

Debunking the Zimbabwean Myth of *Jikinya* Dance in Ndhlala's *Jikinya* and Zimunya's "Jikinya" (Dancer) and "Jikinya" (An African Passion)

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Abstract

This article analyzes representations of the Zimbabwean jikinya dance myth by Geoffrey Ndhlala in the novel *Jikinya* and Musaemura Zimunya in the poetry anthology *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other poems*. It examines the different social and historical settings considered in Ndhlala's *Jikinya* (pre-colonial Zimbabwe) and Zimunya's "Jikinya" (Dancer) and "Jikinya" (An African Passion) (the colonial period of the 1970s Zimbabwean anti-colonial war), and discusses how both texts attempt at describing the aesthetics of the jikinya dance and reinterpret Zimbabwe's pre-colonial and colonial culture and politics. Of significance, however, is that, being aware of the fact that the nature and significance of dance representations in these texts has received less attention, we analyze the way both writers handle Zimbabwean jikinya in colonial contexts. As a result, we argue in this article that although both authors struggle to portray a clear picture of what the dance really is to the reader, they are able to portray the significance of the jikinya myth and

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dance in the construction of the nation's memories and the mapping of the ongoing social experiences and political contestations encountered during Zimbabwe's colonial history.

Keywords

Jikinya, Zimbabwean traditional dance, myth, cultural fable, literary representation of dance

Introduction

This article analyzes representations of the Zimbabwean *jikinya* dance myth by Geoffrey Ndhkala (1984; *Jikinya*) and Musaemura Zimunya (1982; *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other poems*). The article closely examines the different social and historical settings considered in Ndhkala's *Jikinya*, set in pre-colonial Zimbabwe and Zimunya's "Jikinya" (Dancer) and "Jikinya" (An African Passion) set during the colonial period of the 1970s Zimbabwe anti-colonial war and discusses how both texts attempt at describing the aesthetics of the *jikinya* dance and re-interpretation of Zimbabwe's pre-colonial and colonial culture and politics. It assesses how both Ndhkala's and Zimunya's re-interpretation and re-presentation of a pre-colonial Shona (major ethnic group in Zimbabwe) myth contributes to readers' understanding of the essence of *jikinya* over the years and its place in the nation's socio-cultural life and political experiences. Ndhkala's *Jikinya* is, on the one hand, an eponymous novel whose main character is based on the pre-colonial Shona dancing legend, Jikinya. Jikinya, the girl character at the center of Ndhkala's narrative, is a White child born of the early European settlers in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia). She is raised and nurtured to be one of the best traditional dancers among the Ngara (Shona) people after the death of her parents in a war between the Europeans and the African indigenes. She, however, dies tragically in a war initiated by White intruders who purportedly wanted to "rescue" her from the Ngara community. Zimunya's poems, on the other hand, re-represent the myth of Jikinya during the colonial period as an ambivalent character of a culturally invested dancer who also doubles up as a product of the colonial economy. Both writers, belonging to the second generation of Zimbabwean artists writing on the eve of Zimbabwe's independence (Veit-Wild, 1992), provide a re-interpretation of pre-colonial and colonial culture and politics in their literary works. Critics (Kahari, 2009; Vambe, 2004; Zhuwarara, 2001) have mapped both writers' literary works as demonstrating the hybrid effects of Western literary and African oral traditions.

Furthermore, both writers' infusion of the *Jikinya* myth in their works is consistent with M. K. Asante's (2007) program of legitimating Africa's contributions to world culture. However, the nature and significance of dance representations in these texts has received less attention; hence, we analyze the way both writers handle Zimbabwean *jikinya* in colonial contexts. The argument that we put forward in this article is that although both authors struggle to portray a clear picture of what the *jikinya* dance really is to the reader, owing to a number of reasons such as the use of English as a medium of expression, they are able to portray the significance of the *jikinya* myth and dance in the construction of the nation's memories of the contact between the indigenes and the colonial intruders, as well as the mapping of the ongoing social experiences and political contestations encountered during the country's colonial history.

Considering *Jikinya* Within the Afrocentric Debate

We consider, as an entry point to the analysis of Ndhlala's and Zimunya's representations that "*Jikinya*" conjures shifting meanings to the minds of Zimbabweans throughout the nation's history. These meanings range from the contemporary construction of *jikinya* as a schools' dance festival to that of a traditional dance and a myth. Generally, the term *jikinya* seems to be etched in ordinary Zimbabwean social memory as suggested today in the 2002 inauguration of the national primary schools' Jikinya Dance Festival competition. Here, school pupils compete in every other traditional dance except *jikinya*, thus suggesting that *jikinya* may not be a specific type of dance but a way of dance. This could mean that there may be no particular dance called *jikinya* but that a group of related dances may be classified as *jikinya*. This article, thus, examines the way in which the myth of *jikinya* is treated in literary works by focusing on the nature and structure of the dance movements as well as the socio-cultural significance of the Zimbabwean dance, *jikinya*.

