4 Towards *Just* Dance Research

An uMunthu Participatory and Performative Inquiry Into Malawian–Norwegian Entanglements

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Research Focus—Malawi, Norway and a Wish to Decolonise Tertiary Dance Education in the West

This chapter is the outcome of a practice-led (Smith & Dean, 2009) and collaborative (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) exploration between three different authors within the frames of performative (Fels, 2015) and decolonising (Smith, 2012/1999) research. The object of decolonising is Nordic tertiary dance education, represented by Tone, a Norwegian-Finnish dance educational researcher, the third author of this chapter. The fields that we build on in this task are Malawian dance, philosophies and pedagogies, represented by Asante, a Malawian dancer and artistic leader, the second author of this chapter, as well as Sunniva, the first author of this chapter, a musician, ethnomusicologist and music education researcher who is Norwegian and Malawian, a married Malawian. She has initiated and been the driving force for this study, as well as the bridge between the Global South–North collaboration that runs as a red thread through this chapter. Both Sunniva and Tone as academics work with performative, critical and decolonising perspectives on tertiary arts education.

This research started when Sunniva returned to Norway from a longer period in Malawi in 2018, and contacted Tone for some assistance. Sunniva's research interest, that originated from her discussions with Asante and his dance troupe, was to explore how young people in Malawi are dealing with becoming local–global Malawians in-between traditional dance and a modern Malawian identity. She was interviewing Asante's dance group, *Afro-Fricana*, on the issue and needed a dance studies scholar to study some movements. As the dances that Sunniva had filmed were unfamiliar to Tone, she wanted to start with learning, thereby embodying, some of them. Sunniva contacted Asante and wondered if he could help; then, we set up a WhatsApp communication platform among the three of us, and from there, this practice-led and performative study started.

With no other clear preliminary intention than teaching Tone some of the Malawian dances, we soon ran into methodological struggles and challenges as a Global South–North research group working with and against colonial structures that we are all part of. While inquiring this, the three co-researchers needed to take a step back before proceeding to discuss how it was possible to take steps towards a more just, attentive and decolonising methodology. This side-step was needed as neither Malawi

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nor Norway has integrated decolonising perspectives in mainstream dance education; these perspectives are not present if we do not address them directly.

The aim of this chapter, or in the main project, was not initially, and still is not, to decolonise Malawian dance practice or education, as that has to be done as a Malawian Dance Education initiative, but we are happy if the discussions from this cross-cultural project can support any such initiatives. From this practice-led collaboration and (positive) struggle, slowly an analytical question was formulated by the three of us. 'Analytical question' is often used instead of 'research question' in post-qualitative and practice-led research, emphasising that the research question is not ready in advance (St. Pierre, 2014). Instead, an analytical research question is slowly created through exploring and experimenting in creative practice. We have formulated the analytical question that leads us through this chapter as:

> How can we approach a Malawian–Norwegian dance education research project methodologically in a just, attentive and decolonising way?

In the following sections, we describe the context of the main project, the theoretical perspectives and the methodological approach of this chapter, and analyse the practice-led exploration through performative inquiry.

Music Crossroads Malawi

In Area 23 in Lilongwe, Malawi, there is a cultural school: Music Crossroads Malawi. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday after school lets out, there is training for Hear Us Children (HUC), a traditional cultural dance troupe with children from 8–18 years of age. They train hard every week, learning to dance traditional Malawian dances and to sing and play traditional Malawian songs and music. They have acquired a knowledge that is rare these days for their generation: the knowledge of traditional cultural expressions. They have this competence and knowledge while they are, at the same time, living in an increasingly global world where local traditional expressions have been devalued for years. In the 1980s and 1990s, Radio 1 in Malawi, for example, played old songs and folk songs every day (Østern & Hovde, 2019). This does not happen much anymore, and traditional cultural expressions are rarely used, except for special occasions, particularly celebrations. Even though these songs and dances are important to people in their identity constructions as Malawians; at the same time, the dances and songs are labelled as old-fashioned, connected to village life and a lifestyle that is considered outdated, or *not modern*.

Modernity, as used here, refers to a lifestyle equivalent to the European or American lifestyle, music, dance and culture (Østern & Hovde, 2019), and should not be confused with the time epochs often called 'modern' in the Western arts tradition. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018) point out, the term is intertwined with colonialism. However, the term is used as a part of everyday language in Malawi, to describe a certain way of living. This does not mean it is not intertwined with colonialism; on contrary, we think it is clearly connected to both old and new forms of colonialism, but it also embeds the reality of lived hierarchies, locally and globally, in Malawi. The process, as we see it from a Malawian–Norwegian perspective, has not yet reached the point where this term is problematised in many educational situations. There are exceptions such as the Bachelor of Arts in African Musicology (2020) and Bachelor

of Arts in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (2020) programmes at the Malawian University of Science and Technology, led by Dr Robert Chanunkha, and such resources are of great importance for our project with young Malawian traditional dancers.

This means that when we use the term 'modern', it emerges from our empirical material, and from an understanding that this is the reality as it is, even though it is painful to admit that it is a term that so clearly undermines much of the local Malawian cultural heritage. It is important to clarify that the term is not understood in our empirical material only as strictly colonising, but it is at times also connected to issues such as gender equality and other aspects of human rights that are welcomed. While there are significant reasons to problematise the term, the content and the consequences of the word 'modern', and even to avoid using it altogether, that elaboration will not happen in this chapter. We use this term here, as it is used in most places in Malawi, carrying either an admiration towards the West or towards other 'more successful' countries in Africa, thus positioning *modern* as something that has rejected *traditional*,[1] as painful as it is to the authors, for this important reason: if we would not use it in the way our local participants commonly use it in their daily lives, we would be covering up the challenges that we are facing and we would not face the reality as it is. It would mean not acknowledging the premises on which the term *modern* is mostly used. Becoming a modern Malawian (this is a very common term while talking about what kind of citizens we are), is explained as an attractive prospect for many young people, by the young Malawian dancers involved in this project. The dancers refer to being *modern* as having access to and using equity-strengthening value systems,[2] digital and electronic technologies, being interested in globally oriented—or at least pan-African oriented—cultural expressions and political ideas, rather than traditional perspectives. Malawi is one of the most rapidly urbanising countries in the world, and the difference is remarkable between living in a traditional village where you do not necessarily have direct access to water, good education, electronic technology or value systems that promote equity, and living in a Malawian city where life is not so different from city life anywhere else in the world. Urbanity is in large seen as the equivalent of 'modernity', and village life as equivalent to traditional ways of living.

