

## Dancing in our Blood

### *Dance/Movement Therapy with Street Children and Victims of Organized Violence in Haiti*

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The fields of psychology and humanitarian assistance are merging with increasing intensity as the incidence and prevalence of violence in the world grows. Post-traumatic stress disorder, diagnosed after the Vietnam War and succinctly defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, has illustrated the need for mental health professionals to pay more attention to the disturbing effects of war and other forms of organized and systemic violence on individuals and communities.<sup>1</sup> This attention, however, has at times focused on the pathological components of traumatic experience, reducing the experience of a human being at any point in his or her life to that of the trauma. Where trauma exists, especially in areas of ongoing social trauma, resiliency also lives, and the social forces that contribute to individual and collective resiliency can be garnered in support of meaningful healing processes.

In many areas of the world, long-standing civil unrest, conflict, poverty, and oppression create conditions of stress and violence in everyday living that are less newsworthy than war, and therefore often forgotten. These situations can be equally as disturbing to the human psyche and collective experience. Haiti, a country often known only for its poverty and filth, continues to suffer from the ongoing trauma of slavery-related oppression that is an integral part of its history. Haiti's past is a complex and unique web of colonization, slavery, cruelty, resistance, resilience, and liberation, and its recent past includes intense periods of extreme violence and instability, including kidnapping, torture, and rape as an act of war.

Formerly an island inhabited by the indigenous Arawak-Tainos people, and the Ciboney and the Caribs who came from the southern mainland, Haiti

was first a Spanish and then a French colony. Christopher Columbus, thinking he had discovered India, called the original inhabitants of the island “Indians.” These native peoples were slaughtered during colonialism and Africans were imported as part of the slave trade as early as 1502 and up until 1789. It was, historically, one of the more brutal places to serve as a slave, and many died from extreme conditions, disease, and torture. Eventually the Spanish and the French fought over control of the island and its resources, and Hispaniola, named by the Spanish, was divided into two countries: the French controlled the western half and renamed it Saint Domingue (now Haiti), and the eastern half, remaining under the control of the Spanish, is now the Dominican Republic. Haiti, renamed by the former slaves who eventually took control of Saint Domingue, is an Arawak word for “mountainous land.”

What is unique to Haiti is its status as the first independent black nation in the western hemisphere. On August 14, 1791, while Saint Domingue was controlled and the slaves were brutally oppressed by the French, a socially and spiritually charged gathering took place. This meeting of slaves and escaped slaves from the many different tribes (over twenty-one ethnic groups compose the population or peoples who now call themselves Haitians) who had been forcibly brought to the island provided the impetus for dynamic social change in Haiti.<sup>2</sup> The slaves had retained their spiritual connections, practices, and beliefs despite colonial attempts to suppress them, and this gathering became both a meeting and a spiritual call to action. An all-night ceremony took place, and the revolutionary leader Boukman appeared. The rhythms, dances, and rituals of rage and action, known as *Petwo*, or *Petro*, were born.<sup>3</sup> From this night of fiery rhythms and dances grew a long fight for freedom. The general slave revolt began on August 21, 1791, and on December 31, 1804, the formerly enslaved peoples of Haiti declared independence.

## VODOU AND DANCE/MOVEMENT THERAPY

The amalgam of spiritual beliefs and practices that evolved from the fusion of many tribes gave rise to the tradition of communal gatherings, rituals, rhythms, drumming, dancing, and healing rites that are known in Haiti as *Vodun*, *Vodou*, or *Vaudu* (referred to in this chapter as Vodou) and in the United States as Voodoo. The years of civil unrest and conflict, coups and political instability, and violence in the streets, in addition to conditions of extreme poverty, contribute to the ongoing and current trauma and suffering in Haiti, and to the survival of Vodou. Haiti’s history of extreme conditions was, and is, matched by a spiritual force that fostered resiliency and the ability to endure. Vodou not only cultivated the strength and resiliency to organize a rebellion and revolution, and

endure hundreds of years of political and social upheaval; it continues to permeate everyday life. Haiti is an artistic culture with a strong spiritual cosmology; the rituals and traditions of Vodou infuse life with healing, faith, and a strong sense of family, community, and social responsibility.

