

DIASPORIC MOVEMENT PRACTICES: AFRICAN/AFRO/BLACK EMBODIED
TRANSLINEAGES AND CONTEMPORARY MIGRATIONS IN DANCE

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DEDICATION

I must send honor to folks who loved and held me through this endeavor.
It takes a village to raise a creative spirit in scholarship and artistry.

Birth, Blood, Bountiful Family

Lynn Jones, Fayon Jones, Sylvester Jones, Jahi Jones, Ajai Ottley, Ahmari Williams,
Kai Williams, Jahmir Williams, Alex Shaw, Ajai Shaw, Makailin Shaw

The Written Word Family

Dr. Laurie Saunda

An editor angel that guided me to myself as a writer
...may your soul rest in peace and grace.

Dr. Julie B. Johnson

A beacon of get it done...pushed me off the cliff.

Jennifer Etling Gann

A force of clarity...your swoop in gloriously glided me to the end.

The Cohort Crew

Dr. Hari Krishnan, Dr. Wanda Ebright, Dr. Julie Mulvihill

Here I come!

Dr. Brenda Dixon Gottschild

Nia Love

Dr. Kariamu Welsh

Thank you for being artists/scholars in justice and authenticity
near me, with me, and before me.

Dr. Linda B. Caldwell

I had no idea that it would be your spirit that would carry me through. I saw us sitting together in a warm room with hot soup and blankets laughing. You guided me to the light at the end of the tunnel. I am so very grateful to you for that. I don't know what our souls will be now, but somehow, I know it is not over. Rest in peace and stoic power.

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ABSTRACT

LELA AISHA JONES

DIASPORIC MOVEMENT PRACTICES: AFRICAN/AFRO/BLACK EMBODIED TRANSLINEAGES AND CONTEMPORARY MIGRATIONS IN DANCE

The work of this dissertation is to unveil less visible narratives of movement artists who are teachers, choreographers, and/or performers in the movement cultures of black/African diasporic dances. Furthermore, this dissertation contributes to critical discourse around identity from diasporic orientations, lived experiences of citizenship in the United States of America, and the intersections of labor, womanhood, race, and class. The main objective of this doctoral work was to gather movement artists of black/African descent who identified with a black/African diasporic identity, and offer their personal and professional lived experiences as collective insight into philosophies and practices of integrity while living and working in the worlds of black/African diasporic movement cultures.

The primary contributors to this dissertation are Dr. Ojeya Cruz Banks, Nia Love, Dr. Nzinga Metzger, Jeannine Osayande, and Shani Sterling. In efforts to gather a group that could offer nuance, complexity, and multiplicity to the field of dance, all contributors to this dissertation: work within a plethora of community spaces including higher education academic settings, have traveled throughout the black/African Diaspora for their practice, and have all performed, staged, and choreographed diasporic rooted dances.

The research process was approached through a combination of qualitative research methodologies and focused on each movement artist as a case study. The research findings rise from the data collected through face-to-face interviews, participant observations, and video observations that emerge as a collection of philosophies and practices of integrity in black/African diasporic movement cultures.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When I began my time as a doctoral student in 2008, I could not predict that I would be writing my dissertation in a time plagued with such stark and blatant racial, gender, and class divides in the United States of America. And now, in these current times of 2018, here I am trying to write about blackness as a black daughter, mother, aunt, godmother, mover, performer, choreographer, researcher, community organizer, and budding scholar—trying to dream with black people about blackness when there is so much pain. How I feel daily and how I persevere daily are like two shadows trying to consolidate, cooperate, collaborate, and harmonize. They are friends in trauma walking—holding hands down a long road. I can't ever release the feelings that my bodies are barely mine and that the shadows are where I really thrive. I was pulled over by police 3 times in the last month with no citation. I have anxiety every time I see a police car. In vibrant contrast, I have recently, in the last 3 years, been honored and awarded quite graciously and generously for my embodied narratives, artistry, and archival practice by the local and national movement and dance communities. The police officers that pulled me over can't see my spirit. I wish they could see me dance. Sharing what the body and embodiment has been is the only way I know to continuously reclaim and be all of who I am for myself and others. So here is one of my offerings for the cause and for all. Black life is tied to all life.

The Way to Now

I was born May 14, 1978 in the southern United States of America in the (northern Florida, almost Georgia) capital city of Tallahassee, Florida. I am a part of what is popularly called microgeneration of 1977-1983, the xennials. We are the generation that felt every step of transference from analog to digital. I grew up in various areas of the city, but spent most of my time living on the Southside across the railroad tracks in a mostly black U.S. and/or African American community. I could walk to my grandmother, Ruth Bryant Frazier's, and grandfather, Lucious Frazier's, home. My grandmother was a mother, teacher, businesswoman, and a writer. My grandfather is a father, homebuilder, career military man, veteran, and worked for Greyhound Bus at some point when I was younger. The fact that he worked for a bus company always felt exciting. I think it was the potential to travel. I also knew my great grandmother Mattie Bryant. I remember her calling my name softly and slowly with a southern drag or drawl. I got my hair pressed by my great Aunt Iola Bryant Duhart.

On my way to my grandparents, I smelled honeysuckles, then kept caterpillars in my drawer with leaves so they could eat, and put flowers in my hair, fresh or faux, whenever I could. I stayed in the sunshine. My beaded braids would shine with glorious noir after my Aunt Olivia whipped up a fresh hair do and I swung those beads with pride. We celebrated Kwanzaa, an African American holiday, created to instill pride and contemporary connections to an African past. This was spearheaded by my Aunt Nayola (Tamu). I ate the most wonderful soul food and seafood cooked with love and skill. There

is no doubt that all would say my Aunt Lucille took that chef medal from collard greens to pound cakes. It seems like everyone went to Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, (an HBCU, Historically Black College and University) and all my aunts were dancers with Orchesis Dance Theatre run by Beverly Barber. I could walk there too. Everyone in my family could hit a step. We have a spectrum of movers. My uncles were always there whether near or far. They are people I can call and count on, the calm and hilarious spirit of my Uncle Lucious “June” Frazier, a homebuilder, and the spunky navy man, my Uncle Guy Frazier who made a life in California and always rode us around on motorcycles and threw us what felt like 20 feet in the air.

My mom, Lynn Maria Frazier Jones, is a teacher, visual artist, and sewer. I learned how to make science projects and give speeches that won awards wearing clothes that my mother made. I especially remember being the May Queen in kindergarten because my mom made the dress. I know how to sew as well. I am crafty, creative, and a teacher because of her. My father, Sylvester Jones, is a self-taught historian and a fierce city smooth brother of multiple talents—he emits what I call street grace. He has worked in all types of management positions from property management to historical tours. I am global, nomadic, and history oriented because of him. My younger and only blood sister, Fayon Anetta Jones, is swift lightning in the realm of academics and style, especially hair. She kept me on my toes. I learned how to be a mother from her.

My family on my father’s side deserves an ode. I did not get to spend as much time with them—the Lexington, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio folks. They were so city

to me, so intense and right to it. Anything street, any urban coolness and navigation skills came from my dad, Aunt Jackie, Grandma Carol, Vanessa (Boo), Net, Shawn, and Ron. I have never been scared to defend myself against nonsense of any kind. I attribute this to all of them. When with them, there was always an unspoken but well-articulated presence of you are worth defending. Take good care of yourself and your world and do not let anybody take you down—family, friends, enemies, nobody. Do not let any person take something from you. My lessons learned from my parents and their families were very different indeed, but all had to face the cards dealt by racial oppressive systems and I saw them persevere and be taken aback by racism in a continuous visible flow throughout my childhood.

There were problems. I will not spend too much time on them and they are no different than most faced by people in the communities I have been a part of throughout my life. It does not feel like the kind of business to share here and now, but if you know me, you know. The problems hurt yes and were never deterrents—never reasons to give up or to stop. The message I remember is that although trauma was a part of life for many of us, many in our communities knew you could survive; you must. I would see glimpses of thriving—some periods of thriving that would stretch as long as the beautiful canopy roads made by willows and moss. I experienced pain in family life and in a community filled with intentional, unintentional, internalized, individual, and systematic racism and gender challenges.

In elementary school, I was asked if I put cooking grease in my hair; in middle

school, I was called a nigger and I punched the boy. Also in middle school, a private middle school, a super fresh young man whose hand frequented girl undergarments without permission called my mother a b...h [explicative] and I punched him. The private school suspended me and my parents took me out of that school. In high school, I found Klu Klux Klan (KKK) flyers in the bathroom and sat through a history presentation where white Barbie dolls were dressed as KKK members and black Barbie dolls were hanged from tiny tree limbs and nooses. My history teacher was numb. I expressed my dissatisfaction with her negligence. All five young, white male teenage presenters had to apologize and one touched my heart—Lir Sullivan. He really gave me a sincere apology. We frequently passed one another on University of Florida's campus with a smile and short conversation on how things were going before he lost his life the summer after freshman year. I was quite devastated by his death for a time. Tears still rise. The other black person, a male in our Advance Placement (AP) history class, was there for the presentation and said nothing.

I was a cheerleader (until I cut my hair and having no ponytail with a ribbon was an issue), a basketball player, a track sprinter, and a part of the Cooperative Business Education program where I went to high school in the mornings. Then I worked for the Nature Conservancy, Florida Natural Areas Inventory, under the wonderful Tina in the afternoons. My black girl magic and loveliness was wrapped up in Charmettes and Brother's 10, a high school sorority/fraternity run by Mrs. Smith for black/African American students. I was entrenched in Margo's School of Dance from elementary to my

freshman year of high school when our founder and teacher Margo Blake moved to south Florida. We were all black girls from Pre-K to high school. She made a diasporic space. Ballet became a black medium for activism. So did all the dances we made. We also learned and performed jazz, lyrical, West African, Afro contemporary/modern, and tap. Margo Blake put together socially conscious dance theatre productions and we were all about it. She was not a yeller, not that I remember. She was little and we had serious fear of and fierce love for her. I will, just lastly and for a hot second mention, because I can't leave it out, that I spent plenty of teen nights dancing to west coast grooves, slow jams, New Jack Swing, and of course Southern base music from Florida and Georgia. And yes, I watched a lot of BET (Black Entertainment Television), MTV (Music Television), and was obsessed with popular music, Video Soul with Donnie Simpson, and East Coast Hip Hop—hip hop in general accessible through YO! MTV Raps.

I kept on dancing at the University of Florida as the Center for World Arts, directed by Joan Frosch, was coming into place. My dancing there was intense, although I was not a dance major. I earned a Bachelor of Science in Health Science Education with a specialization in Community Health. My internship was with Jill K. Sonke in the Arts in Medicine Program at Shands Hospital. However, because of Joan Frosch, I danced intensively with Moustapha Bangoura, Urban Bush Women, Dance Brazil, Chuck Davis and the African American Dance Ensemble, Mohamed Da Costa, K.T. Nelson of ODC San Francisco, Ric Rose, Kelly Cawthorn, and Isa Garcia Rose. I was entrenched in black/African diasporic orientations and at first, I thought Urban Bush Women (UBW)

was the one and only modern dance company that mattered. Modern dance was introduced to me by unbound and unapologetically black women. That was my start. They took my breath away.

While at Florida State University earning my Master of Fine Arts in Dance with a strong focus on technique, choreography, and performance; I also supplemented my education with diasporic travel and study in Cuba and Brazil as well as community training in traditional black/African diasporic dance, which mainly included the teachings of Akosua Graham and Nzinga Metzger. The people that touched my moving, researching, and writing in this dance department included, in no particular order, Patty Phillips, Anthony Morgan, Lynda Davis, Sally Sommer, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Sheila Humphrey, Richard Sias, Suzanne Farrell, Anjali Austin, and Tricia Brown. There was also Janie Brown, who ran the daylights out of that dance office. She should be lifted! There, I also found dancing pathways through Dance Repertory Theatre and a very special moment of being in the work of Ronald K. Brown. We had lunch. He promised and sent two special books and forever imprinted my continuing dance journey. I apprenticed with him in 2004 in Brooklyn, New York before I moved to Harlem in 2005.

After teaching kindergarten for two years in Tallahassee and Atlanta, so I would not move to New York City broke, and after dancing on the house club scene weekend after weekend at the Underground in Atlanta, I moved north. In NYC, I lived with my second and third cousins Julie, Zora, Claude, and Alex in their Harlem brownstone. I also spent a lot of time with Christal Brown, Nia Love, and Kwame Azalius Ross, and Barak

Ade Solei, and Urban Bush Women. My intensive time with so many Urban Bush Women (UBW) and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar starting in 1997, climaxed in NYC and ranged from my roles as an apprentice, to teaching artist, to company member. There was room to understand and become so much in the world of UBW. I am fortunate and forever grateful. Nia Love took my dancing to authentic artistry, Barak thrust me into what black embodied performance art could be, Christal gave me the business of liquid force in the body, and Kwame taught me the art of dancing spirit and soul in performance.

Furthermore, for the last 20 plus years, I have been fortunate to travel to Barbados, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, South Africa, England, and New Zealand. I am now a movement artist, educator, choreographer, performer, consultant, and community organizer in the Philadelphia area. I am held down by all those who have danced with my current dance company, FlyGround (FG), namely Chevon Stewart (before it was FG), Saroya Corbett, Maritza Ogarro, Nia Eubanks Dixon, William Brown, Deneane Richburg, Zakiya L Cornish, Amanda L Edwards, Aigner Piccou, Shavon Norris, Oiya Lowe, Angelica Cassimiro, Danielle Currica, and Peaches Jones. I am also grateful for the music/sound/vocal artists as well who have joined us including Alex Shaw, Nasir Dickerson, Keisha Hutchins Hirlinger, Farai Malianga, Jeffrey Johnson, and Patricio Acevedo. While in Philadelphia, I have also been diasporically accepted and surrounded by Kariamuwelsh, Kemal Nance, Merian Soto, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Mama Dorothy Wilkie, and all the dance family those folks

bring into the world. All of these people, communities, experiences, and so much more have led to and contributed to the completion of this dissertation. Thus, it is important to name and frame the historical fragments of how I came to offer this work to you, the reader.

Language and Identity for Now

There are several language choices I make throughout this dissertation that require explanation. Much of the language is explained in detail throughout the dissertation; however, some should be addressed immediately. They include the terms black, blackness, black U.S., black/African, movement culture, diasporic, diasporic movement practices, diasporic movement practitioners, and movement artists.

Black and blackness are lowercased often in this dissertation. However, this practice is not meant to disrespect the histories and work it has taken to establish black with a capital B as a culture to be respected, acknowledged, archived, and lived limitlessly. I have chosen to keep Black capitalized when I feel it is used in connection with a history of activism that is important to acknowledge such as the Black Power Movement or Historically Black Colleges and Universities. I will lowercase when I feel the identity marker as black is a part of the landscape, but should also be contextualized strongly as a color in which it may be necessary and essential to inquire within ourselves and with our communities about the continuation of its use to forge new dialogues and pathways.

I attempt to honor black by continuing to use it with love and as a part of my

identity. However, as an identity marker, I still must question it as a color, named and framed, racialized and socialized negatively and positively. There is still an endearment for the term as it is my word of choice to describe my rearing and the way I live culturally—full of blackness. The lowercase is a place to begin again with this word and the way we know it; it is an opening and a calling for the dialogue around black and blackness to stay flexible and ready for change.

The descriptor *black U.S.* is used as a term to illustrate that the United States of America is not a singular America or not the only America. There is also South, North, and Central America, composed of many countries and lands that can claim the term America. I will use the term *African American* also as it honors that many in this dissertation, including myself, use this identity marker and again much work was put into establishing it as an inclusive term that acknowledges black/African descent peoples and communities across the U.S. nationally. These terms, black U.S. and African American, can be considered somewhat interchangeable throughout this dissertation while also multiple in how they are perceived in black/African descent communities and beyond. Neither encompass all black/African descent identity in existence in the U.S. today, but they do contribute significantly to the U.S. story of identity.

The combination of black/African is used to bring forth the continuum of an African past and genealogy and how people from that history, self and socially defined as black, have made blackness in many parts of the world. In all places where transatlantic enslavement of Africans was a business venture, people of African descent made culture,

and included in that culture was dance and the moving diasporic body.

The notion of the moving diasporic body brings me to *movement culture*. When I use this phrase I am referring to the way in which dance and movement can be a co-culture to an overall and broader cultural experience. For example, there is a broad sense of black U.S. and/or African American culture and walking within and alongside that is the way in which people move and dance through gesture, rhythm, steps, and social practices. The latter co-culture described is a movement culture as I define it in this dissertation. There is also an even more layered look at movement culture by focusing on the black U.S. and/or African American African dance community. This co-culture lives within the broader black U.S. and/or African American community. This African dance community in U.S. America is explored more in Chapter V.

Diasporic is used to orient an engagement with Diaspora as a practice—alive, evolving, changing, flexible, and a transitional landscape. This is detailed more in Chapters II, IV, V, and VI. Diasporic is further elaborated upon by historians, scholars, theorists, and the diasporic movement practitioners and/or movement artists that contributed to this dissertation. I have attempted to define diasporic beyond my own understandings, which is true for most of the language used throughout this dissertation.

Diasporic movement practitioner and *movement artist* are used interchangeably as well. Diasporic movement practitioners reference the world and practice of black/African diasporic movement, choreography, performance, and artistry. This term could speak mostly to how traditional dances move through this locations in the field of dance.

Movement artist is a broader term that includes people who choose dance as a profession while also capturing a wider cultural orientation, to include embodying gestures and pedestrian movements within that culture, as well as dance experienced in technique classes and dance crafted for stages and performances.

There are further examples of terminology concerning how identities are discussed in diverse ways by the research participants and specific to their individual needs and experiences. I try to introduce and analyze these individual ways of languaging ideas and practices throughout the dissertation. For example, explanations for the terms *translineages* and *contemporary migrations* will become more evident when listening to the ideas shared by the movement artists in Chapters V and VI. My hope is that by describing how I conceived and framed language throughout the dissertation, the reader will be better able to unravel the concepts unearthed in this dissertation with clarity.

Realizations and Limitations

There were many moments of realization throughout the dissertation that proved I would need to limit what I could include. I aimed to include 6 case studies, 5 individual and 1 group. I knew quite early on into the data analysis that the group study would not make it into the dissertation. I realized that the rigor of analyzing the group data might be its own study in the future. Therefore, I decided to leave an analysis of the group for another time. However, this absence meant losing one of my intentioned perspectives regarding how a U.S. black/African diasporic group experience; meaning the entire group embodying diasporic movement individually and collectively, interacts with the

individual's description of embodying the diasporic experience. Hopefully, through the research and writing process of the dissertation, the reader can see how the voices of the individual participants do become a collective in some ways; however, I still feel there is something missing when the group experience is absent.

After analyzing and working with the ideas of the movement artists and their perspectives in this dissertation, I realized how important it might be in the future to dig into how issues and experiences of embodying and embodiment within a diasporic movement practice, specifically as discussed by differing theoreticians in conversation with the dissertation's movement artists, might open new ways of thinking about notions of embodiment in general. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I again felt topic is best left to future research.

The issues that continually surfaced throughout the process of data analysis concerned how the diasporic movement practitioners discussed citizenship, labor, and diaspora as is has affected their lives and their dance practice. Therefore, I chose to concentrate my theoretical chapters (V and VI) on these themes. These themes further led me to look more closely at how each of them discussed their practice in relationship to how they felt their identity shifting within different cultural and geographical experiences.

My aim and purpose throughout the dissertation is to focus on how specific black/African diasporic women movement artists discuss and analyze their identity orientations, philosophies, and practices in black/African descendant dance. Further, I

hope to share with the reader how these discussions connect with or disconnect from other theorists writing about diasporic movement practices.

In summary, as a movement artist, teacher, choreographer, and performer, I wanted to develop and experience a research process that captured the philosophies and practices of black/African descent women working in black/African diasporic movement practices from various angles, from various movements, and various identities. Further, I wanted to contribute dialogues that expressed the overlapping professional locations in which each research participant places herself in the dance world. Most importantly, however, I found that what became paramount was how these movement artists ebb and flow through these overlapping locations with each flow opening new ways of thinking about a movement practice steeped in a culture in which the research participants are both insiders and outsiders.

When researching for texts or resources that might discuss these ebbs and flows experienced by diasporic movement practitioners, I found few that specifically addressed black/African descent women movement artists, particularly those working within and/or grounded in black/African diasporic dance frameworks. Due to the rare focus on black/African descent women movement artists and their philosophies and practices of teaching, performing, and choreographing black/African diasporic movement and dance, I organized the dissertation to honor this world. I hope that I have been able to make more visible intricately, and comprehensively those whose labor may not be seen often. The objective of the dissertation was to contribute scholarship that may continue to help

decolonize the field of dance and allow other identity orientations and cultural communities several seats at the academic table and beyond.

Another final realization of this dissertation is how a budding cross disciplinary approach to the conversations shared continually emerged. The process of defining diaspora and diasporic orientations became most fruitful when journeying into other disciplines during the writing process. Thus, I am hopeful that this dissertation will spark more interest in the potential for interdisciplinary discourse connecting possibilities of dance and diaspora as catalyst for fresh insights into how a philosophical practical becomes an embodied dance practice and vice versa. I found my engagement with philosophers, linguists, and historians as well as scholars of black feminist, African American, and African studies to be overflowing with fertile trajectories for my future research.

Purpose

Therefore, the broadest purpose of this doctoral research is to open up insights into the nuanced complexity emerging from contemporary dialogues regarding teaching, choreographing, and performing black/African diasporic dance and movement culture. By unveiling and sharing the philosophies and practices within the worlds of black/African diasporic dances and movement cultures, I hope to further contextualize these philosophies and practices through their relationship to diverse critical histories and theories around race, class, and gender, as well as to provide background information on how the diasporic movement practitioners contributing to this dissertation have lived

socially and culturally within the United States and within the diaspora they experienced in their travels and movement research.

In Chapter II, I share and describe my emerging methods of qualitative research used for this dissertation. I organized Chapter III, to reveal how I enter as a researcher into a dialogue on blackness, Africanness, and diasporic orientations through theorists whose work provided resonance and revelations throughout the literature review process. Chapter IV was highly influenced by advisory committee member Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, who saw in the very beginning of her engagement with my doctoral research the potential to focus on the laboring of women diasporic movement practitioners from multiple standpoints. Chapters V and VI is where the embodied voices of the movement artists who contributed their time and energy to this dissertation are revealed. Chapter V explores citizenship alongside the travel of the movement artists through the black/African Diaspora. The second section of Chapter V explores how the movement artists who contributed to this dissertation were first exposed to black/African descendent dances and movement cultures. Chapter VI lays down six philosophies and practices of integrity derived from the collective experiences of the diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation. Chapter VII, the conclusion, summarizes the insight shared by the research participants while also exposing stones left only partially turned due to the limitations of this research study. I conclude by discussing how future research can address how these stones might be further exposed within differing future research trajectories.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGIES IN AN EMERGING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PRACTICE

Introduction

My doctoral research focuses on women who identify as black and/or African American who were born in the United States of America and who embody and create diasporic dances of black/African descent. My research queries the ways in which these women navigate U.S. life, citizenship, and identity and how these factors are intertwined with their artistic endeavors. This research brings together a collection of philosophies and practices of integrity that these movement artists live by and incorporate when they are teaching, performing, and choreographing black/African diasporic movement and dance.

In this chapter, I discuss the Institutional Review Board process; my methodological approaches, influences, and orientations; and the practical methods of data collection, analysis, and writing that were used for this doctoral research. In all sections of this chapter, I bring forth the ethical concerns that emerged during the research process.

To conduct my research, I combined influential elements of multiple methodologies to address the following tenets:

- (1) Understanding the cultural values of the diasporic movement practitioners and/or movement artists who contributed to my research by learning about the

- worlds in which they live from their perspectives;
- (2) Ethically developing relationships with these movement artists, particularly during interviews;
 - (3) Engaging with the movement artists and the data collected with rigor by making use of optimal data analysis techniques and multiple qualitative research methodologies;
 - (4) Valuing the theory that emerges from the data while critically acknowledging what the process raises for me as a researcher,
 - (5) Investigating with high critical awareness and practical action my insider/insider/outsider relationship to the subject matter of the research; and
 - (6) Focusing on the essence of the phenomenon being researched by collecting the lived experiences of these movement artists.

The Institutional Review Board Process

Ethical strategies are woven throughout the qualitative research processes used for this doctoral work, and they are core features of the multifaceted approach that I undertook to complete this project. One of the primary guideposts for ethical research is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. The very first element required for my department and for the IRB procedures was to submit a proposal and a list of questions. Thus, I first had to define who would the contributors to this dissertation would be and why they were chosen.

Defining the Movement Artist Contributors

One of the first things that I needed to determine when embarking upon this research was the criteria for the people whom I would ask to join me in this process. There were a few things that I considered crucial to my research. First, I was interested in the experiences of black and/or African American women who were reared in the United States because of the large contingent of these women who support ongoing access to and who continually support diasporic dances of black/African descent in U.S. communities. I was also interested in multiple practices, so I included teachers, performers, and choreographers. I feel embodying and studying are inherent in all of these ways of working, so I did not consider these to be separate processes at the forefront. I also wanted to be sure that it was clear that these women often participate in more than one of these work modes. In addition, it felt significant to bring in the experience of traveling throughout the black/African Diaspora to help foster nuance and richness in the data collected. I felt that including experiences of blackness and diasporic dances in parts of the world outside of the United States would help to push the boundaries of the dialogue. I also wanted to gather a diverse set of women with varying backgrounds and rearing in both life and the world of black/African diasporic dances. These were my main requirements when selecting and defining the diasporic movement practitioners who would become part of this doctoral research.

As I began to interview each diasporic movement practitioner, I realized that the term *research participant* felt inadequate. It seemed to limit the feeling of who they are

and to remove some of the essence of their relevance in the field of dance. The term felt limiting to me as a philosophical orientation and an identifying term, and it hindered my ability to articulate their perspectives. Through that identity, I was not able to see these artists as people with long histories and narratives in black/African diasporic dance. Frankly, the term felt too clinical. I wanted to describe these women as they emerged throughout the research process.

There are many terms that can be used for the people who contributed to my dissertation; they hold many roles in multiple communities, and they are people first. Because of this, I chose to use multiple identifiers to capture these nuances. Some of these terms are neatly translated, relate easily to one another, and are interchangeable. However, some of these terms fall into the *décalage* described by Brent Hayes Edwards, which is further discussed in Chapter III of this dissertation. The French term *décalage* refers to language gaps, halts, or murkiness that cannot be crossed or that do not intersect in a way that makes sense immediately. The terms I chose for consideration as *décalage* were *black U.S.*, *African American*, *woman*, *mother*, *laborer*, *worker*, *diasporic movement practitioner*, *movement artist*, *teacher*, *artist*, *performer*, *choreographer*, and *student*. Immediately evident are the relational blurs that these words create as they live with one another in the *décalage* of the dancers interviewed in this dissertation. These identity markers reflect the multiple, nuanced, and diverse spaces that the people who contributed to this dissertation inhabit both as individuals and collectively in their communities.

Biographies of Movement Artists

This dissertation unveils the philosophies and practices of five diasporic movement practitioners. These movement artists who contributed their perspectives to this dissertation identify themselves in multiple ways, including by ethnicity, race, class, and gender. I chose each of these participants because I am interested in the philosophies and practices of teachers, choreographers, and performers of black/African diasporic movement practices who also self-identify and are socially identified as black U.S., African American, of black/African descent, woman, female, and/or born/reared in the United States. It was also important to me that these movement artists be committed to traveling throughout the black/African Diaspora to process multiple perspectives and insights related to what it means globally to be black and/or of African descent and how that influences the practice of diasporic dances. I searched for people who wanted to experience dances and movement cultures of black/African descent outside of the United States. Finally, I wanted to bring visibility to women who may not otherwise be written about because their work is felt more locally as opposed to nationally or globally. For some, this factor has changed over the course of this dissertation work.

This dissertation is not an accounting of the life stories of these artists; each story would need its own book. However, by placing identity orientations at the forefront of this dissertation's work, I feel that it is essential to provide a brief biography of each participant. I included my own biography in the introduction and throughout this dissertation for transparency and contextualization. I am listing biographical information

to honor and contextualize the diasporic movement practitioners who offered their perspectives to this dissertation. The biographies presented below highlight these artists' background information to offer some insightful transparency for readers as they move through the philosophies and practices of these artists and locate the work of these artists within black/African diasporic dance communities and movement cultures. Included also is a quote which serves as a brief entry point into each movement artist's diasporic orientations. All information has come from interviews and follow up conversations with each movement artist. Each biography has been constructed similarly for clarity.

Dr. Ojeya Cruz Banks was born in 1976. She is Chamorro and Macron from Guahan/Guam, African American, and of Black/African descent. Her racialized identity is Black and her nationality is U.S. American. Her teachers and mentors in diasporic dance and movement practices include Moustapha Bangoura (Guinea/USA), Marie Basse (Senegal/USA), Ronald K. Brown (USA), Simone Gomez Y the Gomez Sisters (Senegal), Yousouf Kombassa (Guinea/USA), Tacko Sissoko (Senegal/USA), and Eno Washington (USA). Ojeya Cruz Banks has trained in Yoruba Anadabo with Hamlet in Havana Cuba, Bynrwanda and Buganda dance and chant in Uganda. At the time of her interview, she was a Senior Lecturer in the Dance Studies Program at the University of Otago School of Physical Education, Sport, and Exercise Sciences (Dunedin New Zealand Aotearoa) and taught an open community class in West African Dance in Dunedin while also working as a freelance choreographer/ performer. Ojeya Cruz Banks earned a Bachelor, Master of Arts, and a doctoral degree from the University of Arizona.

She also attended University of Nairobi in Kenya and the University of Makerere in Uganda. She studied abroad in 1998 and 2002. Ojeya Cruz Banks is an anthropologist, choreographer, dancer, performer, and teacher.

Afro Diaspora or Black Diaspora has a connotation of U.S. or even America; you know, the experience of African people or African descended people in the Americas. African Diaspora can encapsulate the cultural hybridity and cultural interchange or indigenous remix that is happening on the continent of Africa. The dark side is the transatlantic slave trade but ultimately, I think of interchange or the interactions throughout Diaspora. (Cruz Banks)

Nia Love was born in 1963. She is Black and her nationality is U.S. American. Her teachers, and mentors in diasporic dance and movement practices include Alicia Alonso (Cuba), Baba Chuck Davis (USA), Melvin Deal (USA), Dr. Yvonne Daniel (USA), Baba Richard Gonzalez (USA), Dr. Pearl Primas (USA) and Min Tanaka (Japan). Highly influential in her diasporic trajectory in dance and culture, she is a part of the Bosum-Dzemawodzi traditional African religious and cultural organization community and the Akonédi Shrine, in Queens New York, both led by the late Nana Yao Oparebea Dinizulu. His son, Nana Kimati Dinizulu, was the main connector to the Priest and Priestess of the Akonédi Shrine in Larteh (Ghana), during her Fulbright Research. This shrine was led by High Priestess Akomfo Hemma Akua Oparebea, whom she met in the U.S. Nia Love earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Directing at Howard University and a Master of Fine Arts in Dance at Florida State University. Nia Love is a freelance performance artist, choreographer, curator, facilitator, lecturer, and artist in residence.

"Diaspora," meaning that which is disbursed out beyond its own physical self, its own immediate construct...Africanness gets opened up as it moves across the Atlantic. And it moves across the Atlantic...through the bodies of those Africans

that are no longer...on the African continent that are being now forcefully migrated from slavery over the transatlantic moving...into through the Caribbean, across South America, into North America. So now you have these Africans that carry with them memory and information in their bodies and their conscious and their subconscious minds about all the things that they are and have been from the beginning of time that have existed on a continent...that are now shifting its physical presence in and around the world...that is the disbursement in some instances of the Africanist presence.

Afro diaspora, I'm playing with that word, Afro meaning that it is from Africa, and that it houses itself inside of this new sensibility of Blackness...which was created in the hull of the ship to me. I think that the hull of the ship inside of that very deep brutality arose this movement of sorts, this energy that became Afro, that became Black. That was very racialized but came with it a sense of power beyond...manifestation of that Black Afro...sensibility (Love).

Dr. Nzinga Metzger was born in 1972. She is ethnically Susu, Krio, and African American. Her racialized identity is Black and her nationality is U.S. American. Her teachers and mentors in diasporic dance and movement practices include Mbemba Bangoura (Guinea/ USA), Hodari Banks (USA), Marie Basse (Senegal/USA), Vena Jefferson (USA), Nia Love (USA), Assane Konte (Senegal/USA), Yousouf Koumbassa (Guinea/USA), and Dorothy Wilkie (USA). She is currently a professor of Anthropology at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. Nzinga Metzger earned a Bachelor of Arts in History at Florida State University, a Master of Arts in History at Temple University, and a doctoral degree in Cultural Anthropology at Florida State University. Nzinga Metzger is an anthropologist, historian, performer, and teacher.

Colloquially, they are all interchangeable...it depends on your audience. If you are trying to be really specific in doing academic writing or speaking to an academic audience for me personally if you are talking about Black people who have been dispersed as a result of the transatlantic slave trade then I would prefer African Diaspora. I also know that outside of the community of people of African descent there are other people in the world that refer to themselves as Black who are not

of direct African descent, Australian Aborigines for example, and I also know that there are some people who are older generations of Indians, Bangladeshis such as the artist MYA, and certain Pacific Islanders. Because of that, if I am talking about people of African descent who are around the world because of the transatlantic slave trade and/or its colonial and post-colonial ramifications I like to say African Diaspora...just for my own comfort in being specific I would avoid Black. And then too if you don't consider it [when using the term Black Diaspora] you run the risk of being...North America or U.S. centric. Even when you say African Diaspora there are people who are a part of the African Diaspora who are in Iran, India, Afghanistan, Turkey who are Black. They have Afro Turkish communities, Afro Iranian communities. For me when I say African Diaspora that folds in the history of...East African slavery and West African slavery. The diaspora that has come as a result of colonial and post-colonial ramifications. And then within that I would say Atlantica. I like the term Atlantica because it's a succinct way of dealing with those countries in Western Europe, Western Africa, the Caribbean, and North and South America that were a direct result of the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent phenomena (Metzger).

R. Jeannine Osayande was born in 1960. She is African American. Her racialized identity is Black and her nationality is U.S. American. Her teachers and mentors in diasporic dance and movement practices include Hodari Banks (USA), Daryl Barbee (USA), Yalani Bangoura (Guinea/USA), Marie Basse-Wiles (Senegal/USA), De Ama Battle (USA), Ibrahima Camara (Senegal/USA), Heather Levi (USA), Bamadele Osumarea (USA), Eno Washington (USA), Raymond Sylla (USA), Tamara Mobley (USA), Sadio Roche' (Senegal/International), Dr. Kariamuwelsh (USA), Sharon Friedler (USA), Edir Passos (Brazil/USA), and Francis Nii-Yartey (Ghana). She is currently Owner/Director of Jeannine Osayande & Dunya Performing Arts Company, Guest Artist/Lecturer at Ursinus College, and Master Teaching Artist with Young Audiences New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania. She serves as a Board Member for Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation and as Executive Board Chair for the Philadelphia

Folklore Project. R. Jeannine Osayande is a movement artist, master teacher, choreographer, performer, community collaborator, and anthropologist.

African Diaspora, Black Diaspora, and Afro Diaspora] are terms that are a part of a journey. It depends on where we are and how we see ourselves. I think of migration whether was by force or by choice. Black references Civil Rights and Black people wanting to define themselves. African—whether we acknowledge it or not we are all African.

Afro – African Americans moved away from Afro because of the confusion with the afro hairstyle. Even when they used to say Afro-American, when it switched to that—just because Afro’s a hairstyle, and I understand that slang could be something— like, it could be a hairstyle, but yet, be redefined as something else.

Now, for me, Black—that was like, you know, say it loud: I’m Black and I’m proud; Civil Rights; and just that identity—how black people wanted to define themselves in the U.S. during that timeframe. And so, I identify with it, and I actually don’t have a problem with that term, probably, because it – for that reason, with growing up with it, and it having that – making a statement (Osayande).

Shani Sterling was born in 1974. She is African American and Black and her nationality is U.S. American. Her teachers and mentors in diasporic dance and movement practices include J. R. Glover (USA), Sulley Imoro (Ghana/USA), Dr. Madeleine Wright (USA/Ghana), Jesse Woodcock (USA), Dr. Paschale Younge (USA/Ghana), and Dr. Zelma Badu Younge (USA/Ghana). She is a Professor of Dance at Houston Community College and an independent artist. Shani Sterling is a professor, performer, mother, scholar, artist, mom, daughter, sister, and Yogi.

African Diaspora or Black Diaspora...those terms basically refer to anything that was birthed out of African dance and culture; that has traveled to other places. So, anything that has aesthetics or elements of African dance and culture, but is no longer in Africa and is now existing in other places. I do. In my opinion, African Diaspora would have, I think, more traces or elements of African dance, music or

culture and Black Diaspora is...more closely related to African-American culture or vantage point (Sterling).

Research Questions

After choosing the contributing movement artists and/or diasporic movement practitioners, the next step was to generate a list of questions that would guide my research and another list of questions for the interviewees. My objective was to contribute to diversifying the dialogue around teaching, performing, and choreographing diasporic dances of black/African descent with nuance and complexity. Here are the research questions that I presented in my prospectus:

- (1) How do Black U.S. women describe their experiences of embodying, archiving, preserving, and/or artistically influencing traditional dances of an African/Afro/Black Diaspora? How do Black U.S. women describe their nomadic and migratory experience as they travel the African/Afro/Black Diaspora to learn diasporic movement practices?
- (2) How do Black U.S. women describe their social experiences as U.S. citizens traversing an international network of diasporic movement practitioners? How do they describe navigating their return to daily life in the United States?
- (3) How does my involvement in diasporic movement practices influence how I experience the practice of my co-researchers and the analysis of my data collection? How do I describe my own experience of working with these women as co-researchers in an African/Afro/Black Diaspora and as a diasporic movement practitioner?
- (4) What are the ongoing conversations currently taking place concerning dance of the Diaspora? How might connections develop between the research collected with my co-researchers and the diasporic conversations and movement practices currently unfolding?

With Questions 3 and 4, I begin to see the ethical implications of my position as an insider/insider/outsider researcher (I explain this term in more detail shortly). My

ethical responsibilities included taking survey of my own involvement in the world of black/African diasporic dance as a teacher, choreographer, and performer and interrogating how this involvement may influence the whole of the research process.

For this research—which focused on philosophes, practices, diasporic travels, orientations around identity, and the citizenship of diasporic movement practitioners—it became clear to me that two interviews were needed. The first interview would be used to discuss identity, citizenship, and black/African diasporic orientations; the second interview would focus on philosophy and practice. Following is the list of the interview questions that I prepared for the movement artists who contributed to the research:

(1) Please describe your relationship with the United States of America. Please describe how you define *citizenship* and *nationhood*. Would you describe yourself as a citizen of the United States? Why or why not?

(2) Please describe your ethnicity and how you experience that understanding in the United States of America.

(3) Please describe your gender and how you experience that understanding in the United States of America.

(4) Please describe your definition for and/or understanding of *Diaspora*. How would you describe the relationship between your understanding of *Diaspora* and your understanding of citizenship or nationhood?

(5) Please describe your understanding of the African/Afro/Black Diaspora. If you have an association or description of what *African*, *Afro*, and/or *Black* means to you, please explain your perception of these terms.

(6) Please describe the interaction between your understanding of citizenship as you experience it in the United States of America and also in your experiences traveling throughout the *Diaspora* to learn dance.

(7) Please describe your significant social interactions or experiences within and outside of the dance training environments while traveling in the *Diaspora*.

(8) Please describe your social experience within and outside of the dance training environments in the Diaspora as it interacts (or not) with the social experience in the United States. Do those experiences speak to one another in various ways? Why or why not?

