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Dance as Redundant Communication: Theatrical Routine in Zimbabwe's *Chibhasikoro* and *Borrowdale* Dances

Jairos Gonye

Abstract: The research for this article employs phenomenology to comparatively analyse and appreciate the theatrical qualities and import of *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dances. The paper descriptively interprets both Zimbabwean dances as redundant performance arts. It traces the origins and spread of both dances in their performed world. The researcher observed three dancing couples for either dance; held informal interviews with four dancers and four onlookers for either dance in Masvingo and Harare, respectively. The study concludes that contemporary Zimbabwean dance is a continually growing and transforming phenomenon of crucial social and entertainment value. The researcher contends that while *chibhasikoro* dramatises the cause of farm workers, *borrowdale* concurrently enacts the aspirations of homeless urbanites. The *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* moves, respectively, are interpreted as reminiscent of the 'cargo cult' whereby African dancers, in their want, theatrically denote their wish to ride bicycles and horses while connoting underlying desires to have improved social and economic status. Both dances seem to be enacted all over Zimbabwe, hence a more national rather than an ethnic outlook, contrasting to the traditional socio-cultural-specific dances, *mbakumba*, *jerusarema* or *muchongoyo*. Both dances are viewed as social, psychological and entertainment tools of communication. This researcher contends that dance, as a national cultural asset and an art or form of communication, should freely express the emotions, dreams, and ideologies of the diverse nation.

Introduction

This paper interprets both *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dances¹ as artistic forms of communication that rose both as entertainment and as comment on farm and urban struggles whose success is linked to redundancy aspects of dance as either communication or performance. The term 'redundant' is used here not in a pejorative sense of unneeded impedance to communication but actually from a principle of communication that says that for communication to be effective, it needs to be redundant - repetitive. 'Theatrical routine' conjures associations such as rehearsing, repeated performances with open meanings, and play acting before an audience. Commenting on the ever fluid relationship between dance and theatre, Kavanagh (1997:95) says, "[d]ance invariably includes dramatic elements — mime, story, characterisation, costume — and theatre includes dance elements."

Dance has always permeated Zimbabwe's everyday life, employed to express happiness and sorrow and to make friends and lovers. In politics and diplomacy, dance is used to receive and celebrate dignitaries and leaders from friendly countries. The Harare International Airport tarmac is lined with vigorously dancing Zimbabweans who spectacularly 'welcome' these friends. In essence, these dances embody non-verbal communication in foreign policy because they dramatically communicate Zimbabwean culture of hospitality, comradeship and loyalty.

On social and entertainment occasions, dance has often been an integral feature since emotions and feelings seem easier expressed through dance than words. At funerals, *biras*², weddings, harvesting and parties, dance has always been significant. On these occasions, though improvisation by individual dancers is common, the dances performed are mostly known dances carrying specific meanings. For instance,

'*hwishu*', the persistent pelvis thrust dance performed at traditional weddings is the implied initiation of the recently married into the sexual routine of married life. Traditionally, each type of social and entertainment function has tended to favour specific forms and genres of dances such that each of these ceremonies has come up with its peculiar dance, for instance, *jerusarema*, *mbakumba* and *muchongoyo*.³

In Zimbabwe, as in most African nations, such culturally specific dances have been transmitted over generations through socialisation and ritual (Asante, 2000). This suggests that these dances become accepted within their communities; have peculiar routines and moves to be followed during performance; can therefore be danced socially in groups, hence can be learnt and, if so, can be descriptively interpreted. The existence of accepted social entertainment dances did not, however, preclude possibilities of individual innovation and creativeness. In fact, the general impression is that Zimbabweans, like all humankind, have a propensity towards establishing and performing common dances in which every member of the social group feels the urge to compete and co-participate. If the Americans, Brazilians and Italians are known for hip-hop, ballet or for samba respectively, then Zimbabweans should be known for *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* among other dances.

Chibhasikoro and *borrowdale* dance routines have been the most fascinating in Zimbabwe following independence in 1980 and after the 1990s, respectively. The farm compound communities did not only rally around their birthright dances by twilight. They further developed and nurtured a more fluid *chibhasikoro* which promoted a spontaneous communication of all groups' physical liveliness and dramatised the poor labourers' wish to lead happy material lives. *Borrowdale* seems no longer a dance only performed during the OK Grand Challenge horse race, but it now encapsulates the

dreams and desires of the Zimbabwean ghetto poor. It is in this context whereby clearly certain dances emerge, dances about which social groups feel the urge to dance and master, that this research is interested in descriptively interpreting *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale*.

