

Semiotics of Indigenous Anioma Dances of Southern Nigeria

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Abstract

Dance is a major form of bodily expression among communities and age grades and any society without dance could be dangerous for human habitation. It is from this perspective that this article appraises the symbols in the dances of the Anioma people of Delta State, Nigeria (Aguba of Ubulu-uku, Egwu Otta of Asaba, Okanga of Ibusa, Egwu Amala of Ndokwa and Ile Wonder of Umunede) to highlight their significance to the wellbeing of the people. The intention is to embark on an ethnographic journey into the semiotics and imageries of selected Anioma dances which in turn can be traced to the history of the communities they are located. The interviews and surveys will, hopefully, help to clarify some grey areas for researchers and traditional dance enthusiasts. The historical and sociological approaches of the qualitative method of research were employed in carrying out the study.

Keywords: Semiotics, Indigenous Anioma dances, Images and symbols, Communication art

Introduction

The diversity in Nigerian dances gives credence to the diverse cultures from which they emerged. Dance itself is not merely a unification of symbols, but symbols embedded in the language content of any given society. The conception of images, therefore, becomes an expansion of the linguistic pattern of a group of people. These symbols and images helps in the clarification of humanity's

determination to understand their environment and express their inner feelings of celebration or sadness. Dance as a communication art sends messages from the performer to the audience or beholder. It represents the identity of the people through the use of the body, by using the emphasised body as metaphors and symbols. Specific parts of the body are used to reveal the history of the people, their occupational engagement and the environment. Traditionally, dance is used to document the history of the people. This takes African dances from the teaching of older dances to a newer generation which is often based on residual knowledge, but captures the true gestures and symbols of the people, allowing dance to remain a document, a language and compendium of traditional values of any given society. It is within this context that this article appraises the symbols in the dances of the Anioma people of Delta State, Nigeria (Aguba of Ubulu-uku, Egwu Otta of Asaba, Okanga of Ibusa, Egwu Amala of Ndokwa and Ile Wonder of Umunede) to highlight their significance to the wellbeing of the people.

The power of the signification of the images and symbols also gives dance the socio-corrective value upon which the morality and ideology of any given society are invested. As a language, dance can be broken into four different subsets: symbolism, imagery, music and costume. First, through the symbolic use of language to communicate, dance becomes a medium of coherent language of its own. Second, dance as image and imagery is the full performative rendition and description of what the dance is all about, through the arrangement of images set to rhythm and pattern. Third, concerning dance as music, the beauty and vigour in Nigerian dances lie in the sound of instruments and percussions that accompany it; because when music is fused with dance, it allows the dance to be melodious, sensuous and enjoyable. Fourth, the colour of dance is in the dancing costumes. Each dance is identified with its specific costumes. These costumes add to the symbolic images of the dances. They place the dancer within the cultural milieu of the dance.

Semiotics is the science of signs, and it covers the analysis of signs and the study of sign systems. A sign is something that stands for something else. Therefore, semiotics can also be understood as the study of meaning-making or semiosis. Culture is the system of daily living that is held together by a signifying order, including

signs, codes, texts and connective forms (Nobre, 2008). Semiotics based on its philosophy, is not just a theory but also a common practice present in all forms of communication. So, the study of semiotics in human communication may be a form of studying cultural anthropology. Nobre (2008) observes that:

Semiotics has a positive application when focusing solely on the formal, explicit and visible structures of language or other sign systems or else it may take a more interpretative approach when focusing on the dynamic and transformative nature of the same sign (p. 7) [...] Semiotics has diverse branches and orientations, ranging from the positivistic approaches aiming at unique, linear, static and exact correspondences between signs and meaning, to social context in which it emerges. (p. 18)

Semiotics in dance is as diversified as the culture from which it emerges. It is a signification of the words in gesture and movement, which represent an analogical code that further highlights humanity's determination to understand its environment and express its inner feelings of fear and joy. Semiotics in dance grows from the cultural history and attitude of any group of people. It is a form of language, which sends messages from the dancer to the audience, even as dance is also an art, an ephemeral art. In contemporary dance, semiotic indicators are tools for cultural propagation. Identity semiotics in dance represents the identity of the people by using their body, as an emphasis on metaphors. Specific semiotic movements are used to reveal the history of the people; their occupational engagement and their immediate environment. For example, if they live by the river, the shapes, angles, costumes, music and even their colours become communicative factors in the dance to show their riverine connection. Traditional values existing in dance are used to document the history of the people. In semiotics, the curtsying gestures of two dancers, the symbols of love, of respect, of leadership and uniformity are transmitted to the audience.

