BROTHERS OF THE ‘BAH YÁH’!: THE PURSUIT OF MALENESS IN THE UMFUNDALAI TRADITION OF AFRICAN DANCE

A Dissertation Submitted to the Temple University Graduate Board
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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August 2014

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ABSTRACT

Inaugurated by Kariamu Welsh in 1970, Umfundalai is an evolving contemporary African dance technique that draws movements from African and Diasporan dances. As one of the first of thirteen men to study and perform the technique, Umfundalai reified a North American African male identity, empowering me to navigate American and African American social scripts that posit dancing as a non-masculine activity. This study employs an autoethnographic lens to illuminate men’s constructions of gender in Umfundalai. Specifically, the research explores *maleness*, an experienced gendered agency, among eight male practitioners, including the researcher.

*Brothers of the Bah Yâb* is framed as a multi-layered inquiry that applies phenomenological values and procedures to forward an auto-ethnographic intention. The study’s qualitative methodology draws on Max van Manen’s *hermeneutic phenomenology* and Anselm Strauss’s *applied grounded theory*, as well as *historical description* and *dance analysis*. Sources of data include interviews with seven Umfundalai men, Umfundalai’s progenitor and first dance master; an in-depth research journal recording my own lived experience descriptions and memories of dancing Umfundalai; and videos of selected Umfundalai repertory. The study is informed by the literature of masculine studies, highlighting the social function of masculinities as scripted and learned ideals. There is a dearth of resources theorizing the African American presence in African dance on the American concert stage.

Drawing on primary sources, the empirical findings of the study are framed in a historical analysis of the emergence of a male presence in Umfundalai since 1993, including male-inspired developments in the technique. Analysis of in-depth interviews reveal that
performing Umfundalai choreography affords men an opportunity to dance a self-determined construction of gender performance and that Umfundalai studio practice can be a site for men’s affirmation of their ‘dancer’ identities as well as friction with gender performance. Further, while Kariamu Welsh’s approach to developing Umfundalai’s movement system may be described as gender-neutral, the continuance of Umfundalai by its dance masters substantiated a gendered Umfundalai in which movement and performance were aligned with scripted conventional masculine tropes.

_The Brothers of the Bah Yáh: The Pursuit of Maleness in the Umfundalai Tradition of African Dance_ reveals that ‘the pursuit of maleness’ was a unique construction experienced only by the researcher. Contradicting my initial presumption, the other men in this study found their gendered agency outside of Umfundalai. Moreover, a large majority of men in this study draw significantly on conventional masculinities, namely strength and power, to feel their maleness. Further, a spirituality of solidarity was uncovered – an embodied masculinity that can arise while dancing Umfundalai choreography and observing other men dancing at the same time.

The dissertation concludes that expressions of maleness as described by Umfundalai’s dancing men have currency in sports and in the larger American and African American communities out of which Umfundalai’s dance culture emerges. Strength, power, and spiritual transformation situated in similitude represent commonalities of male experiences. At the same time, Umfundalai choreography can house multiple masculinities. Dances like Kariamu Welsh’s _Raaahmonaaah!_ (1989) and my _Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings_ (1996) serve as portals for masculinities that dismantle the hegemony that erodes the
community in which it exists. Further research is needed to understand how dancing men can be a force that dismantles racism, sexism, and homophobia.
DEDICATION

My grandfather, the late Rufus Nance, always admonished his children and grandchildren to give him his flowers while he was alive to smell them. In compliance with “Pop-pop’s” advice, “Brother of the Bah Yáh” is warmly dedicated to an emerging generation of dancing men who comprise the Berry & Nance Dance Project. These men inspire my continued interest in the research that narrates the stories of a North American African male discourse. I dedicate this dissertation to Cristian Barreta, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Linton Clarke, Julian Darden, David Johnson, Khalil Munir, and Danzel Thompson-Stout.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Brothers of the Bah Yáh” represents both the completion of an academic venture and a commencement of my new journey as a scholar in African dance. As I exhaust this traveling metaphor, I consider the circuitous paths that led to this turning point in my professional life as divine work. The people with whom I have danced, the art that my dancing body has helped shape, and the self-knowledge I have acquired have not only enriched my life but have also nourished my spirit. The tenacity required to complete this dissertation is an indication of God’s presence in my life. I am humbled by and grateful for His many blessings.

I am indebted to my Umfundalai family for supporting both my artistic and intellectual curiosities. With my head in my chest and my palm and knee on the earth, I offer a special dobale to my dance mother, Amai Kariamu Welsh for sharing her life’s work with me. Umfundalai is an integral part of my worldview and the modality through which I celebrate my big, Black dancing body. I also thank my ‘Sister of the Bah Yáh’, Glendola Yhema Mills, for participating in this study and for exemplifying the leadership, patience, and grace required to be a Umfundalai dance master. I thank my Umfundalai twin, my business partner, my confidant, Stafford C. Berry, Jr. for his unconditional love and encouragement. Words will never adequately convey how our daily phone conversations have contributed to the theorizing represented in this research and empowered me in intellectual and spiritual ways. As I round out the acknowledgement of my Umfundalai support system, I smile, bite my bottom lip, and extend a fist bump to my ‘Brothers of the Bah Yáh’, the dancing men whose ‘male tales’ serve as data for this study. They include
Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Harvey C. Chism, Jr., Twan Claiborne, Khalil Munir, Derrick Perkins, Jumatatu Poe, and Charles Tyson.

The awarding of a doctoral degree represents the resolution of unfinished business for me. I started the EdD in Dance program in 1994, left it in 1995, and returned to a newly fashioned PhD in Dance program in 2008. From a false start to completion, Temple University’s Dance Faculty championed my intellectual growth and enthusiastically invited me to join them in the academy. Chief among them is my dissertation advisor, Karen Bond, who excited me about the possibilities of phenomenological research, supported the evolution of my “fluid” academic writing style, and instilled in me the importance of sound research methodology. I am also grateful to Brenda Dixon-Gottschild, Edrie Ferdun, Sarah Hilsendager, Luke Kahlich, Joellen Meglin, and Kariamu Welsh for their individual passions in dance and their faith in my scholarship. I also thank Julia Ericksen for serving on my advisory committee and challenging my assumptions as a researcher, and James Earl Davis for joining my examining committee as external reader. I thank Sharon Friedler for revealing to me that I am a dancer—even before I knew it—and for shepherding my career from undergraduate years to my current place as a burgeoning scholar in the field. As iron sharpens iron, I am indebted to my colleagues who were responsible for my socialization as a doctoral student. Attending classes with five brilliant, talented, and competitive women during my first year of coursework helped transform me into a curious creative researcher. With a knowing smile, I nod my head to Christine Bergman, Tanya Calamoneri, Jennifer Conley, Kirsten Kaschock, and Nyama McCarthy-Brown.

Kenyan-born philosopher and theologian, John Samuel Mbiti reminds us of the important commitment to community with his mantra, “I am because we are and because
we are I am.” These acknowledgments would be incomplete if I were to neglect to recognize my immediate family, both biological and God-given. Firstly, I thank my mother, Delores Wilson-Bailey, for being my ‘Mom,’ for dancing with me in the living room before I went off to elementary school, for teaching me how to ‘jam.’ Everything I know about performance style I learned from my mother’s morning sessions to La Chic’s “Freak Out” and Teddy Pendergrass’s “Bad Luck.” I also thank my God-given mother, DeLois Collins, for teaching me how to mentor younger students and for insisting that I “get that doctorate!” Her consistent expectation of excellence will always be a part of me as I use dance to reach various populations. I thank my aunts, Lucretia “Trish” Jones, Marian Nance, and Katie Denese Nance McKenzie for their prayers and prohibiting me from “whining” about my trials as a finishing graduate student. According to my Aunt Trish, having to juggle teaching, working, performing, and writing is no more difficult than what Black women have done for their families since antiquity. Lastly, I thank my God-given brother, Robert L. Henderson, Jr. for his sporadic “check-ins” during what I referred to as my “dissertation haze.” This degree belongs to my family as much as it belongs to me.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. i

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................................ iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ......................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ...................................................................................................................... xi

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. xii

CHAPTER 1

FROM LAPAS TO SHOKATOES: AN INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 1

Umfundalai: Origins, Philosophy, and Language ................................................................. 2

Significance of the Research ............................................................................................... 3

Orientation of the Research ................................................................................................. 8

Limitations of the Study ....................................................................................................... 9

Delimitations ......................................................................................................................... 10

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES ............................................................................ 14

CHAPTER 3

MASCULINE LITERATURE: INSIGHT, HINDSIGHT, AND OVERSIGHT ................. 34

Setting the Stage .................................................................................................................. 36

Masculinities in Black ......................................................................................................... 42

Maleness: An Embodied Interpretation .............................................................................. 49

Dancing Masculinities ........................................................................................................ 51

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 56
CHAPTER 4

UMFUNDALAI HIS-STORY

CHAPTER 5

THERE WERE MEN IN THAT FIRE, TOO!

MASCULINITIES IN KARIAMU WELSH'S RAAMONAAH!

The Incident

The Dance (1993)

We Dance Ramona (1996)

Auto-ethnographic Reflection

Dancing the Man: Masculinities in Umfundalai Choreography

It's All Man

Summary and Conclusion

CHAPTER 6

MALE IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION: EPIPHANY AND FRICTION

Epiphany: I am a Dancer

The Friction of Representation

CHAPTER 7

PURSUIT OF MALENESS IN UMFUNDALAI:

ORIENTATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

Introduction

Out of the Shadows: Male Essence in Umfundalai

“Strong as Hell:” Toward a Umfundalai Male Aesthetic
The Old School Two-Step: Masculinity as Re-Invention ................................................................. 197
The way men dance: Agency & responsibility ................................................................................. 199
Alright Goddamn it! The Spirituality of Gendered Solidarity .......................................................... 205

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: SANKOFA (RETURN AND GET IT) ........................................................................ 214

Huntu and Homogeneity .................................................................................................................. 221
Bantaba ............................................................................................................................................ 225
Recommendations for Further Research ......................................................................................... 231

REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................. 235

APPENDICES

A. 1996 KARIAMU & COMPANY: TRADITIONS’ CONCERT PROGRAM ............................. 242
B. AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN IN UMFUNDALAI SURVEY ............................................. 247
C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE ................................................................................................. 250
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1: Coded Interview Transcripts</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2: A Umfundalai Chronology of Male Events (1988-1996)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3: Repertoire - Kariamu &amp; Company 1993 and Kariamu &amp; Company: Traditions 1996</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Research Methodology Schema</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Screen shot of Harvey Chism's email</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Poster Advertisement for the 1998 Kariamu &amp; Company: Traditions Concert</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sankofa Adrinka Symbol</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Twan Claiborne, Jessica Featherson and Lela Anglin in <em>Raahmonaaah! Revisited</em> (2010)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

FROM LAPAS TO SHOKATOES: AN INTRODUCTION

I began dancing Umfundalai to fulfill physical education requirements during my freshman year at Swarthmore College in the fall of 1988. Only in retrospect did I discover that my foray into Umfundalai’s evolving African dance tradition, a tradition that is exactly as old as I am, started a legacy of African American male dancers who practice Umfundalai and eventually perform with its premier demonstration company, Kariamu & Company: Traditions. In the 23 years I have studied Umfundalai, my growth as a dancer has deepened my understanding of African culture and crystallized my identity as an African dancing man, an identity that creates friction with the prescriptions of an African American socialization. Becoming a dancer has required negotiation of masculinity and conversely, has provoked me to customize male behavior for a re-creation of self. In other words, I had to learn how to be my own man.

In the proposal for this study, I theorized ‘maleness’ as a gendered agency that empowers recreation of self, a congealing of behaviors that are constructed as male by the men who perform them. As my fellow male dancers (brothers) and I move in a predominantly female African dance tradition, I am interested in the similarities and differences in the ways we, as African American men, experience our gender in Umfundalai’s dance culture. The title of this chapter, “From Lapas to Shokotoes: An Introduction,” refers to the respective female and male attire for Umfundalai dance classes. It is a metaphoric reference to a paradigm shift in Umfundalai’s dance culture, one that includes focus on the experiences of dancing men. This study explores how participation in a contemporary African dance tradition facilitates (and/or not) the construction of male gendered agency.
Kariamu Welsh has been developing the Umfundalai contemporary African dance technique since 1968. Deriving its vocabulary from movement practices of African societies throughout the Diaspora, Glendola Yhema Mills describes Umfundalai as “a dynamic expression of cultural heritage of Africa in its most collective expression of Diasporan people.” In this regard, Umfundalai is Pan-African, drawing on the values, rituals, movement practices, and language of African people around the world, including the Americas. The literal translation of the Kiswahili word, *Umfundalai*, is “essence” or “essential.” The term also serves as a philosophical touchstone in Umfundalai’s dance culture in that Welsh’s intention is to use the “essence” of African dances to support contemporary expressions rather than replicate specific African dance traditions for the concert stage.

For Welsh, the essence that fuels Umfundalai’s dance culture manifests in the commonalities of African people and transcends the strictures of gender roles as prescribed by African societies. In an interview with Laura Katz-Rizzo, she shares the following:

…in traditional dance and neotraditional dance, there are normally very strict gender roles. In some ways, yes, I have used them. I do teach men and the main things that I do are gender neutral. In the West [Africa], and this is something positive… I loved things that the men did. I would learn the male roles, even though they were rigidly defined. This happened in the West a lot. In that sense, I’ve blurred the lines. Many things that just appealed were technically originally strictly male roles.²

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¹ Glendola Yhema Mills, “Dancing in My Mother's Mother's Body: the Transmutation and Synthesis

Mills is Umfundalai’s first dance master and her dissertation is Umfundalai’s definitive text.

² Kariamu Welsh, interview with Laura Katz Rizzo, August 12, 2012.
Welsh’s exploration of aesthetic commonalities of African people while transcending the strictures of traditional gender roles will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Mills describes Welsh’s artistic methodology as follows: “She attempts to place African people and culture at the center of her artistic endeavors for source, inspiration and articulation within in a newly defined structure outside the integrative community setting.”

While Chapter 6 will reveal that a gendered Umfundalai eventually emerges during its Philadelphia phase (1983 to the present), Welsh’s gender-neutral approach to constructing its movement system complicates the stigma associated with gender and liberates the dance from its traditional ties so that all dancers may enjoy it regardless of their gender identity.

Significance of the Research

As one of the first men to become a principal dancer in Kariamu & Company (1993), the only man to be certified as a Umfundalai dance master (2002), I have shared African dance with generations of students of varied dancing abilities, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, and genders. This unique affiliation, as noted above, started when I was an eighteen year-old college freshman, spans over my adulthood which includes a professional dance career, and is punctuated by my present as a forty-three year-old principal dancer and elder in the Umfundalai dance community and as a budding scholar. The research presented in this dissertation is

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4 Troy Barnes, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Abdur Rahim Jackson, and I joined the Kariamu & Company during the same season in 1993. Before then, Craig Spider Moore took classes with Welsh but never performed leading roles in the company. Prior to that time men only served as guest artists.

5 Baba is an honorific title for male elders in traditional African societies. In South Africa, it is the nickname for father.
significant in part as a testament of how dance has shaped my own life. It is an authorial lived experience as well as a rigorous phenomenological, sociological, and historical discourse.

In one of many drafts of the dissertation proposal, Umfundalai’s progenitor, and my ‘dance mother’, Kariamu Welsh, probed my early inquiries about the male presence in Umfundalai. During the summer of 2011, we would meet regularly to discuss Umfundalai’s history as we both lived it. Amidst my arguments about Umfundalai being a female-centered culture, she asked how I dealt with the reality that my male presence has defined, not redefined, the technique. According to her, there have been instances when my contribution to Umfundalai as a dancer transcended gender. In a later official interview, she stated, “I thought of it as Kemal, not as male or female. I just love the way you move. People from the audience would say, ‘Who’s that guy? I love the way he dances.”

In relaying this idea, Welsh cites the time she introduced a variation to the technique’s *Kananga Arm Series*, an angular, seven-movement pattern inspired by the *Dogon* headdress of Western Africa. Dancers usually performed the movement while standing with straight legs, parallel feet, and weight slightly forward of neutral. In achieving each of the arm positions, dancers speak in truncated Kiswahili as they perform what is referred to in Umfundalai as a gesture of divination. Welsh developed a progression of this phrase in which dancers bend their knees, gyrate their pelvises, and step to either left or right in a horizontal trajectory as they perform the sequence. According to Welsh, I demonstrated an immediate grasp of the quality she wanted asserting that while pelvic articulation is neither

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6 Kariamu Welsh, personal conversation with author, July 2011.

male nor female, I had embodied the sequence in a way that challenged many women.8 Welsh’s comments reveal one example of how lived experiences of Umfundalai’s men infuse its history. This research documents Umfundalai’s impact on a specific population.

Involvement in Umfundalai not only chronicles my transition to adulthood, it has empowered my gender and cultural identities. By understanding Umfundalai through the historical and aesthetic contexts that frame its Pan-African vocabulary, I found agency in my constructed role as an African dancing man. Having suffered a childhood of male judgments around my interests in hip-swaying, hand-clapping, and the foot-stomping cadences of drill team marching (e.g. “that’s girl stuff”), as well as my later existence as a gender minority throughout much of my formal dance education, I learned that dancing links me historically to African men of antiquity. In an African context dancing is integral to my gender role, not deleterious, as my American socialization might have me believe.

Glendola Yhema Mills’ research on the maintenance and perpetuation of African culture in Umfundalai suggests that the technique and the tradition it emanates from is an Afrocentric project.9 I argue that the pursuit of maleness within an African dance paradigm is also an Afrocentric project. Molefi Kete Asante defines Afrocentricity as:

\[
\text{…a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. In regards to theory, it is the placing of African people in the center of analysis of African phenomena.}^{10}
\]

Accordingly, it seemed possible that, as with me, Umfundalai has facilitated a sense of cultural and masculine agency among its other male practitioners. However, the degree to

which Umfundalai men’s ‘centeredness’ in African culture aligns with their gender construction and/or their pursuit of maleness is a question that begged investigation.

As introduced above, Kariamu Welsh, an African American woman, developed an African dance technique that draws its vocabulary largely from traditional male movements of continental Africa. In doing so, she created a tradition, heavily populated by women, that offers both men and women an opportunity to philosophically, historically, and spiritually align themselves to Africa. I was curious to discover if men’s participation in Umfundalai facilitates both an African identity and a gendered ‘centerdness.’

Afrocentricity posits Blackness as a code of ethics that opposes racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and White male domination. It seems significant that while the male presence in Umfundalai brings with it masculinities scripted by society, we could also be creating new Afrocentric masculinities to which generations of male dancers behind us could subscribe. Perhaps a synthesis of maleness and Afrocentricity empowers Umfundalai to unearth what Athen Matua refers to as progressive Black masculinities, performances of the masculine self that eschew and stand up to domination.

This study may have significance beyond African American men in Umfundalai, connecting with a broader male discourse in dance. Patricia Hill Collins argues that groups who share intersecting oppressions create a group consciousness and an arsenal of knowledge for members of that group. She defines her standpoint theory as follows:


12 Athena D., Matua, 7.

...a social theory arguing that group location in hierarchal power relations produces common challenges for individuals in those groups. Moreover, shared experiences can foster similar angles of vision leading a group knowledge or standpoint deemed essential for informed political action.\textsuperscript{14}

While power is a relative phenomenon, I place African American dancing men in the center of the theory because of the oppression that surrounds our historical subjugation in a society governed by White male rule, and the further alienation we may experience as men who build our lives in an art form that our communities deem ‘non-masculine.’ Extending Collins’ \textit{standpoint theory} to include African American men, this dissertation research offers an opportunity to learn about the discourse of African American \textit{dancing} men. Further, this discourse is a relevant contribution to the field. Just as Michael Gard’s study of Australian men who dance ballet, \textit{Men Who Dance}, has influenced my work, \textit{Brothers of the Bab Yâb} could potentially have meaning for any men who dance.

This study of African American male experiences in African dance as told by African American men addresses a dearth of resources in the topic. Often the literature regarding African American male presence on the American concert stage reduces our dancing to the imagination of the onlooker, often projecting multiple histories onto our dancing bodies that ignore our lived experiences as dancers. While the Black male dancer’s potential to negotiate American masculinities is a viable inquiry, it is not the totality of what we offer. Moreover, we inhabit something profound from accessing the dance traditions that link us to our African ancestry, even in the contemporary contexts that Umfundalai provides. This study seeks to illuminate the “something” and to offer implications for further study for the larger dance community.

\textsuperscript{14} Patricia Hill Collins, \textit{Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment}, 300.
Orientation of the Research

Since my debut season with Kariamu & Company in 1993, twelve African American men have studied Umfundalai and performed in its premier professional dance company. *Brothers of the Bab Yáh: The Pursuit of Maleness in the Umfundalai Tradition of African Dance*, is a multi-modal study that draws on phenomenological, sociological, and cultural interests to explore the following orienting question:

**How do we, men of Umfundalai, African American dancing men, experience our maleness in the Umfundalai tradition of African dance?**

As Chapter 2 will detail, this study integrates hermeneutic phenomenology and applied grounded theory for data collection and analysis. By definition, this approach will allow other questions to emerge over the journey of the study. Barney Glaser writes, “To respect the research question in a grounded theory is not a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied. The problem emerges and questions regarding the problem emerge by which to guide theoretical sampling.”

Similarly, phenomenologist Max van Manen asserts, “We need to search everywhere in the lifeworld for lived-experience material that, upon reflective examination, might yield something of its fundamental nature.”

*Brothers of the Bab Yáh* is framed as a multi-layered study that draws on phenomenological interests and procedures to forward an auto-ethnographic intention. As Deborah E. Reed-

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8
Donahay describes, auto-ethnography is a “form of self narrative that places the self within a social context.”

Sources of data include qualitative interviews with seven of Umfundalai’s dancing men, along with two crucial female informants – Kariamu Welsh and Glendola Yhema Mills; an in-depth research journal recording my own lived experience descriptions and memories of dancing Umfundalai; videos of selected Umfundalai repertory, adding dance analytic and historical perspectives; and further archival materials, including concert programs, Umfundalai Intensive documents, and conversations with Umfundalai teachers. Constant comparison of these sets of data concurrent with their collection (an applied grounded theory approach) will guide this inquiry into a unique understanding of male dance experience in a specific social-cultural context. The auto-ethnographic lens allows me to consider my own lived experience in the formulation of an emergent theoretical framework; I anticipate, for example, that questions of spirituality, community, and Afrocentricity may be salient to constructions of maleness in Umfundalai.

Limitations of the Study

As noted, this study draws on my own lived experiences; I consider myself as a researcher-subject among co-researcher-subjects. While I assert that Umfundalai has uniquely impacted my maleness and that of other African American men, the intra-cultural focus on African American men who study Umfundalai prohibits the isolation of maleness as a phenomenon without a congruent but different group of subjects to which it can be compared. This study relays a qualitative inquiry with men who study a specific tradition of

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African dance. While there may be commonalities among our experiences, it is possible that other dance styles and other commonalities within our African American male experience could affect us the same way.

Further, men who have studied this technique have personal relationships with each other despite their disparity in ages. The men of Umfudalai are brothers. While these personal relationships may afford a deeply felt connection and commitment to the content of this study, they also have the potential to stymie subjects’ ability to be completely honest. In revealing their experiences to me, a researcher whom they know, interviewees could feel that I am judging them, that there could be an adverse outcome for their honesty and candor. To the men in this study, I am not a random researcher whom they will never see again. For me, they are not nameless clinical subjects. In this evolving fraternity, I am brother, teacher, and elder.

Moreover, this study documents the unwritten history of Umfudalai’s male legacy. To this end, it is important to me that the actual names of subjects, my dance brothers, be used in this text so that their authentic voices and contributions can be represented. This lack of anonymity has the potential to create anxiety about discussing sensitive topics, for example, sexual orientation, for fear of personal vulnerability or judgment. The lack of anonymity could result in self-censorship.

Delimitations

Current trends in gender studies stretch the concept of gender beyond the strictures of anatomical sex. Butler’s work, in particular, allows gender to live on the repeated acts of human beings, so that one could possess a vagina and be within the male gender. This study
is delimited to subjects who identify with conventional constructions of gender; we men of Umfundalai are all males in the anatomical sense (we all have penises, presumably), identify with the construction, man, and see ourselves as belonging to the African Diaspora (African American and one bi-racial).

In Umfundalai’s 42-year history, many men have participated by way of technique class. Male guest artists have performed in Umfundalai-based companies, including Black Dance Workshop, Kariamu & Company, Kariamu & Company: Traditions, The Seventh Principle, Persona Zenobia, and the Berry & Nance Dance Project. This means that these skilled male dancers learned enough of the technique to emulate its style and to perform in selected venues. Their embodiment of and personal investment in Umfundalai’s culture, movement practice, and philosophy is bounded by the temporality of isolated concert performances. Speaking for myself, it was through performance of Umfundalai repertory that I made sense of the technique class experience, gaining a developed understanding of Umfundalai’s philosophical/aesthetic underpinnings.

Conversely, a strong Umfundalai technical background offers a dancer an inside perspective of how to perform Umfundalai choreography and to embody its nuanced movement style and ancestral power. For this study, I focus on the eight men (including myself) who have studied Umfundalai for at least three years, performed with Kariamu & Company and/or Kariamu & Company: Traditions between 1993 and 2012, and agreed to participate in this study. As Chapter 4 will reveal, the first set of dancing men who fit these criteria appeared on the concert stage with K&C in February of 1993. Since then, individual men without Umfundalai training have had a sporadic presence in the company.
Discussion of maleness in dance lends itself to the deconstruction of masculinity as a theoretical formulation. Even as gender can be expanded to accommodate various bodies, masculinity, too, can be experienced and expressed by all genders. This research focuses on masculinity and maleness in African dance as experienced by African American men. I acknowledge that women have lived experiences of masculinity, but my research interest is in unearthing how African American men perceive their maleness in their participation in Umfundalai’s dance culture.

In *Brothers of the Bab Yáh: The Pursuit of Maleness in the Umfundalai African Dance Tradition*, *maleness* is a term signifying a gendered agency for men, an individualized embodiment of both masculinities and non-masculine behaviors and attitudes. With a targeted examination of the gendered experiences of eight of the 13 men who have studied Umfundalai and performed with its professional demonstration companies, Kariamu & Company and Kariamu & Company: Traditions, I examine the relationship between masculinities and Umfundalai men’s gender construction, and how that relationship manifests in Umfundalai dance’s culture.

**Topography of the Dissertation**

After Chapter 1’s introduction to the research, Chapter 2 articulates the multi-modal methodology and procedures I employ to unearth a distinct male experience in Umfundalai. It explains a customized hybrid of autoethnography, hermeneutic phenomenology, historical analysis of selected repertory, and an applied grounded theory approach to qualitative interviewing. Chapter 3 presents a dialogue with masculine studies literature and selected sociology texts that theorize maleness as a means by which men cultivate their gender
performance. In an alternative form of the conventional *critical* review of literature, it offers a phenomenology of masculinities, describing the lived experiences of the author as a response to theories of current scholars in the field. Further, Chapter 3 offers a theoretical backdrop for the lives of the African American men who participate in the Umfundalai tradition of African dance.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the substantive findings of the study. Starting from 1993 when the first Umfundalai trained men graced the Conwell Dance Theater at Temple University with the female dancers of Kariamu & Company, to the present when a man serves as the company’s Associate Artistic Director, Chapter 4 highlights the achievements of male dancers in Umfundalai and illuminates the shifts the movement practice endured to accommodate the presence of dancing men. Chapter 5 focuses on choreography as an active space for men’s gender negotiation, while Chapter 6 shifts the focus to the dance class/rehearsal context as a portal for male discourse. Chapter 7 synthesizes the major findings of this research in dialogue with current masculine studies scholarship. Chapter 8 closes the dissertation, offering autoethnographic reflection, summary, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life.\(^{18}\)

The above citation from Carolyn Ellis’s description of autoethnography encapsulates my methodological approach to this dissertation research. My lived experience as one of the first ‘men of Umfundalai’ is a primary source for the study; it provides a lens for a male experience in Umfundalai dance culture. Autoethnography affords the opportunity to join my dearest friends and beloved students, my brothers, in a metaphorical caucus that spurs a dialogue between the personal and the cultural.\(^{19}\) As Ellis and Bochner assert, autoethnography is a spectrum of inquiry that may emphasize any one of its three components: auto (the self), ethno (community) and ‘graphy’ (process).\(^{20}\) This dissertation unearths my voice as a pioneering man in Umfundalai’s dance tradition, the voices of other men, and the communal discourse that emerges from our common dance experience.

The research presented in *Brothers of the Bah Yáh* is a multi-modal inquiry that employs an applied ‘grounded theoretical’ approach to uncover its findings. It has an autoethnographic intention, satisfying all the criteria for analytic autoethnography: 1) I am a full member of the research group; 2) I am a visible member in the text, and 3) I am

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\(^{19}\) Carolyn Ellis & Arthur P. Bochner, “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity Research as Subject,” 733-768.

\(^{20}\) Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method*, (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008), 25.
committed to developing theoretical understanding of a broader social phenomenon, namely African American men in African dance.\textsuperscript{21} I use the autoethnographic personal narrative but employ an applied grounded theoretical inquiry allied with phenomenological procedures to explore Umfundalai manhood as lived experience. With formal interviews and multi-layered coding, I uncover a discourse that revolves around African American men dancing in an evolving, predominantly female, African dance tradition. In this mode, I explore how African American men's participation in Umfundalai dialogs with our constructions of our gendered selves. I employ interviewing and lived experience data extraction to investigate maleness among Umfundalai dancing men as embodied knowledge.

Karen Barbour, in her own autoethnography, writes the following:

I know that I must critically explore knowledges that I feel are intuitively important with knowledges I have learned from other researchers and theorists, and be consciously aware as I integrate and embody these knowledges. In this way, I can meaningfully weave different knowledges together with my passions, experiences, and embodied individuality in my life.\textsuperscript{22}

In this statement, Barbour advocates for sentient scholarship’s critical role in qualitative research. This dissertation illuminates men’s gendered experiences as they emerge from a dance culture, a culture in which the body is central to its existence. With this inquiry in focus, I contend that maleness, the “knowledge” to which Barbour refers, is appropriately interrogated in the way it is felt, seen, heard, and smelled. Gender constructions situate themselves in the social, and our participation in dance and/or any other American cultural activity—conscious or unconscious—is an intellectual enterprise.


John Gagnon’s theory on sexual scripts underscores the relational facets of our
gendered and social selves that require deconstruction for understanding. To this end, I
found that in order to conduct the study with qualitative integrity, I required a methodology
comparable to the circuitous ways in which participants’ interview data were connected. I
had to allow the phenomenological and the hermeneutic to co-exist in order to unpack the
discourse of Umfundalai’s dancing men. Chapters 5 and 6 feature a metaphorical dance
between men’s lived experiences and their interpretations of those experiences. “Chapter 5:
Dancing the Man,” in particular, employs a phenomenological treatment of Kariamu Welsh’s
choreography through detailed description juxtaposed with the voices of men who have
danced in her work over the last twenty years.

While sociological theory regarding cultural scripts, masculinities, and African
cultural retentions provided theoretical background to the study (to be presented in Chapter
3), an applied grounded theoretical approach allied with phenomenological interests offered
an analysis that emanated distinctly from men’s lived experiences captured by the
interviewing. As Barney G. Glaser writes:

Grounded theory by almost any definition deals with what is going on in the
action system studied. Observational data is not enough. The researcher
should provide interviews along with the observation so the analyst can get at
the meaning of what is observed.  

Supporting the autoethnographic intention of this research, grounded theory, as Glaser
articulates it, empowers me to write about the maleness of Umfundalai’s dancing men in the
ways that we experience it. I describe my method as ‘applied’ grounded theory to distinguish

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23 John H. Gagnon, An Interpretation of Desire: Essays in the Study of Sexuality, (Chicago: University of

Press, 1992), 49.
it from the specificity of what Glaser and Strauss prescribe and to allow for the autobiographical voice. The singularity of the community I am studying and my role as both researcher and subject require an elaborated use of Glaser’s methods. Here are some distinctions to consider.

Firstly, I borrow from both Glaser and Strauss to construct this study. While the two together developed grounded theory, they diverged in their beliefs as the methodology evolved. Glaser opposes reading literature before embarking on a study for fear that this may preempt any theoretical findings that could emerge from the data itself.25 Much like some phenomenological approaches, he recommends a “Bracketing” of theory prior to data collection. I, however, agree with Strauss’s viewpoint that reading literature “enables the user to identify previous research in an area, as well as discover gaps in understanding.”26

Moreover, I am both subject and researcher in this study, in equal parts. Engaging with literature related to African American men, masculinities, and dance has been part of the lived experience of my doctoral education. Phenomenological engagement with literature has not only affected my intellectual process, but lives in my creativity as well. Masculinities studies research has influenced the way I choreograph, the way I teach, and the way I engage in homo-social behavior. It has become a resource in much the same way as the lived experiences of the other men in this study. As Chapter 7 will reveal, many theories of African American maleness are relevant to this study.


Secondly, there are only eight participants in the present study (including me, the researcher) each of whom produced two hours of interview material that resulted in an average of 40 pages of transcribed text per subject. Even with this plethora of data, the number of subjects does not lend itself to the kind of data verification that Strauss advocates. For Strauss, a researcher would need to interview an abundance of subjects until themes emerge from repetition due to a saturation of data. However, grounded theory’s focus on action as described by the research participants aligns with the phenomenological interests of this study. Each mode of inquiry was aimed at uncovering an action or phenomenon in the social and cultural contexts in which they exist.

Phenomenological procedures (interviews, lived experience extraction) allowed me to articulate what being an African American dancing man in Umfundalai “is like.” The interview data reveal many sensuous aspects to consider in the gendered agency of Umfundalai’s men. I assert, however, that the African American male experience in Umfundalai (presented in Chapters 5 and 6) requires both the phenomenological and the hermeneutic lens to illuminate its meanings.

This multi-method inquiry illuminates the complexity that the juxtaposition of gender construction and Umfundalai represent in this study. As Brian Haig argues, grounded theory is a “problem-solving endeavor concerned with understanding action from the perspective of the human agent.” Phenomenology’s value is that it illuminates experience

28 Max van Manen, Researching Lived Experience Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy, 42.
as lived, thus allowing descriptive *experiential* accounts of subject agency.  

Like the cogs in the Research Methodology Schema (Figure 1), van Manen’s *hermeneutic phenomenology*, Strauss’s *applied grounded theory*, *historical description*, *dance analysis* and *theories of masculinity* work together for a comprehensive, multi-layered study that applies phenomenological values and procedures to forward an auto-ethnographic intention.

![Figure 1: Research Methodology Schema](image)

The literature discussed in Chapter 3 suggests that gender is a social construct dependent on social scripting—messages we tell each other and ourselves about appropriate male or female behavior.  

Moreover, as noted above, for me the very act of reviewing

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literature prompted self-reflection and vicarious reliving of experiences that led me to my current gender identity. The autoethnographic intention for the study grew from such encounters; my voice—both theoretical and phenomenological—as a participant in this study plays a critical role in elucidating the male culture of Umfundalai. In much the same way as Ellis and Bochner describe the work of their protégés, Robin Baylorn and Mark Orbe, this study “extends the work of autoethnography and invites us—all of us—to appreciate the ways in which an intersectional approach reveals the relationships among culture, communication, identity, emotions, and everyday lived experience.”

The applied grounded theory method in *Brothers of the Bab Yāb* relies on repeated data comparison, category assignation, and theoretical sampling, concurrent with data collection. Two pools of data contribute to the study: systematic retrospection of my participation in Umfundalai as a dancing male; transcribed phenomenological hermeneutic interview data from seven of the 13 Umfundalai men who were both available and willing to participate in this study. As I discuss each data item, I will underscore the overarching chronology for data collection and the grounded theory method of analysis.

This research began with reflection. By chronicling pivotal moments in my career in the Umfundalai tradition with particular focus on those instances during which my *maleness* was central to the narrative, I employed what Caroline Ellis refers to as “systematic introspection.” It was introspective in that the writing was retrospective, based on my recall

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of impactful events. I did this with the understanding that the ‘truth’ I sought resided in the meaning I assigned to phenomena—not the historical detail of the events themselves.

Recalling my intense and extended participation in the Umfundalai tradition strengthened my phenomenological orientation to the study. Edward Casey theorizes remembering as having a “thick autonomy.” He writes,

For “thick” as it applies to matters of memory means centrally: possessing a depth not easily penetrable by the direct light of consciousness (most obviously in the case of obdurate body memories but also in circumstances or reminding and recognizing, reminiscing and commemorating); resistant to conceptual understanding (for example, when I cannot understand why a given memory obsesses me so much: sedimented in layers (as occurs when an entire set of memories clusters around a particular place); and having “historical depth.” (i.e., when my memories bear on the same thing as those of a preceding generation through our sharing the same symbolic nexus).³⁵

In every way that Casey argues that memory is thickly autonomous, there is a corresponding justification for an inside investigation of maleness as experienced by the men in this study. Masculinities, while socially constructed, affect us in ways that include the intellectual, the visceral, and the emotional. Recall, in this regard, requires a “sensuous scholarship.”³⁶ The mnemonic representations I accessed and recorded through systematic introspection live in my body, my Black male dancing body; they have an “atmosphere” as Casey describes, a presentation of self that provides emotional background to their existence.³⁷ They have “historical depth” in that they narrate a gendered discourse that is potentially shared by other dancing men in Umfundalai.

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³⁷ Edward S. Casey, Remembering: A Phenomenological Study, 78.
One could suggest that in writing journals I was creating fiction. Casey points out that desire permeates the act of memory. As a person remembers, he/she can experience alienation from him/herself in the memory and project his/her current desire on recall. In this “imaginal margin” it is possible to create memory that is not based on actual experience.\textsuperscript{38} It is possible that in the acquisition of memories, I integrated current and newly informed convictions regarding gender with past episodes of my dancing life. In this concern, I refer to Casey’s argument that an imagined representation stands out from actual memories: in the former the mind is free to wonder and is, thereby, not committed to actual details.\textsuperscript{39} Further, from a phenomenological perspective, fiction in itself can be a rich source of lived experience description.\textsuperscript{40} I offer, too, that the comparative data analysis of the applied grounded theory approach promoted isolation of imagined material, as it was compared to stories of other men in the study.

From May 2011 to the present, I wrote journals about my pivotal and gendered experiences in Umfundalai. As a pioneering male in the tradition, my experiences are both relevant to exploration of maleness in dance, and instructive, as they have guided my teaching, and may therefore have been informative for many of the dancing men who entered the tradition after me. Some of these stories include:

- My First Umfundalai Class
- Machismo! Dance Like a Man
- Dancing Raaamonaah! for the First Time
- Dancing Like a Man
- Spiritual Transcendence
- Teaching Raaamonaah!

\textsuperscript{38} E. Casey, 67-78.
\textsuperscript{39} E. Casey, 78.
\textsuperscript{40} M. van Manen, 70.
I have also written field notes about experiences as a dancer in Kariamu Welsh’s Saturday classes at Temple University (September 2010 to May 2011) and as the Associate Artistic Director of Kariamu & Company: Traditions. These notes focused on the messages I told myself as I interacted with other men in the class and the gender issues that emerged when I either danced with them in class or taught them when I substituted for Welsh.

The next phase of autoethnographic inquiry involved the conduct of formal interviews with seven of the 13 African American men (including the researcher) who have studied Umfundalai technique three years or more and performed with either of the Umfundalai-based professional companies, Kariamu & Company (1993) and/or Kariamu & Company: Traditions (1996 to 2008). I interviewed the following men in order of entry to Umfundalai’s dance tradition, as follows: Stafford C. Berry, Jr. (1993), Derrick A Perkins (1996), Harvey V. Chism, Jr. (1998), Khalil Munir (1999), Charles Tyson (2000), Jumatatu M. Poe (2002), and Twan Claiborne (2008).

Each interview process had two stages: a phenomenological and a hermeneutic. According to Max van Manen, interviews in phenomenological hermeneutic human science have two purposes: 1) exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon; and 2) developing a conversational relation with a partner about the meaning of experience.41 In this study, the former allowed for investigation of maleness for each unique dancer as a visceral, sensory, emotional phenomenon. The latter spoke to the community of men who have danced in Umfundalai, giving voice to the commonality of our gendered experience.

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41 M. van Manen, 66.
Data attained through the interview process gave way to what phenomenologist Edward Casey would refer to as a commemoration.

I am remembering with them, and they with me. It is a matter of something communal. Indeed, it is almost as if the absence of recollection on my part—and doubtless that of other individuals—was somehow being compensated by an activity that occurred at the level of the group.  

Casey underscores the solidarity of collective remembering, which for me reinforces the significance that “Brothers of the Bah Yáh!” offers the dance field. While there were several activities within the Umfundalai tradition that facilitated a projection of our male identities, this dissertation explores the relationship between eight men’s involvement in Umfundalai and our gendered agency as we, an African American male community, experience it.

van Manen posits six suggestions for extracting lived experience description:

1) Describing the experience as you live(d) through it. Avoiding as much as possible causal explanations, generalizations, or abstract interpretations.
2) Describing the experience from the inside, as it were; almost like a state of mind: the feelings, the mood, the emotions, etc.
3) Focusing on a particular example or incident of the object of experience: describing specific events, an adventure, a happening, a particular experience.
4) Focusing on an example of the experience which stands out for its vividness, or as it was the first time.
5) Attending to how the body feels, how things smell(ed), how they sound(ed), etc.
6) Avoiding beautifying an account with fancy phrases or flowery terminology.  

Using van Manen’s criteria, I designed the initial interviews to encourage the seven dancers’ recollections of the experience of dancing and being male in Umfundalai.

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42 E. Casey, 217.
43 M. van Manen, 64-65.
The second component of the interview process focused on hermeneutic reflection – the “why” of lived experience. A second interview was conducted a minimum of 24 hours after the initial phenomenological interview. Twan Claiborne’s interviews had the longest lay time of one week. During this phase subjects clarified lived experience descriptions from the first interview and grappled with conceptions of maleness and how they intersect with what we experience as Umfundalai dancing men. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

If the research process is a journey, then the formal interviews with the men of Umfundalai serve as mileposts, marking the uncharted territory that grounded theory required me to navigate. With each interview, questions shifted to accommodate new issues that emerged from memo writing, theoretical sampling, and new ideas brought on by the previous interview. This integrated data collection/data analysis process unearthed new developments in the study: performing Kariamu Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah! (1989) was revealed as a significant gendered experience for Umfundalai’s men (Chapter 5); my own work, 

*Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) emerged as a pivotal work for the older echelon of Umfundalai’s dancing men (Chapter Five); and Umfundalai dance master Yhema Mills ascended as an important figure in the formation of a gendered Umfundalai (Chapter 6). This tangential inquiry ended with the conclusion of the seventh formal interview with Twan Claiborne.

After compiling all the interview data, I followed the three major strategies of grounded theory: data coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling.\(^{44, 45}\) The next step


was organizing the data with labels that emerged from subjects’ language, or *in vivo* coding.

Starting with men’s language, I made a concerted effort to analyze maleness in terms that we, dancing men, expressed it. I extended *in vivo* coding to lived experience descriptions extracted from interviews, journals, and dance analysis of recorded performances of Welsh’s *Raaabmonaaah!* (1989). I then used axial coding as a second level of analysis to look at relationships among codes and to build categories of similar properties and dimensions.

Concurrent with axial coding, I developed analytic memos that reflected my reaction to and interaction with the data as they emerged. Saldaña’s criteria include:

- how the researcher relates personally to participants and phenomenon;
- the study’s research question;
- the researcher’s code choices and their operational definitions;
- the emergent patterns, categories, themes, and concepts;
- possible networks (links, overlaps, flows) among the codes, patterns, etc.
- an emergent or related existent theory;
- any personal or ethical problems with the study;
- future directions for the study; and
- the analytic memos generated in the memo writing process.

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47 J. Saldaña, 159.

