

## *Jichi* Dance Structure, Gender and Sexuality

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**ABSTRACT** Sociological studies have always focused on gender inequality in which men play dominating roles over their women counterparts. Likewise, musicological scholarships have generally discussed that females are deemed to be submissive to males during dance performances. Besides, there are various dance styles practised by different ethnic groups in Zimbabwe and some of them are *isitshikitsha*, *mbakumba*, *mbende*, *mhande*, *muchongowoyo*, *shangara* and *xinyambela*. This paper explored the feminist theory and how *jichi* gendered dance performances in the context of *mukwerera* rainmaking ceremony of the *Shangwe*' people at *Nevana* and *Kufahazvinei* villages in Gokwe North and Gokwe South districts in the Midlands Province in Zimbabwe created a certain form of gender equality. *Jichi* ritual symbolisms are active in the *Shangwe* community yet these symbols have not been documented as a way to preserve them. The study adopted an ethnographic paradigm in which empirical data was collected using face - to - face to interviews. The researcher established that gender inequality which existed in the *Shangwe* community naturally transformed into cultural - conditional gender equality during the dance and that relationship is only alive during the ceremony. The *Shangwe* people make use of symbolism during their ritual practices such as *ndiro yetanda* and *chitanda*. The two symbols are replica of female and male beings which is a pointer to the conception of the dance as a gendered performance.

### INTRODUCTION

Sociologically, men play dominating roles over their women counterparts (Letherby 2003; McDaniel 2008; Titkow 2010; Cottingham 2014; Lainer-Vos 2014; Messerschmidt 2014). Scholarships have generally discussed that females are deemed to be submissive to males during dance performances (Bowers 1989; McClary 1992; Briscoe 2000; Currie 2009). This topical issue on gender inequality is prevalent in the spiritual realm just as it is also predominant in society. Ngara (2014a: 249), on gender disparity, notes that, '... male dominance in the spiritual sphere might be a reflection of male dominance prevailing in societies, and vice versa'. To the contrary, a certain kind of equality happens during *jichi* dance. *Jichi* is a symbolic spiritual procreation rainmaking dance performance when the *Shangwe* offer traditional brew to *Nevana*, a rain spirit which is locally referred to as *mhondoro*. According to *Shangwe* culture bearers, Evina Marariromba et al. (2010), the *mhondoro*, *Nevana*, is traditionally expected to reciprocate the brew with rain. Due to *jichi* sexual symbolism and the belief that rain does not fall when there is a full moon, *jichi* is conducted during dark hours when all children are asleep. At both villages, *Kufahazvinei* and *Nevana* - a village named after the *mhondoro*, where the study was carried out, rain rite performances are done next to a ritual hut

called *dumba*. Most importantly, there are three cultural dancing configurations that follow three distinct patterns. During the first stage, men and women dance in two files. In the second phase, all of them move in a circular formation, and in the third segment, they engage in free dance manoeuvre.

There are prominent scholars of gender study, an area that has and is still a heated public debate. McClary (1992) demarcates male and female obligations as is the case when she delineates male and female characters in dramatic music. In *Musicology and the Undoing of Women* in one of Beethoven's compositions *Eroica Symphony* McClary acknowledges that "throughout Western musical history women have been systematically excluded as acting subjects, denied access to the necessary compositional tools" (1992: 156). From McClary's analysis, the exclusion of women from performing active duties in the field of musicology has been in existence for a long time. McFarland (2003), in the studies of rap music, identified two main themes: An account of racial inequality and injustice and an endorsement of male supremacy over women. The duo made profound contributions to the studies of gender in music. This scholarship shades light to the tenet of men dominance over women. As will be shown in this paper, there is a strict gender delineation and aspects of supremacy and compliance are

predominant in usual live situations in the *Shangwe* community, yet the *jichi* dance situation generates some form of equal treatment among men and women as dance partners, a relationship that only exists during the *mukwerera* rainmaking ceremony.

