

## INDIGENOUS DANCE AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

The question of environmental health has been placed on the front burner of discourses in several academic fields as a measure to provoke conversations to rethink and atone for age-long humanistic and anthropogenic activities. Over the years, humans have continually plundered the earth and other non-human ecosystems in the guise of development, industrialization, modernity, and civilization. Today, we are hit by several negative feedbacks, ranging from high sea levels, global warming, environmental-based diseases, and devastated seas and landscapes. Based on the present accelerated changes evident in society, studies about the future predict the end of humanity or the apocalypse; a report that have received universal attention as reflected in the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs) 13, 14, and 15. Governments and policymakers have continued in their efforts to ensure environmental protection to rebuild the earth's resilience for the present and future generations. Given these indices, environmental discourse has received multidisciplinary attention and the arts have tried to be part of the panoply of strategies. Although there have been considerable responses from drama and music, indigenous dance seems not to have done much in scholarship and practice of this new reality. The researchers, relying on the Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) and using the content analysis and participant observation tools of qualitative research method, submit that indigenous dances in Nigeria have the potency to become dominant tools in advocacy about the environment despite conceptual and physical limitations.

**Keywords:** Advocacy, Environment, Indigenous dance, IST, Posthumanism, SDGs.

### **Introduction**

The idea of a depleting earth (Anthropocene) has assumed several discourses on causes, nature, and impacts. Several nomenclatures have been put forward by scholars and world bodies in an attempt to comprehend and navigate the subject. According to authors like Kidner, it is 'Industrocentrism' (9), which uses the power structure of colonizing both people and nature while subjecting them to the capitalist economic

system, rather than ‘anthropocentrism.’ Others such as Haraway and Routley and Routley, use the terms ‘human chauvinism’ and ‘speciesism’ to describe the long-held preference for the human species above non-human aspects of the ecosystem (Haraway 56; Routley and Routley 36). Some like Baird Callicott refer to it as homocentrism or human supremacism which is the essentialisation of the human factor at the expense of other non-human civilizations and agencies (111). In Haraway’s thoughts, no amount of evidence that other beings also possess these traits would persuade the human chauvinists that they should be given the same moral concern as humans despite the fact that they formally assert that these traits – such as language, rationality, sociality, etc. – provide reasons for privileging humans (56-57). The truth remains that human activity is identified as the primary cause of what studies about the future envision as a coming apocalypse regardless of the course that concern for a weakening ecosystem takes.

Humanist principles essentialize man to the exclusion of his non-human partners, whether under the garb of speciesism, hoomocentrism, ‘capitalocene’ (Moore 1); Chthulucene (Haraway 57); Wasteocene or ‘technocene’ (Lopez-Corona et al. 6). Non-human elements of the environment are viewed as simply objects or ‘means to human ends’ (Callicott 119), a view supported by radical relativists like Protagoras who maintains that man is the measure of all things. To say that the world is in the throes of a depleting earth’s resilience and biodiversity is to say the obvious. In the Nigerian case, there has been persistent toxification and wasting of the human, land, air, and water bodies. Beginning from colonial contacts and their mantra of modernization, civilization, and the current sustainable development fad, humans and their environmental counterparts have been plundered beyond measure. The increasing human population and the consequent demand for food production, capitalism, oil politics, and carbon democracy which are colonial installations, have further plunged several areas in the country into an ecological wasteland. The Niger Delta region has been known to be an example of toxicity and wasting, ‘eco-alientated’ (Abba and Onyemaechi 54) and “a tale of plunder and waste” (Ajumeze 22).

Other parts of Nigeria such as Lagos, the economic hub of the country, have not been spared the ecological devastation consequent upon industrialization and urbanization. Lagos is an area made up of several water bodies in the form of lagoons and creeks as well as land and air spaces. It has been heavily polluted (Omoyajowo, Raimi, and Waleola 37; Salami, Akinbomi and Patinvoh 53). While the water bodies have been heavily polluted by microplastics, heavy metals have polluted the land bodies according to the latter. Due to the prevalence of plastic wastes, a lack of knowledge about their ecological impact, and a lack of commitment to sustainable waste management methods, microplastic pollution is now widely acknowledged as a serious danger to livelihoods, biodiversity, and public health (Omoyajowo 35).

