

## Zimbabwean Indigenous Dance Research: A Reflection on the Past and Present Approaches

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### Abstract

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This article attempts to give an overview of the past and present approaches and scope to the study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances. The academic study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances is assumed to be largely under the jurisdiction of disciplines such as ethnomusicology, musicology and anthropology. Little or no attempt has been made to study indigenous dances in Zimbabwe from an ethnochoreological standpoint. Ethnomusicologists constitute the largest group of scholars momentarily contributing to the study of indigenous dances. At the risk of an overstatement for the sake of the present discussion, I would like to characterise the thrust of Zimbabwean indigenous dance research to be on what dance as a social complex phenomenon can tell us about the nature and social construct of Zimbabwean communities and not on the choreological features of dance. For these reasons, it becomes circumspect to push for a balanced scholarly treatment of ethnomusicological, anthropological and ethnochoreological aspects of indigenous dances in Zimbabwe.

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**Keywords:** anthropology, ethnochoreology, ethnomusicology, Zimbabwean indigenous dance, methods, approaches.

### Introduction

It is very unfortunate that Zimbabwean indigenous dances,<sup>1</sup> which occupy a prominent position in all aspects of life in Zimbabwe were, and still are, neglected in academic institutions and literature on culture and heritage. There is very little written, recorded, and systematically preserved information on indigenous dances and what has been documented and preserved is extremely difficult to access. The most dominant source of information for indigenous dances in Zimbabwe is oral tradition. The oral tradition described by Jan Vansina as ‘a source of knowledge about the past--which are transmitted from one person to another,’ remains the most dynamic, especially with the people who are still performing the dance and living the traditions (Vansina, 1965:11). Those who have shown research interests in indigenous dances have been and are scholars who represent the principal perspectives of socio-cultural anthropologists, missionaries, colonialists, ethnomusicologists, musicologists, and most recently ethnochoreologists. Ethnomusicologists have been mostly responsible for the little literature available on indigenous dances in Zimbabwe.

Historical waves, such as colonialism, evolutionism, and the functionalism of British, French and American anthropological schools of thought, among others have indirectly impacted on the study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances. These external forces, to a great extent, directed the methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks to the study of indigenous dances in Zimbabwe. These waves have also meant that various phases can be differentiated, as various researchers from diverse academic disciplines and with different purposes and perspectives-at different or similar periods in history -have used a multiplicity of methods to study Zimbabwean dances. The study of dance in Zimbabwe can be categorised into three major well defined periods. These periods are pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial.

In the pre-colonial (1000-1887) and colonial (1888-1980) eras, there was hardly anybody we can call a dance researcher. There were only missionaries, travellers and colonial representatives who produced general reports and

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descriptions on Zimbabweans and their cultures. The reports were not specifically on dance topics but various aspects of life connected to dance, such as religious, political and social life. The third and more recent period is the post-colonial era (1980-date). This period includes a small but increasing number of primarily Zimbabwean scholars from various disciplines such as musicology, ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology. This group attempts to use and mix anthropological, historical, ethnomusicological approaches and very minimal ethnochoreological tools to the study of indigenous dances in Zimbabwe.

### **Definitions**

Dance is notoriously difficult to define and there is no single universally accepted definition of dance. This is not only because “the concept of dance” is a “complex phenomenon” but also since, it is comprehended differently by scholars from different academic disciplines and people from non-academic disciplines. Over the past decades, there have been efforts to define and delineate the concept of dance. These efforts were from a multiplicity of perspectives, ranging from ethnomusicology, anthropology, ethnochoreology, sociology, philosophy, etc. As a result of the disarray emanating from the interdisciplinary and cross-cultural nature of the “concept of dance”, I am going to discard the most dominant, purely Eurocentric definitions altogether and go for cross-cultural centred definitions of dance from scholars who represent European and non-European perspectives.