Chibhasikoro is a dance apparently popular in farm and growth point settings and it involves peculiar moves resembling a bicycle rider's pedalling strokes whereas *borrowdale* is originally a ghetto dance whose popular moves seem to imitate those of a horse rider and the horse as seen competing at the Borrowdale Race-course in Harare. These dances appear so attractive and popular that many Zimbabweans cherish dancing and watching them. It looks like dancers have no capacity to exhaust the 'fashionability' and appeal of both dances despite their innovative improvisation about each dance. It therefore looks like *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* have acquired independent statuses as recognisable dance styles with meanings deserving scholarly attention. This research is informed by the belief that most endearing dances are those which communicate communal desires, wishes and aspirations. Such dances are dances everyone would feel pleasurable ease and satisfaction in dancing, everyone would wish to learn how to dance and everyone would dance repeatedly in a camaraderie, loosely competitive manner.

This article explores the extent to which *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dances could be considered as forms of kinesic communication expressing themselves through redundant performances. Apparently, even where the songs or music played could be changed, the same dances will be enacted and re-enacted if the messages in the dancers' minds remain unchanged. The research, therefore, seeks to establish the theatrical nature of the two contemporary dances through interpreting the persistent messages sent through *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* moves as well as

placing these dances alongside traditional dances such as *mbakumba*, *jerusarema* and *muchongoyo*. In other words, why would dancers imitate or mimic a cyclist or a jockey? What is the 'something' beyond the imitation or mimicry? To provide partial, yet relevant responses to these questions, I enlist the theoretical explanations imbued in cargo cultism. The cargo cult movement has emerged among formerly colonized people in their attempt to come to terms with their desire for Western cargo, amidst colonial denial of similar "wealth, technology and living standards" (Kottack, 1991:314). Cargo cultists conduct rituals resembling the powerful wealthy colonizers' observable behaviour hoping that their own ancestors and gods would intercede and grant them desired cargo. Cargo cult activity is typified in manipulative, mock-cum-mask activities such as pretending that building imitation seaports anchors cargo. Though Zimbabweans might not be suffering from the same fallacies and errors of logic as the Melanesians, I hazard to question whether the *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dancers are not performing rituals that target the bicycle or a Borrowdale home as desirable cargo or even much more. In terms of ritualistic dance, Kavanagh (1997:1) explains how early hunting societies communicated their wishes through mimesis "... an action which is believed to have the same effect as another action which it resembles". To control an impending hunt, hunters would mime a hunting catch before really going out to hunt. The research suggests that an understanding of such ubiquitous feelings among Africans can help explain why Zimbabweans started dancing *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale*.

Carey (1992) describes communication as ritualistic in nature. Dance, as communication, could also be seen as ritualistic, particularly so since dance becomes a carrier of shared meanings extractable by a number of receivers over distance and time (Kavanagh, 1997;

Nketia, 1974). The question is, then, do Zimbabwean dancers and watchers alike share the ritualistic intent signified in the bicycle and horse, and their riders' steps and routines, even now that the dances have become secularised and technologically mediated? The research is, therefore, interested in unpacking the processes through which *chibhasikoro* has become, consciously or unconsciously, a cult among farm labourers and growth point residents, just as *borrowdale* has also become one with the urban poor, in the latter raising the *sungura*-music⁴ guru, Alick Macheso⁵, into a cult figure. In a related study in America, Melissa Peick (2005) looked at dance as non-verbal communication used to send and receive both intentional and unintentional messages. I am particularly interested in the seemingly attractive content of both dances which dancers and watchers seem to continually want to send, receive and share, transform, recycle and reiterate. It has become evident that the theatrical movements the 'bicycle' and 'Borrowdale' dancers make are something the dancers themselves are so keen to repeat and the watchers keenly anticipate. I am interested in finding out why both contemporary dances have acquired such tremendous following, often spilling over from those traditional sites of influence, especially in the growth points adjacent to farm compounds and in urban ghettos, and to suggest whether these modern dances are equally as prescriptive as the *mbakumba*, *muchongoyo* or *jerusarema* of yore. To help frame the investigation, the following questions were asked: why do farm community members and growth pointers predominantly dance *chibhasikoro*? Why would every dancer want to dramatise the cyclist's moves in their dance routines? Have the horse rider's moves any deeper meaning? Does dance help us gain insight into current socio-political realities? What role has globalisation and information technology played in the seeming shifting

of boundaries inscribing either *chibhasikoro* or *borrowdale*?

