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***AMA: JOURNAL OF THEATRE AND CULTURAL STUDIES***

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## EDITORIAL COMMENTS

With emerging trends in theatre research and scholarship, *AMA: Journal of Theatre and Cultural Studies* has maintained its stand as a dependable and reliable resource material in inter-disciplinary scholarship.

This Volume: Vol.15, No. 1, of 2021 is an eloquent testimonial to the resilience of the editorial team in ensuring a continued history of astute research and scholarship in order to guarantee adequate learning and pedagogy.

Although the articles in this volume have individual trusts, they are inadvertently related in a collective call for the revitalization of the dramatic, performing and media arts. It is actually what can be termed an "awareness" volume as the essays bother on advocacy.

Awaritoma Agoma's discourse on Solo performance titled "Solo Performances and the Restructuring of the Theatre Curriculum: A Study of Tunji Sotimiri's Performance in Solo Africa" makes a case encouraging teachers and students of Theatre Arts to pay special attention to Solo acts. He traces that evolution of Solo performance and outlines the benefits to the individual actor, the institution and the society. Similarly, Emmanuel Iroh advocates for the use of dramatic techniques in the pedagogy of prose in secondary schools. His work, "Adaptation of Novel to Dramatic Drama for Classroom Teaching: The Efficient Secondary Commercial School, Uyo Experiment" explores the use of drama as an alternative way of teaching prose and as a means of ensuring better understanding.

Martina Omorodion in her essay "Good Governance in Nigeria: The Place of Women" equally calls on women to rise up to their responsibilities as co-equals with their male counterparts in the society. She advocates for the active participation of women in politics. As Martina recognizes the fact that women are beginning to make little impact in politics, Kelechi Ogbonna and Chisimdi Ihentuge call for the utilization of the ethnic identity as a unifying factor for the political and economic growth of the nation. In their essay, "Exploring Positivity in Ethnic Identity for National Re-Integration in Nigeria: A Multimedia

Perspective" is a call for policy makers to cash in on our seeming 'unity in diversity to galvanize a united nation.

Canice Nwosu takes the role of teachers of drama further in his "The Teacher of Teachers as Developer of Human Resources: A Re-appraisal of Dan Uwandu's 'Child Development through Drama'". Here he extols the virtues of a teacher and submits that teachers are nation builders because they are character molders as well as nation builders through the formation of persons they instruct. Likewise, Felix Gbenoba, shows how the medium of drama is an effective way for the interpretation of poetry in "Drama as Style for Enhanced Patronage of Modern Nigerian Poetry: A Reading of Selected Poems in Hope Eghagha's *The Governor's Lodge*". He draws semblances of drama in the poetry of Hope Eghagha and explores how these dramatic elements have helped in a better comprehension of the poems. Equally, in "Nigeria's Female Dramatic Creativity: An Analysis of Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Salami's *Sweet Revenge*", Rosemary Asen calls for an end to negative cultural practices against women. These practices, the author contends, hinder the growth and development of the womenfolk. It calls for the assertion of female rights and better collaboration amongst themselves. And Chibuike Abunike calls for a reduction in violent movies in his work "Examining Domestic Violence through the Film Medium in Nigeria: An Analysis of Selected Films". This lessening of violence in movies he believes can be achieved through proper censorship.

In another wake-up call, Josephine Odunze proffers solutions towards the revitalization of the Abuja carnival. Her essay, "The Defunct Abuja National Carnival: Towards a Rekindling of the Dying Embers" seeks avenues towards the renaissance of the Abuja Carnival. She contends that the carnival is a veritable source of revenue and great tourism potential. As Josephine is calling on cultural administrators to bring forth resources towards the rebirth of the Abuja carnival, Onyeka Ebekue and Somtoo Arinze-Umobi in "Between the Nollywood Classroom and Nollywood Practice: Absence of Synergy or Synergy of Absence" are advocating that there should be a synergy between the Nollywood film practitioners and the Nollywood academia for quality assurance in Nollywood video films.

