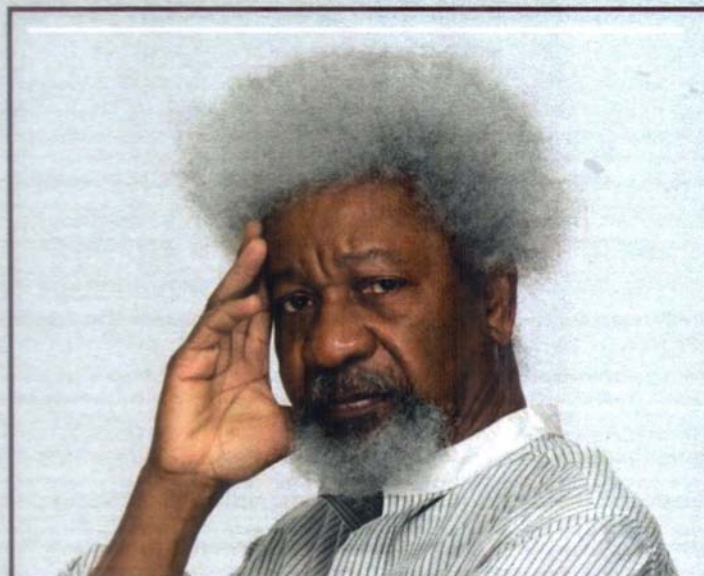




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OBAFEMI AWOLowo UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA.**



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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BODY AS ARCHIVE AND MEMORY: A STUDY OF FISHERMEN AND IKEDE DANCES

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ABSTRACT

This work analyzes one of the important roles of the body which is to conserve or memorialize, to keep practices for future references and use.

Using the qualitative research method and participant's observation as tools, this paper explains the importance of dance in human society, that is, the social function of dance as a human activity. Although most people see dance as what everyone can do, dance in the real sense goes beyond bodily movements that human beings engage in every day. This research looks at two selected Nigerian dances: Fishermen and Ikede dances as they embody some specific cultural practices without neglecting the fact that culture is not static.

The Ikede dance is a traditional dance of the Ebira people of Kogi State which portrays the art of local weaving. Although it is created and performed within Ebira context, it is a practice that is common to some other people in Nigeria like the Tiv, Egons, and Yorubas etc. These two dances form the basis of analysis in this study. The analysis is based on the performance of these dances by the Kogi State Troupe.

Key Words: *Dance, Body, Memory, Archive and Culture*

The Body as Archive and Memory

Dance is the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy or simply taking delight in the movement itself. Also, it is a powerful impulse, channeled by skillful performers into something that becomes intensely expressive and that may delight spectators who feel no wish to dance themselves. (Mackrell, 1165). Dance, according to Vukadinovic,

is a specific type of human, complex and highly articulated movement, deliberately and systematically cultivated for its own sake, or in other words, as system of organized and formalized movements conveying a meaning which an artist expresses consciously and transfers to a spectator on purpose. It is inextricably bound to the importance of dancing context in which the attendance of spectators is essential. (2011:393)

Dance, from a philosopher's point of view, is an aspect of art that deals with artistic expression which according to Fiebleman (40) is one of the seven traditionally accepted fine arts, with a basic concern and medium of expression. He opines that dance "is that art which

deals with the motions of the human body” (Kraus, et al: 13). On the other hand, however, philosophers, like Thomas Munroe, project dance as an art of successive perception (Kraus, et al: 15). Apart from viewing dance as an artistic expression, dance is also seen as a means of emotional expression, a method of non-verbal communication that has a societal role. Sociologists and cultural historians like Curt Sachs see dance as an art that takes many forms and have pointed out that in many cultures dance is profoundly an important social experience for all ages and gender. Following one of the theories of origins of art, Kraus et al call dance, “the collective unconscious which grows out of the history, traditions, myths, and primordial images of a people”. (19)

Dance is mostly seen as one art form that deserves no professional training because it is largely believed that dance is something everyone can do with little or no training. Therefore, often times, triviality is accorded to it even among learned individuals if one declares an interest in studying dance at advanced academic levels. People believe that dance is simply for keeping fit and as a means of entertainment. Although entertainment is the primary function of every art and it is from this that other functions emerge, this research explores another face of dance in human society.

Extensively, dance serves as a purgation of feeling thereby serving as therapeutic channel for individuals with emotional and mental challenges. Mackrell, Judith opines that:

People often dance as a way of powerful feelings, such as sudden accesses of high spirits of joy, impatience or anger which is seen not only in the spontaneous skipping, stamping and jumping but also in the more formalized movements of “set” dances like tribal war dances or festive folk dance. Dance often involves movement being taken to an extreme, with for instance, the arms being flung or stretched out, the head lifted back and the body arched or twisted. It also sometimes involves a special effort or stylization such as high kicks, leaps or measured walks which tend to be organized into a spatial or rhythmic pattern, tracing lines or circles on the ground, following a certain order of steps or conforming to a pattern of regular accents or stresses (10).

All the above mentioned characteristics alongside other inputs like costumes and make-up in dance gives it the beauty that is seen and appreciated as a work of art. Aesthetics of dance is an experience, a particular state of mind that is characterized by a focus on a certain object which engages and fascinates a subject, whereas all other actions in the environment are excluded from consciousness (Vukadinovic, 2011). Aesthetics in dance is one of the factors that differentiate dance from ordinary straightforward everyday movements of the human body. This way a dance movement involving a jump or leap will not just be ordinary but stylized to make it beautiful and attractive to behold. The beauty of dance enables it to function socially in various capacities, primarily entertaining an audience. Dance serves great purpose in ritual and ceremonial capacities too. The audience first considers the beauty of the performance before thinking of whatever message or other functions it may perform, like fostering communal unity, teaching morals and values, being used in social gatherings, promoting cultural identity and memorializing cultural practices.

While not trying to attempt to disrupt instituted facts that entertainment is the core of every dance performance, it is however expedient to emphasize that there are more important

functions dance can perform in the society. Among them is the archiving and 'memorialization' of cultural essences. An archive is an integral part of literate and social life and is in the custody of political institutions for their historical value. Societies that lack the faculty of recording histories contribute to the archive-making process in a different context. Archive making in pre-colonial and partly in colonial Africa was mainly a verbal act. History and stories were recounted mainly through verbal articulation. Africans had other ways of storing information and data which is not in any way voluntary. Justifying this claim, Carol L. Bernstein (3) opines that "although the cultural memory of a group constitutes a history, that history may not coincide with what are regarded as objective facts. Once construed as an art or a practice, *memory* (both individual and collective) and its transmission have become the objects of historical and psychoanalytic study". To memorialize is to keep in memory so that it can be kept alive for future generations. Whatever is to be memorialized is an important aspect of an existence. Ahmed Yerima (2007) submits that "dance is used to write the history of people." This is chiefly because events can be woven into dances that can be performed every time when that aspect of history is to be recalled for any purpose. He also sees dance as a way of representing the identity and the experiences of the people of a particular area. Elucidating further, he says:

Through the body, dance uses the emphasis of areas of the body as metaphors and symbols. Specific parts of the body are used to reveal the history of the people, theft occupational engagement and theft environment. For example, if they live by the river, the shapes, angles, the costumes, the music and even their colours, become symbols which emerge from the river or sea. If they live by the rocks, or hills, the feet movement the jumps, the raising of the shoulders, the hand gestures, all point to the immediate environment of mountain climbing or long years of surviving by the rocks. (Yerima, 124-125).

Cultural practices, when not preserved prompts the loss of an identity. Since cultural practices are germane to the progressive nature of human societies, they must be preserved through an equally important means; and dance being a part of life which involves human bodily participation serves as an appropriate archive of identities and cultural practices.

The human body has the ability to remember anything that it experiences in form of sound, smell, touch, taste and movement According to Lia Mack,

...these memories are neither held in your body nor locked somewhere in the recesses of your brain but held instead in your cells, all the way down at the cellular level. The cells store memories-information about every experience our bodies have ever been involved in, be it good or bad. Our muscles, skin, tendons and nerves remember every experience (2011: 10)

The movements are stored in parts of the body that are involved in expressing such movements and can be recalled as the need arises with just a little trigger. Storage of things in human memory is not as a chip inserted under the skin but the ability of such parts of the body to quickly reactivate movements that have over time become part and parcel of

everyday life. Lia Mack (2011) further states that sometimes our body memories are involuntary.

In body memory, the situations and actions experienced in the past are, as it were, all fused together without any of them standing out individually. Through the repetition and superimposition of experiences, a habit structure has been formed: well-practiced motion sequences, repeatedly perceived gestalten, forms of actions and interactions have become an implicit bodily knowledge and skill. Body memory does not take one back to the past, but conveys an implicit effectiveness of the past in the present (15).

Kate Daigle (2019) is of the opinion that the body never really forgets. It remembers anything that it has once encountered because it is trapped in the tendons and muscles of a person's body. The body remembers all bodily images, bodily harm, and even mental anguish. Considering the fact earlier established that the body never really forgets, it means that the body has the ability to remember dance movements of any sort. Dances, therefore, as a codified and stylized movement, can be used to archive experience and practices. Andre Lepecki (32) argues that most contemporary choreographers are beginning to experiment with old steps, gestures, images, sounds that were performed by past dancers and choreographers. This is body memory, and it is different from mental memory. He also argues that for good re-enactment of dances to take place, there must be specific will to archive those movements, so that the body can comfortably remember them. Buckland submits that

It can be argued that dance has a particular propensity to foreground cultural memory as embodied practice by virtue of its predominantly somatic modes of transmission. Indeed, in traditional forms of dance display, it could be argued that longevity of human memory is publicly enacted, demonstrating the ethereality of human existence and the continuity of human experience, as successive generations re-present the dancing. (1)

If the body can remember dance movements for a very long time, it therefore means that the movements that represent values, experiences, practices that are important to the community will never be forgotten. This therefore calls for the need for such dances to be taught to all members of the society because it will help preserve such practices. This research is not forgetting the fact that some of the dancers will never have to practice what they are preserving in dances, but it will live on in their bodies and the practice and values will never be forgotten. This research also accepts the fact that movements patterns can change with time, but this is not to say that what they represent is changing.

The Human Body and Movement

Dance cannot exist without the human body. The human body is synonymous with movement. All human activities are hinged on movements. Human beings move to accomplish daily goals. Human movement can either be conscious or unconscious but movement here refers to the conscious ones that the body makes in time and space. Not all human movements are spontaneous, voluntary or learned through observations, but some

need to be taught, learned and practised by the human body. According to J.K Horton and H. Keller,

...a blind child may not be able to learn how to run by observation, he might hear the word run in a conversation and realize it is the body movement of walking fast, but that does not tell him how the body moves when running. He may have to be shown how the legs move, how the arms move or the different movements of the body makes while running (15)

Learning how to run is not restricted to the blind child/person alone but to every child. Horton and Keller further state that

although running is not formally taught to the child and sighted children learn by watching and trial and error, some movements may be learned like jumping, hopping, skipping, marching, rolling, leaping, balance, turning, posture, crab walk, bear walk, duck walk, bird walk, frog hop, different human walks, spinning, wheelbarrow, sit-ups, knee bends, jumping jacks, twisting, one-foot hopping, and other necessary movements. (16)

In the light of this, it suffices to say that there is a conscious effort by the body to learn and teach body movements that eventually form the basis of an art like dance. The human body therefore can be referred to as the medium of expression of movements of all sorts. The expression of these movements following a rhythmic pattern is what we now refer to as dance. Dance cannot exist without these movements because they are the raw materials used by dance designers in the process of creation. The body becomes the medium for processing and finally producing dance: “the body is the major source of communication with which we correspond with each other and interact with objects” (Smith, 80).

The Body as Archive and Memory

The body as an important means of expression and communication serves as a proper means of cultural practices including dance movements. According to Smith, “the body is the key to understanding culture and society. The body absorbs the way humans exist and the understanding of the culture around us develops the human’s self-image” (80) Without the body, thought processes are limited. The mind cannot be divorced from the body where memory is concerned. Due to the fact that the body has the cultural behaviour stored in it, man is able to relate with each other easily and identify mostly with those who exhibit the same behaviour as his, and this therefore fosters cultural identification and unification. This is because the behaviour is seen as special, sacred and peculiar to them that own and practise it. Thus, Smith states that,

Cultures consist of components that are individual, unique qualities embodied into a single society, resulting in an exclusive approach to tradition and way of life. Humans relate to each other by identifying characteristics that they are familiar with and that coincide with their culture. Subsequently, gestures and ways of moving are repeatedly copied over time, thus becoming the essence of a cultural being (80).

Human memory, where the body is concerned, is divided into two distinct categories: implicit and explicit/declarative memories. Fuchs argues that implicit memory is an accumulation of

erstwhile bodily experiences which are gathered unconsciously and have become a significant part of an individual. Therefore, any human, irrespective of status and nature of development accumulate skills which are called upon involuntarily. Thus Fush states that

...obviously there is a memory of the body apart from conscious recollection: Through repetition and exercise, a habit has developed. Long-trained patterns of movement and perception have been embodied as skills or faculties that we practice as a matter-of-course in our everyday life the upright gait, the ability of speaking, reading or writing, and the handling of instruments such as a bicycle or a piano (84).

Dance functions as a veritable cultural archive in Africa because most African dances carry one or more cultural behaviour and practices. This is because in Africa, dances are part of daily life experiences and activities like the pounding of yam, tinning, hunting and others which are woven into occupational dances. Hanna says that

African dance is a cultural behaviour, determined by the values, attitudes and beliefs of a people. Nations including Cameroun, Dahomey, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zaire, and Zambia send their own national dance companies or ad *hoc* groups abroad to project the national image and cultural identity through dance (167) .

Since our dances speak volumes about our values and beliefs, such dances can be used as means of reserving and keeping these values and beliefs.

When the body dances therefore, it brings out the practices that it has embodied over time in order to showcase these practices and make them available for others to learn from. Through this process of showcasing these cultural practices, the audience who can relate with these practices also learn them and in turn embody them. The circle of memorializing cultural practices then continues from one generation to another. The weaving culture of the Ebiraland people of Kogi state is being kept alive in the Ikede dance. This helps children and people who are not opportune to learn the actual practice to still have an idea of what weaving is all about. The same goes for fishing practice; one learns the processes of fishing and gets acquainted with the paraphernalia and their uses.

The Cultural Importance of Fishermen and Ikede Dances

The cultural importance of the Fishermen and the Ikede dances which is the focus here cannot be overemphasized. The fishermen dance in its purest form can be traced back to the traditions of the Egun and Badagry people of Nigeria who are predominantly in the business of fishing. The dance, as is found in the repertoire of the National Troupe of Nigeria, is choreographed by the first head of the troupe, Hubert Ogunde, in the 1970s using various dance steps which he strung together with fishermen's professional props. According to Adavi Abraham, one of the pioneer members of the troupe, Ogunde, on a journey to Ghana en route Badagry, witnessed a lot of dance performances, such as the Agbeko, Sato and the Fishermen dance. He however picked interest in the fishermen dance because of its uniqueness. He reworked through the dance using the various movements he has seen. With

his artistic knowledge he first experimented with his troupe, which at the time consisted mainly his family members.

The Fishermen Dance

This description is as choreographed by Hubert Ogunde and performed by the Kogi State Cultural Troupe in 2013 at Confluence Cable Television Studio. The fishermen dance starts with a song while the stage is bare.

Song:

Aloje, eye dhure aye eee
Afofe, eyé dureḍoo, eye dure alofe
Alofeooo, eye dure osere
Oro alofe,
Oluwa mi bi mofeolaya
Mama da mi oaò, eye dure aye eec
Aloje, eye dureooo
Eye durealofe,
Alofe ooo eýe dure o sere
Oro afofe,
Olowa mi bi mofeoloko
Mama da miooo,
Eye dure aye

At the end of the song comes the fast rhythm of the drums and the female dancers storming the stage, each holding a basket with both hands which is thrown from left to right in very fast paces. They make a circular formation while stamping their feet rhythmically as they lower the basket inside the circle and lift it up and then outside the circle and lift it up. This movement represents the packing of fishes from the river.

They place the baskets on their heads and without holding them rub their palms together in a movement connoting thanking God for the successes achieved in their occupation. This is better understood with the song that follows and the movement of celebration as they show the baskets to their audience left, right and centre before dropping them to move their waists gracefully to the song. The song is to remind themselves that this fishing occupation helps them fend for their children who in future will also fend for them and bring *gele* (big head-tie) for them. Literally, the song means 'give a child delicious soup to eat, the world praises a beautiful thing'.

Song:

Efomo lo be to dun ta ye je ooo demonstrates the different processes and procedures of weaving, but the dance as performed by the Kogi State Troupe does not use any of the props. Rather they are mimed. One can still see them and understand what the movements mean, especially for the owners of this weaving practice.

Ikede Dance

The dance opens with an Ebirá song that admonishes people to showcase their work and mind it because that is how they can fend for themselves. This description is the Ikede dance

as performed by the Kogi State Cultural Troupe in 2013 at Confluence Cable Television Studio.

Otoni mi nyin
Enive ne tha
Otoni mi nyin
Enive ne thaooo
Onyavo nu koro
Onyavosohu
Onyavo dare
Eviwhe huonukoro rēsa
Evi he so hu, osohuni ne nisi ne ha
Mu koruwoooo, ewere mu koruwoeee
Ola mo no nieee, otamo no ni
Ewere mu koruwoooo

Dancers come on stage in pairs of male and female. The movement here involves the gliding of the legs backward and forward. The hands too are swung back and front. The movements are graceful, elegant, feminine and without high dynamics, though the dance is performed by male and female dancers. The dancers form two parallel lines with the female dancers in front and the male dancers behind. With a cue from the drums, they move to form an arc. From the centre, the male and female dancers cross, forming an 'X' shape to fill the stage. They do a movement here that involves the wriggling of the body and the waist from side to side, moving back to form two parallel lines, the females behind and the males in front. With another cue from the drum, the female dancers begin the real movement which is a movement that involves bending the torso forward, raising the shoulders high in alternation of the left and right hands. The hands move from side to side and then upward and downward, showing the passing of the 'Ipechi' — the shuttle with thread and the use of 'okaha' — the beater to beat or compress the yarn or thread before passing the shuttle again. This is the real weaving. This movement is described thus according to Sum "with the torso bent forward, shoulders raised high in alternation with the left and right hands which are moved from side to side and upward and downward, the dancers gesture and move to Ikede rhythmic drumming while showing how weaving of Ebirá traditional cloth is done in Ebiráland".

Among some groups like Aminetu, the dancers also combine arm movements with the alternating stepping and gliding movements of the feet to register the processing of cotton wool into weavable thread. This is done with the appropriate props in hand. The male dancers also move forward to repeat these movements. The male and female dancers then do another movement that involves the wriggling of the body as they move back and forward and finally leave the stage in pairs. The male dancers in the Ikede dance are there to appraise, appreciate, give moral support and to celebrate with the female dancers since the practice is mostly for the women folk and only a few men venture into weaving as a trade in the Ebirá community.

Dance is a living culture that only exists through a living body. And like every other aspect of human existence, dance is not static but open to the dynamics of change overtime.

Therefore, when we recall them in the present, we must not forget that change has occurred in the society. This is why we must rework these dance movements in a way that they will still be appealing to the audience. According to O.R. Bakare (73). "Cultural practices do change and must of necessity change. This is the essence of development. There cannot be sustainable development without some changes". The practices we build into dances are no exception when change is being referred to but the important movements must be reworked in a way that the changed society will still appreciate them. The body is dance because dance does not and cannot exist without the body. The human body is the industry, the factory, manufacturer and product itself. This is because the human body is a living body that conceives the creative idea, carries the movement, demonstrates it and lives it.

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