Vodou has at its core a central belief that its longevity and integrity as a spiritual practice and a way of life are determined in large part by the health and well-being of its practitioners. Vodou is a familial, ancestral, human-centered cosmology and a danced religion.<sup>4</sup> It is maintained through familial connections, and it is through this hereditary continuum that it manages to survive periods of intense oppression and silencing. For instance, during the occupation of Haiti by the United States Marines from 1915–1934 when drumming was outlawed and vast numbers of drums were initially destroyed by the occupying forces, practitioners or *sevitos*, as they are known, continued their traditions in more remote areas of the islands, and whatever drums could be saved were guarded in hidden places. (Eventually, it is said that the Marines ended up assisting practitioners to preserve their drums and, therefore, traditions.<sup>5</sup>) In earlier times of occupation and ongoing colonial rule, when drums were burned and destroyed, the slaves created alternative instruments using basic materials found in nature. These “racine” or roots instruments (*tambou marengwen*) include holes in the ground of varying depths covered by large leaves and tree bark of varying tensions, strings or twine of varying tension tied between branches, and other creative percussive instruments, which could be played less loudly than drums and then easily hidden or dismantled.

Deep ancestral respect is an integral aspect of Vodou, and the ancestors are venerated in the form of *lwa*, the spirits who inhabit through possession the *sevitos* of Vodou. The ancestors also continue and maintain the legacy of Vodou as aspects of the *gwo bon ange* (big good angel, or collective soul) described later. Of its humanocentrism, Fleurant writes: “Vodou recognizes one transcendental spiritual entity whose work is reflected through his/her creation, in the totality of the universe. . . . This, Vodou, as a religious system and as a way of life for the Haitian people, summarizes in its teaching the limitless potential of Homo sapiens for realizing their ontological vocation, the attainment of spiritual freedom in this life.”<sup>6</sup>

I began to work as a dance/movement therapist in Haiti ten years ago. I was drawn to Haiti first because of the dance. As a movement therapist I became curious how the dance- and rhythm-based rituals and traditions of Haiti and the practice of Vodou fit into the concept of therapy. Initially I imagined that dance/movement therapy, a somatic and creative arts psychotherapy with roots in ancient healing traditions from around the world, would be a perfect and well-suited healing modality for working with children who suffer from the multiple forms of ongoing violence and abuse that contribute

to conditions of social trauma in Haiti. Dance/movement therapy has its roots in the rituals and traditional healing practices of indigenous cultures around the world.<sup>7</sup> This is one important reason it can be an appropriate therapy for clients who come from different countries and cultures.<sup>8</sup> In addition, because dance/movement therapy focuses therapeutic work directly on the body and its movement, it provides a uniquely targeted therapy modality for survivors of extreme and ongoing stress and violence, albeit one that must be modified to be culturally congruent and noninvasive. In my ongoing work with street children (of which there are an estimated 2,500 in Port au Prince alone),<sup>9</sup> child survivors of the prisons (and often torture), and abandoned children who are also mentally and physically challenged, and adult and child survivors of organized violence, I have learned how a western psychotherapeutic practice, even one that integrates seemingly “cutting edge” therapies such as dance/movement therapy must undergo its own transmutation from being theoretically and conceptually a psychotherapy, to support the type of communal practice that is integral to the cosmology and practice of Haitian tradition.

Theoretically, dance/movement therapy is holistic; the individual is viewed as an integrated unity with mind and body reflecting and affecting each other.<sup>10</sup> Inherent in this integration is the premise that muscle tone, or a balance between relaxed and tense states, affects the psychic attitude and vice versa. Dance/movement therapy theory posits that the health-dysfunction continuum is reflected somatically, in the body. The theoretical foundation of dance/movement therapy is influenced by several perspectives from the field of psychology: somatic, psychodynamic, transpersonal, and interpersonal perspectives. For the purposes of this article, these are briefly explained here, along with their relevance to work with survivors of trauma.