Dance as Communication and Dance as Art

One singular aspect about dance as communication is that, although it is the independent individual body per se that facilitates movements, humankind can read these bipedal bodily dynamics and interpret them as meaningful dance moves. However, because it relies more on elaborate movement, use of space, mime, expressiveness and rhythm and gesture, dance can hardly be separable from theatre (Asante, 2000; Nketia, 1974). Peick (2005) describes dance as an unusual social communication through which planned and unplanned messages are sent and received. This means that dancers and watchers could have both clear and vague meanings about the essence of dance. Meanwhile, completely different meanings may be arrived at just as happens with an audience watching theatre. A performer and an audience should somehow communicate. By the same token, a dancer, other dancers and the spectators should also communicate for mutual approval. Through repeated movements and other non-verbal cues, dance may affect moods, cause attraction, and influence perception (Brabazon, 1998 and Oseroff-Vernell, 1998 in Peick, 2005). Thus, dance seems an equally powerful communication tool, which, like other communication modes such as theatre, achieves effect through redundancy and repetition.

Redundancy as a concept in communication was introduced by Shannon and Weaver in 1948. They exhort the need to counteract any disruptive effects in the communication process through a repetitive transmission of the same message in the same channel or repetition of the message over different channels or communicating something already known to the addressee over time,

among others. (Mersham and Skinner, 2005; <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ASC/REDUNDANCY.html>). Redundancy, therefore, counteracts noise and guarantees reliability. Burgoon, Hunsaker and Dawson (1994) observe:

[w]ithin a group of receivers, some may be distracted by personal problems, noise, other messages... and any number of additional physical and psychological factors. Repetition can help to overcome these barriers to receptivity.

What makes this research interesting, is, however, the realisation that *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* are not necessarily danced repeatedly for their ephemeral nature, but because they are dances whose styles and meanings participants already know.

It has been suggested that dance as a form of non-verbal communication is just as complex as writing or speech, demanding the same faculties of conceptualisation, creativity and memory (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/nonverbal_com...). It therefore follows that as means of self expression, there are patterns of gestures and moves in dance that has to be mastered the same way rules of grammar are mastered in verbal communication. And, as an old cliché says, reinforced behaviours are often repeated. Nancy Montgomery (www.desertraindance.org/Articles/La...) has pursued the verbal-non-verbal analogy through her metaphor of tribal dance by suggesting that rehearsed and extemporaneous speeches are synonymous with and correspond with choreographed or improvised dances, respectively. *Chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* would readily fall under choreographed or rehearsed dances. Still, there are great opportunities for individual improvisation and extemporaneous performances, especially evident in Macheso's and his dancing partner, Slomo's constant experiments and refashioning of *borrowdale* styles.

Singh and Brett, in their study of oriental

dance (2006) contend that dance is a hidden language of the soul, a gift from God, convenient and expedient for its capacity to express what humans have no words to express. Equally important is Singh and Brett (2006:2)'s observation that dance transcends language barriers and is a conduit of communication, not only amongst humans, but also to ancestors and the unseen. This brings into focus the ritualistic function of dance which Asante (2000) and Thram (2003) discuss in Zimbabwean *jerusarema* and *dandanda*,⁶ respectively.

Dance critics and theorists have also seen dance as an artistic tool of communication. In this case, it transcends the non-verbal quality to embrace the socially performative and creative roles. That could explain why various authors view dance as a peculiarly complex concept (Van Camp, 1990; Peick, 2005; Charman *et al.*, 1990). Charman *et al.* (1990) define dance as an art form that involves rhythmical movement of the body to the accompaniment of music for expression, social interaction, spiritual function or a performance art. The current research pursues the performance and creative roles of dance moves in *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale*.

Describing the performative art part of ballet, Van Camp (1990) considers dance as both art and drama. There is the realization that dance is not all about human movement, but also what supports or precipitates that human movement, such as drama — acting and mimicry. Nketia (1974:207-208) says that dance, as a social and artistic medium of communication "... conveys thoughts or matters of personal or social importance through the choice of movements, postures and facial expressions".

In this study, I ask what chosen movements, postures and expressions are repeated and why. Elsewhere on Zimbabwean dance, Asante (2003) notes that African dance's creative and aesthetic functions hinge on religious and social functions. It is important from Asante's concern, to give

dance its due attention, something which has not previously been done as dance was habitually reported "as an aside" to some function considered more significant. As Albert Nyathi (2001:89) complains, few "think of arts as a vital component in national development".

Over the years, Zimbabweans have come up with deeply meaningful dances and styles, pure or blended, that have both interpreted and commented on their times. Asante (2000) has categorized some of these Zimbabwean dances of between 1890 and 1982 into the 'religious' ritualistic, 'adaptive' commemorative and 'participatory' griotic ones. Looking at *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale*, this research is interested to establish whether these dances do not borrow from the ritual, commemorative and participatory.

