

Productive docile bodies in Zimbabwean dance training: the African body in classical ballet training at Afriker Arts Trust

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Abstract

In this paper, we deploy Foucault's theories of power to interrogate body politics in ballet training in Zimbabwe. To achieve this, we critically examine instances of ballet-related discourse-induced docility occurring in the Afriker Professional Dance Training (APDT) students' bodies during training. From a Foucauldian perspective, we interrogate how a ballet dancer's body that has been timeously 'subjugated' to a standard of expected behaviour by the society and has acclimated to a normalized African body posture which is conditioned to become 'ideal' through APTD's ballet training. Through the intensive case study examination of the Afriker Professional Dance Training ballet process, we observe possible shortfalls in Foucault's theories of bio-power in social and community development advocacy.

Keywords: Docility, ballet, African, body, subjugation, embodied

Introduction

In this paper, we deploy Foucault's theories of power to interrogate body politics in ballet training in Zimbabwe. We study how the African body fares in ballet training when any type of body construction that does not fall into the basic 'ballet' structure is subjugated and forced into docility through extra vigorous training programmes. We apply Foucault's disciplinary technologies and technologies of the self to the practical experience of the APTD students and analyse their submissions on their training. Green (2002,3) comments that 'student dance bodies are docile bodies created to produce an efficiency, not only of movement, but also a normalisation and standardisation of behaviour in dance.' Green's assertion indicates that the system of ballet training is structured to 'manufacture' and mould bodies into a certain 'expected' form. It is this horizon of expectation that we explore in this paper by examining the structure of APDT ballet training programme. We examine the typical ballet class structure, the regular exercises, the costume and other aspects in depth, to identify how these engender docility in APDT students. We also explore the discourse of the 'ideal body' in ballet training which manifests and unravels in the form of femininity and masculinity.

Literature that engages the historical development of ballet in Zimbabwe is negligible. Much of the scholarship on ballet in Zimbabwe has largely emerged from international researchers,

yet Zimbabweans have been performing ballet since the early 1980s (Eveleigh 2013). Our preliminary research revealed that most Zimbabwean dancers, including accomplished traditional dancers, find ballet very intimidating and difficult to execute. This is attributed to the life-long training that these dancers have received, especially those with heavy body structures and the belief that Africans should not learn, train or perform ballet because it is for whites. These notions also emerge from conjectures that western training can and will steadily alter African identities (Ravengai 2011).

In this paper, we problematize body politics in Zimbabwean ballet training without over-emphasizing the subjugation of the African body. In so doing, we critically examine the beneficial outcomes of the training, thus complicating power relations in body politics in ballet dance training in Zimbabwe. We further position ballet training as a site of productive engagement where the dancer can acquire tools and a dance vocabulary good enough to position him or her on the local and international stage.

Methodologically, this study utilized a participant-observation, journaling and interviews as data collection tools. The lead author was personally involved in the ADPT training programme as one of the students from 2016 to 2017. Through this active involvement, authentic and personal data were collected using her body as the source of research. This data was documented and journaled as a personal testimony of the physical and psychological reactions emerging out of the training process. These reactions are very important in understanding the processes of subjugation and docility in the APDT programme. Participant-observation enabled the lead author to observe, informally chat with other students during the process. This process of data gathering was important because it allowed the lead author to seek clarity and engage with her colleagues on the dance floor. It is important to note that all the eleven respondents were first-time ballet trainees and did not have an idea what they would be trained in. This makes them ideal candidates for exploring body politics as they had to adjust and re-focus their bodies to the demands of ballet as demanded by the APDT programme.

Afrikera Professional Dance Training

Afrikera Professional Dance Training (APDT) is a specialized three-year full-time contemporary dance training programme run by Afrikera Arts Trust (AAT) with the main aim of developing young black Zimbabweans, especially those from the ghetto, to meet international technical and theoretical dance performance standards. The programme was introduced in January 2015 with eleven students. In 2016, APDT admitted eleven more students including Alina Zhubwawo. APDT forms the backbone of the other arms of AAT, namely, Afrikera Dance Theatre (ADT) and Essence on Women Dance Ensemble. APDT is AAT's strategy of popularising and promoting contemporary dance in Zimbabwe, specifically classical ballet.