Nyambara, an anthropologist, in *The Politics of Land Acquisition and Struggles over Land in the 'Communal' Areas of Zimbabwe: The Gokwe Region in the 1980s and 1990s* unearths issues on how land was allocated to different people of various ethnicities in Gokwe, mentioning the *Shangwe* (2001). In the following year, in *Madheruka and Shangwe, Ethnic Identities and Culture of Modernity in Gokwe*, also explains the origins and the connotations of the terms “*madheruka*” and “*shangwe*” (Nyambara 2002: 291). Even though he provides some background information on various connotations attached to the term *shangwe*, Nyambara was not concerned with cultural practices, rituals and dances. The researcher tries to fill this gap: gender equality, to a certain extent with reference to symbols, gender and sexuality as portrayed in *jichi* dance. To that end, this paper seeks to answer three questions: 1) What is the mythological origin of *jichi* dance as a gendered perspective and its symbolism? 2) What are the symbolic interpretations of the configurations and how does this rain rite dance epitomise the concept of gender and sexuality? 3) How does one interpret gender equality that occurs during *jichi* dance?

#### METHODOLOGY

This study focused on a time period that stretches from 1983 to date such that the researcher could identify culture bearers who were well informed on *jichi* ritual dance. The stint of more than two decades among the *Shangwe* means that the researcher examines this work from a partially emic approach. The researcher's personal involvement in singing, dancing, and drumming during the *jichi* rainmaking dance performances prior to this research created an opportunity to establish a good rapport with the *Shangwe* community. This participant observation accorded the researcher an opportune time to identify and interrogate four elderly men and two women who were identified by Obert Maririromba and Kwuti Takavadii, the village heads of *Nevana* and *Kufahazvinei* villages respec-

tively<sup>2</sup>. From further interviews, the researcher realised that the informants were all above 54 years old. Therefore, age was a crucial factor in sampling informants for this paper, an issue that the sage philosophy advocates (Janz 2009). Here the researcher adopted an ethnographic paradigm which focused on face-to-face interaction and interviewing of the informed informants necessitated by the utilisation of audio-video filming of two *jichi* dance performances at *Kufahazvinei* and *Nevana* villages in data gathering processes. Conducting the study at two sites meant that some similarities and differences could be noted and these interviews and performances could be kept and accessed during data analysis too.

As said earlier on, the researcher's full participation in *jichi* dance performances for more than two decades meant that gathering information on *mukwerera* cultural practice became an easy task. Perhaps this is one reason Titon (2008: 25) talks of observation, participant-observation [“being-in-the-field”] and yet Barz and Cooley (2008: 3-4) refer to it as “fieldwork”, which they explain as a face-to-face interaction. In addition, Bohlman (2008: 248) emphasises that “fieldwork” has to consider daily cultural practices. Barz and Cooley (2008), Bohlman (2008) and Titon (2008) guided the researcher to study *jichi* dance through what the researcher refers to as “a complete engagement fieldwork”.

#### AN ANALYSIS OF *JICHI* SONG – DANCE

*Shangwe* rainmaking spirits fall into two categories: one spirit evoked by the drum exclusion and spirits induced by drumming. According to Ngara (2014b), *Nevana*, a spirit (*mhondoro*) that is close to God, *Mwari*, in the *Shangwe* spiritual hierarchy of communication is evoked through the exclusion of the drum. All songs that are accompanied with drums are sung and performed for *twumhondoro*, literally meaning small rainmaking spirits. (Also see Ngara 2012). Therefore, selected song texts that are sung for this *mhondoro* and *twumhondoro* will be presented and examined in line with the dance.

