

## Exploring the Communicative Power of Mwazindika Spirit Healing Dance from the Dawida Community in Kenya

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<https://doi.org/10.62049/jkncu.v5i1.238>

### Abstract

*Dance in Africa is not a separate art but an integral part of everyday living. Unlike many dances of the West, traditional dance is a cultural instrument for preparation of the young for adulthood that is interwoven into the mosaic of African life. It is a means of storytelling and expression, a communication and connection with the spirit world, a language that speaks of community, spirituality, and the human experience. Traditional African dance is a cultural heritage for identity, community support and wellness. Based upon the spoken language, dance is a source of communication through which it is possible to demonstrate emotions, beliefs, and other reactions through movement. However, African dance has been studied in areas of aesthetics, art of movement, healing, entertainment, recreation and theatre performance but hardly are there any studies on its communicative power. Using communication models and rhetorical theory as lenses, the study explores the communicative power of Mwazindika spirit healing dance from the Dawida community in Kenya.*

**Keywords:** African Dance, Mwazindika Dance, Communication Model, Rhetorical Theory

## Introduction

From time immemorial, dance has weaved its way through the tapestry of human culture, and nowhere is this more evident than in the diverse and powerful dances of Africa. At once both an embodiment of history and a living, breathing art form, African dance captures the very essence of the continent's vibrant culture (Kuwor, 2017). African traditional dance is not a spectator sport but is intricately interwoven into the complex fabric of daily life. Unlike many dances of the West, dance in Africa is not detached from the lives of the people but a spontaneous emanation from the people. It decodes everyday life experiences through movement. Based upon the spoken language, African dance is a source of communication via which it is possible to demonstrate emotions, beliefs, everyday life activities and other reactions through the art of movement (Green, 1998).

African societies often lacked written languages, so dance became one of the primary ways to communicate stories, values, and beliefs from one generation to the next. This practice helped create continuity within communities, ensuring that cultural wisdom and historical knowledge remained preserved. As one of the potent instruments for communication and nation building, dance in Africa has been used as a symbol of oneness which thereby culminates into aiding societal and behavioral changes. It has also helped in shaping and re-shaping the history of different cultures all over the world, especially in Latin American countries such as Brazil, Columbia and the Caribbean. Thus, it is often regarded as a universal phenomenon, just like spoken word, or language (Pieck, 2005).

Despite its practicality as a tool for communication, African dance has been studied in areas of healing, entertainment, aesthetics, art of movement, recreation and theatre performance but hardly are there any studies on its communicative power. Using communication models and rhetorical theory as lenses, the study explores the communicative power of mwazindika spirit healing dance from the Dawida community in Kenya

## Theoretical Framework

Rhetorical theories (Burke, 1950; Foucault, 1972; Baudrillard, 1993) and communication models (Shannon & Weaver, 1948; Schram, 1954) guide our thinking throughout this research endeavor.

Rhetorical theory originates from ancient Greece, where figures like Aristotle, Plato, and the Sophists formalized the study of persuasion and effective communication. Rhetorical theory, rooted in the ancient tradition of oratory and persuasion, is therefore concerned with the study of effective communication—how messages are constructed, delivered, and received (Poulakos, 1999).

There are many ways we can use rhetorical theories to evaluate messages. We might choose to use a feminist, an ideological, or a narrative approach to evaluate message effectiveness. Michel Foucault asserts that we can evaluate messages by looking at how power is enacted in them. Jean Baudrillard states that we can evaluate messages from the perspective that messages are commodities that we exchange. Kenneth Burke argues that we can evaluate messages by understanding them as a dramatic play. He contends that all messages contain acts, scenes, agents, purposes, and agencies. Rhetorical theories give us different “lenses” for us to understand messages. No interpretation is right or wrong. Instead, each interpretation allows us to have a more comprehensive understanding of communication.

Burke picks drama as the central metaphor for his method because of his insistence that any method should represent rather than reduce its subject matter. To *represent* something is to sum up its essence; and the *dramatic* aspects of what people do and say are the *essence* of human action. One aspect of the drama is the *plot* or *story line* that it follows. He argues that to treat discourses if it were the enactment of a plot represents (and thus, *reveals*) the essence of that discourse well. This study uses Burke's dramatic play to try and understand the persuasive power of mwazindika spirit healing dance.