APDT is run by Ms Marie-Laure (aka Soukaina) Edom, a former director of the Dance Foundation Course that gave birth and sustained the much-travelled and internationally celebrated Tumbuka Dance Group. Ms Edom began her dance training in Guadeloupe and continued at the *Academie Internationale de la Danse* in Paris France. She furthered her dance education in New York City at the world-renowned Joffrey Ballet School and subsequently at Alvin Ailey, under a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture.¹ Miss Edom specializes in modern, contemporary, tap, jazz, AfroCaribbean and West African dance. She has been actively involved in dance training, development and choreography in Zimbabwe

for the past three decades. After she left the Dance Foundation Course, Ms Edom set up Afriker Arts Trust and developed Afriker Professional Dance Training programme as a means of identifying and developing talented young black people in the townships. As a result, most of the students participating in APDT programme are school-leavers who come from Harare's townships such as Highfields, Chitungwiza, Mbare and Kambuzuma. These areas have been characterized as lacking in social development and opportunities (Tamukamoyo 2009). Initially, prospective trainees needed five ordinary level subjects² as basic entry qualification, but due to the fact that the target prospective students come from a socially and economically disadvantaged background, AAT had to lower the entry qualification to two subjects. To sustain the students through the three-year training period, AAT offers them scholarships that cater to their tuition and transport expenses.

The APDT curriculum comprises focused dance genres such as pilates, Tai chi, floor barre, Western African, African Traditional dance, ballet, Latin American dances and capoeira. Each genre is taught once a week while ballet is taken four days a week. According to Edom, ballet has many slots on the timetable because it is the foundation of the dance programme (personal interview Edom). Although ballet is the backbone of APDT, Edom notes that the programme's goal is not to create ballerinas but to use the technique to build competitive professional dancers and enhance the students' dance vocabulary. However, this is against the fact that most of the APDT students start at an advanced age with their bodies already socialized to mostly Zimbabwean indigenous cultural performance tradition. Yet, APDT expects its students to go through the same gruelling training process ballet students in the global North are exposed to, in most cases, in their formative ages at school and/or dance schools. It is interesting, therefore, to examine and observe how the African bodies of these students respond to the APDT programme.

Body politics in ballet training: the context

The term 'African body' in this paper is used to refer to the black African residing in Africa. Although we are aware that our definition of the term African body might raise problems because it excludes other races that might have similar physiological, cultural and social characteristics, for the purpose of this paper, we will use this definition which has strong grounding in cultural theory. We use this definition in line with Foucault's suggestion that the body owes its existence to a historical cultural inscription. Butler (1989, 603) observes that

history is a writing instrument that produces cultural signification-language-through the dis-figuration and distortion of the body, where the body is figured as a ready surface or blank page available for inscription awaiting imprint of history itself.

Buttler suggests that the body is a product of its history; its existence is inseparable from its history. The African body we engage with is, therefore, a result of a fragmented and protracted Zimbabwean history characterised by indigenous life, colonialism, liberation struggle and political independence. The cultural indigenous practices which include among other categories religion, relations, work and gender characterisation influence the construction of the body of a native Zimbabwean to date. It is important to examine what characteristics this cultural socialisation (and upbringing) has 'imposed' on the African body and how this complicates ballet training.

The African body is a cultural body (Ravengai 2011). A cultural body is a body that has been fashioned according to customs and norms of a certain society. It has been taught and dictated

to move in a particular way. The body, thus, becomes a site for social control and power; a tool exploited by 'regimes of power' (Foucault 1980a). As a cultural body, a Zimbabwean African dancer's body is nurtured in rhythm and movement that responds to its spiritual and socio-political disposition. Nyathi (2009) observes that most African dances adopt circular-grounded movements as an expression of their connectedness to their cosmology. This connection is a result of the Zimbabwean dancer's link to African indigenous spirituality which dictates that life is cyclic, a process that exposes and socialises the African body to varieties of conditioning experiences and contours.

This inscribed African body is translocated to urban centres where it is further exposed to modern and emerging trends of dance and movement. The modern socialisation process creates a new layer on top of the already consolidated layer of relating and experiencing dance. While it can be argued that the modern black Zimbabwean's body is now being socialized in a more or less the same way as a European's body due to globalization and industrialization, it is the history inscribed and experienced by this body that makes it different to the one from the global North. Understood from this perspective, the term 'African body' is thus not used as a racist descriptor but as a valid point of differentiation. With regard to APTD ballet training programme, this conceptualisation complicates the training process as it demands the student to de-learn the embodied experience and re-learn this exotic ballet technique.