48 J. Saldaña, 40.
Table 1 illustrates the table of contents from an axial coded transcript from Khalil Munir’s interview. The numbers in the table refer to the page number in the transcript on which the axial category could be found. Each of the in vivo (initial) coded interview excerpts were listed under the appropriate category in the listed page.
The analytic memo was the portal through which I interpreted the properties that distinguished one category from another and further elucidated relationships between them. Moreover, it extended my hermeneutic reflection as a participant in the study. The memo writing required me to integrate my acquired knowledge through the excavation of dancing memories, readings of current theories, and emergent themes from the data. These memos became “writing stories,” which Laurel Richardson describes as “narratives about the context in which the writing is produced.”49 Similar to phenomenologist van Manen, Richardson views the act of writing as a mode of ethical inquiry. She asserts further, “Each writing story offers its writer an opportunity to make a situated and pragmatic ethical decision about whether and where to publish the story.”50

Analytic memos, as writing stories, led me to the third phase of applied grounded theory, theoretical sampling:

Theoretical sampling is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges.51

Theoretical sampling and a third cycle of coding, selective coding, worked together. Selective coding involved identifying categories and relevant data that support theories as they emerge. In this effort, I complied with Glaser’s criteria for emerging theories in a grounded research model: fit, work, relevance and modifiability.52 With this in mind, the third cycle of coding


51 E. Casey, 45.

52 B. Glaser, 25.
required a reduction. Upon the advice of my dissertation advisor, I stripped away Umfundalai unrelated data, thereby developing theoretical sampling with data that connect directly to performing, learning, teaching, or choreographing Umfundalai.

The act of writing this research process elongates the inquiry. As Laurel Richardson asserts, “Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable.” After interviewing, coding, memo writing, additional coding, and organization, the act of writing offered another level of examination. As I labored to interpret meanings of the anecdotes subjects shared and to craft intelligible prose that would be coherent to a dissertation examiner, the act of writing forced me to further question my assumptions about my subjectivity in this study. Richardson writes:

Experience is open to contradictory interpretations governed by social interests rather than objective truth. The individual is both site and subject of discursive struggles for identity. Because the individual is subject to multiple and competing discourses in many realms, one’s subjectivity is shifting and contradictory, not stable, fixed, rigid.

As researcher and subject, I experienced the shifting to which Richardson refers. This shift did not alter my identity but rather my relationship to my identity as a dancing African American man. As I rendered the lived experiences of Umfundalai’s men to the written page, I had to make sense of my own experience in concert with other dancing men, discussing their and my stories as a social meta-narrative. Richardson purports that language creates social reality with its capacity to produce meaning. While it fails to result from individuality, language avails subjectivity in the multiple discourses individuals occupy and is “co-
This “co-creation” afforded a communal conversation with the men who served as conduits for Umfundalai’s dance tradition.

For me, as researcher and subject, meaning also resided in the memory, the items which result in systematic reflection and retrospection. All of the interview data presented in this research is presented through the lived experiences of Umfundalai’s men as they recall them. According to Casey’s phenomenology of remembering, reminiscing is a kind of collective remembering requiring two or more to engage. He writes:

It reflects the fundamental difference between being thrust into a world of the ready-to-hand—where I am willy nilly parasitic on the pre-existence of given reminders arranged around me—and being a participant in an ongoing conversation in which I am responsible for articulating the past in quite particular ways.

Following van Manen and Richardson, the writing of this research was a mode of inquiry in itself; it provided refined articulation of the subject matter, it offered the men of Umfundalai a chance to reminisce, and it required Umfundalai’s dancing men to be active in analysis of our discourse. After completing second drafts of Chapters 5 and 6, I emailed electronic copies to each subject with a request that they review their respective interview transcripts for accuracy. I invited them to edit their own words and respond to any interpretations I was making through my auto-ethnographic lens.

55 L. Richardson, 516.

56 L. Richardson, 516.

57 E. Casey, 105.

58 M. van Manen, 111.

59 L. Richardson, 516.
Harvey Chism responded electronically to my request to review the use of his interview data in the dissertation, depicted in Figure 2. I altered the depiction to omit the name of the person to whom he refers in the email and his (Chism’s) personal email address. I share this email to illustrate the dialog that the dissertation afforded us. Not only did Chism have a chance to shape how his words would be read, but it gave him and the other subjects an opportunity to dialog with me about the discourse he has been part of creating. This kind of subject participation both meets ethical requirements and contributes to the credibility of the study.60 While email facilitated continued dialog with Chism, with other subjects – namely Berry, Perkins, and Poe, exchange occurred through phone calls and impromptu face-to-face conversations.

After writing the analysis chapters (Chapters 4, 5, and 6), I extracted all the cited interview data and carried out another phase of coding. Chapter 7 emerges from a deeper exploration of the relationships between this final cycle of coding and the theorizing of both sociological import and meanings for the men who study and perform Umfundalai.

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Late in the research, I encountered Sarah Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*, which showed to be a salient source for the framing of research findings presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In theorizing a queer phenomenology, Ahmed posits ‘orientation’ as a status in which individuals inhabit space in ways that feel like home. She uses ‘queer’ to describe both ‘oblique existence’ and non-normative sexuality. With a focus on spatiality, she argues that the familiarity of a given space is indicative of one’s ‘orientation.’ Regarding the inhabitance of familiar spaces, she asserts:
The familiar is an effect of inhabitance; we are not simply in the familiar. But rather the familiar is shaped by our actions that reach out toward objects that are already within reach. …The work of inhabiting space involves a dynamic negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar, such that it is still possible for the world to create new impressions, depending on which way we turn, which affects what is within reach.\textsuperscript{61}

Ahmed is theorizing both the impact on an individual who inhabits a given space and how a space changes as result of the individual’s efforts to find orientation. With Ahmed’s queer phenomenology as a lens, the ways in which men find a gendered ‘orientation’ within the Umfundalai female dominated dance culture establishes the intended scope of this study. Substituting Umfundalai for the metaphorical space to which Ahmed refers, Chapter 4 deals with the latter part of her proposition, presenting a historical analysis of how Umfundalai’s dance culture has been transformed to accommodate the dancing presence of its men. As introduced in Chapter 1, archival and data sources included videos of selected Umfundalai repertory, concert programs, Umfundalai Intensive documents, and conversations with Umfundalai teachers.

Constant comparison of these sets of data concurrent with their collection (an applied grounded theory approach) will guide this inquiry into a unique understanding of male dance experience in a specific social-cultural context. The auto-ethnographic lens allows me to consider my own lived experience in the formulation of an emergent theoretical framework; I anticipate, for example, that questions of spirituality, community, and Afrocentricity may be salient to constructions of maleness in Umfundalai.

Chapters 5 and 6, then, unpack Umfundalai dancing men’s experiences with what Ahmed would describe as “orientation” and “disorientation” in gender performance in contemporary African dance.

\textsuperscript{61} Sara Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others}, 7-8.
CHAPTER 3

MASCULINE LITERATURE: INSIGHT, HINDSIGHT, AND OVERSIGHT

The body of literature that supports examination of a constructed maleness among African American dancing men in an evolving African dance culture spans sociological texts regarding agency and gender construction and masculinity theories posited as both American and African American discourses. Its composition relies on critical analysis of masculinities in dancing and maleness as a gendered agency that occupies the gap between masculinities and men’s lived experiences. As indicated in Chapter 1 and more fully explained in Chapter 2, I employ an autoethnographic lens to pursue my research interests, which requires a critical and reflective look at self—myself—and my lived experiences as both researcher and subject of this study. For me, the logical starting point for a background review of literature was to unpack the concept of masculinities and the construction of manhood in the socialization of African American males.

My lived experience in dance before immersion in the Umfundalai tradition was riddled with instances when my dancing appeared to defy a tacit definition of male behavior. While dancing requires some level of physical skill to be performed well, any activity perceived as dance, regardless of its requisite skill, seemed to be reserved for female members of my community. Further, being the only male or one of few males has characterized my cumulative dance training. Yet, there never seemed to be a scarcity of males to play on high school, college or intramural sports teams. While there could be many reasons why the males I have observed officially and unofficially throughout my career prefer sport over dancing, to the conscious observer it might appear that the preference emerges from a code of socialization that prescribes masculine behavior.
This exploration of the potential relationship between African American men’s gender construction and their participation in Umfundalai requires, therefore, a theoretical examination of masculinity. The content of this chapter not only surveys relevant literature but also reflects my phenomenological response to the literature that theorizes my experience. Like Carolyn Ellis’s approach to the autoethnographic method, “I’ve chosen to focus … on qualitative methods that connect social science to literature. We'll view ourselves as part of the research—and sometimes as our focus—rather than standing outside of what we do.”

The title of this chapter, “Masculine Literature; Insight, Hindsight, Oversight,” alludes to the layered nature of supporting literature for this study. Insight refers to the profile of male experiences as theorized by current sociology and masculine studies scholars. Hindsight locates my voice in the literature; it refers to my lived experiences as researcher and subject as accessed through the phenomenological method of remembering. Oversight points to the paucity of dance literature relating to the gendered experiences of African American men in African dance.

The chapter contains several sections beginning with “Setting the Stage,” a critical look at men in concert dance. As a precursor to the examination of masculinity as a social construct, I posit dancing men as a discourse, a function of society that has impact on how individuals identity themselves as gendered beings. “Masculinities in Black” examines the evolution of African American masculinity and the intellectual challenges that surround its

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thorization. “Dancing masculinities” further delimits the interrogation of masculinities to the concert stage. “Maleness: An Embodied Negotiation” relates to the orienting premise of the dissertation, that self-determined construction of gender performance may be a salient theoretical framework with which to analyze interview data. Before the chapter ends with a conclusion, I discuss the dearth of current scholarly resources that theorize the masculinities of African concert dance in “Oversight: African Dance Masculinities.”

Setting the Stage

In *Men who Dance: Aesthetics, Athletics and the Art of Masculinity*, Michael Gard explores identity construction in Australian male dancers who study ballet and contemporary Western genres. He theorizes the male dancer as “a process” that embodies the sociopolitical underpinnings of culture, proposing a “technology of justificatory discursive strategies.” Gard writes, “Rather than the male dancer being a self-evident thing, he can be seen as a discursive ‘project’ in much the same way as the ‘self.”⁶⁴ While his definition of ‘technology’ is unclear, I interpret this as a lexicon describing the complex ways that men identify themselves as dancers and accept their dancing bodies.

For Gard, the spectacle of the male body and the assumption of homosexuality are among the discourses that situate dancing in a non-masculine paradigm of art. He finds that the male body is forced to navigate contemporary middle class anxiety about virility. Citing Ramsey Burt, Gard explains that the female body became a site for eroticism for the male concertgoer during the last quarter of the 19th century. He writes, “According to Burt, it is precisely the inability of the body of the male dancer to clearly articulate the distinction

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between the homosocial and homosexuality which precipitated the suspicion of homosexuality.”

Gard’s analysis of Burt’s theory of the male body as spectacle elucidates how society shapes perception of the body to render the dancing male a non-masculine project. It is important to note that both Gard and Burt focus on White men who dance ballet and contemporary vocabularies. Tensions between masculinity and dance are situated in a social and cultural discourse, one that has relevance in an African dance culture transmitted in the United States where Western masculinity constructions play an important role in the way African American men construct their gender identities.

Arthur Brittain offers three premises for understanding masculinity as a function of identity: (1) the socialization case – we are ‘socialized’ to be males, not predestined, and the cultures in which we are situated inform and train us to be the men we are; (2) the masculine crisis theory – we act differently from how society prescribes for us; and (3) the reality construction model – gender fluctuates according to time and how individuals see themselves. Brittain’s framework elucidates how dancing men in Western culture find ourselves, or as Gard would have it, lose ourselves, in art that is socially unacceptable for our gender. Further, there is no biological imperative that prompts men to play sports; dance is fair game as an appropriate physical activity. While we may be biologically pre-disposed to play, as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone finds in the “rough and tumble” play of early hominids,

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and play, as it were, is intrinsically linked to the human behavior of dance,\textsuperscript{68,69} the gendered preference of sport over dance is socially driven. Brittain’s theory dispels the notion that masculinity is a natural or physiologically predetermined ontology and is useful in that way. However, his \textit{masculine crisis theory} seems problematic as it emphasizes social construction to such an extent that deviation becomes ‘crisis.’

Masculinity, and more generally, gender performance, is a societal prescription for how one thinks he or she should act based on their biological sex.\textsuperscript{70} In this light, Judith Butler’s contention that gender is a series of repeated acts that create the illusion of congealing over time has relevance.\textsuperscript{71} The construct masculinity can be equated with Butler’s gender performance, as dance, too, is a “stylization of the body.”\textsuperscript{72} For dancing men, gender performance can reinforce or betray adherence to a masculine ideology, a mythical way of being that embodies societal prescriptions. Gard contends, however, that masculinities are “rhetorical devices…, unstable, political and contingent upon the discursive conditions in which they are deployed.”\textsuperscript{73}

Kariamu Welsh, Umfundalai’s progenitor, advocates for a stylized art within the pantheon of African dance practice, dance that is no longer directly associated with a specific

\textsuperscript{68} Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, \textit{The Corporeal Turn: An Interdisciplinary Reader}, (UK: Imprint Academic, 2009).


\textsuperscript{71} Judith Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, (New York: Routlege, 2006), 45.

\textsuperscript{72} Judith Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 45.

\textsuperscript{73} Michael Gard, 2.
religion or ritual.\textsuperscript{74} Her focus on an essence of African culture as the source of Umfundalai movement practice avails the Umfundalai dancer a myriad of ways to embody African-derived movement and empowers him to access other kinds of essences that permeate African culture, including gender. Umfundalai, too, relies on stylization of the body and therefore allows the dancer the potential to embody African culture to construct gender, dismantle masculinities, and to create an individualized—or stylized—male expression.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the interview methods employed to uncover the lived gendered experiences of African American men who dance Umfundalai. As I am interested in the phenomenological hermeneutic aspects of this discourse, the ways subjects interpret their lived experiences in Umfundalai, John Gagnon’s writing about scripts is useful. He uses the term \textit{intrapsychic script} to denote the internal messages housing the social codes for gender performance that we individually tell ourselves.\textsuperscript{75} He suggests further that sexual desire is also learned behavior, and that the lines bracketing sexual orientation and sexual preference are often blurred.

Gagnon’s assertion that both sexual and cultural contexts live in our “head space” affords an opportunity to unpack masculinities as an experiential construct among African American dancing men. Such \textit{symbolic masculinities}, “the rhetorical devices employed to describe the qualities associated with men,” are functional in identity formation regardless of their origin.\textsuperscript{76} The Australian male dancers Gard interviews knowingly participate in an


\textsuperscript{76} M. Gard, 31.
activity their society regards as non-masculine. Indeed, their pursuit of theatrical dance requires navigation of societal messages regarding male behavior even when they consciously dismiss those messages. As we find in the next section, African American dancing men receive these societal messages from two sources minimally: American society and the African American community. I offer that the concept of intrapsychic script has a particular significance as “the problems of connecting meaning (culture) and action (social interaction) are played out in the domain of the intrapsychic.”

Yet while current writers dismantle the myth of foundationalism, or basic principles, it has power for men. Chris Blazina writes:

> We are seeking an understanding of masculine ideals reflecting western myth, rather than a description of the reality of what men have achieved… This distinction is important, for while cultural myths showcase our prototypes of how it should be, they may not always easily approximate achievable reality.

Blazina alludes to a cultural dialogue, a tension between our expected role in society and what we, as men, actually experience. Much of the literature posits male socio-cultural problems in Western society as a consequence of men’s inability to embrace the masculinities society has scripted. In a thesis-antithesis-thesis paradigm borrowed from Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions, Blazina suggests that new paradigms create tensions by challenging old paradigms. If the old paradigm is credent, it may withstand changes incited by conflicting perspectives. If not, a new paradigm replaces it.

Blazina offers a caveat to Kuhn’s theory as it pertains to masculinities in Western society, suggesting that new paradigms never completely replace old ones. Rather, the old


and the new interface and create a blending when the old paradigm (conventional masculinity) loses its usefulness.\textsuperscript{79} Anderson’s research on male cheerleading exemplifies how nuanced male expression – what he terms \textit{inclusive masculinities}, emerge from the tension between conventional and radically new modalities.\textsuperscript{80}

As masculinities shift and develop, men’s (and women’s) adherence to their ideologies is situated in what Tim Edwards, like Brittain, refers to as the \textit{masculine crisis theory} – the idea that both men and women deviate from a grand masculine schema.\textsuperscript{81} In a historical analysis, Edwards describes three waves of crisis masculinity thinking in the United States: (1) the 1970s sex role paradigm – men’s sex roles prepare them for social control and are harmful to their psychology; (2) the 1980s hegemony theory – the sex role paradigm oppresses other forms of masculinity including those connected to ethnicity and sexuality; and (3) the late 1990’s to early 2000’s post-structural theory, which focuses on normativity, performativity and sexuality in intersection with masculinity.\textsuperscript{82} Gard (and Burt) describe an evolution of middle class anxiety about virility that affected male presence in theatrical concert dance. Edwards, like Blazina, alludes to the discourse of male lived experiences that deviate from societal expectations. This fissure between ideology and lived experience is the location for the reinvention of newer and more complex masculinities as evidenced by Eric Anderson’s research on inclusive masculinities which will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

\textsuperscript{79} Chris Blazina, \textit{The Cultural Myth of Masculinity}, xiv-xvi.


\textsuperscript{81} Tim Edwards, \textit{Cultures of Masculinity}, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1-5.

\textsuperscript{82} Tim Edwards, \textit{Cultures of Masculinity}, 3.
Masculinities in Black

Masculinity for African American men emerges from current literature as a discursive and dialogic project. Janheinz Jahn uses the South African cocktail, Skokian, as a metaphor for European misinterpretation of African phenomena. Much like the beverage, which had to be altered so that it could be manufactured secretly under the Boer’s Puritan prohibition, Jahn asserts that much of development in African culture can be theorized as a reaction to the pressures of White oppression, thereby invisibilizing the development of African culture according to an African paradigm. Skokianism, then, is the reliance on a European worldview to assess the development of African culture, which renders African culture inferior. Citing Malinowski, Jahn states the following:

…all new objects, facts and forms of life in Africa are the results of European pressure and African resistance. Even African nationalism, which invokes and revives an African culture, is, according to Malinowski, nothing but ‘Skokian’: the African, he believes, is seduced by the enticements of western Civilization, and accepts new forms of his life.

Jahn’s skokianism arguably pervades the articulation of a Black or African American masculinity in American society in that gender normativity is characterized by an implicit, perpetual dialog with and negation of White patriarchy. Chief among them is

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84 Janheinz Jahn, Munlu African Culture and the Western World, 14.
McCall’s “cool pose,” the proposition that African American men have developed a way of being that is predicated on what is perceivably unachievable in the masculinity of a White American society.\footnote{Nathan McCall, \textit{Makes Me Wanna Holler: a Young Black Man in America}, (New York, Vintage Books, 1995).} McCall and his contemporaries illuminate what I consider African American culture’s dysfunctional reliance on antithesis to elucidate its masculinities. Theories like “cool pose” situate themselves in the inaccessibility of White privilege among African American men. The intention of this dissertation research is to explore how African American men negotiate social and cultural ideologies in their dancing bodies. To this end, this dissertation is more aligned with the coping aspects of cool pose that Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson describe, the attitudes and actions residing in the Black males psyche that ward off the anxiety of being regarded as inferior to their White counterparts.\footnote{Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, \textit{Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America}, (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), 5.}

This study explores Umfundalai as a potential modality through which African American men embrace and/or refute the gendered construction with which they—no, we—have been socialized.

As I bring African American men into focus, specifically, the dancing men of Umfundalai, our inability and/or unwillingness to subscribe to Western social edicts points to a body of literature that posits African American or Black masculinity as an embodied refusal. Grier and Cobb write:

\begin{quote}
For the black man in this country, it is not so much a matter of acquiring manhood as it is a struggle to feel it his own. Whereas the white man regards his manhood as ordained right, the black man is engaged in a never-ending battle for its possession.\footnote{William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, \textit{Black Rage}, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 59.}
\end{quote}
The “battle” that Grier and Cobb refer to underscores the instability of African American masculinity as a conceptual project in that it relies on antithesis for definition. Richard Majors’ perspective on ‘cool pose’ emanates from the African American man’s adversarial relationship to a White gendered ideology that he is unable to embrace. He explains cool pose this way:

Instead, we channeled our creative energies into construction of a symbolic universe…we adopted unique poses and postures to offset the externally imposed ‘zero image.’ Because black men were denied access to the dominant culture’s acceptable avenues of expression, we created a form of self-expression – the ‘Cool Pose.’  

For dancing men, the poses and postures that Richards refers to have currency – they exist in the stylization of our gendered bodies. As we dance on the concert stage in ways that intersect with the perceived masculinities of choreographers, audiences, and ourselves, the masculine constructs we employ could reflect denial of the masculinities available in a larger American society.

Feminist scholar bell hooks theorizes ‘coolness’ as African American men observe it and arrives at a meaning that embodies self-determining gender performance. She writes:

Black male cool was defined by black male willingness to confront reality, to face the truth, and bear it, not adopting a false pose of cool while feeding on fantasy; not by black male denial or by assuming a “poor me” victim identity. It was defined by the individual black males daring to self-define rather than be defined by others.  

On one level hooks’ ‘cool’ underscores the defiant nature of Black masculinity, the refusal to blindly accept a White masculinity that fails to support our realities. On a deeper level hooks’

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93 bell hooks, We Real Cool, 147.
description refers to the “victorious consciousness” of Afrocentricity, an intentional, subjective perspective of experience in relation to past and present that Asante asserts is required for an Afrocentric project. hooks’ and Asante’s views intersect in their theorization of a cultured agency in African American male discourse. hooks’ reference to ‘cool’ as an extension of African American men’s self-determination points to an essential part of men’s experience that I call *maleness* in this study.

The use of the term maleness in regard to agency can also be an act of resistance. In my own experience as an African American man, masculinity as associated with activities that boys typically do was posited as a natural or biological imperative. In other words, it was natural for boys to play sports, which implied that participation in something that did not include a socially approved cannon of male behavior rendered a man less male. While maleness, in and of itself, connotes the biological entity, I have elaborated it to encompass agency. Maleness, in this context, requires a choice on behalf of the actor, a stylization, as Butler would have it, that he constructs. It is the reclamation of dance and other non-masculine activities as potential expressions of one’s manhood.

As the literature reveals so far, masculinities – African American, American, and otherwise, have been examined as a by-product of society. Further, gendered social constructions have eclipsed men’s lived experiences as gendered beings. In a study conducted among African and European American men, African-American men under 18 years of age agreed with dominant messages of masculinity, as did their White counterparts, while variance occurred with men over eighteen. Harris, Torres, and Allendar attribute this

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95 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 45.
difference to a racial awareness of adult roles in Western society that forces men to look critically at who they are.\textsuperscript{96} In other words, as African American men live into adulthood, we develop a perspective of the power, rights, and privileges Western society affords us and develop realistic, albeit pessimistic views of our gender roles.

Aligning with Harris, Torres and Allendar, both Blazina and Brittain underscore masculinity’s failure to be one-size fits-all. With respect to African American men, Blazina’s thesis-antithesis-thesis model extends Athena Matua’s and Neal’s assertions that the African American community is left with a ‘blackened’ White patriarchy, replete with domination, sexism, homophobia, and nationalism.\textsuperscript{97, 98} Along with other masculine studies writers, Stephen Whitehead challenges masculinity’s dichotomous discourse by advocating for a multiplicity of masculinities to capture the male experience.\textsuperscript{99, 100} He writes,

\begin{quote}
…it is no longer tenable, given recognition of the multiplicity, historicity and dynamism of gender representations, to talk of masculinity in the singular. Rather, we can see that masculinities are plural and multiple; they differ over space, time and context, are rooted only in the cultural and social moment and are thus, inevitably, entwined with other powerful and influential variables such as sexuality, class, age and ethnicity.\textsuperscript{101}
\end{quote}

As Whitehead contends, a multiplicity of masculinities is situated in the culture of a given society, thereby engendering “influential variables” with power. Masculinities are symbols to reflect and refute; we shape our identities in response. As recounted in Chapter 6, in dance,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[96] Ian Harris, Allendar, and Torres, \textit{The Responses of African American Men to Dominant Norms of Masculinity Within the United States}, Sex Roles, 31:11/12 (1994:Dec.), 703.
\item[99] Athena Matua, 18.
\end{footnotes}
they are the symbols I have labored to create. When manifested in gesture or any other stylization of the body, I offer that masculinities, too, possess the “virtual power” theorized by American philosopher of art Susanne Langer (1895-1985).102 Yet, I underscore Blazina’s argument that they fail to fully reflect the reality of a male discourse.103

Peter Castor’s research on the intersection between prison culture and African American masculinity illuminates a representational masculinity. This observed formation emanates from organic exchanges between actual reality and a constructed reality, both contributing to the other. He writes, “This book organizes its study of the representation of criminality and imprisonment from 1931 to 1999 through a set of texts that emphasize the tensions between imagination and history.”104 Castor investigates how the disproportionate number of incarcerated African-American males projects on the imaginations of the American public, and points to the vestiges of prison culture that appear in hip hop music and fashion.

The “tensions” that Castor references create space for a style that heralds prison culture, that arguably promotes prison culture to develop. In this light, one can understand how the inmate jumpsuit style made popular by Dickie in the late 1990s had social currency among inner city African American men. To the extent that Black American men define


Susanne K. Langer describes dance as gestural and as such, having virtual powers. Gesture, as she sees it, creates the illusion of expression. While gesture itself is simply vital movement, it becomes dance in its illusory nature – the choreographer’s ability to have the audience imagine that vital movement has a particular meaning.


masculinity via rejection of White expression, the *Dickie* suit was a stylized ‘fuck you’ to American society. It created an illusion of toughness, thereby unearthing a characterization that posited the Black convict as a symbol of African American masculinity, what African American female rapper, McLyte refers to as a “ruffneck.”

I need a ruffneck  
I need a man that don't stitch like a bitch  
Shed tears or switch  
Doin' whatever it takes to make ends meet  
But never meetin' the end 'cause he knows the street  
Eat sleep shit, eat sleep shit  
Then it's back to the streets to make a buck quick.105

This excerpt from the third verse of McLyte’s *Ruffneck* exemplifies how the Black streetwise and irreverent male stereotype, arguably produced by prison culture, permeates the music that is indicative of the culture from which it emerges. A metaphorical dance begins in which realistic male images and imagined designations morph into embodied stereotypes that appear real. They become masculinities to which many aspire—especially young men. Such masculinities maintain a cultural resonance via tacit social pressure, i.e. without requiring a direct, verbal dictate. In other words, impressionable young men might feel inclined to embody the “ruff neck” archetype drawn by Lyte’s lyrics when a “ruff neck,” as she describes him, may not exist.

From Brittain to Majors, to Whitehead, Matua and Castor, masculinity as a theoretical project is multifarious and convoluted for African American men. Masculinities provide the social code for gendered behavior, and for African American men this code has shown to be reactionary and unstable at best. As African American men pursue their

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interests in Umfundalai, a movement system that intentionally connects dancers to an African heritage, our exploration of ‘masculinity’ may in itself have the potential for seeding gendered cultural agency, or for what I am calling for purposes of this research, maleness. This is the central question of the present study.

Maleness: An Embodied Interpretation

To interrogate maleness as a sociological construct, I refer to a salient configuration in sociology: culture, social structure, and agency, in which social structure and agency are analogous to masculinities and maleness, respectively. Symbolic interactionist Herbert Blumer posits that human beings derive meaning from interaction with other human beings, allied with their interpretation of those interactions. Human society, then, is characterized by collective action or “living,” out of which social structure emerges from how people act toward each other.\(^{106}\)

The salience of symbolic interactionism, much like Gagnon’s intrapsychic script, resides in the individual’s interpretation through self-talk or “indications” as Blumer calls it. As this dissertation brings African American men into focus, symbolic interactionism affords a dancing man a construction of his gender identity though his interpretation of social interactions with members of his community (social structure) and his involvement in the Umfundalai dance tradition (culture). To this end, his interpretation is a modality for agency in his gender role.

Sharon Hays’ assertion that culture is a form of social structure and that agency and social structure are co-dependent, also provides a germane paradigm in which maleness is an agency and masculinities serve as social structures out of which maleness emanates and simultaneously works to dismantle. As Hays writes:

Both structurally reproductive and structurally transformative agency, then, can be understood as human social action involving choices among the alternatives made available by the enabling features of social structure, and made possible by a solid grounding in structural constraints.

I offer that male gender agency may rely on socially scripted masculinities for its coherence as it emerges from the individual as a distinct expression. Yet, as Hays describes social structures, maleness, like transformative agency, reifies masculinities in one’s gender performance.

Several names for agency stemming from gender performance appear within masculine studies literature. Quoting a subject who participated in research carried out in a private school for male adolescents, Oransky and Marecek define “doing gender” as a negotiation of social ideologies. Simons refers to performing ‘in’ one’s sexuality as a portrayal of gender that makes sense for the individual. Neil offers “newblackman” to

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represent the agency situated in the multiplicity of African American masculinities that transcend strictures of domination, homophobia, and rigid White patriarchy.\textsuperscript{111}

For purposes of this study, \textit{maleness} reflects an undergirding theme in the literature that highlights a construction of gender that utilizes and transcends the cultural sociology of gender performance.\textsuperscript{112} Shaped by masculinities, \textit{maleness} is a customized male personhood, the embodiment of characteristics that make a man ‘his own man.’ It may draw from hegemony, masculinity and femininity, as these are all active agents in men’s societal contexts, their \textit{habitus}. However, maleness is associated with choice. As a dancing man I interpret my own gendered existence, which resides both within and separate from the masculinities with which I have been socialized. This study examines dancing men’s lived experiences of Umfundalai’s dance culture, replete with its Pan African philosophies, its specific set of social interactions – symbolic and otherwise, and an evolving African-informed social structure, as a potential resource for male gender construction.

Dancing Masculinities

With masculinities in the foreground, dance becomes fertile ground for seeding male discourse. Dance writer Ted Polhemus defines culture as everything that a social group has in common, its “we-ness.” Dance, for Polhemus, is an abstraction and stylization of physical culture and as such has an intrinsic relationship to everyday life, embodying the overall


culture of society. According to George Ritzer, symbolic interactionism posits gesture as a social act by which “movements of the first organism act as specific stimuli calling forth the (socially) appropriate responses of the second organism.” The caveat, ‘socially appropriate,’ houses the potential for gender performance and performativity that align with a societal formula for male behavior, and gesture has the potential for incubating danced masculinities of the same gestalt. Polhemus writes,

Always and everywhere the way ‘we’ walk, sit, squat, lean against a wall, stand, sleep, copulate, and so forth is seen as the way the body naturally behaves. This is not only because one’s physical self is existentially omnipresent, it is also because ‘the body’ is inevitably caught up in a symbolic congruence with the ‘social body’ of one’s society; a congruence so complete that it has the effect of blinkering us to cross-cultural relativity or corporal experience.

If one delimits the “we” in Polhemus’ statement to gender and race, gesture as an indication of social body and as source material for the virtual power of dance potentiates an African American male discourse that lives within the dancing body.

For Judith Lynne Hanna, masculinity is the hard body. As evidenced by Ted Shawn’s all male dance company, the male body perceived as an athletic body diffuses concertgoers’ assumptions of homosexuality. While she does not use the term ‘masculinity’ in her book, The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool, Brenda Dixon-Gottschild presents Bill T. Jones’ identification of the “big chest of a black man” as a stereotype that at one time

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haunted White concert goers in observing the dancing Black male body on stage. In this same discussion regarding African American dancers’ conjecture of White stereotypes about Black bodies, Gus Solomon Jr. references the musculature of Black men as a site of envy and denigration for White men and women.

Ramsey Burt offers Alvin Ailey’s Revelations (1960) and Blues Suite (1958) as conventional masculinities, and posits Eleo Pomare’s Junkie (1967) as a newer masculinity that challenges masculine stereotypes by presenting a cutting edge depiction of African-American urban life. For Burt, Junkie’s “edginess” counteracts the heteronormative male roles traditionally portrayed in American concert dance. Burt’s analysis points to the convoluted discourse of the African American dancing man. As a White man situated in the privileged stratum of American culture, Burt might have found the portrayal of a man as a staggering, shaking drug addict ‘cutting edge;’ however, such a depiction creates a friction with the American masculinity archetype.

Men in the urban African American communities where Pomare toured the dance with his Dancemobile project in the 1960s might have perceived the dance as ‘real.’ In a Collegium of African Diasporan Dance meeting at Duke University in 2012, dance historian

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John Perpener remarked that Pomare had performed *Junkie* for junkies. Yet, Burt’s analysis points to dance’s ability to house the negotiation of multiple male ideologies – conflicting, complimentary, and otherwise. He alluded to this idea in his contention regarding the popularity of Ailey’s *Revelations*.

The continuing popularity of Ailey’s work in general, and of Revelation in particular, I suggest does relate to simple assertion or normative heterosexual masculinity but to the plurality of possibilities his works sometimes suggest. While, in their citation of popular forms, they have sometimes colluded with stereotypes regarding the black male body, they have also hinted at the discomfort and stress of being seen in such limited and damaging ways.

Oversight: Masculinities in African Dance

As a student of neo-traditional African dance, I have observed several West African dances that require male dancers to perform a masculinity on the concert stage. Chief among them, the Guinean dance *Doun Doun Ba*, “the dance of the big drum,” presents men as strong, wrestling champions. A conventional masculinity of brute strength can be observed in the facial distortion, rapid muscle contractions of chest and arm muscles, and an ostentatious display of anger as danced by the men in this tradition. *Doun Doun Ba*’s significance in the lives of Umfundalai’s men is discussed in Chapter 6.

My understanding of *Doun Doun Ba* and other West African dances from the Malian Empire rely on the oral tradition and my social or symbolic interaction with two male dance teachers: Hodari Banks (Ibeji Performing Arts Company, Philadelphia, PA) and Chuck Davis (African American Dance Ensemble, Durham, NC). Though reliance on my

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125 The Malian Empire (800-1550 ACE) covered a large area of West Africa, and had a strong cultural influence, including the spread of language. http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/685627/Mali.
lived experience as a performer offers legitimate phenomenological data, its placement in this review of literature illuminates a dearth of written scholarship regarding masculinities in African dance. This scarcity of academic resources lends justification for this study and further research that theorizes African American men’s presence in African concert dance.

In 2012, Chuck Davis mounted a new work on the Berry and Nance Dance Project, comprised of Stafford C. Berry, Jr. and myself, Kemal Nance, as a way to choreograph his legacy. As performers of his work and researchers of his process, we interviewed Davis to explore the gendered information he conveyed to us, two African American male dancers he has knighted as his “sons.” Davis offered two ideas about African male gender performance that are pertinent to this study. Firstly, he admonished us to know who we are as African American men. While he did not articulate who men should be in concrete terms, he shared his view that men should avoid being enamored by the expression of other cultures. In metaphor, he referred to the turned out position of the feet as a pose of castration and parallel feet as a stance of forward motion.

The second idea regarding gender performance that emerged from this artistic and intellectual exchange was Davis’s undergirding portrayal of heteronormativity. While he did not advocate for a heteronormative existence in African dance, he isolated it as important to the work that he created for Berry and me. He offers the following statement on masculinities in his work, Paths (2012):

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If you were some other dancers, it would be a problem. There is no problem with you, as an artist, and Stafford, as an artist, when it comes to masculinity on stage. We have to be realists. In what we're doing, there is a masculine side and a feminine side. When I want the feminine side, I will ask for women or very effeminate men. This work is for men—for two men—not for two sissies—not for two homosexuals. I mean flamboyant. You know what the word is. The dance is for two masculine men.  

While there are problems with Davis’s equation of masculinity with heterosexual orientation, the assertion that artists “have to be realists” alludes to a tacit adherence to an ideology that prioritizes heteronormative performance in African dance. Moreover, it points to the idea that Berry and I—two prominent men in Umfundalai men’s history (see Chapter 4)—have bodies that can hold a heteronormative portrayal while dancing.

Chuck Davis occupies an important role in the continuance of African dance traditions in the United States. While his insight on masculinities represents a confluence of his African American upbringing and his experiences traveling to several countries in Africa over the past thirty years, he also reveals an oversight relating to acknowledgement of diversity in male experiences and the possibility of varied gender performances in African dance. *Brothers of the Bah Yáh* is one attempt to illuminate dancing men’s discourse in African dance, a subject that has been largely overlooked and therefore insufficiently theorized.

**Conclusion**

This chapter on the literature of masculinities suggests that African American men struggle to live up to and embody White patriarchy, forcing a conception of gendered selves to be reliant on a culture that renders us “other” or “marked,” leaving us with an

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127 Stafford C. Berry, Jr. and C. Kemal Nance, “Baba to Sons: Chuck Davis Choreographs His Legacy with Paths,” 2.
unattainable goal of becoming a “man” in White patriarchal terms. African American men may align with a separate code for male identity, creating our masculinities as a negation of White male rule.\(^{128}\) In doing so, we reify a White masculinity that seeks to dominate other men, including “marked” men, through a universal that is problematic at best.\(^{129}\)

Black feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins writes:

To the extent that only white men have been allowed to exercise this type of overarching dominion, hegemonic masculinity is defined in terms of white masculinity. Consequently, this thesis, by definition, constructs black masculinity as subordinate. Using white masculinity as a yardstick for a normal masculinity grounded in ideas about strength as dominance, African Americans become defined as subordinates, deviant and allegedly weak, and black men’s purported weakness as men is compared to the seeming strength of white men.\(^{130}\)

Hill Collins’ argument suggests that adherence to White patriarchy renders African American masculinity unstable. This problem becomes more convoluted when one considers the instability of White masculinity.

According to Hannah Rosin, the days of White male strength and power as associated with economic status are relics of distant and unachievable past. She writes:

For most of the century men derived their sense of manliness from their work, or their role as head of the family. A “coal miner” or “rigger” used to be a complete identity, connecting a man to a long lineage of men. Implicit in the title was his role as anchor of a domestic existence.\(^{131}\)


\(^{130}\) Patricia Hill Collins, “A Telling Difference,” 74-75.

Rosin’s research reveals that women are earning more money than men and becoming more sufficient with supporting themselves without men’s emotional or financial support. Further, what had been construed as gendered personality attributes have shifted. What used to be associated with male gender roles are now inverted as women become more aggressive, violent, and sexually adventurous, and men are reluctant to transcend to roles that require them to be nurturing. As dancing men participate in the art that American society has deemed non-masculine and according to Rosin, “man” is over, the prospect of a masculinity that transcends the changing structure of gender performance in American society is hopeful.

Doug Risner’s research on boys who participate in professional training programs in Western dance idioms reveals some of the scripts male dancers use to pursue their art. For instance, boys must be careful how they show their appreciation for another male’s dancing to avoid the accusation of homosexuality. Regardless of his sexual orientation, the dancing boy must demonstrate repulsion in order to assert his maleness in the feminized world of concert dance. As African American men, this kind of scripting is complicated with issues of race. For African American men, manhood can be a perennial battle. Our masculinity can indeed be ‘marked.’ Yet, some of us choose to dance, to leap, jump, and skip outside our manhood into a role that our community arguably regards as non-masculine. Nevertheless, we are men, too.

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Then, there are the subjects of the present research, African American men who have pursued African dance, an art form that offers a direct connection to African heritage, potentially circumventing the White hegemony of our upbringing. For some of us, this path was serendipitous and for others a conscious choice. As we pursue the complex project of becoming dancing African men, this research aims to unearth how Umfundalai influences our North American African male identities. Davis Kirkland, citing Walten, argues,

...by focusing on black male subjectivity..., how young black men imagine themselves and their possibilities and as a tool for acting, we see literacy as the practice of shaping identities and as a tool for participating in culturally valued experiences.\[134\]

In Kirkland’s terms, Umfundalai offers a “literacy” of sorts, and this dissertation aims to translate it for a larger audience.

Through the insight of current masculine studies writers and the hindsight of my lived experiences, this chapter has provided background for the study of gendered experiences in Umfundalai’s dancing men. In its construction the chapter illuminates an oversight – the theorization of masculinities and maleness in African concert dance. This study is an incremental step towards filling this void by theorizing gender in Umfundalai. An assumption of the study is that the gendered constructions of African American men are multi-layered, perhaps labyrinthine.

The next three chapters present the substantive findings of the study, beginning with historical perspectives. The series begins with Chapter 4, which provides a chronology of the emergence of a male presence in Umfundalai since 1993, including male-inspired developments in the technique.

\[134\] D. Kirkland, “‘We Real Cool’: Toward a Theory of Black Masculine Literacies,” Reading Research Quarterly (2009 July), 279.
In Dancing in my Mother’s Mother’s Body: Transmutation and Synthesis of African Dance Culture in Kariamu Welsh-Asante’s Umfundalai Dance Technique, Umfundalai’s first Dance master, Glendola Yhema Mills, documents the evolution of the Umfundalai technique, citing five developmental “phases” she discovered in one of Kariamu Welsh’s unpublished works (1994). The first, the Nationalist Phase (1968 to 1972), stemmed from Welsh’s involvement with the Black Arts movement in which her heightened level of community consciousness spawned artistic ways of expressing African American experiences. The second phase, Developmental Period (1973 to 1975), gives way to the Black Dance Workshop in Buffalo, New York, a student dance company of African American women who sought to create work that uniquely expressed their ‘Blackness’. During the third phase (1976 to 1979), Welsh explored other dance techniques including Graham, Dunham, Primus, and neo-traditional African dances, providing her with more creative resources that formalized how she taught movement.

The fourth phase, the Africa Period (1979 to 1983), ushered in Welsh’s mentor, Pearl Reynolds, third generation Dunham dancer who trained Welsh in Katherine Dunham’s technique and advised her as she directed her company, Black Dance Workshop. Katherine Dunham’s work served as a foundation for Umfundalai. During this period Welsh comes to fully understand the importance of cultural validity as it pertains to dance pedagogy and the visceral concept of “groundedness.” This phase is also characterized by Welsh’s tenure as

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135 Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to the author, May 4, 2014.
Artistic Director of the National Dance Company of Zimbabwe. During the Africa phase Umfundalai’s rituals and protocol were established and the *lapa* became standard female attire for dance classes.\(^{136}\)

Mills’ participation in Umfundalai including her doctoral research is situated in what Welsh identifies as the Philadelphia phase (1983 to 2014),\(^{137,\ 138}\) the fifth phase of the technique’s development. Welsh’s move to Philadelphia brought on a synthesis of previous phases. Live percussion, which usually involved a male musician, becomes a standard practice. While she stopped performing her own choreography during this period (1983),\(^{139}\) her completion of doctoral studies (1993)\(^{140}\) and intense work with youth and young adult dancers codified the Umfundalai vocabulary.\(^{141}\) Mills becomes the first dance master and writes the definitive text on the Umfundalai technique with her dissertation. Upon Mills’ dissertation completion in 1995, the Philadelphia phase was the most current stage of development and the phase in which I, the eventual second dance master, entered Umfundalai’s history. I posit that a subsidiary phase has developed in Philadelphia since 1995. This phase includes a yet undescribed facet of Umfundalai’s evolution that Mills’ work does not address – the emergence of a male Umfundalai culture.

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\(^{136}\) G. Mills, 97-98.

\(^{137}\) When Mills completed her dissertation, the Philadelphia Phase was the current phase of Umfundalai’s development. In recent correspondence, Welsh identified 2014 as the Philadelphia Phase’s end.

\(^{138}\) Kariamu Welsh, e-mail message to author, May 7, 2014.

\(^{139}\) Kariamu Welsh, e-mail message to author, May 4, 2014.


\(^{141}\) G. Mills, 97-99.
Welsh believes that her first group of dancers in Buffalo were primarily interested in how Umfundalai contributed to how they danced—not necessarily its impact on their cultural or political identities. She attributes this lack of perspective to closeness of age between her and her dancers.\textsuperscript{142} Similarly, Mills’ and my ‘closeness’ (nine years) contributed to invisibilization of a history we were both living. Neither of us knew that my repeated cries for a male voice and presence in a usually all-female cast of dancers, for a male movement style to counterbalance what I viewed as feminine movement canons, pioneered a subculture of male traditions and a legacy of African American dancing men in Umfundalai.

Mills describes the second and third phases of Umfundalai’s development as “distinct and overlapping”\textsuperscript{143} in that they identify distinguishable periods in Welsh’s life that happened concurrently. The Philadelphia phase can be described similarly. It starts in 1983 when Welsh with her then husband, Molefi Kete Asante, moved to Philadelphia. In the fall of 1988, Welsh joined Swarthmore College’s adjunct faculty to teach African dance. I, a then 18-year old boy, began my undergraduate studies at Swarthmore during the same semester and enrolled in Welsh’s class. I took Umfundalai class during every semester at Swarthmore and spent summers teaching it to high school students in the college’s Upward Bound program, much like Welsh did in New York in the early 1970s.\textsuperscript{144}

During the summer following my introduction to Umfundalai (1989), I shared this newfound African dance vocabulary with high school friend and eventual dance partner, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., who immediately enrolled in Mills’ Umfundalai class at Temple

\textsuperscript{142} G. Mills, 99.

\textsuperscript{143} G. Mills, 69.

