

# UC Riverside

## UC Riverside Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

The Power of Spoken-Word: Transformative Social Justice and Healing in Structurally Oppressed Communities

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/41f546x9>

### Author

Walkington, Lori M.

### Publication Date

2018

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

The Power of Spoken-Word: Transformative Social Justice and Healing in Structurally  
Oppressed Communities

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Sociology

by

Lori M. Walkington

June 2018

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Adalberto Aguirre, Jr., Chairperson

Dr. Ellen Reese

Dr. David Swanson

Copyright by  
Lori M. Walkington  
2018

The Dissertation of Lori M. Walkington is approved:

---

---

---

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this dissertation was possible only through the generous help, patience and participation of the people, institutions, and organizations involved in this process. I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the spoken-word poetry communities in San Diego that open their doors to everyone, including myself. The life stories shared through spoken-word poetry are illuminating and inspire me to reconnect with activism toward transformative social justice in communities impacted by structural oppression. I hope I have represented your communities, struggles with and resistance to structural oppression honorably. This research was supported by the Chancellor's Doctoral Incentive Program. Their generous support provided important resources for travel and transcription services.

The members of my dissertation committee deserve special recognition for their insights, guidance, and expertise. Dr. David Swanson provided valuable insight for demographic shifts in crime and resident populations, and a keen eye for revisions. Dr. Ellen Reese has been a vital source of support through this process. She is a role model for faculty mentorship. As dissertation chairperson, Dr. Adalberto Aguirre provided essential support for this approach to critical criminological research. It was his guidance that led me to understand the process of healing through packaging and performing pain. Dr. Aguirre, your advice and patience were paramount to this project. Thank you for giving me the space to make my way through this work. Your quiet guidance forces your mentees to work things through on their own. For me, this was essential.

I must thank the strong community and friendship of critical scholars without whose support, the completion of my doctoral degree would not have been possible. Edwin Elias and Julisa McCoy, thank you for helping me navigate the UC system, qualifying exams, and dissertation. Many thanks to Jessica Moronez and Bobby Rivera for helping me keep my eyes on the prize during our first year. Allison Monterrosa, your emotional support and academic discourse have been invaluable during this process. My sincerest gratitude to you all for being my hush harbor. For the late-night phone calls, conference presentations, and dedication to critical sociological scholarship. Further, I wish to thank Dr. Tanya Nieri for her continued mentorship and guidance throughout my time at UC Riverside. Lastly, I must extend a special thank you to my long-time mentor and friend, Dr. Sharon Elise who insisted I go forward to pursue a PhD.

I also wish to thank my family. I grew up with the mantra “I can do anything as long as I put my mind to it.” Although I now understand the many ways life is structured and stratified by social systems and institutions, this mantra has served me well. Once I put my mind to getting a doctoral degree, I was like a character from an Alice Walker book, “nothing but God will keep me from it.” Lastly, I thank my daughter for her patience with me throughout this process, for her endless support, the little notes of encouragement left in notebooks, and bringing me coffee during the dissertation phase.

DEDICATION  
*For my daughter Azhe*

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Power of Spoken-Word: Transformative Social Justice and Healing in Structurally Oppressed Communities

by

Lori M. Walkington

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Sociology  
University of California, Riverside, June 2018  
Dr. Adalberto Aguirre, Chairperson

Spoken-word poetry, and the knowledge we can gain from the poets who perform it speaking of subjective experiences and obstacles, are integral to the successful recovery for members of oppressed communities. Also known as performance poetry, these powerful testimonials often mirror oral traditions such as speaking circles from the African diaspora, Indigenous oral traditions in the Americas, and the spoken-word poetic communities of color and marginalized peoples. Within the spoken-word poetry communities of San Diego, California, community members who have been oppressed by the war on drugs, military policing, mass incarceration, state, interpersonal violence, sexism, racism, poverty, marginalization, and other systemic inequalities, learn from and support one another. This research views spoken-word poetry as public testimonials. I examine what lessons can be learned toward a transformative social justice model for structurally oppressed communities through such community speaking; how spoken-word poetry, as public testimonials, fosters agency and transformational identify construction, creates a sense of community among members of oppressed communities; and how this community nurtures, supports, and teaches its members via the collective community



healing process of transformative social justice. This research seeks to understand what we can glean from spoken-word poetry that may inform programming, policy and funding toward transformative social justice initiatives focused on healing communities and their members situated within the matrix of structural oppressions.

*Keywords: Community Healing, Community Trauma, Oppressed Communities, Transformative Social Justice, Spoken-Word Poetry*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH PROBLEM, AND METHODS...1</b>	
INTRODUCTION .....	1
<i>Restorative Models for Oppressed Communities</i> .....	2
RESEARCH PROBLEM .....	3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS .....	9
<i>Transformative Justice Models</i> .....	9
<i>Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality</i> .....	10
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	13
RESEARCH AS AN INSIDER/OUTSIDER.....	14
<i>Growing up in the Crack 90's and The War on Drugs</i> .....	14
<i>Poetry as Healing</i> .....	16
SAMPLE DESIGN .....	18
<i>Qualitative Approach</i> .....	18
<i>Extended Case Study Method</i> .....	18
<i>Setting</i> .....	19
<i>Content Analysis</i> .....	21
<i>Human Subjects</i> .....	21
<i>Limitations and Objectivity</i> .....	22
<b>CHAPTER 2: NEEDING AND DOING COMMUNITY..... 24</b>	
INTRODUCTION .....	24
NEEDING COMMUNITY .....	24
<i>The Café Poets</i> .....	24
<i>The Art Gallery Poets</i> .....	26
<i>Black Xpression</i> .....	28
DOING COMMUNITY.....	32
<i>Linking Spoken-word Communities to Local Businesses and Organizations</i> .....	32
SUMMARY .....	36
<b>CHAPTER 3: STATE VIOLENCE IN STRUCTURALLY OPPRESSED AND DISRUPTED COMMUNITIES.....40</b>	
INTRODUCTION .....	40
<i>Historical Context of Racialized Police Violence, The War on Drugs, and Mass     Incarceration</i> .....	40
<i>Deep Memories-Even if Not Our Own: The Pain of Police Brutality</i> .....	47
<i>Mass Incarceration and Latino Communities</i> .....	49
<i>We See Y'all: Poets' Links Between Multiple Forms of Oppression</i> .....	55
<b>CHAPTER 4: FIGHT THE POWER-COMMUNITY RESISTANCE TO STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION .....63</b>	
INTRODUCTION .....	63
<i>Transformative Justice</i> .....	64
<i>Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality</i> .....	65

<i>Oral Traditions: Storytelling and Spoken-word Poetry</i> .....	67
<i>Testimonios</i> .....	72
<i>Resisting Racism: Defensive Othering and Reclaiming Histories</i> .....	76
<i>Resisting Poverty</i> .....	79
<i>Resisting State Violence: Higher Education, Mass Incarceration, and the School-to-Prison Pipeline</i> .....	82
<i>Resisting the Borders of Body and Nation</i> .....	84
CONCLUSION .....	85
<b>CHAPTER 5: SPOKEN WORD POETRY AS TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL JUSTICE</b> .....	<b>88</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	88
RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVISITED .....	90
LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS .....	94
Limitations .....	94
Contributions .....	95
FUTURE RESEARCH .....	96
CONCLUSION .....	98
REFERENCES .....	<b>99</b>

## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction, Research Problem, and Methods**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Publicly speaking about experiences with structural oppression and obstacles to community healing, may be integral to healing for members of oppressed communities. For the scope of this research, a structurally oppressed community is defined as that which has been suffering from the consequential impact of structural oppression, including exposure to racism, community violence, sexism, poverty, and family disruption that negatively impact community members' well-being. Within a spoken-word poetry community, members who have been substance users, addicts, victims and perpetrators of interpersonal abuse, discrimination (e.g., racism and sexism), police violence, and marginalization learn from and support one another at "open-mic" events<sup>1</sup>. This research views the public performance of spoken-word poetry in communities whose members experience multiple forms of structural oppression, as testimonials of such experiences. As such, this research will examine spoken-word poetry as a transformative justice model for oppressed communities.

Spoken-word, or performance poetry has its roots in speaking circles from the African and African American diasporas. Through "nommo", the African oral tradition, the performer "manipulates all forms of raw life and conjures images that not only represent his biological place in Time and Space, but his spiritual existence as well" (Walker, 2005:233). Nommo encourages interaction between performer and audience through which life is given to stories in such a way that harmony develops between

---

<sup>1</sup> Short for "open-microphone"; events are readings in a public venue open to anyone who want to read their poetry. For further explanation, see notes.

performer and audience (Walker, 2005). The use of spoken-word poetry as public testimonials may be essential toward the continued healing process for victims and offenders, but also for better understanding the contextual, social, historical, and institutional factors impacting communities oppressed by the war on drugs, but also provide crucial lessons for other types of healing for communities of color. These findings may inform upon future programming, policy and funding toward transformative justice initiatives focused on transforming and healing oppressed communities like San Diego, CA, that have been oppressed by the war on drugs, military policing, and a system that serves to remove those most affected by such conflicts from each other, significantly impacting related types of community trauma.

#### *Restorative Models for Oppressed Communities*

This research expands upon definitions of socially disorganized communities with high levels of poverty, as describing these communities as having “pathogenic” and “dysfunctional” environments is pathologizing to the communities themselves. For this study, oppressed communities are defined as those suffering from the consequential impact of structural oppression, including exposure to racism, community violence, sexism, poverty, and family disruption that negatively impact community members’ well-being. Restorative justice models seek resolution and healing from such exposure. Restorative justice models utilize five components; “meeting (the offender and victim meet face to face); narrative (both present their particular story); emotion (each expresses anger, fear, sorrow); understanding (each begins to empathize with the other); and agreement (some kind of resolution is attained)” (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007: 862-

864). Restorative models that include a focus on and encourage participants to link their experiences with interpersonal harms to structural oppressions are considered transformative justice models.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

While restorative models provide a powerful counter-approach to the criminalization of individuals within oppressed communities, we do not know as much about how transformative social justice measures might help heal communities that have been oppressed by the war on drugs, adults who have been caught in the web of the criminal justice system, victims of interpersonal and state violence, or structural oppression. Transformative justice models view harms as conflicts and victim rights as victim needs, highlight the institutionalization of power inequalities, and make the private public. These models do not seek to immediately respond to conflict, but to situate tconflict or harm within the broader framework of structural oppression (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007). Further, the face-to-face conferencing component of restorative justice models may disrupt healing for victims of domestic violence because the family and community members involved in restorative justice models often serve to uphold men's control over women (Coker, 2002). Using spoken-word poetry performance within a transformative justice model removes the need for face-to-face meetings between crime perpetrators and their victims. This may be particularly powerful for community members who have experienced structural oppressions related to policing and the criminal justice system, strengthening the use of a transformative justice approach to this research.

Members of structurally oppressed communities have lost their faith and trust in law enforcement (Bobo and Thompson, 2006; Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk, 2016). This is particularly present in Black communities where this loss of trust results in behavioral changes. These changes negatively impact residents' willingness to call on law enforcement in their communities, which means less suppression of crimes by law enforcement, ultimately leaving Black community members at greater risk of becoming victims of crime (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk, 2016). Further, Black women represent the fastest growing prison population, even surpassing the increasing percentages of Black men incarcerated in American prisons (Bobo and Thompson, 2006). Perhaps more than any other policy and policing shift in the last century, zero-tolerance policing practices and incarceration rates during the War on Drugs impacted levels of trust within Black communities (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk, 2016).

Mass incarceration of Black community members resulting from the War on Drugs has its roots in two historic patterns of racial bias. First, a pattern of unequal protection under the law refers to conditions during times Black folk had no reasonable assurance of police or court protection from white predators. Second, a pattern of unequal enforcement of the law points to the overly harsh treatment of Blacks when suspected of criminal behaviors (Bobo and Thompson, 2006). Between 1880 and 1980, the United States' total incarceration increased by approximately 285,000 individuals. However, policy shifts in the early 1980s resulted in an approximately 1.1 million inmates increase in total incarceration by 2000. This increase was 206 times that of total population increase of 12 percent, and well above all other Western countries (Bobo and Thompson,

2006). The prison population continued to grow beyond 2000 and is now more than 2 million, the majority of which resulted from drug convictions (Alexander, 2011).

Although people of different races use and sell drugs at similar rates, this increase was largely due to drug convictions of the poor, and Black and Latino males (Bobo and Thompson, 2006; Alexander, 2011).

While many Americans have supported policies that ‘get tough’ on drugs, they did so under the false belief that illicit drug use and sales increased levels of violent crime. However, crime waves have been attributed to demographic waves since the late 1960’s and early 1970’s (Sagi & Wellford, 1969; Ferdinand, 1970; Wellford, 1973). The truth of the matter is that when the War on Drugs was enacted, violent crime was decreasing (Bobo and Thompson, 2006; Alexander, 2011). More than a system of crime control, the War on Drugs functioned as a system of social control over communities that are poor, Black and Latino (Alexander, 2011; Camp and Heatherton, 2016). As Alexander noted (2011), once a person has been labeled a felon (through a War on Drugs conviction), all the old forms of discrimination are now able to be applied.

Discrimination in housing, employment, education, and are all legal once a person has been labeled a felon.

Structural oppression and discrimination was met on the one hand with “broken windows” theory and zero tolerance policies on the other. Developed by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, broken windows theory views the breakdown of social control in local contexts as due to unchecked disorders (Gau, 2010). Left unchecked, these signs of disorder, such as litter on sidewalks, graffiti or vandalism, and abandoned houses or



stores, indicate residents are unwilling or unable to exercise informal control and that local law enforcement is similarly tolerant of such criminal or deviant behaviors. Social disorder here is characterized as teens hanging out on street corners, low-level drug sales, panhandling, prostitution, and other violation of social norms which make area residents uncomfortable. This breakdown of social order then leads to increased crime and increased concentration of criminals in these areas, which in-turn, leads non-criminal residents to withdraw from public spaces, leaving them open to more criminal activity (Gau, 2010). Broken windows theory, and the order-maintenance techniques that resulted from it, has been associated with ‘stop-and-frisk’ policing tactics, a disproportionate targeting of minorities, has no impact on serious crime, and leads to mass incarceration (Mitchell, Attoh, and Staeheli in Camp and Heatherton, 2016).

These ‘zero tolerance’ policies, informed by “broken windows” theory, legitimized extra surveillance, search, seizure, and violence aimed at members of poor, Black, and Latino communities (Camp and Heatherton 2016). This ramped-up, militarized and zero-tolerance form of policing has since led to the high-profile deaths of Black citizens at the hands of law enforcement (Camp and Heatherton, 2016). Violence against these communities has been met with grassroots resistance from members of these communities. After the events surrounding the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Rekia Boyd, and hundreds of other non-armed Black people, the Black Lives Matters organizing effort was developed to address inequities in police response (Camp and Heatherton, 2016).

The current climate of aggressive policing also impacts Latino communities. Within the current sociopolitical climate, families and individuals who reside in sanctuary communities and have been negatively oppressed by the mass incarceration that resulted from the war on drugs (Alexander, 2011) have things to say about their experiences, and society should hear their voices so that we might suggest policy measures to heal these communities. In 2012, California had an estimated undocumented immigrant population of approximately 2.8 million people (Baker and Rytina, 2013). With institutions of higher education navigating the possible repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Change.Org n. d), deportation centers and local jail facilities full to the brim with individuals caught up in the war on drugs, several military installations, and a contentious relationship between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other law enforcement agents and the communities which they are sworn to protect.

San Diego County, CA was an ideal setting in which to conduct this research. It is a sanctuary county (Griffith and Vaughn, 2017), borders Tijuana, Mexico, and stretches all the way to Orange County, CA, with border patrol checkpoints along all major freeways. Accounting for more than 33 percent of the population of San Diego County (US Census Bureau n. d.), many Latino families and individuals have already been impacted; women who are victim of domestic violence, mothers and fathers of young children, and their families.

Mass incarceration resulting from the failed war on drugs has had a serious impact on San Diego County communities. According to the (2013) California Department of Corrections data, the total prison populations for Blacks, Latinos, and

Whites were 29.4%, 41.3%, and 23% respectively. However, the state population for these groups is only 5.8% Black, 39% Latino, and 38.8% White (Lopez, 2014). The disproportionate incarceration of Blacks and Latinos relative to their population, particularly resulting from incarceration from drug charges (Beckett, Nyrop, and Pfingst, 2006) is but one glaring example of the forms of structural oppression community members face. Mass incarceration results in the systemic breakdown of families, a painful reality for many in San Diego. Community members are fed up with broken windows policing and its brutality, domestic violence, and poverty in the era of mass incarceration. The deployment of broken windows policing, its extra surveillance, brutality, and obvious deployment against Black and Brown, and poor people has given rise to community level resistance across the country (Camp and Heatherton, 2016).

Poets have a long tradition of speaking truth to power, calling out structural, political, and social oppressions. Speaking their truth to the over use of power by law enforcement officials is one way in which poets are addressing the interactions between police and the communities they are sworn to protect and serve (Camp and Heatherton, 2016). Social movements against structural oppression have embraced poetry as an oral tradition by performing the “the power of language, the musicality of language, the vividness of language, to move people, to win the proverbial hearts and minds...to effect social change” (Camp and Heatherton, 2016).

This research investigates community-level resistance in the form of spoken-word poetry pen-mic evens where poems may be used to interrogate structural oppression (Williams, 2012). In the process of these interrogations, healing might begin. Healing in

this context has the power to transform San Diego County and other communities like it. Therapeutic models teach the packaging of pain in poetic prose, in this case, that which was suffered due to structural oppressions. This packaging of pain due to structural oppressions is potentially healing in two ways. On the one hand, making pain into an object which is distanced from the self, has potential healing power for the poet. On the other hand, audience members, too, can heal by associating their own pain with that of the poets. This can be particularly powerful in the case of shame. Additionally, poetry has the power to evoke empathy in audiences (Williams, 2012). For communities impacted by structural oppression, this empathy could lead to recognition-of being human, of being valued, of being part of our society. The goal of this research is to identify the locus of community pain, how this pain is associated with structural oppressions, and practical solutions via transformative justice models.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### *Transformative Justice Theory*

Four elements of restorative justice measures constitute a successful resolution which focuses on reintegration as a productive and contributing person within the community:(1) generosity; (2) restitution; (3) behavioral change; and (4) amends. Restorative justice measures also value the inclusion of victims in several stages of the criminal justice process (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007). While useful for this research, restorative justice theories have varying definitions and implications, and do not adequately address structural forms of harm.