Ballet training is a highly strict and rigid practice which demands a designated 'ideal body' from all the participants or dancers (Prochnow 2012; Ridley 2009; Jackson 2005; Green 2002; Koppers 2000; Fitz 1998). This rigidity speaks to influences of diet, lifestyle, body weight and structure, feminine and masculine constructions as basic fundamental needs for a ballet dancer. Any type of body construction that does not fall into the basic 'ballet' structure is subjugated and forced into docility through extra training programmes. It is our contention that in the process of subjugating the African body into an 'ideal' construction, APDT students develop counter mechanisms by bringing their embodied and experiential dance movement into the training space. In engaging with this continuum, we envisage to expose and exploit how the culturally inappropriate expectations filter through the system of learning more generally, dominance and subjugation in the APDT programme.

The subservient body: tools of subjugation

This section is a descriptive and analytical account of APDT students' participation in ballet dance training. In this paper, APDT is framed as a regime of power; a system or practice that models the bodies of dance students into the desired ballet framework; the 'ideal body'. Green (2002, 3) observed, from her ballet training classes, that 'student bodies are docile bodies created to produce an efficiency not only of movement but also a normalisation and standardisation of behaviour in dance'. Although developed in a different space with different socio-cultural and economic characteristics, Green's observation seems to subscribe and confirm the notion that ballet training is a system that disciplines the dancer's body to a certain normalized and standardized frame. From a Foucauldian perspective, this training system operates as disciplinary technologies that are concerned with dictating behaviour and conduct to individuals (Foucault 1980a). Students respond to these disciplinary technologies towards acquiring the 'ideal body' in two ways: submission or resistance.

These disciplinary technologies manifest as timetables, schedules, exercises and workouts which APDT students are expected to follow religiously. These technologies are created to

help students remember the technicalities of movement and vocabulary. Jenifer Homans (2010, 13) observes that ballet is an art of memory when she notes;

Dancers obsessively memorize everything: steps, gestures, combinations, variations, whole ballet. These are physical memories; when dancers know a dance, they know it in their muscles and bones.

This art of physically memorising and internalising ballet techniques is a measure that subjugates the bodies of APDT students into docility. While APDT expects the emergence of a disciplined ‘ideal body’ out of this docility, with physical scars that work as memory triggers, we submit that in post-liberation Africa, any training or educational programme that treats students as a *tabula rasa* is retrogressive. Upon admission into class, APDT students are heavily loaded with ballet technique classes and exercises meant to develop poise, movement and dance vocabulary. Although these classes provide and lay the desired technique and vocabulary foundation, this is a process of disciplining the body and forcing it to forget the socialised and internalised Zimbabwean township modes of dance.

These tactics that APDT deploys to ‘help’ students acquire the ‘ideal body’ are actually ‘tools of subjugation’ and an enforcement of ‘whiteness’ upon the bodies of these students. This ‘whiteness’ is imbued with power relative to ‘racial’ logics associated with ‘black’ young people from impoverished backgrounds (Atencio and Wright 2009). ‘Whiteness’ is deployed in order to raise the ‘standards’ and ‘accountability’ of the dance training outputs by aligning them with ‘white’ middle-class values and linking them with the school’s desire to enhance its profile and respectability within broader communities (Atencio and Wright 2009). This tool of subjugation is informed by the broad Eurocentric ballet discourse which demands that the bodies of African dancers must be disciplined to a certain level of desired technical ability. The core of the tools of subjugation lies in the processes of body conditioning characterised by Foucault (1977) as cellular conditioning, organic conditioning, genetic conditioning and conditioning by combinations. Cellular conditioning is a method that trains the dancer towards spatial awareness, prescribing, determining and monitoring the bond that exists between the dancer and his/her space. In other terms, it is a strategy of de-learning and re-learning new (foreign) ways of relating to space and management of the body. Cellular conditioning is acquired through monitoring of movements and energy used to achieve technical precision (Foucault 1977).