As stated above, songs that are sung for *Nevana mhondoro* culturally exclude drumming. Here the spirit is evoked through singing, dancing and handclapping. When one informant, Phineas Maenzani (2010) was asked to explain the term *jichi*, he presented it in *ChiShangwe*

language that is translated to English as shown below:

*Matambiro atinoita ndiro jichi racho*  
 The manner in which we dance depict *jichi*  
*Tinotomba titsizvida titsikanyaira*  
 We dance in a proud jogging like pattern  
*Ndiro jichi racho*  
 Thus what *jichi* is  
*Hatisimudzi makumbo*  
 We do not lift up legs  
*Mutambo wevakuru vebvura*

It is a dance for the mighty rainmaking spirit

The researcher acknowledges that *jichi* dance depicts how the *Shangwe* communicate with the spiritual realm. Here dancers move their feet very close the ground. They can be seen proudly moving and dancing in circumvention in response to handclapping and singing. Most of their singing is defined by the use of exclamation marks and vulgar words. For instance, one of the songs sung specifically for *Nevana* includes words such as *maitambanudza matako*, meaning you were moving buttocks swiftly. These vulgar words are not culturally expected to be used in the public domain. Yet they are specially sung for a highly respected *Nevana mhondoro* in order to evoke it to possession. The researcher acknowledges that exclamation marks and vulgar words are an important part of the *Shangwe* singing. They are provocative symbols that put pressure on spirits to summon *Nevana* to possession for performers to have an opportunity to talk with these spirits. One example of songs that are sung for the *Nevana mhondoro* is presented in staff notation for analysis as indicated in the appendices. *Shangwe* bodily movements and gestures are considered to be a dance form of their musical behaviour to express their way of life. *Jichi* dance does not only communicate with and ensnare ancestral spirits, but results in the possession of mediums by rain spirits.

The staff notation of one of the songs sung for *twumhondoro* is illustrated in the appendices. The three drums: *humbi*, *mhendembe*, and *mutanda* that accompany this song will be examined. These drums play different but complementary roles. The smallest drum, *nhumbi*: produces the most audible sound and fastest tempo and takes the role a lead singer. It communicates and ensnares spirits to possession. The medium drum called *mhendembe* complements the *nhumbi* drum. It depicts dance movements.

Yet the *mutanda* maintains the rhythmic pattern. In this case, drumming is tightly executed to enable smooth execution of the dance. Characteristic features of *jichi* dance in this context are dance styles (choreography), drum rhythm, melodies, symbolic song texts, and body movements, and gestures are meant to draw spirits so that they intervene and provide solutions to real life problems such as drought. *Jichi* adepts get possessed when the dance reaches its climax, a point that was once echoed by Rutsate (2012) in his study of *mhande* song and dance. Drumming is an important part of summoning *twumhondoro*. The *svikiro*, meaning a medium will fall into trance where the ancestors will be channelled. This is signified in *Shangwe* traditions by episodes of convulsive fits followed by the singing of ancestral rain ritual songs. These songs are echoed back to the ancestor via the audience in a process of call and response. The possessed *svikiro* will then change into their traditional ancestral clothing and dance vigorously while others drum and sing in celebration.

The leader sings *ho yi yeree!* Followers respond *ho nhai mbonga hiyee!* The transcribed song has two periods and the first one comprises 8 crotchet beats but the second one has 16 crotchet beats as shown in the appendices. Thus, the first cycle is  $2 \times 4 = 8$  crotchet beats and the second one is  $2 \times 8 = 16$  crotchet beats hence the second cycle is double the first one. Both periods start on an upbeat implying a structural anacrusis. In the first period, the followers enter at the same highly pitched note of the leader which is note E and they sing the same syllable *ho*. However, the entrance point of the leader in the second cycle is a fourth lower than the one at the beginning. The leader and followers both sing in the question form. However, the leader is free to alter the melodic line as shown in bars 6 and 7, (*Chii chinoriridza?*) and also bars 10 and 11 (*Mvura ngainaye*) yet the followers sing the same rhythm throughout the two periods. This song uses the pentatonic scale, G-A-B-D-E.

*VaChibanya* was followed by *mireniko* (see transcriptions in Figure 2 in the Appendices). This is one of the songs that is sung for *Nevana* spirit.

The leader alters the melodic line by shifting the last note by two tones from G to B (see the last note in bars 1 and 2). Also, the leader is free to employ different names of rain spirits such as *VaChibanya*, *VaNwore*, *VaChikono*, while the

followers maintain their two response lines: *mire-ko* and *gore no tobaiwa, mireniko*. The song has a question and an answer type of singing and utilises a hexatonic scale which is written: G-A-B-C-D-F. The song is based on a period of four bars each with two beats, which gives 8 crotchets per period.

