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Blood Vs. Water

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BLOOD VS. WATER

An excavation of the history my body holds
and my journey with and to Spirit.

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts and Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Sakinah Fatima Bennett

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2021

To my Mom who is the light of my life. I love you forever. To my Nana and Granddad, thank y'all for loving me with everything in you. To my dad Tydus Bennett, who despite everything I forgive and love you. To my stepdad Mark, thank you. To my Grandma Carolyn, love you. To my little brothers Mark and Rashad, my hearts, everything I do is for y'all. To my partner Munir, without you this project would not have been possible. I love you in this lifetime and the next. To Tyisha and all of my Bennett siblings I love y'all like we've been together forever. To my uncles Naim, Sabir, Dullah, Mo, Aaron thank you, my dad wasn't around so God gave me 5 of them lol. To all my other uncles near and far thank you dearly for all the love. To my aunties Brenda, Rosalind, Michelle, Kili, Monica, Lori, Scheena and so many more thank y'all for sending me so much love always. To my big cousins Tasha, Roshelle, Imani, Ayanna, Sakinah, Elle, Gloria and so many more I look up to y'all more than you'll ever know. To my little cousins more like siblings, my nieces, and nephew the sky's the limit I hope I set a great example. To my dance teachers and other parents from Mrs. Axam, Ms. Adrienne, Mr. Connor, to A.D. West I dance because of you all I could never thank you enough. To all the dancers that came before me and inspire me each and every day, Thank You for paving the way. Thank you for To Bard Posse 9, Tekeyia, Mel, and the whole Posse ATL office we did it! To Skylar and Sister2Sister the world isn't ready. To my best friends I couldn't ask for a better group, my chosen family I'd choose time and time again. To all my family, friends, teachers, counselors, professors, coaches, mentors, supporters, and ancestors thank you. It truly has taken a village and I wish I could say every name, because there isn't a village better than mine.

In memory of Julia Gethers, Uncle Spunky, Papa, Uncle Mo, Chance, Warren, Granddaddy Blossomgame, Nanny, Aunt Jackie, Simone, Great-Great Grandma English, Siera and all of my ancestors.

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INTRODUCTION/ARTIST STATEMENT

My past experiences known and unknown have affected me as the artist that I am. I believe that slavery and the horrific events that happened during that time, show up and exist in my body and my work. I believe that how I experienced dance in my childhood imprinted on my movement as a dancer now, and shows up when I consider what I value artistically. These imprints are inescapable and if one does not take the time for deep introspection and extrospection, these factors may be completely ignored because of how integrated they are within our being.. My goal at one time, was to strip them away in order to reveal what I felt would be my true authenticity. I now see that this thought derives from a self-loathing and distant space. To know my history is to love and take pride in who I am and the experiences that created my very being in this very moment. I want to explore more from a place of self love, acceptance, peace, and gratitude for who I am and all that consists of. My goal now is to locate, notice, or acknowledge these things and learn all that is within my body and effortlessly makes an appearance in my work. Where do they come from? What is communal? What is authentically me?

Communal could be family oriented or black dance oriented. Those are the main two communities I am thinking of and how information is translated and transported throughout time in these spaces. What I've picked up or what I have left behind.

Authenticity, to me, is the product of the combination of these experiences; instead of what is me without these experiences which is what I originally thought it to be. I believe that although one

can be traumatized at certain times in life I don't think it is a permanent state of mind that I am imprisoned to enduring and responding to my whole life. I believe, I can, I deserve, and my predecessors deserve peace and bliss although I know the stain of trauma never completely goes away.

I hope to create a dance and body of work from a place of peace and to actively process pain. Things are going to be painful. I am black. I am a woman. I am a dancer. I am HUMAN. There's heartbreak. There's hunger. There's hurt. But I don't want to be subject to a life shaped and defined by trauma.

“Finding yourself” is not really how it works. You aren't a ten-dollar bill in last winter's coat pocket. You are also not lost. Your true self is right there, buried under cultural conditioning, other people's opinions, and inaccurate conclusions you drew as a kid that became your beliefs about who you are. “Finding yourself” is actually about returning to yourself. An unlearning, and excavation, a remembering who you were before the world got its hands on you.”