Sunniva has been discussing the divergence between what *seems important* and what *has status* with fellow Malawian musicians for some time. It seems that one of the consequences of this divergence is that, while people in their everyday lives appreciate many of the traditional expressions, and traditional artwork might be very important to them, at the same time, traditional cultural expressions are considered old-fashioned, non-modern and 'hyper-Malawian'. As such, they are not expected to have much value, no matter if one as an individual appreciates them, because they point backwards to a less technological past, closer to farming and not technological every day, and not to the prosperity of a modern technological society. Asante, one of the first children to start in the HUC cultural troupe over 10 years ago, and a research participant, co-researcher and second author of this chapter, has played a crucial part in these discussions. Asante has started his own dance troupe, practicing and performing both traditional and modern dances. Modern dance, in this context, includes dances that do not originate from Malawi, including African dance practices connected to the commercial African music industry, the global music scene and also more local dance practices from other countries such as Brazil or Spain. This is not a strict definition, but a looser understanding of the term, amongst the young dancers

involved in the project. It is also relevant to mention that the term, as we use it, has nothing to do with 'modern dance' the way it is used in the context of dance traditions in Nordic or other Western dance education.

Previous Research

The analytical question we are investigating in this chapter is how we can approach a Malawian–Norwegian dance education research project methodologically in a just, attentive and decolonising way. The focus is methodological, and we are aiming at contributing to the decolonising of dance and dance educational research in Nordic dance education.

The challenge is to contribute to this field of knowledge particularly through Malawian knowledge, and in doing so, be careful not to reproduce existing unequal power relations. As Land (2015) mentions, it is important to consider who are entitled to act as allies. In the context of this project, both Malawian and Norwegian participants need allies to discuss these issues with. This is also why we are asking the question: Who is benefitting from this project? As Smith (2012, pp. 175–176) points out, in cross-cultural contexts, questions that need to be asked are ones such as:

> Who defined the research problem? For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so? What knowledge will the community gain from this study? What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study? What are some likely positive outcomes from this study? What are some likely negative outcomes?

When discussing these issues together, Asante points out that he believes that we all will benefit from conversations based on respect and equity, and that it is beneficial for everyone to get new ideas, particularly as there are not many people available, in the music and culture scene to discuss perspectives such as decolonising with. He also emphasises that we all need allies we can trust.

The four academic contributions that we are aware of about Malawian dance education that would be internationally accessible are the following: *Music Education in Malawi: The Crisis and the Way Forward* (2002) by Robert Chanunkha (Professor, Malawian University of Science and Technology); *The Dance of Politics: Gender, Performance, and Democratization in Malawi* (2011) by Lisa Gilman; *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing* (1996) by Steven Friedson; and *The Traditional Concept uMunthu as Entangled in a Malawian Dance Teacher's Educational Practice* (2019) by Sunniva Hovde. Music and dance are strongly linked in Malawi, as in many other Southern African countries, and both are integral to music education, as Alinane Mildred Ligoya describes in *Music Education in Malawi: The Need for a Philosophy* (2011). The articles on Malawian dance are, in general, ethnographic studies describing the dances and the differences amongst them (Wroe, 2017; Soko, 2014; Banda, 2013; MacKay, 2013). Gilman and Fenn (2006) have also written an article on popular music, dance and gender, with a focus on gendered practices. In this chapter, however, the focus is methodological, and the context is a participatory study of dance education.

The ongoing project this methodological chapter originates from has followed the three young dancers—Asante, Nthoko and Prince, who were part of the HUC dance company in Malawi, and who now have their own dance group. They practice

traditional Malawian dance professionally, and they have, through HUC, performed on many different occasions, for example, for ministers, presidents and diplomats in Malawi. The dance company HUC has had a significant impact in strengthening the national identity of many people in the local communities. Yet, the dancers have experienced many situations where they have been confronted by the communities' struggle between acknowledging their traditional dance practice and the strive to identify as *modern* Malawians. The dancers themselves do not find this personally difficult, but they stress the surrounding communities' difficulties with the issue. As *modern* Malawians, and as *modern* dancers, they also practice many other dances, not only traditional ones. The Malawian *modern* dances and the Malawian traditional dances are different from one another, but the dancers fully embody both styles. In the research project, we—Asante, Tone and Sunniva—have sought to take part in the spaces in-between, where Nthoko, Asante and Prince seem to move.

The aim was, in the beginning of the project, to investigate a movement dimension, an identity dimension and a local–global identity dimension. We also addressed two essential questions: How do traditional and modern Malawian dances differ and benefit from each other on a movement level? How is this movement level entangled with identity becomings when viewed from a local–global perspective? In a later phase, after Tone got involved in the project, it became evident that we needed to discuss some methodological questions first; hence, we formed the analytical question that is presented in this chapter.

When Sunniva and Asante discuss the issues of modern–traditional–global identity–movement, Asante emphasises that the *modern* dances are not necessarily Malawian—rather, they are to be seen as African dances with Malawian variations. He then states that there are some *modern* Malawian dances that are particularly Malawian, but they are no longer popular and may not be seen as *modern* anymore either.

In our research, we seek to develop culturally responsive research methods. This is important because, as soon as we enter the project, the power dynamics amongst us—Sunniva, Asante and Tone—become tangible and necessary to deal with right from the start. There are material–discursive aspects related to us, such as Western–non-Western, older–younger, blackness–whiteness, academic–non-academic, high formal education–no formal education, that are involved and may establish colonial frames right from the beginning if we do not actively resist them. It might not be possible to totally avoid them—see, for example, the criticism presented by scholars such as Tuck and Yang (2012) and Smith (2012)—but these questions are nevertheless important for this project: Can we do this research differently, and can we act in a decolonial way? Are we capable of such an effort at all? A decolonising knowledge contribution might add something of value to the (methodological) research field, but also to the dance community and the research participants in Malawi.

The discussions between Asante and Sunniva about dance education and Asante's thoughts on this project have prompted other discussions within the dance group, and created other ways of seeing themselves as dancers, as well as reflecting on the educational perspectives of dance. The Malawian participants have, for example, discussed among themselves how traditional dance might be attractive globally, but not always locally. Even though this is not the aim of the main project, these discussions might contribute to processes whereby the group, or other dance groups as well, would start decolonising processes from within. This is something all three of us would highly applaud, as well as support if asked.

The project can also contribute to the Nordic dance education field (through Tone's teaching, workshops and projects) and on the Malawian dance field (through the discussions Asante is joining in on, and his dance experiences in this project). The arts scene in Malawi might benefit from this expanded knowledge. Moreover, Sunniva, being a part of this scene, contributes to discussions and workshops on democracy, feminism and decolonial work in this area regularly. She is also committed to bringing in the lessons and experiences from this chapter into projects on documentation of traditional dance/music/cultural heritage education initiated by the Malawian Film Association, involving the Malawian University of Science and Technology (MUST). As such, this chapter can directly benefit students at the MUST programmes on African musicology and Indigenous knowledge systems and practices.

