

Editorial

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Crowds of mourners celebrate the life of Nelson Mandela outside his Houghton home on 6 December 2013 (*Wynn and EWN, 2013*).

‘We dance when we protest, we dance when we bury the dead, and we dance to celebrate new life.’

Lliane Loots, Artistic Director of Flatfoot Dance Company, Opening Night Address at Jomba Contemporary Dance Festival, Durban, South Africa 2005.

It was in the week that Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela passed away that I was drafting this introduction to the special edition on popular and social dance practices in Africa and of the African Diaspora. I tried to write whilst feeling very, very, far away from my homeland of South Africa. I wanted to fly home but either the airfare prices were too expensive or there were no available seats. I was constantly on Facebook

communicating with friends and family who were equally saddened by the loss of our first (Black nationally elected) President. There were pictures on Facebook of crowds singing and dancing outside Mandela's homes in Soweto and in Houghton, mourning a life gone and celebrating a life lived. Some of my friends were in these photos dancing the *toyi-toyi*, a South African protest dance; I wanted to dance with them. Days later, at the state funeral for Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela at the FNB National Stadium in Johannesburg, I listened to the BBC commentators noting how South Africans had danced over the last few days; the international press appeared to be somewhat bemused by these dancing and singing crowds. I returned to organising the special edition with a reinvigorated zeal of advocating the importance of studying dance from Africa and dance of the African Diaspora as a way to understand personal, social, and cultural experience, and how the dancing body remains a powerful form of expression, not only to South Africans, but to all. 'Dance, as an embodied social practice and highly visual aesthetic form, powerfully melds considerations of materiality and representation together' (Desmond, 1997: 2).

Over the last few decades, many universities have begun to incorporate a number of African or African Diasporic dance styles into their performing arts curriculum. My desire to produce this journal was born out of hoping to add to the academic resources available to those interested in the study and practice of the many dance styles and forms from Africa or those associated with the African Diaspora. As Asante points out '[t]he great paucity of work specifically focused on African dance [and the African Diaspora] creates a scholarly void in the field of dance' (Welsh Asante, 2000: 1). In addition, I often found myself frustrated with the narrow knowledge and naive homogenisation of dances from Africa or the African Diaspora. I have also felt irritated and at times angered by how due to 'colonial domination, and its permutation into neo-colonial yokes...Africa and dance make a good duet, supporting each other in the making of stereotypes of primitiveness' (Castaldi, 2006: 1-2). I have experienced many occasions where dances from Africa are reduced to a particular gesture, or motif, or an action, or sometimes the mere movement of a particular body part. This is not only problematic and perhaps even racist or xenophobic, but is definitely extremely simplistic. As I am involved in this area of academia, I have a responsibility to share knowledge of the many dances from Africa, and the African Diaspora, and in so doing, hopefully, reduce these instances. Therefore, the main objective for this special edition of *African Performance Review* is to provide a useful introduction to and a survey of current popular and social

dance practices from Africa, and or of the African Diaspora, to a wider international community of students, scholars and practitioners.

This is not an easy task. Africa is the second largest continent and Sidney Littlefield Kasfir highlights 'the continent's extreme cultural diversity' when he writes that '[w]hile colonialism and postcolonial state building have attempted to weave eight hundred or more language groups into fifty-plus national identities' (Kasfir, 1999: 7), this special edition of the journal cannot represent all the popular and social dances from Africa. Nor can the journal include the total variety of African Diasporic dance practices. This edition aims to not single out any one particular popular or social African or African Diasporic dance style, nor a specific geographical location, nor a dance company or dance artist that makes use of popular and social dance forms in their choreography; rather this edition hopes to stress how diverse and multifaceted popular and social dance practices in and out of Africa are. I hope that this edition highlights for the reader the plurality that is in play, and perhaps how it might be best to speak of, from now on, of African dances and African Diaspora dances and to stress the variety of these myriad dance forms with an acute awareness of their commonalities and differences, large and small. Therefore, in structuring the special edition, I have arranged the articles in a way much like a crowd which dances simultaneously as a community and as individuals. Similarly, the articles in this edition make it apparent how there is on-going relationship between the popular and the social, the rural and the urban, and the historical and the contemporary.

Jean E. Johnson Jones in 'Mapping the Nama Stap: Reed-Flutes and Nama Stap' investigates the link between the current dance practice of the *Nama Stap* (Step) of the Nama youth of Southern Africa and the dance's history. There is a sense of an archeological dig in this article as Johnson Jones excavates the contemporary practice of the Nama Stap digging for traces of its origins as embodied in the young dancers. Patrick Campbell's article focuses on how Brazilian theatre company, Grupo NATA, appropriates specific aspects of the *Candomblé* in order to stage their performance work. This is an example of how dance with its roots in social and religious practice has transitioned to the stage. In fact, many of the articles in this special edition are about an uncovering or a tracing of the journey from off stage to onstage, from a nightclub to a football field, or from Africa to other geographical locations due to various aspects of the African Diaspora, both historical and contemporary. However, these journeys are not one-way. This movement is back and forth and forth and back, and sometimes there is a heavier accent on one part of the journey and a finer emphasis on another, and sometimes it is organic and at other times it is prescribed or it is forced. There is no original to copy, or

version one and version one point two, and rather it might be best to consider the journeys as all unique, all distinct, at times sharing a geography, at times sharing an aesthetic, and sometimes you just cannot put your finger on it, but you recognise something when watching somebody else dance it, or you feel it when you are dancing. And, it is this that makes dance so remarkable, that it is primarily about our physical ability to express complex experiences and to enable those watching to recognise echoes of their own encounters or an event that they have been unable to describe in words. Many might not remember the speech given by Nelson Mandela in Cape Town after he was released from prison in 1990, but we all can remember him walking with his then wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, holding each other's hands and both raising their fists to the sky in the Anti-Apartheid/Struggle salute, and if you cannot, go and look it up now and you will witness the inherent power of the physical image to capture what words cannot.