At APDT cellular conditioning is taught through floor barre work. Students religiously undertake floor barre exercises three times a day to enforce this new ‘way of life’. These exercises are run by a specialist white ballet choreographer. The hiring of specialist floor barre teacher represents a tacit intentionality on the part of APDT gatekeepers to enforce their white privilege onto these young dancers from the townships. Gillborn (2005, 488–489) observes that a central characteristic of whiteness is a process of ‘naturalization’ such that white becomes the norm from which other ‘races’ stand apart and in relation to which they are defined. The manner in which the white instructor executes floor barre becomes the standard for these students. This is confirmed by the intention of the APDT gatekeepers, who by going out to seek for a European trained specialist, intentionally (and unintentionally) express their inclination towards white racist supremacy. To a young dancer from the townships, these exercises are a means of inscribing and socialising their bodies with a ‘new’ sense of spatiality.

Organic conditioning is acquired through temporary activity regiments a dancer's body is required to go through, that is, movements and schedule (Foucault 1977). At APDT, students are required to have a series of ballet exercises that they do every day as part of the memory inscription model that helps them improve their technique and vocabulary. Whereas within the majority Zimbabwean township dance groups' schedules, warm up means dancing to the most popular song, at APDT warm up exercises demand discipline and focus on the memory of ballet technique. Given the background of the students, organic conditioning exercises are a process of inscribing a new social life that would influence body poise, the manner in which they walk or carry themselves around. This, therefore, implies that the exercises are targeted at transforming the dancer's way of life.

Genetic conditioning is acquired over time through exercises and scheduled practical classes that are used to denote progress (Foucault 1977). This kind of conditioning is an evaluative mechanism deployed by teachers to try and keep track of the development of the student growth in terms of technique and 'new' vocabulary. APDT's genetic conditioning is a three-year cumulative process and is influenced by funding through the scholarships offered to students upon admission. The growth and improvement in technique and dance vocabulary determine the student's progression to the next level. In the grand scheme of body politics, genetic conditioning is the final stage of inscribing the body with 'memories' that will enable students to develop an 'ideal body' and sense of space.

At APDT, these different levels and types of conditioning are combined and synthesised into tactics that attain vocabulary and technique efficiency. While the integration of these different types of conditionings into the core of training and learning at APDT enables ballet students to deepen their knowledge of technical terms, properties, assessment process and procedures and history of the dance, these conditioning processes are an expression of power struggles between the 'unwilling' African body and the new APDT socialisation process. The body of the student, thus, becomes a site of power struggle.

To understand this negotiation of power in the body, we need to explore the embodied dancer's responses to these conditioning processes as it is in these loci that the tools of subjugation manifest as dominant systems of power. French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1968) observed some five decades ago that the manifestations of systems of power detect that what man do now has either been done before or it has been imposed on him by outside hierarchies of domination that control actions. In respect of APDT programmes, the latter applies. Since classical ballet is an exotic dance to these students, power and embodied negotiation dynamics manifest between the desired 'whiteness' and the experienced and socialised body movements and positions. It is at this point that the students either express their resistive agency or docility.

Foucault in Green (2002) observes that docility is a result of systems of codification, methods with strict control and monitoring devices, including hierarchical surveillance, normalized judgment and constant supervision. We submit that it is these processes that re-awaken the students' agency which manifests as 'coping mechanisms' against domination and subjugation. In this paper, we extend Foucault's (1997:136) view that docile bodies are a result of subjection to, transformation, conditioning, manipulation and training in the name of efficiency and skills development by arguing that these processes challenge the subjugated to react, and respond in a manner that dignifies and strengthen their position.

The body in dance learns consciously or unconsciously through imitation from the non-locomotive to the locomotive state. For example, a girl child is never given instructions on how to walk modestly, but through the process of imitation, she acquires the standard and modest gait from most women in her surroundings. In the same manner, ballet training at APDT follows the same process of development where the student imitates the (white) tutor or teacher until they have mastered with precision body positions, movement and dance vocabulary. To sustain this process of imitation, students are put under surveillance and enforced supervision so that they do not deviate from the programme expectations.

Ballet discourses and surveillance as tools of oppression

Discourses are ‘systems of thought made up of ideas, attitudes, beliefs, ways of acting and practices which enable, as well as restrict, that which may be said or done in a certain moment and place’ (Fortin and Tremblay 2010, 72). Discourses define and determine the ways individuals act, confining them to systems of behaviour that the society has deemed appropriate (Green 2000). Within the context of ballet training, discourses of the ‘ideal body’, femininity and masculinity unravel at multiple-layers.

