

## THE RISE OF TRADITIONAL DANCE CLUBS AND THE GENESIS OF DANCE COMMODIFICATION IN BUJUMBURA CITY

By *Aminadab HAVYARIMANA*

### Abstract

*This paper investigates traditional dance commodification amidst an ever-increasing 'club proliferation' in the City of Bujumbura. Bujumbura, Burundi's former political capital, is characterised by a colourful ceremonial atmosphere, where private and public ceremonies are organised most frequently. In this context, songs and dances of various kinds are performed to enliven the ambience. The main objective of this study is to get insights into this club phenomenon to determine the origin of the traditional dance clubs and why they are gaining momentum in the city of Bujumbura. Participants in the study were members of six of the several traditional dance clubs performing in Bujumbura city. A qualitative research design was adopted, and an ethnographic method used to investigate the phenomenon. Eleven participants were recruited from six different traditional dance clubs, participant observation was conducted, semi-structured interviews were recorded, conversations were held and pictures taken. Findings show that, based on backgrounds of the founding members, different reasons motivated the creation of these dance clubs at various periods before evolving into entrepreneurial entities. This phenomenon timidly began to occur in the early 90s and lead to a remarkable proliferation of these clubs around the 2000s in Bujumbura city.*

**Keywords:** *Bujumbura city, Burundian culture, traditional dance clubs, ceremonies, dance commodification, culture conservation*

### Résumé

*Cet article étudie la marchandisation de la danse traditionnelle au milieu d'une «prolifération de clubs» toujours grandissante dans la ville de Bujumbura. Bujumbura, l'ancienne capitale politique du Burundi, se caractérise par une atmosphère cérémonielle multicolore, où des cérémonies privées et publiques sont le plus souvent organisées. Dans ce contexte, des chants et des danses de toutes sortes sont exécutés pour animer l'ambiance. L'objectif principal de cette étude est de mieux comprendre ce phénomène afin de déterminer l'origine des clubs de danse traditionnelle et pourquoi ils prennent de l'ampleur dans la ville de Bujumbura. Les participants à l'étude étaient membres de six des nombreux clubs de danse traditionnelle qui se produisent dans la ville de Bujumbura. Un plan de recherche qualitative a été adopté et une méthode ethnographique a été utilisée pour étudier le phénomène. Onze participants ont été recrutés dans six clubs de danse traditionnelle différents, une observation participante a été menée, des entretiens semi-structurés ont été enregistrés, des conversations ont été tenues et des photos ont été prises. Les résultats montrent que, en fonction des antécédents des membres fondateurs, différentes raisons ont motivé la création de ces clubs à différentes périodes avant d'évoluer vers des entités entrepreneuriales. Ce phénomène a timidement commencé à se produire au début des années 90 et a conduit à une prolifération remarquable de ces clubs vers les années 2000, dans la ville de Bujumbura.*

**Mots-clés:** *ville de Bujumbura, culture burundaise, clubs de danse traditionnelle, cérémonies, marchandisation de la danse, conservation de la culture*

## 0. Introduction

The city of Bujumbura is the former political capital of Burundi, which has become its economic capital since 2018. This most prominent city in the country, like most of the Burundian major urban areas, is cosmopolitan, that is, it is multicultural. Its population kept growing since the increasing urbanisation of most of the African cities due to the migrations of the post-colonial epoch (Antoine, 1997). According to PopulationData.net, its total population was estimated at 1,3 million inhabitants in 2018. Three widely spoken languages are Kirundi (national and official), French (official) and Kiswahili, which is used as a lingua franca in business. The English language, which is taught as a subject from primary school up to university, has also the status of an official language because it is the official language of the East African Community of which Burundi is part.

The heart of Bujumbura city is a haven of multi-coloured performances amidst multifaceted ceremonies; dance enlivens ceremonies, festivals, public and social gatherings. For example, songs and dances of different types are performed to make the ceremonies vibrant and enjoyable for the guests of the families getting united through the wedding of their children as pointed out by Ndimurukundo (2016). Hence, traditional dance clubs (*Clubs de danse traditionnelle*), those dance clubs which try to dance the very same way Burundians used to do in the past (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992: 2 & Edkvist, 1997: 11), play a crucial role in the atmosphere of these events.

In the context where traditional songs (*imvyino*) and dances (*intambo*) of various kinds are performed to enliven the ceremonial atmosphere, a traditional dance club phenomenon, which can be understood, in Plancke's (2016: 150) words, as the "proliferation of youth dance troupes", is gaining momentum since the early 2000s (Irambona, n.d. & Iwacu, 2013). Similar to what is being observed in the Peruvian Amazone, Senegal and Rwanda (Palma, 2001; Kringelbach, 2007 & Plancke, 2017), people, mostly youngsters, are organised into dance clubs and engaging in entrepreneurial initiatives. Hence, traditional dance clubs present themselves as service providers in a setting where celebrations are very frequent. Club members, pushed by the preservation of culture, find in the situation new opportunities to professionalise dance through performance and some already aspire to solely live upon this business. This paper sheds light on the mechanisms that underpin the genesis of this phenomenon and tries to understand why it is gaining momentum in Bujumbura city.

