

Dance, Discipline, and the Liberal Self at a Ugandan Catholic Boarding School

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Abstract: In the last years of Idi Amin's reign, modern dance was introduced at Namasagali College, a Catholic boarding school in rural Uganda, as a means of encouraging modern, liberal self-awareness in students. Drawing on interviews with Namasagali's former headmaster, teachers, and students, this article offers the first scholarly consideration of this important school, and contextualizes its modern dance curriculum within Africa's historical modernity/modernization problematic. The school's progressive educational program, with its focus on creative exploration and ownership of the body, was framed within a neocolonial regimen of discipline and punishment that aimed to drill modern behavior into students. In its clashing modes of government, this school exhibited contradictions that have perennially troubled Western liberal intervention in Africa.

Résumé: Durant les dernières années du règne d'IDI, la danse moderne a été introduite au College Namasagali, un internat missionnaire dans une zone rurale en Ouganda, comme moyen d'encourager chez les élèves une conscience de soi moderne et libéral. Cet article met en contexte cet événement au sein d'une plus grande, historique moderniste/modernisation, problématique en Afrique. Le programme d'enseignement progressif de l'école, qui met l'accent sur l'exploration créatrice et la maîtrise du corps, était encadré par un régime néocolonial de discipline et de répression visant à établir par force un comportement moderne aux étudiants. Au cœur des ces conflits nés d'un différent de gouvernance, cette école expose les contradictions qui ont troublé perpétuellement l'intervention occidentale libérale en Afrique.

Keywords: Dance; Uganda; modernism; Catholic; boarding school; Namasagali; Grimes; performance; education; liberalism

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A Progressive School in Troubled Times

In the late 1970s, the last years of Idi Amin's regime, Uganda was in state of economic, political, and cultural shock. Prominent artists and intellectuals fled the country fearing midnight knocks on the door by government thugs. Those who stayed behind evacuated Kampala for the relative safety of their home villages, or built high walls topped with barbed wire around their houses. State-controlled newspapers and radio published a daily litany of Amin's supposed diplomatic triumphs and grand schemes for industrial development, while the truth obvious to everyone was that the economy was in a shambles, with foreign trade stalled and the Ugandan shilling drained of value. Into the economic gap seeped the black market, spawning a culture of corruption and radical self-interest ruled by fraudsters known as *mafuta mingi* (Luganda for "lots of oil").

During this period and into the war-torn 1980s, parents of the Ugandan elite faced a quandary as to where to send their sons and daughters to school, if sending them abroad was not feasible. Namasagali College, a Catholic co-ed secondary boarding school in a remote rural part of the eastern Busoga region, became an attractive option. Perched on the bank of the Nile, at the site of an old loading station on a defunct branch of the Uganda Railway, Namasagali was a school far from the violence of the city, where parents hoped their children would be able to safely pursue a quality education. Until 2001, when the school was taken over by the government, Namasagali College was run by the Mill Hill Fathers, a British Catholic missionary organization with a long history in Uganda and a reputation for progressive education. One of the school's two headmasters, Father Damien Grimes, was particularly known for his liberal pedagogical approach. Parents were aware that, even in the midst of Uganda's hard times, students at Namasagali were getting a rigorous, cosmopolitan education, comparable to what they might get in Europe or America.

Alumni who attended Namasagali in the late 1970s and early '80s have vivid memories of their first long journeys to the school, which seemed to entail leaving normal civilization behind and arriving at a kind of oasis of learning in the wilderness. An alum I will call Alice Wamboka recalled,

We drove in what looks like the middle of nowhere. It looked like a national park or I don't know, abandoned land, because its barely any development, no buildings, no farms. It was like going to the end of the world. Then finally when we come to gate, yeah, there was kind of civilization there. It was like a gate man, somebody signing in, and you think "yes, I'm going to a school." (Interview, May 27, 2014)

While Namasagali College's facilities were spartan, consisting of what an alum whom I will call Edward Murumu remembers as a "one-story shack" administration building surrounded by airless dormitories (interview, May 23, 2014), it boasted certain novel amenities, most tantalizingly a swimming

pool where mixed bathing was allowed. There were disco dances and movie nights, and students were encouraged to pursue their own interests rather than merely grinding out good grades. Many classes were taught by idealistic young white expatriates recruited by Grimes on his trips back to London. These expatriate teachers—rarer now in Amin's Uganda—were a draw for elite parents, as was Father Grimes himself. With his privileged status as a white priest, and “very, very imposing personality” (former teacher Angela Younger, interview, May 11, 2014), Headmaster Grimes seemed uniquely capable of maintaining a safe space for youth. The school's high tuition fees ensured that the student body would consist mainly of young people from Uganda's well-to-do families.

Namasagali College became especially famous for its Broadway-style revues, which, beginning in 1978, the students brought annually to Kampala's National Theatre. At a time when the public arts were moribund, these shows featured expressive, individualistic dancing that was different in style and spirit from anything the Kampala public had seen performed up to that point, especially by schoolchildren. Then, as now, Ugandan school stages were dominated by traditional music, dance, and drama (often abbreviated “traditional MDD”), a state-sponsored genre showcasing disciplined, spectacular versions of old ethnic social and ritual dances. In traditional MDD, smiling students in gender-divided regimental formations earnestly demonstrate their group coordination, athletic ability, and reverence for the nation's diverse cultural roots (Nannyonga-Tamusuza 2003; Pier 2015). The Namasagali dancing set a different tone: girls and boys, together in relaxed conviviality, showcased their original dance inventions, drawing freely on popular as well as traditional styles and expressing their inner, complex feelings in movement.

This dancing struck audiences of the time as quite modern. And indeed the Namasagali students had received some training in “modern educational dance,” a pedagogical genre developed by Rudolf Laban out of the early twentieth-century modernist innovations of Isadora Duncan, Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, and others (Laban 1975). Three female teachers, first Angela Younger from New Zealand, and later Sandra Jones (now Sandra Forbes-Bennett) and Helene Carpenter from the U.K., had been hired by Grimes to teach students modern dance as a novel, liberating mode of movement. This was in keeping with Grimes's overall progressive educational agenda, in that it emphasized individual self-searching through dance rather than the group drilling of set sequences.

This article is the first scholarly examination of this historically important Ugandan school, renowned today in Uganda for its developments in dance and theater, as well as for its graduates, especially women, who have gone on to prominent careers in politics, business, media, and the arts. For this study, which focuses mainly on the late '70s and early '80s (the period when the modern dance curriculum was first developed), I draw upon interviews with Father Grimes, two teachers who taught dance under his supervision during this period, and five former Namasagali students.¹

I acquired additional information from a public Facebook group for Namasagali alumni (www.facebook.com/namasagalicollege) and from other online sources, including newspaper articles. My broader understanding of Ugandan contexts, especially in the field of dance and culture, derives from ethnomusicological fieldwork I conducted in the country in 2006–7, 2010, and 2011.

Namasagali College is known for having produced several generations of Ugandan graduates who have been not only successful, but also culturally cosmopolitan/liberal. One of its most famous female graduates is Rebecca Kadaga, the current Speaker of Parliament, who—at least before she joined Uganda’s recent anti-homosexuality crusade—was internationally hailed as an activist for women’s rights. Other notable female alumni include the lawyer, Member of Parliament, and women’s rights advocate Miria Matembe, Supreme Court Justice Faith Mwendha, the LGBT rights activist Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera, and the pop stars Iryn Namubiru and Juliana Kanyomozi (Bukenya 2015; Kafeero 2015). The Obsessions, a groundbreaking women-fronted pop music and theater act known for its bold, glamorous dancing, was formed by Namasagali alums and remains associated with the school in pop culture consciousness (Kisiki 2001; Magoba 2013).

