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Andrew Ssebulime

Music As Dance and Dance as Music: Kizino Dance Training, a Dance Moment in the Diasporic Transmission Context

Abstract

Kizino dance originates from the South-Western region of Uganda among the Bakiga ethnic group. It is characterized by music, vigorous strength, stamina, and agility for both female and male members of the community. The transmission process of this dance has been conducted mostly by experienced dancers trained either from folk-dance groups or through the local ways of transmitting dance (community events of practice) such as weddings, birthdays, and other celebratory events. Most traditional dance groups in the diaspora are majorly situated in the cosmopolitan areas and are for-profit, which influences the methods of transmission. These methods however bear colonial legacies and therefore sometimes misrepresent the core essences of the dance, through de-contextualization of the enactment process. What are the practical ways of mitigating these colonial markers in the process of transmitting Kizino dance in a diasporic context? With practice as research (PaR) methodology, I practically used the embodied dance skills as a vehicle to elicit reflections from the trainees. Decolonizing Kizino dance transmission in the diaspora would call for the application of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) embedded in the Bakiga ethnic group. The knowledge derived from practices such as clapping, ululation, stomping, modulation as well as masquerading transcends the anecdotes of Kizino which are the fundamentals of this dance. This paper presents the discourse of colonial methodologies by applying IKS in the transmission of Kizino dance in a diasporic context. The inconclusive research results in this paper demonstrate that decolonization of Kizino dance transmission in the diaspora promotes indigenous knowledge systems ingrained in the Bakiga ethnic group.

Keywords: *decolonization, diaspora, Indigenous Knowledge systems (IKS), Kizino dance, transmission*

Contextual Background

As a Ugandan folk-dance choreographer and scholar, stemming from different diasporic spaces, China, and Europe, I have witnessed how Ugandan folk dances, distant from their places of origin tend to lose the embedded knowledge through transmission by concentrating more on the practice and dance aesthetics. My ongoing academic inquiry is to try and unpack the Ugandan folk-dance transmission in the diasporic context through decolonial methodologies. This article critically discusses the applied mechanisms of transmitting Kizino folk dance in the diaspora whilst validating and safeguarding its embedded knowledge systems. I use the term ‘applied’ to earmark my physical engagement in the dance transmission as it happened during the Clermont weekend festival workshops. The discussions are based on participant reflections from some trainees that I collected during and after the two days’ workshop.

The Weekend dance Festival in Clermont -Ferrand, France was organized by Erasmus Mundus Choreomundus Cohort 9 students that took place at SUAPS, the Sports Department of Université Clermont Auvergne on Friday 27th and Saturday 28th November 2021. Different dance students held workshops on different movement practices including, Indian Bharatnatyam and Kathak, Modern dance, Balinese, Mongolian, and Ugandan Kizino ethnic dance amongst other practices. Numerous university students from different disciplines, departments and local community members attended these workshops. It is here that I experimented with a Ugandan Kizino folk dance training for non-Ugandan participants in a diasporic context in a framework of decolonizing ‘Western languaging’ as a challenge to folk dance trainers or choreographers. The aim was to emphasize indigenous knowledge systems that inform the cultural wealth of such folk dances than only focusing on the dance movement aesthetics.

Research Methodology

I employed a qualitative inquiry based on Practice as Research -PaR (Robin, 2013) also known as artistic or performance research. PaR involves a research project in which the practice itself is a key method of inquiry and where, in respect of the arts, practice is [considered] as substantial evidence of a research inquiry’ (Robin, 2013:9). Since my main research question of, “how to mitigate colonial legacies in the process of transmitting Kizino dance in a diasporic context”, I applied PaR given that I practically and culturally embodied the skills and knowledge of Kizino dance practice which retrospectively became a valid method of eliciting reflexive and transmission opinions. I was not only able to investigate the participants’ dance practical skills but

also test if they would relate to the embedded learned dance knowledge. PaR requires an insurmountable amount of time and repetition to elicit detailed and ultimately produce creditable results. The workshop lasted for two days but the dance training itself was marked by numerous repetitions of dance movements and musical content that juxtaposed the embedded knowledge.

What is Kizino Dance?

The ontological narratives of Kizino folk dance are rooted in different local legends from Kabale region. The most notable and prominent one according to a cultural dance facilitator and trainer, formerly at Makerere University, Judith Lubega Tusiime (2016), reveals that;

there was once a neighbour who decided to visit a friend, with such visits, drinking the local brew commonly known as *Bushera* was a custom. They usually kept the brew in a small roundhouse or grass-thatched hut with a very low roof of about two meters high. These huts were like beer granaries where their brew would be left to ferment. The neighbour got inebriated and as Africans do, celebrated with strong stomping, jumping so high in a small house and dancing vigorously leading to the collapse of the hut. The friend then vowed to retaliate on his visit too, by dancing with the same magnitude of strength that his house will also collapse out of excitement (Tusiime, 2016).