(9) Please describe how it became possible for you to travel throughout the Diaspora. Describe your personal motivation, economic situation, and/or the support you received personally and/or professionally.

(10) Please describe your initial experiences of learning dances of the Africa/Afro/Black Diaspora nationally and internationally.

(11) Please describe your most significant experiences of traveling to various countries in the Diaspora to learn dance.

(12) Please describe your most challenging experiences of traveling to various countries in the Diaspora to learn dance.

(13) Do gender and ethnicity influence your professional and personal experiences of traveling the Diaspora to learn, teach, and choreograph dance? If so, please offer some examples of your experiences in these categories. If not, please explain and describe your perceptions in this area.

(14) Please describe the personal and professional relationships and/or interactions you have with your teachers in the Diaspora. If applicable, describe other relationships developed beyond your teachers during your travels throughout the Diaspora to learn, teach, perform, and/or choreograph.

(15) Please describe your professional teaching, choreography, and artistic explorations. How do they interact with or disassociate from your experiences of dance in the African/Afro/Black Diaspora?

(16) Please describe your personal and professional objectives and goals of the past and of your current dance or movement practice.

(17) Please describe shifts in your practice and/or sustained practices as your learning, teaching, choreographing, and performing developed.

(18) Please describe your relationship to or definition of *authenticity* in your learning, teaching, performing, and choreographic practice in the Diaspora.

(19) Please describe your process of teaching, performing, and/or choreographing with dances of the Diaspora and/or with diasporic movement influences. What choices do you make in terms of artistic exploration? What distinguishes your teaching from that of your teachers? What are the boundaries of this work? Where do you find freedom in this work?

(20) Please describe the unspoken rules of teaching or choreographing African dance. How do you know it is African dance?

(21) When you look at a dancer or in your own process of learning, what are your expectations or the factors that make you feel you have accomplished learning a dance and are ready to teach, perform, or choreograph that dance? How do you know that you know a dance well enough to teach, perform, or choreograph it?

(22) Please describe the emergence of diasporic movement in your choreography and teaching. How does the movement enter your spaces of teaching and choreographing?

(23) Please describe your preparation process for and approach to learning, teaching, choreographing, performing, and/or artistic exploration.

(24) After learning several styles of dance from the Diaspora, how do you experience the mix of learned dances and diasporic influences in your body? How do you feel about the multiple movement styles in your body? What are your rules of engagement and authenticity when teaching and choreographing within diasporic movement?

(25) How do you hone your skills in each practice separately and in combination? How do you keep your practice fresh in your body? Please describe this process when working with what you would categorize as traditional dances and multiple, mixed, or merged diasporic movement, if applicable.

(26) How do you translate or describe your diasporic movement practice to your students, dancers, or audiences? Please describe this process when working with what you would categorize as traditional dances and multiple, mixed, or merged diasporic movement, if applicable.

(27) Please describe significant and unexpected discoveries in your learning, teaching, performing, and choreographing that you will continue or discontinue in your diasporic movement practice.

(28) Please describe your teaching, performing, and choreographing dances of the Diaspora or with diasporic movement influences. Is it a practice that will continue throughout your lifetime? Why or why not? If yes, how?

The interviews were audio and video recorded to capture the moving body in action. Because these were dancers, I knew as an insider that capturing conversational embodiment may stimulate surprising research information. For example, movement artists often demonstrate movement during their dialogue, thus helping to connect philosophy and practice. Once the questions were devised and approved by my dissertation committee, the next step was to create consent forms that would be approved by the IRB. I received consent from all institutions in which I observed and recorded movement moments, classes, workshops, rehearsals, and performances. I also created consent forms for each diasporic movement practitioner involved in any interview or observation.

Site Visits

In addition to conducting the verbally focused interviews, I also decided to film the movement artists teaching, choreographing, and performing in the settings that worked the best for them. These site visits were another crucial component because the practice of these movement artists is based in the body. The labor of diasporic movement practitioners is embodiment, so it is critical to document and observe them in the action of dance to further guide the illumination of their craft. If there were opportunities to participate in movement processes, I joined, as a participant observed, and I video recorded this experience. I also observe and filmed movement engagement where these artists were performing, teaching, or choreographing without participation. I contacted each movement

artist over a period of 6 months to 2 years and confirmed and reconfirmed their participation. For some movement artists, it worked out that I would come to them twice to conduct my research; for others, one visit would work. We decided together and according to their schedules when the interviews, participant observations, and recordings would happen. I also gave them a choice concerning the locations of their interviews to offer comfort to the process. Some preferred their homes, whereas others selected their offices or a café.

I visited with Nia Love twice. During the first visit, I participated in, observed, and filmed a 3-day workshop that she facilitated in New York City by the river and in other natural environments in the Bronx. During the second visit, I conducted both interviews. For Shani Sterling, I visited her Akwaaba Dance and Drum Festival as well as observed her performing the dances of Ghana in her home and on stage. I visited her again at a less busy time for the second interview. I interviewed Nzinga Metzger during one visit. She was the only artist that I was not able to film at work; I was also unable to participate in a class with her for this research, although I have participated in her classes and performed songs of the black/African Diaspora with her in the past. After I asked her to be a part of the study, she had decided to take a hiatus from teaching; some of her reasoning for that will become apparent in the next chapters of this dissertation. I felt her voice as a longtime practitioner from a background and rearing that is different than the other practitioners was relevant, regardless of her break from teaching. Her commitment to the world of black/African diasporic dance expanded beyond teaching, and I felt that it was significant to include her

voice in this research as in service of a diverse dialogue. Ojeya Cruz Banks lives in Dunedin, New Zealand (Aotearoa). Due to financial constraints, it was determined that I would visit her one time for 1 month for the purposes of this dissertation. In this time, we completed two interviews, I was a participant observer, and I filmed her work. I was also able to capture her choreographic work and ultimately to make a second visit to follow up and clarify some data. I was able to spend 3 days with Jeannine Osayande and capture all of the required elements for this dissertation. She lives near me in the Philadelphia area, so my time with her was very convenient.

Observation and Interview Processes

A critical observation of your assumptions, biases, and agendas is a crucial tool to avoid having your biases determine the findings. It is necessary to acknowledge my standing as an insider/insider/outsider researcher and thus the inherent assumptions, biases, and agendas that are relevant to my research. I am an insider first because I live personally, professionally, and daily in the movement cultures and communities that are the center of this research: black/African diasporic movement practices. I am an insider second because every person in my dissertation was already known to me. I have been the student of these women, performed with them, or performed in their choreographic work. However, I am an outsider because the research is asking me to enter their work from their perspective and to build their world as they see it. I can only know their philosophies of their work as an outsider. I am also an outsider because the sites and locations in which I first worked with them are not all the same as those in which I observed their work. Throughout my research,

I used guideposts to curb my assumptions, biases, and agendas to keep the inquiry open and to avoid narrow or generalizing orientations; these guideposts are elaborated upon in the following sections about methodologies in theory and practice. I worked to stay aligned with one of the main objectives of this doctoral research: elaborating upon the diverse nuances of the philosophies and practices of the black/African diasporic movement.

As a researcher, familiarity with your subjects can also bring some positive aspects to the research process if you embrace—as an insider/insider/outsider—the idea that an objective viewpoint may not be fully possible. As an insider/insider/outsider, my familiarity with my subjects was useful in a few ways. It helped tremendously with the structuring of the questions and the flow of the interviews. As a movement artist myself, I have filmed my own classes and work, so I knew which angles would be good for capturing the teaching, choreographing, and performing. Although some spaces just did not allow me to capture the whole of a class at an optimal level, most were acceptable for review.

All observations—including interviews, participant observations, and video observations—were completed, with the exception of those for Nzinga Metzger, who had taken a break from teaching during our time together. All data collection observations were also scheduled at the convenience of the diasporic movement practitioners and as their time and capacity permitted. In some cases, interviews occurred first and observations were last; in some situations, the order was mixed.

Like the design of scheduling the data collection processes, the interviews were flexible as well. For example, if one question led a movement artist into deeper reflection than expected, I let this emerge and maybe even omitted a question if it felt necessary to let the artist lead. All of the openness and consideration for where the research led the movement artists was a critical compass toward hearing the data presented rather than the data desired. This openness in scheduling also reflected the fact that all but one of these artists were mothers and/or caretakers of elders, so these additional responsibilities also played a role in the process. I am sure that this was influenced by the fact that I am a working mother myself. One interview was done with children in the background playing or rehearsing on their instruments; another was done with a movement artist who was taking care of her mother and who even asked her mother to give input at the end of the interview, which she happily did. In terms of the interview fluidity, there were three elements that I tried to keep at the forefront: the movement artist's choice of the interview environment, letting the interview responses influence the design of the interview, and being flexible in responding to the interviewee to create cultural comfort when conversing.

The final stage was to watch and listen to each interview, to review all participant observations on video, and to watch the video-only observations that did not involve my participation. I journaled or did memo-writing continuously to critically capture my own observations, familiarities, and agendas. I did not transcribe my own interviews due to time restrictions. Although I anticipated doing this work myself, I was struck by a dangerously debilitating pregnancy and recovery process that took over 2 years of my life. This shifted

my ability to finish transcribing in the time frame required, so I opted to have the information transcribed by a service recommended by a colleague called Audio File Solutions LLC. Fortunately, they did a beautiful and attentive job, and I feel that I was able to pick up where I left off. Even though I missed the chance to be deeply ingrained in the data through the transcription process, I did eventually feel entrenched during the data analysis stage. All of the journaling and memo-writing throughout the process kept my sensibilities intact. Each participant had an opportunity to review her own transcripts and to offer feedback; all of the artists will also be given an electronic copy of the final dissertation.

Privacy Practice

Working closely with participants and asking them to divulge potentially intimate details of their lives brings with it questions of privacy rights. In *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*, Corrine Glesne said that “privacy is generally the foremost concern” (122). Glesne proposed an autocratic or democratic research process. The researcher with an open and transparent interaction with the research participants can lead autocratic researcher processes with the final research outcome and anonymity decisions made by the researcher (Glesne 124). Democratic researcher processes allow final decisions to be led by a community and sometimes are influenced by political and power dynamics within that community (Glesne 124). The democratic process does bring challenges, because the researcher is also entrenched with assumptions and values about politics and power that influence the research outcome. For my research, I employed

some elements of both autocratic and democratic strategies. As a researcher, I must take responsibility for what I write and what my orientations are, and I must let the theory rise from the data. Autocratic processes allow the researcher to make decisions about the content and presentation of the final product and to take responsibility for it while also considering and honoring the concerns of the research participants.

The consent forms that were approved by IRB and distributed as part of the research process bind the researcher and the participants to agreed-upon ethical procedures, including those related to privacy. The consent document informed the movement artists “(1) that participation is voluntary, (2) of any aspects of the research that might affect their well-being,” and (3) that they could exit the process at any time” (Glesne116). I facilitated transparency and privacy by having discussions with the movement artists about what their participation would entail, what in their participation I could foresee as being places of self-discovery or personal development that might be challenging, and what their processes would be for reviewing their transcriptions with an ability to adapt that information that would be included. I also asked for input and clarification. With the use of these methods, I sought to treat privacy as a preventative and transparent element rather than as an afterthought.

Qualitative Research Methodologies: Approaches, Orientations, and Influences

This doctoral work is focused on black U.S. and/or African American women who are movement artists, teachers, performers, and/or choreographers of black/African diasporic dances. In my research, I sought to uncover their experiences of embodying

diasporic dances of black/African descent in various geographic locations and communities as well as how these processes influenced their artistic, professional, and personal lives. I also sought information regarding their sense of citizenship and agency in connection to diasporic movement practices and in navigating their lives as black U.S. Americans. The research involves very specific communities that have their own ways of life and sets of values. These values do not always merge or fit well into the dominant European or Western research practices, so I explored alternative qualitative research methodologies to expand my ideas of ethics and appropriate practices in qualitative research. This required an investigation of how multiple research methods might intertwine to create a unique system of philosophical approaches and practical actions that are relevant to the needs of this dissertation. Synthesizing, intersecting, and collaborating research methods presented by grounded theory, phenomenology, indigenous research, case studies, and various scholars have shaped the qualitative research methodologies used for this dissertation.

Case Studies

A prominent qualitative research methodology in my doctoral work is the case study. In her 2009 book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, Sharan B. Merriam defined case study as “an in depth description and analysis of a bounded system” and an “inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (40). The case studies of this dissertation were bound to women movement artists and

diasporic movement practitioners who teach, perform, and choreograph diasporic dances of black/African descent and to their communities. The studies were also limited to women born and/or raised in the United States of America who traveled throughout the black/African Diaspora to study diasporic dances globally. There were five individual case studies. The dissertation as a whole is meant to present a diverse set of women movement artists who identify to varying degrees as teachers, performers, and/or choreographers. The phenomenon of diasporic movement practitioners of black/African descent who were born and/or reared in the United States and who are working within the context of black/African diasporic dance as a movement practice is an area in need of dedication and nuance.

One of the main reasons that I chose case studies as a foundational method is that I felt it would offer a pathway to diversifying the dialogue on black/African diasporic movement practices in the field of dance. I saw this an opportunity to unveil and make more visible the selected movement artists out of the many working in the field without massive popular exposure and to also “investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (Merriam 48). The phenomenon under study is the world of teaching, performing, and choreographing black/African diasporic dances. The population is black women born and reared in the United States who are of black/African descent. The general condition is a charged time for facing oppressive systems, mostly as this relates to race and gender, although class is also included as these systems intersect.

Indigenous Research Methods

Shawn Wilson, also known as Opaskwayak Cree, is particularly sensitive to how we, as researchers, enter various communities. According to Wilson, one of the first elements of the work is to take a look at all vantage points, including that of the researcher and those of the people who have agreed to contribute their perspectives to the research. In his book entitled *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Wilson reveals his perspectives on how participants (i.e., research participants, interviewees, subjects, co-researchers, and so on) may be viewing themselves as part of the research process and perhaps how the researchers should be viewing themselves. This inquiry is particularly interesting and complex when researchers play an insider/outsider role in the communities that they have chosen to research. As both a member of an indigenous group and a researcher, Wilson stated the following: “We are beginning to develop our own research paradigms and to demand that research conducted in our communities follow our codes of conduct and honours our systems of knowledge and worldviews” (8).

The diasporic movement practitioners who contributed to this dissertation see themselves as a part of multiple communities that consider and even center values and ways of life that are of black/African descent. As I have mentioned previously, as a researcher, I am an insider/insider/outsider in these communities. We live and work within diverse value systems of black/African diasporic communities that are not always compatible with (or may even be in conflict with) the European or Western orientations

or research scholarship models from which this doctoral process and dissertation emerges. Our values may not even always be compatible with those of one another. As an insider/insider/outsider researcher, the communities of the diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation are communities that have been part of my life since childhood. In other words, I have an intricate connection to and perspective on the essence of the values that these communities employ socially, culturally, physically, and spiritually. However, ethically, it is essential that my research process makes me question my familiarity with the subject matter; it also forces me to look at the data collection and analysis from various angles to readjust my position and to open pathways between my own orientations and the ways in which they intersect with and diverge from the information that the data presented.

It was my job to let the data lead and to keep my familiarity with the subject matter and the communities from which the movement artists in this dissertation emerged in the background. Leaving room for discovery and being pushed out of my own view was highly significant to the rigorous process of analyzing the data. This required some philosophical inquiry and practical action to ensure the nuances of the data, which are centered in particular communal, cultural, social, spiritual, historical, and physical structures. I needed to ensure that the data had fertile ground from which to emerge. Wilson's work served as a guide for moving through the research process with this idea on my mind and in my heart.

Wilson asserted that it becomes questionable to compare indigenous research paradigms with those of others or to try to work within them, particularly when the people participating in the research as interviewees have frames of their own to be considered. Alternative ways of approaching research that combines multiple philosophical approaches and practical actions may elicit more ethical research, but these methods are new and in development. Wilson explained why this way of working can pose challenges and feel incomplete:

If indigenous scholars are to be freed from the need to constantly justify our research and knowledge systems from a dominant system perspective, it may be necessary for us to be clearer in our articulation of exactly what our own paradigm entails. (12)

This is risky work, because, like any new ideas, alternative research methodologies will be articulated in small steps and across generations. This dissertation does not have the capacity to complete this work. However, it is significant to declare that centering the research process in the worlds of the people who contributed to the research is possible. It starts with exploring the idea that alternative methods are needed to fulfill a more ethical and rigorous process through multimodal research methods. There is more work to be done to center alternative ways of researching that reject the notion that we all fit into the structures laid before us. This dissertation employs, continues, and contributes to burgeoning alternative methodologies.

Wisdom exists in all cultures. However, the valuing of it usually defaults to those of European descent when they are the dominant culture, which is the case for this dissertation and for many dissertation programs in the United States. I do want to give

credit to Texas Woman's University for making strong efforts to expose my cohort to diverse methods. There was a time when "it was all but unthinkable that modes of thought of persons African and of African descent could be appropriately characterized as instances of philosophy, that is as achievements of the intellect" (Outlaw 266). Due to the subject matter of this dissertation, it is useful and relevant to draw a connection between diasporic, Afrocentric, and Pan-African centered value systems as having common ground with the tenets of indigenous research methods in their efforts to move away from concepts that promote Eurocentric domination as an intellectual foundation that works for everyone (Adeleke 506). Scholars who focus on diasporic, Pan-African, Afrocentric, and indigenous research are articulating methodologies that will center the values of and unmute the non-dominant communities that live within a dominant culture landscape that both intentionally and unintentionally encourages noise that drowns our under heard voices.

Wilson asked for indigenous communities to be entered by researchers with relationality as a core element when conducting research. This means that any person who wishes to perform research in indigenous communities should, according to Wilson, also spend time researching the groundings and foundations of the community paradigm (12). There are several examples offered by Wilson to explain why, in research, he emphasized considering the community's views of themselves and spending time understanding the community's values and foundations:

We have tried to adapt dominant system research tools by including our perspective into their views. We have tried to include our cultures, traditional

protocols and practices into the research process through adapting and adopting suitable methods. The problem with that is that we can never really remove the tools from their underlying beliefs. Since these beliefs are not always compatible with our own, we will always face problems in trying to adapt dominant system tools to our use. (13)

Working inside of a system that disagrees with the framework from which the data is emerging causes challenges and contentions that are not healthy for the people who contribute to the research, for their communities, or for the data that they bring forth to be interpreted or analyzed. According to Wilson, “People are accustomed to seeing researchers come into their communities and do whatever it is they do and leave, never to be heard from again” (15). Wilson is saying that the researcher with an intentional or unintentional self-centered process—who does his or her work and shares it with the world with no consideration for the relationship that the work has with the people and communities from which it emerged—is unethical. This unethical behavior also includes a disregard for the ways of life and worldviews of the communities in which the researcher wants to explore.

In addition, being compared to or being asked to live inside of a culture outside of your own by a researcher or through that researcher’s work is not ideal; there must be sufficient transparency and warning so that an informed decision about participation can be made. From Wilson’s perspective, when an outsider tries to research a culture with which he or she is not familiar, “the language, tone, and focus of research reflects [a] comparison, with the inevitable consequences of rating one over the other” (17). A researcher’s ethical responsibility is to interrogate their perceptions when engaging with a

community as an insider or outsider so that there is intentional and conscious accountability as a part of the data collection and analysis process. Ultimately, Wilson asserted that an ethical research practice requires an interrogation of the self and an investment in truly knowing the community.

Wilson's discussion entails a researcher using respect, reciprocity, and relationality as guiding principles in order to provide a useful and ethical orientation (58). These principles advise a researcher to "listen intently" to the research participants' and to "not insist that your ideals prevail" as a way of offering respect (Wilson 58). Researchers should recognize that reciprocity and relationality have to do with the research process and product. Reciprocity involves the researcher asking herself or himself how the process and product of the research are reaching out to the participants and their world. Relationality involves contemplating the placement of the research in relation to multiple ways of knowing inside and outside of your frameworks and the frameworks of the people who contributed to your research. The three elements combined offer an alternative method of facilitating data analysis that finds the holes without deliberately poking holes in the data.

Grounded Theory

As a black U.S. woman who studies, teaches, performs, stages, and choreographs black/African diasporic dance and who embodies this orientation in certain aspects of my personal life and in my artistic processes, I am an insider/insider/outsider researcher. I am an insider because of my time in the work since childhood, and I am an outsider because

all of the people in this world who have similar identity markers do not have the same lived experiences in the world of black/African diasporic movement practices. Because I am an insider, it becomes deeply important for me to consider rigorous practices of gathering and analyzing data. As an insider, I am intimately close to my research subject matter, just as Wilson is an indigenous person who is researching indigenous culture. To meet this challenge head on, theorists who are contemporizing grounded theory research practices come to my aid to structure my qualitative research methodologies. Barney G. Glasser and Anslem L. Strauss created the foundations of grounded theory in the late 1960s (Charmaz 4). Glasser and Strauss urged researchers and theorists to “begin with the data” to “systematically raise the conceptual level of their analysis while maintaining the strong foundation in the data” (Charmaz 4, 6). The objective of seeing the data as the origin of the final outcomes of the data analysis process helps to prevent the researcher’s theories from muting what is in the data; in this case, the data is what emerges from the movement artists and/or diasporic movement practitioners who contributed to this dissertation. Relying on methods from grounded theory research practices clarified for me the effort needed to prioritize perceptions of the participants and to situate my theoretical findings as emerging from the data. This is a foundational element of my multifaceted qualitative research methodology.

My attraction to grounded theory research methods is due to its intricate tools for gathering and analyzing data with rigor and bias control as well as its simultaneous encouragement of theoretical development. Grounded theory methods try to keep

researchers close to the data and the framework in which it exists. Sometimes these research practices use forms of categorizing and abstraction through a technique called *coding*; at other times, it employs a technique called *memo-writing*, which leaves room for the researcher's thoughts or emerging concepts to be recorded with but clearly separated from the data. Charmaz stated that "line-by-line coding prompts you to remain open to the data and see the nuances in it" (80) and that memo-writing "prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research" (73). Throughout this process, the researcher is not waiting until all data analysis is complete to explore the developing concepts. These separate but parallel engagements with the data, which consider the researcher's concepts and the data emerging from the research participants simultaneously, become very important for either an outsider or an insider. This dynamic helps the researcher to understand that there is a difference between her thoughts on a matter and the thoughts of the contributors, and it asks immediately for those elements to be sorted out. The information unearthed in separate but related analytic spaces sometimes merges, and even that is something to consider. The ability to look at these two forms of information separately as varied instances of understanding and/or as connected by their emergence from the data is helpful to the researcher in the process of understanding, analyzing, and presenting the research with rigor while at the same time curtailing bias and diminishing the overbearing voice of the researcher.

I am interested in grounded theory research practices as described by Kathy Charmaz because, in some ways, they are on the same trajectory as Wilson's discussions

of indigenous research, just from a different angle. These two methodologies working together conceptually were quite significant as I was developing a multimodal framework for my qualitative research process. Indigenous research practice strives to understand a culture within its own foundations and values. Charmaz says that we “aim to see this world as our research participants do—from the inside” and that “seeing research participants’ lives from the inside often gives a researcher otherwise unobtainable views” (14). The intersection is clear; there is value in a researcher taking the time to uncover the world from the foundations and frameworks of their research participants and recognizing that “neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world” (Charmaz 15). As a researcher, I have the privilege of presenting the findings of my research interests, so I have a responsibility to honor and make visible my world as an insider and the research participants’ worlds as an outsider.

Reflexive Embodied Empathy

Linda Finlay, who wrote an article entitled “‘Reflexive Embodied Empathy’: A Phenomenology of Participant-Researcher Intersubjectivity,” offers three types of research-based interviewing that use empathy and compassion to embody and intertwine with the research participants’ experiences. These methods include *connecting with*, *acting into*, and *merging with* as integral interview and participant observation formats. *Connecting with* is created by the researcher “linking to something familiar with oneself” to find an embodied connection to the research participant (Finlay 280). This involves the researcher finding a connection to the research participant’s story in his or her own lived

experience and taking in how that helps him or her to understand the participant's experience. *Acting into* is an actual attempt to embody the feelings or experience of someone else without disrupting that individual's account of that experience (Finlay 282). The researcher embodies the research participant's way of bodily reacting to a subject matter through mirroring, mimicking, or other exercises. Finlay connects *merging with* to Merleau Ponty's idea of the body as "porous" to the world and therefore the thought that bodies are permeable to one another. In other words, bodies can take in physical, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects from other bodies in a process of exchanging or what Ponty calls "intertwining" and "reciprocal insertions" (285). In an example of the final stage of empathetic embodiment, *merging with*, Finlay stated that, when reviewing the story of her research participants in her data analysis stage, she was able to get lost in the experience. Although being lost is not necessarily a place to stay, it is a place to go to in the data collecting stage and then to come back from in the data analysis stage.

Kathy Charmaz further addressed the idea that "sensitizing concepts...provide a place to *start*, not to *end*" (17). The sensitizing concepts she is referring to are similar to the stage of *merging with* that Finlay presents. They both are relevant to the researcher's first engagements with the data, and I employed *sensitized* and *merging with* orientations in my research processes prior to data analysis and during data collection to help prevent flawed processes of interacting with the data.

I am drawn to embodied research practices for analyzing and gathering data; it feels attractive to try and understand the body as a location that is historical, archival, and

alike or as something to dig into and hollow out. To situate my interest in embodied research in relationship with more practical concerns, I sought the critical check points that grounded theory offers and found them to be advantageous for making the research stronger and more ethical. In these critical checks of working with *sensitizing concepts*, it seems that Charmaz is advising us to walk with caution and to realize that if “they prove to be irrelevant, we dispense with them” (17). The same is to be said about Finlay’s practice: what we find in our data collection processes that does not refer back to the data we must let go.

Media Documentation (Audio and Video Recording)

In the edition *Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice* edited Rosella Ragazzi wrote and contributed an article affirming insight for my strong focus on an ethical approach to qualitative research. In this article, titled “Migrant Children and Performance of Memory: Film Fieldwork,” Ragazzi called her participant observation data collection method “embodied film fieldwork practice” (159). This passage shows how Ragazzi's method connects with the valuable ethical approaches I have been working to employ in my research regarding data collection and analysis.

Above all the filmmakers' reflexive awareness of their bias and ignorance is extremely important in any attempt to provoke a generative process of understanding. For this reason, I take issue with filmmakers who have yet to learn how to observe through the camera with empathy, modesty, and humility, when they denigrate observational filmmaking with the stereotyped appellation 'fly on the wall' (Ragazzi 159).

Ragazzi's practice assesses where the world of the researcher and the world of data meet and where they diverge. The goal is to truly unveil what is emerging from the data. To

her, the filmmaker's job is to approach with humility and dispel the notion that there is the potential for complete objectivity. Along with Wilson and Finley, Ragazzi is leaning in, and if you do that your biases and preconceptions will unveil themselves in order to be assessed and dealt with directly. Ultimately, Ragazzi claimed that filming the children that contributed to her research "allowed her practice to be imbued with inconsolable empathy...most of all with grace, the most necessary ingredient for engaging with realities which call for further understanding" (159). Ragazzi also admitted that this form of participant observation film fieldwork must include more than filming and stated that "sight is not the sole sensory apparatus of our relational engagement with the world" (159). I knew, as a researcher, that my data collection participant observation and film/video observation would be important but should not be what I solely relied upon which is why audio recorded interviews were done in addition to video recorded interviews, filmed practice, and filmed participant observation.

Audio is limited to vocal intonations and breathing patterns as indications of how research participants embody their experiences. With video, a researcher can recall research participants' energy and mannerisms while dancing and while discussing their perspectives. This is not a substitution for live interaction; however, these recordings can jolt the researcher's memory back into the moment and offer nuances that may have been lost or did not seem relevant during the initial experience. Adding video to my research practice reminded me of the value in visiting multiple sites of knowing, just as Wilson advocates relationality in indigenous research.

Returning to the notion of an embodied research practice. Ragazzi also connects with Finlay's reflexive embodied empathy in her research practices when she says that film researchers, should "learn how to observe through the camera with empathy, modesty, and humility" (158). I am drawn to this approach because these words are useful to the multiple stages of the research process (data collection, data analysis, writing) and engagements (philosophical, theoretical, practical) with my research. They lay a pathway towards ethical and rigorous research. I feel bound-full and boundless in my ability to find humility and ownership in the world of my research—to *check my heart* as I traverse the lived experiences of others—to embody the dances of dialogue and the dances of the body and honor them as locations of knowing—to intersect empathy and respect for my research participants—to have outstanding imaginative theoretical vision while grounding, anchoring in the data.

Methods for Data Collection, Analysis, and Writing

Transparency and Objectivity

Through the exploration of multiple qualitative methodological influences during my doctoral work, I came to clarify for myself that researchers must be critical of their assumptions, biases, and agendas. Complete objectivity is not realistic. Researchers bring themselves to the research both unconsciously and consciously; the latter is what would be considered an ethical approach that involves an awareness and deeper inquiry into how one comes to the work. Leaning into who you are as a researcher and assessing that position in relationship to the research being conducted seems to be the optimal approach.

Connecting with the research by consciously and immediately acknowledging my feelings of familiarity with the research subject matter was an important step during data collection and analysis. Unveiling points of connection became a tool toward exposing my research passions and orientations as potential influences on my research outcomes. Finlay's approach of *acting into* was an opportunity for me to feel the work of the movement artists through participant observation and to go beyond verbal reflection and observation; I was able to engage with the work by embodying the diasporic movement practices of the artists. It helped me to engage with their labor and their approach in action to dispel notions of what they do that I may have prior to the experience of their practice in a contemporary time and space. My objective of *acting into* was to create fresh embodied descriptions through video observation, participant observation, and post-participation journaling about the worlds that these artists are creating presently through their practice and to rely on these descriptions while writing the dissertation. Nzinga Metzger is the only exception here, because she had taken a break from teaching, but I have participated in her classes in the past. I remember them vividly, so there was some potential to draw from those memories.

A clear example of how participant observation influenced the final outcomes as the data emerged is my writing about Nia Love's practice. I could feel, in embodying her practice during the doctoral research, a letting go of the traditional in a formal sense. I remember the need to undo my previous orientations around traditional black/African diasporic movement-based classes, such as going across the floor or learning a specific

step, to allow her practice of improvisation and meditation to become the primary goals. In her New York City workshop around diasporic memory as a tradition and an ancient practice, we worked outside in open spaces on what is evoked through embodiment in and with a natural environment. The goal was not to make the work diasporic but rather to understand that traditions of holding memory and re-engaging with the natural environment through embodiment. Love's goal became evident in my writing about her orientation toward traditional dances: the importance of history as embodied by and across generations; the connection of tradition to a contemporary experience; and how Love and her students, co-artists, and performers have the ability to be a part of something that is simultaneously ancient, traditional, and right now.

Additionally, during the interview process, I opted to be in environments that made the movement artists comfortable when possible, even if that meant they were mothering, cooking, and/or laying in the sun. It felt important to respect the diasporic movement practitioners in that they would know the most comfortable spaces for their participation in an interview and what observations would be the right time, location, and community of people. I was able to satisfy most requests, as they aligned with the aims of the research. I asked myself as a researcher, with some familiarity of the worlds of the movement artists in this dissertation, what would make this interview process comfortable for and respectful of them? One way to do this work was to ask these women what environments they wanted to be in and what they wanted to be surrounded by, if possible. They chose spaces such as their homes, dance studios, cafés, windowsills, fire

escapes, and outside laying on the ground in the sun. The atmosphere of the interviews felt quite significant to the success of capturing rich interviews and observations.

Additional ways that I worked toward respectful environments included creating distance between the video and audio recording devices during interviews and observations. I also tried to stimulate interview dialogue that was conversational and open. This meant that I offered some affirmational markers—in the sense that I would confirm by saying something like, “Yes, please continue down this road, if that is where the question is leading you”—when the artists expressed concern about whether they had answered the questions or if their answers were right. Crosstalk and affirmational reassurance are quite common in black/African diasporic communities; they serve as ways of connecting and even bringing care to the process of collecting data. However, I do realize the danger of giving in too much to offering comfort during the data collection process, such as leading the contributing movement artists in the direction towards your own orientations. Throughout the process, I stayed aware that my interactions in the interviews should be minimally influential on what ideas came forth from the movement artists.

In an effort to curtail the artists’ developing an orientation of telling me what they think I want to know or hear, I included the following in my practice: whenever I felt that I had an idea of what was being articulated or defined by a movement artist, I would question her more specifically to get to exactly how she would define it or what she meant when she said a certain word or brought up something with which I felt familiar.

Sometimes I would do this immediately, during the interview, and sometimes I would do it after the interview by email or phone. This follow-up was included as part of my research process in my IRB document to ensure that I could clarify with the movement artists when necessary. At the start of the interview, I would inform the movement artists that there would be times that felt awkward in terms of conversation, where I felt it was important that I not speak as much in affirmation or response to what they were saying so that I could uphold the integrity of the research and let them articulate their ideas clearly and without my influence. I wanted to let them know and remind them, as some of the contributors to this dissertation are research scholars themselves, that the awkward moments in dialogue were a part of the research process and not a comment on my approval or disapproval of their reflections. I explained that this was not my job; rather, my job was to see what emerged from the data and to offer that to the field of dance. There was rigor and discovery in my efforts to walk the tightrope of conversation and formal interview. These examples all demonstrate how I put effort toward centering and respecting the worlds from which the movement artists who contributed to this dissertation live in, both personally and professionally.

Multiple Methods, Reflections, and Frameworks

Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson recognized that more than one method of inquiry or mode of transportation may be when developing a research process. He created maps during his research process that take him where he wants to travel while also leaving spaces for emergence—detours or roadblocks in the research that lead in other

methodological directions. I took this on as a process in my own qualitative research processes by creating a flexible guide of methodologies that would move me through a pathway of data collection, data analysis, and writing. It was important to me to recognize the moments where an emergence in any of those processes may lead down a different road that could possibly be more critical than the previously mapped path.

Social, Cultural, and Historical Frameworks

My research is entrenched in social, cultural, and historical frameworks due to the subject matter of diasporic dances of black/African descent as they are taught, performed, and choreographed by black women born and/or reared in the United States of America. Therefore, it became significant to have a qualitative research methodology that could help me focus on the inclusion of these frameworks in this dissertation. The ideas unearthed in my research process were further developed by questions that unveiled the philosophies and practices of the movement artists as well as the social and cultural worlds from which their ways of life emerged. It was my objective during the interview process to ask the movement artists directly what worlds they are living in and what their values are around their work in diasporic dance. In this way, the movement artists' lived experiences and their reflections upon work became the foundational sociocultural and historical frameworks for contextualizing their work in the field of dance and diasporic studies. This led to a more extensive review of literature around identity and diasporic orientations from multiple disciplinary perspectives. It was important to bring in multidisciplinary discussions of blackness and diasporic experience, particularly in

Chapter III, to ground the research in a contextualized landscape and to honor the worlds from which the data emerged to get to the essence of the phenomenon of black/African diasporic movement practices.

Social and cultural essences from the movement artists and literature in connection to historical narratives help to shape the way in which one enters the research of this dissertation. I say historical narrative because history as written by anyone is a fragment of what has happened before. History writes fragments of the past. With this premise, my approach to qualitative research that involves histories and my writings in this dissertation are surely compiled of fragments. It became clear quite early that I would not be able to tell an entire history of the movement artists and their worlds of lived experience or their philosophies and practices of artistry. I would have to make choices.

Keith Jenkins and his book *Rethinking History* helped me to sort through my historical orientations for this doctoral work. Jenkins stated that “no historian can cover and thus re-cover the totality of past events because their ‘content’ is virtually limitless” and that “no account can recover the past as it was not an account but events, situations, etc.” (14). Furthermore, Jenkins posited the following:

Different sociologists and historians interpret the same phenomenon differently through discourses that are always on the move, that are always being decomposed and re-composed; are always positioned and positioning, and which thus need constant self-examination....[N]o matter how verifiable, how widely acceptable or checkable, history remains inevitably a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian’s perspective as a narrator. (14)

Jenkins’ premise reminded me that the past is a narration. This orientation allowed me to bring transparency and critical process to my research and created another

layer of opening to my ability to hear the histories and reflections of the movement artists in this dissertation in connection to and divergence from my own histories and lived experiences. I became acutely aware of how my own choices about what was included were influenced by my time in the worlds of Pan-Africanism, Afrocentrism, Blackness, and black/African diasporic movement practices. For example, I was able to hear and take in the varying perspectives, histories, and fragments of the past that looked at tradition from a place of multiple intertwining definitions offered by the movement artists. The map of interconnections and divergences in all of our reflections on tradition over generations were revealed and unveiled. The multiplicity of perspectives obtained through reflections of philosophies, practices, histories, and the past, helped to check each other out of dogmatic orientations around tradition and other subject matters raised by the diasporic movement practitioners who contributed to this dissertation.

Although much of the substance of the social and cultural frameworks in this dissertation emerged from the data, the movement artists themselves, the historical narratives and sociocultural literature helped to contextualize how the identity markers and sociocultural frameworks intersected with the data. In addition to the reflections of the movement artists, I included the connection of histories as written by prominent theorists, sociologists, psychologists, and historians. In Chapter III, and elsewhere throughout the dissertation, are historical and contemporary contextualizing references. My objective in including these was to be sure that the histories in this dissertation would contextualize the past with nuance and multiplicity. Although this information is

fragmented, the hope is that these narratives offer significant and impactful collages and collidings of the past to stabilize and counter generalizations that limit dialogue. The goal was to provide grounding and expansive, fertile engagement with black/African diasporic movement in philosophy and practice.

Checking Your Heart

Indigenous researcher, Shawn Wilson, offered insights into a rigorous practice in data analysis for qualitative research: “The source of a research project is the heart/mind of the researcher and ‘checking your heart’ is a critical element in the research process” (60). Wilson asks us to consider whether there is an ethical compass in every person or researcher. If so, what does that compass entail? What is it made of? How do the values and orientations of the researcher engage with the research? Researchers are reared in, live with, and partake in their practice in diverse ways, so their compasses—as Wilson called them—will vary and be something deeply important and personal for the researcher to unveil and explain to those reading the research.

According to Wilson, the objective of checking your heart is that the “researcher insures that there are no negative or selfish motives for doing the research, because that could bring suffering upon everyone in the community. “A ‘good heart’ guarantees a good motive, and good motives benefit everyone involved” (Wilson 60). I can admit that, initially, the idea of “checking my heart” concerned me due to the possible unconscious or unintentional hurt that has come from people trusting their intuition and not interrogating how that intuition is influenced by upbringing, culture, and privilege.

However, I think Wilson is asking researchers to analyze their own assumptions, biases, and agendas and not to just trust that they automatically have a good heart. It is not that good comes naturally or automatically to the heart; rather, researchers should train their hearts to use the tools of *respect*, *reciprocity*, and *relationality*—as mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter—to build an ethical compass that questions their motives as researchers. It is up to a researcher to check his or her intentions and to cultivate ethical processes in their research. It may in fact become very useful to *check your heart*.

Data Analysis: Sites

Checking your heart, reaching for the essence of the phenomenon, allowing theory to rise from the data, and critically examining research perspectives are probably most intently focused upon during data analysis. Ensuring that theory emerges from the data is a challenge, especially when one of the goals of scholarly research is to harmonize the generating of your own theory as a researcher with the idea of that theory is rooted in the data. An orientation toward this objective of theory emerging from the data from indigenous research practice is considering that “knowledge is relational” and that, as a researcher, “you are answerable to all your relations” (Wilson 56-57). There is more to gain than your own individual knowledge through the performance of research. An openness to multiple forms of knowledge creates a dialogue with the data that is outside of the individual researcher’s world.