The historian Alicia Decker (2014) has argued that the surge of women’s political activism that occurred in the Ugandan public sphere in the early years of Museveni’s presidency (1986–present) was actually kindled in earlier, unheralded developments of the Amin years. She highlights attitude changes that occurred at the bottom of the economic ladder, as radical economic restructuring by the Amin government and its resulting penuries opened up new opportunities for nontraditional work among lower-class women. I propose that we can observe, beginning in the same period at Namasagali, a parallel momentum building toward more egalitarian gender attitudes among youth of Uganda’s elite class. These new attitudes were inspired by, among other things, Namasagali students’ participation in a novel mode of individualistic, mixed-gender expressive movement, namely the modern dance taught under Grimes’s direction. Out of Namasagali came a generation of elite individuals, women in particular, who would be instrumental in directing and giving official form to grassroots energies for political and social change.

Namasagali graduates, as well as outside Ugandan observers, attest that the school had (and still has) a distinctive institutional culture, which it developed under Grimes’s headmastership from 1967 to 2000. For example, Irene Kizza-Onyango, who attended the school, wrote in a newspaper essay, “When I arrived at Namasagali, I realized that what made the school tick then was not the infrastructure; it was all in the culture” (2010). Herein, I explore this distinctive boarding school culture, focusing on the intensive, experimental, and often seemingly contradictory measures Grimes took to shape it according to his peculiar modernizing vision. Modern dance, we will see, was just one of a number of practices Grimes implemented at the

school with the explicit purpose of fashioning “modern” Ugandan subjects who would, in his view, be able to thrive in cosmopolitan/Western elite milieus, unconstrained by Ugandan traditional gender norms.

Liberalism by the Rod: The Contradictions of Western Intervention in Africa

This article’s focus is thus on a European-led project of cultural liberalization in Africa, in which modern dance was implemented as a “technology of the self” (Foucault 1988). I take “liberalism” to mean a social imaginary based on the ideal of autonomous individuals freely engaging with one another in an egalitarian public sphere. As will be detailed in a section below, modern dance, since its beginnings, has been a genre significantly devoted to articulating in bodily movement the liberal ideal of the independent, expressive self. First developed in the early twentieth century in the U.S. and Europe, notably by liberation-minded women artists, the modern dance tradition evolved an array of techniques for experiencing the self as something inward and autonomous.

If I am focused on Namasagali’s danced liberalism, I am interested even more in the inconsistencies and contradictions at the heart of Grimes’s seemingly progressive pedagogical project—recognizing that Western projects of liberal intervention in Africa have historically been rife with inconsistencies and contradictions. Far too often, Western-led projects in Africa that claim to be empowering individuals and promoting an egalitarian public sphere show themselves, on closer examination, to be afflicted by hierarchical and coercive tendencies (see, e.g., Van Allen 1972; Englund 2006). Recurrently, Western activists in Africa claim liberal intentions, but fall back into old colonial habits in the actual execution of their projects. In an interview with Elizabeth von Thadden in 2014, Achille Mbembe calls attention to the stubborn persistence into contemporary times of the “old question of the 19th century” of “whether Africans can govern themselves” (see Jentzsch 2015; see also Mbembe 2002). This perennial doubt about the very possibility of African self-government, Mbembe says, recurrently “superimposes itself on the realistic perception of the continent,” making illiberal measures seem rational and necessary even within the most ostensibly liberal undertakings.

I would argue that, despite its genuinely progressive aspects, Grimes’s project at Namasagali was in the end powerfully shaped by an inherited paternalistic view of Africa as an exceptional problem of government. Grimes’s approach was striking in the way it couched progressive educational activities within a system of surveillance, discipline, and punishment reminiscent of the strictest British boarding schools. On the one hand, Grimes believed more than his contemporaries that African students were capable of cultivating themselves through self-motivated, self-searching activities, especially ones involving the vigorous exercise of the body. At the same time, however, he judged that such self-motivated education needed

to be balanced with a large measure of top-down behavioral control, including harsh punishments to be applied when students failed to submit to that control. He had faith in the possibility of African liberal self-government, but saw the realization of such capacity as a daunting challenge, requiring exceptional vigilance and force, even among Namasagali's for the most part already wealthy, cosmopolitan students. Indeed, he applied discipline and punishment with a zeal that suggests a reformer's psychology being pushed to its limits.

A BBC television documentary team for the series *Missionaries*, visiting Namasagali College in the late 1980s, was struck by the school's mix of liberalism and discipline, characterizing Grimes's project as "part English public school, part finishing school and part progressive co-educational establishment" (Pettifer & Bradley 1990:107). Grimes regularly checked girls' hair and fingernails for unkemptness, required them to curtsy in greeting, and demanded decorous socializing at dinners and dances. The filmmakers insinuated that this experimental grooming project was tinged with some megalomania on Grimes's part, suggesting that he was one of a few "little popes in the bush" holding out decades after Uganda's 1962 independence (Pettifer & Bradley 1990:105). Their implication—furiously rejected by Grimes's defenders in the Catholic missionary press (Wijngaards 1990; Corcoran 1990)—was that in remote rural African isolation, Grimes felt free to set up his own controlled utopian society based on Eurocentric civilizational ideals.

Namasagali's lengthy "penalty code" was regularly enforced with corporal punishment, which Grimes himself administered to boys, as well as some girls, with a cane (Tibekyinga 2011). All my informants (other than Grimes) attested to these punishments in their regularity and severity. If students were being encouraged in dance classes to experience their bodies in new, freeing ways, they were at the same time constantly being reminded that their bodies were subordinate to Grimes's disciplinary will. Admittedly, corporal punishment was a normal part of education throughout Uganda at this time. Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of violent discipline and progressive bodily self-exploration at Namasagali seems awkward, as though the school were perched unsteadily between two historical paradigms of government in Africa: one colonial-coercive, the other permissive-liberal.

Grimes was convinced that Namasagali students must become a new generation of free-thinking Ugandan leaders who could redeem the country from its oppressed colonial past and abject present. In order to achieve this empowered subjectivity, however, the students would have to be decisively separated from the culture they had grown up in, with its African-traditional and colonial vestiges. "Grimes was going to make us modern, rather we were ready or not!" chuckled one alum (Edward Murumu, interview, May 23, 2014). Students, Grimes suggested to me in an interview (June 30, 2011), would have to be transformed in their thinking, spirit, and unconscious bodily habits, for if the transformation was less than total, he believed there was a high risk that students would sink back

into subservient and indolent cultural patterns, which beckoned from all quarters. This was in keeping with the longstanding Eurocentric imaginary of Africa, noted by Mbembe, as a place where rational self-government is particularly prone to fail. While Grimes blamed Uganda's political and cultural decrepitude on the effects of European colonialism as much as on indigenous African traditions, his estimation of Africa as a problem of government was severe, in ways that resonate with old, pessimistic, nineteenth-century discourses about the continent.