From a somatic perspective, the integrated unity of an individual is the result of healthy development, broadly defined as the successful sequencing of the basic neurological actions that make up our earliest developmental movements.<sup>11</sup> Viewed in relationship to the environment, humans develop in an organized, sequential manner. Each phase in this developmental process has somatic and physiological elements as well as psychosocial aspects.<sup>12</sup> The successful and satisfactory completion of each of the phases supports healthy development and a state of health that is reflected in the body. This perspective is an important one in the treatment of trauma survivors because of the disruption to their ability to sequence experience.<sup>13</sup>

The psychodynamic perspective began its influence on dance/movement therapy at the earliest stages of its development as psychotherapy. Wilhelm Reich, who paid close attention to the expressive movements of his patients and posited “defenses were rooted in the body as muscular tension,” was developing his work around the same time that Marian Chace, who is considered the

pioneer of dance/movement therapy, was developing hers. The psychoanalytic influences of the period supported similar theories in their respective works.<sup>14</sup> Fran Levy writes, “Both were experimenting with psychomotor therapeutic intervention as a way to unlock the thoughts, ideas, and feelings they believed were held in the musculature in the form of rigidity.”<sup>15</sup> A focus of dance/movement therapy is to foster movement patterns that begin to mobilize and release the tensions of chronically tight areas, thereby supporting the expression of “repressed excitation and affect.”<sup>16</sup> There is relevance in this theoretical underpinning to clinical work with survivors of trauma, and in particular, trauma that involves physical abuse to the body such as child abuse, sexual abuse, and human rights abuses related to war, civil violence, and torture. These abuses are a direct attack to the physical human structure, and to one’s humanity. The emotions and excitations, or arousal and fear, that this attack produces are often necessarily repressed as a means to survive, and can sometimes safely be expressed through dance and movement, given the appropriate context. This phenomenon is described by Judith Hanna as cathartic and as having the potential to reduce depression, accumulated psychic stresses, and to safely restore “more enduring personality patterns.”<sup>17</sup>

Under the umbrella of the psychodynamic perspective it is also important to consider the interpersonal perspective. From this perspective, dance/movement therapy is viewed “as a process of resocialization vis-à-vis the interactive process.”<sup>18</sup> Such a view takes into account that healthy human development requires a communicational relationship between an infant and his or her caregiver. This early foundational relationship is “carried out primarily through mutual sensori-motor engagement.”<sup>19</sup> That the earliest form of communication is movement has implications for clinical work with survivors of extreme social and/or relational trauma from other countries and cultures, for there is often a verbal language barrier between client and therapist, and many cultures, as in Haiti, emphasize family and community bonds and commitments over individual needs. Movement—the primary means of expression in dance/movement therapy—is behavior that is experienced by all people, everywhere, to some extent, especially in the early part of life.

Object relations theories also influence the interpersonal aspects of dance/movement therapy; the internal representation of early relationships is often present in the therapeutic relationship. In dance/movement therapy, such representations are frequently invoked through sensation and motoric activity, as well as through images and memories. The rehabilitation of a survivor of human-induced trauma will always depend on the ability to build healthy relationships. For relational trauma, the importance of relationship in the healing process cannot be overemphasized. The extreme state of dependency created by the physical and human rights abuses can create an uncanny bond between

the perpetrator and the survivor, or the governing body that abuses power and the community. In the course of therapy for the survivor, this bond can appear as an internal representation or experience of the perpetrator. The manifestation of this in the physical structure of many clients I've seen is a withdrawal into a subservient or fetallike posture, a somatic expression of helplessness.

From a transpersonal perspective, being human can be described as a creative and a sacred act. Dance is an ancient form of worship in many cultures, and the use of dance in rituals of mourning, celebration, and divination is frequently cited. "What is made sensorily perceptible in dance, such as anxiety and fear, is thereby made accessible to purposive action by individuals or groups."<sup>20</sup> Dance is both art and sacred experience, and in the joyful, ecstatic, and often painful states expressed by many forms of ancient and contemporary dance, the body is the medium for expression and divination. Trudi Schoop, whose work focused extensively on the use of improvisational movements as "free association" and planned movement formulation as ego function, believed that any form of man-made art draws on the creative forces of the "UR." She describes the UR as "endless space and/or endless time that continues with no apparent reason."<sup>21</sup> A healthy body creatively and freely opens to our connection to this universal force, or life energy, and the act of healing can be seen as restoring a sense of awareness of, and connectedness to, what Lewis calls "the universal pool of knowing."<sup>22</sup> With regards to the experience of physical abuse, an act of unspeakable terror, the words of Claire Schmais best describe the significance of the transpersonal perspective: "By virtue of the nonliteral or apparently nonrational aspects of the creative act, deep feelings that defy words can be symbolically represented."<sup>23</sup>

In fact, it is the transpersonal perspective that most strongly provides a rationale for the application of dance/movement therapy to work with survivors of trauma and human rights abuses whose culture, language, and cosmology are different from that of the therapist or facilitator. This transpersonal perspective supports the integration of the customs, rituals, and traditions familiar to the culture into the healing process or therapeutic form. And because of its emphasis on movement, nonverbal communication, and the holistic continuum of body-mind-spirit, dance/movement therapy is an effective medium for this type of integration to occur.