Interpersonal communication is a dynamic process that involves two or more individuals exchanging messages in order to share meanings and create understanding between the parties involved as shown below in figure 1 (Adler, Rosenfeld and Proctor II, 2020).

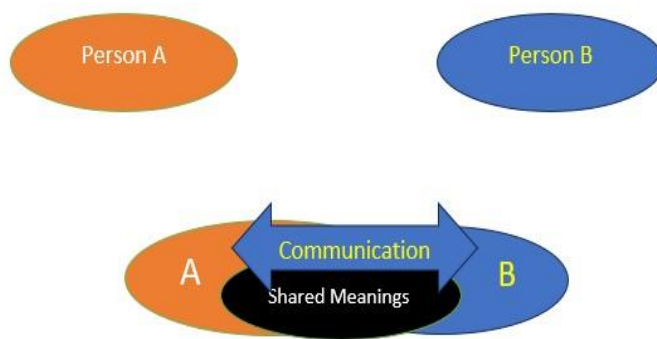


Figure 1: Interpersonal Communication Model

Source: Adler, Rosenfeld and Proctor II, 2020

Communication takes place when there is shared meaning between the parties involved, so as to create understanding and develop a relationship or rapport (Alder et al, 2020). The Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication provides a simple and clear way to identify and analyze the key components and factors of any communication process. There are seven elements in the model. It starts with the *sender* who packages a *message* to be sent through a *channel of communication* to a receiver. *Feedback* from the receiver signals to the sender that the message has been received. *Context* is place and time where the communication occurs. *Noise* is distractions which impede the transmission of the message.

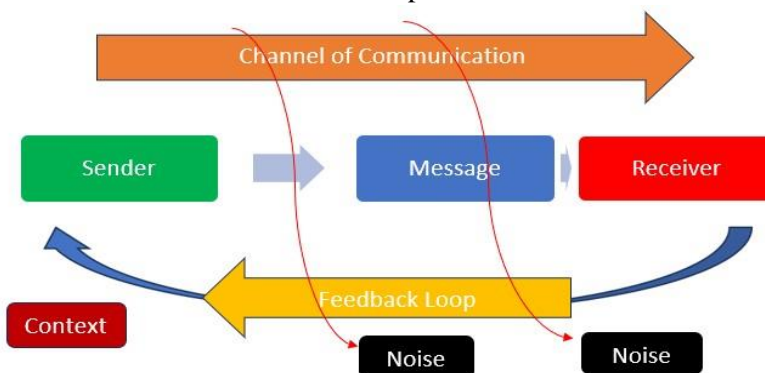


Figure 2: Shannon and Weaver Communication Model

Source : <http://communicationtheory.org/shannon-and-weaver-model-of-communication>

Communication models are useful in that they simplify or represent the process of communication. Most communication models try to describe both verbal and non-verbal communication and often understand it as an exchange of messages. Their function is to give a compact overview of the complex process of communication (Ellis & McClintock, 1990).

In adapting rhetorical theories and communication models to explore the communicative power of Mwazindika spirit dance, the following research questions are posed:

RQ 1: Using Burke's dramatic play as a tool of analysis, what is the extent of the rhetorical agency of mwazindika spirit healing dance?

RQ2: As a tool of communication, to what degree is mwazindika spirit healing dance compatible with the interpersonal communication and Shannon-Weaver models of communication?

### **Significance of Study**

Wray and Wray (2019) explored the role of rituals and traditional practices in the Taita Hills, highlighting how mwazindika spirit dance serves as a conduit for communication with ancestors and spirits, particularly during important communal events like healing ceremonies. The importance of preserving traditional dances as intangible cultural heritage is emphasized in various studies. For instance, Kilonzo (2016) discusses the challenges faced by Kenyan communities in preserving their traditional dances amidst modernization. The study suggests that dances like mwazindika are crucial in preserving cultural identity and continuity, especially in rural settings where cultural practices remain strong. Kisilu (2020) provides an analysis of traditional music and dance in the Taita-Taveta region, arguing that mwazindika dance, though not widely documented, reflects a deep-seated spiritual tradition that is passed down through generations orally and through practice.

To the best of our knowledge, no analysis of mwazindika dance as a tool of communication has been published. Available research on mwazindika is in the areas of music, entertainment, recreation and theatre performance. This study is significant in that it adds knowledge and more understanding on mwazindika spirit dance as crucial in preserving cultural identity and continuity of the Dawida community. Secondly, it studies mwazindika as a tool of communication, an area that has hardly been investigated, laying foundation for further research. Finally, it raises awareness on the importance of preserving mwazindika spirit dance as intangible cultural heritage of the Dawida community.

