

The Contextualization of Indigenous Dance Movement. A Critical Appraisal on Tatasoso Dance Performance

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Abstract

The level of misinterpretation place on some of our indigenous dance movement has really de-emphasis its communicative potency. In Africa, dance movements are perfectly combined, nice ingenuity in its creation and aesthetically attractive. All these qualities found in our indigenous dance movement, have reduce its context to just a mere entertainment or a source of cultural identification only. But this myopic understanding cum interpretation on indigenous dance movement has really been of great concern to professional dance scholars, thereby motivating them to redress people's perception in seeing indigenous dance movement as a communicative, educative and informative tool by giving it a contextual interpretation – base on its theme, form, pattern and style. The essence of contextualization in indigenous dance movement especially that of the chosen case study Tatasoso is to x-ray the choreographer's intention both emotionally, sociologically, environmentally and religiously while creating the dance movements. At this stage the theory of art for art sake becomes secondary while communicative interpretation in dance movement takes the upper edge. This paper therefore will critically appraise Tatasoso dance movement base on its contextualization for effective understanding.

Introduction

The indigenous dance is one unique technique indigenes have in passing on their histories and beliefs. Its dance movement in Africa semiotically holds more importance than the dance steps of other cultures, since it is part of their oral history practice rather than solely for social entertainment. Richard Philips stated that;

The indigenous dance movements passed down each clan's beliefs and history long before they are written down. It is an element of the oral history of each tribal country. (24)

Indigenous dance movement has both historic and social traditions that reflect more significance than those of many other cultures. Some of the dance movements when interpreted actually portray praises to the gods for helping them during planting season, a victory in war or for successful child delivery. Kings Henry maintains that;

The steps of the individual African dances might be different but the meaning it held stayed the same and showed solidarity of the people of Africa. (26)

Indigenous dance movement in Africa cosmology is much more concerned with the use of body gestures, body movements and other dance elements for expression. The element of expression required in indigenous dance movement are; rhythm, time, space, dynamics, costume, props, make-up, lighting and music. Suru Damisa opines that;

Indigenous dance movement messages are communicate using the elements mentioned and through sign and symbol which is the primary working metaphor in dance creation. (34)

Steven as cited by Suru maintains that;

We need to express ourselves with movements. The person whose body remains constantly silent, who speaks on with words, is one who is frozen emotionally whose physical and psychic centers are atrophying and therefore we need to dance. (25)

Indigenous dance movement base on scholarly interpretation seizes to be a social entertainment as people see it, into a serious communicative tool.

An Overview on Contextualization

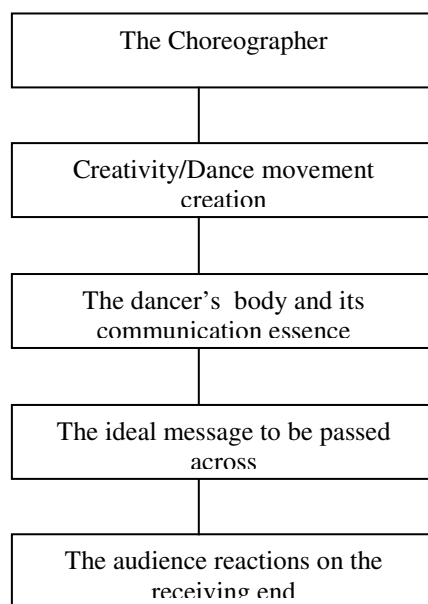
To contextualize means to put into context of a situation and it therefore does not mean changing the original meaning of a statement. In the case of contextualizing the indigenous dance movement, it simply means presenting the communicating cum interpretative potency of the dance movement either to minor the society, lampoon the society or to encourage the ruling and the ruled in the society. Contextualization helps in bringing to bare the in-depth analysis of any given performance beyond its superficial level, it is at this point one can understand what gave rise to the dance and what it is made of base on its communicative and interpretation potency. Hessel Grave as cited by Gailyn Van Rheenen maintains that;

Contextualization is a direct result of ascertaining the meaning of a performance text, consciously submitting to its authority and applying or appropriating that meaning to a given situation. (2)

In contextualization of any given performance especially in dance, the results of its analysis cum interpretation may vary in form, style, pattern and aesthetics, but it will always maintain the required meaning according to the community or society that owns it. Contextualization helps to communicate the inner most intending message, opinion and view of a choreographer before, during and after choreographing a dance movement. Akas Nicholas opines that;

In choreographing indigenous dance movements, the choreographer does choreograph in abstraction rather every of his/her choreographic movement, when interpretatively zero into centers on the community myth, cosmology and religious belief system. (24)

The positive essence of sound contextualization on indigenous dance movement aids the indigenes in understanding the inter-connecting relationship between the following;



Once this is perfectly understood by the viewing audience, then the dance movement becomes a communicative tool.

