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Workshops as a Method for the Dissemination of Performative Knowledge in Nigeria.

The Case of African Contemporary Dance and Ijodee Dance Company

WORKING PAPER



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Workshops as a method for the dissemination of performative knowledge in Nigeria. The case of African Contemporary Dance and Ijodee Dance Company

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Abstract

African Contemporary Dance has emerged as a vibrant form of dance aesthetic and practice across the African continent. Drawing its theoretical roots from modern dance and characterized by a practical orientation directed at the exploration of newness and currency in movements and techniques from a multicultural dimension, the emergent genre has attracted tremendous support, promotion and patronage through sponsorship and training from western governments, philanthropic organisations and cultural agencies. Along with dance festivals, competitions, performance networks and infrastructures, workshops have been adopted, not just as a veritable method for the dissemination of knowledge of African Contemporary Dance, but also as a platform for cross-cultural encounters in which collaborative alliances are produced and exhibited. This paper will briefly discuss the role of workshops in the emergence, growth and popularity of African Contemporary Dance, especially in Nigeria, by using Adedayo Li-adi's Ijodee Dance Company as an example.

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Introduction

Apart from their usage as a method for the creation of collaborative dramatic outputs including, but not limited to, playwriting, improvised theatre performances and actor training, workshops have served as a primary method for the institutionalisation and dissemination of knowledge in other theatrical genres from the late nineteenth century onwards. One of the theatrical forms which enjoyed tremendous support and patronage, via the workshop method, during this period was dance, most notably, the African Contemporary Dance movement. Emerging in the 1970s through the pioneering efforts of early practitioners, such as Germaine Acogny, Alphonse Tierou and Salia Sanou, and with financial support, sponsorship, scholarships and training from western agencies, philanthropic organisations and cultural centres, African Contemporary Dance has grown rapidly and is becoming increasingly popular, especially among young dance artists based mostly in urban areas across the continent. The rapidity of growth can be traced and attributed not only to the creativity of the artists specializing in this form of dance expression and the network of partnerships and collaborations fostered through the propagation of the art form, but also to the multifarious approaches which have enabled the institutionalisation and dissemination of its skills, techniques and knowledge. In addition to schools and dance centres (École des Sables, Dakar; Centre for Choreographic Development or Centre de Développement Chorégraphique, Ou-agadougou; Studio Kabako, Kinshasa etc.), festivals/dance competitions (Danse L’Afrique Danse!, Kaay Fecc Dance Festival, Dance meet Dance Festival, Truth and To-getherness Dance Festival etc.) and other forms of exchange of knowledge and collaboration, workshops have played an integral role in the emergence, development, dissemination and reception of the aesthetics and practice of African Contemporary Dance globally.

This paper will attempt to briefly and tentatively situate the usage and role of workshops in the emergence, growth and popularity of African Contemporary Dance, especially in Nigeria, by using Adedayo Liadi’s Ijodee Dance Company as an example. However, before considering the above, an attempt will be made to briefly establish the defining concepts of African Contemporary Dance as well as the linkages and connections that enabled its emergence in Africa.

African Contemporary Dance

African Contemporary Dance draws much of its theoretical foregrounding and techniques from the modern dance form and practices of such renowned artists as Martha Graham and Peggy Harper with particular emphasis on the ‘now, newness and freedom’ (Barnes, 2004; Itsewah, 2011; Straaten, 2016). Often described as a restructuring and re-codification of “indigenous African dance bringing it into a contemporary framework through research” (Loots, 2005: 38), its main objective is not solely creating new dance steps or movements, but “refining, restructuring, amplifying or intensifying an existing movement in conventionality to the artist’s statement at a given time within a given situation” (Itsewah, 2011:70). From the above, it can be seen that the principal feature of African Contemporary Dance is a constant recreation and explora-

tion of the ‘new’ and ‘current’. This practical ethos is what essentially makes the dance form ‘an unfixed and shifting aesthetic’ (Straaten, 2016) relying enormously on a plethora of physical idioms, movements and techniques developed by individual practitioners, thus making its definition arduous and contested (see Douglas et al, 2006; Loot and Young-Jahayer, 2005).

