

# Chapter Fifty-Two



## HYBRIDIZATION IN DANCE: THE PERFORMANCE OF 'OUR HERITAGE' IN FOCUS

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### **Introduction**

The dialectics of stage dominance, presences, or audience engagement is largely dependent on the method of current conversation within the parlance of the performative. It is a question to be answered by all creative artists (choreographers, dancers, and librettists) that desire to add to the body of knowledge and change some setting, narratives/happenings in our society. Whereas, upon questions on our existential realities as a people, on this parameter, choreographers, dancers, and librettists should critically analyze the content of what they are to package for the audience. Accordingly, as artists, we should realize that most of the things on this surface of the earth are still standing on their true identity without the xenophobia influencing the true existence of the originality in whatever guise and form we see it. For example, our dance steps, costumes, make-up, music, food, language, etc. Emoruwa cited in Kazeem Rufai-Ahmad opines that:

Dance is a reflection of the cultural patterns of a people wherein culture itself is described as the total of people's ways of living; their shared beliefs, practices, and social behavior. To the Africans, the

ideal is for every important event in the lives of people to be defined, designed, commemorated, and accompanied by dance (49).

As such, the above argument described the dance as the sum of people's ways of living and social interactions with their belief systems. Importantly, it graciously calls for the redefinition and redesigned events in the lives of the Africans to feet in into the occasion of today. Undoubtedly, the need to begin to incorporate the new way of life into our dances is certain. This is because no culture is still standing in its true nature due to the migration of persons from one place to another, a mixture of different cultures, customs, values and belief systems etc. Hence, such development calls for hybridization, so that our cultural dance values would not be over-emphasis, as the popular saying goes "culture is not static, but dynamic". In the same vein Peter Bello asserts that: "In the theatre, especially in the academic circle, dance theatre is an important form of dance composition as it tends to mirror serious issues of life and the society at large" (3). Bello's submission critically challenges the creative artists in this profession to ensure that their dance performances should and must reflect the current narrative on issues of immediate needs of its people, juxtaposing the dance within the abyss of mirroring and projecting the image of the society.

Accordingly, we can attempt to say there is a great concern for renewing and conscious understanding of dance in our day-to-day activities as a nation. Dance seems to have an art form practiced by our young teaming youths across our country be it in carnivals, and several dance competitions. In that similar vein, fundamentally is there conscious hybridization of the residual and the emergent dance forms to accommodate and have a harmonious balance within the performance space? How have we been presenting our stories? Has there been a balance between the genre of dance? Peter Brinson in the preface of his book *Dance as Education: Towards a National Dance Culture*, asserts that: "Strangely, such a broad understanding is absent not only among the populace at large, but also among art teachers, and it must be said, even among a significant number of dance teachers and dance practitioners" (ix). It is against this backdrop, that a conscious

attempt is being made to bring to the attention of choreographers, dancers, and librettos to investigate this aspect of the dance, therefore, addressing a very critical issue within the performance space today, most especially the dance aspect.

However, the primary focus of this paper is to briefly illustrate the concept of emergent dance form privilege over the residual dance forms, which is best conceptualized as the failure to hybridize. That is, there is a need to look inward into current challenges of stage dominance, presence, and audience engagement as a matter of enshrining our cultural values into the current trends and events. Dances should reflect our norms and values and not be left at the mercy of emergent forms. Hence, we should hybridize to preserve and rebrand our culture of today that will continue to uphold our rich cultural heritage and traditions for the future of tomorrow.

### **Theoretical Engagement**

The single case becomes significant only when set against the accumulated experience and knowledge that the analyst brings to it. In other words, the extent to which generalization may be made from case studies depends upon the adequacy of the underlying theory and whole corpus of related knowledge of which the case is analyzed rather than on the particular instance itself (Mitchell Clyde cited in Veronica Dittman 46).

The above submission sets the tone for the discourse. It is pertinent, therefore, to insist that the theory gives every scholarly work more credence and originality to argue the point better. It is on this basis that the chapter finds postmodernism and sociological aesthetics theory suitable to create the platform for our study. In that vein, Charles Jencks in his book *What is Postmodernism?* quoted in Sally Banes, who reiterates his definition by submitting that:

...that postmodern architecture involves "double coding", in two senses. Deliberately hybrid, it appeals to two separate audiences, it both continues and transcends modernism by mixing it with classicism-combing old and new styles, materials, and technique to engage both the general public and the experts" (302).