The powers of signification in semiotics gives dance the value upon which the morality and ideology of any given culture are vested. Many scholars have critically examined semiotics as a tool for cultural propagation. Dance preservation and propagation attempts to spread semiotic indicators or keep it safe and maintain the performance of a particular dance form and style in its existing

state to prevent adulteration and extinction. It must be pointed out that culture is not static, so also the semiotic indicator in a dance performance can be affected by time and environmental factors, especially social change. Hence, the new trend in semiotic indicators as a tool for cultural propagation is shifting from the process and from the general to the specific. Consequently, the dance performance is seen as a transformation process. Drewal (2006) argues that “in cultural propagation it is important to, first of all, locate the material to be documented, identify and classify it. The process of identification and classification will involve taking a close look at the movement pattern of the dance in terms of the design in space and weight (p. 37).

Cultural propagation is a major aspect of dance documentation. It may involve anthropological and ethnological approaches in its execution. Semiotic indicators as cultural behaviours are the best approach to the anthropological study and research of dance. In dance, cultural propagation through semiotics indicates the basic issues to look out for, which include identifying the owners of the dance in terms of the ethnic group of choreographer(s). This may entail an understanding of the general settings and background of the dance, its historical origin and function in society, which could be political, social or religious. The dancers involved in the dance performance externalizing these indicators also need to be identified in terms of their age group and sex. This is important in some cases; it may form the basis for determining the dance type/form. The costume, music, songs and instruments, props and other bodily accompaniments provide a significant avenue for cultural propagation. The significance of cultural propagation and preservation cannot be overemphasized. This is because semiotic indicators in dance performance are important elements in identifying formation and national cultural development. Dance, according to Bakare (1994), is “the rhythmic movement of the human body in time and space to make a statement” (p. 3). It thrives on living experiences. Thus, it paves ways for its transmission from generation to generation, which reflects the changes in social conditions. Dance therefore is regarded as a major art and an essential element in the celebration of events connected with every aspect of human life, and it plays a prominent role in entertainment. Historically, according to Ojuade (1997),

Dance is one of the first human activities which did not directly serve the mere survival of man. The experience of dance came as man's effort of expressing individual and collective feelings. Such existence of dance in the early periods of man may be witnessed only by pictorial representations, carved images of primitive people on the walls of the caves. The pictures were created in phases, showing the developmental stages of man within his developmental environment. The developmental processes of human societies have shown that their survival is predicated on a functional association in which men became a part of the broad communities and their activities were regulated by their social needs (p. 16).

In Yerima et al. (2006), dance and movement are done for a particular need. A human being does not just move for the sake of moving, the motivation comes from an identifiable source. This source could be external or just an internal need. Laban (1971) previously noted that humans move in order to satisfy a need. They aim at something of value by their movement. It is easy to perceive the aim of a person's movement if it is directed at some tangible object. Yet there also exists some intangible value that inspires movements (p. 38). The important point here is that movement is something of value to humanity. Thus we have two aims of movement – tangible and intangible value of dance. Laban affirms that "movement has always been used for two distinct aims, the attainment of tangible values in all kinds of work and the approach to intangible value in prayer and worship" (p. 104). The early humans danced to express their feelings about the most important events in their lives. They believed that through dance, they could communicate with the spirit world to seek the help of the gods in taking control of the mysteries that surround them.