Dance is an integral part of ritual practice that has carved the ontological path of human development and human "beingness." Dance, as a human phenomenon, differs from the ritualized dances of animals in that humans can make meaning from, and assign value to, the culturally sanctioned, nonverbal movement patterns that emerge, either spontaneously or in choreographed dances. Dance is a reflection of the human ability to extend beyond preprogrammed motoric sequences necessary to the survival of our species, and to

engage in a creative act that supports a transformative process. Vodou is a danced religion that recognizes and celebrates all these aspects: in my work in Haiti as both a dance/movement therapist and an initiate, I have learned that the dance *is* the healing and expresses the continuum that exists between the spiritual world and the world of humans. Maya Deren, the anthropologist who spent many years studying Vodou and became an initiate herself, writes, “To dance was at once to worship and to pray. . . . To dance is to take part in the cosmic control of the world.” As ritual dancing, the dances and accompanying rhythms and drumming of Vodou (which are truly inseparable) have as their intent “to affect the participant, the means by which the physical act creates a specific psychic state are refined and developed.” Deren describes ritual, in the context of ritual dance, as an “exemplary demonstration of principle in action, so that the actual dance is, itself, principled.”<sup>24</sup> In my own experience, dance, song, rhythm, and spirit are central to the preparation, ceremony, and post-ceremony activities in every traditional *lakou* (spiritual gathering place), and the body is the site and source of everything from the mundane to the divine.

When I began my work with children in Haiti, and later with adult survivors of a massacre on the massacre site, I was quickly schooled in the basics of group facilitation from the perspective of their culture and cosmology.<sup>25</sup> In Vodou, the facilitator does not assume a unilateral or linear leadership role; he or she initiates the group activity or ritual, and an oscillation between leading and following occurs. My work as a group facilitator or therapist evolved from that of a traditional dance/movement therapist to that of a facilitator of communal gatherings that integrated the rituals of Haitian tradition and Vodou. My subsequent initiation and ongoing work as a *sevito* further guides my work so that my facilitation skills are the correct balance between relaxed or open, and tense or directive, leadership states—like that of healthy muscle tone. In other words (the words of my spiritual teacher), I learned to “show up, shut up, and get what’s going on.” I quickly learned that the children were my teachers, and that dance/movement therapy was best suited to group process as a response to, and integration of, their cultural and spiritual practices. I also discovered that many of the principles of dance/movement therapy appear to share similarities with principles of Vodou, a fact that has more relevance, perhaps, for the author than for the children I worked with. It is my belief as I continue to work at least once a year in Haiti that the rituals and practices of Vodou provide essential developmental, social, historical, and cultural progressions and landmarks that are healing in their own right.

In classical dance/movement therapy, based on the work of Chace, group therapy is usually done in a circle. The circle creates a safe container for group expression, process, and healing. In Vodou, the ceremonial dances are

also done in a circle, around a clearly delineated center within the peristyle (ceremonial space), called the *poteau mitan*. This *poteau mitan* represents the intersection of the vertical and horizontal dimensions. It is also the point where the physical world and the spiritual world meet. Dance/movement therapists work with the concept that horizontal, vertical, and sagittal dimensions of movement are milestones in human development that are visible in individual and collective movement. They observe movement gestures and patterns, and mirror observations back to participants in an act of reflection and witnessing. The therapeutic relationship depends on this kinesthetic empathy, which is communicated nonverbally, through mirroring and attunement, and verbally, through reflective and descriptive dialogue.

In Vodou, as in dance/movement therapy, the mirror is an important concept; it is believed that those who have died exist in a world, *Guinee*, on the other side of the ocean. *Guinee* is the ancestral home of the Haitians. The ocean serves as the mirror through which ancestors reflect the actions of our individual and collective lives back to us. Each human life has a *ti bon ange* (little good angel), the part of the soul directly associated with the individual, and a *gros bon ange* (big good angel), the life force that all sentient beings share. At the time of birth it enters the individual, and when death occurs, returns to the universal source of life force, God. This principle of collective experience informs a strong sense of responsibility to both the ancestors and to all those with whom life is shared, and appears to be similar, albeit more broadly based, to the Jungian concept of collective unconscious or the dance/movement therapy concept of UR.

