Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies (JHSSS)
ISSN: 2663-7197
www.hsss.org

Operations to Restore Cultural Legacy: Past and Present Voices on the Revival of Mbende Dance in Zimbabwe

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: July 15, 2019
Accepted: August 13, 2019
Published: September 30, 2019
Volume: 1
Issue: 5

KEYWORDS

Indigenous dance, mbende dance, cultural legacy/heritage, the Zezuru people

ABSTRACT

In Zimbabwean indigenous communities, dance is a form of heritage, identity, discourse, relationship and values. Due to colonisation and Christianity, various dances in Zimbabwe were banned by the British colonial government in the then Rhodesia. One of the indigenous dances that have undergone suppression by the resident missionaries is mbende dance of the Zezuru people in Mashonaland province, particularly in Murehwa and Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe districts. Mbende dance occupies the centre stage in the economic, political and socio-cultural system of the Zimbabweans in general and Zezuru people in particular. Despite the influence of Christianity and colonisation to submerge Zimbabwean dance traditions, mbende dance escaped the onslaught to this day, albeit with modifications in costumes, context, purpose and other features. Drawing upon historical sources, contextual analysis, documentary review, video evidence, interviewee reflections, personal and participatory adjudication experience on mbende dance activities and festivals, the present article explicate issues surrounding the suppression, revival and continuity of mbende dance.

1. Reading the past, locating the present: An introduction

Historians, political scientists and several scholars from diverse academic disciplines published numerous academic books and papers on the implications of colonialism in Zimbabwe and other African countries (e.g. Pwiti and Ndoro, 1999 and Rodney 1992). However, most of the publications on colonialism have been directed towards economic and political themes and cultural issues in a generalist approach. Minimal efforts have been paid to the effects of colonisation on Zimbabwean indigenous dances, expressly how Zimbabweans have been forbidden to dance their value systems and alienated from their cultural heritage. It has been frequently noted that Zimbabwean cultural values were tormented and continue to suffer as colonial authority forced the local people to stop practising their culture. For example, the introduction of Christianity by missionaries such as Father Gonçalo da Silveira [1] gave birth to new alien values which, in the long run, led Zimbabweans to neglect and shun their ancient cultural indigenous knowledge system.

On the other hand, historically, the ascendancy to power of the Western European bourgeoisie created fertile ground for the absorption of its dance and music traditions and taste by nearly all of the Western civil societies. The Rhodesian government[2] employed the similar principle of establishing English governance and influence, intending to change

[1] Father Gonçalo da Silveira, a Jesuit Priest born and Educated in Portugal. He arrived in Munhumutapa state, now Zimbabwe on December 1543 and converted Negomo and his family to Christianity (Magirosi, 2015).

[2] Rhodesia Government is used here interchangeably with Colonial rule, refers to predominantly British authority which governed Zimbabwe from 1965-1970.

Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe to be like a metropolitan country, by promoting elements of English ways of life, actions and cultural production. In most urban areas, Western dances gained widespread popularity and threatened to overshadow indigenous dances such as *nyau, mbende, mbakumba,* [3].

In rural areas of Mashonaland East province, the birthplace of mbende, Christianity and colonialism were a threat to the performance and continuity of the dance. The missionaries and colonial agents attempted to ban the dance. However, the owners of the dance resisted the attempts and restored mbende as the barometer of social, political and cultural events in Zimbabwe. The authors for the present paper view the continual practice of *mbende* dance as a fundamental cultural and nationalistic identity issue that has implications for the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, and continuity of the communities responsible for the creation and performance of the dance from time to time. The revival and continuity of *mbende* dance could be used as a typical example for confronting threats of cultural legacy and heritage loss engineered by colonialism. The reinstatement of African cultural legacy through indigenous dances remain an ongoing project in the African people's declaration of independence, self-identity and actual realisation. Shizha (2010:33) reminds us as Africans that, 'the colonisation of African knowledge spaces by Western knowledge is very problematic'. African indigenous dances have been banned and deemed inappropriate when, in reality, they constitute the bedrock of the indigenous people's identity and essentiality. Banks (2010:27) suggests that traditional dance activities are political and emancipatory in that, they forward an epistemology of dance that directly challenges Western dance genres, being an embodied practice of spiritual and philosophical knowledge that is uniquely African. In this regard, African dance can be considered a principal sponsor of expertise within the contextual framework of the Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) that is aimed at challenging the Western meaning-making system.