### **Scope of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the rhetorical agency of mwazindika spirit dance. Mwazindika is both a dance for treatment and celebration on social and public occasions such birth, rite of passage, marriage, death, bumper harvest and other events in the Dawida community. This study explores Mwazindika spirit dance only performed during healing processes.

Mwazindika is performed in various forms across the three sub-ethnics groups of Taita that consists of Dawida, Saghala and Kasighau. The study investigates mwazindika spirit healing dance that is performed among the Dawida community.

While there are many rhetorical theories that can be used to evaluate messages, which include a feminist, an ideological, or a narrative approach, the study uses Burke's dramatic play to try and understand the rhetorical agency of mwazindika spirit dance.

## Literature Review

Historically, dance derived its major importance in the early societies from its function as an integral part of the social and religious life of man. Hawkins (1988) posits that "through his body, man perceives the tensions and rhythms of the universe around him and using the body as his instrument he expresses his feelings and responses to the universe" (p.3). Early man communicated his belief in the gods and the experience of his own daily life with the first dance of clapping, stamping, swaying, shouting, grunting and crying with noise as well as with motion. Spirit dances, social dances, and rites of passage are but a few of the many facets of traditional African dance. They serve as a means of communication and connection with the spirit world and an affirmation of one's place in the community. It is a language that speaks of cultural heritage, community support, spirituality, and wellness (Shilabukha, 2006; Ume and Chielotam, 2021).

## Spirit Healing Dances

Spirit healing dances are designated to appease the spirits and bring about healing through exorcising of evil spirits, which are known as *pepo* among the Dawida community. They involve dancing, singing and drumming which are intended to activate possession externally observed in the shaking of the dancers' bodies. Omibiyi-Obidike (1997), while discussing music and dance healing among the Yoruba noted that music and dance as a charm to ensure health and to cure illness is closely linked with religion and belief systems. This therefore means that the use of music and dance in healing in Yoruba is seen within the framework of the peoples' attitude to their wellbeing and cause of ailments and disease.

Orawo (2012), in his investigation of *miend juogi*, spirit healing dance among the Luo community from western Kenya, posits that the complaints that deal with spirit possessions in the Luo communities are cases of anxiety. The diseases attributed to ancestral spirits result from guilt as a dominant factor. Orawo indicates that during *yiengo juogi* or climax of the performance the dancers dramatize the activities of the healing process. To perform the act of cleansing the possessed, the cleanser moves to the possessed and pours water on the head. During such activities, the dance becomes more provoking and involving. The idea behind pouring water on the heads of the possessed is to assist them get rid of the evil spirits. The significance of the spirits is medical as it is believed that these spirits caused diseases whose cure lay in the dealing with them. It could be said that it was the diseases which were spiritualized, in the same way the illnesses were diagnosed in terms of the anger of the ancestral spirits, or the curse of the living parents. If it was stomach ache, headache, miscarriage and other diseases that are spiritualized, the techniques of treatment deal not only with the physical aspects; the patient was given herbs to drink or rub on the affected part, but at the same time receives psychological treatment as well (Orawo, 2012).

Dances like the *miend juogi* and *mwazindika* among the Dawida community act as a traditional body regulator against nagging conditions of life that call for courage, hope, aspiration, anxiety, faith, trust and steadfastness (Quarm, 1997). Disease, pain, suffering and death have always been the curse of humanity in society. In order to attempt to overcome and cope with the blight, the Luo and the Dawida like other traditional African communities believe in the existence and powers of spirits, which are believed to take interest in the promotion of the welfare of the lineage. It is important to note that in traditional African

societies the specialized skill and knowledge of music and dance therapy, as we shall see in the Dawida community, are transmitted orally from generation to generation by the custodians of culture whose duty is to ensure continuity (Mokwunyei, 1997).

### **The Dawida Community**

The Taita are said to have migrated from Central Africa alongside other Bantu tribes, arriving in present day Kenya from the south through Shungwaya before settling in the fertile Taita Hills. The Dawida community is found on the main massif of Taita Hills and do speak the same dialect of Taita language. The other two massif of Taita Hills are occupied by Saghalla and Kasighau who speak a dialect of Taita different from that of the Dawida. The neighbors of the Taita are the Kamba, the Taveta and the Maasai; all of whom have influenced each other.

