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**The Black Dancing Body: An Artistic Measure as a Cultural
Protest**

A Case Study Dancing in Blackness 2018 by Halifu Osumare

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Master in Literature and
Interdisciplinary Approaches**

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beloved parents who support me during my journey

To my brother and sister

Many thanks and appreciations go to my best Friends Latroch Ikram & Gaafour Zahra Ines for their support and encouragements, to all my friends with no exceptions.

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To all the artists especially dancers and choreographers

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First, I thank God for giving me the strength and patient to finish this work

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Abstract

Dance has been a significant part of African Americans life; it helped them express their emotions as well as their thoughts and ideas, for that reason this dissertation attempts to study the role of African American Dance as a tool of cultural protest. It aims to explain the use of Black Dance as a way of Black cultural protest against the racial segregation in the United States. “Dancing in Blackness” is the selected narrative for the literary analysis in which the author Halifu Osumare points at the importance of this art form in the construction of identity and the performance of the Black heritage on stages by using physical expressions and dance moves. She illustrates the struggle of Black artists especially dancers for opposing the stereotypes and the racial laws using dance shows and choreographies that portray the pain of Black people who couldn’t use their voices to fight such cruelty at the same time to impose their African cultures and existence in the new world. Finally, it ends to create a strong link between arts and sociopolitical movements.

Key words: African American Dance, Black cultural protest, Black political movements.

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General introduction

Dance has been my vehicle. Dance has been my language, my strength....Dance has been my freedom and my world. It has enabled me to go around, bore through, batter down or ignore visible social and economic walls. Dance is my medicine. The scream eases for a while the terrible frustration common to all human beings who, because of race, creed or color, are invisible. Dance is the first with which I fight the sickening ignorance of prejudice. It is the veiled contempt I feel for those who patronize with false smiles, handouts, empty promises, insincere compliments.... I am able to dance out my anger and my tears-! Dance not to entertain, but to help people better understand each other

(Pearl Primus)

African-Americans in the United States went through hard conditions of living for long centuries and decades due to the White's treatment to them as inhuman, savage, aggressive and dangerous, which made the situation turn to be a racial issue, as a result, this mistreatment provoked discrimination and segregation between the two races. African-Americans needed a way to defend themselves, but instead of using the violent way, they chose to fight it with more intellectuality and cultural weapons, so it gave a big chance to the majority of them to be educated and have an artistic vision, which made them leave their print on the American culture.

Those artists used the most important art which is literature painting and music to make their names enter history. They wrote their own fiction and non-fiction stories to have an image of their lives for the coming generations, they narrated about the paths they had to take to achieve the success during the inequality and the injustice of that time. Using all kinds of arts, Black people succeeded to show their intellectuality. Black artists in the United States were very clever to take this weapon for defending themselves; they expressed their anger by going on stages showing the pride of the black race and its aesthetic, honoring the heritage they took from their ancestors, and all that for the purpose to prove their aim, and in this case Dance was used as a non-verbal expression. Among all different arts, Dance played a significant role during that era because it was the most visual art that made the audiences decipher the hidden story behind the performance or the choreography, and in which the

dancer portrayed all the other arts using physical movements that carried a lot of meanings and ideas. Besides, those dancers and choreographers had a mission to talk to the spirituals and souls of Black people who did not have the ability to show their sorrow caused by the White man's marginalization and prejudice, they tried to heal the scares of the mental abuse left on their memories and souvenirs.

The aim of this research is focused on the concept of the use of a physical art which is Dance as a cultural revolutionary protest weapon against the White man's discrimination, in Halifu Osumare's autobiography "Dancing in Blackness", in which she witnessed and lived in the era of the racial segregation as a young female dancer who wanted to oppose this prejudice by her creative dance choreographies. To explore this issue, the following questions should be answered:

- Did dance as an artistic genre really succeed to be a way of protest?
- How did African Americans show their Black pride on stage?

I hypothesized that the author, as being a dancer herself expressed the Black heritage in different performances using dance as a cultural practice to show the intellectual side of a Black young woman, in addition, this dancer and choreographer had a big impact on other dancers, she proved that the Black body can participate in protesting against the social diversity and that dance is a weapon in the revolutionary race struggle.

This research is based on a primary source which is "Dancing in Blackness 2018", the secondary sources are books collected from libraries, and with interviewing the author "Halifu Osumare" who helped with providing extra information. Also other sources are a collection of data gathered from the internet. This work is divided into three chapters; the first chapter describes the development and the roots of African American Dance styles during many decades, the second one provides us with all definitions of the concept that combined Black dance and social movements in America. The third chapter represents the plot summary of the story and how truly "Dancing in Blackness" is a manifestation of showing Black identity and a way of protest, it includes also all information about the author and the factors that helped her reach her success.

**Chapter One: Black
Dance
An overview**

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I. Chapter One: Black Dance: An Overview

1. Introduction

Back in Africa in 1600, dance has been an integral part of daily life, the African tribes danced for special occasions such as birth, marriage, and even funerals. Yet, during bandage, it helped the slaves connect with their homeland keeping their culture and tradition alive. In this chapter, the concept of the African American dance and its relation with the African important traditions will be explained; also, the origins of all dances will be tackled. Besides, the main discussion will be about the development of the several styles and types of dance, which were enrolled from early ages until the modern ones, and how the White man reacted to that practice; did he allow or ban it?

2. Defining dance

Dance is the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a giving space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or an emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself. It is a transient mode of expression performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space. The dance occurs through purposefully selected rhythmic movements, the resulting phenomenon is recognized as “Dance” by both the performer and the observing members of a given group. (Mackrell)

According to the ballet master John Weaver, dance is an elegant and regular movement, harmoniously composed of beautiful attitudes and contrasted graceful posture of the body. For him, it was a significant number of gestures due to the story not being expressed in any spoken form. Weaver’s description reflects very clearly the kind of dignified and courtly movement that characterized the dance of his time, with its highly formalized aesthetics and lack of forceful emotion. (Weaver 5)

A universal definition of dance must return to the fundamental principle that dance is an art form or activity that utilizes the body and the range of movement of which the body is capable. Unlike the movements performed in everyday living, dance movements are not directly related to work, travel, or survival. Dance may be made up of movements associated with these activities, as in the work dances common to many cultures, and it may even accompany such activities. It involves some extra qualities such as self-expression, aesthetic pleasure, and entertainment. (Mackrell)

3. What is African-American (Black) Dance?

Black dance is a language; it is an expression that emerges from a community, it is also about the individual and their creative identity. (Brown)

African-American dance served some of the same purposes as traditional dances in western and central African cultures on both continents, it is a source of energy, joy, and inspiration, a spiritual antidote to oppression and a way to lighten work, teach social values and strengthen institutions. It teaches the unity of mind and body, and regenerate mental and physical power. (Malone 24)

For Africans, dance was an expression of immediate experience; they danced in celebrations, during marriages, in preparation for war, and to ensure a good hunt. Later, improvisation was highly important in dancing too, because the use of it had to do with the African aesthetic of encouraging freedom and exploration. The main purpose was to extend traditions without straying too far because it was a mean of communication and gesture constituted a language, it could address religious, social issues, express gratitude and friendship. (Knowles 22)

