme subjectivities are differently recognized is catalyzed by embodied performance practices, centering the very expression and presence of the body in motion as a critical player in the transformation of the gendered nature of the public sphere.

This woven history of conceptualizing ties between gender, the socially-ousted figure of the "fool," and publics is relevant to Ouizguen's work as she prioritizes the entanglement between her femme casts and the public sites that she selects for performance. Given this feminist investment in the gendered nature of publics and how erasure has functioned in their mobilization, Ouizguen's decision to intentionally stage a cast of women-identifying performers in public spaces marked by convergences gives the work a resistant tone. The very gathering of these women in public space puts pressure on the ways that publics have been constructed historically. The heightened emotion of the work as the collective of women holler and wail durationally spills out to people surprised to encounter such intensity. This gendered and public communion struck multiple audience members as a form of resistance waged by feminine solidarity. One commented: "It definitely felt like protest...It was powerful in that way where you could take this somewhere and make change happen."[248] Another noted:

> It was a lot of anger, mourning, sharing,...vulnerability, strength, like the strength of vulnerability….Like 'Yeah sister, I hear you.' Wow it was very powerful, very brave, and to me it was like 'Wow, it's an affirmation, it's women's voices taking up the space, the *whole* space.' This huge warehouse was full of women's voices but one, just one woman's voice, and it felt so immemorial, like being connected to the first woman ever in the world.[249]

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[248] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 1, 2021.
[249] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 3, 2021.

These readings of political mobilization in the work mark many comments by local cast members and audience members, with the pluralized, diverse, and often universalized collectivity of the cast being a critical contributor to these reactions. Ouizguen's interest in gathering femme subjects publicly conjures what she notes as a confrontation. The communal nature of the work expresses a form of mobilization, especially when we follow an investment in political gathering that centers bodies in motion as a central part of a political project. Ayşe Gül Altınay, María José Contreras, Marianne Hirsch, Jean Howard, Banu Karaca, and Alisa Solomon offer this useful definition of mobilization: "We welcome the associations of 'mobilizing' with activating, setting in motion, moving. The association of mobilizing with rallying or gathering helps define the value of collectivity in surviving the present to open future possibility."[250] Their language for the political is initiated by a communion of bodies in motion.

The form of *Corbeaux*'s communion is up for grabs. Is it protest? Mourning? Memorial? Rage? As described, this mystery around narrative intent is teased by formal elements. The work's title is named after a species known for its collective grieving practices. The National Audubon Society describes the practice of grief that crows participate in: "When crows see a corpse of one of their own species, they gather around the dead bird cawing noisily and silently departing. Is it grief? Fear? A corvid Irish wake?"[251] *Corbeaux* certainly plays with images of this corvid form of public grief. It also suggests forms of assembly in the sheer number of performers gathered in public. To gather bodies in a shared responsiveness is political in that it counters inaction, forgetting, or devaluing. To commune in this gendered way is to place value on the stance of not just *these* femme subjects, but the perspectives of a more extensive category

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[250] Ayse Gul Altinay, María José Contreras, Marianne Hirsch, Jean Howard, Banu Karaca, and Alisa Solomon (eds). *Women Mobilizing Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 2.
[251] John Marzluff, "Meet the Bird Brainiacs: American Crow." Audubon Society. April, 2016. Accessed September 28, 2021. https://www.audubon.org/magazine/march-april-2016/meet-bird-brainiacs-american-crow.

of femme subjects, their testimony, and the ways that expression might hail witnesses within a public sphere. Altinay, Contreras, Hirsch, Howard, Karaca, and Solomon remind us that performance is always imbricated in assembly: "While varying in scale and format, protests have always involved performance, as the Latin etymology of the word attests: *prōtestārī – prō + testārī* – is to bear witness together, to testify publicly. Protest requires joint action and, importantly, addressees and an audience: those with the authority to satisfy the demand and those to observe the claim."[252] This act of witnessing becomes central to the transmission of protest as it activates politically.

While the form of *Corbeaux*'s gathering is not spelled out for casts and audiences alike, its public facing holds political stakes. This is especially evident when considering Ouizguen's interest in the social and gendered ousting of subjectivities, as well as the public realm's history of delivering power, visibility, and recognition to only select subjects. The work's resistant nature comes through in the ways that it brings notions of privacy to public endeavors. One audience member noted "the discomfort of witnessing something that seemed like a very private ritual to me being presented very publicly...that felt uncomfortable to me."[253] Multiple others noted the intimate process that was being unveiled for each performer. The individualized, somatic journey that each embarked on, as well as the exposed experience of deep pain and labor, delivers a vulnerability that is made more prominent by its public presentation. On the tether between public vulnerability and protest, Judith Butler writes: "As a way of being related to what is not me and not fully masterable, vulnerability is a kind of relationship that belongs to that ambiguous region in which receptivity and responsiveness become the basis for mobilizing vulnerability rather than engaging in its destructive denial."[254] Vulnerability thus becomes an act

[252] Ibid, 16.
[253] Anonymous audience member in discussion with the author, August 4, 2021.
[254] Judith Butler, *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 25.

of resistance *when it is witnessed*, and this exchange of revelation and receipt directly counters its suppression. *Corbeaux* transmits modes of resistance in public, hailing attention for this gendered wailing and putting pressure on mechanisms of erasure that shape the historic contours of public life.

Conclusions: Transnational Feminist Choreographies

Figure 11: All cast members of *Corbeaux* pose for a photograph post-performance, Performances presented by Portland Institute for Contemporary Art in Portland, Oregon. 2017, Photo courtesy of Subashini Ganesan.

Corbeaux performs resistant labor through these layered modes of aesthetic and relational refusal. These aspects of its performance are importantly not at odds, but mutually constitutive. *Corbeaux*'s performance drips with emotive and resonant power as it joins transnational subjects in the project of a gendered, public form of enunciation. In doing so, it clearly puts powerful pressure on social oustings of gendered subjects and their registers of expression. In its project of resistance against the gendered limitations of subjects in public sites, the work also performs critical registers of refusal.

As this chapter has laid out, the sonic, choreographic, and haptic elements of the work catalyze questions that go unanswered and musings that never reach their finales. The transnational circulation of the work is part of how it generates inquiries around meaning— this is part of its choreographic motor. With each new encounter in each new performance site, how the work signifies is on the move. Throughout interviews with audiences and local casts, there were more questions than answers: *Is this feminist? An act of protest? Is this ritual? Does this have different significance in Morocco? What does it mean for my white friends to be wearing headscarves? Why crows?* These questions evoke movement: they are attached to wondering about elsewhere or other with no act of completion. Failure— in the winkish suggestion I offered initially of *rejecting* particular rubrics of success as opposed to not meeting their requirements— becomes a key component of *Corbeaux*. One local cast member articulated the way that Ouizguen seemed to tease at these cravings for people to discover, understand, or narrativize the work:

> I just have so many questions I think about how...like was she trying to create a cross-cultural exchange?...Like I think that probably was part of it but it seemed like maybe not the point you know? It seemed like people were really ready to take that from it, to take the visual headscarves that everyone was wearing as something that was super meaningful in the performance when really you know I think it was just more costuming? And also just part of everyday apparel for some of the women. I think it didn't really have a whole lot of meaning, which is something that I'm sure Bouchra was also aware of and expected, probably?[255]

This performer points out the ways in which Ouizguen intentionally plays with not only meaning, but the questions and projections catalyzed when a work travels across geographic boundaries. This is not to say that the headscarves do not hold specific cultural meaning, but that the catalyzing of questions that they provoke when worn on new bodies is part of the

[255] Anonymous cast member in discussion with the author, September 30, 2021.

performance's project of unveiling assumptions and projections that unfold across transnational witnessing.

My assertion throughout this chapter has been that these layers of refusal performed by Ouizguen and the embodied and aesthetic practices she uses to stage *Corbeaux* make important contributions to transnational feminist relationalities, specifically amidst the performance's redressive, coalitional work. These modes of refusal stage a choreography— not just of or for the body, but for feminist entanglements across borders. They suggest the critical contributions that analytics within Dance and Performance Studies might offer to understanding the sociopolitical matrices that moving bodies evoke as they perform a form of gendered coalition amidst transnational difference. As the work stages resistance to gendered erasure in the public sphere, it also refuses to tell everything. This combination of refusal and resistance not only offers insight into the power structures that infuse transnational witnessing with certain pressures to perform a clarity or revelation that supports translation. It also suggests a *new* mode of recognizing resistance, in which forms of gendered affiliation are also recognized as spaces in which projection, mistranslation, and other fault lines erupt. Diana Taylor reminds us that, "Looking is always an intervention, whether we like it, or accept it, or not."[256] To witness violence is not simply a celebratory act, but one loaded with the possibilities of its own oppressions.

Corbeaux's shared investment in gendered coalition and practices of refusal go hand in hand. Part of the work's resistance is thus how it stages witnessing practices through its evasive qualities that reveal the projections, assumptions, and violences of feminist witnessing across difference. This refusal to give in, reveal, or succumb to demands infused with uneven power configurations does not preclude resistance. Here, refusal and the fault lines which it unveils are part of a transnational, feminist project in which projection and assumption must be addressed

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[256] Taylor, *Disappearing Acts*, 264.

and negotiated as part and parcel of resistant labor. *Corbeaux* choreographs new possibilities for recognition across geopolitical and cultural differences. It implicates power structures induced by colonialism, xenophobia, and neoliberalism that teach us to limit feminist understandings of recognition. And, through its evasive moves and the witnessing practices that ensue, it generates recognition of the seething power formations across transnational lines with which the feminist witness must contend as she labors against gendered oppressions.

CHAPTER THREE

Relational Presence, Diasporic Labor, and Practicing History in Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room.*

Introduction

It is the 2016 Creative Capital retreat in which artists supported by the national arts organization present their funded projects. In a presentation of choreographer Okwui Okpokwasili's *Poor People's TV Room*, a projected video begins, and we hear two simplistic, melancholic notes begin to alternate. Footage from quotidian scenes in Nigeria play: a young girl whose back is to the camera fans herself, eventually turning to look directly at future viewers; a group of young children are perched on all fours, repetitively pulsing their torsos as their backs move from arching to rounding; an elder femme subject walks through an outdoor garden toward a white building in the background; a group of laborers place soil into wheelbarrows; children kick a pile of multicolored flip flops scattered across the earth. These video clips generate a collage with a pronounced, yet non-disclosed sense of place. Suddenly, the melancholic sound dramatizes, and a percussive phrase beats underneath. Then, a title of the work appears, followed by a slide reading "iterations, residencies, satellite performances." The projection departs from these videos of daily life to photo documentation of in progress performances. Okpokwasili's live voice begins to sing over the projection: "*I could go for days. Don't tell me to stop. Don't tell me not to go. The thread runs through my navel*." The performer's song continues to layer over images of the performance's varied public showings.

In each image, performers' bodies move with materials that both obscure and reflect their figures. The first slide states that it is a photograph of a performance at the Lincoln Center Atrium in 2014. A sheet of plastic is in the forefront of the photograph and behind it, the palm of a hand presses the plastic closer to the camera. The figure centered in the photograph is blurred

by the plastic, appearing in the shadows and marked by a kind of opacity. In the next full figure image, we see a performer dancing in a structure made of the same plastic material and a wooden frame. Theatrical lights project onto her from the floor. Images of blur, shadow, and visual echo continue. Some show performers' obscured figures generating shadows. Others show simple lights being directed at different performers while the rest of the action captured by the image unfolds in a darker part of the performance area. Visual themes of disappearance and reappearance pulse throughout these images.

Okpokwasili begins to narrate the work. She states, "In 1929, thousands of women in southeastern Nigeria, primarily ethnic Igbo women, came together to protest colonial practices that threatened their way of life, that made them invisible. Their collective, embodied actions were called The Women's War and sometimes referred to as the Grand Égwú. This word égwú in Igbo means dance." Describing her choreographic work as inspired in part by this historical event, she states, "Rather than creating a historical document, we are making a work that resonates with the memory of their grand égwú, their performance." *Poor People's TV Room* was created in collaboration with sound designer Peter Born and performers Thuli Dumakude, Katrina Reid, and Nehemoyia Young. Okpokwasili is the fourth performer in the work. *Poor People's TV Room* responds to Okpokwasili's interest in both The Women's War and the 2014 kidnapping of schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram. Conceptually, the work takes interest in the entanglements of history, memory, and the embodied practices mobilized by performance.

As noted in the opening description of work in progress materials, aesthetic and choreographic decisions center a simultaneously opaque and reflective space on stage in which performers become pronounced and obscured through their various forms of projection onto one

another and material surfaces. In the final staging of *Poor People's TV Room*, light and props shift the visual clarity of performers. Mirrored flooring, live projection, and shadow are used to double their visual presence on other surfaces, leaving an echo or trace of performers onstage and across one another. The use of lighting materials present performers as coming in and out of visual clarity. A plastic sheet transforms performers that dance behind it into an opaque, ghostly figure. The visual space of the stage refuses a clear exposure: performers are hidden, and the audience must do work to make sense of the visual orientation of their presence. In this chapter, I explore how these visual tricks perform an evasion of visual clarity that is intentional and aesthetically staged. In the space of the proscenium theater, in which higher end lighting and tools which often enhance performers' visual clarity onstage are available, Okpokwasili's choices intentionally refuse accessible visuality and spark questions around the threads between the visual sphere and practices related to history, memory, and lineage.

The entanglement of Black femmes' subjectivity and visual practices, including surveillance, consumption, and hypervisibility, have been theorized as part of systemically linked racial violence and the afterlives of slavery.[257] As I explore, these contours of violence— which are expressed through the visual realm— are attached to the objectification of Black femmes' presence in which visual exposure generates a kind of ocular consumption. I outline scholars who have taken interest in the modes in which Black femmes have performed against the grain of hypervisibility by exposing its expectations of subjugation, thereby manipulating the conditions under which hypervisibility is granted. I follow these scholars' critical outlining of the violences caused by the linkages of the visual sector, Black femmes' subjectivity and presence, and how performance might provide a form in which to resist these liaisons. In the following

[257] See Hartman's formation of the "afterlives" of slavery in *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route,* 2006. For intersections of Black femme subjectivity and hypervisibility, see: Carby, 1992; Brooks, 2006; Fleetwood, 2011.

chapter, I analyze the ways in which Okpokwasili refuses this neat objectification of performers via the visual realm. In exploring Okpokwasili's evasion of visual exposure, I articulate how she explicitly rejects these conditions while generating alternate modes for understanding the presence of performers onstage.