Among the Taita, one language is spoken with various dialects. The dialects are mutually intelligible and thus do not prevent communication. The dialects are Kikasighau, Kisaghalla and Kidawida spoken in the main massif of Dawida. The Saghalla and Kasighau have had closer contact with the Giriama and Duruma respectively than they have had with the Dawida. The Giriama and Duruma are two of the Mijikenda ethnic group or “Nine Tribes” as they are sometimes known, which include Chonyi, Jibana, Kambe, Ribe, Kauma, Rabai, and Digo.

Despite the language differences, the Saghalla, Kasighau and the Dawida still consider themselves as one people. The Taita people, especially those inhabiting the mountains, have been highly influenced by the foreign religions. Of the two foreign religions that have been introduced among the Taita, Christianity seems to have had a stronger impact on the Dawida than Islam. Similarly, Christianity seems to have had a more negative effect on the Taita religious ceremonies which the missionaries labeled evil. The Dawida admit the fact that after the introduction of Christianity, they were discouraged from practicing any traditional ceremonies and in the process dances like mwazindika that accompanied the ceremonies were lost or modified to suit the missionary requirements and demands.

### **Mwazindika Spirit Healing Dance**

Mwazindika is both a dance for treatment and entertainment on social and public occasions.

Mwazindika for treatment is a spirit dance designated to appease the spirits. Among the Dawida, disease, meaning the lack of *ease* in the body, is attributed to one being possessed by evil spirits commonly known as *pepo*. One is possessed by pepo because she angered the spirits. Treatment, therefore, involves doing mwazindika dance to appease the spirits and removal of pepo from the victim.

Mwazindika performance encompasses dancing, singing and drumming which are intended to relieve one of pepo. It begins with a song which is performed by a male soloist and from then on it switches to call and response communication mode. The dancers(s) possessed by pepo have *njugha*, which are metallic rattles, tied around their ankles that they shake to accompany the melodies and drumbeats. During mwazindika performance, the drummers vary the rhythmic patterns of the drums in accordance with leader’s guidance. Such guidance consists of cues or finger signals to direct rhythmic changes. There are also intervals of silence from the master drummer to allow lead drum to perform solo. At climax when the pepo is believed to being exorcised, the skill shown by the master drummer player is referred to as *kushewera ngoma*, which is to rub the drum with wet fingers to produce a *zzzeeeeerrrrrrr* sound.



The number of drums in a mwazindika group varies. Typically, mwazindika dance consists of five drums. There are two big drums called *shimba mbaa*, two smaller sized drums called *shimba ndini* and one *kengele*, which is the smallest of them all. Other instruments include *mmbao*, a piece of wood hit with sticks, *njugha*, the metallic rattles worn on the ankle, *firimbi*, a whistle made from wood and in some cases a mouth organ, which is a foreign instrument that has been incorporated into mwazindika. The role of *njugha* is that of rhythm and percussive sound while *firimbi* blown at intervals act as cues signaling change in dance movements and patterns. *Firimbi* provides a persistent rhythm when played by ordinary dancers (Orawo, 2012).

In mwazindika, the visual spectacle is just as important as the movements themselves. Costumes, body adornments, flywhisk, and *kikuchu* all enhance the vibrancy of the performance and symbolism of the dance, adding layers of meaning and depth to the dance. The traditional attire for the ladies is a skirt made from cow hide called *kidemu*. The men's attire and cap (red in color) are made of goat skin. The color of the attire is made from *shoko*, which is obtained from a swamp where the sisal is submerged and turned into white, black and brown. *Kikuchu* is the leather bag carried during performance.

