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The Diasporic Re-membering Space of Jean Appolon's Afro-Haitian Dance Classes

DASHA CHAPMAN

Saturday Ritual

On Saturday afternoons in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Haiti is brought to life through the moving bodies of sixty students in the Haitian dance classes taught by Jean Appolon. Once thought of as a “dancer’s dance class,” these weekly classes have grown into enormous community celebrations. Appolon draws students from many cultural backgrounds ranging from young children to 60-year-olds. Some participants are Haitian or Haitian American, but many are not. Why does this dance—this Saturday class ritual—matter? I argue here that Appolon’s class offers a space that “re-members” Haiti in ways that expand and extend the body of the Haitian nation. Appolon’s class is a site where Haiti is innervated; Haiti’s revolutionary promise for black life is potentialized and transfigured by a danced collective dedicated to gathering each week in the rhythms of the Haitian *lwa*, or Vodou spirits.

Born and raised in Port-au-Prince, and based in Boston for over two decades, Appolon has become a central force in both the Haitian cultural landscape and the Boston contemporary dance scene. Appolon’s weekly Afro-Haitian classes take place at The Dance Complex in Cambridge—a historic five-story building in the busy center of Central Square, a neighborhood well known

for its eclectic diversity. As a hub for African diaspora dance, The Dance Complex situates Appolon’s classes alongside others labeled African, Afro-Cuban, Sabar, Samba, and Capoeira. Many of Appolon’s students take these other classes, but anyone who has ever encountered the Saturday class knows that something is distinct in what Appolon brings to life.

This unique quality registers what Appolon and participants call “spirit”—a semantically slippery term with shifting significance. In the context of class, “spirit” is grounded in Vodou’s ancestral wisdoms and divine principles, yet spirit is also enlivened by what dance theorist Kariamu Welsh-Asante identified as a “commonality” in African and African diaspora dance practices: the intrinsic imagined and mythic relation to an ancestral Africa that coheres and takes on meanings through dance.¹ This danced remembering is not about the specificity of an event or action; rather, it is about purpose, legacy and desire: “The African dancer remembers all others who danced the dance and why.”² This form of memory carries debts. Debts that, for some, can be identified and appeased through dancing in Appolon’s classes.

It is precisely this quality of spirit, emerging from the *lwa* but transfigured in this class context, that contributes to the diversity of Appolon’s world. A deeply entrenched divide exists between Haitians who embrace Vodou as a life-sustaining worldview and practice, and Haitians who do not. Vodou’s historical stigmatization weighs on the class by placing it in contentious relation to the significant Haitian diaspora in Boston. Due to Appolon’s concerted efforts to share information about his dance work with Boston’s

Haitian community over the years, the classes are now almost one-third Haitian. Many come to dance, some simply to observe. A few are Vodouyzan; others respect the religion but do not explicitly “serve” the spirits. This Haitian presence, alongside the rhythms and dances shared, make Saturday class feel like a Haitian community event.

Boston’s Haitian community has historically differentiated itself from African Americans and other Caribbean immigrant groups.³ This legacy of de-alignment should not eclipse the many instances of racial solidarity and collaboration between Haitians/Haitian Americans and black Bostonians throughout the past five decades. However, acknowledging Haitian separation and differentiation allows a fuller recognition of the importance of Appolon’s work to create a space that forges bonds across African diasporic difference. This class offers one way of acknowledging that Haitian dance, and Haiti in the diaspora, cannot be thought of in isolation from other diasporic configurations. Particularly foundational is the long history of African Americans holding Haiti up as the beacon of black independence and potential—a mode of revolutionary blackness that shined black back to Americans.⁴ These legacies of racial formation and historical imagining materialize through the bodily labor of dancing in Appolon’s classes.

Two Scenes of Diasporic Resonance

November 2008. Class bursts. The intensity of the musicians’ Ibo rhythm has generated an ecstatic palpable energy. 100 people pack the room, riding the pulse of the rhythm. Dancers move in lines of four

toward the musicians, then recede along the sides of the room. Observers crowd at the front watching, singing. Ibo is the dance that celebrates the historical memory of Haiti’s Revolution. Appolon leads us through classic Ibo steps that enact the breaking of chains and through constraint. His distinct choreography encourages dancers toward their physical limits. Limbs propel from torsos parallel to the ground. Arms and legs repeatedly slice outward from shackled to free. The studio vibrates at an incredibly high pitch. A chant begins to rise: *Obama ... Obama ... Obama ... Obama!* The weekend before Barack Obama’s first election, the class marshals the kinetics of black freedom born from Haiti’s dance of Revolution to create an audacious revolution in dance about politics.