The revitalisation of African indigenous dance knowledge system ought to be the foundation for African dance scholarship to push for an Afrocentric approach to the study of dance that is deeply rooted in African cosmology. Shizha (2013) is of the view that the inclusion of traditional dance [4] Within education, curricula would thus indicate an affirmation of the reclamation of the African way of knowing and provide a means of contesting Eurocentric hegemonies that undermine the indigenous people's skills, practices, pride and insights. Afrocentricity theory, a vital theoretical tool to challenge European cultural imperialism has been described by Asante (1991:172) as a theory which approaches 'ideas and events from the standpoint of Africans as the key players rather than victims' thus furnishing Africans with necessary conceptual tools for contesting the marginalisation and suppression of indigenous dances, thereby breaking the bondage of Western superiority in the minds of local people. Rani (2012) insists that the coming of modernity, Christianity, and the process of migration has dramatically influenced and transformed indigenous African dances, resulting in syncretism and adaption. Thus, the authors accept that *mbende* dance, contentious as it is, could be a way of decolonising the field of indigenous dance performance in various sectors of life.

The authors regard *mbende* dance knowledge system as politically, socially and culturally essential in the sense that, like all other African indigenous dances, it figuratively symbolises 'what defines us as a nation, generation, gender and person' (Hanna 1999:12). Hanna's assertion has been supported by Banks (2013:23) who suggests that traditional dance involves a political performance of the nation's 'tragic histories, pain, joy and triumphs' through bodily movements. *Mbende* dance performance, since it is grounded on the Zezuru people's indigenous knowledge system, it offers a perspective for disputing Zimbabwe's suppressed cultural traditions and reclaiming one's eroded cultural legacy. The narratives of Zimbabwe are told and retold in Zimbabwean histories, literature, music, dance and other forms of popular culture, those narratives represent the shared experiences that give meaning to the Zimbabwean society. It is for this reason that mbende dance has a political and diplomatic role when performed by school children and local cultural dance troupes as a way of showcasing the nation's diverse cultural heritage to foreign visiting influential people, embassies and heads of states. The performance of *mbende* dance as Asante (2000:07) suggests, is an ongoing process that is linked in such a way that it is complicated to separate it from other phenomena in society. From this standpoint, religious, socio-economic and political activities in the Zimbabwean indigenous communities are accompanied by dance. They are not followed by a dance performance as a leisure practice to be performed when the so-called ''real work" is finished, as in Western countries. Muponde (2010:118) suggests that indigenous dances

[3]nyau, mbende, mbakumba, mhande etc. are some of the indigenous dances in Zimbabwe originated by a specific ethnic group of people and performed for sacred and ritual purposes.

[4](s) interchangeable with indigenous dance, refers to an aggregation of ethnically and culturally constituted dance practice passed orally from one generation to the other.

of the Shona people [5] "border on the timeless and mythopoetic" in ways that provide what may, for postcolonial Zimbabwe, be an entrance of the "post" on the imagination as well as on critical practice. That perspective can be manipulated by Zimbabweans, in general, to regard the regular performance of *mbende* dance in political, social, educational and other contexts as a tool for the reestablishment of cultural heritage, banned by Christian missionaries. The suppression of dances was not a challenge faced in Zimbabwe only but was a problem faced by many African countries, if not all. In South Africa, indigenous music and dance were forbidden as a result of being regarded as "proletarian, evil and unacceptable for worship" as missionaries and the colonial governments viewed African ways of knowing, their cosmology, their spirituality and their ontological existence as "barbaric", "backward" and unscientific (Nompula 2011:370). This practice of perpetuating European cultural imperialism and alienating Africans from their indigenous dance and music is still a common practice in Zimbabwe particularly by churches such as the African Apostolic Church, Seventh Day Adventist, and the Roman Catholic. They are even conceiving indigenous dances as unholy practices not suitable for consumption by Zimbabwean converted Christians. This is negatively influencing the mission and other government schools to resist the initiative by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to offer dance as a stand-alone subject, in which indigenous dance knowledge is the core content of the syllabus. Therefore, the need and significance of this academic paper are to challenge Western cultural hegemony and strengthen the initiatives of the Zimbabwean government and the Zezuru people in particular to restore Zimbabwean cultural identity.