To be clear, I do not contend that these neocolonial qualities of the school cancel out its progressive accomplishments. My intention is neither to condemn Grimes's Namasagali project nor to celebrate it, but rather to illuminate its complexities and contradictions, which I believe to be exemplary of the complexities and contradictions of Western liberal/modernist intervention in Africa in general. A number of illuminating recent scholarly studies of modernist art projects in Africa have focused on the various ways artistic modernism, claimed as a Western invention, has been a "vexed question" for Africans (Jaji 2014:14), given that it often comes symbolically packaged as part of a larger, paternalistic project of African *modernization*. Grimes may be seen as part of a cohort of twentieth-century white activists, dispersed throughout Africa, who sought, with varying degrees of forcefulness, to stamp their personal visions of artistic/cultural modernity on black African students—a cohort that includes Margaret Trowell in Uganda, Kenneth Murray in Nigeria, Bill Ainslie in South Africa, and others (Sanyal 2000; Okeke-Agulu 2015; Peffer 2009). To focus on these white advocates for the arts and the impacts they had on the development of African modernist art scenes is certainly not to imply that they were the only agents who mattered, or that later developments in African art worlds are to be framed as their legacies. Yet these institutionally empowered white promoters of art in Africa have indeed left lasting imprints on modern African arts, and on African cultures of modernity more broadly.

Throughout this article, I understand "modern" and "traditional" to refer to historically constructed, still evolving, and contested categories, which have loomed large in discourse about Africa since the colonial encounter. Indeed this article is focused on one historical articulation of the problematic tradition–modernity binary: I examine Namasagali as a site where Grimes asserted his own peculiar arguments about what kind of modernity Ugandans should pursue, and how they should pursue it. This inquiry into the intersections between modern dance and ideas of modernity/modernism/modernization in Uganda has evolved out of my earlier research (Pier 2015), which focused on the complexities of the idea of tradition within contemporary Ugandan traditional dance.

In the sections that follow, I first devote attention to Grimes and his plans for Namasagali College, drawing on an interview I conducted with him in 2011. In this interview Grimes invoked the metaphor of a "walled garden," which struck me as particularly revealing about his educational philosophy. Following this portrait, I briefly pull back from Namasagali in

order to give broader theoretical consideration to modern dance as a historically evolved technology of the self. My focus here will be on techniques passed down in this modernist tradition that generate an image of the self as autonomous, insofar as it is contained within and delineated by the body. In the two sections that follow, I return to Namasagali, discussing Forbes-Bennett's and Younger's dance classes in juxtaposition with other expressive bodily activities at the school, as well as with Grimes's strict regimen of discipline and punishment. Here I draw on telephone interviews conducted in 2014 with Forbes-Bennett and Younger, as well as five alumni. In drawing attention to the female teachers and their activities at the school, I suggest that the Namasagali program should not be thought of solely as Grimes's project. Indeed, in the end, Younger, Carpenter, and especially Forbes-Bennett, rather than Grimes, may deserve most of the credit for implanting new gender attitudes among Namasagali students. If I devote more attention to Grimes, it is because I find the contradictions in his character and project particularly interesting and historically resonant.

At the end of this article I meditate on Namasagali's legacy. Over the past two decades, modernist dancing has become increasingly important in Uganda with the rise of "African contemporary dance" as a global art world phenomenon. I first learned of Namasagali College and Grimes while researching today's African contemporary dance scene in Kampala. As it turned out, many leaders of Ugandan dance groups had either studied dance at Namasagali or had studied with someone who had gone there. The school stands in local memory as the site where modern dance was first introduced to Ugandans, and Grimes is remembered as the person most responsible for this introduction. This led me to wonder what sort of precedent for today's African contemporary dance movement was set at Namasagali. Were certain meanings established for modern dance at the school that continue to surround contemporary dance today? I suggest that modern/contemporary dance remains attractive to liberal activists, especially visiting Europeans, as a technology of the self, by means of which Africans might be inspired to seek cultural change. Many new projects of dance liberalization in Africa, however, are subtly afflicted by some of the same paternalist aspects that were manifest at Namasagali in the 1980s under Grimes's headmastership. This exploration of modern dance's introduction at Namasagali College provides a point of historical comparison for critical examinations of today's African contemporary dance movement as a locus of engagement between Africa and Europe.

Grimes and the "Walled Garden"

On June 30, 2011, I interviewed Father Damien Grimes at the outdoor restaurant of one of Kampala's new high rise hotels. Now eighty-one years old and residing in the U.K., Grimes was making one of his regular return visits to Uganda, the country where he had lived as a missionary from 1959 until his departure in 2003, shortly after his 2000 resignation as

Namasagali's headmaster. Ours was only one of a long series of meetings he had scheduled for that day with old friends and current Ugandan project collaborators. He was currently engaged, he told me, in co-administering something akin to a summer camp, where the same values and manners he used to teach at Namasagali were being taught to young Ugandan girls. At first, Grimes spoke to me rather brusquely, perhaps because his schedule was so tight, or more likely, I gauged, because it was simply in his nature to put his interlocutors on the defensive. Though I had been told that he had mellowed considerably with age, Grimes's fabled "imposing personality" was still much in evidence. The forcefulness of his manner seemed to me to be inseparable from his lifelong missionary career. Here was a white man who had lived most of his life in an African milieu, while never really blending into it. He seemed to see Uganda in the first place as a set of stubborn problems to wage war against: children weren't reading books; evangelical religion was making people complacent. Grimes had the assured, impatient manner of a cultural crusader whose certainty in his own vision has only strengthened over the years. His demeanor softened somewhat, however, as the interview progressed and he perused old, fond memories of the school.

Grimes's combative manner, as I experienced it in the interview, may have also been an aftereffect of the public controversies that had sporadically flared up around him and Namasagali College during his long tenure. Some of these controversies, early on, had to do with accusations of student libertinism at the school and in its theatrical performances at the National Theatre, particularly regarding the matter of student dress (Urban TV Uganda 2014). Other critics simply did not like Grimes's battling and autocratic style. In 2000 the school, mired in debt, was taken over by the government and Grimes was forced to resign (Batte 2015). Reading between the lines, I gathered that it may have been the priest's imperious and unyielding attitude toward the Ministry of Education, as much as the school's financial problems, that precipitated his ouster. Grimes still seemed troubled by the battles of the past, as were some of the alumni I encountered on the Facebook group. There was a shared sense that the school had at times been misrepresented in scandalous, prurient ways.

Grimes was a member of the Mill Hill missionary order, which had been in operation in Uganda since the 1890s. While, at the end of the nineteenth century, the more numerous French Catholics and Anglicans had warred for religious supremacy over the central Buganda kingdom, the British Mill Hill fathers had quietly staked out their own territory in the eastern regions of Busoga, Budaka, Bukeddi, and Teso. They thought of themselves as offering a third Christian way to local Africans, one that would be British in culture but Catholic, rather than Anglican, in religion (Gale 1959). Later, Mill Hill became known in Uganda for its alternative approach to missionary education, one that emphasized industrial vocational training (brickmaking, carpentry, etc.) as much as the book learning that was so highly esteemed in the Anglican schools (Vincent 1982). There is continuity between this

early Mill Hill emphasis on vocational learning and Grimes's later insistence on the education of the whole child, especially in her/his physical capacities.² Grimes has pointed to his own upbringing in Jesuit school as a factor shaping his more holistic approach to education (Urban TV Uganda 2014).