September 2014. We dance Banda, Gede’s hip-focused dance. The Gede are the Haitian spirits of the dead: raunchy bawdy tricksters that rule over the domains of death and sex, fertility and healing. This particular Banda movement has us sauntering down the lines sideways, eyes cast toward the drummers. Our back arm folds up to cradle the head and expose the right side of the body. Our left arm and hand point an index finger toward the orchestra of musicians. Hips move in opposition to the feet, swaying back when the front foot steps forward, scooping front with the back foot. While in some Haitian rhythms it can be tricky to hear where and how to step the feet within the complex sonic components, Banda’s relentless pace demands a square sync with the downbeat. I dance behind an elder in the Boston African dance

community, a full-bodied confident black woman who has been dancing to drums for decades. I can sense her enjoying a groove, speaking back to the drummers with her pelvis. I see in her movements a syncopated interpretation of Banda's rapid pace that is incorporating an off-beat tailbone flick of Senegalese Sabar and a Malian groundedness, bouncing vertically in place of Banda's side-to-side sensibility. She is feeling it though; it's just a different feel than a typical Banda, interpreted through other African techniques and bodily listening. Appolon approaches us and recognizes her flow: "YESSS! Work it out!"

"Haiti is here, Haiti is not here." These dance classes bring to life what Brazilian musician activists Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil first sang in their 1995 song "Haiti." *How* and *why* is Haiti simultaneously "here" and "not here"? These vignettes point to two ways Appolon's classes foster complex diasporic connections through Haitian danced principles. They also point to the ways the political paradox of Haiti's presence/absence is also a spiritual one: possession is also always a dispossession. Afro-Haitian principles of Appolon's movements accumulate meaning through individual corporeal interpretations: Gede Banda's circular articulated movements of the hips and butt get transposed into a West African syncopated flick of the tailbone, and the swinging release of the limbs in Ibo become a generative energetic summons for Obama's presidential election. How is diasporic resonance facilitated by Appolon's pedagogies in ways that perform the work of memory and emplacement?

Appolon's Vodou Transmissions

Haitian folkloric dance developed out of Vodou ceremonial aesthetics and peasant life during Haiti's *indigenisme* national cultural movement in the 1930s and 1940s. Dances and their associated rhythms, stories, songs and costuming, were codified from rural and sacred practices into recognizable, repeatable forms for the stage. Through this process of "folkloricization," ritual choreographies and music were intentionally separated from Vodou's long-maligned and persecuted practitioners so as to create a "respectable" art form out of Afro-Haitian ways of life.⁵ Over the decades, Haitian artists have adopted this cultural repertoire as a resource for inspiration and strength despite Vodou's continued stigmatization. Twenty-first-century Haitian dance is still often referred to as "folklore," yet is continuously re-made through each individual artist's creative formations. And while Vodou grounds Haitian dance, each dance artist who teaches it does so with varying levels of connection to Vodou practices. Appolon, rather uniquely, brings his experiential knowledge as a Vodouyizan into his teaching such that these community gatherings cultivate the distinct sensory experience of collective ritual: a class that "feels like a Vodou ceremony."⁶

Appolon rigorously studied folklore in Port-au-Prince in the late 1980s with Lavinia Williams at the École Nationale des Arts (ENARTS) and with Viviane Gauthier at her school on Rue M. He danced against the will of his strict parents who, like many, associated folklore with Haiti's rural poor and dancing with male homosexuality. In the early 1990s, Appolon's father was

targeted in the violent political chaos that followed President Aristide's first term. His family was often hiding or on the run, and Appolon's fast and strong choreography carries with it frantic kinetic memories from that time.⁷ His father was ultimately killed—a loss that still haunts Appolon each day. Appolon was 16 when he came to the United States—one of many fleeing Haiti's *ensekirite* (political insecurity). He reunited with his mother, who had already been living in Boston for three years, and once settled in Cambridge he pursued dance in high school and local programs. Upon graduation he moved to New York to attend the Alvin Ailey and Joffrey Ballet Schools. Appolon's years of Haitian folkloric training were reflected back to him in the Horton and Dunham techniques he learned at Ailey. Now, in his classes in Cambridge, Appolon integrates this modern training into his transmissions of the Haitian repertoire—recirculating the feedback loops that have historically shaped both folkloric and American modern dance techniques.⁸