Key to transformative justice is the focus on transforming structural forms of injustice such as racism, sexism, and classism, and connecting how the past harms connect to the present health of individuals, communities, families, and offenders in envisioning a better future. In this way, transformative justice includes a component directed beyond the immediate needs of all community members and toward the structural oppressions impacting them (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007). This perspective recognizes harms at the political, social, and economic levels while addressing imbalances of power. In recognizing the socio-structural conditions implicit to community and individual harms, transformative justice seeks to empower individuals and communities through needs-based justice that remains restorative while also seeking to “affect social-structural, structural, institutional arrangements, while simultaneously helping those whose lives have been affected by interpersonal conflict” (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007:1023-1024). Because this study seeks to identify thematic elements of structural harms via spoken-word poetry within communities impacted by structural oppression, utilizing the lens of transformative justice provides a more comprehensive analytical framework than a restorative justice model.

### *Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality*

In conjunction with intersectionality (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013), this study utilizes Black Feminist Thought as a critical social theory broadly supporting principles of social justice and empowerment for all oppressed peoples (Collins, 2000). As an analytical tool, intersectionality requires its practitioners to investigate the

interstices of categories of sameness and difference in relation to power (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013). In terms of Black Feminist Thought, there are the six distinguishing features: (1) to resist both oppression and the ideologies and practices used to justify it; (2) the linkage of experiences with ideas, in that certain themes emerge out of group knowledge or standpoint; (3) the importance of self-definition in connections between a diverse collective and group knowledge in stimulating resistance; (4) the use of everyday experiences and actions to guide questions in investigations of intersecting systems of oppression; (5) the utilization of an analysis that is current with the changing social conditions characteristic of Black women (and thereby other oppressed groups) and ; (6) its humanistic vision of Black women's struggles as part of the "wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (Collins 2000: 41). These features are utilized here as an analytical framework to identify emergent themes of structural oppression within spoken-word poetry.

Utilizing Black feminist analysis situates spoken-word poets as knowledge agents who link their experiences with their own ideas and standpoints while using these everyday experiences to investigate systems of oppression impacting their lives and well-being. In looking at the spoken-word poetry community of San Diego, CA, this work is further situated within the changing social conditions unique to this area and its community members. Further, utilizing Black feminist analysis allows the researcher to look beyond the traditions of social disorganization, focusing instead on the ways in which members of these communities organize to resist structural oppression.

Utilizing intersectionality as an analytical tool (Collins, 2015), this research looks at how multiple intersecting oppressions are relayed by poets in communities suffering from disruption and pain. Such a framework requires researchers to look at the ways in which interlocking systems of oppression function within individual experiences as raced, gendered, and having a class location within society (Collins, 2015). An intersectional analytical framework understands intersecting identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, among others, are relational rather than isolated from each other. These identities are co-constructed while underlying and shaping intersecting and interrelated systems of power such as racism and sexism. These intersecting power systems result in a socially constructed and complex set of social inequalities for individuals and communities, like those oppressed by poverty, racism, sexism, and policies and practices associated with the war on drugs, who experience these intersecting identities via their material reality.

Finally, this research utilizes a Critical Race theoretical (CRT) analysis through its five tenets. First, “that racism is not an aberration, but rather a fundamental, endemic, and normalized way of organizing society;” second, “CRT challenges the idea that laws and institutions are racially neutral, holding that claims of neutrality and color blindness mask White privileges and power;” third, CRT includes “the notion of ‘interest convergence,’ which holds that Whites act on their own self-interest, and advance interests of people of color only as long as they converge with White interests;” fourth, CRT holds “that the people who understand racism best are not its perpetrators, but rather

those who are routinely victimized by it;” and finally, critical race theorists are “committed to working for social justice” (Sleeter, 2012).

Because social inequalities are also cross-culturally specific and historically situated, social interactions and unequal material realities will vary depending on the space and time of social interactions. Groups and individuals who occupy various spaces within the matrix of oppression have varying points of view of their own and others’ experiences with inequalities, which results in knowledge projects reflecting their social location within systems of power. Intersectionality theory as an analytic tool has the power to shape knowledge projects which challenge the status quo (Collins, 2015). When analyzing spoken-word poetry, particular attention was given to the ways in which poets constructed pain, how this pain is related to their identities, and the ways in which these are related to systemic forms of oppression. Use of these two theories provides a more nuanced understanding of spoken-word poetry as transformative justice while paying attention to intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, documentation status, and sexual identity.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the historical, social, economic, and structural forms of oppression related through the poets of this community? This context is crucial to understanding the power of spoken-word poetry. Because this community is uniquely situated both historically and socially, the forms of transformative justice that will come out of these communities will differ from those that came out of the oral traditions of earlier generations.
2. How is social pain talked about within these spoken-word performances? The way pain is reflected by poets in this community will reveal to which systems and institutions this pain is connected. Whether pain is related directly or in metaphor, how it is performed, and in what context, will help us to understand avenues toward transformative justice within this and other uniquely situated communities.



3. What types of transformative justice measures are the poets and their audiences experiencing/and or enacting within the spoken-word communities of San Diego, CA? This research seeks to understand how the unique context specific in space and time, can inform upon transformative justice for both the broader San Diego community, and specific communities within larger San Diego, such as those defined by race, documentation and other legal status, gender and sexuality, and proximity to the US-Mexico border. This research may also have implication in the broader United States, and beyond. What role can spoken-word play in supporting, repairing, and ultimately transforming oppressed communities?

## **RESEARCH AS AN INSIDER/OUTSIDER**

### *Growing up in the Crack 90's during The War on Drugs*

I grew up in Lancaster, a suburb in the high-desert about 60 miles northeast of Los Angeles, California during the height of the War on Drugs, or what I refer to as the “Crack 90’s.” Between the mid-1980s and 1990s, Lancaster was experiencing an influx of residents fleeing gang warfare and police violence associated with the war on drugs. Nightly newscasts featured alarming images of infants trapped in incubators, many shaking uncontrollably, as their tiny bodies went through the excruciating process of becoming drug-free during their first days of life. These images were often attached to stories about the War on Drugs that also included images of poor Black and Latino communities being terrorized by militarized police forces. As a Black biracial young woman, my circle of friends was what one commonly sees in poorer areas of Southern California, racially and ethnically diverse.

Gang violence was something I knew by association. The gang members in my area were mostly kids I had gone to middle and high-school with. Some were mothers and fathers of babies with friends. We knew each other. These were not scary people. I

was with this group of friends when I saw the first image of someone I knew being wheeled out of a place I had been before. His name was Jo-Jo and he was dead from a drive-by shooting. I was seventeen years-old. It was during the same year that I found myself at police gunpoint for the first (but not last) time.

After spending an entire afternoon at the hair salon getting my hair cut, pressed, and curled with Dudley Total Control hairspray (nothing moved when you used Dudley's), I met up with a few of my high school friends. After getting ready, we were dressed meticulously, and most assuredly smelling of Poison perfume. The five of us, two young women and three young men all piled in to my friend's parent's Cadillac sedan and headed out into the rainy night.

We were about half way to our destination when we saw the red and blue lights reflecting off the car dashboard. It was late, and the streets were deserted, so we were stopped right in the middle of the street. From the side mirror, I could see the sheriff's deputies crouched behind their patrol car doors. Through the crackling sound of their megaphone, the deputies instructed us to exit the vehicle. Once out of the car, and in the rain, we were commanded to place our hands behind our heads and interlace our fingers. We complied and were then instructed to walk with our backs to their guns \*slowly\* toward them.

They left us there in the middle of the street, late at night, in the rain, while they checked out the vehicle. None of us were asked for identification until allowed to return to the vehicle. Once back inside, the driver was informed she was stopped after the deputies received a call regarding a stolen vehicle. Not shockingly, neither the vehicle

nor its inhabitants matched the description of the stolen car in question. The call also originated in an area that was logistically too far away for us to have travelled between the time the call came over their radio and the stop. That traffic stop left an indelible imprint on me. So much that I would return to it time and again in my own research. It also left me feeling angry, exposed, and vulnerable.

### *Poetry as Healing*

Like many of the young women I went to high school with, I wound up a young mother, and like many of those other young women, I raised my daughter alone after her father was incarcerated for drug related crimes. With recidivism rates as they were at the time, my daughter's father spent the next ten years without being free on parole for more than 11 months at a time. During those brief times of freedom, I became a victim, then survivor of interpersonal violence.

At that age and with only a high school education, I didn't understand the structural influences on myself, my community, and my relationships. What I did understand was that I was angry. Angry that we had all become statistics and casualties of the War on Drugs. My case added to the statistics of battered and abused women during that time. My partner at the time added to the staggering statistics of Black males incarcerated during the War on Drugs. The main source of that anger, however, was my daughter being added to the number of children raised by poor, Black single mothers in the United States.

Poetry found me as an undergraduate college student in north San Diego county. Although reluctant at first, I began to pour my feelings onto the page. Everything from

growing up as a Black girl in a white home to colors of the bruises my daughter's father left on my body came flowing out of me. I was in graduate school before anyone could convince me to read one of my poems at an organized spoken-word event. Once I did, the empathy I received both during and after that reading were unexpected. As I performed my pain, I could hear members of the audience, some of who I'd known for years, gasping and murmuring. After the reading was finished, one of the audience members, a woman I'd known since my undergraduate days embraced me and whispered, "how did I not know this?" I felt empathy in her embrace, and credit the continued pouring of my feelings-from pain to joy- has helped heal some of the pain I experienced. Poetry has been an integral part of my life ever since.

As I embarked upon this research, my original focus looked at spoken-word poetry open-mics as a type of community conferencing we see in restorative justice programs. The problem for me, as I read more about restorative justice, was the main goal of this framework-restoration. When you grow up the way I did, and spend your young adult life in communities disrupted by structural oppression, the gnawing question for me was 'restore to what?' A disrupted state? While restorative justice programs sought healing, they didn't attend to the structural causes of oppression disrupting these communities.

My individual experiences as a poet synthesize perfectly with my training in sociology, criminology, critical race and Black feminist theoretical perspectives. For this research, I relied on preexisting relationships with spoken-word poets to gain seamless entrée to open-mics for data collection purposes. Having been away from the area while

completing my doctoral studies, I was a bit removed from the word-of-mouth information about local open-mic events, and unaware of how poets might relate pain as it occurs in areas impacted by structural oppression.

## SAMPLE DESIGN

### *Qualitative Approach*

This research utilizes a qualitative research design and an inductive approach wherein the concepts emerged from the data collected (Warren and Karner 2014). Utilizing a qualitative method requires the researcher to better understand the meanings this study's spoken-word poets use to express and explain the pains they have witnessed or experienced related to structural oppression. While a quantitative design is appropriate for making broad generalizations about oppressed communities, this research does not seek to do so. Rather, this research combines qualitative collection of spoken-word poetry, with content analysis focusing on the selected poems as data to better understand spoken-word poetry as method of transformative justice within a specific community.

### *Extended Case Study Method*

This research utilized the extended case study method of data collection that requires researchers to “extract the general from the unique, to move from the micro to the macro, and to connect the present to the past in anticipation of the future, all by building on preexisting theory” (Burawoy 1998). The two sites chosen for this research are distinct in time and space. My data consists of fieldnotes and audio recordings of poems collected over a ten-week period at the two sites which allow me to move from the micro to the macro while connecting the present to the past oppression of this

community. I combine the extended case method with Critical Race, Black Feminist, Intersectionality, and Transformative Justice theories and frameworks to analyze all information collected.

### *Setting*

San Diego County, California borders Tijuana, Mexico to the south and stretches all the way to Orange County, California to the North with border patrol checkpoints on all major freeways leading in and out of the county. San Diego is also a sanctuary county (Griffith and Vaughn 2017). According to the Center for Immigration Studies, a county or city is considered sanctuary if it has,

“laws, ordinances, regulations, resolutions, policies, or other practices that obstruct immigration enforcement and shield criminals from ICE — either by refusing to or prohibiting agencies from complying with ICE detainers, imposing unreasonable conditions on detainer acceptance, denying ICE access to interview incarcerated aliens, or otherwise impeding communication or information exchanges between their personnel and federal immigration officers” (Center for Immigration Studies 2017).

The Department of Justice announced in November 2017 that any sanctuary jurisdiction that interferes with Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) communication with officials, jail inmates, or fails to notify ICE of undocumented individuals ICE wants to deport, will lose access to the Byrne Justice Assistance Grants—the largest state source of federal criminal justice funds. It is not yet determined whether San Diego County will lose these funds. (Center for Immigration Studies 2017).

ICE, however, poses a real threat to individuals and families in San Diego County, as evidenced by the arrest and detention of Maria Solis, a pregnant mother and domestic violence survivor (American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego and Imperial Counties 2017). Accounting for more than 33 percent of the population of San Diego County (US Census Bureau n. d.), many families and individuals have already been impacted; women who are victim of domestic violence, mothers and fathers of young children, and their families. The goal of this research is to identify the locus of community pain, its players, and practical solutions via transformative justice models.

San Diego County has a prison incarceration rate of 402 per 1000 felony arrests and 249 per 1000 felony arrests incarcerated in county jails. In Spring 2016, California had a state prison population of 128,643. However, with the passing of Proposition 57, the Public Safety and Rehabilitation Act of 2016, incarceration rates are expected to decrease by almost 6,000 by 2021. There were 16,897 incidents of domestic violence reported to San Diego County law enforcement in 2014, with children present 37% of the time (San Diego Domestic Violence Council 2017). Of these, as many as 16 were considered domestic violence homicides. It also has a poverty rate consistent with the rest of the state at 12% below the poverty line. San Diego County also has a higher than average number of gangs and gang members when compared to the rest of the state, having between one and five hundred identified gangs with membership ranging from five to ten thousand.

### *Content Analysis*

I utilized a three-stage coding process. First, I conducted content analysis of raw transcribed data to identify any poems, poets, or emcee commentary associated with structural oppression while keeping an eye for language and reference to structural oppressions such as but not limited to racism, sexism, police violence and mass incarceration, poverty, and interpersonal violence to be highlighted for later analysis. The second stage of open coding was descriptive, in taking specific note of the types of things people were talking about in their poems. This process was repeated until patterns began to emerge from the data indicating themes under which data would be organized. The third and final stage was values coding, noting poets' beliefs, attitudes, and values which represent their worldviews or perspectives (Saldana 2009).

As this is a grounded approach, the total sample number of individual poets and poems selected varied by number of poets signed up at selected open-mic nights, whether there was a featured poet, and length of open-mic venues. This process was repeated several times for each data collection site. Once open coding was completed, I analyzed data with an eye for how poets relayed pain and trauma and related this to structural oppression. Some comparative analysis concerning the types of structural oppression causing pain and trauma was conducted between sites to inform on which forms of structural oppressions were prevalent at each site.

### *Human Subject Issues*

Spoken-word performances and open-mic poetry performances audio recorded and used as data collection sites for this research are public events with no assumption of



privacy or anonymity. However, as this project seeks to uncover thematic content, not highlight personal individual experiences, only race and gender indicators are used when referring poets and their poems. Poets' names and title of spoken word pieces were recorded, along with emcee introductions. No video recordings were collected. Although expectation of anonymity is questionable within the given context of data collected from open, public spoken-word events, I exclude indicators of poets' individual identities. While every effort was extended to make general, rather than specific mentions to emergent themes, these may be easily discernible by members of the community.

#### *Limitations and Objectivity*

The overall design of this research is limited in scope, as it seeks only to identify themes related to structural oppression, the pain and trauma this causes community members, and if healing may be possible using spoken-word poetry as part of a transformative justice approach within these communities. Sampling is limited to two sites that host four separate open-mic events. Further, the pain and trauma relayed through spoken-word poetry, emcee and poet commentary collected for this research are also subjective.

My lived experiences growing up in Southern California during the height of the war on drugs, being a single mother on welfare, a survivor of domestic violence, and a poet provide me a unique insight through I conduct this research. Rather than striving toward scientific objectivity, this research is informed by subjective experiences and insider knowledge that add to the richness of analysis and findings, rather than detract from them. The overarching themes and conclusions I draw are not a result of my

involvement and history with the spoken-word communities of San Diego. Rather, my training in critical sociological theories and methodological approaches allowed me to synthesize data systematically in order to reconnect with and give back to a community that continues to suffer from pain and trauma related to structural oppression.

## CHAPTER 2: Needing, Making, and Doing Community

### INTRODUCTION

Actively working against the increasing raced, gendered, and classed oppressions disrupting these communities, poets from across and through these identities are forming alliances against structural oppression through the act of being together during open mic events. In a single night, Chicana/o, Black, White, veteran, female, male, undocumented, LGBTQ, those with mental illness, and children may read. In this way, people from across intersecting identities give and receive the pain of others through their poetry. Not only is pain related, but love, gratitude, a sense of family and community in what some would describe as Durkheimian transcendence wherein these communities form a bond that moves beyond the physical and interactional, and into the spiritual (Lawler, 2009).

The environments in these spaces range from celebration to education to resistance. For two to three hours each or every other week (on average), individuals come together in these small spaces, package their pain, and also their joy, and give it to members of their community. Behind the scenes, they are engaging in transformative justice within and for their communities. How these communities are formed and engage in resistance against institutional and structural oppression speak directly to how we see transformative justice at work addressing state violence (including immigration and border patrol, police violence, and mass incarceration), racism, and poverty.