It is instructive that although both Ndhlala and Zimunya allude to the *jikinya* fable, they lack an apt vocabulary that vividly portrays *jikinya* dance. This invokes the well-known language debate in African literatures, where Fanon (1963), for instance, observes, "At the very moment when the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work he fails to realise that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country" (p. 179). Furthermore, Wa Thiongo (1994) argues that the use of "borrowed tongues" (p. 7) presents the African writers with problems, particularly at a moment they want to represent dance, a fluid cultural phenomenon. Zhuwarara (2001), on the contrary, acknowledges that the emergent literature by some colonial educated writers, which, although expressed in

colonial languages and largely “dependent upon borrowed forms . . . is a literature manifesting a sensibility, that is . . . rooted in African oral tradition” (p. 8). Nevertheless, we postulate that the use of a foreign written language to articulate an indigenous Zimbabwean cultural practice, being symptomatic of what Chinweizu and Madubuike (1985) dub the “encrustations of colonial mentality” (p. 239), hampers the writers’ wish to fully represent insights on *jikinya*. For example, Ndhkala’s novel encloses several references to dance (which is a formal device) and the rhythms of dance remain prominent in the narrative, but the apparently taken-for-granted approach of describing the specific dance and its types is ignored. The problem becomes that although African cultures have a list of various mythological heroines, villains, and tricksters that have contributed to the formation of the nation, which both texts seem to be suggesting, the elite artists seem to lack the apt language to represent such. However, the *jikinya* myth suggests a collective memory with regard to Zimbabwean dance origins and utility. This shows the link between myth as “a narrative that justifies a behaviour, practice, or social institution” (Bastian & Mitchell, 2004, p. 1) and the way *jikinya* dance as behavior and practice is popularized by the dancer Jikinya. As the myth links origins of Zimbabwean dance to the name Jikinya, it thus debunks the Western myths that suggest that African dances are always anonymously created and have no owner as there are no named African choreographers (Begho, 1977). Yet, the dance’s moral implications in the land and how *jikinya* steps are danced remain unclear; they are something to be imagined from the story. However, both writers’ invocation of *jikinya* during a period of writing characterized with colonial undervaluing and suppression of African dance (K. W. Asante, 2000; Falola & Fleming, 2012; Reed, 1998) testifies their commendable contributions to the body of Zimbabwean postcolonial cultural productions. What remains is to lucidly unveil what Kaepler (2000) considers “the grammar of a movement idiom” (p. 118)—the structure, style, syntax, motifs, and phrases comprising dance.

Critics on African culture such as Palmberg (2001) oftentimes claim that European colonialists, missionaries, and anthropologists either deliberately or actually misunderstood African dances and other cultural expressions in the colonized countries or patronized them. Such critics outline how Westerners stereotype African dances as primitive, slovenly gyrations of detrimental moral and political implications (M. K. Asante, 1992; K. W. Asante, 2000; Reed, 1998). In addition, Western writers such as Haggard (1885/2006) in *King Solomon’s Mines* and Conrad (1995) in *Heart of Darkness* have depicted Africans as dancing savages who needed Christian enlightenment and thus justify their imperialist mission in Africa. This characteristic contact zone tale, which Mudimbe (1988) terms the “invented constructs of Africa”

(pp. 1-2) resonates with Lutz's (2007) views about Eurocentric classical fantasies and fables of the other, in which European colonialists did not discover the unexpected because "[t]hey went into new territories full of expectations, ideas, and stereotypes: what they found was—in large measure—what they expected to find" (p. 2). Western popular myths fed the colonizers' imaginations with exotic images of Africa and her corporeal practices. However, some African writers who have incorporated dance and myths in their literary works have either generalized or under-represented African dances. This article contends that although Ndhkala and Zimunya make a celebratory re-centering of Zimbabwean *jikinya* in the memories about colonial contact and the larger colonial experiences, there is a sense in which both writers' descriptions to their readers of an image of an African dance in general and *jikinya* in particular, still construct an incomplete picture and perception of the dance. That is, readers who might not have attended the *jikinya* performances may find it difficult to re-imagine the kind of dance being described and its contextual purpose. This difficulty, as postulated above drawing from Wa Thiongo (1993), could be the result of a lack of appropriate and corresponding English terminology to describe the African dance and the negative impact of colonial languages on the Africans' perceptions and relationships with their cultural practices such as dance.