Vodou as a way of life embodies the ongoing human relationship with the natural, ancestral, and spiritual world, and imbues life with meaning derived from its rituals. Both the individual and the collective body are tools for divination and prayer. Healing in Vodou occurs in community. The community is always present in the traditional gatherings and rituals of healing to support and witness. There are always observers to the dancers and drummers in ritual, who literally and metaphorically “hold the space.” This communal aspect is similar to the dance/movement therapy practice of authentic movement, pioneered by Mary Whitehouse, in which there is always a mover and a witness (and sometimes, several movers and witnesses).<sup>26</sup> The form relies on the integral and inseparable relationship between movers and witnesses as reflections of one another for its function.

Finally, in its impressive attempt to survive colonialism and long periods of occupation, Vodou integrates many of the saints and symbols of Catholicism. They are included in altars, ceremonies, and religious rites and are as much a part of the practice as the African-derived symbols and spirits. This integration helped the tradition of Vodou to survive by “evolving” it to include more

current religious elements that dominated the colonial societies and culture. In fact, Vodou is described as an always evolving religion. Integration is also one of the principal healing processes of group dance/movement therapy.<sup>27</sup> The group experience is seen as an opportunity to integrate the individual issues and actions of group members into a communal healing group process.

## WORKING WITH STREET CHILDREN IN HAITI

The problem of street children is a global one that grows daily. Street children may be children who truly live on the streets, sleeping where they can and forced to eke out an existence.<sup>28</sup> Such a life can often include prostitution, sexual slavery, drug dealing, and crime. Some of the street children go home at night, but they often face unbearable abuse in their homes, caused by the oppressive and impoverished environment in which the family lives. Many children in rural Haiti are sold to wealthier Haitians in the cities to be used as *restaveks*, and while at times they are treated respectfully as household help, this position can also mean sexual slavery, extreme neglect, and abuse. Torture is prevalent in the jails in Haiti and, more recently, in the frequent cases of kidnapping occurring in Port au Prince. Many street children are jailed, repeatedly, by law enforcement officials and sometimes by their own parents, simply for being on the streets or because their families cannot provide adequate care for them. Kidnapping affects adults and children alike on almost a daily basis.

Haiti is, for all practical purposes, a low-intensity conflict zone; the years of colonial rule, slavery, and oppression have created social conditions that contribute to ongoing street and civil violence, and continue to plague the social well-being and health of the Haitian people. The period of 2003 to the present has been plagued with violence and danger, and Haiti is, as of this writing, currently occupied by United Nations Peacekeeping Forces. Corruption in the government and a severe depletion of resources contribute to ongoing starvation, poverty, and distress, which impacts almost every Haitian's life. At times, even the wealthy endure frequent power, water, and petroleum shortages, and ongoing civil unrest and violence. The use of weapons, and specifically guns, is increasing in street violence, especially among the ever-growing numbers of gangs. Despite, or perhaps due to, these deplorable social conditions, Vodou continues as a response and powerful intervention to transform the energy of extremely challenging social conditions in Haiti.

To work in Haiti, I prepared myself with tapes of varying rhythms and musical styles, and ideas for group activities. The children who participated in one of several programs I have worked with, CODEHA, were part of a

simple education program run from its founders' backyard, adjacent to a garbage dump (other programs include St. Josephs Home for Boys and Wings of Hope in Cap Haitien, and project Pierre Toussaint in Cap Haitien; children are all male and aged six to twenty-one). In one early group session I led, they quickly abandoned my recorded music, and several of them began to drum. They drummed the rhythms of Vodou, and initially only acknowledged the rhythms as such. After several more sessions, they began to name and describe the rhythms to me, sharing the names and meaning of the *lwa* for whom the rhythms were played, and demonstrating some of the dance movements that accompanied these rhythms. The children who were not drumming began to move in and out of the center of the circle, one at a time, taking turns leading, being followed, and following. As each child created a movement phrase in the center, he or she turned toward each child in the outer or witness circle, and they mirrored movements to one another. No child skipped being witnessed by each member of the group. It was made clear to me that each person had to spend time in the center, to lead or initiate movement, to be seen, and then to offer back to each mover in the center the mirroring of his/her movement. This practice is similar to the tradition of the solo circle that exists in many African dances and rituals, and somewhat similar to the traditional dance/movement therapy circle, although rarely in the traditional psychotherapeutic group setting have I seen group participants so consciously seek the center of the circle, and the opportunity to be seen and to have their experience reflected back to them.