It was as a boxing coach at the Mill Hill flagship boys' school, Namilyango College, that Grimes first made his reputation in Uganda. Several Namilyango boys went on to become successful boxers, including Tom Kawere, the first Ugandan to win a medal in an international competition, who later served as the sports officer in the government's Ministry of Culture and Community Development. Grimes's achievements as a boxing coach were especially valuable once Idi Amin came into power in 1971, since the dictator himself was an avid pugilist and admirer of Kawere (Mugagga 2012). By this time, Grimes had moved from Namilyango to become a headmaster at Namasagali College, the new Mill Hill school in rural Busoga, an hour's drive along rough dirt roads from the nearest town, Kamuli.

Unlike Namilyango, Namasagali was a co-ed institution. This presented Grimes with the problem of finding an activity that would offer the girls exercise comparable to what the boys were getting in boxing. The physical education of girls was of special concern to Grimes since he believed their bodies and selves to be especially imperiled, both by the sexual advances of boys and by their own wayward adolescent desires. In Ugandan culture, he opined, there was a strong tendency for a man to "regard a woman only as a sex object." He aimed to combat this attitude, teaching boys that a woman "is a human person just like you." Other missionaries, he told me, had tended to keep boys and girls apart, in keeping with the "African view." Grimes aimed to take Namasagali's co-educational mandate seriously, purposefully mingling the boys and girls as much as possible, rather than segregating them, as they were segregated in other schools and in the domestic sphere. In mixed gender settings, girls would have to learn to protect themselves as individuals. A girl, he explained to me, should cultivate herself as "a walled garden"—here alluding, probably, to Song of Solomon 4:22: "A garden enclosed/Is my sister, my spouse, /A spring shut up, /A fountain sealed."

Grimes began to investigate dance as a strenuous exercise comparable to boxing for the boys, which would enable the girls to safely expend their youthful energies and build up the necessary protective walls. At first he experimented with Ugandan traditional dance, arranging school competitions in which students performed the ethnic dances they had learned in primary school. While he found these indigenous dances appealing, he also considered them "a little monotonous," with their movements "classical and more or less fixed." Ballet, with its technical demands, was rejected on practical grounds. Modern dance first came to his attention when one of his teachers, Angela Younger, started making up experimental movement exercises for her students. She would have her class move spontaneously to a

line of poetry or a short passage of music. Later, on one of his periodic trips back to the U.K., Grimes encountered Sandra Forbes-Bennett, a young teacher from Wales with considerable training in the modern educational dance pedagogy of Rudolf Laban. At Grimes's urging, Forbes-Bennett came to Namasagali as an English teacher and took over the dance training, later to be joined by her niece, Helene Carpenter. Meanwhile, Grimes began to assemble his own library of books on modern dance theory and technique, reading up on Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham.

Before delving further into the school, I will pause to give broader consideration to the merits of the modern dance genre as a historically evolved technology of the self. I am particularly interested in teasing out the ways in which modern dance's articulation of the willful self, moving and being moved within the individual body, might intersect with Grimes's vision of the self as a "walled garden." Modern dance artists, as I explain below, have imagined the body as a shaping and shapeable container for the individual soul, in ways that correspond with Grimes's imaginary of walled selfhood. This mode of dancing was thus ready-made as a technology for engendering the specific kind of liberal, self-sufficient selfhood Grimes was after. Thereafter, I will attempt to analyze, and interrogate the limits of, Grimes's liberalism. At what point, and owing to what causes, does the notion of contained or "buffered" selfhood essential to liberalism devolve into an autocratic insistence on walls that constrain rather than expand selfhood? This is the question that hangs over Grimes's Namasagali experiment, as it does over the history of Western liberal intervention in Africa generally.

Modern Dance as a Technology of the Self

As dance historians and critics have pointed out, modern dance, the genre invented in early twentieth-century U.S. and Europe by Isadora Duncan, Doris Humphrey, and Martha Graham, among others, has unique potencies as a technology of the liberal self—that is, as a practice for embodying the Enlightenment ideal of autonomous, rights-bearing individuality (Franko 1995; Robinson 1998; Foulkes 2002; Preston 2011; Kringelbach 2013). In her illuminating brief history of the modern dance genre in its early decades, Julia Foulkes writes that a "tension between individual identity and communal harmony lay at the core" of the modern dance genre, which "embodied the conflict and potential of creating a democratic whole out of distinct individuals" (2002:2–3). To various degrees, all modernist art genres enshrine the heroic, autonomous, individual: from the muscular expressionist painting of Jackson Pollock, to the stream-of-consciousness writing of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, to the soul-searching flights of the bebop musicians (Belgrad 1989). Among these modernist arts, however, modern dance stands out for its distilled images of an autonomous self, spatially contained within and in dynamic tension with the body.

Perhaps more than any other genre, modern dance dramatized the inwardness that philosophers of Euro-modernity have highlighted as being

characteristic of modern self-experience and ideology (Toulmin 1979; Taylor 1989). Charles Taylor (2007) has suggested that in modernity the self has been imagined to be “buffered” from the outside world rather than “porous” to it. The individual self, as moderns have come to imagine it, is not comingled with a surrounding social and spiritual world, but separated from it; the self is putatively interior and the world exterior, and this imaginary of spatial division has the effect of reifying both the inner self and the outer world. This assurance about the autonomous existence of the self in the world has persisted in the modern imagination, despite devastating critiques from within modernism itself, notably Freud’s “Copernican revolution,” which decentered the conscious self and revealed it to be anything but a contained and manageable garden (Freud 1924:247).

In the early twentieth century this notion of inward, buffered selfhood found powerful embodied expression in modern dance. The idea of an individual self, contained within and struggling against its body, was portrayed in, for example, Martha Graham’s canonical *Lamentation* (1930), in which the artist appeared in a tubular sheath, a stretchable membrane against which the artist’s rebellious self seemed to visibly strain from within (Foulkes 2002). Carrie Preston (2011) has traced modern dance’s treatment of the body as a container for the inner spirit back to the genre’s roots in nineteenth-century Delsartism, and ultimately to eighteenth-century French monodrama. In Delsartism, a spiritual health regimen akin to today’s yoga, practitioners posed their bodies like Greek statues in order to channel the virtues of classical gods/goddesses and heroes/heroines. In modern dance, this Delsartian “mythic posing” was repurposed as a means of cultivating the inward self in its full spectrum of emotions, from depression to elation. The body continued to be imagined as a kind of kinetic statue, moved from within by the individual spirit, and in turn molding that interior spirit into different emotional states.

Notably, many of the pioneers of modern dance were women who sought to forge more assertive female identities in a patriarchal public sphere. Dance became a means of radically asserting new kinds of female self in public. Notably, if modern dance opened up new possibilities for self-assertion among women, the field remained closed for some time to people of color. The leading white modernists appreciated African and African American dance and culture mainly as “primitive” grist for modernism’s mill, but not as modern in itself (Foulkes 2002; Manning 2004). Black dance was seen as essentially communitarian, not individualistic. It was tacitly assumed that (white) modernist appropriation was required to transform black dancing’s supposedly communal energies into profound narratives about the inner life of the individual.

