
WAR DANCES AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES: A STUDY OF THE *OGBO* DANCE OF AHABA COMMUNITY IN DELTA STATE

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v23i1.4>

Abstract

Ritual Dance is an indispensable performance in the Ahaba community in Delta State because it serves as the connecting link between the world of the living, the dead, and the unborn. Unfortunately, ritual dance has received myopic interpretation as a performance that is totally against the Westernized belief system on morality and idolatry, thereby making some ritualistic dances go into extinction. This debased ideology on ritual dance triggered the aim of this study, to sensitize people that all ritual dances are culturally inspired. The researcher sets to examine the different iconic symbols used in the performance, which made each community where they existed stand out and to interrogate why these ageless ritualistic dances are going into extinction and the possible ways of reviving them. The methodology suitable for this research is descriptive and interpretative design methods, where the researcher will collect data and analysed them accordingly. The theoretical framework for this research is the Cultural Identification theory. Findings exposed how some people dread the selected dance because of its initiation style, form, beliefs cum principles, while some who are members already want to denounce their membership, thereby creating more worrisome impressions on the true image of the dance. In conclusion, ritual dance should not be written off out rightly as being mundane, but empirical studies make it communally appreciated and valued.

Historically Ahaba communities are made of warriors who fought for the safety of their community during the war. A lot of people were killed during the war by Ahaba warriors. But years later the blood of people they killed during wars started tormenting them and causing a lot of havoc among the warriors, especially when they retired. So Ogho ritual dance was introduced as a purification means to cleanse and separate the living warriors from the spirits of the dead.

Keywords: Ahaba Experiences, Ritual Purification, and Cultural Identification

Introduction

A critical historic view will guide one towards understanding Ahaba State, especially their lifestyle, belief system, cosmological events, and professional occupation. The Ahaba State was the notable capital city or headquarters of colonial masters during colonization. It was referred to as the Southern Nigeria Protectorate, which was founded in 1884. Ahaba as the headquarters of the colonial masters then gave room to these few developments: between 1886 and 1900, it hosted the Royal Nigeria Company which the colonial authorities set up to stimulate trade and the exportation of goods to England because Ahaba State was blessed with cash crops and mineral resources. These exports of crashed crops and mineral resources by the colonial masters using the Ahaba State River gave them notable publicity and brought in foreign goods for trade, though it was not in favor of the State. Ahaba State has a lot of communities/towns that made up what it is today: Warri, Agbor, Ugheli, Oleh, Ozoro,

Oghara, Sapele, Koko, Burutu, Okpanam, and Ogwashi-Ukwu. These communities/towns are blessed with rich cultural backgrounds. The unique nature of the rich cultural heritage did not differ so much among the communities, because they all shared the same ancestral and traditional administrative system, the same styles of dressing, festivals, music, and folklore. The Ahaba natives are well known for being hospitable, enlightened, resourceful, and hardworking. Geographically, the state presently covers a landmass of about 18,050 Km² and its longitude is between 5° 00' and 6° 04.5' east and latitude 5° 00' and 6° 03.0' north. It has a lot of common boundaries with some notable states in the country, such as Edo, Anambra, Bayelsa, and Benin. These shared boundaries affect its fluctuating climatic conditions at times from humid tropical in the South and sub-humid in the northeast, thereby changing the planting seasons in the various communities. Aside from the notable historic documentation of the Ahaba people, they are also good warriors who fight for the interest of their communities and territories. During the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970) thousands of young men and women were killed in Ahaba State. These massive killings forced those young men and women who were still alive then to seek more supernatural powers to protect their communities and territory from their enemies. One thing is highly indispensable about Ahaba State: natives believe so much in their traditional African religion. It is their strong belief in Traditional African Religion through their deities and medicine men/women that protected them from unforeseen circumstances and guided every decision taken towards governing the affairs of the state/communities. It was then that Ahaba was later changed to Asaba, according to Nnebisi, which means "I have chosen well".

The influence of Nnebisi on the development and tradition of modern Asaba is indispensable. The fact remains that Nnebisi did not like the fact that he did not belong to where he found himself and this gave rise to the change of name from Ahaba to Asaba. Nnebisi's bravado, kind heart, and moral stand will always be on the lips of the residents of Asaba people that is why the major road in Asaba is named after him. He also won several competitions and later rejected the prizes given to him on personal claims. Because of this claim, he went in search of his original community, with the help of an indigenous native doctor who fortified him against any unforeseen circumstances. The symbol for this fortification historically was done with a clay pot. He was told by the native doctor that during his search wherever the pot fell off his head and broke, he should know that, that point was his ancestral home. Nnebisi's departure was felt because he had been accepted, loved, and cherished by all. It was while he was about to cross the present River Niger in search of his homeland that the symbolic clay pot fell off his head and broke. That was when he knew that his ancestral home was immediately after the River Niger. But, he did not travel alone, rather he was in the company of a few relatives both male and female, who expanded the community through childbearing. To date, such massive expansion still exists in Asaba communities. To appreciate their chi's (gods) for saving and protecting surviving warriors, a special ritual dance was choreographed, especially for the warriors who fought greatly.

Ritual Dance Performance

The use of ritual dance performance as a communicative tool has remained an indispensable tool in Africa's cosmology. In the Igbo communities, it is greatly believed that for any ritual sacrifices to be confirmed acceptable by the gods, there must be dance, music, and festival, to prove that the gods are in support. Umar Habila Dadem observed that “Ritual is an interruption of ordinary linear time, a time-out- of time where the performer uses communicative dance and tools based on the communal cosmology to maintain and sustain the mythical pasts (29).

The use of dances during activities or ceremonies in our communities is a welcomed act and can be performed by anybody as a sign of socialization. But Ritual dance performance has gone from dance for all-comers affair to a serious act for a selected few. The selected few or initiates are not extraordinary people, rather they have made up their minds to become initiates, uphold the traditions, maintain its rules and regulations, and remain true ambassadors of the community. At this point of initiation, what matters most is not who you are, what you have, but rather your acceptability in your community and the ritual realm. Omigbule opined that "Ritual festivals serve as a connecting link between the living and the death. It is through the iconic festival (ritual festivals) that the living seeks blessing, guidance, and protection from their ancestral fathers in their day-to-day activities (before, during, and after the festival). In African cosmology, the dead are also part of the community especially the titled men among them so they must be respected and give all their due rights as if they are alive”. (48)

The level of spirituality in any ritual performance depends so much on its due process, which is usually in three-dimensional

transformation such as; Village Dance - Festive Dance and Ritual purification. In the entire three-dimensional process dance as an act has an impact on the natives at any point of contact. The various socio-communicative values embedded in them that present their various functions as, Village Dance, is simply any new dance merely for celebrations such as child-birth, marriage and chieftaincy titles, and coming of age. In village dance communicative interpretation is deemphasized, rather what matters most are aesthetics, body flexibility, and mastering of movement patterns which is totally against the sociological function of indigenous dance performances? Every dance at this stage must be able to use environmental factors as its creative metaphor. The festive dance, though the same as village dance in performance, is different in artistic ideology. The core artistic ideology for such performance is centered on a particular activity such as New Yam festivals, final burial rites, womanhood, and initiation into adulthood or masquerading. One unique thing about this performance is that members are selected and trained seriously for such performance. The major training given to members at this stage is to make them understand the guiding principles of the performance, most especially the things to do and not do, with that they will be respected in the community as custodians of the truth. Though, during the performance, aesthetics are inevitable, restricted solely to core members, unlike village dance. The ritual purification dance is seen as a dance for half-human and half spirits, for cleansing those who fought for the community against evil attacks, and for cleansing against those who have committed atrocities. Here, the dancers are strictly on

merit, ready to initiate and carry the symbol of authority till they die.

Westernization and its effects on ritual dance performance cannot be ruled out completely, but communities that still value ageless traditions do not give room for such performances going into extinction. The act of colonization transforms indigenous African tradition into a mere rural activity, barbaric and mundane, thereby forcing some people to isolate themselves during such ritualistic festivals and fault every process has been against western religion (Christianity). It is believed to be faulty because anything not done in the open, for everyone to see and partake in becomes evil and must be abolished. Morufu (2017) reaffirmed that "Ritualization is a way, an experimental way of going from inchoate to the expressive, from the sheerly pragmatic to the communicative. Hence in communal belief, it is a close relative of art, especially in performing arts."(20)

Ritual dance performance in its real sense is what differentiates the western tradition (of what ought to be) from African tradition (of what it is). So, in ritual dance performance though aesthetics is inevitable what matters most is the purpose, passion, and perception. With these mentioned, the communicative values in dances will be enjoyed beyond the syntax of the title.

Ritual Dance Performance and its Communal Values

The use of Ogho dance as a corrective, purification, and mode of cultural preservation has remained an indispensable tool in the Ahaba community in Delta State. Ogho dance performance did not just emerge out of mere creativity of the choreographer or originator, rather activities surrounding each performance talk

more about it. Akas (2014) opined that; ‘in order to appreciate indigenous dances based on its corrective measures, the spectators must always understand the mythology and cosmological attachment revolving around each performance’.(18). Etherton (1983) ascertained that; ‘the origin of each person in African Theatre depends solely on their performance, which made them who they are and its sociology essence as a corrective tool’.(45). From these assertions, indigenous dances do not pick their storylines for any type of dance performance, rather the environmental situation serves as an inspirational tool for the choreographer.

Indigenous Dance historically always portrays actions, beliefs, and ideologies of the community where it existed. Though some dances are merely ceremonial, seasonal performance for festive celebrations unites the people and their communal belief system. At this point, every community aims to project their indigenous dance especially based on its social effectiveness. It is this social effectiveness of any dance that differentiates one community from another, their mythology from another, and their cosmo-moral values from that of another community. In Olivia's(2016)words, “Our native dance should and must be coordinated in other to be valued and differentiated from western cultures, so, in Africa all their performances showcase who they are, who they want to be, and how they tried towards achieving it”.(47)

The communal value of Ogho dance performance can vary in various forms and styles in the Ahaba community such as:

1. It can be used as a means of warning against unforeseen circumstances about to befall the Ogho warriors. At this

point, some ritual performances go beyond the physical into the metaphysical, where ancestral spirits must be consulted before certain actions will take place. If not, the Ahaba community must bear the consequences.

2. It serves as a historical undertone in the Ahaba community. The historic essence of Ogho dance is not just for oral narration; rather it is to give detailed explanations of what gave rise to the Ogho dance performance in the Ahaba community starting from its origin, naming, and sustenance, which gives room for historic accuracy for easy documentation.
3. It serves as a cultural motivation. Westernization has affected the potency of indigenous performance especially dance to a good extent. People believe more in dancing and mastering westernized movements than cultural performances. The reason for this could be that such performances are more mundane, below fashion, and outdated, thereby encouraging many not to be initiates of their communal performance. But such myopic perceptions are a result of poor sensitization and indoctrination, thereby affecting the psyche of indigenes. But, with socio-communicative values fully x-rayed in indigenous dance, it will reawaken native consciousness towards understanding, appreciating, and cherishing their performances more.
4. It enhances cultural interpretations. In dance interpretation what seems to be ordinary ceases to be looked upon as ordinary rather what matters so much is the interpretative values. For instance, in some performances, the egg symbolically serves as a tool for destruction instead of

being a source of protein; the knife symbolically represents life in some performances, instead of being seen as a tool for war, while in some performances the use of water symbolically means a tool for communal creation other than being mere drinking water.

From the above mentioned, indigenous dances should be valued on socio-corrective principles and not mere aesthetics.

Identity Theory

It is on this theory that all the analysis and scholarly arguments with literary backups will be anchored. The essence of identity theory, beyond this research work, is always a means of giving a man a form of traceable origin, which can be identified through costume, food, language, music, dance, and tribal marks. These are what differentiate any culture from another irrespective of their mythological belief system.

The identity theory stands out always because it serves as the cultural compass based on four analytical 4Ws of (what - meaning findings, why- meaning Reason, where - meaning the actual locale, and when - meaning the timing). It is on this cardinal 4ws that Erick Erikson, a psychologist, propounded identity theory. Erick Erikson's (1950) identity Theory as cited by Yan (2018) states that; "Identity, either cultural or national, is a form of immigrant or ethnic groups. It has important implications for the self-development of the individual in the teenage period."(35)

The aim and desire of any rational being are to sustain and maintain his/her identity especially cultural-wise. In doing so, it helps in preserving, documenting, and attracting scholarly

research and debates. It is a belief in Africa that any culture that does not guide and protect its identity goes into extinction. Yan (2018) opined that: “No matter where people find themselves irrespective of their colour, profession or religious background. There must be a source of cultural identity which helps to develop self-esteem and high sense of belonging” (61).

It is freedom of association and identification as projected through the theory (identity theory) that helps to sustain our indigenous culture from not being bastardized. It is the individual self that will leave his/her comfort and go in search of who he is, what surrounded his or her existence, and how to become an initiate. It is through this structural process, that what seems to be mythical to non-initiate will be exposed, analyzed, and interpreted for initiates alone. Lustig (2019) observed that "identities especially that of culture are dynamic and they exist within a changing social context." (200). Erikson concurred that from the early developmental stages of a child, the identity of whom he is has been introduced to his cognitive reasoning, all that is required a little is nurture and guidance towards possible substance" (201). Therefore, Burke (2000) suggested that "the core area of identity theory is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role and the incorporation into the self of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance" (12).

From all the assertions in this research work, Erick Erikson's theory on identity, remains apt for understanding, interpreting, and appreciating the communicative values of the understudy beyond its communal existence and acceptability.

Impact of Westernization on Ogbo Dance of Ahaba Community

In the primordial era, the purification of the warriors is done with human heads and their blood. But the coming of the colonial masters changed a lot of things, Akas (2019) posits that "Westernization effects on culture is like chemical reactions in the laboratory, which the outcome can either give a positive result for a solution or negative results for more further research, debates and scholarly arguments."(36), from the assertion, like other cultures in Africa who either suffered positively or negatively from the colonial authorities' during colonialism in Africa, Ahaba community was not left out at all in such experience. Strong debates have emerged among scholars and natives on the side effects of westernization on their ageless, amongst some scholars in the Ahaba community westernization is a welcomed result, and while some natives still regret and believe that colonialist with their colonialism ideology changed their ageless. But this research will scholarly present the two sides of the coin.

Negative results of Westernization as seen by the natives:

1. Originality: The ritual dance performance by veteran warriors in the Ahaba community has its original style of performance, interpretation, and consultation before westernization. The structural process of doing things during the ritual performances was not just learned rather it was an ageless culture handed over from generation to generation. But the natives here felt bad that colonialism altered the originality.
2. Ritual: The ritual process here is very bloodthirsty and scary, but is only meant for men who are no longer ordinary but rather seen as half-human/half-spirit after

initiation. During the purification stage, fifteen heads of young men must be beheaded at a strike before one could be initiated and fully purified with the blood. But such was also altered and believed to be an ill act against humanity.

3. To be a member of this dreaded ritual dance performance was a thing of joy. The major criteria for becoming a member were that one must kill human beings during a war or fight to shed blood within and outside the community. Some young men in the community started causing problems, killing themselves, and destroying things just to be identified and initiated into the sacred veteran war dance of the Ahaba community. That barbaric act was also abolished on the grounds of religion.

The positive results as seen amongst scholars in the Ahaba community:

The colonialist came and discovered a lot of evil had been committed all in the name of tradition and culture. From the scholars, the colonialists and their westernization ideology were not to alter anything as earlier acclaimed by some natives through negative side effects, rather what the colonialist wanted was to modify things from bad to good. So they suggested the following;

1. Cultures and their originality can still be celebrated without scaring people away or forcing them to see them as something barbaric or not to be associated with.
2. Instead of killing people or making the festival bloodthirsty, there should be a substitute instead of human heads and blood, let animals be used

3. The colonialist introduced that to be an initiate if need be should go beyond killing people and destroying things, rather people's good deeds and humanitarian services should be a yardstick.
4. The colonialist suggested proper documentation of the Ahaba Veteran War dance performance to avoid losing the stories surrounding its existence.

Social Relevance of Ritual Dance on Veteran Warriors in Igboland

In Igbo cosmology, people are respected culturally based on their names, action, and activities. The names given to individuals in any community in Igbo land talk more about the situational events surrounding such a person on the day he was born. Chief Obieze (interviewed on 4th July) said that “the name "Dike" in Igboland is given to someone who has fought wars, be it local wars, community wars, or the almighty Biafra war". He further added that “activities and actions of such dikes, must involve real blood and imagery illusions of spirits disturbing after wars before such a person can be identified as a Veteran warrior.”(Personal Communication).

The Veteran warriors in the Ahaba community are people who believed that it is better to die than to live in a community where the natives are suffering, humiliated, and tagged as weaklings because of the belief that no strong man (warrior) exists from that community or household. Chief Obieze (interviewed) opined that “the veteran warriors from Ahaba community choose names based on symbolic situation, events or

action to prove their brevity. Such names are Obiagu(lion's heart) Otamgbo(eater of a bullet) Aka Egbe(Hand of Gun) and Ikpa ike (Bag of power). These Veteran Warriors went the extra mile to acquire and sustain these names. Chief Ike Mma (interviewed on 6th June 2020) posits that "to be a Veteran warrior in Igboland and acquire any name is far beyond reading the bible or saying the rosary, as our colonialist who brought their religion and forced it on us made us believe. Typically, a veteran warrior must be ready to use our indigenous charms, visit oracles and make a promise, so that he will return alive" He stated that "for him not to be misinterpreted wrongly, those who are highly fortified and followed the due process are tagged fallen heroes and must be remembered, while those who chickened out die both physically and spiritually with their names and will not be remembered at all"

Though these brave Veteran Warriors fought, protected, and died for their communities during wars, the aftermath of the wars tormented some of them seriously and extended to their generation the living and yet unborn too. Thereby forcing some of them to ask their "chi" a lot of rhetorical questions such as; (a) did they do anything wrong fighting for their community (b) why are they being tormented by the spirits of those whom they fought (c) why is the punishment being extended to their generation who are innocent of their sins and (d) what is rescue remedy.

The above rhetorical questions and the search for an answer gave rise to the socio-effectiveness of the ritual dance performance, especially in the two communities studied. At a point, some of the Veteran Warriors in these communities (Ogbo in Asaba Delta State and Obinagu in Enugu State), were said to have died mysteriously and while the ones who were alive were

afraid to die. Hence, ritual dance performance came as a remedy based on the following socio-effectiveness.

- A. To cleanse the Veteran Warriors of all the bloodstains they acquired during the battle.
- B. to appease the gods, especially for those who failed to maintain their annual sacrifice to their individual "Chi" (gods)
- C. To appease and plead with their "Chi" to guide and direct them in their new way of life, since they can no longer engage in wars due to age.
- D. They also use it to showcase the bravery of the Warriors while they were still in active service, invariably making the ritual dance a form of initiation for veterans only.
- E. To plead with their "Chi" on behalf of any of their children that decides to follow their footsteps, so that the "Chi" would protect the said child until he becomes an initiate.

It is on the above that the effectiveness of the ritual dance performances understudied remains sacrosanct where they exist.

An Appraisal of Ogbo Veteran Ritual War Dance

The Ogbo veteran ritual war dance is a very symbolic dance amongst the men of the Ahaba community in Asaba Delta state, who fought the Great War called "Agha Ekumeku" between Benin and Asaba people. The "Agha Ekumeku" was a great and bloody war that cannot be forgotten in a hurry. According to Igwe Ejima Okogba (when interviewed), the memory of "Agha Ekumeku" still brings tears to our eyes, especially the likes of myself and some others who fought in that battle, lost a lot of

friends and colleagues who were then a part of the Biafra-Nigerian Army.” He further stated that “the name of this veteran ritual war dance did not just emerge; rather a very tragic situation gave rise to it”. After the battle between the Asaba people and the Benin people, the commanding officer (Adaïke) stole the chair of Oba Benin as a piece of evidence to portray total victory. When he carried the seat as the commanding officer with his soldiers, they were all rejoicing, singing, and dancing. Within five seconds, a bullet from nowhere hit the late Captain Adaïke behind, he fell and died immediately. It immediately stopped the celebration and all his soldiers came back in tears, carrying his dead body and the symbolic staff of office (a stool called Ogbo) of the Benin people specially designed for their kings while still serving.

Igwe Ejima Okogba (interviewed on 3rd August 2020 at his palace in Ahaba community) still explained that “On sighting the chair of authority called “Ogbo” the entire community was happy that Late Captain Adaïke had done well with his soldiers. But when they later saw another set of soldiers carrying the dead body of Late Captain Adaïke; it changed the mood of everyone into instant tears. But the rule then was when such a soldier dies (commanding officer), his death would not be announced till some ritual consultation has been carried out. On hearing this, all the great warriors (veterans) who had fought for the community both past and present, were sent out for the consultation.

After three days, they returned saying that a special initiation dance festival must be set aside according to the oracle consulted, as a form of purification for all who fought in that war (to cleanse themselves from the blood of people they killed). The initiation dance festival was also necessary for anybody who might have killed somebody in one way or another. Also, the

initiation dance festival was needed for purification in case of death of any great warrior, so he can be accepted in the land of the dead. Lastly, according to Igwe Ejima Okogbo (interviewed), Late Captain Adaike was given the title of Ogbo. To make this title, the warrior dead or alive must sit down on the iconic stool. The sitting of the dead or alive person during the initiation Purification Ritual War Dance is to showcase the following;

1. The warrior dead/alive remains a great ambassador in the community.
2. On no account will an initiate of the dance be buried lying down again. The initiate must be buried sitting down.
3. To calm the spirits of those killed that it was not done intentionally but rather as a means of defense.
4. To remind them that though the war was over, they should always speak the truth.

Processes/Requirements during Ogbo Veteran Ritual War Dance

1. Initiation:

According to Igwe Ejima Okogba (interviewed), “The initiation ceremony into this great ritual dance/purification does not have any age limit or barrier, the simple rule is, the initiate must have/has killed someone. He must be an initiate or the spirit of the dead person(s) will come after him and on no account will he be successful in any of his dealings”. He further added that “In a situation whereby a male child is born in Ahaba community in Delta State and his father or great father was a warrior (veteran), that child must be a member into the ritual dance/purification.

Igwe Ejima Okogba (interviewed) maintained that “During the initiation, the initiates are not allowed to eat, drink or make love with wives. The reason for such is that the spirits of the dead ones are not happy. So, if allowed to do such, they kill them, since they are spirits and the initiates are still human and cannot fight back. Also, their wives will run mad.

He further stated that “During the initiation process proper, the initiate will be covered with their indigenous white wrapper and poured different strong locally made dried gin. A lot of people die during the initiation, while only the strong ones can endure till the end. The essence of making the covering of the face airtight is to remind the great warriors of two things during the initiation process such as that:

1. They are alive and survived the war front.
2. Those who are dead struggled to be alive/stay alive but could not make it.



The sacred cloth used in covering an initiate’s face is shown in figure 1.

2) The Stool

Igwe Ejima (interviewed) opined that “The stool chair is very symbolic and every initiate dead/alive must be buried seated on stool” (Personal Communication). He said the reason for such a symbolic burial seating and seating after initiation with the staff of the office is to showcase the following:

1. To show the initiate either dead/alive is a warrior for life.
2. To showcase that though retired but not tired, in case of an emergency he can be called upon to fight back.
3. To calm the spirits of those killed that it wasn't intentional but rather an act of defence.
4. To be able to have a say and be accepted in the ancestral world.

It is on this account that the stool remains sacred only for initiates and it is shown in figure 2.



Igwe Ejima Okogba sitting on the stool and with the staff as a full initiate in figure 2.

The Staff of Office

The staff, as shown in figure 3, is in the form of a spear different from other notable staff of office in Nigeria traditional ruler's context. The essence of using the spear-like staff is to equip the initiates with an easy weapon in case of an unforeseen circumstance. It is an abomination to catch a great warrior of the Ahaba community unaware of any battle-like situation. Igwe Ejima Okogba (interviewed) added that "he is expected to confront his enemies immediately before seeking more advanced weapons".



Plate 3: The spear-like staff

The Costume

The major costume for this ritual war dance is a red cap with feathers and a white wrapper (See figure 4). The two colors are very symbolic and, the part of the body they are worn is symbolic as well. The red cap with feathers signifies the number of persons each warrior killed to stay alive during the battle. Also, the red cap that has been worn on the head signifies “true repentance and a sincere pledge that he won’t kill or fight again rather dialogue will be the best option”.

The white costume shows true acceptance and a search for peace rather than a fight. Igwe Ejima Okogba (interviewed) said that “The white costume shows they have been forgiven and cleansed of the blood of the dead people” (Personal Communication) so, they are now recognized as ambassadors of peace. The reason why the white wrapper is worn on the lower part of the body (waist region) is that that is the part of the body they used in fighting, running, and hiding from their enemies. After the atonement and acceptance, they expected to be agents of peace.



Plate 4: Ogbo initiate in his full regalia

The Coins

It is an iconic way of trade to buy peace from the land of the spirit. The coins must be dropped on the floor with some incantations before the ritual initiation begins. The reason is, that

it serves as a tool to invite the dead spirits, especially those once who are still angry that their death was untimely. The initiates use the money to appease them and drop some on the floor on them, to encourage them to use it and buy anything they want. The coins automatically calm the spirit from harming them and their great-grandchildren in the future. An example of coins is seen in figure 5.



Plate 5: The iconic coins use during the initiation ceremony

Dance Movement

The dance movement here is individually stylized. It is so because every veteran warrior is expected to display his style of fighting war during his active service. So at this point, they are allowed to pattern their dance movement from any angle. However, the majority of either individualized or patterned movements are always chronometric. At this point, dance is all ramifications that

serve as a means of measurement of culture, thereby making the movements solely for initiates of the Ogbo ritual war dance in the Ahaba community as a means of cultural identification.

Medicinal Herbs

It is mixed and given to all initiates before and after initiation because it will help them withstand the pains during the process, while it serves as a healing tool for those who might have sustained injuries during the process. Beyond these, this medicinal herb can be used to heal some ailments such as; headache, malaria, poor sexual performance, back pains, and memory issues. It must be administered by a senior initiate to maintain its potency. Figure 6 shows an example of sacred medicinal herbs.



Recommendations

1. The government of Delta state should employ dance scholars who would document such historic dance.

2. The people of the Ahaba community should not be running away from Ogho dance as being barbaric because is their only means of cultural identity.
3. Dance scholars should be encouraged to start studying minor dances in rural communities because it will help in publicizing such performances.
4. Parents in the Ahaba community in Delta State should always use oral tradition to tell their children historic facts so that they will be well-grounded with the necessary information.

Conclusion

The side effect of westernization on ritual dance performance in Africa has remained a dreaded disease that requires serious medical attention. The essence of the clarion call is not to allow the values, potentiality, and usefulness of indigenous veteran ritual war dance of the Ahaba community to go into extinction all in the name of westernized ideologies. Though the colonialists argued strongly that, they did not come to alter our tradition and culture, but rather to make positive, meaningful, and creative suggestions. So, in that same spirit and against all odds, originality should be strongly maintained but modified little to accommodate all. The value of any dance performance in an indigenous African setting should be on the communicative essence and cultural identification. The cultural identification tools at any point if well-identified such as the ones analyzed in the dance understudy will always give the community (Ahaba) a real sense of belonging. This sense of belonging helps to erase the myopic assumption of seeing ritual dances as being a fetish. Such

an assumption is disheartening because they fought for the interest of the community and deserve superior treatment. This paper, therefore, concludes by saying, the ritual dance performance is/has remained an indispensable tool for purification, healing, and otherwise. What is of the essence in African cultural society through research is to move available information documented on ritual war dances from the private domain (communal) to the public domain for easy accessibility, understanding, and appreciation.

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August 2020)

Chief Ike MMA (Palace Chief 6th June 2020) Anambra state

Chief Obieze (palace chief 4th July 2020) Anambra state