Due to entrenched class and race-based bias against Vodou and the Haitian peasantry, Haitian folkloric dance is socially undervalued, at best recognized rhetorically as cultural heritage. Dance pedagogy, in turn, often instills a disjuncture between folklore and Vodou in order to elide negative associations: movement is offered with neither context nor explicit connections to the dance forms' Vodou depth. This absence of explanation is a method of survival and protection that reflects Vodou's emergence as a clandestine religion among slaves and the technologies of masking developed to transmit its force under duress. In the

performance/practice of the dance forms in contemporary creative contexts, however, separation doesn't always hold: delineations between dance and trance, religion and ritual, specific spirits (*lwa*) and "spirit" are constantly transgressed and confused. These blurred lines create the conditions of possibility for Appolon's classes.⁹ Discursive silence is supplemented by the dense sensory-somatic experience of a Vodou ceremony or "dance" (*dans vodou* in Kreyòl): the battery of drums, an altar with photos and mementos placed atop the room's piano on particular days, the pungent smell of Florida Water (perfumed water used prominently in ritual) sprinkled at the feet of the drums before collective dancing, and Appolon's embodied knowledge of the *lwa*.

Vodou pays homage to the ancestors and the spiritual principles of the *lwa* through the embodied transmission of *konesans*—the knowledge that is a vital force for living a meaningful and harmonious life. Religious scholar Elizabeth McAlister tells us, "The physical body is at the center of Vodou. [...] The body is always the site of instruction and learning, as Vodou is an initiatory system whose *konesans* or 'knowledge' is arrived at through direct experience."¹⁰ Appolon was initiated in 2006 as a *serviteur*—one way Vodouyzan refer to themselves: "one who serves the spirits." Appolon's choreographic translations and inventions are transmitted through his Vodou-trained body; a body that incorporates the *lwa*, adept at ritual choreographies.

Vodou embodiment, and thus Vodou epistemology, are foundational to Appolon's dance culture. His artistry demonstrates what feminist theorist M. Jacqui Alexander

frames as “the idea of intimacy between personhood and Sacred accompaniment.”¹¹ The invisible, immaterial force of spirit, often gathered in recognizable constellations of energy that manifest principles associated with specific Vodou spirits, is imagined through the body in ways that inform participants’ understandings of themselves in both the class and in a larger historical perspective. To take spirit and its associated memories seriously—as ways of knowing that “make the world intelligible”—is, as Alexander argues, a form of “radical self-possession” and ultimately a praxis of liberation.¹² Spirit becomes a mode of accessing transgenerational memory, illuminating times before and their possible futures.

Dancing in/with/as spirit connects one to feelings of the past that don’t exist in the text-based archive.¹³ Forms of epic memory tied to both spirituality and liberation are transposed in the Haitian dance forms in ways that stem from the Middle Passage and Vodou practice. In Appolon’s teaching, these forms refract through contemporary memories and struggles as well. Novelist and theorist Wilson Harris proposes that African diasporic movement and spirit enact an embodied historical imagination that can resituate body, space and time.¹⁴ Collective bodily practice as a form of diasporic re-membering not only transforms temporal and spatial disjunctures through performance but institutes a new type of space. Practices of spirit, then, are practices of memory that—following Harris—disassemble and reconfigure space and time through the kinesthetically imagining body.

Ibo’s Diffusions, Freedoms, and Extending Potentials

A foundational aspect of Haitian dance that sets it apart from other diasporic forms is the centrality of the Haitian Revolution and its defiant memory cast in movement. While many Afro-Caribbean movement forms have warrior dances, the proud warrior spirit Ogou maintains a historical specificity in Haiti, and in one prominent manifestation is Revolutionary icon Jean-Jacques Dessalines.¹⁵ Petwo, the fiery dance of rebellious slaves, and Ibo, the dance that celebrates Revolutionary triumph over slavery, are particular to Haiti and call forth the nation’s specific if mythologized past. The Haitian Revolution functions as a central epic memory that makes Haiti and its dances resonate deeply with African diaspora dancers. These dances offer kinesthetic address to the structural injuries born of a racialized past.