To start with, dance can be defined as a performance art form in which the basic tool is the body and it is purposefully selected movements in an intentionally rhythmical and culturally pattern with an aesthetic value and symbolic potential (Fraleigh, 1987:48). From an African perspective, Fraleigh’s definition left out a lot to be considered cross-cultural definitions of dance. Her understanding of dance did not address the issue of context. As such there is need to try other definitions from other scholars. In her effort to provide an all-inclusive definition of dance Kealiinohomoku tentatively coined the following definition:

Dance is a transient mode of expression, performed in a given form and style by the human body moving in space. Dance occurs through purposefully selected and controlled rhythmic movements; the resulting phenomenon is recognised as dance both by the performers and observing members of a given group (1983: 542).

The two major pertinent facts which differentiate this definition from the Western conceptualisation of dance as the movement of the body are; associating dance to human behaviour since there is no need to regard the movement of animal bodies as dance. The other point is that the definition is attaching dance to a given group of people. However, it is not addressing the issue of the context of the performance of the dance. In Zimbabwe and most African countries, indigenous dances are created and performed in sacred and secular contextual settings. Hannah (1973) suggests that African dance is a cultural behaviour, determined by the values, activities, and beliefs of a people. I concur with Hannah because African dances, Zimbabwean included, are interdisciplinary and they embrace various traits of life such as political, social, religious and cultural aspects. Asante (2000:4), specifically defines Zimbabwean indigenous dance as an artistic way of expression well made, beautiful, pleasing to senses, virtuous, useful, correct, appropriate, and confirming to the customs and expectations in a given cultural context. The terms used by Asante to describe indigenous dances of Zimbabwe attracted me most, not because she defined dance in the shoes of Zimbabweans, but on the fact that her definition is broad, inclusive, appreciative, and culture-specific. Therefore, her definition constitutes the fulcrum of my discussion and arguments on the past, present and emerging trends of indigenous dance research in Zimbabwe.

### **Approaches by early missionaries and explorers**

There are various approaches which might have been used to study Zimbabwean indigenous dances in the past, for instance, evolutionist and comparative approaches, however, the author will only provide a detailed discussion on methods with concrete examples and references to avoid generalisation. The absence of an in-depth study of indigenous dance in Zimbabwe during the pre-colonial era and early part of the colonial period does not necessarily mean that Zimbabwe had no dance traditions by then. During the pre-colonial era, there was hardly what we would call dance research anywhere in Zimbabwe, if not even in the whole world. Most of the authors were missionaries or colonial government representatives (Asante 2000).

Their aims were largely attached to cultural, religious, and political imperialism. Their reports were not specifically on dance but on general issues of life in which dance is a component. This implies that most of the reports were largely on Zimbabwean communities in general and dance activities were rarely mentioned more than in passing, sometimes not mentioned at all. Gertrude Caton Thompson (1931), an archaeologist, British by nationality studied the

cultures of the inhabitants of the ancient city of Great Zimbabwe in Masvingo province. Most of the missionaries and explorers did not take a long time to observe, participate, experience and familiarise themselves with indigenous cultural practices of Zimbabwe in depth. As a result of being influenced by evolutionistic and Puritanistic sentiments, they besmirched Zimbabwean indigenous dance practices as primitive, barbaric, uncivilised and backward. This is supported by Michelina (2006) who suggests that the settlers, colonial authorities and missionaries considered many traditional dances in Zimbabwe as “magical, witchcraft and heathen”. Asante (2000) insists that many European observers regarded African indigenous dances in general as “wild” and “exotic”, with little aesthetic value. Their main agenda was to suppress or submerge indigenous dances in African countries and pave way for Western dances such as *cha-cha-cha*, *fox-trot ballroom*, and *ballet*<sup>2</sup>. For instance, using the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899<sup>3</sup>, the British colonial government in Zimbabwe banned *nyawo* dance in the mid-1920s (Parry, 1999). They did not know that Zimbabwean indigenous dances, in general, differed with a wide margin from European dances. They regarded Zimbabwean dances as witchcraft<sup>4</sup> and this gave rise to, among the missionaries and colonialists, the spirit of antipathy and, indeed fright and estrangement. As a result of this “antipathy, fright and estrangement” the missionaries and explorers painted African dances black and misrepresented them in Western media and writings of the time.