The dances they shared displayed a wide repertoire of movement styles. Yanvalou, danced in supplication at the beginning of all ceremonies, consists of graceful, fluid snakelike movements that honor Damballah and Aida Wedo, the snake *lwa*. They have been described to me as the *lwa* who represent creation, and they are perhaps the most widely known *lwa* in Haiti.<sup>29</sup> The children also taught me some of the movements associated with the dances for the *Guede*, the entities of life and death. One of these dances, *Banda*, contains movements that depict our sensual and sexual nature as human beings, and the dance, in my experience, is one that pokes fun at human folly and therefore contains elements of humor and trickster energy. This dance and rhythm is usually found toward the end of a ceremony. They also shared the strong, warriorlike movements danced in *Nago* for the *Ogoun* (warrior) family of *lwa*.

As our work together progressed, an exchange between the children and myself occurred. Although they were aware of the roots of their Vodou traditions, rhythms, and dances as being African, they complained that they did not know any "real African dances," and wanted to learn them. Thus began an exchange in which each child would teach me a movement from a social or sacred dance associated with *Rara* (the rural equivalent of Mardi Gras) or

the Vodou ceremony, and I would reciprocate with a movement from a West African dance.<sup>30</sup> In this exchange we taught one another about the histories and meaning of the dances, as we knew them, and discussed the collective history of Africa and Haiti.

The children also taught me to cocreate with them and incorporate rituals to begin and end each session that we eventually integrated into every session. They instructed me that ritual was the way to integrate the meaning of our work together into daily and ongoing life. One we created consisted of a simple cleansing ritual using water, to clear the space and to retain the “freshness” and “newness” of the dance after clearing the soul of excess energy and burden. The children stressed the importance of my understanding that healing only occurs when there is community-endorsed movement into and out of the spirit world through ritual and that this is how we make connection with the ancestors, ask for assistance and support, and integrate what we have learned and what we must do to take right action into our daily lives.

The dances of Vodou are dances that both celebrate life and initiate the essential processes and experiences of life, as they relate to the continuum of existence we are all part of. These dances, embedded in a meaningful and historical philosophy of the existence of all life, are core to the healing of children in Haiti. Individuals express and process suffering in the presence of community, and the community builds resilience through a creative, collective process that mirrors and honors the very roots of Haitian culture.

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned previously, the strongly transpersonal nature of dance/movement therapy and of dance itself as a creative force lends it to the discovery of a historically common language for the deeper expressions of the soul that is likely inherent in dance/movement therapy and in the healing rituals of not only Vodou but of many of the healing rituals and traditions to be found in indigenous cultures worldwide. The use of indigenous healing for war-affected children in Africa has been documented as demonstrating that the practices of traditional healers may be just as effective as any western psychotherapy introduced to another culture if it is “embedded within social and cultural specificities.”<sup>31</sup> David Read Johnson, a psychologist who incorporates the creative arts therapies and ritual into his work with survivors of trauma and has worked extensively with combat veterans, describes the importance of ritual and ceremony to reestablish social connection after individual or collective traumatic experience.<sup>32</sup> Ceremony can “re-contextualize the experience of trauma,”

and communal ritual can “encourage identification and attachment with the group and its system of defense, alleviating pressure on the individual.”<sup>33</sup> Dance/movement therapy, a somatic and a creative arts psychotherapy with a strong emphasis in group psychotherapy, may indeed be a psychotherapeutic vehicle to create these social and cultural specificities, albeit one that must also break free of some of its western psychotherapeutic origins that can become cultural limitations.