The Emergence of Chibhasikoro Dance among Africans in former White-farming Communities

In colonial Rhodesia farm settlements, where the largely dispossessed Africans sojourned (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009), the big white farmer's house dwarfed all other buildings. Conveniently removed from the white farm house were the poor black workers' squalid compounds. Thus, to some of them, being complete was to be like the whites, as tragically reflected by Frantz Fanon. Therefore, the coming of independence in 1980 ushered a sense of hope that a new era had dawned, hence the various dances expressive of this new hope, particularly *chibhasikoro*. The farm shop and beer hall turned into cultural exchange and entertainment centres after a long day of farming. In particular, community-produced dancers and musicians would perform for social entertainment on the farms during weeknights and for commercial purposes in towns during weekends. Among the popular names were the Somanie, Chimbetu and Tazvida

brothers⁷ from Marondera, Chegutu and Masvingo farms, respectively. Their 1980s musical compositions were a mixture of traditional, *jiti*,⁸ *sungura* and *chachacha*⁹ and experienced a simultaneous rise with the *chibhasikoro* dance.

One of my first encounters with *chibhasikoro* was after independence at Tachi business centre in Mazhindu's¹⁰ former farm, near Mpandawana Growth Point. Each day I entered the small bottle store, I saw around a dozen patrons sharing their opaque beer as they talked about their slowly improving lives in the recently established resettlement villages of the 1980s. Most of these patrons were former labourers on white men's farms and few had come from surrounding villages. Their discussions reflected their satisfaction that they had finally got land after years of unrewarding toiling on white men's farms. They enjoyed dancing *chibhasikoro* to songs such as "Kuguta Kushanda", "Kossam", "Ndakashanda papurazi raRonnie"¹¹, and some *kanindo*.¹² Couples danced in the verandah, taking turns to compete in *chibhasikoro* steps and routines. They utilised various non-verbal signals such as arm gesture, concentrated looks, winking and many other related signs that showed that, among themselves, the dancers communicated, and also wished to communicate with spectators. I observed that despite the unclear social hierarchies in the absence of chiefs and traditional structures, these societies could still perform social or cultural dances.

In 2002 I visited the Roys' farm shop, forty kilometers east of Masvingo city. From observation and informal discussion, I found that the farm workers of new landowners, vendors and wood merchants expressed their conditions of discontent and resilience through dancing *chibhasikoro*, especially to System Tazvida's *sungura* music, *rhumba* and *kanindo*. The *Chibuku* sharing patrons danced *chibhasikoro* for every song that was played. I saw that the dancers tended to dance in pairs or as a group. There was also

a tendency to come together in the dance moves, with dancers forming semi-circles. The dancers in the semi-circle all seemed tuned in and unwilling to lose each other in the steps, turns and routines they entered together. It dawned on me that they used dance to socially communicate their joy, their dreams and desires. Their *chibhasikoro* dance appeared natural and there was intense bodily kinesics.

Reflecting on the informal talk I had with dancers and beer hall patrons, I conjectured that the farm workers' material desires were modest; sufficient food and drink, faithful matrimony and, possibly, a bicycle to ride between home, town and rural place of origin. Such discussions made me affirm that originally, *chibhasikoro* attempted to synthesize and express the needs and experiences of the varied ethnic groups *vis-a-vis* the white master. Workers and their children used to dance to their traditional music on occasions such as courtships, marriages, funerals, birthdays and social clubbing. Dances included *mbakumba*, *jerusarema*, *muchongoyo* and also western and local concert hybrid *jiti-jive*, Malawian and Zambian *nyau* masked dances. The introduction of modern guitar and other western instruments to spur dance saw the emergence and adaptation of *chibhasikoro*. Dance became a transformed, mixed but fluid avenue of expression. Though *chibhasikoro* appeared influenced by modernisation in style, purpose, costume and the like, it still relied on the traditional mime. *Chibhasikoro* dance embodied the contemporary needs of the poor farm worker, symbolised in the bicycle. *Chibhasikoro* became both a vehicle for the expression of and the object of desire.

Homeless Hararians and the Emergence of Borrowdale Dance

Harare is a modern capital city modelled along first world cosmopolitan cities (Yoshikuni, 1999). For historical reasons, the majority of African workers and the jobless

inhabit the perennially overcrowded high-density suburbs. But it is also from these ethnically mixed ghettos that a new culture for the new societies emerges.

While pursuing my post graduate studies in 1998, I commuted to the University of Zimbabwe from Mabvuku high density suburb where I frequented Kutsendura Nite Club at Kamunhu Shopping Centre. An assortment of patrons, some drinking clear and others opaque beer comingled, listening to *sungura* music and dancing *borrowdale*. I observed that the majority of patrons daily betted on horses in the Mashonaland Turf Club outlet at Kamunhu. So, dancing in imitation to the horse and jockey became almost a habit and not a hobby. Dancers competed to impress both each other and the onlookers, condensing into and out of the motions of the horse and its rider.