These early explorers hardly participated in or closely observed the cultures they wrote about and discussed which led to a shocking misrepresentation of all dancing activities in Africa. It is a gross error to think of groups of people or their dances as being monolithic wholes (Kealiinohomoku, 1983:534). From a comparative approach, they found ritual and activities in which dance is practised more frightening, and thought that if the dances were to be performed in the context of European countries, they would be banned. What the early missionaries and explorers were adamant to appreciate was that dance permeates all sectors of life in Zimbabwean communities, and chances are very slim that one could observe an event, be it funeral, ceremony, ritual and beer drinking party without being exposed to a dance performance. Merriam (1974:177) maintains that “dance is culture and culture is dance” and, as a result, it is impossible to study Zimbabwean culture without studying the dances. The way the early missionaries and explorers regarded Zimbabwean dance activities was similar to the way they referred to African cultures in general, and religion was no exception. Religious activity so different from Christianity, “the only true faith” was the ultimate proof for Westerners that Africans were uncivilized and lost, with no respect for God. From a Zimbabwean perspective, it is not easy to separate religion from dance practices. Most of the dances are very religious and the people too. Although in the more recent stages of the study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances, scholars attempted to paint the dances more politely and positively; unfortunately, such misconceptions and prejudices still follow some intellectuals today. This is evidenced by the research conducted by Gwerevende (2017) on the perceptions of school heads, parents, teachers and students on the introduction of dance as a stand-alone subject in secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Most of the interviews confirmed that, based on Christian sentiments, dance is an unpopular subject and most schools are not interested in offering dance as part of the school curriculum.

### **Anthropological Approaches**

The study of dance under the auspices of socio-cultural anthropology in most African countries was promoted by colonialism. Ikenga-Metuh (1987:5) insists that colonialism created a conducive environment in which anthropologists could conduct extensive fieldwork to document the traditions, customs, beliefs, and practices of African indigenous people before these beliefs and traditions could be contaminated and diluted by Western religion in the form of Christianity. The study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances was part and parcel of the traditional cultural anthropology which was used in many African countries, originated and facilitated by two different schools of thought: British and French. Ray (1976:7) suggests that unfortunately this “slanted ethnographic fieldwork studies concerning the nationality of the scholar, and thus imposed a “colonialist” structure upon the study of African societies. The British socio-cultural anthropologists were concerned with sociological aspects of culture, kinship systems and political organisation. On the other hand, the French anthropologists were much more concerned with how forms of cultural practices illuminate African cosmological systems and their implicit philosophical assumptions.

For example, Evans-Pritchard’s (1928:458), representing the British anthropological school of thought, conducted ethnographic fieldwork on the Zande funeral beer dance performance known as the *gbere buda*. He used the dance to understand aspects of children socialisation and the institutions of marriage and the family.

Besides, for the British ethnographers, the study of indigenous dances aimed to understand their roles in the socio-political frameworks, how dance activities were used to sustain religious and social order, and how dance reflects the social structure of African communities. This functionalistic approach to indigenous dance in Africa, by the British anthropologists, was later changed, with Evans-Pritchard’s (1965) approach to the understanding and

explaining the meaning of African systems of ideas within their orbit. Whereas the French anthropologists were much more focused on African world views to illustrate that, African dances are not simply indications of socio-religious and economic relations, but that they constitute consistent and independent systems of thoughts and actions. For example, Malinowski (1948) and Boas (1830) mostly approached dance as a component of ritual activities. As a result, one can conclude that French anthropologists or those who were affiliated to the French school of thought regarded Zimbabwean indigenous dances as a determinant of the social construct, and the law, mythologies, taboos, ethics and ritual systems of African societies. This perspective was adopted by Bourdillon (1976), a social anthropologist who studied the Shona people and provided snapshots of dance information as segments of religious ritual activities such as *Kurova gwa* (beating the grave), a ceremony performed to bring back home the spirit of a deceased family member and *Mukwerera* or *Mutoro* rain making ceremony.