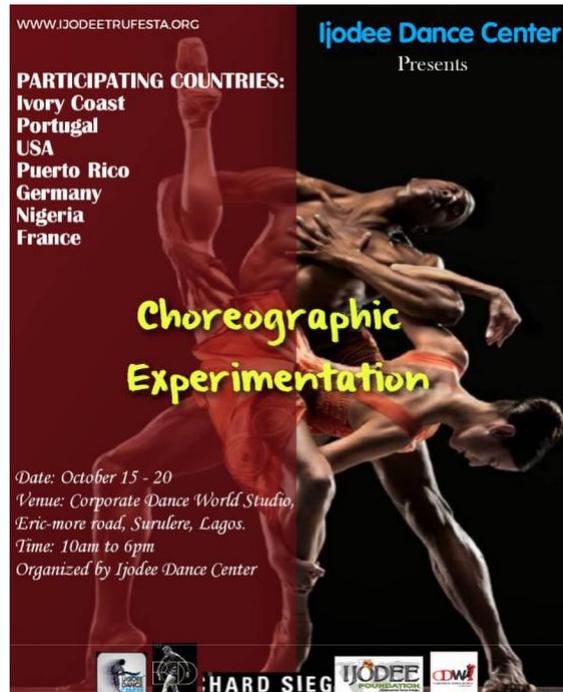


fig. 1: A poster for an Ijodee Dance Company organised workshop. Photo courtesy – Adedayo Liadi.

Moreover, the identity of African Contemporary Dance is firmly rooted, from a performance perspective, in ‘a pastiche of idiom based on physical theatre, contact improvisation, movement, poetry and music’ which are appropriated via the ‘deployment of a theatrical language directed towards translating and re-inventing subject matter that challenges hierarchies and norms in order to raise visibility about socially relevant issues’ (Reddy, 2006:119). Thus, African Contemporary Dance is frequently championed by choreographers who are committed to breaking creative barriers, exploring new ground and working towards creating “new dynamic culture that is constantly reproducing history by virtue of how they actually live and respond to their circumstances” (Maqoma, 2016: 38). This pragmatic ethos of ‘tell it as it is’ (Maqoma, 2016) resonates with Faustin Linyekula’s claim that African Contemporary Dance is an ‘aesthetic of survival’. The thrust of Linyekula’s argument is that assumptions should not be made linking African Contemporary Dance to pre-occupations with Africa because the dance form is undergirded by a system concerned with care of the self which ensures the survival of the artist rather than the geographic location (see Douglas et al., 2006; Loot and Young-Jahayer, 2005). Linyekula’s controversial but significant assessment of African Contemporary Dance practice shows a degree of unease and tension among practitioners due to the connections between the dance form and western influence, philanthropy and collaboration. This is further highlighted in Panther’s (2006:11) observation that the dance form, as a recent phenomenon, was “aided by non-African agents in the form of European-sponsored festivals, exchanges, the transmigration of

contemporary dance teachers from particularly Europe to Africa, and an overwhelming control and filtering by non-African directors and infrastructures.”

Historically, the conception and genealogy of African Contemporary Dance can be traced back to France and the dance is, most often, seen as a ‘French invention’ (Kringelbach, 2013:151). Although some African dance scholars have attempted to contextually decolonize this historical linkage, what cannot be gainsaid is the fact that France, through its various cultural agencies, has been a major driving force in the institutionalisation of knowledge and performance practices, which have merged, over the years, into what is now referred to as African Contemporary Dance, through the funding and promotion of events such as festivals, workshops and choreographic competitions (Kringelbach, 2013). According to Kringelbach (2013:151), it was “French funding that crystallized disparate choreographic elements into a genre.” Whilst it cannot be said whether the emergence of African Contemporary Dance, via French sponsorship and support, was planned or incidental, there is no doubt a connection between France’s promotion of cultural or artistic enterprise in Africa and the achievement of the French government’s strategic interests. According to objectives enunciated in the Patronage Policy viz.: (i) maintaining a strategic presence in Africa over the long term and (ii) raising the profile of the local performing worlds so as to discourage migration to Europe, it is obvious that French activities, especially their sponsorship of prominent African dance artists, such as Germaine Acogny and Alphonse Tierou, workshops, festivals, dance competitions, tours etc. within the African cultural sector are not without ulterior motives (Kringelbach, 2013).