Mwazindika dance is a community event that is summoned by the elders when they sense there is disharmony or dis-ease among the people and hence demands relieving of pepo that is disturbing the peace. At the beginning of mwazindika performance, the dancers dramatize the cleansing ritual. The dancers pour water on one of the dancers to vicariously assist the persons with pepo, who from now on I will refer to as PwP, in reenacting the removal of pepo. The dramatized activities of cleansing PwP go along with the dance. As time goes by the performance becomes vibrant and highly participatory, dancers get to high energy levels, the drummers increase the tempo and the air is filled with liveliness. This combination of different elements leads into a climax of the dance, which is one of awe, wonder and admiration; especially the techniques of *kushewera ngoma* by the chief drummer who plays *shimba mbaa*. At climax, the cleanser, a designated elder in the community, moves to the subject and pours water on her head, at which PwP would scream, vent out and at times demand many things in the name of pepo. The demands include red caps, small colored cloths, water used by other people to wash, etc. Orawo (2012) reported that there was once a PwP whose pepo needed water from the engine of a train in order to be appeased. Because of this, the lady had to go all the way to Mombasa to get the water so as to get herself treated (the train engine as a new phenomenon incorporated into mwazindika demonstrates that Taita culture is fluid rather than static: it changes all the time, every day, in subtle and tangible ways). Mwazindika dance takes place at night and goes on for many hours; sometimes it goes on throughout the night.

### The Rhetorical Agency of Mwazindika Dance

Rhetorical agency refers to the capacity of individuals or groups to create, manage, and influence communication effectively, shaping opinions and actions through strategic use of language and symbols. Mwazindika is a highly participatory and interactive dance that induces trance in PwP to exorcise pepo. The rhetorical agency of mwazindika dance therefore plays a crucial role in how dancers, drummers and cleansers can exercise power and persuade PwPs to get into a trance. Trance is an altered state of consciousness, of relaxation, in which one feels as if they are letting go of the wheel of their life and letting something else take over. According to Pekala et al (2010), during this trance state, the subconscious mind receives positive suggestions helpful in the healing process, such as mental therapy, physical therapy, changing thoughts and feelings to be better and happier, relieving trauma, increasing self-confidence,

maximizing brain and mental abilities. Trance induction is used in hypnotherapy as a technique that provides reprieve to clients with mental conditions that include phobia, anxiety disorders, pain management, weight loss and a variety of other applications (Fritscher, 2023).

There are apparent parallels between mwazindika dance treatment and hypnotherapy in that they both use trance induction as a technique in providing relief to their clients. Pekala et al (2023) states that hypnotherapy is one of the mind therapy techniques for clients who are experiencing problems within themselves as a result of mental disorders such as trauma by using the hypnosis method. According to Pekala et al (2010), there is a relationship between trance, suggestibility, and expectancy, and how they relate to the concepts of hypnotic trance (Shilabukha, 2006). This means PwP's expectation levels to get relieved of *pepo* is also an important determinant in the satisfactoriness of mwazindika dance treatment.

Pekala et al (2010) posits that the main element in the hypnotherapy process is communication through message interactions between the communicator (hypnotherapist) and the communicant (client who responds or reciprocates). Similarly, Sharma (2018), expounding on Ericksonian hypnotic methods, points out the need for a full readiness and willingness for complete interpersonal communication, both verbal and symbolic, between the hypnotherapist and the client. Erickson believed that to help someone, you have to empathize with the person and establish a connection, which now is referred to as 'rapport building'. Otherwise, the person would not trust you have the intention or the ability to help them (Sharma, 2018). According to Roter et al (1984), who conducted research on doctor-patient communication, patient outcomes depend on successful communication. The physician who encourages open communication may obtain more complete information, enhance the prospect of a more accurate diagnosis, and facilitate appropriate counseling, thus potentially improving adherence to treatment plans that benefit long-term health.

Taking a lead from Roter and Erickson's hypnotic method, it is apparent that "complete interpersonal communication" between mwazindika and PwP is crucial in the induction of hypnotic trance and hence relief from *pepo*. This implies that mwazindika has interpersonal communication characteristics embedded in its repertoire. To delineate these communication elements in mwazindika and make sense of its communicative power, use is made of communication models and rhetoric theory as tools of exploration.

## Research Method

This qualitative research uses insider research methods and archival data. A researcher is considered an 'insider' when he or she shares particular attributes with the participants of the study. A researcher is considered an 'outsider' when he or she does not belong to the group to which the participants belong (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The author is a native and has lived and worked for over 20 years in Taita as a high school teacher training students on mwazindika dance performance for music and dance competitions at district, provincial and national levels in Kenya. He studied mwazindika as a tool of communication as part of his dissertation (Mjomba, 2005) and authored peer-reviewed journal articles and a book chapter on the subject (Mjomba, 2011). Being an 'insider' means that the author understands the dynamics and social relationships that inform the situation; hence likely to be in a better position to do research among the groups that perform mwazindika and Dawida community in general (Brayton, 1997; Griffiths, 1998).