## 1. Dance Commodification in Bujumbura City: a Tool to Culture Preservation?

The expression 'Burundian culture' (or 'Burundian tradition') entails the ways of doing and living of Burundians since ancient times. It is even portrayed in everyday life as Burundians often start their private and public speeches with the same expression: '*mu mico y'ikirundi*' (in the Burundian culture). The tendency is stressed by the shared motto of the traditional dance clubs stated as *Uwutaye akaranga aba ataye ibanga* (He/ she who loses his/ her culture loses his/ her secret, the core of their life).

Reasoning in Cohen's (1988) perspective, in the touristic context, commodification is the process by which the traditional dance performances, which depict the Burundian culture (local culture in Cohen's words), are transformed into commodities or goods in the ceremonial market as these performances are held for priced consumption. The Burundian cultural heritage is composed of both intangible and material assets as defined by the Ministry of Culture (2016). Its conservation, termed as 'safeguarding' by UNESCO (2011), is the process aiming at the valorisation of those assets and preserving their historical messages as defined by Spiridon and Sandu (2016: 43). The contribution of the commodification of the Burundian traditional dance in the preservation of the Burundian culture would inevitably bring in a debate on 'cultural authenticity', a concept which, according to González (2016: 48), is being "increasingly used and constantly redefined".

In this regard, the appreciation of 'authenticity' has been a subject of divergences in the field of cultural tourism whereas some scholars such as MacCannell (1973) and Bunten (2008) think that commodification often leads to cultural losses and therefore to the destruction of local identities. However, some other scholars, among whom is Su (2011), positively view the commodification phenomenon as they claim that it, instead, contributes to the preservation of local culture and may even lead to the revival of forgotten traditions. Without objecting to the first group of scholars, who could partly be right in the cultural tourism industry, where tourists may be cheated through staged authenticity which may be 'faked' as observed Cohen (1988) or simply invented traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992), this paper tends to favour the latter for reasons that will briefly be elucidated.

The commodification of traditional dance performances investigated in this study mostly involves both local customers (ceremony organisers) and providers (traditional dance clubs). Consequently, since 'authenticity' mainly depends on who defines/ evaluates it, as claimed by Xie (2003), the appreciation of the cultural value or authenticity of the commodified performances is done by natives, the local identities. In such conditions, the 'fake' cultural authenticity, which Cohen (1988) talks about in the touristic context, has a relatively limited chance to occur. As long as the "clients" are satisfied by the performances, one is tempted to believe that the cultural value of the performances is still preserved at a "good" level.

Nevertheless, 'authenticity' is also sometimes negotiated as new elements are incorporated into a given culture and gain progressive acceptance by the community, most often due to innovation and the revival of forgotten cultural elements that the clubs may reintroduce. In the same line, Su (2011: 496) says that this kind of "commodification sustains discourses of identity building and cultural revival that in turn serve to justify the pursuit of profit". That is even why Cohen (1988) supports that 'authenticity' is dynamic over time, therefore, joining Xie (2003) who claims that "the authentic is not a fixed property of an object or a situation but is a negotiated attribute with multiple dimensions whose status is evaluated by different assessors" (Xie, 2003: 6).

Some traditional dance clubs were investigated to understand their increasing proliferation in Bujumbura city and its implications on the Burundian community in the city, as the

discussion will show throughout this paper. Thus, traditional dance clubs know their people (the Burundian urban publics) and try to perform the ways of living which are dear to them, the ways which characterise lives of most of the city dwellers, their Burundian traditional ways of life. Throughout this paper, bearing in mind the “inevitable change and continuity” of the African traditional dance (Wanyama, 2012: 1), we argue that the commodification of traditional dance performances in Bujumbura City is one of the privileged channels to convey multifaceted messages and an advisable way of contributing to the Burundian culture conservation.

## **2. A Brief Review of the Social and Cultural Roles of Dance**

As observed by Kringelbach (2007: 82), “dance has been neglected in Africanist social sciences” for a long time. However, since recently, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the theme of dance (in general), its performance and virtues (Kringelbach & Skinner, 2012, 2013; Leseth, 2010; Mabingo, 2015; Mojaki, 2014; Plancke, 2010, 2016, 2017; Pye, 2006, 2013, 2015, 2017; Wanyama, 2012; Sieveking, 2014). This has been the case in the academic realms, where suggestions were formulated that dance should be incorporated into formal education at all levels and, in social studies, to train students on the exploration and understanding of dance contents (Gonye & Moyo, 2015; Mabingo, 2015 & Smith, Kulinna, Vissicaro & Fredrickson, 2016). Some initiatives have gone beyond and attempted teaching traditional dance on a web-based system using a 3D animation (Karkou, Bakogianni, & Kavakli, 2008).

According to Wanyama (2012), traditional dances play a significant role in the way people express their ‘culture’ and ‘identity’. For Wanyama (2012), traditional dance is “the most effective way of expressing our [as human beings] success, joy, fear, pride and aspirations” (Wanyama, 2012: 5). Hence, even though sometimes dance is state-scripted for political motives (Covington-Ward, 2016: 165; Jewsiewicki & Pye, 2019) and manipulated by overt or covert exclusionist ethnic ideologies (Plancke, 2017: 341), it significantly contributes to the conservation of culture as well as to the construction and perpetuation of identities, as it can even be observed among people who live far from their native communities (Akim, 2017). Furthermore, Jurowski (2014) supports that dance is understood as a refraction of social life as it is used to grasp and comment upon culture as she puts it: “the strength of the content [of a discussion on dance] is in understanding the composition of dance and the role dance plays in shaping cultures” (Jurowski, 2014: 365).

