

Perspectives on Dance
Fusion in the
Caribbean and Dance
Sustainability

Perspectives on Dance Fusion in the Caribbean and Dance Sustainability:

Rituals of Modern Society

Edited by

Neri Torres,
Aminata Cairo,
Laura Donnelly,
Sally Crawford-Shepherd
and Nzinga Metzger

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ABSTRACT

Dance studies literature is still a work in progress when compared to other disciplines in the humanities. This compilation has two main objectives. The first is to identify some of the important challenges the dance studies discipline currently faces. These include maintaining dance scholarship that is socially and culturally relevant. The second objective is to focus on discourses and research of dance in the Caribbean, a subject about which little has been written to date. This compilation, which is a contribution to the field from practitioners, dance educators and scholars from several Caribbean countries (Suriname, Barbados, Cuba, Trinidad-Tobago, British Virgin Islands, Jamaica) and the globalized world (Japan, USA, Canada), is the first step in filling that void. Topics investigating social and traditional dances, spirituality and ritual, performance, resistance, and dance education are examined from ethnographic, feminist, social, and creative perspectives. This publication serves as an important resource for academics interested in the African Diaspora and Cultural Studies, as well as dance scholars, students, teachers, dance lovers and practitioners at large.

EDITORS

Neri Torres is the Coordinator for Dance at The University of the West Indies in Barbados. Born in Havana, Cuba, Neri holds an MFA in dance with a minor in film from the University of Colorado at Boulder. She is the founder and artistic director of IFE-ILE Afro-Cuban Dance Company, based in Miami, which repertoire combines traditional and contemporary fusion dance works. The company founded in 1996 has performed worldwide in tours, commercials and films. In addition, Torres produces the IFE-ILE Afro-Cuban Dance Festival every summer in Miami, FL, since its creation in 1998 that contains an academic symposium presented in partnership with Miami Dade College and History Miami Museum. Neri is currently a PhD student in the Cultural Studies program at The University of the West Indies. Her areas of research are dance and migration, and Diaspora cultural formations. She chairs the Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination Biennial International Dance Conference that attracts participants from around the world.

Aminata Cairo, Ph.D. is the Lector of Inclusive Education at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. Born and raised in the Netherlands to Surinamese parents, she left for the US to pursue her college education. She obtained master's degrees in Clinical Psychology and Medical Anthropology and a Ph.D. in Medical Anthropology. While in college she started dancing and working in the Lexington, Kentucky community. Since 1989 she worked throughout Kentucky, Maryland, and internationally, promoting the dance of the African Diaspora. She studied dance and activism with the Urban Bush Women Summer Instituted and had several study and performance tours in Suriname, specializing in traditional Afro-Surinamese dance. She has been a company member of Syncopated Inc. in Lexington, and the Sankofa African dance company in Baltimore. She also founded and directed her own Lexington based dance company Sabi Diri, so be it, a multi-ethnic company dedicated to uplifting the richness of our diversity. She has infused her dance work with spiritual lessons from her Native American godmother Mama Wapajea, and her own family's spiritual traditions. She is the only scholar on traditional Afro-Surinamese dance and was invited to give the 2014 Rudolf Van Lier Lecture at the University of Leiden on Traditional Afro-Surinamese Dance. From 2015 to 2016 she

dedicated her sabbatical year to researching Traditional Afro-Surinamese dance in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Development in Suriname with the support of a Fulbright Grant. In 2016 she received the Honorary Order of the Palm, a state decoration by the Government of Suriname for her contribution in culture.