Incidentally, the OK Grand Challenge seems to have precipitated the *borrowdale* dance mania. In the 1990s, the expanding OK Bazaars and Supermarkets developed competitions based on customers buying in their shops who would use their receipts to enter competitions that included horse betting, and cars and houses as prizes. Betting had always been popular opium of the emerging society of poor workers isolated from the rural home and coming to grips with the modern exploitative city. For this literally homeless society, a bet for home ownership was a dream comes true. However, for one to win a house or car, one needed not only to predict the horses in their correct winning order, but had to be present at Borrowdale Racecourse on the final day.

In June 2004, I attended the OK Grand Challenge at Borrowdale Racecourse and observed how the spectators behaved as they waited for the final horse race. As usual, Alick Macheso was providing musical entertainment. It is rumoured that during one of these popular competitions, Alick Macheso had started to mimic the cadence of a racing horse in his dances

to make the occasion more immediately exciting and meaningful to the spectators. By sheer coincidence, that improvised impersonation became popular with the urban poor who also began to dance *borrowdale* style and construct meaning from it. After watching some preliminary horse race competitions and then watching spectators dancing to Macheso's music, I concluded that dancers, indeed, imitated the horse and its rider. I could also see that the faces of the people, 'all punters then', were tense, a tension which seemed to relax as they danced *borrowdale*. I also realized that indirectly corporate sponsorship had facilitated the secularisation of *borrowdale* dance and its acceptance in Zimbabwe.

Rationale

The global and local paucity of philosophical, aesthetic literature and dance criticism is a major worry (Camp, 1997; Sparshott, 1995; Peick, 2005) which this research could help address. Asante (2000)'s concern that the scantiness in Zimbabwean dance criticism is rooted in colonial conspiracy and Kavanagh (1997:96)'s fears that Zimbabwean dance may remain static, repeatedly dancing the old dances or quite the opposite, cavorting new European and American styles, can be hopefully addressed by embarking on this dance research. This research on the communicative and theatrical nature of the dances will add new voice to works by Asante (2000), Thram (2003), Pongweni (1982) and Zindi (2003). These identified writers have tended to focus on traditional dance, liberation songs or biographies of pop musicians, respectively. Nothing has been written on the socio-political significance or entertainment value of post independent Zimbabwe dance, let alone *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale*. However, *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* cannot be simply ignored or trashed as an ephemeral cultural sneeze. Following Zimbabwe's 1980 independence and attendant expansion of growth points

and unrestrained secular merry-making, *chibhasikoro* dance emerged. Ten years later, Harare's ghetto populations fostered a new dance, *borrowdale*. Despite the perceptible connections between the rural growth point and Borrowdale race course factors and the sprouting of *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dances, respectively, no major scholarly attention was paid to them. This apparent obliviousness on the part of Zimbabwean dance critics, art theorists or communicologists has spurred my interest into availing information about the dramatic and communication value of both dances.

Methodology

I chose the phenomenological method because it lends itself to researches of any lived experience. I relied on observations, informal interviews and experience to critique *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dances. Relying on experience of memory and insights, from an ethnomusicologist but trying hard to prevent interest from predetermining notions about Zimbabwean dance, I paid close attention to dance movement as it occurred in social contexts, live musical performances and *galas*, reflecting on gathered knowledge of dance acquired over years. Participant and non-participant observation during such performances enhanced a conscious appreciation of the various styles and moves dancers make. On selected occasions, I visually and graphically noted the dance routines of three dancing couples for either dance, their relations with partners, other dancers and the onlookers. From the observations, I could have formed my own conclusions, but rather went on to verify these through the use of informal interviews. I asked, at random, a total of eight dancers and eight dance lovers or watchers of either sex from different cultural backgrounds about the theatrical nature and function of *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale*. Informal interviews were preferred over formal interviews because they offered

a relaxed, shared atmosphere. With the knowledge gained through experience and preliminary discussions with the Ethnomusicology lecturer, through observations and that corroborated in informal interviews, I went on to descriptively interpret two contemporary Zimbabwean dances.

Chibhasikoro ('bicycle dance') at a Live Musical Performance

The musical performance was held in a council beer hall in Mupandawana Growth Point. The Ngwenya Brothers, a *sungura* band, provided the music. People from the surrounding farming and communal areas gathered in the hall. After assessing several dancers, I finally settled on three couples who were part of the attendees. It turned out that they worked in the nearby farms. The following is my attempt at a linguistic identification of the dance.

