

## **All-or-nothing reasoning and the kalela dance paradox**

*Author:* Terence Rajivan Edward

*Abstract.* An explanation for why the Bisa do not perform a traditional dance to express their identity is all-or-nothing reasoning: “We would have to water it down for this audience and that is not a Bisa dance.”

*Draft version:* Version 2 (14<sup>th</sup> October 2022, poem added)

*They call it modern dancing*

*Even though it has a king*

I wish to approach the kalela dance paradox once again, by means of armchair suggestion. I use the presentation of it from the book *Anthropology After Gluckman: The Manchester School, colonial and postcolonial transformations* by Richard Werbner:

Mitchell was struck by a paradox in the dance. In some tribal dances, people dressed up in all their tribal paraphernalia and danced traditional dances, while chanting traditional songs. By contrast, the *kalela* dance included no tribal elements or insignia. The dancers were immaculately dressed in smart, modern clothes, and the main roles performed were modern – the king, the leader (blowing football referee’s whistler), a doctor, and a nurse. They performed before a popular audience distinctive of town, drawn from a wider public than any tribe or ethnic group. The language of the dance was the town argot, *chicopperbeliti*, a mix of Bemba, English and a Creole of Zulu called *Fanikolo*. Yet in an apparent paradox, the composition of the performing team was tribal

– they were nearly all Bisa – in the team best known to Mitchell; they came from the same tribal group under chief Matipa and were almost all Roman Catholics, with one Muslim. And in a tribal tradition of praise singing, ‘they set out to praise the Bisa in general, and their chief Matipa in particular.’ (2020: 111)

All the others do dances to demarcate their tribe – to express their identity – and naturally use traditional dance, but why do the Bisa not? There are different explanations and here is one. Imagine a migrant who comes to England and decides they are going to have to make and sell Indian curry dishes for a living. Then they are informed that no one will eat their curries as it is (or as they are). The curries must be adapted for English tastes. “But that is not Indian curry,” they think and give up on the project altogether. Similarly, perhaps the Bisa had to water down their traditional dance for the audience, if they were to perform it at all, and they thought, “That is not a Bisa dance,” and so just decided to perform a dance which expresses no apparent identity. By the way, this seems the opposite to a previous solution I proposed (Edward 2022).

## References

- Edward, T.R. 2022. Tribalism again? Annie Saumont’s ghostly story and the kalela dance paradox. Available at: <https://philpapers.org/rec/EDWTAA-6>
- Werbner, R. 2020. *Anthropology After Gluckman: The Manchester School, colonial and postcolonial transformations*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.