Laura Donnelly, MFA is a choreographer, teacher, and dancer who also writes and creates community based public art involving visual and word art. She directs *Dancing with Ease – Body-Brain Balance* presenting workshops for teachers and students incorporating the Alexander Technique into teaching, studying, and performing in dance, music, theatre, and life. As an Assistant Professor of Dance at Kansas State University, Donnelly taught all levels of ballet, pointe, Alexander Technique, experiential anatomy, movement fundamentals and teaching methods. Her research interests include pedagogy, oral tradition in dance, collaborative process, music for dance, and the Alexander Technique. Donnelly's research has been presented at the Congress on Research in Dance, the International Association of Dance Science and Medicine, the National Dance Education Association, the Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities, the 5th Annual International Conference on Civic Education, and the University of New Mexico Mentoring Conference. Her article *Dance Technique - a Basis for Lifelong Learning* appeared in the Chinese/English magazine *All in One*. Donnelly's essay *Meditation in the Dance Studio* is published in *Teaching with Joy: Educational Practices for the Twenty-First Century*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Sally Crawford-Shepherd, Ph.D. is a dance practitioner, choreographer, academic, and lecturer. She loves to dance and keeps searching for new venues to explore her passion. A Kansan by birth, she has moved around the world absorbing inspiration from diverse cultures to share through performances, research, and workshops with students. She achieved a BFA in Dance at UMKC and a MA in Choreography at Trinity Laban in London. She completed her PhD in Dance Ethnography at De Montfort University in Leicester, England. She has choreographed and performed for theatre and dance companies in the Midwest and the United Kingdom. She lectured in universities and colleges throughout the UK and is currently the Coordinator for Dance at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, in Trinidad.

Nzinga Metzger, Ph.D. was educated in the United States, receiving her B.A. in history from Florida State University and her M.A. in history from Temple University. Dr. Metzger completed her Ph.D. in cultural anthropology at Florida State University. Over her years of study, Dr. Metzger's holistic approach to acquiring knowledge has led to her development as a scholar, folklorist and artist. Ms. Metzger's anthropological work focuses on Africa, the African diaspora, ritual, religion and identity. Both her master's level and doctoral work address themes including West African notions of personhood, the historical context and the socio-cultural politics of identity in relation to colonial power, and issues of diaspora and identity formation. Also of interest to her, is the fluidity with which individual and group identities ebb and flow through history as they confront changing socio-political climates. Internationally, she has traveled to Cuba and Nigeria to investigate òrìsà tradition, while domestically she has obtained a decade of exposure and access to and study of òrìsà communities in New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Tallahassee, and Atlanta. Complimentarily to her academic work, Ms. Metzger is also a singer, dancer and folklorist. She has been a student of traditional West African dance since 1991, when she began to study dances from the Old Mali Empire at Florida State University. From 1991 to 1995, Ms. Metzger's study was focused on the dances of the Old Mali/Senegambian region of West Africa. In 1996, Dr. Metzger began to study Afro Cuban Lucumí dances for the òrìsà. This study has both lead to and fed a special interest in the historical and present-day contexts of these dances and their socio-religious functions. Finally, in addition to her scholarly work, Dr. Metzger is also the founder and director of The Dunia Foré Foundation which is a philanthropic, nonprofit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to working in the African Diaspora. She is currently an assistant professor of anthropology at Florida A&M University

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INTRODUCTION

In the Caribbean, one dances first and learns to speak later. Dance embraces you from the moment you are born as your mothers, aunts, and fathers whirl you round and stretch your limbs and ask you: “who then is beautiful?” to the beat of a popular song. Dance manifests at all times, and exists in every gesture. Dance’s function is indispensable in the bosom of the family, and in important moments of the daily hustle and bustle of everyday life, as it provides a touch of the divine in baptismal ceremonies, in Cuban Santería, in Surinamese Winti, and Pentecostal rhythmic moves to name a few. Ritual, improvisation, irreverent sensuality (of carnival or similar festivals like Crop Over), rhythmic complexity, and an inherent capacity to create community combine to make dance the ideal vehicle of expression and human understanding. Yet the Caribbean is missing as a cultural space within postcolonial and postmodern discourses about contemporary dance. This collection challenges this silence.