2. The characteristics of mbende dance: A descriptive analysis

There are various theories on the origins of *mbende* dance and its role in the pre-colonial era (1000-1887), that, is the period before the advent of the British white settlers. The problem is exacerbated by the scarcity of historical literature on *mbende* dance from the pre-colonial to colonial period (1887-1980) and the present-day conversion of Zezuru people to Christianity. As a result, *mbende* knowledge system has been passed from one generation to another through oral tradition. Vansina (1965:11) described oral tradition as a "source of knowledge about the past, which is transmitted from one person to another". It, however, remains the most dynamic, especially with the people who are still practising the dance and living *the mbende* tradition. Some of the Zezuru clan members who used to practice *mbende* dance in the colonial period have already died, for example, Douglas Vambe, [6] who was known as one of the master drummers and dancers of *mbende* died in July 2018. These unavoidable problems are posing severe threats to the oral transmission of *mbende* in the future. One day there will be no one to offer authentic, original and reliable information on the orally transmitted dance. Apart from that, the present generation is quickly getting converted to African Initiated Churches, and such examples include Zviratidzo, Mugodhi, and Apostolic Faith Mission. As a result, Christianity and its activities are now being more valued than the original and old *mbende* dance activities. Therefore, the church's contact on *mbende* is hugely detrimental to the authenticity of the dance. These problems mentioned above are posing severe challenges to the continuity of the dance.

From the problems associated with oral tradition as a source of historical information on dance, many versions were propounded and are available to account for the origins of *mbende* indigenous dance. The local people confirmed that *mbende* is a fertility, sexuality and family dance originated by the Zezuru people [7]. On the other hand, others associate the dance's origin with war background, during the military raids of parts of Mashonaland area by the *Ndebele* warriors, in the 1830s in Southern Africa (Asante 2000). Concerning Asante's argument, *mbende* dance was used as a weapon to divide the enemies in a battle tactfully. Besides, the vigorous and energetic *mbende* gestures were applied to the focus and attention of the enemy before the actual fight. The widely accepted explanation on the origin of the dance is that it was performed as a war dance and diversionary tactic by the Shona during military (Asante 2000). Besides that, another version on the origin and purpose of *mbende* is that the dance originated as a courtship performance and usually men or women who displayed creative sexual movements would get a partner (Gwekwerere, Maluleke and Zhou 2012). The dance can also be performed for entertainment at various socio-cultural and political events. Although all theories on the origins of mbende dance have the right to exist, the most convincing perspective

[5] Shona people is deployed here as a descriptor of the majority tribe in Zimbabwe, the Zezuru clan falls under Shona tribe.

[6] Douglas Vambe, the late, is famously known as one of the best mbende drum experts and is known for mbende drumbeat which is known as the tune for ZBC.

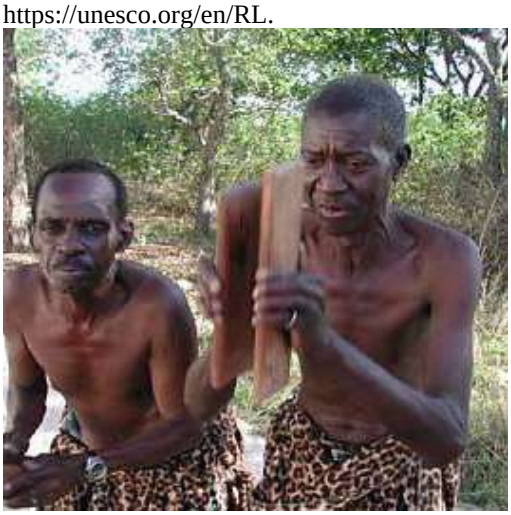
[7] Interview compiled from the Zezuru people on 15/04/2018.

to the authors, as confirmed by the culture experts is that the dance was originated as a courtship dance symbolising family, sexuality and fertility.

