

***Protest Culture:
Creative Practice as Socio-Political Engagement***

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Abstract

Protest plays a vital role in equality because it empowers people to be civically engaged. Practices such as music have a vital role to play in the culture of protest. This research traces my journey of engagement through musical practice as a form of protest culture starting with my politicization and how it has informed my experiences as a bandleader, composer, bass trombonist, and percussionist. This research also traces the development, composition, recording and performance of musical works created with my two ensembles Hannabiell & Midnight Blue and Ladies of Midnight Blue. The CD *Protest Culture* represents my music, a retrospective of my work so far. It is an artifact and a piece of practice based research capturing my compositions and representing my knowledge.

Autoethnography is a valuable research method for documenting, analyzing and providing a theoretical framework. Black feminist thought, like autoethnography, empowers black women towards political activism because it merges thought and action. My use of autoethnography allows me to focus on the events that led to, and the people that helped me create, my first piece in response to Hurricane Katrina and its unnatural aftermath in New Orleans. By using an evocative autoethnographic framework I am able to show what it is like to function as a Black musician in various contexts, and using an analytical autoethnographic framework allows me to develop theoretical insight to my creative practice.

I explore how Black feminist thought, intellectual activism, and intersectionality act as useful theories in understanding my self-defined standpoint. These theories as analytical frameworks help me examine how complex social inequalities are organized and allow me to claim the right to place myself in the center of analysis. My notion of Community Intimacy, which I use as a tool to engage my audience, reveals strong affinities with the African American vernacular tradition and the theory of 'Call Response'. The compositions and concerts of both ensembles have become the meeting point where these theories and my practice of social justice coexist.

Acknowledgements

I came from an amazingly rich tradition of strong Black women whose philosophies and way of life are deeply rooted in both an Afrocentric and a women's tradition. The women in my life are responsible for laying the foundation of my street smarts, savviness, empathy, compassion, work ethic, and activism. I would like to thank my grandmother Mary Sanders, mother Alyce Sanders, sisters Dia and Akiaha, my aunts; Dee Dee, Lissa, Francine, and my spiritual auntie and big sister Vickie White for her unconditional support and understanding. You have all supported me through this journey and helped me to gain a greater understanding of the world and my place in it so that I can return, share what I have learned and help strengthen our family and community.

I would like to thank my supervisor David Clarke. It has been an amazing experience working under your tutelage. I appreciate your patience, kindness, encouragement, and thoughtfulness. You have been more than inspirational throughout this entire process. I would also like to thank my creative practice supervisor Will Edmondes for inspiring me to push the boundaries of my music.

My sincere thanks to all the musicians who have contributed to Hannabiell & Midnight Blue throughout the years. Each musician has devoted invaluable time and energy into the work submitted, in rehearsals, performances and recordings. I am forever grateful for all your help, it has allowed me to actualize my music and dreams.

Last but not least, I want to thank Yilis del Carmen Suriel, my best friend, fellow musician, and muse for reminding me that this process was not just for me and would make a positive impact on every aspect of our lives. Thank you for being my rock and not letting me give up. You are priceless and I can only thank God for allowing our paths to cross.

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Contents of Audio and Visual Documentation

Album *Protest Culture*

Track	Information
1. <i>Free Yourself</i> 5:39 min	Hannabiell Sanders (djembe), Yilis Suriel (djembe), Mark Barfoot (dunun), David Mabbott (bass), Chris Chadwick (keys), Jamie Stockbridge (sax), Mathew Ross (congas), Adam Stapleford (drum kit), Brooke MacArthur (voice)
2. <i>Six Eight Fuego</i> 4:19 min	Hannabiell Sanders (djembe/bass trombone), Yilis Suriel (djembe), Mark Barfoot (dunun), David Mabbott (bass), Chris Chadwick (keys), Jamie Stockbridge (sax), Adam Stapleford (drum kit)
3. <i>Vickie's Speech</i> 4:29 min	Hannabiell Sanders (mbira/dunun), Yilis Suriel (mbira), Mick Wright (guitar), Ojay (bass), Paul Ruddick (sax), Mathew Ross (drum kit)
4. <i>Protest Culture</i> 4:44 min	Ladies of Midnight Blue (Hannabiell & Yilis) Hannabiell Sanders (percussion/bass trombone), Yilis Suriel (percussion), Featuring Climbing PoeTree (Alix Garcia & Naima Penniman)
5. <i>Treedrum</i> 4:19 min	Hannabiell Sanders (djembe), Yilis Suriel (agogo bell), Mark Barfoot (dunun), David Mabbott (bass), Chris Chadwick (keys), Jamie Stockbridge (sax), Adam Stapleford (drum kit)
6. <i>Tumba</i> 5:42 min	Hannabiell Sanders (bass trombone), Yilis Suriel (dunun), Mark Barfoot (dunun), David Mabbott (bass), Chris Chadwick (keys), Jamie Stockbridge (sax), Adam Stapleford (drum kit), Brooke MacArthur (voice)
7. <i>Spirit Rise</i> 3:29 min	Hannabiell Sanders (mbira/djembe), Yilis Suriel (mbira), Mick Wright (guitar), Ojay (bass), Paul Ruddick (sax), Mathew Ross (conga)
8. <i>Triple It</i> 4:48 min	Hannabiell Sanders (vuvuzela/conga), Yilis Suriel (dunun), Mark Barfoot (djembe), David Mabbott (bass), Chris Chadwick (keys), Jamie Stockbridge (sax), Adam Stapleford (drum kit), Mathew Ross (conga)
9. <i>Tazmania</i> 9:14 min	Hannabiell Sanders (bass trombone/djembe), Yilis Suriel (dunun), Mark Barfoot (djembe), David Mabbott (bass), Chris Chadwick (keys), Jamie Stockbridge (sax), Adam Stapleford (drum kit), Mathew Ross (conga)
10. <i>Protest Culture</i> (Zero dB remix) 4:28 min	Ladies of Midnight Blue (Hannabiell & Yilis) Hannabiell Sanders (percussion/bass trombone), Yilis Suriel (percussion) Featuring Climbing PoeTree (Alix Garcia & Naima Penniman)

Audio Documentation (DVD)

Squid Audio 2006 11:52min Hannabiell Sanders (bass trombone), Aaron Craelius (cello), Pete Creekmore (flute), James Borowski (bass trombone), Lauren Delago (french horn), Erin Whelan (french horn), Shane Madek (euphonium), Jeffery Cobbold (bass), Gavri Tov Yares (bass), Takiyah Britton (dancer), Nerik Elliot (dancer)

Tazmania Audio Clip of percussion breakdown and audience participation during a live performance.

Visual Documentation (DVD)

Hannabiell & Midnight Blue

African Blues: Performed at the Gateshead International Jazz Festival 2014. Musicians: Hannabiell Sanders, djembe, conga, bass trombone; Yilis del C. Suriel, Dunun; Mark Barfoot, djembe; Mathew Ross, drum kit; Katy Trigger, bass; Paul Ruddick, saxophone; Mick Wright, guitar. Filmed by James Davoll & David Green (ed)

Six Eight Fuego: Performed at the Gateshead International Jazz Festival 2014. Musicians: Hannabiell Sanders, djembe; Yilis del C. Suriel, djembe; Mark Barfoot, dunun; Matthew Ross, drum kit; Katy Trigger, bass; Paul Ruddick, saxophone; Mick Wright, guitar. Filmed by James Davoll & David Green

Spirit Rise: Performed at the Gateshead International Jazz Festival 2014. Musicians: Hannabiell Sanders, mbira; Yilis del C. Suriel, mbira; Mark Barfoot, djembe; Mathew Ross, congas; Katy Trigger, bass; Paul Ruddick, Flute; Mick Wright, guitar. Filmed by James Davoll & David Green (ed)

Ladies of Midnight Blue

Performance at Soundhouse, Edinburgh March 2013.

Performance at the Live Theatre, Newcastle November 2014, for Afro Vibes Festival in support of The Soil a trio of singers from South Africa.

Protest Culture Recorded in London, UK & Bangalore, India. Lyrics by Climbing PoeTree. Music Edit & Directed by Manoj Lobo and Archana Phadke. Music Remixed by Neil Combstock (Zero dB)

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Contents of Accompanying Portfolio

The contents of the accompanying portfolio provide evidence of the longstanding rich program of events and activities that I have co-created and taken part of. It documents the process and ongoing development of my research in community building, audience development, networking and collaborating. I have included event flyers and brief descriptions, newspaper and magazine clippings, commissions and awards received to support my creative practice research.

Part I: Prologue

Introduction

This dissertation is an introspective endeavor that traces the development, composition, recording and performance of musical works within my portfolio *Protest Culture*. The submission as a whole includes:

- Written Dissertation
- Album *Protest Culture* (CD)
- Audio and Visual Documentation (DVD)
- Portfolio

In this dissertation I explore the relationship between composition and improvisation in the context of my two ensembles Hannabiell & Midnight Blue and The Ladies of Midnight Blue. Written from an autoethnographic and Black Feminist perspective, this dissertation serves three basic functions: (1) To provide a commentary on the creative practice component of my research; (2) To place my album *Protest Culture* within the context of the intersectionality between the political, the personal and artistic; (3) To document the journey from process to production.

This dissertation documents the creative process based on my experience as a bandleader, bass trombonist, and percussionist by exploring how collective knowledge within Black feminist thought is used as a form of scholarship. I examine my experiences while contextualizing engagement from my self-defined standpoint as part of everyday life and explore various contexts of protest, which informs my development as a musician. The use of autoethnography broadens the scope of my research by creating a cultural and biographical context to explore my musical background. Its aim is also to place my music within the spectrum of African American vernacular aesthetics.

I am presenting the album as an artifact, which represents a period of practice based research. It encapsulates a retrospective of my work and the many performances, which led to it. The process of recording is part of the research. Although I used the album commercially to market both ensembles its primary purpose was to capture the experience of a live concert.

In Part I, I explore Black feminist perspectives, collective knowledge and intellectual activism. I introduce Patricia Hill Collins idea of intersectionality and how Black feminists within the African American experience work to create community. Here I also explore why I chose autoethnography as my methodological approach.

Part II emerges as an autoethnography to analyze how my experiences of engagement and my development as a musician have helped to shape my music and performances. Here I explore Hurricane Katrina and its unnatural aftermath, the

Hurricane Katrina Benefit concert at Rutgers University and the 21st Century Freedom Ride, an activist led group who travelled to the ninth ward in New Orleans to get a first hand account of the devastation and to volunteer with grassroots relief organizations on the ground. These events acted as a catalyst to my politicization. In this section I also deconstruct and reconstruct my experiences and the social discourse and practices that have shaped and defined my music, by tracing the creation of both Hannabiell & Midnight Blue and the Ladies of Midnight Blue. The purpose here is to illuminate how my personal account as a musician and the journey has brought my music to its present description as Afro-psychedelic funk.

In Part III I discuss Community Intimacy, the African American vernacular, and ‘Call Response’. I also map out the body of work within the portfolio by explaining the relationship between composition and improvisation. The first ensemble, Hannabiell & Midnight Blue, comprises seven members with the instrumentation consisting of bass trombone, conga, djembe, dunun, drum kit, saxophone, guitar, keys, bass, mbira, and smaller percussion instruments. The second, Ladies of Midnight Blue, is a duet with instrumentation consisting of bass trombone, conga, djembe, dunun, mbira and smaller percussion instruments.

Since musician, teacher, and activist are the three identities, which characterize my current role in society, my research has become an endeavor to theorize the dynamics of the culture of protest. It also offers a valuable way for listening to the music, performed and recorded, during the course of this research. I strongly believe that the power to unite humanity and make peace rests within artists who use art forms to break stereotypes and brings diverse communities together. This text allows for me to speak to this idea and explain how I came to believe this.

The best way to understand the text is to listen and watch the recordings prior to the reading. The recorded and performed material, recorded during the course of this work, is central to the research as is the focus on how I got to compose the work. I am presenting the album as a piece of academic research, it is an artifact and product used to interpret the band at the point of its recording.

Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality

This dissertation, *Protest Culture*, endeavors to bridge the gap between scholarship and community, academia and activism, through music, protest, social action, and accessible scholarship. This text specifically introduces a way of speaking to my needs as a woman

in the African diaspora by looking outside prevailing models of knowledge and redefining circles of scholarship through music and organizing towards social change. It also enacts the duality of writing and living theory (Routledge 1996). This theory allows for “academic writing to merge into action and back again into writing” (Routledge 1996, p. 406); by writing about my engagement I can also transform my research into action, interweaving academic and political spaces through my creative process.

Patricia Hill Collins’s idea of collective knowledge (2000a) within the Black/African communities stems not only from scholars but also musicians, visual artists, activists, and community organizers. While there are drawbacks of collective knowledge gaining popularity in the dominant discourse, Black/African women writers, musicians, visual artists, activists and community organizers have to continue to address the lack of women who are written into African diaspora studies.

I will document the events that have politicized me. I will also look into the performative practice of composing, arranging, managing, and performing with my band Hannabiell & Midnight Blue and my duet Ladies of Midnight Blue. I will explore 1) how using improvisation is a cornerstone of both ensembles; 2) how both ensembles have become the place where my theory and practice coexist, the third space defined as a momentary space between day-to-day world and other worlds (Bhabha 1994). In my case this third space is less transitory, it is a “third space at work, which refers to the simultaneous making of theory and practice” (DeBerry-Spence 2008).

For me, protest culture is a way of living and conducting myself. Political activism is being able to understand, critically analyze and challenge oppression in everyday life. I use critical thinking to understand the complexities and magnitude of social inequalities and to build political coalitions that help to identify the interconnected power relations of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. There is a need for alternative models of scholarship guided by activism that creates a space for voices from the margin. Writing this text as an autoethnography allows me to create an alternative model of scholarship, a new way to define the tactics based around my culture of protest, and a way to explore performative space as a meeting point for social movement. I belong to the second wave of Black feminist thought and practice as described by Barbara Christian as one to not have resided in the academy, but rather its roots digging deep from popular movements, the civil rights, Black power, and women’s movement (Christian 2007).

The manifestation of this body of work stems from a long history of protest originating from the slavery narrative in America. Critical strategies that place insiders’

Afrocentric perspective when examining Black cultural and literary tradition offer an insight that cannot be achieved by other means. Samuel L. Floyd Jr. proposes a mode of inquiry that uses an Afrocentric framework that is consistent with the nature of Black music, which allows for the study, perception and evaluation of Black musical products. I will explore my music through this mode of inquiry.

I include myself amongst the many artists and intellectuals from diverse racial, ethnic, class, gender, and sexual backgrounds who through their scholarship, art, and political activism, questioned prevailing power arrangements and place their ideas in service to social justice. Spaces for new forms of creativity are created when the combination of scholarship and activism, school and society, thinking and doing takes place. Patricia Hill Collins calls this intellectual activism and examines this theory extensively in her book, *On Intellectual Activism* published in 2013. Artists, intellectuals, activists, and everyday people have to recognize the need for multiple expressions of intellectual activism in order to make social change. In her lecture “We Who Believe in Freedom Cannot Rest: Lessons from Black Feminism” Collins states that education, broadly defined, has been a core site of political activism within the African American freedom struggle. Black feminism, as a social justice project, has been deeply embedded within the broader freedom struggle of African American communities, is critical of society, in the sense of being analytical about the conditions in which we are situated, and involves examining the everyday ideas of Black women (Collins 2014, Grand Valley).

Collins also talks about reclaiming the Black women’s intellectual tradition, which is the central site that catalyzed intersectionalities as an analytical framework on the world. Intersectionality is an emerging field of critical inquiry and practice that examines how complex social inequalities are organized, endured, and changed. Collins says that we have learned to see injustices and oppressions of all kind as social issues that are disconnected, scattered, and buried within separate systems of inequality, but in order to understand the complexities we have to take an intersectional framework. We cannot understand violence, how it is organized, how it endures, and how it changes unless we use an intersectional lens, that shows us how race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability, religion and nation constitute interconnected systems of power that produce complex social inequalities.

Intersectionality draws some of its core ideas from Black feminism; these are not necessarily unique to Black feminism but have been made very visible by Black feminists who have raised a certain set of concerns most forcibly (Collins 2014, Grand Valley). African American women involved in articulating Black feminism realized that neither

race only, nor gender only, nor class only, nor sexuality only analysis of their oppression was likely to foster their freedom (Collins 2014, Grand Valley). These analysis and political responses to Black women's subordination might yield relief but they were unlikely to result in a lasting solution. In response to this insight Black women claimed the right to speak for themselves and place themselves and their interests in the center of analysis. "To put Black women in the center and say that we can argue and theorize from this location and see things that we cannot see from other spots remains radical and something that we continue to fight for" (Collins 2014, Grand Valley). Intersectionality is not just an academic discourse. Activists, service providers, human resource staff, grass roots organizers, parents, teachers, kids and ordinary people from many walks of life can use intersectionality as a useful tool in understanding and challenging the social inequalities that they see in their everyday lives. Intersectionality is seeing the world as having connections.