4. Dance and ethnicity

Most of the African ethnic groups were known as people who share marks of identity such as language, nation, and ancestry. However, they never forgot their way of celebration and made dance one of the ways that helped in the construction of identity. Even African American artists never denied their roots, they always brought their black pride in all their shows and performances, but with the racial segregation, these dancers didn't have a chance to join national dance schools and companies, they were told that the Black body is "not right" for ballet and other dance forms, because black is not beautiful, and their appearances are not suitable for these white stages, and an African American with a "nappy", "frizzy" hair and big nose will never have a chance to step on stage near a white dancer, that when more ethnicity showed, because the blacks wanted to break the stereotypes, and develop their skills to be better dancers, also to belong to every company they wanted to. Wideman-Davis¹ agreed, explaining: "Every dance job I've had in a ballet company, I felt like my body was being disciplined to fit within what the white gaze was seen as valuable». This ethnic diversity

¹ **Thaddeus Davis** is the Co-Artistic Director of Wideman/Davis Dance and is on faculty as an Assistant Professor at The University of South Carolina

caused a racial issue, so each race built their separate dance companies and schools, they made more efforts to compete on stages, bringing new original dance moves to amuse their audiences. (Rebekah et al 90)

5. Dance and Race

Race goes by the meaning of the “othering” people of color. White people used it to divide their whiteness from other colors of race, and put themselves on top of all other races, which gave them an opportunity during slavery to use the black body as a property that can be bought and sold, forced to labor and subjugated by the masters. However, after slavery was abolished, black people wanted to reinforce themselves and recreate their identity, to free the black body from the dehumanization caused by the white race, they went from "Black" or "Negro" to African-American, they included it in social politics, culture, and arts, but the term "Black Dance" was invented by the Whites and their critics, thus African-Americans, made it a category of performance which aimed to give more visibility to the black color on stages, then they made the word “Black” a mark of identity.

The Whites needed more satisfaction of showing their supremacy, when many laws that have encouraged racism were legislated in some states, especially in the North, such as the Jim Crow Laws². These laws facilitated the practice of segregation by the Whites toward the African-Americans in public places as schools, restaurants, theatres and public transportations. On the other hand, the Act of Civil Rights Movement was legislated as well, when it gave the Black Americans a chance to defend themselves in many domains, yet the discrimination continued especially for black audiences who were prohibited to attend performances by black dancers and musicians or white people in blackface. (Gottshild 111).

Negroes and Whites do not mix. Perhaps they will in a hundred years but they do not now. If we brought them into this development, it would be to the detriment of the city, too, because it would depress all the surrounding property. (Curtis 206)

US population by race

² **Jim Crow laws** were state and local laws that enforced [racial segregation](#) in the [Southern United States](#) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by white [Democratic](#)-dominated state legislatures to disenfranchise and remove political and economic gains made by blacks during the [Reconstruction period](#)

	1790	1800	1850	1900	1940	1950	2000
White	3,172,006	4,306,446	19,553,068	66,809,196	118,214,870	134,942,028	211,460,626
% Total Population	81%	81%	84%	88%	90%	90%	75%
Black or African- American	757,208	1,002,037	1,002,037	8,833,994	8,833,994	8,833,994	34,658,190
%Total Population	19%	19%	16%	12%	10%	10%	12%

(Cably et al 25)

6. Origines

African-American Dance started from early decades with the arrival of Africans to America as slaves, they were taken as captives on board of slave ships, the hard conditions of the crowded deck by the enchained captives lying on their backs for more than five weeks of trip. many of them died from hunger and diseases, so for economic reasons, slave traders, therefore, started a practice called "dancing the slaves " believing that if the human body cargos were exercised on deck, the slaves would look better and bring a better price at the market. (Medearis 12)

Coming to the new world, the white plantation owners banned drumming, but those slaves needed a way to express their traditional means of communication, so they used the most primitive of all instruments, the human body, it became the main source of rhythm and communication. (Knowles 41)

With more slaves coming to America, the other slaves felt more secure about their heritage, their dances developed. When the white owners observed their talents, they used it in the slave trade; they believed that the ability to dance added to the financial values of slaves. They were forced to dance as they were being sold. (Knowles 39)

When sold to other owners, black slaves were obliged to dance for their guests in ceremonies and parties, but in reality, those blacks took the chance and invented dance forms to mock

their masters in the way they walked and made fun of their classy attitudes and behaviors, adding more style to those moves, many dance types were created by those slaves.

After the abolition of the slave trade and the importation of slaves from Africa were rare, so the slaves needed to keep the contact with their homeland by practicing the heritage. African traditions were not accepted by some owners, they wanted the Africans to cut all ties with traditional cultures, but African dance traditions were too strong to be erased from their memories. (Medearis 15)

For the aim of saving their traditions, black slaves had to make a mixture between the European and the African traditional dance, copying from the master's ballroom at the big house, but they added some of the African dance elements, they created new dances with fancy styles, the Whites were amused by these dances and reminded them of their popular European-derived ballrooms steps.

White people were impressed by their dances, so they started imitating them in their blackface minstrel shows, these were white entertainers who painted their faces in black and made fun of the slaves on, another hand, black slaves also had their own minstrel shows, for them it was the only opportunity to show and perform their dances.

Minstrelsy was the only entertainment show at that time, it became more popular when an entertainer called Thomas Rice saw a disabled black slave who had twisted legs and one shoulder higher than another named "Jim Crow" dancing, it seemed very funny to Rice, so he imitated him and named himself "Daddy Jim Crow Rice" by creating a whole show. The show was a big hit, and many entertainers copied him in blackface entertainments. Blackface minstrelsy established a negative stereotype for African-Americans, as being ignorant and lazy, and Jim Crow became a slogan for racial discrimination. (Medearis 22)

When the Whites saw the great talents of those black slaves, they banned dancing in churches and did not give them a chance of entertainment, so the slaves had to create their stages to perform their unique dances, and the Whites could not convey these acts and dance steps. There when the Black vaudevilles were created in early 1880, they also called it black circuits in where they had more opportunities to perform and develop new moves and styles, however, the most remarkable thing was that females at that time also had the chance to perform on stages for the first time and have their own performance companies. (Thompson 31)

After the American Civil War in 1861, many African-American moved from the South to the North of America as immigrants, they took their dance with them as well, exactly in New York City, when the big movement "The New Negro Movement " welcomed them in Harlem at the beginning of the twenty's. African Americans started practicing their shows in nightclubs, then they moved to perform it to the public in small theaters, also white people came to watch these performances and to get entertained, but the African Americans always felt stereotyped by the white. (Perpener 18).

During the Harlem Renaissance in 1920, African Americans gave more importance to other arts such as literature, music, etc. They were highly interested in dance until the first musical comedy "Shuffle Along", the first written by blacks and performed by blacks to black audiences in which so many brilliant dances appeared. Later, Black artists made it to Broadway, when they participated in many musicals, engaging their original steps and moves that the Whites were fascinated by them, which gave these dancers a big chance to get more visibility as much as other artists. (Medearis 32).

7. Types of African-American Dance

African dance styles are as diverse as its people, and this diversity is at the heart of the continent's richness in arts. Africans brought their traditions and cultures with them to the new world, presenting certain movement patterns, gestures, and attitudes in the language of the body. (Malone 24).

The first types introduced in America were by black slaves in the early 1700s.

