

actually affect change—conversations that ask the hard questions regarding white-washing, erasure, and appropriation of cultural traditions.

I am not asking anyone to give up their yoga practice. (I actually did, after reading [this piece](#), and it was the right choice for me. As I worked to disrupt my participation in white supremacy, I found myself increasingly uncomfortable in a space that was mainly white, with mainly white teachers and owners profiting off the bodies and traditions of people of color. I could no longer justify my participation in that system.) I am also not asking you to stop teaching the method that has brought you physical and/or emotional healing, or that you've seen do the same for others.

I do invite you to examine how your silence in these conversations upholds white supremacy and erasure of bodies and traditions of color. I invite you to reflect on what your somatics practice has offered you, and then do a bit of research to discover its culture of origin. The stakes are high—we are affecting people's relationships with their bodies and therefore how they approach their world.

Just like in a [Land Acknowledgement](#), the first step is to know that we are benefiting from the presence of ancestors and other cultures. Who are your movement ancestors, and how can you honor them? The next step is taking action—what can we do to live in right relationships with our world, now?

Here are the questions I am asking myself as I teach and participate in somatics, and offer you for self-examination:

Where must I call out appropriation, erasure, and/or colonization in my somatic work?

Where do movement practices and/or cultural traditions of African, Asian, or Indigenous people get called by the name of a white practitioner, or represented by mainly white bodies?

What is the historical/cultural lineage of the method I am affiliated with?

How can I support the work of leaders from the culture of origin? What might need to change in my practice to follow their lead?

Who has been left out of the method that I teach/practice?

For me, this means acknowledging that while the Laban/Bartenieff Movement System only bears two names, that many other students of Laban had influence and developmental power over the work. Many of those missing names are women, and there is photographic proof of women of color being part of his cohort at Ascona. I must also mention the African and Middle Eastern influences on Laban.

It also means acknowledging that the System was created in a particular time and place. It is not, as is so often claimed, universal.

How am I making the work that I do honoring or accessible to the people of that history/culture, without tokenizing their participation?

This is one of the criticisms of yoga, in particular, in the US, that South Asian and African people are rarely represented in yoga studios.

If I am financially benefiting from the work of cultures that are not my own, how am I financially supporting that culture, or making sure that money is going to continue the original culture's practice of the work?

What was the original purpose of the method? How has that changed in its passing on?

Additionally, we might ask what aspects of its original culture and meaning have been lost because of that change?

How has this method been used to oppress? Where does this method uphold "norms" that are actually white, Eurocentric preferences?

Appropriation and erasure, claims of universality, ableism, etc.

And most importantly, how do I not continue the oppression in my practice or my teaching?

How do I take action to live in right relationships?

I am not interested in perpetuating methods of knowing my body, and teaching others to do the same, in ways that erase the bodies of others. I am interested in imagining a world of "what if...".

What if you stopped teaching the method you do/in the way that you do? What new possibilities might open up for you? For others?

What if your practice honored its ancestors and culture, in words, finances, and actions?

What if our bodies brought us into right relationships with each other, instead of allowing us to continue in oppressive ones?

What if that world existed now?

What if you turn this into a somatic practice, not just a mental one? Can you create a gesture for "what if" that somatically opens you to possibilities? Can these questions become synced to your breath as you practice? How will you embody change?



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