*Café Cabaret: 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday Jihmye and Revolutionary Poets' Brigade*

Café Cabaret in the North Park neighborhood hosts the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday Jihmye Poetry, and Revolutionary Poets' Brigade in Solidarity with 100 Thousand Poets for

Change open-mic readings. The café is Caribbean influenced and run by a local man and his wife. Set on the corner of Adams Avenue, the exterior holds a fountain, where one can find the emcee speaking to the ancestors before he takes the “mic.” There is bright green paint and art from local artists on the walls, and the small café has plants interspersed between tables. On one night, the mic was set up in the middle of the café. On another, it was just inside the entrance. On each occasion, poets’ chapbooks are on display and for sale. Bubble glass behind a light fixture leaves cool shadows across the wall. The crowd is mixed. Most seem to be there specifically for the reading. One couple sits in a booth near the back of the café, appearing to study with their laptops over coffee. They listen to a few of the poets, then quietly leave. People walk by outside, sometimes stopping to listen for a moment, sometimes watching as they walk past.

This community of poets has strong ties to the surrounding areas of San Diego County with its motto “Inspiration, Motivation, Contamination.” It is diverse in race, gender, class, age, and country of origin. At one of the readings for the San Diego Poetry Annual poets, the diversity of this community was easily observable. The Annual is a publication that is completely run by volunteers and is open to submission for any poet who has performed at one of their readings across the county. On any given night, San Diego Poetry Annual open-mic audiences may hear pieces about state power and violence, the War in Iraq, mental illness and suicide, the resilience of a native teen mother, mass incarceration and the war on drugs, and white privilege.

Data here revealed this community to be highly engaged in transformative social justice actions at both the institutional and structural levels. This community of poets

speaks of love and community as resistance against institutional and structural oppressions. For the Café Cabaret poets, both doing and being part of this community emerged as important. Equally emergent was racism as a theme. Racism was spoken about in relation to slavery, mass incarceration, and tied racial and ethnic groups to the same structural and institutional they have historically faced.

*The Art Gallery: Palabras and Black Xpression*

*Palabras*

The La Bodega Art Gallery hosts both the Palabra and Black Xpression open-mic nights in the Barrio Logan neighborhood. Barrio Logan is situated near South East San Diego, split by the Coronado Bridge, and surrounded by an industrial waterfront, freeways, and a US Naval base. The neighborhoods' residents have a history of civic engagement. In response to residents' lobbying efforts of elected representatives and demonstrations, the 1.8 acres of land that had devolved into a trash dump after construction of the Coronado Bridge, was expanded in 1970 to the 7.9 acres now known as Chicano Park. This area has been designated as an historical site and is recognized for the large murals created among bridge columns by Chicano artists. Barrio Logan residents hold strong ethnic identities, with 80 percent identifying as Hispanic compared with 25 percent of citywide residents. Barrio Logan's residents are also younger and poorer than those compared with the average San Diego county residents. In 2008, the average adult in Barrio Logan was age 28 and making \$6,235, as compared to the average income of 44-year-old San Diego county residents (Economic Research

Associates 2008). The setting is just around the corner from Chicano Park, in an open space with interchanging art from local Chicano artists lining the walls.

The Palabra open-mic is part of the gallery's mission to enrich and engage their community through art

([https://www.facebook.com/pg/labodegagallerysd/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/labodegagallerysd/about/?ref=page_internal)). The gallery also hosts a variety of other events from Rumba dance lessons to all women's arts exhibits and kid's art classes. On one-night Chicano art lines the walls. Metallic pieces with images of Latina women who looked like 1950s rock-a-billy models draped across low-rider cars. A short and sturdy Chicana woman who looked to be 25-35 years-old was already on the mic. She spoke in mixed Spanish and English with her eyes closed as she raised her fist when speaking about her people. She holds a notebook in her hand but doesn't look at it often. One immediately feels the welcoming energy of the audience as they engage in a chorus of snaps and affirming "mm hmm's" to the poet. As is common within these types of open-mic events, members of the audience empathized and gave healing energy back to the poet through their verbal and physical displays such as snapping their fingers and positive exclamations. There is love in these spaces. Encouragement. When poets come to the mic for the first time, they are met with audible support, encouraged when they falter, and given the time they need to express themselves.

One such poet was a little girl who read a poem written by her mother. She was a small girl, no more than age 8. The mic had to be adjusted to her height. Her voice was shaky and high-pitched as she began to read. Audience members offered their

encouragement and her voice became louder and more self-assured. About mid-poem, the girl smiled as she finished reading a line her mother had written for her. The piece was beautiful, about hope and sunshine and a mother spending the day with her children. Again, the audience showed this young girl love, support, encouragement. The audience members here are very welcoming and diverse. This night also included a reading from an elderly woman wearing a bright red straw hat. She spoke with an accent that sounded German. She spoke of her community. Of her garden. The emcee for this open-mic, a middle-age Black man with glasses and dreadlocks read a poem about love. There are smiles all around.

### *Black Xpression*

La Bodega Art Gallery also hosts the Black Xpression open-mic on Fridays. Upon walking in, one immediately feels like family. This feeling of family is by design. The co-founders of Black Xpression are four young Black community members who wanted to create a space “for the community by the community” (<http://www.kpbs.org/events/ongoing/black-xpression-open-mic/>) that is open to everyone in which community members can experience all of the positivity and none of the negativity of Black culture. It was designed to be a safe space where people from all areas of Black culture can go to express themselves in ways that may not be safe for them to do in other public areas, particularly in the current sociopolitical climate of hate and racial discrimination in Trump’s America (Marcin, 2017; Siddique and Laughland, 2017).

Black Xpression began mid-2016 with a group of student performers from the community at a local restaurant. The open-mic was also held at a local church on Logan Avenue in Barrio Logan before moving to its current location in La Bodega Art Gallery (Daily Aztec, 2017). Its co-founder's community link to local colleges continues to show each Friday night as young and creative people of color come from around the county to share themselves, their experiences, their joy and their pain, with each other. One of the co-founders was quoted as describing the open-mic in four words "Black. Empowerment. Unity. Community" (Daily Aztec 2017), but also pointed out that this community is for anyone who has felt silent or "othered."

Othering, or the process by which a dominant group defines an inferior group through invented categories, usually results in and reproduces inequality, and can take three forms; oppressive othering, implicit othering, and defensive othering. Oppressive othering takes place when one group defines another as morally and intellectually inferior, as with racial classification schemes (Schwalbe et al., 2000:422-23). Defensive othering occurs within subordinate groups via deflection of stigmas placed upon them by the dominant group (Schwalbe et al., 2000:425). Knowingly or not, the cofounders of Black Xpression engage in defensive othering each Friday night as they engage in a collective positivity that goes against the stigma of Black urban youth in the United States.

Unlike the other open-mics, community emerged as the most prescient theme at the Black Xpression site. This finding is supported by social media and promotional materials available online. Poets and performers at this site are hungry for community,



family, and a sense of belonging. This is understandable, considering that this is a young community of poets that is largely Black. Based on co-founder's ages and statements about how Black Xpression came to be, these young people have been significantly impacted by the state, local, and interpersonal violence disrupting their communities. Here, violence is the second most prescient theme wherein both state and gendered violence were emergent.

At Black Xpression, the common call and response check-in is, "If you feel it (call) Express it (response)!" Although held in the same art gallery as Palabras two nights before, this space is totally transformed. Where the stage was the night before, sits a brightly painted low-rider car<sup>2</sup>. Local vendors selling food, jewelry, bags, and chapbooks line the back walls of the gallery. An all-Black-woman poetry group was selling also selling creams and lotions. I bought two beaded bracelets from them. Gave one to my daughter when I returned home. They claimed the beads were from Africa. This space is both very Black, and very diverse in terms of Black culture. There are young mothers with children, old folk, young men and women flirting and playing around together. There are even a few members of the Nation of Islam standing near the back. A young white woman sits directly in front of me, enraptured by the feature for the night, a young Black man playing guitar and singing. He is dressed funky-in a floppy multi-colored hat, bell-bottom jeans, and sunglasses with large round black lenses. Between songs he speaks about the ups and downs he has experienced along the way. He tells of body shaming and

---

<sup>2</sup> A customized vehicle with hydraulic jacks that allow the chassis to be lowered nearly to the road. (n.a., 2018)

being told he does not have a marketable image. The audience is audibly not pleased with this as indicated by their shouts of support. It feels like family there.

Once the feature finishes, the emcee takes the mic and reads the rules for the night. There is a sign-up sheet at the front entrance. Each person has five minutes. Audience members are reminded that the only other rule is to respect the performers. We are reminded that although we might hear things with which we disagree, that it takes a certain amount of courage to put oneself out there in front of an audience. As the deejay plays each performer on and off the mic, the atmosphere is club-like; loud and lively and younger than the other two sites. There did seem to be reverence for elders in this space, as well. When an older gentleman doing a freestyle song and dance went over the five-minute time limit, a young man from the audience yelled out for him to get off the mic. The emcee, standing next to me, held up his hand for the two-minute warning. In response, the gentleman turns his back to the audience, and finishes his freestyle without missing a beat. He wishes us all well and bids us goodnight.

At the same reading, a large Black woman who looked to be in her twenties, took the mic. She is soft spoken while giving her trigger warning. As she begins her piece about her sexual assault, there is a lot of clamoring in the gallery. People are milling about the vendors in the back, crowding around the feature artist to buy a CD and perhaps get an autograph, and accept invitations to social media platforms. Just moments before the audience had patiently and quietly (except for one young man) waited for the elderly gentleman as he went over time. There are three young Black men standing near the entrance making a lot of noise. They are laughing, whooping, and generally distracting

from the poet on the mic. The woman stops and asks the audience to please not make her yell. She continues and finishes her poem as the audience gives her their full attention.

What is striking about the Black Xpression open mic is how young, positive, vibrant and Black this community of poets is. Loud hip-hop music plays during breaks. Energy is generally high in this space. There is some cross over between poets at this event and the other held at the same venue. The young mother with her young son is a constant here. She and her son were over at the Palabras readings, as well. Although the space is most certainly a Black space, as is common to the Black community, everyone is welcome. One night during Black Xpression open mic, a young white woman and man took the mic. The woman was from a local non-profit organization who volunteered doing poetry writing workshops with homeless and mentally ill young adults. After the young man read his poem, the young woman gave the audience some quick stats about the mentally ill population of young people in the downtown areas. She, along with other community members, leave cards and fliers on tables in the back near the vendors. The door prize for the night was a hand-made, hemp bag from a locally owned Black business. The owner, invited by the emcee who'd come across his shop earlier in the week, was brought up to the stage to do the honors. In this way, the spoken-word communities at these venues support local businesses.

#### *Linking Spoken-Word Communities to Local Businesses and Community Organizations*

Each of the four open-mic readings included in this study supports local businesses through their events. Black Xpression and Palabras are both held at La Bodega

Art Gallery in Barrio Logan. During both events, local vendors are present, and consumption of their goods is actively encouraged, particularly at Black Xpression. Every Friday, local restaurants, retail clothing stores, original artists, musicians, and poets sell their food, clothing, jewelry, cd's and chapbooks. Individuals and groups from the Black Xpression, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday Jihmye, and Revolutionary Poets open-mic venues engage with institutions in the larger San Diego community, including the Border. Based on their Facebook page, Black Xpression is highly active within the larger San Diego community.

Poets from Café Cabaret open-mic communities conduct writing workshops all over the county that are open and accessible. Workshops for veterans were also announced. San Diego has a large veteran population, so this speaks directly to how this community of poets identifies and addresses the pain of members of their community. Often, new poets go first through these writing workshops, and then come to perform their pieces at one of the open mics where they are welcomed and supported. Cross-over between local open-mic readings is common, as new and welcoming venues gain popularity, new community members are often brought in by word of mouth, or through emcee announcements.

Although emcees rotate within the community and at the various open mic events, it is through the emcees at Café Cabaret, Palabras, and Black Xpression open-mics that community events, other open-mics, community works, and organizations are most often mentioned. This is how the knowledge about grant writing to continue working with incarcerated juveniles became known. While introducing the upcoming poet, the emcee at Café Cabaret announced they had recently worked together and won a grant that

enables a group from this community to conduct poetry-writing workshops. One of the remarkable findings from this site is that poems from these workshops are included in the San Diego Poetry Annual, a publication edited, printed, and donated to local area public libraries by a group of volunteer poets.

*Enclave Caracol: 100 Thousand Poets for Change*

Enclave Caracol sits across from the Tijuana Wax Museum on a street just off famed Avenida Revolución. It has a broad entrance with wood steps and large doors that are open to the street. A hand-painted sign greets visitors, on the window above which reads “Las Negras Vidas Importan” (loose translation Black Lives Matter), in what looks like duct tape. Inside, there are bookshelves backed up against each other in the middle of the room. There are a few wooden tables set up near the wooden stage to the right of the entrance. The mic is set up just outside the entrance, on the large wooded porch. The organizers explain the event is meant to share binational poetry with passersby.

The poets are greeted by two young white women, one blonde, the other brunette with dreadlocks, and a young white man behind the bar with dirty blonde hair cut into a 1980s style haircut. All appear to be in their early twenties. The young man wears two gold pyramid earrings in one ear. I overhear him tell one of the poets that he is from Washington and has been down in Tijuana around six years. He is heavily tattooed, and when asked about his body art, informs the poet that his girlfriend, the young blonde woman from behind the bar, is the current resident tattoo artist. The trio are preparing the daily meal. The young man explains they cook whatever they have, has been donated, or

can find in dumpsters to feed the community. This day, they had vegetables. Squash, tomatoes and potatoes.

Here, community is transient to some degree. The co-founders saw a need and went to work to fill it. During the afternoon we spent there, several adults and groups of children retrieve bags of food. Unlike food programs in the US which often require preregistration, or a referral from a social services agency, there was no bureaucracy in the community works going on at Enclave Caracol. At one point, a group of kids walked in led by a girl who looked to be no older than 10 or 11 years-old. In her arms was a tightly swaddled baby. Trailing behind her were two younger children—a boy who looked about age 9, and a girl who couldn't have been more than 5. They walked straight up to the bar, completely disinterested in the poetic performances, where the male co-founder exchanged an intricate handshake with the young boy. There is familiarity in the gesture, like they've done this before. They chat for a few moments while the girls looked on. After chatting a few minutes, the boy was handed a yellow plastic bag, through which I could see fresh vegetables and cans of food. The two exchange another intricate handshake, and the kids walk back out of the café, food in hand.

While the café is open to the public and feeds the homeless within the community four days a week, the upstairs space is used for community workshops in art, literature, history, and dance. According to their Facebook page, “Enclave Caracol is a community space that promotes free education, art and free access to food” (2018). Their online calendar provides a schedule that at the time of this writing includes African, Haitian, and Tribal dance workshops, along with workshops for Latin music, political philosophy,

meditation and ballet. According to announcements distributed via email and social media accounts, the Revolutionary Poets' Brigade continues to organize canned food drives in San Diego to take across the border. In this way, this binational community of poets continues to grow.

## **SUMMARY**

While the impetus and motivations for founding spoken-word communities via open-mic readings varies from site to site, what is clear across all sites is the need to create community spaces where individuals can come, have their stories heard, build, and maintain communities together. Whether they want to reinvigorate the long history of Chicano art, as with Palabras, or feel the need to create a safe space where young Black community members can express themselves safely as with Black Xpression, the desire for a sense of community within these spaces is palpable. At every open-mic site visited for this research, community members expressed a need for these communities in a way that feels like it is necessary for their lives. Often, these spaces are referred to in relation to belonging. Poets and audience members alike express the feelings they get in spaces like these when they take the mic. This sense of belonging is expressed with ideas about family and church-both places where we should be able to expect acceptance, love, and room for growth.

That members of communities disrupted by racism, state and interpersonal violence take their need for healing into their own hands, invite and share space with community members inhabiting various spaces within the matrix of oppression, and are doing so toward the health, wellness, and vibrancy of their communities, is revolutionary.

The communities examined here engage in transformative justice through spoken-word poetry as resistance against structural oppression in forming communities around their pain, and in small, but direct ways, are addressing it.

The Black Xpression community engages in defensive othering (Schwalbe, 2000) as resistance every Friday night in successfully maintaining a safe and positive space for the expression of Blackness. They engage in economic resistance as a community by engaging in entrepreneurship aimed at home and small business ownership in the Black community of South East San Diego. They engage in community resistance via collaboration with social justice student organizations and their events at local colleges and universities. Lastly, the Black Xpression community engages in resistance by caring for the homeless creatives in their community of Barrio Logan humanely, with fresh baked goods.

The Palabras community engaged in community organization through the rehabilitation of a dilapidated space. Through the art gallery, organizers provide free cultural instruction through dance and art classes. Further, the art gallery serves as a bridge between Black and Latino communities when opening its doors and inviting their Chicano space to be transformed every Friday night into a definitively Black space. Engaging the Black and Chicano communities together in this space is transformational, as it brings together individuals from different communities and spaces that are all situated somewhere in the matrix of oppression.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday Jihmye and Revolutionary Poets' Brigade communities engage in community through writing workshops. These workshops reach several marginalized



communities in San Diego, including veterans, the homeless, and youth housed in juvenile hall. This community has deep ties to established San Diego arts culture. They publish an annual collection of spoken-word poetry that includes poems written by veterans and youth in juvenile hall who may find healing through the process of packaging their pain and giving it to audiences through the spoken-word. Finally, the Revolutionary Poets' Brigade engages in bi-national community building via collaboration with 100 Thousand Poets for change. This process not only helps the homeless community of Tijuana, Mexico, but provides for shared understanding and combined between two multi-racial, multi-ethnic adjacent communities suffering from structural oppression.

In a time when racial tensions are increasing (Marcin, 2017; Siddique & Laughland, 2017), and police violence and racism are at the forefront and center of community pain (Camp & Heatherton, 2016), restorative justice measures are not enough to adequately address the individual and community level harms of structural oppression (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007). Further, within the community conference portion of restorative justice models, traumatized survivors of interpersonal and sexual violence may experience a reinforced power dynamic between male offenders and female victims, leading to further trauma within restorative justice approaches (Coker, 2002). These are not interpersonal issues, they are structural. Therefore, a structural approach to healing is necessary. In forming community around the spoken-word, community members are highlighting, addressing and resisting structural oppression, racism, state and interpersonal violence through spoken-word poetry as a transformative justice practice.