I introduce a key term in this chapter, *tricky visuality*, which I note as on one register, naming the visual tricks which Okpokwasili's evasion of visual exposure generates and, on another register, the difficulty that comes with attempting to witness performers as exposed, independent figures onstage. By suggesting the difficulty of Okpokwasili's visual world, I am naming the critical work of labor that is required if one were expecting to make sense of onstage occurrences only through visual exposure. Here, the term difficulty refrains from judgment and instead underscores the work that Okpokwasili asks witnesses to do outside of expectations of exposure. Instead of leaning so heavily on full lighting or the visual clarity of performers' individual bodies, she instead generates a world of mirroring, projection, reflection, and other visual tethers in which performers are enunciated through one another and other material culture onstage.

Okpokwasili's deployment of tricky visuality opens up new possibilities for understanding and sensing the presence and emphasis of the cast's performance. Withholding of this visual exposure is what allows for what I articulate as a relationally entangled form of presence. Defining relational as more than just a connection with another, I understand it as implicating the mutual constitution that linked subjects perform. *Poor People's TV Room* stages this mutual constitution: one performer's manipulation of a light is what allows another to be lit. One performer's mimicking of another's words emphasizes another's originary words. The cast continuously shifts the presence of one another, adding opacity or emphasis to each other's

embodied and narrative articulations. These linkages are prominent in a work that conceptually centers questions of history and remembrance. Relational linkages point to not just the visual enunciation and privacy of performers' physical presences, but the ways in which figures cast into the archives of history, which Saidiya Hartman has noted as "a death sentence,"[258] are pronounced, articulated, witnessed, and recognized. In other words, I consider these visual strategies as not simply aesthetic decisions, but as considerations of how embodied practices might recontour how history is recognized in the present.

Throughout this chapter, I consider the ways in which questions of diaspora are centered. Okpokwasili's making of the work as a Nigerian American of Igbo descent with a cast of both African and African American performers, as well as her investment in questions about how response to the historic events at hand by and from the Global North impacted their reception raise questions about how these relational tethers might be diasporic in nature. I analyze the ways in which questions of diaspora and matrilineage are narrated onstage, as well as how Okpokwasili utilizes text and storytelling to re-narrate these gendered Nigerian histories. In articulating the ways in which diaspora is intertwined in Okpokwasili's staging of *Poor People's TV Room*, I explore how Okpokwasili attaches failure, erasure, and violence to questions of diasporic entanglement. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, I understand diaspora as a transnational threading of relationalities rather than simply a dichotomy between an originary, nation-based homeland and the flow of subjects outside of it. In other words, I consider the multi-directional, transnational flows that feed into diasporic feeling. My work on diaspora in this chapter centers around the labor, pain, and work that feeds it. I theorize Okpokwasili's portrayal of diasporic lineage as divergent from conceptions of diaspora as return

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[258] Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *small axe,* edited by David Scott, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

or remedy, instead analyzing the work's articulation of diasporic pain points. I note Okpokwasili's unveiling of diasporic labor as a historic practice that counters the erasure of forgetting the femme subjects who experienced the gendered violences which *Poor People's TV Room* takes as its inspiration.

Poor People's TV Room functions as a practice of enacted history focusing on both the 1929 Women's Revolt and the 2014 kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls. These central themes of memory, history, diaspora, and performance anchor the central research questions which I navigate throughout this chapter: *How do the embodied practices of performers as well as this relationally linked sense of their emergence onstage craft new proposals for the construction of memory and the framing of historical events? What might enhanced recognition of the pain or violence of diaspora do for the project of history? How does the dancing body in performance uniquely stage this diasporic pain or failure?*

Methodologically, I employ choreographic, reception, and rhetorical analysis. I first encountered this work when it was performed in Chicago in 2018 at the Museum of Contemporary Art. My analysis stems from witnessing its live performance as well as performance documentation provided to me by New York Live Arts, where the work premiered. I attend to the embodied and aesthetic practices staged by Okpokwasili, as well as the rhetoric performed in the work's spoken narratives. Additionally, I consult interviews with Okpokwasili to attend to her choreographic and staging practices. The central argument of this chapter stems from reading press reviews across multiple cities in which the work was performed, and across which comments on abstraction, confusion, or struggle for the witnessing reviewer became themes. Thus, reception analysis was a starting point for this chapter. Finally, this chapter includes vast analysis of secondary sources outlining The 1929 Women's Revolt, the kidnapping

of schoolgirls from Chibok in 2014, and Okpokwasili's history as an artist. These sources mainly derived from critical archives: the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University, the New York Public Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division, and the archive available at New York's Danspace Project.

This chapter begins with introductions of Okpokwasili, *Poor People's TV Room*, and the historic events at its center. I then explore how visual exposure is evaded in favor of a relational enunciation of presence onstage. I analyze the ways that these relational tethers are both attached to historic events, matrilineage, and diasporic formations and characterized throughout the work as holding the potential for pain, erasure, and violence. I argue in this chapter for the ways that Okpokwasili's framing of diasporic memory practices through these registers of difficulty does not equate to diasporic relations as failures themselves. Instead, I note the ways in which difficulty, threat, and pain all elaborate the *laborious* project of diaspora, in which the attempt of staying in relation is also a *historical* engagement that resists gendered erasure. I consider the ways in which Okpokwasili centers the labor of diaspora through the form of performance, a practice of labor in itself. Performance, a space in which the body exerts on somatic, social, and political levels, gives way to a mode of *practicing* diasporic memory and *doing* history. I conclude this chapter by considering how performance is unveiled as a critical mode of inquiry for questions around diasporic and historical remembrance.

Okwui Okpokwasili and *Poor People's TV Room*

Currently a Brooklyn-based choreographer, Okpokwasili is the daughter of Nigerian and Igbo immigrants who fled the Nigerian Civil War and arrived in the United States in the late 1960s. Okpokwasili, born in 1972, grew up in the Bronx and attended Yale University. She quickly became an important figure in the experimental dance and performance scene in New

York. She has collaborated as a performer with artists including Ralph Lemon and Nora Chipaumire, both of whom have reckoned with histories of violence on Black bodies via performance.[259] Okpokwasili's work itself addresses legacies of racialized violence. Her 2014 *Bronx Gothic*, a forceful solo performance addressing themes of Black girlhood, sexuality, and interiority drew upon "disparate storytelling traditions of Victorian epistolary novels and West African griot poets."[260] Okpokwasili is a lauded and sought-after contemporary choreographer, and she was recognized with a MacArthur "Genius" Grant in 2018. Her work has circulated primarily on highly recognized stages and institutions in the U.S. and Europe which are linked to notions of "high art," including PS122, the Walker Art Center, Danspace, Kunsten Festival Des Arts, and ICA Boston.

Okpokwasili makes work that some might deem Black contemporary dance, yet both of these terms — Black dance and contemporary dance — are unstable and highly contested.[261] Positioning the term Black as a qualifier for a genre of dance already nods to the racialized otherness which does not face white dancers or the genres in which they are classified. In considering the racialized naming of dance practices, Brenda Dixon Gottschild has written, "There is not a black dancing body— nor a white dancing, or other dancing body —that whatever black or white dance is, it is a complex social and cultural idea based on body image and often body stereotypes."[262] These stereotyped and racialized readings of dancing bodies has led in part to their erasures. The canon of U.S. modern and postmodern dance are troubled by the absencing of Black dancers and choreographers from the pivotal moments to which they were

[259] Okwui Okpokwasili, Interview by BRIC TV, 25 April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgvNAQIj1PQ
[260] "MacArthur Fellows Program: Okwui Okpokwasili," The MacArthur Foundation, October 4, 2018, Accessed April 3, 2023, https://www.macfound.org/fellows/class-of-2018/okwui-okpokwasili#searchresults
[261] For capaciousness and categorizations of Black dance, see: DeFrantz 2001 and 2016; DeFrantz and Gonzalez, 2014; Dixon Gottschild 1996 and 2005; Osumare, 2018. For categorical debates around "contemporary" in dance, see: Kwan, 2017; Chatterjea, 2020.
[262] Brenda Dixon Gottschild, "Is Race Still an Issue in Dance?" *Dance Magazine*, February, 2005.

foundational. Dance's embodied form also makes it critical territory for considering the intersections of racialization and bodily practices, including the stereotypes that accompany how they are read. As Halifu Osumare notes, "The field of dance of any cultural persuasion is often viewed as mindless —bodily expression that takes little intellect. Given the Western and Christian denigration of the sensual body and all things associated with it, such as dancing, the linking of African-derived dance forms to a 'natural ability,' instead of a hard-won skill of artistry, positioned it at a further disadvantage."[263] Racialized injury has thus been documented as inextricable from the very methods of analysis, language, and classification used to historicize dance in the Global North. Thomas DeFrantz notes the racialized framing of the concert stage: "I contend that a public space— at least in terms of concert dance— is a white space, a space of production and consumption, a modernist space, a fetishized space, a Europeanist space. A display of the black body in any of these spaces confers a responsibility onto the artist, who assumes 'custodianship of the racial group's most intimate self-identity'"[264] My considerations of Okpokwasili's choreographic work flows from my assertion that the framing of dance practices, specifically on concert stages, is a racially inflected endeavor.

Legacies of appropriation and the disappearance of Black choreographers and dancers who were central to the formation of the Modern dance canon have been well documented, as have the presumed whiteness of the ensuing period of postmodern dance coming from New York's downtown dance scene which primarily circled around members of Judson Dance Theater, including heavyweights Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, Simone Forti,

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[263] Halifu Osumare, *Dancing in Blackness* (University of Florida Press, 2018), 12.
[264] DeFrantz quoting Gilroy's *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*, 246; in DeFrantz's "Foreword: Black Bodies Dancing Black Culture – Black Atlantic Transformations, *Embodying Liberation: the Black Body in American Dance* (Hamburg: LIT, 2001), 13.

Lucinda Childs, and more.[265] Rebecca Chaleff notes that Judson's emphasis on pedestrian movement instead of forms of virtuosity formerly privileged by its modern predecessors continued the "whiteness of high modernism" by excluding Black artists who were "implicitly racialized 'extraordinary' and 'spectacular.'"[266] Noting the racialized legacies of Judson, Amy Swanson notes the following: "Postmodern dance was overwhelmingly white in its earliest iterations but artists of color, including Bill T. Jones, Ronald K. Brown, Kyle Abraham, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Ralph Lemon, and Camille A. Brown, to name a few, have increasingly shaped the art form's shifting aesthetics and orientations over the last several decades."[267]

While I agree with the critique of a "downtown" Judson era's overwhelming privileging of whiteness, I also follow scholar Carl Paris' historical review of the burgeoning scene of Black dance in the 1980s and early 1990s that was intertwined with both postmodern aesthetics and the legacies of the 1960s' Black Arts Movement.[268] Paris notes the ways in which this time period included an increasing number of Black choreographers and performers working more visibly within the postmodern lineage in New York's downtown scene. This period was marked by dance making and curation that was legibly dedicated to Black histories and artists, including The Dance Black Conference at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (1993), The Black Tradition in American Modern Dance, a series presented by the American Dance Festival,[269] and Halifu Osumare's California-based performance series titled Black Choreographers Moving Toward the

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[265] For analysis of race and the American modern dance canon: Dixon Gottschild, 1996; Manning, 2004; Osumare, 2018. For constructions and presumptions of whiteness in postmodern dance: Chaleff, 2018; DeFrantz, 2016; Goldman, 2010.

[266] Rebecca Chaleff, "Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance," *Dance Research Journal* 50, No. 3 (2018): 72.

[267] Swanson, *Illegible Bodies,*16.

[268] Carl Paris, "Defining the African American Presence in Postmodern Dance from the Judson Church Era to the 1990s," in Transmigratory Moves, 1, edited by Janice LaPointe-Crump, 234–243. 34th Congress on Research in Dance Conference: New York, 2001.

[269] See: Allen,1988; Manning, 2015.

21st Century, which was held until 1995 and which had ties to bicoastal artists.[270] These are only some of the major programming events that showcase the Black dance artists who gained notoriety during this era and who additionally interrogated questions of race within postmodern lineages. Thus, while acknowledging the dominance of whiteness within the downtown, Judson lineage of New York dance is critical, to read it as *only* marked by its whiteness additionally performs an act of erasure of the Black choreographers who labored to remix aesthetics, connect Black artists in community, and to put pressure on assumptions about race and choreographic form, that is, to trouble the notion that forms of experimentation, abstraction, or other "postmodern" aesthetics were not generated, contoured by, or available to Black dancemakers.

Okpokwasili is part of this genealogy of Black experimental choreographers with ties to the postmodern lineage. And yet, she is also an artist who challenges any stable classification. Okpokwasili self-describes her work as sitting at intersections of "theater, dance, and installation."[271] An independent artist and performer, Okpokwasili generates funding for her work via grants for projects, artistic development, and touring costs. She has described the search for artistic support and sustenance in stating: "There was always a struggle...I was temping and doing work for free...You hope that one day you'll get paid for it, but that's not the impetus...I'm really excited when I get into a rehearsal space or when I see people working, there's a level of 'wow, what's going to happen? Or,...how are they going to solve this problem? It's an active space."[272] This articulation of rehearsing and generating performance as active, able to solve "problems" in new manners, and mysterious becomes important for both Okpokwasili's larger body of work and, specifically, *Poor People's TV Room* because it articulates a belief in embodiment as both holding potential for forging new epistemological formations and as an

[270] See: Manning, 2015; Osumare and Lewis-Ferguson, 1991; Osumare, 2018.
[271] Okwui Okpokwasili, Interview by BRIC TV, 2017.
[272] Ibid.

activated space in which the vibrational resonance between bodies in motion and witnessing audiences might perform a kind of research with broad sociopolitical stakes..