Since it provides us with food, fibre, oxygen, and regulates weather patterns and crop pollination, nature is vital to human lives. However, the strain on it is escalating. Humans have altered about seventy-five per cent of the earth’s surface, nature and animals are now restricted to ever-tinier regions of the globe. The cumulative anthropogenic activities of human beings on the planet have become the

basis for the United Nation's concern for planetary restoration, especially seeing the recent negative feedbacks such as rising sea levels, climate change, and the rise of zoonotic diseases which Billy McGuire sees as the earth fighting back. Deforestation and desertification are among these anthropocentric activities of humans, especially in tropical landscapes like Nigeria. According to the United Nations, around one million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction, hence, the institution of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a call to action for all countries, rich and poor, to promote prosperity while protecting the environment. It is recognized that addressing poverty necessitates strategies that encourage economic growth while also meeting a variety of social needs such as education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, in addition to addressing climate change and environmental protection (United Nations par.1).

This call to restore and rebuild the earth's biodiversity has taken the front burner of several disciplines including the humanities and the researchers seek to engage the indigenous Nigerian dances in the advancements of conversations for planetary restoration. The research is prompted by the seeming lack of indigenous dance presence in the current matrix of environmental action among other arts such as music and drama. The researchers argue in this article that while indigenous dances before colonial contact have contributed to land and seascapes; acknowledging their agencies and impact on collective survival and existence of the period, the salient features seem to have been distorted and watered down by colonial ideologies.

This paper, therefore, seeks to achieve three goals: firstly, to explore the nature, impact, and trajectories of environmental discourses. Secondly, contribute to the rapidly increasing studies of decolonization through an advocacy of indigenous standpoint theory. Here, the researchers seek to debunk certain misconstrued colonial ideologies and foreground the need to utilize indigenous knowledge resources in conversations and interactions with the peculiarities of indigenous environmental realities. Thirdly, situate indigenous dance as one potent communal knowledge resource with the capacity to further discourses about rethinking human anthropogenic activities for sustainable development.

### **Indigenous Standpoint Theory and the Environmental Question in Nigeria**

The Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) is an offshoot of the Standpoint Theory (ST) that speaks to a researcher's biography. In ST, the researcher according to Denzen and Lincoln, speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural, and ethnic perspective" (11). ST according to Harding and Moreton-Robinson can serve as a perspective, an explanatory standpoint as well and a methodology (Harding 24; Moreton-Robinson 334. However, it also acknowledges the researcher's subjectivity in a location and the manner in which the research is done. Coates, Trudgett, and Page claim that it could serve as both theory and methodology, which give a voice to minority groups, allowing them to challenge social norms as the outside within (907). The theory has been challenged by Western methodologies due to its decolonial nature and insistence on indigenous ways of thinking and knowing.

The Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) provides what Coates, Trudgett, and Page see as the opportunity to reveal the way in which indigenous knowledge is constructed, and unravels Western knowledge paradigms from indigenous ways of knowing (907). It produces more in-depth and culturally inclusive knowledge (Nakata 214). IST affords indigenous scholars a tool to interrogate the ways in which indigenous people are recognized and entangled with Western conceptualization and methodologies. This explains why Nakata contends that IST is a significant advancement in theoretical inquiry (214). Although it has been widely implemented in the educational sciences, the idea itself appears broad and stands alone. That is, it is not specific to one field or environment. This is by no means a limitation, but rather an advantage. The theory's breadth allows it to be utilized in a variety of contexts and combined with other methodological techniques.

The theory helps this study in rethinking the hitherto modalities adopted in engaging the environmental situation for sustainability in Nigeria. It helps to identify, interrogate, and resolve disparities between indigenous and Western knowledge systems (Ardill's 315). It aids the researcher in dismantling negative colonial consciousness on the outlay of Nigeria's understanding of the concepts of sustainability, development, and other variables that have besieged the journey to nationhood. Focusing on the environmental chaos in contemporary Nigeria, the researchers use the theory in their assessment of environmental issues and the peculiar impact on the future of the country. Accordingly, IST helps to interrogate the nature and impact of various approaches and methodologies that have been adopted in environmental issues and foregrounds the need to achieve what Omoera has conceptualised in a slightly different context of film as "painstaking aesthetic inward-looking attitude" to advance indigenous knowledge systems to facilitate awareness and change in theorizations and approaches to research in Africa (119).