## Notes

1. “Open-mic” (short for “open-microphone”) events are readings in a public venue open to anyone who want to read their poetry. Sometimes open mic nights will feature a single reader, but generally everyone who wants to read can sign up to read a poem or two when called up by the emcee.
2. Although the current form of low-riders that are most well-known, with intricate designs and bright colors became most recognizable in the 1950s and 1960s, their history traces back to the 1930s as an expression of the zoot-suit fashion of “Pachuco” culture in Southern Los Angeles. This combination of California car and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Mexican cultures stems from traditional the Mexican “paseo” where single young men and women would walk in opposite directions, flirting with one another. The low-rider cruise is considered by some to be a modern form of paseo.
3. Transformative justice models are part of the restorative justice framework. Restorative models that include a focus on and encourage participants to link their experiences with interpersonal harms to structural oppressions are considered transformative justice models.

## **CHAPTER 3: State Violence in Structurally Oppressed and Disrupted Communities**

### INTRODUCTION

That members of structurally oppressed communities have lost their faith and trust in law enforcement (Bobo and Thompson, 2006; Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk, 2016), and that this loss of trust results in behavioral changes in community members, is not surprising. In Black communities suffering the trauma of police violence and mass incarceration, such changes negatively impact residents' willingness to call on law enforcement in their communities, which means less suppression of crimes by law enforcement, ultimately leaving Black community members at greater risk of becoming victims of crime (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk, 2016). Further, Black women represent the fastest growing prison population, even surpassing the increasing percentages of Black men incarcerated in American prisons (Bobo and Thompson, 2006). Sociologists have pointed to one policy and its related practices that shifted policing during the War on Drugs and its subsequent increase in the mass incarceration rates of Black community members more than any other in the United States within the last century-zero tolerance policing. (Desmond, Papachristos, and Kirk, 2016). Zero-tolerance policing may be most to blame for Black community's loss of trust in law enforcement.

#### *Historical Context of Racialized Police Violence, The War on Drugs and Mass Incarceration*

Mass incarceration of Black community members resulting from the War on Drugs has its roots in two historic patterns of racial bias. First, a pattern of unequal

protection under the law refers to conditions during times Black folk had no reasonable assurance of police or court protection from white predators. Second, a pattern of unequal enforcement of the law points to the overly harsh treatment of Blacks when suspected of criminal behaviors (Bobo and Thompson, 2006). Formal policing in the United States has its roots in chattel slavery with state-sponsored “Slave Patrols,” groups of white male property owners charged with squashing slave rebellion (Cooper, 2015). Following abolition were “Black Codes” replaced slave patrols and were enforced by police officers, rather than citizen mobs (Cooper, 2015), and were meant to keep recently freed Black men and women under white control through newly criminalized offenses (Cooper, 2015).

Between 1880 and 1980, the United States’ total incarceration increased by approximately 285,000 individuals. However, President Reagan’s 1982 re-dedication to Nixon’s 1973 declaration of the War on Drugs created a federal drug taskforce, increased anti-drug spending, and “demonized” both drug users and drug use (Cooper, 2015). This resulted in an approximately 1.1 million inmates increase in total incarceration by 2000. This increase was 206 times that of total population increase of 12 percent, and well above all other Western countries (Bobo and Thompson, 2006). The prison population continued to grow beyond 2000, was 1.5 million in 2007 (Cooper, 2015), and is now more than 2 million, the majority of which resulted from drug convictions (Alexander, 2011). Although people of different races use and sell drugs at similar rates, this increase was largely due to drug convictions of the poor, and Black and Latino males (Bobo and Thompson, 2006; Alexander, 2011). Racial and ethnic disparities in arrests also increased

during the war on drugs. Between 1976 and 1992, the white and Black populations in the United States were 82% and 12% respectively. However, drug-related arrest rates for Blacks during this time increased from 22%-40%, while for whites drug-related arrests dropped from 77%-59% (Cooper, 2015).

While many Americans have supported policies that ‘get tough’ on drugs, they did so under the false belief that illicit drug use and sales increased levels of violent crime. However, crime waves have been attributed to demographic waves since the late 1960’s and early 1970’s (Sagi & Wellford, 1969; Ferdinand, 1970; Wellford, 1973). The truth of the matter is that when the War on Drugs was enacted, violent crime was decreasing (Bobo and Thompson, 2006; Alexander, 2011). More than a system of crime control, the War on Drugs functioned as a system of social control over communities that are poor, Black and Latino (Alexander, 2011; Camp and Heatherton, 2016). As Alexander noted (2011), once a person has been labeled a felon (through a War on Drugs conviction), all the old forms of discrimination are now able to be applied. Discrimination in housing, employment, education, and are all legal once a person has been labeled a felon.

Structural oppression and discrimination was met by criminologists with “broken windows” theory on one hand, and zero tolerance policies on the other. Developed by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, broken windows theory views the breakdown of social control in local contexts as due to unchecked disorders (Gau, 2010). Left unchecked, these signs of disorder, such as litter on sidewalks, graffiti or vandalism, and abandoned houses or stores, indicate residents are unwilling or unable to exercise

informal control and that local law enforcement is similarly tolerant of such criminal or deviant behaviors. Social disorder here is characterized as teens hanging out on street corners, low-level drug sales, panhandling, prostitution, and other violation of social norms which make area residents uncomfortable. This breakdown of social order then leads to increased crime and increased concentration of criminals in these areas, which in-turn, leads non-criminal residents to withdraw from public spaces, leaving them open to more criminal activity (Gau, 2010). Broken windows theory, and the order-maintenance techniques that resulted from it, has been associated with ‘stop-and-frisk’ policing tactics, a disproportionate targeting of minorities, has no impact on serious crime, and leads to mass incarceration (Camp and Heatherton, 2016).

These ‘zero tolerance’ policies, informed by “broken windows” theory, legitimized extra surveillance, search, seizure, and violence aimed at members of poor, Black, and Latino communities (Camp and Heatherton 2016). Policies informed by theories based in stereotypes of Blacks and Latinos as criminals have justified the constant, disproportionate surveillance of Black and Latino communities. Members of these communities are more likely to be searched, exposed to force, arrested, and mistreated by police (Kahn, Goff, Lee, and Motamed, 2016). These policies, whether intentional or not, have also lead to further protection of whites and whiteness, as Kahn et al (2016) found increased severity of physical force by police when interacting with individuals with phenotypes stereotypically associated with Blacks and Latinos, and decreased severity for whites, thus whites are essentially shielded and protected from police brutality and its associated negative health outcomes (Alang, S., McAlpine, D.,

McCreedy, E., & Hardeman, R., 2017). This research speaks directly to the impact of white supremacy within our criminal justice system on the health and wellness of community members traumatized by state-sanctioned police brutality (Alang et al, 2017).

Ramped-up, militarized and zero-tolerance form of policing implemented at the beginning of the War on Drugs has not slowed since the savage beating four Los Angeles Police Department officers, thrust a savage beating upon Rodney King with kicks from their boots, taser-gun shocks, and 54 baton strokes that left him severely damaged (Rabinowitz, 2015). State violence taking the form of police brutality has been the natural progression of such policies. Alang et. al (2017) expand upon the definition of police brutality as “police conduct that is not merely mistaken, but taken in bad faith, with the intent to dehumanize and degrade its target” to include that dehumanization and degradation occur “even in the absence of conscious intent” (n.p. 2017). Against a dominant narrative of racial progress in the United States, police brutality against Blacks in America may seem to have increased in recent years. Considering what seem like weekly (sometimes more) grisly images of lifeless Black body after bloody Black body on newscasts, it is arguable zero-tolerance policies and broken windows policing led directly to the deaths (both high and low-profile) of Black citizens at the hands of law enforcement (Camp and Heatherton, 2016). This constant barrage of images has a profoundly negative impact on the health of Black individuals, whether they witness police brutality and killings of Black folk on television or in their own communities (Alang et al, 2017).

The current climate of aggressive policing also impacts Latino communities. Within the current sociopolitical climate, families and individuals who reside in sanctuary communities and have been negatively oppressed by the mass incarceration that resulted from the war on drugs (Alexander, 2011) have things to say about their experiences, and society should hear their voices so that we might suggest policy measures to heal these communities. In 2012, California had an estimated undocumented immigrant population of approximately 2.8 million people (Baker and Rytina, 2013). With institutions of higher education navigating the possible repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (Change.Org n. d), deportation centers and local jail facilities full to the brim with individuals caught up in the war on drugs, several military installations, and a contentious relationship between Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other law enforcement agents and the communities which they are sworn to protect.

San Diego County, CA was an ideal setting in which to conduct this research. It is a sanctuary county (Griffith and Vaughn, 2017), borders Tijuana, Mexico, and stretches all the way to Orange County, CA, with border patrol checkpoints along all major freeways. Accounting for more than 33 percent of the population of San Diego County (US Census Bureau n. d.), many Latino families and individuals have already been impacted; women who are victim of domestic violence, mothers and fathers of young children, and their families.

Mass incarceration resulting from the failed war on drugs has had a serious impact on San Diego County communities. According to the (2013) California Department of Corrections data, the total prison populations for Blacks, Latinos, and



Whites were 29.4%, 41.3%, and 23% respectively. However, the state population for these groups is only 5.8% Black, 39% Latino, and 38.8% White (Lopez, 2014). The disproportionate incarceration of Blacks and Latinos relative to their population, particularly resulting from incarceration from drug charges (Beckett, Nyrop, and Pfingst, 2006) is but one glaring example of the forms of structural oppression community members face. Mass incarceration results in the systemic breakdown of families, a painful reality for many in San Diego. Community members are fed up with broken windows policing and its brutality, domestic violence, and poverty in the era of mass incarceration. The deployment of broken windows policing, its extra surveillance, brutality, and obvious deployment against Black and Brown, and poor people has given rise to community level resistance across the country (Camp and Heatherton, 2016).

Poets have a long tradition of speaking truth to power, calling out structural, political, and social oppressions. Speaking their truth to the over use of power by law enforcement officials is one way in which poets are addressing the interactions between police and the communities they are sworn to protect and serve (Camp and Heatherton, 2016). Social movements against structural oppression have embraced poetry as an oral tradition by performing the “the power of language, the musicality of language, the vividness of language, to move people, to win the proverbial hearts and minds...to effect social change” (Camp and Heatherton, 2016). Violence against these communities has been met with grassroots resistance from members of these communities. After the events surrounding the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Rekia Boyd, and hundreds of other non-armed Black people, the Black Lives Matters organizing effort was developed

to address inequities in police response (Camp and Heatherton, 2016). Within this tradition, poets in the San Diego spoken-word community are addressing issues of police brutality and mass incarceration in a type of collective recovery from community trauma related to structural oppression that helps community members understand trauma and woundedness, promotes reengagement and resilience with community (Pearlman, 2013).

*Deep Memories-Even if Not Our Own: The Pain of Police Brutality*

One very poignant way in which poets within the Café Cabaret, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday Jihmye, Black Xpression, and Palabras communities addressed police brutality and mass incarceration at open-mics was giving historical context and connections to contemporary issues of police brutality and mass incarceration. One of the ways in which these forms of oppression are situated is within an historical context. Poets from across both sites and all open-mics spoke both directly and in metaphor while calling audience members with them back to slave masters and patrols, Jim Crow, the relegation of Native peoples to reservations, state-sanctioned lynching, institutional racism, and high-profile cases of vigilante racism and violence against Black girls, women, boys, and men. Experiences with police brutality and mass incarceration are related by poets directly, relationally, historically and in metaphor. Poets perform pieces across all sites that link police violence and brutality against oppressed peoples through time, place, and space.

Poets in these spaces speak not only to their own histories, but to the history of our nation, of white supremacy, of Jim Crow from within a white family, and having to overcome racist socialization. During one reading, a white middle-age woman took the mic. She read a piece about being shielded from the racist reality of our country as a

young girl, not knowing about the vigilante racism that killed Emmitt Till, or why Rosa Parks had been arrested in that bus. The piece speaks of questioning one's privilege and teaching new generations the truth of our histories. On the same night, a middle-age white male poet spoke of unlearning the lessons taught him by his racist father and learning new lessons on agitation and social justice from a former member of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

Through the spoken-word poets of San Diego, California, one can get schooled in the history of law enforcement officials as agents of white supremacy in the United States. In metaphor, police are described as predatory animals lusting after bodies to kill—sometimes invisible, unseen but always felt, as they search for their next target. Scenes of the old west are drawn upon, likening contemporary lawmen to those of the wild west like Wyatt Earp, on the prowl for their next kill. In some pieces, metaphor is mixed with vivid descriptions of young Black women and men being killed at church, in jail, in poor neighborhoods, coming home from a party. Anywhere in America, it seems, Black and Brown bodies are constantly in the crosshair sights of police hunting parties.

Social justice movements and protests against racial oppression are also called out in these spaces. Often pieces include a historical situating of state-sanctioned racial oppression and violence. One such piece directly calls the audience to recall the 1965 riots against integration in public schools in Texas, the 1968 Watts Riots in California, the 1968 riots at the National Democratic Convention, the police killing of unarmed Michael Brown in 2014, and the August 2017 killing of a female protestor in Charlottesville, Virginia (in which police were brought in to protect white nationalist

groups from protestors). In another performance piece, the ongoing protest against police brutality engaged by former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick was directly mentioned. In several other pieces, the civil rights movement, Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, the American Indian Movement, and Black Lives Matter are directly mentioned. These call-outs come from a racially and ethnically diverse group of poets ranging in age from teens to over 70-years-old and speak directly to structural oppression at the hands of law enforcement.

#### *Mass Incarceration and Latino Communities*

State violence related to both the history of and current policies used by state agents of the Immigration Customs and Enforcement Agency (ICE) is also present in the spoken-word poetry performed at open-mics in San Diego, Ca. Mass incarceration in the form of private border prisons has grown significantly in the last decade. Much has been written in sociological and criminological scholarship examining the effects of mass incarceration on Black communities, particularly Black males, but far less attention has been paid to how this system of oppression impacts Latino communities. Although immigration laws are civil, not criminal (Patler and Branic, 2017) the Latino prison population in the United States grew by almost fifty percent between the years of 2001-2011, reaching over 330,000 (Kilgore, 2011). By 2013, this number would grow to almost 480,000 (Patler and Branic, 2017). Much of this growth was facilitated by the Patriot Act which included immigration laws mandating prison time for felony convictions that previously resulted in only deportations (Kilgore, 2011). The private prison industry capitalized on the new provisions, controlling nearly fifty percent of the

immigration detention industry, but only 8 percent of total prisons in the United States (Kilgore, 2011).

Individuals are held in deportation facilities for one or more years before their eventual removal, prolonging the negative impact and trauma associated with mass incarceration for incarcerated individuals and their families (Patler and Branic, 2017). Prolonged detention prior to deportation impacts families economically, psychologically, and emotionally, resulting in a type of secondary prisonization. Secondary prisonization is the experience through which “legally innocent people come to experience the effects of incarceration indirectly due to their sustained contact with the correctional institution, characterized, for example, by dealing with guards and being subject to invasive searches (Comfort, 2003).

Expressions of pain related to trauma experienced through state violence via anti-immigration policies and mass incarceration were most present in the Palabras, Café Cabaret, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday Jihmye open-mics. During these readings, audiences witness the collective and individual pain of state violence aimed at undocumented individuals, families, and their communities. Pieces performed at Palabras, Café Cabaret, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday, tended to center on the concept of borders, assimilation, migration, poverty, labor, and violence. Conceptualizing borders as invisible, tangible, of the body, of nation, of race, of gender, these pieces provide a wonderful insight into how mass incarceration in the form of assimilationist policies and violent policing have impacted Latino community members in San Diego, while situating these stories in historical context. During the trip to Tijuana, Mexico with the Café Cabaret, poets discussed the border in

many ways through their poetry. To these poets, the border is fluid- everywhere and nowhere. It is imagined, and yet it kills. Listening to these poets, we learn that for them, the border is more than that of just nation. It is also of class, and of race, of gender, and of space. For these poets, the border exists between the barrio and the suburbs, the fields and the slaughterhouses, the southern valley and the northern forests. For the poets of San Diego, the border follows when it is set on you, for the border *is* you.

At Café Cabaret, stereotypes about Mexican immigrants were directly addressed. The poet stepped up to the mic and apologized for the current of anger running through his poems as of late and told the audience he would read a piece inspired by President Trump, that he wrote as a therapeutic exercise. This piece encapsulated much of what was expressed related to immigration across all sites. Poets expressed anger at the history of forced assimilation, of being labeled as less than human ‘aliens’ who are the worst of what Mexico has to offer. Within both the Palabras and Café Cabaret sites, poets expressed anger at the negative stereotypes of Mexican migrant workers, and the environmental racism waged on them through chemicals sprayed over the fields. Family separation was a theme across these poems, as well. Mass incarceration in the form of ICE detention centers and the trauma of family disruption were also expressed in these spaces.

Themes relating pain and trauma to immigration and ICE raids, loss of community and family members due to deportation, harsh conditions, and violent coyotes emerged at all open-mics except for Black Xpression. For poets at Palabras, Café Cabaret, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday open-mics, poets across racial, gendered, national, and sexual

identities expressed a keen awareness and concern of the histories, policies, and current atrocities related to immigration. Both metaphor and direct language were used within poems that speak to this theme. One recurring subtheme within this area is death. The concept of death related to borders and border crossing, whether imagined, real, or fluid appeared across Café Cabaret, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday/Revolutionary Poets and Palabras open-mics.

The border region encompassed by San Diego was said to include but not be defined by a border, as the border travels with those it chooses to marginalize. At the Café Cabaret open-mics, borders of the body were particularly prescient. Borders of the body include race, gender, color, and are performed in such a way that audience members must reconcile with the sense of border-bound bodies as provided both for their exploitation and the pleasure of denial from the dominant group. A strong sense of being used then discarded appears across poems performed in this space.

