

## Contemporary Dance on Native Land: Indigenous Solidarity in the Choreography of Ananya Dance Theatre

Alessandra Lebea Williams

**O**n Saturday, September 25, 2021, I acknowledge our presence on the land of the Lenape, Delaware peoples in my speech for the “March2RU Gardens” event at Rutgers University-New Brunswick. This event is co-directed by the Arts Integrated Research Collaborative and designed to raise awareness about the need for public access to green spaces on campus. As part of my contribution, I reference historian Camilla Townsend’s work on the subject:

Delaware people were repeatedly moved west, then west again, ultimately landing in Oklahoma, where they still live today. The people at Rutgers never wrote or commented on their painful odyssey; if they wrote about the Lenape at all, they wrote of them as long gone, as disappeared (Townsend et al. 2016, 40).

I suggest that a land acknowledgement of the Delaware Tribe of Indians might recognize the heartbeat, always present there inside of us, pulsing, calling on us to breathe through the removal that marks this colonized land. Once my remarks conclude, I step back from the microphone and Cliff Matias of the Redhawk Native American Arts Council takes over. I stand beside him as he leads the group of three hundred participants in a round dance that steps intentionally on the ground and moves in a circular rotation on the land.

The Arts Integrated Research Collaborative requested that I take on this role alongside Matias because of my work as an artist in Ananya Dance Theatre, a company founded and directed in 2004 by Ananya Chatterjea who has worked in solidarity with Native American leaders in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota to consistently recognize the company’s existence on the land of the Dakota people. Through Ananya Dance Theatre (ADT), Chatterjea has collaborated with Native persons to build our specialized *pranam*, an Indian dance tradition which acknowledges the teacher, all of the artists in the room, and the ground that provides us with stability and space to move (Chatterjea 1996, 71).<sup>1</sup>

---

Alessandra Lebea Williams, Rutgers University New Brunswick, New Brunswick, United States

Alessandra Lebea Williams, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Dance at Rutgers University-New Brunswick who researches dance, sexuality, race, gender and transnationalism. Her anthology “Dancing Transnational Feminisms: Ananya Dance Theatre and the Art of Social Justice” was published with her co-editors Ananya Chatterjea and Hui Niu Wilcox. Her current book project identifies artistic and historical foundations for queer black dance based on the choreographies and dance-films of David Roussève and the REALITY dance company. And as a senior Yorchhā educator, vinyasa yoga instructor and Africanist aesthetic practitioner, she facilitates workshops on movement, vocal-work and intergenerational memory.

When put in practice, this pranam, or salutation, begins and ends our dancing. Our ADT ensemble stands facing one another in a wide circle. Individually, we take a small circle around ourselves by taking six steps in a clockwise direction. Then we lift our arms up overhead, gaze up at our palms, and fold our torsos all the way down to the ground in a forward fold. We lift the torso back up halfway while crossing the arms across our chest, ensuring that each of our hands form the hand gesture of *alapadma* with its widely stretched open fingers that bowl open into the image of a flower. Our knees come down to the floor in a bowing motion. We press the top of our head to the ground, lift back up to sit on our knees, and lightly hold the palms up overhead. Then, we say in the Dakota language, “Mni Sota Makoce” to honor the first peoples’ name for Minnesota as the land where the water reflects the sky. We come to stand and lower our body downward in the position of *tribhangi* by reaching one leg forward and at a sideward motion, bending both knees deeply and further extending the hip of the back leg away from the body’s center. The arms are lengthened at our sides as we lift the front foot up and quickly step it down to the floor, allowing the weight of the leg to release downward to connect to the ground. Our arms lengthen back out to the sides as we make eye contact with everyone in the circle and then come down to the floor. While doing so, we recognize the complexity of Native migrations to the Twin Cities with the statement of “mutual love” with the saying offered by Ojibwe healer and leader Sharon Day, “Zaagi, Zaagi, Zaagi, Zaagi’idwin” to include the long history of Anishinaabe peoples’ contributions to this region. Gesturing our full body downward once more, we touch our palms to the ground and come back up, returning to *tribhangi* pose on the other leg. We step the front foot down again, this time announcing the Dakota saying, “Mitakuye Oyasin,” asserting that, “We are all related.” For our pranam, Chatterjea worked alongside Dakota leader Janice BadMoccasin on the philosophies, “Mni Sota Makoce” and “Mitakuye Oyasin,” to highlight the value of our many relations on Dakota ground. Furthermore, BadMoccasin’s prayer was recorded by ADT with her permission, and this meditation begins every performance, on tour and at home premieres.

Pranam is a central tenet of our practice as contemporary dancers in “Yorchhā,” the technique created by Chatterjea that intersects the Indian forms of Odissi dance, the vinyasa style of yoga, and the Mayurbhanj style of Chhau martial arts. Each of these forms are complex, in and of themselves. In one example, Odissi has emerged through a fusion of diverse regional and cultural elements in eastern India, as dance scholar Anurima Banerji has explained: “From its beginnings, Odissi has been interdisciplinary, interreligious and intercultural. Its past is a microcosm of Odisha’s history” (Banerji 2019, 54).<sup>2</sup> To capture some of the complexity of this practice and how Chatterjea utilizes it toward intersecting Native and South Asian cultures, many of my dance descriptions weave an account for how footwork, hand gestures, fundamental postures such as *chauk* and *tribhangi* are an ongoing basis from which ADT dancers move in Chatterjea’s choreography. Furthermore, when breaking down yoga movements, I describe how the body forms a particular *asana*, or lands in the extension and grounded balance of a posture. I also think about how Chhau martial arts takes form in Yorchhā as Chatterjea layers its storytelling and highlights specific cultural innovations of Native artists.

Through my participation as an artist of ADT, I have come to understand that the act of contemporary dance on Native land is one best framed as a humble one. This energetic quality enables us to observe how contemporary dance practitioners embrace the nature of invitation, step back from an individualistic place of generating choreography which might not prioritize the needs of the Indigenous land on which we step and to rather build choreography with an offering to Native lives. I have been a dancer in ADT since 2006 when I joined the company as an apprentice to be immersed in the three Indian forms which make up Yorchhā. I have by now performed in ten of Chatterjea’s evening-length productions and toured nationally, internationally under her tutelage. It is humbling to recognize that prior to marking an ADT dance as reflecting Native women’s water protection, Chatterjea has to, first, walk with Indigenous leadership, and prior to even this, had to have five years of collaboration to begin to understand Native worldviews on the environmental degradation Minnesota’s waterways have been facing. Chatterjea takes no satisfaction in making one or two dances which fleetingly announce and briefly remember the original peoples of

the land; instead, she develops a call to action by acknowledging Native land in the central themes of every dance piece. Most humbling of all, choreography like Chatterjea's only moves to respond artistically as a result of invitation. Native studies scholar David Delgado Shorter cautions against strictly immaterial relations in stating, "When nonindigenous people claim a connection to indigenous people based on Native *spirituality*, they rarely cite specific indigenous communities or discuss their political, economic, and social *materiality*." (2016, 441) The material gains of Native communities are at the heart of ADT's own actions when Chatterjea makes choreography, although the goal of these dance pieces is metaphoric in nature as the company aims to perform movement sequences which intersect, artistically, with Indigenous people's materiality.

In the four sections that follow, I use the autoethnographic method to argue that solidarity is only enacted, humbly, in contemporary dance. Autoethnography interprets and analyzes data collected from personal experience and history for the purposes of cultural inquiry. As Heewon Chang explains in *Autoethnography as Method*, the cultural comprehension of others begins in real engagement with persons "through which insider perspectives" are acquired (2008, 27). In each of these four sections, I track ADT's practice of humility in its objective to build alliances with Native people in its choreography through continuously weaving in my own experience as an artist in the company. I aim for this autoethnographic writing to provide an insider's perspective of how contemporary dance best solidifies any desire for solidarity with the Native land on which its choreographies are enacted. According to Chang, autoethnographies work through a shared process of self-discovery based on personal experiences, self-reflection and memory (37). I initiate this method based on my understanding of shared responsibility for those moments in which ADT's practice of solidarity falls short; I seek to put in practice here an acknowledgement of the gaps in our—rather than "theirs" when writing on ADT—allyship work. Perhaps this might extend autoethnography into the realm of active accountability for the ways in which our analysis of personal experience requires transformation in our own process as we engage with others.

