

## ARTICLES

# Toward Becoming Good Relatives: Not-Dancing to Centre Indigenous Presence in the Dance Classroom<sup>1</sup>

Sammy Roth, Miya Shaffer, and Tria Blu Wakpa

## Introduction

I am going to slow down and consider the ecosystem of my surroundings. The ways that I am interconnected with my family and my colleagues. I will consider the spaces I inhabit; if I gather, I will also give . . . in my practice, I will begin by listening, considering my role as a guest to the land that I inhabit, and aligning myself with natural flow and order.<sup>2</sup>

—Student author, January 29, 2023

This article is an exercise in reciprocity, an expression of gratitude to Tina and Jessa Calderon (Gabrielino Tongva and Chumash), Deborah Sanchez (Chumash), Carla Marie and Desiree Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe), and Pom Tuiimyali (Winnemem Wintu), who have been participants in ongoing community-engaged research and teaching projects with Tria Blu Wakpa, an assistant professor at the University of California, Los Angeles.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this paper, we use the term *community partners* to refer to these participants as a group. The article is a co-authored endeavour, the result of an additional ongoing collaboration between Blu Wakpa and her two graduate student researchers, Sammy Roth and Miya Shaffer. The paper also emerges from the writing and thinking of a class of undergraduate and graduate students who learned from the California tribal individuals listed above in Blu Wakpa's ten-week course titled Dance and Decolonization, which ran in UCLA's Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance in Winter 2023.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, we aim to honour the multivocal perspectives connecting these various collaborating bodies. By discussing the experiences of devising, leading, and learning in the course, we show how community-engaged research and teaching can challenge normative, "settler-capitalist" (Speed 2019) learning goals in dance education. We ultimately argue that our methods might initiate the process of becoming "good relatives," which we define according to scholarship on Indigenous and queer feminisms (Yazzie 2023; Denetdale 2020; Minthorn 2018, 71; Tallbear 2018; Yazzie and Risling Baldy 2018). As Diné scholar Melanie Yazzie contends, to be a "good relative" requires commitment to "responsible, reciprocal, respectful, and accountable" relationships (2023, 602). Although we cannot uncritically claim this title for ourselves, we explore the Dance and Decolonization class as a component of cultivating and nurturing "good relative" relations between Indigenous knowledge keepers, non-Indigenous learners, and the land on which this exchange occurs.

Mainstream discussions of US higher education throughout and preceding the 2020s demonstrate a profound concern with utility and career readiness, especially in the arts and humanities (Devereaux 2023; Harris 2018). These fields are often assumed to be "indulgent" or "impractical" in comparison

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to STEM-based disciplines, wherein job security and economic gain are perceived to be readily available (Heller 2023; Menand 2021). By emphasizing practicality, these mainstream discourses suggest that the purpose of higher education is to produce “good workers” who will comply with the demands of North American capitalist economies; at the same time, other perspectives have recognized and aimed to censor the critical potential of the arts and humanities. For example, in January 2023, Florida governor Ron DeSantis proposed a state-level plan to transform New College of Florida, a small liberal arts school, from a “progressive” educational environment to “a beacon of conservatism” (Mazzei 2023). These actions are part of an ongoing effort from several Republican state politicians who aim to limit liberal arts education and its emphasis on disrupting white supremacist, patriarchal, settler colonial, and cisnormative US societies, ultimately restricting what can and cannot be taught in the undergraduate classroom (Gabriel and Nehamas 2023; Kang 2023).<sup>5</sup> Dance education holds significance within these debates: at one level, it might be considered superfluous in relation to “useful” STEM fields; at another, it can provide an opportunity to interrogate racist, colonial, patriarchal, and anthropocentric imaginings of the body and its surroundings, which some politically conservative perspectives intend to stifle (McCarthy-Brown 2014; Chapman 2023; Kloetzel 2023).

This article intervenes into these mainstream dialogues, examining strategies for resisting expectations of “utility” in dance education through community-engaged pedagogies, specifically between collaborators who self-identify as Indigenous and as non-Indigenous.<sup>6</sup> Reflecting on the Dance and Decolonization course, we identify three “learning goals” that are alternative to those of practicality and career readiness: through *not-dancing*, and subsequently *listening* to the collective, and *working-for* our community partners, we offer a pedagogical approach that can challenge the settler-capitalist underpinnings of mainstream higher education and work toward reciprocal relationships. Standard dance pedagogies are not inherently settler-capitalist; their prioritizing of the body and its movement can be understood to disrupt the Eurocentric, colonial valuing of the written word in knowledge production (Calamoneri, Dunagan and McCarthy-Brown 2020; Chapman et al. 2023). Yet some approaches to the dance classroom can also obscure or even directly contribute to appropriation and expropriation, actions associated with settler-capitalist structures (Speed 2019, 19). Courses that expect students to demonstrate “mastery” of different dance styles can, at times, replicate cultural appropriation, especially when detached from discussions of community histories, broader cultural practices, and attention to students’ positionalities (C. Davis 2018; Johnson 2020). While these pedagogies can “prepare” students for dance careers as versatile performers (Foster 2019), they might also train them to embody historically, politically, and culturally specific movement forms without attention to their communities of origin. We therefore argue for the potential and even necessity of *not-dancing* in undergraduate dance classes to offer students alternative ways to connect with, absorb, and critique their dominant dance education.

In the context of the Dance and Decolonization class, not-dancing was imperative: the course, which explored Indigenous dances with a majority of non-Indigenous students, implicated long histories of Indigenous knowledge appropriation by settler scholars, choreographers, and dancers. Dance studies scholars have shown how many revered white choreographers have appropriated Native American dances in both popular and concert dance forms (Kowal 2014; Manning 2004; Shea Murphy 2007; Stanger 2021). While many of these dance professionals were capitalizing on Indigenous knowledge for their own success, the US government formally barred Indigenous people from performing their own dances from 1883 to 1934 and did not formally protect dance and other ceremonial practices until 1978.<sup>7</sup> US colonizers have targeted Native American dance for many reasons, including that these movement practices have many decolonial possibilities—such as

strengthening Indigenous identities, values, and spiritualities—which posed a direct threat to US assimilation and Christian conversion efforts (T. Blu Wakpa 2024; Shea Murphy 2007).<sup>8</sup> Throughout the decades that the US government prohibited this practice, many Native people continued to dance in secret and fought for legal protections for their dances. Further, some Native people performed in public Wild West shows, which were frequently non-Native endeavours, in order to continue their dance practices while the ban was in effect (Moses 1999; Shea Murphy 2007; Wenger 2009, 2011; Risling Baldy 2018). The US government’s changing policies with respect to Indigenous dances and ceremonial practices, as well as Native peoples’ responses to settler interference in their lifeways, have fluctuated in accordance with dominant settler interests in Native assimilation and/or the preservation of Indigenous cultures (Shea Murphy 2007). Yet, overall, US policies have largely operated to secure settler jurisdiction despite their stated aims (Martin 1990).