fig. 2: Poster for ‘Aye Asan’ National Tour and Workshop. Photo courtesy – Adedayo Liadi.

Most African cultural events and artists have, over the years, drawn direct funding, patronage, sponsorship and support from foreign organisations, most of which operate under ministries, agencies or parastatals with the implicit mandate of implementing or

achieving their country's soft power objectives, cultural diplomacy, and serving or protecting their government's interests (Nwakunor and Ajeluoruo, 2019). The case is even more profound in relation to the growth of contemporary dance in Africa and Nigeria, most especially due to a combination of factors including a lack of infrastructure, adequate cultural policy implementation and funding. Although artists and theatre practitioners, such as Muyiwa Oshinaike, Felix Okolo and Chuk Mike, have made remarkable contributions to the emergence of contemporary dance on the Nigerian stage, its growth is directly linked to the "perennial support and sponsorship" provided by foreign governmental and private institutions, such as Afrique en Créations, Association Française d'Action Artistique, Cultures France, the French Institute, Alliance Française, the French Cultural Centre, the French Embassy, the German Cultural Centre and the Goethe Institut (Kansese, 2013:287). For instance, the Claude Brumachon and Benjamin Lamarche Dance Workshop, held in 1994 and sponsored by the French Cultural Centre, is often cited as one of the major events that kick-started the African Contemporary Dance movement in Nigeria (Itsewah, 2011; Kansese, 2013). The event, which was promoted as a cultural exchange programme to celebrate a fusion of the African-Nigerian rhythm with French-Western movement in order to develop a dance vocabulary capturing the cultural essence of both countries, attracted about 500 participants drawn from mainly traditional dance theatre companies, including the National Troupe of Nigeria, Akins Production, the Black Marbles, and the Ivory Ambassadors (Itsewah, 2011).

As a strategy to enhance participation in the workshop and attract interest, Itsewah (2011:68) notes that the French Cultural Centre "paid for everything", including providing workshop allowances, in order to enable both prominent and aspiring Nigerian dancers to attend the event. Consequently, out of the over 500 participants, seven dancers – Adedayo Liadi, Abubakar Usman, Abdul Onibasa, Faith Benson, Abel Utuedor, Esther Olaniyan and Bayo Ogunrinade – were selected for further training as "artists-in-residence" at the Centre Chorégraphique National de Nantes in France (Genevier, 1998; Itsewah, 2011; Kansese, 2013). Under the tutelage of Claude Brumachon and Benjamin Lamarche, these dancers and choreographers were exposed to the concept of French (née European) contemporary dance as they performed various dance pieces choreographed by Brumachon, most notably, *When the gods go crying* which toured West Africa and France between 1995 and 1996 (Itsewah, 2011; Kansese, 2013). Thus 'exposed and influenced', these choreographers returned at the end of their residency, as dance 'apostles' to propagate the gospel of African Contemporary Dance in Nigeria through the establishment of dance theatres or companies to train other artists using the workshop model. Besides establishing theatres, most of these leading contemporary dance artists became directly involved in the organisation and production of dance festivals, competitions and shows as choreographers, consultants, producers and mentors, thus becoming a central influence for emerging dance artists.