The Co-Researchers and/or Research Participants in Collaborative Research

This project situates itself within the field of collaborative approaches to research. Savin-Baden and Major (2013, p. 258) explain how there has been, since the emergence of action research, 'an increasing interest in collaborative approaches to research'. Yet, while action research builds on 'the idea that research can lead to constructive change and even empowerment for individuals', there are also scholars who think that action research has 'not gone far enough in breaking down the barriers between research and between researcher and the researched' (p. 258).

The central idea of collaborative approaches is that legitimate knowledge is not only located with the privileged experts and their dominant knowledge. Instead, knowledge needs to be produced in collaboration with local expert knowledge and with the voices (and in this case, also with the bodies) of the knowers (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 258). At the heart of collaborative approaches, there is a strong emphasis on transformation, change, participation and voice (p. 272). There is a fine line between research participants and co-researchers in collaborative research projects, and often the same people find themselves in both roles. In this project, the three young dancers—Asante, Nthoko and Prince—take part as *research participants*. Asante has played an important role in outlining the dance content in this project, as he leads his own dance group. He is also actively taking part in the ongoing discussions amongst musicians situated in Lilongwe on the role and position of traditional music in Malawi. Nthoko and Prince are members of the same dance troupe as well, and they also have similar backgrounds having been involved in HUC. Asante's role in this methodologically oriented chapter is more active, as he has been engaged also in the analysis and writing stages. Asante, therefore, finds himself in the roles of both a research participant and co-researcher, and thereby also one of the co-authors of this chapter. His motivation for the project is to discuss issues that he encounters and experiences on a daily basis and that he is in touch with through his colleagues who consider these issues from a slightly different perspective, but still from the viewpoint of the arts.

Asante and Sunniva also cooperate with each other in other ways—they are music colleagues, play together from time to time in bands, have been engaged in the process of establishing a Centre for Traditional Arts together, and Asante is also teaching Sunniva how to play traditional drums. They continuously discuss music education and the situation of being part of the traditional music/dance scene in Malawi. Their

discussions are influencing their ways of thinking about teaching, learning and how they can strengthen decolonising perspectives as part of their educational approaches, as well as Asante strengthening the capabilities of his students and his dance crew in their navigation in becoming local–global Malawians in-between traditional dance and a modern Malawian identity. The literature addressing these issues is limited, and there are not many opportunities to discuss these issues with experienced Malawian artists, as many of them grew up in a different time and faced different challenges. Nevertheless, the aim is to strengthen the awareness of and competence in articulating these conflicting interests and challenges together.

Tone is a Finnish–Norwegian dance artist and academic from the field of dance with a background in contemporary dance (in the Western meaning of contemporary dance). She finds herself both in the role of a research participant and co-researcher. She takes part as a learner in trying to learn Asante's dances, and she also takes part as a co-researcher and co-author in analysing and writing. Sunniva is the bridge between Malawi and Norway, and in this project and chapter, she is a co-researcher, but not a research participant. In other words, in this context, she is not an active, dancing participant but remains in the role of a dialogue partner and researcher. When becoming colleagues, Sunniva and Tone discovered that they had mutual interests in the issue of decolonising arts education, Norwegian dance education as a normative practice and the local–global positioning of cultural expressions.

An ongoing discussion in Malawi amongst musicians and artists is how Malawi is still under colonial pressure, mentally, philosophically, culturally and economically. Sunniva is part of these discussions through being a musician in Malawi and connected to many musicians and artists through the cultural meeting point of Music Crossroads Malawi and HUC, and she has an extensive network in the music scene through her Malawian husband, who is also a musician. Her position as a local musician with a large network has presented many opportunities to discuss and explore how young people find themselves touching upon both postcolonial and neocolonial issues, in trying to preserve the traditional culture and navigate in the local–global, modern–traditional dynamics of a country undergoing great change and with a wide range of differences within.

Decolonial Theory

'Decolonial' in this context is connected particularly to dance education and the strengthening of multivocality around the identity position in a community as a 'Malawian traditional dancer'. Decolonising, as we use it here, refers to the process of emphasising local artistic and pedagogical understandings, practices and becomings, as many of these practices have been marginalised to the benefit of European and American perspectives. In the introduction of this book, decolonisation is suggested as an 'ongoing process' that is based on a critical view of the self that emerges from states of not knowing, hearing or seeing (Wa Thiong'o, 1986/1938). We believe that this definition is appropriate for our project, as we need to together investigate ourselves critically while openly acknowledging that there are so many things we do not know, but that we can try to learn from others. Some decolonial scholars question whether it is possible—and if so, to what extent—to deconstruct colonial powers through research alone (e.g. Tuck & Yang, 2012). Smith's (2012) concerns about the colonial power of academic writing should be taken seriously in this kind of a project,

and at the same time, knowledge produced in academic research should be made available for everyone interested in contributing to the field. We are aware of the risk of (re)producing colonial perspectives in academic knowledge production, and indeed, this is the main imperative for our critical reflections on dance education.

Our broader research project has originated from arts education and deals especially with dance practices and pedagogies. In this chapter, we focus on the question of how we can approach a Malawian–Norwegian dance education research project methodologically in a just, attentive and decolonising way. If decolonising is defined in terms of acknowledging and supporting local practices and knowledge and striving to amplify otherwise excluded voices that can contribute to the field, we believe that this project has some potential to do so. We also want to emphasise that the struggle against colonialism/neocolonialism is something we see as a collective task, particularly from a Malawian point of view, whereby systematised injustice generally is seen as a collective issue.

While many decolonial scholars, such as Tuck and Yang (2012), underline the importance of decolonising projects to benefit those defined as the colonised, the perspective in this project is somewhat different, as it rather aims to decolonise our own curricula and arts education. We attempt to find ways to work toward a more just and decolonising methodology for us all. In this context, it has been especially beneficial that Asante has often pointed out that he is critical of the typical victimisation perspective, which he considers damaging, as it ignores the agency and power of the victim of injustice. This means that someone else is in control and defining how things should be considered. Instead, working together for common aims requires partnership that is based on equity and mutual respect. In Asante's words: 'It is somehow easy: let's respect each other, be aware of background and power, but not in a way that is "protecting" me. If you do that, you diminish my actions, my thoughts or my choices. There is no need of that'. Seen in relation to Tuck and Yang (2012), we think this indicates how different actors in a collaborative project need to critically consider themselves, their history and their position in the society.