The use of Western language to describe African dances indeed compromises the depiction of such African cultural expressions. M. K. Asante (1992) asserts that the analysis of cultural aspects such as dance and other "icons and symbols through which a people announce themselves" should be carried out from "the standpoint of African centrality" (pp. 38, 19). Thus, this article argues that part of the psychological problem presented by an embodiment of *jikinya* dancing skills in a White character (Ndhkala, 1984), or an emphasis of the erotic dancer (Zimunya, 1982), stems from both writers' seeming perpetuation of colonial stereotypes about African dance and other cultural practices. But we are aware of Ashcroft's (2001) postcolonial perception stating that postcolonial writers engage in "the appropriation of dominant forms of representation for their use against their culture of origin, and to control self representation" (p. 116). This is where Ndhkala and Zimunya could be viewed as having appropriated Western literary discourses to recover Zimbabwean dances and to be using the *jikinya* dance to describe early or growing forms of African cultural affirmation and resistance to colonial domination.

Our reading of Ndhkala and Zimunya draws on insights from Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and the postcolonial theory, which are critiqued from an Afrocentric standpoint. Said (1978) conceptualizes orientalism as a way of creating knowledge and information about the orient in order for the intellectually and culturally superior imperialist to manage and control the orient "other." An illustration

of orientalist discourse is offered in Durkheim's (1976) sociological work on the so-called primitive religions of the Australian indigenes, whose dances are described as tumultuous leaps, shrieks, and gestures. Locally, K. W. Asante (2000) rues the colonialist conspiracy to condemn Zimbabwean traditional dances such as the banned *jerusarema* dance, a dance alongside which *jikinya* can be placed. Said (1978) becomes one of the pioneers of the postcolonial cultural movement that sought to contest Western representations of the non-Western. Nevertheless, though Said (1994) recognizes the significance of cultural literary representations, like Fanon (1963), he does not dwell much on the implicated hybridity that Bhabha (1994) discusses or the possibilities of internal differences among the "other," even in their dance practices. This article contends that Ndhkala and Zimunya self-reflexively respond to Eurocentric dance representations. This article also considers the way in which Ndhkala's and Zimunya's incisive work treat the theme of the sexualized body. It pays particular attention to the cultural lumping of female dancers and the gender dynamics, here epitomized in *Jikinya*, as a potential danger to morals (Bordo, 1993; Butler, 2007; Desmond, 1994; Hanna, 2010). Elsewhere, discussions of the body, especially as imbued in the notoriously ephemeral art of dance (Kabir, 2011; Morris, 2005), have unpacked the conceptualization of the body as a theoretical battlefield, a site upon which to contest and negotiate identity, political and gender representation (Erlmann, 1996; Griffen, 2007; Hanna, 2008; Kabir, 2011). For instance, when John (European character in *Jikinya*) enters the circle of the dance, he finds, as noted by Fanon (1963) that the African circle is culturally permissive, yet protects its own. As much as the people of Ngarra are moved to see the European settler, John, warmly accept their dance, they doubted that there would be any rhythm and symmetry in the European body dancing to African drums and music. Harmony could only be possible in the imaginary, not in embodiment. Contrariwise, dance has specific cultural meanings shared and understood among community members. However, because *Jikinya* has been socialized within Ngarra, her body, though White, has over the years acquired the *jikinya* habitus consistent with the Black Ngarra community, unlike John who is just fumbling their dance steps. Our examination of both writers' depiction of the *jikinya* dance also considers the spatial dynamics of the actual dance. It considers how the dance is performed, where and when it is performed and the meanings that are constructed thereof. Erlmann (1996) in his theorization of performance postulates that the meaning and perceptions of a cultural practice such as dance are a product of a complex interlink between the nature of the performative text, the way it is performed, the context in which it is performed and the meanings that are communicated by the cultural performers as well as the performance itself. This indicates that an examination of a dance performance or, as in this article, its depiction,

should acknowledge the dialectical linkages between the performance, the space where it is performed, and the various performatives as well as the social and cultural meanings that are mediated.