Okpokwasili's attraction to the form of performance for its ability to activate is generative in thinking about how *Poor People's TV Room* was constructed. She has described her work with her husband and primary collaborator Peter Born, as centering the "architecture of space, how things are placed and how the audience is placed in relationship to the people who are performing...we start to think about all of the different energies and all of the different narratives that start to emerge from all of those ways of thinking."[273] Okpokwasili's articulation of performance privileges witnessing and relationality. It engages the relational as spatial, energetic, physical, and sensorial. Thus, Okpokwasili posits a firm belief in the convergence of witnessing, embodiment, and presence as a form of constructing knowledge: "Sometimes I want there to be nothing left but what is there, so for me, I try to strip away anything outside of the moment, so that I can be left at a kind of essential place from which to share information, share the body, share language."[274]

Poor People's TV Room took form through collaborative processes with her co-performers: Katrina Reid, Nehemoyia Young, and South African singer and actress Thuli Dumakude, all of whom are accomplished performers and artists in their own right. Reid is a choreographer, producer, and director based in New York by way of Georgia. They have worked with artists including Nic Kay, Emily Johnson, David Thompson, and Jonathan González. Young, also based in New York, is a choreographer and performer whose work has been presented by Movement Research, Danspace, and Spelman College. Dumakude is a South African singer, actress, and songwriter. She has performed in on- and off-Broadway productions

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[273] Ibid.
[274] Ibid.

including *Poppie Nongena*, *The Lion King*, and *Juan Darién: A Carnival Mass*, as well as released multiple studio albums. For Okpokwasili, collaboration indicates that material is generated in the studio from her directing prompts and through the bodies and intentions of her collaborators. Rehearsal footage from the cast's residency at Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography shows Okpokwasili and Born seated in a rehearsal space as her cast improvises with undulations and forward movement. Key to this collaborative process are bodies working from similar ideas and improvising while in the same space. This sharing of space is critical as it feeds fellow performers and develops a vocabulary of movement. A lineage is built across these bodies. On the residency's collaborative process, Okpokwasili describes: "What we have been working on while we've been here are kind of these vocabularies that bring women together. We've been using text to make gestural vocabulary, but also trying to find a community in the room...What is our collective of women? How do we fall apart?...How do these embodied stories emerge? How do they function?."[275]

Poor People's TV Room has received funding in part from Creative Capital and has been performed at venues including New York Live Arts (where it premiered), ICA Boston, Jacob's Pillow, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, where I saw the work in 2018. Reviews of the work have briefly mentioned Okpokwasili's interest in Nigerian history and gender, but have quickly moved to emphasize the abstraction of the work or Okpokwasili's virtuosity as a performer. In her review of the work, New York Times' Gia Kourlas states, "It can be oblique, but it's also alive as it drifts through myriad subjects to conjure a surreal, imaginary place where, you get the distinct feeling, women have long been oppressed and ignored, or

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[275] Okwui Okpokwasili, Interview by MANCC (Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography), 16 December 2016, http://www.mancc.org/artists/okwui-okpokwasili/

worse: treated like victims" before noting Okpokwasili as "a force."[276] The Chicago Tribune's Lauren Warnecke noted the work as creating a "confusing, circular world that bombards its viewers with walls and walls of non-linear text, the theme of which seems to be about transformation or political activism." Warnecke later notes that she "struggled" with the work, adding "things I thought I knew about certain historical events turned out to be false or misguided."[277] Both reviewer comments unveil the performance's investment in structures of power and history, while also noting the experience of having to do labor as an audience to the work.

Poor People's TV Room was inspired by two events of gendered violence in Nigerian history: the 1929 Women's Revolt and the kidnapping of schoolgirls in the town of Chibok in 2014. The Women's revolt was a widespread response to changes made by British colonial rule, including the threat of additional taxation and practices of indirect rule, in which the colonial government installed leadership with no local credibility. The revolt followed the joining of the Northern and Southern protectorates by Governor General Frederick Dealtry Lugard. Nigerian scholar Chike Dike notes that the resentment that spurred the revolts were in part anchored in economic policies ruled by the colonial government: "Underlining the colonial policies was a strong desire to exploit the economic potentialities of the South-East, beginning from Southern Igboland to the minority areas, a strong oil palm area providing large quantities of palm produce for export. The taxation of men in the area yielded large dividends since it was based on revenue accruing from the palm produce trade."[278] The British amalgamated the Northern and

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[276] Gia Kourlas, "Review: Okwui Okpokwasili Gives Voice to the Ignored and the Oppressed," The New York Times, April 25, 2017, Accessed April 3, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/25/arts/dance/review-okwui-okpokwasili-gives-voice-to-the-ignored-and-oppressed.html

[277] Lauren Warnecke, "'Poor People's TV Room Mixes Boko Haram History with Oprah and is a Tough, Tough Piece to Unpack," Chicago Tribune, April 13, 2018, Accessed March 31, 2023.https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/ct-ent-okpokwasili-mca-dance-review-0414-story.html

[278] Chike Dike, Editor, *The Women's Revolt of 1929* (Nelag and Co. Ltd., 1995), xii.

Southeastern protectorates under the same colonial economy to pay off debts in the north with the accrual of money from the palm trade in the southeast. While masc subjects in the southeast faced taxation, the threat of new taxes for indigenous femme subjects loomed, sparking resistance across the area. In an address honoring the 1929 Women's Revolt, Prince Tony Momoh (the Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture from 1986-1990) noted that "by 1929, the prices of palm produces…had fallen dramatically as a result of the depression in Europe," exacerbating the expectation that femmes would face new taxation to boost the region's economic output.

In addition to economic factors, the British government's decision to place local control in the hands of arbitrarily selected warrant chiefs rather than leaders chosen by communities sparked resistance. For the femme subjects in Ibibio and Igbo societies (who formed the majority of those involved in the 1929 Women's Revolt), communal leadership was a common role. V.I. Ekpo notes the strong social roles often assumed by femmes, as well as how linguistic structures and cultural idioms reflect the power surrounding matriarchal rule, stating "The word 'eka' (mother), in all the dialects spoken in Ibibioloand, means 'large' ('extensive'), 'motherhood' or 'womanhood' and is often if not always, used in expressions of adoration and awe."[279] Ekpo notes that Ibibio women were "admitted into all the social institutions including the highest ones, such as Inam and Idiong."[280] Femme subjects were often viewed as social leaders, and thus, the turn to masc subjects selected by the colonial government as warrant chiefs catapulted femmes to organize in protest.

The Women's Revolt was initiated when one particular warrant chief, Okugo, who presided over the town of Oloko was ordered by Captain J. Cook of the British government to

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[279] V.I. Ekpo, "Traditional Symbolism of the Women's War of 1929," Dike, Chike, Editor, *The Women's Revolt of 1929* (Nelag and Co. Ltd., 1995), 50.
[280] Ibid, 51.

begin a head-count of femmes in the area in order to increase taxation. When Okugo's appointee, a teacher named Mark Emeruwa, approached a local femme named Nwanyeruwa as part of his local headcount, an altercation occurred. News of the physical conflict spread quickly, and femme subjects throughout the region gathered in mass numbers to protest the physical confrontation, taxation, and the establishment of warrant chiefs. The massive scale and efficiency with which participants organized is one of the most noted aspects of the 1929 Women's Revolt. Roles of femme subjects within Ibibio society were a large contributor to the effectiveness of communication. Chuks Osuji notes that, "the women as the primary producers and distributors of food and other local consumer items took advantage of the complex network of market places as centres for the dissemination of information, sometimes through gossip and rumor."[281] Women's connection to multiple families (often her "community of birth as well as her community of marriage"), as well as their affiliations across ethnically organized social groups due to marriage and roles that bridged these ethnic groups meant that information about the protests disseminated rapidly. The revolt included participants gathering in the streets en masse and turning to embodied forms such as dance and song as part of their movement. The revolt lasted from November, 1929 to January, 1930 with thousands of femme subjects across various towns and provinces joining the movement.[282]

The initial catalyst for Okpokwasili's meditation on questions of embodiment, collectivity, history, and memory was the 2014 kidnapping of 276 girls from the Chibok school in Borno, a northeastern state of Nigeria. The kidnapping was carried out by Boko Haram, a jihadist militant terrorist organization in Nigeria. Boko Haram was begun by Mohammed Yusuf

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[281] Chuks Osugi, "The Aba Women's Revolt of 1929: A Study in the Mass Mobilisation Process in Nigeria," Dike, Chike, Editor, *The Women's Revolt of 1929* (Nelag and Co. Ltd., 1995), 46.

[282] The naming practices surrounding the Women's Revolt has been debated and oscillates between the "Women's War," "Women's Revolt," and "Women's Riot." I follow Chike Dike's selection of "Women's Revolt" for the ways it implicates the British colonial government as catalyzing violence with colonial actions. See Dike's *The Women's Revolt of 1929.*

in the town of Maiduguri, which is also located in the Northeastern Borno state. With the return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, portions of the Nigerian population voiced desire to return to a more strict application of Islam's Sharia Law.[283] Boko Haram identified as the "Islamic State in West Africa"and gained power by identifying as "anti-establishment, questioning the existing rules of society, especially perpetrated by the ruling political class...but giving religious interpretations."[284] After an uprising in 2009, Boko Haram began terrorist attacks on villages and civilians. They argued for a take down of the Nigerian state, a return to the Islamic state, and a war against Christians and "bad Muslims."[285] Boko Haram targeted villages in Borno, including Chibok, where girls from the town's school were kidnapped in the middle of the night. The kidnapping launched an international response. Then First Lady Michelle Obama joined the worldwide protest, vocalizing the demand for the return of the girls. The hashtag "#bringbackourgirls" became the slogan for the collective response against Boko Haram.[286] During this period, Okpokwasili began to contemplate the connection between the kidnapping of the Chibok girls and the Women's War. She stated,

> As the viral sensation took hold, I felt the presence of these women who had initiated this movement...was elided, it disappeared. It just drew me back to...other movements of...the political and social agency of African women or those who had disappeared or been replaced. What surfaces in the place of these women - who are the active agents of change in their own lives - are these victim narratives where they then have to be saved and rescued.[287]

Okpokwasili's interest in both Nigerian women's histories, as well as themes of remembrance, resistance, and erasure, anchor *Poor People's TV Room*.

[283] *Boko Haram: The Origins of Evil*, Directed by Xavier Muntz, Java Firm, 2016.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Ibid.
[286] Helon Habila, *The Chibok Girls, The Boko Haram, Kidnappings, and Islamist Militancy in Nigeria*, (Columbia Global Reports, 2016).
[287] Okpokwasili, Interview by ICA Boston, 2018.

Tricky Visuality in *Poor People's TV Room*

Through its embodied practices and onstage materials, *Poor People's TV Room* intentionally generates a world marked by themes of visual disappearance and reappearance. Upon entering the work, the stage is simply designed. The work is performed in a proscenium setting, meaning the traditional staging area between the backdrop of the stage and the edge delineating it from the audience. The theaters in which the work has been performed have tiered seating: audience members closest to the stage are seated at a lower level than those in the back of the theater's house. Black marley — a common material used as a base in choreographic works because it softens the blow to dancers' joints and skeletal systems — is spread across the floor. The props and architecture onstage are simple: a wooden platform, two white plastic chairs, a square of mirrored glass on the floor, and a chair and a lamp hanging by rope from the ceiling. The stage is dimly lit with a large, plastic sheet hanging from the ceiling and dividing the depth of the stage in half. A projection screen sits on the right side of the stage in front of the plastic sheet. The wooden platform lies on the ground in front of the raised screen, and the suspended furniture hangs from the ceiling between the projection screen and the plastic sheet. This right side of the stage sits in darkness and seems unused: nothing appears on the platform or the screen, and it is difficult to identify the suspended objects upon first glance.

In April, 2018, I entered the Edlis Neeson Theater in the lowest level of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago a few minutes before the performance's start time. The work had already been unfolding, and performers were mid-action, as if audiences were walking into a world that didn't require their recognition to begin. Thuli Dumakude's shadowy figure is seated in one of the simple, plastic chairs, both of which you might find at a home improvement store. She is still, looking out at the audience or watching her fellow performers. She has a casual air

about her, as if she is also new to the action unfolding around her. Her chair sits on the reflective, square mirror, which rests atop the black marley and reflects her image back up at her. The only light source that appears onstage comes from the left side of the stage on the floor. It sits right behind the plastic sheet and points directly onto it. Okpokwasili, wearing a pink dress, moves in quick undulations behind the curtain, and her figure is blurred by its opacity. She is fully lit, yet still appears in a ghostly manner. Reid's relationship with the light is in stark contrast. She moves in front of the curtain and is backlit. This lighting makes her dance difficult to recognize, and she appears as a silhouette. Nehemoyia Young is positioned in a clump on the floor on the right side of the stage, with a white sheet of fabric over her body. She is hidden in darkness and is barely discernible until she begins to crawl into the light.

Throughout *Poor People's TV Room*, the visibility of performers is manipulated and shifted through various material mechanisms onstage. The disappearance and reappearance of performers are not presented in highly theatrical ways, meaning that shifts are subtle and non-dramatic. By using visual tricks that support the projection, reflection, and blurring of performers' bodies, the audience is given the ability to identify the mechanisms that interrupt or shift visibility. These mechanisms often appear simplistic or "DIY." They avoid theatrical maneuvers containing more technical prowess, including the use of full blackouts or theater lights hidden from view and operating under the guise of being a part of the imagined world unfolding onstage. All of these staging choices lead to a kind of affective difficulty generated by the work. The mechanisms that populate the stage make a stable visual grasp of any performer unwieldy due to the work's nuanced and subtle "now you see it, now you don't" aesthetic. This sense of visual shift generates an affect of difficulty: nothing is visually reliable, and the eye must be flexible if its expectation is to consume any kind of sturdy image.

This chapter takes interest in the ways that visibility is choreographed by Okpokwasili. Her turn to visual labor does not fully erase performers. Instead, her visual play shifts how they are announced in space, prioritizing relational enunciations of presence and putting pressure on expectations of clear visual exposure as proof of existence. She allows visuality to do communicative work, but she withholds and refuses a visuality that is necessitated by clarity or exposure. Instead, Okpokwasili turns to shadow, blur, and multiplicity to suggest the presence of her cast. In doing so, the visual world of *Poor People's TV Room* makes room for critical questions around the stakes of visual display, specifically for Black femme subjects.