This historically racialized thinking about the meanings of modern dance calls attention to the fact that the modern, interior, buffered subject has itself been a racialized trope. Self-containment, self-centeredness, introspection—these are virtues Europeans have assumed they possess, and others lack. Indeed, the whole edifice of modern selfhood has been

sustained largely through fanciful acts of imperial comparison which suggest that white people characteristically possess a form of selfhood that black people do not have (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; McClintock 1995). This epistemic history must be taken into account as we consider what modern dance as a technology of the self might mean to a white missionary in Africa like Father Grimes. In the 1970s modern dance, like the other modernist arts, was still largely understood by whites to be a cultural property of white European civilization (despite the efforts of Alvin Ailey and other black artists to prove otherwise; see Foulkes 2002; Manning 2004). Grimes could thus comfortably incorporate the genre into his modernizing/Westernizing agenda. In a modernist frame, students' bodily expressions, even ones of a provocative nature, could be rationalized as part of a program of beneficent modernization.³

Dance and Bodily Display at Namasagali

The Namasagali dance and theater program was the centerpiece of a school curriculum that included diverse activities of bodily exercise and display that were exceptional by the Ugandan standards of the time. Though Grimes liked to observe dance classes and occasionally offered pointers from the sidelines, he left the actual dance teaching and curriculum development to Younger first and later to Forbes-Bennett and Carpenter. Younger, who is now in her sixties and living in Australia, had come to Namasagali from New Zealand with her husband in 1977. Earlier, the couple had taught in Sudan and Egypt; "We always looked for sort of challenging situations," she told me (interview, May 11, 2014). She was trained as an English teacher but had some childhood experience in ballet, which piqued Grimes's interest. Although she did not feel qualified to teach ballet, she proceeded with the headmaster's encouragement to introduce expressive free movement exercises into her classes. She described these exercises as being comparable to ones that might be applied in a creative writing class, intended "to motivate the students in a particular way to have outcomes of expression, of a theme, or whatever." Rather than learning a fixed series of dance steps as they would in traditional dance, students were assigned a line of poetry, a passage of music, or a feeling that they were supposed to intuitively translate into expressive movements.

Forbes-Bennett, who was of the same generation as Younger, had more formal training in Laban's modern educational dance pedagogy as well as in gymnastics. She told me that her love of dance came from watching and reading about Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan, and Doris Humphrey, who had developed a "very free-spirited, sort of very expressive, form of movement" (interview, April 18, 2014).⁴ Her teaching philosophy, following Laban, was centered on the idea of developing "the whole child," in her/his physical, emotional, and social as well as intellectual aspects. Like Younger, she was drawn to Namasagali by a desire for adventurous travel. Upon her arrival at the school, she was most inspired by the students' traditional style

dancing, which she described as “jaw-droppingly beautiful and amazing; I felt quite humbled and quite insignificant really.” Forbes-Bennett’s dance classes at Namasagali, similar to Younger’s, were based on the idea of “responding” kinetically to simple abstract “stimuli,” from musical excerpts to poetic phrases, with the goal of collectively compiling a unique “vocabulary of movement.” In a typical class the students would form lines, with each student at the front improvising a single new movement to be copied by the others. This exercise alone promoted a sense of individualism, as each dancer took a turn alone at the front of the stage, facing outward, improvising a kind of kinetic soliloquy, to be taken up by the line.

The repertoire of dance moves composed in class was put to use in dance-and-drama revues modeled on middlebrow Broadway and West End shows of the time such as *Ipi Tombi* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. *Ipi Tombi*, by the white South African playwrights Bertha Egnos and Gail Lakier (first staged in 1973 and restaged as *Ipi Ntombi* [1994]), made a special impression on Grimes, Forbes-Bennett, and Younger when they saw it together in London, because it translated South African folkloric dance and costumes, or stylized versions thereof, to the modern musical theater stage. The theater scholar Andrew Horn has called *Ipi Tombi* the “most widely performed of the [South African] Exploitation plays”—that is, plays written by white South Africans that put a sentimental, legitimizing spin on apartheid, implying that black Africans were most happy on their own homelands, immersed in their own traditions (1986:114). None of the Namasagali teachers or students I spoke to saw *Ipi-Tombi* through a similarly critical lens, though there was criticism of the show in the African media at the time (Vandenbroucke 1976). Namasagali’s version of *Ipi-Tombi*, launched in 1978, was titled *Song of the Bantu*. Based on what I was able to glean about *Song of the Bantu* from my interview with Younger, this show, like its *Ipi Tombi* model, was concerned with putting iconically “tribal” Ugandan traditions in a modern and entertaining theatrical frame—an act of primitivist appropriation that may have given students a sense of command over, and distance from, the African traditional dimensions of their home cultures.

Following *Song of the Bantu*, the Namasagali students brought a new show every year to the National Theatre. Forbes-Bennett recalled, “if you imagine, everything had broken down, the theater was putting on absolutely nothing hardly at all, and here comes this group of incredibly talented, fabulously excited kids.” Namasagali students, who had worked out their novel style in splendid isolation, brought a breath of fresh air to the city’s theater scene. According to the teachers and alumni I spoke to, however, they also incited controversy about the skimpy costumes the dancing girls had designed for themselves, and about the nonconformist confidence with which they moved their bodies on stage. Uganda, and the Buganda ethnic region in particular, has long favored restraint in dress and social comportment in gender-mixed settings—a conservatism attributable partly to the residues of British colonialism and partly to longstanding indigenous notions about polite manners (Summers 2006). In the early 1970s Idi Amin,

appealing to popular male chauvinism and religious prudery, had introduced new restrictions on women's dress, banning miniskirts and wigs (Decker 2014). In this conservative context, the Namasagali girls, appearing on stage in leotards they had designed themselves, were bound to cause a stir. According to Forbes-Bennett and Younger, while most audience members simply enjoyed the spectacle, a vocal minority, egged on by the tabloid press, protested the shows' alleged indecencies and raised pointed questions about the school and Grimes's headmastership.

The teachers and alumni told me that Grimes himself had encouraged the girls to sew revealing costumes for *Song of the Bantu*. *Ipi Tombi* had made a splash with its sexy costumes, which were supposedly based on authentic traditional South African clothes. "Father wanted them to wear less!" laughed Angela Younger (interview, May 11, 2014). "When it came to costuming the *Song of the Bantu*, we were wearing [costumes] really too short, like 'How far can you go with traditional costumes?'" A male alum affirmed that Grimes was avid about pushing the boundaries of decency in dress, in the name of traditional authenticity.

When we did the productions, when we were in traditional, . . . in costume, you know, he would say things like . . . No, he would not say things, he would like, demand. . . . There was not supposed to be any exposed underwear [in authentic traditional dress]. So, I mean . . . you're just "tying bark-cloth," you know? . . . It was just a strip of cloth. . . . It didn't leave much to the imagination. . . . We were basically naked under all these costumes. . . . So, the [African] teachers used to comment a lot about that, about how we were being corrupted. (Edward Murumu, May 23, 2014)

Not just in the theatrical productions, but in the everyday life of the school, girls' clothes increasingly flouted conservative Ugandan norms. The red skirts that were part of the Namasagali girls' school uniform got shorter and shorter. Girls were also permitted to wear jeans and even shorts, revealing their legs in ways many Ugandans found provocative. In addition to the modern dance shows, Grimes arranged fashion shows that included swimsuit runway walks for both boys and girls. There were also weekly disco dances in which participation was mandatory. Then there was the famous swimming pool, in a Ugandan culture that generally discouraged girls' swimming. Upon arrival, each girl received a swimsuit, which had to be imported from abroad since girls' suits were not readily available in Uganda. After the dance shows, the swimming pool and the swimsuits were perhaps the most prominent icons of Namasagali's modern-ness.