Mabingo (2015), a dance teacher and researcher from Uganda, states that even though some non-Western dances have been included in curricular and mission statements both in Africa and elsewhere, the format, the pedagogies and the teachers remain still within a Western frame. This can be considered a type of cultural appropriation, where the bearers of the practices and knowledge are not made visible, but the products, tokens and symbols of the practices and knowledge are used to benefit a majority culture. In Mabingo's example, the majority culture is a majoritarian global culture, a North American dance culture. *Majoritarian* and *minoritarian* are terms borrowed from Deleuze (2005/1987). While majority refers to the group with the highest representation of a certain entity, majoritarian, as a concept, is useful in this discussion as it refers to the normative power of a group or process regardless of whether they are in the majority or not. In Malawi, Malawians are in the majority, but the processes of settler colonisation, cultural colonisation and globalisation are still rendering Malawian practices minoritarian in the Malawian context.

Decolonising can also take the form of an act where terms and ways of thinking from non-majoritarian cultures are given space and power of definition. In this way, local embodied and non-articulated cultural concepts can be articulated and given visibility. Emielu (2018) provides an important way of looking at the dynamics between traditional and popular music in the African context that is considered an elastic and

continuously changing process, as Nettl (2005, as cited in Emielu, 2018) puts it. Nettl also writes that 'in the context of Africa, given its colonial heritage, there is a sense whereby Westernization connects with modernization' (p. 222), which corresponds with our experiences in Malawi. Everything Indigenous or Malawian is associated with traditionalism and non-modernisation.

The decolonial perspective can be used as a tool to see power structures at work, some of which can be hidden from us due to privilege and the naturalisation of long-term effects of colonialism and which can also gain new forms due to neocolonialism. Morgensen (2012, p. 805) emphasises that 'by exposing normative knowledge production as being not only non-indigenous but colonial, (we) denaturalize power within settler societies and ground knowledge production in decolonization'. Here, 'settler societies' refers to non-Indigenous societies in Canada, which is her research context. This is also what we try to do through our decolonial perspective: to expose different forces affecting the young Malawian dancers in the space in-between traditional dance and modern Malawian identity, as well as to challenge the colonial premises of Eurocentric knowledge production in the dance education field. We use the decolonial perspective methodologically to explore ways in which to contribute towards a more participatory, just and attentive knowledge production in/about traditional and modern Malawian dancing. This includes an attempt to describe the dynamics and becomings of the *modern/local/traditional/global* in the young Malawian dancers' lives with the terms and concepts that they themselves use. It also means that learning the dances takes place in a participatory way.

Performative Inquiry

Performative inquiry we understand as a methodological concept which seeks to articulate *how* to conduct performative research in practice. Fels (2015, p. 478) states that performative inquiry invites us to attend to what calls our attention and describes how the heart and pulse of performative inquiry are *stop moments*. Fels explains how they are moments that interrupt, disrupt, trouble, astonish and call for action: 'A stop moment invites us to interrupt our habits of engagement, to recognize absence within presence, to renew an opportunity of choice' (p. 478).

We have structured our methodological experiences so far in the project around what we have experienced as such stop moments. To each stop moment we give a name, which serves as a subtitle. Similar to Haseman (2006), by naming what we bodily experience as stop moments, we also *produce* these moments *as practice*. The stop moments are not necessarily there before we recognise and name them as stop moments with research value. The stop moments we travel through as we write this chapter are the following:

- the relations and local–global entanglements in the project;
- uMunthu participatory, performative inquiry as the research approach; and
- our bodily, performative encounter with the dances of Asante.

In the end, having moved through these three stop moments, we are able to discuss the capacity of the uMunthu participatory, performative inquiry to create movement throughout the research process. Performative inquiry, decolonial theory and uMunthu as a participatory way of doing things in this emerging research design seem

important elements in trying to transform colonial research practices and grounding the analysis in a more complex and contextual understanding. In this way, we seek to produce space for non-binary understandings and non-coherent practices. In the following, we describe how we have been able to move through, and with, the performative stop moments, creating them at the same time as they shape our understanding of an emerging methodological design.

Stop Moment 1—The Relations and Entanglements in the Project

Our first stop moment, our real methodological challenge/opportunity, is to manage to dwell in the relations that we identify or create as we move through the project. It is the relations themselves that are our interest, not the dichotomies or what is created through the relations. The relations in the project are entangled, never separated in the first place, and they are also discursively tensioned. For example, there is a discursive tension in the Malawi–Norway relation. There is another discursive tension amongst the Malawian dancer Asante, the Norwegian–Malawian ethnomusicologist Sunniva and the Finnish–Norwegian contemporary dancer Tone. These tensions have both productive and destructive potentials. Figure 4.1 visualises the project's discursively entangled relations.

We find these discursively tensioned entangled relations everywhere in the project, and they seem to fuel the project with its necessary energy at the same time as they present themselves as methodological challenges, as stop moments. In fact, they are

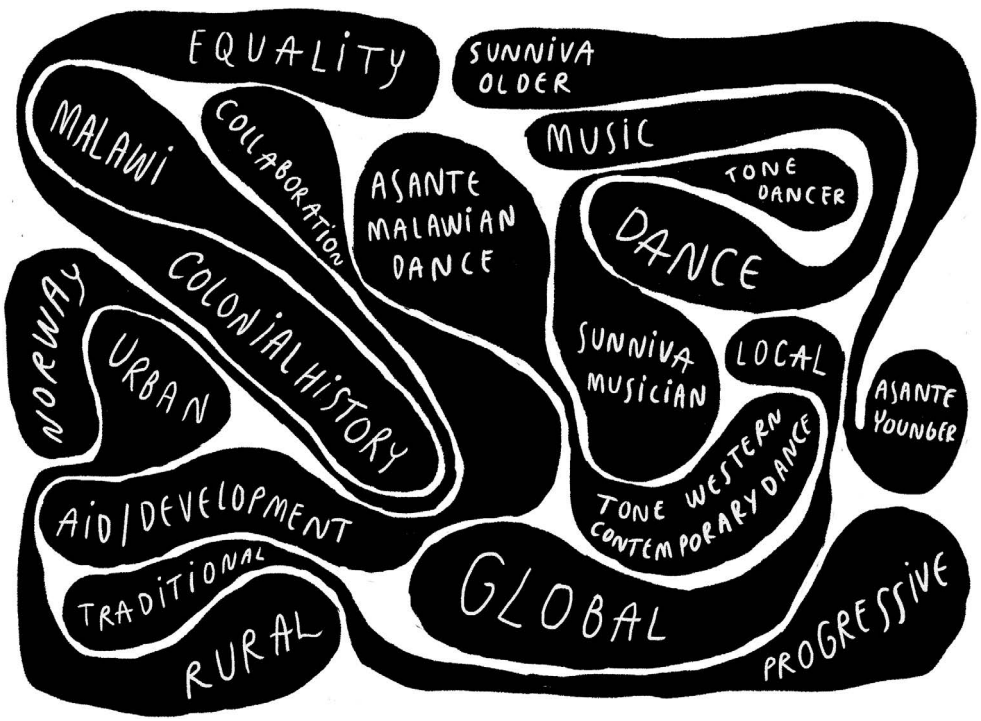

Figure 4.1 The tensioned, discursively entangled relations presenting themselves as methodological challenges and opportunities in the project.