Archival data refers to information that already exists in someone else's files. Examples of archival data include letters, diaries, social media platforms, maps, museum collections, corporate archives, and special collections, such as baseball statistics. Some researchers make a distinction between archival and secondary data. They see archival data as information specifically collected for bureaucratic procedures and the like—applications, reports, etc.—that can then be made usable for other purposes (Turiano, 2015). Secondary data refers to research information, collected as a result of studies and similar efforts, that can then be used by others either as comparison data or as part of new research (Johnson, 2014). This study does not distinguish between them.

### Using Interpersonal Communication Model to Explore the Communicative Power of Mwazindika Dance

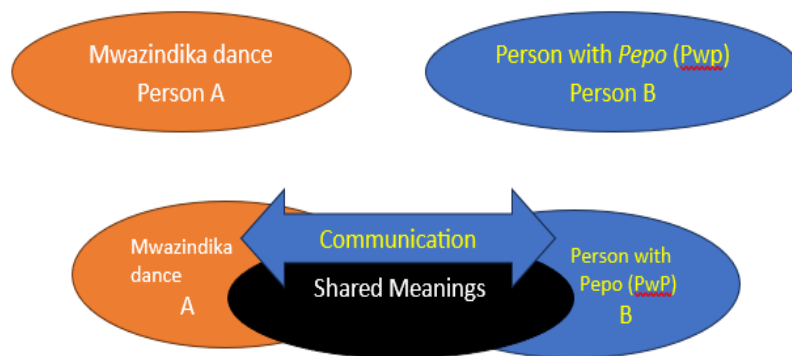


Figure 3: Mwazindika Dance Interpersonal Communication Model

Source Author

To make sense of the interpersonal communication processes in mwazindika dance we juxtapose it on the interpersonal communication model shown in figure 1 to produce figure 3 shown above.

The role of mwazindika dance can be seen like that of a person. It transmits messages like from person A to person B in figure 1a so that the *sender* and *receiver* understand the *message* in the same way as having shared meanings. Figure 1b demonstrates the dyadic communication between mwazindika dance and PwP. The choreography of mwazindika dance is crucial in developing effective dyadic communication or rapport with the PwP so as to activate and mobilize removal of pepo. This corroborates what Sharma (2018) points out as the need for full readiness and willingness for complete interpersonal communication, both verbal and symbolic, between the hypnotherapist (mwazindika) and the client (PwP) to achieve satisfactory results.

Dyadic simply means “between two,” so dyadic communication is communication between two people or creatures e.g., romantic partners, two friends, mwazindika-PwP, parent-child, or patient-therapist dyads (Adler et al., 2020). Meaning is transmitted through an in-person dyadic communication scenario in a range of ways, such as: verbal exchange, body language and gestures, facial expressions, and psychological attributes such as attitude and tone of voice. Dyadic communication is the most important daily interaction through which we get to know ourselves and others better, resolve conflicts and find solutions to our problems.

### Using Shannon-Weaver Model to Explore the Communicative Power of Mwazindika Dance

To delineate communication elements in mwazindika dance we juxtapose the dance on the Shannon and Weaver Communication Model shown in figure 2 to yield Mwazindika Communication Model in figure 4.

The Shannon-Weaver communication model is specially designed to develop effective

communication between sender and receiver. The communication process begins with the sender creating a message that they intend to send to another person. The sender is mwazindika dance ensemble of drummers, dancers, costume, *frimbi*, *njugha* dance steps and patterns etc. working