This withholding of visual exposure —as well as the clear access that we as audiences have to the mechanisms which obstruct it —suggests a resistance to hypervisibility, which has been well documented within Black studies and Black feminist lineages as an expectation facing Black femmes. I follow Nicole Fleetwood's definition of hypervisibility as "an interventionist term to describe processes that produce the overrepresentation of certain images of [B]lacks and the visual currency of these images in public cultures,"[288] as well as "historic and contemporary conceptualizations of blackness as simultaneously invisible and always visible, as underexposed and always exposed."[289] Fleetwood's work in *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* begins from understanding "the field of vision itself as a crucial realm for structuring and enforcing race."[290] In outlining the ways that Blackness itself troubles vision "because of the discourses of captivity and capitalism that frame this body as such," she asks how Blackness might pester the visual rubrics which qualify its racialization in the first place. Fleetwood contributes to well documented examples of expectations of hypervisibility faced by Black

[288] Nicole R Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision:Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 2011), 18.
[289] Ibid, 111.
[290] Ibid, 15.

subjects —especially Black femmes —by asking how they problematize these constructs of Black subjectivity being produced by their visual exposure and its propensity towards captivity.

Captivity is a keyword in understanding how expectations of exposure register as violence. When the visual realm that forms around Black subjectivity is premised upon presumed conditions of exposure, the Black body is demanded to produce its own subjectivity through its unveiling to witnessing eyes. Black subjectivity, in the ways that it has been bound to hypervisibility, demands for Black subjects to expose themselves in order to be known. In her book *Bodies in Dissent*, Daphne Brooks writes: "[B]lack women's bodies continue to bear the gross insult and burden of spectacular (representational) exploitation in transatlantic culture. Systematically overdetermined and mythically configured, the iconography of the black female body remains the central ur-text of alienation in transatlantic culture."[291] Both Brooks and Fleetwood join a lineage of Black feminist scholars who describe the ways in which the "overdetermined" expectations of the exposed Black femme body are what announce understanding of Black womanhood's subjectivity. This expectation of exposure bestows upon the witnessing eye extreme powers: it provides the ability to both *consume* the Black femme's exposed body and evaluate her subjectivity based upon presupposed conditions of her exposure.

Black feminist pressures on these expectations of visual clarity emphasize the ways in which the presence of the Black femme subject is predicated upon a dominant figure registering her through her own exposure. This is where the intertwining of overdetermined exposure and captivity lie. By captivity, I refer to the taking of possession of the Black femme's dominantly configured social access to subjectivity via expectation of visual exposure. In this instance, captivity refers to the ways in which what Brooks calls "the gross insult and burden of

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[291] Daphne A. Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 7.

spectacular (representational) exploitation" and what Fleetwood again notes as "simultaneously invisible and always visible, as underexposed and always exposed" gives the see-er the potential to take possession of the possibility of subjectivity. Thus, the captive position here is one in which subjectivity does not flow freely and is instead premised upon a consumptive expectation of exposure.[292]

I follow scholars who, amidst this landscape of violence, take interest in the ways in which Black femmes labor within these conditions and use them as part of their cultural work. Black feminist scholars have noted the ways in which Black femmes have worked under and with these conditions to counter and make visible cultural expectations. Fleetwood might deem this the expression of "excess flesh," which she terms as "a strategic enactment of certain black female artists and entertainers to deploy hypervisibility as constitutive of black femaleness in dominant visual culture." Fleetwood's research pulses around artists who affirm her critical question: "Can hypervisibility be a performative strategy that points to the problem of the black

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[292] Captivity has obvious tethers to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, in which Black subjects faced physical and psychic captivity, and what Saidiya Hartman notes as its afterlives. The intersections of captivity and Black women's subjectivity have been described by Hortense Spillers in her formulation of what she notes as "flesh." I quote Spillers at length to emphasize this critical contribution to thought on how registers of captivity and Black women's subjectivity are tied:

> But I would make a distinction in this case between 'body' and 'flesh' and impose that distinction as the central one between captive and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography. Even though the European hegemonies stole bodies – some of them female – out of West African communities in concert with the African 'middleman,' we regard this human and social irreparability as high crimes against the *flesh*, as the person of African females and African males registered the the wounding. If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard.

Spillers' conception of flesh provides a foundational framework for understanding the ways in which the Transatlantic slave trade has fashioned relationships to Black women's subjectivity. My point here is that the entanglements of captivity and Black women's subjectivity have been long documented, connected, and understood as both part of a continuous landscape of violence, as well as a landscape that Black women work in and amongst. There is a connection between the captivity of the ship's hold and the ways in which visual regimes have been fashioned in racialized ways, in which the subjectivity of Black women is both in the eye of the beholder and attached to expectations of exposure despite that overexposure not producing reparative recognition. See: Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, No. 2 (1987): 65-81.

female body in the visual field?" Daphne Brooks, also interested in the ways in which Black subjects use performance to play with the conditions that erase them. She frames these subjects as "dissenting bodies" and emphasizes the way that they "negotiated ways of manipulating the borders of the material and the epistemological in transatlantic performance culture" as well as how they "do" their bodies "differently in public spaces" as part of this negotiation.[293]

While Fleetwood specifically notes artists like Lil Kim who use spectacle to play with these modes of exposure and Brooks is interested in the "doing" of the self through the mode of performance to play with "presumably fixed notions of cultural identity," I argue that Okpokwasili, while related, performs a different form of resistance to visual exposure. While the subjects theorized by Fleetwood and Brooks scale up their own self-determined exposure to note the culturally predominant expectation of it, Okpokwasili uses materials on stage, including light, costuming, embodied practices, and more to resist an easily consumable exposure by performing what I call a *tricky visuality*. By calling these visual strategies "tricky," I play with the term's double entendre: Okpokwasili's use of visuality both disorients the audience through tactics like visual blur, mirroring, and darkness and in doing so, she reminds us of the strain that the visual realm can require of those engaging it. Here, "tricky" refers to the laborious task of relying on difficult visibility. And yet, tricky also refers to a craftiness in the ways in which Okpokwasili makes us question the "real."

In the field of Performance Studies, visuality has been bound to proof. Peggy Phelan has importantly theorized that the visual realm —and its ties to the image —is understood as "a representation of the real."[294] Contesting the limitations of visuality, Phelan considers what she deems the "unmarked" as an "*active* vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the

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[293] Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent,* 8.
[294] Phelan, *Unmarked,* 1.

payoff of visibility"[295] as part of her "theory of value for that which is not 'really' there."[296] Okpokwasili tactically utilizes visual modes in which performers are indeed there, and yet, their presence often is interwoven with others: the eye must do work to see them independently. Tricky thus refers to both the arduous task of trusting the visual field as proof and the ways in which the visual field is used playfully and resistantly. I turn to Okpokwasili's play with the visual field because it subverts these expectations of hypervisibility and emphasizes their presence, distorting any reliance on the visual field that would anchor witnesses in the confidence of capture. Throughout the work, we see obvious moments of visual disorientation, confusion, and opacity.[297] Okpokwasili continues to refuse any grasp of reality that is premised upon a clear exposure in the visual field. In the following paragraphs, I turn to multiple moments in the performance as a form of enunciating how this refusal unfolds.

As the opening moments of this chapter unveiled, patterns of shadows, projections, and obscuring tactics visually manipulate the presence of performers in *Poor People's TV Room*. Materials are used to double their presence or to blur them to the point of making them appear as a shadow or outline. Darkness is a common presence in the work's staging, making the manipulation of light more impactful in directing attention and playing visual tricks. Performers' bodies are announced, but not exposed. They appear as a moving tableau and are each enveloped in their individual choreographic tasks, yet connected through their visual entanglement in one another. Okpokwasili moves along the curtain while Reid moves differently in front of it. Dumakude continues to sit until a distinct shift in which she stands and begins to shuffle with her feet moving in very short paces across the stage. Young slowly travels across the stage at a slow pace, enveloped by this fabric. Her body shifts in positions in order to accomplish this motion,

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[295] Ibid, 19.
[296] Ibid, 1.
[297] See Glissant, 1997.

yet the audience is not given visibility into how she physically accomplishes it. In this opening scene, the neatness of visual clarity is interrupted explicitly.

While the work withholds visual clarity, it does not default to simply disappearing performers. Instead, performers become replicated via the materials onstage or the bodies of other performers. This often results in a visual doubling of their bodies in motion.Visual echoes of their bodies allow them to flicker in and out of view. Dumakude's image atop the mirrored surface appears and disappears as she moves across it. Location in the audience changes this viewpoint. One audience member might see her live figure and the mirrored image of her, while another audience's perspective might be limited to just her live image. Proximity to the performer changes whether we see her as doubled, emphasizing the importance of catching sight of Dumakude's mirrored twin. Because of the placement of the light on the side of the stage and theatrical lights hung from the ceiling, both Okpokwasili and Reid have shadows projected onto the plastic sheet. These shadows seem to interact with one another as much as Okpokwasili and Reid's dancing figures do. And, as Young moves across the stage and a theater light raises and focuses on her body, the light also intercepts Dumakude, whose shadow is projected onto Young's fabric. In these moments, images of bodies —real, shadowy, and projected —fill the stage. As performers move, their doubling effect might disappear or reappear. These visual tricks provide a kaleidoscopic sense of the scene at hand, in which performers' movements generate shadows or outlines that enlarge, reduce, shift in orientation, and flash in and out of focus.

Minutes after this opening section, Okpokwasili and Reid roll onto the raised platform sitting in the corner of the stage. Suddenly, the monitor behind them turns on, revealing a live video feed of their projected bodies. The perspective of the video comes from a camera directly above them. What had not been made clear to the audience's perspective is that the surface of the

platform is painted like wallpaper, with framed portraits attached to it. Suspended above the platform in midair are the lamp and chair. The video makes it appear as if Okpokwasili and Reid are standing in front of the wall, and as if the lamp and chair are vertically oriented. In reality, their bodies and these domestic objects are horizontally situated. This mirage literally turns the image on its head, playing tricks with the moment's spatial orientation. This area of the stage was first in the shadows, present for the entirety of the show while likely going unnoticed. Prior to this moment, lighting and motion has drawn the eye closer to other parts of the stage, making it difficult to notice the oddity of the suspended furniture before its presence becomes prominent.

In another section of the performance, minutes before its conclusion, a simple worklight fixed to a diagonally hung rope is the primary source of onstage lighting. The rope runs from the ceiling to the floor at an angle that lands just above the heads of Reid and Young, who dance underneath it. The rope has enough slack so that the light moves and dangles when performers graze its surface. Okpokwasili easily could have worked with a lighting designer to generate this lighting effect without the light or rope being visible. Instead, this lighting device appears in the frame of performance, announcing the importance of its common and quotidian quality as it subtly lights the dancers' bodies.

Young stands under the light as Reid moves behind her, Reid's shadow projecting onto the curtain. Reid holds her finger to her mouth in a gesture commanding quiet. An audio recording of a girl crying plays over this moment. Reid turns the light on and off, oscillating from pitch black to the dim light. Reid and Young eventually lean into one another, bodies placing weight on one another and experimenting in moments of full contact. As they use one another as support to exchange weight and play with physical balance, the rope resting between their bodies moves with them, changing the position of the light and casting quickly shifting

shadows onto the plastic surface behind them. As their bodies move, so too does the ability to track them visually in space. In one moment, Young drapes forward over the rope and Reid's back. Her weight is fully given to Young. As this movement unfolds, the light is caught between them and moves closer to their torsos. Its sphere of light zooms in abruptly, now just illuminating a small portion of the fabric of their T-shirts. As Reid gently releases Young back to a standing position, the projection of light expands instantly. Visibility scales up and down with their dance. In one instance, the details of Reid's entire figure are fully visible as Young becomes difficult to make out in the shadowy space next to her. Then, they both fade into dimmer light as the rope is pulled and the light focuses on the floor. Skewed visibility becomes part of this dance, and the shadowy quality of their bodies are choreographically interwoven.

Figure 12: Photo by Peter Born, Accessed on Wesleyan University Center for the Arts Website.

These moments emphasize the visual tricks that the work's staging plays on its audiences. What we haven't seen has been in plain sight, but hidden. What makes the exposure of a performer difficult, at times impossible, is on full view, allowing audiences the experience of tricky visuality as well as an awareness of expectations of visual revelation. The audience is given access to the ways that the work challenges a sense of visual stability and any possible craving for it. Playing instead with acts that conjure shapeshifting, hiding, and the failure of visual capture, the work asks its viewer to instead sit —at the level of their own senses —with the experience of a visuality that evades a reliance on exposure.

These moments in the work do not just refuse exposure, they also reveal the mechanisms used in the staging of the work —dark light, the opaque curtain, and the doubling of the video projector —to show us what might prevent this full visual exposure. Okpokwasili's tricky visuality provides the audience with visual cues into how she generates a world that avoids this exposure. This visual manipulation might propose an answer to Fleetwood's important question in her exploration of how Black femmes perform under conditions of hypervisibility: "How might we investigate the visible black body as a troubling presence to the very scopic regimes that define it as such?"[298] Okpokwasili's turn to the performers' bodies as shadowy, blurry, and hidden performs a nuisance to this expectation of the exposed Black femme and her visual capture.

Relational Tethers

Okpokwasili's avoidance of visual clarity, stability, or exposure not only resists the consumptive quality of certain looking practices: these intentional staging choices make way for a world in which reflection, projection, mirroring, shadows, and doubling become generative

[298] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 18.

aesthetic gestures. This tricky visibility catalyzes a reliance on other surfaces and bodies to understand the reality of each performers' existence. Here, Okpokwasili proposes a different kind of visual framing, in which we understand the presence of performers through their linkages. Okpokwasili unveils the work's performers and their narratives through their multiplication, emphasis, doubling, and projection onto and through one another and material surfaces onstage. In these instances, the visual presence of Okpokwasili, Dumakude, Reid, and Young is not denied. What is instead negated is their full visual exposure. Performers enunciate themselves through the reflection of their own presence in another or through their own doubling. Dumakude's body is mirrored on the flooring she stands on, and this mirror image slips in and out of view depending on the audience's vantage point. As Okpokwasili and Reid lay on the wooden platform, their bodies are doubled on the screen above them. We are aware of this doubling as we see their live bodies visually replicated on the mediated screen above. In other instances, performers' revelation to the audience is entangled in the presence and movement of other performers. Dumakude's shadow is projected onto Young's blanketed figure. In the duet between Reid and Young, either performer's movements influence how the light that they manipulate reveals the other.