Some researchers on the functional roles of dance and its performance, including Edkvist's (1997), claim that “songs and dances are often meant for entertainment purposes but also as a vehicle of cultural meanings” (Edkvist, 1997: 11). In addition to this, it is said that dance is sometimes used for therapeutic purposes thanks to its positive impact on the mood (Zajenkowski, Jankowski, & Kołata, 2015). Dance is also considered to function as a language that is used to communicate people's feelings, mood, ideas, to tell stories and as a tool often used to regulate, stimulate sexual desire and, at times, for seduction purposes (Hallam-Jones & Wylie, 2001; Hanna, 2001 & Nijhawan, 2009). Within this regard, there is a

strong belief which is built on the assumption that “there exists a fundamental link between body and mind and maintains that we heal psychological pain through expressing a full realisation of our inner life through movement and dance” (Victoria, 2012: 168).

Additionally, dance offers, through its performance, spaces to both men and women for the creation of new relationships (Kringelbach, 2007 & Boyd, 2014) but also for gendered negotiations, through which women negotiate their way of performance in a given sociocultural environment (Winarnita, 2016). Nowadays, in Africanist studies, besides its crucial spiritual facet in healing rituals, dance also gives room to generational and social demarcations as differences between youngsters and the older adults, on the one hand, and between the urban people and the rural ones, on the other hand, become apparent (Pype, 2017).

### 3. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

#### 3.1. Theoretical Framework

In his research, Myridis (2015) claimed that the concept of ‘culture’ has been approached very differently and got many different definitions. Therefore, this term can be understood in the sense of a set of ideas, customs, traditions, and social behaviour of a particular people or society comparable to “collective representations—vocabularies, symbols, or codes—that structure people’s abilities to think and act” (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003: 735). In the same line, ‘culture’ refers to what Kottak (2000: 76) defined as “the customary beliefs and behaviour and the rules for conduct internalised in human beings [which] lead people to think and act in certain consistent, distinctive, and characteristic ways”.

Building on the above-provided definitions, we will join Clifford Geertz in borrowing Kluckhohn's definition of culture as “the total way of life of a people”, which is understood in this paper as “the social legacy the individual acquires from his group” (Geertz, 1993: 4). Thus, as Geertz (1993) argued, the concept of culture has a semiotic utility in the sense that it refers to a kind of “webs of significance”, webs of meanings that the human being has himself created and of which the analysis is “not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (Geertz, 1993: 5).

Thus, the various songs and types of Burundian dances speak to Burundians (but also to any other audience). As the gender societal divides dictate in every sector of life (Ndayiragije, 2011 & Sibazuri, 2019), Burundian dances are subdivided into female and male dances while they may involve one dancer or several at a time. Each of them has its meaning and corresponds to a specific event or activity. Singing, rhythm, bodily expression, mimes are all distinct signs adapted to each circumstance and sought to touch both the aesthetic sense and the spirit. Women, for instance, show choreographic demonstrations in which they imitate the elegance and flexibility of the *inyambo* (cows with long horns) or the graceful movements of *umusambi* (the crown-bird) besides several other styles. Men dances mostly involve energetic movements such as *ingoma* (royal drums), *intore* (war dance), *umuhanga* (hunting dance) and

*ubudemera* (an acrobatic dance), to cite but a few in the range of dance styles, mostly portraying the bravery of Burundian people.

These different types of dances are used to convey cultural messages through words and gestures that the public has to interpret. This transmission of cultural messages through dance is supported by Wulff who claimed it in the following words: “The central quest and *raison d’être* for the anthropology of dance have been to find out what dance says about its society, informing about social or cultural circumstances that cannot be sufficiently expressed in any other way” (Wulff, 2015: 666).

The analysis of the data from this research was therefore done in light of this perspective where observation, description and interpretation were used to “study how dance uses the body -through gesture, locomotion, and posture- to construct social meanings for specific functions” (Hanna, 2010: 214) for the interpretation of the spectator.

### **3.2.Methodology and Investigated Community**

#### **3.2.1. Research Design and Methodology**

To carry out this research, intensive two-week-and-a-half fieldwork was conducted in Bujumbura city in February 2019. A qualitative research design was adopted to investigate the genesis and the growth of the emerging traditional dance club phenomenon in Bujumbura city. This method is particularly useful in social sciences because it helps the researcher to bridge the gap and gain more understanding of social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved in them, in their social and cultural setting (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Hobbs, 2006; Driessnack, Sousa, & Mendes, 2007). This claim is supported by Ejimabo, who argues that “a qualitative research paradigm emphasises understanding through observation, careful documentation, and thoughtful analysis of people's words, actions, and records” (Ejimabo, 2015: 358). According to the same researcher,

*a qualitative research paradigm, as a process, examines the patterns of meaning, which emerge from the data collected from the participants. It is focused on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of participants in a very conducive and natural setting. Under this approach, data collection is done through observation –participant and direct, in-depth interviews, group interviews, and collection of relevant documents, photographs, and videotapes as opposed to doing surveys in quantitative study.* (Ejimabo, 2015: 358)

Another advantage in this study, according to Wanyama, is when the researcher is native of the community under study, as is the case in the present research because the latter could well “understand the verbal and non-verbal language cues of the community being researched” and was “acquainted with some dance movements and their symbolic meanings” (Wanyama, 2012: 6). Hence, this constituted an attempt at determining and describing the processes on course and making sense of the phenomenon in line with the various perceptions of club

members as supported by Creswell's (2009) and Driessnack's et al. (2007) views in this regard. Consequently, an ethnographic method, which is considered to be fundamental to anthropology as a discipline (Davies, 1999), was used to investigate the emerging 'entrepreneurial' phenomenon in Bujumbura city.