\textsuperscript{144} G. Mills, 71.
University in September. During my undergraduate years (1988-1992), I studied Umfundalai with Welsh, Mills, and Joylynn “Ama” Houtman. Berry continued to study with Welsh, Mills, and Houtman at Temple University and Freedom Theater in Philadelphia. During this same period Abdur-Rahim Jackson, a talented middle school student, studied Umfundalai with Welsh in the Intensive Training Program at Freedom Theater.

Until this time male dancers had only performed featured roles as guest artists with both Black Dance Workshop and the early days of Kariamu & Company.\textsuperscript{145} Dunham dancer and Philadelphia native Craig “Spider” Moore worked extensively with Welsh early in the Philadelphia phase, but his debilitating illness and eventual death on March 15, 1999\textsuperscript{146} kept him from fully embracing the technique. In February 1993, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Abdur-Rahim Jackson, and I became the first male Umfundalai-trained dancers to perform with the cast of Kariamu & Company (K&C). Troy Barnes, a modern dance major from the University of the Arts and a new student to Umfundalai, joined the cast as well. Mills, Houtman, and eventual Umfundalai dance master Saleana Pettaway were also among the performers. In 1994, Berry and I, along with K&C dancer Candace Hundley, launched another Umfundalai-based company, The Seventh Principle, a dance company whose beginning repertoire emanated from two of its founders’ shared experiences as African American men who grew up in Chester, Pennsylvania.

In September 1993, I returned to Swarthmore College as an Associate in Performance to teach Umfundalai, ushering in a generation of students whose education in African dance and training as Umfundalai dancers is modeled through my male body.

\textsuperscript{145} Kariamu Welsh, personal communication, 2010.

During the years of teaching at Swarthmore I have developed original Umfundalai choreography for annual student and faculty concerts and explored ways to convey Umfundalai's essence to students in ways that accommodate ethnic, cultural, and socio economic diversity. In the years that mark the beginning of the Philadelphia phase, I was unknowingly developing ‘my Umfundalai,’ a male-informed style of dance that lived on in the students I have taught since 1993. Concurrently, I was growing as rehearsal director in Kariamu & Company, leading rehearsal and teaching choreography when Welsh and Mills were absent.

Since the first dance class with Welsh in 1988, my participation in Umfundalai's tradition inaugurated a series of events in which male involvement significantly influenced Umfundalai's pedagogy, repertory, and philosophy. Table 2 features a chronology of male events that highlight the developments that emerged from the inclusion of men.
Table 2: A Umfundalai Chronology of Male Events (1988-1996)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 1988</td>
<td><strong>C. Kemal Nance</strong> takes his first Umfundalai dance class with Kariamu Welsh-Asante at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June to August 1989</td>
<td><strong>C. Kemal Nance</strong> teaches Umfundalai to Swarthmore College Upward Bound students. Among his students was best friend <strong>Stafford C. Berry, Jr.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1989</td>
<td><strong>Stafford C. Berry, Jr.</strong> takes Umfundalai with Glendola Rene Mills-Parker at Temple University in Philadelphia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1993</td>
<td><strong>C. Kemal Nance</strong> performs his first leading role in Kariamu Welsh-Asante's <em>The King Must Die.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1993</td>
<td><strong>C. Kemal Nance</strong> begins teaching Umfundalai at Swarthmore College as dance faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1994</td>
<td><strong>Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Candace Hundley, and C. Kemal Nance</strong> form a Umfundalai-based dance company, <em>The Seventh Principle.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1995</td>
<td>Glendola Yhema Mills completes her EdD in Dance at Temple University. Her dissertation title was “Dancing in my Mother’s Mother’s Body: Transmutation and Synthesis in Kariamu Welsh Asante’s Umfundalai African Dance Technique.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1996</td>
<td><strong>Derrick Perkins</strong> joins Kariamu &amp; Company: Traditions, becoming the fourth Umfundalai-trained male dancer to perform on the concert stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Stafford C. Berry, Jr., C. Kemal Nance, and Derrick Perkins</strong> perform in two classic all female works, <em>Anthem</em> and <em>Raaahmonaaah!.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Stafford C. Berry, Jr. and C. Kemal Nance</strong> become the first male certified Umfundalai teachers by Kariamu Welsh and the Institute of African Dance Research and Performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2012</td>
<td><strong>Kariamu Welsh premieres a male-inspired work, Same Father Different Mother</strong>, featuring male dancers <strong>Stafford C. Berry, Jr. and C. Kemal Nance.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kariamu Welsh names new movement articulation, K&amp;S Step, after Nance and Berry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In July 1995, The Institute of African Dance Research and Performance hosted the first Umfundalai Intensive, a one-week series of master dance classes and focused discussions. This week brought on important stylistic changes in the technique. Mills, with Welsh’s approval, created a new arm variation for men in their execution of the Nigerian Stomp. Further, a change in the structure of Umfundalai class required male students to dance across the floor together after the female dancers, a practice Welsh adopted from ballet and modern dance classes. She also appropriated traditional African terms to honor dancers who serve as elders in the tradition. Experienced dancers call her and other female elders, “Amai” and men, “Mzee.” In November 1995, Mills defended her doctoral dissertation at Temple University.

In February 1996 Derrick Perkins, a Temple University undergraduate and transfer student from Swarthmore College, joined the cast of Kariamu & Company: Traditions, becoming the fourth male to make the transition from student to performer. Berry, Perkins and I performed two classic Umfundalai works that were not only traditionally all-female, but whose choreographic content focused on women’s discourse: *Anthem* (1992), a dance about homeless women, and *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989), a work about female activism. Our male presence in these germinal Umfundalai works transforms them. As male bodies shouted obscenities and performed crude versions of Umfundalai’s vocabulary to the sounds of Sweet Honey & the Rock and Ray Charles among the women’s dancers, the depictions of homelessness that *Anthem* (1992) projected became even more realistic than they were with

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147 During the single-count Nigerian stomp progression, the men touch their elbow with the opposite fist.
an all-female cast. The dance seemed to speak to a crisis in humanity, not just a plight of women. Raaahmonaaah! (1989) undergoes a similar transformation, to be discussed in Chapter 5.

During the same concert season the Institute of African Dance Research and Performance hosted its first Umfundalai teaching certification ceremony where Mills becomes the first Umfundalai dance master and Berry and I become the first male Umfundalai certified teachers. In December 1996, Berry and I start the Berry & Nance Dance Project, an all male dance initiative dedicated to producing work about African American male discourse.

Since Mills’ dissertation was completed in 1995, I have ushered in twelve African American men who have intensely studied the technique and also become conduits of its aesthetic and theatrical power as performers on the concert stage. My classes at Swarthmore College have generated these trained Umfundalai dancers who would eventually become members of Umfundalai’s premiere demonstration company, Kariamu & Company: Traditions. In 1998, an important year for Umfundalai dancing men, five men danced with the company, including Harvey Chism, a Swarthmore student and the first male whose path in Umfundalai’s tradition has been guided by a man. Figure 3 depicts the 1998 concert poster advertisement, which features a male figure for the first time.
While Berry, Jackson, Perkins and I had taught each other as fellow performers and ‘brothers,’ our primary instructors, the people responsible for our embodied understanding of Umfundalai’s essence, were women: Welsh, Mills, and Joylynn “Amma” Houtman.

Because Chism studied dance at Swarthmore, I was his first dance teacher, which meant that he could look at a Black male dancer for movement quality to emulate. At the same time the danced masculinity I had gleaned from observing my female instructors was visibly available in my body’s material history and therefore accessible to him and other students in the class. Chism became the first of a lineage of African American male Swarthmore College students who study Umfundalai and eventually perform with Kariamu & Company: Traditions. Others have included Malik Wright, Jumatatu Poe, Brandon King, and Twan Claiborne.

Another male milestone occurred in 2002. By this time I had been teaching Umfundalai at Swarthmore for nine years and had become Kariamu & Company: Traditions’ Associate Artistic Director, choreographing Umfundalai works that were featured in the
company’s home season concerts including *Ibeji* (1998), *Journal Entry 9-17-01* (2002), *Youknowblackpeoplebeactincrazyandtalkingshitandstuff* (2006), and Welsh’s favorite, *Is It My Turn in the Chair?* (2001). While Welsh still served as Artistic Director, I taught the company’s classic repertoire and conducted many of the rehearsals. Hence, both male and female dancers were looking at my dancing body as an example of how one might dance Umfundalai. During the February concert season of 2002, Cheryl Stevens and ZakkiYáh-Joyce Lyons were certified as Umfundalai teachers and I became the first male Umfundalai dance master.

During the process of this study, men made another stride in the development of Umfundalai’s dance tradition. In 2012, Welsh choreographed a male-inspired work entitled *Same Father Different Mother*. Berry and I wanted to include a work by Welsh in the repertoire of The Berry & Nance Dance Project, and upon my request, she intended originally to create a duet for Berry and me. *Same Father Different Mother* (2012) explored the impact of Travon Martin’s death on the African American community. It emanated from Welsh’s artistic exploration of Berry’s and my fraternal relationship and our aging male dancing bodies.

This investigation both inspired her choreography and gave way to a new movement variation in the Umfundalai technique. Welsh asked Berry and me to perform a shoulder isolation that resembles the already existing *Sankofa* arm pattern. In Umfundalai, the *Sankofa Arm Motif* is performed by tracing the shape of the *Sankofa adinkra* symbol (Figure 4) with the forearms. The dancer initiates the movement with the fingertips and completes the sequence by extending the arms away from the torso while shifting his center of gravity from

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left to right with knees bent. Variations of the *Sankofa Arm Motif* include articulating the arms in tandem and extending the arms in front of the torso as well as over the head.

![Figure 4: Sankofa Adrinka Symbol](image)

The variation that Welsh required Berry and me to perform required a nuanced isolation of the upper arm, which gave the classic *Sankofa* motif a new quality that involved making smaller gestures with the fingertips while elongating the full arm. She also asked us to stand with legs straightened and to intensify the “squeeze” of the movement as if it felt like we were directing the movement inside of ourselves. This variation caused Berry’s and my bicep and tricep muscles to visibly contract. After watching us perform the movement, Welsh named it the *K&S Step* (Kemal and Stafford).

After inviting three women to join the cast – Adrienne Abdus-Salaam, Shaness Kemp, and Saleana Pettaway, Welsh premiered the work at The Re-generations Conference Showcase in London, United Kingdom on November 1, 2012. Program notes for the showcase read as follows:
Some Father, Different Mother explores humanity, the lack of humanity, and the irony in that we all purportedly connect at some level as brother and sister. Violence and racism are central to this exploration and the death of Travon Martin haunts this work.  

As The Berry and Nance Dance Project, Berry and I went on to perform the work at Swarthmore College (Swarthmore, Pennsylvania), Denison University (Granville, Ohio), and Kwanza Fest (Durham, North Carolina).

While Umfundalai emerges from Welsh’s artistic vision and cultural mission, its early development was danced through the bodies of African American women. Though she stylized many male movements of continental Africa to compile Umfundalai’s vocabulary, Welsh developed the technique out of the need to express her identity as an African American woman. Her early works like Earth Movers (circa 1970), a creation story danced by all women; Gestures (circa 1972), a depiction of homeless women, and Coretta (1976), a dance about Black women of protest, all reflect her cultural nationalist orientation while underscoring her gendered participation in the Black Arts Movement. Mills states, “Umfundalai is the women’s continuum continuing to be.”

As men integrate this largely female domain, our gendered performativity, both experienced and projected, presents a multi-layered discourse. Male presence in Umfundalai represents the “oblique existence” that Ahmed’s queer phenomenology aims to uncover—a

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150 Glendola Yhema Mills, 70-71.

151 When Welsh mounted the work Gestures on a cast of dancers in Philadelphia, she extended the work and changed the name to Anthem, which was premiered in the 1992 season of Karimau & Company in Conwell Dance Theater, Temple University.

152 G. Mills, 6.
reality only seen through a trajectory that a particular “orientation” avails. Some of us seek reflections of our gendered selves in the movement vocabulary, in the choreography, and in the ritual. The goal of this research is to examine whether and how a male agency resides in the dancing identities of Umfundalai’s men.

As I refer to queer phenomenology, orientation or the feeling of home becomes a site for agency. With a masculine agency in focus, the space in which men may be ‘orientated’ continues to be central to this study. The next chapter explores performance as a site for Umfundalai’s dancing men’s orientation.

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CHAPTER 5

THERE WERE MEN IN THAT FIRE, TOO!

MASCULINITIES IN KARIAMU WELSH’S RAAAHMONAAAH!

As alluded to in Chapter 4, Kariamu Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah! (1989) is a classic work from the repertory of Umfundalai’s 43-year history. It demonstrates a marked level of virtuosity in Umfundalai performance as it takes core movement to a level and degree that only the most advanced dancers can perform the work. The skilled Umfundalai dancer is shown at their best in this work with concurrent soft, supple, and dynamic movements that have become iconic.154 Within Kariamu & Company: Traditions’ repertoire, Raaahmonaaah! (1989) (including Raaahmonaaah Revisited, 2010) has been the most frequently performed work.

Among the interview data, Raaahmonaaah! (1989) is a recurrent critical moment. While Chism is the only male informant in this study who has not danced in the work, he has vivid memories of watching it performed by various casts. In the systematic introspection of my auto-ethnographic journaling, performing in Raaahmonaaah! (1989) emerged as a pivotal experience. For me, dancing Raaahmonaaah! meant that I had acquired aplomb in dancing Umfundalai. It felt like a triumph in that it not only allowed me to represent what I thought was a missing component of its real life narrative, but also meant that I was becoming virtuosic in this dance tradition.

As I pursued a phenomenologically grounded theoretical understanding while interviewing participants for the study, I found that Raaahmonaaah! resonated with each of

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154 Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to author, May 4, 2014.
the men. Berry described it first, without a direct question, as a strong site of his experienced masculinity in Umfundalai. Then, as I asked each of the other men about the work in subsequent interviews, every one of them commented on Raaahmonaaah!'s significance in their dancing lives. As I probed, the emergent data revealed that performing in Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah! (1989) and Raaahmonaaah! Revisited (2010) served as sites of ‘orientation’ for ‘Brothers of the Bah Yáh.’

This chapter is written with a descriptive phenomenological method that first unpacks Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah!. Interspersed with close description (from video and memory), structured through a developmental chronology of the piece (1989-2008), I present participants’ lived experience of performing in and/or viewing Raaahmonaaah!, followed by my autoethnographic reflection on meanings. The chapter goes on to address subjects’ further memories of experienced masculinities while performing Umfundalai, specifically, how participants have been affected by participation in dances that require dancing with other men. My own work, Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings (Nance, 1996), in particular, emerged from interviews as a powerful site of experienced masculinities for its all-male cast. As with Raaahmonaaah!, I interpret these phenomenological constructions from an autoethnographic perspective, seeking to illuminate dancing men’s meanings of Umfundalai’s culture.

Based on Ramona Africa’s survival of the Philadelphia police bombing of her family’s West Philadelphia home in 1986, Raaahmonaaah! (1989) has become a classic in Kariamu & Company and Kariamu Company: Traditions’ repertory. Glendola Yhema Mills, one of two women who danced in one of the early, all-female versions of the work while in
Kariamu & Company (1993) and in the coed version of the dance in Kariamu & Company:

Traditions after Welsh’s inclusion of men in 1996, shared the following remarks:

I was really resistant to adding any males to Raaabmonaah! I think I just liked it as an all female piece. That really was my resistance. It was a female piece like Women Gather. In my eyes at that point, it was going to be a classic – an Umfundalai classic.\textsuperscript{155}

Mills’ comments underscore the hierarchal position that Raaabmonaah! (1989) occupies in Welsh’s oeuvre.

Mills and I concur that the work is a classic, representing the artistry of Umfundalai and Welsh’s choreographic aptitude. In her choreographic instructions to dancers, Welsh emphasizes the dynamics of movement execution and the subtleties with which dancers convey meaning through nuanced vocabulary. Raaabmonaah! (1989) typifies these values. With very few choreographed steps, Welsh created an epic work. I also share Mills’ perspective on resistance as a backdrop to the intra-cultural tension that dancing men brought into Umfundalai’s tradition. (Despite her expressed philosophical resistance, Mills taught Berry, Perkins, and me all the choreography for Raaabmonaah! and trained us to perform the work.)

As we direct our focus to the topic of the dissertation, the practice of Umfundalai, and its relationship to the gendered constructions of its African American male dancers, the version of Raaabmonaah! performed in 1996 resonates with each of the male participants in this study for various reasons. Only one interviewee mentioned its direct impact on his gender construction. However, insomuch as this work was a threshold experience for Umfundalai’s dancing men, it is worthy of examination. To this end, my analysis resides in

\textsuperscript{155} Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Norfolk, VA, May 19, 2013.
the phenomenology of the transformations brought on by the inclusion of men in Welsh’s originally female casted *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989), and the masculinities that emerge when male bodies take on its narrative.

Prior to Berry’s, Perkins’, and my performance in the 1996 concert, other works had featured male performance. Welsh identifies Berry and me, however, as the first men of Umfundalai upon joining Kariamu & Company in 1993.156 In 2001, Welsh moderated the first academic panel on Umfundalai at the Congress on Research in Dance (CORD) conference at New York University. After Joan Huckstep, Glendola Yhema Mills, Cheryl Stevens, and I presented papers, Gaynell Sherrod, a dancer in Welsh’s Black Dance Workshop in the 1970s, openly joked about how they (Welsh, Sherrod, and other women of the Black Dance Workshop) used to have women dance the men’s parts. Welsh smiled and nodded in agreement.

Years later, Welsh explained to me that before Berry and I joined the company in 1993, she would often commission men as guest artists to dance selected works. The following works had featured male dancers: *Ibos’ Landing* (1992), *Ndimere Znwa* (1992), *The King Must Die* (1992), and *Samba* (1993).157 In the 1996 season when Welsh amended the company name to Kariamu & Company: Traditions, Berry, Perkins, and I performed in *Ibos’ Landing* (1992), *Anthem* (1992), *Bokolafini* (1994), and *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989). Male spoken word artist Sabela ku Mathango (Delvin Grimes) joined us in dancing the premier of *Herero*


Women (1996). Table 3 provides a full list of the dances performed in both 1993 and 1996, replete with descriptions of each work and the male performers featured. 158, 159

158 Temple University, Concert Program for Kariamu & Company: Traditions, February 16, 1996.

159 Karimau Welsh, e-mail message to author, January 20, 2014.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DANCE</th>
<th>PREMIERE DATE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>MALE PERFORMERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aluta Continua</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>This dance depicts a time when the women of Namibia had to go into combat as men of the community were off at war.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibos’ Landing</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>This dance narrates the story of when 40 Ibos were brought to the U. S. Rather than accepting their plight these Ibos swam, flew, and ran back to Africa.</td>
<td>Troy Barnes, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Abdur-Rahim Jackson, C. Kemal Nance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndimire Zuwa</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>This dance is based on a Shona proverb, <em>Wait for me, Sun</em>. It was believed that if one placed a stone in the branch of a tree he could retard the sun from setting.</td>
<td>Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Abdur-Rahim Jackson, C. Kemal Nance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raaahmonaaah!</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>This dance narrates the police bombing of the MOVE residence in West Philadelphia in May 1986 in which 11 African Americans were killed. Only Ramona Africa and an 11-year old boy, Birdie Africa, survived.</td>
<td>Stafford C. Berry, Jr. and C. Kemal Nance ululated with the rest of cast in the beginning of the dance, immediately following recitation of the poem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samba (Finale)</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Samba was a stylization of the Brazilian folk dance, Samba.</td>
<td>Troy Barnes, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Abdur-Rahim Jackson, C. Kemal Nance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The King Must Die</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>This dance is based on a Kemetic legend that a king’s failure to run up, down, and around the Great Pyramid 3 times proved that he was no longer fit to rule and must be killed. His first wife must lead upon his death.</td>
<td>Troy Barnes, C. Kemal Nance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Gather</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>This dance explored idiosyncrasies of Caribbean women in conversation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthem</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Originally called Gestures, this dance deals with homelessness.</td>
<td>Stafford C. Berry, Jr., C. Kemal Nance, Derrick Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bokolafini (Finale)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>This dance is based on running patterns in the Malian mud cloth, a fabric that is both costume and movement motif.</td>
<td>Stafford C. Berry, Jr., C. Kemal Nance, Derrick Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herero Women</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>This dance is based on traditional Southern African society in which women dress in European colonial attire while performing traditional African movement.</td>
<td>Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Sabela Ku Mathango (Delvin Grimes), C. Kemal Nance, Derrick Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibos’ Landing</td>
<td></td>
<td>This dance narrates the story of when 40 Ibos were brought to the U.S. Rather than accepting their plight as enslaved Africans, these Ibos swam, flew, and ran back to Africa.</td>
<td>Stafford C. Berry, Jr., C. Kemal Nance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Upper Room</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>This solo performed by Glendola Yhema Mills explored spirituality of movement &amp; was dedicated to Welsh’s late teacher, Pearl Reynolds.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raaahmonaaah!</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>This dance narrates the police bombing of the MOVE residence in West Philadelphia in May 1986. 11 African Americans were killed; sole survivors were Ramona Africa and an 11-year old boy, Birdie Africa.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As noted earlier, \textit{Raaamonaaah!} (1989) recurred as an important work in men’s interviews. \textit{Raaahmonaaah!} has spiritual and cultural inscriptions for its male performers. The following section provides a close, multi-sensory description of the dance as it was performed by an all female cast in 1993 and of selected choreographic developments brought on by the inclusion of men in 1996, 2002, 2010, and 2013. Description of choreography from archival videos is interspersed with lived experience accounts of its male performers.

At the conclusion of Chapter 3, I introduced ‘orientation’ as theorized in Ahmed’s queer phenomenology to emphasize that while individuals are affected as they move through spaces of familiarity and unfamiliarity, those spaces, too, are changed by individuals’ inhabitation. In Chapter 4 this construct was offered as a way to conceptualize how the presence of men has affected Umfundalai. Chronicling \textit{Raaahmonaaah!} (1989) from its incubation as a female work to the integrated epic it is now offers a vivid example of how choreography, is changed, or as Ahmed would have it, ‘queered’ by men’s participation.\footnote{Sarah Ahmed, \textit{Queer Phenomenology}, 4.}

\textit{The Incident}

MOVE is an African American organization whose belief system is situated in the preservation of nature and African culture. Its philosophy is anti-technical and anti-establishment – against courts and schools. MOVE is also opposed to killing animals of any kind including rats and roaches.\footnote{“MOVE: Belief and Practice,” On a Move.com, 13 April 2013, http://www.onamove.com/belief/ (13 April 2013)} Founded by spiritual leader John Africa (1931-1985), MOVE believes that human beings must align with the rest of the animal kingdom, which
includes raising and educating their own offspring and living in harmony. The ultimate form of revolution is to divorce oneself from the system as a mental and social project.  

Characterized by locked hair, the common surname of Africa, and a ‘back to nature’ lifestyle, MOVE members operate in society under the premise that human beings have a divine right to defend themselves. One of their tenets reads as follows:

All living things instinctively defend themselves. This is a God-given right of all life. If a man goes into a bear’s cave, he violates and threatens the bear’s place of security. The bear will defend his home by instinctively fighting off the man and eliminating him. The bear is not wrong, because self-defense is right.

On August 8, 1978, Philadelphia police attacked MOVE in what has been described as a ”military assault” during which Officer James Ramp was shot and killed. Police records reveal that MOVE members were in the basement at the time of Ramp’s death and the gunfire that killed him was shot from above him; nine MOVE members, referred to as the MOVE 9, were arrested for third degree murder. This incident gave way to an adversarial relationship between the City of Philadelphia and the MOVE community. Police would perform impromptu searches at and around MOVE’s home at 6221 Osage Avenue in West Philadelphia. Conversely, MOVE members used bullhorns to express their grievances to the city and their distrust of the police, especially the wrongful jailing of the ‘MOVE 9’.

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On the morning of May 13, 1985, MOVE members awoke to the sound of Commissioner Sambor shouting through a bullhorn, “Attention, MOVE! This is America! You have to abide by the laws of the United States!” Acting on alleged complaints from the neighboring community, police evacuated the area and gave MOVE 15 minutes to leave their home. MOVE’s refusal evolved into a 24-hour standoff. There was an open fire exchange. “While the gunfire was going on, other police lobbed dozens of tear gas into the house, firing through the walls from adjacent houses. And firemen trained high pressure deluge guns on the house and on the bunker MOVE had built on the roof.” Police dropped tear gas bombs in front and in back of the house. The bomb squad entered the home and opened fire. MOVE members, who had moved to the basement, announced that they were coming out and had children with them. Ramona Africa recalls:

…we didn’t know exactly what they had done. We heard the loud explosion. The house kind of shook. But it never entered my mind that they dropped a bomb on us. But the bomb did in fact ignite a fire. And it got very, very hot in the house, and the smoke was getting thicker. At first we thought it was tear gas. But as it got thicker, it became clear that this was something else. And then we could hear the trees outside crackling and realized that our home was on fire. And we immediately tried to get our children, our animals, our dogs and cats, and ourselves out of that blazing inferno.

We opened the door and started to yell that we were coming out with the kids. The kids were hollering too. We know they heard us but the instant we were visible in the doorway, they opened fire. You could hear the bullets hitting all around the garage area.

165 “May 13, 1985 and the Legalization of Murder.”

166 “May 13, 1985 and the Legalization of Murder.”


168 “May 13, 1985 and the Legalization of Murder.”
Philadelphia’s Police Department dropped a C-4 bomb on the MOVE residence, destroying 61 homes on Osage Avenue. Five children and six adults died in the wake of MOVE’s standoff with the City of Philadelphia, leaving only two survivors: Ramona Africa and an eleven-year old boy, Birdie Africa. Charged with conspiracy, riot, and multiple counts of simple and aggravated assault, Ramona Africa was ultimately convicted of riot and conspiracy. She was denied parole repeatedly for her refusal to renounce MOVE and served the full term of her “16-month to 7-year sentence.”

The Dance (1993)

The Invocation

A pool of light appears center stage. A tall, slender, and shapely woman with a lemon pound cake complexion dressed in red leotard and lapa enters a cone of light. Her eyes are oval shaped and her hair is locked as it falls down to the middle of her back. The red head tie she wears on her forehead frames her face while her close-fitting red leotard accentuates her full breasts. There is no doubt that she is a female. She walks into the light as if she is searching for someone and cries to the tune of the Name Game (1964) by Shirley Ellis, “Ramona Mona Bo Bona Ramona! Fee Fi Mo Mona Ramona!” She paces and looks

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169 "May 13, 1985 and the Legalization of Murder."

170 Raaahmonaaah! premiered in 1989 in Conwell Theater, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Kariamu & Company performed Raaahmonaaah! on February 16, 1993 at the Eugene & Teresa Lang Performing Arts Center at Swarthmore College as part of a concert series funded by the college’s Cooper Foundation. I crafted this description from watching a video of the performance. While Raaahmonaaah! was still performed by an all-female ensemble, in this 1993 version Stafford C. Berry, Jr. and I run onto the stage to ululate with the women during the Invocation section. Because this is the only time we are seen in the dance, I do not include our dancing bodies in the description. Our singular presence is the only thing differentiating it from earlier versions of the dance. For the purposes of this descriptive analysis, I have titled each section of the dance based on my interpretation of the dance’s narrative. I use these titles to distinguish one section from another when I teach the dance to Kariamu & Company: Traditions’ dancers.
earnestly as a lyrical ‘sing-song’ voice breaks the silence. She continues speaking, allowing her voice to crack as she reaches the higher notes of her vocal range. She speaks:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Child of Isis and Osiris} \\
\text{Ebony doe-eyed woman} \\
\text{Wrapped in your locks} \\
\text{Dreading the fire yesterday} \\
\text{Ramonaaaaah!}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Locked in a steel castle} \\
\text{Where is your King?} \\
\text{Ramona Mona Bo Bona Ramona! Fee Fi Mo Mona Ramona!”}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Miss Lady Woman} \\
\text{Cast your hair toward Africa} \\
\text{And weave net to} \\
\text{Swing Low and Carry You Home!} \\
\text{Ramona! Ramona!}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{MOVE: Ramona!} \\
\text{And as you sway, we’ll move with you} \\
\text{No fire can drown out your light} \\
\text{No flame can dim your glow} \\
\text{You are cowries, serpentine, malacite} \\
\text{You are Ramona!}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Your are Malacite, Cowry, Serpentine} \\
\text{You are Ramona!} \\
\text{Reflections of Nzinga lying the cut’ to set your people free} \\
\text{Ramona Mona Bo Bona Ramona! Fee Fi Mo Mona Ramona!”} \\
\text{Ramona! Ramona!} \\
\text{Raaaahmonaaaah!}
\end{align*}
\]

Her energy swells as she paces in the light. With each stanza, she becomes more vehement, angry and loud.

A drum rolls. Nine female dancers, seven dressed in white scooped-neck leotards and white lapas and two dressed in black, run frantically into the space. The entire ensemble bellows a shrill ululation as their eyes pierce the audience with intensely cold expressions of
anger. Another drum roll fills the auditorium and the dancers run off, right and left, as the stage goes to black.

The Processional

A cadenced Nanigo\textsuperscript{171} rhythm fills the auditorium. As the lights intensify and the stage space becomes visible, a line of dancers led by one of the women in black prance onto the stage holding wooden chairs above their heads. They stop left of center, face the audience, and perform two deliberate, bent-legged, knee raises, first the right, then the left. They immediately turn to face stage right and begin to prance again in a war-like stride that reminds me of parading Clydesdale horses. As they resume their prances, another line of dancers, also led by a woman in black, prance onto the space stage left, joining the first group in a processional. The full cast of dancers face the audience and raise their knees, completing quarter turns with each set and ending the sequence facing stage right. As they prance off the stage, a woman dressed in a white scooped-neck unitard, a two-tiered white lapa, and white head tie follows the line of women. The white costume punctuates her dark chocolate brown complexion and her long black locks that cascade down her back. She is Ramona!

Ramona’s decree

As Ramona prances behind the rows of dancers, she also carries a wooden chair over her head. Approaching center stage, she leaves the processional in an arch to upstage center where she places her chair. The rhythms quicken and swell with her accelerating steps. Once

\textsuperscript{171} http://touchtonepercussion.blogspot.com/2008/08/nanigo.html
she releases the chair from her grasp, she runs downstage center to perform the *Ring Shout*\(^{172}\) and a quick kick that seemed to touch her ears, angular poses reminiscent of the figures pictured in the papyri of ancient Kemet, all while staring in an affront. She dances with the rhythm, stopping and starting in time with the drummers’ slaps. It’s as if she becomes the rhythm, becoming fiercer with each stance, kick, and stomp.

With her fists on her hips in *akimbo*, Ramona undulates her hips. The cast of dancers enter from stage left in a lunge with left legs bent, right legs extended straight behind them; they extend their left arms to Ramona while right hands remain on hips. With angry faces they pump their left forearms in what looks like a charge to Ramona: “Speak for us! Tell our Story?” They pump their arms in time with the rhythm and then place their hands behind their heads, bringing their feet in parallel position, and raise their hips in a percussive and defiant isolation, first the left, then the right. They look at Ramona intensely. The hip raises are fierce and staunch, carving out an angry Black woman’s archetype. This movement phrase allied with the form-fitting leotards accents the dancers’ female anatomy, and the attitude with which they move speaks to a gender informed Black rage. These women are ‘pissed off.’ They complete the sequence until they surround Ramona in a semi circle while she faces the audience and performs the movement with them. The women leave her as they exit the stage with high reaches and torso pitches with legs bent and extended behind them in a movement that punctuates the rhythms of the drums. The angular movements of their bodies, dressed in white against the black backdrop, etch out a series of corporeal hieroglyphics.

\(^{172}\) *Ring Shout* is a sacred African American dance. Situated in the Black Church, it is the oldest dance that has a direct connection to continental Africa.
Ramona remains with her hands framing her face in what looks like a perspective a reporter might have in viewing her through a camera lens. After a piercing stare of indignant accusation, she turns to face upstage to perform another series of percussive hip raises. In disgust, she looks past her shoulders and places her arms in *akimbo*, sending a direct message to her onlookers that says, “Kiss my ass!” She explodes in a jump with her arms over her head, hinges to the floor and turns over until she is resting on her knees with her hands on the floor. Ramona crawls and slaps out the rhythm of the drums with her hands on the floor. Drums stop with her as she starkly looks at the audience ‘on all fours’ and ululates in silence. The drums continue with her as she crawls until she drops, facing the audience with a vacant stare like a new corpse. The stage goes black and the rhythms stop.

*Ramona’s Alter Egos Speak*

The rhythms swell as the lights come up. The dancers, two in black and two in white, spin onto the stage. They sweep the stage with extended legs and arms that reach out, abruptly ending their whimsical phrase with a stomp. They gradually turn to the audience with accusatory stares. They stomp repeatedly as they circle their heads in desperation, allowing their hair to create a visual rhythm. They run off the stage with long strides. Ramona spins into the space, opposite the four dancers, echoing their sequence. As she performs Umfundalai’s Nigerian stomp and stares at the audience, she opens her mouth wide in a silent scream that expresses both pain and anger. She runs around the space with long strides and then reverses her direction with a scurry, allowing her thighs to tremble with vigor. She stops and performs a series a slow, deliberate leg extensions. As she leans forward looking at the audience with anger, her left leg stretches behind her creating an obtuse angle with her standing leg. She shifts her weight and her direction while her
extended leg returns to the floor, then lifts her right leg so that it is parallel to the floor. She licks and strikes her arms as she visually plays out a rhythm. Then she jumps, hinges to the floor and crawls, ending the sequence in a drop to the floor, spread eagle.

The two women dressed in black scurry onto the stage to dance around Ramona. With trembling thighs, they, too, circle their heads in desperation; in percussive quality they extend their arms behind their bodies to touch the back of their shoulder blades. Echoing Ramona’s movement, they jump and hinge to the floor, joining her on the floor, corpse-like.

The Fire: Final Moments

The rest of the ensemble, all costumed in white, enter the upstage space with angular leg extensions and hand slaps on the thighs. They turn and stop to face the audience, throbbing their pelvises as they bend and extend their knees to sink down and rise back up. They again perform percussive hip raises as they extend their arms to the audience. Their faces are fierce as they roll their eyes with each phrase, further accentuating the anger behind their story. Ramona and the Alter Egos (the two women dressed in black) join them. In canon, pairs of dancers stomp and circle their heads to scurry off the stage. Two dancers hinge and drop to the floor like corpses on either side of Ramona. Ramona walks upstage to retrieve the chair. She stands between the lying dancers and lowers her weight as she holds the chair over her head, allowing the bars on the chair’s back to shade her face. The chair jails her. As lights slowly fade, the ensemble performs the opening processional with chairs held over their heads across the upstage space. The light and the rhythms fade to darkness and silence.
Derrick Perkins refers to the 1996 Season of Kariamu & Company: Traditions as Umfundalai’s ‘hey day’. This was the season that Berry, Perkins, and I were principal dancers and joined the cast of Raaahmonaaaah!, becoming the first men to perform in the work.

*He Invokes Her: The Invocation (1996)*

A pool of light appears at the center of the stage and Stafford Berry walks into the light. He is dressed in white *shokatoes* and a white tank shirt and his hair is short with the sides tapered. With muffin brown complexion, thick pronounced eyebrows, and a glare that could burn through metal, he gazes at the audience. After a deep inhalation, he bellows, “Ramona Mona Bo Bona Fee Fi Mona Raaahmonaaaah!” His deep baritone voice fills the air. For this viewer, he provides a profound contrast to the womanly archetype Jillian represented in 1993. He reaches his long arms wide; they seem to span the entire width of the stage. He stands tall and chastises the audience with enunciation. “Miss Lady!” he whispers as he moves his hips, hushing the audience. There is no other sound in the room but Stafford’s voice. He performs the *On Guard* as he shouts, “Reflections of Nzinga lying in the cut!” Distant ululation accompanies Berry’s strong male voice until he screams, “RAAAAAAAHMONAAAAAAAH!”

*Figure 5: Raaahmonaaaah! (1989).* Left to right: Tabatha Robinson, Jamie Williams, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., C. Kemal Nance, and Glendola Yhema Mills perform the invocation. Conwell Dance Theater, February 21, 1997. Photography: Patented Photos.
The dancers run out to join him. The Alter Egos are dressed in white. The women are dressed in black. One man is dressed in white and the other dressed in black. The cast of black and white, African shaped chess pieces, ululate with a shrillness that sounds like cacophony fear, anger, and excitement. Their faces are angry and menacing and the tan masks they hold next to their faces create the illusion that are more faces on stage than bodies to support them. The ululation and the drums stop and the lights go to black.

Stafford C. Berry, Jr.:

I feel strong as hell! I have the ear of everybody in the room, in the theater, back stage, up in the lighting booth, and beyond. I am a voice that matters, one that is heard aurally and layers underneath. Initiated by aural communication, it goes into a hearing that dwells deeper in here. (Berry points to his torso.) I have control over all of that. Everybody in the house and in the wings adjusts to that energy. I have the power of my voice and my ‘physicalness’ taking up the space. I represent an essence about a woman, but am bringing a whole different branch in the way I talk about women, a point of view, a perspective. I am fucking powerful! That is empowering to me and so there is this reciprocation happening. I latch onto it. I know that it was there. I feel grounded. It felt assured. It felt certain. I feel it all in my body and in my voice. I feel it not just in my body but in the space my body takes up.\footnote{Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012}

Glendola Yhema Mills describes Berry’s presence this way:

Stafford did it. It was definitely different. It was definitely -- well, they're two different people from the gate. But I think what Stafford -- I think they're the same -- a more powerful representation of it. It could be just Stafford's voice, the male voice. I think it became more dynamic with the male parts in it.\footnote{Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Norfolk, VA, May 17, 2013.
Male bodies join the processional comprising the last (upstage) line of dancers. The tallest of them, Berry, is farthest stage right leading the men across the stage followed by a young Derrick Perkins dressed in white tank and white *shokatoes*. As they prance, Perkins’ twisted locks shake and rattle with each step. The line of men ends with me, a slightly taller, cocoa brown male dressed in black tank, *shokatoes* and head tie. I am John Africa.

Ramona’s Decree begins as Saleana Pettaway (Ramona) prances onto the stage behind the two rows of dancers dressed in black and white. As the processional disappears behind the stage curtain, she places her mask upstage center and staggars along an arched pathway until she is downstage center. She grimaces at the audience while she performs a series of *Ring Shouts* and knee raises, extending arms left and right alternately. Ramona staggars again, repeating her opening sequence of movement. This time John Africa, the one man dressed in black, staggars onto the stage from the left. Travelling in an arched path he assumes the downstage center location anointed by Ramona’s performance while she circles around him to assume a position behind him, left of his right shoulder. His body and presence are big, and her small slender build positioned behind him makes her look like his shadow. They dance together, repeating the same sequence of *Ring Shouts* and knee lifts until they separate, John traveling left and Ramona traveling right. As John turns to face Ramona, the entire cast appears behind him; he lunges and pump his arms at Ramona in beseechingly.
C. Kemal Nance:

I feel my energy rise as Stafford bellows, “Reflections of Nzinga lying in the Cut!” I jump up and down backstage in anticipation. Yhema, dressing in white for her Alter Ego role, continues to stretch her legs and back as our time to enter draws nearer. Perkins and I share knowing glances, and Monique Newton’s eyes (the other Alter Ego) seem to widen more as each moment passes. We assume runner’s stances with masks in hand. Stafford cries, “Ramonaaaaaaaaaaaah!” We ululate in a shrill, energetic cacophony. The lights go black and the drummer plays a slow cadenced rhythm. We march onto the stage in two groups performing what we call the ‘Ramona prances.’

I come out with the second group from stage left. Stafford looks directly at me as he marches onto the stage. My energy feels uncontrollable. The second group enters, Derrick marching in front me. There is something about the way his twisted hair shakes with the rhythm that stirs my fervor. We are all lifting our knees in four directions executing quarter turns as we, with our masks, exit the space. The rhythm quickens and we leave the stage as Saleana begins her solo. As I dance offstage, I place my mask down and turn to face the wing to prepare for my entrance as John Africa. I watch Saleana intensely as she runs around the stage, dancing the Ring Shout with unbridled power. I feel the heat of Stafford’s breath as he stands directly behind me whispering in my right ear in a deep and angry voice, “Alright God damn it! You better work! Let’s set off this mother fucking fire. You hear me, goddamn it? Let’s work. Alright God damn it! Alright now. Let’s wear this mother fucker out!” I shake my legs and feel my eyebrows descend in a ‘v’ that starts at the top of my nose. He repeats his mantra until I explode in movement onto the stage, joining Saleana as Ramona. While we dance together, I feel power and strength. I feel invincible.

**Male Voices Cry Out: Ramona’s Decree**

In the 1993 version, the cast of women enters the space performing lunges and fist pumps that gesture to Ramona. As they raise their hands behind their heads, isolating their hips as they allow their heels to alternately rise and fall, the audience sees a statement of defiance that permeates the female form. The close fitting scoop-necked leotards, the various styles of braided, corn rowed, and twisted hair, and the voluptuous curves and contours project a power that is woman. In 1996, Berry’s and Perkins’ bodies disrupt the uniformity of the cadre of female images—at least for those who had seen the dance with all
women. For the female dancers who danced the work in both productions, there was an experienced disruption, as described earlier by Mills.

The Alter Egos and the rest of the cast enter from stage left. Dressed in black and white, both men and women lunge and pump their firsts in a call to Ramona. John Africa moves in tandem. With each sequence of lunges, fist pumps and hip raises, the dancers’ movement intensifies; they repeat the series until they completely surround Ramona. With Berry and Perkins among the dancers, the hip raises take on an elaborated meaning of strength. The contours of the men’s bicep and tricep muscles counterbalance the women’s shapely hip movements. What used to read as a highly female articulation reads now as a human vignette. The collage of male and female dancers reaches to the sky and pitches forward as they exit stage right side.

Derrick Perkins:

It feels like a loud scream. It sounds like the movement Ramona does when she is on all fours…this loud guttural scream. It’s purposeful. It’s all inclusive of the ills and issues and pain and suffering – it just comes, this rush. I see myself as a billboard of politics, a political statement. The movement and dancing – all the dancers, the ways that we danced and how we danced, make me more conscious of not just my blackness but the whole political nature of the piece. It felt like every movement means something – the earthiness, and the power. It was a defining piece for me. To ‘hold my own’ in it, to be recognized in it, and to allow myself to go and to take chances in that particular space was good stuff!

I didn’t feel particularly masculine but maybe upright. I don’t know. I just felt very ‘mannish.’ We’re looking at the audience, and we’re giving them attention, and you’re going to notice me, and you honor me regardless of whether you want it or not. I’m here, but you honor me. I think actually it’s when you’re kind of forcing the audience to see you in ways that you want to be seen.\(^{175}\)

Men Burned, Too! - Final Moments

Alter Egos glide on to the stage from the left. They face up stage with trembling thighs, and their arms reach up and out allowing their hands to touch the back of their shoulder blades. They jump and sink to the floor joining Ramona who lies in exhaustion. They crawl with visual percussion that synchronizes with the sound of the bass drum. In one final blow, they collapse. The rest of the cast process from stage left, facing stage right with their right legs extended behind them in long linear stretches and snatching them in to meet their supporting legs, slapping their thighs with each move. John Africa follows the cast holding a mask above his head. The Alter Egos rise from the floor and join the cast as the ensemble of dancers perform hip raises and glare intensely at the audience. Their stretched mouths and piercing stares shoot an indictment to the audience. Ramona rises and dances through them. She then removes herself and positions herself downstage center as if she is dancing for them.

The cast departs the stage in pairs. In tandem, they run, stomp and prance. Berry and Perkins run to position themselves in front of Ramona who stands center stage. They jump, hinge to the floor, and crawl until they collapse at Ramona’s feet in the shape of two corpses. John Africa runs around the stage and dances with Ramona. Together, they kick and turn while allowing their torsos to pulse out the rhythm of the drums. Ramona retrieves her masks and stands in front of John, almost as if she is sitting in his lap. They descend into open bent knees positions while circling their arms around each other’s heads. Ramona takes the mask from John and he suddenly collapses. The Alter Egos and the rest of the dancers prance across the back of the stage as Ramona looks out to the audience. The lights fade to the black as the music fades down.
In Umfundalai’s 30th anniversary concert in 2000, Charles Tyson, a Temple University student, joined K&C: Traditions; he performed *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) in February at Conwell Dance Theater. In 2001, Khalil Munir, a student at Freedom Theater, performed in *Raaahmonaaah!* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Karamu & Company: Traditions were guest performers for the museum’s “Make It a Night” Concert Series.