Rituals of Modern Society: Perspectives on Caribbean Dance Fusion and Dance Sustainability has grown from two international dance conferences I produced and directed in 2014 and 2016 at the Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination (EBCCI) at The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados. These seminal conferences importantly brought together international academics and practitioners at a central location in the geography of the region to highlight the invisibility of Barbados as compared to Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago or Cuba. Some argue that the invisibility is due to the influence of “certain problematic aspects of the colonial historical legacy” (Sutton 2006), which additionally are said to hinder the continuity of traditions of African culture. However, this unsupported claim is being challenged by Barbadian scholarship more and more. The first conference in 2014 was entitled “The Sustainability of Dance as an Art Form: Economics, Politics and the Philosophy of Resistance.” While emphasizing the role of dance as a human right, it also featured spirituality as a means of survival as seen in the dances of Haiti, religious controversy of the *Walk Holy* band during Kadooment, a celebration preserved by Barbadian Afro-descendants during the country’s Crop Over festival and the potential of dance as a feminist tool to effect social transformation. Other highlights included the Trinitarian J’ouvert as a form of decolonization and the Alexander technique applied as a non-

violent approach to social resistance. In the closing speech of the conference, our keynote speaker Dr. Yvonne Daniel encapsulated the purpose of the conference by pointing out that: "...it is important to see and talk about all kinds of dance with all types of dancers from multiple places around the world, just like at this conference, so we are not insular in our thinking or narrow in our plans. This is the 21st century and everything that has happened and is happening shows us meaningfully that we are globally interconnected and therefore, we cannot afford to think domestically only."

Reflecting on the existing relationship of asymmetry between ethnic groups and their cultural dance production, and taking the greater Caribbean as a paradigm of super syncretism where, according to Benítez Rojo, aspects of dissimilar cultural traditions constantly merge and (re)create (1992), the theme of the second conference in 2016 was entitled "Caribbean Fusion Dance Works: Rituals of Modern Society." This conference underscored anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo's 2004 study published in volume 86 of *Cultural Studies*, where he alerts us to the existence of "*ethnicization* as an expression of alterity that specifically places the condition of being black in a subordinate state"¹ cited in (Rossbach de Olmos 2009). We know that this concept is also to a large extent also applicable to indigenous or Asian cultures or others seen derivatively in the Caribbean as non-European. Hence, the conference questioned the future of dance traditions in the region and the role of choreographic (re)construction through conscious production of hybridity along with its potential to destabilize traditional dance forms. The call for papers had recognized the implicit fluidity of dances that are subject to migration from the Caribbean Basin. Presenters at the conference also acknowledged this fluidity in various ways and, besides dislocation, it became clear that these dances have continued the patterns of transculturation, syncretism, and hybridization in new fusions of Caribbean dance with practices as varied as ballet, modern, jazz, hip-hop, bhangra, and belly dance. Discussions about the effects of mass media and commercialization also provoked deeper reflection on the dangers of impaired cultural integrity due to fluid transmutations of dance forms. Investigations that probe the phenomenon of cultural fusion help broaden our understanding of the complex positions many marginalized dancers must assume, and also unveil the power of marginalized dancing bodies when they use hybridity to reclaim a space in their society.

The reader of this collection will find represented within the chapters a range of differing perspectives that respond to critical questions proposed

¹ My translation.