I define activism as a form of resistance and involvement that is more than just participation, but rather direct engagement. As an activist I have participated in various contexts of protest, sit-ins, marches, boycotts, peace camps/rallies, and union-led protests. Paul Routledge when describing what resistance means to him directly mirrors my idea of everyday protest:

I use the term resistance to refer to any action, imbued with intent, that attempts to challenge, change, or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes, and/or institutions. These circumstances may involve domination, exploitation, subjection at the material, symbolic or psychological level. Resistances are assembled out of the materials and practices of everyday life, and imply some form of contestation, some juxtaposition of forces. These may involve all or any of the following: symbolic meanings, communicative processes, political discourses, religious idioms, cultural practices, social networks, physical settings, bodily practices, and envisioned desires and hopes. These actions may be open and confrontational or hidden, and range from the individual to the collective. Their different forms of expression can be of short or long duration; metamorphic, interconnected, or hybrid; creative or self-destructive; challenging the status quo or conservative. (Routledge 1996, p. 415)

As a musician, I believe art is instrumental in a movement's objective. Informed art encourages a collective identity, it aids and motivates collective action, and it fosters collective agency. Documenting my own culture of protest through music I contribute to a small but much needed literature that explores autoethnography as a tool for collective knowledge. Writing this as an autoethnography will help me to overcome the task of effectively speaking to all my readers and listeners at once whilst exploring tactics of the culture of protest that yields the making of both theory and practice.

The autoethnography along with the musical works address the following series of research questions: How do composition and improvisation intersect in my practice as a composer, bandleader, improviser, bass trombonist and percussionist? How does my research and personal practice illuminate issues around protest culture? How does my biography influence my practice? What does the Black feminist perspective reveal about my music? What does my music reveal about Black Feminism?

Methodology

Autoethnography benefits greatly from the thought that self is an extension of a community rather than that it is an independent, self-sufficient being, because the possibility of cultural self-analysis rests on an understanding that self is part of a cultural community. (Chang 2007, p. 26)

My aim in the following pages is to define autoethnography as used in my creative practice. I chose autoethnography as an approach to study my own development, as a Black/African American female activist, and how this influences my music and performances. I take a Black feminist outsider-within perspective, a concept developed by Patricia Hill Collins to explain the unique Black Women's standpoint on self and society. As a participant and observer of my community, I am drawing on a Black Women's tradition where everyday action and experiences informs my theoretical work (Collins 1991). I use autoethnography because, like Black feminist thought, it "aims to develop a theory that is emancipatory and reflective and which can aid African-American women's struggles against oppression" (Collins 1991, p. 32).

The term autoethnography goes back several decades. Because of this there are a variety of definitions, uses, and issues associated with it as a qualitative method. Autoethnography is a methodology for reflexive scholarship, where personal stories come together to form scholarship. It displays many levels of consciousness that connects the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner 2000). "Auto-ethnographers look through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social aspects of personal experience; then inward, exposing a vulnerable self, refracting cultural interpretations" (Ettorre, 2005). Hence using autoethnography allows me to write in the first person and document the major events that politicized and created the foundation for my ideas of social action.

Major players that have contributed to the scholarship in autoethnography include Anderson (2006a), Ellis and Bochner (2000), Reed-Danahay (1997), Chang (2007), Denzin (2006) and Collins & Gallinat (2010). There is a significant debate concerning what autoethnography is and is not. Chang (2007) defines it as a "qualitative research

method that utilizes ethnographic methods to bring cultural interpretation to the autobiographical data of researchers with the intent of understanding self and its connections to others”(p. 56). Ellis and Bochner (2000) define it as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 733) and have gone further to highlight other studies that fall under its rubric (p. 739). Autoethnography places the researcher at the center of the research process (Spry, 2001); it “utilize researchers’ autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions” (Tolich, p. 1608); it can align itself with ideas concerning creativity (Denzin, 2006) or it can focus on the analytical (Anderson, 2006a). Autoethnography can even be performed and used as “the methodological praxis of reintegrating body and mind into scholarship” (Spry, p. 708).

Ellis (2004) believes that “feminism has played a large role in the autoethnography movement”, because it has “contributed significantly to legitimizing the autobiographical voice associated with reflexive ethnography” (p. 47). As stated by Ellis, feminist writers support research that starts from personal experience by explaining their personal connections and using personal knowledge within the research process. Within Black feminist epistemology, Collins states that there are four dimensions: “lived experience as criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of personal accountability, and the ethic of caring” (2000, p. 267). By framing my work in this way I am able to move through “different and competing interpretive communities” (Collins 2000, p. 268). There is a thread that connects all these interpretive communities and within the African American aesthetics this thread binds us to a history of slavery. This knowledge within the aesthetic of the Black radical tradition is described by Fred Moten as freedom. Moten’s book *In the Break* (2003) walks a line between performance and criticism; the book itself can be experienced as a performance and its concern is to demonstrate how the memory of slavery constructs the “essential theatricality of blackness” (p. 234). Moten writes that from the beginning of the African American experience freedom has been at the core of all creative expressions. By expressing our self-narrative we are breaking the personal and cultural chain that binds African Americans to slavery.

By placing my self-narrative at the center of my creative practice research I can use autoethnography as a tool in creating music that highlights my personal endeavors and affect how others can experience this music. Tia DeNora examines the role music plays in everyday life and its use as an organizing force in social life. DeNora argues that music is used in the construction of the self as an aesthetic agent and that it “is a cultural

resource that actors may mobilize for their on-going work of self-construction and the emotional, memory and biographical works such a project entails” (DeNora 1999, p. 32). The consumption of music as a cultural product, DeNora states, “is part of the reflexive and ongoing process of structuring social and social psychological existence,” (1999, p. 34) and allows for the self-construction work to take place. According to DeNora music provides organizing material of subjectivity allowing for the respondent to use music as a resource for the conduct of emotional work. I have found that my music, during live performances, aids in heightening and changing energy levels. In writing this autoethnography I explore various tactics I use to create and perform music and create safe spaces that aid in fostering mediums for social agency.

Although self-narratives have been appropriated as qualitative methods, and are flourishing in many fields, their subjective and reflexive natures have also been a topic for critique. The debate amongst autoethnographers concerns the balance of subjectivity and objectivity. One argument gravitates towards a more subjective and reflexive narrative and the other towards an objective narrative relying heavily on traditional scientific data collection. Ellis and Bochner (2006) and Denzin (2006) argue for a more “evocative” and engaging narrative, which contrasts with the analytical, theoretical, and objective approach Anderson (2006) advocates. The autoethnography I am embarking on focuses on reflexive narrative allowing flowing from an evocative to an analytical framework for theoretical contexts such as the Black feminist perspective, African American music aesthetic tradition and identity politics to come together to enhance and critique my experience, which inform how my creative practice has evolved.

Autoethnographies embrace a broad scope of writings with no prescriptive method of balancing autobiography and ethnography. Wong argues that an autoethnography “should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation...these three aspects make autoethnography similar to and different from other ethnographies” (p. 48). Doloriert & Sambrook (2009) discuss autoethnography as falling along a continuum that represents how all these different discourses can vary.

Autoethnography encompasses a wide-range of different auto-ethno relationships moving along a continuum from a more separate researcher-and-researched to that where the researcher-is-researched. (29) No matter where an autoethnography lies along this continuum, the researcher features as intrinsic to the epistemology, her experiences, interpretations, and critical reflexivity are accepted as knowledge, linking her personal to her cultural and thus blurring the distinction between researcher and researched. (30)

Whilst autoethnography is thriving today in many different fields, there are concerns that autoethnographers have to be mindful of when writing their narrative which include “authenticity, authorial exposure, and reflexivity” (Humphreys, p. 840), including the role of ethics (Chang 2008, Tolic 2010, Ellis & Bochner 2000), the practice of consent, the ethical rights of participants (Tolich 2010), and excessive focus on self in isolation from others (Chang 2007). The source of my data is my personal experiences, and if any names are mentioned through my exploration they have given their consent, or I have protected their anonymity and changed their names, with the exception of Vickie White and Leigh Davis, two of my guiding mentors who passed away in 2009 and 2011 respectively.

Chang speaks of the types of strategies used when collecting autoethnographic data. These include; chronicling, inventorying, and visualizing self as strategies for capturing personal memory data. As a guide for data management and practical strategies Chang (2007) offers various writing and visual exercises that focus on personal memory data, self-observational and self-reflective data, and external data collection. I will use Chang’s strategies to recollect my personal memory data and will write a reflexive, ethically self-aware text that explores my politicized self. I will also use recordings, videos and photography to allow me to recount my autoethnography.

Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguashca, two feminists working within British Universities, termed the way they bridge activism and academia as ‘critical scholarship and pedagogy’. They argue, “for feminist activists, knowledge about global politics is generated from everyday lived experiences and mediated through emotions, the body and empathetic interrelationships” (p. 135). I record two major events that I can trace back to where I worked closely with other scholars and activists, in order to highlight the process of my politicization and the beliefs that guide my creativity today. Both these events stem from the natural disaster that was Hurricane Katrina and its unnatural aftermath. These events have guided me in creating my socio-political standpoint and have allowed me to bridge my experiences with my creative practice research.

Part II:
The Process of Protest Culture: An Autoethnography

Hurricane Katrina: Catalyst for Social Change

There have been many natural disasters throughout the world and depending on the severity and how many people are affected, people come together nationally and internationally to aid in recovery and rebuilding. Populations that experience natural disasters often suffer some form of post-traumatic stress disorder (Klein 2007). Although the recovery time will vary for each person, business, and community, the international world tends to base the affected population's wellbeing, resilience, and recovery as the responsibility of the government of the affected areas. The poorer a country is when a natural disaster hits the greater the risks of devastation. The same goes for inhabitants of low or middle-income areas, slums, and unplanned settlements. Residents in more vulnerable areas usually take the longest to transition back to the status quo and sometimes need more aid, governmental or otherwise, than other affected areas.

In most tragedies getting back to "normality" is the main objective but as the world has witnessed extreme natural disasters, it has also witnessed many unnatural disasters where getting back to the status quo is anything but desired. There are many different kinds of unnatural disasters but I am referring particularly to the direct product of sudden laws, reforms, or policy changes that negatively affect poor and working class communities, and the selling off portions of state provided services to private companies. Many of these unnatural disasters take place immediately after a natural disaster or during a social or political crisis while the residents are still recovering from the initial shock (Klein 2007, p. 7).

Naomi Klein uses the term "shock doctrine" to describe the direct action that is taken to carry out these changes whilst a population is trying to recover. She states that "using moments of collective trauma to engage in radical social and economic engineering" has become "the preferred method of advancing corporate goals" (2007, p. 9). Every business person, company, organization, trader, and corporation has to have a set of goals in order to advance and to be successful but when these goals disregard and impact on large portions of a society and undermine social and economic security in order to advance profits, then they must be held accountable. In the time right after Hurricane Katrina wherever you turned mainstream media seemed to be portraying these types of advantages.

I revisit my past and feel energized at the thought of being able to recount this period, that not only gives voice to my politicizing, but to a whole generation that, like me, was moved to take responsibility prioritize their civic duties.

Hurricane Katrina Benefit: Community organizing for social action

As I write, I remember the pain and sense of betrayal I felt during that period of time. I write down all the key events I can remember in chronological order, (which is difficult because a lot of emotions surge, anger being at the forefront). I am conscious of writing and processing the data as a more politicized individual than I was then. However, ‘unnatural’ is the key word I remember being used then; and I still use it today as a descriptive word for the events that followed the hurricane.

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and American citizens were shocked to see how devastated the city was. We watched hundreds of people beg their American leaders to deploy helicopters to save their lives as they took refuge on rooftops and in attics, but there was no immediate response or rescue. Days went by and the mass media documented the rapid decline of an already devastated situation. For the first time that I could remember, the news was not being censored and the federal government's lack of interest and failure to respond and protect its citizens was aired throughout the country. In this sense the media created a socio-political voice that documented and contended the insufficient help from the government, the unnecessary suffering, and the government's failure that transformed the natural disaster of Katrina into an unnatural national disaster.

Once the floodwaters receded, people were still stranded in the city and many of us found it strange how different media outlets had the wherewithal to get on the ground and be in the know, but the federal government was having difficulty understanding the severity of the situation and lacked important information. Condoleezza Rice, the highest ranking African American in the administration at the time, was seen shopping and buying expensive shoes in New York City, President George W. Bush Jr. was reluctant to cut his vacation short, and Michael Brown, the director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) told CNN that he was unaware of the crowds at the convention center.

When New Orleans flooded it became a toxic pool of chemicals, corpses, and sewage. People who didn't have the means to last minute transportation were trapped. The majority of the population trapped in the city consisted of poor, elderly, and young African Americans. The lack of food, water, medicine, clothes, and safe spaces to take refuge in caused chaos. Some news reports made discriminatory portrayals of the different groups of people doing everything in their power to survive. One specific portrayal of this, that I remember, was a news report on ‘people looking for food’ and the camera panned to a group of Caucasian people walking around inside a store that had broken windows. Later on in the same news hour the same newscaster mentioned the

need for more security and a stronger police force to contain the ‘looting and the violence’ and the camera panned to a group of African Americans filling up shopping carts and wheeling them out of a supermarket. Racially biased reporting of Blacks looting seemed to dominate all the mainstream stations; every once in a while they would tell a heartbreaking story of a Caucasian local or tourist trying to survive amongst all this chaos. The inhumane and illogical reports from the media were absolutely overwhelming.

People of color were being portrayed as looters while Caucasians were depicted as survivors, this heightened racial tensions. The Gretna police force incident exposed more racial animosities. Three days after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, several thousand local residents and tourists who were trapped in the city with no food, water, or shelter tried to evacuate New Orleans via the Crescent City Connection Bridge over the Mississippi River. As they neared the other side of the bridge they were stopped by a blockade of armed Gretna police officers. The officers fired their guns in the air over the crowd and ordered them to turn back. Many people in the group cried out and protested but the policemen threatened to shoot anyone who tried to get through the blockade.

All of the police officers at the blockade were Caucasian, the town they were preventing the crowd from passing through was predominantly Caucasian, and although there were some Caucasian people within the crowd it was primarily made up of people of color. Those of us who were born and raised in the United States are no strangers to racist or prejudicial acts. There was a strong consensus from people of all backgrounds within my community in New Jersey and from people in New Orleans that the Gretna incident was an act of racism. The policemen argue to this day that race wasn’t involved but on November 7, 2005, leaders and activists from different origins throughout the country gathered at the convention center in New Orleans and marched back over the Crescent City Connection Bridge into Gretna to protest the assault by Gretna police on evacuees attempting to escape the devastated city.

Shortly after the Gretna incident New Orleans law enforcement was given permission to shoot looters. President Bush said that he had zero tolerance for looters and Governor Blanco of New Orleans warned that she gave the troops who were coming in to help, orders to shoot to kill. The officials were totally unprepared and the people imprisoned in that toxic city were expected to remain calm and orderly after days without food, water, shoes, clothes, medicine, sanitary napkins, bandages, socks, blankets, towels, and other necessities. There were even reports about some law enforcement officers diverting search and rescue missions to go and stop looters.

One group of people that were not reported on by the mainstream news outlets were the prisoners. I remember driving in my car and listening to extensive radio reports and interviews from Amy Goodman on WBAI Free Speech Radio regarding the prisoners as the floodwaters rose. Thousands of prisoners were abandoned by officers and were left locked up in their cells. Many drowned, some escaped and tried to free others from their cells, and many are still missing. Some prisons evacuated their prisoners to a bridge where they were forced to sit on for days in their own waste without food and water.

This scene was worsening day by day and biased portrayal was absolutely infuriating. People were being shot and arrested for looting when there was no other alternative, bodies were piling up, and to make things worst requests for aid from within New Orleans as well as requests for volunteers nationally and internationally to provide assistance had to climb the Mt. Everest chain of commands, which delayed everything by days and even weeks.

I was furious and felt helpless. What could I do to help the people in New Orleans? What could I do as I sat on my sofa and watched all those people in desperation? I didn't own an airplane, a helicopter, or have access to gallons of water, food, or medicine. How could I get down there and help? Nothing was in place during the first week and many of us didn't know how we could help.

A few months later I went to a program at Rutgers University where local and statewide activists and volunteers spoke on Hurricane Katrina and its effect on New Orleans. Each speaker on the panel spoke about his or her organization, what they had been doing to help, and passed out leaflets with more information on how we could get involved. The speakers were very informative and suggested several different charities for us to donate money to but when the two representatives from People's Organization for Progress (POP), Vickie White and Larry Hamm stood up and spoke, the climate changed in the room and it felt like everyone who had been slouching was now sitting up straight with their ears perked. Vickie spoke first and told us the unedited version of what was still going on in New Orleans and explained how there were still bodies buried in debris on street corners, no clean water, families had been separated during the evacuation process, toxins were in the soil, most of the medical facilities had been destroyed, schools and houses needed to be gutted to prevent black mold from setting in, and people were trying to raise money to travel back to salvage what was left of their property.