A philosophical outlook on multiple knowledges can also be found in Timothy Darvill’s article titled “Research Frameworks for World Heritage Sites and the

Conceptualization of Archeological Knowledge.” Darvill charts multiple territories of socially relevant knowledge that may be necessary as methods of exploring world historical sites. He found that there is a rich nature to gathering data by framing your work from several different social areas, such as indigenous knowledge, religious knowledge, strategic knowledge, contemplative knowledge, and so on. Darvill is proposing that the more points of entry researchers invest in, the more agency their research has to enrich “everyone’s quality of life by providing and promoting different kinds of knowledge that suit many different needs” (452). Darvill suggested that, if we are to name these sites as important to the world, then we should research them from the multiple knowledges that people in the world experience and offer varying socially relevant points of entry.

The multiple sites in this dissertation for me as a researcher were first and foremost the diasporic movement practitioners who contributed to this project. Darvill helped me to acknowledge myself as a site in the same way as each case study; each movement artist and her work was also a site. For archeology, these sites are sometimes quite fixed and in a specific location; whereas in my work, the locations were the reflections and worlds of each movement artist which traveled diasporically across generations, cultures, peoples, and communities. Mining and analyzing data from this multiple-site perspective gave me an orientation that there was always a location to go back to and sent me constantly returning to the data for review when I felt lost or too

caught up in my own site. Revisiting the data produced fresh theoretical options and revived and validated what was continuously emerging.

Coding

After establishing each case study as a site for an initial orientation toward the research in general, I adopted coding, memo-writing, and situational maps from grounded theory research practices as my analysis tools. Coding is a process outlined in Kathy Charmaz's 2009 book *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*. She first defined coding as "the pivotal link between collecting data and developing emergent theory to explain these data" (46). Charmaz also asserted that "careful coding also helps to refrain from imputing your motives, fears, or unresolved personal issues to your respondents and to your collected data" (54). Coding and theory work performed alongside one another help the researcher to facilitate the theoretical findings that are emerging from the data. This idea refers back to my ethical concerns surrounding the definition of general terms that are used to reflect on the world of black/African diasporic dances during interviews. I wanted to be sure to revisit the meanings of the movement artists and to put them up against my own understandings.

There are several types of coding that I chose to utilize during my data analysis stage, including initial, line-by-line, and in vivo coding. "Initial codes help you to separate the data into categories and to see processes. Line-by-line coding frees you from becoming so immersed in your respondent's worldviews that you accept them without question" (Charmaz 51). In vivo coding provides "a useful analytic point of departure"

(Charmaz 55). The actual process for coding is generally set up with one side of the page showing the data—in this case, an interview transcript—and the other side of the page being open for the coding comments. During coding, a researcher makes comments while reading through the data based on the criteria of the particular form of coding being implemented. During initial coding, the researcher is remarking on what the data is a study of, what the data suggest, and from what point of view the data is coming (Charmaz 47). Line-by-line coding has the goal of breaking up the data to define the actions on which the data rests, to look for tacit assumptions, and to identify gaps in the data (Charmaz 50). These critical and rigorous methods of data analysis are not meant to create a researcher who is critical of the participants; rather, this process is meant to employ critical tools that allow the researcher to identify ideas that may escape his or her attention when reading the data for general thematic analysis (Charmaz 50).

In addition to initial and line-by-line coding, I utilized deeper-level in vivo coding, which “helps to preserve participants’ meanings of their world views and actions in coding itself” (Charmaz 55). Charmaz even speaks about what is important to look for or flag for critical review when using in vivo coding: “general terms that everyone knows with condensed but significant meaning, participants’ innovative terms that capture meaning and experience,” and “insider shorthand terms specific to a particular group that reflect their perspective” (Charmaz 55). It became important to acknowledge and pay attention to the language coming forward in the data through coding, to unpack the layers of meanings of each movement artists’ reflections upon this language, and to follow up

for clarification, if necessary. The reflections presented in the following chapters that unveil perspectives on traditional dance and authenticity in diasporic dance were highly influenced by the coding process.

In addition to coding, I found it essential to employ memo-writing, which I sometimes refer to as *journaling*, from the beginning of the research process all the way through data analysis and writing. Memo-writing is a process that records the researcher's thoughts. It can assist with generating theory that emerges from the data as well as with revealing researcher assumptions, biases, and agendas. According to Charmaz, "memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in grounded theory because it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process...[it is an] intermediary step between data collection and writing drafts of papers" (72). The purpose of memos is to record your thoughts, connections, questions, and renderings in reference to the data as they come to the forefront (Charmaz 72). Waiting to do this could risk the loss of valuable material for your final writings.

Making the time to let thoughts flow as they rise, in the moment, could prevent the torture of trying to reconjure an epiphany at a later time. It is also useful to know that all memos do not have to be a part of a researcher's current project; they can be so generative in materializing theory that they could easily be meant for another time because they spark "numerous ideas and serve various purposes" (Charmaz 79). If a researcher is entrenched in the data through coding and reflecting on it through memo-writing, then it is likely that the products that result from these processes will materialize

from the data gathered during the research project. I value coding as a part of my ethical strategies in the qualitative research process. This research encompasses the lived experiences and reflections on philosophies and practices of the diasporic movement practitioners who contributed to this dissertation. The results of this research should reflect the worlds that they build both personally and professionally.

Situational Maps

I further employed situational maps during the coding and writing stages of data analysis. In her 2005 book entitled *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory in the Postmodern Turn*, Adele E. Clarke gave valuable insight into the significance of including these maps as part of the research process. Clarke suggested that situational maps are “not necessarily intended as forming final analytic products. While they may, of course, do so, the major use for them is ‘opening up’ the data and interrogating it in fresh ways” (83). The creation of situational maps is not the end of engagement with the data. In fact, these maps encourage additional possibilities and potentials. As an insider/insider/outsider, I was constantly plagued by ethical concerns, so having multiple methods for critically assessing my findings was important to me. Throughout the coding and writing process, I wanted the data to feel fresh. Stale relationships with the data can turn a fruitful endeavor into a stagnant final product.

The basic method of making situational maps is to bring forth “the most important human and human elements in the situation of concern of the research broadly conceived” (Clarke 86). Situational maps are large visuals that I have found to

continually arouse compelling engagement with the data. Like Clarke, I drew the maps by hand and then wrote in or attached printed versions of phrases from the data using color codes to keep up with the data's source. For example, social worlds/arena maps and the mapping of historical discourses became very important for analyzing intersections between the data collected, historical narratives, and sociocultural theoretical writing. Clarke advises that situational maps be created with coded data or data that has been "digested" as well as combined with "simultaneous 'memoing' [memo-writing] using precepts of grounded theory" (84). Again, the goal is to keep forming stimulating relationships with the data.

These maps were discovery locations for me. They helped me to relate race, class, and gender theories and histories with lived experiences and reflections on the philosophies and practices of black/African diasporic movement practitioners. Finding ways of understanding, exploring, and intersecting multiple knowledges through these situational maps was also important to this research because of how it created relationships between existing academic discourses and the data collected in this dissertation. Mapping discourses and data also challenged my research to see itself within various frameworks and worlds during data analysis, with an objective of making relevant perspectives of dance and movement artist across multiple disciplines of scholarship. Ultimately, I wanted this dissertation to reach beyond my own research motives and the discipline of dance. The situational maps were significant tools in this effort.

Conclusion

In this chapter about qualitative methodologies, I have offered insight into my philosophical approaches and practical actions in the service of rigorous and ethical research. I have revealed the challenging and stabilizing elements of my research process, the questions that I continued to grapple with throughout the research, and the moments of clarity and realization. I have also focused on my orientation as an insider/insider/outsider and how that influenced my relationship to the movement artists who contributed to the dissertation as well as my relationship with the data overall. I unveiled how I took risks when thinking about how to approach this research and how to ground my work in critical review. I also offered biographies of the diasporic movement practitioners included in this research to further contextualize and bring historical narratives to the theoretical findings that will appear in the upcoming chapters. My hope is that transparency around the movement artists and my processes relating to their work and the data will contribute to the reader's fertile journey through the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER III

BLACKNESS, AFRICANESS, AND DIASPORIC ORIENTATIONS

A Note from the Researcher: Throughout this dissertation I, as the researcher, will insert artistic written passages in italics in the form of preludes and interludes that reveal my perspectives on lived experiences related to the subject matter presented in the chapter. The objective is to transparently unveil for myself and others where I sit in these spaces philosophically. This positionality will also inform how I write about others and their worlds. I hope to put my positionality out in the open—my orientations. I also hope to bridge some of the gap between my artistry and my scholarship by bringing these two rigorous worlds together in my writing.

Unveiling my Location: An Artistic Prelude by Lela Aisha Jones

We, those black/African descendants with ancestors who made it through the transatlantic enslavement period, live with our bodies that are full of memories and lived experience of diasporas. These diasporic bodies are blended, mixed, and merged. They are rebuilt bodies. These bodies have had a breadth of experience and have made choices about the depth they will tackle. They are the bodies that traverse, multiply, and sense deeply. They are the bodies that know because of time done...time sitting...time moving...time flying by...time resting...time going hard...time building the body: the muscles, the cells, the blood that remembers. They are not the bodies that just come to know through some magical moment. They are the bodies of talent and the bodies of work. These bodies tell stories of intersecting diasporas. We are witnesses, as they move, birthing something or someone new.

I am one of those bodies. We are the bodies and the blood that has traveled the geography of our own skins and cells and then traveled the landscapes of nations,

countries, and continents. It is the body that has broken the boundaries and reimagined itself as earth...a place to make and remake—a place to re-identify because it can't go back. The lines have been cut, but the fluidity of the body is seamlessly flowing through several countries and five body languages in a matter of minutes to produce its boundless efforts in coming together. It is the body that flows infinitely—crossing familiar and nomadic terrain.

This chapter lays down the foundation for how I, as the researcher, have experienced identity at various points in my life. It also unveils those influential interactions with peoples and communities that sent me on shifting trajectories in my perspectives on blackness—those self-identified internally and those which have been socially identified by others externally. My objective in this chapter is to transparently define and trace the descriptors for identity as I create a context for the world of research in which I and the dissertation research participant teachers and/or artists live. Developing theoretical foundations for how the research participants find their identity in their lived histories in the U.S. and other countries is crucial to the forming of their philosophies in their work as dance professionals. As the researcher, I am a participant in the community in which I have researched and it is important that I be transparent to the reader concerning my experiences in this field of study. A combination of contemplative honesty about where my identity orientations originate and where the research participants ground their identity development will create a comprehensive narrative illuminating the orientations of all parties.

black, blackness: An Identity and a Way of Life

Baraka Sele, Assistant Vice President of Programing at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) and Curator/Producer of NJPAC's Alternate Routes series, discussed identity in a session for the Innovative Cultural Advocacy Fellowship created and facilitated by the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute directed by Marta Morena Vega. Sele is a 30-year veteran of arts curation, consultation, and cultural production. According to Sele, we, as human beings in a social and relational world, have the right to name our own identities; we are who we say we are. Sele advocates that we develop identity language from our own perspectives and in a way that embraces our unique complexities. In doing so, we can catalyze more equitable conversations in scholarship, as well as in arts making, presenting, funding, and curating (Sele).

Sele further stated that even though identity language never tells the whole story, it does, however, establish a foundation from which to begin a conversation and can be crucial to the transformation potential within a dialogue focused on race and culture. There is a need to make visible how individuals and communities in a society have identified in the past, how they will work through the current state of identity dialogue, and how identity descriptions may transform their conversations in the future. Sele concludes by affirming that searching for and accepting the complexities of identity-making helps us remain whole people in the presence of others. Therefore, creating space and making time to fully articulate and hear each other's identity nuances entails a choreographic process that is well worth dancing through. However, at times, it may be

that one is sitting in the unrestful discomfort of identity ambiguity. In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss how this ambiguity can be determined by the ways in which identity labels are applied to a group of people and then may change over time according to differing geographical, social, and political contexts.

In this dissertation, identity transformations and multiple layers of labels play an important role in how the philosophies and practices of dance teaching/performance/choreographic artists developed in relation to traversing black/African diasporic dances. The multiple identities under which I live daily – black of African descent, woman, southerner, teacher, movement artist, mother, daughter, sister, partner, organizer, to name a few – are intertwined within a racial and cultural history of pride and pain, home and displacement, oppression and power. As a member of this community, the ways in which my life as the researcher have informed my identity are important to the work of this dissertation.

In my hometown of Tallahassee, Florida, the term “black” was used often by my immediate family and community to create shared racial orientation, cultural traditions, and historical markers. I have chosen the word “black” as a racial and cultural identifier because, for me, it references the racial and cultural language I heard growing up, specifically in terms of how it named my family’s way of life. Much of my family and community cultural practices were identified to me as black by the people closest to me, and these traditions are still a vibrant and visible reality today. “Afro” and “African American” were considered more formal or public terms in the communities where I was

reared. Afro is also a prefix used commonly and acknowledged throughout the black/African Diaspora particularly in South America and the Caribbean Islands (e.g. “Afro Cuban,” “Afro Brazilian,” “Afro Mexican,” “Afro Puerto Rican” etc.). As a black woman, I do have sensibilities as to why these more specific terms Afro American and African American are perceived as more formal in my experience in the United States. Although these terms are used by people of African descent, they can still be perceived as imposed on black people (by professors, politicians, and those who might be seen as elite), rather than emerging from the communities they are meant to describe. It is a challenging feat to name someone or a group of people without their input and then expect those identity formations to feel like home—to be adapted and indoctrinated as their placed identity. In the following, I discuss how this placed identity might be disturbed.

Blackness is heavy, hurtful, hopeful and, at times, hopeless. Simultaneously, blackness is a site of experience, dialogue, and possibilities for identities beyond what has already been constructed, making black also a place of joy, power, depth, faith, and fertile ground for developing a strong cultural identity that is intertwined inherently with race but not defined by it. Consequently, the term black is of value although it does not begin to capture the essence of all people of African descent, not even their physical skin color, as that color is multi-hued as well. Still, bringing to the forefront that black is a color helps unveil the layers of complexity associated with the term. Further, I have chosen to lowercase “b” in the word black to denote that black is indeed a color, while

also acknowledging that this color is useful for exploring and discussing what it means to be a person of African descent in the U.S. and beyond.

Identifying as black can be a source of pride-building, allowing people of darker skin colors to simply feel good about who they are amidst all the complexities and oppressiveness experienced in their diverse social interactions. Unfortunately, black can also be conceived as a negative racial and social identity label, since it is tied to a system of colorism: the construction of hierarchies related to skin color and race that colonizers employed to name and categorize people.

There is still more work to be done to settle into an identity practice that benefits the coexistence of people within a multi-layered, diverse society. Until the people and communities in the U.S. and beyond develop a common practice employing patience, humility, respect, and deeply conscious individual and communal identity reflection, the racial and cultural term “black,” as both angst and joy, will walk with us daily. The lowercase “b” and the sustaining of the word black is just a reminder to keep working towards more nuanced social interactions between people of varying races and ethnicities. Therefore, it is a jumping off point for building ethical and conscious trajectories when navigating life as someone sometimes labeled, sometimes self-defined as, but not limited to, being identified as black.

black, Afro, African American

Examining the development of naming blackness provides context for and brings reality to the historical public struggles of black people trying to find identity. Before the

1900s, black peoples, Africans and/or African Americans, were forced to live under the names placed upon them by Europeans, with some of those framings still very present today. With the rise of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s, and Pan-Africanism, Afrocentricity, and the adoption of African-centered life practices in the 1970s, black U.S. peoples and/or African Americans began to explore ways to take ownership over what they were called. Molefi K. Asante, a leading, profound, and legendary scholar on Afrocentric philosophy, professed in an interview with Diana Turner that for him black people faced a cultural problem (Turner 717). This problem was the version of black peoples (internally and externally) as spectators instead of agents in the world—the idea that black people in the U.S. had no socio-cultural center or no set of values from which to move through the world. He stated:

it was while I was a student in my Ph.D. program at UCLA that I first heard Maulana Karenga talk about culture and the fact that the African American people suffered from a cultural crisis. It rang true to me from my own experiences; I was in crisis myself. It was not even economics or anything else. It was a cultural problem, and until we were able to resolve our cultural issues of who we were, we would not be able to deal with economics or technology or anything else. This made sense to me. Karenga's notion of Kawaida was so significant that I began, even as a student of communication, to try to turn my discussions and my analysis of communication theory toward the cultural issue. Out of that, I was able to arrive at the belief that our problem was that we had been dislocated by the European imagination. Europe had, in a sense, taken us out of our own position and away from our own subject place, which is our own center; we were no longer agents. We were only on the periphery of Europe. We could only become sane if we understood that we were agents in the world—not spectators, but participants in history, and actors in history. (Turner 717)

Therefore, according to Asante, becoming agents in their own identity labeling, even if these labels shifted over time and varied within differing groups, brought a sense of pride

to black people and inspired political efforts to create equality for black people. Self-naming reflected a shared experience and an increasing shared investment in black approaches to life that were not currently valued inside the existing cultural framework in the United States. In this section, I discuss how cultural labels shifted when emerging from differing political movements and philosophical explorations over time.

The label “black” has a deep history of racist and oppressive stereotypes, and it took on particular meanings during the 1960s and 70s — with both positive and negative connotations — that were associated with the Black Power Movement. Although the Black Power Movement was experienced as positive for many, it was also deemed by some, both black and white, to be a separatist, militant, and even an extremist movement. It followed then that a black person in the U.S. who claimed “blackness” may also be seen as someone who was going against U.S. nationalism (i.e. anti-American), or who hated white people. “Black Power,” thus, conjured both fear and pride during the rise of the Black Panther Party.

While the movement did have tendencies for distancing black communities from their white communities, the Black Power Movement also created organizational structures that fought for equality for black people and sustainability of black life in the United States. The Black Panthers were also well known for their active and vigorous pursuit of Civil Rights. In other words, when black people were attacked for being black by white authority structures, the Panthers were generally ready to defend themselves by fighting no matter what violence was brought to them. The Panthers were armed with

knowledge of U.S. Civil Rights law, and physical weapons if necessary, thus protecting themselves and others from various forms of racial violence, both physical and emotional. These protective tactics garnered multiple strategic responses, such as physical standoffs or pride campaigns (The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution). Therefore, having the power to name oneself was important to those orienting as a group of people living under similar codified values; it allowed them to strengthen their chance for “a place at the table” in the U.S. power structure (Martin 85). Kwame Ture (formally known as Stokely Carmichael, leader of the Black Panthers) and Charles V. Hamilton (Civil Rights leader, political scientist) are quoted in the text “Black Power: The Politics of Liberation,” that “only after group mobilization and assertion could...[black people]...as a group attain their rightful share” of power (Martin 85). Later in the 1970s, this assertion of sharing in the power can be seen in the emergence of phrases like “black is beautiful,” which appeared to then establish blackness as a positive feature (Martin 91).

Today, U.S. citizens of African descent continue to search for a name that encompasses their identities. In 1988, Jesse Jackson, a prominent Civil Rights activist, Baptist minister, and politician, named black people in the U.S. *African Americans*, with hopes of unifying them, and as a means for utilizing and promoting his political platform by encouraging African Americans to rally around their shared interests. This was an intentional shift away from the term *black* as a description of black people, just as *black* was a rejection of *negro* as a descriptor in the late 1960s (Martin 93). Negro, according to Ben L. Martin’s article titled “From Negro to African America: The Power of Names and

Naming,” was commonly accepted in the early 1900s in the U.S., with origins that go as far back as the 1400s. Further, in the late 1800s, colored was used commonly in the U.S. vernacular. Therefore, with all these shifts in identifying labels over time in U.S. history, it is no wonder that *African American*, as an identifying term, also has its struggles as a stable identifier. Some people feel African is stressed over American while others believe the term may mute differences and variances in the racial ethnic lineages of people of African descent living in the United States. Some important examples of these variances in lineage include people from the Caribbean Islands who may prefer terms like “Caribbean” and/or “Bejan American,” or folks from the continent of Africa who may prefer “Guinean American” or solely “Guinean” (Martin 92). Even with all these struggles to find an inclusive term, the descriptor “African American” seems to be holding ground currently as it is included in the census as an identifier, used to describe college departments such as African American Studies, and employed as a title to many current institutions, such as the newly opened National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C.

However, there is also a continued use of *black* as a racial and cultural identifier, a use that is currently almost synonymous with the term African American. This synonymous use is particularly relevant in this present time of the Black Lives Matter movement, a movement directly connected to the unarmed killings of black people in the U.S. by law enforcement agents. This resurgence in civil and human rights activism has been garnering massive media attention since the killing of Trayvon Martin by George

Zimmerman in 2012. Therefore, definitions of black and blackness in a name or in the process of naming will continue on a very complex journey, one filled with detours, road hazards, and unknown possibilities. The journey of naming in this case creates a wonderful metaphor for how blackness is multiple, diverse, exciting, and fraught with differing insights, making it impossible to be simply defined through a few markers of cultural understanding. As new political and social issues arise through the ever-present force of racism, new needs for identifying as black, within blackness, or culturally black also arise in the effort to secure the civil and human rights of black people in the United States. These needs become particularly important when the laws and protections claimed for all clearly do not apply in the same way for U.S. black peoples and communities.

blackness, Morality, and United States Law

From the information presented in previous sections of this chapter, it is clear that no one word has ever fully described the person of African descent in the United States. Many black people will most likely continue to feel they are both within and beyond blackness. Even W.E.B. Du Bois, writing in the 1900s, thought “blackness” needed to shift into a “cultural and historical term” and away from a “scientific or moral one” (Blau and Brown 229). In other words, Du Bois felt that blackness needed to move from its use as a judgmental and demeaning term to one of cultural pride and historical significance. Today, U.S. society is still struggling with Du Bois’ concerns. Current incidents in the U.S. sparked by racial undertones signify that it is still valid to treat black people as if they are not deserving of the rights and protections of the law afforded to every U.S.

citizen. By continuing to assign a negative moral value to blackness as an indictment of one's moral character, rather than as a celebration of Du Bois's notion of cultural pride, U.S. law institutions and policies will continue to indict black human beings as morally deficient. To support this claim, I introduce Michelle Alexander's 2014 text, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and filmmaker Ava DuVernay's 2016 documentary, *13th*, both of which do a comprehensive job presenting the detrimental imbalance in the way that black peoples are treated by our U.S. law-making, law enforcement, and judicial systems. Alexander and DuVernay thus make visible the way morality labels are still used to create an intentional and pernicious, yet incredibly subversive, transformation of the slave trade into Jim Crow era policies, exhibited by the systemic and corporate business of mass incarceration of black people today.

Additionally, in the continual shootings of unarmed black people in the U.S., the victim's physique is often referenced by official or vigilante law enforcement as justification for their death. These cases are also often followed by a not guilty verdict for law enforcement or, more commonly, a failure by a grand jury to indict the shooting officer and bring the case in front of a jury. White police officer Darren Wilson, who shot and killed black teenager Mike Brown in 2014, stated that, "When I grabbed him, the only way I can describe it is I felt like a five-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan" (Sanburn 2). Wilson was 6' 4" and 210 lbs. and Brown was 6' 4" and 292 lbs. at the time of Brown's death (Sanburn 2). In 2012, in reference to the killing of black teenager

Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman, a mixed race Hispanic man, “Zimmerman told police that Martin looked suspicious because he was wearing a hoodie...” (Gutman and Tienabeso 1). This case sparked U.S. national debate on the moral issues entwined within the assumption that a child or person wearing a hoodie denotes suspicious activity, especially if that person is black. These examples of how a negative moral value is placed on an entire race within U.S. law enforcement is best summed up by Lieutenant Javier Ortiz, former Miami, Florida Police Union President, when he wrote on social media in 2015: “Act like a thug and we will treat you like one” in reference to the killing of 12-year old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio (Elfrink 3).

Therefore, in this dissertation, I want the reader to know that I, in the role as a black researcher, and my research participants, as black dance artists, sense that mass incarceration and the killing of unarmed black people are not only disregarded by the courts, but often excused by citizens, elected officials, and those in law enforcement. This means that the language in the examples previously cited indicates a deeply embedded relationship between blackness, black culture, and U.S. moral values. The killing of young black children and youth, such as 12-year old Tamir Rice holding a toy gun at the time of his death, and 7-year old Aiyana Mo’Nay Stanley-Jones killed during a raid of her home, were both deemed warranted accidents with no indictment of police action as well. The most recent young black person killed is 15-year old Jordan Edwards, who was shot fatally in the head by Roy Oliver, a white police officer in Dallas, Texas this past April 2017. Law enforcement’s story around his shooting has changed and shifted

tremendously after the media initially reported the incident. Oliver described the vehicle Edwards was driving as moving towards them aggressively, while later he admitted that he was mistaken (Stack and Houser 2). In the state of Minnesota, Philando Castile was shot and killed by police officer Jeronimo Yanez during a routine traffic stop, even though Castile was being compliant and non-combative. Yanez was not indicted and was cleared of all charges (Smith 1). These incidences continue the haunting vibrations of racial injustice and suffering that plague U.S. societal experience and way of life, thus sustaining the horrendous extremes of violence led by moral bias still present and active since the transatlantic enslavement period.

And, finally, there is Sandra Bland, who was attacked after being pulled over by a police officer for failing to signal at a light. Police allege that she committed suicide in her jail cell, which is highly contested by her family, community members, and activists. In 2016, her family sued the counties and jailers involved and settled at 1.9 million dollars for the wrongful death of Bland (Botelho and Ford 2). Bland's case is particularly relevant to this dissertation, one grounded in diasporic philosophies and practices of black U.S. women in the field of dance. These women, most who are quite like Sandra, are a part of the college and university teaching systems. Sandra Bland was apparently on her way to a professorship at her alma mater, Prairie View A & M University, when she was stopped by police. This could have easily and literally been any of the women included in this dissertation, and it could have been me. These examples show that the world W.E.B. Du Bois dreamed of is not fully realized in our society. There is still much

work to be done. The interviews revealed later in this dissertation explore and reveal how these fatal occurrences, past and present, have become societal normalities, and influence the orientations around citizenship for the black/African descent women teacher, performers, and choreographers in this dissertation. The research participants discuss living in the philosophies and practices of black/African diasporic dances personally and professionally.

Gloria Anzaldúa, an American scholar of Chicana cultural, feminist, and queer theories, uses the term *counterstance* as a means for discussing the immigrant experience in the U.S. Her work can help elucidate the previously cited examples of white aggression towards blacks, and the black response, specifically in the case of Sandra Bland. Counterstance, Anzaldúa explains, “locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed...reduced to a common denominator of violence...all reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against” (Anzaldúa 100-101). Sandra Bland, during her interaction with a police officer, was clearly in a state of, to use Anzaldúa’s word, counterstance. Director of *Dancing While Black* in New York, Paloma McGregor, also reminded me of Anzaldúa’s words in an informal discussion we had the day after the 2016 presidential election. In our conversation, we discussed how staying in a continual reactionary state regarding violence or racial inequities can also keep us distracted from what we may be fighting for, since we are so focused on what we are fighting against. Paloma McGregor expressed a desire to really hone in on what we want as black U.S. citizens and then what we need to bring these wants to fruition. To go beyond this

reactive orientation, would be what Anzaldúa says is "...a step towards liberation from cultural domination..." and a disengagement from "...the dominant culture...." (100). Anzaldúa further advocated that we make an attempt to "...write it [reactive orientation] off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory..." (101).

Author, innovator, futurist, and teacher Nat Irvin II further discusses how some black peoples and communities orient themselves away from victimization as their only approach to solving racial violence. Irvin, as the founder of the IF (IdeaFestival), maintains that individuals do not have to be geographically or socially-privileged to have great ideas and create positive change. In the following, Irvin discusses how a new generation of Africans and African Americans, he titles "thrivals," have the power to create change. He begins by describing thrivals as,

the post-struggle generation of Africans and African Americans, characterized by a keen awareness of and appreciation for multiculturalism, globalization, and change. Drawing on strengths derived from historical victimization and oppression, they actively participate in global economics and politics and are a strong influence on social change. Individuals are typically competitive, critical, savvy, and educated and have an outlook that is international and multicultural (Irvin 17).

Keep in mind that Irvin's description of thrivals is useful when reading the narratives shared in this dissertation's case studies. Many of the research participants include themselves in the next generation of black dance artists trying to develop their abilities for being "competitive, critical, savvy, and educated," while also having an outlook that is international and multiply-cultured. Irvin further defined *thrivals* as those

who do not reject past histories and their places within these histories; instead, they draw on the strengths they sense coming from this oppression and victimization.

Diasporic blackness Within and Beyond the United States

For some black people reared in a particular diasporic location in the world with a strong contingent of black/African descendent people, such as the United States, it may become important to embrace a global black identity or engagement with blackness that connects them to a global black/African Diaspora—an orientation beyond their own lived experience. In communities that associate not only with being black but also with black/African diasporic identities, one can uncover how moments of conflict inspire collective action against oppression, thus generating a shared global orientation of blackness: black people rise in solidarity to restore justice and heal from oppression. An example of this shared orientation of diasporic blackness is reflected in the existence of the London Black Panther Party. The British or UK Black Panthers rallied around Bobby Seale, the founder of the British Black Panther Party, who was being tried for murder in New Haven, Connecticut in 1970. The British Black Panther Party could have remained focused on their local and specific efforts to support civil and human rights for black peoples; however, they chose to connect their efforts, through protests, to a global cause that fought to exonerate Seale (Angelo 17). Although the Black Panther Party has its international headquarters in U.S., and black Londoners' historical relationship to blackness has distinctions from that of U.S. Americans, the party at that time was grounded in a shared global experience of oppression. This was a moment where

blackness as an identity became global and diasporic: black Londoners could relate and contribute to a discourse of diasporic blackness.

In addition to collective action around oppression, solidarity has been achieved around positive cultural commonalities and understandings. For example, Kwanzaa is a cultural practice developed by Maulana Karenga in 1966. This secular cultural holiday was created for African Americans as a way to be reconnected with their lost history before the transatlantic enslavement period. The week-long celebration and contemplative practice continues to be widely observed in U.S. black and/or African American communities. Further, the first *World Festival of Negro Arts* is another celebratory event bringing people together from across the African diaspora. The first festival was directed by renowned African American scholar, dancer, and choreographer Katherine Dunham in 1966. The festival intertwined black/African diasporic dancers, performers, and choreographers from around the globe on the continent of Africa in Senegal, West Africa. Throughout the narratives shared by the research participants, the reader will find more continuing examples of how diasporic practices are being used to create a way to connect to a lost history.

Shared triumphs and struggles of blackness have been a grounding element in most movements of black identity across the globe since the 1800s. These identities are shown to be expansive and inclusive of all those whose African ancestors endured the forced migration by Europeans during the transatlantic enslavement period, as well as those that experienced colonialism in differing geographical locations. Exploring how

blackness and black identities become formed into collective or communal orientation is a common thread throughout this dissertation's narratives since the research participants are specifically working within and through a world of black/African diasporic dance philosophies and practices. These black/African diasporic dance communities thus exist in many ways because people with black/African diasporic identities found a need for them to be created; they had a need for shared experiences and connections as an essential process for thriving.

Pan Africanism, Afrocentricity, and Diaspora

The intensity of traversing historical and contemporary racism within U.S. society as a black person since the transatlantic enslavement period has led to a continuum of intellectual, cultural, social, and political movements within differing black communities. Two well established movements that are a part of this continuum are Pan Africanism and Afrocentricity. These movements center the values, theories, and practices of black/African diasporic peoples across the globe.

Pan Africanism emerged in the late 1800s and introduced some of the underpinnings for 20th century blackness and black identity. This movement's main effort was focused on creating global and political unity amongst black peoples and their descendants whose lives were detrimentally influenced by colonialism and the transatlantic enslavement period. W.E.B. Du Bois is a legendary initiator of this movement through his writings and efforts to maintain relationships with other diasporic scholars. He was a "driving force behind the pan-African congresses" in which delegates

from around the world gathered to discuss shared experiences of black people—specifically addressing their struggles” (Afari-Gyan 1). Further, Du Bois forged a strong relationship with Kwame Nkrumah, who was crucial to Ghana gaining independence from the British in 1957 and who went on to serve as Ghana’s first prime minister in 1957 and first president in 1960 (Afari-Gyan 4). Nkrumah was an advocate of Pan Africanism and a founding member of the Organization of African Unity. The ideals and concepts of Pan Africanism espoused by Du Bois and Nkrumah are intricately woven through the historical groundings of blackness and help trace U.S. black identity in 20th century. Furthermore, Pan Africanism continues to prompt academic and political dialogue on what a black/African Diaspora was, is, and can be.

Afrocentricity, emerging post-Civil war and becoming a major force for the study of Africa in the 20th century, was defined by aforementioned theorist Molefi Kete Asante in a 2012 interview as, “a paradigm which infuses all phenomena from the standpoint of African people as subjects in human history rather than as on the fringes of someone else's culture” (Turner 718). The 1960s, when Asante was first becoming deeply involved in the Civil Rights Movement, was a time of de-centering European/Western/White cultural orientations as the starting point of the existence for all people. Afrocentricity’s aim is to find a remedy for the loss of cultural connection amongst Africans and African Diasporic people by re/establishing the home or motherland Africa as a philosophical center of intellectual and cultural discourse. This was particularly significant for black

U.S. people whose history included forced migration, dispersal, and dislocation from Africa.

Another key element to Afrocentrism is that it has a strong educational agenda. Asante is credited for creating the first doctoral program in African American Studies in the U.S. at Temple University (Turner 712). This groundbreaking program sparked a surge in the development of more African and African American studies programs worldwide. Thus, Afrocentrism brings continental African and black/African diasporic histories of Africa from the peripheries and/or margins of academic focus and puts them at the center of discourse by recognizing that people of African descent have not only ways of life that are valuable and well-developed in themselves, but are also deeply influential in the American history and culture as a whole. It was/is an effort to honor the wisdom, history, and contributions of black peoples of African descent, to reveal foundations for black/African cultures, and to bring pride to black/African peoples and their ways of life. While Afrocentricity continued as an important creation in the 20th century development of the black experience, diverse perspectives have emerged from this discourse, creating new blackness dialogues for the 21st century. Exploring these dialogues through the voices of the research participants is an objective for this dissertation. Hopefully, through their voices insightful, burgeoning perspectives on how black/African values, when centered in educational, artistic, and bodily discourse, are contributing to the larger and diverse knowledge on U.S. and global blackness.

Like Pan Africanism, Afrocentricity was a response to the damage done by colonization and transatlantic slavery, playing a major role in facilitating a connection to the continent of Africa for black peoples of African descent worldwide. Both movements were developed to re/connect African diasporic peoples' lived experience to a homeland. However, these ways of approaching culture emerging from black/African diasporic lived experiences are also highly critiqued. Sociologist Paul Gilroy, author of the pivotal work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, revealed W.E.B. Du Bois' early approaches to discussing black peoples in the world and blacks in Africa as a "...rather idealized, volkish conception of African-American exceptionalism..." (Gilroy 127).

African and African American studies scholar Tunde Adeleke further described a popular critique amongst scholars concerning Molefi Asante's diasporic perspectives through an Afrocentric approach. He stated that Asante's perspective "sustains a romanticized, abstract, and idealized Africa, emphasizing a non-existent harmony and consensus" amongst people of African descent in the world (Adeleke 510). Therefore, the philosophical worlds espoused by Du Bois and Asante and critiqued by Adeleke and Gilroy are currently seen as complex in terms of a Pan African "inherent unity" (Adeleke 510). Further critique also questions the idea that black U.S. peoples or African Americans can claim an African identity. According to Adeleke, this identity relationship between native continental Africans and native African Americans may have been practically at the "heart of a" past "Pan Africanism," but rarely exists in the same form of

unity today (Adeleke 511). This notion of Africa as idealized and romanticized will also appear throughout the voices of the research participants in Chapters VI and VII.

Since slavery through 1960s Civil Rights movement in the U.S., and with notions of Afrocentricity, Pan Africanism, and images of Africa in mind, some black people in the U.S. focused more on returning to live in Africa as the “motherland.” In *Africa, Brazil, and the Construction of Trans-Atlantic Black Identities*, Livio Sansone stated that, “ideas of negritude, blackness and pan-Africanism” were “created in the struggles for independence or by images of what African societies were prior to European colonization” (2), and these images may have been limited in presenting African societies comprehensively. In his book, Sansone also seems to be advocating for an improvisational structure where focusing on Africa the founding location may shift with new generations and new information (e.g. focusing on specific locations in Africa or in other areas of the diaspora). Thus, a morphing of what grounds black and African descendent diasporic identities can be built upon and described differently in terms of individual contexts and needs.

Valiant attempts have been made by Afrocentric, Pan African, and African-centered communities to forge pathways through a complex maze of black identity by connecting to a past blackness in Africa. A resonating and lingering question is how black diasporic peoples can move forward without locking culture into a specific time capsule. In this current generation of 21st century thinkers and theorists, there is a movement to shift away from romanticized a-historic perspectives of black/African

diasporic experience and movement towards a deeper contemporary and global understanding of black/African diasporic peoples. There is, therefore, a focus that favors engaging with black/African diasporic experience as something that people are actively doing and not something that is fixed, complete, and or stagnant—it is an alive, morphing *diasporic practice*. Sansone further discusses Paul Gilroy’s description of 20th century “blackness” and black identity in its present connections to “whiteness” and the widening geographic borders of black/African diasporic experience beyond white or European centeredness (4). Also in 2005, Roger Brubaker wrote an article that introduced a shift in perspective when engaging with the term diaspora. Brubaker takes the focus of the word from an “entity” approach and, instead, engages with diasporic practice as an “idiom, stance, or claim” (12). Brubaker also imagined diaspora as a place to practice. In Chapters VI and VII, the research participants will be presented as exploring this notion of practice and place of practice.

As the process of unfolding the connection between African-ness, blackness, and black/African diasporic identities continues, it is clear that there should be some leeway for those who want to connect to a past and make an attempt to gather what has been lost, stolen, and/or destroyed in their cultural heritage. Romanticizing and idealizing Africa and the histories of black diasporic peoples can be perceived as a normal primary stage in the process of understanding a past way of life, as an outsider. Due to the nature and history of transatlantic enslavement, black U.S. people experience Africa socially from an insider and outsider perspective—walking with African blood and DNA, but not reared

on the continent. Some cultural elements may feel familiar and others not at all. Interrelations between black peoples in Africa, internally in the U.S., globally, and through diasporic practices have suffered in the past, still suffer today. How these challenges, pauses, and gaps influence the personal and professional lives of diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation as well as their efforts to understand an African-ness being descendants of those who survived the transatlantic enslavement period and those reared in the U.S. will be discussed in the following chapters. This dissertation, through the voices of the research participants, tries to open new insights into this complexity of identity by describing where African-ness is located in connection to black U.S. women/peoples traversing blackness in the U.S. and diasporically. Ideas about diasporic practice uncovered in the ideas presented in this chapter will be the basis of my analysis and discussion of the ideas shared by the diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation.

Grounding the black/African Diasporic Nomadic, Multiple, and Divergent

For the work of this dissertation, there are three theoretical lines of thought that contributed to a developing an orientation for imagining blackness and a black/African Diaspora. These lines of theory include: diaspora as a nomadic term, diaspora as multiple, and diaspora as a practice. In order to express how diaspora can be imagined, it is essential to create a foundation for or ground the term in history and theory. To continue grounding an orientation around what a diaspora is or involves, the work of Roger Brubaker, in his article “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora,” was a helpful inquiry. Brubaker

explicated some components of a diaspora, to include dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance. Dispersion speaks to forced migrations and “people living outside of homeland” (5). Homeland orientation was the idea that a “motherland” exists and that the people who were forced to migrate away from their homelands will want to return to that motherland (Brubaker 5). Boundary maintenance involves distinctive identity formations in host societies—meaning the creation or integration of a new way of life and identifying culturally in a new homeland (Brubaker 6). Brubaker’s components speak to the forceful dispersion of black peoples from a homeland by describing how the dispersed people relate to their homeland when holding on to ways of life distinctive from the new homeland’s societal norms and values. According to Brubaker, black people practicing throughout a diaspora intersect in their efforts to create histories based on an African homeland’s historical commonalities and cultural retentions of Africa.