In addition, the French (through Association Française d'Action Artistique) were also instrumental in the organisation, funding and promotion of the first Rencontres Chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et l'Océan Indien (now known as Danse l'Afrique Danse!) in Luanda in 1995. This biannual festival serves as an important point of contact for collaboration between continental African Contemporary Dance practitioners and their European counterparts and as a platform for the selection of African Contemporary Dance companies for worldwide tours and assimilation into the programmes of the European contemporary dance world (Siegert, 2010). As such, participation in this festival draws a sort of endorsement or recognition within the contemporary dance world, both within Africa and beyond, by serving as an access route to a wider network of patronage, exposure, collaboration and sponsorship (Kringelbach, 2013).



fig. 3: Adedayo Liadi leading a dance workshop in Lagos, Nigeria. Photo courtesy – Adedayo Liadi.

Adedayo Liadi and Ijodee Dance Company

Like most practitioners, Adedayo Liadi began his career as a Traditional African Dance artist before his conversion to African Contemporary Dance (Itsewah, 2011; Kansese, 2013). His initial contact with the professional dance industry was through the tutelage of Wale Odule, the Lagos Education District and the National Theatre where he was exposed to compositions in Traditional African Dance, drama and music (Dancefame, 2018). His talent and artistry were further enhanced during a period of collaboration with Sola Fosudo, Debo Alexandra (at Centre Stage Productions) and, most importantly, Muyiwa Osinaike (Ebony Culture Club and The Black Marbles Dance Academy), who is regarded as one of the foremost contemporary dance choreograph-

ers in Nigeria and the pioneer of the dance style commonly referred to as ‘stunt’ movement (Itsewah, 2011). It could be argued that the experience and exposure garnered from his working relationship with Muyiwa Osinaike was what influenced a gradual shift in Liadi’s dance artistry from traditional to contemporary dance aesthetics. The cycle of influence which birthed this gradual shift culminated in his participation in the 1994 French Cultural Centre Dance Workshop, where he was selected along with six others for an artist-in-residence scholarship at the Centre Chorégraphique National de Nantes (CCNN), France. Liadi also underwent several forms of dance training at renowned international schools for dance and choreography, including École des Sables, Dakar (under French sponsorship); Centre de Development Chorégraphique, Toulouse; National Choreographic Centre, Montpellier; Susanne Linke Dance Studio, Essen; and Danceweb Europe, Vienna (www.ijodeetrudefesta.org).



fig. 4: Adedayo Liadi leading a group of dance students in aerobic exercise. Photo courtesy – Adedayo Liadi.

In order to engender a practical transfer of the performative knowledge and experience garnered through his exposure and training in contemporary dance, Liadi established Ijodee Dance Company in 1998 to serve as a research, talent discovery and training platform and workshop centre for emerging contemporary dance artists in Nigeria. According to Dancefame (2018: n. pag.), Liadi’s first dance workshop in Nigeria was sponsored by the French Cultural Centre, Lagos. The event attracted numerous aspiring dancers and choreographers from Nigeria. At the end of the workshop, a dance piece titled “Ido’Olofin” meaning ‘station of satan’ was created. The dance was showcased in several cities in Nigeria and toured four countries in Africa – Benin Republic,

Togo, Ghana and Madagascar. It has been asserted that the workshop and tour successfully launched the careers of the next generation of African Contemporary Dance artists in Nigeria, including Victor Phullu, Qudus Onikeku, Ayola Soyinka, Ibru Zulezu and Josephine Okonji (Dancefame, 2018). Liadi's next dance workshop in Nigeria was held in 2002 (still sponsored by the French) and featured emerging artists, such as Tony Offiong, Uche Onah, Preere Yebowei, Aliu Olatunji, Mary Oamen, Nneka Umeigbo and Frank Konwea, and led to the creation of another dance piece titled "Ori" or destiny. The dance piece *Ori* is often cited as Liadi's breakthrough dance piece because it won the best dance and choreography prize at the 2003 Rencontres Chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien held in Madagascar, and toured 15 African countries and 10 European countries afterwards, thereby launching his career on a wider global stage (Dancefame, 2018; Kringelbach, 2013; Ayakoroma, 2012).



fig. 5: Adedayo Liadi and Richard Siegal overseeing a practical dance session in Lagos, Nigeria.