From these poets, the border is an all-encompassing but unseen force that is everywhere. From this community, the border is described as being both non-existent and in your mind. The border both defines countries and divides them. It is in cities and workplaces, families and the fields. It is within labor and homes where individuals perform pieces describing people being hunted at and by the border. It hunts their children too, the border. At their schools, and in their playgrounds, busses, hospitals, police stations, and anywhere adults are supposed to be helping kids. The border hunts them even there. These pieces are performed with a sense anger and loss, not just of being surveilled, but surveilled to death.

Death and dying related to the border and border crossings are present across poetry at the Revolutionary Poets Brigade and Café Cabaret open-mics. Death is explicitly stated in these pieces and is applied to many groups who have crossed many types of borders. The Revolutionary poets' pieces also included a more global perspective of borders than across the other open-mics. During one particularly explosive reading, a well-known and regarded poet within this and the larger Slam and spoken-word circles of the area took the mic. A Black woman of perhaps 50 or so years performed with thunderous fervor about African immigrants who crossed the border of race and space and sex and nation. Of the Mexican mother who crossed the borders of Chula Vista to strawberry fields. Of Cubans who crossed borders of nation and class and race and space. Each one built on the next calling the audience with her into memory of institutional racism and colonialism. Imperialism and war. It is worth mention here that not all people crossed the border. Again, this poet spoke about the borders crossing people, rather than the other way around. Specific groups called out for having borders crossed against them were Mexican-Americans, Native-Americans, Cuban and other refugees.

An interesting note here is the ways in which death were used in metaphor across the Café Cabaret, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and Revolutionary poets' readings. Across all three open-mics, death was related in terms of being cold. Sometimes it was the cold that caused death. More often the cold was the final state of death for loved ones. This is not so uncommon by itself. It is the ways in which the poets performed their losses, the ways in which they spoke of their ancestors, the pain that their enslavement causes, not *caused*



them. ICE is mentioned several times across this theme. It is often interplayed with *ice*, particularly in pieces where ICE officers and their intentions are linked with colonialism and racism. Here we also see poets speaking back against their animalistic construction in calling out ICE agents as animals.

Poets painted vivid pictures with their words and tone. Several pieces included a type of counting or listing off the ways in which the border and its agents kill. Like much of the other works, these are historically situated, and tend to center around segregation, incarceration, assimilation. At Palabras, the dead are remembered as being moved from one space to another by the powerful using their military and militia, creating a community of migrants from the North, East, and South who are laborers and travelers with shared struggles. One of these that is relayed in a way that directly links the concept of the body as a border with mass incarceration and immigration.

Pieces including mention of families separated by the borders of a prisons were present across all sites. Those related specifically with immigration and detention facilities were, again, most present at the Café Cabaret, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday/Revolutionary Poets Brigade, and Palabras open-mics. Pieces such as those that describe members of impoverished communities, over-surveilled communities, and particularly vulnerable to the system of oppression as they exist within the matrix, for Latina and other undocumented women in abusive relationships, they face multiple oppressions related to the intersection of their nation, gender, and often class. These pieces provide a concrete example of how community members link their own experiences to structural oppression,

and as knowledge agents, are expressing their understanding of the causes and maintenance of structural oppression in their lives.

*We See All Y'all: Links Between Multiple Forms of Structural Oppression*

Poets across Black Xpression, Café Cabaret, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday/Revolutionary Poets, and Palabras open-mics provide insider understanding of the links between structural oppression and state violence. Police and ICE brutality, poverty, mental health, family disruption, gendered violence, community violence, and racism emerged through poetry as either directly or indirectly linked with mass incarceration, including the rise of deportation facilities. Utilizing an intersectional criminological framework rooted in the tenets of Black Feminism allows the researcher to view poet's as knowledge agents concerned with the interlocking nature of systems of oppression as related themes emerge through their poetry.

Poets at Palabras, Café Cabaret, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday/Revolutionary open-mics were more connected with state violence related to immigration and border patrol, ICE, and the Trump administration than at Black Xpression. Emergent themes related to mass incarceration as structural oppression were also historically situated and defined within poetry performed at the three open mics mentioned above. Family disruption, mental health, police brutality, and poverty as causes leading to mass incarceration emerged across all four open-mic readings, including Black Xpression. Much like the researcher, poets approach these issues as overlapping, or interlocking, rather than occurring independently.

Poems addressing the causes of mass incarceration closely align with the feelings expressed across open-mic readings related to being hunted, unwanted, and under constant attack, whether structurally or interpersonally. ICE and Immigration and Border patrol agents were expressly called out most at Revolutionary Poets open-mics. This may be due to the close ties this group of poets has to the 100 Thousand Poets for change organization that has a strong focus on immigration as social justice in the area. The high prevalence of poems attending to structural causes across the Revolutionary Poets and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday Jihmye open mics may also be related to the demographics of these spaces. As these two open-mics are both held at Café Cabaret in the Normal Heights neighborhood, it makes sense that the community of poets here would reflect larger neighborhood demographics. As such, poets here tend to be, on average, older, whiter, working or middle-class, and may be more formally educated than those at Palabras and Black Xpression, which both have more poets of color who tend to be younger.

Youthfulness, however, does not negate the ability for the young poets of color to be knowledge agents analyzing the interlocking systems of oppression impacting their lives. In fact, poverty, mental health and drug abuse were all directly related to mass incarceration through the young poets at Palabras and Black Xpression. One of the more striking pieces here tied depression to drug abuse that led directly to incarceration. We can see here that poets are using multifocal and intersecting systems of oppression when they link poverty to that depression and lack of access to adequate mental health care. Poems here revealed a keen understanding of how systems of oppression intersect and overlap, further indicating that community members not only view mass incarceration as

a system of oppression, but that systems of oppression work in conjunction with instead of separate from one another.

Mental illness and mental health emerged across all four open-mics. These were both present in poems describing how depression can be visibly worn on the bodies of people in their everyday lives, and in the ways members of these communities hide depression from others. Depression appeared most prevalently at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and Black Xpression open-mics, but in very distinct ways. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday poets, depression and other mental health issues such as PTSD were often in poems that were either related to or performed by veterans. The veterans' poems containing reference to depression tend to be written in more direct language without much metaphor. This has the effect of making it hard to ignore the realization that members of the larger San Diego community coexist with homeless veterans in their every-day lives.

At Black Xpression, depression was also performed directly and in metaphor, but much more related to stress, pressure, and anxiety from young people. In one such performance, a no more than twenty-something looking woman of color, perhaps Puerto Rican, dedicated an entire piece to her depression. She spoke about depression being ever-present, yet constantly hidden behind a dramaturgy of faces indicating she is just fine, thank you very much. Her piece reminds me in a way of Melissa Harris Perry's chapter titled "The Crooked Room" in which she describes the warped social structures in which Black women must find their footing. The way the young woman holds her arms and sways with her eyes closed as she weaves together her depression and gives it to the audience. That is the sense, that she has packaged it, and given it to us to think and

reflect on, long after we go home. Particularly when reminded to check in on our neighbors, complete with stats on mental health.

Mental health was presented as interlocking with not only state violence but also with poverty and drugs. The theme of poverty appeared across all four open-mics, indicating that poverty is a social justice issue of concern for two very different San Diego communities. Across the Black Xpression and Palabras open-mic readings, poverty was referred to in pieces that described adults and children as experiencing food insecurity. There were also direct links between childhood poverty and the prison industrial complex at several readings across the four sites. Low-level crimes such as theft and shoplifting were directly related to parents with food insecure children. Common themes related to poverty such as stress related to unpaid bills, and the stereotypes placed on poor black men as criminals. Here, limited access to adequate mental health services were related through metaphor to the prison industrial complex, community violence, juvenile gang affiliation and involvement.

For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and Revolutionary Poets open-mics mental health and poverty intersected with poor veterans. At these open mics, PTSD directly related to war was common. These poems reflect mental health and poverty for veterans mainly from the Vietnam War era. I heard a story once from a family member that he'd observed a veteran family member and his friends from Vietnam during an extended stay. He described a group of older men (our family member was of our parents' generation) who seemed to be transported back in time as they told stories of Vietnam. The PTSD relayed through poems performed by veterans all about atrocities witnessed during the Vietnam

War era. It makes me wonder as I leave after a long reading at Café Cabaret one evening how many of the younger vets we see in the San Diego area are suffering PTSD from wars in their era. I also wonder when we will do something about the structure that deters vets suffering from the debilitating mental illness from seeking help under threat of benefits loss. The first campus I started teaching sociology after graduate school has a fairly large military student body. The military and military-related students in my classes often reported on the stigma associated with seeking mental health resources for veterans from the Iraq and Iran War eras. The realization that one county has such a high population of homeless veterans suffering from PTSD due in no small part to stigma is troubling is a gross understatement.

The overlapping of poverty and family disruption was also identified not only as a result, but as a cause of mass incarceration. At Black Xpression, a young poet expressed an enormous amount of pain and vulnerability he felt as a young child growing up with both parents impacted by mass incarceration. In no more than five minutes, the audience learns this young man's father was incarcerated for drug related crimes, and his mother for poverty related crimes, throwing the family into further disruption, as a result of the initial disruption from the father's incarceration. At the same site poverty and drugs were linked to the separation of families through drug arrests and other state entities like Child Protection Services.

Several references to the institutionalization of family separation were present in poetry performed at Palabras, as well. For the Palabras poets, however, the institutionalization of family separation is more linked to deportation detention centers in

the present and in assimilation schools historically, while the Black Xpression poets link the institutionalization of family separation to poverty and the war on drugs. One of the most striking ways in which poets link state violence to other forms of structural oppression is in relating racism and xenophobia of Mexican immigrants to mass incarceration through deportation facilities and the laws and policies that enabled their exponential growth.

One of the lesser appearing, but no less important links to structural oppression that emerged from this research was between the structures of gender, religion, and education. Gendered violence was presented through poems that referenced the raping of young male parishioners by males in powerful positions within their religious organizations. Gendered violence within schools was mostly centered on girls within the poems included for analysis. There was also an overlapping of race and gender in one heart-wrenching piece describing a date-rape. While listening to the audience respond to performers and their pain, one can see the process of pain packaging and reception of empathy that can exist through performance. The combination of the visual of a large, Black, dark-skinned woman with the auditory of words dancing between melodic voice and choking in the performer's throat was jarring. It also seemed to make some those present quite uncomfortable as a noticeable shifting and murmuring grew to the point of distraction such that the poet stopped and asked for the respect to not have to shout what was already a tough piece to perform.

As in life, racism is woven through, a part of, interlocking and overlapping with all the forms of structural oppression that emerged from the data. The levels of analysis and

historical knowledge present in poems performed at these open-mics varied across readings and sites. Several of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and Revolutionary Poets performed pieces that told the stories of how their families taught them about race. For these poets, many of whom are white, and members of what is commonly referred to as the baby boomer generation, this tended to go one of two ways: ignore or justify. One tells the memory of a father and his teachings of racism, while another tells the story of a mother's complete ignorance of local racial violence, such as the church bomb that was close enough to hear. An interesting distinction along race for performers is that when white performers discuss racism, they tend to relate to more individual memories, while poets of color tend to relate racism through a more collective memory.

For the older baby boomer poets at 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and Revolutionary Poets, institutional racism is explicitly discussed and resisted. Poets of color, whether young or elder, also discuss institutional racism, but tend to link these with other forms of structural oppression within communities of color. Racism at these sites is linked with education and the school to prison pipeline, lack of affordable housing, and employment discrimination. Interestingly, the high-profile deaths of several Black women, girls, boys, and men were most prevalent at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday and Revolutionary Poets open-mics. This may be due to the social club-like and positive atmosphere at Black Xpression, but the absence of such high-profile murders of innocent Black folk seemed peculiar and merits further investigation in the future.

Community disruption due to state violence takes many forms for the San Diego communities of poets reviewed for this research. State violence in the forms of mass



incarceration, institutional racism, and police brutality is linked with other forms of community disruption such as poverty, mental illness, family disruption, and gendered violence. The poets perform their pain and direct the audience to these forms of structural oppression. With open-mic poetry readings like those reviewed here scheduled on every night of the week throughout the county, community members have many opportunities to find an open-mic and listen to the storytellers. They'll hear tales of violence, state and interpersonal. Stories of generations of pain related to the interlocking systems of oppression impacting their communities and the suffering these cause its members. Stories of movements against another slain Black body. Of movements against even one more sexual assault. Such stories of resistance can easily be found on any media outlet by searching #Black Lives and #MeToo. They might also hear something else that is not as prevalent across mass media. They might hear poems, like those collected for this research, of community resistance to structural oppression, and the community of poets engaging in transformative social justice both inside and out of institutions upholding systems of oppression, and rarely in the public eye beyond their own communities. Nevertheless, they resist.

## **CHAPTER 4: Fight the Power: Community Resistance to Structural Oppression**

### INTRODUCTION

This research investigated community-level resistance in the form of spoken-word poetry open-mic events where poems may be used to interrogate structural oppression (Williams, 2012) in efforts to heal communities and members impacted by structural oppression. Healing in this context has the power to transform San Diego County and other communities like it. Therapeutic models teach the packaging of pain in poetic prose, in this case, that which was suffered due to structural oppressions. This packaging of pain due to structural oppressions is potentially healing in two ways. On the one hand, making pain into an object which is distanced from the self, has potential healing power for the poet. On the other hand, audience members, too, can heal by associating their own pain with that of the poets. This can be particularly powerful in the case of shame. Additionally, poetry has the power to evoke empathy in audiences (Williams 2012). For communities impacted by structural oppression, this empathy could lead to recognition-of being human, of being valued, of being part of our society. It is through the ongoing process of receiving and giving empathy that healing may begin on an individual level, while addressing structural oppression through these communities may begin healing at a mezzo or community level. This research identified the locus of community pain, how this pain is associated with structural oppressions, and practical community-level resistance via transformative justice models.

### *Transformative Justice Theory*

Four elements of restorative justice measures constitute a successful resolution which focuses on reintegration as a productive and contributing person within the community; generosity, restitution, behavioral change and amends. Restorative justice measures also value including victims in several stages of the criminal justice process (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007). While useful for this research, restorative justice theories have varying definitions and implications, and do not adequately address structural forms of harm.

Key to transformative justice is the focus on transforming structural forms of injustice such as racism, sexism, and classism, and connecting how the past experiences connect to the present health of individuals, communities, families, and offenders in envisioning a better future. In this way, transformative justice includes a component directed beyond the immediate needs of all community members and toward the structural oppressions impacting them (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2007). This perspective recognizes harms at the political, social, and economic levels while addressing imbalances of power. In recognizing the socio-structural conditions implicit to community and individual harms, transformative justice seeks to empower individuals and communities through needs-based justice that remains restorative while also seeking to “affect social-structural, structural, institutional arrangements, while simultaneously helping those whose lives have been affected by interpersonal conflict” (Capeheart and Milovanovic Kindle Locations 1023-1024). As this study seeks to identify thematic elements of structural harms via spoken-word poetry within communities impacted by

structural oppression, utilizing the lens of transformative justice will provide a more comprehensive analytical framework than a restorative justice model.

*Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality*

This study employs Black Feminist Thought as a critical social theory broadly supporting principles of social justice and empowerment for all oppressed peoples (Collins 2000), in conjunction with intersectionality as an analytical framework. As an analytical tool, intersectionality requires its practitioners to investigate the interstices of categories of sameness and difference in relation to power (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall 2013). This research utilizes the six distinguishing features of Black Feminist Thought. This work links poets' experiences with ideas, in that certain themes emerged out of poets' group knowledge or standpoint. The importance of poets' self-definition in connections between a diverse collective and group knowledge in stimulating resistance is central. Further, in using everyday experiences and actions to ask the right questions in investigations of intersecting systems of oppression, I utilized a Black feminist analysis current with the changing social conditions characteristic of Black women (and thereby other oppressed groups). Lastly, the humanistic vision of Black women's struggles as part of the "wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (Collins 2000: 41) is central to this work. These features were utilized here as an analytical framework to identify emergent themes of structural oppression within spoken-word poetry.

Utilizing Black feminist analysis situates spoken-word poets as knowledge agents who link their everyday experiences with systems of oppression impacting their lives and

the health of their communities. In looking at the spoken-word poetry community of San Diego, CA, this work is further situated within the changing social conditions unique to this area and its community members which are connected to macro structural shifts today. Emergent themes helped me to better understand how spoken-word open mics provide the platform and opportunities toward transformative social justice within this and other communities impacted by structural oppression. Preliminary data collection suggests these spoken-word performances are rich with themes related to structural oppression, including experiences with racism, sexism, mass incarceration, deportation, state, gang and interpersonal violence.

Utilizing intersectionality as an analytical tool (Collins, 2015), this research seeks to understand how multiple intersecting oppressions are relayed by poets in communities suffering from disruption and pain. Such a framework requires researchers to look at the ways in which interlocking systems of oppression function within individual experiences as raced, gendered, and having a class location within society (Collins, 2015). An intersectional analytical framework understands intersecting identities such as race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability, among others, are relational rather than isolated from each other. These identities are co-constructed while underlying and shaping intersecting and interrelated systems of power such as racism and sexism. These intersecting power systems result in a socially constructed and complex set of social inequalities for individuals and communities, like those oppressed by poverty, racism, sexism, and policies and practices associated with the war on drugs, who experience these intersecting identities via their material reality.

As social inequalities are also cross-culturally specific and historically situated, social interactions and unequal material realities will vary depending on the space and time of social interactions. Groups and individuals who occupy various spaces within the matrix of oppression have varying points of view of their own and others' experiences with inequalities, which results in knowledge projects reflecting their social location within systems of power. Intersectionality theory as an analytic tool has the power to shape knowledge projects which challenge the status quo (Collins 2015). Attention to the ways in which poets constructed pain, how this pain is related to their identities, and the ways in which these are related to systemic forms of oppression were included for analysis of spoken-word poetry. Use of these two theories provides a more nuanced understanding of spoken-word poetry as transformative justice while paying attention to intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, documentation status, and sexual identity.