Throughout, I use the term "contemporary dance" for ADT's technique to build on previous analyses that have identified how this category has been readily associated with European-derived forms and not automatically linked to practices entirely grounded in non-western techniques. Outlining how contemporary dance has remained complicit in the priority given to Euro-American practices, Ananya Chatterjea breaks down the unspoken hierarchy:

Moreover, white dance's connection to artistic contemporaneity is not accidental: it follows the legacy of Western modernity, whose global domination positioned it pre-eminently to set the terms of its articulation (Chatterjea 2020, 73).

Dance scholarship has deepened its concern for the contemporary as categorical disregard for the complexity by which Asian dance forms innovate the cutting-edge. SanSan Kwan persuades us to "remember the ethnocentric bias that underlies the yoking of the temporal and the aesthetic and that conflates contemporaneity with the West" (2017, 48). Chatterjea explains further that her self-description as "contemporary dance" is important in many ways because she has discarded definitions in accordance with a nation-state, especially one currently deeply aligned with fundamentalist politics (2024). I call ADT's form "contemporary" rather than "contemporary Indian dance" to further mold this category beyond naming practices purely centered on, or fusing with, Euro-American forms. ADT guides us toward an understanding of the contemporary which always moves humbly in acknowledgement of the Native land on which we dance.

## A Contemporary Dance Foundation for Solidarity: Yorchhā

ADT has long sought to immerse itself in the essential care-work and protective efforts of Native activists in the Twin Cities. For instance, *Roktim: Nurture Incarnadine* (2015) is a company

production that explores the impact of global seed production on sustainable farm practices and lifeways. In preparation for *Roktim*, ADT is invited to provide a movement-based offering at Dream of Wild Health Farm in Hugo, MN, which plants Indigenous crops.

To ground ourselves on the land as dance practitioners who seek to value this Native place through the lens of our contemporary technique, we perform a version of pranam designed by Chatterjea that moves in a circle, executing movements toward the East, West, North and South. Pausing in one direction, we hold our bodies in the curved lines of Odissi by planting one foot down, bending the knee of that leg to further extend the hip, and placing the ball of the other foot down in front. We lift our chest up and gaze high while holding the gesture of *katakamukha* with the thumb pressing to the first and second finger and the remaining fingers lifted and extended. Then, our torsos fold all the way down to the legs as we switch our fingers to the stretched, bowed fingers of *alapadma*, as if holding a cup in the center of our palm. After these movement details, we take a full ninety-degree turn and repeat this sequence to honor each of the four directions. Pembina Chippewa modern dance artist who was born on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, Daystar/Rosalie Jones, has described the communal and relational roles of each direction as the Medicine Wheel, which includes a respect for water, women's labor, sacrifice and artistry, and prayer ("Dancing the Four Directions" 2019). Explaining the role of nonhuman-persons in the North, for example, she points to how the eagle flies up highest to the Creator, sending prayers through feathers and smoke, offering a way to pray and acknowledge our place in the cycle. In ADT's engagement, our pranam at the Dakota farm acknowledges Native ways of knowing through the company's movement practice—that is, rather than appropriating the Medicine Wheel, ADT embodies only its own form, Yorchhā, in honor of Indigenous practices.

This practice is not the appropriation of Native American culture that becomes "traumatizing to Native women, disrespectful to Native peoples, and an act of white supremacy," as described by Seneca, Minneapolis-based choreographer Rosy Simas in her 2016 reflections on choreographer Latifa Laâbissi, who was raised in France by Moroccan immigrants, and whose work presented at MoMA PS1 through the American Realness Festival in New York City (Simas 2016). The problem with Laâbissi's "Self-Portrait" was her wearing, as a non-Native American person, a headdress, which is a "sacred symbol of the Sioux Nations (the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota peoples)," explains Simas. Given that Laâbissi performed nude during the performance, Simas goes on further to clarify that she views "a stage reserved for whiteness excusing itself from responsibility because it is an international person of color performing this mockery."

Rather, ADT is careful to continuously search for this intersection with the expansive world of practices and the multilayered source and archive of knowledge of Native American dance. Dance scholar Jacqueline Shea Murphy specifically highlights how Kahnyen'kehàka (Mohawk) Nation choreographer Santee Smith's contemporary dance form articulates the continuity of Indigenous knowledge (2009, 42). In addition to the work of Native dance in serving as a resource in connecting generations of history to the living present, dance studies scholar Tria Blu Wakpa tracks the relationship of Native dance to land by looking at the dancing of Jicarilla Apache artist Anne Pesata in the choreography of Rulan Tangen: "Pesata '(re)maps' possibilities for human interactions with the land—premised not on dominance or destruction, but respect and recognition of an interconnected relationship" (2016, 118). Native dance explores the worldviews and the contemporary existence of Native peoples on their land. ADT is a dance company that utilizes its contemporary technique not to extract and display these forms of knowledge, but instead to move its form in relation with Indigenous frameworks.

For instance, ADT's first dance series, the "Environmental Justice Trilogy" from 2007–9, highlighted social issues and Native communities. The trilogy was based on the dances *Pipaashaa: Extreme Thirst* (2007), which focused on pollution, *DAAK: Call to Action* (2008), which looked at issues of land displacement and *Ashesh Barsha: Unending Monsoon* (2009), which explored

climate catastrophes. *Pipaashaa* became my very first performance as an apprentice with ADT. As a then-undergraduate student, I participated in the company's series of dialogues with leaders of the Women's Environmental Institute, Cecilia Martinez and Shalini Gupta, who were dealing with the high cases of arsenic that had been found in the soil of Phillips (Stanley 2019), one of the neighborhoods I had grown up in while being raised in south Minneapolis. Integral to the history of this community involves the passing of the 1956 Indian Relocation Act that increased the numbers of Native Americans leaving reservations to reside in cities. Minneapolis became one of the first urban areas to relocate Native American groups, and particularly Ojibwe and Lakota peoples (Campbell 2016). The Minneapolis American Indian Center, the American Indian Opportunities Industrialization Center, American Indian Cultural Corridor, and American Indian Community Development Corporation are just a few of the Native landmarks in Phillips.

The workshops became educational opportunities for me to be reintroduced to the struggles faced by the communities in which I had been raised. Chatterjea has framed this kind of connection that an ADT artist solidifies between themselves and the performance context: "These stories are partly remembered, partly researched, and mostly imagined. I define my dancers as cultural activists and encourage them to develop ownership of the stories, perform them with power, and see themselves as crucial agents of research and community engagement" (Chatterjea 2015). In positioning the trilogy in relation to local issues, ADT's cultural activism made a vital connection to the activist needs of this neighborhood, for as the company's collaborator Martinez explained at the time, "It's bringing the issue to the hearts of the community, and through that we're hoping the community becomes more and more engaged around organizing to deal with these issues" (Martinez 2007).

The communal process has had its challenges and successes. ADT artist and sociologist Hui Niu Wilcox has discussed the example of the company's workshop in 2007 that explored harsh realities along the U.S. Mexico border. Wilcox recalls their dialogue to debrief their experiences. One Dakota participant reminded them of the border issue as it concerns "Native Americans' displacement and genocide" (Wilcox 2022, 64). Her reflections became part of the company's renewed way of thinking about efforts to build alliances: "We now do all our work with the keen consciousness that we dance on Indigenous land and the institutions that we work within and with are built on the oppression of the Indigenous nations." And as different pieces of the Trilogy were performed, dance critics referenced how the choreography constructed these valuable connections to Native land. In an *MPR* review, Marianne Combs described how dancers dropped forcefully onto the stage with "the sound of feet pounding on the floor—a constant reminder of the earth beneath our own feet here in Minnesota. Land that once was the home of the Dakota people" (Combs 2008). ADT's footwork establishes a presence on the ground, metaphorically elevating the conditions of everyday life on the present-day homeland of the Dakota. And of particular concern to Chatterjea are the communities of Leech Lake and the Lower Sioux Reservation of Minnesota (Budig 2008).