As engraved in their culture, the competitive nature of these people was then transposed through their indigenous dance practices. Regardless of the location, the social and commercial performance contexts, the knowledge ingrained in most indigenous dances should be central during the transmission process. To better understand the depth of such knowledge systems, George J. Dei (2008) asserts that; ‘In ...indigenous contexts, local proverbs, parables, fables, mythologies, and folklore contain words of wisdom, instruction, and knowledge about society as sources of Indigenous cultural knowings’ (2008: 7). These connect the traditions and histories of diverse groups and offer a critical understanding of the complex interweaving of society, nature, and culture. They teach us about communal belonging, responsibility, and purpose and further shed light on ideas such as learning as community, learners’ rights, and responsibilities, and learning as a cooperative and collaborative undertaking. During the weekend dance Festival, not all the elements of Kizino dance were highlighted and the most notable one being the African recital *ekyevugo*, which was omitted due to limited time accorded. Other elements whose

knowledge would be easily misconstrued were trained and I was very cautious about employing very limited colonial approaches to dance practice.

The choreomusicality of Kizino dance

Music plays an integral and inseparable part of dance in most African indigenous performances. Ethnomusicologist Owe Ronström infers to this binary by questioning; ‘...the relations between music and dance, which comes first, the music or the dance and what aspects of music are important for a dancer?’ (1999:136). Such questions have been regularly, addressed in ethnomusicological and ethnochoreological research over the years. (Kibirige, 2020; Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2005). To answer some of the above questions, another ethnomusicologist Janet Adshead bases on history to draw her conclusion that, ‘dance has always relied upon music for its structure and rhythms, especially in folk styles.’ (1988:32). Here Adshead tends to conclude that music comes first, then dance but indeed, this confirms the tight bond music and dance share. To clearly understand the epistemology of the indigenous knowledge structures of Kizino, both ethnochoreological and ethnomusicological approaches should be applied. One must deconstruct the dance structure part by part alongside well-translated accompanying songs which, in turn, creates a basis of ‘ontological affirmation and security’ (Giddens, 1990:92) for the culture bearers. The formal/colonial approaches to African folk-dance training often distinguishes between music and dance elements as separate performance components. This is especially exacerbated in the diaspora where the trainer’s main objectives are aimed at kinaesthetic skills parallel to embedded knowledge. Nonetheless, the Kizino folk dance structure presents a non- binary opposition to music and dance that is certainly another reason why It was essential to highlight that tight relationship in the workshop. In the same vein, the transmission process of Kizino folk dance to non-Ugandans in Clermont Ferrand was central to the music elements and dance movements that are embedded within the culture.

Some Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Kizino dance

Many African indigenous dances are a reflection of social, political, and economic lifestyles. (Asante, 1996; Capp, 1997; Dei, 2012). The most significant social and cultural frameworks are manifested through ritual practices that ubiquitous in most African dances. Epistemologically, these dances are the epitome of social and community knowledge some of which have been underplayed by colonial pedagogical terminologies. For Africans to fully

embrace and appreciate these knowledge systems, it is imperative to get back to the drawing board to analyse, evaluate, and assess the formal western vis-a-vie the indigenous pedagogical approaches and draw conclusions for the most appropriate dance training methods, especially in the diaspora. This will subsequently call for decolonisation tools in specific contexts (Hanna, 1973) for ethnic dances such as Kizino where reappropriation of the transmission methods will ensure the safeguarding of the knowledge systems.

Training Process in Clermont-Ferrand

The Kizino indigenous dance is characterized by musical elements which tend to rhythmically punctuate its practice. The essence of these elements transcends the dance signals, to disseminate and inform the embodied cultural knowledge of the Bakiga ethnic group. Therefore, the intertwinement with music tends to obstruct relevant knowledge grounded in the culture which in most cases is lost during training or transmission if not carefully handled. It was deemed imperative during the dance workshops to acknowledge that the plight of such cultural wealth can be better preserved by employing appropriate transmission methods. Knowledge embedded in elements such as clapping, and ululation are some of the dance elements with symbolic knowledge for Kizino dance for which the discussion of this paper is grounded.

For the participants to understand the dance context with practice as research, I had to walk them through the pre-and post-colonial histories of the Kizino ethnic dance including different accompanying musical methods, and lyrical content whilst further translating the song to English for clarity. With the help of a pre-recorded Kizino dance performance video from Kabale, they were able to see observe, relate, inquire, and immerse themselves into the performance from the video and later embody the knowledge through practice. Kizino is an in- discriminatory communal dance which welcomes everyone, however, for quick learning purposes, I had to divide the participants into two groups of males, and females although the learned content was the same.

