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CARIBBEAN DANCE: "RESISTANCE," COLONIAL DISCOURSE, AND
SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES

STUDYING CARIBBEAN DANCE

The comparative study of African and New World Negro dances presents far more difficulties than does the study of music. For not only are the available data on the dance found in scattered literary descriptions of various occasions on which persons, usually untrained in the study of dance, witnessed ceremonies of one kind or another, but no method has yet been evolved to permit objective study of the dance. What we are reduced to, therefore, are statements indicative of the opinions of those who have witnessed Negro dancing in the New World and have found certain qualities of it that they feel resemble the African background more or less closely (Herskovits 1941: 269).

When Melville Herskovits wrote the above words, the serious study of African-American cultures was just beginning to open a place for itself in the academy. Three years before *The myth of the Negro past* (from which the above quotation is taken) was published, Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell my horse* appeared (1938), following quickly upon the publication of her *Mules and men* (1935). Both these works contained a great deal about African-American dance. Although Herskovits cites *Mules and men* as containing useful insights into African-American dance (1941: 271), he provides no further discussion of Hurston's work. One of the purposes of this paper is to try to understand why this could be.

This review of the literature on African-American dance in the Caribbean¹ focuses on three specific problems. The first concerns the production of a canonized body of knowledge on dance in anthropology. The second has to do with the ways in which this canon has dealt with dance in general, and dance

in the Caribbean in particular. Overarching these concerns is a third, broader set of issues surrounding the ways anthropology creates its objects of study.

The first section deals with the establishment of a canon of theory on dance in the discipline of anthropology, and the exclusion of work by African-American women dancers/anthropologists from that canon. I wish to set the record straight, as it were, on the often neglected or underrated contributions of these African-American women scholars/dancers to the field of "dance anthropology," and to underline their importance in studies of Caribbean dance. The neglect of these writers is traced to the deeper problems in the processes through which anthropology defines its claims to knowledge about peoples and cultures of the world. These processes contribute importantly not only to the exclusion of African-American women dancers and writers from the canon of dance anthropology, but also to the ways dance in the Caribbean is treated in the anthropological literature.

Despite the separate advances made by African-American studies and the anthropological study of dance in the twentieth century, the two fields have not produced any critical confluence, and the study of African-American dance remains much the same as Herskovits found it in the 1940s. My review of the literature on Caribbean dance will demonstrate that the same problems Herskovits noted have led to two or three overlapping approaches. But none of the approaches does much to escape these problems, and they may in fact contribute to increased analytical confusion over the origins, transformations and functions of African-American dance in the Americas as a whole.

The second section examines the works of authors who view Caribbean dance in terms of political resistance to, coercion by, or complicity with some dominant force or hegemonic narrative. I argue that the resistance/complicity and coercion/consent dichotomies are inadequate for the analysis of dance in the Caribbean because of their predication upon western bourgeois liberal constructions of an individuated subject - constructions which may not obtain in the Caribbean and which certainly remain to be demonstrated before they are assumed in any particular case.

The third section considers texts that either directly or indirectly reinscribe a colonial discourse on "African-ness" in their analyses of Caribbean dance, often with reference to a particular stereotype of "the African body," and often by evoking a sense of nostalgia for lost imperial "splendor." I argue that studies of Caribbean dance that fall into either the resistance/complicity or colonial discourse frameworks are rooted in one dominant western discourse wherein things "African" are conflated with things "exotic" or "other." This exoticism is predicated on racist, sexist and heterosexist assumptions and ultimately reinforces relations of power and domination along the lines of gender, race, sexuality, and location in the "first" versus the "third" world.

The fourth section deals with those Caribbean dancers and scholars who attempt to challenge that dominant discourse by means of radically revised historiographies. Here, I return to a reconsideration of the invention of a canon in the anthropology of dance, questioning whether the anthropological study of Caribbean dance can proceed in the context of Eurocentric discourse without subverting the counterhegemonic revisions of Caribbean dancers and dance scholars. And I conclude with a brief review of the writers on Caribbean dance who best provide an account of these counterhegemonic moves without subsuming them under the “hegemonic history” of anthropological discourse (Mohanty 1987: 38).

CONSTRUCTING CANONS IN DANCE ANTHROPOLOGY

Hurston’s early work on African-American dance aside (for reasons which will become apparent later), the “official” anthropological study of dance got underway a good twenty years after Herskovits’s *The myth of the Negro past* was published, with Gertrude Kurath’s germinal essay on “dance ethnology” (1960). Kurath challenged dance scholars to question their aesthetic biases and leveled strong criticisms against those who, like Curt Sachs (1933), unproblematically grounded their histories and ethnologies of dance in racist and ethnocentric stereotypes of non-European dances and peoples. Kurath’s important contribution to the anthropology of dance was to recognize that the traditional dichotomies and trichotomies with which dance scholars had framed their debates – “ethnic” dance versus “art” dance, “folkdance” versus “dance,” “traditional,” “secular,” and “religious” dance, etc. – were part and parcel of a mode of thinking in which art is clearly delineated from life, “everyday” practice from “aesthetic” performance.

As Kurath wrote succinctly, these problems are avoided once both dance and the scholarship on dance are placed within their own social and historical contexts, and problematized as such. Anthropology, therefore, is of singular importance in this corrective to previous research on dance:

Any dichotomy between ethnic dance and art dance dissolves if one regards dance ethnology, not as a description or reproduction of a particular kind of dance, but as an approach toward, and a method of, eliciting the place of dance in human life – in a word, as a branch of anthropology (Kurath 1960: 250).