within the framework of the call for paper presentations. Grouped by topics, the collection, contains fascinating insights into the adaptation of sacred rituals within a current context, fusion between the European tradition of ballet and khatak dance of India, creative processes involved in site-specific work combining *nuevo flamenco* and Afro-Cuban rituals, improvisation approaches in tap dance and the concept of nation language applied to new dance expressions in the Caribbean from the perspective of decolonization. Combined, these readings provide a panoramic outlook on the creative dialogue between diverse cultural forms. More equally relevant topics in the world of dance today are represented including the application of critical pedagogy and multiculturalism in the teaching of Afro-Caribbean dances in secondary schools, Winti sacred dances in Suriname and the growing popularity of Bachata dancing in Japan. In organizing this collection, I seek to contribute to current understandings and discussions in the field of cultural studies about the body as **text**, the body as **art**, and the body as a conduit of **spirituality**. I consider it vital to reposition the phenomenological discourse of the senses versus intellectual thought and to advocate for the body to be viewed as a locus from which universal knowledge flows. The body must not be limited to a fragmented existence by being delineated only through age, race, class and gender, but as a holistic cultural vehicle of the highest ontological importance. Western alienation of the body from the mind has been so influential that our thinking about the human spirit, our sense of belonging and even our sense of how we value life itself are too frequently undermined. Thus, a spontaneous rupture of cultural spaces has occurred, and the collective approach encouraged by dancing has been disconnected from social praxis. The philosopher David M. Levin (1983) argues that: "In no other civilization and in no prior age has the human body been so technologized, reified and endangered in so many uncontrollable ways" (91). In contrast, ritual dances of African origin practiced in the Caribbean for generations (i.e. Santeria and Vodou among others) provide a paradigm of study par excellence as surviving forms of embodied knowledge that can be connected to celebratory exaltations of life. As Yvonne Daniel rightly asserts, they cultivate "social cohesion and cosmic balance" (1985, 265).

The displacement of cultures due to increasing globalization and the pervasive interference of mass media marks hegemonic aesthetic parameters that have been and continue to be a challenge for cultural continuities in many Caribbean and other world communities. These issues were addressed at both conferences. The recognition of dance as a discursive and valid form of practice (and hence, a producer of knowledge) as expressed for example by authors Desmond (1993) and

Daniel (2005), has allowed us to understand ‘othered’ cultures and highlight racial and gender disparities. These studies have been influential in bringing attention to the social changes that have occurred in disciplines of dance. From privilege given to dancing bodies in response to essentialist and therefore exclusivist aesthetics, to technological advances that promote a more sedentary life and limit social interaction, people are increasingly banished from shared social spaces that guarantee continuities of expression of the body. On the other hand, in recent decades, the contrast between a progressive increase in ‘spectators’ of dance and a decrease of dance practitioners who engage particularly in spontaneous forms of self-expression (as was the case of swing and disco in the United States) is undeniable. One must also consider the fact that although dance is inherent to the Caribbean, global trends are beginning to gain ground within its cultural traditions.

Sadly, the rise of technology has made watching too easy and has also appeared to herald decreasing active participation in dance and other physical activities. Most of what we know to be dance today has been detached from the organic anatomy of the body to become a physical spectacle for those who do not practice it daily; unattainable due to the mostly acrobatic difficulty of the movement and the need for large spaces for its execution. We see an example in the popular television programs captioned *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance* (SYTYCD). The limited time of most television episodes also undermines the depth of the creative process as choreographers are often forced to finish their pieces in a few days. Also, the increased focus on intellectual conceptualization of dance movements and choreography threatens to replace spontaneous popular expressions. For the most part, these concepts are not well understood by the audiences that attend theaters. The world of social networks keeps a watchful eye on a global level, exercising a self-regulatory role favoring the market and limiting individual exploration and expression. We are often offered dances based on the uniformity of a commodified product. The model proposed by the television in the program *So You Think You Can Dance* places the dancer in a position of physical superiority that only a select group can emulate while the majority watches the unreachable challenge at home under the impression that dancing is a privilege of few.

In the Caribbean, on the other hand, the plantation system fostered the development of distinctive local features (“creolized” forms), among them the dance expressions that identify various regions and that differ markedly from the groups of origin (i.e. mainly Africa, Europe, China, India, Indonesia and Aboriginal cultures) (Benítez-Rojo 1992). The bodily

and rhythmic patterns that emerged from this cultural interplay not only transformed into signifiers of identity and nation for the natives of the islands and the continental inner Caribbean peoples but have transcended to become part of a universal culture. The Caribbean is the space of cultural synthesis par excellence precisely because of that ethnic and historical complexity. The layers of this cultural history are clearly reflected in the negotiation of local gestures that range from the way men and women woo each other to daily greetings between friends. All such gestures are charged with semiotic pluralism and ritual performance, dwelling within a unifying rhythm (Benítez-Rojo 1992).

