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# ZINLI: ORIGIN AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE IN GLOBALIZATION

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**Abstract:** ZINLI is an artistic sports physical activity (APSA), dance and music. It is a great cultural richness of Benin, in particular of the people of Abomey. This empress dance was once reserved for the monarch alone and its music was only sung in special situations. This is why the kingdom of Abomey destroyed and the royalty scattered, this dance was destined to disappear! But it has withstood adversity, time and globalization. This study while describing the Zinli, explains its anthropological scope to lead to the main factors that hinder its promotion and the realistic management that must be executed on it in order to guarantee its safeguard in the context of globalization. A retrospective cross-sectional study of a qualitative nature, its population was that of: a youth, potential succession for the sustainability of the zinli; connoisseurs of Zinli dance and singing (current support of this APSA); customary leaders who are the guardians of the tradition. The results of this study showed that the "acculturating" effects of globalization and the new modern dances, as well as the non-existence of a model for the management of cultural heritage: traditional dances and songs, are the main factors threatening the Zinli dance survival. However, the Zinli song, conservative of orality and pledge of biography, would benefit from retaining all its basic richness while enriching itself with a relative acculturation through other dances and songs: Beninese, Africans or even Westerners who would leave it, in the end and despite everything, strong in its identity.

**Keywords:** Dance, Zinli, origin, culturality, globalization, acculturation.

## 1. Introduction

According to UNESCO: "Culture is the set of distinctive features, spiritual and material, intellectual and affective, which characterize a society or a social group. It encompasses, in addition to the arts and letters, ways of life, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs". It is therefore "what is common to a group of individuals and which "welds" it, it is what cements a society, which allows people to live together. Some African countries have structures that ensure the protection of religious heritage, and it is in this verve that Benin celebrates the Vodoun festival in order to always give a cultural identity to traditional cultural and religious practices, despite the rise of globalization. Globalization with its means of transoceanic transport and sophisticated communications which impress a kind of spatio-temporal compression on humanity (Paarenteau, 2007) which evolves like a steamroller on cultures and razes everything in its path (Latouche, 1989). African cultures are not spared by this acculturation brought about by globalization. And this acculturation goes so far as to affect intangible cultural heritage and traditional social customs (Tokpanou, 2008). Among these social uses of the body, we find the ZINLI, a traditional artistic physical activity whose cultural identity is to be preserved. Researchers like Akesson (1983), Teirou (1983) Nakou (1990), Houngan (1990), have during their research approached traditional games and dances, their meanings and cultural characteristics. But they did not go further and were therefore not interested in the influence of globalization on traditional dances. The threat of globalization on African

dances is very real, and shortcomings related to instruments, the reduction in the number of practitioners, the progressive dislocation of dance troupes are the illustrations. What are the current threats to the survival of the Zinli and can it build resilience to safeguard its heritage and identity? This was the research question. And we had the following objectives: to identify the origin and culturality of the Zinli: traditional dance, song and music; to identify and identify the threats that affect it or hover over it; to identify the proven or potential positive contributions of globalization.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Nature of the study

This is a retrospective and cross-sectional study of a qualitative nature. It took place in Benin, more precisely in Abomey.

### 2.2 Sampling / Population / Samples

For our study, we used the non-probabilistic method with the principle of reasoned choice. The population as well as the samples of this study consist of:

- young representatives of the next generation; Thirty (30) (by snowball method);
- professional dancers who constitute the current support of this dance; Ten (10);
- customary leaders who are the guardians of the tradition; Three (03)
- officials from the Ministry of Culture; two (02);

- as well as the communal administration of Abomey; two (02).

### 2.3 Approach, techniques and tools, data collection

We did a pre-survey, and a survey. And the data collection techniques are: semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and observation. We recovered the data from our interviews with a recorder and a hard disk. and processed in verbatim form. The interview guide was sent to the various traditional groups practicing zinli in the Abomey plateau. Our interviews lasted from May 23 to June 04, 2019. Observation and documentary analysis grids allowed other forms of data collection.

### 2.4 Data analysis

The data being qualitative, we chose content analysis as a processing method. Thus, we developed an analysis format based on our research questions, hypotheses and objectives. The three stages of content analysis, namely transcription, coding of information and actual processing, have therefore been addressed. At the level of the transcription, the data collected from the audios, field notebook were faithfully transcribed to constitute the raw data of the investigation. The various verbatim being constituted, we undertook the coding phase. It concerned the sifting of the transcribed text and the filling of the analysis grid with the verbatim from the recording units, the notes retained and their linking. The sorting of the verbatim as well as their filling in the grid were done according to the themes and sub-themes. The third part of the processing concerned the analysis and interpretation of the content of the different parts of the completed grid. At this level, we have triangulated the words of the different dance actors, emphasizing syntactic analysis (grammatical structures), logical analysis (discourse arrangement) and the analysis of atypical formal elements (silence, hesitations, etc. ...) in order to bring out the main meaning of the research object.