Therefore, in discussions concerning black/African diasporic peoples or movement to improve black life, one response, continuing from the 1940s, was to focus on the forced migration of African peoples from Africa and the continued marginalization of their descendants. This response promoted the notion of Africa as a homeland where black diasporic peoples can connect to their cultural values and practices from wherever they are located across the globe. With this orientation, blacks are given methods for developing and maintaining cultural boundaries in their host communities. These methods included creating, through the ideas posited by Pan Africanism and

Afrocentricity, “black only spaces” to address particular needs and issues. These spaces included developing celebrations connected to Africa, such as Kwanzaa; or asserting agency over, and claiming responsibility for, the protection, nourishment, and education of black communities through programs supported by the Black Power Movement. The Black Panthers particularly wanted to establish equal separation in their neighborhoods by maintaining authority and responsibility in every area of black life (protection, food, education, etc.).

In her book *Yurugu: An African Centered Critique of European Thought and Behavior*, Dona Marimba (also known as Marimba Ani), a contributor to the theoretical framing of the Afrocentricity movement, explains that the pathology of a European world view affects people who have origins outside of that cultural lineage (Adeleke 507). Her writings give more credence to the idea that people of African descent needed to often do things separately from the surrounding European communities since a European way-of-life framework was not working for African Americans holistically. Ideas of blackness needed to be separated and centered around African-based cultural understandings in order to develop into something that would be useful for black peoples of African descent.

Throughout this chapter and especially in this section, I have tried to present how the journey to understand black/African diasporic lived experiences is sometimes historically coherent and well-informed, and at other times romantic and disjointed. The relevant aspects for this dissertation, which is focused on black U.S. women committed to

sharing black/African descendent dances through teaching, choreographing, and performing, is the orientation of diaspora as a practice, as nomadic, and as multiple. These theoretical lines were first revealed to me by the work of Roger Brubaker, Brent Hayes Edwards, and Earl Lewis. Diaspora itself implies a nomadic moving, which also makes people who traverse a traveling diasporic practice of a nomadic orientation. This moving/positioning will hopefully assist the reader in developing any understandings of blackness and diaspora as global movements which are always in a state of becoming with each new generation.

When considering that the origins of the word diaspora come from the Jewish culture, understandings of the term as moving beyond a closed or explicit African dispersal, towards a complex, global history of forced migration and racialization can be insightful. According to historian Edward A. Alpers, Earl Lewis calls this layering of complexities of diasporas “overlapping diasporas” (Alpers 14). Edward A. Alpers wrote in his article “Defining the African Diaspora” of Lewis’s diasporic overlappings as including the contextual, merged, and divergent layering of the Jewish and the black/African diasporic orientations. Both diasporas can be considered distant cousins—meaning each community orienting around diaspora knows of one another’s existence, but they may not come together often to sort out their familial relations.

Edward A. Alpers reported that the term diaspora was adopted from Jewish orientations and “first employed by George Shepperson in a paper at the International Congress of African History held at the University of Dar Salaam in Tanzania, in 1965,”

(2). The groundwork for developing and labeling a black/African diaspora was in its very creation a layering of multiple worlds and a nomadic migration due to its connection to Jewish history, making it only natural that cultural and geographical overlapping would become an active motivator for diasporic practice.

With this notion of overlapping ideas in mind, W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness or multiple souls begins to resurface as significant and the framework for this concept is expanding as theorists work to unfold the multiplicity of diasporic practice. One such theorist is Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, who explores blackness in U.S. American, Caribbean, and Brazilian historiographies. Zeleza used terms like "political blackness" and "ontologies of blackness" (or ways of being black or in blackness) to compare and differentiate the ways that blackness manifests throughout the cultures of diaspora (17-18). When framing the multiple qualities of blackness and diaspora, thus, one can create a multiple consciousness associated with multiple identities, living several existences and/or souls in one human being. For example, there are people of African descent throughout the world that may identify as multiply black from various angles, such as claiming African, American, black, diasporic, Caribbean, and/or South American identity markers. These "multi-identified" people live in and through places of nuanced and varying cultural practices, often as they cross the borders between the racialized and cultural identities of black and white. Additionally, some black people might also feel a pull to settle into a more singular role as a black person, thus holding back or stifling the potential for multiplicity in identity, to attain a certain

level of success and an ability to thrive in various communities/societies in which they must live and work.

This way of moving through the world by navigating differing identities is also discussed by Nat Irvin II when describing what he termed “thrivals,” or those people who refuse to be identified only through victimization (discussed in a previous section of this chapter). The thrivals find ways to create multiple vantage points, maybe multiple identities, consciousnesses, and even souls, in order to move beyond stagnation or erasure of identity created by transatlantic slavery and the lingerings beyond the transatlantic enslavement period. Furthermore, the dispersal of millions of people from the African continent itself during the transatlantic slavery led to an extremely diverse foundation for global ways of life amongst black/African peoples throughout the world. The continent of Africa has thousands of ethnic groups, and countless cultural practices within those groups that mix, merge, and appear as retentions in global diasporic experience. What black/African peoples walk with in their bodies daily includes overlapping, layered, and/or merging multiple identity possibilities. These possibilities are expressed in how they are creating, practicing, and/or performing life and dance: a moving through multiple, what I call, *diasporic nomadic orientations*.

Brent Hayes Edwards, in his 2009 book *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, intricately describes multiplicities through differences in the practice of diaspora, or how difference allows for multiplicity and unity with temporality and distance as key components. Edwards specifically focuses

on language through print, written word, and/or literature in the black transnational culture of the 1920s and 1930s. This dissertation intersects with the work of Edwards in its orientations around the French word “*décalage*.” Edwards describes *décalage* as a “gap, discrepancy, time-lag, or interval” (13). He is interested in how differences, nuances, and variances are temporal in nature and, thus, become elements that live in the *décalage*; a space where words cannot be translated, exchanged, or balanced. Edwards further unravels how “space in time” or the “in between” spaces are manifested in the black/African diaspora. *Décalage* for Edwards, “...indicates a re-establishment of a prior unevenness or diversity...” (14). These diversities, differences, nuances, and/or variances in Edwards’s work relate to the way in which language was used around blackness and throughout diaspora in the 1920s and 1930s, especially by people of European descent and of African descent who were proponents for transatlantic slavery and those who were abolitionists.

Edwards took on the task of sorting through some of the French and English language exchange of the 1920s and 30s to illuminate the complexities defining blackness, a complexity that can now be more fully seen with historical hindsight. By discussing the history of words like *négre*, negro, and noir, Edwards also speaks to the way in which the vast ethnic groups and cultural practices on the continent of Africa and across the black/African diaspora diverge. With a contemporary attention to historical cultural practices and orientations, Edwards presents the multi-layered nuances practiced

when defining blackness. In the following passage, Edwards elaborated on how words existed nomadically and multiply even during transatlantic slavery:

In French, the first translations of African narratives of the early Spanish and Portuguese explorers and slave traders in the mid-sixteenth century almost exclusively used *noir* for the Spanish or Portuguese *negro* (meaning “black” the color), which was read as representing solely a color description. Only in the late 1500s and early 1600s did there begin to develop an understanding of negro that considered the term to represent a particular people and to mark their difference (Edwards 26).

Interestingly, in French, the development of *négre* had relatively little impact on the color designation *noir*, and thus we find French abolitionists adopting the latter term as a proper noun in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, attempting to invest it with connotations of humanity and citizenship... (Edwards 27).

The following continues Edwards’s findings on how the identity of the black person was complicated when he quotes Serge Dagat, an abolitionist, whose use of the word *noir* is noted. Edwards claimed that Dagat:

considered himself the master of a relatively new term, one which he would consider capable of introducing ideological substratums into his literature of combat. This set of circumstances helps to explain the reasons black French citizens in the early twentieth century tended to describe themselves as “Noirs”—which indeed was second only to “hommes de couleur” [people of color] as self-designations among the elite. (Edwards 27).

Brent Hayes Edwards further called upon the famed philosopher, psychiatrist, revolutionary, and writer Frantz Fanon, whose reference to the word *négre* is seen by Edwards to be directly connected to *nigger* in how it was used by those in charge of those enslaved (Edwards 27). For example, Fanon wrote, “[o]ver, there where the niggers {*négre*} were,” meaning in Africa (citation). Fanon also wrote, to seal the intention, “As we see, the positions were clear-cut: on the one hand, the black {*négre*} [nigger], the

African; on the other, the European and the Antillean. The Antillean was a Negro [*noir*], but black {*négre*} [nigger] was in Africa” (citation). These passages exhibit the shifting, nuanced, multiple and nomadic nature of words and the way in which difference can be honored while still creating a complex and intertwined unification potential. The teaching, choreographing , and performing of the black/African diasporic dances by movement artist follows suit as you will see in Chapter V and VI of this dissertation. The translations and renderings they manifest live in multiplicity and the diversity around the approach to them is evident when reading the collective resolves of their interviews.

Décalage also “...alludes to the taking away of something that was added in the first place, something artificial...” (Edwards 14), possibly meaning that what has been created around diasporic practice is an idea that unevenness and diversity were at some time non-existent in cultures of the African continent or culture of blackness. In some way in our diasporic practice, singular and monolithic expressions of diaspora, have been accepted as truth with diversity deemed as not real, or maybe just not what was needed. Edwards’s passages on language above demonstrate otherwise. The difference was always present throughout history and beyond the United States. This is demonstrated by the complexities I noted in the beginning of this chapter as I struggle to find a term for blacks living in the United States, many of which are descendants of people who were forced into migration from the continent of Africa through transatlantic enslavement. Edwards summarized this dilemma:

The black diasporic *décalage* among African Americans and Africans is not simply geographical distance, nor is it simply difference in evolution or

consciousness...*décalage* is the kernel of precisely that which cannot be transferred or exchanged, the received biases that reuse to pass over when one crosses the water. It is a changing core of difference; it is the work of ‘differences within unity’ (14).

Edwards is asserting that the distance, gap, or time lag that is experienced as the cultures cross the water, presumably black/African diasporic descendent cultures, and the realization of the difference between them, is a place to gain unity. This is a unity that can be created by acknowledging and honoring diversity.

Ironically and delightfully, Edwards further uses the body and movement as metaphors for the *décalage* of diasporic practice and to express diasporic differences as coming together through their shared linkings, their joints, to create a unity of action.

The joint is a curious place, as it is a point of linkage...*décalage*, in providing a model for what resists and escapes translation [difference] through the African diaspora, alludes to this strange “two-ness” of the joint [which links various body parts]. It directs our attention to the “anti-thetical structure” of the term diaspora, its risky intervention. My contention, finally, is that articulations of diaspora demand to be approached this way, through their *décalage*. For paradoxically, it is exactly such a haunting gap or discrepancy that allows the African diaspora to “step” and “move” in various articulations. Articulation is always a strange and ambivalent gesture, because finally, in the body it is only difference—the separation of bones or members—that allows movement. (15)

The joints, connecting bones and members, are where the actual articulation of the difference and multiplicities can be practiced performed, shared, and lived through the active, unified body.

In summary, the theorists highlighted in this chapter, Alpers, Brubaker, Edwards, Adeleke, and Lewis, explored how to develop language that can explain “black people elsewhere doing different things or the same things in different ways” (Edwards 115).

These theorists aspire to produce methods that create “fruitful... and more precise... diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on” (Brubaker 13). Adeleke also desired an expansion of this diasporic practice, particularly one that brings elements and considerations from the peripheries to fertilize global, black/African diasporic dialogues. These unfolding diasporic practices move through shifting locations of potent, imaginative, and potentially infinite theoretical concepts. These moving concepts also move through this dissertation as they bring the body, dance, and movement into dialogue with diasporic practice through the research participants’ multiple identities as artists, teachers, performers, and choreographers. This nomadic “identity travel” is what I call a *diasporic movement practice*. Further, the ideas discussed in this dissertation will, hopefully, develop insights into how the intertwining of multiple identities and orientations can also create a vibrant, united collective.

CHAPTER IV

A CONTINUUM OF CHARGED TIMES FOR DIVERSE LABORING WOMEN

Unveiling my Location: An Artistic Prelude by Lela Aisha Jones

*In between the lines we must know is only the place we can go.
the only place to bestow, the grace it takes to set fire – a fire that burns just for us
The water comes 'cause it must.
Who will save us?
only us*

*In between the lines there is pain that no one wants to claim.
that we should feel the same
about our mothers and brothers – the suffering of others – a fire that burns just for us
The water comes 'cause it must.
Who will save us?
only us*

*In between the lines there's no thrill—a place we all sit still.
an aching heart the will
the will it takes to set fire – a fire that burns just for us
The water comes 'cause it must.
Who will save us?
only us*

*In between the lines no one's safe – we all will have to face.
the way we made this place
the place it takes to set a fire – a fire that burns just for us
The water comes 'cause it must.
Who will save us?
only us*

Each diasporic movement practitioner who contributed to this dissertation identifies as a woman. They are all of black/African descent and live and/or were reared in the United States of America. In the previous chapter, I addressed some aspects of a

U.S. racial construct and how it is connected to black/African diasporic peoples, their lineages, and lived experiences. In this chapter, I give homage to mainly women theorists who have informed discourses around race, gender, and class, and have developed theoretical frameworks grounded in these places of intersection. I have also included laboring as an additional focus for this chapter because of how labor is perceived socio-culturally in the U.S., a perception which influences the lived experiences of the women in this dissertation.

This chapter further unveils some general aspects of the laboring woman in U.S. society in connection with gender, class, and race. It then visits the particular notion that in the case of laboring women in black/African diasporic, cultural, spiritual, and nurturing, self and collective cultivating labor can be an overlooked and under acknowledged weight carried by women, especially black U.S. women. Pursuing this research was partially based on the large number of black U.S. and/or African American women who are a part of black/African diasporic dance communities and movement cultures in the U.S. as students, teachers, performers, artists, and choreographers. They are laborers in the field of dance and keepers of black/African diasporic movement cultures and genres. Some push the idea of holding traditions of diasporic dance and some create new pathways— honoring the past while building on it with new practices. Their labor is physical, imaginative, emotional, nurturing, and spiritual. These women diasporic movement practitioners, laborers, and workers have chosen life paths that are highly influenced by how they, their work, and the cultural perceptions around dances of

black/African descent are perceived by society. Gender, women, womanist, and feminist studies are not necessarily at the center of this dissertation; however, it becomes essential that I address these areas consciously, as the researcher and as a woman myself, whose voice is joined together with the voices of the women in this dissertation.

Women Laboring in the U.S.

Dr. Anna Julia Cooper was the fourth African American woman to earn a doctoral degree in any field (Biographies of Women in Mathematics: Anna Julia Haywood Cooper). Cooper is most well known for her book, *A Voice from the South: By A Woman from the South*, published in 1892 (Appiah and Gates Jr. 519). She is also known for the paper she delivered at the first Pan African Conference in 1900 titled “The Negro Problem in America.” *A Voice from the South* is claimed by many as the first written document that unveils the foundational elements of feminism, in which Cooper promoted education as a tool for the advancement of black women in U.S. society. She was particularly focused on liberation from gender-based socialization that engrains in women the need to be financially dependent on men. Since Cooper’s perceptions of blackness are focused mostly on the role of black women in the U.S., there is much to be gained by exploring these concepts in this dissertation when discussing women dance laborers in the U.S. and in a global black/African diasporic context.

Cooper focused her advocacy for black women on the understanding that the work of women does not fit neatly into the boxes that men, those in power, create for it. “Cooper often argued that the status of the entire black race was dependent upon the

status of the women who run the homes and raise the children, and that one of the best ways to elevate black women's status was to increase their education opportunities" (Appiah and Gates Jr. 519). Embedded within this list of home life responsibilities, started by Cooper above, is marriage maintenance, housekeeping, emotional support, and nurturing. Although, the aforementioned labor may be normalized as the work that women do, conventional even, it is not treated with the same respect as an income based job.

Society consigns treating this work as less valid than high educational or economic achievement by men, and even by women in contemporary times, and even when the woman is managing a job that requires higher education and maintains strong salary contribution to the household. However, this labor gets done because society needs it done, by mostly women who are supposed to do it according to societal standards/conventions. However, this labor does not receive the same validation of status as labor associated with educational, intellectual, and/or business achievement. This less visible, conventional, and under recognized labor also follows the woman into work institutions, where the women at all levels are more often the caretakers of administrative and management responsibilities that often include nurturing of others. I was told by a provost while going through a horrific pregnancy of non-stop vomiting, one confirmed by medical professionals as extreme, that everyone at the institution just worked up until they have the baby. Women are heavily relied upon to do labor that cares for and supports the patriarchal and hierarchical structure, no matter what additional labor they

are facing. However, this type of labor is not validated in the same way as the work done by the people who are nurtured by these efforts of caring.

Nourishment of others, including women, is of great need in a well-functioning society and Cooper suggests that women, especially those who give to others, are often left with no space to give to themselves. Even women in leadership positions of government, the judicial system, and the corporate world, tend to be leaned on to donate time and energy to the care of those around them. I have a friend in the corporate sector who is always stepping outside of her job responsibilities to nurture and care for her project team and a colleague who facilitates movement based educational performances that continuously provides home-cooked meals and transportation for artists she works with; this is beyond both of their official job descriptions. I have taken care of official paperwork for many men I have worked with on a freelance level who have not had the same opportunities that I have access to. This caring approach is a service that the women leaders tend to believe in and value, however it also seems that this work in society is again under acknowledged as labor; it just must be done and it is the responsibility of women.

According to a 2005 study by Catalyst: Workplaces that Work for Women, a leading research and advisory organization working with businesses and the professions to build inclusive environments and expand women's opportunities at work, "the old rap—women take care, and men take charge—still persists" (10). The study speaks of women's stylistic approach to leadership that leaves quite a long list of labors for women

including providing resources for others, praise, recognition with financial remuneration, encouraging positive identification with the organization of the unit, and facilitating the development and skill advancement of subordinates (10). This work is done in addition to the job for which the women were hired, except, of course, for positions where the work listed above is their actual job such as human resources which may include professional development. The women in this dissertation are women in society who face the conundrum of under-acknowledged additional labor needs that they commit to beyond their job descriptions, which require laboring for others in addition to themselves—again labor that is not in their job descriptions and leaves little space and time for self cultivation.

Furthermore, this environment does not leave much room for the work to be done to undo racism, sexism, and classism within themselves or in the workplace. And particularly important for this dissertation is the undoing of racism in terms of its contribution to identity crisis as well as self-love, pride, and development. The labor of working in and through diasporic movement practices exhibits, through the women in this dissertation, multiple layers of invisible, under recognized, and under acknowledged efforts towards the betterment of the souls and identities of the movement artist leaders as well as the people and communities with whom they practice. Then beyond just being healthy or survival, where is the time to thrive and feed one's soul?

In order to correct this unequal status of how women's work is validated in relation to the more tangible products mostly produced by men, a society would need to

consciously make an effort, and in some cases, accept certain sacrifices of privilege enjoyed by men, to harmonize the distribution of labor between men and women. Cooper felt women's labor needs to not only be recognized, but also validated as important to the needs of a well-functioning society. Cooper concluded:

women must be pretty, dress prettily, flirt prettily, and not be too well informed...she had no God-given destiny, no soul with unquenchable longings and inexhaustible possibilities—no work of her own to do and give to the world—no absolute and inherent value, no duty to self, transcending all pleasure... men believed or pretended to believe, that the great law of self-development was obligatory on their half of the human family only (124).

Cooper further advocated for women to see beyond cultural norms entrenched in society, such as the institution of marriage. She felt that marriage tied women only to supportive roles as unpaid laborers. Cooper felt this condition of unpaid labor kept women dependent on men. She asserted:

I grant you that intellectual development, with the self-reliance and capacity for earning a livelihood which it gives, renders woman less dependent on the marriage relation for physical support...her horizon is extended (Cooper 128).

Cooper's notion of an extended horizon refers to more than a woman's economic viability and independence; she also is speaking of an investment in "an expansiveness and zest of her soul" (128). In this *expansive zest*, a woman's soul can be released from a society constructed by a male perspective; she can develop her potential through labor valued by society. Cooper's desire for women to have soulful, meaningful, and/or lived experiences on an extended horizon rings loudly for the women laboring in the black/African diasporic dance, narratives unfolding in Chapters V and VI of this dissertation.

Cooper further posited that the self-development of women feeds a whole society (or maybe even a whole Diaspora) in a different way than the education of men (119). Many women walk daily through their lives with all of their communities on their minds and in their hearts, even when they attempt to walk only as individuals. The essential caring and nurturing consistently provided for the broader societal communal construct is work held mostly by women, but it becomes impossible to sustain without time for selfdevelopment. Cooper felt that to take care of society, one must also take care of the self.

Furthermore, in the 1890s, Cooper asserted that women's work helps society to value morals over monetary aims. She explained that:

women's work and women's influence are needed as never before; needed to bring a heart power into this money getting, dollar-worshipping civilization; needed to bring a moral force into the utilitarian motives and interests of the time; needed to stand for God and Home and Native Land versus gain and greed and grasping selfishness (Cooper 365).

Cooper felt this sense of standing for "God, Home, and Native Land" was often the purview of the negro woman. She believed that "to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of crisis is to have a heritage...unique in the ages" (Cooper 203). In the words of Mary H. Washington, who wrote an introduction to the recent release of Cooper's book, "at the heart of [Cooper's] analysis is her belief that the status of black women is the only true measure of collective racial progress" (Cooper 30). In other words, societal transformation cannot happen without the black woman's economic progress.

In summary, Cooper speaks to the multi-layered experiences of black women in the U.S., to name what they traverse as societal labels of gender and race, which lead to economic inequities created by established and oppressive societal norms. The instances of black women traversing race and gender as laborers engaged in the transference and archiving of black/African dance forms throughout the diaspora are revealed in pronounced and subtle ways throughout Chapters V and VI of the dissertation. The groundwork of how labor can be interpreted from Cooper's original insights provided in this chapter can also be used to analyze the ideas and interviews conducted with the movement practitioners, specifically those in which they discuss their insights into the intersections of racism, sexism, and classism as invested in systems oppressive to women. Additionally, this chapter helps elucidate the lived experience of the laboring woman by featuring the work of women theorists and contextualizes the U.S. historical and societal landscapes under which the diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation must continuously navigate.

The Labor of Intersectionality

Society in the United States of America is currently living through quite a telling time in regards to women's civil and human rights with the *Me Too* movement, founded by Tarana Burke, who also serves as Senior Director of the Girls for Gender Equity, becoming hugely influential in bringing to light past (and current) injustices between those with power and those without and also the *Times Up* movement, led by women in the entertainment industry. These socio-cultural movements and shifts are unfolding with

what is described as long overdue, sweeping clearings of men in power who have violently undervalued women through a multitude of pathways, including inequitable salaries as well as gross degrees of sexual mistreatment, misconduct, harassment, and assault.

The intersections of oppression that include race, gender, and class are voicing themselves loudly in the public spheres in connection to the laboring practices in U.S. society today. The work of the dissertation participants is the continuation of what theorists and scholars like Dr. Anna Julia Cooper began in the 1800s. The initial pioneering labor of Anna Julia Cooper brought to the forefront the lived, but undervalued, experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Cooper created spaces that normalized speaking publicly about the restrictions placed on women with courage and vigor. Also, central to Cooper's work was the centering of dialogues around how to value women's labor of caring for and nurturing society, even without much acknowledgement or recognition or equitable monetary pay. Those who continue to speak the tragic and triumphant stories lived by laboring woman, those who publicly re-establish orientations around the labor of women in U.S. society, and those who share equitable orientations concerning the laboring woman, continue the work of Anna Julia Cooper and many others.

Patricia Hill Collins, a prominent feminist scholar and author of *Black Feminist Thought*, is credited with establishing significant foundations for analyzing intersectional oppressions. Collins theorized that the socio-cultural experience of U.S. black women is a

web of diverse and intersecting processes. Collins further theorizes about the multiple forms of crisis women experience according to their racial, economic, and gendered locations in society. Additionally, she addresses how women have labored and continued to labor to find methods for moving through these oppressive, intertwined systems. This unique laboring of women is what Anna Julia Cooper, like Collins, addressed in her observations of the woman's location in society.

Collins's theoretical work informs and contextualizes the experience of black/African diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation and, thus, the interpretation of the research data. Collins embraces the work of multiple voices delicately, rigorously, and intensively. She engages the work comprehensively by deliberately including in her writings "...numerous quotations from a range of African-American women thinkers, some well-known and others rarely heard from" (Collins ix). Collins is dedicated to intellectual exchange beyond what is familiar and comfortable within the academic settings—connecting to the ideas and experiences of people who exist within and outside of academic institutions and with a range of socio-economic experiences. Following Collins's lead, this dissertation includes black U.S. and/or African American women from varying backgrounds and socioeconomic class orientations, complex professional locations who do not always live in the academy, and who have diverse methods for practicing diasporic movement. Collins's work in rethinking the relationship between her personal experiences, theoretical writings, and the lived experiences of black women, specifically those who are not scholars or academics,

is significant in the way in which this dissertation unfolds. Cooper and Collins, together, help orient the work of this dissertation, which presents black U.S. women as multi-faceted, connected, and diverging as people and in their work as diasporic dance professionals.

Collins even brings to the surface the importance of acknowledging and understanding the intersection of race, gender, and class discrimination within the orientation of black/African diasporic identity and lived experience. Examining intersecting oppressions helps to address the issue of developing narratives that are fixed normalities across the experiences of black U.S. women and women of the black/African Diaspora. Every black person is not the same, though collectively there are connections across the experience of blackness. Collins stated that:

since a diasporic framework is not normative, it should not be used to assess the authenticity of people of African descent in reference to an assumed African norm. Rather, Black diasporic frameworks center analyses of Black women within the context of common challenges experienced transnationally (32).

Therefore, using the premise of Collins's quote above, this dissertation presents a group of black women who may experience some of the same difficulties due to shared histories; however, their methods of solving these challenges and the context under which they navigate rough terrain in their lives is shown to vary. Additionally, even if challenges or solutions are shared, no overall black experience is described as emerging as a fixed norm and/or a validation of sameness that diminishes distinctions. Thus, the basic interpretive foundation of the dissertation is that no black woman's specificity of experience should be watered down; instead, the individual and unique experiences and

labors of each diasporic movement practitioner should be highly valued, especially as a way towards understanding how intersectionality of gender, race, and class affects their lives and their actions collectively.

Furthermore, the women diasporic movement practitioners of black/African descent in this dissertation know the residual trauma and also the privilege of being a woman who lives and/or has been reared in U.S. society. The trauma of the women shows up in their stories about feeling less than or in how challenges with low self-esteem and body perception are met. Further, each participant discusses unique methods and experiences as they transverse the unclear and wavering instability of citizenship as a U.S. black woman. Also, the privilege of U.S. citizenship reveals itself throughout the dissertation in how the participants discuss their interactions with other women in the black/African Diaspora, especially those who may not have the means or avenues to become a doctoral candidate in dance, hold university and collegiate positions, or experience black/African diasporic dance globally.

Vivian Verdell Gordon, an ancestor, black feminist scholar, and author of *Black Women, Feminism, and Black Liberation*, further analyzed these nuances of privilege. Gordon advised an expansion of the ways in which black women of African descent are defined by intersecting their identity more intimately "...with African and Third World women with whom they share common interests and challenges" (Adeleke 508). According to Gordon, third world women can be perceived as women who experience treatment in their societies as diverging from the U.S. and/or Western experience in

accordance with their governmental and political structures, especially as these structures affect their possibilities for bettering themselves in terms of their gender, race, class, and religious orientations, etc. Therefore, according to Gordon, it is fruitful for African American and/or black U.S. women to develop relationships with black women of African descent outside of the U.S. since the intersectionality within the experiences of these women in their diasporic communities have degrees of variance. This becomes significant for the doctoral research presented in this dissertation as analyzing the relationality of experiences of teachers and mentors who live in the U.S. and globally that may guide the U.S. citizen's trajectories as teachers, artists, and/or performers of black/African diasporic movement. In other words, a lack of a connection to women outside of a known or familiar framework limits how one may traverse a diasporic context and in turn how one can teach, perform, and choreograph diasporic forms.

Gordon also directly and unapologetically warned black women to be cautious as they consider aligning with white women around issues of oppression. Tunde Adeleke summarizes Gordon's concerns in the following:

Gordon contends that black women and white women have nothing in common besides gender and that gender oppression, however real, does not constitute a sufficient basis for black women to cooperate with white women. In terms of interest and culture, the two are incompatible, according to Gordon. She denies that black women have any business participating in feminism...white women remain a part of the white power structure that has exploited, and continues to exploit, blacks. In other words, white women constitute an arm of the white cultural war against all blacks. As wives, sisters, and mothers, white women perform crucial functions in the inculcation and perpetuation of racist values and thus perpetuate white cultural hegemony. Gordon consequently deemed cooperation with white women dangerous for black women (Adeleke 507).

Although the intensity of this statement may cause some to shy away from this conversation, Gordon conceptually connects back to Collins's advocacy for all to stay true to the specificity of our lived experiences. Thus, when discussing societal gender challenges in this dissertation, I am specifically discussing gender as intersected with race and class equity, and as experienced by each of the diasporic movement practitioners as women of black/African descent. Therefore, the work of this dissertation includes unraveling the similarities and differences of lived experiences while also traversing issues of race and its intersections with class and gender. The study of black/African diasporic dances, as this dissertation addresses, is a shared lived experience of black U.S. women who use a multitude of descriptors to describe their practices that include a plethora of challenging, inspiring, disappointing, and uplifting narratives. The reader will see that many of these descriptors are further marked by how these diasporic movement practitioners experience intersections of race, gender, and class. This dissertation strongly emphasizes how race influences the labor of women in the area of black/African diasporic dance, while also showing how class and gender intersect within the individual lives of black U.S. movement artists.

Spiritual Labor of Women

This chapter seeks to unveil elements of diasporic movement practitioners' labor and this section of the chapter focuses on the portion of that labor that is less visible. I am speaking of the work we don't necessarily see in the intensives, residencies, workshops, or performances. This labor must happen prior to, in between, and behind the scenes to

even produce the person, the woman, presenting before us in a more formal process. This is work that is often hidden because of its personal, emotional, and/or spiritual nature. It is labor that there is not enough time for but is in desperate need of doing and it is often smothered by other more pressing societal and communal nurturing that is needed, and/or dismissed in order to navigate more monstrous or overwhelming inequities. Additionally, this work is often not paid labor. In the world of movement artistry, black U.S. women teachers, facilitators, performers, and choreographers must build and nurture communities for their work, take care of students/mentees and performers in their works, but most of all they need to take care of themselves in multiple ways.

In the U.S. today, there seems to be diasporic resurgences, or revivals that encourage black women to be invested in the development of self as valid laboring, as well as the labor of finding their individual location of practice within a collective force of diasporic practices. Urban Bush Women, headed by Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, is a pioneering organization that provides their Summer Leadership Institute annually to a room full of mostly women. The program helps them to collectively build their individual skillsets with a strong sense of dance, social consciousness, community organizing, and artistry. This is a formalized version of what diasporic movement practitioners in the field of dance do informally quite often—work through race, gender, and class challenges presented in the field in their off time and this is a microcosm of how this labor manifests in our larger U.S. society—on the margins. This laboring is seen by the contributors to this dissertation as also self development for the collective force of diasporic movement

practitioners and practices as a whole which you will find expounded upon in Chapters V and VI. And this work of laboring to better the self and to build community has heritages. It has a trail of leadership, known and unknown. Reaching back again to Cooper's, *A Voice from the South: By A Woman from the South*, she described the qualities of self-development that can be implemented by future generations—what can be done by the I, for the anti-oppression of the we. Cooper concluded:

A quickening of its pulses and a glowing of its self-consciousness...Aha, I can rival that! I can aspire to that! I can honor and vindicate my race! Something like this, it strikes me, is the enthusiasm which stirs the genius of young Africa in America; and the memory of past oppression and the fact of present attempted repression only serves to gather momentum for its irrepressible powers (Cooper 203-204).

Cooper showed the possibility of divergent aims, which are also cohesive and common pulses all at once. These vibrations are guided by the gatherings happening on the off, unpaid time—the gathering of the selves and the collectives to instill vigor of in what could happen when there is time to invest in the spiritual, sort the emotional, and release the unproductive personal. In Cooper's world, with self-investment and development, we can bring to fruition living vibrantly and collectively, while also being vindicated as a race from past shared oppression and current oppressive lingerings. This labor or individual work can lead to unstoppable triumph. This notion of being in the present, while also remembering the past brings us back to Turner's *thrivals* discussed in Chapter III, those who remember a past but stay attentively in the space of the present with flexibility in their movement towards the future.

Ultimately, Cooper, Collins, Gordon, and many others, challenge our normalized

systems of labor, especially within the patriarchal culture of the United States. Their research and scholarship promote a shift in consciousness towards understanding the multiplicity of the ways in which black women can exist and labor in U.S. society, while also considering what they must face daily in terms of intersecting gender, race, and economic discrimination. This dissertation presents the voices of various black U.S. women, who are self-cultivating, rising from wide diasporic experiences, and whose philosophies and practices will bring an enriched complexity and nuance to how and what labor manifests in black/African diasporic dance and in the lives of those who engage with it.

The practice and work of self-cultivation can feed collective progress. M. Jaqui Alexander, in her text *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and The Sacred*, discussed her experiences in black/African descendent spiritual communities and this passage shows the clarity this time brought to her conceptualization of labor. She stated:

Not only have we [those in Western capitalist societies] secularized experience but we have also secularized labor, both in our understanding of the work process and of its ideological construction, that is, the naturalization of women's labor. These formulations do not ravel easily into the communities of the practitioners we meet here [in U.S. black/African diasporic descendent], communities that are marked by women's leadership as priests and practitioners who are themselves largely women, immigrant women. It is thus difficult to understand either what these women do or who they are when their work is solely understood in relationship to the disciplining imperatives of global capital...thus part of the analytic challenge we face in considering the spiritual dimensions of work derives from the very nature of the epistemic frameworks we have deployed...tradition is made subordinate to and unintelligible within, that which is modern (Alexander 296).

Alexander suggested that what is validated and normalized as contemporary labor practices in a capitalistic-based U.S. economic system is in direct connection to a devaluation of the labor contributions of women in less visible, non-mainstream communities, or what Alexander defines as spiritual labor. This devaluing of this spiritual and women's labor makes it complicated to maintain and sustain essential labor in U.S. communities; that which is not seen and/or does not subscribe to capitalistic orientations is invisible (296). However, this spiritual labor is essential work that supports the people who must exist in a U.S. capitalistic and systematically oppressive workforce framework. What brings even more complication for this workforce framework is that this spiritual labor does not center monetary acquisition as the ultimate compensational reward. In these black/African diasporic descendent communities, the women are leaders just as valuable as the leader of a corporation or governmental entity; it is not uncommon finding women doing both types of jobs. One example of this multifaceted laborer is Dr. Marta Morena Vega, who is a scholar and a leader in Yoruba diasporic spiritual practice, a spiritual practice she bravely revealed in her book *The Altar of my Soul*. She is also the President/Founder of the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute in New York City, New York. I use the term "bravely" in the previous sentence since, as Alexander expresses, few know or value what these women do as priestesses, leaders, and laborers in their diasporic spiritual practice; therefore, Dr. Marta Morena Vega took a courageous step in placing her scholarship in relation to her spiritual practice. Both Alexander and Cooper seem to be asking women to go, find out, and describe the work

they and others are doing, where it is, and how it should be placed in this society.

Without this courageous step, the sense and power of labor as spiritual practice and vice versa will remain hidden and difficult to protect or sustain.

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Paul Gilroy addressed what the labor of art can do for the people. He claimed that “artistic expression expanded beyond recognition from the grudging gifts offered by the masters as a token substitute for freedom from bondage, therefore becomes the means towards both individual self-fashioning and communal liberation” (Gilroy 40). In other words, to practice art or dance in an oppressive construct that is not the original space or culture from which the artistic practice emerged, is ironically also a place of traversing or overcoming the oppression. Creative practice is a means of self-fashioning, according to Gilroy, or as Cooper might say, self-development and cultivation through art. Therefore, the experience of the artist in the midst of creative practice allows the artist to release from, or the ability to move through, the oppressive context under which the creative practice exists, albeit temporally at times. The work gives some relief from oppressive systems. This sense of relief is then communicated to the viewing public: the laboring spirit of escaping oppression is shared.

The investment in self-development through the generative work of artistry encourages physical and/or psychological states of being that can move beyond the confines of oppressor-oppressed relationships. The diasporic movement practitioners that contributed to this dissertation engage first-hand in black/African diasporic dances within

a U.S. context that is charged with racial, gender, and class conflict. They aim to maintain the work that may be undervalued according to society's standards and advocate its usefulness, and essential labor, in its relief from oppression.

This labor and life practice within diasporic dance can be credited as beginning with named pioneers and U.S. citizens Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, who brought their work in the area of black/African diasporic movement practice to national and international attention during their careers. Dunham, a Guggenheim awardee, developed a nationally and internationally acclaimed technique, still being facilitated nationally and internationally by master teachers and at the Institute of Dunham Technique each year. The technique is rooted in her study of "African-based dance forms" in which she communicated her knowledge of cultures "primarily through choreography and dance performance" (Appiah and Gates 641). Dunham was also internationally renowned for facilitating diasporic connections for black people all over the globe through movement and culture. In 1966, Dunham took on the position of advisor for the first World Black and African Festival of the Arts (Festival des Arts Nègre) held in Dakar, Senegal, after being invited by President Léopold Senghor ("Selections from the Katherine Dunham Collection"). Primus, a 1991 National Medal of Art awardee, is most well-known for her choreographic ventures and her commitment to teaching anthropology, dance, and ethnic studies (Appiah and Gates 1550). Primus is also recognized for "her careful research of traditional African dance styles and her desire to infuse dance with political and social commentary" as well as committing to "...a long career that sought to counteract racism

with Afro diasporic performance culture” (Appiah and Gates 1550). Both, Primus and Dunham were dedicated to studying these dances in their original geographic locations and cultural spaces and bringing them back to the U.S. as teachers, choreographers, and performers. They are two of the most notable pioneers of this labor and have left legacies as ancestors who labored through this work.

Many have followed Dunham and Primus in their laborious diasporic dance footsteps to archive and/or connect with black/African lineages through movement. A main objective of this dissertation is to introduce and honor some of the women who labored on the paths of Dunham and Primus and especially those doing less visible laboring with large impact on the peoples and communities they touch. These women have philosophies and practices that sustain the work of black/African diasporic movement practice in diverse ways, helping to expand diasporic orientations and blackness dialogue across the field of dance and beyond. Just as Alexander voiced the sustainability difficulties of labor for women leaders in spiritual practice, women preserving black/African dance traditions, or living with them as an artistic medium for education and choreography, are not always validated in a modern U.S. societal landscape. Nevertheless, there is something in this work that makes these women commit and stay with it professionally and personally. Hopefully, the dissertation will bring to light the motivations of these diasporic movement practitioners as laborers of individual and collective spirit.

I, as researcher, did not come across extensive written theory representing the areas

of intersection between woman, spirituality, dance, and labor. Therefore, this dissertation is an effort towards bringing to the forefront the intersectional stories told by movement artists as embedded within black/African diasporic movement and cultural practices. My aim in this writing is to now archive these lesser known narratives since black U.S. women have for quite some time been committed to learning and sustaining these practices as labors of spirit and hope. The women presented in this dissertation create diverse narratives; some engage in their diasporic dance practices consciously in response to a U.S. history of forced migration and dislocation of their black/African ancestors by Europeans during the transatlantic enslavement period, some are drawn to the rhythms, costumes, songs, freedom of the body, and some cannot explain why they were emotionally tied to this work or where exactly the initial seed came from. However, all, once the dances are learned, codify the dances into various forms and then offer it to their communities as teachers, choreographers, and performers. And in all of this work, subtleties of practice are revealed as way to validate and honor the many aspects of emotional and spiritual labor, especially as it, in the words of Anna Julia Cooper quoted earlier, “honor[s] and vindicate[s] my race” (Cooper 203-204).