Interpretations of Caribbean gestures, which are loaded with embodied history and patrimonial memory, are the material on which choreographers such as Gene Carson in Barbados², Rex Nettleford and L'Antoinette Stines in Jamaica, Jean-Léon Destiné in Haiti, Geoffrey Holder, Pearl Primus and Katherine Dunham in the US, Ramiro Guerra, Víctor Cuellar, Eduardo Rivero, Arnaldo Patterson, Gerardo Lastra and Alberto Alonso in Cuba, and so many others throughout the Caribbean, erected their distinctive and intriguing creative work. Their choreography responded to national and regional platforms of identity, always in ambiguous relation to the Western imaginary. What is abundantly evident is that one of the most important functions of the dances created in the region was as a mechanism of cultural resistance.

One can argue the 'vulnerability' of African Diaspora dances including yanvalou, dancehall, rumba, son, merengue, among many others is a result of having been circumscribed to anti-aesthetic stereotypes. According to the Western European imperialist perspective which is overly rationalizing, dances of the Caribbean are characterized as both free-form and self-indulgent and therefore problematic as legitimate artistic creations. In this respect, the taboo against sexual expressions of and through the body censors the most significant area of the moving body in these dances—the pelvis. Caribbean dancing recognizes the importance of the pelvis in human beings as both the center of gravitational stability and reproduction. The effect of such taboo against movements of the pelvis strategically establishes an aesthetic barrier whose true purpose both during colonial times and now is the commercialization (objectification) of the black body.

² Mr. Carson was one of the keynote speakers at our 2016 conference. He has dedicated several years of research to create a new dance technique stemming from Landship, a popular folkloric dance tradition in Barbados.

Mercantilism caused a distancing between cultural production and its black creators who were mostly socially marginalized and eclipsed within the entertainment market. As it ensues in the Marxist theory of the estrangement of labor (Marx 2007), the ‘alienation’ of the worker from the product of his labor means not only that his labor becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists ‘outside him’, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power which confronts him (91). Similarly, dance forms do not belong entirely to the groups or peoples that create them in regions considered “lower-class or non-dominant” (Desmond 1993, 39). The market mediates their diffusion. The market demands that instructors, artistic directors, casting and other professional support producers make those dances palatable to the Western public. As I have argued earlier and re-emphasize here, the objectification of Caribbean dancers creates estrangement between the dance choreography and the places where they originated, often resulting in devaluation. The original choreographer or dance interpreter, then, receives a lower remuneration or credit compared to those dancers who execute more commercialized–Westernized–versions that satisfy mass markets.

In order to gain access to resources, black creators have often had to **unlearn** their own culture by incorporating **hybridized versions**, often through coded manuals. This was the case when a Cuban colleague of mine and professional dancer now living in Miami, taught Cuban Salsa in Europe. To get a job, Maritza³ had to learn the style of Cuban Salsa dictated by the local academy where she worked. Like the workers in Marx’s theory, appropriation made her confront her native dances as ‘something alien’. Despite being born and trained in the country that originally produced the form, instead, she found herself confronting **estrangement** from a dance she identifies with, and most importantly, which *she had always considered to be an essential means of conveying her life as a Cuban woman*. The organic, spiritual act of dancing Maritza had embodied in her country suddenly transformed into a worthless experience in the new space. The case of Maritza is an example of how micro and macro impacts of the global market interrupt cultural continuities, threaten cultural identities, and call into question the sustainability of ‘othered’ dance forms such as Cuban dance.

³ Personal conversation, June 2004 (I am using a pseudonym to protect her identity).