-Unknown

My experiences are me. This project is an excavation of these experiences in order to create consciousness, awareness, assign language, and pay homage to those experiences that have heavily influenced how I move through the world with dance as my medium. I am really interested in the embodiment of history rather than the traditionally written and published history. Acknowledging the history that we hold in our vessels and that history being just as important, present, and valuable as the history we may read.

Hallowed

Can I get an Amen? I can't even begin to tell you how many times I've heard this phrase and responded to it with a big and loud "Amen Pastor!" Growing up in the south, specifically Atlanta, Georgia, I was a part of a culture that was heavily influenced by the African American church experience. From Sunday services, to Sunday's best, bible study, and fish fry's, there are so many memories that have had a great impact on the person and artist I am today.

I grew up in Douglasville, Georgia about 15 miles west of Atlanta. As far as I can remember I always practiced my family's Sunday ritual, church. We went to several churches growing up but the most consistent experience was at my aunt's church that she presided over as Bishop. My mom didn't attend church often but whenever I was with my Nana you could bet your life on Sunday morning you were going to church. Not only was I going to church but she was probably going to ask me if I could do a dance for the congregation. "Oh my gosh..." *Cues facepalm* I'd rather do anything else but dance for the congregation. Why was I never asked to be an usher? For some reason dancing at church always made me so nervous. For one, I knew this meant I was dancing alone, which for myself as a young dancer was terrifying. Secondly, I always felt this immense pressure to be of a certain performative caliber in order to make somebody, "Catch the Holy Ghost," as my elders would say. Lastly, dancing in church always made me feel so overwhelmed with emotion and so vulnerable. I hated feeling like I was going to cry after these performances and sometimes I did. It was different from performing at my school or at my annual dance recital. It always felt like so much more, but I couldn't place my finger on why?

The curiosity I had and still have surrounding this feeling deeply informed my practice while creating in the studio. Which led to the journey I took to tap into those memories and recreate this feeling in a completely different environment. My process, initially when creating, was figuring out how to mimic that experience in any way I could. The first way was through music. Although I knew I wanted to dance to original music, I used some of my favorite gospel songs to improv and choreograph to. Songs like Marvin Sapp “Never Would of Made it,” Lawrence Flowers “More,” and an endless playlist of other songs that carried the energy and spirit and I wanted to embody. A lot of my time in the studio looked like this. Finding these powerful songs and moving to them, recording the movement to pull from later, and then writing down the feelings they brought up. I was so interested in how music assisted me in this journey to experiencing Spirit, more specifically black gospel music. What was in it that felt so familiar and exciting to my body and other black bodies? How does the overarching theme of divinity, religion, soul, and spirit contribute to that experience and where does this info exist in my body.

In Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s work the *Black Dancing Body*, she answers my question about this overwhelming feeling so beautifully:

“One of the reasons the black dancing body exhibits such a palpable, tangible, almost material sense of spirit/soul is its heritage: *Danced* religion and *dancing* divinities reside in African and African American history as well as in the Africanist collective memory. It is not a matter of biology, *not* genes, but a *cultural unconscious* that lives in the spirit and is reconstituted--re-membered --in the muscles, blood, skin, and bone of the black dancing body. In continental and diasporan African religions the devotees embody the deities. The divinity is manifested by entering the body of the practitioner and becoming the “divine horseman” with the dancing body as its steed. In Europeanist outsider-speak, this practice is called “possession.” But

that term doesn't begin to approximate the culturally sophisticated learned response that is entailed in divine energy dancing, singing, and living through one's body. Possession sounds like chaos, hysteria, disempowerment, whereas "embodying" bespeaks the strength, groundedness, and healing energy imparted to the devotee who dances her deities." (Gottschild, pg.225)

Black dancing, more specifically black dancing bodies are inevitably spiritual. It is a natural part of the black body to be able to tap into this part of the black experience through what Gottschild refers to as "Collective Memory." As a child I felt like it was this wild, uncontrollable, emotional experience but I now believe that this is a deep metaphysical practice that has been passed down to me through many generations. Dancing in the black church, with and around other black bodies, that were also spiritually charged only heightened my experience.