Much in the same way that Herskovits figured in the development of the field of African-American cultural studies, Kurath spurred on an entire subdiscipline of anthropology. Her insights led other dance researchers to study ballet as a

form of dance peculiar to western culture and not easily decontextualized from it, rather than the “universal” dance language its proponents had claimed it to be (Kealiinohomoku 1983); to search for deep structures of dance across cultures as part of a structuralist semiotic project (Hanna 1979a, 1979b); to contextualize all aspects of dance and movement in terms of culturally specific systems of aesthetics (Kaeppler 1978); and, more generally, to integrate various bodies of anthropological theory in the study of dance cross-culturally (Kealiinohomoku 1972, 1974, 1979; Royce 1977; Spencer 1985).²

What is striking about the work of Kurath and her followers is the lack of acknowledgement given to earlier anthropologists who implicitly and explicitly put forth the idea on which Kurath’s work is founded: that dance can not be decontextualized from the culture of which it is a part, and that categorization of dance as “ethnic,” “folk,” or “art” – what Sally Price (1989: 49) has called “the standard vocabulary of primitivism and savagery” – only makes sense within ethnocentric modes of thinking. Such was the position of Pearl Primus, for example, who wrote, in 1946, that “primitive dance is a misnomer. There is nothing primitive about it” (Primus 1946: 15). Similarly, Katherine Dunham – a student of Herskovits whose work on dance in the Caribbean is only briefly mentioned by him (1941: 270) – demonstrated in her master’s thesis the value of an anthropological approach to dance (Dunham 1936 [1983]). Yet Dunham and Primus do not appear in Kurath’s bibliography, and their contributions have gone unrecognized by dance anthropologists following Kurath.³

Joyce Aschenbrenner’s monograph (1981) on the work of Katherine Dunham is highly suggestive as to why Dunham has been excluded from Kurath’s canon. In addition, Aschenbrenner’s book indirectly helps explain the similar exclusion of Hurston and Primus, and raises serious questions about the discipline of anthropology as a whole. In her book, Aschenbrenner discusses the social and political contexts within which Dunham’s dancing career was established, focusing on the response of dance critics to Dunham as indicative of pervasive racist social conditions. What I want to suggest here is that the critical response to Dunham’s *dancing* helps explain the “critical response” – one of exclusion – to her *scholarship*.

Before its 1944 performance in Boston, a portion of Dunham’s choreographic production entitled *Tropical Revue* was censored for its “immorality” and “sexual explicitness” (Aschenbrenner 1981: 12, 18). Aschenbrenner attributes the censoring to a reaction against the possibility that sexuality might be redefined in ways threatening to the “protestant ethic: [...] what was involved here was not merely a harmless, uninhibited display, but a disciplined approach to a whole new way of viewing the natural and social order, and [the censors’] social categories, as well as that of their cultural leadership, were threatened” (1981: 19).

That Dunham's work confounded notions of "propriety" and "nature" is evident in the critical reception of her dancing throughout her career.⁴ While I will not reproduce Aschenbrenner's analysis here, I wish to highlight certain aspects of it which potentially relate to the reception of Dunham's scholarly work.

Aschenbrenner points out that one of the obstacles facing Dunham's work was the general perception that "black Americans were assumed to be 'natural' performers requiring little or no training" (1981: 34). The link between African Americans and "nature" led to assessments of the cultural production of Dunham and others as somehow rooted in "natural," "primitive" forces. One critic described Dunham's work as "the essence of mysterious, primitive humanity" (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1937, quoted by Aschenbrenner 1981: 43). This "primitive essence" inheres in the African-American body: the performers in Dunham's 1945 *Carib song* "sing and dance with that air of cheerful improvisation that only Negroes can command" (Gibbs 1945: 48, cited by Aschenbrenner 1981: 43).

These kinds of statements on Dunham's dancing figured importantly in assessments of her scholarly endeavors. Aschenbrenner (1981: 53) lists a number of review articles on Dunham's repertoire which underscore the racist assumptions that served to limit the reception of her work: "Partly primitive" (Davis and Cleveland 1941); "Dunham: anthropologist versus vivid theatre personality" (Martin 1940); "Cool scientist or sultry performer?" (Pierre 1947); "Shocking authenticity?" (Kastendieck 1963); "The schoolmarm who glorified leg art" (*Ebony* 1947); "Torridity to anthropology" (*Newsweek* 1941). Aschenbrenner comments: "these seemingly schizoid responses reflected an inability to reconcile elements that appeared to be opposites in [the critics'] worldview." Indeed, the irreconcilability of Dunham's work as both dancer and scholar, I propose, led in part to her exclusion from the canon formed by Kurath.

Dunham's position as a woman, an African-American dancer, and an anthropologist presented further irreconcilable problems for the discipline of anthropology. One of the review titles cited above sums up these problems: "shocking authenticity?" Indeed, Dunham (and Primus and Hurston) confound anthropological notions of "authenticity" by challenging anthropological claims to represent culture from the "native's" point of view (Geertz 1983). A serious problem arises for anthropological attempts at finding an "emic" position from which to speak with authority on "authentic" culture when the "native" her/himself speaks.