First, I introduced them to one accompanying song ‘*mubarire barenda kwiiija*’ which translates into “lay for them[visitors] they are coming”. whilst emphasizing the difference in the singing techniques such as hamming and yodelling. Then to the different techniques of clapping, ululation, and modulation. Progressively, I moved on to teaching them the first dance phrase of Kizino with its relational space as it is performed in Kabale. This was aimed at zooming in to the indigenous

training and performance contexts of Kizino whilst earmarking the different knowledge anecdotes. Even though some movements are performed by only men and others by women, it was relevant for the participants to understand the difference whilst embodying the dance knowledge and practice itself.

Clapping. From the supporting feet to the upper body, Kizino dance clapping has an embracing gesture which reflects the physical energy of the Bakiga people. The body is in a slightly bent position, the chest protrudes forward, palms wide open and hands bent extending the elbows backwards beyond the body. This is just the preparatory posture for clapping. Additionally, the clapping precedes the singing which is usually in a call-and-response-format. The soloist starts the song and an explosive group response together with vigorous single clapping follows symbolizing the attention given to the dance event. The clapping should not go below the chest level and usually starts with a single clapping that eventually progresses to double clapping as sometimes instructed by the soloists or lyrics of the song for my case, I used the latter. The continuous singing and clapping culminate into a celebratory mood marked by shouting, screaming and ululation (Tusiime, 2016). The knowledge embedded in this clapping demonstrates the aggressive traits of the Bakiga people and better understood from a culture bearers' standpoint.

Ululation. To ululate often refers to uttering a loud long ritualistic high-pitched sound as an expression of joy, sorrow, or celebration. A cultural anthropology scholar Jacobs Jennifer characterizes ululation as a loud “drawn-out, high-pitched cry that is produced on a single breath and shimmers with minuscule pitch oscillations” (2008:2). (Also see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fPGqEpLYuQ>).

Among the Bakiga ethnic group, ululation is something that is routinely accompanied by dancing or other types of gestures and is normally done by women to signify the different milestones of their daily lives (Kuipers, 1999:491). From marriage to success in battles, burying the dead, to invoking of ancestors, celebrations of birth, and good harvest, among others, represents the relevance of the ululation in the social lives of the community. Most ethnic tribes in Uganda have ululations which normally end on high pitch(crescendo) but the one for Bakiga, specifically for Kizino dance ends on low pitch (diminuendo)which symbolizes a change in the dance structure including the temporal and spatial structures, phrase, motif, and sometimes the accompaniment.

Today in Uganda, due to the colonial pedagogic approach by most ‘elite’ dance trainers this knowledge is obscured partly due to concentration on the dance choreographic perfection and aesthetics, and the supposed decontextualization of the enaction process which normally happens beyond its original grounds. For example, if one asks a Kizino ululator in Kampala to describe her participation in the dance, she is likely to focus her response on her role as a dancer than dwell on her role as a ululator because of a lack of or little indigenous knowledge embedded in this element. From a teacher standpoint, therefore, the transmission of Kizino ethnic dance should be procedural from emboldening and embodying the embedded knowledge of ululation to its applicability in the performance as a transitional label connecting the different segments of the dance.

Discussion: Decolonizing Kizino dance Transmission Process

Decolonising pedagogy (Iseke-Barnes, 2008; Trinder, 2020) looks at the need to systematically transform how colonised individuals relate to themselves, others, places, values, and ideas. It seeks to undertake the work of restoration, whilst pioneering an effort towards deschooling and deconstructing as a preface to decolonizing. Most European institutions and scholars have been preoccupied with the notion of decolonisation with some tremendous breakthroughs, however, there is still more to be done for such efforts to be reflected in almost all pedagogical paradigms. In dance, for example, Ugandan dance scholars, Mabingo, et al (2020) in their article ‘decolonizing dance teacher education focused on reflections of teachers of folk dances in African post-colonial environments. Reflexively, they realized that they were surrounded by a dynamic and changing local Ugandan environment, which still carried legacies of British colonialism (2020:148) resulting in the limitation of pedagogical approaches to community-based practices. In most African societies, Indigenous dance communities that were subjected to European colonialism and Christianization are still performing in contexts with colonial legacies for which Kizino is not exempted. Individuals in postcolonial Africa/Uganda have used local resources, social experiences or exposure, and individual ingenuity to transform into indigenous dance teachers and decolonize their pedagogies in the absence of professional dance teacher training programs and frameworks.