In addition, we are aware that dance has indeed played a huge social and political role in African societies. Hence, the necessity for this article to borrow from Gittens's (2012) and Ostern's (2010) discussion of how dance can symbolically express hidden political meanings and how meanings of dance are created within specific dance spaces, respectively. Dance, especially during the 1960s, has, as noted by Gittens (2012), enabled the body of the oppressed subject to express the resistant discourses that could not be openly expressed under colonial oppression and racial as well as gender exclusion. Furthermore, when African dance was exported globally, as noted in the exportation of West African dance to the United States (Gittens, 2012), spatial divisions became disrupted, as African and the American dances became connected culturally, and the diaspora and its African antecedents became interlinked. To this synergy between dance and spatial travel, we add new meanings that were constructed by the audience or through the dance itself in the different spaces. Gittens (2012) actually examines the shifting nature of West African dances in New York from the 1960s to the 2000s, thus implying that as the social-political spatiality and time changes, so do the perceptions and meanings of dance ascribed to the West African dances. This resonates with Ostern's (2010) argument that different spaces lead to various meaning-making processes, which she arrives at in her study of the way different dancers created different spaces in her studio. As such, as we read Ndhkala's and Zimunya's works, it becomes interesting to determine the nature of the dance and the cultural, political, and other meanings that are constructed from the actual space of the pre-colonial and village dance circle entered by Jikinya and John, in comparison with the dance space of the city night club entered by Zimunya's female dancer in the era of the 1970s Rhodesian colonial modernity.

This article therefore seeks to examine Ndhkala's and Zimunya's representation of dance to determine the extent to which both writers are able to capture and depict the essence and spirit of *jikinya* during the different periods in Zimbabwe's historical and Afrocentric social-spatial trajectories.

The Myth of Jikinya

While Ndhkala artistically reconstitutes Jikinya the dancer in the pre-colonial socio-political and time space, Zimunya does the same in the colonial. For instance, Ndhkala incorporates Zimbabwean dance folklore into his narrative through naming the girl child, Jikinya, thus linking dance and the socially

significant moment in Shona life, the naming ceremony and the cultural positivity associated with the hope that the girl will thrive and add to the family and community. The Jikinya myth is located in the social imaginary and epoch of the pre-colonial fairy space, where the most beautiful girl and best dancer who stayed with her grandmother, would sing a song to alert her grandmother upon her return from the late night dances that she enjoyed so much. However, a greedy hyena, which had studied Jikinya's song, came to the hut one night, sang the song, ate the grandmother after she had opened the door, and finally devoured Jikinya after her return (Ndhlala, 1984). Kahari (2009) suggests that the killer-hyena is an embodiment of the mythical dissembling trickster that cheats other animal characters of the folktales and which is here emblematically similar to the modern European colonialist intruder who tricked the Africans of their countries' natural resources and sovereignty. The folklore in Ndhlala's *jikinya* narrative gives a sense of both African myth and history of cultural transformation (Kahari, 2009) and shows how Zimbabweans in various epochs coped with their lived spaces. The same sense can be felt in Zimunya's poetry where the fabled dancer conjures both Zimbabwean cultural depth and the dynamic role of dance in cultural and nationalist consciousness. In addition, both texts demonstrate the function of females in pre-colonial and colonial spaces. Women are storytellers, guardians, namers, spiritual leaders, and dancers. The Jikinya myth, therefore, embodies knowledge about Zimbabwean Shona cosmogony and also expresses the Shona cultural worldview or ideology. People, thus engaged in dances, as noted in Ndhlala's description of the rain and wrestling dances, for their socio-political, ideological, entertainment, ritualistic, didactic, and communicative value. Although Ndhlala's and Zimunya's replaying of *jikinya* myth recognizes the germane role of dance in Zimbabwean socio-cultural realms, the same myth somehow authorizes a patriarchal discourse that undermines feminine dance. As Bastian and Mitchell (2004) note that one core function of myth is to "justify, validate or explain" (p. 2) why certain social systems, rites, and customs exist, then the dancing Jikinya justifies masculine censorship of women, presumed from the folktale, as hopping each night from one dance party to the next, entertaining male suitors. Furthermore, both the relayed myth and Ndhlala's narrative (unlike Zimunya's poems) suggest that the love of dance brings disaster. This seems so because Jikinya, the folktale dancer, causes the death of her grandmother in the folktale while Ndhlala's Jikinya causes the death of many Ngaru people in the novel. Yet, the spontaneous collective participation in dance that is evident in both folktale and fiction belies the suggestion that the love for dance is disastrous. Despite the moral of the fable seemingly being pessimistic, the fact remains that the best dancer in the land was also the most beautiful.