### **Jichi Dance Structure, a Description**

As established above, *jichi* dance in the context of *mukwerera* rainmaking ceremony follows three symbolic configurations: and these are locally referred to as *mitsetse miviri*, *denderedzwa*, and *mvengemvenge*, literally meaning: two files, circular formation, and mingling, respectively.

#### ***Mitsetse miviri (Two Files)***

A slow tempo of the singing and drumming sends a signal to start *jichi* performance. Here dancers are observed entering the performance arena from all directions where they would have been drinking traditional brews and/or performing routine gender and sexuality roles. The dancers naturally form a set of two files: one for males and the other for females. Thereafter, the dance starts. It is at this point that the females endeavour to select their dance partners. Their dance is comparable with female and male eagles. When eagles want to mate, the female tests the commitment from the male. It flies high into the space with the male pursuing it and picks a twig which the female intentionally drops. The male swiftly catches up the twig before it gets on the ground. This process occurs several times. Once the female eagle realises this, she then accepts mating because the male eagle would have proved that he really wants mating. Also, it is a stage of attraction, just as male doves coo and turn round, to attract females in order to mate. On the contrary, here married and unmarried women, on one hand, try to let out their attractiveness as they move their waists swiftly in a bid to impress their male counterparts. The women are up on the mission to choosing dance partners who are usually not their husbands<sup>3</sup>. A man dances in such a way that a woman can tell that he is ready to be engaged in the dance otherwise no woman selects him as a dance partner. The researcher describes this phase as a proposal stage which is also comparable with *Shan-*

*gani xinyambela* a girls – boys' fertility dance. In the given two scenarios, females are the ones who propose love to males, yet in the Zimbabwean real life situation, males do.

Once women have selected their partners, dancing commences. A man can be seen turning around like a cock signaling a hen to come closer in order to mate. From the researcher's personal involvement in the same ceremony, the pair naturally fell in 'love' in order for them to enjoy the performance but could not remain with the same partner throughout the ceremonial rite. According to one of the informants, Evina Marariromba (2010), women are just free to keep on selecting one dance partner after another throughout the performance. A pair was noticed dancing in circumventions at the *Kufahazvinei* group, a sign that the dancers had temporarily forgotten about their gender differences. It is the moment of what the researcher describes as a slow motion in which a woman and a man are almost seen dancing like a bride and bridegroom who are still very shy to move swiftly<sup>4</sup>.

#### ***Denderedzwa (Circular Formation)***

This is the phase that marks the climax of *jichi* dance, be it at *Kufahazvinei* or *Nevana* village. On one hand, the *Nevana* song - dance participants and performers are taken into an intensification of singing and they clap their hands vigorously and break away from the opposite sex pairs. This is the moment the *Nevana* village excludes drumming since their *Nevana* spirit, is the only *mhondoro* among the *Shangwe* that is invited to possession by singing and handclapping. Therefore, drummers almost simultaneously drop down drums to join in an escalation of singing and dancing. Their expression of gratification is automatically transferred from drumming to clapping. As if a storm unexpectedly overwhelms the entire atmosphere, they are interchangeably seen getting into the circular dance and the performers now stamped like cattle hastening to a dip tank thereby creating a groove, *dziva*, with their feet. All their minds are similarly and momentarily focused to impressing *Nevana*, the *mhondoro*<sup>5</sup>. Women and men are naturally seen leading in the dance.

On the other hand, the performers from *Kufahazvinei* also get into a deep moment of singing, drumming, and dance. An exciting atmosphere is created as everyone is taken into a



moment of extreme dance as their feet similarly hit the ground so hard in dance that the dust from beneath completely fills the air like a thick mist in the morning. It is a moment when male dancers momentarily also forget about their supremacy over their female counterparts thereby creating an equal opportunity for them. Here just as the performers from *Nevana* explained above, female and male dancers are free to lead in a clockwise circular dance. Among the *Shangwe*, circular formation represents unity and life continuity, a point that was once noted by Rutsate (2012) in his studies of *mhande* dance of the *Karanga* in the context of *mutoro* rainmaking ceremony.