Since the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, which bolstered the 1934 reversal of the dance ban by providing formal protection for the expression of Indigenous spiritualities, there has been a notable revitalization of Native dances (Shea Murphy 2007, 24). However, given these histories of settler appropriation and infringement upon Native dance practices and their ongoing impacts, many Indigenous dances, which often have spiritual significance, are not appropriate to share with outsiders and are often considered inappropriate to teach and learn in the dance classroom (Jacobs 2013). The decision to dance is dependent on specific contexts and pedagogical approaches; for example, some Indigenous teachers might share select dances to develop non-Native respect for Indigenous cultures (Jacobs 2013, 30). Our approach to devising the Dance and Decolonization course sits within these debates. Following the guidance of our community partners, the class aimed to circumvent the possibility of perpetuating expropriative dynamics by explicitly not teaching students Indigenous dance practices. Instead, students learned about the histories, contexts, and politics surrounding California tribal dance practices through conversations with community partners, scholarly readings, assignments, and practices oriented toward reciprocity, by which we mean the mutual exchange of knowledge and resources to support, rather than extract from, Indigenous groups.

The Dance and Decolonization course explicitly invited students to *work for* community partners Tina and Jessa Calderon (Gabrielino Tongva and Chumash), Carla Marie and Desiree Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe), and Pom Tuiimyali (Winnemem Wintu). In doing so, it aimed to put into practice the UCLA land acknowledgement, which states: “As a land grant institution, UCLA acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovangaar (Los Angeles basin and So. Channel Islands) and are grateful to have the opportunity to *work for* the taraaxotam (Indigenous peoples) in this place” (Roth and Blu Wakpa 2023; emphasis added). The course was structured around a series of research sessions facilitated on a rotating basis by the community partners; each session would first familiarize students with the tribe’s location, history, and work and then prompt students to complete writing that would support dance revitalization. For example, Carla and Desiree Munoz visited the class during a session with a UCLA librarian who discussed challenges to accessing institutionally housed tribal materials; Tina Calderon joined a visit to the Huntington Library archives to examine materials pertaining to the Tongva; Jessa Calderon gave a book talk about her realistic fiction work *SisterHood*; and Pom Tuiimyali discussed the use of digital technologies to support tribal sovereignty in his session. Classroom activities and assignments were therefore tailored to the specific needs of each tribe, and students were expected to complete these assignments as methods of community support.<sup>9</sup> Blu Wakpa instructed the course with the support of Roth and Shaffer, who assisted with syllabus design, organized research sessions, and maintained communication with community partners and UCLA administrative staff. Not-

dancing—and instead listening and working-for community partners—was also imperative for Blu Wakpa, Roth, and Shaffer as cultural outsiders to California tribal communities. Roth identifies as a white settler; Shaffer is a settler of Japanese and Ashkenazi Jewish descent; and Blu Wakpa is of Filipino, European, and tribally unenrolled Native ancestries. Due to our positionalities, not-dancing, listening, and working-for became tactics for producing reciprocal relations without necessarily appropriating.

We suggest that, although our process in the Dance and Decolonization course required significant attention and even reevaluation, our efforts represent one possible method for non-Indigenous and community outsider instructors to explore decolonial, community-engaged pedagogies. It is a method that foregrounds relationships among us, community partners, students, broader institutional and personal communities, and the more-than-humans (non-human animals, land, water, air, the cosmos) with whom we interact. We consider this relationality as essential to becoming “good relatives,” which we understand according to Yazzie’s (2023) definition. Being a “good relative,” Yazzie suggests, relies on an expectation of mutual respect and, in “the realm of political struggle, it is also an expectation to defend, protect, and grow hard-fought struggles for liberation in the violence of white supremacy, settler colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy” (602). Elaborating on this approach to cultivating kinship through shared struggle against oppressive systems, we understand our process of becoming good relatives to include leveraging our academic privileges and resources to support the vital work that Indigenous people are already doing and taking cues from our community partners on how we can undertake these actions effectively and respectfully. In centring the values and knowledge of community partners, as opposed to independently determining course objectives and learning outcomes, we were able to foreground their expertise and commitments in the class, which then became a guide for what the students learned.

This article takes the form of a conversation between Blu Wakpa, Roth, and Shaffer, with additions from student or community partner voices framing our discussion of each learning “goal.” Much of the conversation is drawn from an interview with Blu Wakpa that Roth and Shaffer conducted after analyzing assignments, student surveys, and syllabus design. Each section also includes excerpts from either student reflection papers following community partner visits or interviews with community partners that discussed the effectiveness of the course for their revitalization work. Blu Wakpa’s research and teaching funds provided community partners with honoraria for these interviews and compensated Roth and Shaffer for their time as graduate student researchers. Our discussion also underscores how, despite its meaningful possibilities, the Dance and Decolonization class also has inescapable limitations: although it can critique settler-capitalist norms within higher education, it cannot wholly absolve or decolonize the institution. By demonstrating the possibilities and restrictions of our decolonial, community-engaged pedagogies (Roth and Blu Wakpa 2023), we present our method as open to critique, extension, and transformation from other dance educators.<sup>10</sup>

## **Not-Dancing**

In this section we discuss our practice of not-dancing in the Dance and Decolonization course. In some ways, not-dancing is defined quite simply by the term itself—students did not physically learn any Indigenous dances in the class and rarely watched videos of them. However, the students did learn and perform North American Hand Talk/Indigenous Sign Language, which was the lingua franca prior to colonization in what is now known as North America (M. Blu Wakpa 2017), for one

assignment. Although it is not dance specifically, this assignment was focused on engaging students in movement and narrative through a specifically Indigenous epistemology. While the politics of non-Native people learning Native languages can be contested, North American Hand Talk has been used by diverse Native and non-Native peoples for many purposes and thus is perhaps not as implicated as Native dance regarding Indigenous spiritualities (J. Davis 2016; Farnell 2009; Scott 1918). For this reason, Blu Wakpa assigned the North American Hand Talk activity as a way for students to deepen their exploration of Indigenous movement practices in the course while respecting the need to refrain from dancing specifically.<sup>11</sup>

In planning meetings for the development of the course (2020–21), the community partners were clear that their Native dance practices should not be shared with students, especially ceremonial dances due to their spiritual significance. As community partner Tina Calderon (Gabrielino Tongva and Chumash) told Roth and Shaffer during her interview:

