

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

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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.

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Here I come!

Dr. Brenda Dixon Gottschild

Nia Love

Dr. Kariamua Welsh

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

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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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### *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 Egypt 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. Kariamu Welsh (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