Dancing at my Great Grandmother's funeral, 2010 Julia Gethers

“This practice of divine dancing exists even in Africanist forms of Christianity. Although there is only one Christian deity, blacks in many Christian denominations “get the Holy Spirit” and dance, shout, and let the spirit move them in their worship services, just as their African ancestors did in homage to traditional pantheons of divine forces.” (Gottschild, pg. 225) The picture above displays this experience from a performance I did at my Great Grandma’s funeral in 2010. Although I was very sad about the passing of my Grandmother in this realm, this dance was done with the help of spirit and my ancestors. There is always a sense of familiarity when dancing in these spaces and it derives from the embodiment of history that we (I) naturally possess. This is the familiarity I needed my piece to have. From choosing my costume, the material, and how the skirt needed flow with my movement it was crucial to the story and is reminiscent of the dress I am wearing in the picture above. The process was ritualistic because the experiences stem from this practice that is embedded deeply within our culture.

The history of the black church in the deep south of America and praise dance also referred to as sacred dance or liturgical dance is a complex one that pulls from many cultures and practices within the African diaspora. More generally, we see dancing as a major part of communication, celebration, and praise utilized by slaves in America in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Paired with percussive beats, that at that time were made with the body, in dances like the Ring Shout, but now show up in gospel music, praise dance was a powerful mechanism used to create a spiritual environment and minister a powerful message. Enslaved people would take the information that was given to them through their Master’s interpretation or teachings of Christianity and use the melodies and even characteristics of movement of traditional African dance to create their own new traditions. These same traditions have evolved to Miming, a composition of exaggerated gesture movements usually done with a masked or

painted face and gloves to form gospel music. These traditions have also evolved to banner/ flag and praise dance. All vital aspects to the black church experience.

Now, growing into my practice as a dancer and choreographer I find myself more connected to this aspect of my roots than ever. Whenever I turn on gospel music, in the studio or anywhere, I feel compelled to dance. I feel vulnerable but also free. I feel overwhelmed but also proud. I have never even considered my love or attraction to this particular style of dance or music until recently. This music enabled me to tap into an embodied experience that I had without being present in that environment. I became these experiences, I embodied history. The church was wherever I was and my process in the studio solidified that for me. It was what I felt most comfortable, willing, and pulled to dance to. Using this music and the history I embody and letting it do it's natural thing. Dancing with this music felt and continues to feel purposeful and inspiring. I strive to create work that makes other people feel the same way. Work that causes them to go inward and explore what they themselves may be carrying that they didn't know was there.

Black church dance has made its way all across the world outside of the church. Some of my favorite works have had a major presence of Black Church dance culture and have served as my inspiration for this piece. Works like Alvin Ailey's "Revelations" where the dancers are dressed in stunning white costumes in the beginning of it that are reminiscent of the material and style of the liturgical dancewear seen in the black church. This costume inspired my Costuming for my final performance.



Dancers Kirven Douthit-Boy, Alicia Graf Mack, and Demetia Hopkins-Greene
Shot By Gert Krautbauer

Or works like Ron Brown's "Grace" with beautiful music and powerful movements that makes you feel like this dance is being done for something quite bigger than the people in the audience.



Ronald K. Brown's Company "Evidence" Performing his work "Grace"
Photographer: Unknown

This is what has continued to keep me drawn and inspired to this particular type of dance. Finding ways to create my own choreography to recreate this feeling. Is it possible to experience the “Holy Ghost,” or intense encounters with Spirit like the moments I experienced growing. How does the music I am using play a huge role in how the audience members and myself feel and respond to my work? What are those elements that the music needs to have that feel familiar or reminiscent of the music played in that environment? All lines of inquiry that I continued to grapple with while creating this work.

