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Decolonising Bodies in Motion: Navigating Queer Dance Choreographies Through Homocolonialism

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Abstract

From Greek and Roman performances, featuring “cross-dressing and gender-bending characters” (Butler, 1990), the 20th century witnessed a paradigmatic shift in the representations of 'alternative sexualities', depicting “gender fluidity” (qtd in Davis, 2009) across different media including dance performances. With the emergence of LGBTQIA+, the dance space acted as the catalyst that enabled queer artists to “come out” (Sedgwick, 1994) of the closeted existence and social shadows to visibility. Therefore, this study applies homocolonialism, which refers to the intersection of colonialism and contemporary LGBTQIA+ human rights discourse, underpinning how eurocentric and patriarchal conceptualisations of imposed gendered sexualities are lived and experienced. These imposed ideas can bring the resurgence of the colonial phenomenon by marginalising the non-whites and non-western cultural frameworks, which can, in turn, nurture alienating dynamics from the center. Analysing the narratives and performances of LGBTQIA+ from the jaundiced western lens makes it possible for homocolonialism to obliterate local histories and identities. Subsequently leading to debates on the equilibrium between universal human rights and respect for cultural divergence. This intersectionality becomes the key to deconstructing the intricate patterns of power relations and the cultural narratives underlying the dance world. Performing Arts, with reference to dance choreographies, act as an intersectional space enabling dialogues between queerness and postcolonial reformulations of identities, through dance choreographies to demystify the conventionally gendered space. Therefore, the study aligns itself with the “glass escalator” (Nam, 2024) phenomenon in dance illustrating how male and queer dancers, despite being in a female-dominated space, often enjoy systemic advantages, such as personalised instruction and reduced competition, which exacerbate gender inequities on stage. In adopting an interdisciplinary approach, functioning through Queer, spatial, postcolonial and decolonial theoretical lenses, the authors gear the critical discussion of performative stage representations towards the intersectionality and multidirectionality of queer scaffolding. In appropriating Pereira’s theory of Decolonial Queer, the authors gear the analysis towards the disenfranchised bodies in motion, which struggled as subalterns within the colonial “sex-gender system” (Pereira, 2019), a binary construction conflating social conceptions of gender with biological sex (Wayne, 2023).



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Analysing choreographic performances in Mauritius that revolve around non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality, this paper interrogates how 'bodies in motion' become a site of decolonial resistance, unearthing histories of displacement and marginalisation while envisioning alternative futures of belongingness, visibility, resilience, and empowerment. To ensure the validity, credibility and reliability of the collected data from the Mauritian queer performers and diverging audience sampling in Mauritius, the authors employ the mixed-method approach, whereby interviews and a questionnaire will be deployed. The paper delineates that queer choreographies not only decolonise bodies in motion but involves the reclamation of an oppressed, dehumanised and subalternated existence and memory, subverting heteronormative hegemony. The authors deduce that these queer performances initiate cross-cultural dialogues, empowering the LGBTQIA+ with agency and fostering gender inclusivity to celebrate 'alternative sexualities'. Based on the research findings, the authors recommend that more research could be undertaken to delve into queer theatre, queer press and documentaries.

Keywords: homocolonialism, dance choreographies, alternative sexualities, memory, decolonial queer