In invoking the name Jikinya, Ndhhlala's Tsitsi and Chedu are praying that their adopted child could also be as beautiful and as skillful a dancer. With hindsight, the foster parents might even have been more caring than Jikinya's grandmother in the folktale. For instance, they attend and applaud their "daughter's performances as well as offer her physical protection when her safety is at stake." It can be conjectured that Ndhhlala extends, yet modifies the *jikinya* myth to project a more accommodative and racially fluid Zimbabwean community, not an aimlessly gyrating one. The image of an awesome Jikinya stirred at the nightly dances is reignited poetically in Zimunya's poetry. Jikinya is one with a sweet voice, because she "knew how to apply Vaseline (*a petroleum body protection jelly*) on a song" and possessed irresistible provocative dances. However, Zimunya's Jikinya, unlike Ndhhlala's, who is enigmatically re-inscribed as a European, is essentially African. Zimunya's (1982) Jikinya is sometimes a mythical African "dancesmith," "a bellow-blower at the gates of destiny" (pp. 28, 48) who metaphorically molds (or trains) all others into new dancers (social cohesion) or a mythical Nyaminyami mermaid dancing to the rhythmic roaring of the river Zambezi (a free spirit in the river that was later tamed through the construction of the Kariba Dam). Zimunya's Jikinya thus answers to the cultural beckoning of the colonially invaded and desecrated heritage of Zimbabwe. In that case, Zimunya's Jikinya is endowed with mythical, creative, and spiritual powers that spurred Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. In this sense, *jikinya* is not only part of Zimbabwean cosmogony and ancestral communion or communication of the living with the dead through ritual possession dance, but of a recent national cultural dawn—a precursor of the *kongonya* "war-dance" that played a significant role in boosting the morale of the colonized Zimbabweans at night meetings conducted by the nationalist fighters during the 1970s anti-colonial war. The myth can be read as an illustration of the ambivalence toward dance evident in some colonized African societies. Under colonialism, the positive connotations of Zimbabwean dance were tainted, with outstanding African dancers being tagged as temptresses seeking to destroy marriages, especially if the dancers were exceptionally beautiful like Muchaneta of Chakaipa's (1964) *Garandichauya* and Loveness of Zimunya's (1985) *Loveness*, women dancers who performed in the colonial nightclubs. Nevertheless, we contend that this negative perception only comes into being as the societies were being re-arranged into the colonial worker compound and hostel systems that arise with European-owned commercial farms, the capitalist mines and colonial urban centers.

In their literary endeavors to recreate a popular Zimbabwean myth that colonial administrators and cultural producers would otherwise despise, both Ndhhlala and Zimunya seem to fit the characterization that Fanon (1963)

offers of native intellectuals who decide to catalog “the bad habits drawn from the colonial world, and hasten . . . to remind everyone of the good old customs of the people, that people which [they] had decided contains all truth and goodness” (p. 178). The goodness in a people might be expressed through their cultural practices such as dance. Both Ndhlala and Zimunya single out the unifying *jikinya* dance to illustrate the peace, harmony, and rhythm of their nation. Of the two texts, Ndhlala’s *Jikinya* best reflects Fanon’s remarks as the text shows the people of Ngara symbolically demonstrating African hospitality, humanity, and peacefulness through dance. In that vein, every Ngara child has to be “united with the heart of the people” through a musical-dance and food ritual (Ndhlala, 1984, pp. 27-28). Although *Jikinya* is different from all children of Ngara in complexion and hair texture (being White), she is raised and tutored in the cultural ways of the Ngara. Hence, she is naturally initiated into the community ways through a “blistering” dance ceremony (Ndhlala, 1984). *Jikinya* becomes so much part of the society that even when Ngara’s rivals, the Changani, want her banished for bringing the curse of drought, the Ngara people vow to defend her. Thus, dance is depicted as expressing the potential of ritualistically bonding people of different ethnicities and races.

Dance also served to celebrate the victory of some individuals in the society. For example, when Tendai (*Jikinya*’s “brother”) wins the wrestling and other competitions against Vito (a herd boy character in the novel) and his elder brother, Tendai’s compatriots chant and dance in a circle, lifting him up in the air. This victor’s dance provides a glimpse of the boys’ every-day and growing-up experiences in the depicted pre-colonial social spaces. However, in Zimunya’s “*Jikinya*” (Dancer) the competitions are in the performance of the dance itself, with the impressive performer being rewarded with a dance challenge with *Jikinya* or carrying *Jikinya* on his knee or lap. In “*Jikinya*” (An African Passion), Zimunya (1982) seems to suggest that the exhortation to continually “dance *Jikinya* dance” (p. 48) echoes that nationalist encouragement to wage the liberation war. Dance, being a culturally acceptable way to bestow honor to heroes, therefore encouraged people to perform brave feats even among herd boys and the colonially oppressed.