Figure 13: Photo by Ian Douglass, The Chicago Tribune.

These visual tricks perform a relational mutuality, in which performers' are suggested to us via their tethers to another. Their image, movement, or words are reiterated, multiplied, or

projected elsewhere via choreographic and aesthetic structures which Okpokwasili has designed. The stage of *Poor People's TV Room* thus has a transformative quality in which performers' presences shift in relation to one another. By relational, I refer to the mutual constitution of figures in which their presence, expression, or subjectivity is linked to, shifted by, and articulated by or through another. Okpokwasili's rejection of visual exposure gives way to a more reflective world in which performers flicker in and out of view because their visual presence is intertwined with the movement of other figures and materials.

This reflective and refractive visual quality, generated by a reliance on light, shadow, and the flickering of images, is also mirrored in choreographic and narrative structures. *Poor People's TV Room* has a theatrical quality in which areas of the stage seem to indicate separate worlds. Okpokwasili and Reid's duet on the platform is presented as distinct from the activities of Dumakude and Young, yet these choreographic sections visually overlap and fade in and out of one another, much like images of performers. In the following section, I explore choreographic and narrative, text-based structures which also suggest the relational entanglements of performers before moving to a larger discussion of the political and historical stakes of these choreographic, aesthetic choices.

In one moment of *Poor People's TV Room*, Okpokwasili and Reid follow a similar pathway of movement. They dance through specific shapes together, at times physically syncing up precisely and at other times, incorporating slightly altered movement from one another. Their torsos twist backwards in a leftward spiral over their bent left knees. They trail their weightless right legs on the floor behind them before unwinding them. They circle their leg forward, stepping onto it with their full weight. They raise the left leg with a bent knee in front of them, then straighten it and extend the leg in midair. They step onto the left foot before they again

spiral backwards over the right foot and perform this movement on the other side of their body. This choreography is simple. Yet, the subtle differences between their approaches stand out. Okpokwasili's right foot is more turned in. Reid's arms hang lower in the air. Okpokwasili's right palm faces down while Reid's face upwards. They move slowly and methodically. Their pacing gives space for a co-noticing that increases the appearance of moving together. In this gradual, spiraling motion, it is evident that the movement itself allows the other's body to go in and out of the visual frame for each dancer: as Reid turns to her right, Okpokwasili moves into Reid's field of vision, and as Reid spirals left, Okpokwasili's frame disappears until Reid moves enough to allow Okpokwasili back into her view. There is constant divergence and return in this choreography as the dancers slowly shift apart and then back into connection.

Suddenly, Okpokwasili's body interrupts this slow, cyclical movement as she falls into Reid's arms. Reid shifts Okpokwasili's body so that her weight is more fully centered on her feet, bringing her to a standing position. The pair switches between falling and catching one another in a more hectic pacing than prior moments. Their necks collide, pressing into one another before pushing off of each other's body. They reach for one another and engage in a choreographic push-pull. They caress, hold, and press off of eachother, performing many iterations of entwinement with a quickened pace. Reid holds Okpokwasili's body as she undulates and moves her arms with punctuated, staccato movement. They perform choreography that shifts as they lean on the other for support. Reid becomes a frame for Okpokwasili as she supports her movement. Okpokwasili performs a container for Reid's undulations. Eventually, their upper backs slowly collide. Back to back, they move gently as weight is pressed into one another, sharing the labor of balance before the pacing quickens and they move briskly throughout the stage, connected by the head.

These are only a few moments of many in which various movement patterns unfold onstage that tether performers to one another in space and in psyche. They manifest like relational kaleidoscopes that continue to iterate and shift. It can be argued that all choreographic endeavors with multiple performers express forms of relationality. Yet, *Poor People's TV Room*'s choreographic logics are anchored in pairings that slip in and out of clarity. One performer mimics another's movement and then is in a narrative duet with a different performer. Their relational ties shift, but the work invests in duets in complex ways that change quickly over time. Partners switch, and new relational mutualities unfold. These duets perform relationships in which differences are highlighted by their physical ties. Okpokwasili and Reid's dancing in shared time emphasizes their choreographic divergences. What might we make of these cyclical departures and reunions, relational linkages, doublings, and shadows? What might the dancers' similar choreographic or narrative pathways —and their slight differences —propose about the relational matrices unfolding onstage?

As Okpokwasili and Reid perform their duet, Dumakude —the eldest performer in the cast —sits on a plastic white chair next to Young, the work's youngest performer. Young speaks quickly and softly. Her speech competes with recorded sound that increases in volume, as well as the patter of Okpokwasili and Reid's feet against the black marley as their woven dance intensifies. Dumakude repeats Young's story a half a second after her, creating a disorienting sonic echo. Then, Dumakude drops out of this repetitive murmur and Young, solo, describes a fantastical scene in which she cuts off her own "tail," which continues to grow back. She continues:

> If she wasn't careful, she could go back into historical time. But she was careful. The ancestors would have been spanking her. You know about this thing, one of us has to do something, you'd have to stab her in the chest. Cut it out with a knife, kill her…She's

> been recording…If we were close enough, we would hear it. It would sound something like…

"Like what?," Dumakude asks, to which Young does not answer. This moment in the work suggests a link between Young and this girl which she describes. This girl holds the power to return to the past, suggesting their relationship as one not just between live, present bodies, but figures in different temporal locations. Young's note that there is an option to "kill her" suggests that this killing is not just of the girl, but of this trans-temporal relationship. The option to murder this girl also presents the option to end Young's bind to the past. Young continues:

> I was coming back from the market when I first noticed it. The beginnings of a vestigial tail, a small bump like a mosquito bite in the very bottom of my jacket. It grew longer and longer and longer…If somebody saw it, that would have been the end of everything so late one night, I had a knife and I cut it off. I buried the pain in silence and I mixed the blood into the dirt to hide it. And that tail, I threw it over the wall into the trash heap but during the night already, my tail began to grow back and worse, what I do not know, the cut off tail would grow as well. And from it, emerges another girl. The same as me. Another me. In the morning, I go to the breakfast table. She's sitting there, this double. She claims to be me even though I know I am me. No one can tell us apart.

This moment in the work directly introduces what Okpokwasili has described as a practice of "twinning," which she has noted as being about both "how we project onto each other" as well as "the past and the future."[299] Okpokwasili's investment in the twin has temporal indications. The process of twinning is marked by the temporal entanglements of Black femme subjects: past figures are tied to present ones through this spoken narrative. Young describes the troubling presence of this double, a twin. In the beginning of her story, she notes that part of the threat of this girl's presence is her ability to go back in time. The past continues as a thematic presence in the story when Young notes that the girl has "been recording," suggesting that her relationship to time is not solely about historic return but additionally, the ability to document the past. Young's double possesses the ability to tell history back to the present. Young's narrative affectively

[299] Okpokwasili, Interview by ICA Boston.

positions this history teller as troubling. She notes the option to stab her. When she describes her presence as the growing tail, she notes that it would be "worse" if the tail would "grow as well." Young's burying of the severed tail is associated with torment: "I buried the pain in silence and I mixed the blood into the dirt to hide it." These descriptions suggest a boundedness between Young and the girl, a figure who also represents the ability to record and document the past, that is both unwanted and risky to obliterate. In this narrative, it is the severing of the tail that intensifies the girl's insistent pain: suffering is not simply about her presence but the denial of it.

Young's description of this tail and its figurative representation of her double is also marked by what directly precedes it: Dumakude's repetition of her words. Dumakude's voice is soft as she mimics back to Young the words that she states. She performs as an echo or a record keeper, reiterating Young's language for a delayed moment in time. An echo is defined as both the "sound or series of sounds caused by the reflection of sound waves from a surface back to the listener" or as "a close parallel or repetition of an idea, feeling, style, or event."[300] Mickey Vallee points to the sociopolitical work of theorizing the echo. He writes:

> Echoes are not simply repetitions as much as they are the symbiosis of an articulation, an adaptation as a singularity and a process. Echoes are also more than returns because echoes, while they return to sound, are perceived in their immediacy as autonomous, emanating sense and sensation through a process. And, finally, echoes are more than renewals because they do less to permanently dislodge subjectivity than they do to offer a possibility for transformation, or a quilting point of self-recognition, at once unsettling while secure.[301]

Vallee's notion of echo as a "quilting point of self-recognition" emphasizes the reiterative work of the echo. Understanding an echo as both emphatic and transformative unveils its political work: the echo both underscores the social importance of an utterance just as it marks the

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[300] Oxford English Dictionary. "Echo." Accessed December, 2022. https://www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and-arts/classical-literature-mythology-and-folklore/folklore-and-mythology/echo-greek

[301] Mickey Vallee, "The Rhythm of Echoes and Echoes of Violence," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 34, No. 1 (2017): 100.

transformation possible when that utterance enters the social sphere through repetition. Dumakude's words act as a reflective device through their iterative nature. She begins repeating Young's words even before Young has finished each sentence, generating a ripple effect. Her repetition of each statement indicates the importance of hearing them once more. Their quick echo suggests a documentation of Young's words, as if to confirm their reception.

About fifteen minutes after this moment, Okpokwasili sings a song indicating the emotional weight of mutuality. Dumakude is seated back in the plastic chair. Young appears shadowy in front of the plastic curtain. Reid is positioned behind it in stronger lighting, yet still blurry from its opacity. A soft tone begins to play, and its presence is both somber and meaningful. Okpokwasili begins to sing:

> I could go for days. Don't tell me to stop. Don't tell me not to go. The thread runs through my navel. And round and round your waist too. Let me hear you say. I could go for days. Don't tell me to stop. Don't tell me not to go. The thread runs through my navel. And round and round your waist too. Let me hear you say. Come on, come on, come on. Come on, come on, come on. I'll be radiating. I'm illuminated. I'm intoxicated. I'm emblazoned. I won't loosen this thread no. I'll wind it tighter, I'll bind us closer. I'll knot us tight. I'll wind it tighter. I'll bind us closer. I'll knot us tight. Don't leave our womb tonight.

These lyrics suggest both an emotional and literal bind. Her song is marked by requests: "Don't tell me to stop" and "Come on, come on, come on." Affectively, Okpokwasili's words contain a sense of pleading, and there is urgency in the repetition of the phrase "come on." She describes a literal thread running from navel to navel. She makes the promise that she "won't loosen this thread." In fact, she suggests that she will "wind it tighter" and "bind us closer." These lyrics suggest a form of entwinement between her and the other that mirror Young's description of the tail. This tail, which in actuality is a girl mirrored back to her as being her double, will not be killed.

Throughout the work, movement and spoken narrative flow slightly off beat between pairings. Each performer has a double, a shadow, or a record keeper, in keeping with Okpokwasili's practice of "twinning." The work rejects precise unison in favor of these layered approaches to performance material. These kinds of relational linkages —thus far, referred to via their aesthetic qualities —have important implications. Okpokwasili's refusal to visually expose performers centers a different kind of visuality in which reflection and projection are emphasized aesthetic choices that generate relationships between performers onstage. These aesthetics mutually constitute the cast: performers come into presence through the movement of another. Just as the withholding of visual exposure holds implications for the ways in which it resists the overdetermined expectations and objectification of Black femmes, the turn to a reflective visuality also holds critical promise. These aesthetics and their mobilization of performers' presence generates a relational binding, in which performers are unveiled and understood by audiences through their entanglement.

My turn to the term entanglement references Glissant's "point d'intrication," in which he references diasporic linkages with origins that were made impossible via the violence of slavery.[302] Additionally, I utilize entanglement to reference the embodied practice which the word suggests, in which bodies are twisted together or, literally, physically caught up in one another. Relational entanglement suggests a kind of threading through one another in which subjectivity is co-constitutive and reliant on the presence of others. Okpokwasili's choreographic choices suggest this form of relational entanglement, in which the stakes of subjectivity are not individualized but intersubjective. This reroutes reception of the Black femme subjects onstage, presenting a practice of reception in which a witness must do labor to grasp their relational presence. *Poor People's TV Room's* central interests in gendered histories add complexity to the

[302] See: Glissant, 1997.

work's expression of entanglement. In the following section, I explore how the work references these historic events explicitly, suggesting entanglement as a new practice for approaching the past.

Practicing History

The withholding of visual exposure in favor of enunciating performers' presence in relational ways accompanies the work's exploration of historic events. *Poor People's TV Room* makes frequent, nuanced references to both the 1929 Women's Revolt and the kidnapping of schoolgirls in Chibok. Okpokwasili's staging and choreographic choices demonstrate a connection between performers being enunciated via relational tethers and an approach to history. Okpokwasili's interest in how Nigerian "women's" histories are articulated and framed is expressed through these aesthetic and embodied gestures of twinning, echoing, and doubling. The references in *Poor People's TV Room* to both the Women's Revolt and the Chibok kidnappings are both abstracted and direct. They are embedded in monologues or dialogues that emphasize the performers as both characters in the stories themselves, as well as storytellers in which their tie to history is via narrative depiction. The storyteller, a character who nods to processes of oral history and the felt passage of memory, also holds the ability to frame how these histories are understood, remembered, and recognized.

While Okpokwasili, Dumakude, Reid, and Young were not directly present for the Women's Revolt or the kidnapping of the schoolgirls in Chibok, their description of these historic moments position them as characters onstage performing oral histories, in which the direct memories of a historic event become part of the choreographic project. On the intersections of performance and history, Della Pollock has noted, "The performance of oral history is itself a transformational process. At the very least, it translates subjectively

remembered events into embodied memory acts, moving memory into re-membering. That passage not only risks but endows the emerging history/narratives with change."[303] The embodied statements of past events bring them to the present moment via the live body articulating them in front of witnesses, and this "re-membering" infuses these historical events with the potential for renewal, in which their reappearance not only transforms them, as Pollock emphasizes, but additionally allows the events a form of continuation which counters forgetting.

The mode of performance, marked by its capacity for active processes of making and re-making, offers historic events the potential to be *re*membered and *re*engaged. To bring these moments of history to the stage of *Poor People's TV Room* is itself a play with temporality. Pollock continues, "Oral history performance is strung between reference to real events and real listener/witnesses, between recollection and anticipation of historical change. It has the peculiar temporality of the *representational real*: an engine embedded in historical time, it invokes the *beyond time* of possibility, making possibility real or at least staking the grounds of real possibilities."[304] To bring the telling of history into the frame of performance and to let it live on the body thus ushers the historic event into the present tense.