Photo Courtesy - Adedayo Liadi.



fig. 6: Adedayo Liadi and Richard Siegal during a dance workshop session in Lagos, Nigeria. Photo

Courtesy - Adedayo Liadi

Using sponsorship from the French Cultural Centre, the French Embassy, the French Government, Guild of Nigerian Dancers (GOND), as well as affiliated contemporary dance companies in Nigeria, Liadi conceptualized and helped organise the *Dance Meet Danse* Festival from 2002 to 2006, serving as a consultant and workshop co-ordinator. As an ambassador of African Contemporary Dance, Liadi and his Ijodee Dance Company have been involved in various dance projects, workshops, festivals, collaborations and exchanges aimed at the promotion and dissemination of knowledge of the contemporary dance genre across Nigeria, Africa and beyond. The most prominent of these activities are highlighted below:

Theme		Organisation/Sponsor		Venue	Year
Body	Awareness	Ijodee/C.C.F.		Lagos	1998
[1]					
Dance	with	Ijodee/N.C.A.C.		Lagos	2000
Nature					
African	Dance	Avignon Festival		France	2000
workshop					
Franco-Nigeria		Ijodee/C.C.F		Lagos	2001
Dance Workshop					
Body	Awareness	Ijodee/C.C.F.		Lagos	2002
[2]					
Second	Franco-	Ijodee/C.C.F.		Lagos	2003
Nigerian	Work-				
shop					
Contemporary		Juli Dance		Amsterdam	2003/2004
African Dance					
1st All	Female	Ijodee/C.C.F.		Lagos	2004
Contemporary					
Dance Workshop					
2nd All	Female	Ijodee/C.C.F.		Lagos	2004
Contemporary					
Dance Workshop					
Contemporary		IFAS/Ijodee/Cultures-		Johannesburg, S.	2004
Dance Workshop		France		A.	
DONE		New Dance/Ijodee		Johannesburg,	2004
				S.A.	
DONE		Jomba/Ijodee		Durban, S.A.	2004
DONE		CFF/Ijodee		Bujumbura, Bur-	2004
				undi	
DONE		CCAR/Ijodee		Djibouti	2004
DONE		CCCL/Ijodee		Blantaire,	2004
				Malawi	
DONE		CCFM/Ijodee		Maputo,	2004
				Mozambique	
DONE		CCFM/Ijodee		Windhoek, Nam-	2004
				ibia	

DONE		NOYAM/Ijodee		Accra, Ghana	2004
DONE		AFH/Ijodee		Harare, Zimbabwe	2004
				abwe	
DONE		AFK/Ijodee		Kampala, Uganda	2004
Contemporary Africa	Dance	ART AZIMUTS		Butari, Rwanda	2005
Workshop					
Contemporary Africa	Dance	D.B.D./Ijodee		Bamako, Mali	2005
Workshop					
Creation Process		Ijodee/N.C.A.C.		Lagos	2005
Dance Workshop					
Dance	Meet	Ijodee		Lagos	2005/2006
Danse Int'l	Fest-				
ival					
Venezuelan Con-		Ijodee		Caracas, Maracaibo, Suidad-Bolivar	2006
temporary					
African	Dance				
Workshop	and				
Tour					
Contemporary Africa	Dance	Impulstanz		Vienna, Austria	2005/2006
Workshop					
TRUFESTA Dance		Ijodee		Lagos; Ibadan	2006;2007;2008
Workshop					
WE THINK ALIKE		Ijodee/Canada	Council for	Lagos	2008
Workshop		the Arts/Dept. for Culture			
		and Arts/Govt. of Western			
		Australia			
Dialogue	in	Ijodee		Lagos	2008
Dance					
Abok I	Ngoma	Ijodee		Yaounde, Cameroon	2008
Festival					
SPAN	Interna-	SPAN/Ijodee		Lagos	2008
tional	Dance				
Workshop					
Find	Your	Melting-Pot	Foundation/	Lagos; Accra	2009
Rhythm	Dance	Ijodee			
Workshop					
Encounters		FLATFOOT/Ijodee		Durban, S.A.	2009
New Always		TVC		Cape Town	2009
The New Dawn		NDIC		Abuja	2009
Aye Asan Profes-		Ijodee		Nigeria	2013
sional	Dance				
Workshop					