The ‘ideal body’ discourse presents bodies that have been classified as ‘correct’ and those that are not. Riternburg (2010, 75) submits that the ballerina’s body should be slim with narrow hips, small breasts and minimum body fat which deny them to bear children. This is in sharp contrast to the full figure, wide hips and big breasts characterisation of a black African woman (dancer). This meant that the pool from which APDT recruited its students was largely characterised by the African ideal body rather than the ballet ‘ideal’ body. However, in this APDT case study class, out of the five female students, three had full figure bodies. APDT had to develop a strategy of managing these full figure bodies so that they could fit into the broader (Eurocentric) ballet practice standard.

The male ballet dancer does not escape prescription as he is expected to be masculine and strong, able to carry the female dancer (Ridley 2009). This patriarchal profiling affixes specific-gendered roles to male and female dancers, leaving no room for role reversal. Female dancers must maintain less weight and smaller frames so that the masculine and strong male dancers can lift and carry them on stage. While this discourse affirms the normative patriarchal view in African communities, the demand for small, narrow hips and small breasts is foreign to the Zimbabwean townships. With regard to APDT, the need for an ‘ideal body’ dictated, first, that selection criteria needed to be modelled so that it minimised any divergences from the ideal. This remodelling of the selection criteria is an admission on the part of APDT that attaining ‘ideal bodies’ and perfected execution of classical ballet in African settings is a challenge. Secondly, the remodelling of the criteria should have also influenced and motivated for a curriculum change and navigated the training towards experimental contemporary ballet. However, because APDT was fixated on achieving this perfected Eurocentric ‘whiteness’, these students, both male and female, were expected (forced) to discipline and subjugate their bodies into docility so as to learn and master the ballet technique. To oversee this process, Gordon (1983) observes that ballet dance teachers use surveillance and enforcement.

Because most of the APDT students considered ballet rigid and precise in terms of technique, they noted that their training forced them to imitate and follow what they were told to do by the teacher who acted as the Foucauldian all-seeing gaze. The teacher surveillances the students to make sure that they accurately executed and followed all the rules and regulations

of the classical ballet dance according to the schedules. Surveillance is considered as a tool of oppression that the modern society employs to control the actions of individuals (Foucault 1980b). One of the APDT graduates noted that the schedule that the APDT used was mechanical and did not change over years, from music to steps to exercises. This repetitive schedule is one enforcement mechanism used at APDT to ensure compliance to the classical ballet of old times. While the lack of curriculum changes and transformation enabled the teachers to refine their surveillance tools for enforcing standardisation and quality control, to the students it created opportunities for older students to teach the new recruits 'survival tactics' to circumvent the challenges of disciplining and surveillance.

What is obvious is that ballet training thrives under the system of enforced surveillance through, in the case of APTD, the repetitive schedule, the mirror, costumes and co-students. The APDT classes are done in a large dance studio with mirrors covering one side of the wall. In all the activities ranging from exercises to practical dance classes, students are expected to undertake them facing the mirror. The mirror is used by the student to surveillance their postures as 'panoptic eyes that control the docility of everybody in the room' (Prochnow 2012, 11). Speaking about the effect of mirrors on her training and development, Alina Zhuwawo asserts;

I realized that the ballet posture requires first, an erect head, shoulders down, back straight, stomach tucked in, pelvis slightly tilted to the front to avoid the bum sticking out, legs straight especially at the knees, and finally, legs open from the thighs. This posture is the definition of what ballet is and in every movement a student makes sure the erect head, open thighs and straight back is never compromised. I had problems keeping my posture, so every day while training I looked in the mirror, looking at my body from various angles, correcting every detail to perfect that posture. The position felt unnatural to me and in order to embody the ballet posture, I had to constantly look at myself in the mirror, judging myself and correcting any mistakes. I did this with every new movement I was learning. (Zhuwawo Personal Journal 2015)

Zhuwawo's observation confirms Ridley's (2009) belief that the mirror serves to reflect all the errors and shortcomings of the ballet dancers, monitoring not only technical accuracy but also checking for any excess fat. As observed, Zhuwawo started to define and measure her own progress from what she was seeing in the mirror; thus, her body became an object that had to be conquered and manipulated to fit the structure and technique expected by her tutors. To this end, she was 'exercising this surveillance over and against [her]self' (Foucault 1980b:155).