7.1 Pre-19th century

The Buck dance

Buck dance refers to any solo dance presented by a man at the era of slavery in the South of United States; it is originated from the French word "boucanier", when African-Americans in the West Indies used to describe the poor Irish immigrants who lived in Carolina. The steps of Buck dance are a mixture of African and Irish styles, produced by the slaves and the immigrants who worked at the plantations, so this type of dance was born from this contact; others called it "Clogging", which is very similar to tap dance, with soft shoes stepping on the ground making rhythmic sounds. (Knowles 43)

Patting Juba

It is a variation of clapping, slapping and stomping on other body parts like legs, chest, and arms to make fast rhythm, it is a very complicated pattern, using three or four steps at the same time, it was called "body music", found by the black slaves in the plantations, and it was related to the African dance "Giouba. ("Juba dance")

This dance was brought from Congo, with the slaves of that region, they used it while working in fields as well in their ceremonies when music instruments were not allowed by the white masters, also as a way of communication making secret codes between them to confuse the masters, giving another description by David C Barrow³ to Century magazine:

The performer provides himself with a pair of straws about eighteen inches in length, and stout enough to stand a good smart blow. An experienced straw beater will be very careful in selecting his straws, which he does from the sedge-broom ... These straws are used after the manner of drum-sticks, that portion of the fiddlers' bow, and his left hand serving as a drum. One of the first sounds which you hear on approaching the dancing patty is the tum tee tum of the straw and after the dance begins, when the shuffling of feet destroys the other sound of the fiddle, this noise can still be heard (Knowles 48)

The famous juba dancer William Henry Lane or Master juba was the first freeborn African-American to dance in a minstrel show after the juba dance, the jubilee beatings were public performances to audiences by black dancers or white dancer in blackface, later music, and song lyrics were added to the dance to complete the show. Andrew Womack⁴ notes that minstrel shows hugely influenced American culture. (Gottshild 111)

Stick Dance

At The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum in Williamsburg, Virginia a painting called The Old Plantation which shows a group of people gathering around a man who dances with a stick, Stick dance originated in the plantation during slavery, when enslaved Africans performed that dance in front of their small cabins, celebrating an occasion when two-faced two men or making a group using a stick which was symbolized as a disguised weapon. (Knowles 49)

³ **David Crenshaw "Uncle Dave" Barrow Jr.** (October 18, 1852 – January 11, 1929) served as chancellor of the [University of Georgia](#)

⁴ Womack, Andrew. "Ridicule and Wonder: The Beginnings of Minstrelsy in New York." In *Afro-Americans in New York Life & History*, 94-95. 2nd ed. Vol. 36. Buffalo: Afro-Americans in New York Life & History.

7.2 The 19th century

Tap dance

Tap dance has many origins, but the African American Tap Dance rooted from several ethnic percussive dances and some African traditions, it is the dance when the performer or dancer makes sounds and rhythms by stepping on the feet wearing shoes that have metallic taps, but before, they used wooden shoes, these shoes differ concerning the sound they make. Tap dance can be performed with the musical beats or without them, it depends on the use of the dance, it a cappella, when the music did not accompany. (Seibert 30)

This dance after a while was taken into minstrel shows, when performers found dance competitions a very entertaining way to amuse the audiences, in mid-1800, a famous dance challenge between the black dancer William Henry Lane and an Irish one called John Diamond⁵ when the two of them showed the other new moves and techniques of the dance, competing on stage by creating new stylization of the dance. (Frank)

Later, the dance emerged in the Harlem Renaissance in the twenty's, when it collaborated with jazz music, making very complicated rhythms and sounds, also at that time, dancer incorporated improvisation when performing these moves and steps, then they took it to Vaudeville and Broadway shows when black and white dancer only performed separately for their races because of racism and segregation of that time.

Cakewalk

the Cakewalk was one of the famous dances on the plantations, it is the dance of the enslaved African who lived and worked in the plantations, the aim of the dance was to mimic and mock the white class society and the masters dressing in fancy suits and dresses during the ballrooms in the Big house, the black dancers also dressed up and made fun of them by imitating their walk taking off their hats dropping their hands on their waists and bending back their bodies, but the white master missed the aim of the sarcasm and was very amused by the dance. (Knowles 44)

⁵ **John Diamond** (1823 – October 20, 1857), aka Jack or Johnny, was an Irish-American[1] dancer and blackface minstrel performer.

A slave once said to the actor Leigh Whipper:

Us slaves watched white folks' parties when the quests danced for a minute and then paraded in a grand march, with the ladies and gentlemen going different ways and then meeting again, arm in arm and then marching down the center together. Then we'd do it too, but we use to mock'em every step. Sometimes the white folks noticed it, but they seemed to like it, I guess they thought we could dance any better (Malone 18)

It was called the Cakewalk or the Chalk walk line because black dancers went through competitions winning a decorated big cake as a prize of the contests organized by the plantation owners showing their best slave dancers when they invited their neighbors and competed with their slaves as well, it originated from this aspect.

Moved to minstrels in 1892 calling it "Walking for Dat Cake", performers used the dance in their act, when they painted their faces in black and they ended the show by "the Grand final" which is the Cakewalk, black male dancers mixed some new moves and acrobats while the females clapped for them admiring their capacities. Later the dance became popular and people took classes to learn the dance as a formal promenade, with the evolution in America, the dance was taken to the north, performing it in nightclubs, organizing championships with rewards as champion belts for male dancers and diamonds rings for females. ("[Cakewalk](#)")

Cakewalk was the window which opened to African-Americans living in the future, because it was the first dance that moved from Black to White society, also from stages to ballrooms. Unfortunately, this dance died with the evolution of new dance styles over the years. ("[Cakewalk](#)")

7.3 1920s through 1940s Harlem Renaissance and the Swing era

Swing dance

In the 1920s, Harlem Renaissance was the center of cultural life in America and especially for African-Americans who wanted to grow their consciousness intellectually. Swing dance is a grouping dance, the term "swing" refers to jazz music that inspired dancers to create a new dance style, in the 1920s there were hundreds of swing dance styles but the dances that emerged the most are the following:

Lindy Hop

It is a street dance which was developed in the African-American community of Harlem Renaissance in the 1930s, parallel with jazz music, it was called this way after Charles Lindbergh⁶ "hop" who made his flight across the Atlantic ocean, but this Lindy Hop dance is a duel invented by accident by George Snowden and Mattie Purnell when they "breakaway" during the dance. Then with the evolution of the dance, it was mixed with other dance styles like the Charleston, Texas Tommy, and Hop. It is a dance characterized by a high degree of physical effort and requires much energy; dancers improvise creating new steps and moves. "Shorty," George Snowden⁷ told Marshall Stearns in 1959 said:

We used to call the basic step the Hop long before Lindbergh did his hop across the Atlantic. It had been around a long time and some people began to call it the Lindbergh Hop after 1927, although it didn't last. Then, during the marathon at Manhattan Casino, I got tired of the same old steps and cut loose with a breakaway... (Emery 221)

The dance became very popular at that time, because this dance was invented and grown in the Harlem; only black audiences enjoyed these kinds of shows. Later white audiences began to attend the shows also, they found the dance very entertaining, according to Langston Hughes⁸, The lindy-hoppers at the Savoy even began to practice acrobatic routines, and to do absurd things for the entertainment of the whites, that probably never would have entered their heads to attempt for their own effortless amusement. Some of the lindy-hoppers had cards printed with their names on them and became dance professors teaching the tourists. Then Harlem nights became show nights for the Nordics. (Emery 221)

The Lindy Hop dance developed and both Black and Whites performed it on stages, even in films, theatre musicals and plays, but after World War II, the United States government raised taxes in night clubs, and "Dancing Not Allowed" signs were hanged on walls all over the country, but the dance was re-born in a post-swing era in the 1950s and 1960s than in the revival era in the 1980s and 1990s gaining big popularity in the country. (Murray 109-110)

Charleston Dance

⁶ Lindbergh was an officer in the [U.S. Army Air Corps Reserve](#), and he received the United States' highest military decoration, the [Medal of Honor](#), for his transatlantic flight

⁷ **George "Shorty" Snowden** (July 4, 1904 – May 1982) was an [African American](#) dancer in [Harlem](#) during the 1920s and 1930s. He and his partner Mattie Purnell invented the Harlem Lindy Hop in the dance marathon at Harlem's Rockland Palace between June and July 1928

⁸ **James Mercer Langston Hughes** (February 1, 1901ⁱⁱⁱ – May 22, 1967) was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from [Joplin, Missouri](#).