While Chatterjea has crafted dances to acknowledge Dakota and Anishinaabe peoples in this way, she has also highlighted Native people's water protection in her choreographic themes. On accountability to safeguard our earth from pollution, irreversible degradation, loss of biodiversity and unsustainable extraction of resources, Anishinaabe leader Winona LaDuke says, "Now is the time to make laws which reaffirm the spirit of place, of beings, and reaffirm the relationship between humans and the Holy Land" (2020, 20). The work of preventing land, water, and vital resources from utter disrepair is one deeply connected to spiritual practice. A relational existence with persons not limited to human features is deeply rooted in Native studies, with social relations with other-than-human-persons being explicit in Ojibwe ontology (Hallowell 1975, 158). As David Delgado Shorter insists, "In the very long history of this continent's habitation, native people were relating socially, across species and life forms, in material ways, and for practical reasons, much longer than they have not been doing so" (2016, 449). Also on this point, dance scholar



Maria Regina Firmino-Castillo's work on Mayan performance necessitates a methodology of highlighting how "material and immaterial beings, both, have personhood and agency" (2020, 31).

Relational politics are seen clearly in Chatterjea's 2013 work, *Mohona: Estuaries of Desire*, which emerged in the months after she and company artists had joined Sharon Day, Ojibwe peace activist, on her 1,200-mile Mississippi River Walk from Lake Itasca to the Gulf of Mexico:<sup>3</sup>

And when I walked with Sharon Day on her Mississippi River Walk, I remembered something I had grown up with but forgotten: that water is an intimate part of our cosmology, integrally connected to life and living (Combs 2013).

Sharon Day's statement "Water to be clear must run" is the thematic focus for the entire last section of *Mohona*—her words literally resolve the conflict that arises in the work and that is the name of that entire last section of the production. More broadly, this relationship between land and embodied action has been described by Native studies scholar Karyn Recollet as aesthetics that are "decolonial" as they "gesture towards creative, desirous futures, practicing an active ongoing refusal of dispossession and erasure" (2016, 93). As Native activists do the physical, spiritual work to rid the land of ongoing oppressive dynamics that disturb our vital water bodies, ADT has participated in supporting this through its artistry that aims to honor the constant labor of Native women in caring tangibly for our resources.

In one example of *Mohona*, Chatterjea puts her own body in a precarious position. She performs in a life-size bubble on stage, eventually taking on a difficult yogic posture of Headstand by setting down the crown of her head and forearms on the floor, then stacking on top of this grounding foundation, her shoulders, upper-back, torso, pelvis, and limbs; in this effort, she balances her entire body overhead. This vertical image, however, topples down as the ensemble disrupts her stability, explains reviewer Caroline Palmer:

An opening image summed up the evening: Chatterjea moving slowly inside a large plastic bubble, as if she inhabited a molecule within water's physical and chemical properties—the very essence of H<sub>2</sub>O[...]But disruption was inevitable—soon Chatterjea lay on the ground, the bubble flattened by the other dancers' fists and feet (2013).

Chatterjea's action ushers in *Mohona*'s aim "to reflect the emotional life of water and of life dependent on water" (Mohona 2013), a statement which resonates with Indigenous worldviews on the personhood of other-than-human beings and their existence as relatives. Chatterjea's yogic postural moment is emblematic of how contemporary dance finds that inseparable relation between the physical practice, *Yorchhā*, and an ongoing meditation on Native people's ceremonies which is in service of the sustainability of the land's waterways.

First, ADT fully immerses itself in the activities and physical practices of water protection by walking alongside Native leaders, and second Chatterjea creates choreographic work that submerges the body in the precarity and imbalance of our environmental realities. ADT highlights this lens in its description of *Mohona*:

Images running through *Mohona* parallel the force and flow associated with water: women standing in long lines in a Mumbai slum, waiting to collect water for everyday use; Native women from Minnesota walking 1,430 miles to pour clean water from Lake Itasca into the Gulf of Mexico as a spiritual journey (Mother Earth Water Walk ceremony) (Mohona 2013).

Yoga is one critical element of *Yorchhā* which in *Mohona* embodies South Asian women's daily water labor and acknowledges Native women's water protection. This interconnection is the



Figure 1. Orlando Zane Hunter, Jr., Ananya Chatterjea and Chitra Vairavan in *Mohona: Estuaries of Desire* at The O'Shaughnessy in Saint Paul, MN in 2013. Photo: V. Paul Virtucio. All photos courtesy of Ananya Dance Theatre.

cornerstone by which ADT realizes its aims for solidarity. It mobilizes *Yorchhā* to intersect South Asian and Native American women's lives in the choreographic themes. Contemporary dance on Native land can be this practice of consistently making dances out of a long-lasting, developing relationship with Indigenous women's essential labor for the environment.

## Yorchhā at the Intersection of Indigenous Social Movements: A Humbling Call to Action

Ananya Chatterjea's contemporary dance technique *Yorchhā* is careful not to represent a Native struggle on stage; rather, it aligns the call to action embedded in the form with the grassroots mobilizations of Indigenous peoples. The company's philosophy of "daak" is a central mechanism:

"Daak: Call to Action" is an artistic response to historic and continuing land rights violations happening across the world [...] "Daak" ends with a metaphoric "call to action" for audiences to lend their energy to the struggles of many women of color around the world about land and environmental and socio-cultural breakdown ("DAAK" 2008).

The rich, purposefulness of *daak* is part of how its contemporary form differs from the historical ways dance has marked itself as subversive. Dance scholar Rebecca Chaleff traces out some of these issues when looking at how white female innovators of postmodern dance crafted a central, neutral place for whiteness: "These performances...upheld the supremacy of whiteness by reiterating its presumptive ontological facticity; whiteness was unseen, unremarkable, and above all, ordinary" (2018, 72). In ADT's case, the hope of "daak" is for observers to enable their witnessing of ADT's performances to cultivate energy which recognizes the environmental concerns of Indigenous persons and communities of color.

ADT's *Moreechika: Season of Mirage* (2012) emerged in part from research on Native people's resistance to the multinational corporation ChevronTexaco's pollution of Indigenous people's lands in Ecuador.<sup>4</sup> I participated in *Moreechika* as a puppeteer, manipulating the "hungry ghost" images onto the backwall as part of the underlying philosophy of the production, and I also danced the solo piece "Plastic Desire" while *Moreechika* was on tour in Philadelphia, PA.<sup>5</sup> In our developing research, we identified the film *Crude: The Real Price of Oil* to look at this historic work closely by accounting for the negative impacts on the community, such as its feature on a mother who aids her teenage daughter in her struggle with cancer (Berlinger 2009). To illustrate the devastating decline of a precious, youth's life in *Moreechika*, Chatterjea crafts a narrative arc that begins with dancers performing in a playful aesthetic. Through this childlike quality, Chatterjea builds the call to action by finding the interconnection between her contemporary dance movement and Indigenous worlds.<sup>6</sup>

Artists express different pedestrian gestures and adolescent fun such as hopscotch, running, poking and jumping rope through yoga and Odissi to guide audience members toward young person's ideal environments. Dancers Orlando Hunter and Rose Huey move their bodies into the shape of tribhangi pose by bending the knees and extending the hip outward. In this pose, they tap the ball of the front foot to the floor. They then transition into the limb movements of double-dutch by quickly lifting the feet off the floor and bringing the knees up high. Artists expand on the imagery of playfulness by taking delight in using their fingers to poke one another's bodies. They engage in hand clap games: they touch their own palms together and then swiftly clap the insides of another person's palms. The games also include hopscotch as another dancer Lela Pierce jumps consecutively on one leg as if carefully controlling the place of her foot in a box drawn with chalk on concrete. Then, she ends the hops in the yoga pose of Half Moon by balancing on one leg and bringing the inner side of the other leg parallel to the floor. She then moves her body seamlessly from yoga to Odissi by holding tribhangi pose and gazing at dancers Chitra Vairavan and Alexandra Eady as if daring them to accomplish a better movement sequence.