Terry Bright K. Ofuso and Tabitha Dei focus on the *Azonto* Dance, a dance style/form that is to be found in the nightclubs in Accra, studied in the University of Ghana, on the football fields during the World Cup Football Tournament in South Africa, and in the music videos flickering on televisions in London homes. Their article illustrates the fluidity between the streets and the stage, and between the clubs – places of fun – and the university – places of study, and hopefully places of fun too. This is a dance style that is causing ripples across music videos, nightclubs, schools, and football fields and is now part of the higher education curriculum. Using her embodied knowledge of Belly Dance, Siouxsie Cooper explores the politics of the dancing body and the close correlation between the movement and its contextual surroundings. Cooper, using Brenda Dixon Gottschild's (1996) concept of Africanist aesthetics, attempts to uncover the Africanist presence in this dance form highlighting how, on many occasions in the West there has been a fetishisation of this dance style, and most importantly, the article places this dance style with its roots in Egypt within the trope of African and African Diasporic dance practices. Often the history and contribution of the African-Arab is sidelined in studies of African dances.

Shani Bruno tracks the journeys and connections that occur across Capoeira, Breaking, West Africa, Brazil, and the United States of America making use of the Trickster which captures the upside down, side-to-side, ready to respond, ready to move, active agents, and playful but possibly dangerous practice of capoeiristas and B-boys and B-girls. Tia-Monique Uzor's article 'The Evolving Face of the *Iwa Akwa*' is another example of one of the many articles in this special edition where the author has conducted original primary documentary research in order to record an

African or African Diasporic dance practice. Uzor studies the *Iwa Akwa* festival in Nigeria and traces the transition from the historical to the contemporary, and how the historical is often present in the contemporary. The article unpacks the connection between the local and the global and the uneasy tension between the traditional and the popular. It is a wrought task to express these connections and tensions through the use of text or verbal language, and it is here that the dancing body is able to convey this complex experience and the nuances to be found in these debates and terms. Sylvanus Kwashie Kuwor, with a focus on Adzido Pan-African Dance Ensemble in Britain, investigates the problematic reduction and marginalisation of African dance practices outside of Africa to modes of entertainment with little artistic credibility. This often resulted in their social and cultural contribution to their host country being overlooked. The influence of African and African-American dance practices to the dominant cultures in Europe and North-America is surveyed in Carla Trim-Vamben's article. She explores the appropriation of House Dance from its roots in the nightclubs of Detroit to its use in choreography on the theatre stages of London and examines the routes of this dance style with its strong connection to a particular genre of music and a social scene. Trim-Vamben stresses the interconnectedness of the movement of the dancing body to the music, and its link to the African-Diaspora. Carmen Roman in her article 'The Danced Spirituality of African Descendants in Peru' explores the role dance plays in Afro-Catholic celebrations and uncovers the complex and uneasy relationship between enslaved Africans and the Christian religion of their enslavers. Roman's description of her ethnographic field research allows the reader to be almost part of the festive crowd observing those involved in the *Atajo de Negritos* in El Carmen. Here we observe how dance connects the past to the present and people to their worship. When studying dance, it is important to not focus only on the form or content, but also on how the form or content is arranged or comes into being; it is not the destination that is only important, it is also the journey.

I would like to thank all the authors for their willingness to be part of this special edition, for their dedication to the study of dance practices of Africa and/or the African Diaspora, and their patience in the process of producing this special edition. I had not considered when I put out the call for articles for this special edition that it would turn into a fantastic opportunity to make and develop contact with other researchers in this field; I have greatly benefitted from finding out more about their research and I am sure that the readers of this journal will do so too. I am indebted to the peer reviewers for their time and their considered review comments to the authors. Peer reviewers are an essential part of a journal's

production and many peer reviewers fulfill this role reading submissions and providing feedback despite their busy schedules and ever-increasing workloads, so *dankie* (thank-you). I am eternally thankful to Professor Osita Okagbue for both encouraging me and providing me with the opportunity to produce this special edition, and offering kind and supportive advice: Professor Okagbue, *Nginyabonga kakhulu inDuna* (thank-you very much, wise man). This edition is dedicated to the memory of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (18th of July 1918 to 5th of December 2013) who once said that 'It is music and dance that make me at peace with the world, and at peace with myself' (Weiss, 2013). In closing, it was on a cold and wet Friday night that my London-based family and friends and I made our way to the Nelson Mandela statue at Parliament Square to lay flowers and light candles in memorial. That evening, around his statue, a number of us sang the South Africa national anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* and danced a fusion of the Madiba Shuffle and the *toyi-toyi* and it was dancing that helped many of us make peace with the loss of a great human.



Nelson Mandela Dances what South Africans Call the "Madiba Shuffle" During a Public Event. (*Media Club SA and Shongololo, No Date*).

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