Cooper and Alexander are advocating for women to understand, engage in, and defend the labor of cultivating and intertwining their minds, bodies, and spirits. After undergoing the research process for this dissertation, I feel there is much richness that can be teased out in the labors of women in spiritual and bodily diasporic practices, particularly from movement practitioners, since the body holds every experience and is

always at work. The work of diasporic practicing is not just the remembering and rebuilding of movement cultures, it also deeply informs women's self-cultivation and the self-defining of their role in imagining a black/African diasporic spirit and body. Alexander, Collins, Gordon, and Cooper in dialogues on women's labor provide a substantial foundation from which to expand my future research in this area. More of the women working within black/African diasporic movement philosophies and practices need only to be included—their voices heard, their bodies seen, and their words written. This dissertation is a contribution to that work.

CHAPTER V

DIASPORIC MOVEMENT PRACTITIONERS: CITIZENS AND SEEDS

Chapter V begins exposure to the lived experiences of the women diasporic movement practitioners who were interviewed for this dissertation. In the first section of this chapter, titled “The Laboring Citizen: Migrating Identities,” the research participants’ narratives are focused on how they describe the identity shifts that happen while trying to understand citizenship as a black U.S. and/or African American woman in the United States of America. Further, this troublesome notion of U.S. citizenship is then connected to the processes undertaken when grappling to feel connected to a community while also traveling to diasporic locations outside of the United States. The second section of this chapter, titled “The Seeds: A Laboring Upon Us,” elaborates the varying ways in which seeds were planted in the research participants’ lives and which then helped them begin their journeys as diasporic movement practitioners. And, finally, the last section, “The Laboring Around You: Youthful Immersion in black/African Diasporic Dances,” covers the diasporic movement practitioners’ first exposures to diasporic dances, from their accounts of what moments were most memorable, influential, and impactful.

The Laboring Citizen: Migrating Identities

Where is the best place to begin a conversation about the contemporary migrations of black U.S. or African American movement teachers, performers, and artists? For these diasporic movement practitioners, it may be best to start where they

were reared: their birthplaces or the locations where most of their childhoods took place. A person's home is situated within a location in the world that is generally a part of a nation with stated boundaries, national traditions, cultural practices, and societal regulations. Diasporic movement practitioners reared in the United States of America—particularly the black U.S. or African American women whose lived experiences have shaped this dissertation—often find themselves struggling with their identities as citizens of the United States.

The journeys of the black U.S. or African American women who will be introduced in this dissertation have involved many identity detours, resulting in multiple and shifting orientations and identifications. In the following sections, the research participants discuss how they have migrated—some by choice and some by force—from one identity marker to the next. Throughout the conversations presented in this chapter, the reader will gain a sense of these chosen and assigned identity markers—as well as the results of such identity migrations—as constant influences in the lives of those committed to engaging with black/African diasporic dances and movement cultures.

During my interview with Shani Sterling for this dissertation, she discussed her complex feelings about her U.S. citizenship. Sterling's perception of her citizenship as a right fought for by her ancestors, one involving a constant struggle for the claiming of that right, is summarized in the following:

I feel like I am a citizen. I do feel like our ancestors and forefathers fought for us to have a right to be citizens and to have certain rights and privileges, which some of them, we do have. I do feel like it's still a fight to be respected and acknowledged on some levels. So, it's kind of a dual perception, in my opinion,

when you talk about citizenship here in America. I would never say that I don't feel like I'm a citizen, just primarily because they [Sterling's ancestors] have fought so hard and a lot of them were not able to reap the benefits of what they fought for, even my grandmother and others that we've learned about. (Sterling)

Sterling honors generations past and their work for her rights. She considers her citizenship to have been earned by those who came before her.

Jeannine Osayande discussed her feelings of distance from the term *citizenship*.

Osayande stated that she never really felt like an American until she needed to acquire a U.S. passport when traveling to Bamako, Mali, on the continent of Africa. She discussed her sense of American identity during her initial travels outside of her U.S. home:

The first time I went was rough. Just on the first day. Because I didn't expect how it looked in Bamako and where I actually stayed. The whole quarter was, financially, the poorest. Maybe not spiritually, and not musically, and not socially, and all these other ways. But it was more than modest. And I had to pray. I said, "You know, I really feel American." Like, I want to be all African, and I'm in Africa, and I do African dance, and I'm in Mali. But right now, when I'm looking out, I'm looking out like a straight-up American. (Osayande)

Upon her arrival in Mali, Jeannine Osayande was surprised that she did not feel like a citizen of the continent of Africa or a member of the Malian community: she felt American. She came to the realization that, in America there is "...this whole idea about, you know, when you're involved in the culture, when you're involved in the dance, about what things are. And then, when you go over there, it's not that it isn't true, but you don't account for everything else. And so, I had to pray" (Osayande). Jeannine Osayande describes this act of praying as requesting help to guide her toward an acceptance of the reality of life on the African continent; she wanted to be more open, knowing that what she uncovered may be quite surprising and unexpected.

Like many black U.S. and African American people traveling to the African continent for the first time later in life—myself included—Jeannine Osayanade had to reconcile her romanticized version of the continent of African with the “African reality” that she encountered. As her acceptance of the truth of life on the African continent grew, Osayanade’s sense of black/African diasporic identity shifted, and she continually describes this shift throughout her interview. Further, when Osayanade realized that she may have misunderstood or not been adequately prepared for the reality of Malian life, she experienced a troubling transition that caused her to sense her “place” as an U.S. American citizen. At the same time, she tried to discover how this sense of citizenship could be destabilized since she was also identifying as a diasporic citizen. In this particular moment, her solution was to pray.

To complicate notions of citizenship even further, Jeannine Osayanade also speaks to how the sense of U.S. American citizenship that she experienced in Africa becomes unsettled when she is living in the United States as a black U.S. citizen. Both Jeannine Osayanade and Shani Sterling discuss how the rights granted to citizens can be taken away or reframed when necessary by the ingrained power structures that rule the lives of black U.S. citizens. For example, Jeannine Osayanade discusses how black U.S. citizens often have an unquestioned understanding that their parents are—and always will be—their parents. However, she elaborates on the idea that, at any time, the U.S. government has the right to remove children from their parents and give those children over to the care of protective services or another family. She stated that, as much as a person may feel like a

citizen, feel in control, and feel that he or she will be treated with respect and granted the rights provided to all citizens, at any given moment, those their rights can be stripped by governmental authorities. She argued:

There's no citizenship in a mother giving birth to, you know, something that's part of her. They [U.S. government] literally could, like, freaking knock on your door, and somebody—like, your neighbors say something, and then, boom, you're getting investigated. ... So, I have twisted feelings about it, as an American, as an African American, versus maybe the "citizen of the universe" kind of person. But the state, at any moment—something could happen, and you have no control of your child. (Osayande)

Therefore, from Jeannine Osayande's perspective, citizenship can be both an identity marker as well as the cause of an illusion of having certain rights guaranteed by this marker. Throughout her interview, she vacillates between her sense of the rights granted by citizenship and the possibility of the disruption of these rights.

Nia Love describes her orientation around citizenship in ways that are both similar to and different from Jeannine Osayande:

I'm not an American. I'm never—I'm always—I'm a black person, and a black person is not an American. A black person is an object that's been an object since being brought over here as a commodity, as a piece of land, as an animal. I'm only talking about it from my very, very deeply personal space. I'm not talking about my political voice or my sense of how I see myself with my knowledge. And then, when I travel to Africa, my citizenship is American, and white American at that. I always have to prove that I'm not a Toubab. (Love)

Toubab is a word often heard in Senegal and in the Wolof language that translates as "white foreigner." Thus, like Jeannine Osayande, Nia Love notices how her sense of U.S. American citizenship shifts from how she sees herself as a black person—which she considers to be a non-citizen—when she is in the U.S., to how others see her as a U.S.

citizen when she is in Africa. Here, the idea of orientation returns again to the multiplicity of contemporary identity migrations and the many lives that the women in this dissertation must lead as a result of their sense of displacement, lingerings of memory made physical from the U.S. history of forced migration during the transatlantic enslavement period. Throughout the interviews, it is clear that these migrations continue to interrupt the normality of everyday life for these participants. There is no settling. All of these women are asked to move continually—sometimes while lingering and sometimes quite rapidly—between blackness, Africanness, African Americanness, whiteness, and black U.S. Americanness, etc. There is a continual migration during their daily experiences in the U.S. and also when traversing diasporic locations through their work as movement practitioners.

To further support the sense of displacement between what these women experience as a U.S. American, and what continental Africans believe their life in the U.S. to be, Nia Love discusses how the lives of black U.S. Americans are idealized by continental Africans. Similar to the romanticism expressed earlier with regard to how U.S. black citizens envision life on the continent of Africa, those reared on the continent of Africa often have idealized visions about life as a black person in America. Love describes how, when she is on the continent of Africa, people express this idealization of U.S. citizens to her when the African people she meets say, “I want to be rich like you,” and she responded:

What are you talking about? You all need to come here [U.S.] so you can see this ain't no rich. You're more enslaved in America than ever. You [are often]

working from nine to f—[expletive], you are working a slave shift [and don't have enough money for the basics. And poverty is real poverty, it's not like you can just walk down the street and pick a mango off the mf—[expletive] tree. So those brothers and sisters down in the subway or down in the street, or wherever, they ain't got no money, they don't have no amenities to anything other than some food deserts. What kind of citizenship is that? I don't want that citizenship. (Love)

Nia Love continues to explain that there is a citizenship for black people that could be seen as a default; however, this default is not due to the rights owed to all U.S. citizens. Instead, it is a citizenship that is predicated upon poverty:

To be a citizen of a particular country—space—place—gives you a certain sense of amenities. And then I believe that black people all over the world, the only amenities that we have of any aspect of our citizenship is through poverty. And through that poverty, then we can have access to Medicaid or we can have access to the minimum amount of anything. We are citizens by—what do you call it?—by default. (Love)

For Love, then, black U.S. or African American people are only given citizenship when it must be given for basic civil services and humanity, when forced by laws that will uphold some and then stigmatize others: for black people it becomes a citizenship of surviving not thriving. She further suggested that this aspect of black U.S. citizenship functions and sustains the systematic placement of black people at the mercy of government policies, which can be withdrawn at any time.

Ojeya Cruz Banks also revealed in her interviews that she felt most like a U.S. citizen when she traveled to the continent of Africa:

Well, to be honest, I didn't actually feel a sense of, like, national identity or citizenship until 1998, which is when I went to the continent for the first time. I went to Nairobi, Kenya. And, you know, basically, I was kind of an invisible foreigner until people heard my voice, and then I was busted. I guess that was the first time when I felt this sense of realization of, oh my God, I'm an American.

You know, like I was missing U.S. English, and I was missing black Americans, you know, and just all the things that come along with being born and having an identity as an African American in the States. (Cruz Banks)

Ojeya Cruz Banks continued to further discuss how U.S. citizenship affords her certain privileges when travelling abroad. She concluded: “I am aware of my privileges in terms of being welcomed into most countries and [the] opportunities that are granted to me [because of a U.S. national affiliation]” (Cruz Banks). In saying this, Cruz Banks alluded to how, even though she may have wanted to be an incognito black U.S. or African American and that she may not have wanted people to know her nationality while in Nairobi, she was clearly visible to herself and others simply by the way in which she was able to move through the world and the privileges that she enjoyed.

This paradoxical situation of being a U.S. citizen while desiring at the same time to be accepted as a black/African diasporic citizen is similar to the desire of Jeannine Osayande when describing her experiences in Mali. Cruz Banks, Love, and Osayande’s U.S. passports established their identities as Americans, a labeling idealized by continental Africans; however, for the research participants this labeling also was an identity marker of how their citizenship is also a place of rebellion. Osayande, Love, and Cruz Banks struggled with their privileges as U.S. citizens, while at the same time rebelling against how those privileges are misunderstood by the residents of the African countries that they were visiting. Again, the research participants found themselves migrating through identities that were both felt as forced upon them and desired.

During her interview, Nia Love further described the complexity of her feelings surrounding citizenship when she recalled how famed African American performer Paul Robeson's passport was taken away from him in 1956 due to "notions of him being a communist" (Love). Even though this revoking of Robeson's passport happened sixty years ago, for Love the situation affirms her sense that at any time her U.S. citizenship could also be revoked for any reason determined by the government. Therefore, citizenship is not guaranteed. Nia Love continues to describe this unstable citizenship as also only available through how the power structures place black citizens as what she terms "citizens of poverty." She summarized: "nothing has changed in the way of race in the world. We fight for our citizenship here. The access we have to it is through the pipeline, is through incarceration, is through notions of poverty, or the reality of poverty" (Love).

Throughout their interviews, these black U.S. and/or African American women expressed how contemporary events in the United States contributed to the paradoxical notion of citizenship being a privilege that at the same times places black U.S. people within a constant state of shifting identities. This was further experienced by the research participants in their discussions of the current resurgence in the U.S. of stripping civil rights from black U.S. citizens through the high and low profile killings of black U.S. citizens just for being black or "driving while black." Rather than the government officials being punished for these killings, the U.S. American judicial system allows these offenders to go free and to maintain their full rights and citizenship. Alternatively, black

U.S. American citizens are frequently denied the rights of citizenship. The instability of the definition of citizenship is felt by the women in this dissertation to be a means of keeping black U.S. citizens in complex and undefined spaces of migrating identities when considering themselves full citizens of the United States of America.

To the participants, it is a challenging in-between existence trying to live with a citizenship orientation that is simultaneously a place of privilege, a cause of complex misunderstanding to outsiders, and a status that is also filled with experiences of discrimination perpetrated by those who say they are charged with the protection of your civil rights. In an effort to settle the soul around the navigation of this daunting idea, Jeannine Osayande believes that citizenship is something that is felt more within a specific community and that it is a connection you can feel. She concludes: “Looking back to what citizenship is, it’s feeling, I guess, connected, not just rights that you have. First, it’s just feeling connected to the community. You validate it, it validates you. Hopefully, you grow in it, and that type of thing” (Osayande). Osayande describes how, when traveling to the continent of Africa, she discovered that she could feel a connection to the other dancers she was working with if she got out of her own way. For her, this included praying to release her U.S. Americanness, which she describes as having an influence on her worldview. Jeannine Osayande prayed for the ability to let go of who she had become as a U.S. citizen in terms of certain values that did not serve her or the members of the diasporic community in which she was trying to find community.

Through this release, she was able to find community with others in the African dance community.

This realization of what may need to be released to feel connected was held in tandem with an acceptance of Osayande's U.S. citizenship and the privilege it provides. She wanted to see beyond the monetary and material poverty around her so that she could feel the energy of the culture, the people, and the dance. She describes how this ability to let go of her national identity allowed her to find connections with others beyond her habitual way of experiencing the world. To Osayande, letting go of a stable identity as a U.S. citizen, "opened the idea of the word citizenship [to] just feeling connected. [I was able] to feel something about the people, and the music, that [was] so freaking familiar" (Osayande). This connection with others was something she described as truly unexplainable; it was something that she was only able to experience after consciously expanding beyond her U.S. Americanness and the associated ingrained value system learned when growing up in the United States.

Nia Love, Jeannine Osayande, and Shani Sterling varied with regard to their orientations surrounding ideas of citizenship. They came together around the void felt deeply by many black U.S. citizens, in which efforts to feel citizenship only made them realize that their experiences of discrimination, displacement, and distrust of the U.S. government forged their belief that the fullness of citizenship may be an illusion for a black U.S. person. Further, for all these movement artists, both local U.S. and international diasporic experiences in continental Africa revealed flaws in the values and

social underpinnings of their U.S. upbringings, flaws disrupting any deeper acceptance of citizenship.

Ultimately, these individuals longed to feel connected, honored, and respected because of who they are as both citizens of their U.S. upbringings and global citizens of the black/African Diaspora. By migrating between these two types of citizenships, the research participants sense how this movement sheds light on the benefits and problems of each. For example, Nia Love professed that her feeling of U.S. citizenship was one placed within a space of black poverty and other types of discrimination; however, this labeling is not the foundation for belonging that she wants to accept. At the same time, Love recognized that her notion of U.S. black poverty is felt very differently by those in her African dance community. Shani Sterling honored her black U.S. ancestors who did the work that currently allows her to claim citizenship, but she also acknowledged that those currently engaged in fighting for their rights may not be able to benefit directly from the fight. For Sterling, citizenship seems to be an aspect of the longed for future. Jeannine Osayande describes citizenship as a desire for connection within a shared community; however, she also recognizes how she must release identity with her U.S. sense of community in order to connect to those outside of the U.S.

For all the participants, a sense that, for these threads of differing citizenship insights to intertwine, a constant labor in the present and the commitment of many more generations will be required. Therefore, citizenship for these participants involves the movement of diverse people, communities, and nations over time. This “moving

citizenship” will be an embraced migration of identities rather than fixing an identity to one label, nation, or belief. Therefore, diasporic practice for the research participants is the action of learning how to move between and through differing communities in order to continually create new, rather than defining past, notions of citizenship. Diasporic practice provides a constantly shifting space for differing types of citizenships to emerge, while also being analyzed, critiqued, and then explored. Diasporic practice becomes the seed ready to be planted in differing fertile soils in order to imagine what future citizenship might become.

The Seed: A Laboring Upon Us

Shani Sterling expressed that, as a young person, she would sit by herself thinking of Africa, and emotion would overcome her. She revealed:

I would just start crying. I never understood why I was so moved... I can't say it was sadness or joy or longing. I'm sure it was like a combination of a lot of emotions. The seed has been there...it was very important to go there [to Africa]. I wasn't really interested in studying African dance class as much as I just wanted to go there. (Sterling)

Shani Sterling's pull toward diasporic labor involved not just a desire to learn about African dance but to also experience the dance within the continent of Africa, to truly be in Africa.

Throughout her interviews, Sterling continued to discuss how her sense of an Ghanaian culture came to life when she was able to actually experience the culture on Ghanaian soil and through the lives of those living on that soil. In the following, she

describes how giving her son a Ghanaian name was brought to life when experiencing that name's importance within Ghana.

We gave him a Ghanaian name, *Adom*. We had a book of African names, and we gave him that name. Then I went to Jacob's Pillow¹ in 2002, which was a tribute to Katherine Dunham, and they had several people there from the University of Ghana. That time at Jacob's Pillow was just life changing. So, then, in 2005, I went to Ghana for three weeks. I saw my son's name on different stores—they had his name, stuff like that. The way that I related to people there, it was more than I could put into words during that three weeks. It was just so—I can't really explain it. (Sterling)

After this initial 3-week experience in Ghana making connections with people in the Ghanaian communities that she visited, Sterling was able to travel back to Ghana for a year on a Fulbright Fellowship. During this year, Sterling was able to connect the seeds of her desire to know her African lineage with the actual practice of experiencing how dance is felt and lived within the diverse dance communities in Ghana.

Sterling's commitment to these lived experiences in Ghana currently guides how she shares her dance with her students studying Ghanaian dance at Houston Community College (HCC). At HCC, Sterling also directs the Akwaaba Dance and Drum Festival each year, bringing in dance artists from Africa and the African Diaspora, and that includes those she worked with in Ghana—Bernard Woma and Sulley Imoro. During this festival, Sterling actively and continually engages relationship building between her students and the dance artists from the multiple countries and cultures. The festival

¹ Jacob's Pillow is a school, center, and performance space in the U.S. offering international summer dance festivals. <https://www.jacobspillow.org/festival/>

started with the seeds of Sterling's deep, yet unexplainable, connection and strong emotional urge to visit the African continent. For Sterling, then, those seeds were sown in order to bring the African culture alive to those who might never have the chance to experience it themselves, through the voices and dances of the actual citizens of Africa and the African diaspora.

During her youth, Nia Love felt that an awareness of issues in race and artistry were foundational to her when learning how to navigate life's challenges. In her interview for this dissertation, Love revealed the history of her close relationship with her father, in which social and black consciousness was predominant. According to Nia Love, "Me and my father always talked. He was [in the] Back-to-Africa Marcus Garvey Movement, that was part of my upbringing as well. So, we were always talking about going back to Africa. But it didn't have an African site [a specific place in the black/African Diaspora; it was open to the potential of all diasporic locations]" (Love). Thus, the seed was planted to seek Africa.

Nia Love's father, Ed Love, was an acclaimed visual artist and sculptor who helped to create the sculpture program at Howard University in 1968. For a time, he was married to Love's stepmother, Lauren Cress Love, whose sister was Frances Cress Welsing, the noted U.S. American race theorist and Afrocentrist psychiatrist. As Nia Love was growing up, her proximity to Welsing's ideas allowed her to become intertwined with a community of people who valued consciousness surrounding race and

politics. Love's stepmother provided the first trip to a diasporic community outside of the U.S. Love described this experience as follows:

So, Lauren, my stepmother, was married to my father at that time. Lauren's cousin had a festival. It [featured] artists [including Joyce J. Scott who is a MacArthur Awarded visual artist, was her roommate in Cuba, her father's student, and highly influenced the way she works as an artist today] that were going into Cuba for three weeks and so she made it viable for me to go even though I was really young. So, my father let me go, he supported it. My mother was a little bit funny about the support mechanism of going to Cuba, the notion of Fidel Castro manifested in the ideologies of White America (and) feeding Black America. ...Fidel Castro was not the person to be affiliated [with], but those [cautions] were from people who were not as conscious as my father. He's "Go to Cuba, have a great time!" So, I was well-supported basically by my family. (Love)

The experience of going to Cuba and learning about the exciting dance and visual art happening within a culture deemed inappropriate to the political beliefs of the United States, planted the seed for Love's future interest in visiting Africa.

Another seed planted for how Love planned to navigate her future life was through the complexity of her birth mother's everyday life in the United States as a secretary. This was a strong influence on how Nia visualized who she would become in the world and the ways in which she envisioned how she would labor and for whom. Nia recalls a morning with her birth mother after her parents divorced:

When my mother and father broke up, I wanted to go live with my father because he was an artist. My mother was a secretary and I would see her in the morning putting on her stockings and cursing—not literally cursing but angry because she had to get up in the morning and deal with these honkies, had to deal with white people. She would get up in the morning and everything was a problem. Oh my God, I would just look at her and say, "Oh, no, if I ever do anything, I will never be a secretary." So, I never learned how to type—I will not—I had typing class and I was bad in it. I'm—oh—I can't touch a typewriter. Thank God, we have computers now. I can fit right in that. (Love)

Clearly, Nia Love's family life—which included her artist father, her stepmother's work with black consciousness, and her mother's navigation of a racist construct in her daily life—created and reinforced in her the desire to seek and imagine a way to reboot her own life within what she felt to be a racist American construct. These experiences were not the only elements that influenced her diasporic connection; they were only a few of the many seeds planted. However, these family seeds sit in the forefront of her memory as markers of how she would move throughout her own life.

Ojeya Cruz Banks was primarily raised by her mother and her mother's family of Chamorro indigenous descent from the island of Guam. The island is in the Pacific Ocean on the eastern boundary of the Philippine Sea (Cruz Banks), and it is an unincorporated territory of the United States, which makes its inhabitants American citizens by birth. However, the "Chamorro-diaspora" family migrated to California in 1965 when her grandfather joined the U.S. Navy. Cruz Bank's father, based in the southeastern part of the United States, is African American, but he remained somewhat distant from her in terms of day-to-day life. However, overtime and as an adult Cruz Banks has grown closer to her father's side of the family.

Ojeya Cruz Banks's family continued to uphold a connection to Chamorro culture after their migration to the U.S. She described: "there were lots of things around food and, you know, greeting customs and very sort of clan based networks—an extended family. There's hardly ever nuclear family moments on that side of the family. You know, it's like your cousins are your brothers and sisters" (Cruz Banks). In time, Cruz

Banks realized there was an element missing from her ancestral lineage, causing her to seek a link to her father's African American heritage, culture, and way of life. She found that she had a "desire to know more, understand more about what it means to be an African-American," and she felt that the best way to address that at that time was to go to Africa (Cruz Banks). In Ojeya Cruz Banks' lived experience, this particular seed, her African American part of her identity, was a missing connection, and she initially chose a diasporic connection to fulfill it.

Throughout the lived experiences of Ojeya Cruz Banks, Nia Love, and Shani Sterling, the seeds that led them to the continent of Africa and black/African diasporic locations throughout the world are quite diverse: a feeling about the continent of Africa that brought a young woman to tears, a sense of being reared in one culture while another one waits to be known, a show of support from an artist father who was conscious and imaginative enough to seek and share an extended life story, and a mother who was living oppressed by and moving through a racial construct daily in the U.S. The lived experiences shared in this section demonstrate the variety of sources that can become seeds of desire for a deeper cultural knowledge. However, all of the women interviewed for this dissertation described their individual seeds as culminating in a calling that came from somewhere inside of themselves: they were the ones who would undertake the labor of tending to the seeds. After laboring to plant the seeds, the dissertation participants chose to go where their growing seeds led them: they felt the pull and followed the call.

The Laboring Around You: Youthful Immersion in black/African Diasporic Dances

Some of the women interviewed for this dissertation shared pivotal moments and nostalgic memories that involved being immersed, captured, captivated, or taken away by certain experiences in their lives in which their connection to a black/African descendent heritage was awakened and enlivened. During these moments, the women found themselves surrounded by family and communities of people who labored to pass on traditions and culture to future generations. Their experiences were not only about the joy of dancing – having fun – but entailed a practice, a sense of laboring to understand the culture and to figure out who they were and could become within an immersion in a diasporic dance culture. Basically, it goes beyond just the enjoyment of practice, but it is a laboring of trying to dig into the culture, to travel to the culture, to figure out to immerse oneself in the culture in terms of practice, research, and the ability to see oneself as a citizen beyond the U.S.

Nzinga Metzger, whose father is from Sierra Leone and mother is from the United States, recalled an immersion memory of being with her grandmother in Sierra Leone. Her family would travel to the African continent fairly often, and, when in Sierra Leone, Nzinga Metzger's grandmother would take Nzinga to see masquerade celebrations and festivals. There was one in particular, during which Nzinga remembers getting caught up in the rhythm, music, and spirit of the events. She became lost in the rhythm while moving with the processional and was unknowingly separated from her grandmother. She did not recall how she was found; she only remembers the relief on her grandmother's

face, while at the same time, sensing the freedom she felt while captivated by the music. She defines this memory as the moment she became a dancing wanderer (Metzger). It was one of the first times she describes being spellbound by what she felt as the essence of the African culture. While caught up in processional, she felt all the laboring done to make this African moment happen connected her to her father's family and grounded her in her heritage of festival, masquerade, artistry, music, and dance.

Even though this experience of becoming lost in the dance and music moment sits at the forefront of Nzinga Metzger's memory, especially when she recounts traveling back and forth to Sierra Leone, she also feels that her experiences in the United States with her father's family and her parents' friends had a more sustained influence on her exposure to and practice of diasporic dance. In the following, she described the influence of her father's family on her experience of movement culture:

My first exposure to dance was here [in the United States], but the funny thing about it is I don't have any memories of dancing with my mother's family—my memories of dancing are with my father's family...I imagine that my mother's sisters and their siblings, they probably went to parties and stuff, but there wasn't us dancing together except for maybe at our family reunion.

Growing up, pretty much all of my social exposures and experiences were with people from the diaspora. My parents had me when they were in graduate school and they were in graduate school with people who were all Caribbean and Africans, and so all of our social gatherings were Caribbean and African music, and that's what I danced to, that's what I grew up on. I honestly didn't know the difference until I was about 11. I didn't know Bob Marley wasn't from Africa. (Metzger)

An additional layer of Nzinga Metzger's memories of her mother's black U.S. or African American family and her childhood with them were the differences she expressed

between what a life full of dance meant in her experiences with both sides of her diasporic family— African American mother’s side and Sierre Leonean father’s side. There were varied definitions of dance as a strong force in the cultural landscape of her families. Metzger’s experience with black/African diasporic peoples outside of the U.S., including folks from the Caribbean islands and continental Africans, is the actual place where she found dance full and in effect. She described here her experience of black U.S. culture with her mother’s family.

I feel like I haven’t had the typical African American upbringing. It’s been very atypical. I did not grow up in a black church, so I don’t really have the whole black church experience in my background. I mean, my mother went to church, but I don’t have the “we went to church every Sunday and the pastor” [experience]. And I don’t have that experience that I’ve heard people talk about where you have aunts and uncles and card playing and—that’s not been my family social experience. My family social experience has always been music and dancing. So, for me, being in spaces where there are African Americans often times feels frustrating, because I feel like they don’t have fun because they don’t really dance. They [her African American side of the family] don’t dance as much as we [her immediate and extended family that is a part the black/African diasporic community from the continent of Africa and the Caribbean] do. Music and dancing is a part of almost every single function I have been to since I was—since I can remember, whether it was a baby christening or baby shower or an engagement party or Christmas or New Year’s or whatever, Thanksgiving, everything, we’re always dancing. I’ve been around people [African Americans], they have social gatherings and they sit around and talk and the music is in the background. And I can’t relate to that, because my whole orientation is dancing with your family. That’s what a social gathering is. (Metzger)

Nzinga Metzger further feels distanced from the ways in which black U.S. or African American folks practice, or *do not* practice, dance as a result of her diasporic experiences. Metzger senses these differing experiences as fostering complex feelings in her about the ways in which dance was expressed to her throughout her life from black U.S. and

African American perspectives. She felt that her experiences of events within continental African and Caribbean communities, whether in the United States or in other locations in the world, intertwined dance with every moment of the event; in fact, dancing was most of what created the event itself. Without dance, the diasporic gatherings would lose their very essence. Thus, the combination of time Metzger spent in Sierra Leone and the time she spent with black/African diasporic peoples in the U.S. imprinted dance on her heart and fed her love for diasporic dances. Metzger continued to describe how her exposure to music—particularly music involving live percussion—in black/African diasporic spaces also fed her pursuit of this culture of dance in her life:

Going to Africa and getting to be around live percussion and live instruments was exciting for me, particularly because my dad plays, he plays congas. It wasn't something that I got to be around here a lot. Most of the times, people didn't—we had functions, all the music was through the stereo or whatever. When I went to Africa, my grandmother would always take me to go see masquerades come out in different villages, so I really like the whole live music thing. (Metzger)

In summary, Nzinga Metzger was surrounded by the labors/practices of those within the black/African culture and tradition. However, these labors were created through her experience of diasporic dances at various gatherings in the U.S. and while traveling with her family. Although the black U.S. and African American aspects of Nzinga Metzger's experiences felt less centered around dance, her mother and father made choices to surround her with fertile diasporic groundings that included connections with people, cultures, and traditions from global black/African diasporic descendent communities. Her parents also had the resources and commitment to provide her with opportunities to know life in Sierra Leone and other diasporic locations at an early age,

thereby creating a multiplicity of immersive experiences that further shaped her connection to diasporic dance.

One of Jeannine Osayande's first immersions within the context of diasporic dance was in a dance company called Art of Black Dance & Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She described this company as "still going strong, like 40-plus years" later (Osayande). De Ama Battle was—and still is—the company's director, and, during the time that Jeannine Osayande was there, Bamidele Osumare was the musical director (Osayande). Jeannine Osayande continues to describe De Ama Battle as having numerous avenues for practicing dance since she was a "dancer's dancer, and a teacher, and she was an academic. She was an example of somebody who was always, always doing that research" (Osayande). This sensibility regarding the ways in which one could consider practice and research as intersecting pathways is a foundational aspect of Jeannine Osayande's continued dance practice. For Osayande, this intersection of practices established her sense of labored discipline and validated her abilities as both an artist and a scholar.

In addition, through her work with the company, Jeannine Osayande felt immersed in the many seeds planted when "learning from people who were coming straight over [from the continent of Africa]" (Osayande). In the following, Osayande further described how this diasporic dance immersion also encouraged her to revise her self-image:

I had a lot of female struggle with the self-esteem issues. Even though for some I might be considered nice-looking, or kind, or all of these different things, and

have all these great attributes, I would have issues with self-esteem that you don't talk about and tell people because, you know, those are the things we keep secret. But when I came into the dance, it showed me—even though I never really let go of it for years, it helped me to pry the grip from being so tight. (Osayande)

Jeannine Osayande continued to discuss her experiences with the dance company as creating a way for her to reevaluate her habits of thinking and living. She was able to reflect on her prior self-images and bring them to the surface as she immersed herself in study and practice with Art of Black Dance & Music. She found herself going through a process of self-revisioning:

There was something transcendent in the music, in the dance, and in the discipline and structure of the teachers themselves, and in the environment. This discipline and this structure [honored] being able to go back through dance and reevaluate the notions that I held onto, that maybe I should have let go of, and other things that I was able to refine and hold onto. But to really, each time, have this opportunity to kind of separate it out of where you want to be and what you want to keep and what you want to let go of. (Osayande)

She continued to clarify how she was able to gain more clarity about her personality and how that energy could manifest in the world:

I'm big energy. It [Art of Black Dance & Music] helped ground me, gave me this groundedness back to the earth, that otherwise, I don't really know. I would probably be, like, flying around like a helium balloon all over the place. So, with all my energy, with being bossy, with having some OCD, and all these things, it fit beautifully into being an artist. And then it fit beautifully specifically in this art form. (Osayande)

In summary, Jeannine Osayande highlighted the discoveries that she made while being immersed in the Art of Black Dance & Music; as she labored with the dancers, she began to feel herself as part of a larger diasporic practice, something bigger than herself. The seeds planted in the dance company enabled her to channel and focus her life force

within her black/African diasporic dance. She was immersed in and became a part of the labor of people who were committed to holding onto and carrying forth black/African traditions of movement and dance. In her interview, she describes her time in this company as allowing her identity to unfold beyond a black American. Further, by experiencing and laboring through a different dance perspective, she was able to reveal the harmful aspects that could have stunted her growth as a woman. She was exposed to grounding and self-discovery through her work with this dance company. In summary, Jeannine Osayande remembered most vividly that there was a dedication to comprehensive and holistic disciplined modeling and laboring by the leaders of the company, which helped her expand her self-image as well as her artistic and cultural abilities.

Similar to Osayande, Ojeya Cruz Banks revealed an immersion experience she had when dancing the cha-cha with her family from Guam. She recalls, also like Nzinga Metzger, how time with her family influenced her orientation toward diasporic dance. The Chamorro side of her family from Guam love the cha-cha, which has its origins in Cuba, according to Cruz Banks. Many diverse folks moved through Guam for a variety of reasons, and with Cubans came the cha-cha which is now a cultural staple. Ojeya Cruz Banks expressed that “Everybody—my grandma, my grandpa, my aunties, my uncles, my cousins—we would get down on some cha-cha. Get down! It was definitely one of the most memorable childhood moments, doing the cha-cha with my family” (Cruz Banks).

Ojeya Cruz Banks continued to discuss how she did not grow up dancing in the streets with African American kids in her early youth. Although, as mentioned earlier, her father is African American, her identity during childhood was deeply entrenched in Chamorro cultural ways (Cruz Banks). She did, however, begin to plug into African American dance and music culture during her middle school years, and she describes how she was always dancing in talent shows and other venues. Yet, it was her experience dancing the cha-cha with her family that she discussed throughout her interview as providing her with and grounding her in a cultural marker. As Cruz Banks describes: “People still do it. You go to somebody[‘s event] who’s from Guam, you can turn on some music, somebody will get up and start doing the cha-cha. And then everybody will start doing the cha-cha” (Cruz Banks). The cha-cha was how she sensed herself as being part of a culture beyond her identity as an African American.

Although Cruz Banks is presently deeply committed to the labor of researching and digging into the cultural practices of differing diasporic dances, when she was first exposed to the cha-cha as a young child, its diasporic travels and origins were unknown to her. In a sense, she began her future labors as an unknowing practitioner of the diasporic global fabric. However, this childhood family dance practice led her to want to dig more deeply into how her immersion in a diasporic dance practice could help her gain a better sense of herself as circling back to her black/African diasporic descendent connections.

Alternatively, Nzinga Metzger was consciously aware of her diasporic orientation as a result of the cultural framework created by her parents. Although she may have not understood this framework fully as a child, it has now become more comprehensive because of the concentrated labor needed when tending the seeds grown within the framework shaped by her family. Ojeya Cruz Banks also had diasporic dance seeds planted through her multiple generational family. The labor of tending these seeds is particularly relevant to her now because she is a mother who feels the importance of not only passing down these diasporic seeds, but also the importance of laboring to keep these seeds alive for the next generation. In summary, Osayande, Nzinga Metzger, and Ojeya Cruz Banks all had differing diasporic immersive exposures; however, all three now discuss the importance of laboring to keep the diasporic exposure alive as a way for a black African American to develop a sense of identity as a citizen of the world, a citizen who works continually develops the love of and commitment to a continually shifting diasporic dance essential to their everyday lives today.

Interestingly, Nia Love's immersion moment happened within the framework of ballet during her work with Alicia Alonso and the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. This Cuban ballet company came to Washington, DC. during a time when Nia Love was living there with her father. The dancers were housed by the Washington Ballet, which gave Nia Love access to them through a training program hosted by the Washington Ballet. In the following quote, Nia Love remembered her time with Alicia Alonso and Ballet Nacional de Cuba when later in Cuba, and she shared her memories of this time in a way that only

she can:

When I got to Cuba, I had already previously met Alicia Alonso, and this was a part of my dance career. I had met her because the ballet company came to Washington, the Washington Ballet allowed them to use their place for a place of residence and rehearsal. And so it was the first time that I had actually seen black ballerinas, big and thick-legged and powerful and emotional and vibrant and visceral. ...[The] ballerinas before I had seen were these little, frail-looking, white, lily white, very thin and breakable porcelain type of commodities. They were commodities, they were objects. So, when Ballet Nacional de Cuba came—they were all throughout—they're walking down the hallways with all their colors and their power and just all this upright personality and were really happy and mean, it was vibrant. It was really, whoa, who are these people? (Love)

Nia Love described a stark contrast between what she had been exposed to as ballet in terms of physical presence and what she was experiencing with the ballerinas of Ballet Nacional de Cuba. The energies, as she described and felt them, were quite the opposite of each other.

Before she was actually in the physical presence of Alicia Alonso, Nia Love had studied images of her in books. Nia explained how her mother returned to school and would take Nia to the library with her when she studied. Nia used to sit in the middle of the library aisles with stacks of books, spread out and open. She would just look at the images of American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet, and other major companies, not realizing that she was teaching herself the history of ballet from the late 1800s to the 1960s and 1970s (Love). She would remember and seek out more information about the black ballerinas and ballerinas of color that she discovered:

The two that I remember the most at that time of my searching and looking through pictures and books [were] Alicia Alonso and Maria Tallchief. Maria Tallchief was a First Nations indigenous ballerina. Years later, down the road,

when we were being introduced to Alicia Alonso, I was, “Oh, s—[expletive], that’s the chick I’ve been looking at in the books this whole time, wow, in my face. This chick is in my face, wow.” I was just enamored by her. And at that time, she was—which I didn’t know until after I went to Cuba—she was legally blind, just amazing. She just—she didn’t dance for us there, but she talked about the history of the ballet and the history of her life in a discussion with Mary Day, longtime director of the Washington Ballet. (Love)

Nia Love then asked if she would be able to sit in on rehearsals for the Kennedy Center performance featuring these ballerinas, and she was allowed to observe:

I was, oh my God, I went home and told my father, “Oh my God, Alicia Alonso is there. You just have no idea. I’ve been looking at her in a book since I was seven and now she’s a real person and she said I could come to rehearsals.” So, I said, I’m not going to be home until late, I’m going to catch the bus home late because I’m going. They have rehearsal all week long, I’m going to go to every rehearsal, and I did. I went to every rehearsal. I remember going on one of the days, maybe it was the fourth day I went in, I saw the whole [piece]. My father had to come and get me because it was too late to go home. I forgot about my homework and s—[expletive] like that. I was just done in the world. And she pulled me to the side one day, and the translator said, “Alicia Alonso wants to know what your name is.” I told her my name. She said, “You are so committed, she loved your spirit, and any time you come to Cuba, you are welcome to come and study with us.” I was—wow. I was—man. Went home, told my father, oh my God, I called my mother on the phone, “Mom, this is amazing, this lady invited me. I don’t know when I’m going to be able to go to Cuba, but whatever, it was an invitation.” (Love)

The transformative elements of this immersive dance journey continued to unfold as Nia Love revealed how she was in the lowest level of ballet while studying at the Washington Ballet. She described a class facilitated by Alicia Alonso where all ballet levels took technique together.