The Charleston has old origins from the African-American “Juba” dance, but it was called this way for the city of Charleston, South Carolina. In the beginning, the dance started with simple feet twist steps, than when it moved to Harlem, some new moves were added, like fast kicking of feet forward and backward, later adding the tap to the dance.

Although it was an original Negro dance, no records of the dance on the plantation were discovered. However, the dance went through big evolution, and with the popularity of the Broadway show “Runnin wild” and the song “Charleston” by Elisabeth Welch⁹ in 1923, the dance was better known. Charleston can be a solo dance as it can be a dual dance or a group dance; performers swing their arm when the right arm swing at the same time with the left leg and vice versa, this was characterized by some African dance moves. (Emery 225)

Charleston was performed by partners of a man and a woman, but later with the development of the championships of the dance, partners could dance with both sexes whether a man with a man or a woman with a woman. In the 30s and 40s, many stylistic moves and dance positions were added, such as "jockey position", where the partners do not break away or leave space between them and stay close during the whole dance, in side-by-side position, the aim of the dance was touching hips, and the leader partner steps back with his left foot while the other follows with the right foot. In "Tandem Charleston", one partner stands in front of the other and both step with the same feet, and join the arms to swing backward and forward. (Emery 225)

In group Charleston, dancers gather making a circle or in two lines facing each other's. They can be led by the "caller" who leads the dance or choose any partner they want, but each one has to wait for his turn, and follow the same steps until the next step is called. Later it became a social dance and classified as a very important dance in that era.

7.4 The 1950s

Step Dance

Soulstepping or Step Dance, also called "Blocking", is a dance that had developed in African-American sororities in the southern States in mid twenty's', it became a competitive dance in some high schools and universities. Stepping involves slapping the body clapping and making complex rhythms, Blacks in America invented this dance because it had a relation

⁹ **Elisabeth Margaret Welch** (February 27, 1904 – July 15, 2003) was an American singer, actress, and entertainer, whose career spanned seven decades

with drums, same beats the body make, African used to play it on drums, as Jacqui Malone, the dancer, and choreographer said: “What we notice first and foremost in contemporary stepping is the sound of the drum” (Moore)

The dance developed in the fraternities and sororities, when Black students went to White universities and suffered from the isolation and segregation in social clubs the 1900s, so the first Black men in Cornell University formed the first Black fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha in 1904, they were neglected and influenced by the political and social struggle also the racial laws, so they had to support each other and protect their identities as being an African-American calling their house " The Seven Jewels". Henry Arthur Callis, the founder of the fraternity said: “society offered us narrowly circumscribed opportunity and no security. Out of our needs, our fraternity brought social purpose and social action. (Fin 12)

Using the body as an instrument in Step dancing is clapping, foot stepping and slapping the other part of the body, the dance is a combination of military steps as military men joined the sororities after World War II and African footsteps known as Welly "Gumboot" dance held by slavehood during slavery, vocal sounds can be added to make it more synchronized. ("Step Dance")

Step dancing was considered as one of the social dance that gave black students who danced at that time to defend themselves show their black pride and perform their identity and got each other's back, as the first African-American mayor Johnny Ford said:

The college fraternity was a good experience for me. As a matter of fact, when I left college, went to New York, I couldn't find a job, was about to starve, was out of money, about to be put out of the YMCA, my Kappa brothers and I thought, let's call the Kappa house. And I called the Kappa house and they took us in, under their wings, and gave us a place to stay and helped me find a job. (Fine 52)

7.5 The 1960s and 1970s

Set the flo'

It has its roots from slavehood before the 19th century, also it originates from African dance, it was held by African-Americans in the sixty's, it is a competitive dance where dancers should perform the steps on a circle drowned on the flour, if they step out of it, they will be directly eliminated from the competition, and follow the leads of steps which is given

by the dance leader, if they misstep it, they will be disqualified. The dance can be done in solo by a man or a woman. It can be also danced in a couple, when both the male and female bow at the start of the performance to the other couple, the female should put her hands on her hips, then the man will join her, it can be also performed in groups when the caller asks for a combination of old dances as Buck, Cakewalk and other dances from west Africa. (Charles et al)

Boogaloo dance

It is a dance based on improvisation; it has grown in the streets when freestyle dancer created robotic and popping moves. Within the African-American community in Chicago, this dance was a pure social dance, being a total new style of dance, it inspired many White youths, so they started imitating it in almost all the States of the country. (Pruter 204). It was described as a “single step” dance, basing the moves on soul music beats, combining other steps to make a new stylization.

7.6 The 1980s and 1990s

Hip Hop dance

Hip Hop dance is a category of dance that includes many and different styles, at first, it was just a fool idea for the White race as Black people being stupid, but later it was spread all over the country and even White youth started performing it. It is based on improvisational steps and moves, it began in the 1970s in the Black community when young Black dancer combined dance steps with hip-hop music, considered as Funk Dance using a variety of moves, then it was seen as a Black social dance when these street dancers expressed themselves whenever and wherever they wanted to. The dance entered the movies and films, and then it became a commercial style, when audiences were highly entertained by it. (Huntington p22)

Break-Dance

This type of dance was born from Hip Hop when street dancers added some athletic and acrobatic moves to the basic dance, it became a social Dance, known as “staying out of trouble dance”, it emerged first in South Bronx, New York City during the 1970s, purely created by African-American, Latinos and Hispanic people in America started to practice it too, then it started to be a competitive dance by dance crews, organizing battle between

individuals or groups, one-on-one battle, or crew-Vs-crew battle. The dancer who performed this dance is called B-boy or B-girl, beggaring as Top-rock, when the dancer perform while standing up, also the aggressive form of Top-rock is Up-rock, this one looks much as a fight, the acrobatic moves were called power moves because of all the energy required in it. The dance became very popular, and many singers and actors practiced it making their shows a big hit of all times. (Jorge)

8. Conclusion

Dance was born with African people, even when they traveled, it moved with them, giving them the chance to connect with their roots. The development of it helped the Black community grow big and express more ideas and thoughts to fights the segregated country, for some of them, dance was just a physical practice and had nothing to do in the cultural world, but for others who felt the need of it, was a text which contained metaphors and theories, written on imaginary paper, randomly by a colored body which proved its visibility, ethnicity identity and beauty. As Perl Primus once said:

"Dance has been my teacher, ever so patiently revealing to me, the dignity, beauty, and strength in the cultural heritage of my people, as a vital part of the great heritage of all mankind".