Let’s look at Alvin Ailey’s work, “Revelations.” This is one of the first interactions I had with professional concert dance. The first time I had experienced the blending of two parts of my identity in such a prestigious, acceptable, and grand way. Also the first time I was certain that I wanted to dance for the rest of my life. I was at the Fox Theatre with hundreds of other people all in awe of the work, the dancers, and the overwhelming feeling that this was in reverence to something bigger than all of us. At least that’s what I assumed everyone felt. Alvin Ailey is a world renowned African American, choreographer, dancer, and founder of Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre. He choreographed revelations very young at the age of 29. “Drawing on the his childhood recollections of people, places and experiences in and around his rural church, and using traditional African American blues, work songs, and spirituals as his musical inspiration, Ailey tells the story of African American faith and persistence from slavery to freedom.” Ailey fuses the history of African Americans in this country with his own lived experiences surrounding his faith and growing up in Texas, to create one of the most popular dance works in the world. Mr. Ailey refers to his memories as “blood memories,” because he felt they were so much a part of him as the blood that ran through his veins. “Blood memories,” to Mr. Ailey, “Collective memory,” to Mrs. Dixon Gottschild, and “Embodied history,” to me; this potent

presence of the past that is deeply ingrained in us as black people and shows up in how we live and express ourselves freely everyday.

Ailey was so heavily inspired and fueled by the racial violence that black people endured during and before his lifetime and considered it his responsibility to tell this story. I think about the history of black people in America and I imagine that the music and the culture of gospel music, praise dance, and the black church is a direct product of all that was endured as a race. To create or partake in art within the black church was a radical act and continues to be to this very day. To be, practice, and believe in one's spirituality despite acts of violence constantly being imposed on your community is a huge act and the music and the dance embodies and represents that wholeheartedly.

Furthermore, "Revelations" was choreographed in sections and there are 3 in total. The first section is called "Pilgrim of Sorrow," and that touches on the weight that melanated people in America carried with them each and everyday or what Judith Jamison describes as the, "Burden of life. You've been weighed down by the world and aspiring to touch something you cannot touch but you can only feel." This quote resonated a lot with my research and argument. This research translated into big movement with my head up high and my arms spread wide or taking movement from the church such as the "Shout," and integrating it with contemporary dance movement. It was important for me to identify whether or not the essence of these movements intertwined with contemporary would be as effective as authentic praise dance movement.

The second section of this amazing piece of work is called, "Take Me To The Water," and this part was based on Mr. Ailey's personal baptism experience. In an interview about his

inspiration for his choreography he described how, “One would go and be baptised at the lake outside the church all dressed in white.” This section inspired the ending of the piece and my interest in working with water. Water has always been something that has encouraged clarity for me and although I was never physically baptised I have witnessed many and felt like this was a great opportunity to orchestrate my own in reference to the concept of my work. Water and baptisms are a huge part of rituals throughout the diaspora and in my culture. Being cleansed of my sins, renewing my spirit to be more like Christ felt very important in the context of the piece. Dancing in the water with different hand gestures that derived from my original take on how we pray and communicate with God served as the physical expression of this history. This section also reminded me a lot of Ronald K Brown’s work titled, “Grace,” where the dancers are also in white and also red. Mr. Brown’s piece depicts one’s journey to the promised land, serving as another example of spiritually charged work coming from black choreographers and being produced in the present setting.

The final section of, “Revelations,” is titled, “Move, Members, Move,” and is an ode to the black women in the church every Sunday. Appreciating the culture they created when it came to fashion with their hats and matching two piece skirt suits and their fans going the whole service. These women represented and embodied faith like no other. The black church would not be all that it is without their two steps, shout, and “Hallelujah.” This appears all throughout the piece and was something that I could directly pull from my own experiences. Although my costuming choice is not as literal as the hat and the fans the physicality is very visible throughout the piece along with some musical elements including vocals, claps, and the tambourine all originating from this specific culture. These elements were all intentional when it came to collaborating with Munir Zakee on the music design. Taking from these Gospel hits that inspired

me in the studio, Munir pulled the chords from Marvin Sapp's, "He Saw The Best In Me," and layered the things we felt like were important from our church experiences, our collective memory.