Ndhlala further represents the pre-colonial Black Zimbabweans as hospitable to Whites, thereby subverting the Eurocentric discourses that associate African dance with savagery and violence. Gonye’s (2012) article recognizes the continued harnessing of dance as a nonverbal performance of foreign policy where traditional Zimbabwean dances are performed to welcome preferred diplomats at Harare International Airport. The Ngara dancers are unlike the so-called civilized White Americans who consider first “the shape of one’s body, the colour of one’s skin and/or the texture of one’s hair” before the

expertise of the dancer (Patton, 2011, p. 105). It is a stylistic strength that Ndhkala allows John, an outsider, a perspective which reveals both the exotic and anthropological tinges of the Western thought as he views Africa and its cultural practices. John realizes, in his witnessing of Ngara dances and experiences, that the human spirit and culture is not confined only to the written and Christian and European courts but also found in “distant” serene places like the Ngara of Zimbabwe. John, like a figure in some Mennepeian satire, had sojourned into a distant corner of pre-colonial Zimbabwe which innocently lets him into African traditional religion, ritual, and dance. The Ngara recognize one Supreme God, *Mwari*; therefore, their rituals are surprisingly comparable with Christian ones. As old Tichafa (the wise, elderly leader of the Ngara) insinuates, to understand a people’s religion, you need to experience their performances, rituals, and dances. This analogy works particularly well with dance for it is through dance that people may communicate what their “oppressed voices” may not (Gittens, 2012, p. 51). Hence, John realizes, through his experiences of the Ngara people’s earnest dances and other collective performances that enabled them to commune with their ancestors and God, and pray for peace, rain, and good harvests, that his own people’s industrial civilization was one and not the only alternative among other civilizations.

Zimbabwean writers, therefore, seem to idealize their prime cultural practices, which, as the article argues, appears to confirm European stereotypes on dance. This section has demonstrated that both Ndhkala and Zimunya have enabled an appreciation of the social, religious, and political well-being of their Zimbabweans through an attention to the *jikinya* myth. Ndhkala’s and Zimunya’s representations of the mythical *jikinya* dance in both fictional prose and poetry, respectively, indicate the symbolic, cultural, and political significance of the dances of Zimbabwe.

Ndhkala’s and Zimunya’s Depiction of the Aesthetics of the *Jikinya* Dance

Jikinya appears as both an idealized dancing character and a dance motif in two different literary modes set in different historical periods. The article, however, probes what readers discern of *jikinya* dance from Ndhkala and Zimunya, well aware of how the *jikinya* dance myth is foreshadowed by the rush in dance criticism that attempts to show where “dance may begin to look richer and less mysterious” (Morris, 2005, p. 6). This article thus demystifies the *jikinya* dance and interprets its structural aspects as given by Ndhkala and Zimunya, as critical research on literary representations remains non-existent in Zimbabwe. Therefore, beyond the sociology of dance, scholarship may not provide much understanding on the typology of Zimbabwean dance. This is

in a global context where the “ephemerality” of dance is due to limited research in the field unlike in literature, architecture, or art (Forster, 1996; Morris, 2005). This lack in criticism is much worse concerning literary representations of Zimbabwean dance. Although the use of the dance motif in these Zimbabwean literary texts seems to suggest that dance is a conduit of social, religious, and cultural reality, there are still inadequate linguistic descriptions of the dance routines and its formal features.

For any people to perform a dance, they need to understand the grammar of that dance (Kaepler, 2000). Literary representations of dance should therefore contribute to readers’ understanding of the dance performing communities, the purposes of dance, and allow readers to appreciate the steps and moves involved, in case they may want to learn them. Much as they raise the social, religious, or ceremonial value of dance, these allusive dance texts remain frugal on the dance’s aesthetics and vocabulary. The recurrence of the *jikinya* archetype therefore justifies the desirability of a descriptive narrative and defining discourse for that myth and dance.

Although both writers employ dance for stylistic and thematic purposes, for the non-initiated reader, there is no clarity on what or who *Jikinya* actually constitutes as a dance or dancer, respectively. However, both writers’ incorporation of *jikinya* into their formalistic textual narratives allows each to render epochal attitudes and configurations of the dancing body, dance history, and ideology. For instance, Ndhhlala writing on the eve of Zimbabwe’s 1980 independence from colonialism, returns to pre-colonial 19th century Zimbabwe for his dance material. Readers would have expected the routines, moves, and turns to be embodied in representatives of that African past. Yet, surprisingly, the female body that expertly dances *jikinya*, a European girl, is borrowed from the “modern” 20th century European colonial society. The novel *Jikinya* (Ndhhlala, 1984) has, through naming and performance (among other issues), fulfilled Ndhhlala’s experiment to have a racially inclusive Zimbabwe through making a White protagonist perform the role of a Black legend. However, Ndhhlala’s description of dance per se remains muted and implied.