For some dancers and choreographer, dance had developed to be more than just a cultural genre, they took it to another level when they used it as a weapon to demonstrate and protest against the racial segregation and discrimination in America, and tried to create a place for dance into the politic and social movements and prove that the black body can culturally protest by its beauty and aesthetic, to make Black people proud to be Black and helped them construct their singular identity

**Chapter Two: Dance as a
way of protest**

II. Chapter Two: Dance as a Way of Protest

1. Introduction

I didn't feel the pressure of being black. I felt the pressure of saying to myself "you know you have to do better, so you do better: you work harder, or else you'll never have a chance.

-Joan Myers Brown¹⁰

This chapter will discuss the development of African American dance during the period of 1920s to 1960s; it will also answer the question of how was this Black dance visible during that era. First, it will explain the participation of dance in every Black political and artistic movement. In addition, it will tackle the issue of the construction of Black identity by Black dancers, and how they protested against the White segregation by using dance as a cultural weapon. Lastly, another very important point that will be discussed is Dance as a revolutionary statement.

2. The New Negro Movement 1920

Black people had lived in the United States for many decades, and had already produced several art forms such as music, poetry and novels. However, they had never done much with such confidence and enthusiasm as they did during the Harlem Renaissance era (1920). Centered around Harlem, many Black New Yorkers blossomed and practiced their arts proudly and never felt more recognized as they were during that period. (Eisenberg 182-196)

Known as the "Roaring Twenties, America went through a phase when the society had to let go of all the Victorian moralities and reached for a new life style, so the African Americans wanted to find a way to belong to that contemporary America which neglected them before, not only individually but also generally, they aimed to fight the white prejudice and the stereotype. so the intellectuals agreed to create a cultural revolution which was an artistic movement. According to John Perpener, African American artists were divided into two groups, first, the so-called "more" intellectuals such as writers, poets etc. the second group like musicians, stage performers and dancers. African American writers and poets wanted to do their best to belong to the modern America and be part of the free country,

¹⁰ **Joan Myers Brown** is an American [dance](#) instructor. Founder of [The Philadelphia Dance Company](#)

which at the same time took their freedom and imposed racial laws on them. The famous writer W.E.B. Du Bois¹¹ debated about this point and wrote about the twoness of the Negroes who juxtaposed the love and the hate of America. He gave the example tackled in Claude McKay¹²'s poem when he said:

“Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,

And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,

Stealing my breath of life, I will confess

I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!”

Claude McKay: America

W.E.B. Du Bois said that Claude McKay was caught between being black and being American, he loved America, and he pointed out that it was her that gave him strength to stand against her. On the other hand, Black dancers wanted to join the new America but with the condition of the ultimate assimilation of their culture, and keeping their black heritage alive, they wanted to be more visible as individuals too and being given consideration as real artists by both black and white citizens. (Perpner 12)

Due to the racial segregation, Black and White would never perform on one stage, it was not accepted that the two races dance together, the European Americans believed that whiteness was the only standard of beauty and claimed that the black body was not suitable for mainstream stages because black dancers were too tall and too skinny, their black skins were not beautiful to be seen, and black dance was vulgar, comic, uncontrolled, and undisciplined. (Gottschild 16)

As a result, these dancers made their arts unique; they created new ways of performing their blackness. They wanted to honor the Black body, the body that resisted the hardest torture during slavery, the hands that experienced long work durations and the smooth skin that resisted the burning heat of the Southern States. Yet it was also the body that perceived

¹¹ **William Edward Burghardt Du Bois** (February 23, 1868 – August 27, 1963) was an American [sociologist](#), [socialist](#), [historian](#), [civil rights activist](#), [Pan-Africanist](#), author, writer and editor

¹² **Festus Claudius "Claude" McKay** (September 15, 1889– May 22, 1948) was a [Jamaican](#) writer and poet, who was a seminal figure in the [Harlem Renaissance](#).

the most complex rhythms, the very creative improvisations and the highest jumps. (Gottschild 15)

Black dancers started their shows first in nightclubs, small cabaret, black vaudeville and black minstrel. Then with the development of arts, dance reached a higher level, when dancers could perform in dance concert and Broadway shows. (Perpener 16-17)

As an example, Asadata Dafora, an African dancer who emerged from Nigeria and built his dance company in 1921, and the first who presented the African dance as a concert art in the United States had influenced many black dancers who joined his group. Katherine Dunham as well was not only a brilliant black female dancer; she was an intelligent woman who created some new style formed from a combination because she wanted to oppose the stereotypes performed on stages. (Perpener 129).

These artists grew big during that era and left their artistic mark in the society but due to the Great economic Depression (1929-1930), the financial situations touched badly much of Harlem's Black community and many residents had to leave and that occurred in the Harlem Riot of 1935, when many of them got arrested and injured, also three individuals were dead. This put an end to the Harlem Renaissance. (DeFrantz 89)

3. Is there a place for Dance in the movement?

Steeping out from the Great Depression to the 1940's big changes when African Americans experienced numerous social transformations such as the migration from the South to the North, west and Midwest because of the cultural desire. They wanted to consume leisure and develop an urban identity by going to the movies, listening to radio, purchasing records and of course always dancing. Therefore, dance became an arena of performing a new urban Black identity. (DeFrantz 81)

Black social dance had more possibility to get integrated in the modern America in the 1960's. The period witnessed the rise of radical movements that answered the debates over race, equality and violence in America, most known for the Civil Right Movements, when black communities demonstrated their influence in the political sphere, also the influence of Black youth on American dance culture.

The era saw a growing of the cultural media that motivated Black Americans and gave them hope for the justice, black-and-white pictures of colored protestors attacked by dogs in

the Birmingham race riot was an example, and served as evidence documents that proved the racial inequality and the police brutality. Dr Martin Luther ¹³king Jr understood the power of these footages and used it to justify to the world his aim of getting the racial equality in the ideal America. Learning from that, black dancers also used the American white media to show how culturally they can be, they took the chance to make Black dance spread in the white communities. (Faulkenbury)

After being divided, Black artists and dancers to be precise created their own dance places and ballrooms, showing their talents and creative original moves, black dancers took over all the stages and dominated them, and the Whites got more entertained there than at the White nightclubs and cabaret. Due to that, African American dancers took the chance to express their black aesthetic on stages and used social dance as a new voice of the movement.

The philosopher and the educator Alain Locke¹⁴ wrote in a collection of essays when he linked social and political changes to developing Black aesthetic, and put forward the idea that Black cultural expression enacted the sociopolitical atmosphere through its aesthetic and make meaning of political justice. Locke mentioned that he was an opportunity for Black social dance to achieve many goals and it can function as a mean of humanizing the marginalized, dehumanized Black body. (Locke 259)

On one level, some Black thinkers said that dance was “founding of the soul”, and characterized it as a feeling of vivacity. Aaron Douglas¹⁵, a visual artist wrote that:

The dance offered a field for unrestricted expression of Negroes’ creative passion. Here were no expensive instruments to be purchased, no weird symbols to be mastered, no unfamiliar tools and stubborn material to be overcome, only swift feet, strong legs, a lust for life, and a soaring imagination. With this limited equipment, the Negro has kept folk dancing alive in America when it has died almost everywhere else in the world. He has not only kept the dance alive, but in a spontaneous, revolutionary, creative state. (Fischer 32)

¹³ **Martin Luther King Jr.** (born **Michael King Jr.**; January 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968) was an American [Christian](#) minister and activist who became the most visible spokesperson and leader in the [Civil Rights Movement](#) from 1955 until [his assassination](#) in 1968

¹⁴ **Alain Leroy Locke** (September 13, 1885 – June 9, 1954) was an [American writer](#), [philosopher](#), educator, and patron of the arts. Distinguished as the first African-American [Rhodes Scholar](#) in 1907, Locke was the philosophical architect—the acknowledged “Dean”—of the [Harlem Renaissance](#).