A look at television shows, films and major international events reveals that in rare cases there is similarity between the dancing bodies and those who originally gave shape to those dances as is the case, for instance, of the Jamaican dancehall, among many other examples worldwide. For the creators, geographic determinism and stereotyping circumscribe opportunities within the market that limits free access to resources. The case of Misty Copeland, a black dancer who was promoted to principal dancer of the American Ballet Theater is inspiring. However, there is still a long way to go in the fight against institutional prejudice in ballet and other professional dance companies, in film and in television that limits the diversity of dancers in leading roles. Such exclusions undermine the right of some bodies to dance and to be fully visible in dance performances.

Although this work is not intended to be an exhaustive compendium on sustainability of dance practices—or Caribbean dance for that matter—the variety and scope of the themes allow us to appreciate the current state of the discipline from different angles. A range of perspectives and methodologies are represented, all aimed at extending the debate about providing practitioners of dance with a more relevant space within society so that it integrates harmoniously with other areas of knowledge. In the same way that the conference provided a space for constructive imaginings and actions for international dance practitioners, educators and scholars, the volume reflects the growing joint effort to undermine the production of exclusivist difference to facilitate intercultural understanding. In view of pressing ontological problems resulting from the stress of the industrialized cities, economic uncertainty, military conflicts and the progressive shortage of vital space and resources in the world, a new commitment to re-establishing free expression and spirituality is growing globally. Many dance expressions such as the Cuban Santería, the Surinamese Winti and the Brazilian Candomblé dances are still marginalized to some degree. However, strongly influenced by African ritual and its emphasis on ecological preservation, these dances demonstrate and promote authentic patterns of physical and mental resistance and adaptability. They are being (re)created and adopted as paradigms of positive practice for psychological well-being in the global North strongly pointing to their relevance in the present times.

Whatever other musings come out of reading the disquisitions in this collection, I hope they will help to reinforce that dance, in all corners of the world, can always act as a fundamental metaphor for the human spirit. Through dance, we can transcend language barriers, build bridges of kinetic knowledge beyond boundaries of race, class or gender, celebrate

the human body, and offer the joy of spontaneous and shared step in our communities, both local and global.

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SPIRITUALITY AND RESISTANCE

CHAPTER 1

KRIYORO DANSI: (RE)PRESENTING THE AFRO-SURINAMESE SPIRITUAL WINTI TRADITION ON STAGE IN SURINAME AND IN THE NETHERLANDS

AMINATA CAIRO

Young people stand around the stage and in the audience, stiff as statues, dressed as winti, Surinamese entities from the spiritual pantheon. It is the fourth presentation of “African Offspring,”¹ a show wherein the dance from the winti spiritual system will be displayed in its full glory. Prior to the onset of the show, audience members will have the opportunity to walk around and inspect the winti up close. It is interesting to observe. People approach the winti with curiosity and inspect them. Some are a little hesitant. I wonder if that is due to the fact that they are living statues or does the proximity to a winti representation so publicly make them uncomfortable. We will never know.

This observation was made during a participant observation activity in Paramaribo, Suriname in September 2015, as part of a larger research study about Kriyoro Dansi, the traditional dance of the Afro-Surinamese. *Kriyoro* specifically refers to the people of African descent that are the descendants of enslaved Africans on the plantations in Suriname. Those that escaped early into the bush and lived in freedom are referred to as Maroons or by their tribal names. Technically, the term *Afro-Surinamese* or *African-Surinamese* can refer to these ethnic groups combined, who are distantly related but have developed separately culturally (Cairo 2007, Lewis 1994, St. Hilaire 2001). Reference to *Afro-Surinamese* in this study solely focuses on the Kriyoro for the sole reason that the dance from the Maroons has been documented and those of the Kriyoro have not (Pakosie 2005, Van Stipriaan 1993). The Afro-Surinamese are one of the largest population groups in a multi-ethnic society, where the other most

¹ Not the actual title.

prominent groups consist of indigenous natives, Hindustani, Javanese, Chinese, Lebanese, Maroons, Boeroe (Dutch descendants), Guyanese, Haitians, and Brazilians. Additionally, the term *slaves* is used purposely to identify the generations who were born into slavery in Suriname and developed and practiced their intermixed creole culture, in distinction from *enslaved Africans* who were the first to be imported and brought their cultural practices with them.