It should be noted that Ndhhlala, in keeping with the claim that in Africa dance is hardly separable from the music and drums (Nketia, 1974), attempts in some instances to describe in detail the dance style and performance in *Jikinya*. An apt example is in the description of the rain dance ceremony where we witness the rhythm of the ritual moment as Tendai and other drummers beat the drums gracefully into the night. Ndhhlala explicitly describes both context of performance and pattern of the rain dance in a way that invokes the Durkheimian collective nature of African circular, group dances. It is from the way the dancers move from the edge of the circle in the

moment's effervescence, decide to enter, demonstrate, and compete or enthusiastically watch and urge the performers, that we note the way the participants interact with the dance space. Nevertheless, it seems Ndhhlala does not lucidly elaborate on the basic dance steps involved in the Shona *mukwere*—rain dance. The scene we imagine is of high solemnity as suggested in the carefully chosen diction such as the “solemn steps of the rain dance,” the slow “trembling to the beat of drums,” and the moving arms and legs that merge into “one glorious spectacle” (Ndhhlala, 1984, pp. 102-103). It is the description of Jikinya's trembling and treading on the ground with her “long slender legs moving with the drums” that comes closest to the definition of *jikinya* as a dance whose steps are guided by and interpret the African drumbeat. Almost concurring with this fictional representation, Mheta (2005), a Zimbabwean ethnomusicologist defines *jikinya* as a dance in which the performers dance according to the rhythm of the drum being played. But, as suggested above, to describe a dancer's choreography as “trembling” or “moving with the drum” is apprehended easier by those present during the performance.

Zimunya, however, assigns a cultural and creative role to the dancer in his Jikinya poems. The poems, written before independence but published in 1982, reconstitute the mythical dancing female figure concurrently re-configured by Ndhhlala. The creative female dancer continues to be at the service of male entertainment seekers as in male gazing patriarchal traditions (Mulvey, 1975/1997). In “Jikinya” (Dancer), the female dancer amuses the bar patrons. In “Jikinya” (An African Passion), Zimunya re-configures the persistently dancing Jikinya as if suggesting that despite colonialism and the attendant alienating industrial development, Jikinya keeps African culture active. This could be why Zimunya borrows the oral song and refrain “Tamba Jikinya naBaba” (or dance Jikinya, oh with Father) as suggesting one of the many creative ways of keeping Zimbabwean cultures and myths alive. Thus, Zimunya situates his Jikinya in both the colonial city and rural spaces of pre-independence Zimbabwe, which both contests and confirms African acculturation by Westerners. In addition, Zimunya's poems' description of African dance confirms *jikinya* as a community song and dance. This is epitomized in the beautiful character whose musical dances provided the “anesthetic” and “antidote,” which symbolize dance's therapeutic succor (Zimunya, 1982, p. 25) recognized locally and globally by dance movement therapists (Thram, 2003). The poem “Jikinya” (Dancer) establishes that such community dances were performed at night, thus providing entertainment and diversion to many Zimbabweans. Besides, Zimunya endows the Jikinya character with the capacity to excite awe, admiration, and sexual feelings. However, Zimunya seems more intent to endow Jikinya with voluptuousness than to

linguistically recreate the dance steps. For instance, in “Jikinya” (Dancer), the voice spends more energy describing how sexually appealing Jikinya’s body and her dances are than in describing the steps themselves. The description of the dance performance consists of images of the male gaze and sexual yearning, as aptly noted in the persona gazing at Jikinya’s body “with male eyes” and he begging for permission “to stare boldly/with night-lighting stare eyes” (Zimunya, 1982, p. 25). Zimunya thus entrenches Zimbabwean dance in a phallogocentric discourse similar to that of the West about Africa through his descriptions of the erotic gyrations (K. W. Asante, 2000; Lindfors, 2001; Netto, 2005).

Zimunya also sexualizes and fetishizes Jikinya. First, he uses the stimulus-response scenario of the night-club dance context as noted in the exclamation to the female dancer, “since you sat on my knee/my eyes are like berserk oxen under yoke” and thus further yearns to watch “[her] hip roll like a wave” (Zimunya, 1982, pp. 26-27). Second, he employs sexually suggestive images couched in “deep sighs” and a lecherous gesture of the male’s “embracing arms” as he dances toward “this flame of passion.” Nonetheless, raising *jikinya* as a typical African phenomenon, Zimunya recreates, in the poem, the interconnectedness of steps, performance, whistling, the “drum-thud-thub,” and the voice, hinted elsewhere by Nketia (1974). Sadly, though, the dance routine, its movement, acceleration, changes, and techniques do not clearly come out in the poem. Instead, readers only get a glimpse of the moves in the reminder that the dance would be incomplete, “without the legs agog/and the hips rolling with the jerk of the waterbird/and female fingers at the wide-stretched ends/of the skirt” (Zimunya, 1982, p. 26). Thus, although the use of imagery enables Zimunya to creatively intensify the moment of dance, he still does not describe the dance moves involved in simple and explicit terms, which makes it difficult for those who do not know Zimbabwean dance to imagine the dance beyond the rolling hips.

