'Nudity' as a Strategy of Cultural Preservation among Ingoma Dancers of Mzimba District

Albert Mtungambera Harawa
Department of Languages and Literature, Mzuzu University, Malawi
alloyds66@gmail.com

Abstract
Nativists worldwide cry over the past that has been overtaken by the fast-changing world. In the middle of cultural diversity brought by globalisation, some cultural adherents encourage 'nudity' as one of the strategies for decolonising the minds of the indigenous people because nativism involves "return to the indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in the pre-colonial societies" (Ashcroft et al., 2000 159). Although some pro-modernists think that 'nudity' relegates humanity to carnivals, beasts or cannibals, some cultural enthusiasts have maintained their traditional attire, especially cultural events. For example, one of the cultural events in Malawi involves Ingoma, a Ngoni warrior dance. This paper argues for the importance of traditional attire and 'nudity' in the service of identity formation and preservation of culture. Using Bakhtin's idea of the carnivalesque, the paper argues that the carnival culture presented through the 'nudity' of Ingoma dancers is employed as a celebration of liberation from colonial culture.

Keywords
Nudity,
Nativism,
Pro-modernist,
Carnivalesque,
Cannibal

Introduction

Ingoma is a famous dance among the Ngoni of Mzimba and Mchinji Districts in Malawi and Chipata in Zambia. The Ngoni of Chipata are descendants of Mpezeni, a Zulu Jere Ngoni Chief, and one of the sons of Zwangendaba, who settled in the Eastern side of Zambia, in Chipata area. During some important cultural events in Malawi, Mpezeni Ngoni of neighbouring Chipata in Zambia also come and attend the ceremonies. When performing this dance, usually the dancers

wear some costume. However, because of variations in how dancers dress, it has been observed that some dancers cover up their bodies while others do not. Some dancers are therefore said to be nude when dancing.

Nudity involves being naked, and nakedness is defined by the season, occasion, or generation. One putting on well-refined barks of trees or hides of animals in 1200 AD could not be branded naked. Each generation has its design of clothes. However, some cultural adherents do not want to let the previous fashions and practices. Likewise, in terms of adherence to culture and dances, many societies prefer to have traditional dances and songs performed using ancient attire. The attire used in most traditional dances reflects a significant period in history when that tribal grouping experienced memorable times. Among other occasions, the tribal group remembers victorious battles they fought in the past that led to their clan, tribe, or ethnic grouping. Articulating the critical roles the dancing attire plays in the enactment of different traditional dances, Adjei and Osei-Sarfo (2016, p.15) argue that:

> Several war dances are performed to commemorate victories achieved during wars and major fights in history. These dances mimic historical moves and gestures used during such trying times. During such dances, many clothing items are worn by these war heroes or dancers, which are an embodiment of knowledge.

Adjei and Osei-Sarfo (2016) also focused on the nature of the costumes used and the occasion when such enactments are conducted. The two researchers show that each outfit serves a specific function and reflects the historical past. For example, Adjei and Osei-Sarfo (2016) assert that apart from beautifying the wearer, costumes are used for the spiritual protection of the wearer and symbolise value, peace, victory, wellbeing, or uncertainties.

Most postcolonial scholars such as Young (2003) and Bhabha (1994) argue that it is challenging to reclaim the past. While some people detest the idea of going to the historical past, some consider the past as the best foundation for them to move forward (Chinweizu, Jemie, & Madubuike, 1980; Fanon, 1967). Hence

the world population seems divided into two camps of nativists and modernists. Conversely, nativists contend that the remote past is better than the current practices, so this group aims to return to the past. For example, Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980) argue that African literature, just like Africans themselves, has been colonised and should be decolonised.

Similarly, Fanon (1967) observes that Africans, though with black skin, look like whites and have embraced the foreign (white) culture. On the other hand, modernists adhere to the global practices standard in the western world. Modernists call for intermediate, whereas some positive aspects of the western world and the remote past could be merged (Kalua, 2020). Modernists feel an imminent danger of breaking rules of decent dressing and orderliness of cultural practices if one does the past courses in the present time (Young, 2003; Kalua, 2020). For example, if one covers only half of their body, s/he relegates humanity to a cannibal, a postcolonial term for an eater of human flesh, which points towards the separation of the civilised and the savage (Ashcroft et al., 2000). Cannibals tend to behave like savages because cannibalism involves eating human flesh, and becoming a cannibal, one has to suspend human nature. Therefore, cannibalism displays carnivalesque features in that both involve suspension of traditional rules and order.