Most of the students, especially those who were tuned in to disco culture from Europe and America, were happy to take advantage of every license Grimes afforded them. Those students who were most discomfited by the school's permissiveness in dress were of the born-again Christian faith, then on the rise in Uganda. Forbes-Bennett remembered one Namasagali teacher who became born again while at the school, and was asked to leave

by Grimes, on the grounds that she was using her teaching post to proselytize to students (interview, April 18, 2014). According to Edward Murumu, Grimes reserved special ire for the born-again Christians and their sexual conservatism, which he saw as contrary to Uganda's progress in the world:

Father had this huge clash with the born-again Christians. I didn't know how bad it was at the time. He was of course Catholic and born-again Christians were the bane of his existence, as it were. But they didn't want to dance. . . . So, there was that group, you know, those who totally didn't want to interact. (Interview, May 23, 2014)

One consequence of Grimes's anti-prudery campaign, with its implicit criticism of African traditionalist and born-again Christian culture, was the exacerbation of class hierarchy among the students. Most of the school's born-again Christians were lower-income students from the local Kamuli area who had been admitted at reduced tuition fees. Edward Murumu recalled that these youths, who were already branded by their lack of wealth and family connections, felt further marginalized by a curriculum that rejected the conservatism of their home villages (which was also, in some cases, the conservatism of born-again Christianity). Students joked of a "first world-third world divide" among their ranks. When Grimes became aware of this class division, he tried to eliminate it by randomly shuffling the dormitory rosters, mixing rich and poor students together. Yet the school remained, in Edward Murumu's view, a culturally forbidding place for students who were not already of the cosmopolitan elite—a factor that seems to have contributed to the government's impatience with, and eventual takeover of, the school. The perception among outsiders was that Grimes had a particular, unyielding image of who was worthy of a Namasagali education and who was not: "Fr. Grimes would merely look at you and like you or not like you. That's how he selected his students," a longtime teacher at the school, James Gaira, told the journalist Edward Batte (2012).

At the same time, allowing or encouraging provocative dress at the school was a way of establishing the student's body, and specifically the girl's body, as an object of intervention. The consistent theme in Grimes's project was that the student's selfhood was to be reformed at the subconscious, embodied level Bourdieu (1977) called "habitus" (following Mauss 1934). This reformation might be achieved, on the one hand, through self-motivated, exuberant acts of display, challenging norms Grimes took to be outdated and antimodern. After passing through an initial phase of embarrassment in an unfamiliar and demonstrative bodily activity, students would presumably come to see existing bodily norms as oppressive and unnecessary. On the other hand, as we will see below, it might be achieved through the application of strict behavioral rules and consequences. Enlightened subjectivity would, as it were, be partly liberated from, and partly written upon, the body.

Discipline and Punishment

The bold activities of bodily display and mixed-gender interaction at Namasagali were framed within an elaborate regime of school surveillance, discipline, and punishment. The school “Penalty Code,” in its 1989 version, listed as many as 124 punishable offenses, ranging from “idle gazing” and “despising the diet” (10 penalty points each), to “makeup and nail offenses” on the part of the girls (5 points), to “public drunkenness” (50 points), to the open-ended “lèse-majesté” (15 points), which referred to insubordinate behavior of any kind toward “His Majesty,” Grimes (abbreviated “H/M” in the code).⁵ While there was a dash of tongue-in-cheek in this absurdly thorough code, students learned to take it very seriously. According to Edward Murumu, “You could get penalties for anything. Penalties for ‘moody, moody.’ How did everybody get penalties for ‘moody moody’?! It means, like, you’ve got a sullen expression on your face” (interview, May 23, 2014).

Grimes’s disciplinary code was dedicated especially to the promotion of polite, courtly interactions between boys and girls. At the weekly disco dances, boys were not allowed to dance in all-male groups, as they liked to do.⁶ If boys and girls did not come together as couples of their own accord, Grimes “would literally grab you and grab a girl and put you together and tell you to dance” (Edward Murumu, interview, May 23, 2014). Some students who before Namasagali had attended single-sex schools found such compulsory co-ed socializing awkward and difficult. One alum opined that it must have been harder to be homosexual at Namasagali than it was at other Ugandan boarding schools, because heteronormative behavior was so programmed into the school’s curriculum (Isaac Ateenyi, interview, Nov. 17, 2014).

At the top of the penalty code was the rule that all conversation must be in English, rather than vernacular languages. This was intended to groom students for entry into global, English-speaking elite society, and also to prevent ethnic divisions among the student body from becoming a problem. Students were required to perform social rituals that struck the visiting BBC team as fussy and archaic—especially the mandatory practice of curtsying among the girls (Pettifer & Bradley 1990). Grimes explained to me that the curtsying rule was actually meant to combat the ingrained habit among many Ugandan girls of kneeling before men and elder woman, a gesture he found demeaning and conducive to patriarchy.

Students themselves held some responsibility for reporting and judging their peers’ infractions. Student “reeves,” similar to the head boys and head girls of British boarding schools, were expected to monitor the behaviors of their fellow students. Grimes took the term “reeve” from his study of medieval history: in Anglo-Saxon England, a reeve was a lower official responsible for policing the peasants in a feudal estate.⁷ Students who had been caught in an illegal act by a reeve were in most cases entitled to a trial by a jury of their peers—a democratic process unparalleled in Ugandan schools. Ultimately, however, Grimes held absolute authority. His medievalist

categories encoded the mixed modes of rule that were necessary at the school: student “peasants” were entitled to a voice, and the reeves to some governing power, as long as it was understood that the “lord’s” authority was final and unquestionable. Grimes’s medievalism served to tie the school’s modernizing project symbolically to the deeper history of Christendom, implying that Namasagali’s progressivism was not connected to the liberation politics of the 1960s, but rather to a more sober, deep-historical project of Catholic self-inquiry stretching back into the European middle ages. For Grimes, there was no contradiction between the school’s progressivism and its intense bodily discipline. This was the Catholic side of Grimes’s liberal modernism, which rooted its freedom ethos not in the permissive spirit of the global ‘60s, but in the ideal of a protective, nurturing, feudal community, enforced around the edges by priestly authority.

Once a student had accumulated a certain number of points for various infractions, he or she would be subjected to punishments, ranging from chores such as cutting the lawn all the way to flogging. Often students were able to choose how they wanted to spend their points, avoiding corporal punishment for more prolonged or demeaning chastisements if they so desired. Floggings were, however, a regular part of the Namasagali weekly routine, carried out in Grimes’s private office. The students I talked to attested that the beatings were harsh, contributing to a fear of Grimes that colored their fondness and respect for him. One woman alum told me that while she herself believed in hindsight that the floggings were necessary for the maintenance of order at the school, she knew that a few women had been psychologically scarred by the beatings they had received (Alice Wamboka, interview, May 27, 2014).