This self-disciplining and self-surveillance fall under Foucault's disciplinary technologies because of the individual disciplines him/herself with the knowledge that a higher power is watching. Zhuwawo and other students noted that they used the mirror to correct and judge themselves because they knew that they would be adjudicated during floor barre classes. The desire to please their teachers also led these students to self-discipline and surveillance themselves using the mirror as Prochnow (2012, 11), rightly observes; 'It is only within human nature to strive for approval of those in power because of the tangible or intangible rewards.' In this case, the students became ready participants in the subjugation of their own bodies in a bid to participate and conform to the desired standard of performing ballet.

Visibility is the epitome of surveillance and the compulsory rehearsal costumes students wear encouraged this. Students were expected to wear tight-fitting bottoms and shirts that leave the

outline of the body visible. Female students preferred sports bras and leggings while male students wore leggings with vests or no tops at all. Teachers did not tolerate any baggy bottoms or shirts as they complained that these made identifying mistakes that needed correcting very difficult. During class, the teachers moved around physically checking and correcting the students. During the first days, some students were asked to change their rehearsal costumes because they were baggy and therefore not appropriate. Zhuwawo retorts that during ballet classes, the teacher would get to her and lightly tap on her buttocks saying ‘tuck in your butt, it looks jelly, if you leave it hanging like that. Clench those butt cheeks’ (Zhuwawo personal journal 2015). The tights she (Zhuwawo) wore made it possible for the teacher to see, with accuracy, the state of her body. Since ballet requires attention to every detail and the student’s rehearsal costume ensured that every part of their bodies was under surveillance from the teachers, thus, giving them complete power over them. To this end, the student’s bodies became docile and subject to the whims of ballet teachers.

From a Foucauldian disciplinary technology, visibility is compulsory as it maintains that if the student moves out of the sight of the teacher, it is likely that they would relax and end up executing their movements incorrectly. The students noted that they were all aware that they were being watched; thus, they constantly worked to achieve perfection and gain approval from the teachers, paving way their own paths to becoming docile bodies. This awareness pressures the student to subjugate their bodies for fear of being used as an example of those that are not faithful to the ballet technique and discipline.

The mirror was also used by the students to ‘surveillance’ their teachers. In the absence of the gaze of the teacher, students use the mirror to monitor their experimentation and modifications to the movements they had been taught. While these actions were always considered naughty by both the teachers and co-students, we considered it an expression of a subconscious creative resistance. The students also used the mirror, in their own spare time, to make fun of this ‘whiteness’ that they were expected to strive at by their teachers. In one session the students were over-exaggerating the floor barre movements and mimicking the ‘Spanglish’ accent of the guest specialist teacher. Beyond the lampooning of the ‘whiteness’ of the teachers and the APDT programme, students also used the mirror to make fun of each other and track their development and success. Whether this is done jokingly or in class, the use of the mirror in this manner introduces us to another level of surveillance; student on student surveillance.

Student on student surveillance

The concept of student on student surveillance is aptly captured by one of the most popular statements in the APDT classes: ‘the world of dance is competitive’. While this statement seems to allude to the world of professional dance, we observed that it inspired competition in class activities and created a whole new dimension of the oppressive surveillance system. In response to questions relating to growth and development of technique, one student noted that to improve her technique, she competed with other female dancers because she believed that competition would make them collectively better. While students sought approval from their teachers, their motivation and important approval came from their peers. The competition that existed among students enabled them to form teams, build relationships and create power hierarchies within the group through comparisons, encouragement and open criticism. Through competition, power is negotiated within the circle of students; with the best student gaining power and authority over others.

These power hierarchical structures are also constructed when students are classified according to their level of performance in line with Foucault's (1980a, 12) observation that it is 'impossible for knowledge not to engender power'. We consider knowledge to be equal to skill in ballet training. The best-skilled student, thus, holds power over those who are less skilled as they become the yardstick through which the less skilled measure their progress and growth. This politics dictates that the strong (skilful) students are put in the front or in charge and given priority to ensure that the weak students work faster, thus ensuring the subjugation of their own bodies (Fitz 1998). Zhuwawo records that she constantly observed and imitated one of her colleagues who she considered better than her. This co-student became the standard through which she assessed her daily growth. In this instance, Zhuwawo's dependence on her colleague's skill and technical fluency robbed her of the power to determine her own growth pattern as she submitted herself (body) to the standard set by her colleague. This student-to-student relationship captures Foucault's (1982,781) assessment of power as a process where individuals 'subject to someone else by control and dependence'.