Mikhail Bakhtin used the word carnivalesque to refer to moments when traditional rules and order are put aside, the world is turned upside down, and the routines of daily life are suspended. During such events, the carnivalesque can indicate excitement, revelry, danger, and a specific change in how the world works. Abrams and Harpham (2015, p.88) contend that Bakhtin concept of the carnivalesque marks "the literary mode that parallels the flouting of authority and temporary inversion of social hierarchies, [and] that in many cultures [such inversions] are permitted during a season of carnival." The carnivalesque is a peculiar "trans-positioning or inversion of the time typical of mythological and artistic modes of thought ... The present and even more, the past are enriched at the expense of the future" (p. 147). The carnivalesque is like a parody which Bakhtin

calls an 'intentional hybrid' (p.75). It is the nature of every satire to transpose the values of the parodied style, to highlight some aspects while leaving others in the shade: parody is always biased in some direction …" (p. 75). Bakhtin in Rice and Waugh (1996, p.231) argue that 'the strength and at the same time the limitations of [each parody] become apparent when such categories are seen as conditioned by specific historical destinies and by the task that an ideological discourse assumes.' The carnivalesque involves "a mingling of voices from diverse social levels that are free to mock and subvert authority, to flout social norms by ribaldry, and to exhibit various ways of profaning what is ordinarily regarded as sacrosanct" (Abrams and Harpham, 2015, p.88).

For Mikhail Bakhtin, the carnivalesque is both the description of a historical phenomenon and the name he gives to a particular literary tendency. Historically speaking, Bakhtin was interested in the great carnivals of Medieval Europe. He saw them as occasions in which the political, legal and ideological authority of both the church and state were inverted — albeit temporarily — during the anarchic and liberating period of the carnival. The carnival was not only liberating because - for that short period - the church and state had little or no control over the lives of the revellers, although Terry Eagleton points out this would probably be "licensed" transgression at best. But its true liberating potential can be seen in the fact that set rules and beliefs were not immune to ridicule or preconception at carnival time; it "cleared the ground" for new ideas to enter into public discourse. In his works, Bakhtin suggests that the European Renaissance was made possible by the spirit of free-thinking and impiety that the carnivals engendered.

Bakhtin recognises that the carnival tradition dwindled in Europe following the Renaissance and the eventual replacement of feudalism with capitalism. As a result, he says, the public spirit of the carnival metamorphosed into the "carnivalesque": that is, the nature of the festival rendered into literary form. The person who most fully represented this spirit was François Rabelais, and the book which holds the most significant purchase on Bakhtin's imagination is Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel. The comic violence, foul language, exaggeration, satire,

and shape-shifting which fill this book are, for Bakhtin, the most outstanding example of carnivalesque literature. Ever concerned with the liberation of the human spirit, Bakhtin claims that carnivalesque literature — like the carnivals themselves — broke apart oppressive and mouldy forms of thought and cleared the path for the imagination and the never-ending project of emancipation. However, Bakhtin suggests that carnivalesque literature also became less common as the increasingly privatised world of modern, individualistic capitalism took hold. In present-day Africa, carnivalesque literature or cultural performances, according to this paper, include 'nudity' as a strategy that seeks to challenge Western modes of decent dressing. As a result, we have seen different cultural groups doing various dance performances clad in different outfits. In this study, an attempt was being made to assess the importance of Ingoma Dance attire in promoting and preserving the cultural dance. Therefore, this paper recounts the importance of proper attire in the performance of Ingoma dance.

The study employed a document analysis method. Document analysis is qualitative research that uses already existing data such as diaries, letters, and books produced by somebody else for different purposes (Neuman, 2003). In this case, books that focus on the Ingoma Dance formed the primary data source. Document analysis was ideal for this study because the research concentrated on the use and importance of Ingoma dance attire as a type of pre-existing data. Hence, document analysis and observation proved an appropriate methodology that provided suitable methods for analysing different dance groups. In addition, postcolonial texts and theories helped interpret the zeal and enthusiasm behind animal skins, feathers and horns of animals in performing Ingoma dance.