Source: Design by Tintin Rosvik

simultaneously challenges as well as opportunities. Our methodological challenge is to not slip towards either side of the relations, but dwell in the middle of them. These relations are non-binaries; they are not in opposition to each other, but rather complementary powers working together and in different directions. Different directions are not necessarily in opposition to each other, and the term-couples are not to be seen as in opposition to each other; they are rather ways of relating to the dynamic between all the word-couples. Figure 4.1 should be read like a rhizome (Deleuze, 2005), where the terms communicate in an inter- and intra-textual way where they are relating to the dynamic in all the couples and in the response from the different dynamics. For example, *urban–rural* does not represent an opposition, as the terms are not binary or mutually exclusive.

Stop Moment 2—uMunthu Participatory, Performative Inquiry as Research Approach

The term uMunthu—defined as a participatory way of doing things—is central to the (traditional) culture of Malawi. Our encounter with uMunthu functions as a stop moment for us. One Malawian proverb goes like this: 'kali kokha nkanyama, tili awiri ntiwanthu', meaning that when you are on your own, you are as good as an animal of the wild; when there are two of you, you form a community. This refers to the concept of uMunthu, which is explained, amongst other things, as care for others in a community, humanity and the role you have as an individual in a community. You will always be part of a larger community, and it is the collective benefit of the community that is the focus. In sub-Saharan cultures, this concept is used nearly everywhere in slightly different versions, and it implies, in general, that situations should be solved for the greater good, hence the community. As Tambulasi and Mickson Kayuni (2012) point out, the 'ubuntu concept highlights humaneness, interconnectedness and concern for others'. uMunthu, also known as ubuntu in the more general pan-African context, is defined by a focus on humanity and kindness (Nafukho, 2006), interconnectedness as in a social fabric (Tambulasi & Mickson Kayuni, 2012), supportiveness and cooperation (Koster as cited in Tambulasi & Mickson Kayuni, 2012) and a capacity for including values like compassion, dignity and mutual caring in a society (Tomaselli, 2009). These aspects highlight the importance of *participation* as a traditional value in Malawian communities, as one must participate to be part of the community. Traditional dance teacher John Duma also emphasises the concept *love* as central in dance education, as part of uMunthu, as well as in recognising one's place in a bigger community (Hovde, 2019). The values of uMunthu are applied in the collaborative, participatory research we have practised in this project, as it is the participation and the communal contribution that is emphasised, not the individual result. At the same time, emphasising participation of and for the collective implies that there could also be another way to do it; that is, without participation and a collective focus, which is confusing in a Malawian context due to the strong emphasis on collective participation. However, it must be noted that even this perspective is slowly changing because of what is perceived as the modern way of living, influenced by a turn towards individual focus, is becoming a token of someone being non-traditional, more educated and more directed towards 'globalised' knowledge instead of local knowledge.

Another cultural practice in Malawi that can be considered a part of uMunthu participatory element is the everyday emphasis on the autonomy of a person's perception of something. In everyday situations, it is often accepted that people have an

understanding about something without making an explicit argument, just stating how they feel about the issue. On the one hand, this can be regarded as a part of a non-confrontational Malawian culture, but it also gives people a voice through their affective and embodied responses to different issues, without demanding a verbalised reason for it. People who are not familiar with the local culture might interpret such communication in a different way, which might also have implications for the collaboration; for example, between Asante and Tone when they communicate about the ways in which the dances should be performed.

Performance theory, and performative approaches in research, are concepts where we all three intuitively feel at home, as artists. Performance theory and performativity are not the same, but they are related, and as we understand them, performance theory concerns itself with live sociality while our *performative approach* comes from an interest in what is done (not represented), and to the ever-changing dynamics of what is live and social. Performance theory has developed throughout the twentieth century, with a focus on the live, processual and immediate, in opposition to much art theory which focuses more on the art product as an object. Performance theoretician Richard Schechner emphasises the following qualities of the performative:

1) that it is live or immediate;
2) that this immediacy has a transformative character and that something is at stake for those involved; and
3) that the space or situation where the performative immediacy takes place is given particular attention.

(Schechner, 2003; see also Christensen-Scheel, 2009, p. 85)

Christensen-Scheel (2009, p. 87) states that the performative can perhaps most importantly be understood as a *research attitude* which seeks to relate to the ever-changing, undecided and dynamic quality of what is live and social. Bolt (2016) understands the performative in terms of the performative *force* of art, which she explains as the capacity of art to effect movement in thought, word and deed (p. 130). She points out that J. L. Austin was the first to introduce the term 'performativity' in a lecture series at Harvard in 1955 (p. 133). His argument was that performative utterances do not *represent* anything in the world. Instead, they *do* things in the world in specific contexts. As an example, Austin used the words 'I do' from the wedding ceremony, an utterance producing a marriage in the world. Further, Bolt explains how the performative produces real effects, actuals, in the world. The performative act thus has a transformative power; as Fischer-Lichte (2008) notes, something is at stake. Further, Bolt emphasises that performativity emerges through iterative practice. It is about repetition with difference, never repetition of the same. Performative research, thus, is never replicable.

In line with Bolt (2016), we see our task as researchers with a performative approach to map the movement our research journey produces (p. 141). This can be movement in concepts, understandings, methodologies or sensorial experiences as we move along (p. 141). Central concepts describing what aspects or qualities we are turned towards through an uMunthu participatory, performative approach in this research have been especially inspired by Nafukho (2006), Tambulasi and Mickson Kayuni (2012), Tomaselli (2009), Christensen-Scheel (2009), Bolt (2016) and Fels (2015), and we thus formulate these as the following: *community*, *kindness and humanity*, *interconnectedness and concern for others*, *live sociality*, *social responsibility*, *affected and bodily ways of knowing and understanding*, *what is processual*, *the immediate*,

transformation, *actuals*, *something at stake*, *space and situations*, *ever-changing movement*, *repetition with difference*, *interruptions*, *ruptures*, *action* and *astonishment*. These are the aspects or qualities that we are oriented towards as researchers with an uMunthu participatory, performative approach in our project.