### Historical Approach

Present-day scholars of African indigenous dance are of the view that, until recently, dance from an African perspective had not been approached from a historical standpoint, due to a lack of documentary sources and archaeological literature, as well as the bias of anthropology against dance history. Western anthropologists published an account of African dances that highlighted the current social religious and cultural conditions, rather than projecting dance as something prone to change. Asante (2000) suggests that, despite the prominence of the *Shona* people in religious and cultural architecture and iron making, dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there are few allusions to their dance in the historical and anthropological works of various authors. Historians such Ashwanden (1989) and Bourdillon (1990) wrote about *Mutoro* rain-making ceremony<sup>5</sup>, but they make no reference to *mbande* dance, yet it is an important segment which is performed at various stages of the ceremonial process. Despite this, Western dance anthropologists such as Georgiana Gore (1994), a French dance anthropologist, could not deny the historicity of African indigenous dance. For instance, she studied indigenous dances in West Africa from a historical perspective, although the historical perspective was written from an anthropological perspective. Asante wrote about the history of dances in Zimbabwe with particular reference to *mbende* and *muchongoyo*. *Mbende* is a couple dance of the Zezuru people in Mashonaland East province whereas *muchongoyo* is a war dance of the Ndau people in Manicaland province. Beach (1998) studied the history of the Great Zimbabwe State; he mentions the dance and music activities in passing. There is a wide academic gap in the study of indigenous dance in Zimbabwe and African countries in general, from a historical perspective. Raising her concern on the lack of academic literature on dance in the past, Hanna (1988: 281) insists that, “a system of palpable, vital signs, dance is a barometer of theology, ideology, worldview and social change. Yet dance does not figure prominently in religious or other non-dance scholarly disciplines”. Hanna’s observation has been cemented by Gore (1994) who raised her voice on the acute shortage of source material on traditional dances of West Africa. In Zimbabwe dance is central to religious, social, economic and political activities, but it does not feature in historical accounts of ancient communities, yet so many historians wrote about religious, political, economic and social activities of Zimbabwean ancient past but very little was written on dance.

### Attempts by Zimbabwean scholars to study Zimbabwean indigenous dances

Various groups of Zimbabwean scholars have attempted to study indigenous dance from an *emic* (insider) perspective. Locally and internationally trained scholars, compelled by nationalistic and cultural sentiments adopted ethnographic fieldwork methods to study indigenous dances in Zimbabwe. During the colonial period, local scholars were very few because of the stigmatisation of anthropology as a discipline on the grounds of it being too linked with colonial enterprise (Platvoet, 1996:121). However, in the post-colonial era, dance researchers from diverse disciplines undertook ethnographic studies on indigenous dance and they described “indigenous dance concept” in a highly contextualised approach, incorporating their own opinions and informing their studies with the ethno-philosophy in the assessment and interpretation of Zimbabwean indigenous dances. Rutsate (2007) and Ngara (2012) indicated how their background and experience of indigenous dance practice motivated and helped them to venture into the rigorous study of *mbande* and *jichi*, respectively. Unlike, Zimbabwean anthropologists, musicologists and historians, ethnomusicologists made a commendable and sound contribution to the study of indigenous dances when measured by the number of publications. Although ethnomusicologists greatly contributed to the study of indigenous dance in Zimbabwe, their researches were inclined towards anthropological and ethnomusicological aspects of dance at the expense of ethnochoreological aspects. Most of them did not address choreological aspects of dance; they were trained in ethnomusicology and not in ethnochoreology. Hence, they lack the approaches and analytical tools used in choreological studies.

A small, but growing group of Zimbabwean scholars from disciplines such as history, linguistics, and theatre studies are also conducting studies on indigenous dances from a historical standpoint. Among the few historians who studied dance in Zimbabwe, is Ndlovu (2016) who examined the role of music and dance in the second Chimurenga liberation struggle in Matabeleland province among the Ndebele people. Jesmael Mataga (2008) with an academic background in heritage management, traced the history of *mbende* indigenous dance, as a form of tangible cultural heritage production, Samuel Ravengai (2010), with an educational background in theatre studies, studied the suppression of dance cultural performance by the British colonial government in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe from 1890-1950 with specific reference to *mbende* dance. Jairos Gonye (2013), a professor in the department of English and Communication, traced the role of *kongonya* dance during the first and second *Chimurenga* wars of resistance against the British colonial government. While these are some of the local scholars who studied indigenous dances in Zimbabwe from a historical perspective, their studies were impeded by the hegemony of comparative, synchronic and unitary Zimbabwean indigenous model.