¹⁵ **Aaron Douglas** (May 26, 1899 – February 2, 1979^[1]) was an [American](#) painter, illustrator and [visual arts](#) educator. He was a major figure in the [Harlem Renaissance](#)

The attendance of both Black and White audiences helped the Ballrooms benefit in the American economy and improved the economic status in the Black community where the talented dancers who had high skills got a brief fame so every race would go to the savoy for example to attend a performance or to dance and express themselves like they couldn't do that anywhere else.

4. Performing Identity in Black Arts Movement

Black Art Movement (1965–1975) grew simultaneously with the Civil Right Movements (1954–1968), it was the movement led by artists when they payed attention to the political use of arts. The poet and playwright Amiri Baraka, the founder of the Black Art Movement came with the idea of manifesting Black Power through arts when most of the Black community were doubting the non-violent resistance as a tactic to fight the racial injustice. Dance played a significant role during the movement, dancers wanted to perform the Black Aesthetic on stages, they also wanted cultural self-determination and economic independence in addition to the recapturing of Black heritage and Black identity. (Abugo 2). Many artists according to DeFrantz viewed the recuperation of “black” as a mark of identity during the 1960s as an “emphatic proclamation of an oppressed people’s psychological reorientation but dance was an expressive approach in the representation of “Blackness”. (DeFrantz 6)

After the slogan of Black Power was introduced by Stokely Carmichael in the 1960’s, the term was widely used by every African American activist, politician and even businessmen, it was the new form of Black protest but its cause the division of these protestors into two sectors: political nationalists and cultural nationalists. (Sitkoff 201). Nevertheless, the movement had only one common goal, which was taking over the racial segregation. According Larry Neal an important scholar of the Black Arts Movement, the two concepts were interrelated since they had the same goal. (Neal 272).

Arts were a strong form for African American demonstrators because they could practice it on the street and avoid violence and police brutality, with the development of it, modern dance occurred in that era, it was a way to culturally, spiritually speak to the African American community. For instance, Helen Tamiri on her solo performance “Negro Spirituals” a choreography which carried a metaphor for spirituals that had multiple meanings and significations which expressed historical and cultural experiences. (Manning 10). Black dancers wanted to change the negative ideas about the African American mainstream dance in

America but at the same time, they aimed to show the Black heritage, celebrate their cultural differences, and forget the idea of struggling to be American.

Because of the Black Arts Movements, African American dance became more visible especial in modern dance. It imposed the political function of Dance into the American politics. Dance artists, choreographer and dance critics viewed that modern dance was typically African American but other argued that it was just a form of African American dance, according to the scholar Susan Manning; Modern Dance was a mixture of Euro-American and African American dance. (Neal 273)

Black choreographer started forming their own dance companies and schools, for example the most known choreographer Alvin Ailey who was not only black but also sexually gay, continued his political activism through his choreographies and dances, he pointed to change the social dynamics in modern dance . Ailey formed his dance company “The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater” in 1958 located in New York City at the 92nd Street Y. Ailey focused on the theme of African Americans’ struggle for freedom and opportunity in his choreographies. (Foulkes 182)

Another type of dance that accrued until the rise of the black arts movement was ballet dance. Because African Americans did not have the chance to perform this dance kind of art due to racial discrimination and before the protests, they were stereotyped due to their bodies and skin color. According to some white choreographers, ballet dance was a dance of beauty and the black body was not appropriate to perform such type. we take the example of the famous ballet show “*Swan Lake*”, audiences could not imagine a “Black” swan between “white swans” . However Arthur Mitchell was the first and only African American ballet dancer in the New York City Ballet for many years. Mitchell founded the Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH), also George Balanchine, a very important choreographer who created a unique American dance style by changing the European style into a modern style adding an African touch to make it original. (Emery 279)

5. Dance as a Revolutionary Statement

If I cannot dance, I do not want to be part of your revolution.

Emma Goldman¹⁶

After participating in the movements, dance became an intrinsic part of protest; it has become inseparable from the movement's protest repertoire, Dance was used as a political language to unite and resist. After interviewing Christopher J. Smith, the professor, chair of musicology, founding director of the Vernacular Music Center at the Texas Tech University School of Music and author of the book "Dancing Revolution Bodies, Space, and Sound in American Cultural History", he talked about two reasons why he was particularly interested in the study of dance as political resistance in North American.

First and based on his experience of being a dance musician and politically active for almost fifty years, Dancers and dance makers have created an influence in his life because of the political, social and cultural decisions that they have taken to try to improve their lives has been a driving force in his own arc as a scholar. The second things was that during his prior study he developed a set of tools for reading about and looking at images of movement, in order to recover the performance practice, he wanted to apply those tools across a wider selection of historical "moments" around dance, particularly dance as resistance.

According to Christopher J. Smith, Dance was not only a fine art; it was also used as a political discourse in the context of American public life, in which class, race, gender, political and regional identity was contested and transformed. Social dance was a particularly visible and mutable expression of identity. It could be theorized as embodying a "political performance".

The resistance was possible to be embodied physically at times when verbal and literal discourse was unavailable or unsafe. During the years of political tensions, dance served as a very unique and specific role especially with the oppressive political system as a physical medium that allowed the body to express what oppressed voices could not, and where being vocal was less effective than being visual. African American choreographies used some movements and technics of dance as a mean of communication even it was silent. They aimed to transmit a message through movements that were as important as words. All that was to

¹⁶ **Emma Goldman** (June 15], 1869 – May 14, 1940) was an [anarchist](#) political activist and writer. She played a pivotal role in the development of [anarchist political philosophy](#) in North America and Europe in the first half of the 20th century.

create a new way of revolution, the expressive form began to travel beyond the region of New York during the 1960s because of Dance movements stylization growth. (Gittens 51)

The rise in popularity of Black dance became a significant symbol in expression of Black pride and unity during the 1960s due to that the number of choreographers with Black dance companies engaged in African-based movement style as increased since the Black Arts Movement, many artists highlighted their heritage and pride within the expression of their works. They wanted to show the African and the African diasporic dance movement on the American states, which was similar to the political concept of Pan-Africanism during the wave of independent African nations. (Gittens 58)

Black dancer such as Katherine Dunham, Asadata Dafora and Pearl Primus were the pioneers of the Africa diasporic dance, the approach that these performers took in the foundation of their dance companies was very diasporic as well. They emphasized on the historical and cultural principles for unity of all people of African descents and worked on the education of the African American community about its heritage via dancing. (Gittens 59)

The era of 1970s and 1980s was as important and the previous era, were new styles marked the powerful influence of African Americans who have made popular cultures around the world by visual aesthetics, the era also supported the seeds political creative expression which were planted in the 1960s . Tricia Rose, the sociologist, on her book “The Hip Hop Wars” brought together Hip Hop music and African aesthetic traditions alongside to the political intentions behind the expressive styles. (Rose 99)