### *Oral Traditions: Storytelling and Spoken-Word Poetry*

Spoken-word, or performance poetry, was born through “Nommo”, or the concept of “the generative power of the word” unique within African traditions of orality. This tradition includes indirection, lyrical quality, rhythm, repetition, soundin’ out, indirection, historical perspective, mythication, and protests white domination (Walker and Kuykendall 2005: 2-3). This concept encompasses performance as an integral component of the telling of stories. Much like the working class Black intellectual blues’ women of the 1920s, spoken-word poets in contemporary settings might be combining their ideals with activism in relating their understanding of their everyday experiences. Spoken-word

poetry, like blues music, has the potential to build social solidarity by relating and commenting on social realities (Collins 2000). This may be particularly powerful for Black women, who have historically been denied male protection, and who bear the brunt of what Collins calls the ‘love and trouble tradition’ (2000:151) between Black women and Black men. Spoken-word poetry has been a growing part of culture for people of color. These performances have been lauded as a means by which poets open their own minds and those of others to the realities of their communities (Walker and Kuykendall 2005).

Research within this theme centers on what we can learn about healing communities of color through oral traditions, storytelling, and spoken-word poetry. Central to this literature is agency, political engagement, and identity. This group of literature focuses solely on what we can learn from such testimonials from people of color, immigrants, and other marginalized groups to foster other types of healing for communities of color. Examining youth politics through spoken-word poetry, Chepp (2014), engages in ethnographic methods which seek to understand how contemporary young adults in a Washington, D.C. spoken-word community use spoken-word to civically and politically engage youth toward social change. Williams (2011) utilizes ethnography and autoethnography to examine the raced and gendered experiences of minority students, faculty, and women. Ellis and Rawicki utilize feminist research methods informed by postmodern feminism while interviewing 45 Holocaust survivors in the Tampa Bay, Florida area.

Much like Chepp's (2014) work, this research utilizes collaborative listening which strives to produce information from public testimonials that will extend beyond the academy to reach lay participants and their families. Williams (2015) utilizes interviews with six adolescent poets in the urban Southwest in her year-long case study of the spoken-word group Young Voices Rise. Williams also engages in field observation of writing workshops and poetry slams, and content analysis of group announcements from social media, to examine group characteristics, practices, and group members' views of their own writings, which Williams used grounded theory to analyze. Lastly, Flynn and Marrast (2008), also engage in participant observation and in-depth interviews which explore spoken-word performance texts from five second-generation Caribbean-Canadians in order understand how spoken-word poetic performance can be used as a new form of social protest.

With a focus on marginalized populations, and specifically communities of color, this literature provides important lessons that inform us what public testimonials rooted in the oral traditions of storytelling and spoken-word can teach us about other types of healing for communities of color, as healing through such public testimonies is present in each literature reviewed here. Of this group, Ellis and Rawicki (2013), Williams (2015), and Williams-White (2011) examined storytelling as public testimonials; Chepp (2014), Flynn and Marrast (2008), Williams (2015), and Williams-White (2011) examined spoken-word poetry as public testimonials. Central to these findings are identity construction, agency, and political activism toward social change for members of structurally oppressed communities.



Ellis and Rawicki's (2013) findings also focus on how the process of collaborative listening as a methodology provide life story narratives as public testimonies that serve to evocatively produce narratives in the voices of the participants. These public testimonies inform healing communities of color as the narratives produced through the collaborative listening process are meant to inform the academy, but also to extend beyond the academy to reach lay participants and their families. This extension beyond academic discourse may be crucial for healing addiction, and other traumas for communities of color through the ongoing process of giving and receiving empathy from spoken-word community members.

Conversely, Williams' (2015) findings speak directly to avenues for healing within communities of color. Williams finds that the Young Voices Rise group of young poets created a community of practice offering a safe place for storytelling that teaches distinct writing practices which fostered a sense participants' 'writing selves', which participants reported had not only changed their writing, but changed them, as well. In relation to the topic of healing for communities of color, Williams' work speaks directly to the systemic, institutional, and social sources of pain within this community of color. These findings suggest spoken-word poetic performance as public testimonies serve as instruction for not only academics, but also civic, political, and community members toward healing communities of color.

Lisa Williams-White's (2011) findings suggest that spoken-word performance as poetic storytelling moves critical qualitative research methodologies forward with the potential for interpretive scholarship with, within, and about Black, ethnic, and minority

cultures. These findings provide valuable insights in what such critical inquiry can teach us about healing these and other types of trauma within communities of color. Lastly, Williams-White's autoethnographic exploration via spoken-word poetic performance identified the traumatic impact of racism, white privilege, silence, sexism, and marginalization within the raced and gendered experiences of minority students, faculty, and women. These findings serve to directly inform upon other types of trauma experienced by individuals within communities of color, and common with other research reviewed here, also suggest that public testimonies in the form of spoken-word poetry can serve to heal these and other types of trauma for communities of color.

Examining youth politics through spoken-word poetic performance as public testimonials, Chepp (2014) found three social change processes carried out by group members that speak directly to healing for communities of color. In the first of these processes, called 'speaking truths', participants used spoken-word to draw upon lived experiences (or lived truths) as political and moral sources of knowledge that guided and legitimated their messages for social change. Like Ellis and Rawicki's (2013) findings, through the second process, Chepp (2014) found participants were able to not only heal themselves, but also others within their communities by writing and performing these truths to reach, and teach, beyond the academy. Central to this research, Chepp found narratives function as poetic word therapy for participants by placing themselves, and more important to this research, their communities able to do social justice work. Chepp calls this social justice work 'New School Activism' which is used to advocate for social justice causes, build political networks, and mobilize others into political action. Flynn

and Marrast's findings focus on what these public testimonies can teach us about the realities of Black Canadian life, including police brutality, the dispensability of Black lives, and stereotyping media messages, all of which significantly impact, and often block healing from trauma for communities of color. One crucial lesson unique to this study's findings is that 2nd generation artists show that the contemporary Black Canadian (like those in other Black and communities of color), is a hybridized subject with multiple cultural identities that appropriate and change existing forms of expression as cultural expressions.

It is within such cultural expression that we learn lessons illuminating avenues toward transformative social justice and healing for other oppressed communities. While the spoken-word communities in San Diego, CA address the realities of communities and their members in this region, poets here engage performance as social protest (Flynn and Marrast 2008), and collaborative listening (Ellis and Rawicki 2013). This research seeks to identify emergent themes related specifically to transformative social justice within a diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community of poets within structurally oppressed communities. At time when the President of the United States makes supportive statements about violent white supremacist groups and spews racist vitriol about Mexican immigrants, members of structurally oppressed communities must find radical approaches to healing from oppression.

### *Testimonios*

Other research focuses on the public testimonials of Latinas and Chicanas, called Testimonios. More than stories, Testimonios are intended to educate community

members about systemic racism, white privilege, complex power relations, that foster a more relational consciousness among Chicanas that attends to their unique histories with and impacts of structural oppression. The intent is that the education provided through Testimonios about the social, racial, and economic barriers will inspire other individual responses to systems of oppression in these communities that engage in the struggle against these systems.

Bynum (2016) reviews *The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement* by Mario T. García which utilized grounded theory in a secondary content analysis of oral history interviews. Grounded theory is appropriate for examining how Testimonios serve as more than just stories to educate others to foster continued dedication to the struggles this community faces. Cueva (2013) used critical race theory in which to examine power, and Chicana feminist epistemologies, including third space, or contemporary Chicana feminism, and the path of *conocimiento*, a concept developed by Gloria Anzaldúa. This perspective is particularly useful in lessons that guide transformative practices to heal communities of color, as it encourages the use of painful memories, lived experiences, and traumatic events by which to learn how to navigate through various forms of oppression, emerging as active political agents who use experiences in service of helping others. This develops not only a healing of the individual, but serves to humanize the experiences of the oppressed, making it particularly useful in research seeking pathways toward healing communities of color. Beyond the psychological and emotional impact such forms of oppression have for 21st century Chicanas, these perspectives provide a framework by which to examine the

mechanisms of institutional, social, and economic oppression individuals and communities of color face, which can inform avenues toward transformative justice as community healing.

Like Cueva, Hedrick (2003) reviews Karin Rosa Ika's *Chicana Ways*, utilizing Chicana and U.S. 3rd World Feminisms in combination with Womanist and Black Feminist theoretical perspectives to analyze what Testimonios from a Latina Feminist Group to not only discuss difference, but also move women in these communities toward a more relational consciousness and practice among Latinas. This relational consciousness and practice may also provide lessons toward healing other communities of color from related traumas. Hedrick (2003) explains Ika's framework using Nietzsche's concept of resentment, or what sociologists refer to as strain theory, that focuses on the frustration resulting from a lack of freedom and thus, power to control one's own decisions, or obstacles toward achieving one's goals (Schmalleger 2016) frames an examination of cultural resistance, and bears witness to individual responses to systems of oppression.

In utilizing theories unique and specific to people of color, Testimonios research illuminates the multilayered intersectionally oppressive systems within which these individuals, groups, and communities exist. Perlman's examination found that individuals engage in multiple modes of everyday resistance that test the power and mechanisms of these oppressive systems. Covert engagement, as exemplified in spoken-word metaphor, is one way in which these boundaries are tested, and further support the use of Testimonios as public narratives. Although the body of literature examined here

addresses many of the social, cultural, political, and institutional causes of community trauma, it falls short of examining much of the contemporary state violence upon, and disruption to, Black and Latino communities in relation to the War on Drugs and its subsequent mass incarceration impacting these communities. However, this literature provides robust examples of research methods, design, and theories within which to examine pathways toward addressing some of the related pain in these communities.

This research examines public testimonials of community pain within the spoken-word poetic community in a city where Blacks and Latinos and others have experienced systemic oppression via mass incarceration, the war on drugs, racism, sexism, transphobia, state and interpersonal violence. This study draws upon and builds on critical scholarship, feminist research design, extended case-study methods, content analysis, and Intersectionality as an analytical tool. Further, this research adds to the growing body of work utilizing Black feminist and transformative justice theories to analyze the public performances of spoken-word poets will help frame traumatic experiences within the matrix of structural oppressions in which they are suffered. Understanding and identifying the intersecting structural oppression impacting poets' lives may help to suggest pathways that serve as lessons toward healing, and possibly toward transformative social justice within oppressed communities.

I utilize Mill's (1940) concept of vocabularies of situated motives. This concept views motives as "one which is to the actor and to the other members of a situation an unquestioned answer to questions concerning social and lingual conduct" (Mills 1940:5). According to Mills, when we utilize motives, we are not describing social action, but

attempting to influence others and ourselves, thus motives are social instruments. I collected public testimonies via spoken-word poetic performances within communities with histories of, and/or recent experiences of trauma related to structural oppression. While poets certainly express trauma and pain related to structural oppression, these public testimonies are also used as social instruments to motivate resistance. True to their roots in the African Diaspora and Testimonios, poets at Palabras and Café Cabaret also express and make calls for resistance to the forms of structural oppression impacting their communities. Resistance to the structural oppression of racism and related stereotypes, poverty and systems of residential segregation, gendered and state violence in the forms of police brutality, mass incarceration, immigration and border patrol were present in poems across all four open-mics reviewed for this project.

*Resisting Racism: Defensive Othering and Claiming Histories*

Black Xpression began mid-2016 with a group of student performers from the community at a local restaurant. The open-mic was also held at a local church on Logan Avenue in Barrio Logan before moving to its current location in La Bodega Art Gallery (Daily Aztec, 2017). Its co-founder's community link to local colleges continues to show each Friday night as young and creative people of color come from around the county to share themselves, their experiences, their joy and their pain, with each other. One of the co-founders was quoted as describing the open-mic in four words "Black. Empowerment. Unity. Community" (Daily Aztec 2017), but also pointed out that this community is for anyone who has felt silent or "othered."

Othering, or the process by which a dominant group defines an inferior group through invented categories, usually results in and reproduces inequality, and can take three forms; oppressive othering, implicit othering, and defensive othering. Against being defined as the problem (Dubois, 1903). Oppressive othering takes place when one group defines another as morally and intellectually inferior, as with racial classification schemes (Schwalbe et al., 2000:422-23). Defensive othering occurs within subordinate groups via deflection of stigmas placed upon them by the dominant group (Schwalbe et al., 2000:425). Knowingly or not, the cofounders of Black Xpression engage in defensive othering each Friday night as they engage in a collective positivity that goes against the stigma of Black urban youth in the United States.

The poetry at Palabras also contained expressions of resistance to racism and its mechanisms. Related to the Testimonios tradition, poets at Palabras performed pieces that directly linked historical events and policies of racist oppression, and violence to the segregation and containment for Native, Chicana, and Mexican peoples. Toward this end, the co-founders of Palabras resist structural oppression by rehabilitating an abandoned warehouse in the historical Barrio Logan community. In providing this space for local community members, the Palabras Art Gallery also engages in transformative justice through art, education, community involvement, and racial segregation. Honoring the history of this vibrant community through art is the most prevalent way the Palabras open-mic community engages in defensive othering as resistance to the pervasive racist construction of Latinx people in contemporary United States society.



The 2nd Tuesday/Revolutionary poets at Café Cabaret are the most diverse group included in this research. So much that I was struck at the diversity of this space. Not just the poets, but of the diverse understanding of intersecting systems of oppression this community of poets reflects through their words. Middle-age and slightly older appearing white poets package painful memories of racist family members as primary agents of socialization and shedding those lessons. One such poet spoke of the shame she felt in not knowing of the atrocities of race as a child, or why she could no longer play with her childhood friend. In calling out the ways in which racism is taught to them as white children, poets at Café Cabaret are in direct resistance to that socialization. Further, in calling themselves out, relating how coming to the realization in the ways in which they were impacted by these lessons and calling for other whites to do the same, resists racism by offering a way out of racist thinking. The diversity of this community leads to poetry that indicates community members here are keenly aware of the ways in which systems of oppression work against racial and ethnic groups not their own.

White middle-age and slightly older, often veterans of wars and social justice movements of the 1960s era, the Revolutionary Poets Brigade and 2nd Tuesday/ Jihmye poets express strong resistance to racism in their poetry. Like Palabras, trauma and pain related to racism emerged in the poems at Café Cabaret open-mics and was historically situated but with a slightly different point of focus. The emcee here speaks often about growing up in a home where racism was pervasive, and the reframing of a non-racist consciousness, an ongoing process. While some of the white poets at the open mics resisted racist socialization in their homes, one of the feature poets at Café Cabaret, a

middle-age Black woman, resists racism by calling out the ways in which borders shift and move not only to prevent entrance, but also movement, advancement and resistance. One piece from this poet stood out as she spoke about borders crossing bodies, not the other way around. In this way, audience members are called in to the realization with her. Where they are used to be somewhere else. Belonged to a different people. The impact of a Black woman speaking these histories was not lost on me. It speaks to the necessity for understanding systems of oppression and how they work, for all oppressed peoples.

Poems at Café Cabaret are not only situated in past historical context, but also include resistance to racist stereotypes perpetuated and supported by the Trump administration against migrant Mexican laborers. In one such piece, the President was directly called out for his statements about Mexico sending drug dealers and rapists to America. This piece, performed by a Latino, was an indictment in direct resistance to racist public sentiments about migrant Mexican workers and families. Resisting the common stereotype of Mexican migrant workers as lazy, immoral, and without work ethic, several poets read pieces wherein defensive othering can be seen.

### *Resisting Poverty*

In resistance to poverty and the structural mechanisms historically blocking the growth of Black community wealth founders of Black Xpression linked up with a local entrepreneurial organization aimed at establishing and growing Black wealth in one of the historically Black neighborhoods in South East San Diego. This connection to resistance within the community was not clear by attending Black Xpression open-mics. I

learned of this link through extended case study methods of searching public forums for information about and by communities.

Poets from Black Xpression join with community members working to feed homeless youth in the area with freshly baked goods. Providing fresh-baked food is a measure of humanity that is often held from homeless and indigent community members. Having my own experience with the dehumanization of county-managed food banks, I was struck at the humanity of this gesture. It was unclear from the YouTube video whether this project to combat poverty is continuing at the time of this writing. This mode of resistance also links with another structural factor impacting poverty in Black communities-unequal access to adequate public education, and the school to prison pipeline. Rather than engaging in brain and cultural drain of Black communities, the young Black college students are giving back to the community by making connections between college students and social justice organizations and local community members.

In March 2018, the Black Xpression community joined forces with “Soulcial Workers”, for their clothing drive, “Benefit 4 Brotherhood.” This clothing drive was focused on obtaining professional menswear appropriate for ages 12-26. Soulcial Workers is a local San Diego area non-profit community arts organization with a mission “to restore hope, inspire healing, and nurture creativity for all youth in vulnerable populations” through “Attitudes, Awareness, and Relationships Training.” Through this collaboration, the Black Xpression community of poets is working within a transformative justice approach in attending to the fallout of structural oppression in their community.

According to their website, the Soulcial Workers organization “works specifically with transition evidence based and rooted in a unique collaboration between creative process and restorative practices” that use performance “to engage youth in creating reflections that enhance self-awareness and incite critical thinking... gain problem solving and leadership skills, develop artistry and gain a better sense of identity” in a safe environment, “where youth can create meaningful connections with their peers, empowering one another through the exploration and sharing of lived experiences” that culminates in “team presentations that tell the story of how these issues impact their community and role they would like to play in affecting change” through the process of “directly from its youth about how they see themselves reflected in the world around them” (<http://www.thesoulcialworkers.com/>). Through this collaboration, whether knowingly or unknowingly, the Black Xpression community is engaging in transformative justice. The Soulcial Workers collective is a living example of the power of pain packaged in performances can help make connections with and heal members of disrupted and structurally oppressed communities.

Members of the Café Cabaret open-mics joined together with the group 100 Thousand Poets for Change, a community of poets, writers, artists, musicians and activists joined together in a movement of transformative justice. The goal of the organization is to create global transformation and change by creating and organizing events based on local needs. Several of the poets from the Café Cabaret site took up this challenge and took their poetry across the border to Tijuana for a food drive at a local

café run by a young couple from Seattle Washington. On one observation night, organizers were collecting cans of food as a form of donation prior to their trip.