To conclude this chapter, it is important to mention that, in recent years we are witnessing an increment in the number of Zimbabwean scholars studying indigenous dances in Zimbabwe. For example, Renias Ngara, a Holder of PhD Applied ethnomusicology and Education, the Chairperson of the Visual and Performing Arts department at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU), authored several articles on *jichi* dance of the Shangwe people. Nesta Nyaradzo Mpira, a holder of Master degree in Ethnomusicology, a lecturer at the College of Arts-Africa, published articles on *mbende* dance. There are also a good number of students doing research degrees in ethnomusicology and their studies are on dance. For example, Phineas Magweti, who is a PhD student at (GZU), is working on a thesis on the use of *mbende* dance for sustainable development. Fumisai Rwaendepi, a master by research student at (GZU) is conducting a research on the repackaging of *matendera* dance for the sustenance of the Karanga people. With such a good number of local scholars, one would suggest that, as an interdisciplinary academic fraternity, dance research in Zimbabwe is no longer dominated by foreign scholars, as was in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. This is because several universities in Zimbabwe are integrating dance courses in disciplines such as heritage studies, ethnomusicology, anthropology and musicology. However, it is very unfortunate that at the moment, there is no single university offering dance studies as a stand-alone academic area of study.

### Recent trends in Zimbabwean dance research

The post-colonial era (1980-date) witnessed a new dimension to the study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances. The new direction was prompted by the need to document dances for preservation so that they would not extinct. Asante (2000) suggests that in Zimbabwe the dances have had to transform structurally to survive the colonialist government and its policies, both political and religious. The changes were on various aspects of dance, such as context, purpose and attire. The changes threaten to submerge the authenticity and originality of indigenous dances. Phibion (2003) after realising that Bakalanga musical traditions, dance included, were becoming obsolete, conducted ethnographic fieldwork on *bosana* indigenous dance of the Bakalanga people in Botswana and part of Zimbabwe.

The researches aimed to address questions such as; what is dance, what is the meaning of dance in its cultural context, and how do dances reflect the social construct of societies in which they are performed? According to Giurchescu and Torp (1991:4) dance has been regarded as a non-verbal way of expression, in the process of communication within a well-defined social-cultural context. Ngara (2012) studied *jichi* dance of the *Shangwe* people in Midlands province in Zimbabwe, the study aimed to examine *jichi* songs and dance in the context of *Mukwerera* (rain-making ceremony) as an embodiment of the *Shangwe* traditions. *Mukwerera* songs and dance are embedded in active mythological symbolism and yet the symbols had not been documented in a way to preserve them. Therefore, his study examined the meaning of *jichi* symbolic features in the form of songs and a generalised account of dance features such as props, costumes, musical structure and participants. In this regard, dance from a Zimbabwean standpoint never works independently, but in a given contextual framework. The contextual approach gave rise to the explication of the functions, meaning and purpose of dance in the socio-cultural contexts. On the other hand, Asante's goal for her ethnographic account of *mbende* and *muchongoyo* was to examine the aesthetics of Zimbabwean indigenous dances in the social and political contexts (Asante, 2000).

The recent syncretism of theories and interdisciplinary approach has resulted in a more comprehensive perspective to the study of Zimbabwean dances within their cultural contexts. Ethnomusicological studies on indigenous dances and music have been extensively conducted in various African countries. For example, at the Centre for Indigenous Instrumental African Music and dance (CIIDMA),<sup>6</sup> Professor Meki Nzewi published a plethora

of works on African indigenous performing arts, dance included. His works include volume 1 to 4, on the contemporary approach to African musical arts, which he suggests should be informed by African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and based on the culture exponents or experts' views (Nzewi 1997). His creative philosophy and practice aim at championing the interdisciplinary approach and informant centred research. Nzewi's recommendation has been central to Zimbabwean scholars as it has to other African scholars. Jerry Rutsate as the Director of the Fine Arts and Performing Arts at (GZU), borrowing a lot from Nzewi's interdisciplinary approach to the study of performing arts, greatly influenced the nature and development of musical arts programmes. Great Zimbabwe University has been mandated to be the centre of arts, culture and heritage education and research by the former president Robert Gabriel Mugabe at its inception. However, at Great Zimbabwe University, dance is not studied as a stand-alone degree but as modules under Musicology and ethnochoreology. The course title sounds balanced on the treatment of musical and choreological aspects, but an analysis of the course content reveals that the degree programme emphasises music at the expense of dance. There are only two courses related to dance studies, which are Dance ethnography and Dance choreography; the rest are inclined towards music. This is a typical representation of dance research in Zimbabwe, if not Africa as a whole. Taking a leaf from the anthropological perspectives, Zimbabwean indigenous dance has been regarded by scholars from diverse academic backgrounds as a cultural phenomenon, approached in its cultural context as provided by the socio-cultural network in which it is practised. In this case, dance has been connected to other genres of social and cultural expression thus, being integrated into the fabric of a given way of life. In this paper, I am going to provide two case studies to exemplify the approaches and conclusions of dance research in Zimbabwe.