It's sometimes a little bit difficult because we do want to share [about our culture and dances]. We do want to teach. But we don't want people taking things that are very sacred to us and selling it, or you know, teaching it themselves, because they've got this one little instruction and they think, "Oh, I'm going to go share this with everybody," and then they leave out certain things that are very critical. (T. Calderon 2023)

In this statement, Calderon invokes the histories and ongoing dynamics of appropriation and extraction of Native dances and other practices by non-Natives that we discussed in our introduction. Given Calderon's personal experiences with appropriation, including in a public workshop organized by Blu Wakpa in 2020, which we later discuss, it was of the utmost importance to Calderon, the other community partners, and Blu Wakpa that we engage in a practice of not-dancing. Although this approach went against the expectations of students, who often expressed desires to learn dances, not-dancing might also be considered a generative form of settler discipline, or sacrifice, in which giving up the possibility of physically dancing enabled other learning to occur.<sup>12</sup>



Photo of Tina Calderon (Gabrielino Tongva and Chumash) at the March 2024 California Tribal Gathering, held at Wishtoyo Chumash Village, and co-organized by the community partners (Tina and Jessa Calderon [Gabrielino Tongva and Chumash], Deborah Sanchez [Chumash], Carla Marie and Desiree Munoz [Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe], and Pom Tuiimyali [Winnemem Wintu]), Blu Wakpa, and Roth (Wishtoyo Chumash Foundation, n.d.). Photo: Jay Lamars, 2024.

Undergirding the stakes of not-dancing is the understanding that movement itself is a vital form of knowledge, which is a major contribution that dance studies offers academic discourses. Anchored in this foundational valorization of kinesthetic knowledge, not-dancing specifically pushes back against mainstream (mis)perceptions that dance is frivolous or somehow not valuable, particularly given that Blu Wakpa structured the course to exclude physically dancing in order to protect the knowledge Indigenous dance holds. In other words, it was important to not dance because there is an abundance of knowledge in dance. Yet, it is not possible to adequately learn about Native dance, or any dance practice for that matter, without understanding the histories and contexts of the practice. Thus, although students did not physically learn dances, there was much information that they could learn about ongoing colonization, the politics of Indigenous dance practices, and contemporary revitalization efforts related to human and more-than-human relatives. Our conversation discussing not-dancing highlights how this practice enabled students to expand their understanding of what dance encompasses and protect sacred knowledge without sacrificing experiential learning:

## In Conversation

**Sammy Roth (SR):** I am thinking about the arc of the course, from its planning in 2021 to its implementation in Winter 2023. In the planning stages, the community partners were very involved: we would gather in meetings over Zoom, where community partners would offer feedback on the syllabus; devise learning goals; suggest course readings; and conceptualize assignments that would be useful to them. In these meetings, we would often discuss what was appropriate and not appropriate for the students—some material needed to be protected by members of the tribe themselves and thus not shared. When you [Tria] planned the course, you were also navigating many institutional demands, in addition to the needs of the community partners, such as trying to structure the course work within UCLA’s ten-week quarter. How did you balance student learning needs with those of the community partners? How did you, as course instructor, ultimately decide what was important for the students to read and write about?

**Tria Blu Wakpa (TBW):** It was imperative to involve the community partners from the beginning—this was a strategy for working against traditional, Eurocentric academic norms, which often prioritize the singularity of the instructor in course design. When it came to imagining how dance would be integrated into the course, all community partners articulated a similar goal: students should know that at the heart of California tribal dance is spirituality, but these practices are not appropriate to share with non-tribal people. In the class, the students needed to understand that the dances were not for them to engage with directly and thus the course needed to focus elsewhere. But the students were also expecting a class on dance, right? The “study” of dance in the course had to take a different form: we learned about dances through readings, which the community partners selected, and California tribal scholars wrote.<sup>13</sup> We also learned some about dances from the community partners’ class visits. Using both approaches encouraged students to think about dance more broadly, as always involved with social and historical contexts.

I also wanted the students to understand dance in relationship to our community-engaged work, which is an ongoing process. The syllabus was not a final statement; the course continues to change and develop, as our work with and for the community partners shifts according to their priorities. Each tribal partner has different interests, and students adapted to that. For example, when Carla and Desiree Munoz visited the class, our course “agenda” outlined a discussion about dance, self-determination, and sovereignty. Carla and Desiree’s guest visit ended up being primarily about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), and they wanted us to do work for them around ICWA and its impact on California tribal nations.<sup>14</sup> ICWA was not on the original agenda, but I didn’t see this as a detour from our course plan. It was important for the students to understand how everything, inclusive of dance and beyond, is related, which is also an Indigenous understanding.

**Miya Shaffer (MS):** I’m thinking about how we move forward with the course and how other scholars and instructors can possibly learn from, build on, and/or revise our pedagogies. Our methods emphasize the importance and necessity of not-dancing. We already mentioned the spiritual and social dimension of tribal dances, which are not always appropriate to share with non-Indigenous people. But not-dancing also seems somewhat antithetical to dance education, which often assumes that participation in bodily experience is necessary for dance research and training. How might we reconcile the expectations of dance pedagogies with ongoing extraction, appropriation, and exploitation of Indigenous beliefs and practices?

**TBW:** The students in our department dance in many other courses, so I don't necessarily feel like they're "missing out" on dancing in this class. They are also still having embodied experiences, even if they are not literally dancing—bodily knowledge and movement extend beyond learning dance techniques. For example, the students discussed the embodied experiences that they had in the research sessions, such as during our visit to the Huntington Library, and even in our interactions with the community partners over Zoom.<sup>15</sup> All these involvements are inseparable from the body, even if they're conducted while seated. I also think it's important to recognize, and to hope, that not-dancing might not always be an ethical necessity. At times, there are spiritual, ceremonial practices that have protocols which specify that non-Indigenous people should not participate. But in some cases, Native people do invite non-Native people to participate in certain ceremonies due to the relationships they have nurtured. In the context of the Dance and Decolonization course, we are working with California tribal communities, some of whom are steeped in the process of revitalizing their dances. While this work builds on long-standing Native knowledges, it can also be considered new and fresh, and it can contain very sacred knowledge. This information needs to be protected now and for however long into the future—possibly forever. But not all dance contexts are like this. In some dance spaces, like powwows or some protest movements such as Idle No More, non-Native people can be invited to participate (Recollet 2015). So, it is possible that the level of participation in dances from non-Native people might shift over time with strengthened reciprocal relationships.<sup>16</sup>

## Listening

As our section on not-dancing discussed, the Dance and Decolonization class retained a focus on embodied experiences even though the students didn't physically learn dances; instead, learning through felt sensing occurred through a practice of listening. For us, listening is not merely auditory, but rather builds on dance and performance studies literature and practices that highlight how "listening [can be] done by using all the senses" (Calissendorff and Jaresand 2023, 8). More specifically, scholars have identified how movement practices can reveal culturally coded sensory hierarchies and bodily norms, with Eurocentric norms overemphasizing the visual (Dixon Gottschild 2003, 1996; Foster 2011; Sklar 2008; Cohen Bull 1997). In relation to such hierarchies, the senses can be used methodologically to challenge dominant ways of perceiving, especially when analyzing archival materials, as was done in the class during research sessions with community partners (Kosstrin 2020; Camp 2017).