Teachers also foster a hierarchical power structure among students through openly praising the most improved student and expressing their displeasure to the less improved. This allowed student-on-student domination which is further complicated by the examination process that ensures students are properly distributed accordingly to their level of knowledge and understanding (Fitz 1998, 34). At APDT, the first stage of the examination process are class exercises. Exercises worked as a tool for achieving total obedience of the body and the teachers used the time for exercises to assess student progress in ballet technique. In this process, students are profiled as 'cases' (Foucault [1979]1995, 191), as their teachers document and profile aggregate marks and comments, which are prerequisites for graduation. The student is thus objectified, dehumanised and subjugated; becoming a chess piece on the teachers' board to be moved and situated accordingly.

Riternburg (2010, 74) observes that docility in bodies is achieved through 'exhaustive use of the body through exercises as tasks of increasing complexity marking the acquisition of knowledge such as through examinations.' During exercises, the APTD class had three positions that the students were expected to master and know by heart. The first position was on the bars, then centre and lastly diagonal. There were three bars in class and usually three people shared a bar. All the respondents noted that they worked extra hard during these exercises as they were afraid of being embarrassed as the teachers and other students would attentively watch them. This shows that constant marking of a student's progress subjects him/her to a surveillance system where he/she does not participate on his/her own prerogative but for the marks that the teacher must award.

Students also work extremely hard due to the fear of humiliation at the hands of the teacher and other students. Fitz (1998, 31) submits that humiliation is not a foreign phenomenon in ballet classes; 'if a dancer has executed an exercise incorrectly, it is not uncommon [for the teacher] to demand that the exercise be done infinitely [...] petty humiliation is inherent in ballet dance as in the penal mechanism.' Humiliation ensures that the student stays submissive and eager to escape future embarrassment by working hard on exercises. Due to constant criticism and rules given by the dance teacher, ballet students tend to lose their individual desires and replace them with that of the 'norm' (Ravengai 2011, 11). The main goal of this surveillance and subjugation is to create a group of dancers who look homogeneous and fit Fitz's (1998, 32) characterisation: the 'group of dancers must all move as one'. To the 'weak' student there were two choices: to subjugate and discipline the body to

achieve the 'norm' or be eliminated from the group. This system of (power) assessment produces students who are submissive and passive, motivated to become unified, dominated and docile thereby creating homogeneity on stage.

Validated bodies

The discourse of the 'ideal body' detects that students should subscribe to hegemonic and racial instructions of what constitutes the correct ballet body. At APDT, it is the teacher who validates or puts a seal of approval on the bodies of students as ideal or not. One of the students observed that he believed that he had the 'ideal body' because his teachers had validated it and told him so. He noted 'as far as I am concerned, and from what I have been told by my teachers, even the director of the school, I have the correct ballet body, it's not even perfect but it's correct'. This means that students no longer have control over their bodies because they don't own the frames that validate them as 'ideal'. As Prochnow (2012, 19) observes, this student and many others are 'like puppets to a puppeteer, dancers in ballet seek the reassurance of their director in every move they make.' The bodies of students, thus, become docile as they hand over control and responsibility to those in position of power.

On another level, the admission and validation by APDT teachers of this student's body as the 'correct body' complicates the overemphasis of the 'ideal body'. Although the need for an 'ideal body' can be emphasised in a European context, from an African perspective a 'correct body' should be considered ideal for ballet. In this context, the 'correct body' refers to any body size that allows one to execute ballet movements.

Validation seemed a challenge with APDT students as they continuously sought the endorsement of their bodies, execution and work ethic. One of the male students noted that he was told by his teachers and co-students that he was very thin and needed to put on some meat. He was also advised to join the gym and develop his muscles. This negative validation made this student become obsessed with gaining weight and developing a masculine body. This student also became uncomfortable wearing tights as he considered his body too thin and not 'ideal' for ballet. On the one hand, the student became a victim of the discourse of the 'ideal' male body: masculine, strong body able to achieve flight and lift the female body. On the other hand, it exposed the structural challenges faced by APDT in recruiting, specifically, 'ideal bodied' students from the townships. These challenges are largely related to the fact that in most township schools, young people are introduced and nurtured in African traditional dance and contemporary dance. As such, the bodies maintained by these young people with interest in dance are ideally suitable for African traditional dances rather than the lifts and flights of ballet.