At stake in anthropological definitions of "authenticity" and the "native" are claims to objectivity as well as vested interests of power and authorship (Clifford 1983). So long as the native is silent, the anthropologist can "unproblematically" fix the native in time and space, "incarcerating" her/him and

maintaining that silence (Appadurai 1988). Once the native speaks, the anthropological discourse “pronounced above the native’s head” is disrupted (Trinh 1989: 57-8). To maintain its integrity, anthropological discourse buries these interventions by denying their existence or importance.

Michel Foucault terms such buried interventions “subjugated knowledges,” “blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory” (1980: 81-2). The concept is useful to understand how African-American dancers/scholars who speak about African-American cultural expressions are silenced within the discipline. They are constructed as biased participants. Their work is subsumed under the positions of “cool scientist” or “sultry performer,” for example. To occupy both poles of this dichotomy is to be delegitimized out of existence, and thus relegated to a position unworthy of serious consideration by the academy.

Meanwhile, the literature on dance in the Caribbean has been remarkably untouched by the theoretical formulations and nuances of *either* Dunham, Hurston, and Primus *or* Kurath’s group of “dance anthropologists.” This is unfortunate, if only because the diverse theoretical directions in which the anthropological study of dance has gone could push writers on Caribbean dance down alleyways not previously explored, suggesting ways out of the rigidly dichotomized formulations within which they have worked thus far.

CARIBBEAN DANCE AND POLITICAL “RESISTANCE”⁵

Raphael’s (1981) study of Samba schools provides a good example of an approach to dance which focuses on the socio-political structures of domination in which dance education figures prominently. She demonstrates how the interests of the Brazilian state and the white middle class are furthered in the institutional and ideological integration of the Samba schools with elite-defined notions of “popular culture.” A potentially politicized, community-oriented “Black culture” is thus conflated with a depoliticized, elite-serving “popular culture,” watering down any political effect the Samba schools could have in developing Black cultural consciousness.

In contrast, Cohen (1980) provides a description of a dance event among Trinidadian immigrants in England where preparations for Carnival, including dance rehearsals, provide a base for mobilization and political organization. They also are founded upon an idiom of protest against the repressive white majority. Carnival dance provides spaces in which to resist *politically* the racist hegemony of England in the 1980s.

Yet Cohen only vaguely discusses how cultural or aesthetic aspects of the dances may or may not figure in this ritual of boundary display. In much the

same way, Raphael pays little attention to the cultural transmission occurring *within* the schools, the forms this transmission takes, or the content of this transmission. Rather, the Samba schools' location in a network of racial, class and political hierarchies are what interest her. What this amounts to is a neglect of dance itself as a meaningful subject for analysis.

Other scholars emphasize the political roles of Caribbean dance to the exclusion of aesthetics or aesthetic politics. McDaniel's (1986) analysis of the Big Drum dance on Carriacou, unlike Cohen's and Raphael's works, contains detailed information on the form and content of the Big Drum dance. Yet, like Cohen and Raphael, she locates the importance of the dance in the political function it fulfills. She describes the dance as invoking an historical consciousness. This connects the life trajectories of present-day Carriacou residents to a sense of historical community, and thereby maintains cultural identity even in the face of the U.S. invasion of Grenada.

McDaniel gives us little sense, however, of how the dance itself, as a *dance*, does this: her detailed description of the dance event seems to have little relation to her political analysis of the event. The only exception is her analysis of Big Drum song. But here, song is presented as relatively unrelated to dance, as dance is presented as unrelated to political efficacy. Macdonald's (1978) analysis of the Big Drum dance similarly places the event in the context of its role as a symbol of national pride and in "fostering Caribbean nationalism" (Macdonald 1978: 576). Pearse (1978) takes the same approach to the study of Caribbean dance as a whole in historical perspective, arguing that dance has served "to defend and preserve areas of interstitial liberty and to preserve certain elements of the African culture" (Pearse 1978: 630).

There are other examples of studies of Caribbean dance in terms of political resistance, coercion or complicity. In places, both Dobbin's (1986) and Spitzer's (1986) analyses (of the *jombée* dance of Montserrat and *zydeco* in Louisiana, respectively) come close to dislocating the political aspects of the dances from the dances themselves. Guilbault (1985) presents a related analysis of *kwadril* on St. Lucia. She maintains that the transformation of a European *quadrille* into St. Lucian *kwadril* represents a victory of European notions of "order" over other (presumably African) modes of thought. The adoption of *kwadril* by St. Lucian blacks is seen as a means of social promotion which buys into colonial notions of status and organization imposed from above (Guilbault 1985: 33-5; Morrissey 1989: 148 provides a similar analysis).

In this context, Guilbault's analysis is particularly interesting in that her interpretation of *kwadril* is based on a close reading of the dance form itself. She links ideological suppression of "African" modes of thought directly to socio-political mobility and to the movements of the *kwadril* dance in a kind of aesthetic structuralism. Guilbault's conclusions are similar to those drawn by

Raphael: dance acts as a coercive force for maintaining hegemony. This is in contrast to Cohen's and McDaniel's work, for example, where dance is a form of political resistance. While in all of the texts discussed thus far, the contextualization of Caribbean dances in political realities is an important step in furthering the study of Caribbean dance, the resistance/complicity and coercion/consent dichotomies operative in these works raise a whole set of problematic issues.