Stop Moment 3—Our Bodily, Performative Encounter With the Dances of Asante

The third and final stop moment is based on the experience of Tone and written by her in the first person.

I had the first real working day with Sunniva in this project about Malawian–Norwegian dance entanglements on one day, after she had returned from a longer period in Malawi. She had brought many videos of Asante, Nthoko, Prince and their friends dancing. I watched clip after clip on Sunniva's computer, and I related to the different dances to various degrees. I had not really studied Malawian dance in particular before, but it was still possible for me to connect to the dances through my own bodily experiences of different dances from around the world. As I sat there, I felt slightly estranged, and realised that my only possible way into this project was through the bodily experience of dancing and relating to it myself. However, trying to study the dances using the films seemed somehow disconnected: unaffected, not performative or participatory. Watching the dances did not make me sweat with the dances, struggle with them, enjoy them. It also did not put me at any risk, thereby keeping me slightly on the outside of a performative approach, slightly not-in-touch with Asante and his co-dancers. *Watching* dance is safe, distant, whereas *bodily participating* in learning a dance, and particularly in unknown and unfamiliar dances, presents a risk. I might not succeed in learning Asante's dances.

Bringing with me the uMunthu participatory performative approaches already explored, I knew I needed to engage bodily in the dances, at the same time putting myself at risk in some kind of a relation, creating a space where something would be at stake for me. I needed to try to engage with a community to which I obviously was on the outside. I knew that simply learning the dances from the video clips would not be enough. I needed to stay in *live*, *immediate*, *bodily* and *affected* contact with Asante (as the leader of the group). I sent him a Facebook invitation, but it took a long time before he answered. Therefore, Sunniva suggested a shared WhatsApp group instead (Figure 4.2), as Asante at that time was not very active on Facebook. Suddenly, we were in touch, *interconnected*.

Then, another kind of *space* and *situation* turned up. I was invited to present some of my work as a dance researcher at a Dance in Education conference in northern Sweden.[3] A new place, new people, new possible networks. Very *live*, very *social*. I accepted, knowing I wanted to present this project before it was even designed into a research project: in its very beginning, with me, Sunniva and Asante not having very much more than a very fresh relation at that time. In my presentation, I wanted to explore what performative inquiry in connection to dance research can be, thinking about the workshop as *processual*. It would be an *actual*, creating a *rupture* between this new project and my previous work as a dancer and dance researcher (coming from the Western contemporary dance field, here meaning the dance genre). I presented my workshop like this to the organisers:

> In this participatory development through an art and performative research workshop, I seek to take the participants with me into arts-based research projects with

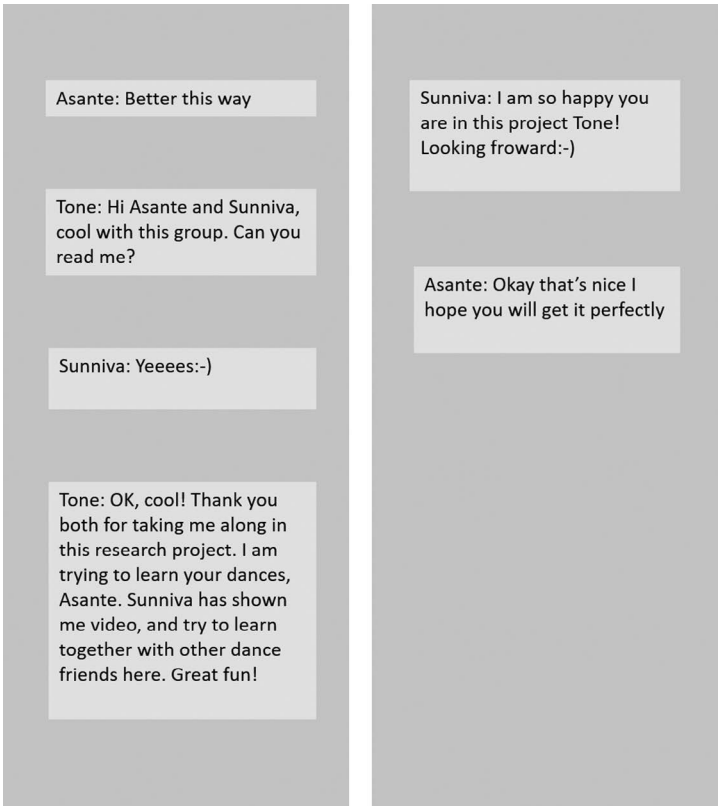

Figure 4.2 A Malawian–Norwegian WhatsApp group was formed (Spring 2018), connecting Asante, Tone and Sunniva.

> which I am involved. In the project, I am, as a third researcher and author, travelling into a dance area completely unknown to me—the traditional dance form danced by the company HuC in Malawi. The participatory turn in many fields, also arts-based research, emphasises the role of communities in determining their own development priorities and creating solutions addressing their needs. What does a participatory and performative turn mean for the dance-in-school research field? During this short workshop, I will seek to address that question together with the participants.

Later, we gave up the 'participatory development' term, recognising it as a concept that can be considered colonising, and instead turned to the uMunthu participatory way, emphasising community, interconnectedness and bodily ways of knowing and understanding.

The 45-minute-long workshop was designed around several proposals or invitations that I had printed out on papers, which I spread out upside down on the floor (Figure 4.3).

I explained to the participants (around 20 dance teachers and dance researchers from around the Nordic countries) that this was part of my performative inquiry and

Traditional Malawian dance /
HEAR US CHILDREN

• How young people in Malawi are becoming local-global Malawians in
the in-between traditional dance and a modern Malawian identity.
• How is the movement level in the dance entangled with identity
becomings in a local-global perspective?

Manifesto for performative research
Brad Haseman (2006)
Practice takes the lead.
All practices are situated in a specific context - why is this interesting also outside the context.
Imply questions regarding ethical issues, sustainability and a wish to contribute to make the world better: the question is not what dance *is*, but what dance can *do*.
Becoming local-global Malawians in the in-between traditional
dance and a modern Malawian identity

Performative inquiry
Lynn Fels (2015)
• Performative inquiry invites us to attend to what calls us to attention
• The heart and pulse of performative inquiry are *stop moments*

Sunniva Hovde
HEAR US CHILDREN – Music Crossroads Malawi
Asante Smzy Maulidi
Tone Pernille Østern
• How can we investigate and learn together?
• What problems will we have?
• What possibilities do we have?