Consistency through repetitive conditioning is another tool that ballet teachers use to ensure that dancer's bodies stay in shape. Foucault [1979]1995, 25) submits that 'power relations have an immediate hold on [the body], they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremony, [and] to emit signs'. It is these scars of the manifestation of power on the body of a ballet dancer that subsequently earn a dancer the validation from his or her teachers. Failure to consistently condition the body results in it losing shape. One student observed that he lost the validation from his teachers because he stopped working out and rehearsing consistently which resulted in him losing the 'correct body'. The subjugation of the body to earn the teacher's validation is a result of the tough rules set down by ballet schools. If a student loses the teacher's validation by failing to maintain a 'correct' body, he/she is either expelled from school or put on a 'disciplinary

programme' that will subjugate his/her body and return it to the 'ideal' size and shape. The undertaking of this 'disciplinary programme', characterised by repetitive and intense exercises, is the first step towards regaining validation. In the process of seeking validation and acceptance into the ballet world, the student has to be totally obedient to the disciplining and subjugating programme which perpetuates his docility.

If ballet training is permeated with power struggles, restriction and subjugation of the African body, why do the students, on their own free will, go through it? First, we must acknowledge that the APDT programme has had great success over the years, advancing and changing many young peoples' careers and lives financially. Kesby (2005, 2040) simplifies the necessity of power and subjugation when she notes that 'neither is power inherently negative [...], it is inherently productive of actions, effects [...] even when most oppressive.' As noted earlier, the majority of the students participating in the APDT programme are school-leavers from Harare's townships such as Highfields, Chitungwiza, Mbare and Kambuzuma. These young people, without adequate education, are highly disadvantaged and the programme is meant to offer them an opportunity to better their lives. Most young women without adequate education in Zimbabwe, particularly in the high-density townships, do not have many choices beside marriage. The APTD programme, thus, offers specifically the young women a safer option from the available ones. In this line of thinking, the students' bodies can be termed productive docile bodies (Foucault 1980b).

Secondly, Foucault's theory of bio-power dictates that 'power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitude, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives.' (Foucault 1980b:39). While Foucault (1980b) observes that any system or group, advocating for social change and preaching freedom fall victim to the very confines of the dominating power they wish to escape, we submit that at APDT the subjugation of the student's bodies developed a transformational determination and resolve among the students. The APTD programme exposed the students to a different 'life' and exposed the talent that would otherwise not have been known. An APDT graduate, whose life was changed by the programme, noted;

For me, I decided to understand the basic principles of ballet first so that I can then begin to infuse my own style and create something contemporary. You have to learn something first before you can break it down

This sentiment runs through most of the students currently in-stream. Although through-out the three-year programme cycle students are subjugated into productive docile bodies, it seems their agency remains strong as they go on to develop mechanisms of breaking down classical ballet movements and restructuring them into their own contemporary style. The APTD classes laid this foundation that empowered this former student to take the first step in his career and reclaim authority over his practice and creativity. To date most APDT graduates work alone all over the world, breaking down ballet movements and reversing them to create uniquely African aesthetic styles. While they share the same perspective that they did not like the restrictive structure of APDT classical ballet training, the training however taught them that if they could restrict and subjugate their bodies to a structure, they can likewise liberate themselves and explore new frontiers in dance.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have offered an analytic and descriptive account of the process of ballet training in the APDT. We further outlined and explained the discourses that render the bodies of ballet students docile. Additionally, we analysed how the system of surveillance in the ballet class lead to the docility of the students' bodies. The ways in which the presence of a mirror fosters a tradition of dancers who define their bodies according to what they perceive in the mirror, assessing areas that need corrections in order to achieve the ballet standards were framed as a surveillance mechanism in ballet training. We submitted that ballet training, wherever it might be practised, is fashioned to dominate and subdue bodies. Our discussions concluded that power discourses may not be necessarily negative; they can be productive and beneficial to the subjugated body.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Notes

1. <http://www.icapatrust.org/IIFF2016Catalogue.pdf>.
2. In the Zimbabwean education set-up, ordinary level is Form Four (4). It is the secondary education exit point where students are nationally examined by the Zimbabwe School Examination Council (ZIMSEC). Five ordinary level passes (in most cases these must include English Language and Mathematics) are a basic entry qualification that is always demanded by colleges and employers from prospective employees and students.

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