The unfinished pasts that anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot called “unthinkable” histories are danced in Ibo.¹⁶ Ibo is often described in Haiti as “the dance that breaks the chains. It is a dance of war, from when our country was in slavery.” The dance and rhythm are named after the Ibo nation of Africa—known for choosing self-determination, defiantly refusing the fate of enslavement by taking their lives into their own hands. The dance’s movements physically re-enact the breaking of slavery’s shackles that bound feet, wrists and spirits. These movements derive from when *nou pran libète nou*—“from when we took our freedom.”

An African American dancer and long-time student of Appolon’s since his first days of

teaching shared with me the vital imperative she connects to dancing certain dances, particularly Ibo:

When I'm doing the more fierce dances—Petwo, Ibo, Dahomey—it's just kind of a presence that I feel. It's a presence. Me, personally, I have a great connection to those ancestors who were enslaved. And I feel like it's my duty—it's one of my duties to honor them. And honor them through these Haitian dances. Especially Ibo, because it's about that: being able to dance that experience of slavery and then breaking the chains. [...] I definitely feel very close to my African American slave ancestors, and, yeah, the experience of dancing is just... WHOA. I can feel, I can channel, I channel them at that time. I channel their emotions. I can feel what it felt like. And I think that is part of the karma of slavery—that enduring wound that is still such a wound in this country. [Those spirits...] need to be acknowledged, they need to be understood, their emotions need to be felt and experienced and honored and released. And I definitely feel a special connection to being able to do that.¹⁷

History does not do justice to the emotions of those enslaved. This dancer envisions her dancing in the service of experiencing those slaves' emotions—*her* slave ancestors' emotions. These emotions are both painful and defiant. Inherited memory accessed through embodied practice can attempt to host unresolved and haunting feelings. Pasts that are so often blanketed as social death or dispossession acquire an affective and emotional depth through dancing. In some

ways, this enactment occasions what cultural historian Saidiya Hartman has called “redressing the pained body.”¹⁸ The kinesthetic experience makes way for emotional justice. It is an emotional knowledge born through movement with the potential to address the “enduring wound” and afterlives of slavery.¹⁹

Re-membering through dancing brings to presence the fact that slavery is *an ending that is not over*.²⁰ Ibo's kinetic and sonic pedagogies teach that both history and liberation are danced, and the revolution's call has not been realized. It must continue to be re-membered. This danced rememory as re-membering calls forth the revolutionary call declared by Toussaint Louverture, then later Jean-Jacques Dessalines, in shockingly visionary constitutions that established liberation as the precondition for humanity and thus the possibility of freedom. Ibo, the dance that remembers the success of the Revolution's emancipatory event, offers a kinesthetics of liberation that produces senses and sentiments of freedom. It is a dance that calls forth Haiti's foundational stance of black life as human life—*tout moun se moun*.

Dancing Gede, Making Haitian Spaces

Black life in Haitian terms, though, is always more-than-human, accompanied by spirits and in relation to the dead. Appolon ensures his students hear the injunction of the dead carried through dancing, particularly in Maskawon (Yanvalou Gede) and Banda, two dances for the Gede spirits of the dead. Dance researcher Celia Weiss Bambara has discussed stagings of Yanvalou and Banda choreographies as expressions of diasporic consciousness, unification, and liberation.²¹