On the other hand, Uji and Awuawuer posit that: Social Aesthetic Theory "... explores dance ethnic features, considering aspects of dance as a medium of cultural and social interaction. Features of different dance genres and styles are analysed, according to their social settings and cultures" (254).

A critical analysis of the two theories as discussed above correlates with the hybridization submission earlier made in the introduction of this chapter, on the need for us to create an enabling ground between the new forms (culture) that have emerged and our way of life (residual) to fit it into the struggle of relevance within the performance space. Postmodernism creates the opportunity to hybridize our existing culture (residual) and the new (emergent) styles in terms of material and technique to critically engage our audience by presenting the conversation of the moment. Jencks Charles still argues further that:

"this eclecticism has a moral and political, as well as aesthetic mission. It is entertaining, decorating, and symbolic, re-anchoring architecture in the public service, at the same time, its playfulness is professionally informed, reinstalling the art in the depth and breadth of its historical tradition" (302).

On the other hand, Sociological Aesthetic Theory sees dance as a medium of cultural and social interaction that brings the entire community for togetherness, preservation of culture, moonlight games, sharing of values, and above all morality issues of the wellbeing of the community are being engaged during the performance from the songs and drum beats, etc.

The theories attempt to explain the differences between Postmodern and Sociological aesthetics in terms of relevance, suitability, and prudence through the cognitive engagement and structure of the content in which they exist corroborated with the argument of this chapter, on the standpoint of interfacing with different cultures of the world. In this regard, therefore, the hybridization of our dance cultures depends largely on the pragmatic steps taken by our choreographers, dancers, and librettos to restructure and repackage what we write and perform before the consumers of our end product (audience).

### **Synopsis of the Performance, "Our Heritage"**

The performance "Our Heritage" is written in three movements. In the opening movement, the stage is filled with different drums positioned at different parts of the stage, different dancers are seen properly positioned to represent all the three geopolitical zone of the Plateau State. The lead drummer dramatically walks into the stage looking at the audience with expectations, in amazement; he rhythmically played the center drum. Accordingly, gesticulations accompanied the drumbeat by a song Achiwo which is rancor? by all the dancers on stage in accompaniment of choreographic dance steps and then the dance and songs drop to a hum level as the narrator walks onto the stage to welcome the audience for coming to watch the performance. Immediately after the introduction of the performance, there comes a sudden transition to a drum ensemble led by the chief drummer; different displays of rich cultural performances showcasing our values, norms, customs, traditions, etc.

After the display, the community comes together to wish their sons and daughters success as they go in search of new knowledge of the city, new dance forms, techniques, choreographic styles, music, etc. The community trusts their sons and daughters know no bound, resolute and undaunted, confident and optimistic that they bring new insight into the current state of arts.