#### **Jerry Rutsate: Performance of Mhande Song-Dance: A contextualised and comparative analysis (2007)**

Jerry Rutsate's ethnographic study of *mhande* dance of the Karanga people in Masvingo province in Zimbabwe examined the role of *mhande* song-dance in the contexts of Mutoro (the rain making ceremony or prayer) and the Chibuku Neshamwari Traditional Dance Competition. The thrust of his research was on the structural and textual analysis of *mhande* music. *Mhande* music and dance were approached from an *emic* (insider) perspective. The study provides the reader with an understanding of the *Karanga* religious dance as a cognitive system that embraces songs and body movements. Methods adopted in the study of *mhande* dance were: fieldwork, participant observation, recording of pictures, audio and video or filming. Finally, in-depth and face to face interviews with the *mhande* dance culture exponents were also undertaken.

In the findings, the research concludes that *mhande* song-dance is used as a medium of communication between the Karanga people and the *majukwa* spirits, in which the songs are used to invoke the spirits to provide rain. The recontextualisation of *mhande* through its performance in the competition is accepted by the Karanga people as a method of advertising *mutoro* ritual to attract people to attend and participate in the ceremony. He also established that rhythmically, *mhande* music is characterised by two major elements that are strongly Shona in nature, these are a) the triple guide beat and b) the emphasis on the second pulse of the three in a beat when drumming.

#### **Innocent, T. Mutero: An Ethnography on how marginalised communities in Gweru, Zimbabwe used the Chinyambera traditional dance as a coping mechanism: The case of Tavirima Traditional dance Group (2014)**

In his ethnography of *chinyambera* dance, the researcher examined the dance in its socio-cultural and political contexts, exploring its uses and means of expression. In this regard, the researcher examined how Tavirima Traditional Dance Group make use of dance as a measure to cope with life's challenges and difficulties in marginalised communities in Gweru district, Midlands province in Zimbabwe. The researcher analysed *chinyambera* songs and dance, which indicate the socio-political crisis in Zimbabwe. Like Rutsate (2007), Mutero also employed ethnographic fieldwork as a method, supported by in-depth interviews, participant observation and recording of music and dance events through the use of audio and video camera. He also used informal conversational and semi-structured interviews with members of Tavirima Traditional Dance Group to collect *chinyambera* dance information in line with his research objectives. Textual analysis was also used to provide insights into how the socio-political crisis in Gweru district influences the creation and performance of *chinyambera* dance in an urban setup.

The research found out that, Tavirima dance group uses elements of *chinyambera* such as nationalism, metaphors, venues and songs to air out their criticism against the government through performances. The group makes use of safe venues, such as open community events places and as a result, their performances will be treated as

apolitical musical activities which neither pose any harm nor influence people or the audiences politically. The club members use *chinyambera* dance to call for political change.