Whereas Yanvalou is the foundational rhythm and dance that begins Vodou ceremonies to respectfully salute the spirits and prepare bodies for devotion, Banda is always played at the end for Gede, who shows up disruptive and raucous, creating laughter and offering counsel. Mirroring the typical order of a Vodou ceremony, Appolon begins his classes with Yanvalou and usually closes with Gede's dances Maskawon or Banda. During Gede's month of November, Appolon's classes become their own *Fet Gede* honoring the dead through dancing. For these well-attended special classes, participants wear Gede's colors of black, white, and purple ready "to really celebrate our passed loved ones."²² The majority of Appolon's students understand that Gede's characteristically erotic movements are grounded by their sacred significance and cultural meanings. This dancing connects a sensually expressive body to ancestors, celebrates the capacity for life, insists on death as a part of life's cycle, and generates healing. The dead come to mean and matter in Appolon's class in his focus on the resonance of ancestral legacies in the present by consistently dancing Gede, in his classes around January 12 commemorating Haiti's devastating 2010 earthquake, in constant Facebook posts and in-class announcements that acknowledge contemporary traumas in his extended transnational community, and more recently, in recognition of the death of unarmed black men on the streets and sidewalks of the United States.²³

For Appolon, dancing Gede's *gouyad*—a focused circling of the pelvis and accented articulation of the hips—is to recognize the close link between death and life, sex and

play, survival and movement. Gede is the central healer in Vodou; a transformation artist whose potential is found in his humor and erotics. Dancing Gede's fluid hip-work in Appolon's classes awakens sensuality in honor of the dead to summon healing for present and future times. While Gede's *gouyad* isn't gendered feminine, many women in class interpret and embody these pelvic movements as gestures of female sexuality and empowerment. Appolon creates space to explore both gender and sexuality on an individual level for each dancer. He aims to teach "freedom of expression, freedom of spirituality" in which dancing collectively creates "an *ensemble*, rather than just a technique."²⁴ This ensemble is a Glissantian *relation*, in and through Appolon's kinetic and affective guidance.²⁵

Appolon dances himself as a powerfully effeminate gay man. His torso and belly are thick. His movements are smooth and fierce. Appolon's force comes through the amazingly fluid rapidity with which he can ripple his spine or vibrate his shoulders. And it is through relation to this thick and virtuosic body that his students channel healing, liberation, sexuality and memory. Appolon never speaks about his sexuality in class, yet it certainly underscores the open environment he creates for his students. His movements play into the effeminate: a rising hip, a sidelong gaze, a hand placed lightly on the waist, the angle of a broken wrist as knees swivel back and forth. His teaching of the Afro-Haitian repertoire is inflected with a commanding yet fluid effeminacy, facilitating a performance of femininity that converges with Gede's eroticism—remarkably, an eroticism traditionally coded as phallic.

Appolon's pedagogies of freedom intervene in the heteromale and patriarchal configurations of nation that deeply underscore "proper" performances of Haitian-ness.²⁶ His teaching reorients how "Haiti" comes to life. This is particularly evident in Appolon's *JAE (Jean Appolon Expressions)* summer dance institute in Port-au-Prince—an annual month of intensive workshops he teaches each July. In that urban Haitian classroom environment, Appolon allows the many young male dancers to freely express themselves in whatever gender expression they choose—which often results in very effeminate embodiments for a number of them who might identify as *masisi* (a Kreyòl term meaning homosexual or effeminate male).²⁷ Free to explore the Gede principles within Appolon's coded-feminine movements, these dances then inform performances of gender both on and off the dance floor. Appolon adamantly cultivates *ekspresyon* (bodily expression) in his Port-au-Prince and Boston classes, continuously calling out "*Eksprime!*" or "*EXPRESS!*" in both contexts. Whereas in Boston a space of feminine exploration awakens repressed sensuality and releases stored experience from tight crevices in hip joints and knotted tissue, in Port-au-Prince bodily expression fostered through the feminine radically destabilizes the aggressively gendered demands that constrict social comportment and behavior. Appolon's pedagogy in Port-au-Prince, while rigorous and physically demanding, expands the limits of Haitian gendered propriety. As such, Appolon cultivates a radical "Haiti" that can only materialize through his collective dance worlds.²⁸

Haiti is Here, Haiti is Not Here

Most of the Haitians that take the class they're really in love, they feel like they can find Haiti when they cannot go to Haiti. Some have not been for like 10, 13 years—... they say, "It's like I'm in Haiti again." It really brings them comfort—even if they haven't been to Haiti in many years, they feel like they find home, every Saturday.²⁹

Quite a few of Appolon's Haitian students can't or don't return to Haiti for various political, familial, or economic reasons. One gay Haitian man who has been dancing with Appolon for over 15 years refuses to return to Haiti because of the homophobia he experienced as a teenager. Some have families who left in political exile; others have no close relatives living in Haiti anymore. Recently, diasporic Haitians traveling back have been targeted in violent crimes or kidnappings. Saturday class engenders "home"; a displaced home that cannot exist "in" Haiti itself.