As many postcolonial scholars have recently pointed out, ideas of resistance and complicity or consent and coercion are intimately bound to emancipatory narratives. And the notion of emancipation, writes Chakrabarty (1989: 225), "though universal in its claim, arises from a body of thought whose immediate background ... is the Enlightenment and its pursuit of 'liberty' and 'freedom.'" Others, not limited to Chakrabarty, have engaged a critique of this and other Enlightenment master narratives to show that, not only are the assumptions of the Enlightenment not necessarily or unproblematically transportable to the non-western world, but they preclude the existence of subjectivity and agency both within and beyond the west (Spivak 1988, Amin 1989). Constructing the subject of emancipatory narrative as either complicitous, accommodating victim or resistive heroine/hero defines the subject of narrative as neither subject nor object, but as the *ground* of debate, the place where the debate on resistance and complicity is inscribed (Mani 1989: 117-8). As Chakrabarty explains for the case of Indian labor history:

Both propositions share one assumption: that workers all over the world, irrespective of their specific cultural pasts, *experience* "capitalist production" in the same way. Since there cannot be any "experience" without a "subject" defining it as such, the propositions end up conferring on working classes in all historical situations a (potentially) uniform, homogenized, extrahistorical subjectivity [Chakrabarty 1989: 223].

In the case of the Caribbean, Mintz and Price have shown the futility of understanding slave actions on a "unilineal gradient from 'accommodation' to 'resistance' to slavery" (Price 1973: 25). "As Mintz reminds us, 'the house slave who poisoned her master's family by putting ground glass in the food had first to become the family cook... and the slaves who plotted armed revolts in the marketplaces had first to produce for the market, and to gain permission to carry their produce there'" (Price 1973: 25, quoting Mintz 1971: 321). The resistance model creates an overly uniform system of agency and struggle, and does not account for the complex negotiations and strategized moves, some of which are necessarily "complicitous" with dominant structures, through which African slaves in the Caribbean, colonized and present day Caribbean peoples, and colonized peoples all over the world have carried out their lives (Price 1990).

The only “true” resistance allowed in this model is complete removal from the systems in which one is always-already complicit. This transcendence is possible, in a romantic sense, only in death; but as Mani (1989) shows, even in the process of *becoming* dead one is always discursively implicated in systems of power and domination.

The approach to Caribbean dance that sees dance in terms of resistance or coercion/complicity thus rests on two problematic assumptions. The first is that dance can be adequately examined in terms of what it *does*, politically; its effect on or role in the surrounding political context is of primary importance in its analysis. Other aspects of dance – its actual form and content, its origins, invention and transformation – are inconsequential to this mode of analysis. The second assumption is that dance can be viewed in terms of dichotomies between complicity and resistance or coercion and consent. These notions are inadequate to explain the slave, colonial or postcolonial situation, and their rootedness in dominant western modes of thinking makes it imperative to question their appropriateness for anthropological investigations.

CARIBBEAN DANCE, THE BODY, AND IMPERIAL NOSTALGIA

A different, but no less problematic, perspective is offered by another group of texts on Caribbean dance, some of which are not at all “scholarly” in the traditional sense. These analyses evoke romantic images of a Caribbean present virtually unchanged from a constructed colonial past. Many of these texts emphasize the supposedly languid, sensual dynamism of Caribbean dance and closely connect that dynamism to a sense of nostalgia for a bygone imperial splendor which never really existed (Rosaldo 1989). Often in these works, the search for “Africanisms” is carried out uncritically, tautologically relying on nostalgic, colonial notions of “African-ness.” Some of these texts tie this sense of nostalgia to a particular construction of the body as erotic.

V.Y. Mudimbe’s (1988) critical study of “Africanism” as a scholarly discipline and system of thought is useful in highlighting aspects of the colonial notions of “African-ness” found in texts on Caribbean dance. Mudimbe analyzes western scholarly constructions of “Africans’ indolence, their unbridled passions, and their cruelty or mental retardation” (Mudimbe 1988: 13), African art as “primitive, simple, childish and nonsensical” (1988: 10), and African systems of thought as necessarily derived from European knowledges (1988: 13-5) to demonstrate how these constructions segue into justifications of colonial expansion and exploitation. What these “ethnocentric epistemologies” do is to propose

... an ideological explanation for forcing Africans into a new historical dimension. They speak about neither Africa nor Africans, but rather justify the process of inventing and conquering a continent and naming its "primitiveness" or "disorder," as well as the subsequent means of its exploitation and methods for its "regeneration" (Mudimbe 1988: 20).

Their real significance is in reifying ideological constructs of "otherness," constructs dependent upon both Eurocentric discourse and colonial expropriation of African resources, minds and bodies (Mudimbe 1988: 8-9, 20, 191-2). Much of the literature I review below is founded upon such epistemological constructions of "African-ness."⁶

One author, for example, attempting to *refute* the idea that Caribbean dance is, by definition, lascivious, does so by asserting that "the hard-living West Indian Negro and his voluptuous, free-loving, rum-drinking, hip-swinging, bosom-bouncing, shoulder-shaking, stomach-rolling creole woman, with rhythm in her thighs, are almost wholly responsible" for fostering these misconceptions (Leaf 1948: 6). According to this author, Caribbean dance isn't inherently sexual; rather, the Caribbean *woman* is, by virtue of her African "blood," and her peculiar kind of female body.