The longer residents waited to move in the more likely they would lose their houses. FEMA was being extremely difficult, putting evacuees through ridiculous

obstacles and odious amounts of paperwork before they would help, money was pouring in both nationally and internationally, and where was it going? Vickie White said, “As soon as the news stopped reporting on New Orleans we all forgot! We can’t forget! We have an obligation not to forget! That could have happened to any one of our cities!”

My friend, Shane and I looked at each other slightly embarrassed because we knew we hadn’t done much more than pray, give a donation, follow the news, and talk about what was happening with our friends. The news did stop reporting on the situation and I guess many of us did start to forget about the flooded city after everyone was evacuated. Many of us went on with our daily routines and prepared for the start of the new academic year.

The second speaker, Larry Hamm, also from POP, was even more invigorating a speaker than Vickie White. As he spoke, I went on another rollercoaster ride of emotion and empowerment. Larry Hamm told everyone in the audience to get up and do something to help the people of New Orleans! “If something ain’t right do something about it!” I was never so fired up about getting involved in a cause before this. After the program I went up to Vickie White and Larry Hamm and introduced myself. I asked them what was the next step and Vickie gave me a copy of POP’s newsletter, her business card and told me to get in touch with her.

Shane and I left the building that night full of enthusiasm and on a mission to help change the world. Within the next couple of days we met and had a brainstorming session. We talked for a long time, looked into different non-profit organizations, and did some research on different ways other musicians got involved in natural disasters and crisis situations. After a lot of consideration we decided to organize a benefit concert to raise awareness about the current situation of New Orleans and to raise money to donate to an organization that was working on the ground to help the residents rebuild. We tried to think about where the concert would be held and who would perform. We wanted it to be a benefit concert that brought together musicians, visual artists, dancers, and poets.

Shane and I emailed Vicki with our idea and thanked her for the inspiration. She said she was proud of us and told us to keep her up to date with anything we needed. We found artists who were interested in being involved but had difficulty finding a venue to hold the event. Every venue we went to expressed interest in providing their space, but they were too expensive and we didn’t have access to a sound system. After several days of frustration someone advised me to schedule an appointment with Cheryl L. Clarke, Director of the Office of Social Justice Education and LGBT Communities at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. We set up an appointment with Professor Clarke and

after that she set up another meeting and invited members from the English Department. It turned out that the English department was also planning to organize a benefit concert so Professor Clarke suggested that we combine our efforts. This suggestion was inline with our idea to create a benefit concert that brought artists together to support New Orleans. We decided that the best venue would be on campus in our own concert hall, the Nicholas Music Center. Professor Clarke took care of booking the venue, PA and sound technicians, the English department was in charge of booking the poets, and I was in charge of booking the musicians.

Professor Clarke and the English department had connections with well-known and respected poets and had no problem booking them to perform. Amongst these were Miguel Algarin, a Latino icon and the leading figure of the Nuyorican poets' movement of the 1970's, and Jewelle Gomez, a feminist, author, critic, and playwright whose work addresses multiple ethnicities and ideas pertaining to lesbian/feminism. The other poet they were having difficulty contacting through email was Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), so Professor Clarke sent me and another organizer, Silismar Suriel, on a mission to find and ask him if he would perform at the benefit. Amiri Baraka was having a private event at his house in Newark, New Jersey and Silismar and I would attend under professor Clarke's invitation.

We arrived at Amiri Baraka's house with a very specific goal and a mission to get him to agree to attend and perform at the benefit. The event at Amiri Baraka's house was attended by family members, prominent activists, artists, and community leaders who read poetry, sang, danced, and recited speeches they prepared for the affair. In between his announcements and introductions of the performers, we managed to have a chat with him about the benefit and got his commitment to perform on the night.

After we booked the three major Poets we formed a small team to go to open mics and poetry performances to scout out two Rutgers University student poets to perform at the concert. We had an exceptional line-up of poets so I started working on securing the musical line-up. Jazz trombonist and composer Conrad Herwig was recently added to the jazz faculty at Mason Gross School for the Arts and had already formed a student trombone ensemble. After a brief meeting informing him about our endeavor, he agreed to have the newly formed Scarlet Knights Jazz Trombones ready for the concert. One of the organizers had an adolescent niece who was an exceptional classical pianist so we put her in the line-up to represent and pay homage to all the young children who were affected by Katrina. Cindy Thompson, an ethnomusicologist, flutist, and advocate for the inclusion of diverse music modules within our department agreed to work up an

arrangement of *Amazing Grace* that would be performed to a slideshow of pictures from the Katrina aftermath.

I composed a lament entitled *Squid* for all the Katrina victims who did not survive the flood and for all the survivors who were displaced from their homes and separated from their families (*Squid See Audio Documentation DVD*). The harsh reality that the people from New Orleans were facing made me tune in and see how complacent those of us who weren't directly affected really were. The storm was over, media coverage declined, and we all went back to our regular everyday lives and schedules. We were safe and too busy to care or get involved. When I did stumble across a news update on the evacuees, I couldn't help but to relive the devastation I witnessed a few months earlier on the television. Reality became surreal, and I started to question if I was really safe. I started to realize that if the hurricane and flooding hit New Jersey the same way it did in the south then I could easily be in the same predicament as the people who were treated as second-class citizens after the storm hit. I started to wonder what would happen to the working, poor, and lower middle class people in my city. Would they have the means and support to evacuate, rebuild, and start all over? What would my family do in a situation like that and could we recover from such a tragedy without the help of an outside community? Would other Americans come to our aid and would they stop caring as soon as the media coverage stopped? This wasn't an incident on foreign soil that could easily be ignored, forgotten, and swept under the carpet. This incident could have undoubtedly affected any community in the United States and I felt it was important for us to do something to remind people of that fact.

I arranged *Squid* for my band Hannabiell & Midnight Blue and asked two of my friends, Takiyah and Nerik, from our dance department at Mason Gross to choreograph and perform as a duet. This arrangement of *Squid* was a multimedia music and dance production with a core of eight musicians in which four were soloists. Each soloist selected an image from a mixture of photos that were taken during and after the New Orleans flood. The musicians choose photos they connected with and I asked each of them to create a story about their image to articulate to the audience through improvisation. During the rehearsals the dancers worked with each soloist to get a feel for his/her sound and choreographed movements to represent the story the soloists were trying to express. After the ensemble chose the order in which the images should be projected, the dancers worked their magic and choreographed a beautiful dance that connected the images and stories to each of the soloists.

Once all of the acts were confirmed I thought it would be a good idea to weave the musical acts in between the poets to give the show a nice flow and keep the audience engaged. Vickie White came to represent POP and set up a table with literature along with a few other charity groups who were helping to aid the Katrina survivors. Several visual artists even donated pieces of their artwork for the silent auction. The event was a huge success and the audience was split between Rutgers affiliates and members from the public. I was pleased with the turnout and was honored to be in the company of so many prolific artists, activists, and professors. Looking back I would say that Squid was the first politically conscious composition that I ever composed and performed on stage. This was the catalyst of a new political consciousness and self-awareness that would shape who I am today.

21st Century Freedom Ride to New Orleans

After consulting and working with Vickie White for the benefit concert I became an active member of the People's Organization for Progress (POP), which self-defines as an independent, grassroots, community based, politically progressive association of citizens working for racial, social and economic justice, and greater unity in the community. Their goals as an organization include the elimination of racism, inequality, poverty, sexism, unjust economic exploitation, all forms of social oppression, degradation, human misery, suffering and injustice. POP was then and continues to be led by State Chairman Lawrence Hamm (Larry Hamm), with its main branch located in Newark, New Jersey. The organization has different branches throughout the state, which take up different regional and statewide causes. Larry Hamm ran weekly general assembly meetings in Newark, but I primarily attended the meetings of the central Jersey branch, which were led by Vickie White in Highland Park, New Jersey, USA.

I was always outraged when I heard about injustices in my community and besides discussing it with my family and friends, I felt like there was nothing I could do, but Vickie took me under her wing and she showed me that I had a voice and that I could do something. Vickie and the Central Jersey Branch opened my eyes to grassroots activism and respected my voice and creative ideas as a young musician and activist. I ended up drumming and adding music to many peace rallies and protest marches. As time went by Vickie became my big sister and activist role model and because the core of POP is comprised of a close-knit community of friends who often met up regularly to just hang out and inform each other of what was happening in their area, POP in many ways

became an extension of my family. Sisterhood, states Collins, is the experience of sharing “concrete knowledge of what it takes to be self-defined Black women” (2000a, p. 260), it allows for connectedness which build the skills to value lived experiences.

Vickie was passionate about helping the people in New Orleans so the central Jersey branch kept the rest of the POP branches informed about the political climate in New Orleans, the status of the evacuees, and updates on plans to rebuild. During this period there were criticisms and rumors of impropriety that included; families being purposefully separated and scattered across the US during the superdome evacuation, the Red Cross and other charity groups not disbursing or stealing money that was donated for the survivors, the systems FEMA put in place for residents to obtain trailers to live in while they gutted their waterlogged homes were criticized as being arduous and time consuming, and now the education system and the schools were being preyed upon. The one thing POP took a large interest in was the scandal brewing around the schools and education system. Vickie had a meeting with two POP members, Leigh Davis and Bruno Oriti, they were distraught about the continued lack of progress and heard that residents in the lower ninth ward weren’t receiving aid from the government and now private companies were trying to attack the public school system.

Vickie, an activist and advocate for social change, was a role model to many in my community. Vickie, a former president of the Highland Park Board of Education, was a tireless advocate and defender of education who created and ran a Children's Defense Fund Freedom School in 2004, which was a five-week literacy program in Highland Park open to all in grades 1-12 and focused on African-American literature (Kornfeld, Blog for Highland Park, Online). According to an interview with Bruno “the three of them felt like it was clear that the government and big business was declaring war on the people of New Orleans and were the same forces that caused 911, the Iran and Afghanistan wars, and the increase in incarceration, it was also clear that protesting was not getting us anywhere. So we decided we needed to take direct action and ‘show up’” (Oriti 2013).

Our Central Jersey branch was assembled and briefed on the idea to travel to New Orleans and everyone agreed that going down to offer aid and bear witness to see the actual conditions for ourselves was the best thing to do. Inspired by the Civil Rights movement and my newfound understanding and commitment to social justice and equality, I immediately saw this as my chance to take part and explore my civic duties to my community. The idea was put on the agenda of one of the general assembly meetings in Newark. Larry Hamm and all present at the general assembly agreed unanimously and

offered unconditional support with the planning and executing of our endeavor to the south.

The Freedom Rides, a movement to fight segregation and redefine the Black experience in the USA, started in the spring of 1961. It was a movement to express the fundamental inequalities of Black people in a nation that had spent centuries trying to degrade people of African descent. It was preceded and inspired by the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, an endeavor led by Bayard Rustin, a Black Quaker of the Civil Rights organization Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and George Houser, a white Methodist minister, from the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Rustin and Houser wanted to challenge segregation laws and test the compliance of the 1946 U.S. Supreme court ruling that segregation could not be imposed upon interstate travellers (Meier 1969, Newman 2004). The Freedom Rides and the Journey of Reconciliation were both intended to be nonviolent direct action of people with diverse backgrounds coming together to support and stand in solidarity for equality and social justice. The first Freedom Ride in 1961 set off from Washington, D.C. and was scheduled to arrive into New Orleans. Although the first trip was stopped and violently interrupted, it stood as a pivotal moment for the civil rights movement and inspired POP to baptize our endeavor as the 21st Century Freedom Ride to New Orleans.

POP Central Jersey and Newark's House of Prayer Episcopal Church sponsored our trip and organized several local events to help us fundraise and raise awareness about our efforts. Citizens from all over the United States descended upon New Orleans offering aid and demanding that the people of New Orleans retain their rights and liberties to homes, schools, and basic human needs. Our intergenerational, interracial, and interfaith group of twenty-five high school and university students, community leaders, and activists went down to New Orleans to volunteer, to bear witness, and to find out what was going on first hand.

We flew in planes instead of riding interstate buses and we did not suffer any physical violence. We were greeted by a volunteer from the Common Ground Collective at the airport, and were given a tour of the French Quarter as we drove from the airport. Many streets and buildings looked fairly normal but as we entered the 9th Ward evidence of the flood became more apparent and then we reached the Lower 9th Ward. We knew that we were coming down to help people rebuild but had no idea what to expect. Street after street of shattered homes and broken dreams. The state of the 9th Ward sent many of us into emotional tailspins. Our guide even showed us different piles of rubble that they believed still contained dead bodies. None of the news reports, online pictures, or stories I

heard could have prepared me for being amidst all that devastation, even 10 months after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans.

We arrived at the Common Ground Collective volunteer center, which at the time was based out of St. Mary of the Angels School on Congress Street in the Upper 9th Ward. The shock of being out of our comfort zone immediately began to set in. It was extremely hot outside and even hotter in the rooms we were assigned to sleep in. After we put our luggage down we were given a tour of the site, briefed on the daily schedule and the various volunteer jobs off and on site. Everything was makeshift, well organized, and run by volunteers. The Common Ground Collective (CGC) was set up by Malik Rahim on September 5, 2005, seven days after the city flooded. The CGC handbook states:

Common Ground is not just about our “titles” or labels; we are made up of young and old, many races, genders and classes. We have different educational background and cultures. Common Ground is an incredible intersection of identities, talents and commitments that has been able to establish a holistic approach to our relief and community stabilization efforts. We are here to serve everybody – no one is turned away! (Common Ground Collective, Volunteer handbook, Online)

It was an eye opening experience to work with another independent, grassroots, community based, politically progressive organization comprised of citizens working for racial, social and economic justice.

There were many jobs that needed to be done and our group helped prepare the daily meals on site; helped package and distribute meals to the various work sites; worked with teams to cultivate the community garden and plant sunflowers, which helped to soak up the toxins from the soil; volunteered at the clinics; helped clean the common spaces and toilets at the center; and a whole host of other things. Temperatures during the day reached 104 degrees Fahrenheit but that did not stop my little sister and I from volunteering with the work crews that went out to gut houses everyday. We had to wear long pants, hard shoes, protective suits, boot covers, goggles, and respirator masks. We worked diligently scraping down moldy surfaces, moving fallen walls, hauling out debris, removing nails, sweeping, and just trying to make as much of a clean slate for the returning residents as possible. In addition to volunteering we also met with a group of young people and attended an education summit hosted by the National Coalition for Quality Schools in New Orleans and the People’s Organizing Committee, a group working to help residents return to the city. The young people and the attendants at the summit were upset because the government in New Orleans was selling off the public schools and replacing them with privately owned charter schools.

Vickie White knew that taking us to the front line would make a lasting impact. Hearing about something is one thing but knowing and experiencing that thing for yourself is another. Patricia Hill Collins talks extensively about how lived experiences have always been part of the African American tradition of assessing knowledge. Lived experiences provide a unique angle, aids in developing critical consciousness, and for US Black women it has always been used as a standard for credibility. Vickie wanted to provide this for us and gave me a long lasting tool towards political activism. POP and Vickie White helped me to become politically literate and encourage me to use my musical skills to become an active citizen. They created a safe space for me to explore my voice as a musician and activist.

Hannabiell & Midnight Blue: Creation and Improvisation

To begin the story of Hannabiell & Midnight Blue I have to write the story of my relation to my bass trombone and djembe. I asked to play the trombone at age 9 after an assembly was held at my elementary school where the local high school band from my town performed. We were presented all of the instruments and were asked to choose one that we would like to learn. I remember the teacher asking my mom to convince me to play a smaller instrument because of my size, and her standing up for me saying “she wants to play the long slidly thing, so let her play it!” Upon graduating from Franklin High School, where my love of marching bands began, I was awarded a music scholarship and spent the first three years after high school in the Spartan Legion Marching Band at Norfolk State University (NSU), one of the historically Black college and universities (HBCU), in Virginia. The Spartan Legion was a well-oiled, highly regimented Black Marching Band with an average of 200 students or more. HBCU marching bands are some of the most entertaining ensembles in the United States of America and in order to succeed one needs a combination of physical strength, endurance, musicality, and the ability to work with all types of people.

Marching band training season started before university commenced and before that all rookie members were required to undergo a pre-boot camp training session. These sessions indoctrinated us with the values and philosophies of the Spartan Legion Family. During that pre-boot camp, we rookies spent all our time together (morning, afternoon, and evening) undergoing intense drills and exercises geared to make us learn how to work together and to trust and rely on one another. Enthusiasm was the key, and that along with

discipline, dedication, and follow-through was drilled into each and every one of us. We practiced, marched, and danced all hours of the day. When we weren't on the field practicing, in the band room learning new music, in sectionals learning new fanfares, or tightening up our dance routines, we were spending time with one another socializing or studying together. We played some of the greatest arrangements of classic and contemporary soul, R&B, and hip-hop tunes. The challenge was great, I excelled quickly, joined the first trombonists, the role models of the section, and worked hard to set an example and encourage new members.