Intent/sion	BCDS	Budapest, Hun-	2013
Dance Workshop		gary	
MAIDA Master- class Dance Workshop	RichCulture		2014

Fig. 5: Ijodee Dance Company Sponsorship. *Source:* Ijodee Dance Company.

As shown in the table above, Liadi and his Ijodee Dance Centre have been at the forefront of disseminating performative knowledge of African Contemporary Dance in Nigeria via the instrumentality of workshops, festivals and collaborative or exchange events, largely sponsored by western government agencies as well as private arts, cultural and philanthropic organisations. It is evident that his consociation with these organisations has shaped the orientation of his artistry by providing him the leverage to learn from and with such notable choreographers, dancers, directors, producers, promoters and arts managers as Claude Brumachon, Benjamin Lamarche, Germaine Acogny, Carlos Orta, Flora Teffen, Fred Bendongue, Pata Rosy, Susanne Linke, Sven Herding, Heddy Maalem, Danielle Rizkallah and Herman le Roux. Moreover, the experience and exposure gained from these interactions not only re-configured his artistic and creative perspective and widened the trajectory of reception for his work, it positioned him as one of the most recognisable ‘ambassadors or apostles’ for the spread of African Contemporary Dance in Nigeria and beyond. The track-record of ‘successes’ achieved through projects such as *Ori, Ido-Olofin, It’s Me, New Age Transition, Heart of Africa, In-Imagination, We Think Alike, Olori Oko Dance, Aruku Shankka, Kaki A Gogo, Alante Tatacumi, Vote & Let vote count (Dance theatre), Encounters, The Real Dance, Molejo (I can Dance), Moyege (Victory) Musical Dance, Aye Asan (Vanity), The Best, The Winner, 8220 Time, Dance Meet Danse Festival and Truth and Togetherness Dance Festival of Africa (TRUFESTA) and Workshop* has made him one of the most sought-after choreographers in Nigeria and a viable investment or sponsorship option within the arts, cultural and philanthropic sphere.

Conclusion

The focus of this brief essay was to trace the role of workshops in the emergence, promotion and dissemination of performative knowledge in African Contemporary Dance, especially in Nigeria, using Adedayo Liadi and his Ijodee Dance Company as an example. It can be seen that strands of contemporary dance practices have existed in the country through the relatively novel choreographic ‘stunt’ movement and stage productions of Muyiwa Osinaike, Felix Okolo and Chuk Mike. However, the support and investment from arts and cultural organisations, most notably, through workshops, festivals and scholarships, have been critical to the emergence, promotion and dissemina-

tion of African Contemporary Dance as a genre. With the French and other western cultural centres playing a leading role in this regard, Adedayo Liadi and his Ijodee Dance Company have emerged as the foremost ambassadors or apostles for the training and mentorship of emerging dancers and choreographic groups. Workshops, dance competitions and festivals, such as *Dance Meet Danse* and *TRUEFESTA*, have become the prime medium for the dissemination of knowledge of African Contemporary Dance. Besides functioning as arenas for collaborative creativity and learning, dance workshop classes as well as the festivals that frequently follow them also serve as sites of interactions, where contacts, ideas and alliances for collaboration on future projects are formed and explored across transnational, continental and cultural boundaries. It is this opportunity of working together in order to explore cultural backgrounds or experiences to create something 'new' through the process of creative imagination that makes workshops a potent medium of knowledge dissemination.

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