In his notes on dance, J. Antonio Jarvis, writing in the 1940s, refers to a "suggestive, sensual piece with all the abandon of an erotic fury" he once observed, in which "on the man's face was a dream-like mask of some forbidden enjoyment. The woman was impassive and calm, save for her lips. Her loose breasts bounced when she dipped her body" (Jarvis 1944, quoted by Leaf 1948: 145-6). In Jarvis's writing, sexual-eroticism inheres in women's bodies: the man's pleasures from the "buxom lass" and her "loose breasts" are manifest in his sublime countenance. Men are thus constructed as having the spirit to appreciate (or be intoxicated by) women, who appear solely as body.⁷ Dance drops out of the picture, although it is in the discourse *on* dance where these gendered constructions become inscribed in the body.

Lisa Lekis's work on Caribbean dance, while not so blatantly sexist as Leaf's and Jarvis's, nonetheless relies unproblematically on colonial constructions of the African body and African dance. In attempting to explain why Spanish dances "combined" more completely with African forms than did northern European dances (and thus neglecting the instances where northern European dances were adopted by African Americans), Lekis falls into a romanticism of "the improvised dance forms of the Negro" and the "verve and spontaneity" of Spanish dance (Lekis 1956: 33). Her later work (Lekis 1960: 41, 57, 187) similarly makes assumptions about "African" dance based on her observations of African-American dance: African derivation is assumed rather than demonstrated, and the "African" traits that are claimed to exist in African-

American dances come a little too close to colonial constructions of “the African” as naturally athletic, erotic, or in some other way physically “strange.”

All of these works echo colonial writings on slave dance in the Caribbean. Colonial observers note the “severe exercises [the slaves] undergo in their violent and athletic dances,” dances “so far from being Acts of Adoration of God, that they are for the most part mixt with a great deal of Bawdry and Lewdness,” made up of “strange and indecent attitudes”.⁸ The slaves’s dances are “droll indeed; they put themselves into strange postures and shake their hips and great breasts to such a degree that it is impossible to refrain from laughing,” the dances are a “display of unseemly gestures,” of “lascivious attitudes.”⁹

Some colonial observations of African and African slave dance are less blatantly implicated in racist notions of “African-ness;” yet they, too, rest on epistemological foundations built on notions of “natural” racial characteristics. Richard Jobson, writing on dances he observed in the Gambia River region in the 1620s, writes of Africans: “there is without doubt no people on earth more naturally affected to the sound of musicke than these people” (quoted in Southern 1983b: 1). The conception of Africans’ musical ability as “natural” is one extant today, and the various meanings attached to the category of the “natural” in this context continue to remain problematic for persons engaged in struggles against racism, sexism and heterosexism.

John Barbot, another observer of African dance writing in the early 1700s, remarked upon its “abundance of lascivious gestures” (quoted by Emery 1988: 3). George Pinckard, in the early 1800s, writes this of slave dance aboard a slave ship:

In dancing they scarcely moved their feet, but threw about their arms, and twisted and writhed their bodies into a multitude of disgusting and indecent attitudes. Their song was a wild yell, devoid of all softness and harmony, and loudly chanted in harsh monotony (Pinckard 1816: vol.1, 102-3; quoted by Emery 1988: 11).

Moreau de St. Méry’s theory linking dance to climate similarly constructed the African body as alien and bizarre, affected as it was by the alien and bizarre climate of the “Dark Continent” itself:

The Negroes of the Gold Coast, warlike, blood thirsty, accustomed to human sacrifice, know only dances that are ferocious like themselves, while the Congolese, the Senegalese and other African shepherds and farmers, enjoy dancing as relaxation, as a source of sensual pleasures (Moreau de St. Méry 1796: 43).

The link between climate, mode of production, personality and dance proposed by Moreau de St. Méry fits neatly into his conception of Africans as tireless: “no matter how tired [“a negro”] may be from his [sic] work, [“he”] always

finds the strength to dance and even to travel several leagues to satisfy his passion" (Moreau de St. Méry 1796: 43). Again, the tireless African body is intimately bound up in notions of "passion" and "sensuality."

Père Labat's 1724 account of slave dance fits well the pattern traced out here. In describing a *calenda* dance, Labat states: "it can be readily seen by this abridged description to what degree this dance is contrary to all modesty" (quoted by Emery 1988: 22). The continuity from this colonial discourse to colonial and postcolonial writings on dance in the twentieth century is striking.¹⁰ Leaf's and Lekis's work aside, as late as 1939 one commentator remarked:

Notwithstanding all that the European landowners and upper classes have done for the blacks by methods of education and gradual civilisation, there remains yet much to be desired to alienate them from the natural savage instincts which they inherit from their forefathers (Ormsby Marshall 1939: 287).

The continuity between colonial and contemporary discourse on dance is also effected through an exoticization of African Americans in the scholarship specifically concerned with African music and dance and their manifestations in the Americas (Waterman 1967, Roberts 1972). Following Herskovits's (and Boas's) imperative to collect as much detailed data as possible, these works intend to provide the evidence with which scholars like Lekis can support their arguments for "Africanisms" in the Americas. Of the two texts cited above, Waterman's is more critical of hasty assumptions about African music. Roberts suggests that much of the literature on Caribbean dance concerned with "Africanisms" (Waterman 1967: 3) relies on colonial constructions of "African-ness". But he, too, comes close to falling into this same way of thinking about African music, and in quite a surprising way. He links his analysis of African music to African contact with Islam - "African-ness" in music is understood in terms of derivations from (Robert's construction of) the Islamic world. The discourse of "Africanism" invoked here is intimately connected to the discourse of "Orientalism" (Said 1978, especially 46-8 where he notes Henry Kissinger's conflation of "Africa" and the "Orient").