While all western psychotherapeutic practice has merit as one aspect of response or intervention to trauma caused by war, violence, or human rights abuse, dance/movement therapy is perhaps one that merits further exploration as the need grows for countries such as the U.S. to respond to the increasing number of civil and political conflicts, wars, genocide, and acts of terrorism around the globe. The flexibility and fluidity inherent in the practice and application of dance/movement therapy create a medium in which the cultural and social practices essential to recovery from extreme stress, even if the individuals or social structures that carry them are disrupted or in part destroyed by the acts of violence, can be cultivated and integrated into a larger-scale healing process.

## NOTES

1. American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

2. Gerdes Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals of Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 2; and Mano Brignol, personal interview, February 27, 2003.

3. The *Petwo*, or *Petro*, rhythms and dances are uniquely Haitian. The tradition of Vodou continues to honor and pay tribute to the various tribal rhythms and dances that came over from Africa (i.e., Nago, Congo, Rada, Ibo), and these are woven into all traditional ceremonies. The *Petwo* spirits who are said in spoken legend to have been “birthed” on August 14, 1791, are considered to be some of the fieriest and most dangerous spirits, and are treated with utmost respect and only called upon in specific circumstances. One does not call them or speak of them without sufficient preparation.

4. Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits*, 2.

5. Odette Weiner (Mambo), interview May 31, 1999.

6. Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits*, 9.

7. Irmgard Bartenieff, “Dance Therapy: A New Profession or a Rediscovery of an Ancient Role of the Dance?” *Dance Scope* 7, no. 1 (1972/3): 6–18.

8. It is commonly cited that dance/movement therapy has its deepest roots in ancient traditions of healing; these are not necessarily specifically elucidated in the early work. However, as an example, the Minianka tribe of Mali has always healed through

rhythm. Health is restored by leading an individual back into a state of alignment with the rhythms appropriate to his/her professional role and personal identity. Their healers make use of what physics calls the principle of resonance or entrainment. Entrainment causes two similar but slightly different rhythms to gradually fall into unison if they are placed in close proximity. A disturbed person's rhythmic patterns will shift according to the rhythms of the drums. In their use of rhythm as a tool for social integration, harmony, and cohesiveness, tribal societies show an intuitive understanding of entrainment. Also, "repetitive, rhythmic movement was thought essential [in many cultures] to build up the movement of ecstatic union with the deity, like rhythmic sensual movements and orgasm. Rhythm is medicine for both the individual and the community, and communal drumming and dancing unite celebration and healing." See Jalaja Bonheim, *The Serpent and the Wave* (Berkeley, Calif.: Celestial Arts, 1992), 154.

9. Amber Gray, "Dancing in Our Blood: Dance/Movement Therapy Voodoo and Social Trauma with Street Children in Haiti" (master's thesis, Naropa University, 1999), 30; UNICEF, at [unicef.org/index.php](http://unicef.org/index.php) (2007).

10. Penny Lewis, "A Holistic Frame of Reference in Dance-Movement Therapy," in *Theoretical Approaches in Dance-Movement Therapy*, vol. I (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1986), 279–89.

11. Susan Aposhyan, *Natural Intelligence: Body-Mind Integration and Human Development* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1999); Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling and Action* (Northampton, Mass.: Contact Editions, 1993).

12. Penny Lewis, "A Holistic Frame of Reference," 1986.

13. For example, while in Haiti I worked with a seventeen-year-old boy who was severely undersized from malnutrition and abuse. His body posture was fixated in the position he was found and tortured in—he was tightly bound in a twisted fetal position on the floor, and always faced the wall with his head turned to the right. He responded to only one invitation: if he were approached from his left side he would grab the outreached hand and push hard into the person approaching him. This single-armed pushing pattern (homologous push) was a very early developmental movement that appeared to be truncated at a fixated, frozen shoulder. Through our sessions his upper body began to relax and he was able to develop more relational behavior and begin to increase emotional expression. See Amber Gray, "The Body Remembers: Dance/Movement Therapy with an Adult Survivor of Torture," *Journal of Dance Therapy* 23, no. 1 (2001): 32; "Healing the Relational Wounds of Torture through Dance Movement Therapy," *Dialogus* 5, no. 1 (2001): 1–4; and "Dance Movement Therapy with a Child Survivor: A Case Study," *Dialogus* 6, no. 1 (2001): 8–12.