During my second year I overheard a trumpet player and two percussionists talking about the Cadets of Bergen County, one of the top drum and bugle corps in the country at the time. This was music to my ears because during my four years of high school I was trained in the corps-style marching technique and the majority of my instructors were members of the Cadets. Drum and bugle corps is a completely different world and style from the HBCU marching band world so when I joined their conversation we were elated to find each other, knowledgeable lovers of this other world of music. They were talking about the auditions and how they were coming up in a month's time. I told them how I auditioned for the Cadets when I was in high school but didn't make it because the instructors said that I wasn't strong enough and suggested I march in their junior corps for a year then come back and audition again. Being a Cadet was my dream and their members were my role models during high school. I would never march with another drum corps and as the years passed I ended up completely forgetting about re-auditioning until I overheard this conversation.

The four of us (two women (trombone and percussion) and two men (trumpet and percussion) made a plan to carpool up to my home state, New Jersey, to audition together. The auditions were very intense and took place over a weekend. I never thought that I could stand in one place for four hours playing a marching baritone or any instrument for that matter. This was a different discipline from the Spartan Legion, requiring a different kind of mental energy. In the Spartan Legion the musicians sang to lift your spirits during physical training, rallied behind you and chanted words of encouragement when you were singled out, or whispered words of encouragement when your horn got too heavy. This ensemble was competitive and required one to tap into their reserves of inner courage and strength.

Three of us made the cut and were asked to come back to the next training weekend but our other friend, who was an amazing percussionist, had a terrible cold that sapped her energy preventing her to demonstrate the physical strength that was needed to

be a member of the drum line. We were excited about making the auditions and reminisced on the six-hour drive back to Virginia about our individual experiences and on how the four of us and three other people were the only African Americans there. When we returned to Norfolk State University (NSU) we decided to keep everything to ourselves until we were officially asked to join. I trained like crazy during the months in between the training camps, holding gallons of water to build my upper body strength, running down and walking up the stairs of my ten-story tower dorm apartment, and practicing the euphonium to increase my dexterity and skills for the marching baritone that I would play. We went back to the next training camp and the three of us made it. What an accomplishment! All we had to do then was find or fundraise the \$2,000 in order to take part.

We told our families and friends in the Legion and everyone was excited for us but when we finally told the band directors they weren't so happy. I was confused. It was an extremely prestigious endeavor and we saw ourselves as ambassadors representing the Black community, NSU, and the Legion. Why would they not jump for joy? We came to realize that we were some of the most talented musicians in the Legion and taking part in the Cadets required us to be away for most of the summer which conflicted with band camp and our being there to help train the new rookies. We would arrive a few weeks after training started but that should have been ok since we were among those who gave all we could whenever we could. The directors weren't happy about the cross over and tried to convince us not to go. This was a weird twist and contradictory to what we thought the Legion was all about. They even threatened to take away the section leader position that the trumpet player was up for. We were disappointed in their response and sad that they didn't support us but there wasn't anything that they could do or say to deter us. We went on and marched with the Cadets that summer and it was a whole new world. The rigor of the Legion prepared me for the intensity, the meticulousness, and the insanity of the cadets. We were conditioned into musical robots rehearsing 12 hours a day 7 days a week and spent the summer refining our show as we travelled throughout the USA competing in the touring circuits. It was the hardest and most rewarding experience in my life. I was exposed to a new kind of discipline, excellence, and hardship that tested the very core of my existence. In drum corps you are a team, a unit that is only as strong as the weakest link, and you will experience camaraderie so long as you are producing and contributing to the whole. The minute you hurt yourself and cannot pull your weight by marching, the brotherhood diminishes, and you become an adversary.

We were happy to return home to the Spartan Legion and our family of friends welcomed us with open arms. Business in the Legion went on as usual and I fell in line with renewed energy. “Drive, Drive, Drive Fool” was the slogan we often chanted on the field or during physical training. Nothing could get in the way or sidetrack a determined Spartan. Not even the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001. Some of us heard rumors that something happened but we didn’t find out until the end of the day because we received direct orders from the band directors to continue rehearsal.

I was happy to be in my home away from home, but once marching band season was over I started to notice how much I changed after marching with the Cadets and playing with some of the most competitive musicians I had ever met. My standards rose significantly and I wanted to become more musically proficient. I had one more year before I was scheduled to graduate and become a music teacher and I didn’t feel like I was well equipped. I needed to know more, decided to make a drastic change after my private instructor became overloaded with new responsibilities and started to forget about my private lessons, and stopped pushing me. I researched a few music programs and found out that Rutgers University, which was back at home in New Jersey, had a private arts and music school called Mason Gross School of the Arts. I looked at the audition criteria and started receiving lessons from the trumpet teacher to prepare me for the auditions. I returned home to audition, got accepted, went back to NSU finished the year, and then told everyone I was leaving. I can proudly say that I got my drive and determination from being part of the Spartan Legion family but after three years, that drive and determination led me to seek more and I transferred to Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University before graduating from NSU.

Upon entering Mason Gross I switched from tenor trombone to bass trombone and had to choose whether to study classical or jazz music. I always associated jazz with being able to improvise and most of the people I knew at Norfolk State who could improvise came to university already knowing how to do it. I did not know how to improvise and when faced with the choice of studying classical or jazz, I choose classical. I never learned how to improvise from joining the jazz band in high school or at Norfolk State, therefore I thought that it was an unattainable goal. There was nothing scary about studying classical music, I had been studying it since I began learning trombone. Looking back, I now realize, that I would have embarked on a different method of learning if I had chosen to study jazz.

All the music students were required to audition for ensembles, some of which were required within the program of studies and some were electives. I was placed into

the Rutgers Symphony Band and as my elective I chose Rutgers Brass ensemble. Symphony Band was a large ensemble that focused on the development of technical and musical skills through performing standard and contemporary literature from classical wind-band repertoire. It mainly comprised undergraduates and acted as a feeder ensemble for the more sophisticated Rutgers Wind Ensemble. It was a difficult placement for me because prior to joining I switched to bass trombone and that meant that I would only ever be allowed to play the third and fourth parts in the music. Going from two years of playing first trombone with exciting passages, high notes an octave above middle C to whole and half notes in the middle of the register proved to be very boring and not engaging. It was torture not being able to play the first trombone parts and, to make matters worse, there was no sense of camaraderie in the trombone section.

The music in symphony band did not excite me the way it did at NSU and I would find myself wanting to harmonize and play different notes or melodies instead of the long tones that were written for my part. The Rutgers Brass Ensemble and the bass trombone parts were a lot more challenging and the director was fantastic but it was a very competitive and sterile environment. The routine was to walk into the beautiful resonant practice hall, unpack, warm up, play, listen, learn, try harder, play, listen, learn, pack up, and leave. I was one of the few people of color, always alone, and invisible. It was a weird world of racial insecurity and awkwardness. The community and music I engaged in before transferring to Rutgers University thrived on inclusivity and camaraderie but this was almost the complete opposite, and again I longed for something more. The Mason Gross music department was located on a very small section of the Rutgers New Brunswick Campus with everything from the rehearsals, lectures, practice rooms, and administrative staff being within two adjacent buildings. I rehearsed, had lectures, and regularly walked by the same students on a daily basis and eventually got tired of trying to make eye contact to say hello. I was confused by their silence and started to feel self-conscious and more out of place. Anderson J. Franklin coined the term “invisibility syndrome” to describe the feeling of being invisible amongst African Americans (1999). This syndrome is created when “(en)countering repeated racial slights (which) can create within the individual a feeling of not being seen as a person of worth. This subjective sense of psychological invisibility takes the form of a struggle with inner feelings and beliefs that personal talents, abilities, and character are not acknowledged or valued by others, nor by the larger society, because of racial prejudice” (Anderson J. Franklin and Nancy Boyd-Franklin 2000, p. 33). And this is exactly how I felt.

As the months went by the students formed small cliques, kept to themselves, and continued to walk past me like I didn't exist. Being invisible was a brand new phenomenon for me, and something I attributed to the color of my beautiful dark brown skin. I felt like that was the only difference between me and everyone else. I was the only woman of color in all my lectures and ensembles and with very few words I was made aware that I was out of place. I became very depressed, skeptical about transferring, and bitter about my in sight isolation. I kept to myself and spent most of my time studying and practicing. My brand new bass trombone was much bigger and heavier than the large bore tenor trombone with the F-attachment that I was used to playing. It did not take me long to develop a good tone in the middle and upper registers because I was already a strong tenor trombone player. It was practicing the technical exercises that were necessary in building dexterity in my lower register that became an extreme challenge. My new equipment caused hand cramping and back pain so my three to six hour practice sessions stopped being as enjoyable as they had been. I ended up spending a lot of time on long tones, exercises geared towards building tone quality, and fell in love with practicing the Bach Cello Suites. Practice, practice, practice! Practice to get better, practice to compete, practice for a better status, practice for recognition, practice to escape, practice for self gratification, practice to become the best musician in an ensemble where it's not natural to communicate or get to know others from different sections, and practice to join large ensembles where silence and competition thrive. This newfound drive was very much a result of being rendered invisible; Collins states, "paradoxically, being treated as an invisible Other places U.S. Black women in an outsider-within position that has stimulated creativity in many" (2000a, p. 100). Practicing became my outlet.

Many of us classically trained musicians have a great deal of technique but never get the chance to use this knowledge to explore our own voices. We are inducted and cultured to worship the gods who created the black dots, educated from grade school to understand and translate their ancient codes, indoctrinated into their rituals of blending in and doing away with our individualism; one band one sound; until we become cogs in a beautiful system of excellence where many spend their lives aspiring to reach the top, to be better than what they've become. We push ourselves harder and harder to play better, to become more proficient so we can be recognized. We struggle in the quest to master someone else's voice, someone else's thoughts, and someone else's ideas. I've witnessed the frustration from the instructors, seen the disappointment of the others, and

participated in the self-doubt and self-hatred for falling short and not being able to execute in order to move to the next level.

Developing showmanship and pride at Norfolk University was counterbalanced with switching to bass trombone and becoming an underdog at Rutgers University. Although the two experiences taught me high levels of discipline and personal subjugation to the group, the Spartan Legion used teamwork and community building to execute its goals. Both experiences added pragmatic life lessons and helped form the foundation of my beliefs that excellence is best achieved when quality is coupled with compassion and understanding the importance of seeking camaraderie in all my endeavors. This foundation along with my political awareness has helped me to be the person I am today.

My passion for drumming stems from a time and place where my access to being taught was hindered because of having other responsibilities, and this provided a stimulus for my creativity. While at Rutgers, I joined the African drum and dance ensemble with the hopes to learn rhythm and drumming. One of the postgraduate classical percussion students, Andy, started an African drumming and dance ensemble and I signed up immediately. I started out learning a couple rhythms on the Ashanti drums and the accompanying dance parts. As the group progressed it was difficult for the leader to teach both drumming and dance, and since I attended most consecutively, I ended up taking charge of teaching the dances after he taught me. Andy was an apprentice to a Ghanaian master drummer and dancer and accompanied him on an excursion to Ghana during one of our school breaks. When he returned he brought back percussion instruments for the ensemble and several djembe drums to sell. Although I purchased a djembe, I never had time to learn how to play it in the ensemble since I started leading the dances. I took it upon myself to practice for hours a few days of the week in a large vacant field that I walked past every time I went to the dining hall from my room. When I was in the field, I didn't practice the rhythms I heard in the ensemble, I just played rhythms and grooves that came naturally to me. I would drum as loud and as long as I wanted, losing myself and only returning after I found peace. It didn't occur to me that I was improvising because improvising was something I associated with jazz and my bass trombone and that was still something I considered unattainable during that period. Little did I know that I was unconsciously channeling, releasing, and nurturing my inner voice during those sessions in the field. Those were my first steps towards using my instrument as an extension of my voice.

The last ensemble that had a big impact on my playing, leading, and improvising was the Rutgers University Salsa Band. This ensemble gave me great pleasure and helped to reignite my passion and enthusiasm for playing and performing with my trombone. There was no sitting down in this ensemble and getting to know each other was the first thing we did. The music was tough and highly syncopated but I enjoyed learning every single note. I was the only trombonist and played the first parts, I was back to playing in the middle and upper registers. This was a little intense since both my horn and mouthpiece were much larger than my previous tenor trombone but that didn't matter to me at all. We were learning how to move, perform, and dance Salsa. I was happy to be part of a music family again and I learned exponentially. This ensemble became a band and we travelled and performed for various events inside the university and abroad to the Dominican Republic. I gained a lot of leadership skills and began learning how to read audiences. Although I was becoming a better trombonist, I was still terrified of taking solos. The moment came when we were on stage at a gig off campus and the director looked at me and nodded for me to take a solo. Of course I clandestinely shook my head refusing and she danced her way over to me and while staying in step with the music and maintaining a perfect smile she said, "take the fucking solo." I couldn't believe my ears! I was speechless and had no choice. I had to do it, in those few seconds my fear turned to adrenaline, and I took my first public solo on my bass trombone.

I began to find a voice that I did not have before and started to translate this voice into music. Never before was I given the opportunity or placed in a situation where I could use the technique and knowledge about my instruments to express my inner thoughts and ideas. I was intrigued, wanted to learn more, and started attending improvisation sessions led by a postgraduate jazz oboist who also didn't feel aligned with the competitive nature of our department. Her style of introducing our small group to improvisation included droning, harmonizing with our voices and instruments, creating ostinato riffs, and using auxiliary percussion instruments. It was a very safe space for me to explore improvisation and develop a true connection with my trombone. There were no rules, all ideas were valid, and we were free to add or suggest anything. Everyone in the group got along wonderfully and as our friendship grew so did the quality of music our improvisations created. Some of the music during our sessions sounded like small sections of songs that were waiting to be developed. The group's dynamic was amazing and we could have easily created a band but our university commitments increased, our regular lives got busier, the bassist who travelled all the way from Brooklyn had other commitments and the group stopped meeting.

The oboist and the bassist were best friends who met at Hampshire College in Massachusetts and studied with Yusef Abdul Lateef. Yusef Lateef was an American multi-instrumentalist, composer, author, visual artist, philosopher, educator, and playwright who coined and promoted autophysiopsychic music. He is considered a legendary jazz musician and was one of the first musicians to incorporate non-Western instruments within his compositions, he also helped in paving the way for spiritual jazz and world music. Although he is famous for playing jazz and improvisation, he grew to dislike the term jazz and felt like it could not encompass the essence of his music. "I find that the word 'jazz' is a meaningless term that too narrowly defines the music I play, and it adds a connotation that's disrespectful to the art and those who perform it," he said in a 2008 interview with jazz journalist Marc Myers's Jazzwax web site (Myers, Jazzwax, Online). Lateef believed that music came from one's physical, mental, and spiritual self and preferred to use the term autophysiopsychic music instead of jazz. For Lateef improvisation was a musician's autophysiopsychic presentation, an individual's voice which projects "their character, their vast array of experiences, thoughts, feelings, concerns and ideas that are entombed in their brain's memory-- and more than that--I will say: they speak with their heart," as he wrote in his essay *The Pleasures of Voice in Autophysiopsychic Music* (Lateef, Yal Records, Online). Lateef nurtured the idea that there is a relationship between a valid presenter and his/her presentations, that "particular musicians are able to transform the events of their mind and heart into sound. They are able to manifest into sound that which is meaningful to themselves" (Lateef, Yal Records, Online). These were Lateef's beliefs and many of his students and fans continue to pass on his philosophies and approach to music. I did not know as much about Lateef then as I do now but his teachings and gentle approach definitely transcended through his students. I learned so much from these sessions about feeling the energy of the performers around you and how to communicate your voice by joining other voices.

Attending those sessions offered me another approach to improvisation and empowered me to start my own sessions. My initial intention was to invite classical musicians who were interested in improvisation but I ended up playing with various musicians from all kinds of backgrounds. What I realize now that I didn't realize then is that all the musicians I invited to play music were people I met and got along with. They were people I wanted to get to know better and explore alternative ways of communicating. As David Borgo writes, "the jazz community has traditionally valued a type of learning that might easily be called embodied, situated, and distributed. Numerous performers have stressed the full integration of aural, physical, and intellectual aspects of

the music, as well as the notion that learning and development can only occur within a supportive community” (Borgo 2007, p. 62). There were so many great ideas that came out of these sessions that I eventually started to workshop some of the riffs and melodies to add structure. The sessions laid the foundation to my style of composing and making music and quickly evolved into my experimental ensemble Midnight Blue.