The blissful energy takes a new course when dancers continue to play, only to become gradually aware of the physical decline of one of their playmates. Chatterjea redirects the energy, stopping in front of dancers with her limbs in the lowered stance of the double chauk position. She then runs the opposite way of where she was facing, leading all other artists to chase after her. The pursuit ends when artists form a straight line across the front of the stage. To interlock their bodies together, they bend down so that their spines are parallel to the floor, reaching their heads under the hips of the person in front of them. Artist Brittany Radke stands behind all other dancers with her hand at her navel. Chatterjea comes to pick her up and roll her over the backs of dancers. Although their spines hold Radke's weight, dancers pay her no mind; rather, they continue to play by focusing on one dancer, Renée Copeland, who crawls on the floor under their bellies and playfully distracts them as she moves her body to the front.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, Sherie Apungu folds her body over at the rear of the line, a position enabling her to become the first artist to remove herself from the group and to notice that Radke has fallen immobile in Chatterjea's arms. She backs away from the sight of Radke's still body with her hands in *alapadma*, shaking her fully stretched fingers and her cupped palm in front of her face. She pauses in tribhangi pose, circling her torso around in the three hundred and sixty-degree, rounded circle of *angabhramari*, culminating in the steady hold of the bent knees, grounded stance and lift of the upper chest behind the body. Apungu's awareness begins to filter through the group: Lela Pierce brings her hips low to the earth in a squatting yogic position so that she observes Chatterjea roll Radke's body carefully on the ground.

The piece deliberately molds the energy and tasks of adolescent games, while pointing the spectator's attention toward one body's illness and one group's growing awareness of this condition and their building sense of grief. These dancers remind us of the innocence of those most directly





Figure 2. (in line formation) Orlando Zane Hunter, Jr., Lela Pierce, Rose Huey, Alexandra Eady, Hui Niu Wilcox, Chitra Vairavan, Sarah Beck-Esmay and Sherie Apungu; (below) Renée Copeland; (above) Brittany Radke and Ananya Chatterjea in *Moreechika: Season of Mirage* at the Southern Theater in Minneapolis, MN in 2012. Photo: V. Paul Virtucio.

impacted by environmental tragedies, next generations of young people who require sustainable, healthy resources to survive. “For Native peoples, it’s not non-violent civil disobedience, it’s our future generations, our land, our water, our ancestors—everything” (LaDuke 2020, 177). In ADT, Chatterjea makes concentrated choices about dancers’ embodiment of play and the vitality of exchanges in a game to shape a world bursting with youthful energy that ends tragically. This diligence in the dance-making moves contemporary dance away from the act of wearing garb or stealing steps to perform as “native;” rather, it is the work of the choreographer to mold a narrative and movement sequence that places dancers in the context of elevating Indigenous people’s water experiences and politics. Moreover, the framing of *Yorchhā* offers a construction of the form in terms of current societal challenges, which might further substantiate Anurima Banerji’s point that the “focus on religiosity and ‘the ageless mythology’ as the originary and structuring conditions of Indian performance is seductive, reductive and problematic” (Banerji 2019, 63). Carefully, Chatterjea’s choreography clearly aims not to replicate any hardline on timeless religious ritual; instead, she takes on the quality of youthful play to align the dance with Indigenous peoples’ livelihoods, grassroots actions and environmental knowledge.

Yet, differently than *Mohona* and the company’s walk alongside Dakota water protectors, *Moreechika* does not emerge from this concrete level of engagement; rather, the intersection between *Yorchhā* and Indigenous land has been forged through research. Is it a performance of contemporary dance on Native land without existing in community with Indigenous leaders as they carry out the labor of protecting vital resources? In this example of *Moreechika*, it seems Chatterjea and we, as ADT artists, have not fulfilled a critical step, although our efforts are multi-faceted. Chatterjea refuses to allow the story to end with death, which counters colonial narratives on Indigenous persons.<sup>8</sup> In the next sequences, a duet between Lela Pierce and Chitra Vairavan sets the tone for embodying the different energies involved in protection: when one body grows tired

and weak, another can be ready and willing to provide assistance. Pierce grabs hold of Vairavan and breaks her fall when she walks over to her and then drops her body down toward the floor. As Pierce drags Vairavan's body, she sustains flexed feet, and when they both pull away from one another, their arms remained outstretched. After they each lift up from this held position, Vairavan returns to balancing on the leg and moving the other repeatedly forward and back.

The objective in ADT is not to mimic Indigenous women's bodily tactics which uphold Native sovereignty and self-determination; it is to take up the philosophy of *daak* by cultivating emotional realms of play, perseverance and support and to mold this energy to map the choreography's solidarity with Indigenous social movements. Even so, as contemporary dancers, we have to acknowledge when our attempt at solidarity falls short, such as the lack of moving with Indigenous peoples in their efforts to protect land, prior to solidifying choreography designed to be in honor of their labor. Simpson explains what is at stake in Indigenous social movements: "When we speak of dispossession we are speaking of the materiality of land. The land that Indigenous peoples own, care for, are related to and moved from, by force or by fiat for settlement" (2016, 18).

In this example of ADT, there is an opportunity to push the dance field toward an analysis of its philanthropic efforts such as Sarah Wilbur's work to "elucidate the political imbrication of artists and institutions as complex choreography in its own right" (2021, 13). While Wilbur invokes the term "dance-making" to closely examine the institutional logics of funding organizations, I take interest here in this humbling practice of contemporary dance: aligning with Indigenous peoples over the course of multiple dance pieces to sustain a choreographic focus beyond one singular dance and to rather honor Native land in each and every evening-length production.<sup>9</sup> Still, there will be moments of reflection to realize when our call to action for alliances has not quite been enough to be named "solidarity." At issue with *Moreechika* is the larger question of whether we have been invited to highlight Ecuadorian Indigenous peoples' critical efforts to protect land. Contemporary dance supports the material aims of Indigenous peoples through its choreography, but it does not materially change conditions of Indigenous injustice purely through dance movement that is entirely reliant on research.

## A Contemporary Dancer's Indigenous Narrative

Tracing an Indigenous narrative through dance, too, is a humbling task as colonial legacies of suppressing and disregarding Native people have become the norm, which raises the concern for how one dancing body can hold up the layers necessary for solidarity. *Yorchhā* becomes the technique through which dancer Kealoha Ferreira moves within the many parts of her Indigenous Hawaiian narrative. She helps to reveal how contemporary dance has the potential to sustain in its choreography a distinct mode for embodying the multiplicity of Indigenous lives.

Kealoha Ferreira grew up in Oahu, Hawai'i. In 2018, she participated in the tour of *Shyamali* to the Maui Arts and Cultural Center in Hawai'i: "That was the first time being on Maui where my grandfather was from and the valley where he used to own land" (Ferreira 2020). And she goes on further to describe the impact of performing in this tour: "To bring *Yorchhā* so close to the people that I came from and the people that love and supported me [...], there is a new level of intensity. There's no imagining that this is the place that I am conjuring. There's none of that distance anymore." Critical to Ferreira's capacity to integrate herself within the dance while nearest her ancestral home was the company's community engagement. I also took part in the tour to Maui where we had the opportunity to visit the Noho'ana Farm to hear about harvesting taro, the Native *kalo* plant. Here, we continue that process of invitation by immersing our tour-work in the specific realities of Native practices with land in Maui. For Ferreira's experience, this cultivation became transformative: "It was the first time I got to plant *kalo* even though I went to high school as a 'quote-unquote' 'Native Hawaiian.'"