Charles Tyson:

I got inside that piece. I was familiar with the MOVE incident. It was eight blocks from my house. I remember feeling that explosion... I embodied a character I imagined played out in the incident. My friends who saw me performing that piece said, ‘I don’t know where you went, but that was scary.’ That piece just speaks to me, it’s so powerful and dynamic, beautiful and angry and sad all at the same time. That aesthetic has always affected me the most in dance, my own work, too. The lights came up. I was getting myself in the mode. I remember going inside and taking deep breaths, and pulling myself up and feeling that anger, and the second I hear that rhythm start coming up, it just pulled me out, and the first step was the strongest.\(^{176}\)

Khalil Munir:

*Raaahmonaaah!* was very spiritual for me. I had to learn the history of Osage Avenue – this didn’t happen any place foreign to me. This happened in Philadelphia! I had to translate that story on stage. I felt like we were speaking for them. Wanting to tell the story of MOVE and give it justice while being in the moment of taking on that story was very spiritual. I go into another space emotionally, physically. I am not myself; I am that story and it engulfs my body. I am exhausted afterwards, backstage breathing heavy and my emotions are running...from the tip of my head to the bottom of my feet. I am just filled with this emotion. I know my breathing gets heavy, and my body gets warm.\(^{177}\)

The Introduction of Birdie Africa (2002)

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A pool of light appears center stage and the back lighting transforms into a deep red. Saleana Pettaway gives the invocation. “Ramonaaaaah”! Her melodic female voice fills the theater with sound as she stands, leans, and scowls. She is dressed in a red, long-sleeved, scooped-neck leotard and red *lapa*. Her hair is ‘buzz cut’ short. With a caramel complexion, Saleana dances as she speaks, giving each word of the classic Ramona score a new interpretation. She dances some of the signature vocabulary of the choreography and embodies a distinctly female character as she shouts out the words to Welsh’s poem. In ways that Stafford made the poem male, Saleana discovers ways to make it especially female, replete with polycentric African American female idiosyncrasies including neck twisting, eye rolling, and serpentine negotiation of the torso. She turns, pauses, extends her arms, paces, and finally screams “Raaahmonaaah!” as the rest of the cast, dressed in red and black, run from the wings to join her center stage with masks and ululating a shrill cacophony as the lights quickly fade to black.

The processional begins. Saleana leads one group of dancers out from left. They are joined by the second group led by Josephine Heard who is also dressed in red leotard and *lapa*. (Heard and Pettaway dance the roles of the Alter Egos.) Two men make up the second line: Jumatatu Poe, dressed in black, and me, John Africa, dressed in red. We prance across

![Figure 6: Jumatatu Poe dances the role of Birdie Africa in *Raaahmonaaah! Revisited*. February, 2010, Conwell Dance Theater, Temple University. Photo: Bill H.](image)
the stage with masks in our right hands and exit in synchronized trot until John Africa, the only male in red, disappears.

Ramona begins her decree. A young Dina-Verley Sabb-Mills dances the role of Ramona, giving the character womanly contours, wiry extensions, whimsical Ring Shouts and Nigerian stomps. Dressed in a white unitard and lapa with crinkly hair that bounces with every movement, Ramona dances the opening phrases with sudden pauses and intense glares at the audience. I, a younger Kemal Nance but older John Africa (relative to the Ramona character), stagger onto the stage and join Ramona in her decree. John shoots knowing glances at Ramona, and as they dance together, she stares back with widened eyes, flared nostrils, and clinched teeth. They jump together and separate with a variation of the Ring Shout, Ramona moving to the right and John to the left.

Usually, the rest of the cast would now join John and Ramona with lunges and fist pumps toward Ramona. In this version, however, slender Jumatatu Poe appears on the stage. With his lemon pound cake complexion and black twisted hair that frames his face like a lion’s mane, Poe performs the lunge and fist-pump section in tandem to me, creating a four-count counterpoint. He is Birdie Africa, the only other survivor from the real MOVE story. As Birdie, he reaches up and pitches to the floor. He dances backwards as he reaches out to Ramona and John. John holds Ramona in his arms then quickly separates from her joining Birdie in a sequence of forward reaches and behind-the-back arm swings. John faces Birdie and then Ramona as he dances backwards with Birdie off the right side of the stage until they both disappear.

Jumatatu Poe:
I remember practicing profusely...outside of class. I felt like I needed more time. I remember practicing the Birdie part really heavily. Then the next rehearsal Mama Kariamu asked me to do it by myself. I was thankful that I spent so much time on it. There was a lot of pressure because of the ranking Raaabmonaaab/ has in the Umfundalai canon. Everybody loves that piece. It's a very charged piece. I remember my heart beating fast...so many nerves. I was afraid that I was going to forget the choreography...I felt so much nervous energy. I mean it felt really good to have all that energy, like it felt good to be nervous about that.

I remember experiencing a different universe on stage. It extended behind the stage, too. Not into the audience, but the whole stage place was this different place. I don't remember imagining that I was Birdie Africa or that I was living in that burning building. I remember accessing it in a way that felt like the new universe on stage is this other place that I need to figure out. I can't understand unless I move through it. I don't even remember you as being you. I remember you being this figure that was much larger than I was and with whom I felt a certain comfort.

With Dina as Ramona, I was conscious of our relationship and our ages. It was hard. I couldn't access it through imagining that Dina was a mother figure to me. However, I remember that there was something between that triangle created between me and you and Dina. I remember her energy being merged with yours, and I was moving towards that. I was moving towards that convergence, which felt like a place I needed to go. It felt like a place I could find comfort.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Jumatatu Poe, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Swarthmore, PA, November 17, 2012
In 2010, Welsh changed the name of *Raaahmonaaah!* to *Raaahmonaaah! Revisited*. An ebony complexioned, muscular Tamara Thomas dances the role of Ramona Africa. Instead of the traditional long sleeved white unitard, Tamara’s Ramona wears a white camisole top and white *lapa* that reveals her dark brown legs with every extension. Former Ramonas Saleana Pettaway and Dina-Verley Sabb-Mills dance the Alter Egos in red camisole leotards and *lapas*. Jumatatu Poe dances Birdie Africa in white *shokatoes* and white sleeveless T-Shirt, and I dance John Africa in red. The chorus features male dancer and new company member Twan Claiborne.

Thomas, with her extensive neo-traditional West African training, gives Ramona a new frenetic energy that prior leads did not offer. With actual locked hair that drapes down her back to her buttocks, dark complexion, and pronounced African features, Thomas offers a realistic representation of Ramona Africa. Poe, as Birdie, also dressed in white, provides visual cohesion with Ramona; in real life they were the only survivors of the bombing. This version features a trio section in which Ramona, John, and Birdie Africa dance with each other. John holds Ramona and then walks away and back to

![Figure 7: *Raaahmonaaah! Revisited* - Tamara Thomas and C. Kemal Nance are pictured in the "Final Moments" section of the dance presented at Conwell Dance Theater at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in February 2010. Photography: Bill H.](image)
her as if he has unfinished thoughts to complete. Ramona stomps, kicks, and extends in a visceral dialogue with the two male forces in the universe the dance creates.

In this version, there is also a moment when John Africa joins Ramona in what used to be a solo. He turns and spins and walks in a serpentine path along the stage. He stomps towards and glares intensely at the audience with each repetition. With him in red and Ramona in white, they collapse to the floor in time with the break of the drummer’s rhythm. The Alter Egos scurry onto the stage with trembling thighs and sinuous head and hip articulations. Upon their descent to the floor, John Africa rises and performs a spastic iteration of the Cameroonian Fours – a signature movement for these dancers. He crawls on the floor, allowing his head to release upward and his pelvis to hyper extend. He collapses. Ramona and the Alter Egos sit up with piercing ululations and spinal undulations as if they are crying in bereavement.

After the ‘Final Moments’ section, the dance ends with Ramona center stage and Birdie to the right. They dance two synchronized, deliberate turns as they face each other. Birdie contorts his body and descends in a slightly open fetal position while Ramona gestures to him with her mask. The rest of the cast, including John, slowly roll upstage in what results in a simulated pile of corpses.
Twan Claiborne (Figure 8):

*Raaahmonaaah!* has a lot to it that had to be conveyed in the movement. It was very difficult. I had to be on top of the movement and know exactly where to place my foot and to do the same thing 100% of the time. Otherwise, I was going to have to do it again and again and again. There’s a lot of repetition. “Press that thigh up, press that thigh up!” I kept hearing a voice every time I did that move. I thought, “Oh, my gosh! I hope Mama Kariamu doesn’t see me with my thighs down.” It was intense. It’s funny though. I felt less pressure when I performed it. I kept saying to myself, “Trust you. You know the movement.” Everything clicked when Saleana said that poem while doing Umfundalai movements. We all ran out and ululated. I remember everything else but what my body was doing.

The highlight for me was when we all came out and did a calling to you and to Ramona. That was very, very intense. And the parts where we had to press our hips up by pushing on our toes, I really felt that, and I really felt when we had to do it and lunge forward. I remember feeling the hips, and the thigh, the hips and the thigh. Everything Mama Kariamu said clicked in my head at that moment. So when we came back in and did the feet thing, that intensity, that 100% all the time was there. Probably the best I’ve ever performed *Raaahmonaaah!* I was like, “I passed the test, she is happy.”

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Figure 8: Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah! Revisited (2010) Conwell Dance Theater, Temple University;
Pictured (Left to Right): Jessica Featherson, Twan Claiborne, Lela Anglin; Photography: Bill H.

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Kariamu & Company performed the latest version of *Raaahmonaaah! Revisited* (2010) on February 1 and 2, 2013 at Conwell Dance Theater. Adrienne Abdus-Salaam danced Ramona Africa, Shaness Kemp and a former Ramona, Saleana Pettaway, danced the Alter Egos, and I, in my twentieth year as a principal dancer in the company, danced John Africa. Stafford returned to K&C to perform Ramona’s invocation. (The last time he performed the poem was in January 1998 at the International Association of Blacks in Dance Conference.) While there were two other men in the work, Julian Darden and Danzel Thompson-Stout, no one danced the role of Birdie Africa.

In this version, Welsh replaces the Clydesdale–like prances done by the cast during the *The Processional* section with a grounded hip sway, giving dancers the opportunity to project even more anger. Adbus-Salam’s portrayal of Ramona features neo-traditional West African dance stylization and crying. Her Alter Egos Kemp and Pettaway dance until their bodies cover her as she falls to the floor immediately following her solo. Still dressed in red they literally cover her body projecting a metaphor of blood. For the first time, I, as John Africa, join Ramona during her solo, hinging to the floor and crawling percussively marking the deep sounding beats of the drums with each movement.

At the end of the dance, the men perform a variation to the former thigh-slapping backward leg extension sequence. While the women execute complete leg extensions, we extend our legs and snatch them in so that the leg rests on the calf in the same timing. In the ‘Final Moments’ section, two men, Darden and Thompson-Stout, lie lifeless at Ramona’s feet in the same way that Berry and Perkins did in 1996, underscoring the reality that men
died in the MOVE event. Lastly, after John Africa perishes and joins the two men on the floor, the rest of cast perform the *Cameroonian Fours* as they enter they space. They throw their masks to center stage where John and the deceased men lie and where Ramona stands, and collapse. The rhythm stops and the lights go to black.

**Auto-ethnographic Reflection**

Examining *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) as a potential site for danced maleness has both intellectual and visceral implications. My role as researcher allows me to analyze myself, describe my dancing male body, the bodies of Umfundalai’s other dancing men, and the masculine metaphors that emerge from watching them perform Umfundalai on video. This practice as a kind of audience to myself and other male Umfundalai dancers in *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) suggests meanings of masculinity that extend my lived experience as a performer in the work (or more accurately, my memories of performing). Watching and describing required bracketing gender agency to privilege my dancing body’s visible adherence to the representational masculinities generated by American society and the African American community. This descriptive discipline challenged me to disregard the masculinities I felt as a performer and focus on behaviors I witnessed in watching myself perform.

Secondly, extracting lived experience description from the interview data of the other male dancers and from my own journal entries launched a level of reflection that offered new insight or as Ahmed might have it, a “queer” understanding of *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) as a site for gendered performativity. Other mens’ memories sparked further memories of my own performances offering another layer of inquiry and yet another lived experience. These layered, intersubjective reflections craft a congruent paradigm for exploring danced
masculinities, underscoring three potential perspectives for further analysis: the audience perspective, the choreographer’s intention, and the lived experiences of the dancers.

*An Audience Perspective* - The audience perspective illuminates the relative nature of masculinities. Someone may be deemed masculine insomuch as he is compared to someone less masculine or feminine. To abuse a cliché, masculinity is in the eye of the beholder; there is no one construction that equalizes the masculinity of dancers in a work like *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989); instead, multiple interpretations point to a nuanced and varied discourse. For instance, part of Berry’s experience of masculinity was in comparing his rendition of the *Raaahmonaaah!* poem to that of DeGannes. 180 Yet, concertgoers witnessing the dance after 1993 did not have access to DeGannes’ version and might observe a masculinity situated in Berry’s embodiment of archetypes that they recognize from a larger American society.

In watching Perkins perform *Raaahmonaaah!* in a video of the 1996 Karimau & Company: Traditions concert, he appeared to me as virile and confident. His masculinity was vivid and appeared ‘natural;’ it seemed as if he was dancing out of his own gendered agency. Perkins, conversely, cloaked himself in a masculine portrayal he named “mannish.” For him, dancing Ramona Africa’s real life story required him to be a conduit, a danced interpretation of power, integrity, and strength. Dancing a women’s story through his lens required a separation from his embodied construction of masculinity, one that he readily experiences while performing some of Welsh’s works like *Bokolafini* (1994). 181, 182 While his

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180 Jillian Degannes was a graduate student in African Amerian Studies at Temple University during the time when *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) was mounted on 1993 Kariamu & Company dancers. She recited the poem for the “Invocation” of the dance.

gendered performance appeared natural to me as audience, for Perkins it was a contrived convention in which he distinguished his gender performance from what he considered masculine; my “masculine” was Perkins’ “männish.”

In an analysis of Joe Goode’s (1987) *29 Effeminate Gestures*, Ramsay Burt describes Goode’s work as having “ghosts.” He coins the metaphor to suggest how Goode advances a homosexual identity in juxtaposition with heteronormative, White masculinity, or what he calls “unmarked masculinity.” “Ghosts” serve as the images of expectation and the modality through which masculinity is identified in the work. He writes,

Goode also showed off a solidly muscular and desirable body to create a homoerotic charge through evoking the ghosts of former, desirable male dancers that belied the abject state associated with effeminacy.183

In *Raaabmonaaaah!* (1989), Berry, Perkins, and I dance in the “ghosts” of the all woman cast, ghosts that Mills was insistent on protecting. To this end, our performed masculinity is most vivid to concertgoers who expect a cast of women to take the stage. We are masculine in comparison to the expected or ghosted female presence.

*A Choreographer’s Intention* - The choreographer offers a different perspective. When Berry, Perkins, and I danced *Raaabmonaaaah!* in 1996, Welsh required us to dance the same vocabulary as the women in the same way. She choreographed additional movement for me to do as John Africa in efforts to distinguish my role as a new character among the three tall (over six feet) muscular men dancing among petite, curvaceous women. As the close

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182 Bokolafini (1994) is a dance inspired by black and white Malian mud cloth. See Table 3 for a description of the work. In the version Perkins references, the men wore *lapas*, attire that is usually reserved for women dancers in Umfundalai.

description conveys, masculinity was apparent to me when I saw our arm muscles contract in juxtaposition with the women’s sensuous hip articulations; when I saw our tall physiques tower over our female peers; and when I saw our stone-faced grimaces alongside the rolling eyes and puckered lips of the women with whom we shared the stage.

The masculinities in Raabmonaaah! (1989) were largely physiological, corporeal reflections of the masculinities that exist in larger communities beyond the concert stage. Welsh costumed the men in pants and tank shirts that accentuated maleness as a physical manifestation. However, her choreographic vision did not require us to embody contrived notions of masculinity. There was no dictate to “machismo.” She created a fertile space for us to grow our own gendered engagement. Berry and I advocated for what we thought was a more accurate depiction of the MOVE incident thereby championing the representation of men in Raabmonaaah! (1989). For me, Berry’s comment and the title of this chapter, “There were men in that fire, too” encapsulates our mission.

Performers’ Lived Experiences – Ghosts, as Burt would metaphorize, infiltrate male experiences in Raabmonaaah! (1989) in two ways. Both Berry and I were high school students when the MOVE incident occurred. From watching the event on television and seeing naked brown male and female bodies scatter from the explosion was an impactful experience. When I first saw Welsh’s choreographed recount of MOVE, I saw women dancing in the “ghosts” of the male MOVE members who died in the fire. In the single-sex version of the dance, the dancing women seemed to project a sisterhood and a woman-ness that eclipsed the male experience in the story. After all, the only other survivor of the bombing besides Ramona Africa was Birdie Africa, an eleven-year-old boy who initially was
absent from Welsh’s “biomythography.” Both Berry and I fought to represent the male ghosts of MOVE’s real life tale.

Secondly, Raaahmonaaab! (1989), as a biomythography, evolved from recounting the actual bombing. Umfundalai’s women, with their braided, cornrowed hair, hour-glass physiques, scooped neck leotards and two-tiered lapas transformed this danced recounting into a work of art. Welsh often described Raaahmonaaab! as a work about African American women in protest and their unwavering devotion to their causes. Though the dance was inspired by the MOVE incident, it made a broader statement about African American women and spoke to Welsh’s own lived experience. Much like Audre Lorde’s biomythography, Welsh “creates a new form of personal and cultural ‘biography’—composed of history, biography and myth to unfold her personal history.”

While Berry and I felt justified in expressing discontent with the absence of men in the dance, in retrospect I am aware that we were asking for entrée into a distinctive piece of folklore, a woman’s tale that transcended the recounted tragedy. Kariamu & Company’s dancing women created a myth in which all the women were both defiant and profoundly

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185 Audre Lorde, Zami: A New Spelling of my Name – A Biomythography, (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1982).

186 In 1976, with support from the Buffalo, NY Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kariamu Welsh choreographed and performed in a dance called Coretta inspired by Coretta Scott King, widow of Civil Rights activist, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the early days of the Black Dance Workshop. (Kariamu Welsh, email message to C. Kemal Nance, January 19, 2014.)


feminine. Berry, Perkins, and I joined the cast in 1996 and with what was then the newest version, danced in the ghosts of these female dancers whose bodies narrated Ramona Africa’s story. These ghosts could only be seen by Kariamu Welsh (choreographer), Glendola Yhema Mills and Saleana Pettaway (the only two women who danced in both the single-sexed and coed version of the dance), and concert goers who have followed the evolution of the dance since its premier in 1989.

By watching our male bodies dance in the ghosts of women, our masculinity became apparent. The way our bodies manipulated the movement choreographed for the female cast, the way we lifted and dropped our hips, the way we narrowed our faces to express our anger, the way our bodies filled the tank shirts and shokatoes, all illuminated our difference – our masculinity. The way we experienced that masculinity or any gendered performativity varied individually.

As a performer, I feel confident in the maleness I experience when I am dancing. While I am not always conscious of it, I think my dancing projects my gender portrayal. Further, my dancing projects a masculinity that transcends the distinction of sexuality. On the concert stage, I feel like a man dancing. Yet, I found myself analyzing masculinity in comparative ways as I watched video footage of Berry, Perkins, and me dancing Raaabmonaahl! For me, the visual image of my dancing confirms what I remember feeling when I performed the work. (As Chism asserts that his friend’s behavior betrayed him, I wonder if he would arrive at the same conclusion if he had an opportunity to see himself in the moment he describes.)
As a performer, the maleness I experienced seemed more intellectual than visceral. I felt a sense of solidarity with the men who perished in the MOVE bombing. I felt a sense of shared triumph with Berry. We had talked about dancing *Raaahmonaaah!* since I saw the dance in 1993 and our performance in 1996 demarcated an accomplishment for us as dancers and for male dancers yet to be seen. Berry’s call in my ear before I entered the stage to solo as John Africa used profanity and affirmation to celebrate our perceived achievement. I felt heightened emotion and strength, a kind of amplified self, which are aspects of maleness as I experience it. However, it is through retrospection, a critical look at my past lived experiences, that I attribute these phenomena to my gendered construction.

Berry’s account of his performance in *Raaahmonaaah!* was a direct response to my question, “Has there been a moment in Umfundalai class, rehearsal, or performance when you felt especially masculine?” Earlier in this chapter, I cited a lived experience extraction of Berry’s description of the moment. Unnoted was his mention of learning the Ramona poem from watching video footage of Jillian DeGannes reciting the poem and having to discover his own way of conveying its meaning. In this light Berry works with the ghost of DeGannes’ spoken word. Moreover, Berry speaks of strength and power and the ability to manipulate, claiming control of how the audience saw him: “I have control over all of that. Everybody in the house and in the wings adjusts to that energy.”

In “The Performance of Unmarked Masculinity,” Ramsay Burt makes the following contention about masculinities and dance:

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189 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012.
If one’s gender and sexuality are social constructions, as *The Male Dancer* argued, this means that one’s body interfaces and mediates between one’s individual experience and one’s place within society… Dance is an area through which, as embodied beings, we negotiate the **social and cultural discourses** through which gender and sexuality are maintained [emphasis added].

For Berry, notions of strength and power, tenets of African, American, and African American masculinity emerge as embodied ideals as he performed in *Raaahmonaaah!* As Burt might suggest, Berry’s performance, both the dancing and the spoken word, were portals for gendered scripts that Berry learned in the world beyond the concert stage. For me, the cultural scripts that inform the masculinity to which Berry refers became apparent through retrospective analysis. As a broader phenomenon, the “social and cultural discourse” to which Burt refers resonates for me as strength and power, and as masculinities in my lived experience.

For Perkins, gendered scripts manifest as archetypes. He separates himself from a contrived or scripted masculinity with the term “mannish.” The choreography and the political backdrop of the work offered him a connection to what I interpret as a dramatized masculinity. With intention, he distinguishes masculine from mannish and with his dancing body he mediates his individual experience (masculine) with his perceived gender role in society (mannish). Yet, the data on his dancing *Raaahmonaaah!* emerge from a conversation about moments when he felt particularly masculine dancing Umfundalai. For Perkins the dance produces an archetype that synthesizes the meaning of the actual MOVE event, or as Perkins would describe, the essence that feels like a “loud scream,” with a gender portrayal. Specifically, his enraged gender portrayal as a character in the dance was distinct from his

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embodied masculinity or social gendered agency. Potentially, the character Perkins becomes in *Raaahmonaaah!* sits outside of his maleness.

Since Berry, Perkins, and I became the first male dancers to perform in *Raaahmonaaah!*, the work has not been performed by an all female cast. As the dance has evolved, men have been integral to its development. I argue that the three of us created masculinities in Umfundalai with our pioneering presence in this classic work. By the time Tyson and Munir danced *Raaahmonaaah!* in 2000 and 2001, respectively, the female ghosts of Welsh’s original *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) had dissipated. While it is not clear that Berry’s, Perkins’ and my presence facilitated Tyson’s and Munir’s ease upon entering the Umfundalai dance tradition, our physical presence invisibilized the ghosts of Welsh’s original biomythography. In other words, neither dancer had to imagine what men would or could look like dancing the work; they could focus on the story. As revealed in their interviews, neither of them resonated with any scripts regarding an especially masculine gender portrayal. They, like Berry and me, connected with the social and cultural aspects of the MOVE story. As Philadelphia natives, the MOVE incident was their story, too.

Poe, who upon his foray into *Raaahmonaaah!* was a budding Umfundalai dancer, connects to art itself. His memories of the dance are peppered with questions of preparedness for what serves as one of the more virtuosic pieces in Kariamu & Company: Traditions’ repertoire. His performance, as he recalls it, speaks to a metaphysical dimension in which his and others’ identities shift and merge in time and space. Phenomenologist Edmund Husserl contends that fact and essence are indistinguishable. He writes:
The acts of cognition which underlie our experiencing posit the Real in individual form, posit it as having spatio-temporal existence, as something existing in this time-spot, having this particular duration of its own and a real content which in its essence could just as well have been present in any other time-spot; posits it, moreover, as something which is present at any other place, and in any other form, and might likewise change whilst remaining in fact unchanged, or change otherwise than the way in which it actually does (original emphases).\textsuperscript{191}

Husserl’s words underscore the essence that Umfundalai attempts to achieve with its dancers, an essential being that is organized by a Pan-African cultural system. Welsh’s work created a transformative space for Poe, a real space, in which the essence of her choreographed dance and the actual MOVE story became inseparable, allowing a slippage of perceived identities and actual reality.

\textit{Dancing the Man: Masculinities in Umfundalai Choreography}

In an interview for another study,\textsuperscript{192} Jumatatu Poe coined the phrase “Dancing the man” to refer to instances when he intentionally dances from his gendered self.\textsuperscript{193} As covered earlier, in my analysis of Welsh’s \textit{Raaahmonaah!} (1989), I identified three perspectives through which to examine gendered dance phenomena: the audience perspective, the choreographic intent, and the dancers’ experience. While both Berry’s and Perkins’ memories of their \textit{Raaahmonaah!} performances included “dancing the man,” the gendered constructions I perceived in the work were accessed in the main through video observation, an audience lens. Upon completing the research for this study, my own work as


performer and choreographer emerges as another demonstration of experienced maleness, providing opportunities for Umfundalai’s men to “dance the man.”

As an African American man, my body’s materiality has often narrated a fictional story for other men that I encounter, specifically, an illusion of athletic prowess. In high school gym class, classmates would often select me first for the intramural sports team despite my plea for them not to choose me. “I am only here for the credit. I could care less about putting a ball in basket,” I would announce. Someone would predictably reply, “Nance, you’re big – just stand under the basket!”

In college, after beginning experiences in African dance, Swarthmore’s athletic director approached me during one of the mandatory swimming lessons about playing football for Swarthmore. I respectfully declined. Later, he shared his analysis of my ability to be a competitive track runner based on the stretch he saw me perform in the student dance concert. Though I was flattered by his interest, I was even more affected by the enthusiasm my African American male friends expressed at the prospect of my joining them in sports activities. (They were all varsity team members at their respective high schools and skilled Division I level athletes.) When I reminded them that I was not interested, they would joke with me about my being a “dannnnzzzzzer.” Rolling their eyes and chuckling, they would also throw around terms like “pussy,” “fat ass,” and the like. We were men. This joking was a way we communicated, and sport was a way that, in our collective urban African American backgrounds, we bonded as men.

In the communities in which I reside, sports house many masculinities. In a study of boys who participate in pre-professional dance programs, Doug Risner found that serious
male dancers resented the ‘dance as sports’ analogy, but that this masculine justification was effective in retaining general education males in dance programs.\(^{194}\) As a point of entry into the possibility of concert dance serving as a portal for African American gender roles, I asked the men in this study to compare sports and dance as masculine projects. Within the scope of this research, the one commonality among the responses was that these dancing men felt that both activities, playing sports and dancing, were equally capable of carrying out their gendered agency.

However, Chism’s unique comparison posits dance performance as a particularly salient opportunity for maleness, underscoring the significance of choreography among Umfundalai’s dancing men. He offers:

I would say dancing is more masculine but I hadn’t thought about that until now. ... If there is something that exudes or emanates from an individual, you stand a greater chance of witnessing that through a performance. There are a lot more possibilities of expression and emotion in dance that you might not see in a game. ... you can see the dimensions, the spectrum that could be covered, the highs, the lows, the strength, the stoicism, a lot of the things that people associate with being masculine are probably more readily visible. This excludes camaraderie with other dudes, in like a team setting. But when you think about the individual and their own person, you get a lot of that through dance.\(^{195}\)

Chism draws on societal conventions to elucidate his conception of masculinity as a spectrum. He suggests a multiplicity of masculinities and a holism that seems congruent with any male experience. His use of the word “exudes” suggests that there is an essence that resides in a person’s gender portrayal that undergoes a social assignation. Yet, it is through


\(^{195}\) Harvey V. Chism, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, June 17, 2012.
these social conventions that we make sense of our gendered selves. As Anthony Elliot writes in his summation of George Mead’s “symbolic interactionism,”

The self is the agency through which individuals experience themselves in relation to others, but also an object or fact dealt with by its individual owner as he or she sees fit. We routinely construct our experience of daily life in exactly this manner: prodding, pushing, suggesting, advising, admonishing, criticizing and praising as we create the flow of our actions in the social world.¹⁹⁶

As I will discuss later, for Chism and other male subjects Umfundalai choreography is an incubator for varied male masculinities both experienced and assigned. In terms of my research question, both Chism and Perkins specifically described self-determination and empowerment in the context of male-centered thematic material.

*It’s All Man*

I choreographed the Umfundalai-based *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) after being initiated into Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the first historically African American Greek-lettered organization. At the time, the public displays of affection that men in the organization would express in fraternity-designated spaces inspired me. I titled the dance *Genesis* to allude to the pioneering presence that Alpha Phi Alpha occupies among historical African American fraternities and sororities, and to narrate a fictional premise about how men might interact if unfettered by the stigmatization associated with men loving men. In November 1996, Berry, Chism, Perkins, and I danced *Genesis* at the Swarthmore College Faculty Dance Concert. For Chism, this work symbolized a confluence of multi-layered discourses across personal, spiritual, and political lines.

The dance emerged from my lived experience as a neophyte in Alpha Phi Alpha and intersects with various similar lived experiences that characterize Chism’s pursuit of maleness. *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) impacted Chism’s agency as both dancer and man. He explains:

Yes! I felt masculine – it’s all man! In the narrative and the ensemble and the cast, it’s all man! I felt especially masculine then...the movements were statements. For me, that dance has political significance – genesis, creation, start. There was a subtext, an undercurrent of power and dominance and strength. Oh, I felt wonderful! I had arrived. I was living life. ... I felt affirmed. I felt like a vessel...I was able to be a symbol for folks like me in ways that you don’t readily find.

And it kind of pulled out of me a sense where I just be really feeling good about Harv and Harv in his past lives – I am going on this cultural epic memory stuff – and Harv in his present self. ... And the interesting thing, ... it had a physicality to it, but it wasn’t an aggressiveness, which people sometimes equate with masculinity. Right?197

In the above anecdote Chism relates to danced representations of power, dominance, and strength, values that American boys are often socialized to embody.198 Male representation, as I will explore in Chapter 6, also emerges as an important masculinity for Chism. His identification with being “a symbol for people like me” speaks to an underrepresented discourse. In a follow-up conversation, Chism explains that the representation that meant the most to him in his performance in *Genesis* was that of being non-heterosexual.199

197 Harvey V. Chism, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, McCabe Library at Swarthmore College, April 19, 2013.


199 Harvey V. Chism, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, June 17, 2012.
According to him, gay men are left out of the creation story and his portrayal in *Genesis* choreographed a different male presence to a newly fashioned beginning of civilization.

While I can relate to Chism’s assertion regarding the representation of gayness in the dance and appreciate gayness as a shared discourse, at the time I choreographed *Genesis*, sexuality was at most an unconscious muse. More salient, however, the choreography with its male-themed content seemed to allow for gayness to co-exist among the other conventional masculinities that Chism mentions including strength, dominance, and physicality. His jovial description of the dance being “all man” is perhaps more profound than he intended in the interview. Choreographically, this male-centered dance without consciously prescribed sexual scripting allowed for a multi-faceted representation of manhood and the opportunity for its cast to dance a self-determined manifestation of themselves comprised of the masculinities with which they were socialized and new masculinities that they create and project through their dancing bodies.

Like Chism, Perkins also felt affirmed by his participation in *Genesis*, locating his affirmation in a particular sequence of the choreography. In Perkins’ interview, he describes how the *Nigerian Stomp* invokes masculinity for him. As he describes the aesthetic properties of movement that align with his sense of maleness, he identifies *Genesis* as the work that for him epitomizes this danced male experience. Following is an excerpt from Perkins’ and my conversation:
Nance: So the *Nigerian Stomp* makes you aware of your gender?

Perkins: Absolutely, I’m so a dude, I’m so a man.

Nance: You feel your man?

Perkins: I feel it. I feel my man. I feel more man doing that than if I were winding. I feel powerful on a whole other level – the stature of the movement, like it’s completely upright.

Nance: Upright?

Perkins: It forces me to hold my head up. So just by that alone – I’m not saying it could not be that for women – the movement requires a boldness that defines my masculinity, my maleness.

Nance: Derrick, you said the stomp really spoke to you because “you got your manhood on.” Can you describe a moment when doing the stomp spoke to you that way?

Perkins: Any time we do *Raaahmonaaah!* Well, no, your piece *Genesis*. When we did that goddam circle – me, you and Staff (*Perkins jumps from his chair and starts dancing*). ABSOLUTELY! Of all the pieces I’ve done, all the professional dancing, that moment was the most defining, confirming, affirming, unifying movement I’ve ever performed. That whole sequence! I don’t know what the hell you were on but the way you channeled that, honestly?

Nance: What was it about *Genesis* that resonated with the ‘man’ in you?

Perkins: Understanding the concept of the piece...that connectedness we all had at that moment, and while the movement was the same, we all brought our ‘isms’ to it, but it was just as powerful, just as affirming.*

Perkins is referring to ‘The Circle,’ a sequence in the choreography when Berry, Perkins, and I perform a variation of the *Patakato* dance, which includes the *Nigerian Stomp* and side stretches to the floor. As we stomp, kick, and lunge in a circular path we look at each other with intense, piercing glares.

Even in relaying the story in our interview, Perkins felt compelled to dance, performing the movement sequences as he was speaking. It was as if words failed to hold the fervor that arose when he relived this moment in the dance. Perkins describes the sequence as “unifying.” In *Genesis*, a dance performed by an all African American cast whose personal connection narrates a sense of masculinity, I interpret Perkins’ experience of unification as a danced kinship with other men with whom he shares ethnicity, gender, and passion for dance. Moreover, we were and still are close friends – brothers, as we readily refer to ourselves.

Like Chism, Perkins also alludes to self-determination as a vehicle for affirmation. His use of our shared vernacular, “isms,” refers to the personality quirks that uniquely characterize each of us. In other words, the choreography left the space for each of us as male dancers to be whom we are without prescribing an archetype for us to embody. As men, as human beings, each of us is endowed with unique idiosyncrasies and movement style. As Karen Bond asserts, “…Personal style fosters self-determination evidenced in heightened affect, whole body engagement, creation of new forms, cumulative learning, and conscious self-presentation.”²⁰¹ The ways Stafford tilts his head to the left when he performs neo-traditional West African vocabulary, the way Perkins grimaces as if he has tasted something bitter when he performs the more grounded movements of Umfundalai’s vocabulary, and the way Chism squints when he wants to intensify his performance quality, are movement designations that highlight each dancer’s uniqueness.

In the world outside of concert dance, such idiosyncrasies could have a gendered assignation in the transmission of American and African American culture. For instance, the flip wrist, an articulation that permeates African Diasporan dance styles, has a connotation of gayness in American culture. However, in Genesis, each of the dancers’ movement styles, regardless of their social import or origin, were welcomed as an expression of their gendered selves. Further, bringing our unique ‘isms’ meant that we could each contribute our constructions of maleness, creating a collective male archetype that lives on in this danced creation story. Bond notes that when the dance context accommodates personal style, a collective style of movement may emerge, an “aesthetic community.”

Twan Claiborne is the youngest man in this study and the newest addition to the legacy of Umfundalai’s dancing men. His defining Umfundalai dance experiences transpired during his classes with me at Swarthmore College. Eventually, he danced with Kariamu & Company: Traditions for one season in 2010 before moving to New York to be a special education teacher. While Perkins had a unifying experience dancing with other Black men in choreography, the literal presence of other dancing men shaped how Claiborne danced in another work I choreographed called Remembering So Well…(2003). Following is his recollection of dancing in that work:

…the three of us dancing together and I just felt like I had to – we are men dancing with each other so we usually dance like men would dance if that makes any sense. … It feels more restricted... In your dance I felt tense. Like, there was a Ring Shout in there, but usually my arms would be more fluid and diving. I was just more rigid. My muscles felt tense when I moved my arms, and I wasn’t travelling as fast as I would have. I was more grounded in the movements.203

Claiborne felt a connection with two other dancers, but the unifying quality that he experienced failed to affirm him. Minimally, dancing in Remembering So Well…(2003) required him to alter what would be a more ‘natural’ way of moving for him, to depict a masculinity, a pre-conceived notion about the way men should dance. His comment, “We dance like men usually dance” reveals that social prescription guided Claiborne’s movement. Claiborne’s predicament is reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s construction of “docile bodies,” which, as loci of power, can “be subjected, used, transformed, and improved.” Describing the bodily impacts of the 18th century penal system in France, Foucault writes:

To begin with, there was the scale of the control: it was a question not of treating the body, *en masse*, ‘wholesale,’ as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it ‘retail,’ individually; on the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, as the object of the control.204

The tacitly gendered dancing that Claiborne experienced as ‘dancing like men’ became a docile (albeit rigid) masculinity with a direct impact on his “movements, gestures, and attitudes,” as Foucault theorizes. This masculinity created tension; moreover, it was self-imposed.


The dance to which Claiborne refers was a fictional exploration of ancient Kemet. Dancers were dressed in Egyptian inspired costumes and performed Umfundalai vocabulary to drums and a soulful rendition of *Afro Blue*.²⁰⁵ I gave no gendered instructions for performance. My prompt was that the men dance with all the energy they had to offer. Yet, Claiborne felt that he had to dance ‘manly’ in relation to the other men with whom he shared the stage. He altered the way he performed the *Ring Shout* in order to comply with a male movement system that he construed. While it is possible that part of what he constructed came from technique classes he had taken with me, he also drew on masculinities available to censor his dancing. For Claiborne, dancing with other men, even men he knew well, stymied an agency and fluidity in his own dancing body.

Masculinities of movement and gesture run deep with Claiborne and other men in this study. However, as we learn and live with masculinities, we ultimately dance with them in our performance experiences. For Claiborne, masculinity is a blind spot in that he finds it difficult to express his own masculinity in a holistic and genuine way.²⁰⁶ Yet, he adjusts his dancing on a stylistic level to accommodate an archetype he finds difficult to embody, adhering to a representational ideology that is inauthentic: “tense” rather than “fluid.” Even in his hip hop classes, Claiborne scales back his wrist movement when dancing a combination with the other men in his class in an attempt to represent men in a way other than his own movement would convey.


Perkins also speaks about dancing in a way that represents men in a certain light.\textsuperscript{207} I suggest that this representation is a hetero-normative archetype that combats the social assumption that dancing, specifically concert dancing, is an indication of male homosexuality. While I have since changed my perspective, I remember my own challenges with the across the floor portion of class when I was a beginning Umfundalai dancer. Walking across the floor in parallel position at a pace that was most comfortable for many of my shorter and female instructors made my buttocks rock side to side. In Chester, Pennsylvania where I was raised, we called the rocking of the buttocks ‘switching’ – an ostentatious walk of sassiness that women often executed to seize the attention of someone they sexually admired. In my community, when a man “switched” it was an indication of his sexual interest in other men, thereby making him less male. In my beginning days as a dancer in Umfundalai, I remember walking across the floor on my heels, protruding my chest, and sometimes jerking my elbows in efforts to counterbalance the image of the rocking motion of my hips. I was looking for a masculinity, a vestige of my socialization that would help me justify ‘switching’ across the floor.

Up to the time of my study of Umfundalai, I had internalized so many pejorative messages about my male dancing body that I was determined that it was going to be just as masculine as any moving male body I had encountered. I, too, was preoccupied with offering a danced representation of maleness that could contend with any male archetype that existed outside the studio walls. In this regard, I relate to Claiborne’s and Perkins’ concerns with representation. However, choreography and performance gave me a respite. I discovered that in performance, the less preoccupied I was the more masculine I became.

\textsuperscript{207} Derrick A. Perkins, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Philadelphia, PA, June 6, 2012.
My agency emerged from dismantling some of the social conventions for what my body should and should not do. For me, the concert stage was the place I could be ‘me’ in my entirety: confident, strong, vulnerable, and soft.

From male-centered choreographic content to imagined alignment with a male way of moving, Umfundalai choreography opens the opportunity for a multiplicity of masculinities. In both *Genesis: the Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) and *Remembering So Well…* (2003), I developed the choreography in multifarious ways that intersected with my male dancers’ construction of their gender roles. This retrospective examination of my choreography excludes the perspective of the audience. To this end, the masculinities that I analyze focus on the dancers’ experiences and my choreographic intention which may or may not align with what an on-looking audience identifies as masculinities. Albeit socially mediated, masculinity is relative; it is lived experience as the aforementioned anecdotes reveal, constructed only in part through embodiment of something vicariously experienced or seen in a man’s social terrain. In the Umfundalai choreography that I have ushered into the tradition, my intention, much like Welsh, has been to leave the responsibility of masculine embodiment up to the dancer, affording him the agency to project his own construct.

**Summary and Conclusion**

…most societies hold consensual ideals—guiding or admonitory images—for conventional masculinity and femininity by which individuals are judged worthy members of one or the other sex and their attendant images, or models, often become psychic anchors, or psychological identities, for most individuals, serving as a basis for self-perception and self-esteem.\(^{208}\)

\[^{208}\text{David D. Gilmore, } \textit{Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity,} \text{ (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 10.}\]**
In an essay titled, “The Manhood Puzzle,” David Gilmore provides a rationale for how masculinities work in various cultures across the world. I use his statement to introduce this closing section, which has advanced the ‘de-puzzling’ of masculinities with which we, dancing men, infuse our work with gendered meaning. This chapter has shown that Kariamu Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah! (1989) and Raaahmonaaah! Revisited (2010), as well as my Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings (1996) provide Umfundalai’s dancing men with fertile ground for constructing maleness. Neither Welsh nor I gave our dancers specific instruction on how to project and create maleness in these works. The male essence, as it were, emanated from the dancers’ agency in performance – from their self-perception, as Gilmore suggests.  

Both Claiborne and Perkins adhere to scripts that prescribe the way men should dance. While their ideals may come from a perceived place in their social experiences and perhaps from their Umfundalai experiences, the carriage of their bodies in the choreographies they mention, comes from an imaginary. As Burt offers, their dancing bodies interfaced with social reality to create their own masculine experience.  

For Chism, dancing in Genesis (Nance, 1996) was a positive stroke of his self-esteem, supporting Gilmore’s premise about the psychological underpinnings of masculinity. Notions of an affirmed gayness as it might be projected in a story about creation were, in fact, his creation—not the choreographic intent. Yet, the work itself offered a space for him to explore, to arrive at his own agency that both empowered him to perform the dance with aplomb and encouraged him to think positively about his gendered and sexual identities.

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211 D. Gilmore, 10-11.  [Why different ways of citing?]
Lastly, connectedness creates a ‘male’ space for some of Umfundalai’s dancing men. Perkins’ masculinity—not ‘mannishness’—was found in the community that the cast of *Genesis* (1996) provided. Similarly, the masculinity I experienced in *Raaahmonaaah!* (1996) stemmed from my connection to Berry, another African American man, as a fellow aspiring dancer. While Claiborne’s experience with communal masculinity caused him to stifle his visceral expression, it was connectedness or even disconnection with the other men that sparked his introspection of gender portrayal. Umfundalai, in these cases, afforded an opportunity, a creative space where men engaged, refuted, and/or dismantled social scripts for masculine behavior.

Carrie Noland contends that agency is potentiated in the embodiment of gestures as cultural inscriptions on the body: “Gesture serves as a reminder that movement is not purely expressive but is culturally shaped at every turn.”

For her, embodiment is the process by which acculturation happens; at the same time, a movement practice that emerges from *habitus* can afford a power to resist and/or alter behavior and beliefs (agency). With Umfundalai as the cultural terrain that holds the danced experiences of its men, a critical look at its ritualized movement practices, what Noland would construe as gesture, offers a salient perspective as to how men actualize maleness as gendered agency. The next chapter examines the process through which Umfundalai acculturates its men and the potential for gendered agency in the embodiment of its Pan African vocabularies. While Chapter 5 unearthed the act of performing as a portal for men’s gendered constructions, Chapter 6

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213 C. Noland, 7.
focuses men’s ‘orientation’ in the *habitus* that exists in Umfundalai dance culture, namely, the studio experience.
CHAPTER 6

MALE IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION: EPIPHANY AND FRICTION

In the preceding chapter, “There were men in that fire,” I presented a phenomenologically based, auto-ethnographic analysis of male experience in performing Umfundalai choreography that emerged as significant through a grounded theoretical interview process. While dancing choreography, Welsh’s or mine, has had a multifaceted impact on the men in this study, it is only one facet of Umfundalai cultural practice. For Welsh, it is her least favorite part because of its finality. When it is over, it is done. She appreciates the rehearsal process that requires an engagement with the dancers allied with the creation of art.\textsuperscript{214} Indeed, much of Umfundalai’s culture transpires in the spaces and times of class and rehearsal.