Appolon's dance class also activates a Haiti not subsumed by dominant narratives of "poorest country in the Western Hemisphere," atavistic "Voodoo" culture, ungovernability, and teeming masses of bare life. While class is an "event in space" that allows for "new moorings and mappings,"³⁰ the class space is still affected by the gravitational pull and expansion of what literary historian Carole Boyce Davies calls Haiti's "halo."³¹ Appolon tells me, "Class, every time it happens, always something special happens. It's the only place I can make people see Haiti, the true Haiti, the *real* Haiti. It's only that class."³² What is this

“real Haiti,” so alive in the class? The real Haiti for Appolon is a Vodou-grounded Haiti. Appolon is more interested in bringing the communal healing from Vodou into the dance space than shaping bodies in specific ways under his choreographic command.³³ Haiti, then, emerges as ensemble: a Haiti built alive again, and again, assembled from gatherings of old and new.

This manifestation of another Haiti cultivates what I have been referring to as “remembering.” The hyphen here indicates the repetition required to build the body, over and over, in Haiti’s danced histories. Remembering is not always based on a specific memory; rather, it is a manifesting of pasts through the body; an embodiment in the service of memory. Some participants in these dance classes aren’t linked directly to memories of Haiti, nor may they even know which pasts they are dancing. But dancing these pasts nonetheless brings these pasts to presence, and they live in the body’s sensations, vibrations, and feelings. Appolon’s classes give life to a limb of the fragmented body of the nation.

When Appolon tells me his class is a place to “feel Haiti,” I understand this as an imperative to examine what Haiti feels like, and how it is that a nation, its belongings and historical imagination can be felt. This imperative reframes conventional understandings of the dynamics of place, and underscores how diasporas exist as they do because of imperial interventions elsewhere. “Haiti” simultaneously performs a haunting presence and instantiates an absence—a being here but being there, a location that proliferates. *Haiti is here—Haiti is not here*. Performance theorist Barbara Browning’s response to Veloso

and Gil’s song explores the connective consciousness around Haiti as both figure and reality of black bodily experience, whether we consider black presence in Bahia, Port-au-Prince, Kingston, or Los Angeles.³⁴ Today, we must add New Orleans, Ferguson, New York City, Baltimore, the Haiti-Dominican Republic border, and countless more sites where Haiti is/isn’t. This present-absent “Haiti” is conjured by the forces of global capitalism, systemic racism, and eternal violence that persist. But this “Haiti” is also materialized by the rhythm and dance that persistently beat toward freedom.

Dancers in Appolon’s classes take Haitian worldviews into their bodies—communally honoring the dead while exploring gender/sexuality through Gede’s *gouyad*, or reenacting the slave experience and revolutionary struggle in lbo. These pasts are processed kinesthetically, whether or not there is an intentional or imagined commitment to memorializing them. Appolon’s collective cultivation also produces a prismatic call for the mattering of black life. It offers corporeal re-membering of Haitian-African diasporic histories that continue to be underacknowledged. The political promise of freedom is actively made in these dances, in the radical self-possession and re-membering of bodies in motion. Reconstructing pasts requires making anew; a facing backwards that visions a densely relational present. This requires assembling a different kind of body—a collective body that bears past violences, celebrates defiance in the face of oppression, and attempts to host the unresolved business of history. But this danced re-membering is always ephemeral and always unfinished, a paradoxical performative that calls for the

repeated practice of dancing, together as *ensemble*. Haiti is here, Haiti is not here; Haiti is felt, and it is yet to come.

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Notes

1. Kariamu Welsh-Asante, "Commonalities in African Dance," in *Moving History/Dancing Cultures*, eds. Ann Dils and Ann Cooper Albright (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001 [1986]), 144.

2. Kariamu Welsh-Asante, "The Zimbabwean Dance Aesthetic: Senses, Canons, Characteristics," in *African Dance*, edited by Kariamu Welsh-Asante (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 213.