Hybridisation as an aspect of the carnivalesque

Nudity, mostly displayed during special occasions, as a carnival mark, shows pronounced variations in stripping bodies of the clothes. While the performer would be completely naked in some cases, imitating our forefathers' attire, most modern societies prefer a hybrid approach to covering their bodies. Below is a

discussion of the divisions among nativists, all serving one primary purpose: to preserve culture.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's 'Church, culture and Politics' in Homecoming (1972) presents the dynamics of cultural cohesion and cultural differences when the church, culture and politics clash. Ngugi (1973) claims that it becomes difficult to preserve culture in the face of church ideologies. However, the church provides a platform for hybridity. Several literary critics such as Bakhtin, Young (2003), Ashcroft, Griffiths (1989), and Bhabha (1994) have commented on the effects of colonisation which involves the clash of different cultures and practices. For instance, Bhabha argues that hybridity becomes the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling the critic to trace complex movements of disarming alterity in the colonial text.

When two different cultures meet, both cultures are affected even if one culture appears more superior than the other (Cross & Cross, 2000). Different things happen when two or more cultures meet. Harawa (2015) calls 'modulations', various forms of hybridity manifest in a heterogeneous society. This agrees with the assertion by Bhabha (1994) that the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridisation rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions. The colonising power is also indirectly 'colonised' by the less powerful cultures (Young, 2003). Some features of the less powerful cultures get spotted in the dominating cultures because some practices are learnt unknowingly (Kalua, 2020). This is why Bakhtin in Bhabha (1994) suggests two types of hybridisation: unintentional and intentional. Unintentional hybridisation happens unconsciously through the mixing of various languages co-existing within the boundaries of a single dialect, a single national language, a single branch, a single group of different branches, in the historical and paleontological past of the languages (Harawa, 2015). The pregnancy of unconscious hybridity gives birth to new amalgamation forms rather than contestation (Young, 2003).

The organising intention of the artist dialogises hybridity, which is common among the carnivals (Bhabha, 1994). Intentional hybridity sets different points of view against each other in a conflictual structure (Harawa, 2015). Bhabha has transformed Bakhtin's intentional hybridity into an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant cultural power (Bhabha, 1994). Black cultural politics involves, in Bakhtin's terms, both organic and intentional hybridisation, processes of merging and dialogization of ethnic and cultural differences set critically against each other (Kalua, 2020). Harawa (2015) further argues that hybridity is deployed against the culture that invented it. Hybridisation is a raceless chaos, and it produces no stable new form but rather something closer to Bhabha's restless, uneasy, interstitial hybridity (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridisation as carnivalization suggests a threat of degeneration and decay incipient upon a 'raceless chaos' not yet wholly redeployed and reflected. Kalua (2020) argues that hybridity as a cultural description will always carry with it an implicit politics of heterosexuality, which may be a further reason for contesting its contemporary pre-eminence. Hybridity, in particular, shows the connections between the racial categories of the past and current cultural discourse: it may be used in different inflexions (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity or intermediality is a solution to the identity crisis that emanates from the clash between nativism and globalisation (Kalua, 2020).

Hegemonic advances of the colonisers do not move nativists. Similarly, the carnival playing the role of the nativists is not bothered by the 'interpellation of the colonised subject' (Ashcroft et al., 2000). Nativists are aware that their identity is under siege, so they seek to fight the western or alien forces as two forces push against the cultural fabric of the society: the desire to remain pure in the remote past and the desire to go west. Consequently, many subjects choose to take the middle line, the hybrid or liminal state. The central line becomes the norm of society. However, the carnival works against the established order of the society at a particular time and during a specific occasion. The carnivalesque disturbs order. Because of wholesome copying of the past, the carnival is a parody and an aspect of mimicry and often displays mockery of the 'genuine' history. This indicates that it is not possible to claim the past.