### **3.2.2. Investigated Community**

For the purposed of this study, eleven participants were selected from six different traditional dance clubs, among which one was the main club which was contacted before the others, and a snowball sampling technique was applied thanks to the help of the club leader and the first participants he recommended. According to Noy (2008), the snowballing technique consists of the way participants refer the researcher to other potential knowledgeable participants in the field of interest.

Occupations of the participants were diverse: two of them were university students, two others were holding cultural shops. There also were two secondary school teachers, one working in the public sector as a communication manager, another was involved in theatre and comedy, and the three others are working in the cultural domain on a full-time basis. Overall, participants were both males and females aged between nine and fifty-seven years.

Participants were interviewed on a personal convenience basis. Some of them were met at their usual workplace, others at rehearsal places and some students were interviewed at the university. Participants who are involved in business were met at their cultural shops. Formal conversations were organised in public places, mostly cafés. Performance and rehearsal sessions were attended and Musée Vivant de Bujumbura (Bujumbura museum, mostly zoo-botanical) was also visited. This is a touristic site where most of the objects used during performances are bought.

Data were collected using the ethnographic method which is considered to be useful while adopting a qualitative research design (Ejimabo, 2015). Therefore, participant observation, as a central component of any ethnographic research (Davies, 1999), was applied during the fieldwork, semi-structured interviews were carried out and recorded, informal and formal conversations were held, field-notes and pictures were taken, and audio and video recordings were made. To abide by ethical regulations, pseudonyms were used instead of the actual names of participants. The gathered data were analysed thematically and emergent themes guided the discussion of the findings.

#### **4. Identity and Motivations of the Investigated Traditional Dance Clubs: the Contexts of Births**

##### **4.1.From Cultural Nostalgia to the Promotion of the Culture of Peace**

##### **4.1.1. The Cultural Nostalgia and the Will to Reconnect with the Roots**

Cultural nostalgia has been felt since the nineteenth century and, thus, it could be observed that people from different parts of the world expressed nostalgic feelings of the past, which does not come back (Fritzsche, 2007). Throughout various initiatives, Jewish migrants in Germany sought to revive the ‘tradition’ they were longing for as they settled in new areas affected by the rapid pace of modernisation and urbanisation (Hess, 2007). In a similar situation, Mary (a 57 years-old woman from Kirundo province, the northern region of Burundi), a founding member of one of the oldest clubs investigated shared her personal and collective motivation which, in 1989-1990, pushed her and her friends to create *Lac aux oiseaux*, the ‘first’ club of the kind in Burundi, as she claimed.

Therefore, as urban immigrants and most of them being educated people, they wanted to contribute to the ‘safeguarding’ of their home cultural identity once in Bujumbura city. Feeling the nostalgia of traditional Burundian values that characterised, and which mostly still characterise the rural areas, they decided to create this club, which would not only allow them to meet as people from the same region but also an opportunity to reconnect with their traditional ways of life. The specificity of *Lac aux oiseaux* is that of exclusively aiming at promoting the dancing identity of that region spread around the northern lakes of Burundi, as Mary highlighted it in the following words: “We want to perform and teach songs and dances we best know”. They could thus have opportunities to meet, sing and perform dances they used to enjoy during the evenings before migrating to the city. That also constituted one of the best occasions to share foods and local drinks between close friends and neighbours as a larger identical family in a society where sharing is considered as the highest social value (Colignon, 2011: 12).

Another reason, and most important for Mary, that impelled them to create *Lac aux oiseaux* is that they saw their children growing up in an environment that could wipe away all that was dear to their parental identity. Bujumbura city is an area where, as a multicultural milieu, external cultural elements tend to absorb the local ones during their process of indigenisation as claimed by Appadurai (1990). Members of *Lac aux oiseaux* then united in this context with another goal of educating the urban youth in the northern region’s songs and dances to ensure the ‘conservation’ of the northern region’s cultural values for future generations (Mary, February 14, 2019).



#### 4.1.2. Promoting the Culture of Peace in the Context of War and Conflict

Beside nostalgia of identical values, the promotion of the culture of peace was also one of the reasons that propelled some of the Burundians to create traditional dance clubs. Since around the 1960s, Burundi has been one of the African countries most shaken by civil wars due to politico-ethnic crises and has regained relative stability as from the early 2000s, after the signing of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of Arusha in Burundi (Parqué, 2002; Reyntjens, 2002; Sculier, 2008 & Curtis, 2019). It is, therefore, around this time that a traditional dance club, inspired by that context of war and lack of peace, was created (Club “*Giramahoro*”, “peace be with you”, in Kirundi).