This study originally took place from 2003 to 2005 and produced some initial findings. From 2015 to 2016 the study resumed to go deeper into the data. The dance research did not merely set out to study and document Afro-Surinamese traditional dance; specifically, the dance was researched as a link and display of one's identity. What does the dance tell us about who we are as Afro-Surinamese people? How do we as Afro-Surinamese people use the dance to tell the story of us as a Surinamese people?

From the many dance forms that contribute to the Kriyoro Dansi repertoire, the *Winti dansi*, in other words winti dances, are of particular interest. From the onset when the spiritual system of winti was developed by the slaves out of a syncretism of various African spiritual traditions it was condemned by the colonial powers as idolatrous (Cairo 2007). State and religious institutions condemned the practice, and vilification by the upcoming evangelical churches remains to this day. Shielded in a historical veil of secrecy, taboo, and shame, we are finally in an era where the winti tradition is being brought out into the open. Official acknowledgment by the government, public presentations and discussions about winti, have all become common place in the past twenty-five years, or so. Now winti dance presentations are also becoming part of the public repertoire, in Suriname as well as the Netherlands, where there is a large population of Afro-Surinamese people.

The ethnographic research into the winti dance tradition has included attending *winti prey*, winti dance ceremonies, dance rehearsals, and dance shows in both Suriname and the Netherlands. In addition, I have interviewed choreographers, dancers, and have collected survey questions about the winti dance experience from audience members and performers. Lastly, I organized a special winti dance presentation in the Netherlands and had an audience discussion afterwards about what they had just witnessed.

This project explores how the winti dance is presented on stage in Suriname and in the Netherlands. In the subsequent section the study will compare and contrast performance forms, dancers and audience responses, and choreographic choices based on local and/or national context. As this exploration enlightens about winti in the performance arena, it also gives

insights into how Afro-Surinamese identity is experienced and expressed differently between Netherlands and Suriname based youth. This discussion will close with questions to consider for dance professionals in the Caribbean that have to negotiate complex heritages and contexts.

Youth Performance Groups

There are currently two youth performance groups that are actively presenting winti dances on stage in Suriname and the Netherlands, respectively. The group in Suriname I will refer to as Pembo². Pembo is a department of the one of the oldest Afro-Surinamese cultural organizations in Suriname. It has been in existence for almost seventy years and is a well-respected organization. Numerous Afro-Surinamese organizations in Suriname are offshoots from this original organization. This organization is dedicated to the well-being of the Afro-Surinamese population. It offers programs in cultural arts including song, dance, theater, and fashion, but has also offered programs in educational and economic development. Due to the range of departments, a range of ages is represented from ages as young as six, to people well into their senior age.

Pembo is the evolution of the original research group from 2003. Only three of the original members remain. Most members are in their mid-twenties, while a few members are over the age of thirty. The group is dedicated to preserving and presenting traditional Afro-Surinamese dance. They teach and perform winti dances (spiritual), banya dances (ancestral), and kanga (slavery children's games). They are closely linked to Fembo, a traditional singing group and also a department of the cultural organization. All members of Fembo are also members of Pembo.

The group is self-governed. They teach each other, do their own choreography and are responsible for running and guiding the group. Since the onset they have focused on teaching and performing winti and banya dances. More recently they have also started to teach and offer workshops in kanga.

The Dutch youth performance group I will refer to as Ambos³. Ambos has been in existence since 2002. It is a youth group which was founded by a young man. Except for one member who is in her thirties, all members are in their early and mid-twenties. The organization is dedicated to black youth empowerment, and strongly emphasizes knowledge and pride of one's African heritage. They use theater and dance to empower

² Not the actual name.