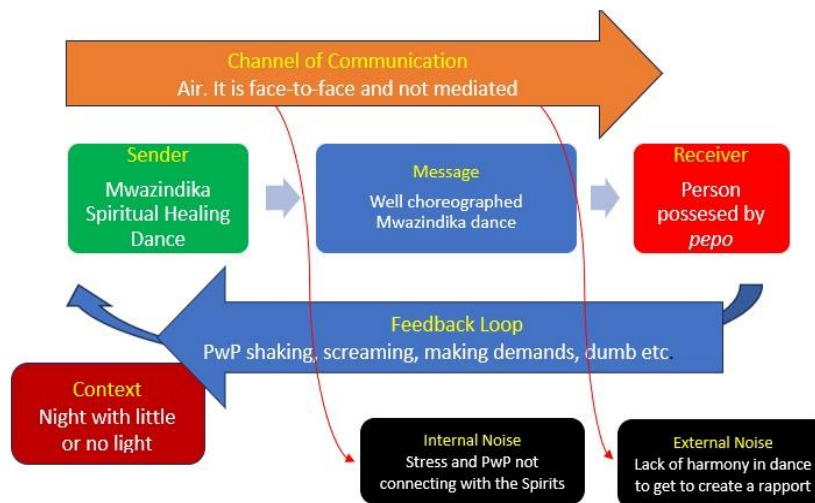


Figure 4: Mwazindika Dance Communication Model

Source : Author

together as a highly organized team. A well packaged message is a well-choreographed mwazindika dance that is custom-built for that particular occasion. There is harmony and it reacts to the feedback response from PwP. Mwazindika tempo has to change with the change of state of the PwP. There is an occasion where they have to play for a long time, even going overnight--depending on the feedback from PwP because there are no signs of activation of pepo. Sometime the PwP almost immediately starts to manifest signs of activation of pepo. The choreography has to be tailored for a particular pepo-exorcising occasion. There is no one-size-fit-all mwazindika spirit healing dance.

Next, the sender decides the channel of communication. In the case of mwazindika the channel of communication is face-to-face, and the receiver is PwP. The communication process is effective when the sender and receiver share meanings of the transmitted message. Lastly, unless it's one-way communication, the receiver will provide feedback in the form of a reply to the original sender of the message. Feedback is the signs or response from the PwP in terms of screaming, shaking, making demands, being dumb etc.

Context is the time and place the interaction is taking place. In almost all occasion, mwazindika for exorcising pepo takes place at night. The assumption is that pepo possess one at night and therefore that is also the ideal time to kick it out. Noise can be both internal and external. Internal may be caused by stress of PwP which makes it difficult to get the dance message activate the pepo. External may be lack of

coordination by mwazindika group so as to have no harmony and poor choreography that may take a long time getting to activate pepo.

In summary, mwazindika communication model shown in figure 2b helps make sense and reveal communication elements imbued in the dance. The implication here is that mwazindika indeed has communication power but there is need to make more clearer the persuasive nature of this power, especially in terms of how it influences PwP to induce trance. Use is made of use Burke's dramatic play to try and understand the persuasive power of Mwazindika dance.

### Using Burke's Dramatic Play to Explore Communicative Power of Mwazindika Dance

One of Burke's central concepts is the idea that literature is "equipment for living". By that he means that through types, components, or structures of literature people confront their lived situations, celebrate their triumphs and encompass their tragedies. Throughout his writings runs the idea that types, components, or structures of literature recur as appropriate responses to recurring types of situations; that there are ways of speaking about epidemics, diseases, drought, famine, floods, war, victory, civil unrest, marital problems, etc., which will reliably equip communities or nations or the world to live through those situations.

Throughout Burke's writing, he focused more on literature, fiction and poetry than on any other form of discourse. Scholars have posited that African dance is a repository of knowledge that prepares the young for adulthood which is akin to Burke's idea that literature is "equipment for living". Therefore, there is nothing in his theories which disqualify them for application today on mwazindika spirit healing dance, which is a powerful discourse that equips for life. I shall argue that the dramatic characteristics of mwazindika make Burke's dramatist method relevant for analysis.

Burke picks drama as the central metaphor for his method. One aspect of the drama is the *plot* or *story line* that it follows which can be traced in mwazindika spirit healing dance. At the beginning of mwazindika performance, the dancers dramatize the cleansing ritual. The dancers pour water on one of the dancers to reenact the removal of pepo. The dramatized activities of cleansing PwP go along with the dance. As time goes on the performance becomes animated as dancers get to high energy levels and the drummers increase the tempo and the air is filled with liveliness. This combination of different elements leads into a climax of the dance, where there is *kushewera ngoma* by the chief drummer who plays *shimba mbaa*. At climax, the plot thickens as the cleanser moves to the subject and pours water on her head, at which PwP would scream, vent out and at times demand many things in the name of pepo. The story ends with PwP making specific demands that include red caps, small colored cloths, water used by other people to wash, etc.