Alumni recall Grimes flying into rages, as though the challenges of keeping students in line were pushing him past his limits. Notably, the exacting disciplinary system did not have the effect of cowing students into good manners; it may, to the contrary, have upped the pleasures of misbehavior. For some students, rule-breaking escapades were all the more delicious for the fact that they would drive Grimes into apoplexy should he ever find out. An unsupervised swim in the Nile, a trip to the local store to buy beer (often to “fortify” students for the anxieties of couples dancing), cigarettes furtively tucked into one’s clothes, secret visits by male students to the girls’ dormitories—these were the kinds of misdemeanors students excitedly committed whenever the attention of Grimes and his reeves was directed elsewhere. The drab diet served at the school mess spawned a black market in smuggled commodities like sugar and curry powder. One is reminded of the “hothouse society” of British boarding schools, with its mix of surveillance, cloistered regimentation, violence, and delightful, ritualized transgression (Lambert & Milham 1968). The expressive bodily activities Grimes encouraged at the school fanned flames of adolescent mischief that no penalty code or threat of flogging could contain. He was both the instigator of mischievous behavior and, in his capacity as disciplinarian, its stimulating foil.

Grimes's co-headmaster at Namasagali, Father Jaap Zonneveld, played a much quieter, behind-the-scenes role, leaving most of the engagement with students and teachers to Grimes, while he himself attended to the school's finances and administrative matters (Angela Younger, interview, May 11, 2014). Notably, other teachers at the school modeled mentor–pupil relationships that were different from the more autocratic one modeled by Grimes. One female alum fondly recalls her interactions with Forbes-Bennett:

She would come down to our level. If she didn't understand, she wouldn't embarrass [you]. She'd call you maybe under a tree and then kind of go through whatever she'd taught and correct you without embarrassing you. And people would ask her anything: "How old are you?" "Do you have a boyfriend?" "Do you smoke?" "Do you drink?" . . . That was the kind of relationship we had, it was very personal. And she would cry. I have never seen a teacher cry, you know? (Alice Wamboka, interview, May 27, 2014)

Grimes may be seen as straddling not just Catholicism and secularism, but also two historical paradigms of Western governmental intervention in Africa. He had one foot in an established, colonial way, which sought to inscribe civilization directly on ostensibly recalcitrant African bodies, by means of regimental drill and the rod. At the same time, he was taking steps into a more liberal art of government, one that would, in the coming neoliberal decades, become increasingly dominant in European-led interventions into Africa. In this recent neoliberal mode of intervention, Western benefactors do not openly seek to reform Africans from the top down, but rather to expose them to diverse technologies of the self which are meant to spur entrepreneurial reform from within (Englund 2006; Smith 2003; Swidler & Watkins 2009). In the concluding section, I discuss the increasingly prominent function modernist dance plays as a technology of the self in this recent mode of neoliberal advocacy in Africa. Grimes's project, I suggest, established a precedent for future dance-based cultural interventions in Uganda, both in its liberal politics of the body and in its more antagonistic, paternalistic aspects.

Conclusion: African Contemporary Dance and the Namasagali Legacy

Six dancers are kneeling in a meditative posture—four men and two women. One of the women is white. One by one, they peel away in somersaults. Now they are rising, arms fixed at awkward right angles, shuffling mechanically toward the corners of the room, atmospheric German electronic music in the background. The dancers alternately loosen and lock up their joints, reach for one another and spin apart, playing out a contest between a desire for human contact and some unseen, centrifugal force. At one point, each individual dances in a detached space of her own, struggling with some beloved gadget: a cell phone, a handheld game, headphones. Pangs of technological

frustration register in their bodies as spasms, electric shocks. Wandering, limbs disjointed, scratching themselves and muttering “No! No!,” they collide, shoving and leering at one another. In the end, though, the dancers come together, moving smoothly as one, rediscovering their collective, embodied humanity.

The above description is compiled from my field notes about a 2011 dance piece by Ugandan National Contemporary Ballet (UNCB), a Kampala-based troupe led and choreographed by a white French woman, Valérie Miquel (Pier forthcoming). Over the past two decades, troupes that perform in this experimental, sociocritical dance style have become increasingly prolific throughout Africa with the rise of African contemporary dance as a global art world phenomenon. Receiving much of its financial support from European state-based cultural institutions like the Alliance Française and the Goethe-Institut, the African contemporary dance movement is notable for its African–European artistic collaborations and for its thematic focus on human rights topics of special interest to the liberal international community—child soldiers, female circumcision, LGBT rights, the dangers of climate change. African contemporary dance has become a “global arts circuit” (Kringelbach 2013:147; see also Sieveking 2008, 2014) within which African artists seek connections to like-minded artists around the world and sponsors in Europe, while European liberal institutions seek to make contact with African artistic trendsetters and their teachable publics.

Hélène Kringelbach, a scholar of African contemporary dance, has pointed out that an “emancipation of the self discourse” is prominent in this genre and to some degree defines it (2013:170). Grimes’s use of modern dance as a technology of the self in Africa has gone mainstream with the rise of contemporary dance as a European-funded tool for cultural empowerment and awareness-raising. In most African metropolises one finds projects led by Westerners that seek to enlighten dancers and their audiences about the feelings, rights, and capacities of individuals, especially those of disenfranchised identity groups. African contemporary dance often flies in the face of local conservative attitudes about the body, with dancers sometimes appearing in revealing costumes or even in the nude. More important, contemporary dance tends to break with implicit cultural prohibitions against certain kinds of emotional expression in polite public settings: dancers use their bodies to show anxiety, lust, addiction, suffering. As with the modern dance tradition out of which it grew, much African contemporary dance is devoted to delineating the interior and exterior dimensions of human existence, the inner self being expressed outward into the world.

The work of Grimes, Forbes-Bennett, Younger, and Carpenter at Namasagali established important Ugandan foundations for this globalized dance movement. When dance entrepreneurs like the UNCB’s Valérie Miquel arrive in Uganda armed with European arts grants and seeking to start dance projects, they find that they do not have to teach the principles

and techniques of modern dance from scratch: there are already a number of modern dance specialists available who got their start in the Namasagali College program.⁸ Modern/contemporary dance is not hugely popular in Uganda; shows at the National Theatre are typically attended by only a smattering of urbane arts lovers. But neither is contemporary dance challengingly foreign in its sensibilities. Over the decades, Namasagali's expressive, provocative, sometimes sexy approach to dance has spread outward, into Ugandan pop dance (notably in the work of *The Obsessions*), and even into traditional dance. (According to Grimes, the neotraditional "creative items" performed in annual school competitions were influenced by the Namasagali style.)

If Namasagali set local technical and theoretical precedents for today's African contemporary dance scene, it is important to consider also the ways in which the school shaped upper- and middle-class Ugandan attitudes more broadly, particularly in regard to gender. If Ugandan women in today's contemporary dance groups are able to assert themselves as empowered individuals without fear of public censure, this is due to a recent, substantial shift in public attitudes about women's roles, to which Namasagali made a small but important contribution.⁹ The experience of individualistic, gender-equitable body performance—not just in modern dance, but also in swimming, fashion shows, and everyday socializing—left a lasting impression on Namasagali alumni, which in the late 1980s they carried into a Uganda that was then opening up new opportunities for women. One woman assessed her personal development at the school thus:

We had dance. We had music. We had swimming. We had working. We had so many activities that other schools didn't have. You had people who are pursuing art, fine art as a subject, and pottery and stuff, and tie-and-dye and you know, if that's what they wanted to do. . . . It was the only school in the country that did that, and one thing about that I realized was it made us creative. It made us have our own identity. And that's one thing about us, if you meet a Namasagali person, you can tell. There's that confidence and sense of self, self-identity. I don't have to be like somebody else to be who I am. This is who I am and it's okay to be the way I am. (Alice Wamboka, interview, May 27, 2014)

But if Grimes's program at Namasagali was genuinely empowering to students in the ways this alum describes, the school also had, as we have seen, a more oppressive, paternalistic side. Even as students learned to exercise artistic control over their own bodies and selves, they were learning that their bodies were subject to Grimes's white male surveillance and punishment. This striking mix of liberal and autocratic modes reflected the old colonial doubt as to whether Africans are capable of self-government. The question then arises: has this vestige of colonial paternalism been eradicated in today's avowedly non-Eurocentric African contemporary dance movement?