Considerable energy was expended with couples using all their body parts and zones. Dancers exhibited exceptional footwork, dexterously stepping their feet forwards and backwards at rapid alternate pace like cyclists, while they simultaneously mimicked the action of throwing morsels in their mouths. The couples had their upper waists loosely and obliquely pivoted to allow free shaking of the hips and buttocks. Intricate moves, performed with legs bent in a crouching fashion, revealed the couples' athletic agility. Their upper bodies produced several gestures and moves that were in sync with the movements of the lower half. Hands stretched out to imaginary bicycle handle bars, bars which freely dissolved into automobile gears, the couples gestured with their hands, chins, hips and foreheads as if in response to statements the nimble feet uttered. In another dance routine, the couples, then abreast, bent slightly forward, scanned the audience, and then made four or so simultaneous sweeping moves with both left forearms and lower left legs, before switching to the other half. The

opposite legs supported their body weight during those precarious moves. To sign off their performance, a male dancer each fell over on his back, supported a fully rotating bicycle wheel on his forehead while his feet, pelvis and belly, all together performed some fancy tricks. The female partner, each in turn, took the rotating wheel, balanced it on her hip, then simulated a sexual act, gyrating her waist, before dashing into her partner's embrace.

Despite their visibly affluent status in a country where the majority was poor, most white farmers had gained notoriety for rewarding even their most loyal retirees with nothing above the bicycle for a pension. New African farmers seem not to have turned much different either. Capturing perhaps the farm workers' purpose in dancing *vis-a-vis* their employer, a non-dancer said, "The *chibhasikoro* moves echo the intentions of the traditional ritual dance, the itch to ask for rain, harvests, growth and protection of family." The interviewee added, "In dancing *chibhasikoro*, eyes fixed on a distant outer future, dancers are communing with their ancestors and God to grant their present requests such as bicycles and food." Such utterances confirm people's conferment of meaning to dance, and a general appreciation of its communication and ritual value.

A male interviewee substantiated my views about the growth and transformation of *chibhasikoro* by asserting that initially, *chibhasikoro* was a masculine beer hall dance currently being gradually accepted socially, with women partaking in it. A female dancer explained the origins and character of *chibhasikoro* thus:

Expert dancers actually own one of two bicycle wheels; either one rim with, or one rim without spokes and gear that they use at certain stages of the bicycle dance. Even for those without the kit, their basic move is the miming of the cyclist, like communicating the desire to own

one. *Chibhasikoro* entered the city with rural to urban migrants, getting renewed a little by adding the dance swings that appear like the dancer is changing the gears of a car, turning and accelerating. This indicates the increasing and shifting needs of the poor."

Like in theatre, in *chibhasikoro* dance, there is evident use of prop - properties or stuff used by stage actors. The use of a wheel as prop demonstrates a desire to have a successful performance, every actor and director's dream. Eventually, a successful theatrical production is always on demand, hence is repeated and gains more popularity through that routine. The use of the wheel is reminiscent of the use of the small axe, 'gano' by traditional dancers.

Observations, interviews with dancers and onlookers, and my own personal experience support the view that *chibhasikoro* dance is used by the poor to pray for material, emotional and psychological benefaction from the Almighty. Evidence suggests that *chibhasikoro* originated in the commercial farmlands of Zimbabwe, but migrated to urban centers together with the drifting dancers, musicians and general workers seeking better fortunes there. The rate of spread of *chibhasikoro* increased with the forced migrations following the 2000 onwards land redistributions.

'Borrowdale' Dance at a Live Music Gala

The gala was held in Harare's Rufaro Stadium. Because the musicians were a rich variety, it also attracted a diverse assortment of attendees and dancers from Harare's suburbs, but mostly from the ghettos. I closely watched three young couples who danced in proximity, dancing *borrowdale*, and produced the following account:

The couples' basic moves depended more on nimbleness of legs than the pelvis. Their moves consisted galloping steps, unlike the shuffling pedals of chibhasikoro. (Imagine a horse galloping at one place!). In vertical posture, the dancers' bodies were supported on a leg each. The other leg was bent at knee-level and only beginning to touch the ground. From the waist upwards, their torsos were slightly tipped forwards. They hung their arms in space, bent at the elbows at 130 degrees or so. All hands were bent at right angles, the angles at which they swam back and forth to symbolize the thrust of the horse's gallop and the reins of the jockey. Their dance reached a full gallop as the couples pulled out to the front and drew their second and last fingers out like ears of race horses, while competitors chased on coordinated feet, a hand intermittently urging the 'horse' on, facial gestures and head movements corroborating the energy sapping nature of the dance.

A noticeable trend after independence in 1980 was that affluent blacks and African political heavyweights migrated to respectable and exclusive suburbs such as Borrowdale. Borrowdale Racecourse, the home of the best bet, is found there. But the majority of blacks remained in the ghettos and could only dream of owning a house of their own. My discussion of the OK Grand Challenge and Borrowdale Racecourse activities suggests that with its origins in commerce, *borrowdale* dance was essentially performed to entertain the betting spectators at the racecourse. Yet, we saw the poor urbanites harness the dance to communicate their pent up social grievances and wants, disguised in the wish to win the OK Grand Challenge prize. Who would itch to win anything they already had? A male dancer observed that,

Borrowdale is a poor ghetto man's dance with a rich man's name. It's not by coincidence that dancers imitate horses competing at Borrowdale Racecourse.