I was, oh, s—[expletive], I’ve got to be on my best behavior. I’ve got to get that extension up there, I’ve got to get that—woo, I was excited. She came and she taught that class. And I was a turner, so I could land pirouettes left side, right side, I was—I could pick up information really quick. I didn’t know I—why I was in level C [the lowest level and where she was placed by the Washington Ballet]

other than because I was black and maybe I was a little chunky at that time. Well, I wasn't chunky, but I was chunky for them [Washington Ballet]. Whatever, it didn't matter, I didn't care, I just did it. But after the class was over, Alicia Alonso's guy that had translated for us the day before told me to come, that Alicia Alonso wanted to show me some things. So, she put me in first position, and she extended my leg up in front of me, and then she extended behind, and she pushed my leg up and held it there. She [says], "OK, this is where you need to work from here." So, she gave me like a mini f—[expletive] lesson. So, when I walked out and we were downstairs, all the white girls were talking. They were so f—[expletive] jealous, I'll never forget. Jealous—it was the first time that they were ever jealous of me, because I was *invisibilized* there. I've been *invisibilized* my whole life in this ballet world, and now for the first time I was being—wow—people can see me! They'll see me. (Love)

Nia Love committed to laboring at her best even when she was told by the white ballet culture at the Washington Ballet that she could not attain their standards. That discipline of labor and practice paid off with Alonso giving her an opportunity to grow the seed planted in their short time with her in the United States. When the diasporic moment came she was ready and Alicia Alonso was ready to see her, embrace her, and take her in.

In summary, Nia Love and Jeannine Osayande both had the experience of working with or being part of a dance company or organization as an immersive and captivating exposure to black/African diasporic movement. Ojeya Cruz Banks and Nzinga Metzger found their first pathways toward dance traditions through family gatherings, specifically families coming from countries outside the U.S. These memories of immersion all occurred during times of growth and transition. Whether the events occurred during the formidable preteen period or during young adulthood, these movement artists found themselves participating in immersive gatherings that were

centered around black/African descendent dances or diasporic movement practices with organizations that exposed them to diasporic dance orientations—the labor of planting and then tending the diasporic seeds was put into practice.

Immersive environments created feelings of connection and inspired a sense of citizenship beyond that espoused by an American culture: the research participants discuss creating new identities and awareness of who they were as humans in the world. The participants further discussed how their feeling of citizenship affected the ways in which they sensed themselves grounded in cultural traditions during their most vulnerable times of growth. However, they further discussed how this new sense of citizenship was something that needed constant tending, constant researching, constant practicing, and constant developing through a genuine labor of love. The vivid memories of immersive influence imprinted on the research participants shaped the ways in which a labored practice of dance influenced their lives.

While these individuals were grappling with their feelings about American citizenship as black U.S. women, seeds were planted that turned out to be unexplainable initiators of the exploration of the African continent and of black/African diasporic dance. These early immersive experiences led these movement artists to continue their migrations and travels through diasporic dances, movement practices, philosophies, and the labor required to maintain them.

CHAPTER VI

PHILOSOPHIES AND PRACTICES OF INTEGRITY

IN BLACK/AFRICAN DIASPORIC MOVEMENT PRACTICES

This chapter unveils the diverse and collective philosophies and practices of integrity expressed in interviews by the movement artists and/or diasporic movement philosophers/ practitioners as they developed throughout these artists' ongoing careers. However, it is important to first unpack what is meant by the term *philosophies and practices* to better understand the content of this chapter.

Philosophies are schools of thought that are attributed to a particular community of people who are linked by the ways in which they move through the world or by certain core beliefs. *Philosophy* can be broadly defined as the critical study of fundamental beliefs and the groundings that are central to those beliefs. Some of the philosophical styles, branches, or schools of thought include epistemology (the study of knowing), ethics (human conduct), phenomenology (human consciousness and self-awareness), and aesthetics (beauty). These philosophical schools of thought are all embedded within this dissertation's interviews, which describe—in ways that are quite interwoven and cyclic—the lived experiences of five movement artists. Although this dissertation touches upon certain philosophical schools of thought, it is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of the connections between these dancers' lived experiences and philosophical

thinking. In other words, it is not focused on philosophy as a critical study practice. Rather, this dissertation will reveal some of the nuanced philosophical unfoldings of these diasporic movement practitioners, which are intertwined with narratives of their lived experiences.

Practices can be thought of as the ways that philosophical concepts are put into action. Sometimes the philosophies behind a specific practice are not always sitting at the forefront of the action: we see the act in the form of the practice, but the philosophies behind the practice may not be readily evident. This dissertation will make more explicit the ways in which the philosophies and practices of the movement artists, discussed in this dissertation, walk together through narratives of lived experience.

Integrity is a code of values that guides the way in which a person approaches life and work and how that person makes sense of, or perhaps even justifies, that approach. In the research, it became clear that the integrity of the dancers' practices was deeply connected to the dancers' philosophies. The dissertation has taken this idea into account and brought together some guiding philosophies related to black/African diasporic movement practices.

One critical objective of this dissertation is to build and continue a diverse, nuanced dialogue around black/African diasporic movement practices and the ways in which black U.S. and/or African American women movement artists share their practices, philosophies, and values that surround their artistic work of teaching, choreographing, and performing. For me, as the researcher and writer of this dissertation, finding the

through lines connecting all of the participants was like creating a patchwork quilt. The dances that these artists teach, choreograph, restage, and perform are created collectively over generations; they are rooted in traditional dances which can also be described as dances with long lineages. It is only fitting that the philosophies and practices of these artists come together through the collective and collaborative process of building dances and movement cultures over the course of multiple generations. The patchwork that I have sewn together integrates the work of these artists, while also leaving room for the work of other artists to be included later on by myself in future renderings or others traversing this subject matter in research and/or artistry. All of the quilt patches that represent these movement artists' philosophies and practices of integrity have not been included as that is a feat of collective force; it takes the work of many. In other words, this dissertation will not tell the entire story of each movement artist. It will not be a linear narrative, and even though some of the patches will fit the themes of multiple sections of the data chapters, they may only appear in one section and it is the work of us all to layer and intertwine.

There is a cyclic nature to lived experience that this dissertation is trying to capture. A desire to circle backward or forward while reading this dissertation is expected, and readers may find themselves feeling "in-between;" this was a conscious choice so that readers may experience, through the delivery of this data, the in-betweenness expressed in the movement artists' interviews as they discuss their lived experiences and their unsettled explorations of self, collective culture, and community.

This dissertation is meant to be viewed as a collectively built quilt that includes patches composed of the emergent discoveries of the diasporic movement practitioners who continuously and graciously gave and give their time and wisdom to the field of dance and movement practice.

Laboring Through Afro Ambiguity and (Con)temporary Migrations

Unveiling my Location: An Artistic Interlude by Lela Aisha Jones

There is a laboring due.

Not chosen but calling then chosen then calling then chosen

Oh...it's not labor to you

Well try a culture of integrity

Try being a citizen of the world with scruples and empathy

Brings grief, displacement, delight, and dysfunction to your doorstep

Mis/Displace yourself on purpose and tell me that is not labor

This is not the work of basking. The sun browns and burns.

Cooks you soooo right and throws you through the sanctuary.

Going is and is not the junk and coming back...

The black U.S. and/or African American movement artists or diasporic movement practitioners included in this dissertation seek diasporic experience and live through constant migrations of identity that leave them at times not quite sure where to settle or whether settling in terms of identity is viable at all as an objective. I often use the term *Afro Ambiguity* to describe the identity shifting that arises among individuals of

black/African descent who travel as seekers of dance/movement and culture by making (con)temporary migrations, meaning for more than just tourism, to locations in the world. For the black U.S. movement artists in this dissertation, these travels have been partially about finding their identity locations in these places, whether personally, culturally, or artistically. Such travel has involved a resettling of their blackness by experiencing blackness outside of the United States of America, which was the place of rearing for all of these artists. Such travels are (con)temporary because, within each artists' experiences, there are multiple layers associated with time. These trips have happened in both past and recent time periods; the past experiences feed the artists' present travels and practices as well as their contemporary existences. In addition, the length and timeframe of the travel may differ: it may range from weeks to years, it may be consecutive and structured as a single trip, or it may be spread out over time. These artists were not able to stay, or chose not to stay, in these other locations for more than two consecutive years, and this fact also influences their present philosophies and practices. Time is a factor.

For some, these trips are about going to specific places. For others, the trips are more nomadic, with the individuals choosing to migrate to multiple diasporic sites that have been labeled as such due to the transatlantic slave trade and/or the forced or chosen dispersion of people of black/African descent. The diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation have varying experiences that fall on the spectrum of orienting and reorienting in a diasporic context. *Orienting* can be thought of as a person experiencing the elements of a certain culture that he or she was somewhat prepared for; *reorienting*

involves those things that tend to catch a person off guard, to put them in a state of culture shock, and to bring them into a state of consciousness that they were unaware of prior to the experience. Such orienting and reorienting involves the multiple moments of sociocultural adjustment that occur during these (con)temporary migrations. As mentioned in chapter V, there are orientations that the movement artists carried with them from their past experiences; many of these had to shift when the artists entered new diasporic communities. These orientations and reorientations live within and beyond the framework of *Afro Ambiguity*.

There are overlaps in the lived experiences of the movement artists presented in this dissertation, but the objective of this research is to bring to the forefront the nuances of these experiences. Specifically, I want to focus on the continual orienting and reorienting that occur; these involve learning and relearning culture, accepting and reaccepting certain aspects of culture, and continual revision of ideas about culture. The work of the diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation was not performed solely to learn or teach dance; it was a more comprehensive experience. It involved labor beyond taking in and disseminating information, and it required the dislocation of each artist's self so that she may then create new identity elements and fresh ways of walking through life. This process has continual moments of *Afro Ambiguity*, which, again, is my term for the messy identity shifting that comes from being open to more than one orientation of blackness or ways of being black beyond the U.S. experience.

There are two movement artists in this dissertation to whom the term of *Afro Ambiguity* may be an alternative experience: Nzinga Metzger, who was born to an African American mother and a Sierra Leonean father, and Ojeya Cruz Banks, who grew up in the United States but who was raised by a tightly knit Chamorro Guamese family, and who now lives on the Pacific island of Aotearoa (South New Zealand). Shani Sterling, Jeannine Osayande, and Nia Love are all U.S. born and reared. All of these artists have faced the diasporic experience and their own *Afro Ambiguity* in diverse ways. When visiting diasporic locations throughout the world, some black U.S. diasporic practitioners felt moments of in-betweenness and mixedness: the not-quite-Africanness and not-quite-U.S. Americanness that the word *Afro-American* implies. The prefix *Afro-* is most notably used as an identity marker within the context of Afro-Cuban, Afro-Peruvian, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Columbian, Afro-Brazilian, and other cultures. However, these are not terms that I would associate with the idea of *Afro Ambiguity* and the confusion or messiness of the black/African diasporic experience due to the well-developed black/African descendent cultures that exist in these other cultures. Rather, I am using *Afro-* to emphasize how this term demonstrated an in-betweenness in the United States; especially since it did not last long as an identity marker and was quickly replaced by *African American*. Jeannine Osayande stated that the term *Afro-American* was too tied up with the Afro hairstyle, prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s as a clear social marker and a statement of blackness, but it was not enough to ground black people as an identifier.

Nzinga Metzger also brought to my attention the idea that *Afro Ambiguity* can be considered a transient space or an initial stage of the process of moving toward black/African *diasporic consciousness* in that it allows individuals to see themselves in a multitude of possible blacknesses. *Diasporic consciousness* is a concept first brought to my attention in an article by Edward A. Alpers as introduced to him by anthropologist James Clifford. Clifford described *diasporic consciousness* as dwelling-in-displacement (Alpers 16). The term *Afro-Ambiguity* seems to be connected to the idea of dwelling in displacement, but also differs from it, in that *diasporic consciousness* seems to be a more permanent state of acceptance, whereas *Afro Ambiguity* is a temporal process or an initial stage. *Afro Ambiguity* poignantly captures the constant state of openness and the continual and prevalent identity and belonging migrations that occur while the movement artists in this dissertation try to connect with a descendent culture that some consider lost to forced migration and the transatlantic enslavement period.

Jeannine Osayande spoke about what she called the *African reality*, which she faced when she arrived in Mali and which involved a clear reorientation of her previously held notions. *Afro Ambiguity* includes this moment of realizing that there is an African reality beyond one's own perceptions, and this moment hit her strongly and shockingly. For all of the women research participants in this dissertation, the ideas behind *African reality* and *Afro Ambiguity* are both a bit different and a bit the same. One of the touchstones of these experiences occurs when, as a person who identifies as black, you are called a *white foreigner* on the African continent. As a researcher, I have personal

thoughts about this experience, as I was called *toubob* in Senegal, *oburouni* in Ghana, and *oyibo* or *oyinbo* in Nigeria. These terms are loosely translated as white foreigner. The true meaning of certain words in any language can sometimes be quite complicated, and there is an unresolved debate surrounding whether or not one should be offended by these terms as a person of black/African descent who was not born or reared on the continent of Africa. There is no doubt that these terms can be used as effective openers for conversations about belonging and identity.

The personal experiences described in this chapter include stories about orienting and reorienting. The diasporic movement practitioners not only moved through multiple understandings of who they are and what they can withstand, but also the ways in which they are being seen, by people on the continent of African and throughout the black/African Diaspora, with whom they identify through their own connections. Shani Sterling began our conversation:

In Ghana—a big part of me feels like that’s home. It’s kind of hard to explain, but the feeling you get when you go to an auntie’s house or a grandmother’s house for a family reunion is the feeling that I get when I am in Ghana, or when they come here. Then there’s also another part of me that honestly feels like it’s not. I don’t know how much people talk about this, but there’s the whole issue of being called *foreigner*, the whole issue of being called *oburouni* in Ghana, or being treated on some levels like I have a lot of money, or like my life is a lot different than theirs, which it is... The whole issue of getting sick because I wasn’t born there, so my body reacting to eating different foods and experiencing getting bitten by mosquitoes, that will let you know [you are] in a different land. That’s what makes it kind of emotionally difficult for me sometimes, is feeling and navigating those different emotions. (Sterling)

There are several elements that were brought up in Shani Sterling’s quote. One thing that she addressed is the potential of becoming sick from foods that your body is not used to

or just from being outside and doing the normal things to sustain life. There is also the idea of being called *foreigner* while at the same time feeling familiar and comfortable with the diasporic culture in the place you are visiting and exploring your notions of home as a cultural experience. Like Shani Sterling, in the previous chapter, Nia Love also mentioned being perceived as wealthy when she was expressing her feelings around citizenship. She saw this vision of herself as troubling.

As a researcher and member of the diasporic practitioner community, I often tell the story of how I was called *my nigga* in Ghana as a result of the globalization of Hip Hop culture (and the associated lack of context because Hip Hop travels without clear explanations, just the music). It was a moment of culture shock for which neither I, as a black U.S. person, nor the Ghanaian individual who referred to me that way was ready. However, this experience of misunderstanding between cultures resulted in a teachable/learnable moment. The two of us were able to communicate and discuss the term, and I quickly discovered that the person thought they were affirming me—or, how we might say more commonly, “loving up on me”—with that term as it is used from a multitude of vantage points in Hip Hop. The one way it may be left out often, not always, is as an oppressive term and the history of the terms connection to enslavement. This conversation left me feeling better, but this experience made it very clear to me that I had not been reared in Ghana; it also showed me it was not common among Ghanaians to meet black U.S. folks that live and have been reared in the place where Hip Hop was first created; there is no one to explain this term expansively. The effort that this person made

to make me feel welcome and familiar, instead, created difference. However, the experience forced us to resolve some of our feelings, and we both had to reorient ourselves after coming into contact with each other, our histories, our identities, and our understandings of one another.

To continue the conversation about orientation, reorientation, and feeling out of place when the goal is to feel connected, I present Ojeya Cruz Banks' story of being in a dance format called the "solo circle." At the end of many West African dance classes in the United States, there will be something call the *bantaba* or "solo circle," during which each person contributes movement to the circle individually. Ojeya Cruz Banks had the opportunity to be a part of a solo circle rendition in Guinea. However, it was not a place of comfort for her, even though she had participated in this type of experience in the United States:

Yes, displacement. I definitely am glad that you brought this up because there was a moment that I experienced in Guinea. In my last trip, I went to this DunDunba [also spelled Dununba]. There were a lot of dancers there, and some of the [Les Ballet Africains] veterans, so like people who danced with Moustapha [Bangoura]. In fact, this woman was laying it down, she created such amazing music. But I did not feel like I was a part of that circle. I was sitting in it, but I didn't feel a part of it. The music was going really, really fast. And, you know, I was not born there, so I can't just jump out of my seat." (Cruz Banks)

In this passage, Ojeya Cruz Banks reiterated the idea of not being born on the continent of Africa, and she is referring to the need to warm up the body before jumping into a moment of movement. Obviously, this is a specific moment that she is describes, and in some circumstances, it would feel quite fine to just join in. However, there are also

instances like this one, where a body that has been reared in the United States is just not ready.

Non-native is a term I use to discuss those who were not reared in certain parts of the black/African Diaspora. This is significant, because daily life influences the way people dance and their movement practices. People who do not sweep or cook low to the ground in a squat position or practice life in more manual ways, such as walking far distances while carrying water or going to work, dance differently; everyday living is, in a sense, the warm up for the dancing. Certainly, there are people who reside on the African continent who are exceptions to this notion of active and embodied living, and there are U.S. folks that have everyday lives that keep them physically ready for action at any moment. However, in general many dancers in Africa do not sense the need for the same “warm up” practiced by dancers in the United States as a preparation for full movement. Ojeya Cruz Banks continued to discuss this warming up difference between cultures as making her feel like an outsider, one having the discomfort of not having “any moment where I felt the spirit.” For Ojeya Cruz Banks, not being able to warm up for her dancing made it difficult for her to enter fully into the solo circle, a practice she enjoys in the United States. She exclaimed:

I’m always dying to get in there, girl [laughs], especially if me and the music are on the same pulse, I’m with it. I did not [feel it] in that particular [Guinea] context, and I do think that is dealing with displacement. Dealing with that mystery of my genealogy is a lot more confronting within Africa than it is for me in the [United] States, and I kind of experience it here [Dunedin, New Zealand, Aotearoa] a little. I’m moving through it. (Cruz Banks)

Moving through this sense of displacement is the constant work of the migrating identity, which is tied to the temporality and contemporary existence created by past transgressions. When living with *Afro Ambiguity*, sometimes there are moments of orienting and reorienting that lead to acceptance, whereas at other times you feel out of the loop of your own existence and quite displaced and disoriented. This idea leads seamlessly into Philosophy and Practice of Integrity 1, which is to experience the black/African diaspora outside of the United States if you are to become a diasporic movement practitioner.

**Philosophy and Practice of Integrity 1:
Experience the black/African Diaspora by Going**

To delve into the ways in which these movement artists approach their work with integrity, there needs to be an understanding of what it means to traverse a black/African Diaspora by actually traveling to diasporic locations and spending time with people in those communities. Every diasporic movement practitioner in this dissertation has been to the continent of Africa or traveled outside of the United States to black/African diasporic locations multiple times in order to study dance. The philosophies and practices of integrity unveiled in this dissertation are held together by the research participants as a collective, with the narratives of some diasporic movement practitioners at times emerging into the forefront and at other time many narratives rising together collaboratively.

One element that I felt, along with the dissertation research participants, when laboring in and migrating through the black/African Diaspora, is that we learn what we

did not know we needed to learn. In the United States, diasporic dances of black/African descent or diasporic movement practices and cultures, like many cultures, come to us. Here, we are consumers of culture. We can shape culture, come to it when we want it, and leave it when we do not want it. We can treat it as a commodity that we buy when we are interested in it, and then disregard it when it feels irrelevant to our individual lives. We make a lot of the rules about the consumption of culture while navigating the experience of black/African diasporic movement practices.

This sense of entitled consumption in the U.S. is part of the reason Jeannine Osayande feels every U.S. teacher teaching dances of black/African descent needs to visit the continent of Africa. Thus, the first philosophy and practice of integrity encourages the direct experience of the cultures in which the dances originated by traveling to those locations to know the dances better and more comprehensively, within the context from which they emerged. According to Jeannine Osayande, “there are a lot of people who teach African dance and [who have] been teaching it for years and have never been to the continent. And I don’t even care where you go. Let’s say all you do is dance from Guinea. Just go somewhere. Even if you don’t get to Guinea, go somewhere.” Shani Sterling expands on this idea of why, if you teach African dance, the labor of going to the continent of Africa is essential to the practice of teaching. She concluded:

I realized that what I wanted was to completely experience a culture. Getting malaria, getting typhoid is a part of the culture. Some people die from it that have been born and raised in Ghana. Some people die from malaria. It’s a part of the culture.

I'm not just learning a dance or a culture by learning the movement. I'm embodying that whole experience to learn the culture. Like, say, for example, when the women would wake up in the morning, you could hear them sweeping the compound and the broom that they use is maybe about 18 inches long and it's a bunch of straw tied together. So, they would lean over, and they would sweep with one hand and hold their chest with [the] other hand, almost in a rhythm, sweeping. I learned how to exist within the culture as a married woman. You dress differently. You wear extra cloth tied around your outfit, how to greet people when you're walking through the streets, and things like that. All of that influences the dance. The women's role in society, being a woman, all of that influences the dance, in my opinion. The culture dictates the dance, just like our culture dictates how we execute our movement here in America. Culture in Africa, specifically I'm talking about Ghana, influences the dance. I learned that by living there. (Sterling)

Jeannine Osayande echoed Shani Sterling by expressing that, when traveling to the continent of Africa or throughout the black/African Diaspora, you can go for reasons other than to study dance. Just being there is a part of the journey.

Some years, when I'd go, I was specifically studying. Other years, it was important to also just be, [you] don't always have to go to Africa to dance. We can go to Africa to just see how Africa exists, see what's important, what's valuable, what's not valuable. How do people celebrate their joys? How do they have their problems? How do they confront those problems and get over it? Because all of those things inform the dance. (Osayande)

In the above quotes, Jeannine Osayande and Shani Sterling are discussed traditional dances and/or dances with long lineages. They express the importance of being out in the black/African Diaspora beyond the United States. To both practitioners, there are elements that are not teachable if a diasporic movement practitioner does not go to Africa and has not been embedded in the culture or lived with the culture from which the dances originate. The dances can of course be taught without the practitioner having traveled to the dances' places of origin; however, the daily cultural lived experience that influences

the dances adds a richness to the teaching, performance, choreography, and artistry of these movements. Jeannine Osayande and Shani Sterling are focused on what being in the culture offers to their diasporic movement practices, particularly in the places where these dances originate. Being in the native spaces of these dances and with the people and communities in which these dances have been held for generations contributes to a more comprehensive engagement with the dances.

During her first trip to Senegal in 1990, Nia Love felt a connection and a sense of belonging. For Love, there is an ability to create belonging when you travel or migrate through black/African diasporic global locations, but a person may also feel a certain distance from the culture and come into an *African reality* (a phrase created by Jeannine Osayande) that requires orienting and reorienting. Nia Love's cultural experience in Senegal taught her more about her own desire to belong. The trip both connected and disconnected her from an Africanness that she envisioned, and it also reoriented her around an *African reality*. In the following, Nia Love reflects upon her first time in Senegal when she recognizes some cultural elements of African that she has learned about in her U.S. rearing as well as experiences some preconceived notions of her blackness by those on the continent of Africa.

So, we went to Senegal together, that was my first trip, and it was just amazing. It was the first time—I think I spent seven days in depression. When I first got there, got off the plane, everybody was just, “Wow, look at the stewardesses. They got lapas on.” I was taking pictures, “She’s got a lapa [traditional skirt worn across the continent of Africa].” Who the f—[expletive] wears a lapa, except for people that’s coming to dance class in America? Unless you knew some Nigerians or some Senegalese, New Guineans that were in D.C., which you could see, but you knew that they were African. They weren’t African American.

So, yes, we get off the plane and are really welcomed and supported in some ways. I guess we were also objectified, black bodies coming back to Africa to seek our roots and people wanted to try to get us to pay them so that we could take them to our original home place that we'd never known before. "Oh, you are Fulani, I can take you to Fulani. You have to come with me because you are Fulani, I am sure of it, I am sure you are Fulani. And you are Soussou [also spelled *Susu* or *Soso*], so we have to take you, too. Yes, we take you first, then we take you second, that's going to be \$3,520 cedis. We just take you, no problem, you can get—we can bargain." [laughs]

And we were, "Wow, I'm Fulani! Ooh, you're Soussou." {laughs} Then you go and look up some Fulani people, then you start seeing who's Fulani. "Oh, I'm Fulani." Then you see this brother—maybe he's got my complexion, maybe he's got some of my sense of features, and you ask him, "Are you Fulani?" "Hey, yes, I'm Fulani, I'm Fulani!" Ooh, wow, I've held onto Fulani all these years. So that was an incredible sense of belonging that I could say, wow, this diaspora brings me home in a way.

Then it was from the rest of the days there that I really started to see that I was not as African as I thought I was. I wasn't as African-thinking. I would test the food, I couldn't drink the water. I couldn't hang out really in the way they were hanging out. I had to always be mindful. And my first trip to Senegal, I didn't take my malaria pills. I was, "F—[expletive] this, I'm vegetarian, I'm not taking none of this s—[expletive], all [these] chemicals." And people were making me salads and I was eating salads.

I was what's called "lucky." God only protects, what, babies and fools? I was a fool. I wasn't a baby, but I was a straight-up fool. Yes, I was protected, I was well protected. I did not get sick. Some people were really, really sick. I did not get sick, and I hung out on rooftops. I went to the lake, went to some of the ballet companies, hung out, drank. Going to weddings and naming ceremonies [an event for introducing a child to the world through revealing the child's name] and—that's when I really felt—that's when I was impregnated with the movement. Prior to that, I wasn't really. I was impregnated with that energy through my feet. I could feel it. I could feel when I came back to the United States and then I started taking classes, then that was when I was, "Whoa, oh, I know some stuff!" Because you saw—you didn't see the dance irrespective of itself [or] inside of itself in a very controlled environment. No, you went to *bembe* [a spiritual ceremony in Cuba], you went to any kind of [ceremonial or cultural event]. (Love)

Nia Love evolved emotionally from being enamored by a connection she felt when seeing lapas everywhere and being told she was from the Fulani ethnic group in Senegal, to feeling more distant because of health cautions surrounding the local food as well as having someone ask her to pay for access to a specific ethnic group—being perceived as having money to pay for her history or someone who wanted to pay for it. Her experience of migrating through Senegal and Cuba, and the experiences that she had in these countries, taught her that she was both an insider and an outsider and that orienting and reorienting were necessary to her process of understanding her location as a person of black/African descent colliding with the *African reality*. By choosing to travel to these locations, she thrust herself into fluctuating states of *Afro Ambiguity*.

Nia Love, Jeannine Osayande, and Shani Sterling value the time they spent living with the people, culture, and dances of the continent of Africa and throughout the black/African Diaspora; they consider these experiences to be essential contributions to their diasporic movement practices. These influences can situate the movement artists in a more holistic and comprehensive cultural construct that also influences their execution and dissemination of the dances: their teaching, choreographing, performing, and artistry. Being in the spaces where the dances were born and have existed for generations can also lead diasporic movement practitioners back to themselves and ask them to orient and reorient their identity locations as people of black/African descent and as teachers, performers, choreographers, and artists. Immersing themselves in the cultures from which the dances have emerged and tending to these seeds opened up the potential for what can

be taught and how much clarity and richness each movement artist can bring into her labor as a diasporic movement practitioner.

Philosophy and Practice of Integrity 2: Be Conscious of Your U.S. Americanness

All of the movement artists and diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation have traveled to and spent time on the continent of Africa, namely in Ghana, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Mali. Most of the movement artists in this dissertation live with black/African diasporic experience, but are not native to these cultures as they were not reared in them (one exception is Nzinga Metzger, who spent a significant amount of time as a young person migrating between the United States and the continent of Africa). However, all of the movement artists found similarities with the people and cultural practices that they encountered in the locations to which they traveled; in general, these artists traveled to places that are part of their indigenous and genealogical roots, and there are cultural vestiges and lingering aspects that their communities in the United States continued to practice after transatlantic enslavement.

Enslaved peoples from the continent of Africa who were forcefully migrated to the Americas were able to hold on to some of their cultural traditions. However, many protocols, proverbs, and philosophical ways of thinking were not passed on directly, so they are instead learned through interactions with others they might meet in their lives over time. In this section, the research participants discuss how they often and starkly realized that they were not naturally members of the communities they visited because of

their blackness and even if their objective was to connect with black/African communities and cultures with pride, enthusiasm, and discipline.

Nia Love visited diasporic locations for significant amounts of time. As discussed previously, her first travels were to Cuba, which she visited at the invitation of Alicia Alonso of the Nacional Ballet de Cuba. Columbia was another country she visited as a young adult, but this trip was not to study dance. This reaches back to Jeannine Osayande's thought that traveling through the black/African Diaspora does not always need to be about dancing; sometimes it is just about living in and experiencing the culture. Nia Love described the realization that she carried her U.S. Americanness with her to Columbia in the passage below.

I finished my last high school year in Colombia, and [I was in] the main city in Bogota. I resided at first in Medellin, which is the drug cartel of the world at that time, the eighties. I had a lot of run-ins with the cops during that time, because I would wear—I didn't know that it was a problem—but I was wearing army regalia. That was one of the styles here [in the United States] during that time, like fatigues. I would wear the batista [or fatigues], they were associated with the revolutionary Black Panthers movement, you know what I'm saying? So I was coming like that, and they were [saying], "You don't wear that s—t[expletive] over here." (Love)

Nia Love was trying to express solidarity with the Black Panther and the Black Power movement in the U.S., but she did not realize that this alarmed the people and authorities of Bogota, Columbia. In other words, she brought her U.S. Americanness or U.S. centric orientation with her during her travels. Although she was not immediately conscious of this, she slowly realized that her fashion, quite socially aligned with movements in the U.S. at the time, was not appropriate for the social climate in Bogota, Columbia. This

situation revealed that there is the potential for unconscious creation of barriers that block a desired ability to join in solidarity with a community through blackness or as a person of African descent. A U.S. centric orientation can manifest complicated distance between you and the people with whom you are trying to connect. Even those conscious of struggles within the lived experience blackness must continuously gauge how we are informed by would socialization. The work is ongoing.

A memorable story that emerged for Jeannine Osayande was about an incident occurring at a wedding in Mali. This took place after she had taken a hiatus from traveling to the African continent due to parenting, financial, and time commitments. At this point, she had not been to the continent in more than 15 years:

We went to a wedding [in Mali], and I don't speak Bamana, I don't speak French. Sometimes you don't know what was going on, [I] thought I was going to a dance class {laughter}, had on a lapa, had my headscarf. We get there, and they're talking about, "We're going to a wedding." [laughter] So, that's that, I had to go. We get to this wedding in my dance class clothes, where I could have looked good. So, that's number one...is understanding the language really matters. Not just body language, but being able to communicate with the language. You wouldn't show up at a wedding with dance clothes on. You would have known, you know, to put something on.

We get there, and I'm the American. It was a beautiful day. The music—the Malian music—it just goes in your soul. It was slamming. I speak to the couple, then it's time to dance, I'm ready to dance. I'm with the people. And, so, I'm going to do this first movement, then I'll go do that second one. Then, okay, because they were playing, like, Dansa, Lamba, kind of feel, I get up in there, and I'm tearing it up. They play the break [a musical communication from the drum that a transition is in order] —boom, I go to the next one. They play the break. I go to lift to go to the next step, and a mama [from the community] comes out and {makes squelching sound} from behind, and grabbed me, and took me off the floor. {laughter} I had seen it happen to a few people, but I didn't know what it was, because of language. When I asked about it later, they would try to explain it, but it was hard, right, to get that lost in translation thing? It was like, you know,

you have a line of questions and things. So, I said, so what is it with—and I had it on video, too! {laughter}—because in my cameras {laughter}, you see me get snatched. So, I was like, “Well, what does that actually mean?” I’m thinking, “What happened? Did I not hit the movement right?” (Osayande)

After some time and returning to the U.S., she asked these questions of someone she calls her African son, Malé, whom she trusted quite deeply. She spent time discussing this episode in Mali to help her gain a deeper understanding of the situation:

And he said, “Auntie J, it’s like food. You eat together from the same bowl. People might push, you know, the food to you—you don’t try to eat everything in the bowl when other people are sitting there. Everybody gauges, and you eat enough; the rhythm is the same. And when you hop in the circle, you get in and you do it, and you get back out. You don’t stay there for a long time, because then you’re eating too much food.” (Osayande)

Jeannine has a concept that she calls *supersize me*. She feels that what she did at the wedding was a very U.S. American thing to do, even though her intention was to share all that she could. In that moment, there was not much reflection on what she might be taking by giving as much as she did. She went on to describe this idea:

I call that the *supersize me*. That, here [in the U.S.], where things are with {snaps fingers} information, the digital age being quick, and with the Big Gulp, or the supersize me, or the abundance thing that we’re caught up in as Americans, it translates and reflects in our culture that way. You drive to the window and get a freaking nasty burger, and you drive off, [that] type of thing. (Osayande)

Jeannine Osayande was in a state of reorienting that caused her to name what she had brought with her to the wedding as U.S. Americanness. Her *supersize me* approach, which reflected her cultural orientation of abundance, generosity, and offering, was perceived from this Malian community's perspective as taking too much time and space from how others could contribute.

From Jeannine Osayande's perspective, the *supersize me* phenomenon is also evident in the ways in which we give ourselves permission to teach other cultures. She expresses her frustration with the ways that we, as U.S. Americans, abuse our financial and cultural privilege by taking what and how much we want from a cultural experience. We use this privilege as we wish, no matter the histories and heritages of the people from which the cultures being shared originate, or whether or not our qualifications allow us to ethically teach with integrity to the culture. Jeannine Osayande summarized:

Nowadays—I mean even in the past 15 years to currently—that one group of people, where they're going to go and take some dance classes for a little—maybe they have a background in dance, period. But, because you have—or just someone who's taken three years of dance at a community class level—then they decide that they're going to start teaching, start saying yes to gigs. It used to be where somebody would pass it to the professional person that you know, or the person who's actually teaching you. You wouldn't start saying yes, where people suddenly can do this, whereas before, you couldn't do—you couldn't just teach, even choreograph or whatever. They [the teachers] had to see it in you, groom you in it. [The person who wanted to teach] apprenticed in it. You arrive at that place, and it wasn't overnight. You know, you were carrying bags. You were doing things that just weren't even about the dance. (Osayande)

Making the determination of when someone has permission to teach and who can grant such permission is a sensitive subject. Jeannine Osayande brought it up within the context of U.S. American processes of commodification. She feels that it takes some reorientation to realize that taking something just because you have the ability to take it for social and cultural capital may not be the choice of integrity. When can, and how do, we take something that we have learned and sell it to others? This will be left as a question for further research, as it was not intricately focused upon in this dissertation.

Although, this idea was also touched upon by Shani Sterling when she talked about asking for permission from her teachers. She discussed how she has had an ongoing discussion with her teachers about her teaching methods, thus revealing her commitment to professional development as a diasporic movement practitioner. She described her process and the thinking behind it:

Before I left Ghana, I asked [my teacher Sulley Imoro] if he felt comfortable [with me teaching] when I was coming close to the time for me to leave. I asked him. We were just riding in the car in Ghana...He said yes, he did. He felt comfortable with me teaching. He told me the dances [he would approve me to teach]....

He also told me what he wanted me to work on. That's the drumming. He wants me to spend more time on the drumming, which I have been. But for me, the beauty in it—and I guess that's also my perspective as a dancer—the beauty in it is that it's a process, and I feel like I'm always learning. I just feel like that. Some people probably feel like, at a certain point, I have an MFA [Master of Fine Arts], a terminal degree, a master's degree, then I am a master teacher.

In a lot of ways, I do feel like that, but I just feel like it's ongoing. And I think by acknowledging that my body is my tool—a plié will always be a plié, and we need it, to maintain our body. Your culture and the dances and the rhythm is just always—in my opinion, it's always to be studied, to be reexamined, to dig deeper, to see how it's changing, to acknowledge the new trends and have respect for it in that way. (Sterling)

Shani Sterling also gave an example referencing why it felt important to her to ask for permission to teach the dances. She provided a foundation for thinking about the gravity and responsibility of holding culture and passing it on to others when she states:

When I went to the National Dance Company, Bernard Woma is the one who took me there, because Sulley was coming to the U.S. to teach, and Bernard had just come from the U.S. back to Ghana. He had a relationship with them, and he took me there to study with them. He took me right in. Put me right in the rehearsal, had me teaching classes. I would go there every day. Every morning, I'm there with him. Sometimes it felt like they were being mean to me because

they're like, "No, don't talk to her in English, only talk to her in Twi. Do the rehearsal in Twi." But, after some time, somebody else came up there, and he wanted to watch them and do some research, and they told him no, just flat-out no. After he left, they told me that...he keeps coming up there and asking, and they said no. They said sometimes people come and they're only here for like 2 weeks and then they go write whole books based on 2 weeks or they go and teach things and they don't teach it right. Also, just the nature of my research is looking at dances and how they change, and do the keepers of the culture still acknowledge those dances as the same when they change. Because I'm sensitive and interested in that, it would only be natural that I just would like to know from the person that taught me if he's okay. There's a lot of controversy within African dance of, is this person qualified to teach.

I'm not talking about teachers from the continent. I think once we see that they're here and that we know a little bit about their background and we acknowledge and we give them that reverence and respect. But I think more so with people who are not from Africa: Why are they teaching? What are they teaching? What's their experience? What qualifies them to teach? It can get kind of messy. With all that in mind, I just wanted to know from him. I'm not interested in running an ensemble or anything, African dance and drum ensemble. I won't say I won't ever do it, but I'm not interested in it. I'm just interested in sharing. When I was in Ghana, I realized that people who are able to go there, they have resources. Not everybody is exposed to it, and I just wanted to somehow get that information, that I got, to people who may not be able to get it. The community college environment was like perfect for me to do that, because we're dealing with people who may not even be able to go to the university. They're just at the college, and you're dealing with people from so many different places. It was perfect for me to share in that capacity. (Sterling)

Jeannine Osayande also revealed some similarities with Sterling's idea about how permission is given. Although she did not mention explicitly asking for permission, she does see her teachers as those who can give her the power to begin her journey as a teacher:

I earn the right through having the investment made in the time and experience, in the research, and even in the permission. I still came from [a time] when I[just] didn't decide I was teaching. It was my teachers who picked me when we were coming up in the company, and got to a certain level, like maybe after, like, a couple of years. (Osayande)

Jeannine further expressed that being able to take over a class was a gradual process. Her teachers would first have her help with small groups while they were crossing the floor, then they would let her “actually take over half of the class [and then let her] take the whole class, but they’d be there” (Osayande). She continued:

And then when it was time for me to start, like, I didn’t decide, “I’m actually going to go and teach African dance classes.” I went to [my teachers] and said, “This is, you know, what I’d like to do now. Am I at that place?” And this would have been after this other process that would have happened, like being in the room while they’re teaching, and they would, like, [say] “Come here!” {laughter} You go back on the floor and you redo it. So, that’s kind of it—that they gave me that permission. So, between them giving me the permission and then my newer teachers inviting me to do it, that’s what it is. It’s not, like, self-appointed, which I have an issue with. (Osayande)

Shani Sterling and Jeannine Osayande are described philosophies and practices of integrity around acquiring permission to teach cultures in which they were not reared but to which they have a genealogical connection because their ancestors are of black/African descent. These stories of permission within the context of these artists being U.S.