### Discussion on case-studies information

Generally, ethnomusicology is the main perspective at the forefront of the study of indigenous dance in Zimbabwe. Rutsate (2007) and Mutero (2014) studied dance within sacred and secular contexts. None of the two scholars approached dance from an ethnochoreological perspective; their works did not spend time on explicating choreological features of dance. Rather, they concentrated to musical aspects and the anthropological features attached to music in dance. Marret (1909) also did the same by regarding dance as a component of religious practice but did not explain its importance. Mutero (2014) in his ethnomusicological study of *chinyambera* dance, dedicated his energy and time to musical elements, which he regarded as tools used by marginalised communities in Gweru district to resist economic hardships and call for political change as a way of addressing economic challenges. In other words, he approached dance within the functionalist theoretical framework. Thram (2002) is also probably one of the scholars who did a detailed ethnography of indigenous dance in Zimbabwe in the post-colonial era although her research is not on my case study list. Her anthropology of *dandanda* dance of the *ZeZuru* people in Murehwa district in Mashonaland province is worth mentioning in this article to exemplify the nature of dance research in Zimbabwe. She incorporated historical tools in her study of *dandanda* dance. The study examined the performance of *dandanda* dance from an ethnographical standpoint of ethnomusicology and the study was informed by functionalism theoretical perspectives. Her study of *dandanda* established that the dance is used for various purposes such as healing, the rite of passage in ritual activities and entertainment in social events.

Mostly, the scholars who studied and study indigenous dance in Zimbabwe in the post-colonial period, both locals and foreigners, mainly pay attention to musical aspects, with particular reference to structural and textual analysis, transcription of songs and, to a much lesser degree, to the choreological features. Their studies on indigenous dance lack a detailed description of dance from an ethnochoreological perspective. Hanna (1979) blames this on the bourgeois Puritan ethics in which she argues many European scholars were raised. In this regard, dance was perceived as a useless form of entertainment that would distract people from serious work and life as good Christians. Puritan philosophy influenced the banning of Zimbabwean indigenous dances such as *mbende* and *nyawo* during the colonial era. *Nyawo* dance was outlawed in the 1920s (Parry 1999). *Mbende* dance was banned in 1910 but continued under an undercover Christian related name *jerusarema* (Asante 2003). Missionaries had the power to suppress any indigenous dance which they thought was not compatible with Christian doctrines and this has been the nemesis of *mbende* dance. As an explanation to the present lack of ethnochoreological study of indigenous dance, Brenda Farnell (1994) in her extensive review paper on moving bodies argues that anthropologists interested in the body had long feared allegations of biological reductionism, and therefore shied away from it.

Ethnomusicologists who studied Zimbabwean indigenous dances were blind to ethnochoreological aspects because they lacked skills, approaches and tools to record, register, talk, write and analyse them. Kringelback and Skinner (2012:5) cite a claim from dance scholars that people who have a form of “skilled vision attuned to rhythmic movement” are the ones who watch and write about dance.

### Concluding Remarks: Mapping way forward for Future Dance research

This section seeks to give ideas and visions for the future scholarly study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances. To comprehensively and holistically, understand indigenous dances of Zimbabwe, it is essential to set aside preconceived and popularly held Eurocentric theories. Zimbabwean or African indigenous dances are in general not primitive if primitive is meant to mean simple, crude or original in the sense of being without a history (Asante 2000:1). Zimbabwean dances are in-fact complex, multifaceted, sophisticated and have a very long history. The dances are not created exclusively for aesthetic ambitions - that is the dance for dance's sake, as is the case with most Western art dances; rather, they are deeply rooted in the philosophical concept of *Unhu* and the belief practice of the indigenous communities. *Unhu* is a Shona term which is also known as *Ubuntu* in Nguni languages. The concept of *Unhu/Ubuntu* is shared among many African traditions. According to Mandova and Chingombe, (2013:100) *Unhu* is a socio-cultural philosophy which embodies virtues that celebrate the mutual social responsibility, mutual assistance, trust, sharing, unselfishness, self-reliance, caring and respect for others among other ethical values. As such, *Unhu/Ubuntu* should occupy centre stage in the study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances since it is a necessary framework in which Zimbabweans can engage their way of life in existential activities indispensable for the development and continuity of the Zimbabwean society.

Zimbabwean dance scholars and other researchers interested in indigenous dances of Zimbabwe need to adopt interdisciplinary approaches to the study of dance as a way of striking a fair treatment of anthropological, sociological, ethnomusicological and ethnochoreological aspects of dance. Kelly, (2016: 97) suggests that "interdisciplinary study of dance is great but it is not easy...", other than to stick to ethnomusicological inclined methods. Whilst, I neither seek to belie nor denigrate Zimbabwean ethnomusicologists and popular Western dance research approaches, I intend to provoke dance researchers in general and specifically Zimbabweans to take up alternative methods of inquiry for the study of Zimbabwean dances. I see it as a way of uplifting and promoting dance research in general.