## 3. Results

We have found answers to our various research questions. What are the threats to the survival of Zinli dance in the context of globalization? The practice of Zinli dance is experiencing a regression in the commune of Abomey. The extent of this regression varies from one village to another. It is weak in certain villages and accentuated in certain villages. Indeed, some villages in the commune place the decline phase of their zinli in the years 1999 and others in 2005. The members of the groups are relatively old in almost all of the groups visited. Only one group, presents a relatively young group, again the younger dancer at 25 years old. For the dancer Armand, "We have aged but we continue to dance the zinli despite the misery and the difficulties that we encounter. I am convinced that after us, the children of today will not practice the Zinli dance under these conditions". Some villages that could have had around forty to fifty dancers now only have around eleven. In villages like Agbangnizou and Djidja the groups have broken up. The practice of Zinli dance is therefore in decline in Abomey. The succession is not prepared and if nothing is done, its disappearance is programmed. "The slope is really steep and we fear its disappearance if no action is taken. It was the zinli that resounds on the eve of each funeral, but currently it is prayer vigils followed by religious songs until the early morning," says a customary official. Most respondents

recognize that the steep slope of the zinli is linked to social change, in particular the new way of life, which they attribute to globalization. "Personally, I find that it's globalization, it's the fact of wanting to copy the West, their logic, their dances, that's why we abandoned the zinli", relates amandine, an 18-year-old first year student. years. The world has become more and more materialized with the rise of the westernized capitalist branch imposing on all humanity a way of life based on the consumption of goods and services. This kind of life is not without consequence on the culture in particular its heritage and its cultural identity of people of Abomey that is the zinli. Born in the time of King Guezo during a funeral, the zinli did not have an economic aim. The zinli finds himself in another world, in his own society which seems unknown to him by the fact that it receives the dictates of globalization. All work deserves remuneration (money). All activities that do not generate it are called to disappear. But the zinli brings in little. For the young girl, Amandine, "the zinli alone cannot feed me, that's why we prefer to spend our time doing other business than dancing the zinli, which doesn't allow me to have a motorbike or build a house". To accomplish specific needs that require great economy that the zinli dance cannot satisfy. The only possible way is to abandon the zinli for other more promising activities. To these constraints is added the loss of identity markers created by the social upheaval that plays on the zinli dance. He was the identity of the town, "Before we danced for bravery, for honor and for the image of our locality, now we have to motivate the children to dance". The situation has worsened with the expansion of revealed religions. Christianity and Islam are also the causes of this identity disorientation: "Don't forget that our generation has adopted the revealed religions, which make us understand that there are no other rites for funerals than prayers and not a dance. Can zinli still resist the threats of globalization in order to safeguard the cultural heritage and identity of people of Abomey? Modern and African-inspired dances are attracting more and more young people to the detriment of the zinli. This reality is much more observed in villages with an urbanized tendency where information and communication technologies (ICT) convey these dances and music. "When I dance the zinli, it is the old and old alone who appreciate me, while I dance the modern ones I am admired by the young girls", relates Enock, a 19-year-old young man. These facts explain not only the enthusiasm among young people but also the disappearance of the Zinli dance which suffers from a lack of talent. The sound devices now installed during funeral and rejoicing ceremonies explain this state of affairs. We can count more than twenty (20) marquises and bar dancing. They are filled with young people who express themselves in these dances. Rap, jazz, coupé-décalé and others were the dance rhythms that animated these marquises. The material and economic success provided by these dances explains its choice by some young people. Note that despite the world around these modern dances and African inspirations, most young people are unaware of the message they convey. Many are aware of the dangers they instill. "Everyone dances according to their inspiration, even respect for the hierarchy is flouted by the dancers. For example, we can dance, stick the little one in front of the little one," says Enock, a 19-year-old.