A group of young women who had been recruited into the mandatory military service at the time (DRCISR\_Canada, 2001), after their secondary school, created a meeting platform that could help them keep in contact when they joined the university. They had a shared history and common roots (Yudhishtir, 2008) not only regarding the patriotic service that had brought them together but also through their daily experiences as citizens of a country torn apart by fratricidal wars (Laroque, 2014). Consequently, they decided to bring their contribution to the building of a culture of peace through traditional dance. Alongside this central mission, the club set another objective targeting the conservation of the Burundian culture through the supervision of urban youngsters by showing them traditional objects and teaching them practices related to their contexts of use. Among others, the practices taught revolve around the cow, such as milking and skimming cow milk. Some of the objects include those used in the housework, as well as those used directly in the processing of dairy products (Jasmine from *Giramahoro*, February 11, 2019).



**Figure 1:** Abagumyabanga female dancers with Burundian traditional utensils, ©Photo: Club Abagumyabanga

## 4.2.From Youth Movement to “Entrepreneurial” Motives

### 4.2.1. Youth Movements and Culture Conservation

As it is observed in the neighbouring countries' contexts, the revitalisation of traditional dances is enforced in various ways, and youth organisations play a paramount role in this regard, especially in urban areas (Plancke, 2016: 150). In Burundi, for example, *Abagumyabanga* Club originated in a youth organisation created by mainly scout pupils in Gitega (political capital of Burundi since 2018), in 1998, as indicated by Claude, a 42-year-old man from Mwaro (the centre of Burundi).

This organisation was meant to promote the Burundian traditional dances at the centre of which were *ingoma*, the Burundian emblematic royal drums, which were classified as universal intangible heritage by the UNESCO since 2014 (RFI, 2014 & Jeune Afrique, 2015). This duty could, therefore, be achieved through frequent meeting in places baptised *ibicaniro*. *Ibicaniro*, in the pastoral tradition, mean fireplaces that cattle keepers make for cows so that, when they gather around them, the smoke of burning grass can chase away insects that feed on animal blood, such as mosquitoes and tsetse flies.



**Figure 2:** Ingoma Placed before a Performance by Intahemuka Club at Hôtel Club du Lac Tanganyika, ©Photo: Author

In this context of *Abagumyabanga*, they refer to *ibicaniro* as those meeting places for traditional public debates, a synonym of the Agora in the Hellenistic tradition. The importance



of these places was to reconnect and connect the urban youngsters to their ‘culture’ especially that most of them do not have frequent opportunities to go to the village. Thus, young people could travel to their original villages through songs and dances that describe their ideal and various environments. Claude concluded by saying that his club was among the first to entertain the *ugutwikurura* ceremonies, in Bujumbura city, for monetary remuneration, inferring the origins of the commodification of traditional dance performances (Claude, February 11, 2019).

#### 4.2.2. Traditional Dance amidst Entrepreneurial Motives

As aforementioned, traditional dance clubs got involved in the commodification of dance performances in Bujumbura city since around 1998. Thus, the commercialisation of dance performances by traditional dance clubs is frequently, in a way or another, confronted with money issues because, for most often, the distribution of the income is “modulated by intra-group hierarchies” as realised by Kringelbach (2013: 139). Shortly after the creation of some traditional dance clubs in the 2000s, schisms led to the birth of many other similar clubs. As Claude and Richard (a 29 years-old man, play and songwriter from Mwaro) said, the creation of some of these clubs rose after conflicts over the distribution of the money earned during various exhibitions in which founding members took part (Claude from *Abagumyabanga*, February 11, 2019, & Richard from *Intahemuka*, February 4, 2019). Thus, some of the dissatisfied members decided to organise and create new traditional dance clubs sharing the same goals as their first clubs. Among others, most known of those clubs, among those investigated in this research, are *Intatana* and *Intahemuka*, which were created by dissidents correspondingly from *Abagumyabanga* and *Umuhanza*, respectively in 2009 and 2013.



**Figure 3:** Intahemuka Club Mixed Rehearsal at Ngagara IV Primary School, ©Photo: Author

## 5. The Concealed Intimacies of the Clubs

Through formal and informal conversations, with different participants involved in this study, it emerged that some of the traditional dance clubs in Burundi are both regionally and ethnically discriminatory. Therefore, even though the entire population is constituted by only three ethnic groups (Uvin, 2017), it is not always easy to ethically distinguish people, but the regional dimension helps selective clubs in a relatively small country. For these clubs that recruit members from a given region or ethnic group, most of the members know from where and from what ethnic group others might be. This selectiveness might be linked (or might be a factor) that pushes some of the customers to make ethnically oriented requests for the entertainment of their celebrations.

What can also be highlighted is that selective clubs are not from one region, but different corners of the country and “people tend to associate with those with whom they share the same cultural language”, as Richard puts it (February 6, 2019). Participants indicated concrete examples of such clubs from different sides. Fortunately, things are changing as some of these clubs tend to open doors to all as participants added. This is a good sign for a society that has been involved in ethnic and regional divisionism that has caused many politico-ethnic crises (Uvin, 2017).