Umfundalai’s first dance master, Glendola Yhema Mills, reflects on rehearsal experiences during her beginning days in the tradition:

\textsuperscript{214} Kariamu Welsh, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Glenside, PA, December 21, 2012.
This is a technique class. But she [Welsh] has us standing center floor in our Umfundalai stance. We were pressed and leaned forward, and pulled up. She talked about something she had experienced in Africa or some aspect of Black culture to help us understand how to get into the movement, how to be grounded. … So, that would transcend from technique to rehearsal. So, when you talk about the culture, the intangible stuff, in the studio, … the dance I'm going to do is important. I'm a person entering the dance and that is going to impact you and I dancing together, us dancing with other people, us – the teacher, the choreographer being inspired by what we do. That was new, that idea that I'm just as important in the creative process to the choreographer as they are to me. And it became a very conscious thing.

I think one of the reasons I stayed with Umfundalai was because I felt ‘at home’… it was familial. People were hungry for it. I think we inspire one another. There was a nurturing. Mills has an important role in this study as a conduit of the Umfundalai tradition for many of the men who studied the technique. Before becoming my colleague and my sister, she was my second Umfundalai teacher after Welsh at Swarthmore in the fall of 1989. Mills offered the above comments in response to a question about the culture of Umfundalai upon her entry in the late 1980s when she began her graduate dance studies at Temple University. This pre-dates Berry’s and my entry to Kariamu & Company in 1993. Later in the interview Mills mentions that the nurturing and familial aspect of the culture remained after Berry and I began to take classes.

Mills’ description of K&C as familial is notable in light of the title of this study. As a familial unit, the ‘brothers’ of this community have our own stories about how we interact with Umfundalai’s evolving culture. Some of our stories speak to the universality of a dancer’s experiences under Welsh’s guidance and others speak to a friction enflamed by our socialization as African American males and our participation in a female dominated dance.

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215 Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Norfolk, VA, May 19, 2013.
tradition. Using Gagnon’s terms, this chapter explores the intrapsychic scripts, the representations of “the problems connecting meaning (culture) and action (social interaction),”\textsuperscript{216} that emerge from engagement with Umfundalai’s transmission of dance culture.

*Epiphany: I am a Dancer*

Yes I know you are a man and I’ve always known you were a man, but the beautiful thing about you and Stafford was that I could use you as dancers – as body. I could capitalize on your being able to do everything, I didn’t have to make a lot of separation in my mind. I just couldn’t.\textsuperscript{217}

During the early years of the Black Dance Workshop and Kariamu & Company, dancing men had a sporadic presence as they were contracted to do featured roles in selected venues. Until Stafford Berry, Abdur-Rahim Jackson and I danced in a Kariamu & Company Concert in Philadelphia in February, 1993, no men had trained in the Umfundalai technique. In the above excerpt, Umfundalai’s progenitor, Kariamu Welsh, reflects on her experience working with Berry and me, as we became two of the first Umfundalai-trained male dancers in her female company. My hours of dialogue with the men of Umfundalai revealed that Welsh’s focus on our dancing bodies independent of gender not only eased the tensions associated with the pursuit of aplomb in a dance technique class, but also affirmed many male practitioners’ place in its tradition. Stafford describes his experience as being “affirmed and acknowledged” as an artist.\textsuperscript{218}

\textsuperscript{216} John H. Gagnon, *An Interpretation of Desire*, 140.

\textsuperscript{217} Kariamu Welsh, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Glenside, PA, December 21, 2012.

\textsuperscript{218} Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012.
While there have been numerous instances throughout my career when Welsh publically acknowledged my exemplary embodiment of Umfundalai, the time that I remember most clearly was during my first class. The following excerpts from my journal (June 13, 2010) describe my recall of that moment.

In a soft voice and assertive tone, Kariamu says, “Okay people let’s go.” I stand tall with my back erect, and narrow my focus on a hole in the panel. A man with long locks, thick ‘coke bottle’ glasses, and a *dashiki* sits in the left corner of the studio. He is playing the hell out of those drums! I cannot believe he is the only one playing; he sounds like an orchestra of percussionists. How is he making all that sound come from those drums? Under Kariamu’s guidance, we continue to move, and stretch, and then…, the moment of truth. Kariamu starts teaching us a movement she calls the *Zulu Shuffle*. It reminds me of the *Hustle* from the 1970s disco era. I love it. I begin to move and my heart races. The drums are doing something to me that I don’t quite understand but that feels familiar. I am getting ‘hyped!’ I turn to the left and then the right. I clap as I mark time. I breathe heavily but stay focused. I don’t want everybody to see me, the fat kid, lose my composure. This would be all too familiar. The drums seem to get louder, and I am ‘jamming.’ Sweat leaves my body like a sprinkler system.

Finally, the movement phrase ends. Carolyn, a beautifully dark chocolate-colored woman, appears out of nowhere and taps my left shoulder. I look back. She says, “You are good.” I don’t smile (I still had on my jamming face). I reply, “Thank you.” Then, Kariamu stands in front of me with her black scooped-neck leotard and her wrap skirt. She has wavy hair pulled back in a bun with what appears to be a strategically placed triangle of gray hair over one eye. (She is so classy.) After the drums stop and out of a brief silence she joins Carolyn, “That’s right. That’s right!” What’s your name, sweetheart?” I reply, “Curtis.” She responds, “Well, Curtis, you are doing wonderfully!” The class applauds. But I still do not smile. I take deep breaths … I want to ‘wear out’ the next movement.

In an interview with Welsh I asked her to describe me during the first times I took class with her. I also shared some of my own memories of my first experiences dancing.

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219 The *Zulu Shuffle* is an abstraction of movement that Zulu men do to toughen their feet for battle. It is performed by alternately moving the feet out and in from center will keeping them connected to the floor. In its progression, there are turns and claps that accentuate the rhythms of the drums.
Umfundalai, including an abridged version of the aforementioned excerpt. This is her recollection:

Well, I remember you, too. I don’t remember that, but I remember you. I don’t know if this was the very first class, but I remember you at the back of the room before we went across the floor. You were taller than everybody. I just remember your absolute love for what I was doing; you were just eating it up.

You just seem to connect with my soul. You describe yourself as chubby, but actually, my memory of you was that you were very tall. You reminded me of Alvin Ailey. Now, we don’t associate Alvin Ailey with African dance, obviously. It had nothing to do with the genre; it was something about your face, and your eyes were on fire. It was like you and I were the only two people in the room. It was a beautiful thing. It was probably the greatest compliment any teacher can get. It’s not anything you said to me... it’s like falling in love, it’s like you were saying, “She is speaking my language.” and I was saying, “He is speaking my language.” and everybody else is like... [she shrugs her shoulders, laughing]. So yeah! It was great! It was great.  

As I remember it, Welsh’s and my connection felt kismet. As a young man, I felt that we somehow understood each other, but was unclear what that understanding meant. Retrospectively, I believe that that ‘understanding’ was an indication of the roles we would play in each other’s lives – even though we had never met prior to that moment. In that moment, however, it felt as if our shared African American ancestry, our similar visceral reaction to rhythms of the drums, gave us a connection that felt honest and cultural.

Was this cultural déjà vu a vestige of what Welsh would describe as epic memory, the phenomenon of interpreting an expression according to a cultural worldview? In any case,

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learning Umfundalai with Welsh transcended the gendered cultural scripts about dancing men that I brought to the class. As introduced earlier, during my Chester, Pennsylvania childhood and adolescence, male peers often ridiculed me for demonstrated exuberance for movement and moving. My joy for dance often broke the unspoken rules for ‘coolness.’ Moreover, my big dancing body broke aesthetic rules of slenderness and masculinity for both male and female observers. My failure to comply with normative standards of beauty and masculinity left me open to designations of effeminacy, gayness, and buffoonery, positioning me as ‘other’ in my own community. I often heard remarks like, “He’s big but he can party!” as I ‘jaammed’ at parties, or “Look at the big dude in the back!” as I marched in neighborhood parades with my drill team, which was largely populated by African American girls (in a drill team of about 40 youth, six were male). I enjoyed marching or what can be referred to now as ‘stepping.’ Yet, I had to contend with members of the community who wondered aloud, “Why is he marching with all those girls?” and concluded, “He must be gay.” I hoped that attending college was going to be an opportunity to craft a new identity.

While I knew I loved to dance, I had anxieties that dancing would recreate the alienation I felt living in Chester. Such concerns about my new college community dissolved with Welsh’s public acknowledgment of my dancing; she offered an alternative narrative. I was making visceral connections between the inner-city drill team and cheerleading cadences, the social dances my mother showed me, and the hip hop dances I was currently doing at parties and Umfundalai’s Pan–African vocabulary. At the same time Welsh was making connections between Umfundalai and the cultural practices of a Diasporan Africa. In dancing, she taught us history and aesthetics and celebrated the power of the dancing body. More importantly, she encouraged my new college community to appreciate my dancing.
body. Her designation of my dancing body as beautiful and powerful dismantled the cultural scripts that describe men as non-dancing, athletic, slender, and muscled.

Further, Welsh’s acknowledgement supported my emerging identity as a dancer whose movement linked to an ancestral past. This, in my eyes, made me more masculine than the athletic and violent archetypes that pervaded my urban upbringing. The power and strength exhibited in the dances of ancient Africa seemed to have a purpose far more profound than running with a football or proving my street toughness. The masculine archetypes Welsh introduced via the *Zulu Shuffle*, *Imbende Stretch*, and *Patakato* required me to embody a strength that was communal and ancestral; playing sports and embodying urban hyper-masculinity of the late 1980s and early 1990s paled in comparison.

While I offer that my agency as an African American dancing man emerged from my growth in Umfundalai and congruent appreciation of African culture, my strongest memory was the first epiphany that I was a ‘good dancer.’ I, like Berry, felt “affirmed and acknowledged.” When my body failed to live up to the hard, impervious masculine body that I was taught to emulate, my pudgy belly, wide hips, and thick thighs failed to matter as much in Umfundalai. My dancing body had currency in the sacred space Welsh created with Umfundalai’s ritual and protocol. My African and African American peers shot looks of excitement and joy when I danced across the studio floor. Welsh often grinned at me and maintained what appeared to be a reflective smile in much the way my mother would do when she watched me labor to learn dances from *Soul Train* during my childhood. My new White, Asian, and Latino colleagues looked on, as they would slap shoulder, high five, or

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222 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012.
verbally congratulate me with each movement Welsh introduced to us. This contemporary African dance made sense to my mind and my body.

Charles Tyson had a similar experience with Umfundalai:

It was the only dance technique I’d studied that felt natural on my body from the beginning, like certain rhythms and movements – I just got it. I might have been rough with it, but at least it made sense, unlike ballet, which is very foreign to me. And that was it for me, I was hooked, that was my bug.  

Tyson’s use of the word “natural” speaks to the phenomenon of cultural resonance that Umfundalai may have for a dancer who has been socialized by an African community. His reference to “just getting it” has a similar meaning as Welsh’s description, “speaking my language.” These notions capture the sense of familiarity and fervent energy I felt when I did the Zulu Shuffle for the first time.

Moreover, public acknowledgement of the connection when it happens had sonority for other men in the study. A self-realized empowerment happens when Welsh or whomever one deems as primary instructor acknowledges him as a good dancer. Perkins discusses how Welsh’s public affirmation housed his acceptance of ‘dancer’ as his identity.

Before that whole concert experience, I never saw myself as a dancer. I saw myself as a dancer in that experience. Mama [Welsh] liked one of my movements, and said “Yes!” For whatever reason, I was a dancer. I know that was a large leap, but she acknowledged me, and the movement, and wanted me to do the movement. I was a dancer! I was Derrick with a “y”.

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223 Charles Tyson, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Community Education Center, October 9, 2012.

For a brief period following the first season with Kariamu & Company: Traditions, Perkins began spelling his first name ‘Derryck,’ “with a y.” He, like many men of Umfundalai, saw himself differently after Welsh knighted him, ‘dancer’.

One commonality among the ways men in this study confirm their identities as dancers is the public acknowledgement that they have performed well in technique class. These public pedagogical statements serve as a pronouncement to the dance community that is unique to the studio experience. Tyson describes a moment in a Umfundalai class at Freedom Theater when Welsh called him to demonstrate movement when he regarded his execution as “just adequate.” He remembers hearing Welsh’s signature “whoop” (ululation) and suddenly gaining the confidence to perform as well as Welsh said he did. Khalil Munir remembers when he was called to do the Ring Shout in front of his classmates at Freedom Theater. He relays: “I was not feeling entirely sure of myself as a dancer but hearing her give encouragement was really important. It left a positive impression. I wanted to do better and do more.”

I asked Berry if he could recall the most meaningful comment anyone had ever shared with him in Umfundalai class. He offered the following lived experience:

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225 Charles Tyson, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Community Education Center, October 9, 2012.

I remember being shocked and delighted that I did something that no one else could do. I didn’t think that was possible. There was one moment in *Herero Women*, a new dance that Mama was putting together. True to form, everyone learned everything and learned different parts. We were all up in the mix. Then, Mama’s direction was to fall to the floor. Everyone started asking, “Well, do you want it with the leg, with an *arabesque*…?” They were trying to give all the dance lingo. *(Imitating Welsh): “Fall to the floor!”* Everybody tried to use their hands. *(Imitating Welsh): “Fall to the floor!”*

I thought to myself, “She really wants us to just land. She just wants us to drop to the floor. No hands! No preparation!” She’s not asking us to do what I think she’s asking us to do. I am thinking all this in split seconds. I was like, “She really is asking us to do that!” and I thought, “I think I can do that!” You know how you know what you know what you know? So, I said, “Mama, do you mean this?” I allowed my legs to spring from under me and went straight down to the earth with my ass hitting the ground. *(Imitating Welsh): “Yes! Staff, that’s it!”* That moment stands out in my head … everyone started breaking their necks trying to… *(Imitating Welsh): “No! Staff?” I did it again!*

According to Berry, he became a ‘dancer’ during his college years at Temple University, which spanned 1987 to 1993. The moment he describes in the above excerpt occurred during the 1996 season of Kariamu & Company: Traditions when Welsh premiered *Herero Women* (1996) at Temple University’s Conwell Dance Theater. Much like Umfundalai’s other dancing men participating in this study, Stafford’s story speaks to his realized potential to achieve excellence in dancing. He starts with disbelief that he could execute movement in Umfundalai’s evolving canon that no one else could do. His description also infers the presence of an underpinning dance culture that requires its participants to achieve virtuosity. I interpret Berry’s description, “all up in the mix,” as his stylized vernacular for the sense of community that emerged from dancing in the company.

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227 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012.

228 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012.
Also salient is how he describes the behavior of other dancers. As a phenomenological account, his words fail to convey how the female dancers’ frequent reference to Western dance terminology could alienate dancers who had not practiced Western dance as a movement practice. Admittedly, this inference comes from my shared lived experience of this moment and my own recall. Welsh’s public acknowledgment of Berry’s execution of the *Herero* drop to the floor felt to him like a triumph in that it sanctioned his ability to achieve virtuosity in Umfundalai.

For the other men, namely Perkins, Munir and Tyson, self-acceptance as dancers was an evolving project. Their epiphanies came in moments when they were either unaware of their own skill or the power their performance had in this African dance tradition. Further, their sense of skill and prowess came, as it did for me, with Welsh’s designation of our ability to live into the role of dancer. As Umfundalai dancers and eventual Kariamu & Company: Traditions performers, Berry, Munir, Perkins, Tyson and I, five of the eight men in this study, describe impactful interaction with Umfundalai’s progenitor. The integration of men spans 20 years of Umfundalai’s history and in that time, and for some men, the affirmation of becoming a dancer as described in many interview anecdotes happens through the person the man identifies as his primary instructor.

I emerge from the data as another primary instructor who has affected male dancers in similar ways to Welsh. Harvey Chism recalls when I would ask him to demonstrate movement in front of his classmates at Swarthmore and how that gave him a level of confidence in his dancing body.
It could be something as simple as learning choreography for a piece and you had me demonstrate something to Jumatatu who was another great dancer. You’d say, “Harv, show Juma this.” If you liked the way I executed a certain movement you would say, “I like that. Do it again. Do it again. Do it again. Do it again.” And then, somehow, it would find its way into the choreography. That’s a serious sense of affirmation as this was nothing more than a stylization. “Everybody look at Harv. Do that.”

For Chism, affirmation of his personal style came through me, a man. Twan Claiborne, too, speaks of ways that I affirmed him during his years of taking class with me while studying linguistics at Swarthmore College.

I saw myself in you. This is weird because I didn't know nothing from nothing when I met you. But for some reason, I saw myself in you. Others saw that as well. They would say, “You’re like a mini Kemal.” I was like “Oh gosh!” I’m all about legacies and how I’m connected and a part of this larger tree. If I'm part of the tree of Nance, I've got to step everything up 100 times because he's like over there and then over here, and I'm like right here and still right here. But eventually, I got over there. It took me a couple of years, but I got over there.

Prior to taking my Umfundalai classes, Claiborne had many experiences dancing other genres. In our interview, he often described being the only man and the only Black man in his dance experiences, how he felt uncomfortable in those situations where he felt like a big Black dancing man in a conventionally White, female space. I asked Claiborne if he could recall specific moments in his life when he felt that he was punished for being a Black man. Among his retelling of instances in his private school education when he was singled out for being African American, male, and high achieving, he shared this memory:

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229 Harvey V. Chism, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, June 17, 2012

I think I was the only Black male in the class. I was the highest performing student, higher than her White kids. I was made an example of…not in a bad way as she [his teacher] would see it, but I felt like I was being punished as I was made the exception. For the longest time—and to some extent now, I was the exception to the rule. It’s been a burden.\textsuperscript{231}

Similar to how Welsh described her interaction with me, in my role as Claiborne’s instructor, I, too, was affirmed by his presence and immediately recognized his passion for dancing the moment he performed the \textit{Four Points of the Universe}.\textsuperscript{232} His eyes reminded me of how I look when I am ready to dance. It was like looking into a mirror. I was moved to see his dark skin, full lips, big thighs, and full buttocks move across the studio floor with freedom. I focused on Claiborne with a piercing gaze when he danced. His energy and love for movement appeared unparalleled by any of my other students and our physical likeness reminded me of all the reasons I still dance: the joy, spirituality, and sweat. I was teaching Claiborne and he, like me in Welsh’s classes, was “eating it up.”

For Claiborne and me, the joy of moving is the driving force that propels our enthusiastic involvement in Umfundalai. Umfundalai’s men dance for various reasons. This study focuses on men who not only studied the technique but performed in its professional dance company. The significance of this qualification is two-fold: (1) for some of the men, dancing Umfundalai was either their entry into or their singular professional experience in concert dance; and (2) some of the men may not have regarded themselves as professional dancers without their experience in Umfundalai. ‘Dancer’ as an identity has both social and cultural import.

\textsuperscript{231} Twan Claiborne, interview by C. Kemal Nance, New York, NY, December 16, 2012.

\textsuperscript{232} \textit{Four Points of the Universe} is a head and neck articulation in the Umfundalai technique. Dancers move their heads left and right and up and down after which they complete a series of head swings and nods.
Outside of Poe and Chism, interview data reveal that dance had a pejorative assignation in men’s socialization. Khalil Munir tells a story of leaving home for dance classes at Freedom Theater; a group of boys in his neighborhood would sing a song from the movie *Robin Hood*, “We’re men in tights…tight tights.” Charles Tyson recalls wrestling with his nephew and inadvertently coaching him to plié; his sister interrupted, declaring, “My son doesn’t plié – my son doesn’t dance.” Berry remembers enjoying himself dancing at a party in high school; a few girls commented on his “jamming” to which the guys retorted, “Oh, he gay.” For Perkins it was a foregone conclusion that men who do concert dance are homosexual. Claiborne shares about not dancing for fear that his peers would tease him and then being surprised when he received positive recognition for his dancing.

Risner reports that, “approximately fifty percent of the male dancers in the U. S. are gay or bisexual as compared to four to ten percent in the general population.” Yet, ‘gay’ is the epithet that often confronts dancing men, regardless of sexual orientation, creating a friction between concert dancing and the ‘boys don’t dance’ masculinity of their African American socialization. Nevertheless, many men, like Perkins and Claiborne above, eventually accept dance and dancing as part of their identities.

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235 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012.


The “affirmation” that Umfundalai men referred to in interviews is related to acknowledgement in the studio. In most instances, Welsh calls the dancer to the front of the class to demonstrate Umfundalai vocabulary. Though temporary, she calls him to leadership, expecting him to perform with quality and to serve as a prototype for other dancers. For us, the men of Umfundalai, this call bestows power and acceptance. While Welsh inculcated affirmation as acknowledgement into Umfundalai pedagogical practice, Chism, Poe, and Claiborne arrived at their epiphanies with me. Berry’s ‘buttocks fall’ in the rehearsal for *Herero Women* (1996), Perkins’ revised spelling of his first name with a ‘y,’ and Munir’s *Ring Shout* all illuminate critical incidents when men become dancers in Umfundalai despite the cultural scripts they learned prior to their involvement.

The dance studio is also a site for discourse in masculinity. While many of the men in this study felt affirmed in their pursuit of proficiency in Umfundalai, the gendered scripts arising with its cultural evolution fail to be a universal portal of empowerment for dancing men. This finding will be discussed in the next section.

*The Friction of Representation*

In Umfundalai, Stafford and I are the leading men in both the characters we dance in Umfundalai repertory and the gender roles we play in its evolving tradition. Prior to our arrival, there was no consistent male presence. Berry and I felt this absence in significant ways. I recall having conversations before and after rehearsal about how we were going to alter selected movement for our tall male bodies. I recall instances when we would employ movements from our neo-traditional West African dance training with Hodari Banks to express the physicality of our male bodies. (We often did this by extracting phrases from
In the absence of Umfundalai masculine role models, Berry and I sought out resources to inform how we wanted our male bodies to be presented on the concert stage.

In retrospect, we were looking for a representation of our gendered selves in the technique, the folklore, and the choreography; further, we wanted our new dancing bodies to have access to the high level of performance that our female peers embodied. To these ends we interrogated what we thought were the conventions of Umfundalai. Welsh recalls our beginning days with the company:

What I remember about particularly you and Staff was that you were very vocal about things I would do. You were very funny. … I don’t know how the female dancers felt, but I would laugh because a lot of the humor was based on truth. And a lot of stuff I was doing that had already been done you wanted to do. When I did it on women it wasn’t because it was a female dance – that’s just what I had to work with. When you all came in, you all just wanted to do it, and I would see you all do it. I said, “That’s great. I like that!” It gave me more options, and even when I was working with Abdul when he was 13 and 14, he wouldn’t have dared to be as disarming as you all were…with you two he became more relaxed.  

During Kariamu & Company rehearsals, Welsh or whoever was directing rehearsal would assign dancers’ parts based on what she felt were their movement strengths. In Berry’s and my beginning days, Welsh would see Berry and me in the dances that Mills and Joylynn Amma Houtman (a Umfundalai teacher) felt were best suited for our skill level at that time. However, Berry and I would learn everyone’s parts and dance them on the

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239 *Doun Doun Ba* is a wrestlers’ dance of Guinea, West Africa. It is characterized by fist and arm pumping, full-bodied muscle contractions, and ferocious facial expressions. *Doun Doun Ba* is typically performed by men in traditional African societies.

periphery of the studio during what should have been our rest time. In jest, we would declare how we could do the ‘other’ parts. We imitated the other dancers, exaggerating the movements so that they resembled hip hop dances of the late 1980s. In tandem, Berry and I created any opportunity to laugh and dance. Welsh found our sophomoric antics “disarming” and “funny.” We were having a good time.

Two key statements in Welsh’s excerpt characterize the culture of Umfundalai at the time Berry and I entered the tradition. The first, “I don’t know how the other female dancers felt but I would laugh,” suggests that there was a difference between how she viewed our behavior in Umfundalai and how the women with whom we danced experienced us. We spent most of the rehearsal experience learning repertory from the other dancers and understanding the culture of Umfundalai in performance. Our interactions with the artistic director (and technique progenitor) happened near the end of the creative process. There were tensions between Welsh’s vision of her work, the senior dancers’ interpretation of that vision, and Berry’s and my interrogation thereof. Our humor and expressed opinions about our experience may have moderated Abdur-Rahim’s experience as a new dancer in Kariamu & Company, but it was irksome for some of the female dancers.

When we joined the company, the seasoned company members, all women, warned us that our laughter and perpetual joking was inappropriate. They advised us to ‘get it out of our system’ before Mama [Welsh] arrived. Fortunately, we disobeyed and found that Welsh’s hearty laughter at our jokes, her smile, and subsequent conversations showed that she appreciated our humor and that she loved to laugh. Nevertheless, there was a tacit company culture that Berry’s and my participation troubled. At the time, we interpreted this culture as female and thought that the dissonance our humor and sophomoric behavior created was
due to our being men. This social aspect of Umfundalai was evolving without Welsh’s presence and independent of her direction.

Mama Kariamu’s statement, “When I did it on women it wasn’t because it was a female dance - that’s just what I had to work with,” is also telling. It appears that what Berry and I interpreted as an intentional women’s company came to be by happenstance. Recalling many conversations with Berry when we joined the company, we decided we were in a women’s company on three factors: (1) the choreographer (Welsh) was a woman; (2) women were the content experts in the company; and (3) much of the thematic material focused on what we considered a woman’s discourse.

In 1993, Kariamu & Company’s repertoire consisted of Women Gather (1991) a dance that explored the idiosyncratic communication of Caribbean women; Raaahmonaah! (1989), a biomythography of a 1985 bombing in Philadelphia and the sole adult survivor Ramona Africa, discussed in Chapter 5; Aluta Continua (1976), the story of how women of Southern Africa protected their homeland while men were off to war; and The King Must Die (1992), an ancient Kemetic tale about a king who was killed by his community because of his physical inability to rule, and his head wife’s reign after his demise (see Table 1). Mama Kariamu created meaningful work with the dancers she had access to. Having not yet experienced the creative processes that led to the development of her works, Stafford and I were impacted by her artistic production. While enamored by her artistry, we were convinced that Welsh choreographed works about women to advance an unspoken feminist agenda.

The familial aspect of Umfundalai, as Mills describes above, taken together with dances about women and an emerging female dance culture, created fertile ground for the
male tradition that Berry and I sowed during our maiden years in the company. This is Berry’s recollection of our beginning days in Kariamu & Company:

It was quite beautiful. They had this little sister circle and it was lovely. I am sure it was nurturing for them and it came from Mama on down to them. I hated to be the person that kind of broke all that up. [Berry lowers his eye lids, makes smacking sounds while he eats his grapefruit, and rolls his eyes from one side of the room to the other.] We, in a sense, broke all that up. I mean they eventually welcomed us into the fold. We were like family. It was a challenge for them…we were treated like annoying little brothers. And this is the part that was critical for me; they didn’t take us seriously.

I think part of the reason was that we liked to jam. We always like to have a good time. For them, there was this nurturing happening…but we didn’t need all that. We wanted to come in and jam. And when we were invited to come in and jam, they were like, “Well, who are they?” So we disrupted that for them.

It could have blown up. It didn’t – we were genuine people, worthwhile people to dance with and get to know. But we were bringing the male essence up in there. We were bringing a different energy and we demanded respect for that. We weren’t just the annoying little brothers. We brought something that did not exist before and that was huge! I don’t think we realized it then. We are the male folks up in here now!  

The ‘jamming’ Berry refers to is the sheer joy of dancing with little regard to pretense or protocol. “Sister circle” is an apt metaphor for the social dynamic at play during this time in Umfundalai’s history. As a written text, Berry’s comment, “I hated to be the person to kind of break all that up” fails to convey the facetiousness with which he uttered those words. The reader cannot see his twisted lip, bent eyebrows and rolling eyes. Even the company’s folklore was conveyed through vernacular and gestures of ‘girl talk.’ Throughout the rehearsal process the veteran dancers would recall instances of ‘Mama’s wrath’ or reminisce about their experience performing certain works with dancers with whom they

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241 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 11, 2012.
shared ‘sisterly’ bonds. Berry and I often heard expressions like, “That was my gurl! She was my sistah!” as they described dancing in previous seasons. We were the new company members and we were men.

Berry describes our interaction as sibling rivalry; the women treated the new male company members like “annoying little brothers.” I recall a quality of condescension in the way the women answered our questions about the technique and the meaning of movements and rituals. They would often laugh with us in our joking, but much like the way siblings act when their parents are not present. Their deportment changed when Welsh attended rehearsals: our joking stopped being as funny; they would place themselves strategically in the front of the studio for company class; they would openly express their ‘willingness’ to teach the company repertoire to us and other new dancers. Among Umfundalai philosophical principles, the maintenance of community is an important one. To this end, it is the responsibility of seasoned dancers to teach newer dancers and enculturate them. Their ‘willingness’ to teach us could have been their way to assert leadership and/or win favor with ‘Mama Kariamu.’

Berry contends that we dismantled the company’s sister circle; I recall additionally how we were complicit in the “annoying little brothers” treatment, thereby contributing to the friction around our representation within the company. Whenever there was an inconsistency in the folklore of Umfundalai, Berry and I would intentionally point it out so that Welsh would have to address it and admonish the dancer responsible. We sometimes imitated the way the dancers spoke, performing their idiosyncrasies with our bodies as a way to poke fun. I asked Glendola Yhema Mills to describe any cultural shifts she perceived in the company upon Berry’s and my arrival. While I remember Berry and I both participating
in tomfoolery and making people laugh, Mills’ recollection targets me as the primary character.

You brought a real energy. When I taught at Swarthmore and talked to Mama about you, because she told me about you. I said yeah, “He's in the class.” She said, “We're going to have to tame him.” You would be, “let's get it going!” You were a real energy! To me, the energy was good…playful. When it was time to get serious, we would get serious, but you were always mocking somebody. Even if it was just the face, you know? … The attitude of work remained, but there was this lightness…laughter…even in class. Especially when she [Welsh] would critique you. You were thinking you were “wearing something out” and then she would show you what she really wanted. You'd be like “Whoa! Whoa, okay.”

I interpret Mills’ description of my behaviors as the kind of antics an annoying younger brother would exhibit. As an older brother, constant laughing and mimicry were behaviors that annoyed me about my younger brother. Berry and I participated in the ‘girl talk’ of the company but as males we intentionally satirized it. We often performed drag impressions of the female dancers and Welsh. While it was unclear to me at the time, Mills remembers my antics as “light,” which seems congruent with the “disarming” and “funny” qualities that Welsh described.

The retrospective analysis that this dissertation affords suggests that the acts of resistance I contributed in my beginning moments in K&C reflect an agency that emanated from my dancing body. Carrie Noland argues that the embodiment of gestures, which she extends to include movement practice, is the modality through which agency is acted. She writes:

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242 Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Norfolk, VA, May 19, 2013.
Nevertheless, I intend to privilege corporeal performance and the sensory experience it affords in the hope of yielding a theory of agency fully implicated in embodiment, which I take to be that ambiguous phenomenon in which culture both asserts and loses its grip on individual subjects.\(^\text{243}\)

Berry’s and my repeated performances of Umfundalai’s movement system and rituals through studio practice, rehearsals, and concerts availed an embodiment of Umfundalai that not only enculturated us but empowered us to destabilize what we perceived as a female-centric social structure. Our drag performances of the women’s idiosyncratic expressions of Umfundalai vocabulary reflected the agency we discovered in embodiment. Allied with our and other dancing men’s eventual inclusion in the repertory, Welsh gained new artistic resources to develop choreography. As Umfundalai’s dance culture evolved, the agency we achieved through embodiment evolved into a Umfundalai male aesthetic, to be discussed in Chapter 7.

Welsh indicated that Berry and I were vocal about how we were experiencing Umfundalai during our early years dancing with Kariamu & Company. Mills references this above when she mentions that I was “always mocking somebody.” Berry and I would continue with our performances when Welsh was present, which seemed to breach a tacit etiquette in the company. While Mills describes my antics as “fun” and “light,” I recall disapproving facial expressions and admonishments, which suggested to Berry and me that our interrogation of Umfundalai and our jovial critique of its social structure were not always appreciated.

\(^{243}\) Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 3.
I recall one rehearsal during the 1997 season when Mills cast roles for the forthcoming concert. (Welsh was healing from a torn Achilles tendon acquired while working with the African American Dance Ensemble in North Carolina the prior summer.) When she mentioned that I would be dancing Ndmere Zuwa, I responded jokingly, “Do I have to?” I loved Ndmere Zuwa but I found the dance exhausting. After dancing all the works in the 1997 home season concert, I uttered these words as a reaction to fatigue. Mills fired a piercing look at me and asked to speak to Berry and me in the hallway of Temple University’s Pearson Hall. She told me that as a “budding dance master” I must never question a role assignment in a dance because it sent the wrong message to younger dancers. She mentioned that if I did not feel up to dancing Ndmere Zuwa, she would need to take Berry and me out of Bokolafini, my favorite dance choreographed by Welsh. When we returned to the studio, Berry and I danced with all the energy and passion we could muster.

A plethora of factors could have informed Umfundalai female dancers’ reception of us. We were new and our proficiency in dancing Umfundalai had been achieved only recently. Troy Barnes, Lanita Hall, Vena Jefferson, and/or Nikki Sutton may have felt a similar alienation from the “sister circle.” They, too, were either new to Kariamu & Company in 1993—the year Berry references in his excerpt—or had rehearsed with the company but not performed. In any case, I interpreted our otherness as having something to do with being male.

In the years that followed 1993, Stafford and I became principal dancers in Kariamu & Company and integral to the continuing evolution of Umfundalai. As described in Chapter 4, a confluence of events would eventually inspire Berry’s and my pioneering roles as male dancers in Kariamu & Company. Concurrent with dancing Umfundalai at an
advanced level, Stafford and I together pursued careers in the neo-traditional West African dance circuit in Philadelphia. We took classes at the Community Education Center with Ibeji Performing Arts Company under the direction of Hodari Banks and Jeannine Osayande. While 1993 marked our first year dancing with Kariamu & Company, the company did not perform a full season again until 1996 when Kariamu changed the name to Kariamu & Company: Traditions. Between 1993 and 1996 Stafford and I ran our own company, The Seventh Principle Performance Company with K&C dancer Candace Hundley, and performed neo–traditional West African dance with Ibeji.

As a teacher, Hodari Banks insisted on our learning the male canon of movements within the dances of the Old Malian Empire. During this time we received an intentionally gendered education on how to dance like men within a continental African social context. We found Hodari’s pedagogy abrasive but valued his investment in grooming our masculine presences as performers. Berry reflected:

He could be a ‘meany’ and belligerent and hyper-masculine, aggressively masculine. … I didn’t take him personally. I took him seriously but not personally… I loved when he taught. I didn’t appreciate it at the time; up until then we had female teachers and I was used to that. But he made me appreciate the hard shit…going down the floor and doing the ‘crocodile’ or putting flips and somersaults in the movement. Not that I could do any of that shit. He made me appreciate the more athletic, more aggressive, the more traditional African male movement. For that, I will always love and respect him. That’s a part of African dance that I still love to this day, the athletic and the physical. The way he did it just blew it out of the water.244

Like Berry, I appreciated in retrospect what Hodari gave and grew to love him. During the time that Berry references, however, I suffered through what I perceived as hyper-masculine

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244 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 11, 2012.
histrionics, which included having the two of us go back and forth across the floor by ourselves until we were exhausted and then dancing in front of us—showing us up—during our fourth or fifth time across the floor. Yet, he was giving us an education that not only informed our performance quality in neo-traditional African dance, but as male dancers in Umfundalai.

Umfundalai depends on the essence of each dancer who performs it. Welsh describes the male essence in African dance throughout the Diaspora as “physical and athletic.”245 Hodari’s teaching focused on our athletic abilities. Our weekly interactions with him as dancers in his company allied with our quest to find our own artistic voices provided impetus for us to interrogate the masculinities in Umfundalai. In a recent telephone conversation with Berry, I asked him to clarify the ways we depended on each other for support in articulating maleness dancing Umfundalai.

We sure did depend on each other—in three ways. One, we were always trying to figure out how to adjust Umfundalai on our bodies. It was not always a neat fit. Two, we were always trying to incorporate what we were learning from Jeanine and Hodari. He was always on our cases about dancing like men. We tried to bring some of that to Umfundalai. Three, we were always trying to personalize the vocabulary. Remember how we used to ululate (laughing)? Alright! Berry and Nance in the house!246

In our neo-traditional African dance education we did movements that emphasized upper body strength while the women did hip twisting. With the exception of the Imbende dances, movement distinctions between male and female were non-existent in Umfundalai at that time. The masculine ideologies prevalent in West African dance were fun to embody but felt artificial; they failed to narrate the African-American manhood we had lived. While it


246 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, September 25, 2013.
was empowering to learn dances like Mandiani, and their origins, as African American men we could not relate to celebrating a harvest. It had no lived linkage to our lived experience.

The Umfundalai vocabulary pulled on cultural resources from our African American upbringing but the maleness was hard to identify. While there may have been vestiges of traditional dances throughout the Diaspora, there was also vocabulary that emanated from my African experience, the one I lived in Chester, Pennsylvania. Among them, The Temptations’ preparation for the African Triplet, was named after the African American singing group, brought memories of dancing with my mother while watching the television show Soul Train. The Ring Shout immediately took me to the Smurf, an African American social dance made popular during the early 1980s and the Baltimore Cracker Jack, a 1960s social dance that my mother taught me.

In Umfundalai classes and company rehearsals, Berry and I would inquire about the origins of movement, particularly those that required us to move our hips. We challenged the absence of men in some of the company repertory, namely Raaahmonaah! (1989). Glendola Yhema Mills taught Berry and me most of the beginning repertory and heard most of our questions about gender roles and choreographic intention. As described earlier, Welsh recalls us being vocal about our interests in Umfundalai. She would stylize movement in ways that created a space for us to explore masculinity. Mills developed the arm variation of the Nigerian Stomp for men, which was eventually approved by Kariamu during the first

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247 The African Triplet is a Umfundalai movement sequence performed by pushing one’s weight from the floor with the ball of the foot. Much like the Brazilian Samba, the African Triplet is performed in three steps in time with a 2/4 rhythm. The preparation for the African Triplet is performed in half time, pushing off each foot twice while rocking the forearms in the direction of the foot that is in action. The signature dance step of the African American male singing group, The Temptations, is performed the same way.

Umfundalai Intensive in July 1995. Mills took an interest in helping male dancers achieve “maleness” in our dancing, employing physiological and cultural references to illustrate how she felt the male body should dance in this contemporary African dance tradition. Some of her attempts were more successful than others.

Berry recalls this critique of our dancing:

I was never aware of my gender until it was pointed out. Yhema would say, "Staff and Kemal, y’all machismo it!” I remember looking at her and thinking, “What the hell does she mean by that?” I did what I thought she meant and kind of stuck my chest out and put on a ‘placed’ physique. I remember her making a comment about the ‘Ailey barrel chest,’ “You know when you see the ‘Ailey barrel chest’... I’m talking about that.” I remember thinking, “Chile, I ain’t no Ailey dancer. You may be saying ‘barrel’ but ‘bird’ is what you gonna get” (chuckling). I remember thinking, “Chile! She gon’ get what she gon’ get!” Not that I am not gonna try but I am not an Ailey dancer. I am not going to pretend. What they do is different. So it seemed out of context to use the Ailey male dancer as a model for Umfundalai. I mean...we’re not doing Cry. Yes, we’re all dancing. But this is different, so why do I need to look like an Ailey male? I never could latch onto it at that point when I was interested in latching onto it; …after a while, I was like... (sound effect).  

At the time, I shared Berry’s confusion about Mills’ machismo and Ailey prompts. While I remember Mills using the term, however, I do not remember her using it to describe something she wanted from my dancing. In my interview with Mills, I asked if she remembered what she meant by machismo. She responded:

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249 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 11, 2012.
Machismo! Come on! Pull it up (lifting her shoulders). I would use *machismo* with *Kismo*, which is Brazilian, Latin, for lack of a better word. We know what *machismo* is, Machismo is upright with strong shoulders. I don't mean a stiffening, but there's a confidence…a broadening of the chest; there's a strength. It's like the guy in the hood. “Yeah! There's a brother right there.” By the carriage of his body as he walks, there's a confidence. I don't mean rigid. I mean a strong upright posture – how Black men walk. It is that uprightness that I wanted him to maintain in the dance. It goes back to notions of strength and power.  

Mills’ reference to the “Ailey barrel chest” remains a mystery to both Berry and Mills. Though she cannot recall what she was trying to describe, her reference to “broadening the chest” in her description of *machismo* could suggest that she was commenting on Berry’s slender build. Figure 9 pictures Berry, Perkins, and me during the time span that Berry and Mills reference. Berry and I joined K&C in 1993 and Perkins joined in 1996. The picture in Figure 6 was taken in a performance during the summer of 1995. While Berry’s physique has remained the same over the years, his slender chest as pictured in a younger image provides a distinct contrast to the muscular upper bodies that Mills associated with Ailey male dancers. While the term *machismo* evolved into an American meme, neither Berry nor I were aware of its social import in the context of contemporary African dance. As Berry mentions in his interview, contrived expressions of masculinity were available for him to access.

Later, during the winter of 1998, after Berry left K&C to join Chuck Davis’s African American Dance Ensemble in Durham, North Carolina, Mills used *machismo* again to describe a quality that two of her younger male students at Freedom Theater lacked in their performance of her choreography. Only in retrospective analysis have I discerned that Mills

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250 Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Norfolk, VA, May 19, 2013.
was trying to get the men of the company to articulate a masculinity that distinguished itself from the strength and power that emanates from dancing women. For Mills, *machismo* was a way to encourage dancing men to find a ‘maleness,’ an agency in their danced gender that was non-female and reminiscent of the masculine archetypes of power and strength that pervade the African aesthetic. I asked Mills if, in her years of teaching experience, she had observed any common challenges men face in embodying Umfundalai. This was her response:

Maybe it's more my challenge than theirs, but I would say it's a challenge of maleness. If we take the posturing of the hands, here is where I am. Mama has always done this. You know how we do it with the hands swinging on the pelvic drop sequence? I pull the elbows back because for me the challenge of maleness is the males taking on my demeanor. I don't want them to look like me. I want them to do movement like them as men, males. That has to do with everything. But there are specific movements like the Zulu Shuffle with the contraction, meaning release and use of the arms and hips.

So, *machismo*, that uprightness, is a maleness aesthetic that I think should be evident. Using the hips a certain way, even with the Chiwowo, there is this as opposed to this, which is for me, feminine. I want the men to maintain their maleness. If you come into class and I size you up and I say, “Okay! That's his maleness,” I want to see that in all of the work. I don't want to see you shift your aesthetic, how you move, so that it looks like me.  

I offer that Mills’ “intangible me” is an essence, a quality that emanates from her own gendered agency. Her mission was to ensure that her feminine essence was not replicated in male dancing bodies, but rather that they embody a masculinity uniquely informed by their personhood. Despite the confusion that *machismo* caused Berry and me, Mills was also able to offer a physiological approach to training—often emphasizing our physical strengths and how they might be manipulated to achieve a level of performance that was on a par with the more skilled female dancers in our company. Perhaps Mills’ reference

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251 Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, May 19, 2013.
to the Ailey barrel chest was an attempt to provide Berry with an image that embodied a masculinity that she felt his dancing lacked. In any case, Mills does not recall this teaching moment from 18 years ago.

As her definition of *machismo* reflects, Mills was trying to help us to access a representational masculinity for our male dancing bodies. The problem was that it was a masculinity that she desired, not one that was organically achievable through an agency with our gendered selves. This “challenge of maleness,” as she described it, points to a three-pronged discourse that affected my carriage as a conduit of Umfundalai and created a masculinity that has influenced the men who have danced with me.

The first component of this discourse is the problem of inter-gender mimicry. Beginning dancers emulate their teachers, especially in the early phase of their development. The young men who had problems ‘*machismo*-ing’ Mills’ choreography were young dancers, 16 and 17 years old. Berry and I were 24 and 23 respectively when we joined Kariamu & Company. In my own experience, I imitated everything Kariamu did as my instructor (I still do). I wanted to be good at dancing and it appeared that the key was to dance like her and the other female dancers in class.

A critical point for me was when I travelled to Gambia, West Africa in 1991 and a male teacher commented that I danced like a woman. Something about what I had embodied from watching Kariamu Welsh or something that dancing Umfundalai brought out of me resonated as “woman” to this continental African man. Perhaps this quality is what Hodari Banks fought to correct in his approach to teaching Berry and me neo-traditional West African dance. As a Umfundalai dancer, there was something I needed to
change to become a dancing man who dances like a man by Gambian standards. Ultimately, a male dancer who imitates his female dance teacher may run the risk of disturbing a congruency between the ‘man’ he feels when he dances and the ‘man’ the audience sees while he is dancing.