To decolonise Kizino folk dance training during the workshop, I first focused on how to address the notion of formalized teacher-student relationship which elevates the teacher as an all-knowing entity and students as objects of knowledge consumption. Moreover, the emphasis would rather be on the knowledge through practise as a core subject of study. One of the participants from the

workshop Priya, an Indian Bharatnatyam professional dancer and choreographer explained that she likes this approach of training indigenous dances because, ‘the communal learning here places both the trainers and trainees on the same level which fosters the sense of communalism and it accelerates the learning process’ (Priya, 2021). In addition to Priya’s remarks, another attendee, a local native admitted that she ‘learnt a lot about [this Bakiga] culture in the shortest period’ (Anonymous, 2021). I draw on the Ubuntu philosophy (Mabingo, 2020) to emphasize the above workshop reflections which bring community to the forefront of most African social, cultural, and political activities. During Kizino dance training in Kabale for example the instructor, usually an elder, teaches the folk-dance skills to community members in a participatory manner. Visibly, the emphasis is on the dancing skills but introspectively, the teaching methods highlight the embedded cultural knowledge. This ultimately enables the learners to embody cultural, practical, and theoretical knowledge at the same time as[in] a community.

The concept of community of practice is another good place to explore a social discipline of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991). From an analytical perspective, it is the simplest social learning system. During the dance workshop, I was involved in transmitting some bodily practices based on a framework of horizontal learning. Although I assumed the role of a teacher at that moment given that I was teaching a dance which I practised over time, it was clear that the attendees/students were also equally contributing to the learning process of the different dance styles present. In such a situation, participants learned through their bodies with a sense of music and a sense of feeling which manifested the freedom and relevant folk dance knowledge systems during the transmission process. Their capability to learning was anchored in mutual recognition as potential transmission, (Lave, 1991). In the Bakiga ethnic tribe just like other African communities, elders mostly are the embodiment of cultural knowledge mainly through practice and oral transmission. This learning structure is based on participation in a community where the practice or the activity context involves a dual process of cultural meaning-making. With practice as research, I was engaged directly in the dance training, able to gauge the dance knowledge and how much practical and theoretical skills the trainees could comprehend at a time. The dialogues, conversations, and reflections after the training informed the findings of my investigation which further credits the notion of communal learning. Together with the trainees, we collectively generated interpersonal connections and other forms of reification that reflected our lived

experiences around which we organised embodied transmission through participation. A British sociologist Nick Jewson (2007) asserts that “meaningful learning in social contexts requires both participation and reification to be in interplay,” (Jewson, 2007). Therefore, a community of practice can be defined as a group that coheres through sustained mutual engagement on an indigenous, commonality, enterprise, and creating a common repertoire, in this case, the trainees were able to grasp the dance knowledge and skills of Kizino ethnic dance.

Another concept of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), proposes new models of learning through social interactions rather than the formal processes of cognitive learning. It encourages informal methods of learning in situ, by observation, and peripheral participation. Engagement is typical of participation in the communities we belong to, but it can also be a way to explore a boundary if we can have enough access to the practice whilst safeguarding the community/cultural knowledge. If done properly, it does not affect our personality but rather emboldens our identity. For example, the dance music, clapping, ululation, and the dancing itself were practised as a collective in a participatory manner similar and existential to Bakiga ethnic tribe. Ultimately, the collectivity of the learners encapsulated a communal atmosphere as an enabler to learning in situ. The workshop itself created a communal microcosmic space in the diaspora for learners to fully participate, interact, embody, and exchange knowledge about a different ethnic dance in a decolonial learning framework.

As a dance trainer, my efforts were to illuminate the thought systems and frameworks of realities on which the Bakiga ethnic communities are organized and to reflect on how the indigenous epistemologies and worldviews are generated, refined, activated, and distributed through Kizino dance practices. All that happens in a communal set-up involving multiple players in a participatory manner. The philosophical attributes show ‘the extent that all people [in African communities] have a philosophy that guides the way they live, their perceptions of others, and decisions and choices that they make about aspects of their lives’ (Letseka, 2000: 179).

Conclusion

This was not full-blown research and hence the paper is still work in progress. Nonetheless, from the workshops, I was able to immerse the learners into Kizino folk dance, explained and practiced the dance. The learners were able to embody the dance skills whilst paying attention to the embedded knowledge. It was important to dwell on the knowledge derived from of each dance-

music elements such as clapping, ululation, stomping and modulation which were some of central elements of focus. The on-going informal and scholarly debates about decolonizing dance transmission/ training are aimed at (re)positioning, (re)appropriating and rethinking about safeguarding indigenous philosophies. Most significantly, my on-going investigation on decolonial transmission methods of Ugandan folk dances in diaspora calls for application of appropriate methods, language and practice that upholds the different/ relevant knowledge anecdotes embedded in these dances as conceived and perceived in their places of origin.

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