The class dedicated one archival research session to fulfilling a request made by Carla Marie and Desiree Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe), who were interested in accessing genealogical records held in archives on Indigenous California languages at the University of California, Berkeley. Given resource constraints, we could not arrange a visit to the archives at UC Berkeley; however, a UCLA research librarian joined the session to discuss archival holdings broadly, including gatekeeping dynamics and how to search archival databases and access materials. Reflecting on this experience in a response paper for the course, one student wrote:

Deeply unsettled, I observed the various privileges and positionalities in the classroom space: A) galleries, libraries, archives, and museums—or "G.L.A.M." institutions<sup>17</sup>—became visible as predominantly White institutions unethically holding another's sacred knowledge; B) the UCLA research librarian's identity demonstrated privilege, as both a White woman and "G.L.A.M." employee accessing



and discussing archival findings on another’s ancestry; C) the English language was our common ground for researching and dialogue; and D) I felt my position, as a student and witness of settler-colonialism’s impact on the Munozes’ genealogy. Conversely, Carla and Desiree’s virtual presence [on Zoom and] their reliance on an elitist system and its staff to fulfill familial inquiries served as a possible tool to further combat the cultural erasure of their peoples. (Student author, February 22, 2023)

As this student’s response shows, the practice of listening—that is, sensory awareness of the politics of archival research—helped students name systems of power and how they impact community partners in their revitalization work, while also allowing students to tune into their own visceral responses, such as being “deeply unsettled.”



Photo of Carla and Desiree Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe), community partners who attended a research session with a UCLA librarian about accessing archival material. Photo: Scott Davis, 2021.

It was especially important for students to understand that archival materials can be read against the grain—and at times must be for ethical reasons, including when engaging colonial accounts of Indigenous peoples—and that their dance training could assist them in such subversive analysis.

Dancers are often trained to prioritize a “kinesthetic mode of attention,” which can include “directing intentionality toward one’s own bodily sensations, and perceptions and maintaining a particular awareness of the ways the body moves and responds to movement—a sort of listening and openness to the body and its movements in a mode of discovery” (Ehrenberg 2015, 46). By drawing on such training, not-dancing, and instead listening, students engaged their own sensory experiences in class to recognize and challenge historical and contemporary power relations, which seek to diminish Indigenous presence, even noticing moments when they inadvertently perpetuated these dynamics themselves. Thus, our discussion of listening as a learning goal highlights how not-dancing enabled students in the course to draw on performance-based methods, attuning to conversations with the community partners, other students, and Blu Wakpa at multiple sensory registers:

### In Conversation

**SR:** When I was reading the student reflection papers, I noticed that several of them were clearly naming power dynamics in the research sessions with community partners. When I teach my own classes, I’m often working to make power dynamics present, and then challenge them. I want students to ask: how do we understand collectively how power is working in the room without overlooking how each of us experiences it differently? In the reflection papers from Dance and Decolonization, these issues were most apparent in the students’ discussions of the course’s focus on archival research, in which they questioned the power dynamics implied in dominant access to and gatekeeping of archival knowledge. It seemed to me that the course offered students two opportunities to reflect on what has historically been deemed “worthy” knowledge in Eurocentric education systems. First, the research sessions seemed to prompt them to consider who counts as knowledgeable and then actively decenter normatively valorized knowledge holders [like GLAM institutions] by recentring experts from communities deemed structurally nonnormative, like the California tribal community partners. Second, in writing the reflection papers, the students had the opportunity to unpack these power dynamics further. Could you speak to how the classroom offered this recognition of power dynamics and potentially challenged them?

**TBW:** I think it is important that, when we are doing decolonial work, we are naming the ways that power operates as clearly as possible. Then, as you shared, after we make power dynamics transparent, we can directly challenge them. When I bring California tribal people to class, I try to combat mainstream understandings of knowledge and expertise within dominant academia. I sometimes tell my students that the community partners have the equivalent of a PhD or beyond in their tribal forms of knowledge—this framing makes apparent that Indigenous understandings are valid and vital, which might be a new idea for some students. Additionally, I draw on Indigenous epistemologies, which underscore that everyone has something valuable to offer (Shea Murphy 2022, 17). This approach is important for the students in their own learning: they should understand that they can offer powerful contributions to our class and society, and they can learn from one another in ways that are significant. I also make clear to students that I’m still learning—I don’t know everything! As the instructor, I don’t ever think I’m not complicit in the power dynamics of the classroom, even when I’m doing decolonial work. So, I try to make power dynamics a topic of class discussion, emphasizing that everyone has something to contribute. We all learn and grow together.

Students also recognized power dynamics through the experiential components of the course, such as in our trip to the Huntington Library. Students visited the library with [community partner] Tina Calderon; Tina and her daughter, Jessa, had requested this trip, as the Huntington occupies their ancestors' land and holds archival materials that are relevant to the Tongva people. During the visit, we talked a lot about access and colonial violence, which extend beyond land theft and into academic extraction. We discussed how researchers have come into Native communities, extracted knowledge, and then not reported back to the people on their findings. Often, the knowledge is then published in academic journals, which people will not have access to unless they have a university affiliation. Throughout the visit and these conversations, the students seemed taken aback at the amount of privilege they had as UCLA students—they were suddenly going to have access to the same archive as Tina, who, due to ongoing dynamics of extraction and gatekeeping, was viewing it for the first time. I think this struck some of them as deeply unsettling.