Asante's dances
• A way of getting to know one another through the dance, feeling the dance in the body
• I send greetings to Asante through dancing the dances with groups in my local context, film them and send them back to him

Participatory and socially engaged art as research
Pablo Helguera (2011)
• Meaningful interaction or social engagement
• Dependence on social intercourse, away from the autonomous, individual artist
• Deskilling, unlearning and learning anew
• About transpedagogy, where the pedagogical process is the core of the artwork
• Seeking to go from nominal – directed – creative participation toward collaborative participation
• From lecture towards conversation

Figure 4.3 The workshop was designed through a different proposal on papers turned upside down, inviting a participatory, performative route through the workshop.

that we would move through the workshop in the order in which the paper proposals were opened and revealed by the participants. I then asked one of the participants to choose one paper, turn it over and read it out loud. We would then act according to the proposal written on the paper. In this way, the structure of the workshop was not decided by me beforehand (thereby, also challenging typical teacher-led teaching pedagogies). I needed to stay ready to have a more theoretical entrance to the activities, if one of the more theoretical proposals was turned over first: a more contextual one, or a more practical entrance into the workshop. One of the paper proposals was a QR code.[4]

When this QR code paper proposal was turned around, the workshop participants were asked to take their mobile phones, scan the code and use ten minutes trying to learn the dance by themselves (Figure 4.4). The participating dance teachers did this with great joy, and soon the workshop space was buzzing with activity, with dance teachers trying to learn the dance from their mobile phones. Music was heard from the different devices, playing out loud in unsynchronised ways. I thereby removed myself completely from the established instructive dance teacher position, and instead the space was filled with *ever-changing movement*, *interruptions* (especially musical ones, the music playing at different spots of the dance from the different devices at the same time), *action* and *astonishment* as the dance teachers were trying to engage with the video clip on their mobile phones.

The dance teachers learned different parts of the dance—some learned a long part, some a short one—and they materialised the dance they saw in different and personal ways. The time was limited, so there was no point in striving for perfection, which was something I emphasised as part of the performative approach. After ten minutes, I asked if we could film ourselves doing the dance together, and send the link back to Asante. The dance teachers happily agreed and commented that it became real, actual in a way, since we were sending the film clip back to Asante and his friends. The result, which we sent to Asante, can be seen with a QR code (Figure 4.5).

I had a happy and live feeling having finished the workshop. Somehow, we had created a little sense of community across Malawi and northern Sweden, even if for

Figure 4.4 QR code taking the scanner to the Malawian–Brazilian dance that I had chosen out of Sunniva's video clips for this occasion.

Note: To access the film, use the password: sunniva_malawi_2018

Figure 4.5 QR code taking the scanner to dancing in Sweden.

Note: To access the film, use the password: tone_sweden_2018

only a short moment. The 45 minutes had been real, actual, and I was highly present the whole time, walking out of the workshop space slightly transformed. When the workshop was finished, I left northern Sweden and posted the link on WhatsApp. This dialogue amongst Asante, myself and Sunniva then followed (Figure 4.6).

This stop moment, formulated as *our bodily, performative encounter with the dances of Asante*, was what really brought me into the project. From that moment on, I lived the project, lived with it, experienced transformation with it. Asante and I had formed a live relation, a relation we considered just and equal (as far as that is possible). Until then, I was mainly a participant in a learning process in this project, seeking to relate to Asante's dances. In this learning process, I have at the same time been investigating what an uMunthu performative inquiry approach in dance research means, actively exploring the research qualities that we had earlier defined together.

Because of this inquiry, I was left with the thought that maybe it enabled taking some preliminary steps towards more *just* dance research—attentive and possibly also contributing to decolonising of dance education. I was investigating a form of dance that I knew very little about, and from a long distance. The sensed feeling between me and Asante was that he was the expert and I was the novice. Also, all the Swedish dance teachers that I was exploring Asante's dances with were novices in this particular context. In this situation, we were the learners. The Northern–Southern hemisphere and Norwegian–Scandinavian–Malawian power imbalance was challenged in this micro situation. I felt that we managed to avoid entering into the more binary roles. These are the dichotomies that have been present historically, socially and geographically, in the understanding of relationships involving a global North–South dynamic. We must be aware of them if we are ever to transform them.

Discussion: uMunthu Participatory, Performative Inquiry as a Research Approach

At this point, having framed our emerging research design theoretically with decolonial theory and methodologically with participatory, performative inquiry as well as

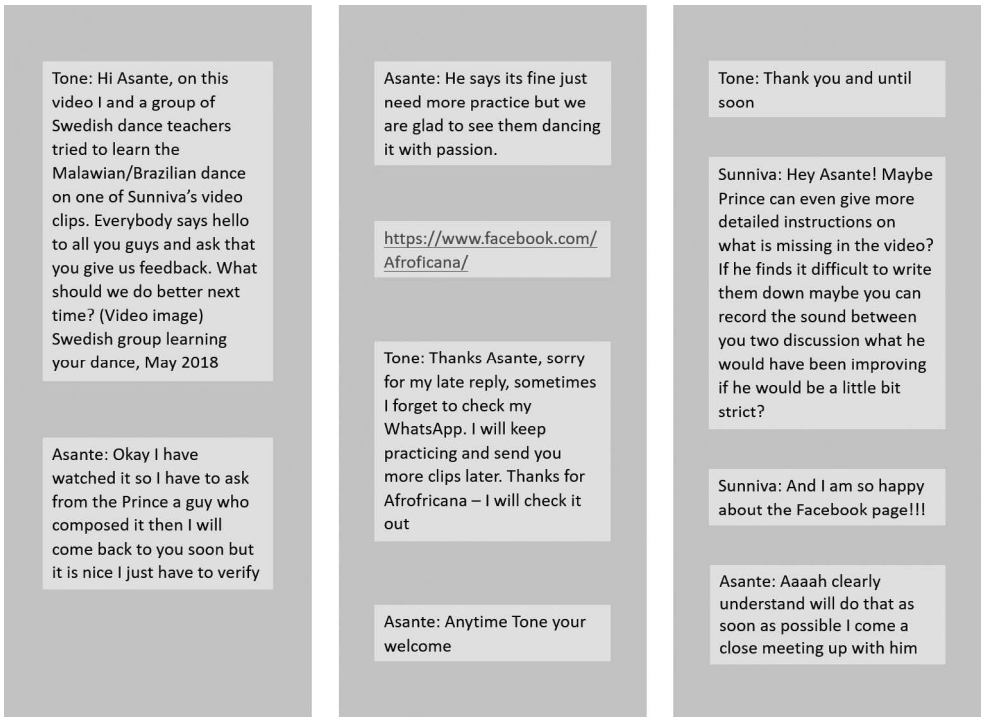

Figure 4.6 WhatsApp dialogue amongst Asante, Tone and Sunniva after the participatory, performative inquiry workshop organised in northern Sweden.

describing and analysing our experienced stop moments, we return to the analytical question we set out to answer:

> How can we approach a Malawian–Norwegian dance education research project methodologically in a just, attentive and decolonising way?