Midnight Blue has come a long way since its inception and has been through an assortment of line-ups and instrumentations. Since I discovered my rhythmical freedom first, all my pursuits in developing and playing music were centered around improvised drumming on djembe. In the very beginning I used my bass trombone to play harmonies, melodies, and riffs and always included at least one musician in the ensemble who was comfortable improvising. Midnight Blue’s first line-up was a trio of trumpet, double bass, and myself on bass trombone/djembe. The second was a female quartet of flute, double bass, voice and me on bass trombone/djembe, the third was two bass trombones and djembe. Playing in the trombone duet was pivotal and opened my eyes to new possibilities because the other bass trombone player was well versed in jazz studies and very intrigued with using the bass trombone in unconventional settings. After a while I added a classical bassist and a jazz flutist and we performed for a few art related events on and off campus, provided music for our campus production of the *Vagina Monologues*, and performed for my senior recital. It was with this line-up that I created and performed the multimedia music and dance composition, *Squid*, for the hurricane Katrina benefit concert I helped to initiate and organize.

By the time I reached my senior recital I lost faith in the classical music ensembles and tried my best to get out of being required to take part. Not wanting to participate didn’t settle well with the administration and some of my peers because by then I was playing in the prestigious Rutgers Wind Ensemble; but that did not matter to me because I had mentally given up on classical music and the ensembles. My soul and spirit was being fed through the one world music class that was held every year, the salsa band, my experimental ensemble, and my collaborations with the other Mason Gross students of color outside my department. I was fed up with all the rules and isolation that went with the classical music world and as an act of rebellion I opened my classical bass trombone senior recital with a percussion solo. I did not want to perform for an audience that acted out proper concert etiquette, one that would only clap after I finished playing an entire composition, so by starting with an African drum solo I set the tone and encouraged them to participate. I did play the classical pieces that I worked up with my amazing and extremely supportive bass trombone teacher, John Rojak, but I also included

three Midnight Blue songs to break up the set and get people going. My recital program was diverse, and contradictory to the school's classical music tradition, but it was important for me to reflect who I was and what kinds of music inspired me. Having such a diverse repertoire made people clap, cheer, and shout at "appropriate" and "inappropriate" times. I wanted to create a space where, as Small puts it, "performers and listeners are dynamically engaged with one another; the listeners respond, not with stillness and the formal signs of 'polite' attention, but with cries, handclaps, shouts, movement and dance - which are much better-mannered in black society than silence" (Small 1994, p. 298). I loved that the show went against the rules and confused people because the result was that they engaged and clapped when they wanted to not only at the appropriate moment. If they liked something in the middle of one of the classical pieces I played they clapped and that's what I wanted. I didn't care that all the students who were well versed in classical music etiquette were uncomfortable about some of my audience members feeling, connecting, and responding to the music in the moment. For me that was the point.

In her book *Music in Everyday Life* and article 'Music as a technology of the self', Tia DeNora analyses how music is used to self-regulate emotional states. She reveals how we use music as a resource for "modulating and structuring the parameters of aesthetic agency – feeling, motivation, desire, comportment, action style, energy," and goes on to say how we use music's various elements - rhythms, gestures, harmonies, and styles – "as referents or representations of 'where' [we] wish to go, emotionally, physically, and so on" (1999, pp. 37-38). I created Hannabiell & Midnight Blue as an outlet to explore my voice through music; as a way out of my in sight isolation; a space in which I could belong to and feel part of; a space where all of our voices were equal; and a space where audience members could feel comfortable to let go. I wanted to be part of something that moved me emotionally, physically, and spiritually and I began to piece together various elements to create my own haven. Greg Thomas states that art and creativity "is what we have when there's a need to make a way out of no way. The arts are one of the key forms of feeling that humans have created to confront the chaos, suffering, and absurdity of human life and the human condition" (Thomas, Integral Life, Online). Midnight Blue was freeing, full of energy, and based on making new friendships and connections.

Being an outsider within made me create Midnight Blue. Not fitting into the status quo, and mainstream ensembles allowed me to find new ways of communicating, making music and building alliances off the traditional route. I created new spaces where the playing field was leveled for all participants. Improvisation became my gateway to self-

expression and freedom; a freedom that encompasses the body, the mind, and the spirit as a whole; a freedom created in my image by my knowledge.

Ladies of Midnight Blue: Creation, Improvisation, and Community

At the end of my last year at Rutgers University a good friend of mine, Yilis del Carmen Suriel, asked me to teach her how to play the djembe. Even though I was self taught and did not consider myself an expert, I agreed. I approached drumming by creating melodic and expressive sounds that embodied elements of rhythms I grew up with. I played with three djembe of different sizes that I tied to my waist. I began by teaching Yilis the rhythms and patterns I learned through my exploratory improvisation sessions and she was able to play a steady rhythm in no time. We developed a strong connection after several months and she was able to follow me during tempo changes and play variations while I strayed away from the original rhythms. We established a profound awareness of one another, became in sync, and began creating our own style of communicating and improvising.

David Borgo (2007) says that improvisation is a complex social phenomenon composed of a tapestry of aural stimuli, which forms the basis for further thought and action. He discusses the notion of an ‘ecological’ approach to music performance, which “focuses on the perceptual learning that occurs through our embodied history of interactions (p. 75).” The foundation and musical development of our duet is based on improvisation and is the key to our style and performance. Within the duet’s musical practice we always integrate a repeated rhythm and/or pattern that becomes the foundation where we overlap improvisatory language.

Until now, I never realized how pivotal the period I spent teaching Yilis how to drum really was. I learned so much and grew tremendously during that experience. Those drumming sessions became my main outlet for further discovering and developing my voice as an improviser. As the academic calendar came to an end so did the ensembles I performed in, this left plenty of space for me to put all my energy into our sessions. Our first performance as a duet was at an open mic in New Brunswick, New Jersey followed by several protest marches and rallies organized by the People’s Organization for Progress (POP).

The most memorable rally we drummed at was for a young woman in West Virginia named Megan Williams. Megan Williams was a 20-year-old African American woman from West Virginia who was kidnapped, raped and tortured by six white

Americans, three men and three women, from Logan County, West Virginia in August 2007. Megan Williams was the subject of racial slurs, stabbed repeatedly, and forced to eat rat, dog, and human feces. It was astounding to hear of a hate crime of this nature in 2007. Within the following months as the public became aware of the incident and its details, outrage grew. POP found out that the West Virginia chapters of Black Lawyers for Justice were organizing a large protest and solidarity march at the state capitol in Charleston, West Virginia. Vickie organized an emergency meeting and it was decided that eight of us would rent a van, hotel rooms, and take turns driving over night so we could arrive on the morning of the rally. This was the first time Yilis and I made such a spontaneous decision and were excited, nervous, and proud to be part of something so monumental.

We arrived at the footsteps of the capitol and people started to arrive by the hundreds. By the time the welcoming speeches started there were over a thousand protesters, various organizations, and people of all colors and ages from all over the country standing together with solidarity paraphernalia. Yilis and I were in awe and climbed the stairs of the capitol building to get a better view of the sea of people who were in attendance. After the initial speeches Megan Williams and her family thanked all of us for coming out and supporting her and the march started. I had some extra bells and woodblocks and asked Vickie White and a few others if they would help Yilis and I make music. We tried to sync our rhythms with the chants coming from the bullhorn at the front but as the march progressed we became too distant to keep in time. We then started to play our own rhythms and the protesters around us started creating chants that went along with them. By this point more and more people around us joined in. The atmosphere was uplifting, energetic and some people were even dancing. After ten or fifteen minutes we noticed that the people in front of us stopped moving forward so we stopped drumming to see what was going on. The sea of protesters in front of us split down the middle and made a path to us because the leader at the front with the bullhorn started chanting “bring the drummers to the front.” Several others joined in and Yilis and I began to blush. We could not believe our ears and stared at each other in astonishment. It was a magnificent sight and all I could think about was the image of Moses parting the red sea and beckoning us to come to forward. Vickie, sensing our frozen state, gave us an encouraging look and said, “go on.” Yilis and I started drumming and walked down the path with our makeshift solidarity band and our POP family. As I looked around I realized that we were strengthening and reinvigorating the energy of the people. It

became evident then and there that we had an incredible opportunity to create music that engages people.

That event changed our lives forever and showed us the importance of music in protesting, the significance of music as a form of protest, and how engaging and connecting with listeners can be meaningful and rewarding. Those informal performances at peace rallies, protest marches, and community events became the sites where we developed our understanding and connections to audiences. There were no boundaries, the inspiration was reciprocal, and we fell in love with giving and receiving energy during our performances.

Part III:
Community Intimacy and
Commentary on the Album *Protest Culture*

Community Intimacy and the African American Vernacular

In this section I will contextualize the ways in which my ensembles engage and challenge our audiences during our concerts to become active participants in our music making process. I grew up immersed in the African American vernacular and find myself both consciously and unconsciously accessing various elements and traditions that have been passed down from my ancestors through music and culture. The African American vernacular is a tradition of Black expression and cultural idiosyncrasies that are passed down through oral tradition and learned behavior (Ashe 1999). Prior to the process of writing this dissertation as an autoethnography my knowledge and use of musical signifiers and tropes was unconscious. Through lived experiences, I mimicked and reproduced some of the visual, gestural, and audible musical signifiers and tropes that I learned by growing up in the African American vernacular tradition.

As a performer I've always expected my audiences to participate and be engaged, and as an audience member, participation has always been second nature to me. These expectations have everything to do with my first musical experiences taking place in the church. During a music selection, whether it was the choir, a solo singer, or an instrumentalist, my grandmother, mother, and aunties would always wave a hand, stand up and shake their head, shout, or yell "sing it" or "you better play that (insert whatever instrument)." From a young age, when I went to see live music, I remember being amongst some of the first individuals who would clap along or get up and dance. I learned to participate then and it became second nature to me. I could never just sit through a concert I enjoyed. I used to find myself swaying to the rhythm or bopping my head at classical music concerts during sections that really moved me.

Samuel A Floyd Jr. uses the musical principle he called 'Call-Response' to understand the elements of African American music. His Afrocentric approach is indispensable in understanding the elements of African American vernacular music, and is based on the following:

(1) a system of referencing, here called Signifyin(g), drawn from Afro-American folk music; (2) a tendency to make performances occasions in which the audience participates, in reaction to what performers do, which leads in turn to (3) a framework of continuous self-criticism that accompanies performance in its indigenous cultural context; (4) an emphasis on competitive values that keep performers on their mettle; and (5) the complete intertwining of black music and dance. All these elements combine to create, foster, and define what I have called here Call-Response. (2002, p. 68)

Signifying is a concept born out of the Black narrative tradition, which can be traced to the ring shout. The ring shout was a cultural ritual that the African slaves who were brought to the antebellum America had in common. It “was an activity in which music and dance commingled, merged, and fused to become a single distinctive cultural ritual in which the slave made music and derived their music styles” (Floyd 2002, pp.50-51). Black nationalist and historian, Sterling Stuckey argues in his book *Slave Culture* that a single culture formed out of the interaction of African ethnic groups in North American slavery. His central position is that the ring shout was the principal means by which physical and spiritual, emotional and rational needs were fulfilled, and that it became the meeting point where the enslaved Africans were able to achieve oneness in America. “In the world of the slaves the ring shout fused the sacred and the secular, music and dance; it continued the African and African-derived tendencies to eschew distinctions between religion and everyday life, between one performance medium and another” (Floyd 1995, p. 6). Based on Stuckey’s analysis, Floyd argues that the ring shout is the foundation of all Afro-American music: “the shuffling, angular, off-beat, additive, repetitive, intensive unflagging rhythms of shout and jubilee spirituals, ragtime, and rhythm and blues; the less vigorous but equally insistent and characteristic rhythms of the slower “sorrow song” and the blues; and the descendants and derivatives of all these genres have been shaped and defined by black dance, within and without the ring, throughout the history of the tradition” (Floyd 2002, p. 52).

Samuel Floyd Jr. builds his interpretive theory of an Afrocentric approach to music on much of Henry Louis Gates Jr’s literary critical work. Signifyin(g), a term coined by Gates, stems from the tale of the signifying monkey, which originated during slavery. This tale was developed from Esu-Elegbara, a mythical African classical figure, the “guardian and inspirer of the art of interpretation,”(Floyd 2002, p. 53), a trickster archetype commonly found in African mythology, folklore and religion. “Signifyin(g) is a figurative, implicative speech; it is a complex rhetorical device that requires the possession and application of appropriate modes of interpretation and understanding on the part of the listener. It is an art in itself, to which anyone who has the ability has the right - but a right that must be earned through contest and conquest” (Floyd 2002, p. 54).

Floyd’s musical principle Call-Response is used to convey the dialogical, conversational character of Black music and subsumes all the musical tropological devices including call and response. It is the master musical trope, a concept embracing all the other musical tropes.

Its process include the Signifyin(g), troping practices of the early calls, cries, whoops, and hollers of early Afro-American culture, which themselves were

tropes from which evolved - through extension, elaboration, and refinement-varieties of the subtrope: call-and-response, elision, multimeter, pendular and blue thirds, and all the rest, including interlocking rhythms, monosyllabic melodic expressions, instrumental imitations of vocal qualities, *parlando*, and other processes that have a kind of implicative musical as well as semantic, value. (2002, pp. 60-61)

Through my research I have come to find that I have been using some of the elements of Call-Response within my music and for creating Community Intimacy. Intimacy is a crucial aspect of human life. It represents a place of safety where differences can co-exist or, at the very least, be understood and not threatening. For marginalized groups, those outside the dominant society, intimacy is rarely shared outside the borders of their own community. In fact, differences may be hidden or kept secret from the dominant society, done so in the effort to thwart ridicule or even bodily harm. Those who cannot hide their differences are left to combat an often-hostile society or are ignored and made invisible.

Community is a site where intimacy may take place and may be fostered. Shared similarities and rituals may define its borders; it may provide safe spaces for learning and developing, where the Self may be expressed freely. Yet, community does not exist in an ideal world. Rather, it comprises spaces of conflict. For Stuart Hall, community “is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps, instead of thinking of [community] as an already accomplished [site]...we should think instead of [community] as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” (Hall 1990).

Communities are constructed within signifying practices of difference, and as a result, must be “defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘community’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference” (Hall 1990). Borrowing on Paul Gilroy’s concept of diasporic intimacy, I introduce the term Community Intimacy, seeing it as a site where people come together, a space where they feel comfortable. Community Intimacy is comprised of the struggles that highlight the different ways in which marginalized communities and dominant groups interact. Struggles that are framed by unequal power relationships, which establish hierarchies, are based on difference – of race, class and gender.

Through both ensembles, I create Community Intimacy through my music and during my performances with both ensembles in a number of ways: through the art of improvisation; community listening; audience participation; bringing together audiences

from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds; and by combining elements from African American musical vernacular tradition in my compositions.

Improvisation is at the core of my music and is a primary agent and driving force in the music of many cultures. Improvisation is an element that helps me to create and nurture three forms of community listening and intimacy: on stage between the performers, off stage between the audience members, and both on and off stage between the performers and the audience members.

Within Hannabiell & Midnight Blue, performances are designed to start with a layering effect of the musicians' presence on stage and with the tone, timbre, and characters of their instruments. The show may start with me taking in the environment and warming up on the various drums in front and around me, creating a rhythmic orchestra of melodies and sounds. The second percussionist walks on to the stage, listens for a bit and then begins adding the different tones and ideas of her drums and percussion instruments, the third percussionist on the dunun, then adds his voice. The kit drummer is next to follow, carefully adding an intricate but simple foundation to the melodious rhythms of the hand drums. The bass player walks on stage, adds an ostinato bass line that encompasses and supports the percussion, and sets the foundation for the melodic instruments. After this tonality is set, the guitarist enters creating riffs and harmonies of color that weave in and out of the various layers and textures. The saxophonist, the last to enter this cacophony of polyphony, feeds off this wall of sound, restating and adding new ideas to the already existing conversation. This introduction is a very important part of our show, it sets the tone for the concert, allow the musicians to create and display their own musical ideas and personalities apart from the set repertoire, and it purposely fosters an environment in which the musicians can interact freely with one another. (This can be seen in the entrance of *Six Eight Fuego* See Visual Documentation DVD)

Within Ladies of Midnight Blue performances we employ form and structure to facilitate our individual expression; however we have a broader approach to improvisation. We have been playing together for over eight years and have created a kind of improvisation that engages us emotionally and expressively. Ladies of Midnight Blue concerts are conceived in the present tense. We keep our possibilities open and observe the mood, energy, and the nuances of expression and body language of our audience in order to modify our performance as it goes along. Our improvisatory language is shaped by our individual needs, which are amplified by the instruments we are playing, awareness of the audience, and the conscious and unconscious reaction to sound stimuli. When we are performing for an audience that is not afraid to engage and

respond to our music verbally or physically then we can be more sensitive to those listeners and can adapt to their responses (Small 1994, p. 297). (This can be seen in the Performance at the Live Theatre See Visual Documentation DVD) Live performances are also the place where trust and support between us as performers gets tested. The willingness and ability for us to react on the spot in a live performance converts our hours of practice into preformed knowledge.