**MS:** I'd like to ask a pedagogical question, which is related to the broader limitations on my experiences of the class itself. Because Sammy and I were graduate student researchers, rather than teaching assistants, we were not in the classroom while the course was ongoing.<sup>18</sup> Instead, I read the students' reflection papers and evaluations of your teaching: these texts provided a "gateway" to the actual classroom, illuminating interpersonal dynamics and learning experiences, even if I was not physically present for them. While reading, I did notice some moments where students applied pre-existing, stereotypical knowledge to the lessons that the community partners provided. For example, in the first reflection paper, it seemed to me that some students were conflating the more nuanced information that they were given with more stereotypical ideas about Indigenous people that they might have already acquired, as several students openly acknowledged their lack of familiarity with Indigenous philosophies and practices. In these essays, students summarized Indigenous beliefs about more-than-human relatives with statements such as "Indigenous people are one with nature." This sentiment can be understood as generalizing and oversimplifying of some Indigenous concepts. We can't control what knowledge the students bring to the classroom, but we can determine how we shape and respond to it—what do you do in your teaching to broaden that conversation and push students beyond stereotypical ways of thinking?

**TBW:** First, the rhetoric you mentioned, "Indigenous people are one with nature," is obviously problematic. And I've seen Indigenous scholars circulate critiques of settler scholars who write about Indigenous peoples and practices in ways that detrimentally romanticize them. On the one hand, the student's statement reifies settler colonial stereotypes. On the other, it is important to recognize that many Indigenous dances are inextricable from relationships with more-than-humans. When students offer stereotypical statements in class or their writing, I gently and diplomatically try to nuance them. As the professor for the course, I typically take on the majority of the labour in educating students about these harmful typecasts. This is in part because students have limited opportunities to speak with community partners who are often attending the session alongside them or presenting to them. At the same time—and as ridiculous as it sounds—sometimes students who are repeating problematic tropes are also making progress. In the US context, there are so many people who don't even know that Indigenous people exist in the present.<sup>19</sup> When a student puts forth a stereotypical observation of contemporary Indigenous people or cultures, they are also recognizing Indigenous presence in the present, which can be considered progress in itself, even if their language doesn't reflect the complex relationships among human and more-than-humans in many Indigenous epistemologies. From the perspective of conducting community-engaged research and teaching, all discussions are opportunities for growth, even if it takes time to arrive at more in-depth understandings. I want students to learn with as much nuance as possible, and—especially

since many of them have been exposed to settler colonial typecasts of Indigenous people for decades before they take the class—the process involved in arriving at that complexity can be lengthy.

**SR:** I think this example crystallizes the conflicts between worldviews that the course illuminates. The gap between Eurocentric frameworks, which many students have been trained in, and Indigenous frameworks, which are often new for non-Native students, can create challenges in the ways that material is learned. I appreciate thinking through how we give grace without sacrificing accountability; everyone, ourselves included, is learning in real time. We want to push beyond the repetition of problematic tropes, while being attentive to positionality regarding who is taking on this labour. Community outsiders and non-Natives with stronger relationships to Indigenous communities and greater familiarity with Indigenous epistemologies can support the ongoing work of Indigenous peoples by sharing what we know, when appropriate, with those who are less familiar.

### **Working-For**

Beyond not-dancing and listening, a primary aim of the Dance and Decolonization class was for students to have the opportunity to work for the community partners in ways that would support the revitalization of their dances and other tribal practices. However, the form that this work took differed according to the needs of each community partner, their tribes, and what was feasible within UCLA's ten-week term structure. In the Dance and Decolonization course, working-for meant using funding for research and teaching, classroom technologies, support from UCLA staff (such as the research librarian), and student assignments in ways that assist the community partners' ongoing work. In Roth and Shaffer's interview with Carla Marie Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe), she reflected on the in-class research session we arranged for the Munozes with a UCLA research librarian, discussed in the preceding section. The aim of this session was to support the Munozes independent archival research, which they determined was not appropriate to share with students. Carla stated:

I learned so much with a lot of the terminology that she [the research librarian] brought and a lot of the terminology that she shared was very relevant to the work that we're doing. . . . It just made me realize the bureaucracy that's actually inside of these [GLAM] entities, and how difficult it can be to navigate if you don't know the right language, or if you don't know the right way of asking for things . . . because, you know, we're not privy to that. If we're not learning that [language], we don't really know. And so, when you're Indigenous, they expect you to not only be an anthropologist, you know, all of these different titles you're supposed to wear. But it takes a lot of work, and I feel like she [the research librarian] did [offer me] a lot of clarity [for how to approach institutions housing our tribe's materials]. (C. M. Munoz 2023)

This feedback from Carla confirmed one aim of the research session in regard to working-for the community partners, namely that their time in the classroom could help advance their work at the same time that it educated students about archival research and the challenges settler colonial structures create for revitalization.

We define “working-for” broadly.<sup>20</sup> We also consider how working-for the community partners is not only something for the students to do in class but rather something that we undertake together as the professor, students, and graduate student researchers all engaged with the course in some capacity. For example, the time-consuming labour coordinating the research sessions for the class, including scheduling the visits with community partners, staff like the UCLA research librarian, and outside locations like the Huntington Library; facilitating and filling out paperwork for community partners’ honoraria; creating promotional flyers for public sessions; and more, would not have been possible without allocating hours from Roth and Shaffer’s graduate student researcher positions to meet these needs. In this section, we discuss the multiple forms that working-for has taken in the context of the class and outline direct and more diffuse types of support that the course offered to community partners:

### In Conversation

**SR:** Can we discuss the activities and deliverables in the course? In our early planning stages, we talked about how to design the syllabus so that students could work for the community partners. But, in meetings with the community partners, issues about appropriate sharing were at the forefront of our conversations: some community partners decided that their initial ideas for student assignments were ultimately not appropriate to share in the classroom context.<sup>21</sup> Other unexpected projects arose and were given to us [Sammy and Miya] rather than the students due to logistical concerns. For example, Carla and Desiree Munoz requested research on ICWA, which Miya and I had more time and were more qualified to do than the students, and thus we completed this request. When I read the student reflection papers, I noticed that they expressed sentiments about wanting to do more work for the community partners. What were the students ultimately able to give back? How might you envision the balance between students learning from community partners versus working for them in future iterations of the course?

**TBW:** Admittedly, this course was very ambitious. Students were asked to work for experts from three different tribes, all of whom had very different goals. The community partners wanted to work together, which led to this model, and I think it was very beneficial for students to learn about and interact with individuals and representatives from the three California tribes, which share similarities, but are also diverse. Perhaps students would have preferred to have completed sustained work with only one tribe throughout the quarter’s duration. We could have identified one or two specific goals—maybe exploring one archive or drafting a series of grants—and used the remainder of the quarter to delve deeper into that work. I know students wanted the experience of working more for our tribal partners. After we had a visit with one of UCLA’s research librarians, students expressed excitement about knowing what archives are; they then wanted to dive into them and learn how to do archival research for community partners. But it is important to remember that our community-engaged work has its limitations. Even if students were asked to focus on a specific archive for one tribe, there is no guarantee that our community partners would deem the archival materials appropriate for students to look at. For instance, Carla and Desiree Munoz were interested in examining archives that could further the genealogical information they had about their ancestors. Understandably, they did not want to share this very personal information with the students. The question you raise about balance (between learning from and working for) will never be entirely resolved, as we will always be grappling with questions about what is culturally appropriate for students to do, and this varies according to contexts, tribal protocols, and individual understandings.