Publicity materials for African contemporary dance projects tend to proclaim that they have emerged either out of autonomous African creativities or out of collaborative interactions with Europeans in which Africans hold most of the executive power (Pier forthcoming). The old background understanding that shaped Namasagali—that Europeans are in Africa to teach Africans modernity—is no longer tenable, at least not in public discourse. In fact, the very adoption of the open-ended term “contemporary,” in preference to “modern,” by this new movement (in the manner of “contemporary art”) suggests a rejection of the “modernization” conceit with its Eurocentric premises. On the face of it, this seems like progress. And yet it behooves us to be aware of the ways old Western paternalistic patterns may persist in African contemporary dance despite its anti-imperialist, decentering rhetoric. Europeans tend to hold the power of the purse in African contemporary dance projects, for it is they who are best positioned to seek and win the institutional grants. This economic power, lodged in Europe, combines with a lingering sense of European civilizational mission to arouse an undue sense of authority and entitlement in white African contemporary dance entrepreneurs.

Kringelbach (2013) relates stories of imperious behavior by visiting white participants in African projects. In one case, for example, a choreographer demanded that African women dance naked, against their expressed wishes. This demand was likely grounded in one or more inherited Eurocentric assumptions: that African artistic energies are “raw” and best expressed in the nude; that modernist/contemporary dance is ultimately a Western invention, thus giving the choreographer inherited authority on the subject; and/or that Africa is ultimately the West’s project of enlightenment, justifying autocratic prescriptions for the Africans’ own good. The online publicity material for Valérie Miquel, the French leader of Ugandan National Contemporary Ballet, proclaims that this project is based on an amalgam of “precision and discipline from the classical and contemporary dance on one side, mixed with the power, dynamic, and athletic [sic] of African dance on the other side” (<http://valerie-miquel.com/choreographer-dance>). This description resonates with a longstanding discourse in which Africans supposedly provide the raw energy, while Europeans provide the “precision and discipline.” During my field research on UNCB Miquel seemed to me to be genuinely committed to fostering individual creativity and an atmosphere of egalitarian artistic exchange. Yet in her project, as in Grimes’s, longstanding Western habits of addressing Africa as an intractable problem of government resurface.

In the final analysis, Grimes’s project at Namasagali was both a product of its particular time and place (not to mention Grimes’s individual personality) and symptomatic of perennial tendencies in Europe’s historical engagement with Africa. The school cannot be fully understood apart from its distinctive historical context: it was an outpost of liberal, cosmopolitan culture at a time when the Ugandan public sphere had all but broken down. Grimes’s zeal for reforming students stemmed in large part from his

warranted sense that Uganda was in crisis, and that a few select young people had to be shielded and raised differently so that they and the nation might someday rejoin the international community. This project, as it turned out, bore fruit: Namasagali graduates have indeed gone on to leadership roles in a resurgent Uganda.

At the same time, Grimes's views were continuous with longstanding, essentially pessimistic, Western attitudes about Africa and its capacity for self-government. I have focused not just on Grimes's pedagogical innovations at Namasagali, especially in the area of dance, but also on the ways his headmastership hearkened back to the earlier era of colonial rule that was dominated by the assumption that Africans could either be forcefully molded in schools into modern, essentially Western, subjects, or else left to their archaic traditions on rural reservations. Under colonialism, the potentialities of Africans' own independent processes of self-modernization were typically not taken into account. Grimes did, by contrast, take his Ugandan students' creativities seriously, and gave them room to grow—this was the great strength of the school. Yet at the same time he could not let go of the old colonial imperative—that Africans' behaviors must be constantly monitored and corrected lest they slip back into tropical indolence. If these students were to become modern, liberal subjects, they would have to be decisively separated, at least for a time, from a corrupting African world, like gardens shielded by high walls—walls that Grimes himself would vigilantly maintain. I would suggest that this metaphor—of the cloister or walled garden—suffused the entire Namasagali project, lending it that peculiar atmosphere of both freedom and paternalistic control that one finds again and again in colonial as well as postcolonial African contexts. Taking Grimes's work at Namasagali as a point of historical comparison, we may ask whether and to what degree this atmosphere persists, albeit more subtly, in today's liberal-spirited, European-funded projects of African contemporary dance.

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Notes

1. The five Namasagali students agreed to discuss their time at the school with me on the condition that I not reveal their true names. Namasagali and Grimes have been topics of public controversy in the recent past, and these students, who are active members of an alumni community, would prefer not to have their names associated with any critical inquiry into the school—particularly one that deals with the delicate topics of corporal punishment and the accusations of libertinism that were leveled at the school. The students I talked to were those who made themselves available for interviews, having learned of my project, either from my online requests or from others who had talked to me. All were in their forties and fifties, living in Uganda, and engaged in various middle-class professions. Four were male, and one female.
2. British missionaries and colonials in general were strong proponents of school sports as means of instilling the virtues of discipline and fair play in African students (see Ranger 1983; Mangan 1987).
3. For more on the history of modern/contemporary dance in African-European interactions, see Castaldi (2006); Sieveking (2008, 2014); Kringelbach (2013); and Young-Jahangeer and Loots (2006).
4. Forbes-Bennett currently lives in the UK, where she continues to teach.
5. I obtained a copy of the 1989 "Namasagali College Penal Code Sheet" through the Namasagali College Facebook group (www.facebook.com/namasagalicollege) on May 13, 2014.
6. Sex-segregated dancing remains common today both in club dancing and in Ugandan traditional dance. The decision as to whether to dance in couples or in groups has been an important one in many modern African popular cultures. Bob White (2008) observes that in Kinshasa, for example, popular *rumba* dance developed a kind of happy compromise. Congolese *rumba* has a two-part form: the first part dedicated to genteel couples dance, the second to energetic line dancing in sex-segregated groups. Couples dancing has in the past been marked as the more modern option.
7. Grimes told a television interviewer that the students approved the term "reeves," possibly because it reminded them of the American country-and-western singer Jim Reeves, who was very popular among Ugandan youth at the time (Urban TV Uganda 2014).
8. Modern/contemporary dance specialists who trained at Namasagali include Grace Flavia Ibanda, Patrick Kaddu, and Nassef Wangubo.

9. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Ugandan women were universally meek and withdrawn until Namasagali taught them otherwise in the 1980s—far from it. But the school, and more important, its vocal, high-placed female graduates, did make a dent in the ideology of women’s “domestic virtue” that had been instilled in upper- and middle-class Ugandan society by colonial-era missionaries (see Kyomuhendo & McIntosh 2006; see also Tripp 2000).