Sexual differences are as well, momentarily set aside. The *Shangwe* believe that women and men are equally responsible for inviting rain spirits from the spiritual world where they will be watching in anticipation. Consequently, people get into a high mood of performance and they go around in a quick circular motion, creating between them a large trench, *dziva*, to be filled with rain by the *mhondoro*. Both *Kufahazvinei* and *Nevana* performers dance around with so much hope that this *dziva* will be filled with rain. In due course, the *Shangwe* expect rainfall, *vhura*<sup>5</sup>. Rainfall is a sign that their rainmaking prayers, *miteuro*, would have been well received.

### *Mvengemvenge (Mingling)*

In the final phase of the dance, the informant, Gaison Gasura (2010) stressed that “*Zvakanaka zvinopera zvakanaka*” literally meaning: “All is well that ends well”. According to *Shangwe* belief, the rain is assumed to start pouring down from heavens, a sign that the powers of the spiritual realm would have been engrossed by the hilarious moment of the dance. In due course, men and women freely scatter around with a sigh of relief and festivity that their rainmaking prayers, *miteuro*, have been heard. As soon as the sound of ululations, whistles, and recitations come to an end, the performance naturally stops. Just as the dancers entered the dance arena from all directions, they follow suite in exit. The equal treatment of men and women that occurs during the *jichi* dance ends as soon as the performance is also over. Then the performers disperse to their socially designated places in order to drink ritual brews and/or to automatically assume their gender and sexuality roles<sup>6</sup>.

### Theoretical Framework

The *Shangwe* music is performed alongside some symbolism as a way of linking the world of the living and the supernatural world. Referring to Geertz (1973: 45), humans are in need of symbolic “sources of illumination” to familiarise themselves with respect to the system of meaning in any particular culture as done in the interpretive approach to symbolic anthropology. Symbols bring about social action and are “determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action” (Turner 1967: 36). This mirrors the symbolic interpretive approach and it further acknowledges that there are symbols in each particular society. Schneider (1987) and Turner (1982[1980]) make it known that symbols have specific functions and they also make it possible for one to understand how a particular ethnic group operates. Schneider and Turner’s perceptions informed the researcher on how to interpret the *Shangwe jichi* gendered rain performances.

Turner’s performance theory places emphasis on the analysis of the ritual structure in order to understand how human beings interact during a particular performance.

If man is a sapient animal, a tool making animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is, no less, a performing animal, Homo performances, not in the sense, perhaps that a circus animal may be a performing animal, but in the sense that a man is a self-performing animal—his performances are, in a way, reflexive, in performing he reveals himself to himself. This can be in two ways: the actor may come to know himself better through acting or enactment; or one set of human beings may come to know themselves better through observing and/or participating in performances generated and presented by another set of human beings (Turner 1986: 81).

The above theory converges with the architecture of the rain dance in the study. Turner’s 1986 performance theory mapped the symbolic examination of *jichi* dance structure leading to the formulation of a conceptual model which the researcher refers to as the *Shangwe Jichi* Dance Model that has three symbolic configurations. This model will also be used to interpret the symbols of the three phases of the rain dance.

The feminist theory is focused on the social construction of sex and gender, and with partic-

ular emphasis on women's rights (Letherby 2003). The theory seeks to address gender inequality which is experienced by women in societies. *Jichi* dance creates a condition whereby both men and women enjoy equal positions. They temporarily exist without any supremacy or compliance. This cultural - conditional gender equality theory will be discussed afterward.