Mwazindika performance articulation of a life situation (in this case healing through removal of pepo) in discourse "vicariously" helps the PwPs to understand and act through their own situations. This can be seen in the mwazindika spirit healing dance where it begins by the dancers dramatizing the cleansing ritual. The cleanser pours water on one of the dancers to vicariously assist the PwP to visualize the process and be equipped to be able to also work with the team to remove the pepo. The dramatized activities of cleansing PwP go along with the dance as a form of priming or persuasive speech to encourage PwP to join the fight to jettison pepo. Preparation and priming of PwP is key to the whole process of removing pepo. This process helps increase the expectation of PwP of getting relieved of pepo which is important as indicated by Pekala et al (2010) who posited that there is a relationship between trance or altered state effects, suggestibility, and expectancy.

Mwazindika drumming, dance steps and music melodies express speeches, emotion and thoughts about appeasing the spirits and relief from pepo. The dance-song *malemba ni wughanga* repetitively points out that leaves are medicine, and they have the power to heal. The persuasive power of mwazindika in the healing processes is evident in the meticulous choreography of the dance which includes call and response communication mode, drumming and dance-steps increasing in tempo to create vibrancy, *njugha* and *firimbi* that rent the air continuously, climax where master drummer *sheweras* ngoma, reenactment of the cleansing act, and the period of awe and wonder that ushers one into a trance-like state.

Herrick (2001) suggested that when we express emotions and thoughts to other people with the goal of influencing them, we are engaging in rhetoric. Therefore, through the use of mwazindika to influence members within their group, the Dawida have for a long time been engaged in rhetorical discourse for the well-being of the community. Mwazindika as rhetorical discourse is usually intended to influence an audience to accept an idea in a manner consistent with that idea.

Therefore, mwazindika performed during healing; by posing a problem such a dis-*ease* to the PwP through powerful rhetoric, discourse activates or addresses their “appetites” or concerns. When discourse satisfactorily shows a “solution” on how to exorcise pepo, following the traditional dance as a narrative form accepted in the culture, the formal completion of the discourse is satisfying to the audience and thus provides them with the motives, hope and symbolic resources to face their real situation (Brummet, 1999).

Finally, it is important to consider the environmental context in which the dance takes place to understand the rhetoric. Context is the time and place mwazindika takes place. In all circumstance, mwazindika for healing takes place at night. The postulation is that pepo possess one at night and therefore that is also the ideal environment to jettison it. I agree with McGhee (1999) who says discourse ceases to be what it is whenever parts of it are taken out of context. Failing to account for context or reducing context to one or two of its parts means quite simply that one is no longer dealing with discourse as it appears in the Dawida community.

## Conclusion

The study was out to explore the communicative power of mwazindika and make evident its persuasiveness. The study has attempted to show that mwazindika dance fits into the interpersonal communication model and is also imbued with the seven elements of Shannon-weaver communication model. Using Burke’s dramatist method, we see that mwazindika dance tells a story that helps equip for life in the Dawida community in terms of healing and well-being.

This study recommends further studies to clearly map out the steps in mwazindika communication processes that induce trance-like states. Mapping out these processes may help reveal more parallels with hypnotherapy and hence find its place in traditional medicine that can be incorporated into mainstream modes of treatment in mental health. WHO (2023) indicates that recognition of the role of traditional medicine in primary health care (PHC) and universal health care (UHC) has been growing. For example, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPR Korea), which has a long history of using traditional medicine, is one of the leaders in integrating traditional medicine with allopathic treatments to provide care and promote health and well-being.

Secondly, mwazindika, more than a spiritual healing dance, intertwines with the daily life of the Dawida community, marking milestones and providing solace in times of calamity. Mwazindika stands as a cultural treasure, a testament to the resilience of the Dawida community. Beyond its captivating dance, songs, and drumbeats, this ancient ritual offers a profound glimpse into their rich heritage yet faces an urgent need for safeguarding. There is need for in-depth case studies on mwazindika dances to delineate the imminent threats posed by rural-urban migration, opposition from religious institutions and other dangers so as to put in place sound mitigation plans.

Finally, there are apparent parallels between mwazindika dance treatment and hypnotherapy. Pekala et al (2023) indicates that hypnotherapy is one of the mind therapy techniques for clients who are experiencing problems within themselves as a result of mental disorders such as trauma by using the hypnosis method. Further research on the communicative powers of mwazindika and its therapeutic benefits as far as mental health is concerned need to be conducted to see how it can be integrated into mainstream as part of primary mental health care.

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