After gathering at one members' home that is close to the California/Mexico border at Tijuana, the poets fill their car with bags of donated canned goods and head for Enclave Caracol. This community space provides free food to the community four days a week, offers classes in art, dance, and other educational sources. Here, poets were engaging in binational transformative justice efforts in bridging the 2nd Tuesday Jihmye and Revolutionary poets with poets and activists across the border in Tijuana. In an area that is rife with state, drug, and gang violence on both sides of the border, this work is transformative.

*Resisting State Violence: Higher Education, Mass Incarceration and the School to Prison Pipeline*

Another way in which these communities engage with transformative justice is through linking with local colleges. At one Café Cabaret open-mic, a poet announced that her campus community was hosting an event produced and organized by students that featured poetry from formerly incarcerated students. Events such as these are transformative in that they provide a different vantage point through which the larger community can understand and empathize with these members of their community. When held on college campuses, these events have the power to transform the minds and ideas of young people who will go out in the world, make and enforce laws and policies, and attend to those most vulnerable in our communities.

Working directly against structural oppression, poets from the Café' Cabaret community have worked together to write grants and organize volunteer efforts across the area. One of them funds a poetry-writing workshop in local juvenile halls. It was announced during data collection that a two-year grant had just been awarded so that the workshops can continue. Working in the juvenile and criminal justice systems is important to this community of poets. In keeping with the goal of transformative justice that seeks to highlight local issues of structural oppression for those on the outside, publishing these works in the San Diego Poetry Annual may help to humanize these kids to members of the larger San Diego community. Further, in attending and completing writing workshops, kids who have been adjudicated delinquent have an avenue for packaging their pain, and receiving empathy not only from the workshop facilitators, but also their peers, and perhaps even law enforcement and social workers.

Like the poet community at Black Xpression, the Café Cabaret community of poets also works with youth before they are swept up in the juvenile criminal justice system through their kids' version of the San Diego Poetry Annual. By conducting workshops with local youth, poets engage in transformative justice through poetic intervention. We know that packaging of pain and receiving empathy back from the audience through poetry can heal folk. These poets seem to understand that children are also impacted by structural oppression, and are taking a proactive, community-level intervention-based approach to healing through poetry which has the possible added impact of reaching members of the larger community who may relate to or empathize with what these kids are going through.

*Resisting the Borders of Body and Nation*

Members of the Café Cabaret and Jihmye 2nd Tuesday open-mics joined together with the group 100 Thousand Poets for Change, a community of poets, writers, artists, musicians and activists joined together in a movement of transformative justice (<http://100tpc.org/about-2/>). The goal of the organization is to create global transformation and change by creating and organizing events based on local needs. Several of the poets from the Café Cabaret site took up this challenge and took their poetry across the border to Tijuana for a food drive at a local café run by a young couple from Seattle Washington. On one observation night, organizers were collecting cans of food as a form of donation prior to their trip. From what I can gather, this is an ongoing process, and have seen social media planning future can drives and poetry readings from the Revolutionary Poets' and 100 Thousand Poets for Change.

Through collaborations that are binational, the Revolutionary Poets Brigade engages in resistance to white supremacy in that many of the poets involved are white, male, and at least middle-aged. Engaging with poets in Tijuana, this group engages in resistance to racist constructions of Mexican people by engaging with them on a personal level and sharing in their pain through the art of poetic expression. Perhaps some of these poets engage in this work as change agents with some form of insider status as whites. The meanings poets make of the process of packaging their own pain and receiving others through a process of mutual empathy is a question for future research. However, it is clear the poets observed for this research are acutely aware of and able to express how

structural oppression in the form of immigration and border policies has impacted their communities.

Poets at Palabras also resist the borders of nations through their poetry. During one reading, poets took audience members through the history of borders invading their land, communities and families. Poets here resist the idea that borders are a space or place, instead bodies are the border. In resisting the body as a border, poets remind their audiences that border cross bodies, not the other way around. There is a dream-like sense to these pieces, as poets imagine themselves into birds, flying and crossing and free from borders, resisting their placement and meaning. Performing poetry in a mix of Spanish and English, poets at Palabras resist the southern border by speaking in the language indigenous to the land. It is a useful reminder of the transitory and superfluous nature of borders being drawn over, between and among people. Poets at Palabras remind us of the bloody histories attached to this land. Of prisons and guns and economic exploitation. Of horses and schools and liquor brought to their people as a means of disruption and division. They remind us that the placing of borders across bodies deemed as ‘others’ is not new or aberrant, but a part of the fabric and history of this nation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Poets at both the Palabras and Café Cabaret open-mic sites express resistance to structural oppression in their poetry. As knowledge agents, poets clearly identify racism, state violence, and poverty as structural disruptions to their communities. Related to transformative justice, these poets don’t just speak about it, they be about it! It is clear the Black Xpression and the 2nd Tuesday/Revolutionary Poets Brigade community of poets



engage in community-level efforts fighting poverty and homelessness through canned-food drives and distribution of fresh-baked goods, collaboration with Black entrepreneurial organizations with the goal toward growing Black home and small business ownership in the local historically Black community of South East San Diego, and local and binational social justice organizations.

Poets across both sites engage in resistance against racial stereotypes. For the Black Xpression poets, this takes the form of Black joy as defensive othering. Every Friday night, over one hundred (mostly young) people crowd into the Palabras Art Gallery to engage in Black positivity. In an era when Black death pervades newscasts on what seems like a daily basis, Black positivity and joy are necessary for healing from the damage caused to members of communities blighted by the war on drugs, police brutality, and the poverty that has remained in many of these communities. Resistance against mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline, poets from the Café Cabaret and Palabras communities engage in poetry writing workshops for vulnerable populations such as juveniles both in and not yet in the juvenile justice system.

Maintaining identity and speaking truth to each other about their pain, poets at Black Xpression, Palabras, 2nd Tuesday/Revolutionary Poets' open-mics call for resistance to several forms of structural oppression. They resist the silencing of their histories by speaking of resistance movements through time and space. They resist racist construction of Mexican migrants by telling the stories of mothers looking for work, so they may feed their children. They resist state violence by calling out specific forms of it, lest we forget it is ever present. They resist shame by speaking about sexual and

interpersonal violence, depression, anxiety, and addiction. They resist white supremacy by coming together across racial and ethnic identities, sharing their pain and their histories. They resist by continuing to heal through the expression of their pain, empathizing with each other, and addressing the structural causes of that pain within their communities.

## **CHAPTER 5: Future Implications for Transformative Social Justice Interventions**

### INTRODUCTION

I spent the last year collecting and analyzing data for this dissertation. Working on this project has provided me with a foundation for identifying and evaluating the impact of the various forms of structural oppression impacting members of two disrupted communities. I have been able to document the most prescient themes of structural oppression that community members relay through their poetry as agents of knowledge. The desire for community and the need for poets to come together and share their pain and joy was a surprise for me. For example, I was not familiar with the Black Xpression open-mic, and was struck at the vibrancy of this community, particularly as data showed the intent of its co-founders to do just that. Witnessing the bi-national, racially and ethnically diverse community of poets informed me that there is much potential toward building on methods of transformative social justice through performance.

In the early stages of this research, it became clear that each individual present at an open-mic is part of a community. It was then that I began collecting data audio data from the entire open-mic event, rather than only the poetry itself. Through emcee introductions to both the open-mic and individual poets, I learned a great deal about why open-mic cofounders felt the need for community and their vision for what these communities do for their members. Often, emcees provide a brief history of poets' involvement in the community. Short stories of chance meetings at coffee shops, other open-mics, and writing workshops often accompanied poet introductions. Poets engaged

in this process, as well. I got a good feel for what these readings and events mean to the poets through these brief interludes, between the poetry.

This research speaks to the importance of utilizing critical approaches to understanding the impact of structural oppression on communities suffering from such oppression. In utilizing a Black Feminist approach, I was able to give value and merit to the analysis of structural oppression and the relaying of the pain this causes to the poets as knowledge agents reflecting on their lived experiences. My analytical approach was intersectional and infused with a critical race framework inclusive of and attendant to the ways in which poets communicate their oppression related to legal statute, and policies.

The most striking finding in this research was uncovering the sometimes-hidden ways in which poets from open-mic communities collaborate with other community members toward solutions to structural oppression. One of the most memorable of these is the collaboration between Black Xpression and Soulcial Workers, an organization that works toward positive self-identity and community engagement toward social justice through performance. Poets from across both sites, including those at Café Cabaret collaborate faculty and student organizations at local colleges and university to organize spoken-word events which highlight social justice issues such as mass incarceration and police brutality.

The chapter on resistance provides the most important implications for future research. Through the extended case study method, I was able to determine that poets from the Black Xpression community were also in collaboration with local Black entrepreneurial groups that focus on growing Black wealth through home and small

business ownership. Also, in resistance to poverty and ethnocentrism, the Café Cabaret poets hold on-going food drives in collaboration with 100 Thousand Poets for change. In direct resistance to the school-to-prison pipeline, poets from Café Cabaret open mics conduct poetry writing workshops in juvenile hall, which may prove useful to healing some of the trauma that precedes juvenile adjudication.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS REVISITED**

The goal of this research was to answer three questions: what are the historical, social, economic, and structural forms of oppression related through the poets of this community? Secondly, how is social pain talked about within these spoken-word performances? Thirdly, what types of transformative justice measures are the poets and their audiences experiencing/and or enacting within the spoken-word communities of San Diego, CA? These three questions are interrelated and influence each other to provide insight to the forms of structural oppression impacting members of disrupted communities. In the following section, I address each question individually.

What are the historical, social, economic, and structural forms of oppression related through the poets of this community? This context is crucial to understanding the power of spoken-word poetry. Poets across both sites and all four open-mics situated their poetry to some degree, within historical, social, economic, and other structural forms of oppression. Findings center around three themes: community, state violence, and resistance.

The histories of Black, Latinx, and undocumented Americans were laced through poetry at each of the four open-mics. Several pieces from the Café Cabaret and Black

Xpression communities of poets drew audience members directly to the history of state violence through lynching, bombing, and vigilante ‘justice’ of Black Americans. State violence related to immigration and border patrol, colonization, and forced assimilation of Native and Latinx peoples was most present at Palabras and Café Cabaret. What was clear from this data is the poets performing at these four open-mics are keenly aware of the War on Drugs, and the police brutality that has been sanctioned against Black and Latinx communities ever since. If you listen closely, these poems can teach audience members about the history of structurally oppressed communities and state sanctioned racism.

Immigration and Border Patrol was directly indicted at both sites, with poets often turning the tables on racist vitriol in referring to agents of these agencies as various kinds of animals. They are also referred to as being cold, like ice. Links to larger social and political forces were also present in these pieces. The current Presidential administration was directly implicated in several pieces, indicating poets at these San Diego area open-mics make links between the federal and community levels of our social structure. How is social pain talked about within these spoken-word performances? The way pain is reflected by poets in this community reveals connections between poverty, racism, and state and interpersonal violence. Pain is related both directly and in metaphor, and across all open-mics. The pain of being raised in a racist household, and in coming to terms with how this impacted their world view was most present at the Café Cabaret open-mics. This may be due to the higher numbers of white and middle-class poets with histories of involvement in social justice movements. However, some of the poets here also relayed

the pain of being racially profiled by law enforcement and teachers, directly linking racism to social institutions.

Related to state violence, pain is performed in pieces that are more like storytelling than poetry. In these performances, poets take audience members on a journey with them. During this research, I went on journeys through poetry that included pain related to Jim Crow segregation, police brutality in several different states, across several decades, and on many different Black bodies. Poets also share the pain of separation from family members seeking a better life. I was struck by how often these pieces mentioned historical events, and the arbitrary nature of boundaries. Pain related to poverty often came in the form of metaphor, with empty vessels standing in for empty bellies. Poverty related to economic exploitation and the racist narratives accompanying seasonal migrant workers was also present.

What types of transformative justice measures are the poets and their audiences experiencing/and or enacting within the spoken-word communities of San Diego, CA? This research sought to understand how spoken-word poetry, in the unique context specific to this space and time, can inform upon transformative justice for both the San Diego community, and others defined by race, documentation and other legal status, gender and sexuality, and proximity to the US-Mexico border. This research may have implications in the broader United States, and beyond. The role spoken-word poetry communities can play in supporting, repairing, and ultimately transforming members of structurally oppressed communities may be integral to transformative justice approaches in similar communities.

Poets at Café Cabaret engage in transformative social justice related to poverty and state violence. Specific measures include poetry writing workshops in juvenile hall, spoken-word events in collaboration with local community colleges, colleges and universities, and canned food drives. Poets at Black Xpression also engage in transformative social justice in collaboration with local colleges and universities.

Additionally, the Black Xpression community engages in transformative social justice against poverty through their collaboration with Soulcial Workers and Black entrepreneurial community organizations. The collaboration with Soulcial Workers specifically serves youth ages 12-26 through performance centered on social justice issues. Poets at Black Xpression further engage in transformative social justice by attending to the pain and trauma within the Black community by providing a space where all the positivity and none of the negativity of being Black is by design. The intent to create a space where anyone who wants to experience, and more importantly needs to experience Black joy is evident.

The cofounders of Palabras Art Gallery engaged in transformative social justice through the rehabilitation of an abandoned warehouse building in historic Barrio Logan. In doing so, they transformed an eye-sore of a building into a space securely rooted in the history of the Chicano Movement in San Diego. In transforming this space just around the corner from historic Chicano Park, the cofounders also formed community against ethnocentrism by inviting and hosting the Black Xpression open-mic. In a time when racial animosity seems to be rising by design and supported by the highest levels of



power in our country, I find this a significant step toward transformative justice initiatives in this community.

## **LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS**

### *Limitations*

I previously mentioned there are limitations to this research. This project is conceptualized with at least three stages, the first being to identify themes related to structural oppression. The second will be to engage in further ethnographic studies incorporating in-depth interviews with poets, emcees, and audience members. The final stage will be applied research attending to whether packaging pain and performing it through spoken-word poetry can heal members of structurally oppressed communities. That this paper focuses on only themes related to structural oppression and possible modes of transformative justice is the first limitation. While themes related to structural oppression and the need for community were evident, how and if healing occurs as a result of engaging in the process of packaging and performing pain through spoken-word poetry for members of these communities was not.

Second, this research is limited in scope in that I collected data from only four open-mic events held at two separate location, both of which are within San Diego county, California. Thus, findings from this research are not generalizable to communities and areas outside San Diego county. Spoken-word poetry has gained popularity in recent years, and many communities across the United States have histories of and continue to suffer from structural oppression. However, this research cannot make predictions about which forms of structural oppression might emerge in other

communities as the poems utilized as data for this research are also specific to the members of this community.

### *Contributions*

Although limited in scope and generalizability, findings from this research make a significant contribution to the growing body of research attending to innovating and alternative forms of addressing structural oppression and its related harms. This dissertation research utilized a combination of theoretical perspectives and frameworks to analyze social pain related to structural oppression as it emerged through spoken-word poetry. First, my findings show that poets who are members of structurally oppressed communities can identify and relay the sources of their pain. I stress the importance of combining a Black Feminist approach with critical race and transformative justice frameworks in considering poets' understanding of their everyday experiences as knowledge. Second, this research provides an example of innovative qualitative methods within the fields of criminology and justice studies by utilizing spoken-word poetry as data though with we may better understand the impacts of structural oppression.

This research moves justice studies scholarship beyond the scope of restorative justice measures that by design, restores communities and their members to their previously disrupted state. Restorative justice measures are limited in that these focus on individual-level solutions without attending to problems and causes at the institutional and structural levels. Toward this end, my findings highlight the need for transformative justice measures in historically oppressed communities where members have lost their faith in law enforcement but have a desire to work toward a better community. Further,

this research challenges traditional criminological approaches to communities with histories of structural oppression in two ways. First, in highlighting community members' dedication to solutions for and resistance to structural oppression, this research disrupts traditional and positivist criminological perceptions of communities suffering from structural oppression as being steeped in a subculture of violence. Such work is rooted in long since deserted criminological theories of biological determinism (Schram, 2018). Second, instead of utilizing an approach focused on social disorganization, my approach to this project focused on the ways in which community organization thrives in structurally oppressed communities. Instead of continuing to focus on what is wrong in these communities, this focus of this research is on what is going right in this community. Rather than focus on social disorganization, this research focuses on social organization.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research provides compelling evidence of the need for innovative approaches to criminological research and transformative justice measures for structurally oppressed communities. Directions for future research will follow the design as outlined above. First, to get to a deeper understanding of the meaning of open-mic community, in-depth ethnographic methods are necessary. Future research attending to the effectiveness of spoken-word poetry as a mechanism for healing members of structurally oppressed communities is necessary. Second, although members of the spoken-word communities included for this research are found to collaborate with local colleges, universities, and

organizations to address some issues related to structural oppression, these too are limited.

These spaces are not utopia, and as mentioned earlier in this work, open-mics can tend to be masculine in nature. This was evident to me in which forms of oppression and pain were addressed by these communities of poets and which were not. Poverty and mass incarceration were both addressed through transformative justice approaches and collaborations at both sites. Many open-mic cofounders included here are male, with only two women. This is reflected in the forms of transformative social justice that emerged from these spaces, which tend to follow trends in larger social justice communities in being male-centered or male by default. Future research seeking innovative transformative justice solutions for communities suffering the trauma of structural oppression must attend to trauma related to sexual and interpersonal violence. Although not as prescient as the three themes discussed in this work, both sexual and interpersonal violence emerged though the data.

Second, applied, gender-specific research utilizing poetry writing workshops and spoken-word events that highlight gendered violence will add to the growing body of critical and intersectional feminist criminology. Further, by focusing our attention to the power of performance toward social change, future research will also add to literature concerning the sociology of performance and performance sociology. Population-specific applied research may also attend to the efficacy of writing and performing spoken-word poetry within other communities suffering from structural oppression, and the individuals tasked with serving them through law enforcement.