As a young boy, dancing had brought me so much joy, as it does for many young people across cultures.\(^{252}\) I felt alive, virile, and spiritual. When I danced, I could go to another place. While I was unfamiliar with the idea of spiritual transcendence as a young child, my memory of the feeling of dancing as a child was much like the trance I have experienced as an adult dancer. When I was dancing, nothing else mattered besides my movement and the music that facilitated my dancing. I experienced power, which I associate with virility. There was an energy I embodied in having control over my body and willing it to create rhythms.

Yet, as noted earlier, there were many instances in my childhood when my dancing was viewed as feminine. Wanting to learn Janet Jackson’s choreography from music videos rather than play basketball was an aberration in my community. Moreover, my ability to imitate Janet Jackson with aplomb was deemed “weird.” I loved to move, I lived to dance, and I was indiscriminate about how I did so. This expressive freedom, if you will, meant that for many of my male and female peers, I danced like a girl. By the time I started dancing professionally as an adult, I had some residual concern that audience members would see something other than the man I experienced when I danced.

The second component of this discourse is the pursuit of maleness. Finding maleness in dance, a form of expression that my socialization categorized as non-masculine, was a complex process. As illuminated in this chapter, Berry and I had no physical models to inform our masculine carriage in Umfundalai. While Mills attempted to offer us some specialized instruction, we did not have a Hodari Banks to groom our gender portrayal. Devoid of male mentorship, Berry and I depended on each other to arrive at a danced maleness—one that was uniquely ours that could accommodate the strong man archetypes of traditional African dances and leave room for us to create the men we wanted to be.

Prior to the early 1990s in Umfundalai, the Imbende dances were the signature canon of movements that required the men to dance differently from the women. Men usually performed Umfundai’s Imbende Leg Stretch, which is characterized by a low squat to the floor while striking one leg behind one’s center and simultaneously reaching both arms over the head to achieve a line with the body that forms a 45-degree angle to the earth. Dancers thrust their bodies through space achieving this position as they move across the floor. The choreography for Welsh’s D’Zimbabwe (1998) features this movement. Conversely, in studio practice the women usually perform the Jerusarema Hip Twist when the men dance the Imbende Leg Stretch.253 This is performed by twisting the hips with the knees together three times on each side while shuffling the feet so that it appear that the dancer is gliding across the floor. In response to Berry’s and my cries for more male vocabulary, something comparable to the education we were getting from Banks, Mills stylized the Undressing arms sequence so that

253 In a Southern African traditional context, Jerusarema and Imbende are the same canon of dance movements. Imbende was changed to Jerusarema to appease European missionaries appalled by what they deemed the lascivious nature of the dance. Umfundalai uses both names, Imbende Leg Stretch and the Jerusarema Hip Twist to articulate two separate movements that belong to the same canon.
the men’s arms reached from the torso rather than from shoulder to side of hip like the women.

In traditional African dance, movements are linked to social roles within a given society and many of those roles are differentiated along gender lines. This allows one to be a ‘man’ by the nature of his execution of the movement. Neo-traditional African dance\textsuperscript{254} evades the question of masculinity as well, by relying on a gendered movement assignation. Umfundalai, however, requires a holistic sensibility. In the main, Umfundalai dancers do everything—male and female movement, which means that men need to draw on something deeper to be masculine in their performance. Masculinity, if achieved, is holistic in that its isolation is not prioritized or emphasized over the dance as a function of community.\textsuperscript{255} While Welsh generated much of Umfundalai’s vocabulary from traditional male dances, she avoids viewing movement through gendered lenses. Movement is movement:

Yeah, that’s something [the Kananga arm series with hip articulation] you do beautifully. … I’ve seen many women who can’t do it. So, it’s like all of a sudden I have this palette of all kinds of things and I can have men embody my movements. I don’t think of pelvic movements as being female movements unless it’s something overtly feminine. Even the female dancers don’t really do what we would call overt feminine movements. So there wasn’t a separation with you all.\textsuperscript{256} (Emphasis added.)

\textsuperscript{254} In this context, I am using neo-traditional African dance to describe the study and performance of continental African dance traditions outside of the continent of Africa and out of the context of the cultural practices that situate the dance. In my use of the term, I acknowledge that people study traditional African dance within the African Diaspora but assert that the moment the dance is removed from its original context, it changes.

\textsuperscript{255} Kariamu Welsh-Asante, “Commonalities in African Dance,” 80.

\textsuperscript{256} Kariamu Welsh, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Glenside, PA, December 21, 2012.
“Separation” refers to the gendered distinction that occurs in neo-traditional African dance, the distinction that Banks upheld vehemently in his classes. Moreover, separation refers to Berry’s and my attitude toward dancing. From Welsh’s perspective, we exhibited no apprehension in executing movement as she gave it to us. While Berry and I interrogated the dances, our critical analysis did not impede our willingness to perform it.

Taken together, mimicry, the pursuit of maleness, and gendered movement assignation challenged me as a young dancer and teacher of Umfundalai. More importantly, my response to these challenges affected my teaching, which in turn influenced the way younger male dancers experienced Umfundalai under my instruction. In his interview, Jumatatu Poe referred to me as the “male body of Umfundalai.”

Munir offered this description of Berry’s and my role in his life:

I admire you and Stafford. You guys were the men I looked up to growing up as a dancer in the genre. … You guys were figures that I was able to look at and emulate…like a blueprint. They’ve done this before and—not to say that you guys are elderly, but in a sense, you are. You were and still are someone we can ask for advice and connect with in an artistic sense, and everyday life situations. I haven’t had that before—not in African dance.258

Much like Berry and me, Munir was looking for male mentorship in dance. Neither Berry nor I predicted that we would impact future male dancers.

Welsh gave her protégés license to be creative in the technique with her mantra, “Umfundalai belongs to you.” This permission, allied with our concurrent experiences in neo-traditional African dance, compelled me to champion a male component of Umfundalai.

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I incorporated and stylized traditional West African dances in my classes so that there would be a gender distinction. I further stylized Umfundalai vocabulary to allow for what I viewed as more masculine expression. Much like Mills, I would alter hand and arm articulations in progressions so that they projected a conventional masculinity. In particular, I would require male students to hold their hands in fists while performing Umfundalai’s *African Time Step*, a movement that contracts and releases the pelvis in twice the time while performing a step-touch pattern across the floor. In 1995 Welsh changed the class structure so that men danced across the floor in the back—a practice she borrowed from a ballet class structure. Immediately thereafter, I insisted that men dance together in my classes.

Much like the way Mills would offer her male students alternative movement stylizations to evoke their maleness, I was intentional about how to convey movement to my male students so that they might understand it in a way that freed them of preconceived notions that their expression might be viewed as non-masculine. In retrospect and in light of Mills’ 2013 definition, I was accessing my *machismo*. For the men who followed me in the tradition, this new gender separation created a space of tension and empowerment as evidenced in Chism’s and Poe’s wanting to dance the movement I assigned to the women in my class, and Munir’s sense of fulfilling a male legacy in Umfundalai by looking to Berry’s and my dancing as examples of what he could aspire to.

Perkins holds a key position in the lineage of Umfundalai men in that he danced with Berry and me during the 1996 season of Kariamu & Company: Traditions when Berry and I became the first certified male teachers, when “Traditions” was added to the company’s name, and when men for the first time danced in principal roles in the company’s classic repertory. He also studied with me in the several years that followed while he finished his
undergraduate degree in Psychology at Swarthmore College. Unknowingly, he lived through an emergence of male expression in Umfundalai and in so doing, found his own gendered agency in what I contend was an evolving masculinity within the Umfundalai tradition.

When I’m dancing Umfundalai, I am very aware of my maleness. The movements are distinct; they are defined by their gender-associated occupations in Africa or whatever. I am aware of it through the way I walk, the upright posture we assume, and the groundedness of the movements. The *Nigerian Stomp*, yes. Absolutely, I'm so a dude, I'm so the man.\textsuperscript{259}

In Umfundalai, Welsh taught us that the *Nigerian Stomp* makes a statement. Mills, in her adaptation of Kariamu’s instruction, would often suggest that each time our heels touched the earth we were sending a message to the ancestors. For Perkins, this statement of communion with the ancestral world reified boldness and virility. In his interview, Derrick often refers to the 1996 season of Kariamu & Company: Traditions, his first season as principal dancer, as the “heyday” of Umfundalai, a time of exceptionally skilled dancers and familial relationships in the company.

The 1996 season can also be characterized by its resonance around being male. When Berry describes this time in our shared history, he declares, “We were the men up there!”\textsuperscript{260} It was a moment when dancing men and our unique essences were permeating Umfundalai choreography. Perkins’ reference to the “upright” not only speaks to the position of the torso when dancing the *Nigerian Stomp*, but to a broader masculinity situated in African American culture. Uprightness as a vernacular expression speaks to a masculine


\textsuperscript{260} Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Columbus, OH, May 13, 2012.
aesthetic value. Phrases like “keep your head up” or stay up, refer to a tenacity and, as Perkins described, a “boldness” that Black men are socialized to embody.

Many of Umfundalai’s masculinities reside in the stylization of its core movement vocabulary and in the development of choreographies that not only depict stories about men but also feature male dancers. This tradition resonates with other men of Umfundalai. I asked Charles Tyson to describe a moment when he felt he had to dance gender. He responded:

There are gender specific variations of movement, so yes, I’ve had to dance gender. I like that there’s a special way to do things that only I can do, that it’s only correct if I’m doing it that way. The Undressing is an example. I like the fact that I get to do a different version.261

Tyson found this stylization of male movements empowering. The Undressing is a back undulation in which the dancer moves his body like a wave of water. Typically, it is done with the arms unfolding from the shoulder to the side of the thigh and repeats in synch with each undulation. Tyson refers to “liking” Mills’ stylization in which men extend the arms away from the torso from the shoulder. For Tyson, having access to a gender specific movement in a situation where he is one of few or the only male provided him with a movement experience that he could enjoy.

As noted above, for Chism and Poe gender specific movement instruction unearthed questions about gender roles in Umfundalai. Chism stated,

261 Charles Tyson, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Community Education Center, October 9, 2012.
I’m aware of my gender when different movements are given to men. When I would see movement put on women, I would be, “Oh, I can wear that out!” (but that’s not your part). When it wasn’t presented as my part or the part intended for men, then I would be aware of, “Oh no! That’s not how we move” (chuckling). There were adaptations of movements and instances when the movements would be completely different if you were a male versus a female. “Why do the girls get to do that?”

Chism is responding to a class structure that made him feel that the dancing deemed as female was unavailable to him. From 1994 to 1997 when Chism was my student at Swarthmore, he was subjected to my insistence on masculine articulation in Umfundalai classes. I was so preoccupied with having male students embody my contrived notions of masculinity and articulating a canon of movement that could accentuate maleness that I projected a gendered hierarchy of movement. When I gave movements with rigorous hip action to the women in my class, I would concurrently give the men something that looked athletic. In many ways, I made particular aspects of Umfundalai a female expression for Chism. His parenthetical comment, “but that’s not your part” implies that the movement he saw the women perform was not appropriate for him to do. “That’s not how we move” underscores a social expectation that I created that prohibited him from dancing a movement he wanted to explore.

Jumatatu Poe was critical of being limited to a certain movement experience: “But I feel it’s in my personality, I didn’t like being told that I had to do something because of something that I couldn’t help, like being a guy, being a male.”

I was Poe’s and Chism’s first dance teacher. In my attempt to create a space in the tradition in which they could have the option to ‘dance like men,’ much like Mills’ use of machismo, I imposed a masculinity that

262 Harvey V. Chism, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, June 15, 2012.

these two refuted. Further, I replicated the friction that I experienced choosing dance as a career when my socialization suggested that dance was a non-masculine enterprise.

For Munir, the class structure served as a portal for a male experience that transcends sexual orientation. He feels power and strength in his dancing and the visceral carriage thereof, which he experiences as “masculine.”

I always feel masculine in class. Because any time we would have to go across the floor, the first walk, walking series, to walk with such power and strength and confidence, just that alone, I felt really powerful, really masculine. I remember Shawn Lamier saying to us, I don’t care what your sexual preference is, a man dances like a man, and a woman dances like a woman, and that kind of stuck with me. So it just translated into Umfundalai.

Like Munir and Lamier, I was preoccupied with dancing like a man. For me, the preoccupation stemmed from my passion for combating the stereotype that dancing men are necessarily homosexual. I taught classes so that men, regardless of sexual orientation, could relate to the danced archetypes in Umfundalai. For Munir, the Walk Strong part of class was a place where he could exhibit power. In Umfundalai, the across the floor portion of the class is a critical moment of distinction. Men dance in the back, which means that they are the last to move across the floor. It is a time when the female dancers see the men moving together as they bring up the rear. For Tyson it is a moment of pressure because everyone’s eyes focus on the men. According to him, “you simply must be good.”

264 Shawn Lamier is a modern dance teacher who taught Khalil while he was student at Freedom Theater. Lamier has always supported Umfundalai but has not participated in its movement tradition.


Conclusion

When I asked Welsh to describe the aspect of Umfundalai that makes her proudest as the technique’s creator, she referred to its longevity, that the technique has remained recognizable over its 44-year history.\textsuperscript{267} Twan Claiborne points to another accomplishment. An African American man with a distinctively African physique (dark complexion, thick thighs, full buttocks), Claiborne can go to a dance class and see himself in the instructor. In this movement tradition in which only 13 men have studied the technique for three or more years and performed with its professional company, this young man, who has been the only male in so many of his dance and educational experiences, can see a reflection of himself as a dancing African American man. My presence as a dancing Black man and master teacher in this tradition eased the friction of Claiborne's entry: “Because I saw a lot of myself, I didn't feel the pressure.”\textsuperscript{268} My presence as a dancing role model speaks to an emergence of male resilience in this evolving African dance tradition. I present Claiborne's remarks again to underscore the gendered Umfundalai emerging from Welsh’s dance tradition.

I'm all about legacies and how I'm connected and a part of this larger tree. If I'm part of the tree of Nance, I've got to step everything up 100 times because he's like over there and then over here, and I'm like right here and still right here. But eventually, I got over there. It took me a couple of years, but I got over there.\textsuperscript{269}

Berry’s and my vocal and visual presence in Umfundalai created a space for us to dance. With humor and movement exportation from our concurrent neo-traditional African

\textsuperscript{267} Kariamu Welsh, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Glenside, PA, December 21, 2012.

\textsuperscript{268} Twan Claiborne, interview by C. Kemal Nance, New York, NY, December 16, 2012.

\textsuperscript{269} Twan Claiborne, interview by C. Kemal Nance, New York, NY, December 16, 2012.
dance training, we provided a critical analysis that led to developments in the technique that facilitated a *maleness* in Umfundalai. The *Nigerian Stomp* and *The Undressing* arm variations are examples that illuminate the subtle changes that extend the technique.

As with any masculinity, the ones that Berry and I created with our dancing and the ones I institutionalized as a teacher have both liberating and restrictive properties. For some, it was affirming to see other African American men dancing, to dance with more experienced African American male dancers in Umfundalai, and to have a targeted vocabulary that embraced a masculine gender role. For others, it stymied gendered exploration. In my efforts to develop a way for men to move in Umfundalai, I inadvertently modeled a way for them ‘not to move,’ reinforcing hegemonic reflections of a larger American society.

Pedagogy and performance offer the potential for gender performativity in the Umfundalai dance tradition. As I bring the crux of this research into focus, the pursuit of gendered agency in Umfundalai dance culture, common issues of masculinity and maleness emerge as important for Umfundalai’s dancing men. The following chapter extends the relevance of *maleness*, and discusses the masculinities that articulate dancing men’s gendered experiences.
CHAPTER 7

PURSUIT OF MALENESS IN UMFUNDALAI:
ORIENTATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

Introduction

As introduced in Chapter 1, I draw on a metaphor from Sarah Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* to justify a male-centered “orientation” as researcher. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 presented historical, phenomenological, and sociological perspectives on the “orienting question” of the study:

How do we, men of Umfundalai, African American dancing men, experience our *maleness* in the Umfundalai tradition of African dance?

In-depth interviews with seven men of Umfundalai along with my own auto-ethnographic reflections show that men’s gendered experiences are located in Umfundalai’s performance and pedagogical practices. Further, Kariamu Welsh’s *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) and *Raaahmonaaah! Revisited* (2010), and my *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) and *Remembering So Well…* (2002), emerge as significant performance contexts for an experienced masculinity.

This chapter synthesizes the key discoveries of this research, illuminating the phenomenological and social meanings of *maleness* for the eight dancing men of Umfundalai who participated in the study.

I begin in a spirit of humble surprise. Contrary to my initial expectation, analysis of interviews revealed that the ‘pursuit of maleness’ is singular to my experience in Umfundalai. In other words, the gendered agency that I attribute to Umfundalai has been actualized

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differently by other subjects, including one dancer who expressed a lack of interest in ‘gender agency’ as a value of his practice. This study also illuminates that while gender and sexuality may be closely linked, a conversation about the former does not necessitate a conversation of the latter. In other words, the men in this study only mentioned that they were gay, straight, queer, or “bi” when I asked them directly to describe their sexuality; the phenomenon did not arise as part of their lived experience descriptions of dancing Umfundalai.

In this study, participants’ meanings of Umfundalai cluster around experiences of artistic transformation and spirituality, as well as nuanced constructions of power and strength that both embody and go beyond masculine stereotypes. For example, some subjects associate ‘masculinity as power’ with the ability to manipulate an audience’s gaze. Men’s lived experiences of spirituality may both embody and transcend gender meanings in Umfundalai’s dance culture.

Another pertinent finding in this study is that the female body serves as the standard for Umfundalai’s aesthetic (unmarked) thereby leaving the male body “marked” in the continuance of Umfundalai’s dance traditions. As a gendered essence evolves amidst the cultivation of Umfundalai’s Pan–African dance vocabulary, dancing men become the site for negotiating and transcending social, cultural, and gendered scripts for embodied masculinity.

Through a rigorous methodology that seeks to theorize maleness in Umfundalai, the research findings overall suggest that maleness, or male essence in Umfundalai, is the customized embodiment of behaviors, attitudes, and/or belief systems that, regardless of their social/cultural import, empowers one to name himself, “man.” At the same time,
maleness resides in the cultural commonalities that Umfundalai underscores with its Pan-African movement system and philosophy. Many of the men in this study, six out of the seven interviewed, connect an observed spirituality with some facet of their manhood. Regarding my initial hunch that Umfundalai might be illuminated as an Afrocentric project, this was not confirmed in the present study; this finding will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

The writing method I employ for this chapter reflects both the phenomenological and autoethnographic intentions of the research. After completing Chapters 5 and 6, I extracted all narrative anecdotes and pursued a final round of coding in efforts to articulate an “intra paradigmatic” synthesis. In other words, I used the data inclusively to seek a deeper illumination of Umfundalai’s dance culture. I organized the codes into thematic categories, which became the sections of this chapter in the order in which they crystallized from the coding process. I named each section by pairing the emergent themes with vernacular that aligns with analogous social and cultural—and often gendered—expression.

To the extent that autoethnography’s purpose is to unearth cultural meaning through the lived experience of the individual,271 this naming process reifies autoethnography as a viable methodology for examining the gendered experiences of Umfundalai’s men. In “Out of the Shadows: Male Essence in Umfundalai,” I assume a male-centered orientation to explore an emergent gendered essence in Umfundalai’s dance culture. “Strong as Hell: Toward a Male Aesthetic” explores how this male essence gives way to a masculine aesthetic presence in the transmission of culture in Umfundalai. Chris Blazina’s use of Kuhn’s theory

271 Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social, 9.
of scientific revolutions (Chapter 3) suggests that for new masculinities to emerge in a given society, they must have some coherence with the masculine expression that precede them.\textsuperscript{272} “An Old School Two Step: The Re-Invention of Masculinity,” much like the pre-existing masculinities in Blazina’s, theory, explores the reappearance of conventional masculinities in Umfundalai” while “The Way Men Dance: Agency and Responsibility” examines how dancing men interpret both conventional and evolving masculinities in gender performance. Lastly, “Alright Goddamn It: The Spirituality of Solidarity” takes on spirituality as a potential portal for Umfundalai men’s expressed maleness.

While these sections organize the analysis of interview data, they are malleable and overlapping, representing the circuitous ways in which maleness is experienced and observed in Umfundalai’s dance culture. Similarly, the language I employ is symbolic of the circular ways in which gender is observed among the men in the study, underscoring the autoethnographic lens of this research and the oral tradition on which Umfundalai relies. In part it emulates the discursive style that Ellis and Bochner champion in ethnographic writing.\textsuperscript{273} My dissertation advisor, Karen Bond, describes my language as “fluid and spiral,” moving in and out of narrative and theoretical prose while integrating the salient ideas from current masculine studies scholarship.

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\textsuperscript{272} C. Blazina, xiii-xiv.

\textsuperscript{273} C. Ellis & A.Bochner, 733-768.
autoethnographic lens of this research and the oral tradition on which Umfundalai relies. In part it emulates the discursive style that Ellis and Bochner champion in autoethnographic writing.274 My dissertation advisor, Karen Bond, describes my writing style as “fluid and spiral,” moving in and out of narrative and theoretical prose while integrating the salient ideas from current masculine studies scholarship.

Speaking of masculine studies scholarship, the absence of a strong male discourse of sexuality in Umfundalai’s dance culture gives this study an “oblique” orientation.275 With a disproportionate number of men in this study identifying as non-heterosexual, coupled with Umfundalai’s reinvention of conventional and arguably heteronormative masculinities, an outside observer might be curious as to why sexuality or more specifically, queerness, fails to emerge as a phenomenologically grounded finding of the study. As Ahmed argues, the orientation of an oblique existence avails a different perspective of the trajectory with which one navigates space.276 With seven of eight Umfundalai men disclosing a queer (sexual non-normative) orientation, why does gayness remain oblique in their gendered experiences of Umfundalai’s dance culture? While I offer Umfundalai’s pedagogical focus on essence as a possible answer to this question, other potential reasons could reside in the interviewing design of the study allied with Umfundalai men’s agency (or lack thereof) in their sexuality.

To prepare for this study, I conducted a practice interview with a young man who currently studies Umfundalai and had performed with Kariamu & Company: Traditions during his brief stay in the Philadelphia area. For purposes of this study, I will refer to him as

274 C. Ellis & A.Bochner, 733-768.


Levandre. He had attended my dissertation proposal defense and heard a committee member’s assertion that men’s sexual identity would be a significant aspect of gendered agency among Umfundalai’s male participants. Upon introducing my research interests during the practice interview conducted three days following the defense, Levandre interjected with, “Are you going to ask me about my sexuality?” His wide-eyes, nervous smile, and rapid speech revealed to me that a discussion regarding sexuality was going to be troublesome for Levandre, (and potentially for the other men I was to interview later.) When I replied, “Not if you don’t want me to,” Levandre released a large breath, sat back in his chair and while slowly blinking his eyes uttered under his breath, “Okay.”

Levandre’s reaction revealed that while all of the men have personal relationships with me, they may not feel comfortable speaking about their sexuality. Moreover, the subjects in this study were aware that their identities would be disclosed in this dissertation (this was noted as a limitation of the study in Chapter 1). Like Levandre, they may not have felt comfortable having their names associated with their queer identities in an official publication. In other words, while they willingly revealed their sexuality to me within the context of an interview, they may not be ‘out’ to their families and hence having names associated with their sexuality in an official publication might be problematic.

Nevertheless, upon the advice of one advisory committee member, with a slight diversion from my phenomenological/applied grounded theoretical interview method I included a direct question about sexuality toward the end of the interview, asking, “How would you describe your sexuality?” This late placement of a hermeneutic question allowed Umfundalai’s male dancers an open opportunity to introduce the topic as they felt appropriate. I acknowledge, however, that the order of interview questions could have stymied queerness as an orientation for Umfundalai’s male discourse. Conducting interviews
from a mutual understanding of queerness, a hermeneutic approach, might have generated different—queer—interview data.

Ultimately, however, gender and masculinity foregrounded sexuality in this study as they more accurately represented my specific research interests. This research seeks to illuminate maleness as agency—the self-determined ways in which men construct identity, *within the Umfundalai dance culture*. While I could glean sexualities through my personal knowledge of some and phenomenological observation of others, I was more interested in what the men of this study said about themselves and how they perceived the pertinence of their identities in the transmission of Umfundalai dance culture. Whether it stems from order of the interview questions, the degree to which the men in this study are ‘out,’ or an oblique presence in my own sexuality, ‘queerness’ of sexual orientation has little resonance in the intersection of gender performance and Umfundalai male discourse at this point of analysis.

**Out of the Shadows: Male Essence in Umfundalai**

In the 25 years that I have witnessed Kariamu Welsh introduce Umfundalai to dance communities including college level dance classes, youth and adult populations at Freedom Theater and other community arts venues, master classes at Umfundalai intensives and conferences, I have heard her state that the word Umfundalai is Kiswahili for *essence* or *essential*. Glendola Yhema Mills points out that after Welsh’s first experiences learning traditional African dance with Synyer Hanesworth, she realized that traditional dance stymied the creative agency she sought.²⁷⁷ In developing Umfundalai, Welsh used stylization and representation to arrive at a contemporary, Pan African movement system that

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²⁷⁷ G. Mills, 77.
articulates an essence of traditional African dances from societies throughout the Diaspora.

Welsh describes essence in Umfundalai as a multi-dimensional phenomenon:

The essence of the Umfundalai technique is its texture, spirituality and the multiple layers of rhythms: it is space materialized and rhythm asymmetrically personified. The essence of the technique is grainy, funky, gritty, and it embodies history, both ancient and new. The aesthetic of the technique is intrinsically linked to creative intelligence and spirit. The essence of the technique is individual and collective allowing artistic room for the one and the many.278

Over the many times I have heard Welsh discuss Umfundalai, she has avoided describing the technique as traditional. For her, ‘traditional’ would infer dances performed in the original social and cultural contexts of African societies. This is not to suggest that all dance traditions are cultural relics linked to static moments in ancient history. Traditions continue to evolve in continental African societies as well as in the Diaspora. Welsh added the word ‘traditions’ to her company’s name to reflect the holistic way she presents African culture in her concerts.

During the Philadelphia Phase of Umfundalai’s evolution, Kariamu & Company concerts featured guest artists who worked in multiple African informed traditions including spoken word, hip hop, and singing. The inclusion of multiple traditions gave a new ambience to K&C concerts, which inspired Welsh to amend the name of her company to reflect the transformation she observed.279 With regard to the technique, she uses the word ‘contemporary’ to distinguish Umfundalai from traditional and neo-traditional African dances. In honoring the past and its significance in articulating new expressions, she often speaks of respecting the traditions of Africa. She writes:

278 Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to author, February 12, 2014.

279 Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to author, March 19, 2014.
Umfundalai respects tradition by recognizing the role of the musicians as integral to the dance. It emulates tradition in ensuring that dancers and musicians always know the origins of the dance even if it has been stylized and changed. Tradition is also respected in that the musicians and teachers are acknowledged as masters of their craft and facilitators of the creative process. Vocal responses continue tradition in that students, musicians, dancers and audiences are encouraged to give immediate feedback about the quality and level of performance in the studio or on stage. Regardless of the stylization and fusion that occur in the Umfundalai technique, tradition is present in the symbolic dress code for class. Women wear *lapas (wrappas)* and the men wear some kind of pants that are not tights.\textsuperscript{280}

While Umfundalai’s contemporaneity fosters new traditions in African dance culture, Welsh develops movement progressions and choreography that are informed by the history and cultural practices of African people throughout the Diaspora. These serve as the “origins” to which she refers. Mills describes Welsh’s approach this way:

\begin{quote}
Her approach and aim is to keep the contents and context of African dance culture but modernize the presentation… She attempts to place African people and culture at the center of her artistic endeavors for source, inspiration and articulation…\textsuperscript{281}
\end{quote}

For example, *Ibo Arm Series* is a mimetic swimming sequence that narrates the story of the actual incident during which 40 *Ibos* from Nigeria refused to be enslaved in the United States and returned to the water to swim back to Africa. The *Ibo Arm Series* is an abstraction; it does not originate in a traditional Nigerian dance practice. Yet, in its contemporary context, it acknowledges the story of the *Ibo* people and perpetuates an African narrative that asks the dancer to relive the story in performance of the movement.

\textsuperscript{280} Kariamu Welsh, email to author, March 17, 2014.

\textsuperscript{281} G. Mills, 110.
Before pursuing this research, I believed that my cultural identity was empowered solely by the cultural nationalist awareness that Umfundalai avails. Mills’ dissertation employs Berry and Blassingame’s definition of cultural nationalism as “the view that all black people share a common lifestyle, aesthetic, and world view, often expressed in a distinctively black idiom in literature, art, or music.”

As I interpreted Umfundalai’s Pan-African philosophy, I understood Welsh’s focus on essence to mean that as an African American, I am free to dance ancient Africa in contemporary contexts thereby experiencing and constructing new meaning.

Essence, a signifier that links me to Black people around the world, empowered me to be African. As Welsh implies with her Pan-African cultural nationalist orientation, Umfundalai fosters an African worldview that elucidates the duality of an African American cultural existence. Prior to this doctoral investigation, the artistic agency that Umfundalai’s cultural nationalist philosophy afforded was situated in the ethnic cultural facets of my identity. Through academic pursuit of maleness in Umfundalai, I have discovered that there is potential for a gendered essence within Umfundalai’s dance culture. A grounded theoretical interpretation of multiple sources (phenomenological, historical, autoethnographic) indicates that the liminal performance space Welsh’s and my choreography offer Umfundalai’s male performers (Chapter 5), the tension that male subjects describe in the fissure between their personal movement style and masculinities requested by their instructors (Chapter 6), and the spirituality that emerges for men dancing with each other (discussed later in this chapter) punctuate a male essence that resides in the


cultural commonalities that Umfundalai underscores with its Pan-African movement system and philosophy.

In a discussion regarding the intrinsic connection between natural knowledge and essential intuition, Edmund Husserl described essence as follows:

> Whatever belongs to the essence of the individual can also belong to another individual, and the broadest generalities of essential being, of the kind we have been indicating through the help of examples, delimit “regions” or “categories” of individuals. \(^{284}\)

David Woodruff Smith explains that Husserl described essences as being “material” and “formal.” Material essence refers to the spatiotemporal-physical attributes of an individual while its formal essences “define the pure forms of objects, forms that are filled out in substantive ways by their material essences.” \(^{285}\)

With Umfundalai, Kariamu Welsh has articulated an essence that, in Husserl’s terms, organizes the broad generality of dances from the African Diaspora. While Berry and Blasingame coined the term cultural nationalism to theorize a political orientation during a specific time in African American activism, \(^{286}\) the philosophy that commonalities thread the experiences of all Black people, taken together with Welsh’s focus on essence, has phenomenological import. “The grainy, funky, and gritty” \(^{287}\) substance that Welsh describes illuminates the African culture expressed through and characterized by the Umfundalai


\(^{287}\) Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to author, February 12, 2014.
dancing body. In Husserl’s terms, Umfundalai is a region, providing order to a cadre of movement styles linked by a vast African culture. As an African American woman, Umfundalai, as essence, belongs to Welsh, the countless number of African people she has taught over the last four decades, and more saliently, the 13 African American men who have studied her technique and danced her choreography since 1993.

For Welsh, however, Umfundalai’s essence transcends gender. She recognizes the physical and social distinctions between individuals who identify with specific gender formulations and sexual orientations, but her focus on essence has precluded such distinctions from bifurcating an evolving contemporary African dance tradition. At least, that has been her intention. Welsh’s comments about Berry and me (Chapter 4) illuminate how her artistic intentions eclipsed a gendered discourse in Umfundalai. Again,

Yes, I know you are a man and I’ve always known you were a man, but the beautiful thing about you and Stafford was that I could use you as dancers—as body. I could capitalize on you both, on you being able to do everything. I really didn’t have to make a lot of separation in my mind… I just couldn’t.”

For Welsh, Berry’s and my maleness were additional artistic resources for her choreography. Indeed, drawn to the strong dynamics of male African dance vocabularies, she created much of Umfundalai’s vocabulary from movements that men do in traditional African societies. This was illustrated in her comment in Chapter 4: “I don’t think of pelvic movements as being female movements unless it’s something overtly feminine. Even the female dancers don’t really do what we would call overt feminine movements.”

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Maleness becomes an identifiable phenomenon for Welsh when it accentuates the substance of her choreographic intent. In Raaabmonaah! (1996), she choreographed John Africa’s solo to express the archetypal strength that he represented in the actual MOVE saga. In twenty years of dancing with Kariamu & Company: Traditions, I recall only two distinct times when her instructions were to ‘dance masculinity.’ The first was when she wanted me to grab my crotch while I was dancing a mentally unstable homeless man in her work Anthem (2002 version). The second was in November 2012 during the spacing rehearsal for the premiere of her work Same Father Different Mother (2012) in London. As noted in Chapter 4, the dance was inspired by the murder of Travon Martin, and while the original version of the work featured five dancers (three women and two men), Welsh’s initial intention was to create a work for Berry and me. As we prepared to perform another run-through of the work for the lighting crew, her instruction for me was to convey “a strong male essence” for the opening sequence of jumps and leaps.

With the progenitor of Umfundalai’s dance tradition placing an emphasis on African cultural essence, the question of how a gendered discourse emerges from the technique begs to be answered. While my memory of Welsh’s construct of “male essence” does not surface until forty-three years into Umfundalai’s history, the essential being of maleness had to exist prior to her creation of Same Father Different Mother (2012), as soon as male bodies integrated the bodies that perform Umfundalai’s vocabulary. Admittedly, Welsh offers that her intention was not to exclude men from the Black Dance Workshop or the early days of Kariamu & Company; it was just happenstance that all her dancers were female. As Umfundalai developed as a technique, it did so through a female embodiment. It is not
surprising, therefore, that Berry and I both discerned the energy we perceived upon our foray in Umfundalai and illuminated in the “Sister Circle” (Chapter 6) as a female essence.

In the discussion of Welsh’s *Raaahmonaaab!* (Chapter 5), I refer to Burt’s use of ghosts to describe the gendered and sexualized expectations set up by Joe Goode’s *Effeminate Gestures* in order to articulate the tension that arose when female bodies danced the real-life MOVE story, which in reality included males, and when men danced the all-female biomythography of the same story. I find that ghosts similarly haunt my critical analysis of the emergence of masculinities in Umfundalai (Chapter 6). Mills refers to continental African men dancing as an aesthetic image by which she gauged her male students’ gendered (masculine) performance of Umfundalai. Male students in her class were unaware that they were dancing with the ghosts of the continental African men with whom Mills took class and the myriad of male archetypes that comprised her working definition of *machismo*. Her comments about the “challenge of maleness,” which for her was about not wanting her male students to look like her, are salient:

You know how we do it with the hands swinging on the pelvic drop sequence? I pull the elbows back because for me the challenge is the males taking on my demeanor. … I don't want to see you shift your aesthetic, how you move, so that it looks like me. I want to see the movement. I want to see the technique. I don't want to see me, my demeanor, my ‘me’, my intangible me on you.291

Later in the interview, Mills states that the problem of mimicry, at least as it pertains to her "intangible me," did not apply to her female students. Mills' “intangible me” is integrated

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into her gendered essence, the movement stylization tendencies that emanate from her female existence.

Mills defines effeminacy as the moment “when it appears that men are emulating females so much so that it looks like a caricature.” According to her perspective as a Black woman raised in a Black community, males should dance like men and females should dance like women and that distinction is essential. The arm variation to the Nigerian Stomp that I described in Chapter 2, her stylization of the pelvic drop release movement noted above, and her use of machismo (Chapter 4), were efforts to enculturate male students to an African male way of being. Chief among Mills’ masculine aesthetics were broad shoulders, strong back, and boundness (as opposed to fluidity) of the hips.

In my conversation with Mills, she stated that her machismo edicts in the early 1990s were more about shaping men’s gendered performance in Umfundalai than quelling an observed effeminacy. In hindsight she wishes she had employed different language to articulate the gender performativity she wanted dancing boys to achieve; at the time she was surprised to see that her male students at Freedom Theater, unlike Berry and me, readily understood machismo as a masculine physicality. As I apply Ahmed’s conceptualization of ‘orientation’, I re-examine the idea of machismo and its relationship to effeminacy as a potential oblique existence for Umfundalai men. According to Ahmed, the body serves as

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293 Glendola Yhema Mills, in discussion with author, March 24, 2014. Mills uses male and female to refer to the biological sex of individuals. For example, men have penises and women have vaginas. She uses men and women to refer to their gender roles or how men and women are. In other words, men and women refer to masculinities and femininities attributed to the individual. For instance, men should be strong because they are the protectors of their respective communities.

the point of orientation and the way in which one finds his way in unfamiliar spaces is the line he sees or the direction he travels. She writes:

We might be used to thinking of direction as simply which way we turn, or which way we are facing, at this or that moment in time. Direction then would be a rather casual matter. But what if direction, as the way we face as well as move, is organized rather than casual? We might speak then of collective direction: of ways in which nations or other imagined communities might be “going in a certain direction,” or facing the same way, such that certain things “get our attention.”

In-depth interviewing of Umfundalai male performers allows me to re-orient the ‘lines’ of Umfundalai to a subjective male body; the things that come into view, that matter, include a multiplicity of African American male expressions that extend beyond the “males dancing like men.” Chism wanted to embody Umfundalai’s women’s canon. Poe problematized the gendered movement designation in Umfundalai and wanted to experience the dance as an artistic expression that physically grounded him in a movement system. He was disinterested in “dancing like a man;” he just wanted to dance.

Mills’ machismo does not account for effeminacy in dancing men in the “lines” that stem from a heteronormative orientation or as she would offer, “the perspective of a Black woman raised in a Black community.” However, what Mills views as a female caricature (effeminacy) might be considered essential to a progressive Black masculine orientation. As Jane Desmond asserts, in meaning making of dance in cultural studies, it is important to ask who does not dance and why some ways of moving are forbidden for certain social

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297 Athena D. Matua, *Progressive Black Masculinities*, 7. One of the theories that supports Matua’s ‘progressive Black masculinities’ is multidimensionality. She asserts that Black men are diverse by class, sexuality, religion, and other systems of subordination.
classes, races, and sexes. A broad view of dance as codified fashion reveals the social attitudes of various marked bodies.\textsuperscript{298} I offer the male body in Umfundalai as the marked body, a discursive site for negotiation of social scripts.

Welsh may view movement as gender neutral but her observation of Berry and my facility for hip and pelvic articulation was instructive for her.\textsuperscript{299} Her commentary about facility for hip articulation in the \textit{Kananga Arm Series} and the caveat that some women have difficulty performing the movement suggests that while she does not subscribe to a gendered movement canon, she recognizes a gendered social assignation for gyrational movement of the hips. The aplomb with which I gyrate my hips in the \textit{Kananga Series} is notable not only because I am an advanced Umfundalai dancer; I am also a male dancer performing movement that can be construed socially as female.

Mills was not alone in her quest to articulate a men’s way of moving. I, as one of her students and fellow dance master in Umfundalai’s dance tradition, also set out to create a space for male stylized expression, a space in which a discernible male essence could be observed. As a performer, I would integrate aspects of neo-traditional West African male vocabularies I learned from Hodari Banks in my improvised dance solos in Umfundalai dancing circles or \textit{Bantaba} in class. I would stylize these male dances with Umfundalai and embody some of what Berry describes in Chapter 6 as the "hard shit." As a teacher, too, I stylized Umfundalai’s movement vocabulary to accommodate what I thought was a


\textsuperscript{299} Kariamu Welsh, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Glenside, Pennsylvania, December 21, 2012.
masculinity and became adamant about designating Umfundalai’s evolving progressions and movement variations by gender.

Mills explains that her motivation stemmed from her observation of dancing men in neo-traditional African dance classes prior to her involvement in Umfundalai. The retrospective critical analysis brought on by this study suggests to me that I was combating the cultural scripts that diminish manhood for those who participate in a non-masculine convention. Since I was taught that non-heterosexual men were less male and while I struggled with a sexual identity I could not claim — heterosexuality, I set out to liberate African dance for all men, especially Black men, regardless of their sexual orientation. Moreover, I wanted our dancing to reflect masculine gender performance based on tropes and archetypes that permeated my African American socialization.

While in hindsight I recognize the value in developing a male voice in Umfundalai, I concurrently recognize its limitations. In my insistence on identifying the way ‘men move,’ I was replicating masculinities that may or may not fit the male bodies I was teaching. This may have discouraged the potential participation of effeminate men and possibly eclipsed the evolution of masculinities yet unseen. I offer that a male essence can only be achieved organically and a masculine performance presence, much like maleness, is developed, customized, by the man exhibiting his agency as a dancing man.

However, in tandem Mills and I developed a preoccupation with a male Umfundalai independent of the genderless movement philosophy of our mentor and progenitor of the technique. The consequence of our efforts was that forthcoming male and female students would learn a gendered Umfundalai, complete with vestiges of masculine archetypes from its
surrounding society. Chism’s comments in Chapter 4 elucidate how gendered movement designation according to imagined boundaries of masculinity truncated his individual expression.

Sometimes I am aware of my gender when different movements are given to men. When I would see a movement or phrase or whatever that was put on women, I would be like, “Oh, I can wear that out!” (But that’s not your part.) In those moments when it wasn’t presented as my part or the part intended for men, then I would be especially aware of “Oh no! That’s not how we move” (chuckling).300

Mills’ and my stylization and gendered movement assignment, allied with Berry’s and my burgeoning presences in the tradition, punctuates an evolving Umfundalai masculinity.

“Strong as Hell:” Toward a Umfundalai Male Aesthetic

The development of a gendered aesthetic in Umfundalai has the potential for a multi-layered examination. As discussed in Chapter 6, Welsh contends that movement is not gendered, or more specifically, that pelvic articulation is neither male nor female. When the topic of gendered movement arises in training workshops for Umfundalai teachers, Welsh typically acknowledges the physiological differences between men and women, as well as their relative aesthetic strengths, but resists designating Umfundalai’s vocabulary as strictly male or female (see Chapter 6). Welsh gives movement, in and of itself, to the dancer regardless of their gender. The interview excerpt that opens the “Epiphany: I am a Dancer” section of Chapter 6 reveals that her appreciation for Berry and me as students was that we self-identified as dancers, freeing her from having to negotiate the social/cultural tensions of gender performance and movement.

300 Harvey V. Chism, Jr., interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, June 15, 2012.
From 25 years of learning dance with Welsh, it seems to me that her artistic focus in Umfundalai has been to articulate the cultural essence of African dance as it emerges from the Diaspora. Admittedly, however, she extracts sources from the dances that men perform in traditional African societies to create Umfundalai’s contemporary technique.\(^\text{301}\) In an informal conversation Welsh, I had three years ago, she mentioned that the women’s movement felt too “laid back” for her and that she just enjoyed dancing the men’s movement. She likened her love for men’s movement to the joy she discerned in my dancing body while doing the movement the women usually do in Umfundalai. When I asked her this question officially within the context of this research, she relayed the following:

I loved their "maleness" and I see "maleness' differently from sexual orientation. I think that here in the West, some male dancers dance in an affected way and I was impressed with the performances that I saw that didn't conflate dancing style with sexual orientation.\(^\text{302}\)

For me, Welsh’s extraction of traditional men’s dances remains curious—even devoid of the social structures of sexual orientation or affectation as exhibited in continental African societies. I continue to question her connectedness (or lack thereof) to the female dances of the communities she studied in Africa and whether an issue of a gendered essence factors in her movement selection. As an African American woman, what essence did the men’s dances house that inspired Welsh to codify her own movement practice? The intention behind this rhetorical question is not to explore Welsh’s navigation of gendered lines in traditional African dance but to establish whether a gendered aesthetic exists despite Welsh’s gender-neutral philosophy.

In *African Culture: Rhythms of Unity*, Welsh writes:

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\(^{301}\) Kariamu Welsh, personal conversation with C. Kemal Nance, circa November 2012.

\(^{302}\) Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to author, March 24, 2014
The foundation of an aesthetic can be found in the culture of a society. The value system and religious ethos normally provide and stimulate the creative setting for “stylized art,” that is, art which is no longer directly associated with religion or ritual. The particular qualities of an ethnic group provide the ingredients that distinguish the aesthetic and enable individual expression as well as collective expression.