Another distinctive feature among the studied clubs is that there are some which, despite being rooted in a given sub-culture, such as *Lac aux oiseaux*, are open to people from other regions. Hence, as Mary explained, they want to teach others the typical songs and dances of their club and region. However, there are other ‘conciliating’ clubs as *Giramahoro* that welcome members and styles from across the country. They, therefore, allow members to teach other club members the songs and dances from one’s home region (Jasmine, Personal interview, at Ecole Indépendante, February 11, 2019). A presumed reason for this openness to members from different corners of the country would here be the search for diversity in the performances as one of the strategies to attract customers in a city where both ethnic and regional identities cohabitate. They then try to practice everything to win the trust and interest of all the categories of customers as acknowledged by Richard (Personal interview, at Institut Français du Burundi, February 6, 2019).

It is also worth noting that some of the investigated clubs are gender marked. Thus, as Jasmine disclosed, her club (*Giramahoro*) is dominated by women. Parallel to this, there are exclusively male clubs, especially the royal drums clubs from which women are de facto excluded. Here, the exclusion of the females is dictated by some social and moral beliefs in the Burundian tradition which associates some of the parts of the drum with some parts of the woman's body such as the stomach and the breasts, as mentioned by Richard (February 14, 2019). This social belief is also enforced by an official decision, as from 2009, by the Burundian government because there were some instances in which women were commencing to beat and dance the royal drums in the past two decades (Nijhawan, 2009 & Ilado, 2017).

To support this social and ‘moral’ dimension of the exclusion of women and girls in some types of dances, Elias voiced out: “It is not decent for a [Burundian] woman to dance some types of dances such as *ingoma*, *ubudemera* and *ubusambiri* since there is a risk for her to expose her nakedness to the public” (Elias, February 5, 2019). In the Burundian culture, a woman is expected to cover herself at least until beneath the knees and even, as Ndayiragije (2011) says, the way she sits is supposed to be ‘acceptable’, that is, she must keep her legs close (Ndayiragije, 2011: 16). It is, for example, ‘scandalous’ for a Burundian woman to show her thighs. That is why some dance styles which involve the lifting of legs do not generally involve girls and women.

## Conclusion

This article tried, for the first time in the Burundian context, to trace back the origins and understand the motivations of the investigated traditional dance clubs involved in dance commodification in Bujumbura city. Findings indicate that, in terms of periods at which the clubs were created, some of them (such as *Lac aux oiseaux*, created in 1989-1990) are older than others (as *Intahemuka*, created in 2013). The contexts of their creation, their motivations and goals vary from one club to another as well. The commodification of traditional dance is shaped by various motives ranging from ‘culturally’ nostalgic ones to ‘cultural entrepreneurship’, besides the promotion of the culture of peace.

There was a clear-cut emergence from views of all the participants that, regardless of their personal and collective motivations, traditional dance clubs aim at the promotion and perpetuation of the Burundian culture. As some of the participants acknowledged that they also seek financial gains in their endeavours, cultural entrepreneurship seems to be the accelerator of the proliferation of traditional dance clubs in Bujumbura city. Since participants even confirmed that there are some of the clubs' members who are earning their lives through traditional dance commodification, the number of these clubs is likely to keep increasing in the context of many and multifaceted ceremonies.

In short, even though commodified traditional dance is often affected by changes provoked by the search for creativity and innovation (Plancke, 2017: 338), it might be believed that the commodification of traditional dance performances in Bujumbura city is one of the appropriate ways to convey 'cultural' messages. It could, therefore, be deduced that traditional dance commodification contributes to culture conservation in Burundi. Besides, this conclusion confirms existing findings which have proved that traditional dance commodification has socio-cultural advantages, as it not only enables the club members to survive economically, as claimed by Finn (2009: 191) but also keeps folk traditions alive and sustains the “authentic” local identities (Xie, 2003: 5), sometimes amidst ethnic exclusionism (Plancke, 2017).

## Bibliography

- Akim, M. (2017). En scène avec le groupe de danse culturel Abaserukarikaka” des USA. Retrieved from <http://akeza.net/culture-en-scene-avec-le-groupe-de-danse-culturel-abaserukarikaka-des-usa/>
- Antoine, P. (1997). L’urbanisation en Afrique et ses perspectives. *Revue “Aliment Dans Les Villes,”* 1–21.
- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7, 295–310. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-2-2-1>
- Boyd, J. (2014). “I go to dance, right?”: representation/sensation on the gendered dance floor. *Leisure Studies*, 33(5), 491–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2013.798348>
- Bunten, A. C. (2008). Sharing Culture or Selling Out? Developing the Commodified Persona in the Heritage Industry. *American Ethnologist*, 35(3), 380–395.
- Cohen, E. (1988). Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15, 371–386. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6592.2010.01279.x>
- Colignon, M. (2011). Le long chemin de l’apprentissage. *Empan*, 82(2), 133. <https://doi.org/10.3917/empa.082.0133>
- Covington-Ward, Y. (2016). *Gesture and Power: Religion, Nationalism, and Everyday Performance in Congo*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Curtis, D. E. A. (2019). What Is Our Research For? Responsibility, Humility and the Production of Knowledge about Burundi. *Africa Spectrum*, 54(1), 4–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002039719852229>
- Davies, C. A. (1999). *Reflexive Ethnography: A guide to researching selves and others*. ASA Research Methods in Social Anthropology. London & New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203069370>
- DRCISR\_Canada. (2001). Burundi : existence du service militaire obligatoire [...]. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4bedd20.html>
- Driessnack, M., Sousa, V. D., & Mendes, I. A. C. (2007). An overview of research designs relevant to nursing: part 2: qualitative research designs. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 15(4), 684–688. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0104-11692007000400025>
- Edkvist, I. (1997). *The Performance of Tradition: An Ethnography of Hira Gasy Popular Theatre in Madagascar*. Uppsala: Uppsala University.
- Ejimabo, N. O. (2015). The Effective Research Process: Unlocking the Advantages of Ethnographic Strategies in the Qualitative Research Methods. *European Scientific Journal*, 11(23), 356–383.
- Eliasoph, N., & Lichterman, P. (2003). Culture in Interaction. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(4), 735–794. <https://doi.org/10.1086/367920>
- Fritzsche, P. (2007). Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity. *The American Historical Review*, 106(5), 1587. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2692740>
- Geertz, C. (1993). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London: Hammersmith.
- Gonye, J., & Moyo, N. (2015). Traditional African dance education as curriculum reimagination in postcolonial Zimbabwe: a rethink of policy and practice of dance education in the primary schools. *Research in Dance Education*, 16(3), 259–275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647893.2015.1036020>