Finally, even very recent scholarship on Caribbean dance falls into colonial ways of thinking about "African-ness" (Gallo 1978, Szwed and Marks 1988). Szwed and Marks's (1988) article on "the Afro-American transformation of European set dances and dance suites" provides a useful review of some of the more recent literature on Caribbean dance and recordings of Caribbean music. One of their main points about the transformation of European dances into African-American ones, however, is founded upon the same kind of notion of "African-ness" evidenced by the colonial writers. In discussing the *quadrille* on Guadeloupe, they write:

It appears that throughout the Caribbean the last dance of a set is typically a local form. Whether this indicates the chronological order of the appearance of each dance in the culture... or is another illustration of the Afro-American performance style of turning "European" performances into "Afro-American" ones as they progress, remains to be seen (Szwed and Marks 1988: 30).

Neither of these propositions is necessary to explain the variability of the last figure in Guadeloupean *quadrille*. Szwed and Marks's uncritical use of a singularly defined "Afro-American performance style" echoes colonial writings on African and African-American dance, with the same implicit racist underpinnings. The literature available on European set dances of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries provides a solution to the question Szwed and Marks leave open to two equally unsatisfactory answers. One author, for example, describes the development of different *quadrilles* in France in the early 1800s, noting that "the fifth or final figure has been danced in many ways" (Richardson 1960: 61). Other authors (Hilton 1981: chs. 1, 3; Hertz 1957: vol.2) spend a great deal of time discussing the variations in the fifth figures of even earlier *quadrilles*. Thus, Szwed and Marks' uncritical reliance on (colonial) notions of "African-ness" is not necessary to explain the variation in the fifth figure of Caribbean *quadrilles*.

CARIBBEAN DANCE AND SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES

The authors whose works I examine in this section are fully aware of the processes of devaluation and delegitimation involved in the construction of Caribbean dance as "folkdance." Perhaps because many of them are Caribbean dancers or scholars themselves the stakes in challenging these processes are higher, and the need to deconstruct the colonial discourse on Caribbean dance more immediate. Their projects confront western biases toward dances defined as "folk" and, in so doing, adopt a decidedly and consciously political stance toward the study of dance. Because of these authors' constant strategic positioning of themselves and their subject matter, at times their work seems to contribute to the conceptual muddles surrounding notions of resistance and complicity, exoticization, and imperial nostalgia discussed above.

This is especially evident where some of these authors attempt to define their projects in terms of cultural resistance. The resistance involved here, however, is not one conceptualized in vulgar political terms of a dichotomy between resistance and complicity. Rather, it involves the production of correctives to previous writing and thinking on Caribbean and African dance. These correctives are then rewritten as historical narrative, a revision which provides

a direct challenge to the hegemonic histories of colonial and imperialist discourse. The new historical narrative presents itself as a system of subjugated knowledges (Foucault 1980) now coming to the surface to create an alternative, subversive discursive space.

Pearl Primus's work is an excellent example of a critique subjugated by dominant discourse. Her article on African dance (1946), written contemporaneously with Leaf's and Jarvis's texts, begins with an attack on the notion of "primitive" dance: "Primitive dance is a misnomer. There is nothing primitive about it" (Primus 1946: 15). She goes on to challenge the perception of African dances as erotic, wild, unstructured, and formless. She concludes by extolling African dances as "art" in their own right. While this could be seen as a slip toward glorification of an ontological "African dance" in the terms of the dominant culture (with exoticization not far behind), the work of another author helps put this piece in perspective.

Writing on the "African roots" of African-American music, Nketia (1979) concedes that, when seen from an African perspective, few "Africanisms" can truly be said to exist, except perhaps fragmentarily, in the Americas. But despite this acknowledgement, he argues that the *idea* of "Africanisms" in the Americas is of utmost political and cultural significance:

From the point of view of the Americas, [...] it appears that the primary value of what exists in Africa is that it provides the basis for the development of tradition, for exploring new directions [...](Nketia 1979: 17).

Primus' acceptance of the category "art" can thus be seen as a political move toward legitimating the subjugated history of African dance, and toward bringing that claim of legitimacy to bear on western scholarship on dance, and on dance itself.

Cheryl Ryman is similarly involved in a project of legitimation. Dance for Ryman figures importantly in the development of historical and national consciousness, and her article on Jamaican dance (Ryman 1980), published in *Jamaica Journal* and thus read by *Jamaicans*, represents an effort to bring that consciousness to a Jamaican readership. On the kind of colonial constructions discussed above, she writes:

... no Jamaican should perpetuate, even through ignorance, the exaggerated, sensationalist attitudes directed toward our African heritage. This is one legacy of the colonial experience which must be shed (Ryman 1980: 2).

Misguided projection of our heritage, either for entertainment or, what is worse, for what is purported to be serious documentation, is not only unnecessary, but belittles our cultural identity. [...] We run a very real risk [...] that through self-perpetuated ignorance, we will

stand rootless and ornamental, waiving a banner of Jamaican culture - ORIGINS UNKNOWN (Ryman 1980: 3).