Americans with privilege reach toward notions of cultural appropriation. The phrase *cultural appropriation* is broadly defined as the ability of certain individuals to gain social, cultural, and monetary capital using elements of cultures in which they were not reared or of cultures that may belong to communities that do not have the same types of privilege. This dissertation unfolds cultural appropriation a little more when discussing the philosophies and practices of the movement artists focusing on authenticity developed in the later sections of this chapter.

Another potential area under which a person can bring a U.S. centric orientation with them while traveling diasporically is gender. Ojeya Cruz Banks and her perceptions of her gender privilege continue a different tact when thinking about the integrity of traveling into other cultures. For her gender and privilege intersected. In part of her interview, Cruz Banks reflects upon her privilege of being a U.S. American woman diasporic movement practitioner during her time in Guinea. She unfolds how women on the continent of Africa are not as easily able to migrate and move through the world as she does with her U.S. American citizenship and passport. The black U.S. women movement artists in this dissertation can travel, learn, teach, choreograph, and perform throughout diasporic locations globally, even as mothers. They make it to the continent with resources, and that—from Ojeya Cruz Banks’ perspective—is a privilege. However, women in Guinea who are dancers or diasporic movement practitioners have challenges that are common among all women; the place of divergence is in the ability to maintain the practice over time. Ojeya Cruz Banks elaborated on some of the gender and cultural norms that women must face and the restrictions that these norms place upon their careers:

Gender is an interesting one, I think, for black women, isn’t it? Because, growing up, as I’ve articulated my identity, gender is not featured. You know, it’s definitely been race and now indigeneity. [Her Guam heritage has been a central focus in her identity making.] But certainly, you know, there were some things about the roles of women in Guinea that I wasn’t that excited to see. A lot of female dancers [from Guinea] have a really hard time developing themselves professionally, because they have children or they need to stay home and cook dinner. So, a lot of the teachers that are living abroad and who are doing this work happen to be men for that reason. So, I’ve got some misgivings about that. But, you know, Guinea is particularly an interesting place to have that debate, because

Guinea means “woman,” right? To have a country [with a name] that literally translates into “woman” says a lot about how women are valued. (Cruz Banks)

Cruz Banks further brought up a proverb which we both think has African American origins, but which I have not been able to confirm. The proverb states: “Behind every good man is a black woman rolling her eyes.” We both laughed at this. Cruz Banks continued to elaborate her sense of gender in her diasporic travels and her heritage:

There is [laughs] some of that going on. The invisible matriarch. You may not see the *mana wahine* [Maori term] feminine power or the woman leadership within a culture when you are an outsider. I think that also probably carries over in the U.S. as well. I mean, I was raised by a single mother. I don’t have a great relationship with my dad. And all my mother’s side, the Chamorro side, that is a matriarchal society. It’s the women who inherit land, and the women are seen as the owners of the land. And it’s the men—the sea is the domain of the man. So, you know, some of these Western conversations around gender, female versus male, they’re quite culturally distinct when you shift around the world. I’m aware of the bias, the teaching bias in the Guinea dance world because of the pressures on women and that I haven’t actually studied with a whole lot of women because of that. (Cruz Banks)

Ojeya Cruz Banks first spoke about her privilege as a U.S. American woman of black/African descent in relationship to the women in Guinea who are also movement artists who teach, perform, and choreograph. She surmised that there is privilege in her ability to develop professionally in the same way that many men from Guinea are able to travel more than their women colleagues. She even expressed some of the challenges and biases that women from Guinea face, which are not much different from those experienced by U.S. American women, but which influence their lives differently. She revealed a more complex layer of orientation around gender in indigenous culture as well, which she connects to her experience in Guinea; women are sometimes not at the

forefront of visibility in societal power. It may take time to fully comprehend how the masculine and feminine intersect and intertwine culturally, philosophically, and practically in varying societal structures.

Staying conscious of U.S. American approaches to culture while migrating through black/African diasporic locations globally is worthwhile labor that has been undertaken by the movement artists that have contributed to this research. Their experiences of being thrust into *Afro Ambiguous* spaces caused them to orient and reorient their U.S. Americanness. Whether their realizations of difference came by way of fashion associated with blackness, a freestyle movement contribution of thoughtful intention, coming to teach with integrity, or the idea of gender and wealth offering privilege to U.S. Americans, these diasporic movement practitioners have chosen to carefully frame the ways in which their U.S. American cultural notions were colliding with the communities through which they were migrating.

Philosophy and Practice of Integrity 3: Defining and Redefining Traditions and Translineages

To begin defining and redefining traditions and translineages I must first ground in the words of an African American woman, artist, and scholar dedicated to dances of black/African descent who has paved the way for us all, in academia and artistry and in practice and in theory, for more than 30 years: Dr. Kariamu Welsh.

The Jerusarema is a griotic and commemorative dance [practiced in Zimbabwe] in that it was originally performed by very young children, women, and elderly men as a diversionary tactic during a time of imminent assault. It then made a transition into a classical commemorative dance used for social, ceremonial, and honorific occasions (Welsh 207).

The Jeruserema is an example of the controversy over what is "traditional dance." What "shapes" traditional dance? Historical, ecological, religious, cultural, political and social changes are the various signatures written on the fabric of the dance. The essence of the dance remains unchanged even though the steps, costumes, music, and percussive instruments may undergo change. I have stated several changes in the Jerusarema that have not altered the nature of the dance itself, despite the fact that those elements were not present in the dance one hundred years ago. The *hoshos*, for example are now made of soft drink cans instead of gourds, cloth skirts have replaced the *mbakiza* skirts, and the women no longer dance bare-breasted. These changes while acknowledged are incapable of changing the " motional" aspect of the dance, of the polycentric quality of the dance or the actual steps of the Jeruserema (Welsh 215).

Welsh's unfolding of the concept *traditional* helps us to contextualize and bring a fertile historical grounding to the perspectives of the diasporic movement practitioners that follow. Much of what is expressed here in these 1994 writings above resonates still in the voices speaking today about traditonal orientations. It marks an inquiry on a continuum and debunks the notion that there has not been an ongoing dialogue or that these philosophical renderings are not building upon seeds and labor prior to this moment. As more people delve into the black/African diasporic dance world there hopefully will be more inclusion of what came before the present research but was not permitted to emerge from the outliers and margins into the mainstream for multiple reasons.

When I asked Nzinga Metzger to define traditional dance, she became focused on how folkloric and traditional dances help to define one another. She began with her thoughts about why African Americans or black U.S. folks practice black/African diasporic dances. She surmised:

I think that there is a whole backstory for why African Americans are interested in African dance. It's a whole, long story, you know what I mean? And most of it

has to do with identity, reclaiming, reconnecting, all these things. And, so, to my mind, one, if that is what you're doing, then you must respect the root before you make adaptations. That's first and foremost.

If we are in fact participating in the process of—in some process of preservation of these folkloric forms—and I hesitate and resist the term *traditional*, because traditional dance does not look like folkloric dance. They're not the same. And when these dances are done traditionally, I daresay that most people, if they were to look at these dances in their traditional context, they would be bored, because most of the time it's the same step over and over and over and over and over again. Fifteen people will come into the circle and do the same step. So that is traditional. (Metzger)

When Metzger described traditional dance as different from folkloric dance in terms of extensive and intensive repetition, she alluded to the possibility that, when people who are not reared in the culture from which the dances emerge, they may feel disconnected from the way these dances are practiced traditionally in the places of origin. She thinks that these individuals may find the repetitive nature of the dance to be unappealing or unexciting. It is true that the traditional dances employ an approach that is not commonly experienced in the areas of the United States where black/African diasporic dances are accessible.

Nzinga Metzger describes folkloric dance as “an adaptation of those [traditional] movements to present on the stage as a representation of a group of people's dance culture or music culture or what have you.” The steps from a traditional dance are taken and recreated for presentation, production, and entertainment for people who are, for the most part, outsiders to the culture being represented. In many cases, when the dance has a folkloric approach, the audience is learning about the dance, music, and culture through

the process of watching the performance. As the traditional dances are moved from their environments of origin, they change, and other elements come into play.

Interestingly, Shani Sterling described traditional dance in a manner that is closely related to the way in which Nzinga Metzger describes folkloric dance. Sterling concludes: “Traditional [means to me] it was created and the time that it began to be performed was a long time ago and that it’s carried out through history and still performed. It represents the history. It teaches. It teaches the history. It teaches about the culture. It has African aesthetics in it.” Nzinga Metzger description of folkloric dance is heavily aligned with Shani Sterling’s description of traditional dance when she states: “For me, folkloric dance is heavy on community [snaps], it’s heavy [snaps] on tradition, it’s heavy on history, it’s heavy on conveying technique.” Clearly, trying to articulate with any certainty a strict definition of traditional and folkloric is problematic and considered differently by the research practitioners. The collective defining is what tells the story and it is still a fragmented narrative continuously being redefined.

However, according to these two artists, both folkloric and traditional dance can hold space for preserving dance traditions while at the same time creating community through tradition. These dances can be passed on (or intentionally migrate) to new generations through repetitive engagement or through the teaching of history, culture, and technique through dance. The way in which a dance, its history, and its aesthetic qualities will be passed down from its origins or from a community of people who desire to learn

or practice the dance together differs from the orientation of experiencing the same dance when it is passed to audiences from the stage.

Both folkloric and traditional dance, even though differently defined, still carry an underlying purpose of passing down dances to the next generations, either by keeping the tradition through repetitive practice or by intentionally encouraging migration of the practice to meet the new needs of the practitioners in differing time periods and geographical spaces. Since the terms *folkloric* and *traditional* were defined both similarly and differently, but being on the border of one another by Nzinga Metzger and Shani Sterling, it is important to be aware of how one is defining these terms in teaching a cultural form, especially when both terms are so commonly used in black/African diasporic dance circles in the United States. Thus, the responsibility of clearly defining how one is using the terms and for what reason becomes significant for diasporic movement practitioners, their students, and diasporic movement practices.

In her interviews, Nia Love aligned the ideas of *traditional* and *ancient*. For her, *ancient* is generally defined as having existed for many years or belonging to a long ago past; *ancient* may also refer to something that is no longer in existence. This reaches back to Shani Sterling speaking about traditional as dances that have been performed for a long time and over many generations. Nia Love revealed similar thoughts about the meaning of the term *traditional*:

During the eighties, I think what happened with this notion of categorizing, the term *traditional* came at a time when that was the only description of something —“This is ancient.” I also think that the lens of the word *traditional* comes from a people who were enslaved. Anything that was colonized but still had its own land

and still had its own language and still had its own direct communication [was labeled traditional]. I think that when African American people looked at Africa, it was an opportunity to look at something that was traditional. It was something that had maintained a certain integrity. And so without really thinking about that for some years, until maybe [the] last 10 years, we started to really dissect the word *traditional* as a stifled, non-living form. (Love)

Nia Love went come to understand that the black/African diasporic dance community uses the term *traditional* to reflect a connection to a culture that held integrity but also feels far away and distant temporally, and that embodies a long lineage reaching back to the time before the transatlantic enslavement. This can create a desire on the part of the U.S. dancers to hold the dances in time rather than acknowledge that the dances change depending on the people dancing them and where they are being practiced in the world culturally and environmentally. Therefore, since so much time has passed since the first dances of the black/African Diaspora were brought to the United States, the orientation toward the term *traditional* is, from Nia Love's perspective, being revised. Today, *traditional* is transforming into a word that includes viewing traditions as living and changing.

In the past, Nia Love noticed that U.S. American-reared black people “studied [with] those specific people from [the continent of] Africa [and] they were told by those Africans, if you don't do it this way, you're not doing it. And that if you do it this way, this really demarcates the topography and what you're doing it for.” In other words, traditional dances were marked by topography or by specific essential features that were being set by the continental Africans who were teaching the dances to black U.S. folks. These essential features have origins that are a part of dance traditions that span long

lineages and that create a gathering of aesthetic qualities including movements, rhythmic patterns, attire, adornments, relationships between the music and the movement, relationships between the dancers, relationships between the musicians, and relationships between the dancers and the musicians. According to Nia Love, the use of the word *traditional* in connection to ancient things seems to be about what is held—in this case, the topography, essential features, aesthetic qualities, and types of relationships—over long periods of time and across generations, geographies, and cultures.

Nia Love goes on to give an example of a particular traditional dance called Dununba as a living, breathing tradition in her teaching and embodiment, as well as in that of her students. Dununba, which is also referred to as *Dounumba* and *Dundunba*, is a dance from Guinea, West Africa, that is very commonly practiced in most black U.S. African dance communities. In the quote below, she unfolds Dununba as a living, breathing tradition in her teaching practice and embodiment of the dance:

The Dundunba rhythm has an explicit form. Inside that form, because it's living, it's expanded, the form has expanded, the ground has expanded, the relationship of people who are doing it now, the young people who do Dundunba open that s—[expletive] up and then next thing you know you got Dundunba steps that were incorporated inside of the Harlem Shake, right? And then they saw that and they connected with that and then connected the Harlem Shake inside of Dundunba and did some other stuff and then opened it up again. [It] keeps opening and peeling itself and getting threaded with all this new material that's not necessarily Dundunba. I mean, we don't know. Just like when you go to certain places in the Diaspora and you see certain deity movements that highlight that energy, if you're in Guinea, it might be one way. If you're in Benin, it's another. (Love)

Here, Nia Love is unpacks the ways in which traditional dances and specific movements or steps (in this case, within the particular dance Dununba) migrate and become

connected to present social dance cultures here in the United States, such as a popular social dance called the Harlem Shake. They are revised in response to the locations, bodies, and cultures through which they migrate. As suggested by Nia Love's renderings of tradition as living and breathing, the connection between Dununba and the Harlem Shake made by Love's students shifts the topography, essential features, and aesthetic qualities of the traditional dance Dununba. As her students embodied Dununba, they—another generation—found a location in their present social dance culture, namely the Harlem Shake, that captured the energy and physicality of the traditional and ancient dance Dununba of Guinea, West Africa. This also requires that Nia Love, as their teacher, embrace Dununba as a dance that can live, breathe, and open up as new generations, communities, and cultures come into contact with it.

Nia Love even unveils how these dances are touched by many factors in addition to the energy and physicalization of movement by multiple generations. She elucidated:

And the topography has everything to do with it, the set of circumstances of colonialization versus enslavement. So all those things are really important. The reason why I said that [colonization versus enslavement] is because, even though that is a historical value that's a part of this definition and integration of that energy inside of that definition, I, too, am that. I, too, am that topography in a way. So when I go to teach, I am all that, too. So I'm not going to just teach Dundunba. I'm going to teach my relationship of Dundunba, my relationship to Dundunba as Nia Love, all of those experiences that I am and all those experiences that I had and all those things that I read and all those kinds of conversations and being a part of the egun [ancestor] shrine. All those experiences of energy [I] hope to ignite, color, defend, operate, shadow how I'm teaching that thing. So I'm not going to come off and just teach Dundunba, really, but I might have an improv[isation] that will open up and then something will happen in the movement that will tag in my mind. (Love)

Nia Love expressed the idea that colonization, transatlantic enslavement, her own life experience, her cultural choices, and basically her entirety of lived experience influence how she teaches the dance Dununba. The living and breathing of traditional ancient dances and dances with long lineages has to do with being open to what influences the dances within and beyond the present moment in the classroom. These dances migrate, cross, and move with and beyond the original lineages from which they were born, and such migrations change them. Because these dances have been touched by many people, generations, cultures, sets of circumstances, and locations throughout the world, there is a creation of, what I call, *translineages* that are embodied within them. These dances take on new characteristics, essential features, and aesthetic qualities with each new person, generation, or sociocultural climate to which they are exposed. As Nia Love put it, the “topography” of the dance is transformed by each generation, community, or culture that embodies the dance.

Translineage connections are also made on the continent of Africa in the diasporic communities there; the dances do not have to come to the United States to be transformed. Shani Sterling mentioned in her interview how she experiences popular dances when she is in Ghana. In her description below, it is clear that *translineages* exist there as well; when the people are influenced by other cultures so are the dances. Azonto emerges, for Shani Sterling, as an example of a popular dance that is swiftly becoming *translineaged*. Shani Sterling elaborated:

Azonto is a dance that was created in Ghana, but...you might see people in a Nigerian music video doing Azonto. It's a popular, current dance. It has the

aesthetics of African dance, of course, but it's not like a Kpalongo, Bambaya, or Funmi Funmi [all traditional dances of Ghana that have longer lineages than Azonto]. I would compare it to Kpalongo, because Kpalongo is a dance that is a recreational, freestyle dance. Azonto will be like a Kpalongo. To me, those dances kind of serve the same purpose. Azonto is not necessarily done for anything other than recreation, but in my opinion [Azonto will also be] traditional. [She reflects on the transition of dance to traditional status for a moment asking me the question out loud and rhetorically], were those dances [Funmi Funmi, Bamaya, or Kpalongo] called traditional when they were first created? (Sterling)

Here she continued to talk about the shifts in movement culture in terms of fashion and embodiment.

As far as the way I see the dance performed, the actual movements of the dance—I think the aura, environment, the mood, yes, most definitely [has influence from other cultures]. Because this past summer, my last month I was in Ghana, we were watching music videos. Yes, last month I was in Ghana and we were watching music videos on TV. There was a music video, and how are they dressed in the music video? They're dressed in sagging jeans, t-shirts, shades, hats. They're dressed like the [U.S.] Hip Hop culture. They're singing and dancing, rapping. Then, they start doing Azonto, which is—[Shani Sterling demonstrates the movement.]—this is the movement pretty much, but you can do so many different varieties, of course, with it, so the movement, I really can't say [how influenced it is by other cultures.] [Although, in the dress] I can definitely see them looking at black American, African American, whatever you want to—we had a huge conversation about that with my students—whatever you want to call popular, Hip Hop culture in America, I could so see that influence, and I saw it when I was doing my Fulbright. Sometimes it's not always right. You could tell that they're trying to be influenced by the culture, but got that part wrong. [As], we [black U.S. folks] don't really say that like that [they way they might say it], or something like that. But I could so see the influence of—or the sharing, the sharing, which you could say that about dances we do. (Sterling)

Everywhere the diasporic exchange occurs is a location of practice that produces *translineages*.

Shani Sterling had a realization that black U.S. folks were creating our own traditional black/African diasporic movement traditions through the African drum and

dance conferences and the way we teach and take classes here. For the most part, in her lived experience, Shani Sterling noted that dances from Ghana (which is her focus) and popular dances from the continent of Africa have not been represented as much as those labeled traditional. She has noticed that, in Texas where she now lives and in Florida where she lived previously, she only had access to classes that taught traditional dances that were defined in a specific way in the United States, and that usually did not usually include current, popular African dances. She described the dances from the African continent in the way they are practiced in the U.S., as “our traditional dances,” referring to how we, black U.S. American folks, orient around black/African descendent dances as they migrate to and through us diasporically. She elaborates in the following passage her a sense of her experience practice of black/African diasporic dances in the United States:

There’s a whole population of [U.S. America–reared black] people that travel from African dance conference to African dance conference, studying traditional dance. I think in the last year or two, which I had to come to my own realization, that I’m okay with just studying Ghanaian dance. I’m really interested in it. I had to finally say, “It’s okay.” There’s a whole lot to study, but there’s that whole population that studies the dances represented at most of the African dance and drum conferences, [which] are [dances from] Mali, Guinea, Senegal, and Cameroon.

You go to [an] African dance and drum festival, you don’t see those popular, new, hot African dances represented in a class. Most of the classes are going to be the traditional dances that we know of. I would say traditional in the sense that it represents our [U.S. orientation toward] traditional [continental African] culture. It’s representative of the traditional culture [here in the United States]. It has African aesthetics in it. It ties us [black U.S. folks] to our tradition. In my opinion, it’s twofold. It’s tradition in the sense that it teaches us about our history. It was created a long time ago out of necessity or for different reasons, and it’s survived the test of time. It teaches us about our culture, but also traditional in the sense of it just ties us to that. It’s like a bridge to tie us to those dances. That’s what I would say. If you were to ask me this question while I was doing my research, I

would not have given you the same answer. It's taken time, experience, relationships with people, being in the environment, being there. I think that's a very important part of the research to me. (Sterling)

Sterling's sense of tradition as being important to the black people in the U.S. is much like Nia Love referencing a longing for connection to or a continuation of dances from before the transatlantic slave trade; it also reflects Nzinga Metzger expressing her feelings about black U.S. Americans reclaiming or relocating black/African diasporic dance and culture in their lives, which may have been lost otherwise. Shani Sterling sees this as a core beginning and a continuing purpose for the existence of most African drum and dance festivals in the United States. However, it is also key to note that black U.S. folks have created our own traditional dance culture through these festivals. This will be discussed more fully in the dissertation concluding chapter.

Witnessing traditional dances as they migrate through communities and as they are embodied by others helped Nia Love and Shani Sterling to see clearly what is actually being practiced in these spaces. Nia Love sees the way in which she and other generations open up the possibilities of the dances as offering a moment to clarify a relationship with the dance as a diasporic movement practitioner. Witnessing the practice of others helps Nia Love to define her articulation of the dances and how they live in her. She advised:

Step away, look at the movement from other people's relationship to that movement. They have no relationship [to] the way that you have a relationship to that movement. But it does make you step back and go, oh, wait a minute, that's not what I was doing. I'm clear that that's not what I'm doing, so I'm doing something else there. Then, because I had a chance to look at what I was doing through another body, I was able to travel deeper in my body, trace where I am in

that pathway [of the dance or the topography], and [start] to live through these responses in my body so that I can be more articulate. (Love)

As these traditional dances migrate through people, Nia Love realizes how they have migrated into her body as well and how she has transformed them by witnessing others embodying the same dances. From this witnessing, her clarity as a mover becomes both more conscious and more developed. Traditional and ancient dances are alive and migrating through people, generations, social climates, and many other environments. As they migrate, they create their own *translineages*.

Philosophy and Practice of Integrity 4: Authenticity in a Migrating Practice

Some of the diasporic movement practitioners in this dissertation have been performing the labor of offering authentic experiences with black/African descended dances for a range of 15 to more than 40 years. Those who spoke about authenticity have spent a significant amount of time mulling over what it means to be authentic in a movement culture that migrates through their own bodies as well as through diverse bodies, generations, sociocultural constructs, and locations throughout the world. In my experience, casual informal and formal dialogues about authenticity in black U.S. communities can get quite heated and generally lead to or begin with ideas related to cultural appropriation.

Conflicts around authenticity and cultural appropriation can be intense, particularly between U.S. racialized black and white communities: people in racialized groups of blacks and whites often find themselves in painful, colliding, and resentful interactions around authenticity in black/African diasporic movement practices. This

already heightened (and many times insular or underground) state of conflict will be addressed more directly in the next section of this chapter. I mention it here because it is usually a place where a dialogue about authenticity may start. However, the first subject matter around authenticity I would like to dive into is how authenticity resonates within black/African diasporic communities and, how black diasporic movement practitioners who have descended from or been reared in those diasporic communities navigate internal challenges of authenticity and integrity.

Shani Sterling, Nia Love, and I have all faced situations while on the continent of Africa in which we realized that what had been taught as authentic in the U.S. had some nuances that needed further unfolding. In conversation with people in the deeper village areas of Guinea, outside of Conakry, Nia Love came to understand that what she had been taught was only a particular perspective; it was not the sole perspective. Authenticity within the black/African diasporic community, in terms of what is traditional dance, was different depending on who was teaching and the location of that teaching in the world. She described one example here:

We started in Conakry [a city in Guinea], and then I went to a more secluded area. Man, that's when that s—[expletive] was deep. That's when I got my real—that's when [they] were whipping me [teaching me the dance intensely]. No, that's not the step, this is the step, you do this, [not] that. Mandiani, what is that, that's nothing. We don't do Mandiani. We don't know what that is. {laughter} Wow, you don't know Mandiani? I thought that was the thing. No, it's not. (Love)

Shani Sterling and I also had an experience that involved the relationships between dances from different countries on the continent of Africa. In particular, it was a colliding of Guinea style dance aesthetics with Funmi Funmi, a dance from Ghana. During the time

of Shani Sterling's Fulbright Scholarship, I visited her and had the privilege of studying with her teacher, Sulley Imoro, who is now also my teacher and mentor. This moment of realization happened for both of us in Ghana—where we knew that at least I had come with a certain orientation to black/African diasporic dance. It revealed aesthetic and technique variances from Guinea to Ghana.

During Shani's interview, she and I were discussed a particular moment when I was learning the dance Funmi Funmi of the Ewe people. There was one movement where there are three heel steps to the side and then a jump. I will never forget that step, because after I jumped, Shani said everyone was staring at me. They were taken aback by my attack and the height of my jump, which felt very natural to me. It was how I had learned to jump in the context of black/African diasporic dance while working with Moustapha Bangoura during the late 1990s. I was proud of that jump. The other dancers that were helping to teach me the dance asked us, "Are we all going to have to do it like that?" They saw a distinct difference between how they were doing it, as hovering off the ground, as compared with my "supersized" (as Jeannine Osayande would say it) jump. This approach was influenced by my teacher, and I am also quite sure it was influenced by the general energy I had been taught to offer as a dancer: to let it all go on the dance floor, to go hard or go home. It was a distancing moment in which my U.S.- and Guinea-style performance training and orientation collided with the subtlety of the aesthetic techniques of Funmi Funmi. I am not quite sure from which Guinean dance I pulled this orientation for such a high jump, with knees tight and a suspension in the air.

Many times, when continental Africans or black U.S. people, who have traveled to Africa, bring dances to the United States, they are teaching the dances from the perspective of the National Ballet Companies, which were for the most part created to represent and share continental African dance, music, and arts culture with the world. These dances were created to share history and culture through dance with people outside of the culture and who were not reared in the culture. How the dances were being practiced off of the stage was not initially the focus of dance instruction in the United States. Instead, everyone received the staged versions or what Nzinga Metzger calls the “folkloric dances.” And I, as someone who learned from a member of one of those organizations, performed the movement I was being taught from that perspective—a hypeness and energy of getting the audience excited about the performance. This was not necessary for Funmi Funmi; there was another essence required which taught us about the multiplicity of authenticity.

Throughout the process of learning folkloric dances from continental Africans and black U.S. folks who learned from them in the United States or abroad—namely Youssouf Kombassa, Marie Basse, and Nia Love—Nzinga Metzger was taught in a specific way that focused on technique and meaning. She says this focus on learning specific techniques as tied to the needs of specific dances has changed a lot over time. She does not enjoy going to classes anymore due to the strong focus on learning combinations that often seem to blur the distinctions between the differing techniques of each specific dance. For Nzinga Metzger, learning authentically is wrapped up in the

nostalgia of when she first became exposed to dances from all over the continent of Africa while in the United States. She explained:

I also lament the teaching style that has kind of begun to pervade African dance classes, which is predominantly choreographed little snippets of movement rather than technique. So, when I first started dancing [formally] 20 plus years ago—I can’t believe I can say that—you would learn one dance, then you would learn another dance. You would learn that one dance, and you would learn those same steps over and over again until those steps were in your body and that somebody could look at you and say, “This is this dance,” very clearly, because the technique of that dance had been basically drilled into you. But nowadays, when you go to dance classes, there seems to be very little differentiation and very little focus on that level of specificity in the dance, and so, when you take the dance classes, you get all these combinations. It’s all combination, combination, combination, and it’s difficult for me, because I’m—if I don’t know what the spirit of that dance is, or if I don’t know what the technique of that dance is, it’s very hard for me to hold onto the combination. And so it just seems like a lot of rote memory. And a lot of times, I’ve seen performances where I’m, “Oh, wait, what is that?” And I had to listen to the rhythm or I had to look for context clues to figure out what dance people are doing, because the focus is so heavily choreographic rather than specific—dance specific—which I don’t know if that’s a function of modernity, globalization, I don’t know what it is. I just don’t like it. I feel like the dances have already been removed from their context when they’re on the stage, and so when you do that to them and they all start to blur and look the same, then you’re messing further with the integrity of those particular dances. (Metzger)

Nzinga Metzger further reflected on how the dances taught to her felt more specific because of the teacher’s approach. Shani Sterling’s current way of facilitating dance instruction seems to be a link to the exact type of class Nzinga Metzger would appreciate. Shani Sterling described her classes in the passage below:

For me, my entry point is always to give them some background information about the dance. Talking about what ethnic groups or tribe that it’s from and what the dance may be about and also the costumes, because the costumes would be different for each dance, or what they’re wearing. That’s usually my entry point, what makes this dance unique or just giving the background information about the dance. Some of the dances—say, for example, we talked about Kpalongo, which

is a recreational dance. It's a freestyle dance, but then you have Funmi Funmi, which is a dance about the medicine man. Maybe that is a different mood or energy you bring in, to try and explain to the students. I think all of them have ...something they can grasp onto and make a comparison to the medicine man. But then, there's also taboos associated when you say something like medicine man, so I try and use language that's not negative at all. I try to get my students to understand that some of the language they use is negative. Some of my students, when they refer to the African American or Black culture, they say things like, "watered down, diminished," and they don't know that that's a negative, even a negative word. I try not to use words like that when I describe anything and kind of let them know why the medicine man was important when this was created and just give them information about it, because the dance is different from Bamaya. I guess that would be my entry point. (Sterling)

Shani Sterling echoed the sentiments of Nzinga Metzger in terms of the conversation about specificity when teaching, especially when providing information about the meaning of the dances. However, Nzinga Metzger is more focused on the technique differences between each dance; she goes more intricately into the significance of these differences by speaking about the migrations of the dances, what it means to be a master, and how mixing the dances in a society that highly values capitalism and commodification—namely U.S. American society—can influence the ways in which culture is experienced and respected. Nzinga Metzger concluded:

So if we are in the process of some kind of folkloric preservation, then it would make sense that people are able to differentiate between the pieces that are a part of the folkloric repertoire. If you are dancing Swan Lake, it is not going to have the same movement repertoire or it's not going to be the same choreography as in The Nutcracker. If there is a prima ballerina who has a particular solo in Swan Lake, it should not look like the sugar plum fairy's solo. They are two different pieces in the repertoire. So we have to be able to say this is the repertoire from Mali, this is the repertoire from Guinea, this is the Ivorian repertoire, this is the Sierra Leone repertoire, this is the Senegalese repertoire, what have you. And even within those repertoires, Dununba in Senegal isn't necessarily going to look like Dununba in Guinea, isn't necessarily going to look like Dununba in Mali. Each and every one of them have their own separate techniques.

And if you are going to call yourself an expert or if you're going to call yourself a master, then you should be able to articulate those things in your body, and you should also be able to convey them to your students, because they're a part of a folkloric repertoire. It's not all one thing. And people who lump everything together are contributing to this ongoing stereotype about African dance that there is no technique, that there is no varied repertoire, that all the dances are the same, that all the rhythms—and that's just not true. Dances from Africa are just as complex, as layered, and as specific as dances from every place else in the world. And if we don't take the time to honor that by being specific and by being well-articulated in conveying the techniques of those movements, then we are participating in the process that denigrates our art forms and turns them into so much fodder for capitalist exchange. And that's how the spirit of the dance is lost.

If you can't tell me or if you can't show me the difference between technique in Guinea Lamban, Mali Lamban, and Senegalese Lamban, what are you doing? You know what I'm saying? Those two are different dances, and they're different pieces of repertoire. If you are a classical musician, you have a repertoire. You have your Beethoven, you have your Mozart, you have your Handel—and then you have the pieces from each and every one of them. But if you just start throwing them all together as if it's all the same thing, even though they come from different countries and they come from different techniques and they come from different what have you, then that communicates a certain level of disrespect for the art form and a disregard for the specific histories that those art forms came out of and the stories of those people and the purposes for those pieces, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. And all of that makes up the folklore. So if you're not paying attention to that, you can't call yourself a practitioner of folklore, and that's just the beginning and the end of it. You have to be able to—if you're a tap dancer, there's a difference between Broadway tap and hoofing and shuffling. Those are all three different techniques. We have to give that same level of respect and consideration to dances that come not only out of Africa, but out of the diaspora. Haitian dance doesn't necessarily look like Jamaican dance, doesn't look like Cuban dance, doesn't look like Brazilian dance, and you as a dancer—as a practitioner of folklore, diaspora, and dance—should be able to articulate those differences in your body out of respect for the form, at the very least. (Metzger)

Clearly, Nzinga Metzger brings to the surface the importance of specificity and continued study in the teaching and facilitation of black/African diasporic dances; she also begins a conversation about the authenticity of the dances on the basis of their

collective origins in the case of how Dununba has traveled through various countries and communities on the continent of Africa. Metzger mentioned the names of specific composers; however, she also acknowledged in her interviews that, even if you can name the teachers and choreographers that have influenced you the most, the actual dances are collectively made by all of the communities, generations, cultures, and locations in the world that have touched them. Thus, for Metzger, every person who touches the dances helps to shape them.

Rhonda Greene, Executive Director of Heritage Works in Detroit, deserves credit for pushing my views on the collective creation of black/African artistic forms during a conversation we had while working together on the *Black Body Project*, which is grounding in artistically making visible the bodily aesthetics of blackness in Detroit through dance and performance. According to Greene, no one person or individual can claim they own folkloric traditional dances or dances with long lineages. These dances have been touched by so many. Who can truly claim ownership over them, except for an ethnic group, a people, or a community? What can be claimed is dedication to those dances and their traditions, history, and technique over time as well as integrity and respect in the practice of those dances as stylistic approaches from each practitioner are created? What is being expressed by the dancer with integrity is that the dances do not come from nothing; they take care and tending to, like anything that is alive and needs to breathe. The dances breathe through the people who teach, learn, choreograph, perform, and approach them with artistry. This takes a labor of specificity, respect, and integrity

and an understanding of the philosophies and practices that the dances walk with as well as the philosophy and practice being developed by the people who are migrating through and sharing the dances with others.

Nzinga Metzger and Jeannine Osayande have a shared interest in bringing the purpose and meaning of the dances to current lived experiences in their communities. Below are passages that demonstrate how Nzinga Metzger does this through teaching, and how Jeannine Osayande does this through choreography. Below, Nzinga Metzger describes how she uses dance to process challenges in her community. She brings the dances up to date by associating their original meaning with a purpose that acknowledges the current sociocultural climate:

I give the information that I've been given about the dances, about the regions they come from, about the reasons why they're done. But then I also take that information—or I take the dance and then I try to apply it to my contemporary present context and the present context of the people who are taking my class. So to me, that's not inauthentic, because, for example, when Trayvon Martin was killed, we did Dununba in my class, because a lot of people had a lot of feelings about the murder, they had a lot of feelings about the non-conviction. And, I mean, you could go to a protest or you could sign a petition or you could do all these things, but that doesn't necessarily assuage the sensation of frustration or anger or anxiety or whatever you have in your body. And obviously, we can't just go out and start busting white people upside the head, so I took that as an opportunity to use Dununba, and that's what we did in the class that day.

I mean, even though Dununba is used for wrestling, there is a part of it that is used to express aggression, so we used that part of it. That was an authentic experience. We had somebody who had—I think he had a stroke here, had a stroke in our community, and we did Lamban for him. I mean, whenever those kinds of things that happen, then I do those kinds of things in class. But sometimes it could just be a feeling that I have about anything. It could be anything. It could be something that I could sense early or whatever that I feel needs to be addressed.

And, I mean, I know a lot of times I'll do Sunu [also spelled *Sounou*] because of my mission. Sunu is a dance that is very much for women, and it's for women's expression. The way that Hodari Banks taught it, he was saying that Sunu was a dance that women would do to welcome visitors to their village, and he would talk about how when you're welcoming people, what you want to welcome with are those qualities that people perceive of as—that people perceive as feminine, so you want graciousness and all those things that you would offer to a guest that are—that should be—that can be expressed through Sunu. But there's also the element of just femininity and those things that are expressed, so those are things that I try to convey when I teach some of these dances. Kassa, Sorsorne, those are all—I think about the purpose that those things are done for and, for example, what the Sorsorne mask means and what it does in the community, and try to use it in that capacity, if the opportunity arises. And even if it's not an explicit something that has happened, then when I teach the dance, I try to get my students to convey that sentiment through their movement. (Metzger)

Jeannine Osayande continues the dialogue about the philosophies and practices of integrity while authentically passing on traditional folkloric dances to new generations and audiences. This labor of updating black/African diasporic dances while holding their original meanings and purposes happens when Jeannine Osayande is working with the students, dancers, and performers that are a part of her choreography. It is also communicated to the audience in the examples she described below:

I'm going to use my tribute to Amadou Diallo as an example, which is a piece that I re-choreographed at—well, it was originally at University of the Arts back in, like, 2000, where it was simply a tribute to Amadou Diallo, who was an African illegal immigrant who came to the United States and was mistakenly identified as, you know, somebody in the community that did something wrong. And some unmarked policeman jumped out of a car and shot him 41 times. The process [was] just using that idea. That was at UArts [University of the Arts]. But then, with Black Lives Matter and all these other things that were happening, that—or continue to happen, really—that are happening with black people in the United States, this year, I felt like I really wanted to bring that voice back up again. So, I re-staged the dance, keeping some sections of it but re-staging others. So, that [new] piece was Black Lives Matter tribute to Amadou Diallo. So, it was more, taking the scope of everything that's happening. Videos from the 2014 Dancing for Justice Philadelphia Solidarity March and Social Action that

happened in Philadelphia in December of 2014, through FlyGround, which is directed by you, Lela Aisha Jones {laughter}, and a large committee of Philadelphia [movement and dance] artists. And just taking some photos. But taking more than just the photos, but what it represented for people [artists] in Philly, and wanting to be able to put that back to Amadou's story, in a figure-eight kind of a way.

So, what I do then is, I come in. I introduce the idea. But I'm more, at this point, always interested in collaboration than just telling everybody what to do for a movement. Of course, I'm going to structure how I see the piece. You know, what the arc of the piece is going to be, what's going to happen in all the different sections. But some of the specific nuances about it, I want the artists who are performing to have their own voice, because then it really adds the value, what people have to say.