14. Claire Schmais, "Dance Therapy in Perspective," in *Focus on Dance VII*, ed. K. Mason (Washington, D.C.: AAHPER, 1977), 9. Marian Chace is considered the mother of dance/movement therapy, having created an extensive body of work that is still the foundation of education in dance/movement therapy in the United States. Her work, which developed around the same time as Wilhelm Reich's, displays the strong psychodynamic influences of the time, and all the pioneers of dance/movement therapy demonstrate influences from the psychotherapies of the time as well as concepts developed in the dance world (i.e., Rudolf Laban's efforts).

15. Fran Levy, *Dance/Movement Therapy: A Healing Art* (Reston, Va.: American Alliance for Health, 1988), 25.
16. Claire Schmais, "Dance Therapy in Perspective," 9.
17. Judith Hanna, *To Dance Is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 68.
18. Claire Schmais, "Dance Therapy in Perspective," 9.
19. Penny Lewis, "A Holistic Frame of Reference," 289.
20. Judith Hanna, *To Dance Is Human*, 68.
21. Fran Levy, *Dance/Movement Therapy*, 77.
22. Penny Lewis, "A Holistic Frame of Reference," 280.
23. Claire Schmais, "Dance Therapy in Perspective," 9.
24. Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Voodoo Gods of Haiti* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1953), 240–41.
25. The children, who participated in programs described later in this chapter, did not tolerate my showing leadership of the group process until I had been there enough times to earn their respect and confidence. Initially this group dynamic appeared to me to be resistance, but eventually I learned that the children, who were strongly bonded in their community of street children, had adapted what I later came to know, through Vodou, as interactive facilitation (my description). In Vodou, the Mambo (female) or Houngan (male) is a spiritual, medicinal, and social leader, and as such, is imbued with certain authorities, education, and powers. It is their responsibility to be familiar with the sequence of songs, prayers, and rhythms that compose a proper ceremony, based on the purpose, timing, and meaning of the ceremony. Similar to the role of the witness or mover in authentic movement or many other forms of therapy or dance, their role is to be the presence that "creates and holds the space," be it creative, healing, or ceremonial space. Other than keeping the group and ceremonial activities on track, the facilitator does not interfere, interpret, or judge; only in cases in which a participant needs assistance that the community cannot provide will the Mambo or Houngan intervene. Abuses in this power are not tolerated. Hence, the Mambo or Houngan is both leader and in service to spirit. Community or neighborhood leaders in Haiti perform a similar role for their communities.
26. Authentic Movement is a movement form in which the therapist, facilitator, or witness observes the client, or mover, in silence. Jungian psychology influenced the development of this work, and while the therapist, or witness, may be applying any of the above-described theoretical foundations of dance/movement therapy to the mover's practice, this is not usually done aloud. The witness shares observations of the mover from the perspective of "I." For example, rather than interpret or judge a movement gesture or sequence, the witness might say, "When I saw you raise your arm, I felt my own breath move upwards in my body." For a good description of Authentic Movement, see Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler, Joan Chodorow, and Patrizia Pallaro, eds., *Authentic Movement* (London and Philadelphia: J. Kingsley Publishers, 1999).
27. Claire Schmais, "Healing Processes in Group Dance Therapy," *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 8 (1985): 17–36.
28. Amber Gray, "Dancing in Our Blood."

29. Odette Weiner, interview, May 31, 1999.

30. Gerdes Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits*, 13. As a dancer I have been involved with several troupes that perform West African and Afro-Caribbean dance. The foundation of African dance and drumming, and drum circles, is the call and response: the drums and dancers are in a constant state of interaction with one another—drumming responds to the movements of the dancers, and movement responds to the rhythm of the drum. One of the dances I frequently teach, for example, is a West African (Guinea) Harvest Dance (also called “Kakelambi”), whose movements symbolize and mimic gestures associated with the important act of harvesting (planting, sifting, sowing, and picking crops). Another dance, *Funga*, from Nigeria, is a dance of welcome, in which the movement itself gestures from the heart upwards to the sky, downwards to the earth, and directly out (sagittally) toward other people in the area.

31. Edward Green and Alcinda Honwana, “Indigenous Healing of War-Affected Children in Africa,” *IK Notes*, no. 10 (July 1999): 2.

32. David R. Johnson, “The Role of the Creative Arts Therapies in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Psychological Trauma,” *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 14 (1987): 7–13.

33. David R. Johnson, “The Therapeutic Use of Ritual and Ceremony in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 8, no. 2 (1995): 286.