American studies scholar Dean Saranillio cautions against brown bodies in Hawai'i molding a narrative of their immigration to the land in a way that overlooks the Indigenous people of Hawai'i, the Kanaka 'Ōiwi. Rather, Saranillio suggests Asian Americans comprehend freedom while enacting responsibility for Indigenous peoples' decolonizing agenda (2013, 280). Ferreira takes on a layered understanding of her familial history to acknowledge Native lives:

My dad's side of the family is Native Hawaiian and specifically my dad's father we know is Native Hawaiian. That's how I have it on my birth certificate—because it is on his birth certificate. So, when it comes to my mother, the story is different because she isn't Native Hawaiian. She is Filipino and she does have a mix of Chinese and Spanish. I've been doing more learning, listening to my mother's mother who is still alive to really be able to hold the family stories that she holds and to be able to just recite them out of heart. My mother's mother was born and raised in Hilo and her parents came from the Philippines. Her father came to Hawai'i first. They called them [—] because he was slightly fairer-skinned.<sup>10</sup> They brought him strategically in as a Filipino who could oversee, to a certain degree, the other people working the sugar plantations, specifically other Filipinos. The majority of the people that they brought in as those overseers were Portuguese, but he was a different case. So that's my great grandfather on my grandmother's side. (Ferreira 2020)

Ferreira maps her story of Native identity and migration in a way that uncovers the multiple dimensions involved in the histories of Asian populations' emergence on the land.<sup>11</sup> I envision that Ferreira's narrative moves in the direction Candace Fujikane, scholar of Asian American settler colonialism, points toward: "Nevertheless, an analysis of settler colonialism positions indigenous peoples at the center, foregrounding not settler groups' relationships with each other or with the U.S. settler state, but with the indigenous peoples whose ancestral lands settlers occupy." (2008, 9) An obligation to the self-determination of Indigenous peoples in Hawai'i is the foundational work for Asian Americans in Hawai'i, according to Fujikane. Ferreira's performing in ADT and touring to Maui present a critical moment to place her politics and identity as Native in the center: "I had all of this distance from other Native Hawaiians, but suddenly coming to [Maui], all of that research on identity was laid out in the open. You don't know if you've been doing that work right—politics of authenticity inside of indigeneity and what is appropriate—but there's some of those personal stakes that felt higher."

In her solo for Chatterjea's choreography, *Shaatranga: Women Weaving Worlds* (2018), the very weight of these stakes become the work of Ferreira's movements. This piece uses a prop that ADT calls the "Navigation Star," a handheld device about one foot in width and length that is made of wood and shaped geometrically with sharp corners, straight sides and adorned with colored pieces of cloth. Dancers use this fully formed Navigation Star as well as a second prop known as the "broken" Navigation Star—its fabrics are torn on one of its sides, with its wood broken entirely open at this point. The philosophy underlying the Navigation Star has been inspired by the company's visit to the Hokule'a canoe of the Polynesian Voyaging Society during our tour to Maui:

Witnessing the lashings and the precise intersections of ropes and wood pieces used to assess direction in keeping with the star system suggested the value of relationships to time, space, and each other, especially during long and difficult journeys (Shaatranga 2018).

Through this framing of the prop's significance, Chatterjea strategically places one artist, Ferreira, in the choreography because of her connection to Native Hawaiian land.



Figure 3. Felicia Perry, Renée Copeland, Ananya Chatterjea, Kealoha Ferreira (holding the Navigation Star), Lizzette Chapa, Alexandra Eady, Alessandra Lebea Williams, Hui Niu Wilcox, Julia Gay and Leila Awadallah in *Shaatranga: Women Weaving Worlds* at *The O'Shaughnessy* in 2018. Photo: Randy Karels.

The use of both Navigation Stars in the dance becomes a symbol of the need for the uneasy, uncomfortable, intentional effort in mapping out one's path on Native land and Ferreira takes on this difficult track through her performance with both props in her solo. She holds both the complete and broken Navigation Stars, gliding on the floor by placing one knee down, and lengthening the other limb out in front of her and then repeating on the other side. While remaining grounded in this form, she lifts both props up and overhead in a halfmoon shape. Ferreira's dancing holds up the shattered, torn nature, as well as the holistic structure of the props, intersecting their differences only through the strength and balance of her own body. Native dance studies scholar Mique'l Dangeli sharpens our awareness of the many factors of history, innovation, and cultural preservation involved in Native dance, especially as part of the generation born after the legislated banning of Indigenous practices in the U.S. and Canada: "I dance to perpetuate our ancient ways of being and, as my ancestors have always done, to contribute newness that keeps our practices vibrant, diverse, and relevant to the time and space that it exists" (Hupfield and Dangeli 2019, 17). Native studies scholar Glen Coulthard's discussion of a politics of resurgence is also important here because it grasps how Native social movements draw "critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present" (2014, 157).

Through Ferreira's embodiment, Chatterjea's choreography continues to circle back to its concern for Native peoples' land, but it does so through the South Asian premises of *Yorchhā* contemporary technique. ADT has the capacity to uphold longstanding Indigenous practices and some complexities of these narratives and experiences, through her dancer's performance. Is one artist's narrative and solo performance enough to solidify a production as an enactment of contemporary dance on Native land? In and of itself—it is a building block for the larger architecture by which solidarity can be realized, but contemporary dancers still must work under multiple Indigenous protocols, such as sustaining permission to offer up dance's energy on Native land in the first place. And even upon invitation to perform in the spaces in which the Indigenous artist herself has been raised



and for her to connect with the land there as a Native person, this dancing still requires careful navigation of identity, migration history and Indigenous peoples' histories and contemporary lives.

## Offering Dance as Invited Allies of Native Water Protectors

Humility is how I have come to understand the moment in September 2016 when artist Renée Copeland and I joined Ananya Chatterjea to drive from our performance base in the Twin Cities to the Standing Rock site. As an ally, ADT abided by the first step—that is, to be invited by Native leadership, rather than to assume our presence was automatically desired or needed. Chatterjea took a small group of us to respond to the invitation of Dakota leader Janice BadMoccasin who requested an artistic offering to support her water protection efforts. The historic moment of Standing Rock and its work in North Dakota to prevent the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline is a vital point from which to understand ADT's solidarity with Native people's water protection. In this transnational gathering of Indigenous allyship, diverse Native communities set up an encampment to protect the land from a pipeline's oil spillage into the Missouri River. Citizens of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation constructed the Sacred Stone Camp to prevent the natural gas pipeline from destroying sacred sites and to protect the region's primary water source. Standing Rock adds to the multiple resurgences of Native land protection, such as the 2015 Keystone XL Pipeline when the Rosebud Sioux tribe of South Dakota built an encampment to protect the land, to name one example (Donnella 2016). As we entered Standing Rock, viewing the powerful visual of flags displaying the magnificent array of Native nations along the route nearby, we were reminded that we were present there because of this invitation, the longstanding alliance between Chatterjea and BadMoccasin, and the task of lifting up the work of Indigenous protection.

Humility is critically acclaimed in the life's work of Janice BadMoccasin. She is an intergenerational caregiver, healing liaison and a tribal member of Dakota Nation, Oceti Sakowin. In a 2019 interview with Chatterjea, she describes herself as: "I am Dakota, my spirit name is Cetanskan (chay tah ska n) White Hawk Woman Dancing. I am a Cultural Bearer, Healer, Knowledge Keeper and Muay Thai combat athlete warrior" (BadMoccasin 2019). And on her healing practices, she says:

What drives my dedication of healing work to community is the greatest need for culturally specific healing and my unique approach of believing in miraculous wonders of a healing gift. The quiet leadership and healer within me has been summoned by my family, women, and families. It is my spiritual ethics and values that I strongly adhere to being a good relative, healer and quiet leader as I have learned compassion and humbleness are the language of spirit and the natural world.