Drawing from this, so many definitions of dance have been put forward. These definitions are based principally on three factors, which are – dance as an expression of feelings, dance as imitation, and dance as the pure movement of the human body in space and time. In whichever way one looks at the definitions, the keywords, which are imitation, expression and pure movement, connote some ideas of an attempt to communicate. This, perhaps, explains why Enekwe (1991) states that dance can be used to "communicate, entertain, inform, educate and mobilise a society

towards achieving social cohesion or togetherness” (p. 2). The purpose is to use dance as a medium of communication as characters were portrayed using human events to entertain the audience. The art of dance may be considered an artistic expression predicated on movement. This means that such expression involves the rhythmic movements of the body to music, especially with a view of expressing an emotion or an idea or to narrate a story. In whatever way it is considered, it has a function or utility, which cannot be altogether expressed in words, but through the act of dancing itself (Ojuade, 1997).

Dance and its Communicative Abilities

Dance is a very important activity in the lives of human beings, fauna and to some extent flora. As a universal phenomenon, dance has a biological basic: the possibility it gives to humans for both physical relaxation and emotional release. This has engaged the attention of scientists who have demonstrated that movement is essential to both human beings and animals for the release of emotional tension caused by both joyful and painful events. However, in human beings, dance acquires a new function of expressing abstract ideas. This is because humans are superior to animals in their capacity for conceptual thoughts; their movements convey sophisticated meanings in a more compact and rapid manner than speech (Enekwe, 1991). Dance contains symbols, which have language value, in the minds of the audience and can thus be deciphered. Supporting this, Ugolo (2007) asserts that since the human factor is very crucial to dance the moment you place it, that is, the dancer in space on a stage, meanings will begin to emerge, meanings about the sex, socio-cultural background and psychological state of the dancer, will begin to filter into the minds of the member of the audience.

Nwoko (1981) reiterates by opining that dance is an aesthetic language with which the people speak. Dance as a non-verbal language, can thus communicate a variety of information and emotions through reflecting socio-political structure. It has to be noted, however, that this object is not intrinsic in dance content, as it is only subjected to the meanings that are associated with it in different societies. Its power to achieve the expected communicative intents is embedded in its sensory-motor and aesthetic capability to create mood and a sense of the situation for

performers and spectators alike. We hope to look closely at selected dances from Delta State to understand the meanings of some of these communicative symbols. The researcher's sojourn in the dance scene comes with the experience and realization that dance is a total imitation of humanity, nature, symbols and images aimed at re-telling an existing story or using existing story as a basis for the new story that interestingly also revolves around the imitated.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis in this study is anchored on Sense Making Theory (SMT) by Brenda Dervin. Sense Making Theory helps to examine the communicative value in any creative work of art; be it dance, music, printing and drawing. It gives the artist that sense of belonging that at the stage of creation every idea matters, especially when utilized positively. Naresh Kumar Agarwal (2017) claims that Sense Making Theory is all about trying to reconcile apparent differences and polarities without wishing away the difference, but reorganizing them as important (106). Dervin (2003) affirms that the use of sense making theory while analyzing cultural symbols pays explicit attention to the 'hows' of communication that occurs at every level of performance that helps us not only to understand how performance communicated, but rather to intervene, change and improve the potency (p.116). The above assertion shows that no cultural symbol exists in abstraction. Rather, certain environmental factors give rise to its existence and substance. The essence of any symbols used in traditional dances is to pass the required information across, but in a situation whereby the intended message is not achieved, it automatically becomes ordinary props.

Dervin (2003) contends that be it in music, dance, symbols, play analysis and costume analysis the sole aim of any creative work is to; bridge the gap of complex or multiple misinterpretations placed on content analysis of performance, rather than aiming to assist individuals and community to make sense in the usage of cultural symbols beyond generalized assumption. This paper adopted this theory in order to give the iconic symbols used in the dance understudy some sense of belonging and socio-cultural values. Brenda (2003, p.4) maintains that "if the communicative gaps in the use of symbols are not well analysed, interpreted and

documented, the required essence (communication) becomes mere art for art sake only. This explains why every cultural symbol used in performance or literary work must be appreciated by the evidence from its point of pictorial diagram.