According to Mataga (2008), mbende dance is characterised by sensual acrobatic waist shaking and hip gestures by women in unison with men. Both dancers end with energetic thrusts of the pelvis directed towards each other, thereby creating exhilaration amongst the audience. Gwekwerere, Maluleke and Zhou (2012:241) are of the view that *mbende* dance is marked with very energetic and sexually suggestive moves. Although it is not clear, the authors for the present paper believe that it is such sexually suggestive movements which prompted the colonialists and early missionaries to take advantage of the Witchcraft Suppression Act to stop the performance of *mbende* dance, although the attempts were resisted. The name mbende is used to refer to a group of arts connected and performed together in a single performance in the name of mbende dance (such as music, instrumentation, songs, war cries, the movements, and clapping). One master drummer does mbende drumming, and rattles and wooden clappers support the drumming. Clappers are a wooden musical percussive instrument, consist of two wooden blocks that produce a musical sound in a clapping format. On the other hand, the rattles are hand-shaken percussive musical instruments. The mixture of musical sounds from rattles, clapping, singing and drumming produce an interlocking polyrhythmic sound that direct *mbende* dance movements. The performance starts with the playing of *makwa* (clappers), which mark the introductory part of the production and serves to give signals at various segments of the dance as the performance progresses. After the first part by *makwa* players and the master drummer, the dancers move onto the stage towards the rhythm of the drum. *Mbende* dance performance has been illuminated by Asante's (1985) description of the dance as an "image dance" in the sense that the *Zezuru* described the dance as an imitation of a mouse or mole. Conversely, regarding the notion of *mbende* dance movements, as an imitation of a mouse or mole; the main idea here is not on the reproduction of the mole's gestures, but preferably on the symbolism of mouse as a sign of sexual, fertility and family. Mataga (2008) suggests that there is little actual caricaturing or mimicking of a mouse. Also, during the performance of mbende dance, male dancers stumpy to the ground surface and dance fleetingly moving their legs in a forward and backward succession. They dance while their knees bend very close to the ground and only stand up when they get closer to their female dance partners. In response, the female dancers will wiggle their waist, dancing toward their male partners and their waist (females and males) get into contact as the conclusion for each segment of the dance.

Figure 1: Below shows a pictorial presentation of Mbende dance key elements

Men were playing wooden makwa — source https://unesco.org/en/RL.



Dancers were demonstrating how the dance is performed — source https://unesco.org/en/RL.

3. Colonial legal framework for the suppression of mbende dance

Colonialism and Christianity had drastic implications on indigenous dances in African countries. Although indigenous African dances had similar characteristics to European folk dances,[8] Europeans regarded African dances as a typical manifestation of ancient paganism and opposed to the pure and sincere faith. Generally speaking, Europeans had often regarded Africa as a "Dark Continent" firmly rooted in barbaric melancholy. The arrival of Europeans in the land of Africa with their pre-conceived ideas about Africans, indigenous dances adopted a new meaning for most native Africans, Zimbabweans included. The British Rhodesian colonial government instituted repression rules and regulations to absolutely stop the performance and practice of indigenous dances in Zimbabwe, to pave the way for Western dances such as *ballet, samba, cha-cha-cha, ballroom* and others which were rated superior, civilised and pure as compared to African dances. The Europeans instituted laws to define what was supposed to be written, performed and said about on a particular topic. In theorising about the discourse on language and cultural production, Foucault (1976) argues that the creation of discourse is controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed according to clearly defined procedures. Therefore, it is clear that a discourse is a fabricated truth originated by the dominant group of people in a given society and perpetuated as the separate acceptable way of doing things. Foucault indicated that "each society has its regime of truth [---] that is the types of discourse which it accepts and make function as truth [---]" (1980:131). The Rhodesian discourse was an aggregation of "truth" fabricated by European theorists (such as Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, De Gobineau, Hegel, to mention a few) who originated cultural policy and legal frameworks used by many European colonial governments in many African countries. The Rhodesian colonial rule with no exception had administrators influenced by the (pseudo)-scientific theoretical frameworks of these scholars to craft laws to suppress the performance of indigenous dances in Zimbabwe.

According to Mamdani (1996:17), the whole process of colonisation of Zimbabwe was spearheaded and fulfilled by Cecil John Rhodes, the owner of the Chartered Company (British South African Company) that administered the country until 1922. Rhodes declared equal rights for all "civilised men". On the contrary, the "uncivilised" Zimbabweans were susceptible to a censorship process to stop them from enjoying citizenship privileges. The regulations instituted by the Rhodesian government covered a wide range of intellectual property such as theatre, literature, drama, film, music and dance (Ravengai 2010). Colonialists used soft and invisible absolute authority to persuade Zimbabweans to conform to the view that, black people are inferior to the white race, and the white race is superior to the black race. European discourse was also promoted through an educationally skewed curriculum policy (Rodney 1989, O'Callaham 1977) which championed the teaching of European dances in schools at the expense of Zimbabwean indigenous dances.