Art and spirituality work hand in hand. The church is literally a place of art. The stained glass, the poetry in our sacred books, the praise and/or liturgical dance, and the hymns in our music. Coming into one without coming into the other is inevitable. Art and Religion coexist effortlessly in the same space. Every form of religion and culture incorporates some type of movement. What is it about dance in the spiritual realm that makes it so exhilarating and so effective in expressing honor, gratitude, struggle, or praise? Maybe the fact that we always resort to movement when language is not enough.

What is it about dance in the spiritual realm that makes it so exhilarating and so effective in expressing honor, gratitude, struggle, or praise? I'm not sure if I'll ever know the answer to that. But what I can conclude is that history and culture play a huge part in who you are. What can be so magical is, how one decides to cultivate their own personal influences to create their own experiences. I am rooted and grounded in knowing and honoring the history of my life and the life of my ancestors that calls me to be connected spiritually through my craft. I acknowledge the history of the Black Church that I carry with me everyday that isn't in a book, but exists and manifests through how I move and create in this world.

Breakdown

“Your connection to spirit is about the work you put in that no one can see, the conversations you have that nobody can hear, your healing and your understanding of self, your connection to your Ancestors and the Most High.”- Unknown

Spirituality helps me cope with life and the suffering that I can be dealt during this lifetime. Spiritual beliefs and practices are what ground me. They allow me to see and believe in something that is bigger than myself, not tangible, and that is for the greater common good. For me, the cards I was dealt included not having my biological father around. I grew up with my mom, brothers, and stepdad. My stepdad was in and out of jail and him and my mother’s relationship was not consistent. Although I had a tribe of uncles and a wonderful grandfather nothing or no one could ever fill the void and the longing for a connection and relationship with my biological father. Along with other experiences, not having my dad around led to a lot of mental health challenges growing up. However throughout the healing process, God was my saving grace. My trauma and my spiritual practices became the center of my dance practice. I felt the need to express the hurt, abandonment, and loneliness that I felt. While simultaneously crying for help and clinging to the only thing that gave me relief, dance. How does this trauma, also something that is embodied and can serve as history, or what I would rather like to call, life experience, shape my movement, even in the midst of my denial of it sometimes?

I recently met my dad and I genuinely thought it would fix the trauma that I have suffered from as a result of not knowing my father growing up. On New Years Eve I reached out to my older sister whom I found on Facebook. We talked, we laughed, we bonded over similarities that

we felt confirmed our sisterhood, and she connected me with my dad. After talking with my dad, two weeks later I decided to go to Houston, Texas, to meet my family. While in Houston I met my nieces and nephew, I met my older brother, my sister's family, my dad, and his brother, my Uncle Romero. I cried happy tears for the fact that I was able to connect with a part of my existence that I yearned for my entire life. I cried sad tears for the fact that it was not all I thought it would be. As much as I wanted to be, "Daddy's little girl," that ship had sailed and I was left to deal with the complexities of my reality on my own.

I thought that I would be happy. I thought that we would cultivate an open, loving, and meaningful relationship. I thought that I would fulfill the role of daddy's little girl that I often dreamed of at father daughter dances with my uncles. Although I am eternally grateful for them and those experiences, it could never grant that wish. It opened up so many unhealed wounds. I learned about why and how he left. A truth I will probably never know because each party, mom and dad, has their own perspective and story that they stick to. I learned about 13 other siblings that I have and that me coming to meet my dad was the first time my sister and brother would also see him in the past 10+ years. Pain, hurt, anger, and excuses. Such a sticky situation that I can't understand, believe, and wrap my head around that left me with so much to process. What really happened? Did he leave or was he pushed away?