They also dream of one day owning a house in Borrowdale. It shows how people cling on to false hope in order to cope with poverty and want.

The idea of imitation mentioned here is of the dramatic, an expression of what is expected. If the early hunters' hunting catch dance prefigured the desired catch, by analogy, punters bet because they expect to win and dancers dance *borrowdale* because they also want the good life associated with Borrowdale suburb. This is reminiscent of the spirit shown in cargo cultism, particularly inspired by the difficult lifestyles the have-nots lead, while constantly being bombarded with possibility images.

As the dance entrenched itself with urban society, *borrowdale* seemed a complete overhaul of the Zimbabwean dancing stage, particularly an overwriting of *chibhasikoro* dance. If *chibhasikoro* appeared rather mechanistic and more staccato in speed of steps, turns and rhythm of movement, *borrowdale* was a more refined, clearly smoother phrased and sometimes capable of moments of floating stretches. If *chibhasikoro* was more collective, calling for dancers to swing in proximity, *borrowdale* tended towards exhibitionism, beginning with many dancers, but ending with the overall best. An onlooker commented thus:

Borrowdale is the dance which members of different societies can groove down to with ease. Being able to move your body to its intricate styles is actually an achievement. Politician, civil servant, white, all compete and chill with the poor worker, informal trader, vendor and tout in *borrowdale*.

The author's sentiments suggest that there is a style '*borrowdancers*' aspire to master,

perfect and perform.

I achieved a keener appreciation of *borrowdale* from watching Alick Macheso, originator of the dance and arguably Zimbabwe's best postmodern 'choreographer'. Macheso looked such an innovative hybrid master mixer. In partnership with the flexible Franko Dhaka (Slomo), the duo performed some delightful kangaroo-like spring dances, twisting their thighs like razor wire. Then, having exhausted all the other competitors out of the *borrowdale* gallop, the pair apparently wrestled technique from technology. And, inscribing photo-finish technology unto themselves, they performed the dance in slow motion—conscious that they were creating an unprecedented choreography in Zimbabwe dance. On reflection, I saw that this was an instance of innovative improvisation of skills that guarantee beauty and perfection in whatever art form.

As if to say, our dance is as fast as the racing horse, therefore to appreciate it, you need to 'slow motion' the dance, Macheso and Slomo effectively obliterated the boundary between performed dance and technology. They sent cameramen rushing to shoot the 'illusion' of the 'horses' in slow motion. Zindi (2003:96) appreciates Macheso's "magical" prowess, not only his "serious bass gymnastics" but also the "dazzling gyrations in a combination of the Kanda Bongoman and the Michael Jackson 'moonwalk'". Though *borrowdale* dance is synonymous with Macheso, in Zimbabwe, it is generally agreed nobody owns a dance just as nobody owns the daily multiplying language.

Analysis of interview data

It has emerged that *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dances are not only avenues of entertainment. That entertainment is specifically offered in theatrical form, *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dancers dramatizing the growth pointers' and urbanites' desires and

wants to expectant spectators, respectively. Interviewee comments reflect the general view that Zimbabweans are creative geniuses who can come up with dances that help to interpret our experiences and define our culture. Though the legs and arms dominance in *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* (meant to illustrate the bicyclist and jockey's actions) tends to distinguish both dances from other indigenous dances which emphasize the "head and torso" while aligning them to globalised European dances which feature the "legs and arms" (Asante, 2000:117), the two dances have become as culturally meaningful as *mbakumba*, *jerusarema* or *muchongoyo*. The difference is that the two contemporary dances have no ethnic borders inscribing them while the three identified indigenous dances have. It has also emerged from interviews that *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* contain both overt and covert messages, implying that they are as good as any other art, particularly theatre. On the surface, *chibhasikoro* or *borrowdale* may denote joy, contentment and play acting, but underneath, they connote complex messages such as comments on farm labourers' grievances with their lifestyles, urban struggles and the desire to lead less stultifying, but fulfilling lives.

According to dancers, *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* have shown that consciousness is not fixed but dynamic; dancers do not only become conscious that whites oppress blacks but dancers and complicit watchers alike also mind when post-independence environments deny them of their dreams to ride bicycles, drive cars, ride horses or have decent food and drink. Both dances are viewed as socio-political metaphors about the wishes, desires and world limitations of dancers and watchers. Interviewees agreed on the class dimensions of the dances: the majority of dancers, watchers or fans were farm and urban workers, touts, vendors, the urban unemployed, 'growth pointers' and ordinary villagers.