Elements To Be Considered In Contextualization Of Indigenous Dance Movement.

Some elements in contextualization of indigenous dance movement stand indispensable. They are highly indispensable because its guidelines people's perception, understanding and interpretation while watching a dance performance. It is those required elements that state categorically the essence of indigenous dance beyond aesthetics, chanting and stylized movement into a serious communicative tool. The indigenes at this point not only appreciate the dance and its well choreographic style as their own source of cultural identification rather these 4W's of what, why, where and when will be more clarified to them towards the existences of the dance. Those elements are;

1. Mythology
2. Cultural Sacredness
3. Occupation
4. Environmental factor
5. Folklore
6. Ritual

Mythology

People's belief system always affects the indigenous dance movement, as their belief system differs both in thought and action so is their dance movements. Some of the mythological essence in indigenous movement is believe to be unchangeable. Instead of changing the mythology, indigenes will prefer to die than live. It is believe that it is such mythology both in their dance, costumes, feeding and worship that makes them what they are today. And once such is uttered they automatically loose their identity and favour from their ancestral fathers.

Occupation

The people's occupation also affects their style, form and pattern of dancing. It is from the various indigenous dance style or movement that people can differentiate where each indigenous dance performance emergence from. The occupation of a particular community clarifies what gave rise to its dance movement and also it automatically aids in exposing the sociological potency behind the creation of that particular dance movement. The non-indigenes are not only thrilled with the energetic dance movements, they are also presented with the community occupational cultural identification.

Cultural Sacredness

There are some indigenous dance movements that are not meant for everybody, not of any aesthetics and strictly out of bound for non-indigenes. When such dance movements are been performed it is strictly to actualizes its ideal purpose. At this point the dance movement becomes strictly for the initiates who are well trained in the choreographic movement and how to interpret the communicative potency of the movement. The cultural sacredness in some indigenous dance movement differentiates the full initiates from non-initiates, and makes them superior

Folklore

Folklore serves as an important tool in creating indigenes dance movement. Some of the indigenous dance movement when contextualizes are reenacting the popular folklore stories into dance movements. The reenacting of folklore into serious dance movements presents it as a didactic tool in the lives of indigenes.

Benefits of Contextualization

1. It is always flexible and adaptable.
2. It can enhance engagement and motivation by providing relevancy to workforce skills.
3. It can help to accelerate the pace of access to festivals event and occasion.
4. It helps to address challenges that might surface through misinterpretation of indigenous dance movement.
5. It helps in bringing the meaning of the dance much more close to the people.

The essence of contextualization in dance as a profession

Dance has been misinterpreted by some people as a non-profession, so whoever that claims to be a dancer by profession is seen as unserious person, lazy person and cannot be associated with for a serious business outside mere entertainment. But with aid of contextualization in dance , it can now be appreciated as a serious act beyond entertainment and can also been seen as profession. Akas opines that;

The myopic understanding or viewing of dance has devalued the professional essence of dance in the eyes of some people thereby seeing it as an act of mediocrity, where anybody can claim to be a dancer or dance profession whether acquiring formal training of being a dancer or not. (24)

The sole essence of contextualization in dance is to bring to bare what makes dance a core profession when compared with others and not to be seen as mediocrity.

Core aims of interpretation on indigenous dance movement in education

1. To learn in, through and about dance as an aesthetic and artistic form of symbolic representation and expressive communication.
2. To develop the ability to engage as participants, creators, viewers and critical inquires in, through and about dance as a form of social and cultural expression.
3. To participate in dance and learn to use the body as a form of expressive communication.
4. To develop an understanding of dance as a socio-cultural phenomenon.
5. To instill a sense of pride in one's own identity through dance movement.
6. To foster understanding through dance about the people who live in our local community and their relationship to the global village.

Ways of developing a contextualization perceptive on indigenous dance movement

1. To explore and use dance elements, vocabularies, technologies of various dance forms, style and genres.
2. To always see the body as an indispensable tool of the dancer.
3. To critically view, respond to, reflect on, analyse and develop increasingly informed judgments about indigenous dance performance.
4. To always investigate, appreciate and learn about dance in relation to its social and cultural contexts

both past and present.