Consequently, an attempt to claim the past produces some catastrophic features. Some of the standard features of the carnivalesque include comic violence, foul language, exaggeration, satire, and shape-shifting. This is why Ashcroft and others (2000: 159) argue that:

> Colonial discourse theorists such as Spivak and Bhabha argue strongly that such nativist reconstructions are inevitably subject to the process of cultural intermixing that colonialism promoted and from which no simple retreat is possible.

As explained above, cultural intermixing is promoted by, among other factors: comic violence, foul language, exaggeration, satire and shape-shifting, and these factors compromise the purity that nativists intend to uphold. However, an African's attempt to go, White, has also been attacked by nativists. For example, Fanon (1967, p.228) bemoans the Black man's lust for whiteness as follows:

> The black man wants to be like the white man. There is only one destiny for the black man, and it is white. Long ago, the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts were aimed at achieving a white existence.

This is a profound statement that underscores the effects of mimicking whiteness. Ingoma traditional dances are rare when Africans reclaim their 'lost' identity. On the contrary, according to Abram and Harpham (2015, p.319), such traditional performances serve as "a safety valve for self-expression" and a 'repression' of globalisation.

Nudity and modern dance

A different code of dressing distinguishes each generation. Since time immemorial, human beings have progressed from wearing leaves and barks of trees to wearing clothes of different types and pairs of shoes. What is unique in this paper is that some dancers choose more striking outfits that expose the private parts while others sew their costumes made from clothes and cover up their bodies.

The most common animal skins that dancers use include a lion and a leopard. The Ingoma dancers prefer these animal skins because they draw their strength and resilience from the instinctive behaviour and characteristics of the lion and the leopard. Unfortunately, because of strict wildlife preservation rules and that most animals have been wiped out from their natural environments, modern dancers have embarked on designing and sewing clothes so that the costumes resemble the features of a lion or a leopard.

In this paper, common nudity shall refer to all those who cover their bodies with skins of animals and clothes. Ingoma dance may appear awkward if the dancer would wear, for example, a necktie and a jacket. Therefore, common nudity implies the everyday attire for Ingoma dance, such as animal skins, headgears, shields and spears for men, and wrappers and headgears for women. Typically such dancers do not put on a pair of shoes. They dance barefoot. Such a group of dancers may be joined by modern dancers who may choose to be partially nude. With a "mild" version of "nudity", dancers are usually clad in a "Euro-centric" attire when attending official functions. These people are in a traditional Western suit of the same colour as the jacket and a pair of trousers, a shirt, and a matching necktie and pair of shoes, for men. Naturally, it is the same colour of a dress or blouse and a skirt with a matching pair of shoes for women.

When dancers dressed in this regalia join the dancing men in animal skins, with their heads 'tucked' in animal heads, the mixture smacks of hybridity and mimicry. This situation is similar to Bhabha's dissembling image because black dancers would like to be seen as whites which do not present a neat division. Bhabha argues that Fanon's concept of 'black skins, white masks' is not a super division; it is a doubling, dissembling image of being in at least two places at once ... to be different from those that are different makes you the same (1994, p.44). This doubling suggests instability or fluidity of the cultural artefacts. This is why Bhabha (1994, p.152) argues that

> It is from this instability of cultural signification that the national culture comes to be articulated as a dialectic of various temporalities – modern,

> colonial, postcolonial, 'native' – that cannot be a knowledge that is stabilised in its enunciation 'it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation.

Christianity and African traditionalism interface in the course of Ingoma dance. After getting Western education, indigenous intellectuals rely upon Western culture (Fanon, 1990 p. 176). Consequently, modern cultural practices interface with practices of the remote past during the performance of the Ingoma dance.

Nude dancers are sometimes interspaced with churchgoers who display a unique dualism: one side an African traditionalist and a devout Christian. For example, some Roman Catholic dancers were captured performing the Ingoma dance but with their rosaries around their necks, indicating their faith. This means that much as they are involved in the traditional dances, the Ingoma dancers do not abandon their faith. Nudity is a display of an identity that is under siege. Fanon (1967) considers a Negro's yearning for whiteness a split identity. Bhabha (1994:40) contends that

> To read Fanon is to exercise the sense of division that prefigures – and fissures – the emergence of a truly radically thought that never dawns without casting an uncertain dark. Fanon is a purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth. He may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change: from the area of ambivalence between race and sexuality; out of an unresolved contradiction between culture and class; from deep within the struggle of psychic representation and social reality.