An example of Community listening between audience members can be witnessed when Hannabiell & Midnight Blue is in the middle of playing a high intensity composition and I cut off the melodic instruments leaving only the three percussionists and drummer to sustain the energy. This changes and thins out the texture so the audience is being driven by sheer rhythm. I will then shout out to the audience to join us and clap and as they become more involved, I signal for the rest of the percussionists to cut off. Now the only thing that is heard are the different rhythms and hand textures of the crowd and one hand drum on stage. There is an instant shift in responsibility and the audience knows that they have to keep the momentum going. I often witness people laughing and looking at each other as they start to realize that they are now making the music. It is a very intimate moment and to help unify all the performers a little more, I may start a call and response chant or even ask one of the audience members to make one up on the spot. By now the band members have all picked up small percussion instruments and add to the music that the audience is creating. An intimate but very playful moment has been created and is being shared by all in attendance. This is a prime example of community listening between the performers on stage and the new group of musicians off stage (*Tazmania* See Audio Documentation DVD).

We allow the collective voice of the audience to stay dominant for as long as possible because we want them to let go, feel free, and to realize how important their voice is in keeping the moment alive. Although the experience is extremely invigorating and can go for quite some time, it is a difficult task trying to make an audience keep the momentum going. Before it starts to fade I signal another percussionist to join me and one by one the band starts the process of entering in layers, building it up from percussion to melodic instruments, slowly shifting the dynamic and bringing the responsibility back to the ensemble on stage.

Community listening within Ladies of Midnight Blue performances is approached differently than when performing with the full band. Within Ladies of Midnight Blue concerts we have more flexibility and encourage audiences to participate throughout rather than within specific sections of songs. Our entire performance is based on reading

and feeding off the energy of our audience therefore participation is at the forefront. The music we create is a form of vernacular performance; we include call and response, the weaving of rhythms, use of African and Latin percussion, and the affirmation from a listener as an active participant. “In the vernacular tradition, performers play not “to” but “with” an audience, drawing on the call-response patterns that characterize the black aesthetics” (Ashe 1999, p. 277). This is not to say that all my audiences are aware of Black vernacular aesthetics. However, I use a conscious vernacular approach in non-vernacular circumstances. Because of this we now have learned new skills to aid in empowering an audience to become a vernacular crowd. The vernacular tradition can be practiced by anyone “the black vernacular is not a racial so much as a cultural phenomenon” (Ashe 1999, p. 279).

Throughout my performances I use the tactic of Community Intimacy to get the audience involved. Community Intimacy is my primary strategy in the way I bring together audiences from different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Because the Black vernacular tradition is a cultural phenomenon it can be learned, and for a non-vernacular audience my initial approach is to engage in vernacular play as a way to communicate. Christopher Small speaks about Musicking and provides this definition: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small 1998, p. 8). He explains that music’s ultimate function is to provide understanding of relationships, as simple as the relationship between notes and chords, rhythms and sounds, musicians and listeners, producers and industry workers and so forth. Musicking is an active way in which we relate to the rest of the world:

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world (Small 1998, p. 13).

Fans/concert goers look forward to the participatory environment we create. Some people even bring their horns or percussion instruments to Ladies of Midnight Blue concerts because they know at some point during the concert they will have a chance to play and add their voice and ideas to the music being created (Performance at

Soundhouse See Visual Documentation DVD). This participatory environment is one of our most conducive tactics in creating safe spaces that aid in fostering social agency.

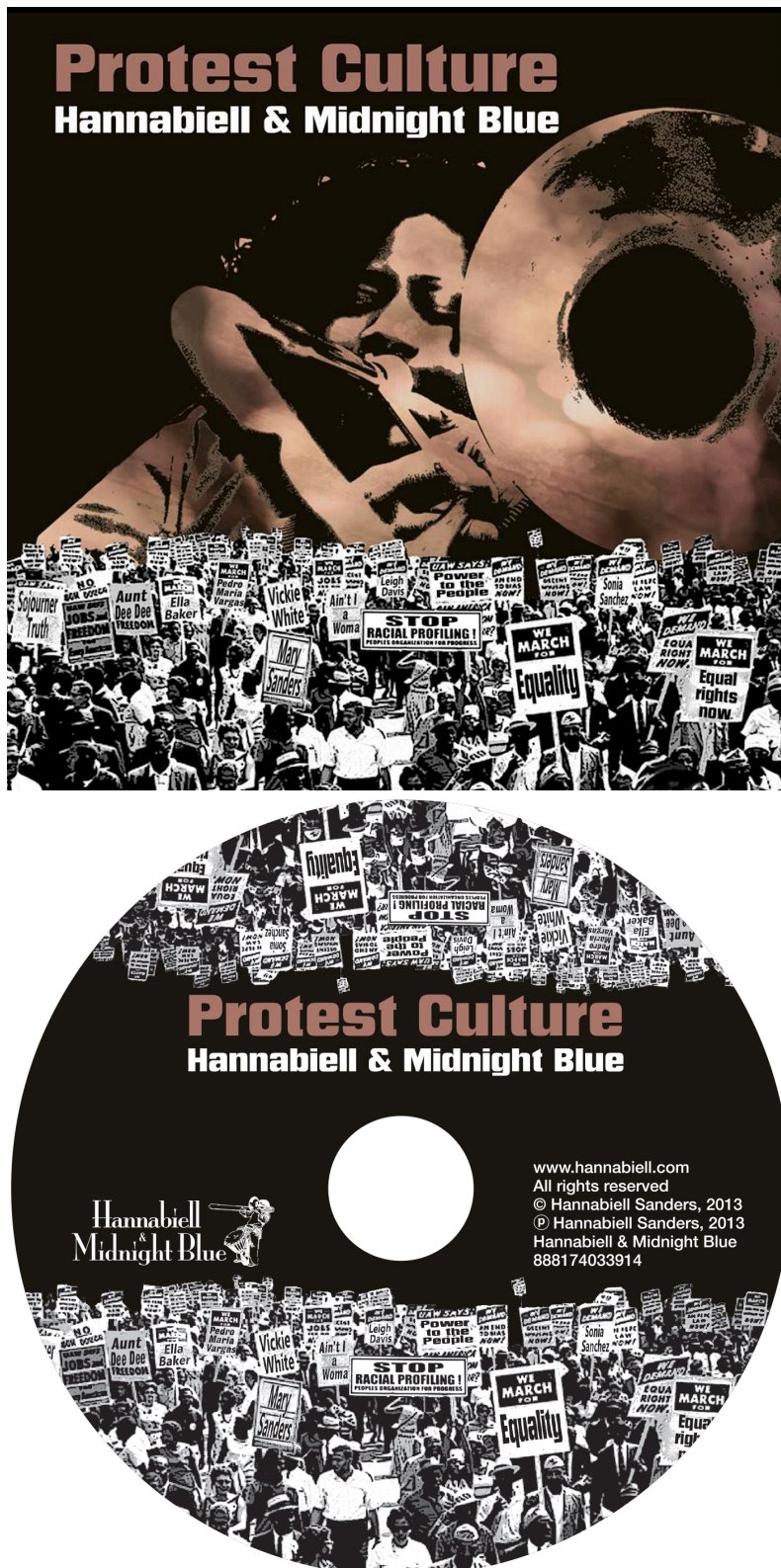
Protest Culture: The Album and its Compositional Background

Protest – or the collective use of unconventional methods of political participation to try to persuade or coerce authorities to support a challenging group’s aims – is perhaps the fundamental feature that distinguishes social movements from routine political actors. (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004, p. 263)

Protest culture to me is a way of living that engages others through cultural forms of expressions. Protest culture is a social movement whose process takes time, aims to shape opinion, and pressures those who are in positions of authority. During my performances I employ Community Intimacy as a tactic that goes beyond what is seen today in social movement research.

In this section I will talk about the album *Protest Culture* (see Figure 1: *Protest Culture* Album & CD Cover, p. 45) and provide a brief commentary on each piece. The nature of my creative practice places my autobiographical voice at the center of its discussion through a Black feminist standpoint. Within my practice led research I am able to uncover the ways my experiences are intertwined with the creation of music. I grew up listening to a great deal of music but the styles that have directly influenced my compositions and performances are Jazz, Gospel, Funk, House Music, African Drumming, Reggae, Dancehall, Afrobeat, and Hip Hop. Although my compositions do not resemble these styles in their entirety, they contain ingredients that can be found in most African American and African derived music. Jazz is a product of a cultural setting which mirrors vernacular expressions, identity, political/cultural critique, and emerged as a new music and form of expression in which “Black Americans worked out their identity in relation to the dominant Euro-American culture” (Small 1994, p. 447). My music was initially a response to isolation while at Rutgers, and like jazz was born out of rebellion. Jazz has influenced Reggae, Afrobeat and other forms of music that notably portray socio-political and aesthetic unrest. Although Dancehall is a version of Reggae, its lyrics, like many forms of Hip Hop, moved away from political messages of social injustice and the inequality experienced by the Black community, and became focused on dancing, sexuality, and voicing violence. What I take from Dancehall, Hip Hop, Funk, Afrobeat, African Drumming, and House Music are the repetitive interlocking rhythms, the colorful textures and soundscapes, the bass lines and grooves, and the heavy drum beats.

Figure 1: *Protest Culture* Album & CD Cover



Today my band Hannabiell & Midnight Blue (see Figure 2: Hannabiell & Midnight Blue Tech Specs pp. 46) is intergenerational, interracial, mixed gendered, and intercultural. It contains a vast array of percussion instruments including congas,

djembes, dunun, a drum kit, woodblocks, cowbells, agogo bells, a shekere, and other auxiliary percussion. The drums and percussion are the heart of the ensemble and the brass instruments, bass trombone and saxophone, are second in line. Together, the brass and percussion can stand-alone from the rest of the ensemble for separate performances. The guitar, bass, keyboard, and mbira add another level of melodic cohesion and add both familiar and distinctive sounds and effects. I use an innovative mixture of African, Caribbean and Latin rhythms, improvisation, and have come to call this organic blend of powerful and upbeat music “Afro-Psychedelic Funk.” Afro-Psychedelic Funk is not a genre within popular music so we often describe our music as being a mixture of Jazz, Afrobeat, Funk, Latin, and Reggae in order to give readers an idea of our influences.

Figure 2: Hannabiell & Midnight Blue Tech Specs



The Ladies of Midnight Blue (see Figure 3: Ladies of Midnight Blue Tech Specs) is an Afro-Latin percussion, mbira & brass duet who have performed all over the world for various festivals, charity benefits, peace rallies, women and LGBT events, and protest marches. Our music consists of powerful and upbeat combinations of percussion, brass, vocal chants, and mbira arrangements that inspires dancing and audience participation. Today, the duet is comprised of myself on Percussion, Bass Trombone, mbira, and voice, and Yilis del Carmen Suriel on Percussion, and mbira. In the last eight years we have been workshop facilitators, guest artists for youth programs, grade schools, universities, community organizations, and have performed at a host of diverse venues from the Bandra Base in Bombay, India; the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, South Africa; the Univerisity of Hawaii in Honolulu, Hawaii; all the way to Edmundbyers Village Hall, a small rural village in County Durham, England.

Figure 3: Ladies of Midnight Blue Tech Specs



All of the music I compose contains elements that connect my music to an African diasporic sound that shares the common experience of Musicking: syncopation, offbeat phrasing stressing normally unaccented beats; polyrhythms, multiple rhythms being played simultaneously; polyphonic texture, simultaneous lines of independent melodies, riffs, and/or solos that are played together; constant repetitive rhythms; ostinato riffs and melodies; timeline patterns, asymmetrical rhythmic ostinatos played on a bell,

woodblock, glass bottles, castanets, or the side of a drum that act as the structural center; and improvisation.

Improvisation and collective improvisation are the cornerstones of my compositions. Within each piece I create spaces to allow players to feature and develop their voice. Christopher Small describes improvisation within music as a socially effective tool, “the musician as he [or she] improvises responds not only to the inner necessities of the sound world he [or she] is creating but also to the dynamics of the human situation as it develops around him [or her]” (Small 1994, p. 295). He further states “to improvise, is to establish a different set of human relationships” which occurs when a performer can “pick up the sense of an occasion, to bring it into focus and enhance it for the greater social and spiritual benefit of all” (Small 1994, pp. 295-296).

The album *Protest Culture* is made up of ten recorded pieces. It incorporates music recorded by Hannabiell & Midnight Blue and the Ladies of Midnight Blue with guest appearances from various performers who contributed a great deal to the formation of the songs. The songs could not exist without the pre-existing frameworks of music making and likewise could not exist without improvisational expressions.

Each composition is developed from a melody, bass line, rhythm or a combination of two of these elements. I provide notation of melodies or bass lines when appropriate, however, I do not work from notated scores. When these elements are learned we workshop the piece so everyone can internalize the groove and essence of the composition. I explain the larger context, social and political meaning, and feeling I want each composition and/or solo to invoke through analogies and visual description. It is important for each band member to understand these complexities in order for our music and improvising to create change that communicates from the musician to the listener. It is impossible to determine how my explanations of these complexities are interpreted and effect each musician's' improvisation; however, my explanations aid in creating a unified musical *modus operandi*.

All of the songs carry characteristics that are particular to the line-up at the time. When the line-up changes the individual performer has their own take on the composition. In this way, I use improvisation as a compositional tool, by using specific players to highlight individual improvisatory approaches within each piece. Working with various musicians has allowed me to develop and advance my compositional ideas. Most of my compositional structure is based on exposing the soloist playing over the various textures and interlocking rhythms. Therefore individuals within the ensemble create their own notes and notations to follow the structure that I have prescribed.

There are no scores for the music, but the audio recordings and videos of the live sets are effective audio and visual records of each compositional structure. The album was created with the intention of capturing the live experience to be able to demonstrate the combined elements from African American musical vernacular tradition. The recording process itself was part of the research. It helped to clarify how to capture a live experience and how to help the music transcend the recorded piece. We tried to recreate the live experience within certain tracks by recording a live audience soundscape. The majority of the recording studios I researched and had access to were not equipped to record a live band centered around a percussion ensemble so recording was a challenge. The essence of our music is based on the energy we create when playing together so we cannot record and layer each part separately. We feed off one another and heavily rely on cues. We have to be in the same space in order to create what we do on stage in live performances. There were certain concessions we had to make because of the recording process. We had to set certain sections and the solo lengths for some of the songs. Normally everyone solos until she/he has finished what she or he has to say. However during the recording session we set the lengths in order to make the process easier.

We discovered vast differences between performing this repertoire in live performances and recording in the studio. I lead and conduct the band through the use of eye contact, horn lines, vocables, drum cues, and gestural cues. I have also put into place a multi-layered system of communication amongst the players, for example in the end of a soloist section he or she can signal the rest of the band, the next soloist or myself so that I can cue out of a section. One gestural cue I use the most is holding up my fist in the air to either cue a change in section or the end of the song. I started using this cue while in South Africa where I led an African Music & Dance module at the University of Kwazulu Natal and it has become a symbolic image for all that we stand for (unity, strength, and resistance).

Each song within the CD *Protest Culture* was recorded with the idea that post-production would not play an important role in changing the structure of the songs, but would only be used to highlight certain aspects of the live performance experience. The mixing and mastering of the material involved adjustment to balances and levels, and some simple compression across the tracks to bring out as much detail as possible. I do not discuss every piece in the portfolio in detail, but rather I highlight the parts within each song that illustrates particular aspects of my compositional practice. The order of the songs in the following pages is not as they are in the album. They are discussed in relationship to the compositional tools I've used and to each other. I have included the

history of some of the songs because it is pertinent to their evolving compositional structure.

Protest Culture (Track 4 & 10)

Protest Culture is the title track of the album and this dissertation. It is very different from all the other work in the portfolio. Yilis and I filled a rehearsal room with various percussion instruments (djembe, dunun, shakers, woodblocks, castanets, whistles, floor tom, surdo, agogo bells, pandeiro). We explored the various sounds each instrument could make and had a couple sessions to find and create different rhythms and grooves. Once we created different sections we made a basic structure with a breakdown section for a trombone solo. During this session we created different rhythms and grooves to be arranged to set the parameters of the work. We then made a plan for recording based on the investigations and developed a one-day schedule for recording the piece. This was envisaged to be an important part of developing the rhythms and grooves that we workshopped during our exploration sessions. Because we perceived an open approach when using the rhythms and grooves with the basic structure the layering became the most important part of the composition. With the help of our sound engineer, John Ayers, the then studio manager of the School of Arts and Culture at Newcastle University, we arranged the structure, recorded the percussion in layers, added a bass trombone solo, and included a few effects to enhance some of the transitions.