ANALYSIS ON TATASOSO DANCE MOVEMENT PRODUCTION

Brief Insight Into The Dance

The tatasoso dance performance is an indigenous dance production choreographed by Uzomma Akamere. The communicative potency of the dance centers on the fast leg movements of the muscular male dancers. The fast leg movement of the dancers when merely looked into by the live audience, it is purely an aesthetic movement and very attractive. But in the mind set of the choreographer (Uzomma Akamere) he uses the dance movements of dancers to portray the following;

1. Tatasoso Brevity
2. Tatasoso Protection
3. Tatasoso Struggler
4. Tatasoso The Achiever

The tatasoso dance performance is all about using leg movements to depict what young men always pass through in achieving whatever they want. It is believe in Africa cosmology that “ it is only he that works will also eat”, so for the male in this performance to prove that they are not lazy, they are mandated to demonstrate that in their viragoes leg movement. In this dance, the individual interpretative ability of the dancers matters a lot in achieving a powerful transitional stated of moving from one dance step to another still maintaining the communicative potency of the choreographer wants to achieve in the dance. The name of dance aside depicting what young men pass through in live, it is also a cue gotten from the drumming style of the drummers. The rhythmic sound been produce from the drums of the drummers while the dancers are on stage is called tatasoso. The tatasoso rhythmic sound motivates the dancers to always be on a fast movement while transmitting from one movement to another and it is the individualized movement display of the dancer’s that portrays the communicative potency and choreographer’s intention before choreographing the dance.

Analysis on the tatasoso dance movements

Tatasoso brevity movement

This is a choreographic style introduce into the dance by the choreographer to showcase the high level of bravely in lives of African men. In this dance performance, the men that depict how brave they are, are all muscular in nature and each of the dancers are expected to use the muscularity to showcase what he can do. In portraying the various skills in their brevity movement each of the dancers is attached to a particular drummer. It is the duty of the various drummer to call-in their dancers to come on stage and display his braveness. For instance;

- a. Some of the dancer displayed swallowing razor blades and nothing will happen to them.
- b. Some of dancer’s displayed climbing a tree without a rope.
- c. Some of dancer’s displayed caring 20 bags of cement on their stomach.
- d. Some of dancer’s displayed capturing moving breeze.

All these displays by the dancers are been controlled by the tatasoso rhythmic sound from the drummers drum and also from the rhythmic sound movement of the dancers leg. It is bravery of individual dancer in displaying his own skill that makes him outstanding, respected and presents him as having what it takes to absorb shock effectively on whatever he meets in life. The tatasoso drumming style and its dance style is always recurring throughout the performance. The level of tatasoso movement in this dance movement is always on a very high pitch and must be sustain at any pointing in the both sides of the drummer’s and the dancer’s. It is the ability of the dancer’s to maintain their fast movements that truly qualifiers them as there brave men. According to the choreographer (Uzoma Akamere) he maintains that;

The level of bravery of the dancers in the dance is tested in their ability to last long on a particular dance movement and still maintains its fast tempo. It is the ability of the dancer to sustain the fast tempo of a dance that makes him a communicator, a good dancer and entertainer. (218)

So the choreographer believes that the tatasoso bravery dance movement both in its uniqueness, smartness and its choreographic style presents a dancer as a communicator.

Tatasoso protection

The dancers are position in different shapes of walls by the choreographer. The wall like formation of the dancers is in ascending to descending other. One the dancer’s will be throwing imaginative stones to the walls, aiming seriously to break the walls. . This movement is done throughout the performance on stage and on very high speed. The interpretative essence of this is to showcase how an African man protects whatever he has such as wives, children, property and animals. It is believe that what makes an African man what he is today, is the ability to protect whatever he has. In order to achieve this he can go extra-mole in acquiring more powers to protect them or enforcing.

At a point in the dance of protection if the dancers wall are getting tried and weak, the drummers will