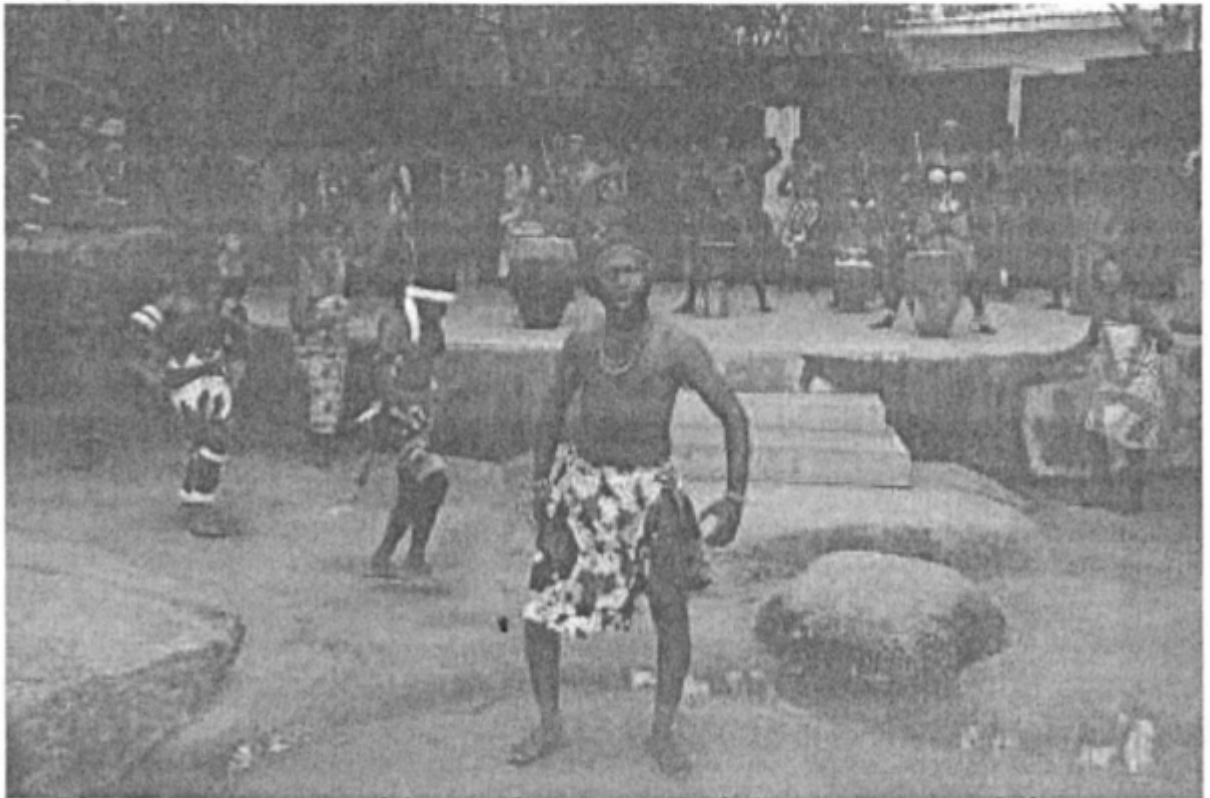
In the second movement, a few years later, we see the sons and daughters that went in search of new dance forms, learning old school, salsa and ballet dance, etc. As the saying goes, culture is a way of life, so the only constant thing in life is change. The dancers feel so excited that they have acquired new forms, techniques, choreographic styles, a new form of music, etc. Their expectation now is to come back to their village and change the current dance routine, which to them is now barbaric and out of date.

In the last movement, it is a village setting with normal day to day activities of the communal celebration that took place in the first movement, drum ensemble and lots of cultural displays of our rich cultural performances are being showcased, as the sons and daughters return from the city with the emergent dance forms. They display the new dance forms and are rejected by the villagers; there comes a battle

of relevance between the residual and emergent dance form. After a long battle, the dancers agree to hybridize the two cultures, residual on the one hand, and emergent on the other hand, as they freeze for the narrator to engage the audience on their views concerning what they saw.

### **Hybridization in the Performance “Our Heritage”**

The performance, “Our Heritage” unambiguously engages the need for a shift from the manner of approach in the presentation of the residual and emergent dance forms. It advocates for the hybridization of the techniques of both residual and emergent dance forms, in other to restore, preserve and inculcate the tradition of appreciating our residual dance forms within the performance space. Taking a look at the performance, it consciously showcases the importance of our rich cultural heritage in the opening movement of the dances, the logical arrangement of traditional drums on stage in an ensemble manner, the costume and make-up display, the song sang and dance movements in accordance to the rhythmic manipulation of the players as captured in the plate below.



*Plate 1: An ensemble performance of drummers and dancers.*

*Photograph credit: Tommy Shield*

From the above picture, it is a manifestation of the juxtaposition of different concepts coming into play, simultaneously, the breakaway from usual conventions, as many drums on stage in an ensemble manner accompanying the dance movements and songs to create aesthetics. Interestingly, Enekwe cited by Abdulmalik Adakole, Josephine Doofan, and Hairat Bukola opines that: "The Nigeria dance is characterized by a formalized rapport between musicians and dancers. There is an active interaction between them. The music does not merely accompany the dancer. Both encounter each other, sometimes, in a dialectical sense" (30). The marriage of the two genres often creates a symbiotic relationship between dance and song towards a significant experience in the audience's engagement with the aesthetics and the spectacular hybridization of dance and drums within the performance space. Nevertheless, the introduction of the narrator into the performance is one of the techniques employed to bring about the harmonization of the hybridized concept of borrowing from different genres of art to make a sum. As demonstrated in the lines of the narrator as captured:

**NARRATOR:** Africa my motherland! You cannot miss this beautiful sound, the drums, music, and dance. The music! Melody to my ears, the drumbeat that makes my grandmother's waist jiggle, the music that lulls a baby to sleep, the drums that calm the nerve of a raging lion. The thickness of the rock, the green nature of the plant, Africa! Land of peace, quiet and tranquility. My destiny! Our dance, music, and drums can never grow old. Africa, our home, our heritage! (2).

The narrator's lines clearly show the hybridization of concepts, ideas, thoughts, and the interplay of the diverse genre of art coming in a conjugal and harmonious partnership in a bid to pass across a significant experience that will change the narration of the present conversation. Instead of prejudice, we see a competitive engagement of the two forms residual and emergent, to create a balance for proper representation of its values and customs.

It is a good marriage to hybridize the two concepts of the residual and emergent dance forms. African tradition and values regard the

custom of our belief system regardless of any form of adulteration from any guise of western influence, but the reform of the aesthetic embellishments to meet up with the jet age trends is of importance to preserve it for our teeming leaders of tomorrow. As such, it is our collective responsibility as choreographers, dancers, and librettists to concurrently place our cultural values alongside global changes, and to achieve such is to hybridize and situate the performance within the context of the current conversation as argued by Beatrice Volbea:

The choreographic structures are made visible and real-time is used, which has the effect of flattening the dynamics and wiping out any suspense that might result from the dramatic processing of the temporal structure. The intertextual references of postmodern dancers are often influenced by their interest in cultural fusion, a mix of ideas, movements, and music from different parts of the world. In the absence of a good understanding of postmodernism, viewers may feel distraught when confronted with how artists are challenging traditional aesthetic standards (312).

The performance "Our Heritage" concatenates with the submission above, in the sense that, it juxtaposed residual and emergent dance forms together, (cultural fusion) costumes and make-up usage, and the employment of different styles of music, both traditional and contemporary. Regardless, it challenges the traditional aesthetic standards of men playing drums, which is common with African settings around the world, as men to be custodians and responsible of such aesthetic embellishments in the performance arena. See the picture below for further understanding:



***Plate: 2. A female playing African drum:  
Photo credit: Tommy Shield***



### **The Goal of the Hybridization in Dance**

The goal of the hybridization in the current dance stage is to deliberately create a platform for the need to appreciate our rich cultural heritage, the importance of its preservation, values, and content for our upcoming choreographers, dancers, and librettists. In interpreting our works, we need to creatively experiment with new developments and concepts as creative artists in reawakening the new dawn and a voice on issues affecting us as a society, using the performance space, particularly in the age of globalization. Tor Iorapuu critically x-rays the high impact and subsequent emergence of modern facilities in Nigeria dance cultures, as he opines that:

Therefore, overwhelming changes in the cultural and artistic attitudes of the Nigerian and most African peoples as a result of media and other forms of technological interaction between Europeans and Africans have continued to persist. These changes are glaring in our dances, songs, instrumentation, style of worship, sculpture, etc (7-8).

On this note, Mariam Iyeh summarizes how choreographers engage their space:

This is the way the artist expresses his/her thought(s); embodying the concept of nature and ideas, etc. In choreography, the choreographer drives at a particular message, intent/purpose. Therefore, when judging/analyzing a dance, the level of interpretation of the idea/subject matter or concept of the dance by the choreographer/dancer should be taken into cognizance (23).

Using the performance space as a negotiating tool to sensitize, choreographers, dancers and librettists need to understand the magnitude of the expectations and the prevalence and impact of emergent privilege. By doing so, emergent and residual dance can form partnerships that will lead to more equitable engagement of emergent and thereby undermine the myth of relevance given to it by young teaming youths. Bakari cited by Peter Bello opines that: ... achieving the purpose of every dance composition requires the process of choreography which he broadly classified into two types including

residual (traditional) and emergent (innovative) choreography (5). The argument above clearly distinguishes the two dance forms in what we can term the haves and the haves-not. Accordingly, Louis Horst argues that: "Nothing has an aesthetics existence without form. No dance can be called a work of art unless it has been deliberately planned and can be repeated" (23).