This version of *Protest Culture* was released on my first album *With Us* in 2011 but I always knew that I wanted to revisit it in the future. Listening back to the song I had clear visual images of a protest march, which inspired me to want to create a music video that would capture the image I had. When it came time for me to think about my submission as a whole, including recorded songs from the Ladies of Midnight Blue was very important to me, I immediately thought of remixing *Protest Culture* with lyrics from Climbing PoeTree. Climbing PoeTree is a spoken word duet formed by Naima Penniman and Alixa Garcia who reside in Brooklyn, NY and have roots in Haiti and Colombia respectively. Our dear friend and activist Leigh Davis who saw them at a conference introduced Yilis and I to them. Leigh took Yilis and I to Harlem, New York in May 2009 to see their show, Hurricane Season: the hidden messages in water. It was a multi-media two-woman show about unnatural disaster. We were blown away by the power of their

performance. They were able to blur the lines between performance and activism through the use of spoken word, sound collage, shadow art, dance, film and animation. In their own words “hurricane season tackles; global warming, environmental injustice, policing, prisons, militarization, corporate domination, gentrification, and displacement as [a manifestation] from one gulf to another, with a powerful tale of resistance, resilience, creativity and survival” (Climbing PoeTree, Electronic Press Kit, Online). The show was inspirational and allowed for me to have one of my first powerful encounters with women activists and artists who were able to create work as a tool for social justice.

Almost all my music is created for a live experience and does not include lyrics but I wanted to use this song to make a statement about the vision I had for the song. I wanted to include lyrics and knew that if Climbing PoeTree agreed to be part of the project, they could help me get the message across. I sent a copy of the song along with my visual description, and asked if they would be interested in composing lyrics (email sent on Dec 23, 2011);

There is a massive protest march about to take place and the majority of the protesters have arrived and are standing around talking, getting fired up, and are waiting for direction. A few more buses with large groups of people have just arrived and as they walk over to join the crowd, the rally leaders (the castanets & whistle) starts to bring everyone in and get their attention. The purpose of the rally & common link between everyone present is reiterated, the route for the march is explained, several chants are rehearsed, and the fact that nothing can be solved unless the people work together and take back what belongs to them is stated strongly and the march begins (1:04). The rally, high energy and super intense stops at a monument or building along the route and a speaker gets on the mic or bullhorn (Tyler, my bass trombone 1:33) and addresses the large mass with a powerful speech filled with important and empowering facts & reality checks. The crowd gets excited and starts the march again while the speaker carries on with the speech & leading chants.

I received an enthusiastic email stating that they were moved by the music, loved the messages I was trying to get across, and would be happy to write lyrics (see Figure 4: *Protest Culture* Lyrics, p. 52). Climbing PoeTree are a powerful duet who are in high demand and tour most of the year so it was quite a while before they could dedicate time to work on the project. They were also in the process of booking a West Coast USA tour when I contacted them. In an interview after the project was done they revealed to me that they were only able to find time to work on the project during their down time once they were on tour. When they completed the lyrics, they did a rough recording over the track in GarageBand and emailed it over to me. They were able to capture the essence of my message within their lyrics, and I was astounded!

Figure 4: *Protest Culture Lyrics*

Naima's Lyrics:

Take a stand, for what you believe in
convene your team, its time to rise up
decide what you willing to die for,
clock is ticking, world is shifting, alright now times up!
you want change? gotta break these chains, yeah!
trade em in for a brand new day
we are the ones we've been waiting to come
the countdown is ON your mark, get set, run
we source our strength, straight from the sun
we store the sky, deep in our lungs
our chests are loaded like guns
we spit hymns to the rhythm of drums
a grenade is waiting up under my tongue
My throat will self-destruct by the time this poem's done
in the meantime I'ma speak on what I seen come
how will we know where we're going if we don't know
where we're from?
All my women, stand up!
All my queer folk, stand up!
All my allies, stand up!
All my dreamers, stand up!
All my farmers, stand up!
All my artists, stand up!
All my healers, stand up!
All my people, stand up!
If so much is controlled by so few
Imagine how much your whole crew could do
When you consider the system runs off our fuel
we'll stop running along and see who's ruling who'
the game don't exist if we don't play by it's rules

WE DEMAND:

government transparency, fairness and honesty
no more corporate hegemony, the abolition of poverty,
gender equality, indigenous sovereignty
bio-diversity, racial harmony
common ground open space public property
true participation in a true democracy
respect for the planet's ecology
stop modifying genes microscopically
we demand wealth be distributed properly
strip search the colonists for stolen property
pay back reparations, we demand compensation
fair labor, workers paid what they outta be
heads of state give a public apology
G-8 nations stop playing your monopoly
decolonize our people's psychology
we wanna love who we love,
wanna be who we wanna be!

Alix's Lyrics:

The alchemist's gold
Was never the goal
And the emperor needs new clothing
We were transforming
Growing wings where there was only bone

Cause there is nowhere left to go
These fires long been burning
Bursting seeds wide open
We are no longer condoning
Or paying homage to your violence
That keeps our hearts hostage
I said, this rope is no longer the gate
keeper's bondage

We unraveling your nooses for these sails
We trust the wind will guide the journey
Of a thousand steps
The first is the most important turning

And we've been marching
Reigniting the slow riot
The calm storm
Truths be told

Too many lies been bound and sold
From auction blocks to rock and roll
We bringing back that southern stroll

Nina Simone was the original home
Where swagger was born
We were born by the river
But never running alone
We've been marching
This life was never on loan
So you can try to sell your stolen property
Patten life's codes for all your profits
Deny the indigenous sovereignty
The last shall be first and the first shall be
last
Says the oldest prophecy

Be the change that you want to see cause
love will triumph over the terror & greed
Our unified power cannot be defeat and the
first shall be last as the last take the lead
Be the change that you want to see cause lo
will triumph over the terror & greed
Our unified power cannot be defeat and the
first shall be last as the last take the lead

I had to figure out how to record them properly and decided that it would be more beneficial if they came to England and record at our studio in Newcastle University. Bringing them over to record in Newcastle would also allow us, Ladies of Midnight Blue and Climbing PoeTree, to officially meet, get to know each other, discuss future collaborations, and allow me to pursue my vision of creating a music video that included us all.

Embarking on such a pursuit proved to be very expensive so Yilis and I used our resources and networks within the university and local community to help make their journey to Newcastle possible. We booked several engagements for them to cover the fees for their flights, travel within the UK, and accommodation. The experience allowed me to see how they used their poetry, visual art and mixed media projects as a tool for activism.

Although the trip was extremely successful we ran out of time and resources to properly record a music video while they were here in Newcastle. A year and three months after Climbing PoeTree came to Newcastle, Yilis and I were asked to be filmed by a cinematographer we met in India while on tour a few months earlier. He saw one of our Ladies of Midnight Blue performances in Bombay and was inspired to see female drummers. He wanted to film us while we were in India but we did not have time, as we were already booked to travel to other cities. His work with a British Airways project brought him to London and he asked if we could meet him so that he could film us. We were on our way to Paris and could only meet him on the morning of our travel, so we spent four hours filming in London. After we finished we gave him some of the footage we took while in India, our album, and briefly described each of the songs to him. Ten months later he sent us the music video *Protest Culture* (*Protest Culture* See Visual Documentation DVD).

Free Yourself (Track 1) & Tumba (Track 6)

When I moved to England in 2009 I found myself amongst a thriving African drumming community. Many of the drummers were students of Nansady Keita, a master djembé drummer from the Malinké tribe in Guinea. They spoke highly of his classes so Yilis and I decide to partake in one of his traditional Guinean drumming workshops. This was a series of firsts, it was first time my schedule, finances, and location lined up to allow me to access this type of tutelage, the first time Yilis and I engaged in formal djembe tuition,

and the first time we engaged as students in a drum workshop. Most importantly we received our first official introduction to the dunun, a family of West Africa bass drums consisting of the dundunba, sangban, and kenkeni.

Free yourself is composed of rhythms we learned in a traditional Guinean drumming workshop. The summer after the workshop I took one of the djembe patterns to Camp Treetops. Camp Treetops is located outside of Lake Placid, NY in the Adirondack Mountains, and I spent one to two months of every summer working there for ten consecutive years (up until 2012). It is a progressive summer camp for boys and girls ages 8-14 that seeks out emotionally mature individuals to serve as positive role models for children while living and working in a fast-paced, intense, collaborative space. Camp Treetops is in accordance with values influenced by John Dewey's progressive views of education, most notably that too much structure and competition stifles children's natural curiosity and creativity. At Treetops I climbed trees, hiked up mountains, lead music overnights trips, taught drumming, mentored campers, created ensembles with unusual instrumentation, built fires, and created drum and dance ensembles made up of both campers and staff members. One of the many amazing things about working in that environment was that all the campers and staff stayed together for an entire seven weeks, which not only aided in the development of healthy relationships, but also provided me with complete creative freedom and access to over 150 individuals to create and be inspired by. During those ten years I worked in the Adirondack Mountains I developed a lot of my music, teaching styles, and techniques.

It was there that I first taught the rhythm to a group of staff and kids, created the initial structure, came up with the melody, and gave the song its name *Free Yourself*. At Treetops, the song was arranged for a percussion ensemble but I brought it to Midnight Blue when I returned to England. We worked around the melody and traditional rhythms to enhance the structure to include all of our voices and solo sections. In this song I play djembe and lead the band through gestures, vocables and use a traditional West African drum call to go between each section.

Small writes: "Performers and listeners are bringing into existence, if only for the duration of the performance, an ideal society very different from that created...it confronts the values of industrial society with a celebration of the body and its movements, an affirmation of those qualities of warmth, communality and emotional honesty, which Black Americans call soul" (Small 1994, p. 298). When composing *Free Yourself* with Midnight Blue, I explained to the band that I wanted this song to summon the atmosphere and energy of one of my first musically enriching experiences. When I was in grade

school my mother took us to a small church in New Jersey where the environment was safe and people felt free to let go of their inhibitions. Everyone in the congregation experienced similar struggles and used the service as a time to de-stress, reenergize, forge fellowship with allies, and gain wisdom and insight on how to deal with everyday challenges. I wanted this song to signify on this church experience and used an echauffement to help invigorate the energy Black church shouting music. An echauffement is a technique that traditional djembe players use to speed up the tempo and inspire the dancers and audiences alike. I do this as a repetitive roll of slaps speeding up the tempo.

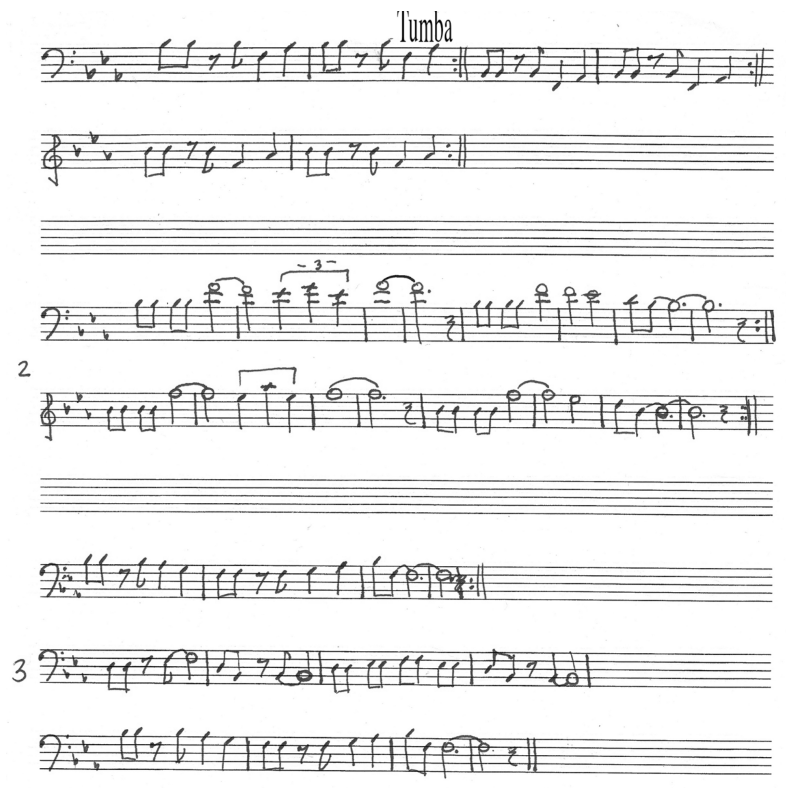
During the recording session we tried to capture the essence we create at our live concerts and overdubbed the band members clapping, whistling and whooping in the background. I also asked Brooke McArthur, a soul singer and songwriter based in Newcastle upon Tyne, if she would like to be featured on the album and sing the lyrics in the intro. The lyrics “free yourself to my rhythm” gives the audience permission to break the rules, join in, let go, dance, and have fun. During our concerts with non-vernacular audiences many people default to western classical music etiquette, which calls for audience members to become human statues for the duration the musical performance. They may be moved or inspired by our music but will not get up out of their seats or engage unless they are asked to do something specific or given permission from the musicians on stage. Although we don’t open our concerts with this song, I purposely made it the first track on the album to get this message across.

Tumba is another song I first explored and developed with my campers at Camp Treetops. I originally learned the tune from a friend while in high school. I have explored various arrangements of this song over the years but finally settled with the arrangement on the album once I workshopped it with the ensemble. *Tumba* is the only composition that utilizes vocal polyphony that is structured around three independent melodies (Figure 5: Notation of *Tumba*, p. 56).

The first line is a two bar ostinato cycle that acts as a bass line. The second line has an eight bar phrase and the third line has a sixteen bar cycle. I use the second line as the common thread that links all four sections of the song together. You hear it in the intro, under the saxophone solo, which is the last solo before the percussion break, and again at the end of the percussion solo leading into the outro. During live performances the first and third lines are only used in the intro at a slow tempo and in the outro in an upbeat tempo. In the album recording I invited Brooke McArthur to sing and double up

the second and third lines with the saxophone and trombone so you can also hear the third line under the saxophone solo before the percussion break.

Figure 5: Notation of *Tumba*



I was interested in the texture that was created when combining unison trombone and voice with unison saxophone and voice and the texture that would be created when they were added together.

***Triple It* (Track 8)**

Triple It has a unique history. The structure has evolved over the course of the years as I have performed and workshopped it in various settings, each time adding something new until it evolved into how we perform it today. The basic concept and structure of *Triple It* was born during the summer of 2008 at Camp Treetops. I created the basic call and response, triplet pattern and one of the campers created the high-pitched bottle response which acts as the timeline. The campers had no experience working with triplet patterns so we spent a lot of time clapping, chanting, and stomping the rhythm until everyone felt comfortable with it. After the piece was composed we decided to include the chanting and stomping exercises as part of the intro because we loved the hemiola rhythm that were created from our feet and voices.

This percussion composition was extremely catchy and stuck with me for weeks after Camp Treetops. The next stage of development for *Triple It* was in the fall of 2008, when I returned to South Africa. I moved to South Africa to pursue my Masters degree and ended up teaching an African Music & Dance module at the University of Kwazulu Natal. Bringing *Triple It* and its basic structure to a mixed group of amateur and semi-professional musicians and dancers was an amazing experience. The amount of percussion instruments we had access to was exceptional and even included animal horns. The class was so large I had enough people and instruments to have six different sections consisting of 4 to 7 people. After the composition was finished, we decided to add a horn improvisation and call and response to the intro before the stomping and chanting. During this time period I started to see how much energy this piece could actualize and evoke when the musicians really engage and commit to the performance. This is also where I developed the visual and rhythmic cues to transition between the various sections. Once all the musicians were playing their parts and doing their choreography it was difficult to signal to everyone with the rhythmic cues alone so I held up my fist in the air until I made eye contact with everyone before playing the cue to change to the next section. While in South Africa *Triple It* gained its name, new rhythms, a breakdown section, horn calls during the intro, and a new understanding of physical and visual energy.

When I brought the song to the musicians in Newcastle it maintained the structure I created in South Africa. I still led the band as I did when it was solely a percussion composition through visual and rhythmic cues. I rearranged the song so that the overarching rhythms were covered by the percussionist, transcribed rhythms patterns and the timeline into melodic riffs, and made the horn call during the introduction into a vuvuzela call.

Vickie's Speech (Track 3) & Spirit Rise (Track 7)

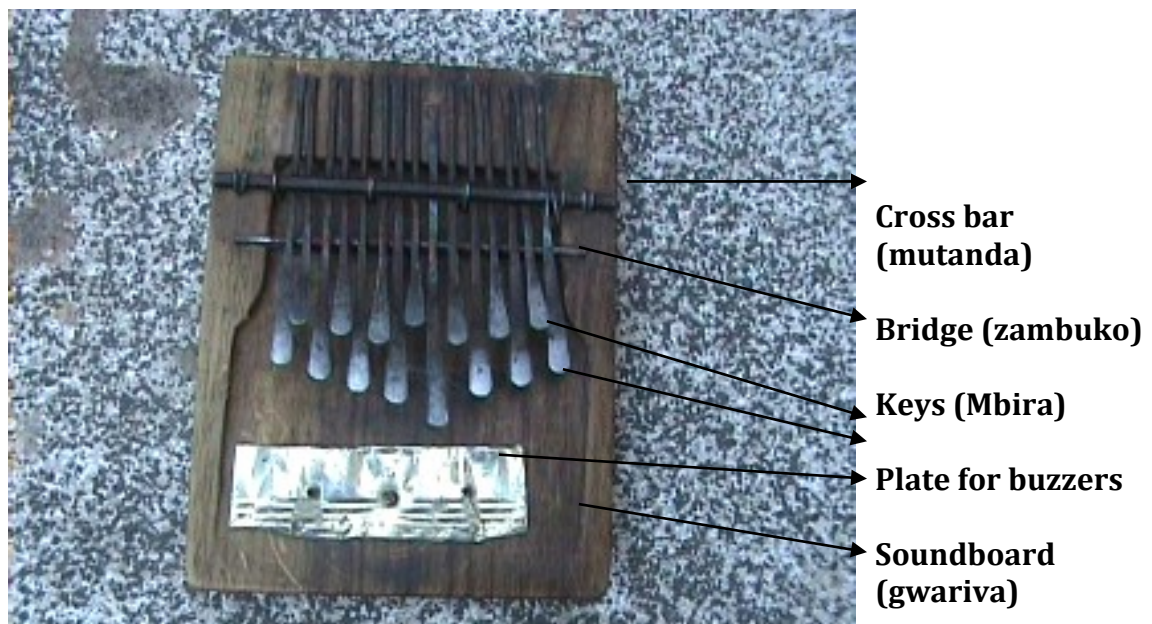
Vickie's Speech and *Spirit Rise* are two songs that I composed on mbira. There are many kinds of mbira found throughout various parts of Africa however, the two mbira I studied and learned how to play while living in Durban, South Africa were mbira dzavadzimu and mbira nyunga nyunga. The mbira, played by different tribes of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, is both an African musical instrument and the name of numinous music.