Interviewees also noted that these dances

were no longer clean texts, but transforming fusions, borrowing and sharing styles and moves from diverse contexts, viz: Zimbabwe traditional dances, South African township dances, Namibian and Congolese waist dances, Malawian *nyau* stage tricks, Michael Jackson, John Travolta and also ballet moves. Hence, to some observers, *borrowdale* dance appears a modification and a continuation of *chibhasikoro*. However, the objects of imitation or interpretation have graduated from the bicycle and rider to a horse and jockey, respectively. Interviewees' observations about the hybridity of *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* dances corroborate Jones (1959)'s contention that American jazz, western four-part harmony and derivative music, tap dance and other ballroom dances shaped the emerging ethno-folk genres in Southern Africa. Makwaya (choir) music and *tsava tsava*¹³ drifted southwards from Zambia with migrants. Supporting this view, Yoshikuni (1999, 115) says in the mid 20th century Harare, "dance, music and other forms of recreational culture had a strong northern flavor."

As the ethnomusicologist had observed, *chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* still fell under group dances favouring either linear formation or spaced competitive gallops, respectively. The crescent forms were informed by the traditional culture that prefers circular shapes, reflecting the cyclical nature of African cosmogony.

Conclusion

Chibhasikoro and *borrowdale* have risen as both communicative entertainment and sociopolitical performing arts, ways of theatrically sharing the crises and desires of farm workers, the urban poor and ordinary Zimbabweans. *Chibhasikoro* and *borrowdale* have been shown as powerful metaphors giving meaning to our harsh everyday conditions, but also with a tranquillizing, cathartic influence. Ironically, dancers have

generally not been accorded the honour that singers, drummers or sculptors have been accorded. This is apparent in a lack of leadership from the ranks of dancers as compared to singers, guitarists or drummers who can become leaders, say, of a band. However, female participation in these new dances appears keen like in other arts and cultural productions, suggesting a thawing of both the attitude and the gender issues. A nation of so many innovative dancers should be able to dramatize its deep-felt, psycho and socio-political experiences and interpret its history entertainingly and peacefully, hence the need to acknowledge and support efforts by cultural exponents such as Clayton Ndlovu of the Umoja fame.

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Notes

- 1 *Chibhasikoro* derives from the English word 'bicycle', and 'Borrowdale' derives from the name of one of the posh suburbs in Harare, a place where the classy horse racing also takes place.
- 2 Bira is a Zimbabwean traditional commemoration through ritual, song and dance to accept the spirit of the dead into the family of ancestors.
- 3 Zimbabwean traditional dances: *Jerusarema*, originally known as *mbende*, was a cultural courtship dance with sexually suggestive, energetic moves, performed to assess whether the young, unmarried Zezuru men and women would be good fathers and mothers. It was performed under moonlight skies, mostly in Murehwa and surrounding areas. The colonial administrators banned it for its 'licentious' moves but the people changed its name and presented it to the whites as a Christian "Jerusalem" dance; *mbakumba* was originally performed by the Karangas of Masvingo. From evening into the night, adults would dance while drinking beer, especially after communal work and for entertainment; and *muchongoyo* was a traditional dance of the Ndau and Shangaan offshoot clans of the South African Nguni who crossed into eastern Zimbabwe during the Mfecane. Originally it was performed evening times as a war dance with men dancing the earth vigorously and competitively while singing self-praise and intimidation songs as women applauded.
- 4 Sungura is one of the most popular genres of music played in Zimbabwe. It is a mixture of high speed guitars and drums. It combines *chachacha*, *tsavatsava*, *kanindo* and *rhumba* rhythms lending it highly danceable.
- 5 Alick Macheso is a Zimbabwean musician renowned for popularising the *borrowdale* style dance.
- 6 A traditional ritual dance performed for spiritual possession and healing purposes, especially in Chiweshe, Dande and Murehwa (Mashonaland Province). *Dandanda* dance is normally performed throughout the night in a hut, and the mediums have to be 'sexually pure for the period.'
- 7 Popular musicians whose careers started in the farm communities, namely Daiton and Josphat Somanje, Simon and Naison Chimbetu and System and Peter Tazvida. All latter dumped the farms for the cities as they became popular.
- 8 *Jiti* is both a fast dance and musical genre emerging after the 1960s in Zimbabwe. It mixes danceable, high speed guitars and drums.
- 9 *Chachacha* is a type of rhumba music that became popular after the 1970s in Zimbabwe.
- 10 Mazhindu was a nickname for the white farmer for his unpredictable temper.
- 11 Socially-conscious music pieces by musicians Ketai Muchawaya, Simon Chimbetu and Solo Makore, respectively.
- 12 Fast-playing dance music from East

Africa popularised during the Zimbabwean liberation war.

- 13 Tsava-tsava is to dance stylistically, attempting very much to be in synch with music, mixing traditional and

modern moves.