Performing histories provides a reminder that history is itself a *doing*, meaning that history is constructed, narrated, and often, transformed. Performing these histories is a foundational element of how they are constructed in the ongoing social imaginary. In describing oral history as a mode of performance, Soyini D. Madison has noted that "performance promises engagement with otherwise…This is a political enterprise."[305] Madison's notion of "otherwise" shakes loose any stable notions of historical events. Instead, she draws our attention to the ways

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[303] Della Pollock, *Remembering: Oral History Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 2.
[304] Ibid, 7.
[305] D. Soyini Madison, "Performance, Personal Narratives, and the Politics of Possibility." *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions.* Ed. Sheron J. Dailey (Annandale: National Communication Association, 1998), 280.

in which performance influences the already on-the-move nature of how history is remembered, articulated, embodied, and narrated. These are iterative processes in which memory is repeated and restaged via the body, and these *re*tellings are marked by variation. The promise of performance— via its liveness— is a political one, in which the doing and *re*doing of history is marked by configurations of power which mobilize its subjective construction.

In *Poor People's TV Room*, these narratives of historic events are abstracted yet spoken in present tense. Performers tell stories from the first person, as if to communicate the raw effect of their memory's continued presence. These narrative references to the Women's Revolt or to the kidnapping of school girls in Chibok may not be obvious to all audience members. They are not contextualized or announced, and audiences only know that these events in Nigerian "women's" histories are material for the work if they read the program, which makes quick reference to them. These abstractions generate different tiers of knowledge around the work's references for audiences: some may be well versed in these events, some may be unfamiliar yet aware that the work addresses them, and some may not grasp these points of reference. Yet, in all of these narratives, there are distinct themes: Characters reference their linkages to other figures, femme subjects from the past and present are described, and stories are affectively shaped by disorientation, pain, and at times, violence.

Moments after Reid's monologue about the girl that grew from her own tail, the light shifts, fading Reid and Dumakude out of view. Okpokwasili and Reid have ended their duet. Okpokwasili sits in a different plastic chair in front of the platform, and Reid lays on her back on the platform facing the ceiling. Okpokwasili begins to speak passionately, her voice dripping in concern. At times Reid interjects, adding short responses. Okpokwasili engages only partially with Reid, and most of her monologue appears to be directed at an unknown someone in the

distance, as if Okpokwasili is deeply immersed in her own thoughts. In her words, Okpokwasili makes reference to the pain and labor of matrilineage. She references an "old woman" and asks "Why am I seeing this old woman?" She states that "she's speaking my mother's language, and I can't understand it." References to this "woman" are sprinkled throughout her narrative. She frequently ties this figure to maternal ancestors. She repeats: "She's insulting me. She laughs. She's speaking my mother's language, and I can't understand it. And in my mind, I curse her. But then she says out loud, 'Why do you curse yourself?'" Okpokwasili's description of this "old woman" suggests that Okpokwasili is simultaneously bound to her and experiencing difficulty with translating her words: this woman is related to her mother, yet Okpokwasili struggles to understand her language. She suggests that the woman speaks with a mocking tone, as if there is discomfort or tension despite their familial ties. Okpokwasili names a curse that she puts on this woman, as if attempting to protect herself. She concludes by emphasizing that cursing this old woman is, in reality, a curse on herself.

This narrative sections suggests that the work's expression of relational linkages are a form of lineage. The active naming of Okpokwasili's character's mother, as well as the pain that accompanies this gesture, articulates a laborious, painful relationship to matrilineage. Later in her monologue, Okpokwasili yells desperately about practices of paying attention, seeing, and forgetting, stating:

> Because it's me. Because I forgot. Because I keep forgetting. Because I always forget. Because when I forget her, she disappears. Because she disappeared. Because when I forget her, she dies twice. Because after the first time when she was shot, I killed her *again*. Because I'm disappearing her. Because I'm forgetting her. Because I don't know her. Because I know her.

Her monologue articulates the tension between the labor of paying attention and erasure, specifically across matrilineal connection. She names the pain and labor of this relationship,

noting both that she (Okpokwasili) *is this woman*, and simultaneously, that she is unable to understand her. In the second stated portion of her monologue, Okpokwasili's voice becomes heightened, as if pleading. She lists acts of forgetting, disappearance, and erasure. She describes a lack of recognition or attention as what kills this woman: "Because when I forget her, she dies twice." These repetitive statements emphasize and re-emphasize the ties between the past, remembrance, and erasure, suggesting the risk of disappearance as a central threat within historical practices.

Okpokwasili's monologue makes numerous references to specific details of the 1929 Women's Revolt. She mentions that she makes yams, a product that has been noted as gendered in its production and distribution at the time of the revolt, with men often growing the commodity and women selling it. Femmes were traditionally the traders at the market and responsible for overall economic production. As noted by Nigerian scholar Ifi Amadiume, women used their monopoly in the market and trading spaces to gain political control prior to British control.[306] Colonial rule interrupted this. As men lost power and other social roles due to colonial disruption, they took more control of the market and interrupted what was traditionally a sphere directed by femme subjects. Okpokwasili's story mentions this woman as a market trader, suggesting the importance of this gendered role which was at the heart of grievances mobilizing the Women's Revolt. She notes that the woman was nude from the waist up, a common form of dress for Igbo women which was symbolically utilized in the 1929 revolt. Dike notes that "In the traditional adjudication system in Nigeria, women are known to have used such powers by appearing nude before the populace as a means of crying out against oppression."[307] Nudity was

[306] Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, 182.
[307] Dike, *The Women's Revolt of 1929*, 149.

not simply a quotidian form of dress, but an acknowledged aspect of women's practices of resistance.

Okpokwasili notes that the woman was carrying a palm leaf, a common item used by femme subjects to protest. Palm products were tied to the revolt in multiple ways. Chike Dike notes that the spread of the revolt was managed through communication delivered on palm leaves: "Each village which joined the movements sent a fresh palm leaf through other women who traveled on foot to the next village."[308] As mentioned, palm oil was also at the heart of colonial interest in Nigeria. With the colonial government facing falling profits in other parts of the country, they turned to the southeast where palm oil exports had strong economic potential. Taxation was also based on revenue from the palm trade.[309] Initially, the British taxed only masc subjects and, as noted, when word spread that femmes may also be counted for the purposes of initiating taxation, tensions escalated. Okpokwasili implies Western qualities of those populating Nigerian streets, suggesting these figures as colonial subjects and naming their wrongdoings:

> I'm watching the people. They are wearing Italian shoes. They are carrying Chanel bags. They are driving in big cars. They are kissing each other. They are biting each other. They are defecating on the roads. I am in the house, cooking the yams, cooking the Jollof rice watching them chop, chop oil, chop the money, chop a life. They are eating money. They are eating each other.

In referencing these daily sightings of Western subjects, Okpokwasili articulates the ways in which the quotidian violences spurred by this colonial presence contributed to the 1929 Women's Revolt.

As Okpokwasili continues her monologue, a slow, melancholic tone begins to play underneath her words. She picks up the pace of her words and begins to more directly describe the events preceding and making up the revolt itself:

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[308] Ibid, 150.
[309] Ibid, xii.

> Because she lived on her father's land. Because they taxed her. Because she had to pay to live on her father's land. Because how can she pay to live on her father's land? Because they counted. Because they did not count. Because they counted but they did not count. Because they danced and they sat on his head. Because he was not their man on the ground. But he was *their* man on the ground. Because he was a mouthpiece. They made him their mouthpiece! But in the village, his mouth was just a piece not their piece and could bring no peace. And because they chose him…And because they wanted to count. And they wanted to know who he would count. They wanted to know, would his mother be in the count? They wanted to know, was his mother in the count? Because they sat on his head. Because they sat on his head. Because they sat on his head…

Okpokwasili continues to repeat this line and then follows it with the repeated phrase, "And they were dancing. And they were dancing…" Her narrative references not only the fear of the counting of femmes as a sign of imposing taxes. It additionally points to the installment of warrant chiefs by the colonial government, which granted power to local masc subjects selected by the British who did not have traditional, localized power within the indigenous communities over which they were given rule. As many Nigerian historians have noted, this installment of Warrant Chiefs destabilized women's social and political power.

Okpokwasili's final repeated statement —"Because they sat on his head" —directly references a resistant practice performed by the femme subjects in the 1929 revolt. Sitting on a man's head was the name for a method of protest in which femmes would make "unscheduled and uninvited visits to warrant chiefs."[310] Marc Matera, Misty L. Bastian, and Susan Kingsley Kent note that the residences of colonial leaders were often identified while femme subjects were protesting at the market: "After learning where the warrant chiefs and other town elders lived, the *Nwaobiala* 'band' would enter those compounds and begin a much less generalized song/dance, one directed towards the ruling authority."[311] As Bastian et. al outline, this practice of sitting on a man's head occurred prior to the 1929 Women's Revolt in the "nwaobiala" of

[310] Misty L. Bastian, Susan Kingsley Kent, and Marc Matera, *The Women's War of 1929* (London:Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 109.
[311] Ibid, 115.

1925.[312] Sitting on a man's head was a common practice in the Women's Revolt, and dance was ingrained in this resistant tactic. Okpokwasili references this as she ends her monologue by repeating "And they were dancing. And they were dancing. And they were dancing…"

As Okpokwasili speaks, Reid appears as a ghostly figure directly behind the plastic curtain. She undulates and walks from the right to the left side of the stage. Her image is blurry and opaque. Young appears in front of the curtain and moves in the same direction as Reid. The two dance together through space, only separated by the curtain's material. Despite this directional togetherness, their motions and visual clarity remain different. Reid's figure behind the curtain appears as a shadow of Young. As these two forms travel —distinct, yet joined — their pacing remains slow and spacious. At times, their bodies pick up speed, undulating through the spine or punctuating the space around them with the angles of their limbs. At other moments, they move with the contemplation of a processional.

This moment in *Poor People's TV Room* generates space for thinking more broadly about the gesture of walking alongside another. This choreographic form appears frequently in cultural life. Bodies pass by another on urban sidewalks in quotidian moments, at times sharing immediate peripheral space and duration with one another. In political spaces, protest is often generated by bodies moving side-by-side. Ritualized ceremonies, including marriage ceremonies or occasions for mourning the dead, include the slow and meditative act of the processional. To walk alongside another holds the capacity for dense, yet disparate, social meaning.

Somatically, the space that is shared —this *alongsidedness* —activates the peripheral surfaces of bodies joined in space. On the practice of slow walking, Okpokwasili has told The

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[312] Nwaobiala can hold multiple meanings but Bastian has noted that scholar Afigbo has "interpreted the movement's name to mean that a child was born deformed or otherwise marked in some material fashion as a portent sent from the Earth to alert people of her unhappiness." See Bastian, Kent, and Matera, *The Women's War of 1929,* 112.

New York Times' Brian Seibert that "slowing down helps us be together. It's a rupture from what you normally do, a re-sensitizing to micro-perceptions." The periphery opens up these "micro-perceptions" to the body in more pronounced ways: the rise and fall of breath, the subtle grazing of skin against skin, the breeze generated by another's motion, and the expansive opening of peripheral and dorsal space often not attended while bodies move through quickened daily tasks. These perceptions signal a kind of co-presence, in which the term presence signals what Diana Taylor refers to as the active imperative "presente!" She writes that "presente" is "an ethical and political practice, a way that strengthens intersubjective generosity and mutual recognition."[313] While bodies may exist frequently in close proximity to one another, the slowness of this walk and its intention to keep pace with one another demands a sensing of one another, activating the kind of "intersubjective generosity" to which Taylor refers.

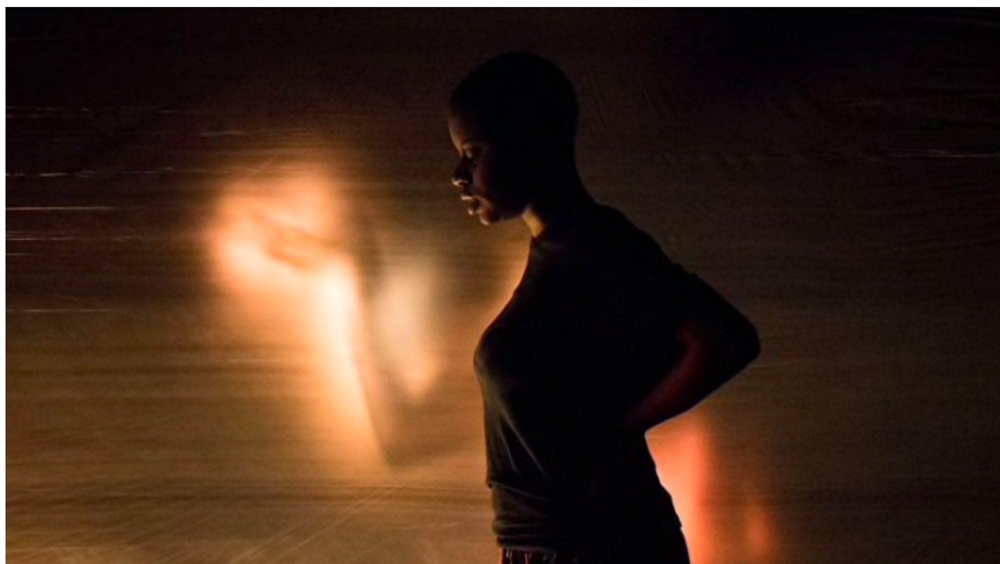

Figure 14: Photo by Ian Douglas, The Chicago Tribune.