### **An Analysis of the Wooden Plate and Stick**

According to the informants, Evina Marariromba et al. (2010), when the dry weather peril prevailed, Tevasiira Samson Marariromba, the late medium of *Nevana mhondoro*, would get into his sacred round hut called *dumba* to collect a stick (*tsitanda*) and a wooden plate (*ndiro yetanda*) which was filled with some water. The *ndiro* (plate) was then placed on the yard where direct heat from the sun was able to reach the water surface. Later in the evening, Tevasiira Samson would return the rainmaking symbols into the *dumba*.

However, the *Nevana* informants, Evina Marariromba et al. (2010) could not accept the capturing of a photograph of the wooden plate and stick that were used by the rain spirit in the rainmaking ritual since they expressed that their sacred symbols would lose its primary value. Instead, they just agreed that it could be illustrated through drawing. However, the informants offered the researcher an opportunity to even see and touch the ritual symbols. In the appendices is an illustration of these symbols that are only found at *Nevana* village and rainmaking is centrally organised in the same community. This means that these revered symbols are a form of tangible heritage for the *Nevana* family.

The informants from *Kufahazvinei* village, Phineas Maenzani et al. (2010), just like the culture bearers from *Nevana* village, also referred to the symbols that were and still are used in the ritual, as *chirume nechikadzi*, literally meaning: a male and a female being, respectively. Sanders (1998) on *Making Children, Making Chiefs...* also once acknowledged that the two sticks in rain ceremonies were emblematic to the males and females in their reproduction of children. As *jichi* dance was defined earlier on, that it is a spiritual procreation rainmaking dance, the wooden plate, water, and the stick, have deeper symbolism. The informants expressed that their prayers, *miteuro*, are meant to ask for rain from

the Supreme God, *Mwari*, through their *mhondoro*. Once their *miteuro* are well received through the supply of rain, the *Shangwe* are able to get enough food, *zvekuja*, to feed their children. Therefore, *jichi* dance is meant to sustain human race through reproduction<sup>7</sup>. The wooden plate is a resemblance of the womb or uterus which accommodates the baby from conception to delivery. In the researcher's view, it is from the same mythology's femininity and masculinity perception that the *Shangwe* derived the philosophy of *jichi* as a gendered dance phenomenon.

The above mythology is also enmeshed in scientific symbols. The wooden plate is an emblem of oceans, lakes, dams, and rivers. Scientifically, the water that is constantly and continuously heated up evaporates from all open sources of water such that it will eventually condense, saturate, and precipitate (Allard and Falkenmark 1988). In short, the rainmaking symbolism is what the researcher refers to as "the *Nevana* Mystic Water-Cycle". The stick acts as the agent that speeds up the rate of evaporation. When water is placed in a container which is under direct heat from the sun, it will certainly evaporate. The myth is a pointer to *Nevana's* metaphysical perception of cloud formation.

### **The Shangwe Jichi Dance Model: Its implications**

The two files of male and female dancers mentioned above at *Nevana* village resemble the chiefs who sit at the eastern door of the *Nevana* hut (file of male dancers) and the chosen *Nevana* family members (file of female dancers) who are allowed to enter into the same hut through the western entrance. This separation is already visible before the actual ceremony begins. One of the informants, Evina Marariromba, said, '*Kana titsienda kuguva raNevana kumutambo wejichi tinenge tiri mumutsetse mumwe. Varume vanenge vari mberi, vakadzi titsitevera mushure*'<sup>8</sup>. For the culture bearer, Evina (2010), men always walk in front of women wherever they go, which also means that the *Shangwe* men are the leaders as the women are the followers, mirroring the males' dominance over females. However, as the dance starts, they dance as opposite sex partners. This reflects their desire to recognise each other as equals in the rain prayers. As was noted at both fields of study, everyone

is free to lead in their circular dance, implying again that the supremacy of men over women is temporarily forgotten during *jichi* performance. Everyone is free to dance. Eventually, all performers who will be dancing scatter as they apparently celebrate the rainfall which also reflects that they all have an equivalent responsibility to thank the rain spirit for his mystic power offer rain<sup>9</sup>.