Anioma as a People

The term Anioma is an acronym derived from the four original local governments in the Northern part of Delta State - Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ika, Oshimili and two common denominators of 'M' and 'A' to give a meaning to the acronym. The coinage was made by Chief Dennis Osadebay in 1951 and has since been a preferred acronym for the people under consideration. The Anioma people are the communities within the Ibo speaking part of Delta State. The people of this area are calm and wonderful, while the region has been described as one of the most peaceful in the Nigerian polity. The Anioma people are naturally blessed with beautiful culture, creative and enduring art performances, which could hold anyone, spell bound. The Anioma culture over time has become distinct and typical to the region, thus no ethnicity or group of people can justifiably lay claims to this culture because it is unique to the region.

It is said that the Anioma culture speaks for itself. It has also beaten the imagination of several culture observers on how speedily the culture and tradition of Anioma people have become homogenous in spite of the group not having a common ancestral history as many historians assume. Although certain communities in this region can lay claim to Igbo ancestry as supported by oral history, many of these groups have their histories obviously not linking them with Igbo home as their place of origin. It is for this reason that those ignorant about Anioma history fail to understand that in Anioma; more than twelve languages exist in the region it occupies. The Agbor people who are of Ika ethnic group agreed to join the union of Anioma with the rest of their neighbouring communities, chiefly because all the towns and communities in this region have had a common cultural rapport, dating centuries before the coming of the Europeans. The Ika people in their native language know and acknowledge this; only early Europeans and visitors to the region failed to understand this because they were particularly not interested in studying the

social aspects of the people but greedily centred their interest on trade.

The Ugbodu people speak Olukumi (an extinct form of Yoruba language), Igbo and Igara languages. The Igara language is not typical to Ugbodu, elsewhere in Ebu this language is also in use in addition to the Igbo language. In Igbodo, Igbo and Ika are spoken by the people. Ika is a language similar to Benin (Edo). These languages are somewhat strange to Igbo because they reflect in everyday usage in names of humans, articles, and chieftaincy titles shared with Edoland, which is largely believed to be the ancestral home of many of the Anioma communities. It is, therefore, very interesting that in spite of the differences in the histories of Anioma communities, unique fusions hold the people together, though some would argue that the fact that these people have related socially and politically has been a major factor responsible for this. It is important too to consider that the old Benin kingdom has played a greater role in re-shaping and binding the region together with certain ideas and values typical to Edo.

The Anioma kind of dance which requires so much energy to do is so unique that you cannot help but fall in love with the people, especially if you watch the Anioma lady traditionally appearing in akwa-ocha, with a white blouse and red beads, or even in just akwa-ocha tied around her waist up to her chest with her red beads, you will indeed admire the Anioma people in their attractive traditional attire. Today, several traditional kinds of dances are in existence in Anioma, some of which are the Aguba Royal Dance, Uloko Dance, Egu Amala, Okanga, Egwu Osusu (Ukuani,) Ile-Wonder of Umunede (Atilogu), Egwu Otta of Asaba, Egwu Oshushu (Enuani), etc. Many of these dances are typical to the Anioma people, and the people of this region have come to master the art over time, adding finesse and excitement to them.

Anioma Dances and their Symbols **Egwu Aguba of Ubulu-Uku**

Chief Jones Ofunne (a snr. member of the Aguba dance troupe, interviewed on the 2nd of February 2020) said that Aguba Royal Dance is a dance of royalty. According to him, the Aguba royal dance is found among the Ozo title-holders (the initiates of the Ozo revered traditional cult) of the people of Ubulu-uku, Delta

North axis. Its name is derived from the master drum used in the dance called 'Aguba'. The mastery of the drumming and the seamless execution is said to be an innate prowess usually performed only by the initiates. He stressed that the dance is not for children or youths. The movements and steady gaits exude royalty. Its accessories consist of horsetails, hand fan, elephant tusks and royal beads, which are not only expensive but also very difficult to get. He insisted that the essence of using the symbolic accessories is not just for aesthetics. Rather, to show the communal mythology embedded in the performance. The akwa-ocha (white cloth) costume and the red cap, symbolize dignity and purity and a visual representation of history, ethics and belief. It is indeed a beauty to behold. Both men and women of very high social status perform it. It has peculiar instrumentation specially made for the Aguba dance.