The case of rebuilding earth's resilience in the guise of posthumanist consciousness has also been a lopsided one. Having been the agents of earth's pollution due to industrialization, missiles and nuclear weapons building and launching, crude oil politics, and unhealthy exploitation, dumping, and toxification of crude in the global South, the West has turned to these despoiled sites to take responsibility for rebuilding their land, human and seascapes. They treat the issue in ways that seem like all regions are responsible for their own pollution without attributing any blame to themselves. More so, they have, as they have often done, moved further to impose their methodologies on us to utilize in the campaign for environmental issues without considering the unique lifestyles and knowledge systems of others.

Perhaps, due to futures' studies' prediction of an impending apocalypse, the colonial masters have become genuinely concerned but as usual, blame the generality of humanity in all regions and locations of the world for their environmental transgressions. Africans for instance, had their unique ways of relating with and protecting their environment. If the goal of environmental protection is to "support the health of humankind and the rest of nature in their respective habitation" (Mwambazanbi 26), then Africa had a perfect structure going for them before the "clearing and cutting" (Ysabel Martinez 174) systems of colonial masters. The

methods adopted in Africa are cognitive of the agency and essence of environmental collaborators up to their spiritual agencies. The trees were not just felled for fun and leisure and the lands were not 'abused' during food production. In many African communities, the fallowing of land was a system that enabled the land to regain its lost nutrients.

Environmental issues in the global south have been closely linked to colonialism. There is no doubt that several years of Western conquest in these countries were characterized by the plundering of human, animal, plant, and environmental bodies. The slave trade, exportation, pesticides, crude oil discovery and exploitations, and building of railways and motorways were very instrumental to the exiling and pollution of several animal, human, seas, and land and air bodies from their natural environment. This thought aligns with that of Martinez who maintains that "the culprits of pollution are colonial mechanisms enforced by militarism and imperialism and that the right to pollute becomes the ultimate form of colonialism" (171). The post-colonial movement which the researchers read as merely a handover of oppressive regimes from foreigners to the landowners maintained the same status quo in managing resources and development outside the collective well-being of all occupants of the environment and their distinct roles. The mechanisms of the colonial masters were retained in politics and economics which increased capitalism and the wasting of environmental bodies. Scholars like Martinez observed the hierarchical structure of the world in the nomenclature of the global north and global south dichotomy, that the planet is increasingly and unequally polluted.

In addition, there is the idea that global south territories are more like what Bruce calls an "ecological wasteland" (par.1) following the toxification engendered by colonial conquest and sustained by postcolonial ideologies. Indeed, the 'clearing and cutting' of colonial masters have deprived nature of its rhythms and balance. The case of sustainable development regarding the environment as a postcolonial ideology does not suit the peculiarities of certain scenes in the theatre of environmental wasting and toxification in Nigeria. Just like all regions of the world are increasingly and unequally polluted, so it is with Nigeria; it is increasingly and unequally polluted. The oil-producing Niger Delta region, for instance, is environmentally devastated in ways that development seems like a curse to inhabitants of that area in the same way that sustainability for them is nothing short of 'hate speech.' Sustainability for them entails the maintenance of the systems and structures of polluted flora and fauna of the region in the same way that industries have defaced the creeks and waterways in Lagos, Onitsha, Aba, and several other cities in the name of industrialisation and modernisation.

Nigeria has pursued development, industrialization and world recognition in ways that are non-indigenous and the result is the recognition of the Niger Delta as "one of the most polluted places on earth. Life expectancy is just 41 years" (Mbachu par.4). Other parts of the country have also been impacted by severe environmental issues such as flooding, polluted water, high rising sea levels, and zoonotic diseases. Given the nature of the times we have entered, which Ziauddin Sardar calls "the postnormal times (435)," environmentally, we seem to have become more ignorant of

ourselves and our place in the world or perhaps, humanity is been overrun by an army of environmental forces, fighting several years of degradation and oppression. In line with the Indigenous Standpoint Theory, which the researchers also read as a decolonial tool the onus is on regions to look inward to evolve strategies for tackling their issues in their unique ways. As much as the researchers acknowledge that several governments have attempted to rewrite the ecological tragedy, it is also a thing to note that there have been loopholes in their approaches. Firstly, environmental issues are approached from a hierarchical standpoint emasculating the indigenes. The structures adopted deprive indigenes of their input and participation. Secondly, these approaches seem to play around colonialist ideologies that have not helped so far, such as amnesty, developmental projects, contracts, and aid. This approach seeks to offer ‘development projects’ in exchange for quality living in these regions either as a way for governments to mask their ignorance of the issue or their gullibility to critically process the impacts of long-term effects of the situation. This approach creates unwanted and complex dependencies on Eurocentric models to tackle national issues, which have continued to fail in Nigeria and other postcolonial states.