Pictured from Left to right: Tyisha (older sister), Sakinah (myself) Tydus (father), Zayvion (older brother)

I thought it would be freeing but what I realized was how shackled I was to these emotions of hurt, rejection, and sadness. It led me to deciding that this project was about how I process my experiences and the experience of my ancestors that live through me. Looking into and deconstructing the trauma I have experienced and the collective trauma African Americans have experienced throughout the history of this country. In Bessel Van Der Kolk's book, "The Body Keeps The Score," he takes a deep dive into explaining how we are affected by our history.

"We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present. Trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but also our very

capacity to think.” — Bessel A. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*

It's about not running from myself but locating where these things sit and how they manifest in my work as a person. I wanted to take the time to explore that relationship with my father or the lack thereof. A personal excavation of my own history and creating a way to document, share, and process these experiences.

My maternal grandfather, Abdullah Jihad, is a Muslim and I grew up learning very little of his practices but I was always interested in a lot of it. My grandfather served as one of the father figures in my life. We talked a lot, he took me out for lunch dates, we watched historical documentaries, talked about politics, he drove me to meetings, he gave me books to read (many of them about modesty), and scolded me when needed. He was and still is an integral part of my life. I don't recall how I found out, but growing up I learned that my biological father was also Muslim. This fueled me to connect with grandfather even more, through his religion, to feel more connected with my father.

Going into the studio with this information, context, and experiences was overwhelmingly emotional. Originally I planned to do a solo expressing the feelings that I had regarding me meeting my father for the first time but I decided that telling the story felt more important. When Solo offered to work with me on my piece it felt like a perfect way to engage and reenact the story. Solo is also a Muslim who is deeply devoted to Islam and it's practices. Solo also is a father and had a great relationship with his father. We talked for many of our rehearsals. I asked questions about his childhood. Solo grew up very disciplined in his religious

practice. He talked about how some would say he practiced better than his older siblings. I asked him about his father and he told me how he loved his father very much. He was very close to him and was with him until the day he transitioned. I asked him about being a father now and it was obvious how honored he was to be a dad and how much he loved his family. This presented an interesting perception that was very different from my experience, so it was refreshing and also healing to talk about my story with Solo. He was positive and encouraged forgiveness which allowed me to go through with the piece and for that I am eternally grateful.

I thought about this piece in several parts. The beginning is representative of the beginning of my childhood when I didn't know my father and once I did, talking to him very seldomly. But there being a present connection with my Grandfather and a present interest in his religious practices. That's seen when I'm dancing alone and then later Solo acts as my grandfather and I am mimicking his prayer routine. We then go into a choreographed duet which represents the short amount of time me and my dad actually connected and spent time together. I also pulled from Solo's experience and my experience with my grandfather to create movement that felt authentic to the story. Lots of hand gestures, maintaining spacing being side by side to convey comradery, conversation, and connection. That then leads into a moment of self-discovery where me and Solo are investigating ourselves finding out who we are after these experiences. Taking a look inward to notice how this affects us, who and what we see in and through ourselves. We walk toward each other like we were about to connect but then don't. So close yet so far away. The last part of my dance is a physical letter to my father. An improvisational session that changes intensity every time it is performed. Dancing out the feelings there are no words for. Trying to understand why but never quite comprehending much.

Until the very end where Solo walks away. I haven't spoken to my father since a couple months after my trip to Houston. So the dance ends open-ended like the story. Performing this piece was very emotional. From the moment I stepped on stage I felt like I had completely recreated these moments in my life but this time I was able to deal with them in a way that didn't leave me feeling powerless but hopeful and strong. I discovered a new version of myself that didn't lack because of my traumas but contributed to the depth of my being and my work. My story, history, HERstory.

Sakinah Bennett Photo by Miles Bitton



BREAKTHROUGH

“History is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books—books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe. As Napoleon once said, ‘What is history, but a fable agreed upon?’” - Dan Brown, “The Da Vinci Code”

If it's one thing I've learned here and while looking at the consistency of the history of my culture is that history lives in and through us each and every day. We see the history of enslaved people, as well as prior to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, through the songs, music, religious practices, food, and overall culture that has maintained its presence up to this very moment. We are the living embodiments of history. The culture that we have today is a result of history. The societal norms that we adhere to today are a product of history. History is forever present in and through us and is not only found in text. It is valuable, it is credible, it is valid in every aspect of it, in any way you see, and in every way that it exists.