On 18 August 1899, the British Rhodesian government passed the Witchcraft Suppression Act which regarded witchcraft as "the throwing of bones, the use of charms and any other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery" (Statute Law of Zimbabwe, 1899:295). The Act was used to ban *mhande* dance (Plastow (1996), of the Karanga people in Masvingo and Midlands provinces in Zimbabwe. Using the same ordinance, *nyau* dance of *Chewa* people was also banned in the mid-1920s, (Parry 1999). There are many dances directly and indirectly affected by the regulations passed by the Rhodesian government. However, the main focus of the present article is *mbende* dance, which according to Asante (2000:44) was banned in 1910, but continued under a Christian related undercover name *jerusarema*. Missionaries had executive powers to suppress any indigenous dance which they thought was detrimental to Christian principles, and this has been the nemesis of *mbende*. The suppression of indigenous dances was not a problem faced by Zimbabwe nor African countries only, but several non- European countries. For instance, samba dance in Brazil and Tongan dance in the Polynesian island were banned in the 19th century by the Wesleyan missionaries due to the mistaken mentality that the dances were performed for pagan gods (Hill, Jack & Partin 2004). Like the Zezuru who renamed mbende dance to jerusarema, to suit the Christian environment, the Tongan people were much cleverer than the missionaries. They started Tongan Dance Festival competition to revive old remnants of the dance into a "new" dance that became known as ''Lakalaka". Moore (1978) suggests that the failure of the colonial leadership to achieve total control of the colonised people had also happened between the Western bourgeoisie and its civil society. In Zimbabwe, the colonial government relied on dictatorship rather than democracy, force and coercion in a bid to repress the local people. Guha (1997) regarded this situation as non-hegemonic (where the term hegemony is used to refer to a culture of domination where persuasion dominates coercion) and insisted that domination cannot be successful where force is used instead of persuasion. The main argument here is that the pronouncement of domination is followed by fake submission which is linked to resistance. This appears applicable to the colonial arena

[8] European folk dances here is used to refer to dance traditions originated in European countries that reflect the life of people in European countries, such as *samba, cha-cha-cha, ballroom* etc.

of cultural production as indicated by the continual performance of *mbende* dance, despite its ban, thus a sign of resistance against colonial rules.

The discussion on the policy framework used to alienate Zimbabweans from their dance traditions would not be enough without an overview of one of the most notorious policies, Land Apportionment Act. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930, was amended to the Land Tenure Act of 1969. The Act facilitated the division of Zimbabwe in two distinct areas, of Europeans and Africans, mainly on the agricultural potential of the regions. The most significant piece of the productive land, with favourable climatic conditions, of high rainfall and moderate temperatures, and fertile soils were given to the Europeans, while tsetse fly-infested, extremely hot and infertile soils were given to the Africans (Zimbabweans). The implications for all this was that most Zimbabweans were directly and forcibly disconnected from their ancestral homes to pave the way for European occupation. Pwiti and Ndoro (1999) suggest that black people were resettled to newly created overcrowded reserves, which in Zimbabwe are referred to as "Trust Lands". From a cultural perspective, this implies that Zimbabweans left their intangible and immovable cultural heritage in areas which Europeans allocated themselves. Thus, they were disconnected from a crucial part of their culture and were no longer in connection with the sites which they could relate to as they were resettled in new lands, foreign to their belief systems with which they could not directly identify. After all, one would conclude that one of the pertinent issues which were central to the first, second and third Chimurenga liberation struggles, apart from political and economic emancipation, was cultural heritage practice and production freedom, of which the restoration of mbende dance was an integral part.