Indigenous Standpoint Theory (IST) teaches that “any appeal for self-sufficiency grounded solely on economics and good sense is doomed to fail” (Glissant 149) and research according to Choy and Woodlock should have cultural meaning and perspectives for the indigenous people and their communities (41). Against this background, therefore, there is a need to look inward and devise unique means to break all encrustation of colonial constructs about ourselves and our world. Such device(s) will dismantle the normalisation of wasting practices through continuous demands and reckonings; and provoke new consciousness about our activities on the planet. This article proposes the need to fall back on indigenous knowledge resources to rebuild our failing plant in Nigeria due to their inherent appeal and potential for pushing the environmental question from the domain of knowledge to the domain of feeling.” (Tolstoy 196). Indigenous knowledge resources such as dance and folktales can be used in confronting contemporary anthropocentric ideologies and cultivating stewardship in the human relationship to their environment. They could also be deployed in touching the attitudes of Nigerian (African) leaders whose gullibility has mortgaged the well-being of their communities and has (people, land, and sea) more vulnerable to complex and unwanted dependencies on colonial ideologies.

### **Environmental Concerns in Some Nigerian Indigenous Dances**

Dance is a medium of communication that entails the translation of the human body into codes that project intent and recognisable messages from dancers to their audiences. It is a “language which expresses the geographical locations, biological temperaments, religious beliefs, political and historical experiences of the people that own it” (Arinze 23). This conceptualisation makes indigenous dance in Nigeria, like other African countries, a “total performance” (Akas 69), such that incorporates key elements of traditional African theatre like masquerade, mime, painting, costumes, folktales, and dance. Dance, like any other African art form, commits individuals to being tools for projecting the norms and values of their society. In line with the

foregoing thought, we can apprehend indigenous Nigerian dances as indigenous knowledge and a projection of same to the members of the community.

Indigenous knowledge speaks to the accumulated knowledge and wisdom as well as the pedagogic modes of transference of traditions to communities based on socio-religious, political, and economic views of life. Hardly is there any aspect of African life that lacks expression in dance including the environment. Dance is interwoven in the fabric of African life: work, play, social, vocation, and religion. Human relationships with the environmental 'others' are also indexed in dances. Indigenous dance emerged as a result of man's attempt at establishing a relationship with the forces of nature. Therefore, "man interacts with the world through his body, which also acts as a sensory organ for him to pick up on and understand the rhythms and tensions of the world around him" (Hawkins 3). The environment is at the centre of all traditional norms and values in Africa. The various festivals are prayers of human elements to forces unseen for better living conditions in the environment. In the same vein, the various traditional norms and values are intended to guide and safeguard man's interactions with the human and environmental bodies. The cosmic and environmental foci of dance arguably gave rise to different forms of dance that abound in Nigeria and indeed the African continent. Akpan and Ekong assert that the environment greatly affects the movement, musical instruments, songs, costumes, and cosmetics in a creative endeavour like dance (11). Hence, all dances have their environmental roots or implications for indigenous communities. Even in the case of marriage and childbirth dances, the environmental implication is the continuity of race and balance of life on earth; maintaining the ecological order of existence.

Furthermore, the Egbenu-Oba, a traditional dance of the Ora-Eri people in Anambra State, Nigeria is a dance that reproduces and celebrates the experiences and exploits of hunters in their hunting expeditions. Hunting is an age-long indigenous vocation not just for the Igbo ethnic group but all indigenous peoples across Africa. It was a steady income stream that one could work at full-time. Hunting was used to gather meat from bush animals such as deer, antelopes, and grasscutters. They were also employed to get rid of dangerous wild animals, including wild bulls, warthogs, and leopards. Usually, Egbenu-Oba depicts hunters hunting with locally made rifles and cutlasses. The Egbenu-Oba is a manly dance with precise dancing moves that are akin to a real hunting experience. The issue for the researchers here is this; placing the scope of this dance and the current and future realities of the Anambra ecosystem (one of the fastest developing states in southeast Nigeria), what becomes of the fortunes of this dance amidst the burgeoning concerns of urbanism, infrastructure and development?