Community-engaged research and teaching should involve relationships of trust, which must be attended to and adapted. I have worked hard to build trust with the community partners, and I have developed that trust with you [Sammy and Miya] over our years of working together. But I have not developed the same level of trust with the students, who only participate in the Dance and Decolonization class for ten weeks. We risk fracturing this trust when we invite new people into our community-engaged work. We've dealt with these issues in the past: a few years ago, we hosted a public workshop with Tina and Jessa Calderon. After the workshop, one participant, who was not a student or UCLA affiliated, made a video about the tribal practices she had learned about from Tina and Jessa. The participant then posted the filmed content to Instagram, sharing Tina and Jessa's tribal knowledge with the public without their permission and inadvertently breaking tribal protocol. The participant even tagged Tina and Jessa in the video, suggesting that she had good intentions in posting the video, although, as we know, impact can significantly differ from intent. Jessa then reached out to the participant, informing her that it is always necessary to ask permission before sharing tribal knowledge, particularly when that knowledge is not culturally yours. Obviously, we do not want to create the conditions for similar situations to occur in the classroom, and so we have not offered such workshops since. Creating trust and a sense of reciprocity between community partners and students is more important than fulfilling students' desires for which archives we look at or which projects we complete.

I also want to expand the ways that we think about "working-for" the community partners. In the Dance and Decolonization course, we are not just producing deliverables; in some cases, we are also leveraging the UCLA name to give community partners a broader platform. The privilege that I have as an assistant professor allows me to contribute to this effort by inviting our community partners to the class, leveraging university resources for them, and using my teaching funds to provide honoraria. Some people might find these actions problematic. They might see my efforts as upholding UCLA as a "brand" in order to validate the community partners' own work, which does not need this external, institutional "legitimization." But it is also important to recognize how, given the way settler society works, leveraging the prestige of UCLA might support community partners in acquiring more resources, opportunities, networks, and cultural capital. Yet given that these efforts are largely individual tactics, they cannot wholly address the long-standing and ongoing disparities in access and compensation that Indigenous peoples endure within the context of higher education due to structural inequities. For example, the honoraria we provide is certainly nowhere near the equivalent of the salary for a full-time position. Still, it is always a generous sum, which can support our community partners in their work.


We also give time and space to the community partners to host their own guest lectures and workshops. We create and circulate flyers and other promotional materials for these events, many of which are open to the public and are held virtually over Zoom. We frequently co-sponsor these gatherings with UCLA's American Indian Studies Center, which is a recognized and reputable organization, and so, it can also support our community partners' connections and cultural capital. We have had people from the community partners' tribes attend the virtual events we organize from locations all over the world. In facilitating and promoting these workshops, we use the classroom as a space to illuminate the powerful work Indigenous people are already doing, and to celebrate them with people from their communities, who often virtually attend the presentations and share words of encouragement with the presenters. This is an example of "working-for" community partners, even if it's less concrete than gathering archival materials.

From the feedback I've received, several of our community partners seem excited about this type of support: for example, Jessa Calderon, who hosted a hybrid in-person/virtual book talk in the Dance and Decolonization class, shared her excitement about and appreciation for the book talk on her social media (J. Calderon 2022). My hope is that, through social media posts, flyers, and the virtual availability of these guest talks, we can help circulate information about Jessa's and other community partners' work. This might lead other educators to invite the community partners to their classes, teach Jessa's book, and so on. Of course, this support is not one-sided. Our community partners have helped us tremendously by being willing to work with us in ways that count academically and allow us to advance our careers. We could not ethically do this work without their guidance, consent, or collaboration.

UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance Presents

# *SisterHood* Book Talk

Jessa Calderon (Tongva & Chumash)



**Monday, March 6 | 12:00pm-1:20pm | Hybrid Event**

In Person: 101 Kaufman Hall | Zoom: <http://bit.ly/3ICSvKH>

UCLA  
INDIAN  
STUDIES  
CENTER

World Arts  
and Cultures / Dance

Flyer for Jessa Calderon's (Gabrielino Tongva and Chumash) book talk in the Winter 2023 Dance and Decolonization class. Photo provided by Jessa Calderon; flyer created by Roth.

**MS:** Additionally, we can ensure that our methods remain useful for our community partners through this feedback. If the course can offer something to other educators, who might experiment with approaches comparable to those of Dance and Decolonization, then it might also be helpful to continually reassess if the course does, in fact, enact reciprocity with community partners and students.

**TBW:** Yes, social media has helped me to gauge whether our California tribal partners consider the community-engaged work we are doing useful. Many of our partners are active on social media and use their platforms to share about the work they undertake. They have also engaged with our posts about the community-engaged work we are doing together. In particular, they often comment on the flyers we post to advertise their public presentations. Both their individual posts and their feedback on our posts have helped me [Tria] to stay attuned to what is important to them and their communities. If the community partners like, share, or comment on our posts, they uphold us and provide helpful information for us as we continue this work.

**SR:** In keeping with the discussion about university resources, I'm wondering, Tria, if you might share any advice you have for leveraging institutional resources. As we have discussed, we are all complicit with the settler-capitalist underpinnings of higher education in many ways. And yet, we can repurpose higher education's resources for decolonial work. Can you share any advice for going beyond superficial actions of simply naming something as "decolonial" to other material efforts? I am interested in thinking about these questions specifically in terms of labour; this course was labour-intensive, so I am wondering how we continue these decolonial efforts accordingly.

**TBW:** Whether intentional or not, there is currently an increase in administrative labour for professors, which impacts our community-engaged work. Amid this increase, the university is also actively promoting community-engaged research and teaching. There is a contradiction here: professors are encouraged to do community-engaged work but are also, on some level, penalized for it because administrative duties are arduous.

When we think about leveraging resources within settler-capitalism (Speed 2019) and nurturing reciprocal relationships with Native people, we also need to grapple with issues of continuity. There is often significant emphasis on the beginning of the project, in which we strive to have the money and resources to start something new. But there is sometimes an assumption on the part of the university that, after the project is initiated, the community-engaged teaching should be self-sustainable. This is often not the reality. There is frequently a lack of ongoing, structural resources and this can make it very challenging to continue our collaborations. Working within universities, it can be really discouraging to figure out how to do community-engaged research, teaching, and service without sustained support.

