

association with terms such as traditional and contemporary must shift to understand how all techniques can respond to the present. Chandralekha, a contemporary Indian dancer of the late twentieth century and discussed in this book, created impactful choreography not solely because it was ahead of its time but because it reflected ideologies of feminism and politics that she strongly believed in. The contemporary requires a sharp questioning of the dynamics of our time, and it will continue to move and shift. In locating the multiple approaches to alterity, we all have access to the contemporary; we must look ahead.

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HOT FEET AND SOCIAL CHANGE: AFRICAN DANCE AND DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

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Hot Feet and Social Change: African Dance and Diaspora Communities traces the transmission and dissemination of West African dance in the United States. Focusing on the African American diaspora, which is defined by the editors as extending "from Canada to Chile, the Caribbean to the Hawaiian Islands" (1), this book serves as a great resource for researchers, practitioners, and readers interested in both theory and practice. Central to the text is the

positioning of African dance as a progenitor of community engagement and social change. Editors Kariamuwelsh, Esailama G. A. Diouf, and Yvonne Daniel situate dance within a larger artistic whole and attempt to decolonize the field of dance by educating readers "concerning pervasive Eurocentrism and lingering, under-served (literal and figurative) capitalization of references to former colonial and paternalistic canons, institutions, and perspectives" (6). In order to do so, highlighted are the voices and work of master instructors—many of whom have been omitted from the American dance canon—who discuss the vast diversity within African dance. The book presents African dance as a social institution that allows communities and individuals to "embody and demonstrate their values in physical space" (6).

During the first Council of African Diaspora Dance conference at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina (2014), co-editor Kariamuwelsh envisioned "a book that would be inclusive in that it would present voices that represented different regions and different perspectives on the important African dances that have spread across the American African Diaspora" (3). This collection fulfills Welsh's vision by presenting African dance as a dynamic and complex ideology that extends beyond the continent and the performance stage, as well as by explaining how it impacts the daily lives of Black people.

The first section, "Hot Feet and Local Histories," focuses on history and genealogy. Building upon dancer/choreographer M. Jacqui Alexander's concept of *spirit knowing*, a mechanism for making the world and the metaworlds intelligible, scholar and artist Esailama G. A. Diouf introduces *spirit talk* as a way of knowing within the African diaspora. Spirit talk is a liminal moment wherein the spirit of the dancer interlocks with the spirit of the dance and transcends to a meta-level of creative expression. Welsh's concept of *epic memory*, and renowned choreographer Alvin Ailey's concept of *blood memory*, describe how practitioners are able to develop empathetic and kinesthetic connections to an African identity through movement. Ways of knowing—such as spirit talk, epic memory, and blood memory—have been influential in the work of many Black artists and described by many members of the African dance community. In another essay, dance

artist/educator Julie B. Johnson employs an ethnographic approach to analyze how the five main components of an African dance class—the warm-up, the lesson, the act of dancing across the floor, the circle, and the *dobale*—help cultivate a sense of community among participants that is rooted in African dance traditions. Employing reflective prose, poetry, and visual texts, Johnson offers readers a diverse lens through which to understand how community is established within African dance classes and what it feels like to move within it.

Utilizing a variety of mediums, the second section, “The Elders’ Work and Words,” highlights the voices of pioneers, dance companies, and dance centers that allowed African dance to flourish in the Americas. Charles “Chuck” Davis, C. Kemal Nance, and Kariamuwelsh share direct knowledge about the development of African dance in the United States and key features of both African and African American aesthetics. An understanding of the communal and familial bonds that are established within the African dance diaspora communities can be observed in Nance’s interview with Davis. Affectionately referring to Davis as “my Baba Chuck” and Welsh as “Mama”—greetings offered to elders as a sign of respect—readers are able to gain a sense of how, unlike many European forms of dance, the relationship established among participants of African dance extend beyond the studio. Several dance centers and dance companies are highlighted, including KanKouran West African Dance Company, Diamano Coura West African Dance Company, Kumbuka African Drum and Dance Collective, Muntu Dance Theatre, and the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. Discussed are the histories and the ways in which these companies add communal value. Ausetua Amor Amenkum of New Orleans’s Kumbuka African Drum and Dance Collective employs the concepts of *remembering* and *spirit* to illustrate the ongoing connection between dance and African cultural practices. Through poetry, Amenkum demonstrates the connection between people of African descent and their ancestors by discussing the impact of New Orleans’s second line dance to the history and lives of Black people in the city. Moving beyond the private walls of the studio, and the public sphere of second lines, Kumbuka further highlights the role of African dance as an agent of

social change through its involvement with women’s correctional facilities in the city.

The third and final section, “Perpetual Motion in the Aesthetics of Africa,” focuses on defining African aesthetics, danced gender and sexuality, and Africanist approaches to improvisation. Steven Cornelius and Habib Iddrisu examine the transition of baamaaya, a music and dance genre of the Dagbamba ethnic group of Ghana’s northern region, from village to international stage. Historical representations of Black masculinity and heteronormativity in the field of African dance are explored by C. Kemal Nance. Employing an autoethnographic methodology, Nance utilizes communication specialist Ronald Jackson’s concept of *scripts* and historian Ramsay Burt’s theory about masculinity to investigate the linkage between the Black male dancing body and the concert stage. Through Chuck Davis’s choreographed work titled “Paths,” Nance investigates how problematic assumptions are made about gendered performances, particularly as it relates to sexuality. Applying Davis’s metaphor of “walking in parallel,” Nance argues that Black men must look to an African ideology when constructing their identity and avoid adopting European and Northern American standards of masculinity. Also discussed in this section are questions of identity, cultural values, nationalism, and the politicization of the traditional art within the nation-state.

As someone who was introduced to West African dance in my mid-twenties and has since studied with many of the elders and dance companies highlighted in this collection, I experienced both a sense of familiarity and a surge of intellectual inquisitiveness while reading this book due to its varied approaches and diverse perspectives. Interwoven throughout the text is the idea that social change and community engagement is integral to the teachings, rituals, and performance of African dance.

Although this book does a phenomenal job discussing the history of West African dance in the Americas, highlighting the voices of pioneers, artists, educators, and scholars, I found myself wanting to know more about the experiences of young people and recreational community dancers within the African dance community. Why have they chosen to engage with this dance community? Do they see the connection between African dance and social justice?

This book is an incredible resource for anyone interested in learning more about dance forms rooted in the African diaspora, and the history of West African dance in the Americas. In undergraduate curricula, *Hot Feet and Social Change: African Dance and Diaspora Communities* could serve multiple purposes. This would be a great foundational text for an introductory dance studies or race and ethnic studies course. For an upper-division performance theory course, it would be a useful text

on the intersections of identity and dance. Outside of academia, nonprofit and community leaders could utilize this book as a resource to better understand the relationship between the arts and social justice. Its concepts are accessible, intellectually stimulating, and theoretically engaging.

Gianina K.L. Strother
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