If aesthetics is situated as stated in the aforementioned quotation, then I suggest that culture is gendered. While the “qualities of an ethnic group” provide the ingredients for an aesthetic, the qualities to which she refers can be and have been organized by gender. For instance, Welsh typically teaches the *Imbende Leg Stretch* to the men in her technique classes. Conversely, she instructs the women to dance the *Jerusarema Hip Twist*. Both dances originate from the same *Imbende* tradition in Southern Africa. Even in the contemporary African context that Umfundalai provides, Welsh kept this gendered distinction intact. In the more abstracted movements of Umfundalai, like the *Hungwe* and the *Kananga Arm Series*, gender origin is eclipsed by Welsh’s essence and by her body as a conduit for “stylized art.”

As a beginning Umfundalai dancer, I interpreted Welsh’s holistic presentation—essence, body, and movement quality—as distinctively female. I still maintain that Umfundalai embodies a female aesthetic. Welsh’s own construction and embodiment of Umfundalai’s Pan-African vocabulary allied with generations of female dancers’ emulation of her movement style—a gendered movement style—offers continuation and strengthening of feminine nuances in the technique. At the same time, as dancing men infuse Umfundalai’s tradition, performance qualities emerge that have the potential to develop into a male Umfundalai aesthetic. This section, “Strong as Hell,” is named after the language Berry used.

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to describe significant gendered moments as one of the first men to dance Welsh’s 

Current masculine studies literature posits African American masculinity as a 
response to the unavailable privileges implicit in White patriarchy (social and economic). 

In a discussion regarding hegemonic masculinity as it exists in Western thought, Athena 
Matua writes, “Masculinity embodies socially valued traits. Men are to be strong, active, 
aggressive, reasoned, dominant, competitive, and in control.” African American 
masculinity, conversely, relies on rejection of an unachievable power, which results in an 
embodied nonchalance. McCall's ‘cool pose’ defines a stylized act of resistance that gives 
way to an emerging male aesthetic. Allied with this uniquely African American embodied 
masculinity, cool pose offers African American men strength and power that results in a 
coping strategy for the denied privileges of mainstream culture.  

Even in its reliance on a 
White antithesis, “being cool is an ego booster for black males comparable to the kind white 
males more easily find through attending good schools, landing prestigious jobs, and bringing 
home decent wages.”

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House, 1994).

308 Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson, Cool Pose, 2-3.

309 R. Majors and J. Billson, 5.
In Umfundalai’s dance tradition, strength and power assume an alternative meaning than a man's capacity (or incapacity) to earn money or situate his stability in a socio-economic class. There, strength and power may be associated with a dancing man’s capacity to impact his audience's gaze with confidence. Berry refers to his performance in *Raahmonaaah!* (1989) as an experienced masculinity (Chapter 5). He felt “strong as hell” in his ability to seize the attention of “everybody in the house.” This lived experience anecdote came as a response to a question about a gendered moment in his Umfundalai experience:

I have the ear of everybody in the room, in the theater, back stage, up in the lighting booth, and beyond. I am a voice that matters, one that is heard aurally and layers underneath. Initiated by aural communication, it goes into a hearing that dwells deeper in here. (*Berry points to his torso.*) I have control over all of that. Everybody in the house and in the wings adjusts to that energy. I have the power of my voice and my ‘physical-ness’ taking up the space…. I am fucking powerful.310

For Berry, there is a power in being heard, to have someone acknowledge his contribution to the community in which he resides. His ability to perform the buttocks fall in *Herero Women* (1996) and his critique of the “Sister Circle’ formed by Umfundalai female dancers underscores the significance he places on experiences during which he is “taken seriously” (Chapter 6).

Other Umfundalai men, namely Harvey Chism and Derrick Perkins, feel a connection to the performance power Berry describes. Perkins shares an anecdote about changing the spelling of his name, Derryck, spelled with a ‘y,’ as a symbol for the transformation he experienced in being acknowledged by Welsh and his acceptance of a dancer identity311 (Chapter 6). The act of performing may instantiate the gendered power to

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310 Stafford C. Berry, Jr., interview with C. Kemal Nance, May 13, 2012.

311 Derrick Perkins, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Philadelphia, PA, May 15, 2012
which Berry refers. Presenting oneself in a way that persuades people to watch and observe has the makings of masculinity for Umfundalai’s men. Perkins, like Berry, references performing in Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah! (1989) as a demonstration for dancing his gender (Chapter 5). He describes his experienced masculinity this way:

I didn’t feel particularly masculine but maybe upright. I don’t know. I just felt very ‘mannish.’ We’re looking at the audience, and we’re giving them attention, and you’re going to notice me, and you honor me regardless of whether you want to or not.\textsuperscript{312} Perkins’ term “mannish” suggests that some aspects of the male archetype he employed while performing in Welsh’s choreography were inauthentic for him. At the same time, like Berry, he recognizes the kind of power that captures the audience gaze; “…regardless of whether you want to or not,” suggesting an audience’s ensnarement. For Perkins, this power emerges from a collective, specifically male effort. In his excerpt, the “we” to whom he refers is composed of himself, Berry, and me.

Chism references Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings (1996) as lived experience for dancing masculinity (Chapter 5):

I felt especially masculine because there was a subtext to the piece, an undercurrent of power and dominance and strength. Oh, I felt wonderful! I felt like I had arrived. I was living life. … I felt very much affirmed. I felt like a vessel…like I was able to be a symbol for folks like me in ways that you don’t readily find.\textsuperscript{313} The power he observes in this male-informed narrative is manifested in the tall, undeniably male bodies of the cast (Berry, Chism, Perkins, and me). As discussed in the “It’s All Man” section of Chapter 5, he, like Berry and Perkins, felt acknowledged performing this dance. Chism interpreted Genesis’s narrative as having an African American gay subtext, allowing

\textsuperscript{312} Derrick Perkins, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Philadelphia, PA, May 15, 2012.

\textsuperscript{313} Harvey Chism, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, June 19, 2012.
him a space to perform his racial, sexual, and ultimately social identities. For Chism, too, the act of being seen, a metaphor for being heard, or using Berry’s words “to be taken seriously,” is power.

For Blazina, masculinities are myths, reflecting an idealistic gender script for how men in a given culture should perform, but one that often describes an “unachievable reality.” Nevertheless, this study finds that strength and power have a phenomenological currency for Umfundalai’s dancing men. Masculinities are vestiges of a larger society that the virtual world of concert dance can replicate. Based on analysis of in-depth interviews, I suggest that the masculinities that resonate for Umfundalai’s men, particularly those of strength and power, contribute to Umfundalai’s dance culture in two ways.

Firstly, Umfundalai’s Pan African vocabulary draws on gender roles from societies throughout the Diaspora, including North America. Regardless of what Blazina would describe as their “unachievability,” the culture (Umfundalai) requires men to embody masculine gender performance as a way to respect the African traditions in which Umfundalai’s contemporary vocabularies originate. When Umfundalai instructors insist that men (and/or boys) in their classes perform the Imbende Leg Stretch alongside women dancing the Jersaroma Hip Twist, they—no, we—are requiring them to access strength and power through a danced masculinity. In so doing, we are providing students, both male and female, a holistic experience that aligns with the gender codes of a given tradition. As we saw in Chism’s remarks about dancing the “women’s part” (Chapter 6), these gender constructions have the potential to create a paradoxical myth for men. On the one hand, men must dance a

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314 Chris Blazina, The Cultural Myths of Masculinity, xiii.
certain way, but on the other hand, Umfundalai’s vocabulary has been extracted for female dancers from traditional African male vocabularies.

Secondly, the embodiment of strength and power as a vehicle for compelling an audience to see one’s dancing is a goal for all Umfundalai dancers, male and female. The way men achieve this goal is through their bodies’ physical histories. Perkins refers to “uprightness” in performing Raaahmonaaah! (1989). Mills speaks of “uprightness” in her conceptualization of machismo in Umfundalai, positing it as a masculine and physical stylization (Chapter 6). Umfundalai’s men also achieve strength and power in the wake of the female ‘ghosts’ that precede them. Berry’s lived experience of performing the Raaahmonaaah Invocation, which was previously performed by Jillian Degannes, was a moment of masculine power (Chapter 5). His, Perkins’, and my performance in Welsh’s former all-female cast of Raaahmonaaah! (1989) was a moment of solidarity for the three of us as we finally danced the stories of the men who perished in the real-life MOVE tragedy. However, the act of capturing an admirer’s gaze or transforming a by-stander into an admirer fails to be unique to the gender performance of dancing men.

As referred to earlier, McCall argues that the preoccupation with strength and power among African American men gives way to a ‘cool pose’, a stylized rejection of the strength and power admired but inaccessible in White patriarchy. According to McCall, this ‘embodied nonchalance,’ as I describe it, results in psychological unhealthiness.315 For Umfundalai’s dancing men, strength and power as masculinities, represented in our bodily

carriage, forge a movement quality, an aesthetic. In terms of this finding, Glendola Yhema Mills emerges from this research as a significant influence on the masculine scripts that developed in Umfundalai. As she taught the men in this study including me, the researcher, she assumed responsibility for articulating a male movement language in Umfundalai. Whether they have been discovered organically or assigned in unconscious adherence to hegemonic notions of male deportment, her attempts at stylization allied with male dancers’ visceral compliance over the last 44 years has given way to an identifiable stylization of the dancing male body.

At the outset, Mills’ term *machismo* was met with confusion and criticism. While she used it to solicit a masculine quality from selected Umfundalai men, I found it problematic in that it invited a representation that was contrived, a cliché. I thought it was antithetical to the essence that Umfundalai aimed at excavating in its dancers. Mills offered the following explanation (Chapter 6):

*Machismo* is upright with strong shoulders. When I say strong…it's a stiffening of the shoulders, but there's a confidence. There's a broadening of the chest; there's a strength – this uprightness, in *Machismo*. It's like the guy in the hood. “Yeah! There's a brother right there.” By the carriage of his body as he walks, there's a confidence. When I say, “stiff,” I don't mean rigid.  

Arguably, Mills drew on conventional masculine archetypes to inspire the movement quality of male students. Yet, her *machismo* synchronizes social expectations for male bodies and the gendered intra-psychic scripts of Umfundalai’s dancing men. Without hearing her explanation of *machismo*, the men in this study echo Mills’ descriptions in interviews, validating her proposed aesthetic values for male dancers in Umfundalai. Mills’ *machismo* became a symbol for a burgeoning Umfundalai male aesthetic.

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316 Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Norfolk, VA, May 19, 2013.
Referring to the carriage of the torso while dancing, Mills identifies uprightness as a preferred quality for Umfundalai men. In our interview, she referenced Umfundalai’s Southern Africa-inspired *Chiwowo* dance. The movement requires a dancer to place his fists on the middle of his thighs and step while knocking hips twice with each step. Although the movement requires the dancer to bend at the waist, it also necessitates an erect torso. When I asked Perkins to describe movements that trigger a lived masculinity for him, he described his performance in *Genesis: the Royal Dance of Kings* (1996), identifying the *Nigerian Stomp* as the Umfundalai movement that embodies what he refers to as his “manhood.”

Perkins: I feel it. I feel my man. I probably feel more man doing that than if I were winding. I feel powerful on a whole other level – just the stature of the movement, the way the weight is distributed, like it’s completely upright.

Nance: Upright?

Perkins: It forces me to hold my head up. So just by that alone – the movement requires a kind of boldness that best defines my masculinity, my maleness. It is notable that Mills’ interview took place eleven months after Perkins’. The word ‘upright’ stood out for me in Perkins’ interview, as another male dancer had offered it in a practice interview as a description of masculinity. This constituent of Mills’ *machismo*, uprightness, resonates with Perkins as a masculine Umfundalai expression. While he does not use the word ‘power,’ the boldness to which he refers suggests an analogy with Berry’s power in the rendition of *Raaahmonaah!* (1989) performed in 1996 (Chapter 5).

Mills uses the *Chiwowo* to illustrate stiffness as a male aesthetic quality. During our interview, she performed the hip knocking movement around her dining room table as she

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discussed the carriage of her torso. When she would talk about a male way of moving, she would stiffen her torso and contract the muscles surrounding her collar bone. As she transitioned into her own movement style her torso became fluid; it seemed to accommodate a ripple initiated by the hip articulation. Mills asserts that stiffness without rigidity is distinctively male.\textsuperscript{318}

In a recounting of dancing with other men in Umfundalai, Twan Claiborne discusses a tacit expectation he experienced. He felt that his performance quality should match the other men with whom he is performing. In this anecdote cited in Chapter 6, he relays how he adjusts his dancing to accommodate this situation.

\begin{quote}
\ldots the three of us dancing together \ldots I felt I had to – we are men dancing with each other so we usually dance like men if that makes any sense. \ldots It feels more restricted... In your dance I felt tense...usually my arms would be more fluid and diving.

I was just more rigid in it. My muscles felt tense when I moved my arms, and I wasn’t travelling as fast as I would have. I was more grounded in the movements.\textsuperscript{319}
\end{quote}

Claiborne’s interview reads as if he is performing to a script or a contrived masculinity. Minimally, he feels like he has to adjust to tacit understanding, augmenting his dancing with what he thinks is an appropriate style for male dancers. Claiborne attempts to access power through the \textit{Ring Shout}; he embodies a rigidity that he interprets as the desired aesthetic presence. It is unlikely that Mills and Claiborne discussed this particular facet of Umfundalai. (Mills’ last season with Kariamu & Company: Traditions was in 2000. Claiborne joined the company in 2008.) Yet, both identify rigidity as a male aesthetic.

\textsuperscript{318} Glendola Yhema Mills, interview by C. Kemal Nance, May 17, 2012.

\textsuperscript{319} Twan Claiborne, interview by C. Kemal Nance, New York, NY, December 16, 2012.
As noted above, Mills is important to men’s dancing history in Umfundalai. She was a primary teacher for six of the eight men in this study: Berry, Chism, Munir, Perkins, Tyson, and me. Mills did not teach Claiborne or Poe. Poe felt largely an artistic connection to Umfundalai, asserting in his interview that were very few gendered moments for him as a man in its dance culture. It seems plausible, therefore, that the similarities in our expressed aesthetic values are a result of Mills being Berry’s, Perkins’, Munir’s, Tyson’s and my instructor. Perhaps her use of the terms ‘upright’ and ‘rigidity’ have permeated our vocabulary by way of the organic exchange of ideas that Umfundalai classes afford. However, this study finds that the more significant aspect of an evolving male aesthetic is that it reflects an ideology that transcends the structure of Umfundalai pedagogy or performance.

The Old School Two-Step: Masculinity as Re-Invention

Welsh provides dancers with an African dance essence, a vocabulary that both binds us as African people and gives creative license to the dancer to expand Umfundalai. Her focus has been on the African cultural underpinnings of Umfundalai as a movement practice. Mills and I, and the other men in this study inscribed and reinvented a gendered dance based on what surrounding American and African American societies prescribe; we re-inscribed Umfundalai’s masculinities. While men may not intentionally set about to ‘create masculinities,’ I suggest that our adherence to them depends on their salience in our lived experiences. For Umfundalai’s men, strength and power do not emerge as conscious social goals, yet they permeate how Umfundalai men construct a danced masculinity and coincide with strength and power as a masculine preoccupation in the encompassing African American and American societies.
Blazina likens the evolution of masculinities to Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions. Kuhn asserts that science develops from a thesis-antithesis-synthesis model whereby new paradigms challenge old paradigms. If the old paradigm is successful it will withstand changes brought on by the tension of conflicting perspectives. If not, it is replaced. Blazina asserts that with Western masculinities, new paradigms never completely replace the old; they interface and blend.

Blazina’s application of Kuhn offers a useful schema for critical analysis of Umfundalai’s dancing men’s experiences with masculinities. In many instances we have resisted certain masculinities as represented in Umfundalai. Both Berry and I challenged what we construed as femininities in Umfundalai with our ‘drag’ performances of the women’s idiosyncrasies. In a danced parody of the women and in our zeal to learn Umfundalai in its totality, Berry and I offered Welsh choreographic options or what she refers to as a ”palette” from which she could create art (Chapter 6). The synthesis of our embodying movement that by macro African American cultural standards could be regarded as feminine, our incorporation of traditional male movement from the West African canon of neo-traditional dance, and our engendering of female choreography gave way to a new paradigm (Kuhn), a new masculinity (Blazina).

Yet, retrospective analysis of men’s gendered experiences in Umfundalai shows that most of us also employed conventional or what Anderson would call “orthodox” masculinities to articulate maleness in Umfundalai. In Chapter 5, Berry describes his gendered experiences in *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) as “strong as hell,” which in many ways

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320 C. Blazina, xiii.

represents a conventional way of projecting masculinity. Also in Chapter 5, Chism similarly describes his masculinity in *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) as an “undergirding strength” brought by the male bodies of Berry, Perkins, himself, and me. Clabirone imposes a masculinity of rigidity onto his body when dancing with other male dancers in *Remembering So Well…* (2002) Even when masculinities manifest themselves as unrealistic ideologies, they make lived sense to these dancing men as participants in societies outside of Umfundalai’s dance culture.

Jumatatu Poe’s place in the discourse of Umfundalai’s dancing men can be construed as one of outlier or ‘other.’ For Poe, maleness is not emblematic of his involvement in Umfundalai. In light of Ahmed’s queer phenomenology, I suggest that Poe situates himself in a different orientation than the other men in this study, one that eclipses the intersection of gender and movement practice.

The way men dance: Agency & responsibility

Twenty-six years of dancing Umfundalai has afforded me both professional and personal interaction with its progenitor, Kariamu Welsh. Professional experiences include demonstrating the technique in selected master classes, teaching and casting Kariamu & Company: Traditions repertory, and sharing Umfundalai with national and international dance communities. In all these events, I never heard Welsh describe any male’s or female’s movement style as effeminate.

In July 2012, Welsh and I attended Philadanco’s home season dance concert at the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia. As we discussed the dances during the intermission, I discovered that we were both impressed with the facility with which company members
performed each of the dances, including Rennie Harris’s house dance choreography. As we watched the company’s modern dance repertoire, Welsh mentioned how she felt the male dancers were “affected.” While the dancers’ technical execution was exceptional, the male dancers appeared preoccupied with the idiosyncratic vocabulary of Western modern dance. They ‘over-performed’ the flipped wrist, extended fingers, and facial expressions of eternal bliss. Philadanco’s male dancers appeared to relish in their execution of what I refer to as the ‘daintiness’ of modern dance. For me, the dancing was gendered and feminine. Welsh described this over-stylization as “affectation.”

I mention this observation to underscore Welsh’s disinterest in “genderizing” dance. As her protégé, it is difficult to conceive of Welsh vocalizing her observation of male dancers’ effeminacy. However, it is likely that she would discern if a dancer was “affected,” which could describe his/her gendered idiosyncrasies as well as the overuse of neo-traditional West African, ballet, and modern vocabulary. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 6, Mills and I problematize the potential for effeminacy in Umfundalai. She, with her protection of an “intangible me,” and I, with my integration of neo-traditional West African male vocabulary, championed a male aesthetic in Umfundalai, thereby imbuing the movement affectation that emerged from Umfundalai’s male dancing bodies with social import.

As Umfundalai evolved during its Philadelphia Phase (Chapter 4), Mills’, Berry’s, and my efforts to articulate a ‘man’s way’ of moving offered a gendered Umfundalai to male practitioners. Interviews reveal an assumed responsibility for protecting and/or upholding masculinity within Umfundalai’s dance tradition. Claiborne speaks about altering his movement expression to accommodate an imagined male-informed dance style. He also discusses protecting what he deemed as a “Nance legacy,” the integrity of movement he had
admired in my dance style (Chapter 6). Chism struggles with dancing the canon of Umfundalai male movement as it robs him of the opportunity to experience the hip twisting that the women frequent or to use his terms, he wanted the chance to “wear it out” (Chapter 6). Tyson refers to his pride in knowing that there is a specialized movement style for men of Umfundalai. He references an arm variation of an undulation progression called *The Undressing* that Mills stylized for men in the late 1990s. Welsh describes Berry and me as being “vocal” about our interests in Umfundalai (Chapter 6). Our training in neo-traditional West African dance with Hobari Banks served as a resource to develop a gendered male movement language in Umfundalai.

The responsibility Mills and I assumed in advocating for male dance in Umfundalai was self-appointed. As described earlier, Welsh’s focus targeted cultural commonalities in African dances. In Husserl’s terms, she crafted a dance tradition that spans the categories of African movement. This is the “funkiness” and “grittiness” she references in the earlier ‘Out of the Shadows’ section of this chapter. In an essay about the African American spirituality, Donna Richards writes:

> Our spirit symbolizes our uniqueness as a people, or we could say that the African-American ethos is spiritual. The ethos of a people is related to special characteristics which identify them as a group, setting them apart from other groups.\(^{322}\)

The essence Welsh articulates with Umfundalai is cultural and spiritual; its movement practice is based on the “special characteristics” that reside in an African continuum that originates in tradition while connecting to contemporary expression with no specific connection to a region of Africa or a geographical location within the Diaspora.

In many of her early lectures during the 1990s, Welsh referred to Umfundalai as an open-ended project allowing each dancer to be a conduit for movement innovation and the continuance of its rhythms. In reference to Umfundalai’s essence, she suggests it is both individual and collective. Yet, many men (e.g. Berry and me) who participate in Umfundalai’s dance tradition seek to maintain a more specific essence, one that organizes individuals across gender lines. In other cases (Claiborne, Chism, Perkins, Poe, and Tyson), a male essence is articulated largely unconsciously through the sheer presence of men in the transmission of Umfundalai dance culture. As discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, this male essence intersects with a cultural essential being as it hones in on our gender performances as African men. As a largely unconscious act related to the agency of embodiment that Noland articulates, the lived experiences of African American men create and perpetuate new masculinities in Umfundalai. Noland writes:
My interest in the moving body grows out of a desire to find a way beyond the impasse of constructivist theory, which I take to be the inability, after Foucault, to produce a convincing account of agency. I begin with the observation that despite the very real force of social conditioning, human subjects continue to invent surprising new ways of altering the inscribed behaviors they are called on to perform.323

Eric Anderson’s theory of inclusive masculinities is relevant to the analysis of maleness in Umfundalai. He writes, “For inclusive masculinities, a culture must be free of men having to prove heterosexuality. The driving tenet behind orthodox masculinity is homohysteria, not homophobia.”324 Research on male cheerleaders led him to articulate two kinds of masculinities, orthodox and inclusive. While orthodox masculinity represents conventional attitudes about appropriate male behavior and stems from heteronormativity, inclusive masculinity blurs the lines of masculinity and femininity and houses men of varied sexualities.325 Both orthodox and inclusive masculinities were observed by two distinct groups of male cheerleaders, the traditional team in which many non-heterosexual men are “closeted” and the parody team composed of a diverse cadre of openly expressed sexualities. A key premise of Anderson’s inclusive masculinities theory is that participants in neither orthodox nor inclusive masculinities view one or the other as natural or dominant.326

Masculinities that emerge from Umfundalai are inclusive in the literal sense of the word. Arguably, the masculinities that Mills, Berry, and I infused in the tradition stem from orthodox masculinities we have experienced and/or witnessed outside of the studio. If any

323 C. Noland, 7-8.


326 E. Anderson, 94.
of Umfundalai’s dancing men felt the need to perform heteronormativity as a masculine attribute, it potentially could be found in Mills’ and my subversive efforts to manage effeminacy and provide male dancers a way to dance “like men” or more accurately heterosexual-looking men. Both Chism’s and Poe’s comments regarding the tension around performing the male movement illuminates this idea (Chapter 6). However, Anderson’s theory does not have direct application in that Umfundalai does not offer comparison groups of men. Moreover, sexuality and attitudes about sexuality do not emerge from interview data as a significant Umfundalai discourse. While only one man self-identified as heterosexual, no man in the study foregrounded his comments about maleness, masculinity, or agency with a pronouncement of sexuality. The topic arose only as a direct response to the following interview prompt: “Describe your sexuality.”

After presenting the research proposal for Brothers of the Bah Yáb, an advisory committee member recommended strongly that I reveal the sexual identities of research subjects. She argued that sexuality might be a muted but important voice in a study that explores gender construction. While I felt resistant on phenomenological grounds, I complied with the recommendation. As I interviewed subjects for the study, I found that many of the lived experiences Umfundalai’s men accumulated in dancing could be coded for suspicion or assumption of homosexuality by non-dancing observers in dancing spaces (Chapter 6). From Munir’s after school serenade of “We’re men in tights…tights tights!” to Tyson’s sister’s admonishment that her son (his nephew) does not dance, a heteronormative hegemony shadows dancing men’s participation in Umfundalai. However, men’s lived sexuality, sexual preference, and sexual orientation did not emerge as significant in their experience of dancing Umfundalai, the focus of my study.
In the interest of illuminating construction of maleness – the constructed agency that men assume in gender performance, I asked each subject to describe the attributes that make them “men.” In other words, what is the social evidence that supports their being men. Of the seven men, two mentioned the ability to love other men. In those instances, the statements about same-sex loving were among the last items mentioned. More notable is that six of the seven subjects referred to a connection between spirituality and manhood (Chapter 6).

*Alright Goddamn it! The Spirituality of Gendered Solidarity*

Through systematic retrospection, this study connects feelings of strength and power to an experienced maleness. Chapter 5, “There were Men in that Fire, Too” includes a detailed description of my experience performing *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) for the first time in 1996, a performance that marked the first inclusion of male dancers in what has become a classic in Kariamu & Company: Traditions’ repertoire and an exemplar for Umfundalai choreography. As with the other men of Umfundalai, dancing this work was significant for me and for Stafford Berry.

I feel the heat of Stafford’s breath as he stands directly behind me whispering in my right ear in a deep, angry voice, “Alright God damn it! You better work! Let’s set off this mother fucking fire. You hear me, goddamn it? Let’s work. Alright, God damn it! Alright now. Let’s wear this mother fucker out!” My legs shake and I feel my eyebrows descend in a ‘v’ that starts at the top of my nose. He repeats his mantra until I explode in movement onto the stage, joining Saleana. While we dance together, I feel power and strength. I feel invincible.

Karen E. Bond and Susan W. Stinson examine meaning making in dance in a large study of young people ranging from ages three to 18. Drawing on multiple sources of data (interviews, observation, and dancers’ drawings about dance), the theme of “superordinary”
emerged in relation to “dance experiences that go beyond the ordinary and the everyday.”

A number of sub-categories emerged from their phenomenological analysis and several have particular relevance to the gendered experiences of Umfundalai’s dancing men: ‘magical or spiritual dimensions,’ ‘another place and time,’ ‘being who I really am (or might become).’ In terms of spiritual experiences, dancers’ descriptions in Bond & Stinson referred to altered states using magical, mystical, or religious language that sometimes referred to special powers. While dancing there may be a sense of being animated by a force that is greater than the self. One young child recounts, “It felt like there was a god or spirit inside me. It was making me move.”

I felt a similar phenomenon during Berry’s and my 1996 debut performance of Raaahmonaaah! (1989). As John Africa, I became an intensified version of myself. Incited by Berry’s profane, masculine vernacular, my eyes stretched wide and the musicians’ rhythms were not fast enough, loud enough, or intense enough to reflect the surge that propelled me onto the stage. While I may not use the kind of religio-spiritual language quoted in Bond & Stinson, that experience was spiritual for me, invoked by a heightened masculine connection. Berry’s chant felt like the foot stomping, hand clapping, soulful gospel music found in the “getting happy” traditions of the Black Church. The spirituality I experienced may have been a synthesis of the rhythms, the emotional fervor the dance required and my

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328 Karen E. Bond and Susan Stinson, “‘I Feel like I’m Going to Take off!’” 68.

329 K. Bond and S. Stinson, 68.


206
kindred connection with Berry. In that moment, my body assumed a liminality that linked the reality of the present dancing space to the cosmos. Much like Welsh describes, I “embodied history, both ancient and new.”

The theme of spiritual transformation applies to other male dancers who have performed in Raaabmonaaah! Khalil Munir’s interview directly references spirituality, again through embodiment of history, becoming a conduit for voices of others (Chapter 5).

Dancing Raaabmonaaah! was very spiritual for me. I had to learn the history of Osage Avenue, know that this didn’t happen any place foreign to me. This happened in Philadelphia! I had to talk about my people going through what they went through and had to translate that story on stage. I felt like we were speaking for them. ...I go into another space emotionally, physically. I am not myself; I am that story and I am portraying that story in such a strong fashion that it engulfs my body. I am exhausted afterwards. I am backstage, and I am breathing heavy and my emotions are running...from the tip of my head to the bottom of my feet. I am just filled with this emotion. I know my breathing gets heavy, and my body gets warm.

One could suggest that Munir’s description depicts an encounter with the ancestral world (as does mine, above). Not only does Raaabmonaaah house spirituality for Munir, he experiences spirituality through a connection to the communal. The community to which Munir refers is composed of the actual players in the real-life MOVE story. Without suggesting a direct correspondence between spirituality and maleness, Munir’s interviews illuminate the possibility of spiritual transformation in Umfundalai’s men’s experiences.

Poe remembers dancing Raaabmonaaah! (1989, performed in 2002), and how a “different universe” was created (Chapter 5).

331 Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to C. Kemal Nance, February 12, 2014.

I remember experiencing a different universe on stage. It extended behind the stage, too. The whole stage place was this different place. I don't remember accessing it through imagining that I was Birdie Africa or that I was living in that burning building. I remembered accessing it in a way that felt like the new universe on stage is this other place that I need to figure out. I can't understand unless I move through it. I don't even remember you as being you. I remember you being this figure that was much larger than I was and with whom I felt a certain amount of comfort.\textsuperscript{333}

Poe remembers \textit{Raaabmonaaah!} as an altered reality. The dance itself provided him with a liminal space that he only understands through his dancing body.\textsuperscript{334} Poe is unique in the way spirituality permeates his Umfundalai dancing in that the metaphysical experience to which he alludes resides in the virtuality of the dance. Poe experienced himself and his interaction with the other dancers in a way that left them bereft of gender role, gender performance, or personal identity. As he explains, in dancing \textit{Raaabmonaaah! Revisited} (2002), I was no longer his teacher. In the way that Poe describes me, I became an amplified force.

These male experiences of spiritual force/s drew me to African philosophy. In Bantu philosophy, \textit{Ntu} serves as a universal force that pervades all human and spiritual existence, including the construction of God. German philosopher Janheinz Jahn interprets and translates African scholar Alex Kagame's research, writing,

\begin{quote}
NTU is the universal force as such, which, however, never occurs apart from its manifestations: Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu. NTU is Being itself, the cosmic universal force, which only modern, rationalizing thought can abstract from its manifestations. NTU is that force in which Being and beings coalesce.\textsuperscript{335}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{333} Jumatatu Poe, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Philadelphia, PA, November 20, 2012.


In Jahn’s application of Kagame’s paradigm to the evolution of African American culture, he explains that *Hantu* is the modality through which *NTU* is manifested in the convergence of time and space. From an Africanist perspective, Poe’s virtual reality in *Raaahmonaaah! Revisited* (2002) exemplified *Hantu*, a specific moment (time) of performing Welsh’s choreography in Conwell Theater (place) availed a spirituality, a life force. Jahn explains, “Hantu is the force which localizes spatially and temporally every event and every ‘motion,’ for since all beings are force, everything is in constant motion.”

Tyson refers to a similar transformation of time and space, a *Hantu*, associated with *Raaahmonaaah!’s* narrative. His participation in what Poe calls a “different universe” was apparent to his friends in the audience. He states, “My friends who saw me performing that piece said I don’t know where you went, but that was scary.” According to Poe and Tyson, dancing in Welsh’s *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) and *Raaahmonaaah! Revisited* (2010) blurred the lines between reality and theater, transporting them to another place. I interpret this ‘superordinary’ phenomenon as spiritual transformation, a human possibility in dance.

The men who danced in *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (Nance, 1996) also described qualities of spiritual transformation. Further, Chism and Perkins noted how *Genesis’s* male-centered narrative and all male cast were significant in how they experienced masculinity in Umfundalai. From my auto-ethnographic perspective as a dancer in the work, a lived spirituality emerged in our male-to-male interaction, a tacit understanding potentiated by our shared racial and gender identities. The knowing glances Perkins and I shared before the first time I performed John Africa in *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989, performed in 1996) exemplifies how

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we communicate ‘unspoken messages’ (Chapter 5). This phenomenon was manifested also in the profane chant Berry whispered in my ear before I danced the duet with Ramona Africa (Saleana Pettaway) during that same performance. A spiritual connectedness emanates from the commonality of being men. In the ‘It’s All Man’ section of Chapter 5, Perkins describes a moment dancing *Genesis: The Royal Dance of King* (1996):

> Your piece, *Genesis*! When we did that goddam circle – me, you, and Staff *(Perkins jumps from his chair and starts dancing)*. ABSOLUTELY! Of all the pieces I’ve done, all the professional dancing, that moment was probably the most defining, confirming, affirming, unifying movement I’ve ever performed. That whole sequence! It was the power in it. It was the connectedness we all had at that moment.\(^{338}\)

Perkins attributes defining, confirming, and unifying to the connectedness that happened among us. His holistic statement of “the power in it” relays a spiritual significance or as Bond and Stinson would offer, a superordinary experience. In a later conversation, Perkins offers that the combination of all male dancers, the intrinsic power of the movement, and the male-centered narrative allowed the four of us (Berry, Chism, Perkins, and me) “to go to another place,” a space actualized through the bonding experience of all men.\(^{339}\)

In Chapter 5, I provide Perkins’ commentary as a case for an experienced masculinity. Yet on deeper reflection, Perkins articulates a metaphysical essence. Umfundalai excavates a cultural essence that binds people through their African ancestry, masculinities exist among people who comprise the male gender, and spirituality arises as the essential bond that unites people cosmically. The fervor with which Perkins relayed this information in his interview allied with similar commentary from the other brothers of the Bah Yáh


\(^{339}\) Derrick A. Perkins, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, December 13, 2013.
suggests that one can be empowered by gender identity in the spirituality that emerges from connectedness with other men.

Chism describes his experience in *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) (Chapter 5):

Oh, I felt wonderful! I felt like I had arrived. I was living life. … I felt very much affirmed. I felt like a vessel…a pulse of energy ran through me and the other dancers that made it awesome. I felt very present…privileged to be in it and special. Few pieces I’ve been in have reached my core. And it kind of pulled out of me a sense where I just be really feeling good about Harv and Harv in his past lives – I am going on like this cultural epic memory stuff – and Harv in his present self. …

Spirituality, as an African retention, rings loudly when he describes connecting to “past lives.” In an essay about African American spirituality, Donna Richards writes:

To the African the sacred and the profane are close and can be experienced as unity. All of this is so because of the multidimensional nature of the African universe. Phenomena and events are understood on many different levels at once. The African universe is alive and rich, filled with myriad possibilities. It is a phenomenal universe.

Richards’ account suggests the plausibility for Chism to see himself in concurrent and separate time dimensions, affording him an ancestral appreciation of his dancing body made possible by connecting with the ‘phenomenal universe.’ For Chism, this was an affirming experience that affected his sense of self and spirit, while dancing with other men.

As discussed in Chapter 2, White patriarchy has served as a prototype for African American male identity. Staples argues that Black masculinity stems from the emasculation of the enslavement period which is echoed by Abby Ferber’s construction of Black

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masculinity as a White supremacist agenda to “tame and control Black males;” others suggest it stems from alienation from, including resistance to, White patriarchy. The undergirding and problematic message is that Black masculinity has been defined in terms of an antecedent, White masculinity, as if its permanence depends on Black men’s status as ‘other.’

This trope continues in theories regarding African American men in concert dance; as our masculinity becomes “marked,” the expressed masculinity of White heterosexual men remains “unmarked,” thereby validating Whiteness and heteronormativity as a triangulated standard of male existence. In the Umfundalai tradition, however, dancing men are finding agency, a male essence and gendered performativity in dancing African dance with other African American men. For us, Umfundalai’s dancing men, this ‘male-to-male’ connection is spiritual and virile. In the liminal space of stage performance, it temporarily dismantles the otherwise reliance on White patriarchal and heteronormative sources to construct a masculinity that we can holistically embody.

As discussed in the review of background literature in Chapter 3, George Herbert Mead suggests that one’s concept of self is a social construction – meaning emerges from the ways in which individuals interact with each other. With symbolic interactionism, he distinguishes the “I” from the “me.” The “I” is the unpredictable and creative aspect of self, and the “me,” is the organized set of attitudes of others assumed by the actor. Social control

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is manifested through the “me.”\footnote{George Ritzer, “Symbolic Interactionism,” \textit{Sociological Theory}, (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008), 356.} Just as masculine studies scholarship posits Black masculinity as a multifaceted, convoluted project, Mead’s “I” is cogent to theorizing a gendered agency for Umfundalai dancing men.

The spirituality that Berry, Chism, Perkins, and I accessed in the essence that connects us as African dancing men offers an alternative to the Blacking of White masculinity theory that dominates much of masculine studies literature. As Chism describes blatantly (and Perkins implies), dancing in Welsh’s \textit{Raahmonaaah!} (1989), \textit{my Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings} (1996), and other Umfundalai works, is affirming. These works allow African American men to see and dance with each other as a mode of tacit communication, a symbolic interaction, if you will, offering us an opportunity to actualize a gendered agency, a maleness that borrows from the cultural scripts of the non-dancing world while enabling a self-determined construction of the men we want to be.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: SANKOFA (RETURN AND GET IT)

The West African Adinkra Symbol, *Sankofa*, is a metaphor for the culminating knowledge of this research. In Umfundalai, the *Sankofa Arms Series* is significant as it represents a core Umfundalai movement that Welsh stilized to accommodate a male essence in Stafford C. Berry’s and my bodies. As discussed in Chapter 4, the newest progression of the *Sankofa Arm Series* is the *K&S Step* (Kemal & Stafford) named after Berry and me. Moreover, in its cultural context *Sankofa’s* literal translation, "return and get it," reminds us to learn from the past. I name the conclusion of this study *Sankofa* to allude to its purpose and to symbolically align this research to an African ideology that, like maleness, can potentially stand independent of White patriarchy. Chapter 8 *returns* to the study’s point of entry and realizes its autoethnographic intention. Starting with a *return* to the question of Afrocentricity posed in Chapter 1, it addresses meanings of culture, community and spirituality as they pervade the lived experiences of Umfundalai’s dancing men.

In the introduction to Chapter 1, I consider the potential of Umfundalai men’s actualization of a gendered agency, or maleness, in Umfundalai, an African dance tradition, as a means to the cultural groundedness required for Afrocentricity. My premise was that an embodied understanding of Umfundalai’s African philosophy allied with acceptance of one’s gender performativity would align a dancing man’s gender construction with an Afrocentric paradigm. As Asante asserts that Afrocentricity requires a central focus on Africa, the

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realization of maleness in a contemporary African dance tradition would locate an African and male discourse at the center of analysis.

The above premise captured my own lived experience in Umfundalai and underscored the autoethnographic method of the research. However, in-depth interviews with selected men of Umfundalai suggest that the synthesis of gender and race or more specifically, being African American and male, is not a constitutive identity for the men in this study. When these dancing men discussed their meaningful experiences in Umfundalai, they punctuated either their Blackness or their masculinity in lived experience anecdotes. Harvey Chism’s sense of empowerment in experiencing a “natural Black gay existence” while performing in *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) is an exception (Chapter 5).

Burt theorizes White masculinity as an “ulterior entity” upon which difference is “marked;” Whiteness as it pervades the male body becomes an aesthetic standard, a non-entity in masculine discourse. White America’s obsession with Black male athletes and pop stars notwithstanding, African American men do not have the collective power to render their ethnicity and gender a standard. Blackness, as it emerges in this research, is invisibilized as a discursive item among the ‘Brothers of the Bah Yáh.’ While each subject identified with a cultural Blackness, none refer to it as a social modality for his lived experiences in Umfundalai. Analogous to the White masculinity Burt theorizes, Blackness became “unmarked” in the experienced masculinities of Umfundalai’s dancing men. As “Afrocentricity seeks to enshrine the idea that blackness itself is a trope of ethics,”

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At the outset of this project, dancing Umfundalai as a means by which male practitioners experience their gender was the primary locus of investigation. Maleness served as the language voicing the agency with which men enact their gender performativity. Chapter 7 theorized essence as a central Umfundalai principle, including its potential for empowering dancing men to individualize their gendered roles. I suggested that Kariamu Welsh’s artistic focus on the varied expressions of African culture throughout the Diaspora creates a liminal space for men as they enter the tradition, where the act of performing Umfundalai avails men to actualize maleness.

Further, strength and power are reincarnated as masculinities in Umfundalai, described by some as the ability to seize an audience’s gaze. Welsh’s Raaahmonaaah! (1989) houses several masculinities in this regard. Berry’s feeling “strong as hell” as he engendered Raaahmonaaah!’s “Invocation,” Perkins’ “mannish” embodiment of the Nigerian Stomp, and my superordinary experience in dancing John Africa all speak to distinct and complimentary ways dancing men used a gendered performance to manipulate the audience’s gaze.

In an essay about Black masculinity, Burt examines gender, sexuality, and national identity of four modern dance choreographers, Alvin Ailey, Eleo Pomare, Merce Cunningham and Steve Paxton. He argues that Ailey’s work reinforces recurring stereotypes of African American men, in contrast with Pomare’s Junkie (circa 1967), which offers an alternative to the conventional heteronormative male roles seen on the American concert stage. I cite Burt’s critique at this concluding stage in the dissertation to illuminate how choreography, particularly danced narrative, relies on archetype and stereotype to create

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literacy for concert audiences. Burt’s dismissal of Ailey’s choreographic intention, allied with the critic’s own cultural orientation, may have facilitated a misread of the dances he cites.

To the conscious observer, restaging of gender roles as they exist in society has the potential to reinforce contrived masculinities that may not align with dancing men’s lived maleness—much like the conventional masculinities in Ailey’s *Revelations* (1960) that Burt critiques. The reliance on archetype and stereotype as a means to construct masculinity for dance performance necessitates a predicament in which men, namely African American men, dance a gender performativity that in Blazina’s words, may be “unachievable” or as I would offer, incongruent to their maleness.

In contrast, Umfundalai’s dancing men (except for Poe) experience an individual masculinity in the act of performing. For Poe, masculinity is perceived as a contrast to specific female variables including sex roles, sexual physiology, and differences in socially gendered styles of communication.\(^{351}\) None of these “contrasting” phenomena affected his involvement in Umfundalai’s dance culture. As he explains in a later conversation, he was disinterested in exploring masculinity in his body outside of dance and less interested in using masculinity to ground himself in a movement practice.\(^{352}\) As the other men of Umfundalai navigate the masculine tropes in both Welsh’s and my choreography, their embodiment of male characters as they are drawn in Umfundalai allows them to transcend the strictures of gender scripts and embody customized variations that make them experience power and strength.


Stafford C. Berry, Jr. finds embodied power as he transforms Welsh’s *Raaahmonaaah!* poem (performed originally by a woman) into a male manifesto about the real life heroine Ramona Africa. Derrick Perkins equates masculinity with his (and our) ability to compel audiences to watch. For him, “uprightness” as a physical stance indicates a gendered way of existing in his body. Khalil Munir and Charles Tyson discover power in *Raaahmonaaah!*’s real life narrative. Berry’s and my advocacy as Umfundalai dancers reflects our desire for the choreography to replicate the actual story. The title of Chapter 5, “There were Men in that Fire, Too” originates from Berry’s and my mantra in championing the presence of men in one of Umfundalai’s classic works. As citizens of the Greater Philadelphia area, Berry, Munir, and I felt a sense of ancestral connection to the men who died in the MOVE incident. It is unclear whether Tyson experienced an ancestral connection as the interview data suggest that he had to travel in a liminal space to access a character. He had to become someone else, embodying an enraged character that according to his admiring friends was “scary” and unrecognizable as the person they identified as Charles. For me, the anecdote he shares resonates with spirituality or at least, the superordinary; for Charles, it did not. He sees spirituality only as related to religious practice. He could not connect his faith (Catholicism) to the transformation he experienced in performing *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) and was therefore not able to interpret his experience from a spiritual or religious perspective.

According to Kwame Gyeke, “brotherhood” is an African cultural value. He writes that, “a practical translation of the idea of brotherhood leads to such social and moral virtues as hospitality, generosity, concern for others, and a communal feeling.”353 Gykeye extends

brotherhood to include all of humanity thereby broadening the term ‘brother’ to become a synonym for human being. Yet, the spirituality Perkins describes while performing *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) and the spirituality I felt while dancing John Africa in *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) underscore a humanity that we experience in our lives beyond the concert stage. Even in the fictional world of stage performance, our commonality as African men pervades and embodies an ancestral cultural value. Brotherhood, in cultural and gender specific terms, emerges not only as a portal for spirituality but also as an African retention.