(Fig. 1: Aguba dance of Ubulu-uku people)

Song:

*Odi enuoo nanyi jeli Aguba-oooo, Odi anioooo
Nanyi jeli aguba-oooo, na ofuonye adi egwu ini kpo aja
O agidigbo, agidigbo yadio.
Ohohoho Aguba eje ana, ohohoh Aguba eje ana – ooo*

English Translation:

No matter how bad the situations are
We will dance Aguba
Because a man cannot single handedly dig a grave and fill it too.
O Agidigbo, Agidigboo it is well.

Egwu-Ota Royal Dance of Asaba

The Anioma environment can inspire dance steps: the graceful movement of a swan in water or a flamingo inspires the ballet dance and ball costume of the west and over time has been modified. This is no news as behavioural patterns of animals, birds and flies, which are non-verbal communications, are viewed as dance materials. For example, the bee dance is a mating dance. When it comes to such dances that are inspired in the state, the Egwu-Ota dance of the Asaba people becomes one. Egwu-Ota is a royal dance for kings during their installation ceremony or burial and as narrated by a high ranking member of the Egwu Ota group,

According to Mr Paul Okolo, the lead instrumentalist who spoke extensively about the dance on the 10th of March 2020, revealed that Egwu-Ota dance is peculiar to the Asaba people and they are the only community known for an unadulterated version of the royal dance. He added that a woman above seventy years is seen as a senior citizen and deserves an Egwu-Ota complimentary performance during her passage rites. A man that was not initiated into *Alor* age grade (a group of men that undergo some sacred rituals as a requirement for membership) will never be given the Egwu-Ota complimentary performance because he is not an *Alor* title holder. (Ikpa Alor). The sage noted that when a young woman of about twenty years dies, if her husband is an *Alor* title holder, she will be entitled to an Egwu-Ota complimentary performance in honour and respect of her husband. A few women are also allowed to be part of the dance just for aesthetics and gender friendly disposition.

The history of Egwu-Ota dance according to Mr Okolo revolves around a mysterious bird and a hunter. Nnunu Agbama (the revealer bird) revealed and taught the hunter the rhythm of the dance. It has various types such as *Ukele*, *Obinanzu*, *Nwuha*, *Akaja*, *Ozi*. *Tikenke tinke* (2x) *tinkele tinkele*(the rhythmic sound of the bird). This meeting persisted between the hunter and the bird for some

time, the hunter then realized the bird was singing and dancing with the repetition of a rhythm and dance in each of those encounters which according to the narrator, was more than five times. The hunter returned home, assembled other men, narrated his experience and taught them the rhythm and movement of the song and dance. That was how Egwu-ota came into existence. Mr Okolo said that it is usually performed by the *Okwulegwe* age grade (men and women between the age of 30 and 50) but danced by all; and usually danced with the Uya and Azuzu (horsetail and traditionally made hand-fan).

Song:

*Ama ndonuo iyo ama ndo
Ekene ekeneze bigwe-ao iyo amando*

*Nwata kpoliam etiemeooo iyo ama
ndo*

Ama donuooo iyo amandooooo

English Translation

Greetings I bring to you
The greetings to a king is
revered

A child that insults elders,
deserves beating

Greetings I bring to the
community.



(Fig. 2: Egwu-Ota Royal Dance)

A close look at the picture above will show that that the Egwu-Ota dance is a graceful dance with hands raised, holding the horse tail, the dancers gently move with the swaying of the hips as it is

being performed, Egwu-ota dance is specifically performed for Asaba royalty. A symbolic dance, Egwu-Ota is performed during celebration moments and even at burial ceremonies, but for the nobles and royalties only. It is for the *Asagba* (king) who is the highest traditional authority in Asaba, the traditional council of elders and titled stakeholders in the society. Being a people that strongly believe in maintaining and preserving their culture, no traditional ceremony with the Asagba and the title-holders present is considered complete without performing the Egwu-ota dance, especially the *Igu-Aho* (praying for the new year) and *Iwaji* (New Yam) festivals. Usually, it is the theme dance of the day. When gifts are presented and homage is paid to the Asagba, Egwu-Ota is performed alongside. It is only during this time that ordinary citizens are allowed to perform the dance with their traditional heads. The Egwu-ota dance is accompanied in performed with three small drums, a big drum, and a gong. The costumes are strictly white in colour either the indigenous hand woven white cloth (akwa-ocha) or another expensive white lace material. The implication of the costume is that white symbolises purity and since it is a royal dance, an individual with questionable pedigree will not be allowed to be part of the Egwu-Ota ceremony. The costumes reveal the people's culture, religion and social behaviours.