As noted, the act of walking holds the potential for diverse social meanings. To walk is to fragment geographic space with the body. The distance between "here" and "there" immediately is broken down as a step is taken. To walk *with* is also to engage in a joint bodily action within a

[313] Diana Taylor, *¡Presente!: The Politics of Presence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 35.

shared landscape. Taylor notes that "walking is a thinking/becoming in motion, a pedagogy and training (peripatetic)." To walk *with* is a "becoming" that is relational as bodies come closer to a similar experience, never quite understanding the subtlety of their difference. In this way, Okpokwasili's staged walk highlights the attempt to know across historic or temporal divisions between intersubjective bodies. This choreographic form —*alongsidedness* —is performed as the cast of *Poor People's TV Room* references historic events, past relationships, and confessions of memory, signaling the walk as an attempt back and towards relationality with ancestral figures.[314]

These references to the 1929 Women's War suggest that *Poor People's TV Room* attempts not to *restage* historic events but instead, to generate new approaches to the *practice* of history through its performance. Okpokwasili's turn to embodied performance as a mode for considering this history of gendered violence and resistance suggests the moving body as a critically important site for historical work. As Pollock and Madison note, performance offers political transformation. It allows for alterity in the form of attention paid to events cemented in the past because its liveness remixes and enlivens historic moments. And, performance's liveness includes a witnessing audience, in which attention is given to historic narratives in ways that differ from what Hartman has noted as a deathly, archival end. Okpokwasili's references to the Women's Revolt suggest the violence of erasure: "Because it's me. Because I forgot. Because I keep forgetting. Because I always forget. Because when I forget her, she disappears. Because she disappeared. Because when I forget her, she dies twice." Okpokwasili's refusal to visually expose

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[314] Okpokwasili's interest in the practice of slow walking —and it's support of "being together" via "re-sensitizing to micro-perceptions" —was further explored in her performance which followed the making of *Poor People's TV Room*. 2018's *Sitting On A Man's Head* not only directly references this protest practice, it additionally plays with the central gesture of sensing one another while slowly walking alongside. In this later work, Okpokwasili and performers invited audience members into this practice of the slow walk as a reference to the political work of women who practiced sitting on a man's head.

the individual body resists expectations of hypervisuality and instead relies on a visual mutuality between performers, generating an affect of relational entwinement onstage. This refusal and its generation of kaleidoscopic relationships between performers suggests a practice of history in which relational tethers are *practiced*. Just as performers are enunciated through "seeing"themselves via another, the audience is also reminded that historical practices might beckon the same kind of relationality. The risk of forgetting or *not* seeing, as Okpokwasili reminds, kills her twice. Thus, these visual practices of refusal and relationality exit the realm of the purely aesthetic and become political suggestions for the doings of history. In the next and final section, I articulate these relational practices as tied to diaspora, and I consider the labor of diaspora as a historical practice of remembrance which counters the erasure of gendered violences.

Diasporic Labor

Poor People's TV Room's investments in historic events, memory, relationality, and modes of resistance are contoured by diasporic formations. The work's casting, conceptual investments, and staging choices are all linked to diasporic considerations of gendered Nigerian histories. Thus far I have articulated the ways in which Okpokwasili resists expectations of visual exposure around Black femme subjects and instead enunciates their presence through relational structures. I have argued for the ways in which these relational structures are historic practices, in which the *doing* of history is understood through the labor of staying *in relation* to events and people easily relegated to the past. I have also explored the ways in which these historic practices are expressed through affects of pain, threat, and risk, all of which accompany a general attention to the ways in which staying in relation is an effortful task.

I want to conclude by considering how these laborious historical practices are diasporic. Okpokwasili's staging choices in *Poor People's TV Room* open up opportunities for new understandings of the relationship between diaspora, histories of gendered violence, and relational forms which counter the erasure of past femme subjects. Critical here is the way that Okpokwasili positions diasporic relations as marked by labor, in which the attempt at staying in relation from afar is itself a practice of doing history. In this final section, I begin by considering the ways in which *Poor People's TV Room* expresses diaspora before moving to exploring how Okpokwasili's staging of diasporic relations —specifically in the context of centering gendered Nigerian histories —might open up new formulations of diaspora and its performance.

Throughout the work, diasporic relationships are expressed through performers' onstage narration and the broader conceptual investments which catalyzed *Poor People's TV Room*. The work is inspired by events that are not only critical to gendered events within Nigeria's history but which are additionally entangled in global, diasporic response (specifically the kidnapping of Chibok schoolgirls and the ensuing #bringbackourgirls campaign). The work thus addresses the influence of global response on how these histories are both received and constructed, especially by African American femme subjects including Oprah and Michelle Obama. *Poor People's TV Room*'s emphasis on diasporic response to gendered Nigerian histories become a core part of how Okpokwasili explores remembrance of the Chibok kidnappings and the 1929 Women's Revolt. Casting choices also reflect Okpokwasili's interest in diaspora. Okpokwasili's own Nigerian American, Igbo identity, and her interest in these events from her ancestral country is inflected by her own diasporic relationship to these histories. Finally, the cast themselves are marked by diasporic entanglements: Dumakude is South African, Okpokwasili is Nigerian American, and Reid and Young are African American.

The work's investment in diasporic relationality becomes a mode of not only how the performers are announced on stage but as a practice of narrating history. Twenty two minutes into *Poor People's TV Room*, Dumakude begins to describe Oprah Winfrey, who has thus far not been mentioned and whose mention in the work is surprising. Dumakude stands from her white plastic chair, stating:

> There was a time, way, way back when Oprah was a human being. Just a woman, she felt pain and she suffered. She felt fear and desire. She had deep wells of feeling. She could get lost in feeling. But she knew herself. And she could stand outside herself and watch that feeling. And she could measure it from root to blossom. She could direct it and deploy it as a somatic weapon. She could turn a cool and calculated psychopath — a someone who could watch another someone hit by a car without flinching — into a someone who could not look at a starving child without feeling their hunger pain so acutely they might even faint.

Dumakude's words suggest Oprah's ability to shift levels of empathy for those witnessing violence. Her noting of Oprah's ability to work with what she terms "that feeling" as a "somatic weapon" suggests the body as the site of affect, and she ties embodied, affective feeling to empathy. She continues: "You see Oprah never made an antidote to this extreme empathy, she never figured it out. People screamed until they had no voices left, their screams were voiceless. Their mouths open and women bled and bled and bled, many did not survive." Dumakude's reference to Oprah never making "an antidote" to what she calls "extreme empathy" is quite telling in this passage. The term antidote suggests healing properties against something harmful, or "a medicine taken or given to counteract a particular poison" (Oxford). Here, the "poison" is empathy itself, emphasizing Dumakude's description of it as "extreme" and suggesting empathy as harmful.

Saidiya Hartman has described the violence of empathy in her works on 19th century writers from abolition movements whose attempts at understanding the experience of formerly enslaved Black subjects led to violence via forms of imagination, self-substitution and thus,

erasure of those subjects at the center of this history. Hartman states, "Beyond evidence of slavery's crime, what does this exposure of the suffering body of the bondsman yield? Does this not reinforce the 'thingly' quality of the captive by reducing the body to evidence in the very effort to establish the humanity of the enslaved?"[315] She goes on to state, "the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values."[316] Hartman's discussion of the relationship between empathy and violence is specific to the historical context of the abolitionist archives that she reads. It also provides important questions about how empathy and erasure might duet. With the kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls in 2014, the hashtag #bringbackourgirls went globally viral. Celebrities in the Global North quickly vocalized their own horror in response to the kidnapping. Okpokwasili's interest in this viral attempt to shed light on the kidnappings came from her own questions about what that publicity of the violence did for these women's voices. She asks, "What surfaces in the place of these women —who are the active agents of change in their own lives —are these victim narratives where they then have to be saved and rescued?"[317] Okpokwasili's words —addressing Oprah —underscore the erasure of the kidnapped girls themselves which increased as global outcry spread. Dumakude's words about Oprah foreground this erasure as she states, "People screamed until they had no voices left, their screams were voiceless." What replaces the acknowledgment of "their screams" are the cries of the global, often diasporic, response.

Okpokwasili's investment in centering the erasure of the Chibok girls is tied to critical questions about the power structures embedded in diasporic relational frameworks. How might

[315] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.
[316] Ibid, 21.
[317] Okpokwasili, Interview by ICA Boston.

the violence of this substitution — the concerned Global North for the subjects at the center of this history — be entangled in diaspora? How does Okpokwasili's pressure on these power formations generate new understandings of diasporic affiliation that work against historical erasure? My work throughout this chapter points towards the diasporic relational frameworks that Okpokwasili stages as modes for practicing memory, framing history, and countering erasure.

Diaspora has been heavily theorized with African and Black studies, trauma studies, and dance and performance studies. As Brent Edwards' title of his 2001 article "The Uses of Diaspora" reflects, the term can hold multiple and divergent meanings, often due to its various utilities in describing what Edwards notes as "the links and commonalities among groups of African descent throughout the world."[318] Khachig Tölölyan has noted the term diaspora as being "in danger of becoming a promiscuously capacious category that is taken to include all the adjacent phenomena to which it is linked but from which it actually differs in ways that are constitutive, that in fact make a viable definition of diaspora possible."[319] In theorizing diaspora, postcolonial theorists have often emphasized the circulation of cultures, ideologies, and practices across locational points: Arjun Appadurai has noted diaspora as a circulation of flows between global geographic localities and Paul Gilroy has noted it as a system of exchanges that challenge the solid border of the nation.[320]

Edwards notes the ways in which diaspora has often been positioned as holding convergent properties, in which diasporic subjects are expressed through their linkages, similarities, and unities. Edwards adds that part of diaspora's theorization frequently includes

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[318] Brent Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," *Social Text* 19, No. 1 (2001): 45.
[319] Khachig Tölölyan, "Rethinking *Diaspora*(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," *Diaspora* 5, No. 1 (1996): 8.
[320] Gilroy additionally works against the concept of diaspora as always a return to origin and instead offers the concept of transnational flow. See: Gilroy, 1993.

"the sense of a real or imagined relationship to a 'homeland,' mediated through the dynamics of collective memory, and the politics of 'return.'"[321] In dance studies, for example, diaspora has often been noted as having healing properties, marked by a sense of return or connections that "suture differences."[322] [323] Edwards argues for understanding diasporic linkages through divergence rather than convergence. He writes, "The use of the term *diaspora*, I am suggesting, is not that it offers the comfort of abstraction, an easy recourse to origins, but that it forces us to consider discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference."[324] This positioning of diaspora as a "difference within unity" allows for a more capacious understanding of how diasporic relations slip and morph. This acknowledgment of difference, which Edwards describes as an "articulation," also suggests a kind of practice. For diasporic meaning to transform, those within diaspora make anew as they adjust and transform expressions of it.

I echo Edwards' disruption of diaspora as a unidirectional return to home. Instead, I approach diaspora as a transnational circulation, in which the divergences of experiences of diasporic peoples, while related, continue to iterate and transform. While still linked to a place of origin, diaspora becomes itself through its transnational flows, in which ideas, practices, and their transformations make way for the divergences Edwards describes. By approaching diaspora as a transnational phenomena, my work acknowledges the multidirectional flows which it encapsulates and puts pressure on the originary homeland, often boundaried by terms of the nation state, as the anchoring center of diasporic relationalities.

Hershini Bhana Young has pronounced her investment in a "flesh and blood diaspora" that is "embedded in the dense structures of memory."[325] She notes that the diasporic Black body

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[321] Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," 52.
[322] Jasmine Johnson, "Casualties," *The Drama Review* 62, No. 1 (2018): 168.
[323] For more on Black dance and diaspora as healing: Daniel, 2005; Welsh, 1998
[324] Edwards, "The Uses of Diaspora," 64.
[325] Bhana Young, *Haunting Capital,* 1.

is always bound to racialized violences (including but not limited to the Transtlantic slave trade). Bhana Young urges for an understanding of the Black body as a "*collective*, remembering body" which is "unwieldy, awkward, and continually falling apart." Young invokes the role of the diasporic "witness," stating "The body, both flesh-and-blood and ghost, bears witness at great cost, whispering in the corners of our mind." The diasporic subject is marked as witness because of her entwinement with racial injury, which Young refers to as the "spectral nature of violence."[326] The ghost which marks Young's framework for diaspora is noted as both laboring and resistant. This ghost that is lodged in diasporic subjects resists the erasure of disappearing racial injury: "Reparation and reconciliation are achieved not by pressing the ghost back into its grave, but rather by multiple historical re-engagements with the specters that haunt (national) bodies in ways that resist closure." Young's conception of diaspora is critical to my own because of the way it notes the seething presence —the "hauntings" —of past racial injuries that are continuous across diasporic relations yet not convergent, as well as her notion of a *laboring* diasporic subject confronting these hauntings.[327]

I follow Bhana Young's emphasis on the diasporic witness because it implies the work of resistance, just as I am aligned with Edwards' investment in diaspora as an articulation of divergence as opposed to a relational formation marked by convergence, healing, or originary return. Edwards' "articulation" coheres with what Jasmine Johnson notes (following Edwards) when she states, "Scholars of African diaspora studies have theorized diaspora as both a noun and a verb; the African diaspora *exists* and it is in a constant state of *enactment*."[328] This articulation of diaspora notes not only the continuous duration of diasporic *feeling* but the

[326] Ibid, 18.
[327] These durational sensations of lineages of violence are akin to what Walter Benjamin refers to as a "flickering" in which the present subject sensing this past is the "depository of historical knowledge." See Benjamin, 1969.
[328] See: Edwards 2001; Hall 1996; Hartman 2007; Nelson 2011

embodied and affective *doing* of diaspora. Across these articulations of witnessing and divergence, the body becomes the central site upon which diaspora is constituted, felt, and remixed. *Poor People's TV Room* stages a form of diasporic entanglement in which articulations of diasporic memory unfold as bodily labor. I turn to these theorizations of diaspora not only because they center memory practices as engrained in diasporic relationships, but also because they implicate the sensing body and its ability to engage history as part and parcel of diaspora.

Throughout *Poor People's TV Room*, diasporic lineage is not only referenced, it is framed as painful, risky, and at times, violent. Moments frequent in which performers reference their entanglement with a mysterious other who is positioned as an ancestral elder or relative. Okpowasili mentions the "old woman" who speaks her mother's tongue and whom she cannot understand. Young describes the tail that persistently turns into a girl who is seen as her. Reid tells Okpokwasili "I am not at war with you, I am at war with myself." These moments convey a threaded sense of characters, in which people slip in and out of becoming and rejecting one another. Pain is included. Dumakude tells Young that to rid herself of the girl she would have to "stab her in the chest, kill her." Later, she mentions that the "ancestors will be spanking you." References to breastfeeding and maternity pulse throughout the show. Okpokwasili yells, "It's not me, it's not my milk" as she begins to describe the old woman. She follows this with, "You think you can poison me? You are poisoning yourself." Diasporic matrilineages are tied to this slippage between the self and another, and these slippages pose a risk as well as a challenge to continue laboring.