4. The revival of *mbende* dance and its continuity after the colonial rule

"...data are not simply data but are inexorably linked to those theories that give meaning to them" (Bohlman 1988:26). The discussion on the revival of *mbende* dance in the present article has been grounded on the anthropological theory of resistance by Sally Moore (1978). The argument has been adopted to provide a discussion informed by theoretical and contextual material on the restoration of *mbende* dance as part and parcel of the Zezuru cultural legacy. Moore is of the view that the process of regularising a society through social systems, laws, ideologies, rules and force do not in any way produce what she regarded as "situational adjustment". In the case of *mbende* dance, the *Zezuru* people did not conform to the cultural production regulations imposed by the colonial government to stop them from practising their values and belief systems for political, social, economic and aesthetic purposes. For instance, ceremonial activities continue to be performed, such as the installation of kings, and traditional marriage ceremonies and mbende dance continued to be the medium of expression for such events. McCulloch (2000) suggests that ritual performances that have something to do with the sustenance and survival of the culture bearers, for instance, *Mukwerera*[9] and *Kurova guva*[10] were continued to be performed despite insurmountable pressure from the Rhodesian resident missionaries. For indigenous Zimbabweans, upholding a kind and friendly relationship with the ancestral world was and, still, is more important than obeying colonial rules such as the Witchcraft Suppression Act, which prohibited practising of African indigenous ceremonies, ritual and dances as unholy and not suitable for worship.

The command to stop the performance of *mbende* indigenous dance did not result in any submission. Instead, revival mechanisms were put in place to ensure the continuity of the dance. The *Zezuru* people continued performing mbende in various events under a Christianised name, *mbende jerusarema*. According to Mataga (2008), the name *jerusarema* being a biblical derivative from the well-known holy city of Jerusalem in Israel; this was done to make *mbende* dance more appealing and acceptable to missionaries and Christians. *Mbende* dance culture, although it was outlawed, continued to be the heartbeat of political, socio-economic and cultural events in both rural and urban areas in Zimbabwe. In the post-colonial era, there have been efforts from the local people and the government through the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe (NACZ),[11] to promote the continuity of the heritage. Various *mbende* dance ensembles were formed in Mashonaland East province and beyond. Some of the ensembles were registered with the NACZ. These dance clubs include Ngomadzapasi, Swerengoma, Dombodzvuku and Zvidozvevanhu. The clubs participated at various events as the dance continued to be performed in festivals, political rallies, mapururudzo (traditional marriage ceremonies), at funerals and white wedding ceremonies. In the same vein, urban-based dance

[9] Mukwerera a Shona term referring to rain making ritual performed to ask for rain from the ancestors.
[10] Kurova guva (beating the grave) a ritual conducted among the Shona people to back home the spirit of the deceased.
[11] NACZ is the official and governmental arts council of Zimbabwe established in 1985 by an Act of Parliament.

clubs also listed mbende dance on their advertisement posters, websites and Facebook pages as one of their key performances. Due to the process of urbanisation, many people moved from rural to urban areas in search of employment. From the 1920s onwards, mbende dance was often performed for entertainment and recreation in township beer halls such as Mai Musodzi hall in Mbare high-density area in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Asante (2000) insists that in the contexts of recreation, *mbende* dance evolved into a dance that highlighted the despair of a dominated and suppressed people. She further suggests that the joy of dancing was contrasted with the desperation of oppression, and dance clubs spoiled the respectability and meaning of a dance which was supposed to be ceremonial; by putting more emphasis on exaggerated sexual innuendo. Although it is extremely difficult to assess the impact of urban *mbende* dance performances on the restoration of the Zezuru legacy, one can concur with Asante that such deformations highly sexualised the dance (Mataga 2008). Performances by *mbende* dance clubs seem to have influenced how the dance was perceived in urban settings in the post-colonial era (post-independence 1980). *Mbende* indigenous dance culture exponents bemoaned the distortions and misinterpretations of the dance, which they thought played an essential role in the suppression of *mbende* by the colonial authority, yet they were busy trying to restore their culture. The distortions are worsened by clubs that are dancing for profit-making. For example, "Hohodza" and "Inkululeko Yabatsha School of Arts" (IYASA) were seen to propagate the exaggerated sexual misrepresentations of the dance. On their websites, they described *mbende* dance as basically an exhibition of sexual prowess (Hohodza webpage, 2007).