6. Dance in the Age of Black Lives Matter

Audiences were encouraged to escape reality by dance performers, but later, Dance forced the audiences to face that reality and that was during the Black Lives Matter Movement, which was a movement inspired by the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement, the 1980s Black feminist movement, Pan-Africanism, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, hip hop and the LGBTQ social movements. For some protestors, it was the “new Civil Right Movement”. (Demby)

BLM aimed to build power through protest, using every form to get on the street. It campaigned against violence, policy brutality and racism toward Black people in the United States .it started with a simple hash tag in 2013 after the assassination of the African-American teen Trayvon Martin in February 2012. Many activists joined the movement,

among them dance choreographers and university dance professor, and since the Black Lives Matter movement has returned race to the center of the national debate of racial violence and discrimination, they challenged white dance audiences to confront their discomfort with racial issues. (Schaefer)

Dance became a visible resistance and a weapon against white supremacy, the *Performing Resistance to Representations of Weaponized Blackness* Saidiya Hartman an African American writer and academic argues that pleasure gives the possibility for, what she calls, “redressing the pained body”. She explains this redressing as the black body existing within and against the oppression of the system and transforming the body to a site of possibility. (Bell)

Dance artists wanted to address politics with their art because for white audiences, Black dance was only an entertainment way, Jason Samuels Smith, tap dance performer, choreographer, and director said, “White audiences “love the dance moves," but they don't want to connect with the people and the communities who are creating these dance moves." Another The Black Lives Matter activist, dancer and teacher, Shamell Bell said, “My vision is to viciously attack the detrimental practices and policies that disadvantage the poor and people of color in housing, education and employment,” Her vision was to accomplish a peaceful protest, which took a new way of demonstrating and street marches; instead, she danced and asked people to join her art. (Venkatakrisnan)

Shamell Bell called her protest “Street Dance Activism”, she argued that the dance was to rise up the spirit of protest at the same time to practice social resistance to inequality, racism, and oppression; she said “giving protesters foundational tools and dance instruction allows them to build their “crew”, a sort of group dynamic that offers moral support and understanding.” Dancing also serves as a catalyst to have a conversation about appreciating cultural movement without cultural appropriation. (Venkatakrisnan)

7. Conclusion

Although the barriers and the color lines African American dancers saw during the development of these art form, yet they managed to participate in the political and social movements from the period of 1920s until 2013, and still, they created new ways and styles of choreographs and dance moves, moves which were not acceptable before to be performed by a Black American. Their performances based on peaceful and non-violent social movements,

which included themes of black protest and culture, helped the African Americans and their dances more visible.

To make this idea participate in the historical records, many African American writers and literature makers wrote about their own experiences as dancers and choreographers and how did they crossed the color line and fought the racial segregation by taken their art as a weapon, and no matter what gender they were, they all participated in showing the black heritage and grassroots to the white audiences.

**Chapter Three:
Manifesting Black dance
in Dancing in Blackness
2018**

III. Chapter three: Manifesting Black Dance in Dancing in Blackness 2018

1. Introduction

After African American dancers were no more amateur, they acclaimed dancing as a profession and became dance teachers in big university, they wanted to put the development and the growth of their careers in the American historical records, so they wrote novels, stories and autobiographies that show how much they suffered to get to the positions they reached eventually. Halifu Osumare is a living example of this, she wrote her book, a memoir in form of an autobiography untitled “Dancing in Blackness: a memoire 2018” that shows the steps she took to achieve her goal living in a very difficult community that faced a serious racial segregation. The issue tackled in her life story is how she took dance as a social, political tool to fight that discrimination.

This part of the thesis will devote to show more about the author and her origins, also it will give a short summary about the story and the main events and people who helped her go through all that, which led her to write this book, in addition to that, the themes of this autobiography will be explained.

2. About the author

Halifu in Swahili language means the independent rebellious person, this name was given to her as a gift by the playwright Ntozake Shange¹⁷ who was a close friend to her. Halifu was born by Janis Miller, in November 27, 1949 in Galveston Texas an island in the Gulf of Mexico near Houston. The people of that area were called the Negroes who were uppity and too self-reliant because they defied the white authority and they made the best social and educational system under the hard circumstances of the legal segregation. She was an independent rebellious black woman who aimed to explore her dance career which she really achieved when she became Professor Emerita in the Department of African American and African Studies (AAS) at University of California, Davis, and was the Director of AAS from 2011-2014, also she was an arts administrator, and scholar of black popular culture for over forty years. (Halifu 21)

¹⁷ **Ntozake Shange** (October 18, 1948 – October 27, 2018) was an American playwright and poet. As a [Black feminist](#), she addressed issues relating to [race](#) and [Black power](#) in much of her work

In 1977, Dr. Osumare founded Everybody's Creative Arts Center in Oakland; she also helped establishing California's multicultural arts movement. After retiring from UC Davis in 2016, Halifu went back to dance theater, when she choreographed a very interesting piece of art called "In the Eye of the Storm" for the event of the presidential elections of 2016.

3. Plot summary

Dancing in Blackness is the third and the last work of Halifu Osumare published in 2018 after she published her two books, *The Africanist Aesthetic in Global Hip-Hop: Power Moves* published in 2007 and *The Hip-life in Ghana: West African Indigenization of Hip-Hop* in 2012. the story is written in form of an autobiography in which the author narrates her own story about how she grew up being a dancer and how dance helped her build her career as a dance teacher, choreographer, researcher, cultural activist and art administrator.

The story of Halifu begins with her introduction when she talks about her origins and where she comes from, also she introduces the people she met during her journey, and those who helped her achieve her goals. Another point she talks about is the twenty three counties she visited while doing her research in three decades. The story is divided into six chapters, the first one, untitled "*Coming of Age through (black) Dance in the San Francisco Bay*", the author talks about her going to George Washington high school, when she participated in modern dance class for three years and learnt that dance is more than something you practice at parties or for fun, because unlike other art forms as music and painting, dance was always taken for granted because people saw that they all can move and dance, so she realized that dance can be a profession, also she discusses about her first experience as a professional dance job, after she graduated high school and decided to be a professional dancer in san Francisco state and evolved her dance by taking new classes to do jazz dance.

After exploring herself, Halifu moved to Europe and that in chapter two "*Dancing in Europe*" when she took another step and lived three years there, first she started her dance company in Copenhagen Denmark than moving to Stockholm Sweden where she taught in the biggest dance school. After getting a big experience in Europe, Halifu went back to the United States and exactly to New York the centre of professionalism in the USA, so she was a dance teacher but she aimed to get to a highest stage there. She joined the Rod Rogers Dance Company in 1970, which she really admired his work and made it a part of her book so she said:

In Rod Rogers's dance studio is where I found like spirits serving the dance gods. We all experienced the joy of movement alone and together striving to bring forth the aesthetic and social dance messages. (Halifu 63)

In Rod Rogers, Halifu had the chance to do a solo dance in the first time of the company's history, she performed a dance called "Shout" at the Statue of Liberty Park in 1972, which symbolizes freedom, and that allowed her unique quality in dance to be noticed and mentioned in the New York Times review. That was from chapter three untitled "*Dancing in New York*", moving back to Oakland Bay area and San Francisco Bay in 1973, this area according to Halifu illuminated the effects of the west coast on the cultural possibilities and artistic potential in dance, and she explained that in the fourth chapter saying that that era gave her the chance to explore herself and test after her journey in Europe which allowed her international experience growing bigger.