*Plate 1: Performance shots of the Egbenu-Oba Dance of Ora-Eri in Anambra State, Nigeria*

The dance is dependent on the existence of bushes and the availability of non-human communities that the colonially-hoisted ideology of development is fast taking away. This means that possibly in the next fifty years, given the current indexes of population increase and the implication on housing and infrastructure, Egbenu-Oba may soon suffer what the Ohafia War Dance suffered in contemporary times when there are no more wars to fight. In any case, the content and context of the dance is anthropogenic because it is a celebration of the exiling of non-human communities that constitute stakeholders in the ecosystem. Another case is the Ukwata dance of the Abbi people of Delta State Nigeria. This dance is central to the Ukwata festival which marks the transition in age groups and serves as a time to honour the land's ancestors. The festival also signifies the end of the Abbi people's yearly agricultural efforts and the start of a new growing season. Ukwata dance honours the benefits of water and all of its beauties. The dancers usually wear stunning blue and green costumes, and they imitate a variety of aquatic animals, including crocodiles, iguanas, fish and alligators. They create dance steps that allude to aquatic existence as well as the ancestry of these aquatic animals. The dance has an effect on the environment and spirituality of the community during the Ukwata festival.

The researchers' argument here is that: what is the 'future' of the Ukwata dance when the water bodies have been charred by oil spills and gas flares in that part of Delta State, Nigeria. What amount of life will the Abbi people still find in the water bodies in the next fifty years given the persistent environmental devastation in the area? The sordid environmental realities put these indigenous dances and cultural practices at the brink of unimportance because human life cannot be devoid of the environment. The quality of human life is a product of the quality of the environment; the level of ecosystem interaction tells on the life expectancy. In other words, our cultural practices including dances will make more sense when there are human beings to perform them and when the impetus for their performance is largely sustained particularly from the environmental standpoint.

### **Indigenous Dance and the Setbacks of Environmental Sustainability**

The salient environmental features and implications of indigenous dance were arguably truncated during colonialism. The alien intrusions into traditional knowledge systems in the fashion of religion, media, technologies, and formal education saw the crumbling



of indigenous structures from which the indigenous dances derived their bearing and impact. Religiously, the drifts from the shrines to the churches/mosques heavily impacted the perspectives of indigenes on their cosmic structures just as the formal education and technologies made the indigenes question long-held belief systems and practices as well as turn their backs on them. The researchers here do not imply that these intrusions are totally negative to the Nigerian society. Rather, they are of the view that their adoption was without critical interrogation on the overall impact on indigenous communities and the environment. Secondly, they are of the view that the new realities that were forced on us by colonialists were totally anti-tradition and by extension, anti-environment.

The core of indigenous life has been greatly punctured in ways that indigenous dance performances and other indigenous practices are seen as evil and paganistic since they do not meet up with the realities of contemporary aesthetics and functionality. Aesthetically in the sense that the various design patterns in their pure forms seem backward for today's audience especially Generation Z (those born between 1995 and 2012) and Generation Alpha (those born between 2013 and 2025). These generations of people have been enmeshed in a highly technological and chaotic world punctuated by cyber and environmental exposures and crises. The postnormal happenings in the world such as flooding, lead dumping, crude oil spills, gas flaring, microplastic toxicity and climate change have become daunting and persistent realities. The subject has attracted the attention of world governments and has also assumed a multidisciplinary stature wherein all disciplines have engaged with it in ways to provoke conversations around it. Given the imperilled nature of the government, climate change and other environmental issues appear 'too big' to be left in the hands of the Nigerian government alone.

Other arts like drama and music have to some extent contributed to the environmental discourse in Nigeria but the indigenous dance seems to be unconcerned perhaps as a result of ignorance or inability to navigate the art form into credible contributions to environmental conversations. Collard-Stokes aptly sums up this dilemma when she says that in discussions about the preservation and improvement of human ties with nature, the field of dance has largely gone unmentioned (par. 3). For her, this can be a result of a general lack of awareness or a failure on the part of dance(rs) to convey the breadth of their expertise in this area. Amidst the potential of indigenous dances to contribute to the ongoing conversations about rebuilding the earth's resilience, there are certain glitches. The human body is implicated in conversations about the environment. Anthropocentric ideologies figure humans as responsible for the depletion of the earth and the same body is the sole instrument for dance. In the ways that painting, drama, and music can be interrogated independently from their creators, the dance art is not so. The dancer is his/her dance and dance also, speaks about body essentialism. Therefore, in line with posthumanist tenets, the art of dance seems unfit to interrogate environmental issues.

Secondly, there is an issue with indigenous dance scholarship. Reactions in dance research in Nigeria began as responses to validate African dance forms as theatrical arts for early critics who never found anything of theatrical value in Africa

dance. Since then, much of the scholarly writings have focused on the semiotic or iconic qualities of dance and the functions of certain indigenous dance forms in society. These again, the writers of this article perceive, as colonial constructs to derail dance scholars into the constellation of all forms of dance into the umbrella of 'African dance' for the ease of identification and assessment while there is no concept up-to-date about 'Western dance.' This is partly the reason why indigenous dances have not developed in their various forms beyond validations as theatre in their own right. Hence, the seeming inability to address contemporary issues as observed by Collard-Stokes above. Certain scholars have attempted to focus more on the generalisations of African dance in their works to the peril of its various forms that abound in the various communities. This makes the expansion of the forms seem difficult as they lack a scholarly bases upon which to 'plant' the needed development. The seeming gap in the scholarship of African dance has further impaired the communicative and developmental potential of indigenous dance. On one hand, some scholars still feel that the indigenous dance forms must remain in their purest forms, devoid of Western encrustations. On the other hand, there is the opinion, according to Arnold Udoka that:

The purpose of dance in the society is to define an ideological focus and aid the citizenry in understanding, internalizing and relating with their environment. By so doing, participants in a culture are then predisposed to appreciate their bearing in relation to society. This understanding and internalizing processes assist the participants in the efforts to reconcile with the accepted pattern of behaviour and social interaction... the popular local performers in this regard are not responsive to the social needs of the society. Maybe because of ignorance ... culture by colonialism and subsequent social changes which demand more of repositioning rather than opposition. (286)

Udoka's position aligns with the thrust of this study in the sense that it creates room conceptually for indigenous dances to be flexible and attuned to emerging and prevailing realities in society. It is in this consciousness that the researchers criticise indigenous dance practitioners and scholars for the seeming relegation of the art form in the present scheme of things, including environmental discourse. Thus, dance is yet an untapped potential in environmental conversation on remediation/awareness of degraded sites and endangered fauna and flora ecosystems.

### **Adapting Indigenous Dances for Environmental Stewardship Advocacy**

Just like in times past, indigenous dance still has the potency to speak to current environmental realities. Its nature and appeal to emotional and psychological sensibilities can push environmental conversations from the domain of knowledge to the domain of feeling. Environmentally plundered landscapes such as the Caribbean and Philippines have begun evoking indigenous knowledge resources in remediating devastated landscapes. Nigeria needs to follow through with indigenous knowledge resources to first debunk colonial consciousness about the issues, critically analyse the nature and degree of polluted land and seascapes as well and make us take responsibility to ensure better living conditions for everyone. Indigenous dances, therefore, can aid this process when the issues around the engagement are scholarly

and practically tackled. Hence, the need to rethink the place of the body. As much as the human body is a metaphor for human chauvinism, it is the wrong way to conceive the human body. The human body itself is an ecosystem that consists of a large number of microbiomes. What this means is that a large portion of what makes up the human body is made up of non-human species. These microbiomes constitute the oldest forms of life on earth and their existence goes back more than 3.5 billion years. They have evolved with humans for the last six million years and have developed intricate interactions over time (“Human Microbiome” cited in Folke, Polasky, Rockstrom, and Galaz 834).

These microbiomes are necessary for human health and in turn, need the environment of the human body to survive. Therefore, dance forms could be created to project the relevance of environmental collaborators and the need to preserve them. In this regard, the several hunting dances that abound in Africa, for instance, could be retouched to rather than kill animals without considering their ecological agency, to protect and enforce animal rights so as to enable replenishment and contribute meaningfully to existence. This position highlights the importance of the non-human communities and foregrounds the need to “collaborate with the planet that is our home, and collaborate in a socially just and sustainable manner” (Folke, Polasky, Rockstrom, and Galaz 835).

Dance emerged out of prevailing environmental situations of society and must get its bearing by keeping in touch with emerging realities. Practitioners and scholars of indigenous dances should begin to manipulate dance materials or create new indigenous dance materials to address this great threat to humanity: the environmental issue. Adjusting existing forms may be seen, therefore, as puncturing the essence and identity of existing indigenous dance forms but in a critical sense. The researchers see this issue as yet a self-imposed colonization of ourselves and our future in the world. It is glaring that indigenous dances are fading as a result of the punctured essence of their existence due to colonial contact and the need to revive them through a kind of repositioning to address current realities to restore patronage and appeal of the indigenous dance forms.

In sticking to the ‘pureness’ of the indigenous dance forms, African dance practice and scholarship alienate themselves from the fleetingness of life or society. The reality of our times is in no way in concordance with the precolonial and early colonial societies. Advancement has occurred in several fronts. Geographical borders have been obliterated by technological advancement and there is a heavy traffic of cultures in and out of the Nigerian space. The case speaks to changing aesthetics between the precolonial society and now. Against this backdrop, insisting on pureness is another way to relegate the indigenous dance art form. What is needed is a critical repositioning of the art to be attuned to prevailing realities and the apocalypse is an apt subject to trigger this transposition. The various boat regatta performances and the Ukwata dance in the riverine areas of Nigeria can be retouched to speak to the detoxification and protection of sea bodies as well as the agency of the non-human lives that inhabit them. As a highly emotional art, dance can connect with the emotions of inhabitants, oil companies and governments towards a changed environmental

attitude from toxicity to remediation for sustainable development in the case of the Niger Delta region.

Social dances like the *Abigbo*, *Bongo* and *Odinala* dances and music in Imo State, Nigeria can be used in environmental awareness creation and consequent policy formation and reformation for environmental stewardship in Imo State and beyond. Issues about effective waste management, dumping and pollution of water bodies can become the thematic thrust of the *Abigbo* dance and music which will help interpret the impact of the environmental oppressive actions on the generality of life in the now and in the future. We can have dances that speak to the uncritical and unrelenting pursuit of 'WIERDing' against the concerns of their environmental impact and implications for the future in Nigeria. WEIRD which Siliezar, interprets as a 'Wealthy, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Developed' society (par. 6), is a colonial machination that was not critically analysed by countries like Nigeria. The aftermath of WEIRD pursuit is the colossal waste of human, air, land and water bodies evidenced in the growing hunger rate, industrial pollution of urban cities, the spread of zoonotic diseases, and a threatening biodiversity loss in virtually all regions of Nigeria. Indigenous dances have the efficacy for environmental positive impact when consciously utilised as decolonial tools.

### **Conclusion**

Indigenous dance practitioners and scholars must understand that in line with Adeoti "when dance travels across space and time as it often does, the aesthetics transform in response to the realities of the new destination while still bearing the marks of the old environment" (6). Adopting this consciousness in its entirety will not only aid in debunking rigid conceptualisations in the field of dance but will inform all aspects of indigenous knowledge in contemporary society. Today's realities, its contradictory, complex and chaotic nature exposes the folly of individualist approaches to existence and environment in Nigeria. Upon making some millions of naira in Nigeria, the next line of action is the 'clearing and tearing down' of nature in the name of building houses. Governments in the name of development care less about the environmental impacts of the projects. Corruption on the other hand has flawed the policies of government and industries to their environmental roles. These foreground the need for inward solutions to collective environmental issues and indigenous dance can aid in the campaign towards fostering the needed actions of stewardship to the environment in various communities. Its nature as a collective identity of a particular people gives it an edge over alien Western structures that have been hitherto explored and aimed at turning the country to a dump site for the West. Its ability to appeal to the emotional and aesthetic sensibilities of its hosts also impacts its communicative influence to drive and provoke environmental conversations in Nigeria and beyond.

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