Egwu Amala of Aboh

The Egwu Amala as explained during an interview with a member of the troupe Mr Lawrence Akue in an interview on the 20th of February 2020 is a dance that combines music, movement and theatrical elements that distinguish it from others. It is mostly done by the communities that live by the river bank. Egwu Amala originated from the river goddess to whom the dancers pay homage before they start their presentation publicly to any audience. Its origin from my Akue's account can be traced to the river goddess who was said to have appeared to a woman in her dream, presented a paddle to her and taught her some of the dance steps and songs. The woman woke up and realized that she was in a dream. Since she learned the steps and songs were etched in her memory, she remembered them and taught some other women she assembled, until they mastered it. Egwu Amala means "paddle dance." It is synonymous with the inhabitants of the riverine area

because of the features as a means of survival to the people unlike other paddle dances of the riverine areas.

Bakare (2005) advances that dance “is a language which expresses the geographical locations, biological temperament, religious beliefs, political and historical experiences, social practice and economic peculiarities of the people that own it” (p. 76). The Egwu amala encompasses unity of purpose that relates the daily life of the people such as the cultural belief system, values and attitudes of the people in cognizance to what is perceived as their life. It captures the different forms of traditional dance; its performance style is usually occupational, childcare, royalty, leadership, adoration, beauty and paddling. All these movements take different steps, patterns, forms and are performed by different dancers depending on the positions and roles assigned to them as they are divided into four major parts: the *Obuzor/Obuanjinya* (Leader), *Umu Amala*(paddlers), *Okwommili*(Water bailer), *Okpeazu* (Navigator or the last man on the boat). These are all structured in the canoe form/pattern (Isename, 2019). The Egwu amala accessories include; a small paddle, a horse tail, an handkerchief, mirror, an effigy of the water goddess, maracas, gong, metal pot, traditional flute, small bowl for bailing water from the canoe and white handkerchiefs. The costume comes in different colours of wrapper but with a white blouse. The costume and the accessories for those familiar with the river bank dwellers is derives from what they use in their daily living and their major occupations of farming and fishing.



(Fig. 3: Egwu Amala of Aboh dance at a function).

Okanga Dance of Ibusa

Okanga as narrated by the Uwolo (the chief warrior) Diokpa Ohaegbu John (interviewed on the 5th of March 2020), is a war dance but mainly performed for nobles and royalties. It was originally used to herald the entrance of warriors. It is said that Okanga will never go for any war and come back defeated (flaunting its intimidating outlook/rhythm). It is also performed at the burial ceremony of very senior citizens of Anioma extraction, chiefs, kings and those that have brought great advancement and development to the community. Their costumes are usually loosely fit and mostly shorts for the youth performers and the indigenous white cloth for the older men. The costumes only help to advance the warlike disposition of the youth who are not ready to settle for less or be boxed to a corner by intruders.

Song:

Ewewe Oyaho yadio Onye nkenke ebulu Ozu, Onye nkenke ebulu Ozu odi ka ozu na gba Osor

Kelekele Esike Nni ma bilibili anala lie (x3)

Oshimil ebuke ibu (x2) ma ugbo kawa ji aga oshimili.

Odilinma Nwaeze, na nwaeze akpaliba ibewe, odilinma nweze, odilinma nweze ana.

Ogiga ngelu uno we kolu PAPA, Na onyeoma nji je ogwu ana olu ndo

Ewe(x3) olu ndo olu wa gbui egbu olu ndo

English Translation:

When a short man carries the corpse, it seems as if the corpse will speak or run

The River Niger is too deep and wide but it will always be crossed with a boat

How can I be a harbinger of the news that the head warrior died in the war front?

All these are praise singing in the form of chant in honour of the late king or warrior.



(Fig. 4: *Okanga dance of Ibusa*).