Bhabha acknowledges divisions that are not clear-cut. Such divisions reveal the contradictions between culture and class, race and sexuality, and Blacks and Whites. After all, "the conditions for cultural belonging are fluid and contested" (Kalua, 2014, p. 71). This is made possible because, as Young (2003, p.7) puts it;

> [W]hen an original culture is superimposed with a colonial or dominant culture…it produces a nervous condition of ambivalence, uncertainty, a blurring of cultural boundaries, inside and outside, and otherness within.

Some dancers from TA Mpherembe were aged ten and below. The dancers displayed great skill in spinning the shield and turning around following the beats and rhythmic patterns of the chorused verses. Though born in the 21st century, the young dancers mimic their forefathers who did not have the 'luxury' of having a cotton cloth. Consequently, they danced while putting on animal skins. Different types of animal skins symbolise respect and honour accorded to different personalities. For example, the king mainly was expected to be clad in the skin of a lion or a leopard. Such skins were (and still are) very expensive. Young nude dancers provide a vibrant nursery for future dancers. Therefore, apart from the actual nudity as a strategy for cultural continuity, elders inculcate in the youth the spirit of the love for their culture by "catching them while young."

When dancers are presented in a mixed and heterogeneous manner, those not dressed in proper attire become a mockery of themselves. Even if you dance very well, the dancer not in traditional attire does not match those in traditional attire. The one in western clothing looks out of place. This shows that it is the act of stripping oneself of western dress that forms the core business of cultural continuity. Nudity, in this case, is similar to counter-hegemonic discourses that include postcolonial discourses such as postcolonial literature and literary theories. For example, Abram and Harpham (2015, p.306) argue that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin present "hybridisation of colonial languages and cultures in which imperialist importations are superimposed on indigenous traditions" nudity is, therefore "a rejection of the master narrative of Western imperialism – in which the colonial 'order' is not only subordinated and marginalised but in effect deleted as of a cultural agency – and its replacement by a counter-narrative in which the colonial cultures fight their way back into a world history written by Europeans" (Abram and Harpham, 2015, p.306). However, it remains to be seen if there is any pure culture at all because according to Kalua (2014, p.71), "culture must be understood as a continuum along which shifting identities are plotted."

Some women go to the extreme of exposing their breasts to display the right way of performing the Ingoma dance. For example, some female dancers

from Chipata, the Eastern part of Zambia, expressed their wondrous love and respect for their culture by not hiding what would otherwise have been hidden in blouses and bras. Instead, these women put on skirts only. Each time such women appeared in the dancing arena, loud applause was sounded, and the audience surged forward, indicating that people were shocked but interested to see more of these older women who could dare expose their private parts to the public.

The climax was when men appeared in the dancing outfit that showed their sexual organs. The audience was driven crazy when they saw the private parts of the dancing men. Some male dancers from the same Chipata (Zambia) of TA Mpezeni displayed their excellent love and respect for their culture by not hiding what would otherwise have been hidden in a pair of trousers. The audience was surprised but visibly amused in a related development; in some instances, men do not wear animal skins; they hide their penises in the gourds to protect them from external forces or objects. This shows the diversity of cultures despite global trends that intend to push the world into following a single culture. However, Bhabha (1994, p. 162) argues that

> When different cultures co-exist, a hybrid culture is born that presents an opportunity for cultural diversity. Putting on spectacles, wristwatches (instead of bangles made of elephant ivory), shoes (instead of being barefoot), clothes (instead of hides of animals) show a marked departure from the past.

This marked departure leads to cultural diversity, which according to Bhabha in "Cultural diversity and cultural differences", "is the recognition of pre-given cultural 'contents' and customs, held in a time-frame of relativism; it gives rise to anodyne liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange, or the culture of humanity" (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p.155). Cultural diversity is an acknowledgement of differences in cultural artefacts. Bhabha (1994, p. 163) stresses that "[t]he differences' of cultural knowledge that 'adds to' but does not 'add up' is the enemy of the implicit generalisation of experience, which Lefort (1988) defines as the effective strategy of containment and closure in the modern bourgeois ideology.

The masks, skins of animals, feathers of birds, and clothes that depict pictures of different wild animals like lions and leopards help Ngoni dancers relive their ancestors' past. The costume they put on also makes the dance authentically beautiful and exciting. Young dancers get used to the prevailing atmosphere of the Ingoma dance. It can also be concluded that, in their effort to run away from being accused of abandoning their culture, they further undermine the very culture that they seek to uphold because they want to attain something that is not attainable. Cultures are in a state of flux. Some dancers put on an Ingoma dancing regalia, yet they have a rosary around their necks. Ingoma dancers put on a mask that instead 'mimics' their ancestors. Therefore, instead of rejecting Western cultures, they abandon their own cultures. The Ingoma dance provides an opportunity that makes it possible for Ngoni dancers to "reject their own culture, becoming, like their masters, 'mimic-men'" (Ashcroft et al., 1995, p.154).

Nevertheless, nudity pushes all dancers towards the remote past, making the performance' authentic', enjoyable and exciting. It was typical that the dancers' ancestors put on animal skins and feathers of birds. In the past, such regalia were the primary mode of dressing. However, it was not a uniform for the dance. Different countries have passed the law on the conservation of wildlife and vegetation. Therefore, the standard and appropriate attire cannot be commonly used now. Furthermore, some animals have become extinct as a result of wildlife poaching. What remains are the skeleton features of the costume in the performers' minds.

Conclusion

The paper has shown that through Umtheto cultural festivals and other cultural events, the Ngoni of Mzimba preserve their cultural heritage as they wear attire befitting the events. The Ingoma dancers come up with clothes depicting a lion or a leopard to be sewn into an outfit for the Ingoma dance. Apart from the scarce animal skins and feathers, Africans are being lured by the advent of globalisation, which calls for intermediality to solve the identity crisis (Kaua, 2020). The significant consequences of globalisation include the transmogrification of traditional religions and belief systems, the disintegration of the traditional social

fabrics and shared norms by consumerism, cyber-culture, new-fangled religions and changing work ethics and work rhythms (King, 1997). Therefore, because of changes in ideologies and cultural practices, what used to be decent dressing has become a uniform for the Ingoma dance. Nudity presents an opportunity for the remote past to be showcased. Due to emerging changes in religion, food, attire, modes of transport and the whole outlook to life, stripping oneself of the western dress remains the only immediate solution to maintain the nature of the Ingoma dance in the presence of ever-changing cultural dynamics.

It seems inevitable that Ingoma dance would become extinct if dancers would wear clothes that people wear when they are involved in doing other tasks. What makes the Ingoma dance distinct is the nature of the costume. The dance becomes even more interesting when nude performers appear on the stage. Therefore, it means that the dance's future lies in preserving the costume. Dancers who perform on the stage while nude are the ones that are taken seriously. Some critical animals whose hides are used as a costume are no longer exist as such modern dancers have resorted to designing and sewing clothes that bear the colours and designs of wild animals. The 'natural' uniform that helps maintain the existence of the dance is nudity. Therefore, being nude while dancing Ingoma can be singled out as one of the central pillars that keeps the dance afloat in the ever-changing modern times.

There is undoubtedly a tug of war between nativism and globalisation, none of which seems to be winning. However, the dance outfits explained above show a shifting pattern towards intermediality. While maintaining some previous dancing antics, the Ingoma dance has incorporated many modern attires such as clothes and shoes. The current Ingoma cultural practice aligns with different literary theorists such as Bhabha (1994) and Young (2003), who claim that no culture is ever static but instead dynamic and fluid. The dancers display hybridisation of the once rigid practice of wearing animals' skins and barks of trees. The hybridisation of the Ingoma dance has become a solution to the otherwise evident conflict between nativism that seeks to promote nudity and the wearing of animal skins

and globalisation that accepts the wearing of clothes, rosary, shoes and all sorts of modern attire.

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