Poor People's TV Room does not, however, simply position diasporic formations as violent. Instead, the work articulates a diasporic orientation that requires effort: to stay in relation, to remember, and to counter forgetting. Doing this labor poses risk. Not doing this labor

poses more. The work of diaspora is interwoven with remembrance, and memory work counters the erasure of which Okpokwasili continues to remind us ("Because when I forget her, she dies twice"). Diaspora thus becomes a practice of doing history, in which the *doing* is both laborious, divergent across diasporic subjects, and embodied. Okpokwasili is clear in her investment in resisting the erasure of the femme subjects in the streets in Oloko in 1929 and for the schoolgirls kidnapped in 2014. Her work is centered not only in history but in practices of *doing* history as a redressive practice. Diasporic memory practices are central to the ways in which she seeks to alleviate this violence. Diasporic memory, situated at the site of the performing, dancing body, is laborious. It requires risk, pain, and violence. It is the risk of the diasporic witness which Young articulates. And, it is the mode through which diaspora becomes both a practice of remembrance, as well as a site of resistance to the threat of ongoing, gendered erasure.

Figure 15: Photo by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Conclusion

Poor People's TV Room offers the opportunity to differently understand diaspora as both a site of transnational labor and a practice of witnessing history — of remembrance that counters the forgetting of gendered subjects. Diasporic memory and its painful labor is not its failure but its offering. Here, pain is inevitable. Gendered violences pulse across these histories: the colonial project and its theft of indigenous ways of life, the death and physical pain experienced by femme subjects in the streets in 1929, the assault of young schoolgirls in 2014, the grief that has overhauled those who lost them, and the unending violence that throbs throughout slavery's afterlives.[329] Pain is inevitable across these histories of gendered violence, and it is embedded within their remembrance. And yet, Okpokwasili's work in performance opens up the potential to consider diaspora and its memory practices anew. Here, diasporic relations can be understood as tethered to a sense of past without collapsing difference. Diasporic linkages might circulate around countering erasure as opposed to a sense of celebratory healing or return. Diaspora is also highlighted as laborious, painful, and risky, sensations often linked to discomfort or other negative affects. Refraining from reading these sensations as collapse or failure, but rather as the political *work* of diaspora, is part of the promise of approaching diasporic formations anew.

Okpokwasili's turn to the mode of performance as the site of recontouring these histories and countering the erasure of the femme subjects is interwoven with the labor of diasporic memory. Performance is itself a site of exertion across critical social, political, and cultural levels. The live labor of performance thus provides a fitting home for expressing the work of diaspora, specifically when its work is aimed at forms of remembrance that counter gendered erasure. Performance's liveness offers up a witnessing audience that coheres with Okpokwasili's emphasis on witnessing history. And, the labor of witnessing is especially clear on Okpokwasili's

[329] See: Hartman, 2006.

stage, in which visual exposure is withheld in favor of a more laborious form of visual recognition.

Throughout this chapter, I have articulated the ways in which Okpokwasili refuses consumptive exposure of the Black femmes who perform on her stage. Instead, she generates new modes of witnessing, in which relational entanglement is offered as a new route through which to understand the Nigerian histories of gendered violence which are centered. Instead, performers are enunciated through relational frameworks. To register one's presence, you must register the presence of another. Performers' pronunciations through and because of one another thus have political stakes: these are not simply aesthetic choices. *Poor People's TV Room* urges for an understanding of subjects, specifically Black, femme, diasporic subjects, as linked in ways that require labor and exertion to maintain. Okpokwasili thus stages a form of redress as she pushes back on the erasure of gendered subjects. She does so by generating new forms of witnessing, in which relational mutuality and the diasporic labor to *stay in relation* become pronounced. Here diasporic labor is a form of entanglement that counters the forgetting instantiated by histories of gendered violence. It thus becomes a redressive orientation towards the past and a resistant historical practice.

These diasporic entanglements do not convene around sameness but rather the resistant potential that diasporic labor— and its embodied, affective effort— offers. This potential opens up further questions: *How might diasporic memory be further investigated and understood through its resistant potential? How might the embodied labor of memory open up new understandings of past gendered subjects and the linkages that connect a diasporic "us"? How might witnessing subjects through their mutuality make way for the redressive work of diaspora?* Okpokwasili's work asks us to understand anew the notion of a transtemporal tether as a resistant

tool. In doing so, the labor of the body —its pain, exhaustion, and risky wagers —sit front and center as part of the diasporic memory practices which might vitally reorient the articulation of gendered histories under the threat of erasure.

CONCLUSION

In September, 2022, I began to encounter haunting images of activists moving in a sea of people in the streets, a familiar image in sites of protests. Flags abound, and their red, white, and green stripes announce the geographic context. Bodies are pushed together, spilling onto sidewalks and across blockades. Smoke discolors the air, and signage with politically urgent statements proliferate: *Women, Life, Freedom*. Or, *Stop Killing Us*. The image of a young woman with piercing eyes and subtle smile dots protest signs: *Mahsa Amini*. In one image published by Al Jazeera News, a femme protestor holds scissors in hand, open, poised right before the cut.[330] Her neck is bent at an angle, and her other hand pulls her dark hair out into the open air. Images like these heighten the moment before hair is chopped, signifying the intensity of these actions. In the final months of writing this dissertation, the site of Iran has become notorious for gendered violence and its response to protest. The images noted above illustrate resistance efforts following the murder of Amini, a woman murdered by Iranian police for not wearing a hijab, a headscarf worn often by Muslim women. On September 13, 2022, the country's "morality police" detained Amini. In custody for days, Amini passed away in a Tehran hospital under suspicious circumstances, kicking off mass protests across the globe in response to the country's gendered and violent restrictions for women.

When my eyes initially became consumed with a myriad of images of Amini, Muslim femme subjects wearing or removing hijabs, and the power of protestors in resistance, a familiar emotion continued to bubble: *Here we go again*. This sentiment is twofold. "Again" refers to the insidious continuation of violences perpetrated based on the categories of gender. It also, however, signals an insidiousness in the quality of global response to these violences, one which

[330] Al Jazeera News, "Not Afraid Anymore: Iran Protests Enter Fourth Week," October 8, 2022, Accessed April 6, 2023, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/10/8/not-afraid-anymore-clashes-as-iran-protests-enter-fourth-week

Chandra Talpade Mohanty might note as "the production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts."[331] In the moments of encountering these images, I could not help but wonder how many cultural assumptions about the figure of the Muslim woman, her presumed oppressions, experiences of and with gender in Islamic practices, the feelings and experiences attached to the wearing of the hijab, and more, would be sparked by Amini's death. My suspicions are not intended to diffuse the resistance against Amini's death or any other registers of gendered violence. Instead, they exist to point out a doubling of violence, in which gendered subjects already targeted with violence because of their gender also might be the subject of projection, mistranslation or assumption by feminist resistance efforts. The murder of Amini and ensuing protests raise questions of how feminists reckon with reading and understanding difference across gendered practices situated in vastly distinct locales, specifically how feminists across geographic distance might flatten, universalize, and project ideas of power and violence onto cultural, religious, and geopolitically distinct practices that in reality require their own sets of nuanced rubrics

Months later as I write the conclusion to this dissertation, protests continue: protestors have been detained and sentenced to death by the Iranian police, global outcry has sharpened focus on the country's gendered violences, and protestors continue to engage in symbolic mass actions, including the cutting of their hair en masse and in public. These modes of political action against gendered violences illuminate the ways in which resistance mixes modes of performance, or, in how performance becomes critical to protest through its generation of symbolic physicalities, charged affect, and witnessing practices. I begin with the murder of Amini and the resulting resistance efforts because they illuminate the stakes of this project. The activists protesting Amini's death demonstrate a readiness in response to gendered violences: they

[331] Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes," 333.

vigilantly stay flexible and prepared in the face of state-waged terror. They turn to modes of performance to nimbly narrate the atrocities waged by patriarchal power. They utilize creative physicalities, enact meaning through site specificity, attire, gesture, and rhetoric. They move their bodies as a reminder that they are still here, tired, but not backing down.

At the heart of this dissertation are questions of violence and resistance, as well as violence *within* resistance. My work pushes against easeful, celebratory hermeneutics, instead searching for fault lines, fractures, and missteps amongst attempts at redressive justice. Aimed at unsettling universal applications of a gendered sisterhood and modes of practicing it consumptively, this project began with a desire to chip away at the unsettling moments in which redressive labor might generate new registers of harm by solidifying witnessing practices that spur assumption, projection, and cultural mistranslation. My work comes from a place of resistance. Amini's death takes its place amongst countless modes of violences waged in the contemporary moment that are anchored in patriarchal power and waged at gendered subjects because of and for their genders. Patriarchal power is insidious in the ways in which it manifests harm against otherness, including trans* and gender nonconforming communities, queerness, and femme subjectivities.

As this research is deeply invested in resistance against and redress in the face of gendered violence, it also asks questions about how feminist work might generate helpful practices across geopolitical and cultural differences without generating harm anew. In other words, this dissertation aims itself at transnational feminist witnessing practices, putting pressure on their/our methods of watching violence from afar in the spirit of redressive care and labor that holds itself accountable to geopolitical difference and uneven power structures, including along lines of race, class, ethnicity, and gender in its various terms and forms. In this sense, this

dissertation began from an investment in witnessing and its double edged potentialities for redressive recognition and harm. In asking critical questions about the politics of witnessing across geopolitical differences, this project is anchored in the artists and practices that might teach us to witness anew.

In centering the stakes of witnessing gendered violences and redressive modes of response, I have turned to the staged performances included here to ask how they put pressure on the rubrics and expectations that witnessing across lines of geopolitical difference can generate. While the chapters in this dissertation do not cohere around traditional forms of protest— the intersections of performance and protest are continuing to be enunciated by performance, dance, and theater studies scholars— my research activates questions around how gendered violences and forms of redress in their wake might be recognized, translated, and felt through the witnessing practices which performance might produce.[332]

With these questions in tow, I turn to the performances which anchor this dissertation because they initiate new forms of witnessing subjects and their embodied practices, live and in front of our own bodies. Regina José Galindo's work counters dominant tactics for redressive justice in response to feminicide. Her work generates affective strategies for sensing the persistent duration of feminicide and puts pressure on testimonial forms which ask survivors, victims, and their communities to do the labor of renarrating trauma. Bouchra Ouizguen's performance unveils audience expectations, exposing their projections across cultural difference as part of the work. Her refusals expose these systems of fantasies placed onto cultural others, asking witnesses to contend with their transnational desires as part of the project of communion in resisting gendered erasure in public sites. And Okwui Okpokwasili refuses a visual exposure of her Black femme cast as they renarrate histories of Nigerian gendered violences. In doing so,

[332] For more, see: Fortuna, 2018; Foster, 2003; Fuentes, 2019; Madison, 2010; Son, 2018; Taylor, 1997.

she exposes what Nicole Fleetwood notes as racialized "scopic regimes" centering upon the Black femme subject's expected hypervisibility.[333] Instead, she generates a form of presence for performers that is relationally tethered and diasporically inflected. Okwui's choreographic and staging choices reveals diasporic labor and pain points as part of the work of staying in connection to historic, gendered subjects who have been erased by registers of violence.

Each of these works spark raw, powerful emotions with traces of violence's affects. To hear the whipping of Galindo's body and to not know its source is to experience a trace form of violence. To witness the guttural wails of intergenerational and cross cultural femme subjects in public as they drive their bodies to the brink of exhaustion and pain is to experience a trace form of violence. To watch Okpokwasili and cast undulate as they deliver fierce narratives of diasporic musings and gendered harm is to experience a trace form of violence. To witness the power of these performing bodies in front of us is to feel vestiges of the violences from which they move and against which they resist. Each of the included performances is in itself a form of redress for the ways in which it performs certain sensations of the impacts of gendered violences.

Across this dissertation, I have endeavored to enunciate the ways in which performances have utilized modes of refusal to make witnesses do new forms of work. I have articulated the contours of refusal with which each work performs as they simultaneously spark raw, powerful affects. They instigate charged feelings in the live moment of witnessing, *and* they make their audience engage in particular forms of labor to digest these experiences. I have gathered these three artists across their vast differences: they each respond to divergent, yet unique combinations of gendered violence contoured by localized conditions. Yet, I find coherences in the ways in which each artist utilizes modes of refusal, including evasion, withholding, trickiness, and nondisclosure. I also find ties between the ways in which these relational moves,

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[333] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 18.

their dances, put direct pressure on expectations of what performing femme subjects might be expected to do to register their labor as redress. Each of the artists I have centered remixes this labor, unveiling the regimes of expectations for exposure, disclosure, and translation that land upon resistant subjects, and generating alternate modes of witnessing in which the witness must work anew.

By turning to modes of refusal and putting pressure on expectations of divulgence, these artists offer alternate routes for staying in relation to gendered violences. Not all witnesses of these performances are necessarily feminist in identity or conviction. Yet, this collection of artists and their embodied strategies reroute witnessing practices in a way which I contend is critical for transnational feminist witnessing practices, specifically of gendered violences occurring "elsewhere." What might it mean for the transnational feminist witness to stay vigilant about expectations around gender and its oppressions as she witnesses harm? What might it mean to learn from the experience of having presumptions refused, rejected, or unveiled? And, how might the labor against dominant rubrics for resistance open up new modes of recognition amongst histories of gendered violence? In other words, how might we labor against the doubling of violence that presumption, expectation, and projection pile onto already sedimented registers of injury? This dissertation's argument that the form of performance offers new routes for witnessing gendered histories, violences, and resulting resistances is an offering. It comes in the form of urgent pressure, a critique, and the belief in the high stakes and urgencies of continuing to labor across and through geopolitical differences in the face of gendered violences. It is born out of a belief in the artists that show us the way, through the body, towards feeling histories of gendered violences differently and of feeling ourselves as witnesses. It is a criticism,

a love letter,[334] a plea, and a reminder that to witness holds high stakes, the demand for vigilance, and the potential for redressive care.

[334] Here, I reference Jennifer C. Nash's formulation of the "love letter," in which she notes the critic as providing a love letter which, following Lauren Berlant, "offers us a way to imagine 'becoming different.'" See Nash 2019; Berlant and Hardt 2023.

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