- González, M. P. (2016). Authenticity as a challenge in the transformation of Beijing's urban heritage: The commercial gentrification of the Guozijian historic area. *Cities*, 59, 48–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2016.05.026>
- Hallam-Jones, R., & Wylie, K. R. (2001). Traditional dance - A treatment for sexual arousal problems? *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 16(4), 377–380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681990120083495>
- Hanna, J. L. (2001). The Language of Dance. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 72(4), 40–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2001.10605738>
- Hanna, J. L. (2010). Dance and sexuality: Many moves. *Journal of Sex Research*, 47(2–3), 212–241. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224491003599744>
- Hess, J. M. (2007). Leopold Kompert and the Work of Nostalgia: The Cultural Capital of German Jewish Ghetto Fiction. *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 97(4), 576–615. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jqr.2007.0060>
- Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (1992). *The Invention of Tradition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ilado, L. (2017). Music in Africa. Retrieved April 15, 2019, from <https://www.musicinafrica.net/magazine/president-nkurunziza-bans-burundian-female-drummers>
- Irambona, Y. (n.d.). Importances des clubs culturels dans la promotion de la musique. Retrieved from <https://www.ppbd.com/index.php/extras/sports/10099-dossier-importances-des-clubs-culturels-dans-la-promotion-de-la-musique>
- Iwacu. (2013). Club de danses traditionnelles Intashikirwa : «Il faut transmettre la culture aux enfants». Retrieved from <http://www.iwacu-burundi.org/club-de-danses-traditionnelles-intashikirwa-il-faut-transmettre-la-culture-aux-enfants/>
- Jeune Afrique. (2015). Burundi : qu'est-ce que l'ingoma, classé au patrimoine immatériel de l'Unesco ? Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/236296/societe/burundi-quest-ce-que-lingoma-classe-au-patrimoine-immateriel-de-lunesco/>
- Jurowski, C. (2014). Dancing cultures: globalization, tourism and identity in the anthropology of dance. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 12(4), 365–367. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2013.878287>
- Karkou, V., Bakogianni, S., & Kavakli, E. (2008). Traditional dance, pedagogy and technology: an overview of the WebDANCE project. *Research in Dance Education*, 9(2), 163–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14647890802087985>
- Kottak, C. P. (2000). *Cultural Anthropology* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Kringelbach, H. N. (2007). « Le poids du succès » : construction du corps, danse et carrière à Dakar. *Politique Africaine*, 107(3), 81. <https://doi.org/10.3917/polaf.107.0081>
- Kringelbach, H. N. (2013). *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn.
- Kringelbach, H. N., & Skinner, J. (2012). The Movement of Dancing Cultures. In *Dancing Cultures: Globalization, Tourism and Identity in the Anthropology of Dance* (pp. 1–25). New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Laroque, A. (2014). *Historiographie et enjeux de mémoires au Burundi TOME 1*. Université Paris I. Retrieved from <https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-01199375/document>