Further, there are also university models that do not account for—let alone fully support—community-engaged work. For example, the Dance and Decolonization course operates with a holistic approach, linking teaching, research, and service as all components of community engagement, but most academic structures separate each of these criteria when evaluating professors' work (Roth and Blu Wakpa 2023). Universities put forth initiatives that are promotionally appealing, but they are often not providing the material support to sustain them. A similar phenomenon can occur with Indigenous communities beyond the university, such as with grants. An Indigenous organization will receive an generous grant, which they can use to expand their community programming. But when the grant funding is over, what happens to that programming? It often cannot continue, which can detrimentally impact cultural revitalization efforts and fracture trust between grant institutions and Native people.



## Conclusion

This article has considered not-dancing, listening, and working-for as key actions in the process of becoming a “good relative.” Being a “good relative” is an ongoing commitment, subject to critique and revision, and thus it mirrors our pedagogical process of designing, teaching, and reflecting on Dance and Decolonization, a course similarly available for critique and requiring of commitment. Shaffer and Blu Wakpa discussed this further in our conversation:

**MS:** Something I keep returning to when I think about this course is its urgency in our current moment, a time of intense debate about the futures of US higher education. High tuition rates and precarious employment are factors that suggest that many university degrees might be more harmful to one’s economic status than indicative of economic and social mobility. For those of us in the arts and humanities, we’ve always known that we must “prove” why our work is important. But these pressures feel even more visceral now, as some studies show declining enrollment rates in arts and humanities subjects, as students opt for degrees which will allow them to work in Silicon Valley or wherever else (Heller 2023). For me, many of these conversations foreground mastery within utility—students become “useful” when they prove that they’ve mastered a particular subject or gained a skill set that is sought after. In the Dance and Decolonization class, we offer something different: how do our alternative learning goals sit within the settler-capitalist foundation of higher education, especially in this moment of public discourse about higher education?

**TBW:** I think it’s complicated. When I recently brought my youngest daughter to UCLA with me, she asked, “Are you the boss here?” It was an interesting moment for me to reflect on the fact that I am not. After decades of formal education, two master’s degrees and a PhD, I am just a worker in the capitalist system. There is no escaping our complicity in settler-capitalism, even when we do community-engaged work. But through community-engaged research, we can creatively leverage oppressive systems in anti-oppressive ways. I can use my role within the capitalist system to offer California tribal people a seat at the table because we don’t currently have any California tribal scholars in UCLA’s School of the Arts and Architecture. Our work in the Dance and Decolonization class, and in other university initiatives, becomes useful that way—it draws on capitalist “usefulness” to foster decolonial action.

I also think that a course like Dance and Decolonization can help us think through the limitations of how “mastery” is normatively defined. This reminds me of a lesson that my parents taught me growing up. My parents had a karate school, and they would often dispel mainstream myths in the US about what becoming a “black belt” supposedly meant. Students at the school often assumed that a “black belt” was equivalent to being an expert, but my parents reminded them that earning a black belt merely suggests mastery of the basics. I take this lesson into my own teaching: I want my students to leave the course with basic competence of California tribal histories and dance practices, as having “mastery” over them is not an achievable or appropriate goal.

For me, the goal of higher education would be to acquire basic competence and use that knowledge to establish healthy human and more-than-human relationality. My youngest daughter’s next question when I brought her to campus was, “How many friends do you have here?” Essentially, she was asking, “How plentiful are your good relationships and community in this place?” Capitalist systems are very individualistic. They teach us to value being number one. But in the Dance and Decolonization course, our priority is teaching students and learning ourselves how to be a good

relative. There is no point where you've "mastered" or "completed" being a good relative. We need to think of these things as a process, and as extending beyond merely being relatives to other humans. We should also ask, How can we be better relatives to the land, air, water, and nonhuman animals? Given anthropocentric norms in settler society, being a good relative can mean seeking the guidance of people who are Indigenous to the land, and for whom the land has always been considered a relative rather than a resource.

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Ultimately, the Dance and Decolonization class impacted us all differently based on our own positionalities and familiarity with Indigenous dance and California tribal peoples, especially the Tongva, Chumash, Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe, and Winnemem Wintu nations. For some students, the course might provide the beginning of continued reciprocal work with California Indigenous communities; for others, it might have offered an introduction to alternative imaginings of dance, prompting new understandings of what dance—and specifically Indigenous dances—can do. For us, not-dancing, listening, and working-for are not conclusive nor finalized learning goals. They do not represent the totality of strategies available for pursuing relationalities in the (settler colonial) classroom. Yet, in the Dance and Decolonization class, these practices enabled emphasis on Indigenous presence. Students, instructors, and assistants learned to be present for Indigenous presence, affirming the possibilities of how Indigenous dances can be understood even within the constraints of higher education and its often settler-capitalist goals. As our community partner Desiree Munoz (Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe) reminded us:

Everybody needs to start somewhere. There's a curriculum in each classroom and a syllabus, but you can adapt it to make it still have that [focus on learning about] colonization and a decolonial twist on [the material] to get [students] really thinking. . . . No matter where [the class is or] what topic you bring, always an Indigenous voice can blossom. [Indigenous perspectives] can water it, make it . . . flourish. (D. Munoz 2023)

## Notes

1. This article was supported by a 2022 Instructional Improvement Grant from UCLA's Center for the Advancement of Teaching. We extend our gratitude to Marc Levis-Fitzgerald, Amy Liu, and Casey Shapiro for assisting us with the development and implementation of this course. With this support, we received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for our methodologies, including analyzing student responses and assignments. All student responses quoted anonymously within this paper are shared with permission in accordance with our approved research protocols.
2. In this student's reflection paper, they reference their role as a "guest" on Indigenous land. Although they might merely be referring to their non-Indigeneity in general terms, Tongva and Acjachemen scholar Charles Sepulveda (2018) has also theorized the "guest" as a "decolonial possibility" for non-Native peoples.
3. Within her ongoing community-engaged research, Tria Blu Wakpa works with both tribal individuals and formal representatives of Indigenous nations. Throughout this project, they have all shared their work with us from their individual perspectives rather than providing formal statements on behalf of their tribes. Their views cannot, nor should they be expected to, represent entire nations, which are made up of unique individuals like any collective. For more information on Tria Blu Wakpa's community-engaged research, teaching, and service with California Indigenous communities, see Roth and Blu Wakpa (2023). For more

information about the work that our community partners do, see T. Calderon (n.d.); J. Calderon (n.d.); Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe (n.d.); and Truong (2021).