Despite the prohibitions, distortions and modifications of *mbende* dance features, it continues to gain widespread popularity in the post-colonial Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) selected the drum rhythms of *mbende* as the introductory music for all radio and television news bulletins in Zimbabwe. This was done at the attainment of independence in 1980. According to Mataga (2008), there was a nationwide outcry when the ZBC attempted to replace *mbende* tune as the introduction of the news bulletin. Public pressure to reinstitute the tune compelled ZBC to maintain mbende drumming as the music for radio and television news bulletins in Zimbabwe. During the first and second wars of liberation, fought against the colonial government in the 1970s, *mbende* dance was used as a uniting force among members of the community and also as an essential medium of communication between the masses and the freedom fighters. The fighters attended *mbende* dance performances to collect information and get moral support from the masses. In this regard, *mbende* dance was used as a weapon to fight against British colonial rule. After the attainment of independence in 1980, the dance continued to play an essential role in the political sphere by featuring in political gatherings and state events. The colonial government thought that they had utterly banned and buried the dance, but the locals continued to practice their *mbende* tradition, and the same dance was used to support the gun in dislodging the colonial rule. The more they suppressed the dance, the more the dance continued to be more relevant in the political arena. Therefore, we can conclude that the present nationwide popularity of *mbende* dance was also as a result of its political role in the struggle against the British settlers and even its performance at political rallies after independence.

There are also international organisations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific Cultural Organisation UNESCO, which directly and indirectly influenced *mbende* dance to withstand against the colonial blow. In 2005, UNESCO selected and listed the dance among 43 cultural traditions around the world, that were accorded the status of being masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humankind, thus acknowledging *mbende* dance as an essential living, tangible cultural heritage. According to Mataga (2008), other notable indigenous dances listed together with *mbende* from the Southern African region were *makishi* from Zambia and Malawian *vimbuza* healing dance. In 2006, *mbende* qualified for UNESCO cultural music heritage competition through the late Douglas Vambe, who competed with other musical performers from around the world.

5. The present voices on the continuity of mbende dance: Interviewee's reflections

The article also utilised the views of mbende culture experts, as represented by predominantly rural interviewees from Murehwa and Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe districts in Mashonaland East province (most of them used to participate in cultural events at a local and national level, such as Mbende and Jikinya festivals). The collection of dance information from the people who practice and own the dance has been recommended by Nzewi (1997) who speaks of culture experts or exponents and culture bearers. According to him, the culture experts provide authentic and reliable voices even though his or her contributions are being relegated to a marginal position. All the participants interviewed for the present paper represents the views of members of mbende dance clubs, chiefs, Zezuru community members and the officials from Murehwa Culture Centre and National Arts Council of Zimbabwe. All the informants noted that

mbende dance festival, a project of the NACZ in partnership with the local communities aim to safeguard or promote the continuity of mbende even in the face of Christianity, modernity and globalisation. The Director of Murehwa Culture Centre Ronald Biza suggests that the festival is hosted annually at the centre and it is regarded as one of the strategies in place to preserve and maintain the local traditions such as mbende dance, culture, spirituality and history in Zimbabwe.[12] Bearing in mind the influence of globalisation, mbende dance and other indigenous dances in Zimbabwe that communicate and used to celebrate the cultural life of the Shona people are in danger of being submerged by the process of globalisation which is gaining widespread popularity, internationally.

In support of the initiatives to promote the permanency of mbende dance as the epitome of the Zezuru cultural heritage, Catherine Mtombeni, the NACZ communications and marketing officer suggests that in 2013-14 mbende dance has been the set-piece or compulsory dance piece of these years' editions of the Jikinya Dance Festival. On the selection of mbende as the set-piece, the officer commented:

> *NACZ selected mbende dance as the compulsory dance for Jikinya Dance Festival from 2013-14 as a way of promoting the continuity and safeguarding the cultural heritage. All primary schools in Zimbabwe competed for the festival awards starting from zonal, district, provincial and national level. The main aim of the festival is to encourage the learners at primary school to appreciate and participate in Zimbabwean traditional dances, thus promoting the transmission of the cultural heritage from generation to generation.*[13]

In this regard, mbende dance reminded Zimbabweans, in general, and the Zezuru in particular about their history and future aspirations of the nation. The interviewees' comments also suggest that the festival was officially opened by Chief Fortune Charumbira, who is the president of Chiefs Council of Zimbabwe. The event was also graced by Chief Mangwende and other Chiefs from the local areas such as Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe and Murehwa.[14] In Zimbabwe and other African countries, chiefs, village heads, spirit mediums and other prominent officials from the community play a crucial role in cultural activities, especially in the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to another or in events where dance is used to drive a specific ritual or ceremony. Besides, government representatives from various ministries, teachers, arts practitioners, students from local universities, school children and the general populace also attended the festival. Apart from the festival participants mentioned above, one participant said that "several dance clubs participated in the festival, such as Shingirirai jerusarema, Zevezeve dance group and Ngomadzapasi" [15].