As artists, then, we arrive to be in solidarity with a Native leader who has worked through a restorative, spiritual, healing practice, and for which humility is a primary quality for life and transformation.

For our offering, we perform for BadMoccasin and Dakota water protectors near their tent section at the Standing Rock encampment. Chatterjea leads us through exercises in *Yorchhā*. Copeland and I follow her direction as she chooses one of the *tribhangi* exercises that we work in. Here, the torso leans down toward the bent legs, rises back up with the hand above the crown of the head; then, that hand stretches across the body to press the inside of the wrist forward while simultaneously balancing the body on one heel. By working in this form, Chatterjea guides the footwork, as well as the careful placement and shape of the spine, to meet the efforts taking place on the ground on which we dance. It is an endeavor to elevate the alliance of Dakota peoples in their protection work on the land of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.



Chatterjea brings in a second one of the forms ADT works in, the vinyasa flow of yoga, to make a clear relationship to the four directions. We do a series of Sun Salutations: we place the body in a firm standing position, and from this place, lift the arms overhead and fold the torso all the way down toward the floor so that our upper body then faces the legs. We lift our torsos halfway up from the floor and then place the palms down directly underneath our shoulders. When stepping the feet all the way back behind us, we hold ourselves in a long Plank Pose and bend the elbows so that our bodies lower further toward the floor without touching the ground. Pressing firmly into the hands, we lengthen the arms to press the chest up and forward. Finally, we move the position of the pelvis from hovering over the floor to reaching up toward the sky so that we can form the shape of yoga's Downward Facing Dog. The practice of moving through poses with concentrated breath and toward a focused direction intersects Chatterjea's contemporary dance form intentionally with the Native value system of North, South, East and West. As Robin Wall Kimmerer explains through the teachings of Potawatomi master basketmaker, John Pigeon:

Our people honor the four sacred directions and the power resident there. Where the two basket strips meet, at the intersection of those four directions, is right where we stand as humans, trying to find balance among them (Kimmerer 2013, 151).

Chatterjea, Copeland and my offering at Standing Rock—that articulation of Yorchhā to honor Native peoples—would resonate in the company's production the following year, *Shyamali: Sprouting Words*. It put on further display how contemporary dance only sheds light on its solidarity with Native peoples' work on their land by responding to and taking the cues from specific Native leaders, and then and only then, making work.

Chatterjea, Copeland and Ferreira gradually move from the upper corner of the stage to the center: they slide along their spines with their knees lifted and then transition to yogic movements such as a low Crescent Moon Pose that lowers one knee on the floor while keeping the knee of the other leg lifted and foot planted down. Entering the stage from the upper right corner, the visual begins to thicken as dancers crawl on their bellies on the floor, forming the shape of yoga's Cobra pose with their spines. This slower pace is enhanced with a swifter energy as we also emerge with quick somersaults—we press the crown of our head to the floor, then swiftly round the head to the navel to roll from the back of the neck to the lower spine and come up on our feet. All our entrances embody a lowering of the body completely to the floor, ushering in a closer relationship to the ground which softens the gaze downward. As our ritual solidifies at center, I hold the yoga Headstand Pose with forearms on the floor, head between the hands, torso and pelvis stacking over the head, and legs open in a square position to complete the posture. Directly in front, dancer Alexandra Eady shifts into a major back bend, hovering her spine up and over my body, mirroring the rounded fold of yoga's Upward Facing Bow. Rather than directing energy up and forward, these postures place dancers in relation to one another and firmly to the ground. As we had offered Sun Salutations at Standing Rock, honoring each of the four directions through the lens of Yorchhā, *Shyamali* relies on flowing in and out of yoga postures with dancers emerging from precise directions on stage and establishing ourselves at center in a culminating image of delicate balances and poses forming not only concrete positions on the floor but ones which humble our presence. Chatterjea's choreography reveals how moving on land as contemporary dancers requires a concentrated ritual of breath and movement that the deliberate nature of yoga makes possible to do so with care.

Chatterjea envisions the final section of *Shyamali* out of her research on Native artist Cannupa Hanska Luger who had crafted mirror shields for Standing Rock water protectors to hold so that the actions of riot policeman would be reflected back on them (Luger 2017). Directing this to the set design, artists move with handheld shields, coated in silver, formed in different geometric shapes. The shield is already at the center of Yorchhā because Chhau uses the tactics of attack



Figure 4. Leila Awadallah, Lizette Chapa, Felicia Perry, Alexandra Eady, Julia Gay, Kealoha Ferreira, Jonathan van Arneeman, Ananya Chatterjea, Hui Niu Wilcox, Renée Copeland, Sophia Hill and Alessandra Lebea Williams in *Shyamali: Sprouting Words* at *The O'Shaughnessy* in 2017. Photo: V. Paul Virtucio.

and defense, with the movements requiring dancers to hold a sword in one hand and a shield in the other. *Shyamali* further establishes how the contemporary intersects with Native cultural practices through the potential of the technique itself—in this case, the use of handheld devices and the purpose of |Chhau in preparing for communal action.<sup>12</sup>

For instance, dancer Hui Niu Wilcox holds the shield in front of her chest. She brings the foot down momentarily to touch the floor, but then lifts both feet up in a jump and lands down in a side lunge with the shield lifted parallel to the floor and the other arm lengthened toward the ceiling. Here, she has crafted the body in Chhau's *Uska Topka*, "leaping movement." Since the question of how actual, material changes to Indigenous social movements are impacted when solidarity is the main concern, the shield brings to light how contemporary dance seeks alliances in its choreographic, thematic design, through the foundational practices of its form, and in terms of Indigenous material practices such as Luger's.

As the finale further develops, bringing in more ensemble dancers who embody this relationship to the shield, a duet emerges downstage that carries forward this vision of solidarity through humility, illuminating how it is not simplistic in nature. Closest to the audience, dancers Sophia Hill and I plant the shield flat on the ground and gaze at it. We come to our knees, lower the head to the floor and reach one leg out to the side, fully lengthening it. Keeping the head in this lowered position, we extend that leg up, keeping the foot flexed and then send it back behind us while ensuring the leg is parallel to the floor; then, we lift it high up to the ceiling. We lower the leg back down, push the shield forward with the hands and lift the back knee off the floor to hold a lunge pose, all the while looking downward at the shield. Lowering our forehead to the floor and our shield, we come forward to bring the front knee down to the floor and then also bring the back leg in so that we can place both shins down and lower the torso in Child's Pose. This dancing embodies the role of the invitation to Standing Rock held by ADT, to offer that which is requested and not to move with

force. The ongoing lowering and gesturing of the upper body to the floor constantly humbles the head and torso downward in a close connection with the ground, acknowledging it as well as the practice at hand—the fixed movement of this shield which is central to Yorchhā. Chatterjea enacts her solidarity through humility by responding to Native person's call to offer Yorchhā to the cause of water protection and by crafting choreography which stages this energetic requirement of invitation as a ritual of connection, putting Native land at the center of the design and movement quality.

## **Conclusion: The Artist's Unending Alignment with Native Peoples' Sustained Caretaking for Land**

On February 21, 2021, Chatterjea leads ADT on a journey to the Native water protectors center in Palisade, Minnesota. On a snowy, cold Midwest day, they will provide an offering there in support of Native people's call to Stop Line 3, a pipeline whose expansion is designed to carry millions of barrels of tar sands oil over the course of sacred wild rice fields, more than 800 wetlands, and over 200 water bodies in Minnesota (Minnesota Interfaith 2021).