Zimbabwean indigenous dance knowledge system and its methodological approaches cannot be separated from its people's values, history, cultural context, and cosmology. Cosmology shapes alertness and constitutes the theoretical foundation on which knowledge is extracted and evaluated. Zimbabwean indigenous dance heritage has cultural significance and should be explored for its particular goal or focus. Concerning this line of argument, it is a detrimental colonial heritage to hail European dance research methods as universal. Therefore, Zimbabwean dance scholars should try to use indigenous dance-friendly methods informed by Afrocentric perspectives.

It is high time that dance-related departments such as anthropology and ethnomusicology in different academic institutions in Zimbabwe pave way and advocate for the establishment of dance departments which focus on dance as a stand-alone area of study integrating ethnomusicological, anthropological and choreological perspectives in the study of dance. The department of dance should advocate for the advancement of dance scholarship at both national and international level, by introducing discipline-oriented methodological approaches to researchers in and outside dance and integrating nascent, interdisciplinary methods, and theories to promote the advancement of dance knowledge as an expression and a movement practice informed by social, religious, ethno-philosophy and cultural context. The researchers should also take advantage of the advancement in technology and the widespread of Information Communication Technology and mass-media.

Continuous and intensified interactions between an increasing number of dance researchers from various disciplines such as anthropology, ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology at the national level should develop the study of dance in Zimbabwe into a stand-alone academic field of study in its right. The participation of Zimbabwean dance scholars at international academic forums such as International Council of Traditional Music Study Group can expose them to constructive debates based on holistic, interdisciplinary, comparative and partly cross-culturally mapped research paradigms and approaches.

A well-known and internationally recognised platform for this purpose is the International Council for Traditional Music Group on ethnochoreology, which provides a fertile platform for the scientific and academic study of dance cultures of the world, promoting the exchange and experimentation of past and present theoretical frameworks and research paradigms within the field of dance research. This will help Zimbabwean dance scholars to revise the concept of dance and widening the scope of research, by integrating anthropological, ethnomusicological and ethnochoreological paradigms not as opposite approaches but as complementary and necessary methods to the holistic study of Zimbabwean indigenous dances.

Conclusively, in this paper, I made it clear that in the past, Zimbabwean indigenous dance research was dominated by Eurocentric research scholars and approaches. On the other hand, the present dance research in Zimbabwe is characterised by ethnomusicological methods, some of them borrowed from cultural anthropology. The choreological voice is being sidelined, yet it is a necessary theoretical tool which should be combined with other perspectives to unearth the multi-layered features and elements of indigenous dance making in Zimbabwe, their components, meaning and purpose in the community, thereby contributing to the understanding of indigenous communities and their means of expression within the contexts of ethno-philosophy and socio-cultural milieu.

## Notes

1. Zimbabwean indigenous dances refer to dances originated by Zimbabweans and transmitted from one generation to another orally. The dances are mostly performed for sacred and secular purpose in various contextual frameworks. These dances include muchongoyo, mbende, jaka, mhande etc.
2. *Cha-cha-cha*, *tango*, *fox-trot ballroom* and *ballet*, are some of the Western dances brought to Zimbabwe by the White settlers.
3. Witchcraft Suppression Act, the law passed on 18 August 1899 by the British South African Company to stop everything they associated with the use of charms and the practice of sorcery. Some ordinance was used to ban

Zimbabwe indigenous dances basing on the fact that they were inconsistent with the principle of faith in Christianity.

4. Witchcraft broadly refers to the belief in the practical use of magical skills, abilities and charms in the practice of sorcery by solitary practitioners and groups in a given culture.
5. Mutoro/Mukwerera is a ceremony performed to ask or pray for rain from the ancestors, which is done at a shrine such as Matonjeni, Njelele and Mabweadziva by different ethnic groups of people, mostly in rural areas.
6. Centre for Indigenous Instrumental Music and Dance Practices of Africa, is an organisation or institution into the promotion and advancement of African Indigenous musical arts and dance education, research, documentation and preservation.

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