#### 4. Discussion

Passed down from generation to generation, the origin of the zinli seems to be common to other traditional dances (Balandier, 1992). On this subject, Cohan (1986) locates the origin of dance since the existence of human society. Along the same lines, Garaudy (1973) finds the origin of dance at work. Whatever the nature of its origin, the human body is seen as the common support for all dances among all researchers. Modern, postmodern, classical or traditional dances present the same factor which is the assimilation of the "body in motion", a universal characteristic valid over time (Guellouz, 2013). The zinli dance is no exception. It uses the body and gives it a social status. The difference between the attire of the dancer and the zinli dancer marks the difference between the feminine and masculine gender in the society of people of Abomey. These results confirm the work of Nakou (1990) who concludes that traditionally, it is obvious that the body is inseparable from the society which uses it for its own ends without taking into account that of the individual. These results reaffirm those of Chevé (2012) who emphasizes that the body plays a role in social differentiation. The musical instruments, the different dance steps, and the different figures of the zinli dance convey deep messages. These results confirm those of Dunham (1966), Ouédraogo (2006) and Nakou et al. (2012). For these authors, dance only exists when its message is needed. The results of the study expose yet other functions that the zinli dance brings and which confirm a lot of previous research in the field of dance. On the cultural level, the zinli dance is above all an intangible cultural heritage of people Abomey. The zinli represents the cultural identity of this people through its dance steps and its attire which are drawn from their physical and socio-cultural environment. His figures drawn during the ceremonies reflect his know-how including his technical identity. These results corroborate the research of Nakou et al. (2012) and Marceau (2014) who explain that dance today is an individual and collective identity. On the social level, the zinli ensures integration and social cohesion. The figures of the dances which draw "unity makes the nation" have an example. This social function of zinli dance reaffirms the work of Garaudy (1973), Akuesson (1983), Ward and Thomas (1997), Nakou et al. (2012). The research of these authors concludes that traditional dances constitute a vector of social harmonization and an instrument of socialization. But the results contradict the work of the researcher Le Boulch (1971) who asserts that primitive societies dance to obtain rain, healing, to ensure a successful hunt. This could not be possible because the municipality of Abomey in the grip of accelerated urbanization is not a primitive society. This shows the absence of types of zinli fulfilling the aforesaid functions. We always see at the end of the zinli sessions of rejoicing, the whole assembly comes on the stage to dance. This fact confirms the research of Téirou (2000, p.2) who explains that in Africa everyone dances: babies, pregnant women, kings, queens, authorities, old people, etc. On a physical level, the zinli dancer performs many athletic movements. We note, jumps, jumps, receptions on both feet, pirouettes etc. This dance solicits almost all the joints and muscle groups of the body. It then develops the qualities of relaxation, strength, endurance, coordination, etc. The zinli dancer is like an athlete who can do anything. These results confirm on the one hand the research of Nakou et al. (2012) on the physical functions of tètè dance. And on the other hand, attest to the results of

Koné (2013) on the gluteal area highlighted in dances in Africa south of the Sahara, in the Caribbean and among African-Americans. The zinli as it is danced today has undergone a remarkable evolution, which follows that of its physical and social environment. This evolution confirms the research of Hall (1995), Clifford (1996), Amselle (2001) and Tartif (2008). For these authors, culture is not a closed entity endowed with an internal coherence but it is dynamic especially in the context of globalization where the articulation between local cultures and those of mass conveyed by the media is accentuated. The results also show that the steps of the zinli dance are exploited by modern dances. This confirms the work of Koné (2013) who approved that contemporary African dance result from a tinkering or a readjustment of traditional African dances. Entiope (1996) goes further in the same direction underlines that these modern dances create a link between the past and the present, thus restoring a lost Africa.

#### 5. Conclusion

By approaching this study on the zinli dance, for the safeguard of the cultural heritage and identity of people of Abomey, the objective was to describe it, to understand its anthropological scope and to lead to the main factors which hinder its promotion and its safeguard. In the context of globalization. In order to touch such a reality which makes the traditional and the modern interact, a composite theoretical framework of the "Bendrology and cultural literature of the Mossé" by Pacéder (1997) and the "cultural diversity and globalization" of Parentau (2007). After the pre-survey, where we sought to understand the internal and external logic of the zinli dance, the understanding of the anthropological scope as well as its detailed description was carried out. This will undoubtedly contribute to the safeguarding of this cultural identity heritage of people of Abomey and at the same time marks the verification of our first hypothesis. After our various interviews, the result was clear: the lack of new talent is the major difficulty for the promotion of Zinli dance. Our second starting hypothesis, which indexed the pressure exerted by modern and African-inspired dances as a threat to the survival of zinli dance in the context of globalization, is confirmed. The economic benefits generated by these modern dances motivate the young people of Abomey to practice them to the detriment of the Zinli dance. Also, the results also show that these modern dances cannot be the only factors of the degrading situation of the zinli dance in the context of globalization. The expansion of revealed religions, the urbanization of the area and the adoption of a way of life centered on the pursuit of gain and the consumption of goods and services are all other factors linked to the phenomenon of globalization which accelerate the drift of the zinli dance. In the hope that a good strategy will be found for the promotion of the Zinli dance, suggestions have been made for all the actors of this cultural and identity heritage of people of Abomey in order to mitigate its drift.

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