- Leseth, A. (2010). Michezo: Dance, sports and politics in Tanzania. *Anthropological Notebooks*, 16(3), 61–75.
- Mabingo, A. (2015). Decolonizing Dance Pedagogy: Application of Pedagogies of Ugandan Traditional Dances in Formal Dance Education. *Journal of Dance Education*, 15(4), 131–141. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15290824.2015.1023953>
- MacCannell, D. (1973). Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 79(3), 589–603.
- Ministère de la Culture. (2016). *Nouvelle politique culturelle du Burundi 2016-2025: un outil pour le développement durable du Burundi*. Bujumbura.
- Mojaki, P. G. (2014). The Phathisi dance of Botswana: Decoding the meanings in the traditional performances of a dance. *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa*, 11(1), 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.2989/18121004.2014.995443>
- Myridis, N. E. (2015). Culture's Definition, 1, 5–7.
- Ndayiragije, G. (2011). *Images de la femme au Burundi à travers les contes et les épithalames*.
- Ndimurukundo, B. (2016). *Anthologie des épithalames burundais*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Nijhawan, A. (2009). Excusing the female dancer: Tradition and transgression in bollywood dancing. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 7(2), 99–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746680902920841>
- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645570701401305>
- Palma, I. (2001). Performing Traditional Dances for Modern Tourists in the Amazon. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration Introducing Environmental Management in the Hotel Industry*, 6480, 37–41. <https://doi.org/10.1300/J149v01n03>
- Parqué, V. (2002). Conflit Burundais et théorie des relations internationales: étude de cas. *L'Afrique Des Grands Lacs. Annuaire 2001-2002, Annuaire 2*, 1–23.
- Plancke, C. (2010). On Dancing and Fishing: Joy and the Celebration of Fertility Among the Punu of Congo-Brazzaville. *Africa*, 80(4), 620–641. <https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2010.0405>
- Plancke, C. (2016). Contemporary Dynamics in Rwandan Dances: Identity, Changing Creativity and the Globalisation of Affect. *Dance Research*, 34(2), 150–169. <https://doi.org/10.3366/drs.2016.0157>
- Plancke, C. (2017). Dance Performances in Post-genocide Rwanda: Remaking Identity, Reconnecting Present and Past. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 11(2), 329–346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17531055.2017.1302694>
- Pype, K. (2006). Dancing for God or the devil: Pentecostal discourse on popular dance in Kinshasa. *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 36(3–4), 296–318. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006606778941968>
- Pype, K. (2013). The Drama(s) of Independence Day: reflections on political affects and aesthetics in Kinshasa (2010). *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 36(1&2).
- Pype, K. (2017). Dancing to the rhythm of Léopoldville: nostalgia, urban critique and generational difference in Kinshasa's TV music shows. *Journal of African Cultural*



- Studies*, 29(2), 158–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2016.1189816>
- Reyntjens, F. (2002). Chronique politique du Rwanda et du Burundi, 2001-2002. *L'Afrique Des Grands Lacs, Annuaire* 2, 45–77.
- RFI. (2014). Les tambours du Burundi inscrits au patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20141127-tambours-burundi-inscrits-patrimoine-mondial-unesco>
- Sculier, C. (2007). *Négociations de paix au Burundi: Une justice encombrante mais incontournable*. Geneva.
- Sibazuri, M.-L. (2019). *La femme sur le sentier des interdits: Contes et légendes du Burundi*. Bordeaux: Copy-Média.
- Sieveking, N. (2014). "Create your space!" Locating contemporary dance in Ouagadougou. *Africa*, 84(1), 55–77. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972013000661>
- Smith, K., Kulinna, P. H., Vissicaro, P., & Fredrickson, L. (2016). Anthropology, Dance, and Education: Integrated Curriculum in Social Studies. *The Social Studies*, 107(1), 28–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2015.1094725>
- Spiridon, P., & Sandu, I. (2016). *Conservation of Cultural heritage: From Participation to Collaboration* (Vol. 5). Retrieved from <https://www.encatc.org/media/2666-2015encatcjournalvol5issue14352.pdf>
- Su, X. (2011). Commodification and the selling of ethnic music to tourists. *Geoforum*, 42(4), 496–505. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.03.006>
- UNESCO. (2011). *Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*. <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004180444.I-786.6>
- Uvin, P. (2017). Ethnicity and Power in Burundi and Rwanda: Different Paths to Mass Violence. *Comparative Politics*, 31(3), 253–271. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42233>
- Victoria, H. K. (2012). Creating dances to transform inner states: A choreographic model in Dance/Movement Therapy. *Body, Movement and Dance in Psychotherapy*, 7(3), 167–183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17432979.2011.619577>
- Wanyama, M. N. (2012). Researching on Kenyan Traditional Music and Dance Today: Methodology and Ethical Issues Revisited. *Muziki*, 9(2), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2012.742231>
- Winarnita, M. (2016). The Not-so-gentle Makassarese Fan Dance: Misperformance Challenging Indonesian-Australian Transnational Femininity. *Anthropological Forum*, 26(2), 177–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2016.1150808>
- Wulff, H. (2015). *Anthropology of Dance. International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences: Second Edition* (Second Edi, Vol. 5). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12051-3>
- Xie, P. F. (2003). The bamboo-beating dance in hainan, china: Authenticity and commodification. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 11(1), 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580308667190>
- Yudhishtir, R. I. (2008). Cultural diversity. *Journal of Diversity Management*, 2(4), 2–7.
- Zajenkowski, M., Jankowski, K. S., & Kołata, D. (2015). Let's dance – feel better! Mood changes following dancing in different situations. *European Journal of Sport Science*, 15(7), 640–646. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17461391.2014.969324>

---

<sup>1</sup>This article is an excerpt from “Dance Commodification and Culture Conservation in Burundi: Dancing Identities in Bujumbura City” (2019), a Master’s Thesis defended by the author at KU Leuven, under the supervision of Professor Katrien Pype.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'intambo' is both singular and plural.

<sup>3</sup> In a context of severe civil war, the Burundian government initiated (1997-May 2001) compulsory military service for graduates from all secondary schools in the country.

<sup>4</sup> A Burundian ritual ceremony when members of the bride’s family for the very first time go to see her at her new place the day or days after wedding ceremonies. After some drinks, the guests lift the newlyweds as they all joyfully sing and dance in a group.

<sup>5</sup>There is non-implication of Burundi having multiple cultures but regional cultural variations.

<sup>6</sup> The hollow part of the drum on which is applied a cow-skin is called *inda* (stomach) and the sticks which help in fixing the skin are called *amabere* (breasts).