The participants also confirmed that mbende dance played a critical role in the second Chimurenga liberation struggle against colonialism and cultural imperialism. The white settlers used to suppress various dances, and the same dances were used for political and cultural emancipation. In 2007 the local community with the help of the NACZ in syndicate with Murehwa Culture Centre formed and established a local management committee comprised of the local people responsible for the safeguarding of mbende dance and other dances from the vicinity of Murehwa and Uzumba-Maramba-Pfungwe districts.

In the same vein, the informants also indicated that they are happy with the initiative taken by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to introduce dance in formal schools as a stand-alone learning area in the country's education curriculum. Mbende dance is among the indigenous dances which constitute the content of dance syllabus in primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The teaching and learning of mbende and other indigenous dances are a crucial step in the right direction in the implementation of a postcolonial education blueprint within the broader policy framework in the reclamation and restoration of the nation's cultural legacy. This could help to guarantee the position of schools as ‘cultural spaces and centres' that proffers strategies to recover African cultural identities from diminishing intimidations of cultural identity damage (Shizha 2013:7), engineered by colonialism. Banks (2013:31) also insists that uplifting traditional dances involve reclaiming indigenous epistemological and ‘asserting indigenous worldviews'. She further argues that dance should be regarded as ‘cultural knowledge", hence the need to perceive the integration of mbende and other indigenous dances in the national education curriculum as a direct challenge against Eurocentric education curriculum which promoted and championed proof-based, objective and empirical knowledge

[12] Interviews compiled from the Director of Murehwa Culture Centre Ronald Biza on 20/04/17
[13] Interviews compiled from Catherine Mtombeni, the communications and marketing officer of the NACZ on 20/04/2017.
[14] Interviews compiled from Douglas Vambe on 19/04/2017.
[15] Interviews compiled from Njaravani Ernest, the provincial NACZ arts manager on 20/04/2017.

(Banks 2010:11). It is, therefore, possible for both Primary and Secondary schools in Zimbabwe to formally offer the learning of mbende dance as a tool to redefine Zimbabwe's cultural heritage in general and Zezuru mbende legacy in particular, an initiative previously anticipated by the government and the citizens to accept dance cultures as the heritage and identity, not residues of an irreclaimable history.

6. Concluding remarks

Despite pressure from colonialists and missionaries, *mbende* indigenous dance managed to survive and continue to be the central pillar of the Zezuru cultural legacy. The Zezuru people, Zimbabweans in general and the government through the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe, took various measures to resist the colonial ban of *mbende* and reinstitute the dance in political, social, economic and cultural sectors of its owners. By practising *mbende* indigenous tradition, the people resisted the attempts by the colonial government to completely stop the performance of the dance because of its sexually suggestive movements. They also said it was unfit and unholy to be consumed by the Christian community. The ban resulted in the renaming of the dance to *jerusarema*, which is an associated Christian name, to suit the Christian environment as well as to escape the suppression. The idea of Christianising the name of the dance was a way of saving the dance against pressure from missionaries and colonialists and at the same time to maintain the ‘'Zezuru cultural legacy" in an otherwise harsh and unfriendly world which attempted to choke Zimbabwean indigenous dance traditions. The contact between the British White settlers and Zimbabweans was not only political but cultural and allowing the performance of the coloniser's dance traditions on the expense of the colonised, thus creating unfair power relations. Cultural production in Rhodesia was characterised by the notion of ‘'dominant construct" which regarded the colonialist's authority unchallenged and had the authority to disparage Zimbabwean indigenous dances. Zimbabwean dance scholars have delayed locating the space for the restoration of Zezuru cultural legacy through producing literature on how *mbende* was reinstituted after its ban by the British Rhodesian government. This scholarly lacuna prompted the authors for the present article to adopt a historical and ethnographic approaches to trace the process of *mbende* indigenous dance revival initiatives.

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