## **CONCLUSION**

I was fortunate to have embarked on this research during a time when social and community engagement, political awareness and activism, and resistance to structural oppression are on the rise. This also means that unfortunately, communities continue to suffer from the pain and trauma structural oppression can produce. The combination of the disruption of the Trump administration and the demographic rise of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States results in mounting social pressures. Poets in communities suffering from increased state violence in the form of police brutality, immigration and ICE raids, and vigilante white supremacy, are speaking out and leaning in to engage transformative justice within these communities.

What is occurring in San Diego county is happening in cities and communities across the United States. In the weeks leading up to this writing, news stories of racist rants aimed at Spanish speaking customers, (mostly) white women calling on law enforcement to control Black bodies in public spaces, and abuse of power by immigration agents have all appeared. Innovative approaches are necessary considering failed zero tolerance policing, the War on Drugs, and its related mass incarceration informed in large part by traditional positivist approaches to the causes and deterrents to crime. The findings from this research can be used as tool to envision future criminological and sociological research attending to vulnerable communities without further pathologizing them, as is done too often in criminology and criminal justice studies research.

## References

- Alang, Sirry., Donna McAlpine, McCreedy, Ellen, and Rachel Hardeman. 2017. "Police Brutality and Black Health: Setting the Agenda for Public Health Scholars." *American Journal of Public Health*, 107(5):662–665. <http://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2017.303691>.
- Alexander, Michelle. 2011. "The New Jim Crow." *The American Prospect*, Jan, pp. A19 (<http://ezproxy.csusm.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/docview/817399306?accountid=10363>).
- Ali, Alisha N., Emily McFarlane, Robert Hawkins, and Ini Udo-Inyang. 2012. "Social Justice Revisited: Psychological Recolonization and the Challenge of Anti-Oppression Advocacy." *Race, Gender & Class* (19) 1/2:322-35. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43496876>.
- Baker, Brian., and Nancy Rytina. 2013. "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: January 2012." Office of Immigration Statistics, Homeland Security. Retrieved December 3, 2017. (<https://www.change.org/p/united-states-protect-and-preserve-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca>).
- Beckett, Katherine., Kris Nyrop, and Lori Pfingst. 2006. "Race, Drugs, and Policing: Understanding Disparities in Drug Delivery Arrests\*." *Criminology* 44(1):105-137.
- Bobo, Lawrence D., and Victor Thompson. 2006. "Unfair by Design: The War on Drugs, Race, and the Legitimacy of the Criminal Justice System." *Social Research* 73(2):445-472.
- Buitelaar, Marjo. 2014. "'Discovering a Different Me': Discursive Positioning in Life Story Telling over Time." *Women's Studies International Forum* 43:30–37.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1998. "The Extended Case Method." *Sociological Theory* 16(1).
- Bureau, U. S. Census. n. d. "Census.gov." Census.gov. Retrieved October 5, 2017 (<https://www.census.gov/>).
- Bynum, Katherine E. 2016. "The Chicano Generation: Testimonios of the Movement." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 119(3):330–31. Retrieved March 9, 2016 ([https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.csusm.edu/journals/southwestern\\_historical\\_quarterly/v119/119.3.bynum.pdf](https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.csusm.edu/journals/southwestern_historical_quarterly/v119/119.3.bynum.pdf)).
- Camp, Jordan T., Christina Heatherton. 2016. *Policing the Planet: Why the Policing Crisis Led to Black Lives Matter*. Verso. London.
- Capeheart, Loretta and Dragan Milovanovic. 2007. *Social Justice: Theories, Issues, and*

*Movements*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Chepp, Valerie. 2014. "Speaking Truth to Power: Spoken Word Poetry as Political Engagement among Young Adults in the Millennial Age." University of Maryland.

Cho, Sumi., Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall. 2013. "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis." *Signs* 38 (4):785-810.

Clayton, Dewey, M. 2018. "Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement: A Comparative Analysis of Two Social Movements in the United States." *Journal of Black Studies*. Pp. 1-33. <https://doiorg.ezproxy.csusm.edu/10.1177/0021934718764099>.

Coker, Donna. 2002. "Transformative Justice: Anti-Subordination Processes in Cases of Domestic Violence" in *Restorative Justice and Family Violence* (Heather Strang and John Braithwaite Eds. 2002) Cambridge University Press.  
<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2617411>.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas." *Annual Review of Sociology* 41(1):1-20.

Comfort, Meagan. 2003. "In the Tube at San Quentin: The "Secondary Prisonization" of Women Visiting Inmates." *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 32(1): 77-107.

Cooper, Hannah LF. 2015. "War on Drugs Policing and Police Brutality." *Substance Use & Misuse*. 50(8/9): 1188-1194.

Cooper, Hannah LF., Mindy Fullilove. 2016. "Editorial: Excessive Police Violence as a Public Health Issue." *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New Academy of Medicine*. (93): S1-S6. Doi: 10.1007/s11524-016-0040-2.

Cueva, Bert M. 2013. "Theorizing the Racial and Gendered Educational Experiences of Chicanas and Native American Women at the Ph.D. Level in Higher Education: Testimonios of Resistance, Defiance, Survival, and Hope." PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Davis, Evelyn L. 1999. "Storytelling in the African American Narcotics Anonymous Community as a Praxis for Recovery." PhD dissertation, The Ohio State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963. *The Souls of Black Folk; Essays and Sketches*. Chicago, A. G. McClurg, 1903. Kindle eBook. 2016.

Ellis, Carolyn and Jerry Rawicki. 2013. "Collaborative Witnessing of Survival during the Holocaust an Exemplar of Relational Autoethnography." *Qualitative Inquiry* 19(5):366–80.

Einspahr, Jennifer. 2010. "Structural Domination and Structural Freedom: A Feminist Perspective." *Feminist Review* (94):1-19. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40664126>.

Esteves-Joyce, Raquel. 2012. "Who Am I Not to Be? Latina Scholars Reading, Writing Our Testimonios and Engaging in Discourse." PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Fallon, Andrew A. 2014. "Anonymously Restored: The Natural Partnership and Mutual Instruction of Alcoholics Anonymous and Restorative Justice." *Contemporary Justice Review: Issues in Criminal, Social, and Restorative Justice* 17(1):104–23.

Ferdinand, T. 1970. "Demographic Shifts and Criminality: An Inquiry." *The British Journal of Criminology*, 10(2):169-175. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23636062>.

Flynn, Karen and Evelyn Marrast. 2008. "Main Content Area Spoken Word from the North: Contesting Nation, Politics, and Identity." *Wadabagei: A Journal of the Caribbean and Its Diaspora* 11(2):3–24. Retrieved March 3, 2016 ([http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/docview/200337322?accountid=10363&fr\\_id=info:xri/sid:primo](http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/docview/200337322?accountid=10363&fr_id=info:xri/sid:primo)).

Freidman, Samuel R., Don C. Des Jarlais, and Claire E. Sterk. 1990. "Erratum: AIDS and the Social Relations of Intravenous Drug Users." *The Milbank Quarterly* 68(1):85–110.

Friedrichs, David, O. 2009. "On Resisting State Crime: Conceptual and Contextual Issues." *Social Justice* (36) 3 117): 4-27. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768546>.

Gau, Jacinta M. 2010. "Wilson, James Q., and George L. Kelling: Broken Windows Theory." *Encyclopedia of Criminological Theory* (2):1018-1022.

Grassau, Pamela. 2009. "RESILIENCE AND "TURNING IT OUT: How the Arts Engage with Relational and Structural Aspects of Oppression." *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue Canadienne De Service Social*, 26(2):249-265. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41669916>.

Griffith, Bryan and Jessica Vaughan. 2017. "Center for Immigration Studies." CIS.org.



Retrieved November 28, 2017 (<https://cis.org/Map-Sanctuary-Cities-Counties-and-States>).

Hartmann, William., Gone, J. 2014. "American Indian Historical Trauma: Community Perspectives from Two Great Plains Medicine Men." *American Journal of Community Psychology*. (54): 274-288, CINAHL Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 1 May 2018.

Hedrick, Tace. 2003. "Reviewed Works: Chicana Ways: Conversations with Ten Chicana Writers by Karin Rosa Ika; Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios by The Latina Feminist Group." *NWSA Journal* 15(2):191–95.

Herrnstein, Richard J., and Charles A. Murray. 1994. *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. New York: Free Press.

Kahn, Kimberly Barsamian., Phillip Atiba Goff, J. Katherine Lee, and Diane Motamed. 2016. "Protecting Whiteness: White Phenotypic Racial Stereotypicality Reduces Police Use of Force." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 7(5): 403-411.

Kilgore, James. 2011. "Immigration and Mass Incarceration." *Race, Poverty & the Environment*, 18(2): 42-43. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41554781>.

Krisberg, Barry. 2016. "How Do You Eat an Elephant? Reducing Mass Incarceration in California One Small Bite at a Time." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. (664) 1:136 – 154.

Lawler, Edward J., Shane R. Thye, and Jeongkoo Yoon. 2009. *Social Commitments in a Depersonalized World*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Lawrence, Regina G. 2000. *The Politics of Force: Media and the Construction of Police Brutality*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Accessed April 29, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Lemelle, Anthony J. 1996. "The Black Underclass: Critical Essays on Race and Unwantedness." *Social Forces* 75 (1): 374-75.

Lipsitz, George. 2012. "In an Avalanche Every Snowflake Pleads Not Guilty: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Incarceration Impediments to Women's Fair Housing Rights" *Overpoliced and Underprotected: Women, Race, and Criminalization IV. Reentry and the Community Impact of Women's Incarceration*. Regents of the University of California. 59(1746): 1746-1807.

Lopez. Mark H. 2014. "In 2014, Latinos Will Surpass Whites as Largest Racial/Ethnic

Group in California.” Retrieved December 3, 2017. (<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/24/in-2014-latinos-will-surpass-whites-as-largest-raciaethnic-group-in-california/>).

Lyle, Perry and Ashraf M. Esmail. 2016. "SWORN TO PROTECT: POLICE BRUTALITY - A DILEMMA FOR AMERICA'S POLICE." *Race, Gender & Class* 23(3):155-185 (<http://ezproxy.csusm.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/docview/1899014782?accountid=10363>).

Marcin, Tim. 2017. “In Donald Trump's America, Racism Is Becoming an Even Bigger Problem, Americans Say in Poll.” *Newsweek*. Retrieved April 15, 2018 (<http://www.newsweek.com/donald-trumps-america-racism-becoming-even-bigger-problem-americans-say-poll-665024>).

Mills. C. Wright. 1940. “Situated Action and Vocabularies of Motive.” *American Sociological Review* 5 (6): 904-913.

Moran, Greg. 2018. “Border wall security cost San Diego County sheriff nearly \$900,000.” *Los Angeles Times*. January 19, 2018. Pp.1-3.

Neiderland, Paula. 2017. Black Xpression open mic empowers and unites community.” *The Daily Aztec*. (<http://thedailyaztec.com/85737/artsandculture/black-xpression-open-mic-event-seeks-to-empower-and-unite-community/>.) Retrieved March 22, 2018.

Nessel, Lori, A. 2017. “Instilling Fear and Regulating Behavior: Immigration Law as Social Control.” *Georgetown Immigration Law Journal*. (31): 525-566.

Patler, Caitlin and Nicholas Branic. 2017. “Patterns of Family Visitation During Immigration Detention.” *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*. 3(4): 18-36.

Pearlman, Jeanne. 2010. “CHRONICLES OF RESISTANCE: A BORDERLANDS TESTIMONIO.” PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburg, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Rabinowitz, Paula. 2015. “Street/Crime: From Rodney King’s Beating to Michael Brown’s Shooting.” *Cultural Critique*. (90): 143-147.

Rodriguez, Melanie L. 2017. "Racial Injustice in Houston, Texas: The Mexican American Mobilization Against the Police Killing of Joe Campos Torres." The University of Texas at El Paso, Ann Arbor (<http://ezproxy.csusm.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/docview/1924706431?accountid=10363>).

Sagi, Philip and Wellford, Charles, F. 1968. "Age Composition and Patterns of Change in Criminal Statistics." *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science*, 59(1):29-36.

Schmallegger, Frank. 2016. *Criminology*. Pearson Education. New Jersey.

Schwalbe, Michael et al. 2000. "Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis." *Social Forces* 79(2):419–52.

Siddique, Haroon and Oliver Laughland. 2017. "Charlottesville: United Nations Warns US over 'Alarming' Racism." *The Guardian*. Retrieved April 15, 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/23/charlottesville-un-committee-warns-us-over-rise-of-racism>).

Sleeter, Christine E. 2012. "Critical Race Theory and Education." *Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education*. Ed. James A. Banks. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2012. 491-95. SAGE Reference Online.

Snow, David and Dana Moss. 2014. "Protest on the Fly: Toward a Theory of Spontaneity in the Dynamics of Protest and Social Movements." *American Sociological Review*, 79(6): 1122-1143. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43187582>.

Somers-Willett, S. 2005. "Slam Poetry and the Cultural Politics of Performing Identity." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 38(1): 51-73.

Spector, Alan. 2014. "Racism and Capitalism—Crisis and Resistance: Exploring the Dynamic between Class Oppression and Racial Oppression." *Humanity & Society*. (38) 2:116 - 131  
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.csusm.edu/10.1177/0160597614534345>.

Taylor, Clarence. 2013. "INTRODUCTION: AFRICAN AMERICANS, POLICE BRUTALITY, AND THE U.S. CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM." *The Journal of African American History*. 98(2):200-204. doi:10.5323/jafriamerhist.98.2.0200.

Veneklasen, Lisa. 2012. "Citizen Action and the Perverse Confluence of Opposing Agendas." *Development* 55(2):158-161  
(<http://ezproxy.csusm.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/docview/1018844161?accountid=10363>).

Wacquant, Loïc. 2010. "Class, Race & Hyperincarceration in Revanchist America." *Daedalus* 139 (3): 74-90.

Walker, F., & Kuykendall, V. 2005. Manifestations of Nommo in "Def Poetry." *Journal*

*of Black Studies*, 36(2): 229-247.

Welford, Charles F. 1973. "Age Composition and the Increase in Recorded Crime." *Criminology* 11(1): 61-70.

Wildeman, Christopher, and Western, Bruce. 2010. "Incarceration in Fragile Families." *The Future of Children* 20 (2): 157-77.

Williams, Wendy. 2015. "'Listen to the Poet' What Schools Can Learn from a Diverse Spoken Word Poetry Group in the Urban Southwest." PhD dissertation, Arizona State University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Williams-White, Lisa. 2011. "Scholarship Revolution." *Qualitative Inquiry* 17(6):534–42. Retrieved March 9, 2016 (<http://qix.sagepub.com.ezproxy.csusm.edu/content/17/6/534>).

Williams-White, Lisa. 2011. "Dare I Write About Oppression on Sacred Ground [Emphasis Mine]" *Qualitative Inquiry* 11(3):236–42.

Williams, Todd O. 2012. *A Therapeutic Approach to Teaching Poetry: Individual Development, Psychology, and Social Reparation*. Palgrave Macmillan. New York.

Windsor, Liliane Cambraia, Eloise Dunlap, and Andrew Golub. 2012. "Challenging Controlling Images, Oppression, Poverty, and Other Structural Constraints: Survival Strategies Among African—American Women in Distressed Households." *Journal of African American Studies* (15) 3:290-306. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43525495>.

N.A. 2008. "Barrio Logan Market Analysis." Retrieved December 1, 2017 (<https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/planning/community/cpu/barriologan/documents/pdf/barriologanmarketanalysis1208.pdf>).

N.A. California Sentencing Institute. Retrieved December 1, 2017 (<http://casi.cjcj.org/Adult/San-Diego>).

N.A. "Community Profiles North County." Retrieved December 1, 2017 (<https://www.sandiego.gov/planning/community/profiles/greaternorthpark>).

N.A. 2017. "Greater North Park Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile 2010." SANDAG

N.A. 2018. *Oxford University Press*. Retrieved from Oxford Living Dictionaries: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/low-rider>

N.A. 2016. "Police Use of Force." National Institute of Justice.

<https://www.nij.gov/topics/law-enforcement/officer-safety/use-of-force/pages/welcome.aspx>).

N.A. "Poetry in San Diego." Poets.org. Retrieved November 30, 2017 (<http://www.poetryinsandiego.com/>).

N.A. 2018. "Read a Poem at an Open Mic" Retrieved April 15, 2018. (<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/read-poem-open-mic>)

N.A. "Protect and Preserve Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)." Retrieved December 3, 2017. (<https://www.change.org/p/united-states-protect-and-preserve-deferred-action-for-childhood-arrivals-daca>).

N.A. San Diego County Domestic Violence Council. Retrieved December 1, 2017 (<http://www.sddvc.org/statistics/>).

N.A. 2017. San Diego Tourism Authority. Retrieved December 1, 2017 (<https://www.sandiego.org/explore/downtown-urban/north-park-south-park.aspx>).

N.A. 2018. San Diego Tourism Authority. Retrieved January 25, 2018 (<https://www.sandiego.org/press/press-releases/san-diegos-charismatic-neighborhoods/normal-heights.aspx>).

N.A. 2017. "Spring 2017 Population Projections." California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Retrieved December 1, 2017. ([http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports\\_Research/Offender\\_Information\\_Services\\_Branch/Projections/S17Pub.pdf](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/Offender_Information_Services_Branch/Projections/S17Pub.pdf)).

N.A. 2018. 100 Thousand Poets for Change. Retrieved January 25, 2018.

N.A. [https://www.facebook.com/pg/enclavecaracol/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/enclavecaracol/about/?ref=page_internal)

N.D. [https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/weekly\\_update\\_11-8\\_2017\\_draft\\_0.pdf](https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/weekly_update_11-8_2017_draft_0.pdf)

<sup>1</sup> For more information on gang territories and maps, see <http://centroculturalaustriaco.com/california-gang-territory-map/california-gang-territory-map-california-river-map-california-gang-territory-map/>.