A certain tension seems to exist between the writings of Ryman and other contemporary Jamaican dancers and commentators on dance, in particular those concerned with articulating a Caribbean dance aesthetic (Nettleford 1968, 1985; Barnett 1982; see also Rohlehr 1980). These writers, particularly Nettleford, challenge western notions of authenticity which both deny Caribbean dance the status of "art" and label any attempt to bring Caribbean dance into the arena of stage performance a "corruption" of "authentic" (folk)dance (Nettleford 1968: 129). The process of challenging these notions of legitimacy through experimentation with Caribbean dance forms and their realization on stage is, for Nettleford, a process of "artistic discovery" which is simultaneously an act of liberation (Nettleford 1985: ch.1).

Nettleford's National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica follows from a tradition of Caribbean dancers' and dance companies' experimentation with Caribbean dance, from Beryl McBurnie and the Little Carib Group of Trinidad, to Ivy Baxter's Dance Group and Eddy Thomas's Dance Workshop/Jamaica Dance Theatre. The Caribbean dances with which these dancers have worked have been "extended, distorted, recombined and added to" to create original artistic creations which speak to the majority of Caribbean people (Barnett 1982: 86). For these dancers, herein lies the revolutionary potential of dance as a nonverbal communicator of a message of liberation founded in struggle (Nettleford 1985: 19).

The tension with Ryman's work remains. On the one hand, Ryman seems to suggest that experimentation with Jamaican dance forms might slide into "sensationalist attitudes" toward Jamaican culture; what is needed instead is careful research. On the other, Ryman, with her call for research, makes a bid for the reification of the "authenticity" of Caribbean dance forms. As Nettleford points out, however, when one is dealing with Caribbean cultures, formed by genocide, slavery and exploitation, no one can claim "authenticity" for anything (Nettleford 1968: 129).

For the most part, such notions of authenticity are avoided by *some* scholars studying Caribbean dance. Spitzer's (1986) analysis of *zydeco* in rural Louisiana carefully articulates historical documentation on the origins of *zydeco* music and dance with ethnographic accounts of performances today, in the context of the political negotiation of histories in forming regional identities. Roseman's (1986) book on music and dance in the French Antilles from 1635 to 1901 examines, practically decade by decade, the forms and functions of dances and musics in relation to historical events, social realities and political change. Dobbin's (1986) work on the *jombée* dance of Montserrat similarly locates form and

function of the dance in sociopolitical realities, although his uncritical assessment of the “African-derived” religious aspects of the dance requires careful problematization.

Bilby’s (1985) work on Caribbean music and Lafontaine’s (1982, 1983) on music and dance in Guadeloupe carefully avoid hasty conclusions about African derivations, and both firmly locate their accounts of music and dance in the context of historical struggle – Bilby in the contemporary arena, Lafontaine more historically. Both are sympathetic to the projects of people like Nettleford who are engaged in the redefinition of Caribbean dance in the articulation of a Caribbean political aesthetic.

CONCLUSION

I began this essay with a call for a partnership between African-American studies and the anthropology of dance. Kurath’s important contribution to the anthropological study of dance was her recognition that all dance must be studied in its social, cultural, political and historical contexts. No dance should be separated from the culture of which it is a part for the purposes of analysis. Ballet, for example, should not be seen as an aesthetic event universally generalizable to all other cultures. The false distinctions between “ethnic” dance and “art” dance dissolve: *all* dance is “ethnic,” just as all “common sense” is “local” (Geertz 1983). Few of the works on Caribbean dance take this into account. Dance is conceptualized as “folkdance” or “ethnic dance” as distinct from “Dance,” that is, “dance as ‘we’ commonsensically know it in the west.”

The conceptualization of Caribbean dance as “folkdance” leads to two interconnected ways of discussing it. On the one hand, dance is seen in terms of political resistance, complicity, or coercion. In the resistance framework, anthropological onlookers cheer as “native” dance triumphs over western imperialism and capitalist domination by virtue of its “authenticity.” Or the anthropologist sings an elegy for Caribbean dance forever “tainted” by dominant political economic structures. On the other hand, dance is seen through colonial eyes; the anthropologist gawks at the strange and unusual, sensual and exotic dances of the “native.” The anthropologist is again buying into notions of “authenticity” in the quest for something “different” from and “untouched” by western multinational capitalism. Both poles of debate rest on notions of authenticity constructed out of an idea of the unknowable “other.” Both thus return to the same conceptualizations of “folkdance” with which they began.

Can there be, then, a scholarship on Caribbean dance critical of notions of resistance and complicity, critical of assumptions on African origins which reinscribe colonial discourses, and sympathetic toward the strategic negotiation

of dances and their histories by Caribbean dancers engaged in liberation struggles? Aside from the small number of books and articles just discussed, the study of Caribbean dance has not escaped its colonial heritage in most twentieth-century scholarship. Perhaps we could qualify Herskovits's statement that previous research on dance in the Caribbean is "indicative of the opinions of those who have witnessed Negro dancing in the New World." This research is indicative not of individual opinions and motivations so much as of a general mode of thought along the lines of Foucault's *episteme*, wherein during the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, western preoccupations with naming and ordering gave way to hierarchical systems of naturalized difference (Foucault 1970: 206-8). In the earlier epistemological field,

... it was of course necessary, *de facto*, to share the normal functions with the non-normal; thus a pathological psychology was accepted side by side with a normal psychology, but forming as it were an inverted image of it...; in the same way, a pathology of societies (Durkheim) and of irrational and quasi-morbid forms of belief (Levy-Bruhl, Blondel) was also accepted (Foucault 1970: 360).