To disregard the embodiment of history is to disregard folklore, traditional dances, holiday meals, stories your grandparents told you, family traditions, and so more. It perpetuates the violence of white supremacy and strips away the accessibility for certain cultures, primarily those deriving from the African diaspora and other indigeneous cultures, to be a part of academic conversations. Everything isn't always written down, research is not always enough or truly authentic to its subject of inquiry. Some things you can't read about and some history doesn't have the “privilege” to be translated to English or even published for consumption by those outside of it. Therefore we must be open, we must continue to deconstruct the ways in which we

teach, critique, and share history. Constantly questioning our positionality in the context of academia and the causes we are serving; oppression or liberation.

This project served as many things. I wanted to explore myself as a person and an artist. Who am I? What inspires me? What are the things that innately show up in my work? What is my story? How can I heal, process, and overcome adversity through dance? How can I contribute to deconstructing white supremacy in dance and academia? What is authenticity? How do I honor the history that isn't always written? I answered all of these but some are life long, continuous, ever- evolving journeys that I will continue to grapple with. I learned so much about myself in this process. It inspired me to have conversations with my grandparents about their childhood and their journeys. It inspired me to reach out to my dad and my other siblings for the first time in my life. It inspired me to connect with the history of dance and those who have come before me. It inspired me to heal in ways that I didn't think were possible.

My whole journey at Bard has culminated to this very moment. As I write these words I feel prouder than I ever have to be Sakinah Fatima Bennett. To be the daughter of Jamila Blossomgame and Tydus Bennett, the granddaughter of Sakinah Jihad and Abdullah Jihad, The great-granddaughter Eugene and Elizabeth English, Julia Gethers and I honor all of my ancestors for without them, there is no me. Their stories live through me just as your ancestor's live through you. May we continue to acknowledge every part of us and stand unapologetically proud even in the spaces that weren't made with us in mind.

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1. Gottschild, Brenda Dixon. *The Black Dancing Body: A Geography from Coon to Cool*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Dixon-Gottschild is in conversation with many black pioneers in the concert dance realm about all things black and all things dance. She really focuses on the aesthetic of black dance and where it derives from. This was the main foundational source for my inspiration and research.

2. A., Van Der Kolk Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015.

This text was originally used with the intent to work through my trauma but became extremely helpful with my own research. This really focused on and helped me clarify how history is embodied from a psychological standpoint and aided in the creation of the dance portion.

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THE BARD COLLEGE DANCE PROGRAM PRESENTS

Recovery

Senior Projects in Dance

April 29–30, 2021

Streaming Live from the LUMA Theater
Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College

Recovery

Concert Coordinator
Artistic Advisors
Lighting Designer
Costume Designer
Stage Manager

Souleymane Badolo
Jean Churchill • Maria Simpson
Brian Aldous
Liz Prince
Vanessa Hart

• • •

against the tide

Choreographer and Performer
Performer
Music

Arlo Tomecek *they/them*
Peggy Florin *she/her*
against the tide by Arlo
Tomecek

Music Sample

“La Jeune Fille En Feu” by
Arthur Simonini

Promotional Content and
Cinematography

Molly Tomecek *she/her*

Special thank you to Rick Reiser and the production team for bringing the sculpture to life.

Blood Vs. Water

Choreographer and Performer
Performer
Musician

Sakinah Bennett
Souleymane Badolo
Munir Zakee

Special thanks to my mommy Jamila Blossomgame, my Grandparents Sakinah and Abdullah Jihad, my little brothers Mark and Rashad, my Partner Munir, Maria Simpson, Solo Badolo and all the amazing dance faculty, my history advisors Tabetha Ewing and Christian Crouch, Monique Leggs Gaynor, Bard posse 9, Thurman Barker, Office of Access and Equity, and a host of amazing family, friends, and loved ones.

Choreography in partial fulfillment of the requirements for senior projects in Dance.