These pelvis gazing images are the closest we get to an understanding of *jikinya* as a dance. Otherwise, other descriptions are of the dancer’s prowess as well as her physical and spiritual indispensability for the occasion. For instance, Zimunya’s (1982) persona in “Jikinya” (Dancer) makes us understand that as a spiritual and national inspiration, Jikinya was like a medium to whose shrine all mortals brought their problems and desires: “sadness,” “tears,” “scars,” “thirst,” and “emptiness” (p. 27). Zimunya complicates the myth of Jikinya, embodying her as both a creator and a symbol of the Nyaminyami serpent-mermaid inhabiting the musically cascading Zambezi River. In “Jikinya” (Dancer), Jikinya is “a bellow-blower/at the gates of destiny” responsible for molding all the obedient dance neophytes into expert dancers (Zimunya, 1982, p. 28). Furthermore, in the poem “Jikinya” (An

African Passion), her dances feed the liberation war background “across the raped land.” The creative force Zimunya associates the Jikinya myth reminds the readers of the feminist liberating activity of Cixous’s (1976) new Medusa. Thus, the *jikinya* song and dance, and its invoked African “tom-toms” (Fodeba in Fanon, 1963), blend with the noise, violence, and identity formations of the 1970s Zimbabwean war.

From the foregoing, it appears that the drum, music, or song determines the steps for the *jikinya* dance. To “*chikinya*,” as Mheta (2005, p. 44) intimates, is to dance to the rhythm of a drum. As there are different beats of drums and dynamics in music, there could therefore be different *jikinya*-s depending on the context and purpose of each ceremony. *Jikinya*, which we state here might be the Shona equivalent of the noun “dance” or verb “to dance” could therefore be a prototype of all Zimbabwean dances from which all the other styles such as *mbakumba*, *muchongoyo*, *jerusarema*, *mhande*, and the rest may emerge as per function. This is so because though most Zimbabweans associate the word *jikinya* with competitive dance and mythical dancers, in Zimbabwe, there is apparently no dance type called *jikinya* the way a dance may be called foxtrot or *samba*. However, the *jikinya* myth confirms Zimbabweans as creators and lovers of dance.

Conclusion

It is evident from the analysis that both Ndhlala and Zimunya, despite their limited vocabulary of *jikinya*’s formal features, have fruitfully represented *jikinya* as both Zimbabwean dance and myth that facilitates the construction of the nation’s social and historical memories. Ndhlala shows both Black and White bodies dancing African *jikinya* together in the temporal mélange of colonial pacification. These muted images of dance interestingly occur at a time when resilient indigenous dances were being targeted for extermination and replacement. However, Zimunya uses the *jikinya* figure to show the African subject inscribing her presence in a politically awakening colonial city. In addition, both Ndhlala and Zimunya sexualize *jikinya* dance by using the female body as a potential site for desire, with Zimunya’s description of the female dancer potentially risking falling into the sexist social constructions of gender and sexuality that appeals to male voyeuristic preponderance. As a result, their descriptions of the dance steps have remained meager, meaning that an incomplete picture of *jikinya* still obtains. Both have, however, assigned diverse meanings to the dancing female body and the actual dance. First is the racial construction of the African ideal dancer. Second is the mythical as well as the spiritual conduit dancer (similar to Vera’s dancing Mbuya Nehanda) and third is the female “other” who provides visual and

sexual gratification to the male spectators. Finally, the article shows how Ndhkala's and Zimunya's depictions of *jikinya* have helped to discuss aspects such as dance in pre-colonial rural and colonial urban spaces as well as dance and intercultural/racial relations. Their depictions of *jikinya* point to the view that dance is not simply entertainment but also symbolic and spiritual. Dance, in myth and lived experience, indeed has the power to transcend petty ethnic differences and deep-seated racial prejudices. However, it appears that by reincarnating Jikinya, a mythical African dancer as a White protagonist, Ndhkala succeeds more in putting African dance into dispersal, into the global no-owner's space than in depicting dance as an intercultural cohesive force as opposed to Zimunya's more sexist Afrocentric approach, which, however, retains Black African Jikinya-s.

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