With the turn of the century, and the work of Freud, Foucault argues, the pathological and irrational are more completely incorporated into newly emerging normative systemic epistemologies, wherein "each area provided its own coherence and its own validity" (Foucault 1970: 361). This epistemic shift is, however, incomplete. As far as discourse on Africa is concerned, the "expression of a will to truth" implicit in earlier epistemological fields "has been questioned only recently" (Mudimbe 1988: 26). The case appears to be much the same for the discourse on Caribbean dance.

Approaches to the study of Caribbean dance founded in notions of political resistance and its permutations or in nostalgic colonial discourse on "African-ness" are both parts of a greater whole: a system of thought overly concerned with demonstrating the authenticity of things "native," which in fact conflates the categories "authentic" and "native," and, in so doing, creates an "other" subject to "scientific" scrutiny and dissection. To escape the circularity of this mode of thought, we should seriously consider the implications of Nettleford's assertion that "authenticity" is a concept not applicable in the Caribbean (or anywhere) - especially in the study of African-American dance.

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NOTES

1. Other reviews of the literature on Caribbean dance are Szwed and Marks 1988 and Thompson 1979. In this paper, I use a broad definition of "the Caribbean," including Caribbean immigrant communities and African-American communities in parts of the southern U.S. Due to space and language constraints, I have not included the tremendous scholarship in both Spanish and English on dance in the Hispanic Caribbean. Furthermore, the history of scholarship on dance in the Hispanic Caribbean is, I think, significantly different from that on dance in the rest of the Caribbean. This is mainly because of a stronger and longer tradition of non-U.S. scholars studying dance in these islands, and of a decreased impact of American anthropology in these studies. I have included as an appendix a listing of sources on dance in the Hispanic Caribbean.

2. Paul Spencer (1985) provides the most complete overview of the different trends in the anthropology of dance along theoretical lines, from structural-functionalist approaches, to Turnerian ritual process approaches, to Malinowskian psychological, Geertzian symbolic and, finally, structuralist approaches. Like Hanna, Kaeppeler and Kealiinohomoku, Spencer's work leads up to a favorable assessment of a structuralist framework in the analysis of dance as a language.

3. I would like to thank Prof. Jim Gibbs for pointing this out to me, and for suggesting Aschenbrenner's monograph as an important source. Also of interest here is the publishing history of Dunham's and Hurston's works. Dunham's M.A. thesis was not published until 1983; Hurston's *Tell my horse* was published first in 1938. Its copyright was renewed in 1967, and it was not reprinted until 1983.

4. But this is not to suggest that critical reception of Dunham's work was *uniformly* racist, or that positive evaluations did not exist. Aschenbrenner (1981) points out that on numerous occasions, by the mid-1950s, critics were much more favorable to Dunham's project, and that at many earlier performances audiences also responded favorably to Dunham's programs.

5. The categories I employ to present my sources are my own constructions. They function in my text as a useful organizing principle in maintaining the flow of the argument I present below.

6. Sally Price (1989) notes with the following quotation E.H. Gombrich's contribution to racist stereotyping of Africans as "childish":

Negroes in Africa are sometimes as vague as little children about what is picture and what is real ... they even believe that certain animals are related to them in some fairy-tale manner ... [they] live in a kind of dream world ... It is very much as if children played at pirates or detectives till they no longer knew where play-acting ended and reality began. But with the children there is always the grown-up world about them, the people who tell them, "Don't be so noisy", or "It is nearly bed-time". For the savage there is no such other world to spoil the illusion (Gombrich 1966, quoted by S. Price 1989: 125).

For more on these stereotypes and the invention of "Africa" and "African-ness," see Milbury-Steen 1981: part 1; Drake 1987: chs.1 and 2; and Miller 1985.

7. James Clifford discusses the political and economic relations behind such constructions of non-western bodies as relying on an aesthetic of "modern primitivism" that changed the boundaries

between the western categories "primitive art" and "ethnographic specimen" (Clifford 1988: 197-201).

8. These quotations are from (in order): Stewart 1808: 263; Sloan 1707-25: vol.1, p.vi; and Phillipo 1843: 242. All are cited by Nettleford 1985: 17-8.

9. These quotations are from (in order): Marsden 1788: 33-4; Kelly 1838: 21; and Gardner 1873: 184. Again, all are cited by Nettleford 1985: 18.

10. Several books providing quotations from colonial sources which are not discussed in this paper are: Southern 1983a, 1983b, Emery 1988, Epstein 1977, Roseman 1986 and Hastings 1976. Of these books, Emery 1988 and Southern 1983a are most prone to the kind of assumptions discussed in this section; the others are mostly concerned with documentary history. Roseman 1986 provides a description of dance and music in the French Antilles broken down along military, religious, social and political functions. Epstein provides a similarly detailed and clearly organized account of music and dance among African Americans, mostly in the U.S. Hastings 1976 is a translation of Moreau de St. Méry's 1796 article on dance in the West Indies.

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APPENDIX: SOME SOURCES ON DANCE IN THE HISPANIC CARIBBEAN
(see n.1 above)

In addition to the sources listed below, two journals, *Latin American Literature and Arts* and *Latin American Music Review*, frequently contain articles on dance in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. On Cuban dance, and on situating the study of dance in the Hispanic Caribbean more generally, see especially the work of Daniel and Ortiz below. On Puerto Rico, refer to the special issues of *Revista/Review Interamericana* on Latin American music and dance (1978/1979, 8(4) and 9(1), articles listed individually below). Comparatively little is written on dance in the Dominican Republic, but see Lizardo 1979 below.

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