### Cultural - Conditional Gender Equality Theory

When Evina Marariromba (2010), an informant woman who dominated in giving answers, was asked to explain the meaning of the opposite sex paired dance, she simply said, "Your question is deep."<sup>10</sup> When the researcher further interrogated Evina, she referred him to a male informant, Gaison Gasura. Consequently, the researcher realised that the female informants were shy to reveal the symbolism of the spiritual procreation dance. Since the researcher was a male, and Evina being female, she culturally found it very difficult to answer a question on reproduction<sup>11</sup>. Dance styles such as *mbende* and *xinyambela* of the *Zezeru* and *Shangani*, respectively are also fertility dances which are philosophically meant to attract the supernatural world and they mirror gender equality of a similar nature.

As cited earlier on, men and women enjoy an equal status in the *jichi* spiritual baby procreation rain dance. In the day to day sexual relations, the *Shangwe* sex partners have to cooperate if they desire to have babies. Also, in the *jichi* dance performance they all move towards a symbolic climax<sup>12</sup>. Besides during the dance, equality also occurs between *Shangwe* girls and boys. They perform the same chores such as preparing food, washing clothes, heading cattle, and fetching firewood. Further, all ages groups of both sexes equally take part in all farming activities namely land tillage, cultivation, and harvesting. For instance, social status among the Bantu people and the *Ndebele* in particular, is gender neutral as evidenced by the title accorded to aunties and uncles. *Baba*, referring to one's biological father, and all the male folk in the family or males of the same age in the society, while '*babakazi*' is the effeminate version of father, literally meaning the female father.

The *Shangwe* spiritual procreation ritual momentarily and completely erased the feminine-

masculine notion thereby giving birth to what the researcher describes as "cultural - conditional gender equality". As noticed by the researcher during the ritual, women are free to lead in the dance just as men are. The biological studies on fertilisation inform that: a) A man and a woman have to mate. b) Since one sperm fuses with one ovum, the couple's input to fertilisation and/or pregnancy to take place is equivalent. In offsprings, the equal contributions of a mother and father can be proved through the use of the Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) tests. At fertilisation, the male and the female both contribute 23 chromosomes, in the creation of foetus.

The researcher refers to the *Shangwe jichi* dance balance as "cultural - conditional gender equality". The practice is cultural since the *Shangwe* old tradition still specifies that a woman and man should dance as a pair during the rain rites in order to attract rain favours from rain spirits, *dzimhondoro*<sup>13</sup>. The ritual can be perceived as a symbolic metaphor in the supernatural, (cosmos) replicating the biological. This same metaphor can be discerned in the Eastern Oriental Japanese concept of yin and yan, meaning the perfect balance of the male and female forces of the universe. The conditionality features in the universal acceptance of the notion that the biological requirement for the process of fertilisation and/or pregnancy to occur is the fusion of a sperm and an ovum. Consequently, the researcher acknowledges that "the rain ceremonial rite equality is not just cultural gender equality but cultural - conditional gender equality". Similarly, the researcher views the equal number of the agents of fertilisation in human beings as "representative of the natural gender balance perception". As soon as the rite was finished, women and men ethnically found themselves performing their day-to-day roles - what the researcher refers to as "cultural gender resumption perspective". Accordingly, one does not have to be reminded of her or his gender and sexuality role. She or he just resumes it automatically. Correspondingly, the *Shangwe* had to work together as a family in their rain prayers.

### CONCLUSION

*Jichi* gendered dance has a mythological inclination as implied by the two symbols used in the rainmaking ritual. The dance portrays three