Alongside ADT company members, Chatterjea has brought her students from her course "Choreographing Social Justice," a curriculum that she structures around a central tenet of activism. This year, students will witness her company's solidarity work with Native water protectors. As she explains, "I was helping my students understand that they were not there to do anything but to learn and offer energy" (Chatterjea 2021). Having also participated in this journey, gender studies scholar Jigna Desai describes how students had to learn from Chatterjea how to deepen their commitment, especially given the detailed efforts of Native activist Winona LaDuke and ally Shanai | Matteson in preparing this land: "Everyone coordinated to bring offerings. 'We leave more than we take' is an important component, to the ability that they can. It's a shared responsibility" (Desai 2021). ADT's offering for Native water protectors here is another example of the company's unending work to prioritize Native peoples' caretaking of the land.

I, too, continue this collective practice of ADT on Saturday, April 29, 2023 at Rutgers University for the New Jersey Folk Festival where I take up Yorchhā as a form to acknowledge Native peoples' land. Immersing students in this practice, I bring four BFA dancers from my "Contemporary Fusion Movement Practices" course where I teach Chatterjea's technique. We have about forty participants whom I guide in learning ADT's pranam to acknowledge the land of Lenni Lenape peoples, placing the crown of our heads to the ground and lifting our hands up in this effort. We move through Sun Salutations to value each of the four directions through the lens of Yorchhā's work in yoga. I hope my students will seek out a contemporary form which grounds all its dancing in relation to Native land.

These continual efforts of ADT to track their steps as they dance in the homeplaces of Native American peoples can guide us toward a model of contemporary dance which initiates itself by way of Native invitation. When framing its dances through its engagement in the multiplicity of Indigenous social movements, we do so through invitation and Indigenous dancers' migration stories in relation to Native peoples' land. Rather than look away in fear or disillusionment from how a colonial legacy continues to lead us toward extraction of oil resources on Indigenous land, contemporary dance in ADT can act as one critical guide in acknowledging Native people's protective work for the environment, including the lessons learned along the way which actively call on us to be humble in our solidarity. Contemporary dance companies are in some instances doing physical labor in Native communities and at protective actions which lead to daily life changes in communities. Given that these embodiments bring to light the difference between material and immaterial relatedness, we as contemporary dancers can be clear and exacting about the precise value of our solidarity that offers movement energy to the material visions of Native people through the decolonizing, metaphorical themes of our dancing which emerge by way of invitation.

## Notes

1. In “Training in Indian Classical Dance,” Ananya Chatterjea defines the practice as a respect for god, audience and the instructor (1996, 71).
2. In *Dancing Odissi*, Anurima Banerji, notes how “the characterizations of Odra-Magadhi in the *Natyashastra*, intimate that Odissi had secular roots, in the sense of being ‘worldly’ rather than ‘spiritual’” (2019, 93).
3. The Mississippi River Walks are also discussed in Sydney Swanson’s article, “Carrying the Water,” *Winona Daily News* (2013).
4. Public interest lawyers in 1993 advocated for Native persons in “a class action lawsuit against Texaco over millions of gallons of oil and toxic wastewater that released into groundwater, rivers and streams” (Tinker Salas 2015). Indigenous Amazonian peoples “have borne the costs of oil development without sharing in its benefits and without participating in decisionmaking that affects them,” explains Judith Kimerling (2007, 504).
5. For more on the role of the hungry ghost puppets and this “Plastic Desire” section, see the chapter “Loving Deeply” in *Dancing Transnational Feminisms: Ananya Dance Theatre and the Art of Social Justice*, edited by Ananya Chatterjea, Hui Niu Wilcox and Alessandra Lebea Williams (Wilcox 2022).
6. The program brochure for *Moreechika* explains the company’s aim to highlight the work of “women from the Kichwa community of Ecuador, who ran through forests for hours shouting ‘Anchuri! Get out!’ to protest against land encroachment by oil corporations” (*Moreechika* 2012).
7. For more on how whiteness gets shaped at the intersection of race and gender, please see “A Radical Practice of Inclusion” (Williams 2022).
8. Settler colonial theory provides a framework to understand the ongoing disappearance of Native persons and dispossession of Native land. See Patrick Wolfe (2006).
9. Indigenous curator Christopher K. Morgan comments on the problem: “I also want to make sure I do it in a way that has integrity, and is not just contacting someone from that tribal community and saying, ‘Great, now we’ve had that contact, and we’re good to go’” (Simas 2019, 32).
10. This term has been omitted to prevent reiterating stereotypes on the basis of color.
11. Writing one’s personal narrative can disrupt “the entrenched ideologies of white heteropatriarchy and settler sexual colonialism both within and without Native communities and communities of color,” according to Native Hawaiian scholar-activist Kalaniopua Young (2015, 90).
12. For more on the role of Chhau historically, see Chandralekha (1980).

## Works Cited

- Ashesh Barsha: *Unending Monsoon*. Choreographed by Ananya Chatterjea. World Premiere: The Southern Theater, Minneapolis, MN, September 10, 2009.
- BadMoccasin, Janice. 2019. “Global Feminist Funk Underground Club: Fire-Bellied Feminist Forum.” Ananya Dance Theatre, June 7. Accessed December 5, 2019. <https://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/global-feminist-funk-underground-club-fire-bellied-feminist-forum>.
- Banerji, Anurima. 2019. *Dancing Odissi: Paratopic Performances of Gender and State*. London: Seagull Books.
- Berlinger, Joe, dir. 2009. *Crude: The Real Price of Oil*. DVD.
- Blu Wakpa, Tria. 2016. “Culture Creators and Interconnected Individualism: Rulan Tangen and Anne Pesata’s *Basket Weaving Dance*.” *Dance Research Journal* 48 (1): 106–25.
- Budig, Susan. 2008. “Dancers Rouse Audiences to Fight Environmental Racism.” *MN Spokesman-Recorder*, June 11. Accessed September 29, 2016. <https://www.tcdailyplanet.net/dancers-rouse-audiences-fight-environmental-racism/>.
- Campbell, Alexia Fernández. 2016. “How America’s Past Shapes Native Americans’ Present: A Minneapolis community seeks to counteract centuries of federal policies that have put its people at a disadvantage.” *The Atlantic*, October 12. Accessed April 18, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/10/native-americans-minneapolis/503441/>.