³ Not the actual name.

youth and work in communities through school programs, performances, workshops, etc. Group membership consisted initially of an even mix between Dutch-Caribbean and Surinamese youth, now the group and staff mostly consists of Afro-Surinamese people.

The group is led by a professional staff of people who alongside artistic gifts are all educated in social and or community work. They are trained by professional dance educators and choreographers. Their dance repertoire is mostly West-African based, albeit generic, rather than representing specific African populations. Their repertoire consists of theater combined with dance and generally tells stories with contemporary themes.

Performance

Both groups have presented the winti dance in a show to the public. The Surinamese group has presented a show called “African Offspring” since 2014, while the Dutch group has presented a show called “Forces”⁴ since 2013. There were some significant differences in the presentative logistics of both groups. African Offspring lasted on average three-and-a-half hours and one time even close to four hours, whereas Forces lasted one hour and fifteen minutes. As reflected in the duration of the show, African Offspring showed every aspect of winti and ancestral dance that one might encounter at a ceremony. The show consists of a presentation of dances with narrative explanation by a host. Forces shows dance abstractions interwoven in a theatrical play with a contemporary message.

Afro-Surinamese identity is expressed as being linked to the other ethnic groups in African Offspring through inclusion of the Kuli winti (Hindustani ethnic group), Amerindian choreography (Indigenous), and elaborate use of Javanese costuming elements. The Forces show presents Afro-Surinamese identity as closely linked to West Africa. Choreographically they use predominately west-African movements to which the Afro-Surinamese movements are added. They use strong, broad movements with jumps and high energy, as typically seen in west-African dance classes. The head choreographer is a professional male dancer from the Ivory Coast, while the second choreographer is a woman of Surinamese descent.

African Offspring presents choreography which is roughly seventy-five to eighty-eight percent representative of traditional winti dance as seen during winti ceremonies. A large portion of what one would see

⁴ Not the actual title.

underneath a winti *kampu*, a covered winti dance place, one would see again represented on stage during the African Offspring show. The show Forces has more choreography mixed in, and in comparison to African Offspring uses only fifty-five to sixty percent of winti elements. Winti dance in the Forces show was part of a theatrical play about a young man confronted with his life and the role the winti could play to get him back on track.

As stated Pembo is self-governed and does everything themselves from choreography to organizing the show. For the last show (out of a series of four) they did have a director. They used an outside artistic director and a stage director. The stage director was well experienced with theater shows, but not with dance shows. Forces had a (white) director who helped set the stage play. They worked with professional theater stage personnel at each production.

Dance/Choreographic Differences

There are various clear differences in the presentation of the winti dances, which in quick superficial judgement might be ascribed to one being more traditional than the other. However, there are a number of factors and context related issues that affect choreographic and presentational choices. Ensuing is some discussion of choreographic differences and some analysis as what has contributed to these differences.

The African Offspring used many dancers, approximately thirty individuals. Numerous dancers joined the group just to participate in the show. Given the large amount of numbers that were performed, all dancers were used to the maximum level. Forces used their standard company members, about 10 dancers total. The company performed the show with two new members who recently were admitted to the company. These new members did not participate in all aspects of every dance. Pembo, who is self-governed, felt pressured to show every aspect of the dance culture and hence choreographed accordingly. Ambos, which has a professional staff, though dedicated to present the winti dance tradition, has a long-term vision of how this particular performance will be part of a series of performances, all dedicated to promoting the culture. They work with a schedule that includes applying for subsidies, scheduling performances, up to a year in advance, while including planning for new shows.

Both groups used spatial patterns that differed greatly from each other. Forces, which was heavily (generic) west-African movement based used spatial patterns that are generally seen in African dance companies. There were a lot of movements in unison, faced to the front. Dancers were