Ile Wonder of Umunede

The Ika people of Delta State are bound together by their history, cultures and traditions, which include dressing, beliefs, religion, dance, et cetera. Dancing takes a higher percentage of the entertainment and spiritual (religion) aspects of the Delta Igbo culture. They believe that dancing performs more functions other than entertainment in the society, such as spiritual cleansing of the land, training of teenagers to keep fit, preserving the history and so on. Of all the traditional dances in the land, the Ile-Wonder-Atilogwu dance as submitted by Mr Dumber Onyeoghani, a member of the community, in an interview on the 12th of February 2020, is one of the most popular, widely performed and one of the oldest dances of the Ika people. The Ile-Wonder Atilogwu dance is the same in technique as the Atilogwu of the Igbo people

(Anambra). Ile-Wonder Atilogwu is an amazing youth dance that involves vigorous body movements and a lot of acrobatics. Only agile youths can perform the dance because of its energy-sapping moves, stunts and rigorous training routines.

The origin of Ile Wonder-Atilogwu dance as put forward by the interviewee above is traced back to the origin of 'Atilogwu' dance. During the time the dance was introduced in Umunede, spectators were amazed at the skills showcased by the vibrant Atilogwu dancers which prompted them to ask themselves "is this magic?" Thus the dance got its name, 'Atilogwu' which literally means "is this magic?" It is worthy of note that Atilogwu dance was derived from the conglomeration of five traditional Igbo dances namely: Anam, Ogwulogwu, Anaku, Ochanja and Adunjanja. The exact period when Atilogwu dance came into existence remains unknown but it is generally agreed that the dance has evolved over the years. New steps and stunts have been added to make it more lively and enticing and that is how the Ile-Wonder Atilogwu dance of Umunede was birthed. Atilogwu has earned both local and international recognition and has been performed all over the world. The Atilogwu dance is accompanied by fast and rich music produced by different traditional musical instruments such as drums, a flute-like instrument known as *opi* (traditional flute), metal and wooden gongs called *ogene* and *ekwe* respectively and *ichaka*, a beaded gourd. The steps of the dancers synchronize with the rhythm of the drums and the *opi*, which also dictate the dance steps or moves by the dancers. The Atilogwu dance is performed on important occasions like coronation, new yam festival, and marriage ceremony. It remains one of the oldest and most popular traditional dances in Nigeria.

The Ile-Wonder Atilogwu dance has remained a strong cultural identity among the Umunede and Ika generally. This brand of dance has spread throughout Nigeria and even outside the shores of the country. Some of its important features are that it is performed only by youths due to the high amount of energy required for the execution; it can take a considerable amount of time to perfect the dance; hence, it is often taught to children who then grow to master it; it involves a lot of body movements and the dancers are expected to be skilled in acrobatics; and can be performed by any number of persons. The Ile-Wonder Atilogwu dance movement involves high jumps, flips, twisting, climbing and

falling down from a human tree. The pace of the dance is usually dictated by the flute player. The dance is usually accompanied by music, which is played with the same tempo as the dance; when the dancers are in high spirit the tempo of the music also increases and vice-versa. It requires a lot of foot stomping which is usually done to create a special kind of rhythm generated by the leg rattles and that is unique to the dance. Ile wonder dance is not just a dance; it is seen as an art form that can be expressed to create happiness and well being among the people. The costumes comprise of a top and a raffia skirt and leg rattles which creates the very loud stomps by the dancers. The costumes, accessories and dance attitude show the attitude of a happy healthy youth having fun and exploring his youthful energy through the very energetic pure dance routine.



(Fig. 4: *Ile wonder dance of Umunede*).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated through survey that symbols and innate language of a dancer can permeate through an audience in a way that he or she connects entirely to that culture either as a citizen of the culture portrayed or as a cultural enthusiast. The accessories or properties of dance must be given serious consideration as it usually carries the actual message being transmitted. Furthermore, culture as a determinant of people's origin and backgrounds can show a state's social and economic

status in a way that it connects with people and benefits both the practitioners and the receivers; it also shows the true nature of a community and its people. Therefore, culture and dance are two major elements that could guide any society today; hence, dance is the driver of culture while culture captures the totality of the way of life of the society.

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