Halifu decided to go back and look for her origins and roots, by 1976, she traveled to Africa exactly to Ghana for researching as an auditor in the School of Music, Dance and Drama, where she quickly felt like one of them and the Ashanti¹⁸ tribes took her between them and introduced their cultures and traditions to her, she learnt many dance style and music there, another important thing she studied was the African diasporic culture, Halifu narrates that in her fifth chapter, moving to the sixth and the last chapter, with the title of "*dancing in Oakland and beyond 1977-1993*" when she ends the book by narrating her experience back in her home where she decided to start her dance institution and stopped dance performance physically but focused on dance ethnology and made the transition from dance to writing dance by applying some of the dance concepts to the writing process saying she could "dance across the pages". Story of Halifu Osumare was a journey full of travel, adventure and of course Dance that gave her the opportunities to be a famous dancer, choreographer and cultural activist.

4. The manifestation of Black dance in "Dancing in Blackness 2018"

4.1 Black dance

Halifu Osumare based her entire autobiography on her only passion, which Dance, she made from this art form her professional career, which makes it the most important theme of

¹⁸ **Ashanti** also known as **Asante** are part of the [Akan ethnic group](#) and are native to the [Ashanti Region](#) of modern-day [Ghana](#). The Asante speak the [Twi](#) language. The Twi language is spoken by over nine million Asante people as a [first](#) or [second language](#).

this book. Halifu defined dance as a complex process of embodied creative expressions that has many levels and purposes. She added that Black Dance includes personal, social, cultural and spiritual body, mind and soul, which must be all integrated to create it. Moreover, basing on the theory of the anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna¹⁹ who treated dance as social, cultural, political, economic and communicative level as well. She also suggests that dance can be read as a text, a nonverbal language with syntax containing and can be understood as a somatic communication device. The question of “What is Black Dance?” was asked by many people, they wanted to know how it was related to the socio-political context. Dancers and choreographers did their best to prove the function of dance as a protest weapon, linking between social dance and every social movement in the US Black history due to the its function as a space that negotiate many struggles and changing within the Black community and between Black people and other racial groups.

4.2 Black cultural activism and protest

In *Dancing in Blackness*, the author attempts to create a confluence between the art from and the socio-cultural construct of blackness when she took the example of the question asked Hemsley Winfield²⁰ after a dance performance at the Harlem YMCA in October 1933 “What Shall the Negro Dance About”, this question was a metaphor because Winfield the interpretive dance of black Americans to take place alongside the other art as literature, painting and music as a part of the Harlem Renaissance’s New Negro Movement, he saw that dance was a conversation with “race” which made the human division. In her memoir, Halifu talks about how she created and produced her own dance and theater works, but she wasn’t seeking for the existing in the large White concert dance scenes, she saw herself as a cultural activist by creating her own studio for the aim of the political sensibilities by dance choreographies. She had first emerged in the west coast cultural activism “Black Arts Movement” that went toward the politics of the Third World Liberation front that had formed the san Francisco state strike. Moreover, due to her voyages, she didn’t really participate in every strike but her solidarity with other black cultures in other part of the world.

4.3 Cultural Revolution

¹⁹ **Judith Lynne Hanna** (born 1936) is an anthropologist, scholar, and author. She is an affiliate research professor in the Department of Anthropology at the [University of Maryland, College Park](https://www.umd.edu/).

²⁰ **Hemsley Winfield** (April 20, 1907 – January 15, 1934) was an African-American dancer who created the New Negro Art Theater Dance Group

According to the author, in the history of north America, moving the body in the public that has relation with musical sounds was seen as a subversive, immoral and revolutionary, because in the contexts of American public life, which includes class, gender, religion, politics and race, moving arms and torso with making noises out in the streets was exotic and rebellious. The Anglo American society received complex political messages from working-class people but only vocabulary; nevertheless, African Americans transferred their political messages visibly by moving their bodies calling it “politics of performance”. The physical embodiment made it possible for resistance when verbal or literal discourse was unavailable or unsafe.

Halifu explains in her memoir the political connotes of the bodies, and compares it with traditional European dance aesthetics where the body must be held upright for classic forms, and straight right torso indicates the royal elegance act of the monarchs. However, African American dancers dominated the dancing body showing the democratic equality of body parts. She adds to that her personal participation in the Cultural Revolution in Oakland bay, and as she says, it wasn't easy for the area as the other states of the country. Also the beginning of the free speech movement, the big strike of san Francisco that insisted on black studies and ethnic studies being a part of the university. Another important part of the revolution she participated it was with the Black Panthers who took their rifles to the state capital to insist on less police brutality, that had influenced her so much and influenced the way she looked at dance itself which gave her a political curiosity that led her to explore her own artistic approach through choreographies when she took her solo to the Black Panthers showcases and offered it as her creative contribution to the revolution.

The public demonstration of street dance ritualized and symbolically gamed-out conflict between groups and social classes between conservative and modernist social models, and between dominant and subaltern identities. The body language can transmit real messages in all different aspects, because every gesture and move has a specific meaning, which indicates a specific issue. The main aim of these dancers was to oppose the racial segregation as all other artists aimed to, but especially the wanted to be hostile to the stereotypes performed on stages by white performers as the blackface for example. Using black dance as an expression of resistance became a symbol of unity and togetherness by portraying the Black aesthetics with dance choreographies and shows for all kind of audiences, which led to a big cultural exchange between all different racial groups.

5. Conclusion

In this last chapter I determine to look at the use of social Black dance as a tool of cultural and aesthetic resistance and its specific artistic communicative of sensibilities in the expression of identity. In addition, I aim to prove the idea of the use of this art form as a cultural demonstrative weapon that helped Black American defend their heritage by engaging it to the political movements.

General conclusion

Dance in general is a very important art, it not only used for entertainment and fun, it can transmit ideas through gestures and moves. African American dance precisely was used as a way of protest by Black Americans during segregation, and as a way of expression. In conclusion, the book “Dancing in Blackness” by Halifu Osumare shows the importance of Black Dance, not only as an art form but also as a cultural demonstrating weapon. This autobiography tells the real life of this female dancer and choreographer who struggled to reach her goal and make her dream come true. She focuses on the idea of opposing the racial segregation, the white prejudice and the inequality of the America society through dance shows and choreographies. The idea of fighting this injustice was an inspiration for Halifu due to the previous dancer who really left their cultural influence on her, which makes it the main topic of this book, explaining how dance and political movement can be incorporated and combined to create a non-verbal expression that comes from the soul and touch all kind of audiences.

This work is a set of chapters in which the history of dance, the analysis of the book and the plot summary of the story are explained in details. The first part discusses the history of African American Dance from the first African slaves on the American grounds until the modern America. Secondly, the analytical frameworks is presented, it includes all the key words and the analysis of the book and lastly the final part, which present a short biography about the author besides to the plot summary of the story and the main themes.

Dancers and choreographers of the ear from 1920s to 1980s influenced many dance generations, they helped them defend themselves culturally and especially to avoid violence and stay away of trouble, at the same time they participated in creating a new stylizations by mixing American and African dance moves, which made it unique and exclusive. This thesis aims to show how important Black Dance can be in the American society and beyond, and how the embodying of the Black body can express real emotions and transmit meaningful messages and thoughts.

Still, nowadays many dancers, professionals or amateurs are keeping the path of the old dancers, walking on the same steps and developing this remarkable art, furthermore, it would be very useful for them to continue looking for the impact of African American dance on the society and examine the use of it for next the generations. Further research could be

done on the development of African American dance, and the use of this art as a profession and a real career.

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