4. In an early planning meeting for Blu Wakpa’s Dance and Decolonization course held on Zoom in 2021, the community partners preferred the terminology “California tribal” as the primary term to refer to them, although noted that Native and Indigenous were also acceptable.

5. Most proposed education restrictions are relevant in K-12 classrooms; as Gabriel and Nehamas (2023) note, Republican politicians in Florida, South Carolina, and Texas, among other states, have attempted to limit K-12 class materials about race, gender, and sexuality.

6. Although the participants in Dance and Decolonization did typically self-identify as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous, this binary can perpetuate a damaging, dualistic framing that homogenizes the vast diversity of Indigenous groups. It also obscures the experiences of Indigenous peoples with mixed heritage, who might identify with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous categories or think of themselves as “falling somewhere in-between” (Dicks 2023, 261).

7. The Religious Crimes Code of 1883 banned Native dances and ceremonies and authorized extreme settler violence to enforce these restrictions. In response, Indigenous peoples utilized creative strategies to maintain their dance practices ranging from asserting first amendment rights by arguing for the religious significance of dances to secularizing dances and emphasizing their similarities to mainstream social dance practices (Wenger 2011). Many of these strategies contended with stereotypical representations of Native practices as “heathen” and “barbaric,” which undergirded the ban. On January 3, 1934, John Collier, the new Bureau of Indian Affairs commissioner, issued Circular No. 2970 on “Indian Religious Freedom and Indian Culture,” which repealed the dance ban (Willard 1991). Although this lifted formal restrictions on dance, mainstream misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples and their practices persisted in ways that continued to infringe upon Native traditions. In 1978, the US Congress passed the Native American Religious Freedoms Act to address ongoing interference with Native practices, citing the “denial of access to certain sacred religious sites, restrictions on the use of substances, and actual interference with religious events” (Martin 1990). Notably, many of these dynamics persist in the present day, particularly the denial of access to sacred sites, which can be essential to some Native dances. In that way, some Indigenous dance and ceremonial practices continue to be infringed upon despite these purported formal protections. For more on controversies and Native strategies to repeal the dance ban, see Wenger (2009, 2011) and Willard (1991). For more on the limitations of the ban’s reversal and the Native American Religious Freedoms Act, see Martin (1990).

8. Additionally, as Shea Murphy articulates, US officials criticized Native dance by “emphasizing waste and lack of productivity,” which counters Protestant and settler capitalist ideals (2007, 86).

9. Course assessments for the Dance and Decolonization class consisted of four reflection papers, which students completed after each research session. The reflection papers encouraged students to think critically about their positionalities, relationships with community partners, and contextualize the sessions in relation to course readings. Reflection papers were then shared with community partners as a way to enact reciprocity. Community partners have commented to Blu Wakpa that they appreciate reading them and knowing how their words resonated with students.

10. We use the definition of *decolonial* from Roth and Blu Wakpa’s article: “collaborating with Indigenous peoples and centring them and their practices, acknowledging ongoing Indigenous sovereignty while working to shift power dynamics and the distribution of resources (including returning land)—which is inextricable from Indigenous futures (Wolfe 2016, 387)—and challenging long-standing, settler-capitalist, academic conventions and hierarchies” (2023, 76).

11. A student in the Winter 2024 iteration of the Dance and Decolonization course notably employed North American Hand Talk as a spontaneous act of reciprocity during a Talking Circle in which all participants were invited to share at the California Tribal Gathering, an event co-organized by the community partners, Blu Wakpa, and Roth. In this way, the North American Hand Talk assignment directly prepared the student to enact reciprocity with the community partners.

12. For more on settler sacrifice see, T. Blu Wakpa (2021).
13. Course readings included dance-focused texts like Cutcha Risling Baldy's (Hupa, Yurok, Karuk) *We Are Dancing For You* (2018) and Tsim Schneider's (Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria) "Dancing on the Brink of the World" (2021), as well as broader scholarship on decolonizing methodologies and cultural revitalization including Charles Sepulveda's (Tongva and Acjachemen) "Our Sacred Waters" (2018) and Yve Chavez's (Gabrieleno Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians) dissertation (2017), among others.
14. The Indian Child Welfare Act is a statute passed by US Congress and enacted in 1984 that addresses policies and practices that have separated Native American children from their families. The statute aims "to protect the best interest of Indian Children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families (25 U.S. C. 1902)." At the time of teaching the Dance and Decolonization class, the US Supreme Court upheld ICWA following a challenge to the statute from a White couple, who claimed that ICWA was discriminatory, as it determines adoption of children based on "race." See FindLaw (2023).
15. Community partner Tina Calderon expressed interest in visiting the Huntington Library, a large educational and research institution on Tongva lands, which holds some archives related to the Tongva people. As part of her research session, Calderon, Blu Wakpa, and the students visited the Huntington to explore its archives.
16. Indeed, at the March 2024 California Tribal Gathering, which the community partners, Blu Wakpa, and Roth co-organized, one of the tribes did invite non-Native participants to join them for one dance. The California Tribal Gathering had a designated time for invited, non-California tribal participants to join the event as well as private components, which allowed the community partners to share solely among themselves.
17. GLAM, or Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums, is a common acronym used to refer to institutions that control access to knowledge oftentimes related to cultural heritage.
18. At UCLA, graduate students are typically employed as either teaching assistants (TAs) or graduate student researchers (GSRs). TAs assist faculty with classroom activities; GSRs support faculty research outside the classroom, helping with faculty research projects and publications. Students with GSR employment are typically not permitted to attend the classes that faculty teach, even if they are supporting the faculty member with teaching-related research.
19. In a study of Indigenous representation in K-12 curricula in the US, Shear et al. found that 86.6 percent "of the state-level US and state history standards dictate the teaching of Indigenous peoples in the context of pre-1900 history" (2015, 82). Although some students in the Dance and Decolonization course might have encountered more information about Indigenous peoples through their K-12 education, this statistic provides important context for the lack of knowledge about Indigeneity that students might be entering our class with; for example, some students might be unaware that Indigenous people exist, and thrive, in our current moment, if their education limited Indigenous existence to the past. For more see Shear et al. (2015).
20. For more background on the use of "working-for" within decolonial initiatives at UCLA specifically, see Roth and Blu Wakpa (2023).
21. When planning for the Dance and Decolonization class began, another community partner, Deborah Sanchez, was included in the process. Sanchez, who is Chumash, has collaborated with Blu Wakpa on several projects; however, she ultimately decided that her potential project for the course was not appropriate to share with students.

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