All in all, performing offers Umfundalai men choices, which I suggest is a constituent of maleness as gendered agency. Welsh’s philosophical emphasis on essence in the development of choreographic work requires the artist to focus on linkages, commonalities, and the modalities that bind people to one another. During the creative process for Umfundalai works like *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) and *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996), dancers are not asked to impersonate another, but rather are given scenarios and asked to imagine themselves in the parallel time and space that the scenario offers. As dancing men, we choose the archetypes or stereotypes to embody as we interpret our roles in the world that the performance creates. Umfundalai requires its men to be conduits of the dance, thereby empowering us to create scripts that emanate from our maleness.

Conversely, the Umfundalai class experience presents a binary discourse. On one hand, the class experience compels dancing men to claim their identities as dancers. As described in the “The Epiphany” section of Chapter 5, Perkins changed the spelling of his name to reflect the transformation he experienced through Welsh’s affirmation. Tyson also speaks fondly of being acknowledged by “Mama Kariamu” in technique classes. On another level, men experience a gendered Umfundalai in technique classes. Tyson endorses Mills’
version of the *Undressing* as it designates a specialized movement sequence for men, while other men of Umfundalai felt a tension with this specification of gendered movement. Chism and Poe, specifically, felt they were denied access to the women’s canon. While Mills’ *machismo* was an attempt to articulate a male way of moving in Umfundalai, Berry’s lived experience was one of confusion; for him it implied a deficiency in his gendered embodiment and an unachieved masculinity he was unaware he lacked (Chapter 6).

Chapter 7 presented a critical pedagogical perspective, illuminating how Mills and I engaged in a tacit mission to gender Umfundalai through what I interpret as an assault on effeminacy in its dance culture. As progenitor, Welsh’s focus has been primarily on the cultural aesthetic qualities that an African artistic source avails in a contemporary context. For different reasons, Mills and I sought to inculcate a qualitative movement system within Umfundalai that accentuates a male essence. In the final analysis, this stylization was an attempt to reify heteronormativity in the representation of male bodies in Umfundalai.

Moreover, the act of taking Umfundalai class requires social interaction unavailable in the act of performing Umfundalai choreography in concert. The class environment is tantamount to the world outside of the studio with its scripts for gendered behavior. The instructor, too, participates and in many ways orchestrates the social interactions of class members. He or she assumes a power to his/her intrapsychic scripts, including gender, on the bodies he/she instructs. Whether this pedagogical act is conscious or unconscious is irrelevant. All in all, the man who dances Umfundalai aims to achieve a movement quality with his body that the instructor renders acceptable, appropriate, and desirable. As with Chism and Poe, dancing men may experience a tension when an instructor’s gendered

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354 J. Gagnon, 140-141.
aesthetic fails to align with his gender performativity or when it stymies his maleness or aesthetic concerns.

Huntu and Homogeneity

As both researcher and subject for this dissertation research, my lived experiences as a male conduit of the Umfundalai tradition include episodes of metaphysical transcendence. In the close description of my first experience dancing Raaahmonaaah! (1989) (Chapter 5), I emphasize the intensity I accessed through Berry’s profane chant before entering the stage space and the movement of Perkins’ hair as we marched in for the processional. As both Chapters 5 and 6 reveal, other Umfundalai men felt affirmed in their spiritual connection with other men as they danced Umfundalai. As Perkins asserts (Chapter 7), the spirituality we reference could only happen through the commonality of being men. Interview data illuminate a spirituality of similitude for a selected group of men in the Umfundalai tradition.

In Chapter 7 I discussed essence as central to Umfundalai philosophy, arguing for the development of a gendered essence within its contemporary African tradition. I based this proposal on Husserl’s definition that posits essence as an organizing modality relating individuals to a category. For Welsh, Umfundalai’s essence is situated in and intrinsically linked to a “gritty, funky, and bluesy” aesthetic characteristic of an African ethos, what Dona Richard suggests is the emotional tone of a people and indicative of an African spirituality. Notably, the essence that Welsh articulates pervade gender distinctions.

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356 Kariamu Welsh, e-mail to C. Kemal Nance

Yet, as African American men, replete with the similitude that distinguishes our maleness, continue to infuse the African dance traditions transmitted in Umfundalai, the culture itself is transforming (Chapter 4), including the emergence of a Umfundalai male essence. I offer that this masculine essence embodies a lived spirituality that not only instantiates our connection to the cosmos but avails an experienced masculinity that is uniquely found in a danced manhood. Chism’s and Perkins’ performance in *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) and Berry’s and my performance in *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) in the 1996 season point to what Jahn refers to as *huntu*, a convergence of time and space in which we simultaneously dance in our maleness and spirituality, eclipsing the reality that surrounds our dancing.358

As a Umfundalai dancing man, I am pleased to see spirituality emerge as a lived experience for other Umfundalai men in that it strengthens my sense of a communal ethos in Umfundalai’s dance culture. At the same time, spirituality as a grounded research finding inspires a question about uniqueness in the panorama of American and African American masculinities. While writing this dissertation, I wondered whether this spirituality of similitude, the awareness that someone with whom a man is connected is experiencing a mutual and concurrent spirituality, might be unique to the “Brothers of the Bah Yáh”?” As researcher, subject, and advocate, I might like to think that the “superordinary”359 experience I had dancing *Raaahmonaaah!* (1989) with Berry and Perkins in 1996 or the spiritual resonance that Chism and Perkins experienced while dancing *Genesis: The Royal Dance of Kings* (1996) were uniquely characteristic of men’s dancing and performing Umfundalai. In the

359 K. Bond and S. Stinson, 55-56.
final analysis, I am unable to suggest such a proposition, as there are other sites of male embodied spirituality. As sports serve as a masculinity justification for men to dance\(^{360}\) and arguably the physical manifestation of dance’s masculine antithesis, it, too, affords a congruent spirituality for its participants.

Drawing on Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow,\(^{361}\) Theresa Miller identifies “being in the zone” as a temporal site for personal transfiguration and revival of communal understanding. She writes,

> In the realm of sport, God-within is perhaps epitomized in the experience of flow. Also experienced by accomplished artists and musicians, flow is described by many athletes as being ‘in the zone’: a state of harmonious union of the body and mind wherein the two work together effortlessly. Leaving the individual with an undeniable feeling that something special has occurred.\(^{362}\)

Miller’s description of “flow” reads like the experiential realm that Umfundalai’s dancing men depict as spiritual or minimally regard as “something special.” Moreover, it is salient that she includes artists in her examples of flow, as dancers are keenly aware of the potential harmony that may exist in mind/body union, what phenomenologist Maxine Sheets-Johnstone would call “moving in concert.”\(^{363}\) In the main, individuals play sports in single-sex teams. However, Umfundalai’s men find themselves in co-ed casts where they are the

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minority. This *habitus* allows gender bonding in dancing men as a specialized team, if you will, indicating a spirituality that Miller identifies in sports.

In light of this research, I conclude that a spirituality of similitude may occur when men move in a space that by some nature of existence offers intensity and a common goal. Performing Umfundalai is a physically and emotionally intense enterprise; it requires more than the ability to execute movement with precision. In and of itself, Umfundalai requires a spiritual presence. While there may be no generally accepted definition of spirituality, several current conceptions are apropos to the plurality of spiritual experiences described the men of Umfundalai. In the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mary MacDonald defines spirituality as

…the concern of human beings with their appropriate relationships to the cosmos. How the cosmic whole is conceived and what is considered appropriate in interacting with it differ according to worldviews of individuals and communities.364

Dona Richards reminds us that an African worldview necessitates spirituality, an awareness of the cosmos.365 She elaborates, “Rhythm, dance, and song are quintessential aspects of the cosmic African universe.”366 Welsh describes Umfundalai’s essence as having a spirituality along with its gritty and funky texture (Chapter 7). Umfundalai choreography requires the dancer to embody the cultural essence that its Pan-African vocabulary articulates and to use rhythm and movement to embody the ancestors through its epic narratives. When shared by


366 D. Richards, 224.
men who dance in the same time and space, this intensity offers a unique spirituality of visceral fervor, solidarity, and maleness.

Bantaba

As men participate in Umfundalai’s dance culture, the masculinities that both pervade our gendered experiences and emerge from the male essence that permeates Umfundalai’s aesthetic system draw on conventional social scripts. These scripts reify masculinities from a larger American and African American society. Even in Umfundalai, with its potential to liberate dancers from the artificial strictures of gender, we dancing men employ them. As discussed in Chapter 7, strength and power are chief among classic masculinities reincarnated as Umfundalai masculine values. As I explore power as an ability to manipulate audience gaze, I allude to its commonality with a trope in American masculine behavior. Men’s pursuit of attention from structured audiences, incidental on-lookers, or as a social goal, underscores masculinities, danced and otherwise. (Perhaps, ‘femininities’ are supported in similar ways.) The aforementioned ‘spirituality of similitude’ addressed in Chapter 7 and redressed earlier in this concluding chapter, alludes to the idea that masculinities (and femininities) are socially constructed and approved modes of behavior whose primary goal is to be acknowledged by members of the community from which they emanate. As I infer from Berry’s description of his foray into Umfundalai dance culture, perhaps masculinities are the modalities through which a man seeks to be “taken seriously” by his community.

In conclusion, I pose the difficult question to myself, “So what? Why discuss masculinities or maleness if they all stem from what can be construed as a universal quest for
strength and power?” A struggle in answering this question inspired me to speculate about the construction of community and the process by which it defines its needs for sustainment or more specifically, the ways in which a community’s needs translate into gendered ethics that dictate how men should be. The title of this section, Bantaba refers to the dancing circle of West Africa and reconstructed in American West African Dance in which the community creates a circle for its members to dance. As Melvin Deal admonished delegates of KanKouran West African Dance Company’s 28th Annual National African Dance and Drum Conference (2011), the dancing circle is an opportunity for individual dance for and with the community. The dance is not self-indulgent but rather an extension of communal expression. Further, the community must approve of the individual expression.

As I use Bantaba as a metaphor for the communal aspects that govern masculinities, the Umfundalai community that Kariamu Welsh built through Black Dance Workshop, Kariamu & Company, and Kariamu & Company: Traditions needed skilled contemporary African dancers, dancers who could access the dimensionality of African dance styles while also achieving movement innovation that supports current and ancient African narratives. As an artist, she needed dancers who could project an Africanist essential being, who could embody African movement styles that reference traditional roots and afford contemporary

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367 Chris Blazina argues that there is a schism between the masculinities or “the way men should be” and their realities. For him, masculinities are myths of Western culture.

368 C. Blazina, xiii.


370 Kariamu Welsh defines dimensionality as the depth or texture of African dance. Similar to the way she describes the essence of Umfundalai in Chapter Seven, she refers to “fuzziness” and “graininess” as evidence of dimensionality. It is a supernatural presence that goes beyond the visual presence.

modalities. The modality to which I refer is her choreography replete with its African informed and often women-centered narratives.

In this light, the men who dance Umfundalai and perform choreography offer Welsh visceral resources for her to actualize these narratives. She uses “palette” to describe Berry’s and my willingness to embody the full gamut of Umfundalai vocabulary. As discussed in Chapter 5, the use of men in Raaahmonaaah! (1989) and Raaahmonaaah! Revisited (2010) tells a holistic narrative of the actual MOVE Event. Other Umfundalai choreography, the Museum Piece (2001) and Anthem (circa 1991), project male bodies in varied human experiences offering audiences a realistic portrayal of discourses as they are played in society. Choreography, in this regard, requires men to dance gendered scripts. The irony is that as maleness emerges from the fissure between men’s actual gender portrayal and scripted gender performativity, some of Umfundalai’s men feel most like men in their gendered performance of these tropes in Umfundalai choreography. As Perkins describes, “I got my ‘dude’ on.” As Berry describes, “I felt strong as hell.”

Umfundalai choreography offers African American masculine discourse a useful paradigm. Umfundalai choreography and the society it aims to replicate need men to fulfill a function; men dance in their maleness to meet the needs of artists’ choreographic visions. In this regard, Umfundalai choreography with its African-centered themes offers the potential for dancing men to actualize masculinity that aligns with his social and cultural core. It avails a construction of maleness which African centered resources that include but are not limited to lived experiences, folklore, visual art, etc. While I contend that McCall’s “cool pose” essentializes White masculinity for African American men, predicking itself on what is inaccessible to us, it explains a tension that African Americans experience in negotiating and
embodying a masculine ideology that Blazina argues is a myth for White men as well. Abby Feber, however, supports a White supremacist construction of Black masculinity based on four premises: (1.) continued emphasis on Black bodies as inherently aggressive, hypersexual and violent; (2.) institutional concern with taming and controlling Black males; (3.) inequality depicted as a product of a deficient Black culture; and (4.) naturalization of White supremacy and White male superiority. While being White and male holds power and African American masculinity is still an unfinished project, “cool pose” explains one dimension of an African American discourse. What could be interpreted as lethargy and insolence among African American men is an embodied reaction to a feeling of powerlessness, a rejection of an unattainable power. Umfundalai choreography, however, offers an embodiment of power that draws on African culture thereby liberating the male dancer from a dependency on White patriarchy for self determination.

Bryant Keith Alexander situates Black masculinity as a cultural performance and offers a good man-bad man paradigm in advocating for double consciousness that Black men must employ to move through American society. Good man represents the socially accepted gender performance, one that works to dismantle White, racist stereotypes about Black people. Bad man, however, is a more authentic portrayal of an African American man’s anger that is not quelled or softened to accommodate a White onlooker. Yet, African American men, he argues, embody one while being completely conscious of the other, much like Perkins’ distinction between “masculine” and “mannish” (Chapter 5). However, while his good man-bad man construct offers a more layered skokian interpretation that in many

ways aligns with Ferber’s White supremacist articulation, Alexander ultimately advocates for an agency that is comparable to the maleness unearthed in this research. He writes:

The contemporary Black male agenda is not to unweave the cultural tapestry that tells the story of our history. It is to reconfigure and offer alternate perceptions to those who view the display, and those who blind themselves in the veil of oppression. … Within this vigorous program of self-identification and determination, the materialization of possibilities is revealed in a nonessentialized fabric of many hues.373

Scholars like Athena Matua, who advocates for progressive Black masculinities that stand up against racism, sexism, and homophobia, and Mark Anthony Neal, who theorizes the *newblackman* as an inclusive masculine archetype that dismantles hegemony for the African American community, conceive a new gendered existence for African American men independent of reliance on Anglo masculine ideology.374, 375 They posit a masculinity that contributes to sustainment of the African American community. As this dissertation research reveals, the actualization of a liberated gender performativity is more problematic than it is possible. In a dance tradition that emerges philosophically from African essence, Mills and I consciously (and possibly unconsciously) reinforced conventional masculinities. However, in spite of our conditioned gender assumptions and practices – our “natural attitudes” as Husserl would put it,376 this study shows that Umfundalai choreography offers a possible way of being for men in which masculinities as social scripts may be refashioned to accommodate a gendered agency, a maleness.

373 Bryant Keith Alexander, *Performing Black Masculinity Race, Culture, and Queer Identity*, (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006), 90.

374 Athena Matua, *Progressive Black Masculinities*, 4-6


All but one “Brother of the Bah Yáh” described feeling virile, strong and powerful when performing Umfundalai. Hence, only one participant expressed a notably different or ‘queer’ orientation to the men’s discourse illuminated in the present study – one in which gender and dance do not intersect, his presence affirms that Umfundalai’s dance culture can support varied male gender constructions and non-constructions, the “nonessentialized fabric of many hues” to which Alexander refers.

I suggest that the masculinities that Matua and Neal envision, the social scripts that meet a need in the African American community, can be actualized in the imagined masculine archetypes of the Umfundalai concert stage. Peter Castor describes a metaphorical dance between fiction and reality in prison culture, arguing that hip hop creates the illusion that criminality is a necessary ingredient for artistic credibility. Because of this illusion, hip hop enthusiasts become involved in crime and ultimately perpetuate the fallacy of the illusion.377 Journalists Natalie Hopkinson and Natalie Y. Moore use a characterization from Erykah Badu’s single “Tyrone” (1997) as an archetype for African American men in hip hop, writing: “When it comes to Tyrone, there is a profound disconnection between perception and reality, but no C-O-N- spiracy. A lack of diversity in media ownership and control contributes to creating a consistent pattern of misrepresentation.”378

Umfundalai choreography can house multiple masculinities and provides fertile ground for the creation of new ones, even progressive Black masculinities and newblackmen. In light of Castor’s research, works like Raaabmonaaah! and Genesis are portals for

377 Peter Castor, Prisons, Race and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century U. S. Literature and Film, 1.

masculinities that dismantle the hegemony that erodes the community in which it exists. Umfundalai choreography, much like the Bantaba, lives up to the expectations of an envisioned community in which strength and power are redefined as the force that dismantles racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Recommendations for Further Research

In the lived experiences I have accumulated in African dance throughout my career, I have observed a disproportionate number of males either performing or taking African dance, compared to their female counterparts in the neo-traditional African dance circuit. In the Greater Philadelphia region as well other African dance communities I have frequented, women predominate in classes. In contrast, men’s participation in the sustainment of African dance traditions is primarily through drumming. This bifurcation of male participation, dancing and drumming, as a background to the American discourse regarding men who dance suggests that gendered scripting among African American men situates drumming as a more masculine project. In my experiences, drummers have been predominantly male. Not only do men socialize around drumming, they often bring their sons to class to drum alongside them. The spirituality of solidarity might be at work as men fraternize around their ability to play; this would be a salient question for future research.

In Umfundalai, Joseph Bryant, master Umfundalai drummer who has served as the lead musician for Kariamu & Company and Kariamu & Company: Traditions and has played for Welsh’s classes since her move to Philadelphia in the late 1980s, started his career in the arts as a dancer. Yet, in all the 25 years that he has been a part of Umfundalai culture, I have only seen his sons and grandsons drum with him. All three generations of Bryant men have
played for K&C concerts, but none of them have joined the ‘Brothers of the Bah Yâh’ on the concert stage.

There could be a myriad of reasons why African American men choose drumming over dancing, including its financial benefits. Aspiring dancing men must pay for dance classes along with their female counterparts and usually represent a minority among the dancers in the class. Aspiring drummers can attend dance classes and drum alongside their teachers for free. This economic disparity has gendered and sexist implications when one considers who is dancing, who is performing, and who gets paid. More important, however, is that drumming generates masculinity in a space designated for dance without requiring its participants to dance. So, what does this mean for the dancing men?

In Chapter 1, I acknowledge the inclusive nature of this dissertation research as a limitation, noting that a study focusing on African American men who study a specific African dance technique prohibits me from making claims about a broader population of African American men who study various dance traditions. Moreover, the nature of this study prohibits me from generalizing to all Umfundalai men. In this regard, a survey would be a helpful tool in integrating an objective voice in understanding the ways maleness is actualized in African dance traditions. (See Appendix B for a draft of a survey developed for this study, but proved to be beyond the scope of implementation.) There is a need for further study that examines maleness for men who pursue all forms of African dance in traditional, contemporary and neo-traditional contexts. What gendered information do the range of dances of Africa offer African American dancing men and what are the lived experiences of men in a range of African dance contexts? From a phenomenological
perspective, illuminating the qualitative range of styles and informants would support the further theorization of essences in African dance.

“Brothers of the Bah Yáh” focuses on constructions of maleness; it was designed to unpack the embodiment of gender construction. Some subjects of this study described experiences in which sexuality was integral to their gender role. In most cases, however, the issue of sexuality vis-à-vis sexual preference appeared only as a result of direct interviewer questioning. At the onset of this project, I argued that the construction of gender did not necessitate an exploration of sexuality and therefore I questioned its relevance. Yet, tangential accounts that intersect dance and sexuality sporadically emerged from the interview data; the applied grounded theory approach (and the recommendation of one of my committee members) required me to at least explore how sexuality orients the men in this study.

While most of the men were reluctant to label their sexuality, only one man described himself as heterosexual. A focus of further study could be the relationship between non-heterosexual men and involvement in Umfundalai. Similar to the questions that haunt Michael Gard’s work with Australian men in the Western canon of modern dance, what do non–heterosexual, African American men receive from the practice of contemporary African dance? Further, while this dissertation aimed to excavate a gender performativity that emanates from the multiplicity of African American male ‘orientations’ present in Umfundalai, future research could examine the relationship, if any, between dancing Umfundalai and men’s enactment of same-sex desire and/or agency in queer identity.
Has Umfundalai facilitated my sexuality? Hmmm. (*Long pause*) I don’t think it did intentionally. No one said, “Step right up and be your gay self and bring it into this realm!” It was through dance that I met a former partner who helped me to develop my sexuality from youth to young adulthood. That was something that happened and helped me come into my gayness.

Sexuality is not an easy thing for me; it was not an altogether easy evolution. If you think about even paying *dobale*, there’s a constant appreciation for the opportunity to be. That means something...you can transcend and ride above all that stuff. … It helps when you are going through issues (*nervous chuckle*) and knowing that the ancestors, or God, care.379

---

379 Harvey Chism, interview by C. Kemal Nance, Boothwyn, PA, June 17, 2012.
REFERENCES


Kirkland, D. “‘We Real Cool’: Toward a Theory of Black Masculine Literacies.” *Reading Research Quarterly* 2009: 278.


TECHNICAL & STAGE CREW

Stage Manager:
Rodrigo Ferraro

Lighting Designer:
Curtis "Phil" Stone

Lighting Design Assistant:
Mary Daschle

Stage Crew:

Lindsay Lehmann
Andrea Navar

Ajaka Perkins
Julia Reiter
Katherine Walker

Kariama & Company 1996 extends a special "Thank you" and debate to the following people who made a significant contribution to the concert's success:

Temple University's African American Studies Department

The Black Student Union of Temple University

The Institute for African Dance Research and Performance

The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts

Philadelphia Dance Alliance

Wito' Amie
Janae Harper
Preston Logan
LaVonne Woods

River Rock Theatre

The Philadelphia Theatre

Philadelphia Dance Alliance

Wito' Amie
Janae Harper
Preston Logan
LaVonne Woods

River Rock Theatre

The Philadelphia Theatre

Friday & Saturday February 16 & 17, 1996
Conwell Dance Theater
Broad & Montgomery Streets
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
8:00 PM

Kariama Welsh-Asante


An Invitation

My space is your space
A moment of intimacy
A glimpse of Soul Power
No declarations! No promises
Of peace and good will on Earth.
That is for the ancestors and the gods
To flash fire and thunder over us
With rain and shame
And snow and lightning
Burning us in our discomfort
Until we are almost killed dead.
This Offering
Is merely
From hands and limbs of flesh
That more
In an ambitious attempt
To understand
The beauty of Creation
And the strength of will.

Kariama Welsh-Asante

and plans to pursue graduate studies in African American Studies after graduation. Mrs. Pettway-Ross extends a special debate to her new husband, Khalil G. Ross.

Marita Revion is a 16-year-old senior at Central High School. She has been dancing for 5 years at Freedom Theatre under tutelage of Patrick Scott Hollos. Her training consists of modern, ballet, African, jazz, and tap. Marita's future plans include going to college and building a career in the music business while making dance an integral part of her life.

Tabatha O. Robinson is now a senior at Temple with a major in Dance. She is the Vice-President and co-founder of the Temple Tap Troupe. Tabatha has recently performed with the Seventh Principle Performance Company, Inc. as a guest artist. After graduation, Tabatha plans to pursue graduate studies in exercise physiology.

Charles Mobolaji Walker, "I want to make a mark that the world will never forget." Philadelphia born, Mobolaji Walker started playing the drums in late 1960's. In 1970, he became the first chief drummer for the Temple University-based company, Seed of Blackness. Some of Mr. Walker's performance credits include the Inner City Dance Ensemble, Dikomen, MoGu Wine Moshin's Band, Byrd Lancaster's Sounds of Newerlo, Afrika Band, and Freedom Theatre's award-winning "Black Nativity."

Clairewa Williams has performed in "Push," "Pocahontas," "Irene," and various performances about Black Church Life. She is currently seeking a Ph. D. in African American Studies at Temple and holds a B.A. in Political Science and a M. P. A. in Public Administration. Mrs. Williams' goals include teaching on a university level and producing theatre that empowers Africans.
RAAAAMONA (1991)

Choreographer & Score: Kanani Welsh Asante
Staging: Yehma Gendoloh Mills
Performer: Sekai Ellison
Music: Baba Joseph Bryant, Charles Beatty Walker
Costume Designer: Kanani Welsh Asante
Lights: David Brown
Dancers: Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Al Bryant, Charise Tiffany Bryant, Malini Dueua, LaTanya Joseph, Monique A. Newton, K. Kemaal Nance, Darryl A. Perkins, Sakhana Pettaway-Ross
RANKAKA African Dance: Yehma Gendoloh Mills
Monique A. Newton
John A. Ati-C. Kemaal Nance

Raaaamona is based on a historical event that will eventually become legendary. Raaaamona is a dance that is particularly close to me and it not only represents my work but it is a story that is autobiographical. I have revisited it now three times, first choreographing it first (for now) and third revision in 1995. It is loosely based on the move protests in May, 1955 in which young people protested for a fair right to a university. I was stuck by the strength, determination and will of Kanani Welsh. Her voice represents the voice of so many women in various modes of conflict, but her voice stood alone for me as the voice of supreme will. It was not the politics of change which I was unfamiliar with at the time that I was exposed to the annual event but Kanani's ability to withstand her voice and her will to live. Chirographically it is a complex work, it relies on the spoken word, poetry, dialogue, live accompaniment and movement. It is a work that I will continue to work on until I see a full performance. Raaaamona is more the Raaaamona in women and not so much the person called Kanani Welsh although she was certainly the inspiration.

Sister Sadie

written and performed by Clarissa Williams

TAN ODUBO (NAME DANCE)

Choreography: Kanani Welsh Asante
Staging: Yehma Gendoloh Mills
Special Guests: C. Kemaal Nance
Music: Baba Joseph Bryant, Charles Beatty Walker
Costume Construction: Nana Kisse

TAN ODUBO House Dance

Born March 8, 1995 at 11:21

Tah Odubo House Dance

Kwame Miranda Parker
Shawné Parker

AFRICA NOW: UNCHAIN YOUR MIND

written and performed by Sekai Atwell-Adoro

IBO'S LANDIN

Choreography: Kanani Welsh Asante
Staging: Yehma Gendoloh Mills
Special Guests: C. Kemaal Nance
Music: Baba Joseph Bryant, Charles Beatty Walker
Costume Construction: Nana Kisse

Dancers: Patina Motsho, Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Al Bryant, Charise Tiffany Bryant, LaTanya Grant, Malini Dueua, Monique A. Newton, Marieta Gevan, Tabatha O. Robinson

The story of Ibo's Landing is a historical event in which 40 Ibo's were taken off a slave ship. As they walked off the ship's plank, they looked around and knew that this land was unfriendly and hostile to them and had nothing good for them in the future. Historians record that there was a mass suicide of forty Ibo's off the coast of South Carolina. Legend states that the blood turned around and walked across the waters back to Africa. I choose to have this film fly, swim, walk, and run back to Africa.

Noonday Motiv

written and performed by Sekai Atwell-Adoro

on her goals with the support of her two persistent children:

Sister Sadie (Deloris Gibson), a performance poet, singer, and songwriter, has performed extensively in Philadelphia, California, Washington D.C., and New York. Presently, he is a head start teacher at New Beginnings Head Start and performs with the Next Breath Collective. One of the highlights of Ms. Kumafo's career was performing at the Steven Bullock Commissionary Ceremony in Johannesburg South Africa.

C. Kemaal Nance (Asst. Dance Master), a native of Chester, Pa., is an Ed. D. student in Dance at Temple University and currently teaches dance at Bryn Mawr College and the New Dance Workshop in Lansdale, Pa. He is an Associate Member of the Seventh Principle Performance Company, Inc. and a newly inducted member of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity.

Carrie Ann Nash enjoys reading, piano, and international travel and has interests in African dance and composition. With a B.A. S. in Physical Science, Ms. Nash is currently seeking a M. S. in Physical Therapy with specialization in Neuro-Science. Her career goal is to include herself in the Development of African-Wholistic Physical Therapy Practice and Curriculum.

Monique A. Newton, a native of Chester, Pa., is a graduate student at Albright College. She is an Associate Member of the Seventh Principle Performance Company, Inc. and is excited about her first performance with Kanani Welsh. Ms. Newton thanks her parents, Esther & Donald Newton, for their continued support.

Derrick B. Perkins is a first year student at Temple University. He is currently working towards attaining a B.F.A. in Dance with a minor in African-American Studies. Understanding and valuing the need for voice and self-actualization, Mr. Perkins plans to pursue a Masters Degree in Social Work and enter the field of dance therapy.

Sakhana Pettaway-Ross has studied Umfundulwini under "Mama Kanani" at the New Freedom Theatre since the age of 12. She is a full-time student of Dance in the McNair Program at Temple University and been contracted at the New Freedom Theatre where she currently dances along with Philecino.

Marine Dueua (Nkiri Belcher) majors in Dance and African-American Studies at Temple. She discovered her love for African Dance through Umfundulwini. Makes dances at Philadelphia and with the Children of Ikaif, a traditional West African Company. She gives all praise to the "Creator" for blessing her with such a beautiful purpose.

LaTanya Grant, a 17-year-old senior at Creative and Performing Arts High School, has been dancing at Freedom Theatre for 5 years where she has trained with some of the finest teachers of Umfundulwini. She enjoyed dancing with members of Kumafo & Company and hopes for everyone takes wing and fly.

Rhonda Hall is Physical Education major with a minor in Dance at Temple. Since the age of 6, Rhonda has been engaged in the arts. She sang at Mt. Sinai Tabernacle Baptist Church at studied dance at the Brinton Lee Dance Studio for eight years.

LaTanya Joseph is a native of New York by way of St. Thomas U.S.V.I. After studying dance at the Harlem School of the Arts, she went on to study and ultimately graduate from the Dance Department at Fordham H., LaGuardia Performing Arts High School. In May, LaTanya will graduating with a B.F.A. at Temple.

Mekia Lankhen is a native of Boston, Mass. After starting her dance training in Philadelphia, the then went on to study at the High School of Performing Arts and then later, the University of the Arts. Mekia currently teaches at the New Freedom Theatre and wishes to further her artistic endeavors by traveling abroad to Africa. This is her first concert with Kumafo & Company.

Zakyntha Joyce Lyons is pursuing a dual degree in Dance and Physical Education - Exercise Science Track at Temple. Her goal is to become a Masters in Physical Therapy and a Doctorate in Dance Education. She currently teaches at the Center for Dance Program at Normtown and can be seen performing with the Progressive Center for Dance and Jazz Dance. Zakynthia stays focused
Intermission
With Peaceful Thoughts and Positive Vibes
(15 minutes)

Awarding of Umfundulu Dance Master Certificate
Yhemna Glendola Mills

Awarding of Umfundulu Dance Teacher Certificate
Candace Hundleby
C. Kemal Nance
Salema Pettaway-Ross

*Certificate Presentations will only be made at Friday evening's performance.

Pause
(2 minutes)

The Upper Room
(Premiere 1996)

Choreography: Kanema Whali-Asante
Music: Sweet Honey & the Rock
Scenery: Melanie Bratcher, Carmen Nash
Dancers: Yhemna Glendola Mills

This work is dedicated to my mentor and teacher Pearl Reynolds who is in the "Upper Room."

Yhemna Glendola Mills
Dance Master

Yhemna Glendola Mills is an assistant professor specializing in the Umfundulu technique in the Department of African-American Studies at Temple University. As an Umfundulu master teacher, Ms. Mills has been teaching in the private, educational, and public institutions of Freedom Theater, The Philadelphia School of Dance, University of the Arts, Swarthmore College and Temple University. In addition, her expertise has been requested for master classes at a variety of professional organization conferences in the field. A principal artist with Kariamu & Company, Akoya Dance, Philadanco II, and Nomo Performance Company.

Ms. Mills is the Associate Director for the Institute for African Dance, Research, and Performance and the Managing Editor of the International Journal of African Dance. Her research to date focuses on the African and African-American aesthetic and dance with an emphasis on the image of dance in literature and popular culture forms. Ms. Mills is also interested in the role, meaning and significance of movement and its forms in black family life.

Baba Joseph Aboaje Bryant, III
Master Drummer

Baba Joseph Aboaje Bryant III studied African drumming and dance under the instruction of such masters as master drummer Osei Abeke of the Ghanaian National Ballet, Sabata Ame, Lawrence Ball, former Aum Alley Dancer, John Williams, and Baba Aboaje Bryant/Dancer Baba Robert Crowder. Baba Joseph is the founder and director of the Baba-Care Afro-American Highlife Band and Cosmos Rock, African Dance & Theater Family Ensamble. Baba is the Master Drummer for the African Studies Department at Temple University, Freedom Theatre, University of Performing Arts and Shire Drummer for Osana Abreake Shone of Ghana, Philadelphia.

Wonderful!
written and performed by Sebasta Kuphethonga
choreographed and performed by Makini Dzusa

The Herrero Women
(funded by the Ford Foundation, 1995-96)

Choreography: Kanema Whali-Asante
Costume Design & Construction: Saida Muhammad
Dramaturgists: Baba Joseph Bryant, Charles Mbojaji Walker
Singers: Stafford Berry, Jr., Melanie Bratcher, LaTanya Joseph, Sabela Kuthimulo, C. Kemal Nance, Carmen Nash, Derryck A. Perkins, Clarice Williams
Dancers: Fatima Abdullah, Ali Bryant, Makini Dzusa, Rhonda Hall, Zakiyah Joyce Lyons, Marika Reynor, Yhemna Glendola Mills, Monique A. Newman, Tasha S. Robinson

The Herrero Women is a contemporary African dance that draws from both German and Namibian traditions in music, dress but the movement vocabulary will stem from the Herrero traditional dances. In Namibia, the women dress in seventeenth century German dress and they continue to wear the German dress long after it was given in Germany. More importantly, after the independence of Namibia, the juxtaposition between the dress of the eighteenth century German culture and the traditions of the Herrero people provides a unique opportunity and challenge to choreograph a dance that deals with transformation and the permeance of traditions.

Drum Selection:
Baba Joseph Bryant
Charles Mbojaji Walker
The COMPANY

FATIMA ABDULLAH has been dancing for 7 years. She has been studying the Unidentified dancer for 4 years with "Miss Karamu." This is her second performance with Karamu & Company. Fatima gives thanks to Allah for her talents and his many blessings.

SEOK AKA ADERO, a native Philadelphian, attends Temple University's School of Communication and Theater. She is the Departmental Administrator of African American Studies at Temple and the Director of the Annual Celebration of Life Festival. An alumna of Freedom Theater, Ms. Adero's performance accomplishments include The Owl Killer, Company Kitchen, Emperors of the blues and her one-woman show, Faces of a Woman.

STAFFORD C. BERRY, Jr. is a native of Chester, Pa. He received his B.F.A. from Temple University in Theatre with minors in Dance and Computer Science. He is the Associate Director of the Seventh Principle Company, Inc. and currently teaches at the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. Berry's choreography was recently added to the archives of The New York Public Library for Performing Arts.

MELANIE BRATCHER, 1997's Miss Langston University is currently seeking a M.F.A. in the African-American Studies Department at Temple. She is a native of Oklahoma City, Glassboro and holds a B.S. in Computer Science. Ms. Bratcher's future goals include opening an African-centered family day care and becoming a well-rounded performer.

All BRYANT, a student at Creative and Performing Arts High School (CAPA) has been dancing since the age of 7. She loves to dance and perform. This is her second performance with Karamu & Company. After completing high school, All plans to attend college while also pursuing dance.

CHARITY TIFFANY BYRER attends the Philadelphia High School for Girls as a proud junior. At the age of 7, she plans to attend Clark Atlanta University. She has been dancing for 10 years, and enjoys to watch other people because of the inspiration. Most of Charity's training has been at the Karamu Center.

ANTHEM (1991)

Choreographer & Poet: Karamu Welsh Asante

Set Design: Yehma Gendola Mills

Music: Ray Charles & Sweet Honey in The Rock

Costumes: A.T.

Sword: Melanie Bratcher

Dancers: Stafford C. Berry, Jr., Malini Dewa, LaToya Joseph, Malaki Landrum, Yehma Gendola Mills, C. Kamal Nance, Monique A. Newton, Derrick A. Perkins, Salena Pettway-Russ

Set Design: A.T.

Yehma Gendola Mills & Salena Pettway-Russ

"A.D.A.", "A.D.A."

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APPENDIX B
AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN IN UMFUNDALAI SURVEY

Age: _____

In what year were you introduced to Umfundalai? _________

Where did you study Umfundalai (institution)? __________

How long have you studied Umfundalai? _____

What is the gender of your dance Umfundalai teacher? If you have had more than one Umfundalai dance teacher, please check the gender of whom you would consider your primary teacher?

☐ Female ☐ Male

Have you ever performed Umfundalai?

☐ No ☐ Yes

Do you study other dance techniques?

☐ No ☐ Yes

Do you study other African dance styles?

☐ No ☐ Yes

Please check which best describes what you most often wear in Umfundalai dance class?

☐ Dabas/Shokatoes ☐ Sweats ☐ Shorts ☐ Lapa/Wrappa

Which term best describes your sexuality?

☐ Bisexual ☐ Heterosexual ☐ Homosexual

Have you ever seen the Kariamu Welsh’s work, Raahmonaaah!? 

☐ No ☐ Yes

Have you ever danced in Kariamu Welsh’s work, Raahmonaaah!? 

☐ No ☐ Yes

Dancing is a ‘man’s’ activity.

☐ I strongly disagree ☐ I disagree ☐ No Comment ☐ I agree ☐ I strongly agree

247
African dance is a ‘man’s’ activity.

☐ I strongly disagree  ☐ I disagree  ☐ No Comment  ☐ I agree  ☐ I strongly agree

African American boys must learn African dance.

☐ I strongly disagree  ☐ I disagree  ☐ No Comment  ☐ I agree  ☐ I strongly agree

If I had a son, I would insist that he have some African dance in his life.

☐ I strongly disagree  ☐ I disagree  ☐ No Comment  ☐ I agree  ☐ I strongly agree

Umfundalai has taught me something about being an African American man.

☐ I strongly disagree  ☐ I disagree  ☐ No Comment  ☐ I agree  ☐ I strongly agree

Umfundalai is female dance culture.

☐ I strongly disagree  ☐ I disagree  ☐ No Comment  ☐ I agree  ☐ I strongly agree

I feel like I have to justify my dancing to my African American male friends.

☐ I strongly disagree  ☐ I disagree  ☐ No Comment  ☐ I agree  ☐ I strongly agree

I feel like I have to justify my dancing to my parents.

☐ I strongly disagree  ☐ I disagree  ☐ No Comment  ☐ I agree  ☐ I strongly agree

In terms of what being a man means to you rate order the following items in terms of importance.

   a. Making Money  
   b. Having Sex  
   c. Dancing  
   d. Having a family  
   e. Spirituality

Please rate the following item in terms of their masculinity.

       1. Dancing
2. Fighting
3. Playing Sports

When in your life are you most aware of your gender?
What inspired you to take Umfundalai?
Describe how you feel when you are dancing?
What are your favorite Umfundalai movements?
Describe when you are/were most aware of gender in Umfundalai?
What has any of your Umfundalai teachers told you about how men dance in Umfundalai?
What do you remember most about Kariamu Welsh’s Raaahmonaah?
Has anyone ever made an assumption about your sexuality because of your dancing? What did he/she say?
When are you most aware of your being a Black man? Describe.
What is the most memorable thing anyone has said to you about your dancing Umfundalai?
Describe a moment in Umfundalai class, rehearsal, or performance that was especially spiritual for you?
Did you dance as a child? What kind of dancing had you done as a child? Were there any other boys with you?
What is one of the most memorable things one of your African American male friends said about your dancing?
What do you get from dancing Umfundalai?
What new thing have you learned about yourself from studying Umfundalai?
Phenomenological Inquiry

Masculinity/Maleness

1. What does masculinity look like? How does it feel?
2. Has there been a time when you were aware of your masculinity? Please describe.
3. When are you most aware of your gender?
4. When are you most aware of your being a Black man? Describe. How do you feel during those moments?

Spirituality

1. Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual person? Describe a moment during which you have experienced your spirituality? Where did it happen? Who were the other people involved? How did they respond to you? What inspired it?
2. Describe how you feel when you are dancing?
3. Is dancing spiritual for you? Describe.

Dance

1. What do you remember about the first time you took a Umfundalai class? What were some messages or statements you said to yourself during that first class?
2. Who was the teacher? Who were the other men in the class?
3. Describe the first time you performed in a Kariamu & Company Concert.
4. What is the most memorable thing anyone has said to you in Umfundalai class?
5. What is the most memorable thing Mama Kariamu has said to you about your dancing?
6. Can you think of any moment in Umfundalai class during which you were particularly aware of your gender? If so, please describe.
7. Have there been any moments in Umfundalai class, rehearsal or performance when you felt especially masculine? Please describe. How did the other dancers respond to you?
8. Have you experienced your spirituality in Umfundalai dance class? In performance? Please describe. Were there any other people? Who were they? Were any of them male? Describe the behavior of the people.

9. Has anyone ever made an assumption about your sexuality because of your dancing? How did you feel? What did you say? What did you do?

10. Have your parents seen you dance on stage? What memorable statement has your mother made about your dancing? Your father?

11. What are your favorite Umfundalai movements? How do you feel when you dance them?

12. Have there been moments in your life when you were keenly aware of your spirituality? Please describe one of those moments. Describe how you felt in those moments?

13. Describe the first time you performed Raaahmonaah! with me?

14. Describe the moments in Umfundalai class, rehearsal, or performance you think are spiritual? Describe the first time it was spiritual for you.

15. Have you experienced a spiritual connection with another person while in Umfundalai dance class, rehearsal, performance? Describe the other person.

16. What did he/she say? What did he/she do? What do you remember hearing?

17. Have you ever seen the dance, Raaahmonaah!? Describe it. What did you remember most about? How did watching it make you feel?

18. Have you ever performed Raaahmonaah!? Describe the first time you performed Raaahmonaah!. How did you feel? Did you feel masculine at anytime during your performance? If so, describe.
Hermeneutic Inquiry

DANCE

1. Tell me about your history in Dance. How is that you became a dancer? How did you come to study Umfundalai?
2. As a performer/teacher/choreographer of African dance, is there anyone in the field whom you admire? Why? Are any of them African American male? How did you come to know him?
3. Did you dance as a child? What kind of dancing had you done as a child? Were there any other boys with you?
4. Have you ever played any sports? Is there a difference in how you feel when you play sports than when you are dancing? Explain the difference.
5. How many of your friends dance? Are any of them male? What do they think about your dancing? Do they come to your performances? What is one of the most memorable things one of your friends said about your dancing?
6. Which do you feel is more masculine, dancing or playing sports? Why?
7. Do you find that some dance forms are more masculine than others? Explain.
8. What message did you receive about boys who dance while growing up? How much of what you learn still resonates with you as an adult?

UMFUNDALAI

1. Have you studied any other dance forms?
2. What do you get from African dance? From Umfundalai?
3. Who introduced you to Umfundalai? Who were your primary teachers?
4. Are you a different person when performing or teaching Umfundalai? If so, describe who you become when dancing? How is that person different from who you are in any other facet of your life?
5. Have you come to learn anything new about yourself when studying Umfundalai? If so, what? Why do you think you have only come to know this through dance?
6. Have you ever used dancing to seize the attention of someone to whom you were sexually attracted? How? What did you do? How do women respond to your dancing?

7. Have you learned any cultural lessons from Umfundalai?

**BEING A BLACK MAN**

2. Define the word, ‘manhood’? What defines your manhood?

3. What role does dance play in your manhood?

4. Have you ever had to justify your dancing to other men? To women? To yourself? In other words, have you had to explain how dancing fits in with your manhood?

5. Were there any times in your childhood when you felt that you were “punished” for being a Black boy? Please describe. How did you know that your treatment was based on your gender and race?

6. In terms of what being a man means to you rate order the following items in terms of importance.
   - a. Making Money
   - b. Having Sex
   - c. Dancing
   - d. Having a family
   - e. Spirituality

7. In your mind, is there a difference in masculine and feminine behavior? Describe each. How did you come to learn the difference? Where would dance fall in your distinction?

8. Does the expression, ‘being cool’ mean anything to you? If so, what does it mean? How did you learn its meaning?

9. How much of ‘being cool’ is part of being a man? Is performing African dance on a concert stage cool? Why or why not?

10. Do you feel that there is a difference in growing up as white or Black man in this country? What is that difference? If so, what should men know about growing up Black?

**Raaahmonaah!**

11. What is it like to dance Raaahmonaah!
12. What about the dance resonates with you?
13. Is dancing Raaahmonaaah! spiritual for you? Describe the aspects of the dance that speak to you?
14. Are there masculine or feminine movements in Raaahmonaaah!?
15. Describe your approach to dancing Raaahmonaaah!. What do you consider when you get into character?