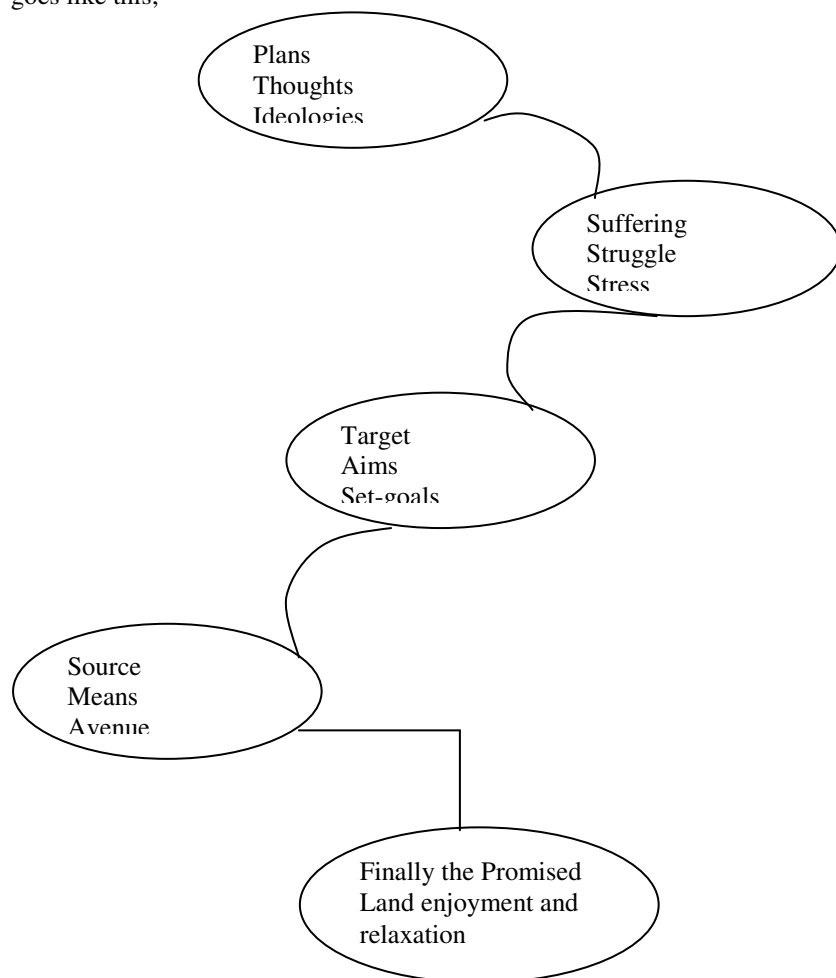
change their drumming style from:
Before-TaTasoso soso soso
Tatasoso soso soso

Change To-Tata lili li li li
Tata li li li li li

Once the wall dancers' hears this drumming cue from drummers they will collapse like falling walls immediately another walls will be set up, while the dancer throwing at the former walls will continue throwing at the newly form walls. The essence of the change simply shows the strategic planning in the mind set of an African man whenever he is faced with strong enemies and the attack been melt on him is so much. He always change his strategy so that he can sustain the attacks been melt down on him. The wall like dancers and change of the wall like dancers simply portrays an African man as somebody that never gives up easily no matter what his passing through.

Tatasoso struggler

The drum rhythm and dance movement of the dancers are in a very slow beat. The slow beat of the dance movement is like that of a crawling snail. The dancers are seen on stage dragging themselves slowing while aiming at a sign post tasked "The hand of plenty and Assurance". The crawling dance movements of dancer are of a great symbolic essence. It simply portrays that there is no hurry in life, that whatever one has been destined to be he will be no matter what. In trying to portray the darkest part of man's struggle in trying to survive, the dancers where on black costumes while aiming for brighter costumes and had loads at their backs while trying to dance rhythmically to the slow beat of the drumming. The pictorial diagram of the choreographic movement goes like this;



The serpentine choreographic movement of diagram shows the state of uncertainty in a man's life before achieving anything meaningful.

Tatasoso the achiever

The dance movement here is always faster movement and choreographic style of the choreographer placed the dancers inform of a well beautified moving train. The dances are well arranged to look like a well decorated train with so many colours, shapes and sizes. The different colours, shapes and sizes of the dancers on stage are very symbolic interpretatively. They are symbolic in the sense that the colours of the train- showcase the various level of expression of people whenever they achieve anything in life, the shapes of train – this simply portray the level of riches people have acquired and their required status and position in their immediate environment or society and while the sizes of the train – simply portrays those who have finally succeed in life, what have they achieve with their money more especially how they invest the money, who they spend their on money, how does the society benefit from their riches and what do people say about them. All these is what the colours, shapes and sizes of dancers used inform of train by the choreographer depicts on stage. The fastest in the movement of the dancers on stage simply portrays interpretatively the personalities of rich people both in their reasoning, thoughts and ideologies. It is believed that those who have made in life especially in African don't just relax and start eating their money rather they struggle to get more and more money to add to the once they have gotten already, thereby making them to be richer. Akamere maintains that “for the rich men in Africa there is nothing like I have gotten enough money”. So the fastest in the dance movement of the dancers symbolically portrays the man's desire to acquire more wealth.

Conclusion

The indigenous dance movement of today has gone beyond mere combination of aesthetic movements by amateurs or road-side dancers. The dance movements when interpretatively looked into remains an educative, informative and entertaining tool before the audience and the society at large. At this stage skilled choreographers don't just dance to exhibit their individualized skills, rather they uses the dancers body to minor the problems of their immediate environment and profound solution on how to resolve it. Conclusively, tatasoso dance movement contextualization aided in the interpretation of the dance movement beyond its superficial understanding of just flexibility expression among the dancers into a serious reflective tool on the socio-environmental happenings in the society.

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