We know that as we create a Western–African relationship, we must address the heavy burden of colonialism, which requires an active effort to ensure, as much as we possibly can, that colonial practices are not reactivated. As we approach the end of this first phase of the larger research project, we are left with a (bodily, affected) feeling that we have managed to take at least one methodological step in the right direction. The performative journey has involved a growing understanding of how we create dancing together and how we can work towards establishing that decolonial space where the entanglements between dance movements and various identity becomings/movements can co-exist, a source of tension and traces of controversy (Hovde, 2012), functioning like stop moments.

The performativity in the process has helped us address the asymmetrical power structure in the sense that we have focused less on the hierarchies of aesthetics: good or not so good dancing. We emphasise the learning of a dance, a learning process and a discussion more than we look to definitions of 'quality'. We produce

live sociality where we attempt to dwell in the middle of the identified, discursively entangled relations displayed in Figure 4.1. Decolonial theory has helped and reminded us not to fall, at least consciously, into the trap of exercising majoritarian power. Decolonial theory has also worked as an important tool to see power structures at work, structures that are often hidden behind structures of privilege and the long-term effects of colonialism. In this way, and through the performative inquiry approach, we have aimed at destabilising those structures of privilege in the context of our project.

What was needed in addition to take the methodological approach one step further, however, was to establish a participatory approach as well—not just any participatory approach, but an uMunthu participatory approach. There is a real danger of constructing a harmful dichotomy between those 'helping' and those 'in need of help' as we addressed earlier through Asante's questions on victimisation. We actively tried to avoid entering those roles and imposing Western ideas about dance or identity construction—instead, we tried to create a platform for equal investigation of these issues. We are interested—all three of us—in investigating what role dance and dancing play for Asante and his dance group in exploring and balancing their position in-between traditional dance and a modern Malawian identity (for definition of the terms, see the 'Music Crossroads Malawi' section of this chapter).

In our project, uMunthu has worked as a participatory frame, derived from a Malawian understanding of participation, interaction and communication. With the help of uMunthu—and the way we understand it through Asante's understanding of the concept, through traditional dance teachers (Hovde, 2019), as well as through decolonial theory and Sunniva's ongoing inquiries and discussions in Malawi—we believe that we have been able to add some important research qualities to the performative list we described previously. In the following, we mark the uMunthu participatory qualities with bold font: ***community***, ***kindness and humaneness***, ***interconnectedness and concern for others***, *live sociality,* ***social responsibility***, ***affected and bodily ways of knowing and understanding***, *what is processual*, *the immediate*, *transformation*, *actuals*, *something at stake*, *space and situations*, *ever-changing movement*, *repetition with difference*, *interruptions*, *ruptures*, *action and astonishment*.

The uMunthu participatory approach has enabled us to take some steps towards a decolonising practice in the field of dance education; approach this dance education research project in a more just, attentive and decolonising way; and understand how at the same time we move together entangled in those practices in a way that is affected and bodily. The relationships within the project are, in different ways and in different relations, struggling to challenge colonial perspectives and other asymmetrical tensions. We have been avoiding established research paths and producing new ones through participating in an uMunthu participatory, performative process, and we have tried to do it in as just, attentive and decolonising a way as possible (see Figure 4.1). With our lived lives as artists/researchers, travellers and locals, we are using the performative inquiry to engage in each other's lives through dancing, dancing—understanding and dancing—learning/teaching.

The participatory elements in uMunthu have revealed the need to use our expertise and talents for the benefit of something larger—the community/group: in this case, researchers, dancers and Norwegian–Malawian colleagues, and the dance education field in both countries. Moreover, uMunthu can imply using our abilities as dancers (Tone) to learn someone else's dance, based on other systems of movement, in order

to investigate the tensions and joys experienced on a bodily level, even though her own dance training comes from a dominating and colonising educational structure in a global perspective. To become a learner in a more shared and performative way can include refusing/declining established truths about aesthetics and carefully resisting socialised training to deconstruct such dominant truths. This kind of an approach can potentially redistribute power to some extent, and lead to a more equal partnership. The uMunthu participatory way can also imply using one's research abilities as a scholar to study, describe and discuss, in dialogue and participation with other participators, colonial structures that come to the surface through the performative inquiry in learning to dance.

This uMunthu participatory, performative journey on which we perform/learn/understand physically/emotionally/cognitively while discussing, dancing, presenting and performing has also created movements. It has put into motion movements of thoughts, bodies and perceptions about dance and identity, and dance concepts. The way of living dually, for Sunniva, in both Malawi and Norway, creates a movement towards a more in-between feeling, instead of dual living. She lives in both places at the same time. The repetitions and the variations in the learning processes, particularly for Tone and Sunniva, are not linear but cross-cultural and complex. Asante has, as a result of the research project, expressed through discussions a feeling of becoming more sensitive to, and aware of, the resistance from society against traditional arts, in the way described previously as a tension between traditional–modern–global–local structures. This is something he is in touch with in his everyday life.

There has been movement towards a knowledge production of decolonial awareness as well, in the group of dancers who have started, for example, to correct Sunniva's understanding, telling her: 'Now you see it like a Norwegian, it doesn't make sense', or giving positive feedback when they believe that she understands it as a 'true Malawian'. Throughout the discussions, the participants have gradually gained confidence to be more direct and assertive while pointing out their own points of expertise.

Our research project is still ongoing, and there is yet much more to learn and explore. For now, we conclude that through this performative inquiry research journey, where using an uMunthu participatory approach has been crucial, we have managed to take some small, preliminary steps towards more *just* dance research that consciously seeks to be attentive and decolonising.

Notes

1. We would like to point out that this view is not in contradiction with our visualisation in Figure 4.1, where we describe the word-couples as non-binary. They are powers working in different directions and with different aims, which does not mean they would be entirely in opposition to each other. There are also distinctions between stereotypical positions, such as the ones we refer to in this particular phrase, and the experienced discursive tensions in-between *modern* and *traditional*, visualised in Figure 4.1. It should be also noted that there are also ways of understanding the term *modern* in Malawi that do not reject *traditional*, challenging the mainstream understanding of the word in Malawi, but that is an inquiry for another article and will not be discussed here.
2. Equity here refers to areas such as gender, age, finances, education and tribe.
3. www.dansiskolan.se/se/p%C3%A5-g%C3%A5ng/biennal-2018-37371602
4. The use of QR codes in performative workshops is inspired by Kristian Nødtvedt Knudsen's (2017) PhD project.

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