- Chaleff, Rebecca. 2018. "Activating Whiteness: Racializing the Ordinary in US American Postmodern Dance," *DRJ* 50 (3): 71–84.
- Chandrasekha. 1980. "Militant Origins of Indian Dance." *Social Scientist* 9 (2/3): 80–85.
- Chang, Heewon. 2008. *Autoethnography as Method*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, Inc.
- Chatterjea, Ananya. 2015. "Creating a New, Contemporary Dance." *Ananya Dance Theatre*, October 10. Available at: <https://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/2015/10/creating-a-new-contemporary-american-dance/>.
- Chatterjea, Ananya. 1996. "Training in Indian Classical Dance: A Case Study," *Asian Theatre Journal* 13 (1): 68–91.
- . 2020. *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2021. Interview with the author. Zoom. March 19.
- . 2024. Communication with author. Email. March 16.
- Combs, Marianne. 2008. "Dancing for the Land Beneath Their Feet." *MPR*, June 12. Accessed September 29, 2016. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2008/06/12/dancingforthelandbeneaththeirfeet>.
- . 2013. "Ananya Dance Theatre takes on Troubled Waters with Mohona: Estuaries of Desire," *MPR*, September 19. Accessed March 29, 2021. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2013/09/19/ananya-dance-theatre-takes-on-troubled-waters-with-mohona-estuaries-of-desire>.
- Coulthard, Glen Sean. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- "DAAK: Call to Action." 2008. Accessed May 17, 2023. <https://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/dance/daak/>
- "Dancing the Four Directions." 2019. Accessed January 13, 2019. [https://www.daystardance.com/medicine\\_circle\\_dancing\\_the\\_four\\_directions.html](https://www.daystardance.com/medicine_circle_dancing_the_four_directions.html).
- Desai, Jigna. 2021. Interview with the author. Zoom. April 5.
- Donnella, Leah. 2016. "The Standing Rock Resistance Is Unprecedented (It's Also Centuries Old)." *NPR*, November 22. Accessed December 5, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/11/22/502068751/the-standing-rock-resistance-is-unprecedented-it-s-also-centuries-old>.
- Ferreira, Kealoha. 2020. Interview with the author. Webex. August 31.
- Firmino-Castillo, Maria Regina. 2020. "RUXIMIK QAK'U'X: Inextricable Relationalities in Mayan Performance Practice." *Decolonizing Dance Discourses*. Conversations Across the Field of Dance Studies (Dance Studies Association), edited by Anurima Banerji and Royona Mitra, XL: 31–35.
- Fujikane, Candace. 2008. "Introduction: Asian Settler Colonialism in the U.S. Colony of Hawai'i." In *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i*, edited by Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, 1–42. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hallowell, A. Irving. 1975. "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View." In *Teachings from the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy*, edited by Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock, 141–78. New York: Liverlight.
- Hupfield, Maria, John Hupfield (Waaseyaabin) and Deanne Hupfield and Sm Loodm 'Nüüsm (Dr. Mique'l Dangeli) and Goothl Ts'imilx (Mike Dangeli). 2019. "Dancing for Spirit, Family, Community, and Culture." *Sovereign Movements: Native Dance and Performance*, edited by Rosy Simas and Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán. *Movement Research Performance Journal* 52/53: 14–17.
- Kimerling, Judith. 2007. "Transnational Operations, Bi-national Injustice: ChevronTexaco and Indigenous Huaorani and Kichwa in the Amazon Rainforest in Ecuador." *American Indian Law Review* 31 (2): 445–508.
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 2013. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions.
- Kwan, SanSan. 2017. "When Is Contemporary Dance?" *DRJ* 49 (3): 38–52.
- LaDuke, Winona. 2020. *To Be A Water Protector: The Rise of the Wiindigoo Slayers*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.



- Luger, Cannupa Hanska. 2017. Quoted in Carolina A. Miranda, "The Artist who Made Protesters' Mirrored Shields Says the 'Struggle Porn' Media Miss Point of Standing Rock." *Los Angeles Times*, January 12. Accessed April 6, 2021. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-cannupa-hanska-luger-20170112-story.html>.
- Martinez, Cecilia. 2007. Quoted in Marianne Combs. "Pipaashaa Means Thirst." *MPR News*, September 4. Accessed October 3, 2016. <http://www.mprnews.org/story/2007/09/05/pipaashaa>.
- Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light petition. 2021. "Tell President Biden to Stop Line 3!" Accessed February 11, 2021. <https://mnipl.nationbuilder.com/biden-faith-leader-petition-stopline3>.
- "Mohona: Estuaries of Desire." 2013. Accessed October 12, 2020. <https://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/dance/mohona/>.
- Morechika: *Season of Mirage*. 2012. Choreographed by Ananya Chatterjea. Southern Theater, September 6–9, 2012. Minneapolis, MN. Program brochure.
- Palmer, Caroline. 2013. "Ananya Dance Theatre Sends Powerful Message." *Special to the Star Tribune*, September 21. Accessed May 16, 2023. <https://m.startribune.com/ananya-dance-theatre-sends-powerful-message/224709452/?c=n&clm>.
- Pipaashaa: Extreme Thirst*. Choreographed by Ananya Chatterjea. World Premiere: The Southern Theater, Minneapolis, MN, September 6, 2007.
- Recollet, Karyn. 2016. "Gesturing Indigenous Futurities through the Remix." *Dance Research Journal* 48 (1): 91–105.
- Roktim: Nurture Incarnadine*. Choreographed by Ananya Chatterjea. World Premiere: The O'Shaughnessy, Saint Paul, MN, September 18, 2015.
- Saranillio, Dean Itsuji. 2013. "Why Asian Settler Colonialism Matters: A Thought Piece on Critiques, Debates, and Indigenous Difference." *Settler Colonial Studies* 3 (3–4): 280–94.
- "*Shaatranga: Women Weaving Worlds*." 2018. Accessed September 27, 2020. <https://www.ananyadancetheatre.org/dance/shaatranga-at-the-edge-of-new-worlds/>.
- Shea Murphy, Jacqueline. 2009. "Mobilizing (in) the Archive: Santee Smith's Kaha:wi." In *Worlding Dance*, edited by Susan Leigh Foster, 32–52. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shorter, David Delgado. 2016. "Spirituality." In *Oxford Handbook of American Indian History*, edited by Frederick E. Hoxie, online edition 433–452. Oxford Academic, April 7. Accessed January 3, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhdb/9780199858897.001.0001>.
- Simas, Rosy. 2016. "Rosy Simas Reads Laåbiss's "Self Portrait Camouflage." *Infinite Body*, December 13. Accessed March 4, 2024. <https://infinitebody.blogspot.com/2016/12/rosy-simas-reads-laabissis-self.html>.
- and Christopher K. Morgan. 2019. "Longer Scores: Native Choreographic Turns, Curatorial Visions, and Community Engagement." *Sovereign Movements: Native Dance and Performance*, edited by Rosy Simas and Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán. *Movement Research Performance Journal* 52/53: 31–33.
- Simpson, Audra. 2016. "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty." *Theory and Event* 19 (4): 1–30.
- Stanley, Greg. 2019. "EPA says cleanup of arsenic-laced Minneapolis Superfund site is mostly complete." *Star Tribune*, August 1. Accessed November 4, 2019. <http://www.startribune.com/epa-says-cleanup-of-arsenic-laced-minneapolis-superfund-site-is-mostly-complete/513463092/>.
- Swanson, Sydney. 2013. "Carrying the Water." *Winona Daily News*, March 18. Accessed March 29, 2021. [https://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/carrying-the-water-activists-hope-to-draw-attention-to-mississippi-river-pollution/article\\_af08b758-8f83-11e2-a5e5-0019bb2963f4.html](https://www.winonadailynews.com/news/local/carrying-the-water-activists-hope-to-draw-attention-to-mississippi-river-pollution/article_af08b758-8f83-11e2-a5e5-0019bb2963f4.html).
- Tinker Salas, Miguel. 2015. "Can Ecuador Bring Chevron to Justice?" *Al Jazeera America*, April 24. Accessed April 14, 2016. <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/4/can-ecuador-bring-chevron-to-justice.htmlT>.
- Townsend, Camilla, with Ugonna Amaechi, Jacob Arnay, Shelby Berner, Lynn Biernacki, Vanessa Bodossian, Megan Brink, *et al.* 2016. "I Am Old and Weak ... and You Are Young and Strong ...": The Intersecting Histories of Rutgers University and the Lenni Lenape." In *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History*, edited by Marisa J. Fuentes and

- Deborah Gray White, 6–42. Rutgers University Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1k3s9r0.5>.
- Wilbur, Sarah. 2021. *Funding Bodies: Five Decades of Dance Making at the National Endowment for the Arts*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Wilcox, Hui Niu. 2022. “Dance of the Spiraling Generations: On Love and Healing with Ananya Dance Theatre.” In *Dancing Transnational Feminisms: Ananya Dance Theatre and the Art of Social Justice*, edited by Ananya Chatterjea, Hui Niu Wilcox and Alessandra Lebea Williams. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Williams, Alessandra Lebea. 2022. “A Radical Practice of Inclusion: Choreographing Race and Gender with Ananya Dance Theatre.” *TDR The Drama Review* 66 (1): 102–18.
- Wolfe, Patrick. 2006. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8 (4): 387–409.
- Young, Kalaniopua. 2015. “From a Native Trans Daughter: Carceral Refusal, Settler Colonialism, Re-routing the Roots of an Indigenous Abolitionist Imaginary.” In *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, edited by Eric A. Stanley and Nat Smith, expanded second edition, 83–96. Oakland: AK Press.