Mbira has been in existence for thousands of years and saturated nearly every aspect of Shona culture before it became an object of scrutiny and was banned in the 19th century during the English colonial regime. The mbira was resurrected during the

Zimbabwean struggle for independence in the 1970s and became a crucial musical ingredient in the popular music, chimurenga. Chimurenga in the Shona language translates to revolutionary struggle and has become an expression for human rights, political dignity, and social justice. It is a form of protest music that was made popular by Thomas Mapfumo. The mbira within chimurenga reemerged as a powerful force in Zimbabwean pop culture and is played alongside guitars and other modern instruments. Mbira dzavadzimu is the most important mbira in Shona religion and culture and is seen as a telephone to the spirits. It is the mbira that is used during religious ceremonies and social gatherings. (Berliner, 1981)

Mbira nyunga nyunga, the mbira I compose on (Figure 6: Image of Mbira Nyunga Nyunga), originated in Mozambique and was introduced to Zimbabwe in the 1960s by Jeke Tapera. Both *Vickie's Speech* and *Spirit Rise* were created from melodies made on mbira nyunga nyunga. The melody for *Vickie's Speech* was created by a variation of a traditional song I learned from my teacher, Perminus Matiure while studying in South Africa.

Figure 6: Image of Mbira Nyunga Nyunga



Mbira music usually goes hand in hand with singing, chanting, and vocables but I choose to only use instruments when composing these two songs. Both melodies for *Vickie's Speech* and *Spirit Rise* were composed separately before being workshopped with the full ensemble. I composed the melody of *Vickies' Speech* by playing a variation of a traditional mbira song I learned when I traveled to Zimbabwe with my teacher

Perminus. When I returned to New Jersey after a year in South Africa I taught Yilis how to play nyunga nyunga and she created the melody for *Spirit Rise*.

Spirit Rise is composed to have each soloist signifying on the player before him/her (*Spirit Rise* See Visual Documentation DVD). The idea was to have a continuous sound mirroring to the Shona belief that mbira music is continuous and can always be heard. My teacher told me that “when you pick up the instrument and start playing you are just tapping into something already existing”. This is why I choose to fade the song out at the end. I also decided to only use hand percussion and not the drum kit to invoke a more traditional feeling and sound. My flute player being familiar with traditional mbira music was also conscious that we weren’t incorporating vocals and decided to signify on the tradition by imitating vocables on his flute.

Once I was settled on the mbira parts for *Vickie’s Speech* and the accompanying rhythms, I envisioned the song as a motivational piece, an epic speech from a great leader, and structured it in this manner. The band sets the stage, the saxophonists delivers the speech, and the bass acts as an audience member, signifyin’, agreeing, and commenting on what was said. When I first composed the song I told the soloist to pretend that he was Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King delivering one of their famous speeches but when it came time to give this song an official name, I thought of the day I met and was inspired by Vickie White. She touched, influenced, and transformed so many lives and as a tribute, I named this song after her. This way her name and memory will live on through my music.

When we recorded the mbira previously we encountered problems with microphone positioning and feedback. The mbira are acoustic instruments that are placed inside a deze (resonator) in order to amplify the sound. Recording the mbira for Protest Culture encouraged us to research and develop new ways to record. With the help of John Ayers, our Newcastle University studio technician, we were able to build contact mics with quarter-inch jack mono audio sockets. The contact pickup mic allowed for greater gain before feedback and made recording and performing with the mbira much easier. We did not have to worry about microphone positioning and feedback or bleed from other instruments. This revolutionized our sound and capability in studio and for live performances.

***Tazmania* (Track 9) & *Treedrum* (Track 5)**

Experimenting with shifts in dynamics and texture became an important process when composing *Tazmania* and *Treedrum*. I created the melody and bass line separately before bringing them to the ensemble. After teaching these parts we workshopped the rhythms and groove with the percussionists. I wrote these two songs specifically to explore various elements of dance music. Borrowing from the build up and drops commonly heard in electronic dance music, I wanted to create a similar effect. During these workshops I would randomly cut off the percussion instruments, add one, then cut off the bass, and so on. When I finally cut off the accompanying melodic instruments during the solos, I discovered a change in the way they soloed and responded when isolated with only percussion. There was a shift in energy that raised the auditory awareness of the percussion section, which builds up tension and heightens the soloist's intensity. This concentrated sound acts as a break and naturally drives the song into the next section, the drop, when I add the bass and accompanying instruments back in.

Tazmania begins with myself on bass trombone setting the tempo playing an eight bar ostinato riff, representing the timeline or heartbeat. The guitar and bass introduce the melody which is also built around the eight bar timeline. Once the scene is created, the drummer takes over the timeline and the bass trombone solos. The phrasing and rhythm patterns derive directly from the syncopated intervals of the trombone riff. I see my trombone solo as a narrative creating a scene of a wailing woman in a field grieving for a loss. The song accelerates to a climax and unfolds in four sections (solos, percussion break, outro, and resolution). The first section is up-tempo and features the guitar and keyboard solo. Each solo is split in two parts where the soloist plays with the full band and the over percussion to create the shifts in dynamics and texture.

We also experienced the same shift in intensity and drive during the percussion break when we stripped away all the melodic instruments. We found that during a live concert this section is a great point where we can interact with the audience and get them to participate with us by starting with a full percussion section and then stripping it down to one drummer and inviting the audience to add different rhythms. During the recording process we kept this percussion break full and danceable and overlapped extra percussion parts.

Treedrum starts when I play an ostinato djembe rhythm that establishes the tempo and groove. The other instruments enter consecutively every 4 bars starting with the agogo bell (which acts as the song timeline), then the dundun, the kick drum, the bass line

and full drum kit, followed by the melody played by the saxophone and keyboard. This song is much shorter than *Tazmania* but it has many similarities. None of the solos have set lengths so there is constant communication and negotiation between players as we coordinate the changes of each section. The first solo by the saxophonist is the same as *Tazmania* and is split in two parts where the first half is with the full band and the second half is over percussion. Instead of duplicating the same effect under the keyboard solo, I bring the song to an end by having the saxophone play melody twice under keyboard solo. This melody, like in *Tazmania* also acts as an audible cue for the end of the song.

Six Eight Fuego (Track 2)

Six Eight Fuego is a piece that I often use to start the live concerts because it visually and musically introduces all the musicians and instruments onto the stage (*Six Eight Fuego* See Visual Documentation DVD). It highlights the core of the band, the percussion ensemble, and displays the complex layers of rhythms, textures, and harmonies as each musician enters and syncs in succession. During our live concerts this staggered entrance, which starts with myself followed by Yilis, also allows for the Ladies of Midnight Blue to set the tone and interact with our audiences. We often perform three to ten minutes of our improvised percussion set before transitioning into the six eight pattern, and calling the other musicians on stage one at a time.

Six Eight Fuego is a piece Yilis I created from experimenting and combining different six eight rhythms on our djembes during our performances as a duet. I play a six eight rhythm I was taught while studying music in South Africa and she plays an Afro Peruvian six eight rhythm she learned on cajon from a Peruvian bassist we worked with in another project. When we took these rhythms to Midnight Blue, our other African hand percussionist added a West African six eight bass drum and bell pattern, the keyboard created the ostinato riff, and I created the bass line.

Protest Culture: Sustaining Change

My performances reflect the aesthetic of the Black radical tradition of freedom and I find myself quoting Ella's Song by Sweet Honey in the Rock "We who believe in freedom cannot rest. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes". In doing this I am closer to being amongst women who use their art form to create change. My work carries with it a history of unrest that I have discovered through my creative practice research. I am part of a historical legacy of Black feminists who understand the importance of placing the power of ideas in service to social justice.

I have come to understand through my creative practice research that the role of performance, within the context of my ensembles, carries an Afrocentric aesthetic that falls within the Black radical tradition. Researching the foundational elements of African American vernacular music that stem from Black culture has allowed me to recognize my use of tropes and signifiers throughout my compositions. Recording, documenting and reflecting my musical experiences through videos, my album, and photographs has enhanced my understanding of, and connection to the music I compose.

There are noticeable changes in the way I approach composing today and the way I composed for my first Album *With Us*. I am more aware of the signifying aspects that I can use as a tool to compose. *African Blues*, a composition I developed after recording *Protest Culture* by creatively workshopping the melody and bass line with the ensemble has become one of our signature songs (*African Blues*, see contents of Visual Documentation DVD). Hannabiell & Midnight Blue has grown immensely since the recording of our album *Protest Culture* and many things have changed, including some of the song structures, personnel, instrumentation, and the sound of the ensemble. The title, *African Blues*, gives homage to the people, culture, and music that have influenced my music making and signifies on an art form that is continuously evolving. It also signifies on Blues as an emotion expressing my frustration of the band being overlooked by people who label and dictate what a popular musical genre should be by excluding music and musicians.

I structured *African Blues* similarly to the other pieces on the album, creating solo sections and using the head or the thematic melody to signal the various transitions. This is one of the first songs where I incorporate trading as a compositional tool, in jazz this is known as trading fours. In *African Blues* trading can be found in the call and response between bass and saxophone. The song itself is not a traditional blues composition. However, my referencing blues in the title specifically signifies on a musical genre that was born out of people expressing and voicing their frustration.

Blues is an African-American music that traverses a wide range of emotions and musical styles. “Feeling blue” is expressed in songs whose verses lament injustice or express longing for a better life and lost loves, jobs, and money. But blues is also a raucous dance music that celebrates pleasure and success. Central to the idea of blues performance is the concept that, by performing or listening to the blues, one is able to overcome sadness and lose the blues” (Anderson, MojoHand, Online).

Collective trauma has been the catalyst for my awareness of protest culture.

Documenting my creative practice as an autoethnography, like the Blues, allows for the product of this process to become “something to be used, not a conclusion but a turn in a conversation; not a closed statement but an open question” (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, p. 9). This dissertation is not meant to be received passively by the reader, viewer, or hearer, but to create a “process somewhat improvisational in nature, involving an unexpected interplay between a script and exploration, between tradition and innovation” (Bartleet & Ellis 2009, p. 10).

As a member of the post civil rights generation, a Black Feminist, teacher, and musician, I have an obligation to continue the fight against the system of racism that has been the defining component of the African American experience for centuries. *Protest Culture* is a way of life. It is a conscious and sustainable idea, and in my case I have been able to express it through ‘Musicking,’ Community Intimacy, composing, improvisation, and performance. My largest effort to build community and foster an environment that supports and encourages scholarship and activism has become Harambee Pasadia (Figure 7 & 8: Harambee Pasadia Flyer 2015 & 2016, p. 64-65). Harambee Pasadia is an Afro Fusion music and camping Festival, and was created out of Yilis’ and my passion for building community through music, art, and culture. It stands as a symbol of collective power through music. In the past four years it has evolved from a one-day experience to a four-day camping festival that showcases the sights, sounds, tastes and cultures that are created by fusions within the African diaspora. The festival was envisioned as an event that promotes social experiences that transform people. In the past six years since I moved to Newcastle upon Tyne I have found myself creating events that create spaces where Community Intimacy can be achieved. Since moving to the North East of England I have always made sure that the idea of Protest Culture has been at the forefront of all of the events I have organized (See Accompanying Portfolio). I believe that behavior is a statement of philosophy, and by creating these events I am able to transcend my performances onstage and foster an environment to encourage others to do the same.

I find great pleasure in unifying different elements from different music. I have been influenced by various musical genres and styles over the years and have come to use

conventional and unconventional techniques to create my compositions and to connect with my audiences during live performances. Not belonging to a specific, popular, or traditional genre has placed my music and ensembles on the outskirts, making it a mirror to my lived experience as a marginalized African American Woman. I gained self-confidence through all my musical experiences and gained determination in my music making as I developed my self awareness and self defined standpoint. My lived experiences have made me who I am today and continue to encourage me to compose and perform with the purpose of defying stereotypes and transcending boundaries. My music, like my personal life, is deeply rooted in social justice, empowerment, collaboration, and inclusivity.

Figure 7: Harambee Pasadia Flyer 2015

Hannabiell & Yilis Present:
Harambee Pasadia
Afro Fusion Music & Camping Festival

Featuring:
 LyricL • Anansi
 Manding Kabou Trio
 Dennis Rollins & Funky Funk
 Hannabiell & Midnight Blue • Paul Edis Sextet
 Ray Harris & The Fusion Experience • Ladies of Midnight Blue
 K.O.G & The Zongo Brigade • King Bee • Lindsay Hannon Plus • Taupe
 Tenth Avenue Band • Briannagh Dennehy • Brass Studs • Swagger & Strut
 Pikey Beatz • Runaway Samba • AfroKru • Los de la Vega • Little Alaska
 Movida • Arcanum • DJ Volta 45 • DJ Zero dB • DJ Mariam Rezaei
 Fiddler's Elbow Ceilidh Band

Friday May 22nd to Monday May 25
 TCR The Hub, Barnard Castle, DL12 8TD
 Gates open 5pm

Free Workshops:
 Dance: Kuduro • Cuban Salsa • West African • Gumboot • Hip Hop Fitness
 Zumba • West African Drumming • African American Step Dance • & More!

Weekend Tickets - £45 adult, £15 under 18, Free 10 and under, Day tickets also available
 Available from: www.brownpapertickets.com or www.creativevisionsandrhythms.com

Logos at the bottom: Hannabiell, Creative Visions, Colour your Life, Newcastle University, MAMA'S RISE UP, SHUB, rise up, Arts Council England.

Figure 8: Harambee Pasadia Flyer 2016



The flyer is designed on a textured, parchment-like background. At the top left, there is a faint silhouette of the African continent. The main title 'Harambee Pasadia' is written in a large, bold, black font, with 'Harambee' on the first line and 'Pasadia' on the second. Above the title, it says 'Hannabiell & Yilis Present:'. Below the title, it says 'Afro Fusion Music & Camping Festival'. A horizontal line separates the title from the list of featured acts. The word 'featuring' is written in a small, black font above the first act. The list of acts is written in a mix of black and blue fonts, with some acts in blue. The acts are: Hot 8 Brass Band, Mungo's Hi Fi, Tom Caulker, Iya Sako, Lively Up, Hannabiell & Midnight Blue, Hot Diamond Aces, Ladies of Midnight Blue, Pons Aelius, Yuvel Soria, Yersin Salsafro Rivas, Angelina Abel, Runaway Samba, Volta 45, and Precious Cargo. Another horizontal line separates the list of acts from the date and location information. The date 'May 27th-30th' is written in a large, bold, black font. Below the date, the location 'The Hub, Shaw Bank, Barnard Castle, DL12 8TD' is written in a smaller, black font. Below the location, it says '3 days of workshops, music & camping'. Below this, the website 'www.harambeepasadia.com' is written, followed by icons for Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. At the bottom, there is a row of logos for various sponsors and partners, including Crossings, Newcastle University, SHUB, GATEWAY, Inner Power Yoga, MAMA'S RISE UP, and Cafe NOBIA. The background of the bottom section features silhouettes of trees, tents, and people camping, with fireworks exploding in the sky.

Hannabiell & Yilis Present:

Harambee Pasadia

Afro Fusion Music & Camping Festival

featuring

Hot 8 Brass Band * Mungo's Hi Fi * Tom Caulker
Iya Sako * Lively Up * Hannabiell & Midnight Blue
Hot Diamond Aces * Ladies of Midnight Blue * Pons Aelius
Yuvel Soria * Yersin Salsafro Rivas * Angelina Abel
Runaway Samba * Volta 45 * Precious Cargo

May 27th-30th

The Hub, Shaw Bank, Barnard Castle, DL12 8TD

3 days of workshops, music & camping

www.harambeepasadia.com   

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