Nevertheless, therefore, can we then say that our residual dance forms do not have forms and cannot be repeated within the performance space; these are deliberate means of elevating the emergent dance form? Hence, we must design a mechanism of seeing that emergent does not get ahead purely by ability, choreographers, dancers, and librettists will develop more communitarian attitudes. Here, they will begin to see that without residual dance forms, emergent dance would be just dependent on aid from others as are dance residual dance forms.

No wonder, John Allah asserts that: No, it cannot be! We must question the question, to restore integrity to the discourse and its subject. It bids us re-narrate... (5). Accordingly, the time is now to ask questions or hopefully begin to realize that if we do not repackage and change the narration channel of our existential realities, to fit in into the postmodern trends, our residual dance forms will soon be like an artificial and socially created construct and that it has been assigned or inherited to them (our youths) with nefarious purpose in mind. Louis Horst gave a historical perspective on what dance is to mankind as he asserts that:

Long before the time of recorded history, dance must have been a developed and complex skill. Early man used it to help him surmount the riddles and tragedies of his daily life. He lived at the mercy of natural forces which we have learned to understand and to some degree, control, and dance was for him a powerful way to conciliate these forces. It was his religion and his poetry and his science. Ritual dances were his insurance of success against natural enemies of hunger, disease, and death-fertility dances, harvest dances, and war dances. He danced to celebrate his joys in triumph or his sorrow in defeat and believed that his very survival depended on a dance of such strength and agility that it would be worthy of notice by the gods who controlled his destiny (13).

The above submission chronologically took us through a sojourn of our past, present, and set the future to dance, celebrate, merry, and continue to ensure the defeat of natural forces against any hindrance that sabotages the preservation and placing our traditional dances side by side with any dance forms. In as much as we deliberately allow such tradition to get its root within the performance space (academics). Whereas, shall in no instance time affect the equality and those to carry on with the culture of teaching folk dances in our institutions. We should encourage hybridization in the face of postmodernism in other not to allow our culture to go extinct in the name of civilization. Regardless, we should advocate for the marriage of two forms (residual and emergent) by creating a strong notion of biological and genetic differences between the emergent and residual dance forms in order to get the root cause of inequality: unfair and unjustified privilege given to the emergent dance form by our youths. Only such a pragmatic and conscious gesture will unmask the differences in the opportunity between residual and emergent dance forms.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing, it is observed that hybridization in the current dance stage and its peculiar features in terms of the relevance to the cultural preservation and showcasing our cultural values to stand and compete alongside emergent cultures that are trying to erode our traditional norms and belief systems; as a result of civilization, the search for new knowledge and the family responsibilities beckons at the doorsteps of every African to explore the new-found knowledge. In the words of Capo'Sobral Suzy on cultural emancipation, he asserts that: "... an urgent and unstoppable affirmation of values and ideas defining an objective national sovereignty that is necessary, dynamic and pluralistic" (13).

This chapter shares the submission of the Capo'Sobral above to link the performance *Our Heritage* in using the artists' gesticulations and movements to negotiate the broader issue of cultural and political emancipation of our cultural identity and values in the performance space. Only such critical and conscious engagement will help place our performances in the books of history and undoubtedly capture the

attention of our upcoming choreographers, dancers, and librettos to invest more into the hybrid concept, not just for preservation purposes alone, but as a means of competing favorably with emergent cultures respectively.

Overall, our residual dance forms have been riddled and abandoned by our upcoming dance practitioners with a lot of barbaric notions ranging from its practice and relevance, etc. The narrator makes a provocative question when the villagers left for the city in search of new dance forms and techniques:

Thank you for being such a wonderful audience, I am glad you are part of my story... culture they say is a way of life, but I dare to ask, what is the position of the change in this way of life? But then, they say it is dynamic, again I pause to think, how dynamic is this culture of ours? Is it so dynamic that it embraces change with open arms or does it toss it aside? Hmmmmm! Culture, change, dynamism, way of life, so many questions, so many thoughts, yet no answers... (3).

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