In the first part of the process, I, alongside the students, we'd rehearse two and a half hours for each session. But when we originally started, this was at Ursinus College. We did an intense weekend. So, the way they kind of do it is, starting from Friday night, all day Saturday, and part of Sunday, we are just in the studio the whole time. And then, after that, we have two-and-a-half-hour rehearsals that meet and are spread out until the spring. So, we really workshopped the first part of it. And when I say "we," there's Ira Bond, who is a drummer and a masquerader, who also collaborated with me on the piece, and is my drummer. And so, we had the students research Black Lives Matter, and what it is? Like, go out and do their own research. We had them research, who's Amadou Diallo? They had to research, and find people who have been murdered by the police in the U.S., in the system. And not just find them and read about it, but when—they had to retell that story, and then make a statement at the bottom of it, for example. So, we didn't want them to just say, I did my homework, and I've researched this guy. They actually had to say something like, "God rest their soul." Like, "God bless them, may they rest in peace." So that, every time they sent me that "I did my research," they had to actually say something like that to really connect them. But we had them go and do their own stories. Because everybody does have a story. And although it might not be a violent crime story—some people did—we all have suffered, and we all have experienced loss. We all have been through a crisis, or we know somebody who has, if we haven't. So, to tell the story—and the only way they could tell the story is they couldn't dance it; they had to be it. So, they had to be Amadou's mother, sister, brother, cousin, aunt and uncle, family, community. So, the only way they could be it is to talk about, identify something in their life. (Osayande)

For Nzinga Metzger and Jeannine Osayande, bringing the meanings and purposes

of the dances to life through the lived experiences of their students, communities, audiences, and new generations, as well as through the current sociocultural climate in which they live, is significant labor. Making the dances present occurs through the teaching of specific dances and through the artistic and choreographic process. This labor of asking all involved to locate themselves inside of black/African diasporic dances through the meanings and purposes of the dances' origins and to find connections to today's lived experiences opens the dances up to an authentic process, one in which the diasporic movement practitioners—those dancing the dances—can feel alive within the dances. How can they be authentic if they are dancing something they see as belonging to another time? The dances must feel real to each person who experiences them in the multiple ways in which communities can engage with the dances and through the ways in which the diasporic movement practitioners are offering such experiences to these individuals so that they feel like a part of the story. However, authentic experience involves more than being a part of the story; it includes the ability to locate oneself and to know critically how one is involved in the story. In this case, it involves understanding how being a part of the story influences the performance and practice of the dances and how it influences the community of people involved in the dances, the audiences viewing the dances, and the cultures from which they emerge.

Philosophy and Practice of Integrity 5: Authenticity and Traversing Whiteness

In a conversation about authenticity that touches on the experience of black U.S. Americans, it would be neglectful to avoid the racialized divide between white and black

communities as well as the connected cultural appropriation and/or cultural *misappropriation*—that is a major part of the U.S. social climate. Cultural appropriation and misappropriation generally combine to be defined as the ability to gain social or economic capital by imitating or using—sometimes described as *stealing*—the cultural creations, practices, or developments of groups of people who have less power or who are a less dominant culture collectively in a societal structure. Cultural appropriation causes particular tension in communities that are racialized as black and white. These terms—*black* and *white*—can also refer to culture practices and structures and also to refer to culture either negatively and positively. The word *black* has been taken on by many black U.S. communities as a term that marks the cultures developed in the United States or elsewhere outside of the continent of Africa that are created by people of African descent. It is also a term of empowerment that has been incorporated by organizations such as the Black Panthers, the phrase “Black Power,” and the Black Lives Matter movement. Activist movements associated with blackness continue to be in direct pathological conflict with whiteness, and the trauma and pain between these communities continues to plague racial, social, and cultural relations in the United States. The black/African diasporic dance communities are not exempt from these concerns.

Jeannine Osayande began our dialogue surrounding white people of European descent, which also includes others who benefit from a white-dominant societal power structure through social and cultural capital and the ways in which its presence or the presence of white people emerges as significant in relation to the diasporic movement

practitioners who contributed to this dissertation. Osayande shared: “I think the whole appropriation thing is always going to be a question that’s a good one, because it helps people to have something, to know how—what they’re measuring against.” Osayande further explained how this question must be discussed on a continuum and analyzed carefully. She continued this notion by discussing how the African culture should be shown respect, with that respect being a method by which a teacher can reach for authenticity in teaching. Just doing, teaching, performing, or choreographing the movement is not enough to offer it authentically. Osayande explained how if she is simply mimicking something she has seen because she likes it and, “I’m throwing it up there, and I’m not giving respect to it by knowing really where it came from, and what it is, and who did it, and those types of things, that’s problematic to me.”

Nzinga Metzger added to the notion that authenticity and appropriation are connected. She moves forward into a broader conversation about issues that arise for others within a white-dominant societal power structure. However, she pushes for more than a societal view of how we engage with culture. She feels that there should be high levels of acknowledgement of how white societal power structures consciously act if the goal is to work with respect and equity in societal relations. Beyond that, equity should and could be a concept that considers human relations and humanity within the world of black/African diasporic dance. In the following, she discussed how culture is tied to humanity:

Inauthenticity, for me, comes in with appropriation. When you see African dance and you don’t see no Africans, then I have a problem, because then we’re dealing

specifically with white supremacy and appropriation and cultural hegemony. And people try to gloss over that and act as if everybody has equal access to these things, and this is why white people do them, because it's open for the world [for them]. It's not open for the world [for everyone]. I don't have access to classical Indian dance, you know what I'm saying? And part of that has to do with my race, because Indians are going to be more likely to teach a white girl than they are to teach me. And Indian dance is more likely going to be in a neighborhood that is easily accessible to white people than it's going to be in my neighborhood, and that's just the truth. So the inauthenticity comes in for me when it comes to that type of appropriation, because white people are frequently dishonest about how and why they have access to these forms and how and why you do not see the converse happening in other communities. So that's where the inauthenticity comes in, because often times the construct of white supremacy does not force white people to pay homage and give credit. And at the point where you're not paying homage and giving credit to where something comes from and what it is, you are stealing and you are appropriating and you are lying, which is a story that has been repeated over and over and over, not only with black art forms but with black intellectual work, with all kinds of things. So, I mean, we can look at—what was that movie that came out, “Cadillac Records?” We can look at the whole, very well-known tradition of white cover artists, because black culture is much more palatable to white people when it has a white face on it. I remember when there were no black people on MTV. I'm old enough to remember that. I remember that Michael Jackson was the first black person on MTV. I remember that day when the “Billie Jean” video came on, and everybody was, “Oh my God, there's a black person on MTV.” You know what I'm saying? I remember when Hip Hop was not mainstream. I remember when the only people who were rapping and dance battling and doing Hip Hop dance were people of color, largely black and Latino youth. Now you can turn on the television and see a commercial full of Hip Hop dance and not see one person of color, not one. To me, that is inauthentic. To me, that's just not real, that's just another manifestation of white supremacy. I mean, I guess it's authentic white supremacy, but it's not authentic humanity. So that's the way I see it. (Metzger)

Nzinga Metzger first touches on the inequality and inequity of the access that black people have to the cultural practices of other cultures, let alone their ability to take these practices and use them for social and economic gain through artistry performance. She continues to unveil the continual access that white people have because of their privilege in a U.S. white-supremacist societal foundation in a white-dominant socio-economic

power structure. Metzger then expresses how, from her lived experience—as a person of black/African descent, a researcher, a scholar, and a diasporic movement practitioner—she has seen white people use cultures other than their own when desired. These appropriated cultural dances have not emerged from white/European ancestors, such as Hip Hop; instead, these dances may have even emerged as expressions against the structures created by white-dominant societal power structures. This has led Nzinga Metzger to draw the conclusion that authenticity only under these circumstances is that of a white supremacist and dominant nature.

White people buy into the idea that because they have access to cultural experience and expression means that they also can use that access as desired. This idea of entitled access is reliant upon an understanding that white dominance and supremacy are foundations on which to fulfill desires, no matter how it influences the racial, cultural, and socio-economic relations and lives of others. This dominance also allows white individuals to proceed as if these processes have no influence on the other humans involved in the web of cultural exchange or that their actions should not be of such grave concern. Nzinga Metzger considers it privilege for these white individuals to not think about others or to not be concerned with how their individual actions influence a collective that is not their own and uses artistry and performance as her main examples of how this inequitable process of cultural exchange works.

Nia Love moved more deeply into a personal experience with cultural appropriation and traversing whiteness when she decided to approach a well-respected

dancer who has a postmodern worldview in her artistic practice. The exchange that she describes is in alignment with many of the expressions that surround the authenticity and cultural appropriation that Nzinga Metzger brought to the forefront. Love described her interchange with this movement artist:

Everybody loves her, she's a darling of postmodernism. I think she's oblivious to culture. She's white, so she lives in a very privileged sensibility. I called her on some s—[expletive]. She was doing Lamba, she was doing some—what she thought she saw—so I questioned her. So I said, “Well, where did you—where were you inspired to do this movement? What was your inspiration?” She said, “I don't know, I saw it from somewhere.” I said, “Well, where did you see it?” She's, “Oh, I can't remember.” I said, “See, for me, that's a problem, because that's whiteness.” I think whiteness is so privileged that they don't really have to remember where they saw things that were blackness. They don't, because it's an immediate sense of appropriation. We got into an argument, and I told her, “No, whiteness and privilege is unconscious. You don't walk through the world thinking, “Oh, I'm just going to f—[expletive] people up.” I mean, you can, right? You can, but the whole notion of whiteness and privilege is that you f—[expletive] people up because you're white, because of the way that you can walk through the world. You don't have to think like this, you can just walk through the world any way you want to, and it's okay. So I told her, “I challenge you to think about where you got that movement from, because it was Lamba. So if you don't know, you can consciously never give it validity. And because you are unconsciously white and privileged, you don't have to show all these white people that are following you [or yourself] that this is not just some stuff that [you] made up. I can't support that, [because] the other side of it is blackness has to be responsible every step we take for our whole people. We don't walk through the earth independently. We walk through, we step out the door, we like, boom, we're representing a nation of people. So we're very sensitive people. (Love)

Here again, Nia Love—in chorus with Jeannine Osayande and Nzinga Metzger—states that teachers, performers, and choreographers who embody movement from multiple cultures, but who do not name, claim, or frame these cultures (especially people who have the privilege of being white and unconscious) have the power to appropriate or gain social and monetary capital from learning and practicing these cultures. She is also

expressing that, within the context of a racist construct, accepting and using this inequitable privilege of not having to be aware, of not having to cite your sources, and of not having to reference the original places from which you pulled your movements, is painful to those who are trying to represent the practices of their own cultures and who are held to a higher standard of being keepers of a culture's history and traditions. This is a sensitive location for those who have lost, or have been distanced by force from, their cultures due to colonization and transatlantic enslavement; their path is full of obligations that are not privileged away by whiteness.

Philosophy and Practice of Integrity 6: Authenticity and Mixing

Because black/African diasporic dances have been in the United States for some time now, thanks to an extensive list of dynamic people, there is bound to be creative cultural exchange and a mixing of dances. There are a variety of concerns surrounding what it means to move away from folkloric traditional dances that are practiced for cultural preservation, cultural sharing, cultural educating, or the keeping of culture and to, instead, move toward more open approaches, such as freestyle, improvisation, or artistic renderings of black/African diasporic dances. This is not meant to pit one area of practice against another; rather, it is done to unveil how these two worlds of practice—traditional folkloric and freestyle/improvisational/artistic—emerged during my interviews with the movement artists presented in this dissertation and to contribute to the continuum of black/African diasporic dance philosophies and practices. In many ways, this conversation moves forward from the last section about authenticity and whiteness.

Nia Love believes in referencing when using black/African diasporic dances in either of the approaches listed above. She understands that teachers, choreographers, performers, and artists are always comprehensively referencing their experiences, but she also feels that they should make sure this information is explicit to those they are sharing the culture with by citing and referencing sources to show respect for those who have kept and continue to keep the dances alive and in cultural circulation. Nia Love will not let certain things be lost from her body's topography. In her own practice, she has normalized citing and referencing in her teaching and when she makes dance. In an earlier section, she spoke about the dance Dundunba, and she continues her line of thinking related to how she goes back to the source of the dances to let her students grasp the fullness of the dance. She first tells her students that the dances do change from their traditional form by simply continuing to exist. By giving the students this information, she teaches that it is authentic for the dances to change and shift; however, it is not authentic to let the histories and cultural elements that have walked along with the dances disappear. Nia Love concluded:

When I go into class, that's how I think about stuff. Although it may be interstellar, I still attribute it to all of the blackness and African sensibility, the diasporic sensibility, which means all of that you know and all of that you don't know and all of that intrinsically comes inside of you. You're always referencing. And you verbalize it. [S]ince we're talking about Dundunba, [I say to my students] did you ever see Dundunba? And then what do I do, go online and open it up, boom, this is 2016 Dundunba, this is 2000, this is 1975, so that they [my students] get to see Dundunba is, yes, a traditional dance form, right? And this is the history of it, this is my referencing, and that referencing has some very important historical components, everything to do with colonialization. So then, after I finish the movement and we go through it, then they can read something more than this is a movement she just made up. Not that everything is like that,

only if I can catch it like that. So sometimes classes will be real intricate, some deep, some {snaps}, and some are just wash over. [Sometimes folks] come into class and I can turn them good. But sometimes I'm not in the mood to turn them. [In other words, people may need to understand something more deeply, but they are not ready in Nia Love's eyes or she does not have the energy to shift them.] You're going to be, like, that's fine. Not that day, maybe later, hopefully I'll have them for a certain amount of time, right, and it's not just a one time [like in ongoing class settings, where people can drop in]. But if it's a workshop, in that workshop, you'll have all of that, those levels of information. (Love)

Nia Love brought up the importance of knowing your topography and staying consciously aware of what is with you and where it came from, as part of a responsible dance and movement practice. Jeannine Osayande expressed this same sentiment but in the following passage moves the conversation to what it can mean to authentically mix and merge cultures, rather than just thinking about how black/African diasporic dances with long lineages change over time within the same dance. She talks about how she first felt about mixing dances, their histories, and their cultural orientations. She then talked about where she is now with regard to mixing in her teaching and choreographing.

Jeanine Osayande expressed that:

At one point, I thought you shouldn't mix it, that it should stay in those categories, and as they are, because that's how I was taught about it in those categories: keep those things right where they are. But if you put in the time and you've done the work and you have the respect of your teachers and of the culture and you have the approval or the, like, sign-off kind of a thing, I'm all for mixing it. I really am. But you have to acknowledge that that's what you're doing. You don't want to represent something as something that it's not. So, I don't have a problem, and I do it. I mix this with this and this and this, if I'm telling a certain type of a story. If I'm even teaching a movement, and I'm working—you know, I do a lot of the art and education with the little kids. I have stuff that I'm doing in the choreography that is not the dance. And I tell them that. This is not the dance. Because every time I teach at a school, and you're [the students are] sitting on the floor, you're spinning on your bottom in circles. And so, I'm going to take that idea and put that idea alongside these other dances for Soli, for example. So, I

think as long as we're clear on when we're slicing it, and mixing it, and doing all these types of things, if we're doing it to get to another idea, of course it should be valid. Like, who's the police, you know? But say it, you know? That's important to me, to identify it and say it. Otherwise, it's like plagiarism, you know? Otherwise, if you're mixing and slicing and whatever...say what it is, so that you're giving the credit to where credit's due. That's all. (Osayande)

Jeannine Osayande joins Nia Love in thinking that the act of naming and referencing what you are doing is deeply important to how traditions are carried on. It is important for both the person offering the information and the people receiving the information to be informed in the most comprehensive way possible.

At this stage in her practice, Shani Sterling chooses to mostly stay aligned with how she was taught when she teaches. She experienced moments of soloing in Ghanaian dance that allowed for more freedom in the movements used and to add learned techniques and energies derived from lived experiences to the dances. However, it seemed to her that soloing was the ideal time for freedom, freestyle, and improvisation. In general, many teachers of African/Diasporic dances felt that during the core moments of the dances —particularly when teaching them or performing them—it was necessary to first teach or perform the movements that make the dance what it is, and to dance all of the ingredients of the dance before adding new flavors. However, to some extent, the solo circles or the moments at the end of a class or during a performance demonstrate the possibility of what can happen when folkloric traditional dances are moved in a freestyle, or manifest it in the moment, manner. Solo circles are open moments where individuals perform movement made up on the spot or choreographed; in many cases, they are grounded in the foundations of folkloric traditional movement practices, but not bound

within creative expressions that are beyond their time of origin. People may perform the core movements from particular black/African diasporic dances as they enter the solo circle and then move into something more freestyle, artistic, or stylized to offer their strongest energy to the collective moment. In the following, Shani Sterling first spoke about how she teaches her classes and then about her experience on the continent of Africa in Ghana observing and learning how the dances exist in various environments:

If it's like a dance we do, Kpalongo, they [her students] do some movements from Kpalongo and then, they come out and solo. They could do whatever they want to do in the solo. I had one girl from Nigeria. She came out moving her hips in such a way. Those hips "was" movin'. Before we knew it, everybody in her group was movin' those hips, and that was her thing. It wasn't a part of Kpalongo. Now in that instance, they do have their own—they do bring other things in, other dances in, to their solos, but other than that, I stick to what I was taught. I did see a level of freedom in the solos that they did [in Ghana]. I did see them pull from other dances in the solos that they did [in Ghana]. I acknowledge that my U.S. students come from different backgrounds. They're not from Ghana, so they might pull something that's really cool and that's from their background. I want them to understand the improvisational aspect of the culture and the community aspect and, yes, you do add your own flavor. (Sterling)

Shani Sterling teaches from what she experienced as freestyle in Ghana and recognizes that many of the people that she welcomes into her classroom each year come from diverse lived experiences and cultural backgrounds. She tries to honor that by allowing some room for freestyle dance during solos. When in Ghana, Shani Sterling experienced a sense of improvisation and freestyle not only in the dance but also in the costuming for one of the dances. The improvisational aspect spreads beyond just one aspect of the cultures and traditions that hold black/African diasporic dances. In this next passage, Shani Sterling discusses how the dances in the village and those on stage use

similar structures but present varied vantage points. This was the topic of her Fulbright research:

When we went to the village to look at Bamaya costumes, they just had something tied on their heads. They had their Bamaya skirt. They just grabbed a woman's shirt and a skirt. It didn't all match. Bamaya is a dance where the men dress up as women. The story goes that there were problems in a certain village. They went to this old man in the village to ask him, "What do we need to do?" He said, "You need to pray as the women pray for rain." So [t]hey dressed up like women. When we went to the village to look at Bamaya, it was such a community effort. It was just like a big circle and moving around with the drummers, the flute, the Brekete drum, which really resembles the snare drum, and then the talking drums. Somebody was playing the flute, because the flute is really present in that area, which is Tamale, the Dagomba people. They have those bells around their ankles. They had just a woman's skirt, the Bamaya belt, a woman's shirt. They even put a bra on and put something inside the bra, wear a hat with coral shells hanging from the hat. It looked like earrings. Sometimes they put makeup on, too. But nothing matched, and there are no solos, not really. It was more just going around. It wasn't even really choreographed. It was just that main movement of twisting, twisting, twisting. Then, if they went to a different rhythm, then maybe they would go to the movement that's associated with that rhythm.

But Bamaya—as we saw it this past weekend, in fact—they come here with the song, they go on, they are dressed alike. They have really nice costumes that are, for the most part, it's all alike, color-coordinated and things like that, and with the fan, a really nice fan that they use in their right hand. Then, you might see some solos, people come forward. Usually they have more solos. People come forward and do their solo and really displaying the acrobatics and the—I don't want to say tricks, but those highlights of the African dance in Ghana. You see more highlights. [W]hen they come forth for their solos, it might not just be Bamaya. They might pull from another dance or something like that, because they want to highlight, give you all of this in a short amount of time. So, in that regard, it's different. It's different, in my opinion, because now, it's performed for entertainment. Not just entertainment, but cultural and educational exposure purposes. It's not just in the village. (Sterling)

In the last section of the previous passage, Shani Sterling explained what happens when the dance, Bamaya, moves out of the village and onto international stages, particularly in the United States. The freestyle elements differ and move away from the varying clothing

experienced in the village to become more evident in the solos that are performed. Even beyond that, such performances may pull from dancers or physical orientations that are not grounded in the dance Bamaya; this can cause the form to shift even further.

Interestingly, in the Ghanaian village, the dance Bamaya was not altered during pronounced solos; however, there was a freestyle element evident in the clothing. In the United States and in more stylized performance in general, there is not a focus on making the clothing freestyle, but there is an acceptance of this type of freestyle possibility. Shani Sterling mentioned that, during the freestyle sections of the Bamaya performance in the United States, movements from other dances or other movement forms were brought into the dancers' solos. The main example that she gave was acrobatics. The multiple and mixed styles and individual talents of the dancers performing Bamaya outside of the village cause the dance to shift over time.

Nzinga Metzger also has experience with being multiply embodied, and, in her interview she goes into detail about how her experiences with having multiple, varying, and mixed black/African diasporic movement contained within her own body. She expressed her thoughts about fusing together various forms of movement from different black/African diasporic dances. She sees the value in knowing and teaching specificity while also having admiration for artists whom she feels often work well with mixed movement cultures in performance and choreography. When asked how it feels to have multiple dances in her body, she concluded:

It feels fine to me. It feels very natural to me. But I think that's only because I had very specific teachers who forced me to embody every technique separately. So, I

don't feel any sense of conflict between Haitian, Cuban, West African. When I'm in West Africa, I'm in West Africa. When I'm in Cuba, I'm in Cuba. When I'm in Haiti, I'm in Haiti. It's very—the division is very clear to me, because {slaps hands} that's the way I was taught. I was not taught, "Oh, these pieces are interchangeable." I was taught technique. This is Cuban technique, this is Haitian technique, this is Guinea technique, this is Mali, this is Senegal. So the way that I learned it was very clear, so I feel that it remains clear in my body. And even if I'm not always able to articulate it, I know what it is. So, if I don't necessarily have the virtuosity as a performer or as a dancer, if I don't have the virtuosity, I am clear as to what the things are. I don't confuse them when I see them. They don't look the same to me. But that is only because I was trained to see. That is probably the first {slaps hands} thing a student has to be able to do. That's the first thing a teacher has to be able to convey is to teach you how to see the difference and not just categorize everything as the same. Our teacher used to tell us all the time, you can't just glance at a movement one time and be, "Oh, yes, yes, I know what that is." You have to actually be able to look at it and see, "Oh, well, this movement in Kou Kou is not the same as this movement in Manjani is not the same as this movement in Oya is not the same as this movement in Yanvalou." It's just not. But if you approach it like it's the same thing, it's whatever, whatever, of course it's going to be unclear to you. But each one of those places has a different historical trajectory that created the movement that is the movement of those places. There's a story built into the movement of each one of those places that deserves to be honored in and of itself. And so because I was taught that way, I don't have any problem, it's fine for me.

I do, though, like some of the fusion that I've seen. Choreographers like Jeffrey Page, Nia Love, I like Forces of Nature [directed by Abdel Salam], I like some of the things that I've seen them do in terms of fusing modern and African dances. [However] fusing different African dances together to create Neo-African pieces, I don't really like that. But if you're going to be performing folkloric dance, folkloric African dance, I think it's important for people to be able to know which dance you're doing. And it seems like it's becoming harder and harder to do that when you look at people's bodies and you look at performances. Teaching for me really has very little to do with teaching people to perform. [P]eople always are, "Oh, you teach dance, when do you guys have a recital?" I be like, "I don't." {laughter} I don't have recitals because I just don't feel like every single time you dance you need to be preparing for some performance. All dance is not about stage performance. Some dance is actually just for you, it's for your life, it's for your mental health, it's for your body, it's for your emotional well-being, it's for your spiritual upliftment, it's for all of these things. And so when I'm teaching, I am teaching because I want to give people another tool that they can use in their lives. I'm not really interested in teaching performance. (Metzger)

Clearly, specificity in the body is crucial to Nzinga Metzger as a teacher; it's important to her that traditions are carried on with consciousness. Since the dances can be open to artistry and freestyle in performance and choreography, she wants to be sure that people are getting a comprehensive understanding of folkloric traditional dances alongside these openings. She continues to talk about what she values in teaching when she explains why she does not teach toward performance; her work is about the health of those who attend her classes. She also stated that she is not fond of what she calls "Neo-African" pieces, which bring together multiple black/African descendent dances. However, she does respect some artists who are doing fusion work, and she expounded below on why she respects certain people who attempt an artistic or freestyle approach:

What I really like about Jeffrey [Page] and his work is that Jeffrey is—first of all, he's one of the most amazing dancers I've ever seen in my life. But having known and watched Jeffrey grow over the last 20 years and watch him attack and embody every single different technique and be able to duplicate that technique in his body is exactly what I'm talking about. And so, to me, what he was doing was acquiring a vocabulary. Part of what he was doing was acquiring a vocabulary. Outside of now being able to move through the diaspora and communicate with people in different areas of that diaspora in that language, now he has acquired this vocabulary to be able to come here and tell his own story with that vocabulary by using those vowels and consonants and words and phonemes and morphemes and graphemes, you know what I'm saying? He's been able to put that together and tell his own story.

And so, to me, that is really the next—to me, it seems like it's at least part of what the next step is for practitioners of this art form...to be able to use that repertoire and use those techniques to tell our own story. But you can't do that if you muddy the original. It's like taking a copy of a copy. Each copy of the copy gets less—has less and less integrity, and it gets harder and harder to read, and it less and less serves its function. So, if you're going to adapt something, I believe that it's best to adapt from the original, because at least if you have the word *cat*, and then

you can then take everything that goes with that word and use it in another context and have that flavor in that particular way. (Metzger)

Nzinga Metzger continued to question:

Could there come a time where Manjani (a West African dance that is also spelled *Mendiani* and *Mandiani*) becomes white dance? I'm sure there was a time when people looked at Lindy Hop and thought, "Nobody will ever think Lindy Hop is a white dance." Look at where we are because people have not preserved the story, the folklore, the history, the technique, the context, the music, all of those things that went along with the idea that Lindy Hop embodies and the part of our story that it tells. People were able to separate that from the dance, and now it has moved on to this context that has almost absolutely nothing to do with black people. You can see Lindy Hoppers, there's all these Lindy Hop clubs all across the United States of people who do Lindy Hop and there ain't hardly no black people in the dag gum clubs. They're not Lindy hopping. How'd that happen, you know what I'm saying? It's just crazy. Shagging, bopping, all of these things, all of these dance forms that were inherently African American have now been appropriated and completely removed from our communities. The same could be said for jazz, the same could be said for the blues. If you don't hold onto those things, if you don't tell your story, if you don't continually invoke the connection that those things have, you—we will lose them. (Metzger)

Nzinga Metzger further discussed how to stay focused in a way that can curb cultural appropriation tendencies in the teaching and sharing of black/African diasporic dances. Also included in this next passage are her feelings about teaching white people, which ties into her concerns about cultural appropriation and how culture moves through the United States and internationally. Metzger argued:

I mean, for me, it definitely means connecting every single dance to its people, to its culture, teaching what it is, where it came from, why it's done, this is the rhythm, no, you can't dance wherever you want to on it, you know what I'm saying? That is definitely a part of it. Manjani is not Soco is not Kou Kou is not—what's the other one? Macru. They're all different. And making sure that people understand that is a part of it.

As far as—I mean, I don't have a pat proscribe upon myself as far as not teaching white people, but white people are not my focus when I'm teaching. They can

come, but I'm not out there, "Come to my class, white people." I really don't care if they come or not. And because of the community that I live in, it's very rare for white people to come to my class, although I've had white people come to my class. But I'm mostly interested in black people, and I'm most interested in black women in terms of teaching. (Metzger)

During Nzinga Metzger's interview, the conversation about mixing black/African diasporic dances swerved back around to a root that was a common theme for Nia Love as well. There is a consciousness that those racialized as white need to bring to the surface: they need to acknowledge their involvement in the appropriation and loss of culture. There is a desire for and even a vocalized request that white people, as a collective, take responsibility for and be held accountable for history and how it continues to affect and permeate modern society and human relations. At the same time, those who are racialized as black cannot let their cultures be erased and need to tell their stories and hold their culture with comprehensive specificity and accountability. The racialization created by those in power—namely, white people and all who continue to perpetuate the U.S. racial divide—is what continues the inequity of the ways in which culture is disseminated throughout the world.

Authenticity has many angles and elements. However, accountability to what has come before stands out in this section when it comes to black/African diasporic dances in their traditional and folkloric forms. Respecting, honoring the histories of the dances by citing and referencing the people who have held the dances in existence and also by teaching diverse techniques with a comprehensive specificity seem to come together to form philosophies and practices of integrity when engaging in black/African diasporic

movement practices. The labor required to teach, perform, and choreograph black/African diasporic movement practices with integrity is essential and unavoidable work. The philosophies and practices of integrity listed in this chapter arose from the interviews with each movement artist that contributed to this dissertation. Their collective work can serve as a time-stamped, ever-evolving atlas of developing processes for honoring and respecting the traditional folkloric dances that have survived the transatlantic enslavement period and that continue to thrive globally. This collective work can bring to the fore the gifts that black/African diasporic descendent peoples give to the world.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

A Contribution

The world of mixed and multi-faceted U.S. American communities that make up black/African diasporic dance practices in education, artistry, and performance are immense and range from annual community festivals to programs of study abroad in higher education academic institutions. Nationwide African Dance festivals such as Kankaran, Florida African Dance Festival, Akwaaba African Dance and Drum Festival, Camp Fareta, and the famed DanceAfrica are vibrantly sustained today. A growing number of academic programs require intricate focus on movement cultures of black/African descent such as Temple University and Swarthmore College where the legacy of Dr. Kariamu Welsh has been sustained through her Umfundalai African contemporary dance technique over generations of students and teachers, Columbia University and University of Colorado Boulder where Onye Ozuzu has played a key role in laying the foundation for dances of black/African descent to be implemented as core curriculum, and Denison University where Stafford Berry implemented various levels of African Dance required for students in dance.

This list of festivals and institutions of higher education does not even begin to encompass the wider reach of the black/African diasporic communities in the U.S. including the lusciously extensive collective of freelance workers in the field who work

through artistic, cultural, and community centers nationally and internationally or the cultural organizations like Junebug Productions (New Orleans), Institute for Dunham Technique Certification (U.S. National), Heritage Works (Detroit), Dancing While Black (New York), Community Education Center (Philadelphia) and Freedom Theatre (Philadelphia). An essential part of these communities are black U.S. and/or African American women who are less visible nationwide and internationally because of their intimate work locally in their own communities. This research was meant to bring some of their philosophies and practices in black/African diasporic movement practices to the forefront, to call into question how we archive their work through research and through value systems homegrown here in the U.S., and to boost discourse and dialogue on the diverse, multiple, and comprehensive nature in which this work is happening in the U.S., diasporically and globally through the case studies of five diasporic movement practitioners.

There are many stories to be told and we must build the archive continuously and vigorously. This research is a clear equitable and humane contribution to efforts in dismantling relentless oppressive systems, in the U.S. and diasporically, that attempt to smother the voices, complexity, and essential work of diversity as well as the importance of black lives and the lives of all humans who do not have or cannot live white lives. This research is a working guide and a call to action.

This dissertation offered intricate perspectives from Dr. Ojeya Cruz Banks, Nia Love, Dr. Nzinga Metzger, Jeannine Osayande, and Shani Sterling—five black U.S.

and/or African American women movement artists of African descent, born and/or reared in the United States of America, who teach, choreograph, and/or perform diasporic dances of black/African descent. Their personal and professional lives have been dedicated to this work for a range of 15 to more than 40 years. This doctoral research garnered a strong collective compilation of diverse philosophies and practices of integrity that intertwine, intersect, collide, diverge, and converge due to a focus on the diversity of movement practices and lived experiences of the five contributing movement artists.

Summary and Future Trajectories

In Chapter I of this dissertation and as an introduction to this research, I offered a brief synopsis of how I was reared through blackness, diasporic practice, family, education, and artistry. This was to provide transparency in how I was coming to the work as a researcher, an insider/insider/outsider. I wanted to implement a research practice guided by ethical interaction with the diasporic movement practitioners that contributed to this dissertation and being open about my role in black/African diasporic dance communities was an essential offering towards ethical process. Chapter II described my data collection process as centering participant observation, embodied research, video observation, and audio interviews as well as my data analysis approach, which included the use of coding, situational maps, and memo writing as key components—producing a research orientation of letting the ultimate narrative rise from the data. A further objective that rang true early on was a need for a crossdisciplinary research approach that included critical race and gender studies with class as an

intersecting layer. It also felt significant to explore where diasporic theories intertwined with embodiment and artistry. All of these elements in Chapters I and III supported my ability to conduct ethical and embodied research in a case study format that rendered a collective list of philosophies and practices of integrity, found in Chapter VI, that span teaching, choreographing, and performing.

My literature and theoretical reviews, in Chapters III and IV, covered the work of scholars and intertwined relevant current events from multiple fields, including race, black, African, African American, Pan African, Afrocentric, feminist, womanist, diasporic, linguistic, philosophical, and pedagogical studies. A budding crossdisciplinary dialogue was crucial to this dissertation, as it additionally opened historical and contextualizing pathways to subject matter that could not be traversed without laying a strong foundation from which to grow. In Chapter V and with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, the contributing movement artists reveal collective insights into notions of U.S. citizenship as people who travel throughout the black/African Diaspora and bring the culture back to their communities through artistry and dance. Further acknowledged, in Chapter V are the multiple ways in which seeds were planted in their lives that led them to this trajectory of becoming diasporic movement practitioners and sustaining that artistry in diasporic movement practices.

The philosophies and practices of integrity tenants, revealed and explored in Chapter VI, include the call to experience the black/African Diaspora by going; be conscious of your U.S. Americanness; define and redefine traditions and translineages;

search for authenticity in a migrating practice, authenticity and traversing whiteness, and authenticity and mixing. One of the most compelling objectives and realizations that rose from this research is that these philosophical and practical guideposts of black/African diasporic movement practices have an ability to be utilized in multiple areas of facilitation in the field of dance, including diverse techniques, performances, freestyle exploration, and choreography.

In Chapters III and IV, I was able to ground the work of critical studies and diaspora in a way that spoke directly to what was rising from the data. This helped to inform how I would approach the challenges of women movement artists of black/African descent, generally as U.S. citizens, as descendants of transatlantic enslavement, and as laboring diasporic movement practitioners in the world of black/African descendent diasporic dances. In these chapters, I established that the U.S. has a history of racial oppression and activism against this oppression, while also focusing on complications of laboring in the U.S., as a woman and as black, in conventional and non-conventional workforces and professional landscapes. In Chapter IV, I featured women theorists who explored the diversity of women and were willing to go against the grain to assert all the essential and varied labor of women through their scholarship.

The subject area that is notably not included is the core essences of each diasporic movement practitioners' individual practices—the answer to the question what is the core, *ase*, *wahine*, *topography*, or *life force* that drives the individual practices of

embodying, artistically manifesting, and sharing their practices? As mentioned, I was able to uncover some key collective philosophies and practices; however, there were limitations on my ability to capture the essence of their individual work in this dissertation, which could have offered another layer of complexity and multiplicity to diversifying blackness in the field of dance. I hope to tackle this in future research. Another component that did not make it into this dissertation is the potential for offering what group structures could contribute to the dialogue on black/African diasporic movement practices. I had also hoped to include Kúlú Mele African Dance and Drum Ensemble to explore how researching with members of an ensemble from the perspective of embodiment, and the essences they are able to manifest together, could make for an enriched take on my research area.

In Chapters V and VI, where the data—voices of the diasporic movement practitioners Dr. Ojeya Cruz Banks, Nia Love, Dr. Nzinga Metzger, Jeannine Osayande, and Shani Sterling—rise to the forefront, I was able to unravel citizenship as a challenging conundrum. I also shared their narratives of first exposures to black/African diasporic dances and movement cultures—the seeds planted that grew around them and within them. The main aspects that rose from these chapters were the conflicts with the ideal citizen experience and the actual citizen experience and the six philosophies and practices that are useful guideposts of integrity when teaching, choreographing, and performing diasporic dances of black/African descent. As U.S. citizens, it was clear that there were narratives of displacement and belonging in the place they were reared and/or

called home. In these narratives, citizenship was challenging and contradictory, especially when they always knew at any moment their citizen status could be illegally revoked by those with the authority to do so simply because they are black. Diasporic dance communities they were able to join nationally and internationally, as movement artists, were places that helped to curve anxieties about self-worth and dis/mis/placement. They became locations of re-identifying who they were in relationship to history, in U.S. society today, and in the world. These are the spaces where the possibility of *afro ambiguity*, *embodied translineages*, *a diasporic nomadic*, and *ethical, (con)temporary migrations* begin their conjuring. These are all notions that re-began their journey in this dissertation and are theoretical and philosophical renderings that could be fleshed out more intensely in future research. The intertwining of these concepts more intricately with crossdisciplinary diasporic studies and artistry could make for compelling interdisciplinary expansion for the field of dance.

More specifically to dance and movement practice, questions arose in regards to how these forms exist in various educational, performance, and choreographic spaces in our communities. For example, how do we work through the philosophies and practices of integrity that have implications of ethics and authenticity in higher education settings? Dr. Melanie Dalton and Dr. Nyama McCarthy-Brown have both been working on these implications from different vantage points, but I wonder how what was uncovered through the research of this dissertation intersects with their work? Even deeper, how do we continue to advocate for conversations that embody complexity and clarity around

cultural appropriation in all facets of the field of dance including education, choreography, performance, and technique, etc.? When is it okay to mix and merge dances? Who gets to do that work? How do we engage with rigor and referencing? We all know the beauty of combining forms, but what is the pain unearthed from or implications of our combining cultures in a capitalistic society where everything is and can be a commodity simply because someone will buy it or someone wants to do it? The field is ripe for digging into these notions nationally in the U.S. and globally throughout diaspora.

The unfinished business of this dissertation prompts another set of questions: What is our responsibility to the cultural retentions of these forms and their origins? How do we value the heritages and the nuanced detail that some of these dances offer from generations of engagement—dances that are ancient? And in tandem with this question, what are our ethical responsibilities to the valuing of heritages and the natural order of change that comes with generations of people dancing a dance? How are these features organizable or not when centered under certain hierarchical structures and systems not grounded in how these forms originally came to fruition? How do we decolonize the academy and beyond so that is may center in more than one way and with equity? Do we notice how capitalism drives the field of dance and in turn these forms and what is there to do about it? Do we surrender or submit or continue to fight for centering around what honors other systems and values besides the one we know or the one that holds us?

I also then cannot help but wonder what is the responsibility of U.S. society and

its citizens to consider reparations in connection to all this work? What does equalizing, harmonizing, or creating equity in our current U.S. socio-cultural construct, in a supposedly post-transatlantic enslavement time look like? I wonder if *marronage*, as Dr. Neil Roberts explored it in the book *Freedom as Marronage*, is probable—the ability to move out of oppressive states for temporary moments through *diasporic nomadic embodied migrations*. Is there space for what we might call an *embodied diasporic marronage* or *restorative activism*? What if we take the time to self-cultivate, self-develop, and self-fashion and be courageous to make spaces of shared experience that could push us beyond our stifling around race and difference—a real and nuanced integration, not a glossy image of it? Will we make more places where the pain is welcome to be worked through as a normality in academia and our society? Will we make processing spaces that include people that are similar and different? What does the courage to say “this is necessary” and put action and resources behind it, especially our embodied resources, do to ground this as a massive shift in what we thought of as a melting pot or an integrated society? What is the opportunity here to offer the time, space, and energy for black U.S. or African Americans to self-cultivate through embodiment of the black/African Diaspora? What would it mean to include this historiography in core curricula and for everyone to center and re-center beyond U.S., Eurocentric, and Western centric orientations? Finally, how might that usher in the many who are ethnically, racially, and culturally marginalized with respect, dignity, and honor?

What are the potentials of these embodied intersections and what I call

translineages? How do we extend the dialogue to other forms and movement cultures emerging from Asian diasporas, Indigenous diasporas, and more, as the U.S. has a history of smothering one culture to let another rise? How can it be the time for us all without discounting the weight of how histories, heritages, and cultural contributions manifest locally and globally? What are the harmonics and nature of world and/or global dance orientations in our educational, performance, and artistry ecologies? These are all massive inquiries continuously being called to question that need more time and attention. This doctoral research is but one cross road where many pathways intersect. I am encouraged by the narratives that came forth, the questions and implications rising from the fog, the affirmations that oppressive systems are still in need of dismantling as an accepted societal construct, and the embodied guideposts of black/African descent offered by centering and navigating our beautiful bodies. These bodies are ideal locations to traverse *orienting and re-orienting towards diasporic consciousness*—ultimately a release and restoration from systems that do not serve humanity.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter