



Expressing indigenous knowledge through traditional dances

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Abstract

Traditional dances are the pivots around which cultural practices revolve among the Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. They are entrenched in religious rites and cultural ceremonies. Besides being a repository of indigenous knowledge and artistic traditions, traditional dances serve as avenues to re-enact the Xhosa people's history, social life and culture. Nevertheless, traditional dances, are being challenged by modern alterations that impact cultural aspects, which has affected the cultural roles of those dances and reducing them to entertainment. This article is written in response to the need to explore the functions of Xhosa traditional dance as an expressive tool to retain indigenous knowledge, values and musical practice, to help create and promote awareness and the use of indigenous knowledge among the Xhosa people in South Africa. To support the discussion on how traditional dance serves as an expressive tool to retain indigenous knowledge, the positivism paradigm was employed in line with the qualitative approach that was used for the collection of data, which comprised mainly Xhosa traditional dances performed during religious and social gatherings.

Key words: Xhosa dance; indigenous knowledge; traditional dance; South Africa; cultural practice

Introduction

Traditional dance is a broad term utilised to describe dances with cultural and religious significance that originated in an indigenous society (Rani, 2013). Firenzi (2012) posits that traditional dances have been largely disregarded as expressions of indigenous knowledge culture in African society since the formal start of the study of African history more than four decades ago. Reyes and Fernández (2019) are of the view that indigenous knowledge is largely transmitted and expressed through the encoding of sociocultural performances of everyday activities such as storytelling, dancing and singing. Akinwale (2012) opines that indigenous knowledge comes in different forms, including stories, songs, dances, and cultural ceremonies that represent religion, culture, and societal values (Zimu-Biyela, 2016).

Indigenous knowledge, according to Ngara and Mangizvo (2013), is a body of knowledge held among indigenous people in a particular cultural group that has survived for a period that spans numerous generations. Mapara (2009) asserts that indigenous knowledge is native knowledge that is distinct to a given ethnic group built over generations through rituals, dance, music and other cultural activities (Ngara, 2007; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). Xhosa traditional dance, of the Xhosa culture in South Africa, which is the subject of this article, is regarded as an indigenous practice with cultural roots when placed in the indigenous knowledge sphere.

Traditional dance as indigenous knowledge

Nel (2005) reminds us that almost all cultures and races have indigenous knowledge that is expressed in different ways. Mlisa (2009) concurs with Nel (2005) when he opines that every tribe has an indigenous knowledge that is ingrained in its cultural ideology and ancestry. Although there exists different ways of expressing and interpreting such meanings, all cultures embrace indigenous forms of knowledge (Mlisa, 2009). Akas (2013) posits that indigenous dance should be construed as a society's intrinsic indigenous knowledge.

Igweonu (2002) posits that traditional dance can be found in every culture; its practice and functional values are intrinsically linked to a society's socio-cultural ideology. It is vital to note that in most African societies, traditional dances represent the indigenous culture of the people and serve various purposes in the community. Ugolo (2006) states that traditional dances in any indigenous community can be characterised by the purpose they serve, such as ritual, social or entertainment; traditional dances serve as tools for cultural sustainability and sources of indigenous knowledge. Davis and Harrison (2008) opine that traditional dance began before people had a language and that feelings, ideas and beliefs were expressed through dance movements and rhythms and that they do not appear in isolation but are a part of broader cultural activities. Yoder (2018) posits that dance was how stories and feelings were conveyed before people had language, they used dance in the time past to express emotions and to celebrate nature. This indicates that dance is an integral part of every nation's customs and traditions.

Udoka (2016) states that indigenous knowledge in the form of traditional dance is intertwined with the fabric of the African indigenous community based on socio-cultural experience. Chris (2006) opines that traditional dance is the expression of a people's cultural life in that no aspect of the people's cultural life is celebrated without a traditional dance performance. Chielotam (2012) asserts that traditional dance in Africa is used to encode significant meanings that border directly on the totality aspects of a people's life and cultural identity. Chielotam (2012), goes on to state that traditional dance is viewed as a significant instrument for gaining a deeper understanding of human beings and their culture.

Traditional dances in the Xhosa culture have similar characteristics to those described previously and are an integral feature of the Xhosa people's socio-cultural landscape. Mtiya (2012) posits that the various traditional Xhosa dances performed during initiation ceremonies, rituals and social gatherings help to sustain their customs and traditions and to educate the people about their culture, traditions and history. Mtiya (2012) also opines that the Xhosa people perform traditional dances during formal and informal ceremonies for pleasure and ritual. For instance, dances are performed to welcome important dignitaries to the community and during social events that include traditional or cultural family occasions to relate to ancestors (Mtiya, 2012).

The Xhosa people, according to Alexander (2021) and Statistics South Africa (2005), are the majority ethnic group in the Eastern Cape Province but their indigenous musical culture has been the subject of only limited published research (Smith, 2006). Although the Xhosa people make up a significant portion of the Eastern Cape's population, little is known about their traditional dances and how their indigenous knowledge is expressed and sustained through their various traditional dances. Little or nothing has been documented about its transmission processes and performance practices. According to Traoré, Sotunsa, & Ojó (2016), the preservation of indigenous and local knowledge in Africa encounters various obstacles in an increasingly globalised and Westernised world. The purpose of this article is therefore to deepen the scholarly conversation about the paradoxical dynamics of preserving indigenous knowledge in African communities. The researchers' earnest aim is that this article will enhance the relevance of Xhosa traditional dance as an avenue to express and retain indigenous and local knowledge. The term expressions, which appears prominently in this article, refers to making known. The traditional dances discussed in this article are thus presented to disseminate some of the indigenous and local knowledge practices of the Xhosa people. This article is also an expression of the knowledge and values embedded in the various traditional Xhosa dances that are continually performed in both communal celebrations and traditional initiation rites.

Methods

The positivist theoretical approach was employed to explain how traditional Xhosa dances serve as expressive tools in the retention of indigenous knowledge. According to Macionis and Gerber (2010), positivism is a philosophical approach that emphasises that knowledge is derived from experience of natural phenomena. Hence, information derived from cultural experience is the source of indigenous knowledge (Macionis & Gerber 2010). As the study's focus was on traditional dance, the aforementioned approach was appropriate. In other words, the approach recognises traditional Xhosa dances for what they are and values the expressions of those who perform them.

The qualitative research method was utilised in this article. According to Stake, Denzin, and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is a multidisciplinary method that involves a descriptive and naturalistic approach to researching a subject. Due to the nature of this study, the qualitative research approach was deemed the most appropriate. The data was collected using a qualitative technique and consisted primarily of indigenous Xhosa dances (*umteyo*, *ukutyityimba*, *umnqungqo*, *umdudo* and *umtshilo*) performed during initiation rites and religious and social gatherings.

Results

Expressing Indigenous Knowledge through Xhosa traditional dances

Various forms of ritual and expression reflect the diversity of cultures around the world and the unique connections that each culture has with traditional songs and dances (Moncada, 2016). According to Harper (2011), traditional dance performances within indigenous dance traditions usually serve a precise purpose, which may express the people's communal beliefs. There are various traditional dance forms among the Xhosa people that express their indigenous knowledge and are embedded in their traditional ceremonies and communal rites (Siyabona Africa, 2021; Harper, 2011; Mbusi, 2011).

According to Moncada (2016), there are songs and dances for every occasion that reflect beyond the aesthetic of the performance, embodying knowledge of social customs, spirituality, history, celebration and healing. The people's history and the relationships that are expressed in the interconnectedness of all life are held within the various songs and dances. Smith (2020) opines that there are various dance types performed across different age groups that serve as a means of communicating the salient elements of Xhosa culture and a powerful medium through which the Xhosa people express and sustain their indigenous knowledge. As a result, traditional Xhosa dances and songs are components of people's daily activities (Mbiti, 2000).

Despite the growing impact of Western civilisation, traditional Xhosa dances continue to be a powerful representation of traditional beliefs, values and customs. The various categories of traditional dances serve as means of communicating the culture's most important features. Heunis (2013) posits that the various dance types in Xhosa culture are for different events and performed by either males or females. The traditional Xhosa dances discussed in this article are *umteyo*, *ukutyityimba*, *umnqungqo*, *umdudo* and *umtshilo*.

Ukutyityimba

The *ukutyityimba* dance is a significant aspect of communal practices and is a type of indigenous knowledge that provides insight into the Xhosa people's cultural experiences during traditional weddings and is passed down from one generation to the next. According to Mtiya (2012), the *ukutyityimba* dance is mainly performed by married women at wedding ceremonies. Mtiya (2012) says that this dance is performed on the wedding day and women take turns to compete with one another. According to Nombembe (2014), various indigenous songs accompany *ukutyityimba* dance performances to cheer the spectators, and celebrants.

According to LaMothe (2015), in response to emotions, people are moved to express themselves through physical movement and dance becomes an avenue to express one's cultural knowledge in time and place. To dance, according to Moncada (2016), is to be knowledgeable about

people's cultural traditions, history and beliefs; *ukutyityimba* dancers are knowledge holders of Xhosa language, culture and tradition.

Levine (2005) asserts that the *ukutyityimba* dance is one of the foremost indigenous dances performed among the Xhosa people. Dike (n.d.) opines that the dance requires the dancers to use the entire body during the performance by shaking and vibrating their upper bodies when dancing. Levine (2005) explains that the "entire body quivers and the knees are pushed forward and backwards". *Ukutyityimba* dancers express different attitudes and movements at the different segments of the song's text; it blends with the theme of the wedding and serves to demonstrate the theme of each stage of the ceremony.

Bumbaco (n.d.) cited in Joseph and Petersen (2008) states that a deeper understanding of the *ukutyityimba* dance and the ceremonies in which it is performed defines who the Xhosa people are and helps to shape the image they have of themselves and what they wish others to perceive of them. As a result, through the *ukutyityimba* dance, people are continually building their identity in relation to their heritage and desires. For instance, the *ukutyityimba* dance showcases the rich cultural heritage of the people during the performance. According to Akas (2013), it is what is entrenched in the culture of a people that can be expressed through dance movement. Onwuekwe (2006) opines that indigenous dance goes beyond the movement to express indigenous knowledge and portray the people's socio-cultural values.

Umteyo

Joseph and Petersen (2008) are of the view that cultural dances serve to distinguish one social group from another within a society because participating in dance is typically predicated on one's place in the community's social structure. For example, the *umteyo* dance symbolically portrays societal duties in Xhosa initiation rites, particularly in the *umguyo* (transition from boyhood to manhood) ceremony. The *umteyo* traditional dance is performed by young boys known as *amakwenkwe* before they are initiated into manhood (Mtiya, 2012). Grau (2004) asserts that these young boys, or *amakwenkwe*, are aged approximately 20 or 21.

The *umteyo* traditional dance becomes an outlet through which the *amakwenkwe* express their history and their knowledge of the natural world. *Umteyo* dance plays an important part in the living tradition as an exploration of the *amakwenkwe* essence. Traditional dances investigate our methods of living, familial and tribal relationships, processes, devotion and the intent with which the dance is constructed and presented (Murphy, 2007).

Dance, according to Moncada (2015), shares the intertwined dynamic between a people and the natural world in which they live. The *umteyo* dance is an expression of Xhosa cultural belief that is not divorced from their cultural practices. This dance is a means to convey living customs and transmits collective indigenous knowledge that is embedded in every stage of life. The *umteyo* dance can therefore be considered as an expression of cultural belief in its ritual of celebration in connection with ceremonies. This awareness of traditional dance as the core of traditional life permeates every aspect of the community, as it is anchored in the culture of the people (Moncada, 2015).

Mtuze (2004) opines that this dance is performed in various ways depending on the genre. For instance, the movement is based on a deeply felt response to rhythm as the young boys pledge solidarity and bid farewell to those transitioning to manhood. The performers often wear small bells across their thorax and tin rattles filled with stones referred to as *izikhunjane* around their lower leg to emphasise the vibrations of their shaking bodies (Mtiya, 2012; Gulwai, 2007). The *umteyo* dance is referred to as the "shaking dance" by Seridaran (n.d.) and Kehinde (2016) because it involves quick chest shaking that causes the entire spinal column to quiver.

The transition from boyhood to manhood ceremony involves core aspects of indigenous knowledge beginning with the *umteyo* dance performance, songs, costumes and the local musical instruments utilised in the ceremony. Like other art forms that are specific to the Xhosa people, the *umteyo* dance is not intended for entertainment purposes only, it projects the cultural identity of the

people. According to Akas (2013), traditional dances are integrated into the core structure of indigenous societies' cultural, and religious practices.

Umnqungqo

Traditional dances in African societies serve a wide range of societal functions. According to Picton and Harper (2017), each performance in an indigenous dance tradition usually includes a primary and subsidiary purpose that reflects the people's communal values, social interactions and indigenous knowledge. Thus, the *umnqungqo* dance, an indigenous dance performed by elderly Xhosa women, serves as a cathartic experience for young girls transitioning into adult responsibilities among the Xhosa people. According to Picton and Harper (2017), the individual is not left alone to bear the emotions that accompany the transition phases, as members of the community assist the young woman and her family through the process with appropriate cultural ceremonies expressing the emotions of the moment in traditional music, song and dance (Picton & Harper, 2017).

The significance of the *umnqungqo* dance in the expression of indigenous knowledge is reflected in the dancers' roles as the bearers of Xhosa traditions and culture. The dance is a powerful reminder of that connection during every rite or celebration, as it acknowledges the diversity of life beyond the performer. The deep-seated nature of dance to express indigenous knowledge is reflected in the act of dancing. The essence of traditional dance is creation and togetherness (Moncada, 2015).

According to Mtuze (2004:30) and Mtiya (2012), the *umnqungqo* dance is performed during the *intonjane* (initiation ritual for preparing young girls for adulthood, marriage and childbearing) ceremony by women and it is performed when a girl reaches puberty. The dance is performed outdoors by married women only (Sotewu, 2016). The *umnqungqo* dance is performed by older women because it does not require much movement and is a slow, dignified dance that is accompanied by handclapping and traditional music played on local musical instruments such as *uhadi* (struck bows) and *uMrhubhe* (mouthbow) (Mtiya, 2012).

The *umnqungqo* dance is restricted to women only because everything that has to do with *ukuthombisa* (female initiation) are women affairs (*yindaba yabafazi*)" (Akrofi, Smit, and Thorsén, 2007). According to Akas (2013), every indigenous dance has a context or a tale within its performance. The context in which the *umnqungqo* indigenous dance is performed indicates the importance of the indigenous knowledge attached to the *intonjane* rite, which is linked to women's reproductive health, childbearing, and fertility among the Xhosa people (Akrofi et al., 2007).

Umdudo

Traditional Xhosa society views marriage as the amalgamation of two families, thereby extending the sense of communalism in the society. The *umdudo* dance plays an integral role during wedding ceremonies by enabling the passing on of cultural values and indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next. According to Mtiya (2012), the *umdudo* is a traditional dance performed at weddings often accompanied by *umbholorho* (indigenous songs). Of concern here is the way in which the *umdudo* dance is utilised to express indigenous Xhosa knowledge traditions and to demarcate the various components of the marriage ceremony over time.

The *umdudo* dance experience is a profound link to "being" indigenous for the Xhosa people; the dance reconnects them to their cultural roots, which are fundamental expressions of their identity and spirituality. Detaching indigenous dance from indigenous communities, according to Moncada (2015), would be removing the core of the people's cultural existence. The *umdudo* traditional dance is more than individual rituals; it represents the people's living heritage.

In describing the *umdudo* traditional dance, Gouws and Prinsloo (2010) posit that the dance entails an individual stamping his/her foot on the ground to the rhythm of clapping hands. Soga (2013) opines that the *umdudo* dance is performed by older men while women sing and beat the *ingqongqo* drum in accompaniment. Soga further states that the *umdudo* dance is executed in three movements; the first movement is performed in the courtyard between the huts and cattle kraal and is accompanied

by the *umyeyezelo* (praise song) sang by the womenfolk while beating the *ingqongqo* drum (Mtiya, 2012).

Van Niekerk (1999) describes the first movement as a "group of men clad in garments or short skirts stand in line and wait for *umyeyezelo* an introductory dance-song. They begin by leaning their bodies forward and kicking their left foot forward, causing a 'resounding' bang on the ground. They then retreat to their initial upright positions in synchronisation, repeating the sequence three or four times before leaping into the air three or four times. After a while, the leader blows a whistle to end the first movement sequence.

The *ngoma kaMhlala* or Mhala's song replaces the introductory song and introduces the second movement, the *ingqaqu*. According to Van Nierkerk (1999) and Soga (2013), this movement is executed with considerably more intensity and energy by young men. The movement's leader breaks free from the group and sprints forward, kicking each leg interchangeably. Each movement starts with a short jump, which is followed by the other dancers in a 'follow-the-leader' sequence. (Van Nierkerk, 1999).

The second dance movement similarly comes to an end when a whistle is blown, followed by the *umxhentso*, which is the last dance (Van Nierkerk, 1999). Mtiya (2012) asserts that the third movement, known as the *umxhentso*, is performed by older men accompanied by singing and clapping by women to maintain the rhythm.

Traditional dances have evolved but have remained as vital pillars in the preservation of indigenous knowledge traditions. Traditional dance encourages the restoration of traditional knowledge and continues to reflect the people's cultural worth from traditional life to contemporary times. By its very essence, the *umdudo* traditional dance is an act of oneness, bringing the thoughts and life of the Xhosa people into embodied reality.

Umtshilo

The *umtshilo* is a traditional Xhosa dance that is performed to celebrate the *abakweta* (circumcised boys) initiation ceremony (Momoti, 2002). According to Sparg (2014), the *umtshilo* dance performance attracts numerous spectators who enjoy the initiates' outstanding display. The dancing is rigorous and tests the dancers' endurance, as it begins at midday and continues until sunset, except for brief pauses for dancers to adjust a skirt or headgear (Sparg, 2014). The dancing is competitive and the judges are older, more experienced men and the best dancer ("*intshili*") is rewarded with gifts (Pahl et al., 1989). Although the *umtshilo* dance is held in numerous kraals over the three-month seclusion period, the main event is held at the kraal that houses the circumcision school ("*usosuthu*") (Sparg, 2014).

Traditional dance reflects the cultural life or traditions of a group of people and is an expression of the people's cultural identity (Moncada, 2015). The *umtshilo* traditional dance is deeply rooted in the *abakweta* (circumcised boys) initiation ceremony; an artistic expression that is linked to the ceremony. The *umtshilo* dance display is perceived to be one of the great events in Xhosa culture (Sirayi, 2012; Soga, 1931; Van Nierkerk, 1999). The initiates' spectacular performance demonstrates self-respect, identity and pride as the *abakhweta* rejoice and entertain themselves as a reward for reaching this stage (Momoti, 2002).

The dancers are 'decorated with motifs of blue spots on the white clay background of their bodies' (*abaThembu*), or of black, blue and red spots of various sizes on the day of the ceremony (*amaBomvana*)' (Sparg, 2014:1). They wear a short skirt made of dried palm leaves that are twisted multiple times around the waist (known as "*umhlambi*"), as well as headgear that includes a head covering ("*ingcambane*") and a veil ("*ixhonkxo*") with two slender palm fronds protruding upward like horns (Pahl et al., 1989; Sparg, 2014). Plaited grass ribbons hang from the wrists and one hand holds a slender stick (Pahl et al., 1989).

In describing the *umtshilo* dance, Momoti (2002) opines that the dancers vigorously move their buttocks and pelvic region back and forth causing the skirt to alternately rise and fall, opening like a fan with an exhilarating swish sound. According to Sparg (2014), the head is nodded at regular intervals,

causing the horns to wave up and down. The dance is performed to the rhythmic beat of *ingqongqo*, a dried ox-hide strung on four sturdy rods and beaten with sticks by older women (Soga, 2013). It is sometimes accompanied by singing and the older men constantly encourage the circumcised young men (Pahl et al., 1989).

There is a special cloth made for performing the *umtshilo* dance known as *umhlambi*. The clothing is worn as a kilt comprised of dried palm leaves. The *ixhonxo* headgear is made of dry grass and partly conceals the initiate's face while dancing (Momoti, 2002). According to Levine (2005), the costume "had stems and leaves attached on either side, creating the appearance of grasshoppers' antennae. The headdresses lightly touched the ground when the dancers leaned forward. The dancing costume is the most generally recognised as distinctly Xhosa, with an array of colourful body paints and palm leaf attire" (Levine, 2005).

Because the weight of the palm-leaf kilt seems to hinder the free mobility of the entire body, the dancers perform in single file with stiff movements (Levine, 2005; Momoti, 2002). They bow at the waist, creating a sharp percussive rattling sound with their skirts (Levine, 2005). Gracefulness is the deciding factor in determining which boy is the best dancer. The beautiful movements are accompanied by the sound of dry palm leaves, which are audible throughout the dance (Momoti, 2002).

To the Xhosa people, dance is not merely entertainment or an aesthetic experience, it is an indigenous knowledge experience created by the people to sustain their identity. According to Escobar and Quintero (2016), "dance is not just only a set of movements, music, rhythm, but it also expresses the context of performance and the traditional knowledge".

Indigenous knowledge, according to Rani (2013) and Ntuli (2002), aims to promote local knowledge resources in communities and support indigenous cultures' cultural assets. Indigenous knowledge of dance is distinct to every cultural group and embedded in communal ceremonies and rituals (Rani, 2013). The various traditional dances of the Xhosa people outlined in this article assist them to express their cultural views and also serve to preserve historical and cultural traditions. Dance serves as a cultural and artistic avenue for the community to express their indigenous knowledge (Snipe, 1996).

Purpose of Xhosa traditional dances

Traditional Xhosa dances, like those of other African societies, are typically executed in different age groups; groups of young girls or boys or groups of elderly women or men (Mbusi, 2011). The traditional Xhosa dances reflect the Xhosa culture, which includes gender roles in society, ceremonies, communal events and religious ceremonies.

Traditional dances and gender roles

Xhosa traditional dances capture the diverse social responsibilities ascribed to men and women within the society (Smith, 2020), which implies strong convictions about what it means to be male or female, as well as rigid taboos concerning inter-gender interaction. Men and women generally dance in different styles (Mbusi, 2011).

Women's dance movements tend to highlight their domestic roles in society. These roles, according to Smith (2020), revolve around maternity and domestic activities and they dance with grace to reflect their femininity (Harper, 2011). The dance movements of the male dancers can be seen as a statement of masculine dominance; they dance with an attack of fast, muscular motions to portray masculinity (Harper, 2011). In their social relationships, Xhosa men are typically supposed to embody power and authority.

Mtiya (2012) citing Elliot (1970:88) explains that the coming-out dance performed by young men when leaving the initiation school is to instil the significance of being a man and assuming

responsibility. Traditional dance can be viewed as a potent paradigm for passing down traditional values and gender roles to future generations (Smith, 2020).

Traditional dances and culture

Xhosa traditional dances are used to celebrate births and deaths, honour the spirits of dead relatives (ancestors) and entertain. They also teach social patterns and values and assist people to work, mature, praise or criticise members of the community while celebrating festivals and funerals (Mtuze, 2004). Xhosa traditional dances are also performed for entertainment, narrating history, religious and ritual purposes and to encounter the gods (Mtiya, 2012). This indicates that dance commemorates, celebrates, witnesses and highlights communal events. Mtuze (2004) posits that the purpose of the dance is to express the indigenous culture of the people; it expresses communal desires, values and collective creativity.

Magubane (1998) contends that the various traditional dances performed during initiation ceremonies celebrate the passage from childhood to adulthood. For instance, the initiates are taught the core value of Xhosa indigenous knowledge through the various traditional dances performed at the initiation ceremonies by involving them in dance at the various stages of their life.

Xhosa indigenous knowledge is embodied in the different Xhosa traditional dances performed at cultural rituals and social gatherings (Hardman, 2005). As a result, traditional Xhosa dances are frequently viewed as a part of Xhosa cultural activities rather than in isolation (Mbusi, 2011). Traditional dances are performed at significant events such as weddings and anniversaries and to commemorate the coming of age of young men and women. They instil confidence in the initiates by allowing them to perform in front of an audience while being formally recognised by the adults (Mbusi, 2011). This fosters pride and a strong sense of belonging. Mugubane (1998) states that traditional dance that is performed in a communal setting instils in the Xhosa people a sense of belonging and solidarity; an opportunity to connect with one another and be part of the collective.

Traditional dances and religion

Xhosa tradition is modelled on the aspect of ancestral veneration and dancing is how the living communicate with the ancestors and express their gratitude to them (Smith, 2020). Ceremonial and sacrificial dances are performed on special occasions as an appeal to one's ancestors and to honour and seek guidance and support. For instance, traditional healers use dance to get inspiration for healing illnesses of the body and spirit; they dance until they attain a trance-like state (Mtuze, 2004:61-62). In conclusion, Xhosa traditional dances serve to unite generations and ensure a smooth transfer of indigenous knowledge from one generation to the next.

Factors militating against Xhosa traditional dances

According to Nicholls (1996:15), Western influence adversely affects African traditional dances. Bhola (2002) contends that indigenous culture has been lost through the influence of education, the media, Christianity and urbanisation. Magubane (1998) cites Christianity as one of the major factors affecting the Xhosa traditional dances. Early missionaries restricted or outright forbade some cultural practices and rituals such as playing indigenous music, dancing, circumcision, ancestor veneration and tribal rites were strongly discouraged (Bediako, 1995). It was thought that such acts were rooted in evil religious experiences and should be avoided (Lebaka, 2017; Hiebert, 1994).

The missionaries attempted to change the way of life for the Xhosa people by building schools and churches and encouraging them to abandon their indigenous culture (Mtiya, 2012). This introduced social and cultural changes to the Xhosa indigenous traditions (Magubane, 1998). Magubane (1998:3) explains that while Xhosa traditional dances are still performed in both urban and rural areas, they have been altered by external influences and the rituals that are observed bear little resemblance to the practices of the past. The author claims that modernity has influenced cultural traditions and that these

traditions now revolve around Christianity and Western ideologies. However, some traditionalists continue to perform their rituals around the dictates of their ancestors (Mtiya, 2012).

Other factors that have influenced the preservation of traditional dance include the growth of the migrant labour system and urbanisation and the realities of modern life, which have brought about a change in the Xhosa people's way of life as well as the assimilation of other dance traditions in Xhosa traditional dances (Richards, 2007; Harrison, 2008; Rina, 2013; Mtiya, 2012). As a result of social changes and cultural evolution, other forms of dances that are comparatively new to the Xhosa tradition but are now part of present Xhosa community customs have emerged (Mbusi, 2011). An example is the gumboot dance, which originated in the mines in South Africa and is a popular new dance among the Xhosa people, usually performed by youths (Harper, 2011). This dance is characterised by constant foot beats that result in a consistent rhythm (Mbusi, 2011). According to Mbusi (2011), the *kwasa kwasa* dance, which originated in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is another new dance that is popular among young girls and boys. In summary, we can state that as people moved to towns, cultures collided and new hybrid forms of dance emerged resulting in a mix of different cultures (Richards, 2007; Rina, 2013). The meaning, context and function of traditional dance have been influenced by the merging and collaboration of diverse cultures (Rina, 2013; Erlmann, 1990).

Conclusions

The cultural values of the Xhosa people in South Africa, are embedded in their cultural practices and expressed during religious ceremonies and traditional dances. This article emphasises the significance of the various Xhosa traditional dances as avenues to express the salient elements of Xhosa indigenous knowledge. In general, the Xhosa people view traditional dance as the core of most of their traditional ceremonies. The value of this practice by the Xhosa population has declined due to the aforementioned influences and adoption of Western culture. Writing about and documenting the cultural potency of these dances can serve as a means of sustaining and preserving indigenous knowledge. There is a necessity for further research in this area, as Xhosa indigenous knowledge traditions need to be extensively explored, examined and structured in a scholarly manner from a musicological perspective employing a multidisciplinary approach that includes sociology, history, art and linguistics. The researchers hope that this article will contribute significantly to existing studies in related fields, mark the beginning of a new direction, stir debate and inspire similar research in other African cultures and artistic traditions.

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