3. Regine O. Jackson, "The Uses of Diaspora among Haitians in Boston," in *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora*, ed. Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2011).

4. For example, see Mary Renda, "Race, Revolution, and National Identity," in *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation & the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

5. The Haitian folkloric movement, directed by the tripartite interests of ethnologists, the state,

and young Haitian bourgeois performers, emerged in the aftermath of the racist hegemony of the US Occupation and was central in elevating Haiti's African roots to the level of national culture. Folklore, however, developed in conjunction with aggressive "anti-superstitious campaigns" that prohibited Vodou and violently persecuted its practitioners. See Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) and Lois Wilcken, *Music Folklore among Haitians in New York: Staged Representations and the Negotiation of Identity* (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1991).

6. Interview with Jean Appolon, June 20, 2014.

7. Interview with Appolon, January 11, 2013.

8. See Millery Polyné, "To Carry the Dance of the People Beyond: Jean-Léon Destiné, Lavinia Williams and Danse Folklorique Haïtienne," in *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870–1964* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

9. On the blurred lines between the sacred and folkloric, see Katherine Hagedorn, *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

10. Elizabeth McAlister, "Love, Sex, and Gender Embodied: The Spirits of Vodou," in *Love, Sex, and Gender in the World Religions*, eds. Joséph Runzo and Nancy M. Martin (Oxford: One World, 2000), 131. See also Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahhian Candomblé* (University of Illinois Press, 2005).

11. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 301.

12. In Alexander's conceptualization, liberation requires a radical repairing of self through spirit because the socio-psychic misalignment produced by the long shadows of slavery and colonialism demands sacred reparation. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 282.

13. The archive, according to Diana Taylor, is the lettered discursive production of the past as well as the tangible repository of documents from which History has been constructed. This she contrasts with the repertoire of embodied cultural memory, which is necessarily performed. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

14. Harris emphasizes that both Vodou ritual and forms of Afro-Atlantic movement "issued from a state of cramp to articulate a new growth" served as redress to cultural dislocation and socio-historical amputation. See Wilson Harris, "History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and the Guianas," *Caribbean Quarterly* 54, nos. 1/2 (2008): 12–13.

15. Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Karen McCarthy Brown, "Systematic Remembering, Systematic Forgetting," in *Africa's Ogun*, ed. Sandra T. Barnes, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

16. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

17. Interview, March 24, 2013.

18. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 51.

19. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Macmillan, 2008).

20. Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1997).

21. Celia Weiss Bambara, *Transfiguring Diaspora: Travel and the Politics of Haitian Dance* (PhD diss., University of California Riverside, 2008.)

22. Facebook post, November 2, 2013.

23. The day after the indictment of Mike Brown's murderer in November 2014, Appolon called for dancers to come to class to "stand strong together and say no to injustice and racism!" Saturday's class became an opportunity for a healing memorial gathering. Appolon increasingly posts calls like this to harness class energy for fortification as response to assaults on black experience.

24. Interview with Appolon, June 20, 2014.

25. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

26. See Jana Braziel, *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Mimi Sheller, *Citizenship From Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

27. *Masisi* is most often slung as a derogatory term, but in recent years has been reversely appropriated among a small cohort of Haitian LGBT activists, and among gay men themselves, much like "faggot" in US English. Nevertheless, the word's negative charge cannot be underscored enough; it still remains a problematic way of referring to homosexual men in Haiti.

28. Appolon tackles Haitian queerness and homophobic violence in *Angaje*, his suite of choreographies premiered by his Boston-based company JAE at Boston Center for the Arts, March 2015.

29. Interview with Appolon, June 20, 2014.

30. J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxxiii.

31. In her conceptualization of Caribbean spaces, "contoured beyond assumed fixed geographies," Boyce Davies considers the

energetics of the halo as a logic by which we can understand the iconicity of Haiti: “an energy field with gravitational pull” that also exhibits “a series of readable energies that radiate visibly and invisibly outward.” Boyce Davies, “Haiti I Can See Your Halo!”: Living on Faultlines,” in *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from Twilight Zones* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

32. Interview with Appolon, January 11, 2013.

33. Appolon’s choreographic imagination is channeled into his dance company *JAE*.

34. Browning, *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

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