configurations and each structure has its figurative connotations. The dominance of men over women in certain spheres of life is still evident among the *Shangwe* yet when it comes to their *jichi* rain ritual dance, an equal platform for both women and men is culturally and conditionally created. At the end of the ceremonial rite, everyone naturally assumes her/his gender and sexuality routine role. This cultural - conditional dance practice is believed by the indigenes as a favourable situation for the *mhondoro* to supply rain.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally, previous scholars talked about gender inequality whereby men dominate in dances. To the contrary, this study found out that there was no dominance of men over women or of the former by the latter. Yet in other day to day social settings, male dominance over female counterparts is believed to be a cultural norm. This then means that there is an arising for further research on African dances of a similar nature as a way to further confirm this finding: gender equality, from informed culture bearers of such particular dances. In addition, researchers usually discussed rainmaking dance performances done in various cultures. One of the findings of this study was that rain dances are spiritually perceived as baby procreation rituals. This given, there is need for academics and scholars in ethnomusicology to further find out if reproduction ceremonies are embodiments of other cultures. Besides, scholars largely deliberated about dance ritual structures that are viewed during performances. It was established in this study that the *jichi* dance model has three configurations and each arrangement reflects a myriad of symbols. Therefore, it is proposed that further research needs to be carried out to find out if these three configurations and symbols cut across culture divides.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The Shangwe are among the fourteen minority cultures whose languages are not written as a way of preserving them. They are the first inhabitants of the then Gokwe District which is found in the Midlands Province in Zimbabwe.
- 2 Gaison Gasura, Kwuti Takavadii, Obert Marariromba, Evina Marariromba, and Silindeni Makunga 2010. 27 June (Transcripts in author's possession)
- 3 Todd Sanders (1998: 240) in *Making Children, Making Chiefs. Gender, Power and Ritual Legitimacy*

stressed that: "To unite the genders is to activate the cosmic and divine powers of the Ihanzu social and natural worlds".

- 4 Phineas Maenzani and Silindeni Makunga and Evina Marariromba and Obert Marariromba 2010. Personal interview, Nevana and Kufahazvinei villages, Zimbabwe. 25 and 27 June (Transcripts in author's possession)
- 5 Evina Marariromba 2010. Personal interview, Nevana Village, Zimbabwe. 27 June (Transcripts in author's possession)
- 6 Silindeni Makunga and Evina Marariromba 2010. Personal interview, Kufahazvinei and Nevana villages, Zimbabwe. 25 and 27 June (Transcripts in author's possession)
- 7 Evina Marariromba and Silindeni Makunga 2010. Captured performances and personal interview, Kufahazvinei and Nevana Village, Zimbabwe. 25 and 27 June (Transcripts in author's possession)
- 8 Men walk in front of women when they go to perform *jichi* at the Nevana graveyard.
- 9 Performances captured 2010. Kufahazvinei and Nevana villages, Zimbabwe. 25 and 27 June (Audio video footages in author's possession)
- 10 Mubvunzo wako wakadzama.
- 11 The researcher realised that Babiracki (2008), in *Reflections on Gender and Research in Village India*, notes that gender identity has a great impact when seeking sensitive answers, especially from an opposite sex person.
- 12 Susan McClary (1991: 39) writes in *Construction of Gender Monteverdi's Dramatic Music*, that "...for the purposes of reproduction, both male and female partners had to be aroused to the point of ejaculation".
- 13 Evina Marariromba and Obert Marariromba 2010. Personal interview, Nevana Village, Zimbabwe. 27 June (Transcripts in author's possession)

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APPENDICES

♩ = 100

The musical score is in 2/4 time with a tempo of 100. It consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line (L) and a piano line (F). The vocal line has lyrics: "Ho hi ye re\_ Chi\_ chi no ri ri dza". The piano line has lyrics: "Ho\_ nha i mbo nga hi ye\_ Ho". The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "Mvura ngai na ye" and the piano line with lyrics: "\_ nha i mbonga hi ye\_ Ho\_ nha i mbonga hi ye\_".

Fig. 1 Song title: *Nhai Mbonga?* [Extract from Renias Ngara 2012: 107]

♩ = 100

The musical score is in 2/4 time with a tempo of 100. It consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line (L) and a piano line (F). The vocal line has lyrics: "Va Chi ba nya Va Chi ba nya". The piano line has lyrics: "Mi re ko Go re no to ba i wa mi re ni ko".

Fig. 2. Song Title: *VaChibanya!* [Extract from Renias Ngara 2012: 104]



Fig. 3. *Nevana* instruments used in the rainmaking ritual [Extract from Renias Ngara 2012: 37]