The use of signs and symbols in dances as expressed in some war dances is explored in Tochukwu Okeke and Judith Ume's

discourse in “The Significance of Cultural Symbols in *Ogbo* traditional War Dance”. The authors use this work to underscore the importance of symbols in traditional dances and explain how such signs aid the audience’s understanding of the performance. Charles Nwadiuwe and Ebuka Ilukwe make a call for an overhaul of the Nigerian Creative Industry in order to create a level playing ground for performers through a review of the Copyright law. The article "Copyright Law and the Challenge of Piracy in Nollywood Business" advocates for stricter penalties for defaulters in the creative business. And, Ver-Or Kachii sums up these calls for a better society in his article "Theatre and Revolution in Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*". Here the author calls for continued use of the theatre as means of sensitization and mass orientation. It is believed that through revolutionary plays like *Hangmen Also Die* that the cries of the masses will be heard and a better society will emerge from the ashes of the old.

We look forward to receiving more articles on this advocacy for the revitalization of the performing arts and similar discourses especially works that encourage interdisciplinary research.

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS IN *OGBO* TRADITIONAL WAR DANCE

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### **Abstract**

Cultural symbols play significant roles in the way traditional war dances are perceived and interpreted by the audience. Hence, cultural symbols instigate meaning and enhance the understanding of the motif behind any traditional war dance. This study looks at the problem of poor interpretation of cultural symbols used in traditional war dances by the audience. Consequently, this study is aimed at examining the *Ogbo* War dance of the Asaba people of Delta State to underscore the influence of cultural symbols used in the dance. The objectives of this study are to explore the different cultural symbols used by the *Ogbo* war dancer(s) to communicate relevant socio-cultural issues and to accentuate the significance of cultural symbols as carriers of meaning and value to the dancers and the host community. The study uses a qualitative research method to address the case study, and relevant data were interpreted and analyzed through the participant observation and content analysis approach. Ferdinand de Saussure's Semiotic Theory is used to situate the discourse within a performative context. The study therefore reveals that *Ogbo* war dance is used to communicate issues that border on security of lives and property through the use of cultural symbols. It thus concludes that interpreting these unique cultural symbols helps to unearth and understand the underlying meanings inherent in the dance. Finally, the study recommends that dance scholars should further their research on the significance of cultural symbols in traditional war dances in order to underscore the implicit and referential meanings of such symbols because of their obvious role as a means of cultural identification.

## **Introduction**

Symbols are objects that stand for, or represent ideas or concepts in human society. Keir Elam defines symbol as “a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas” (14). Symbols are important tools of communication that convey information about a person, group of persons, community, tribe, race and nationality. Generally, symbols play key role in directing and repositioning the mind of an individual towards understanding basic facts that are not verbally expressed. Hence, symbols appeal and influence the human emotive senses of sight, feeling and thought and can trigger an observer to make meaning out of them.

More importantly, symbols can be overt or covert, natural or universal, concrete or abstract. Symbols are overt when they require less cognitive involvement in order to decipher the meaning of an object of signification, while some symbols are covert when they require in-depth study and interpretation to understand their inherent cultural and social meanings. Relatively, natural symbols have innate qualities that trigger people’s perception of such symbols. Joseph Boggs and Dennis Petrie posit that “natural symbols possess “inherent qualities that make them particularly well suited to be symbols” (63). For instance, an owl or vulture is a symbol of death in African cosmology. Boggs and Petrie further argue that universal symbols “are charged with their meanings externally through past associations with people, events, places, or ideas rather than through their inherent characteristics” (63). Furthermore, symbols are concrete when they are physical and tangible and are capable of enforcing meaning through their involvement in the process of communication, while they are abstract when they evoke meaning beyond the object of representation.

Fundamentally, Symbols are the basis of cultural representation. They stand to represent certain information that characterize a particular culture as well as differentiate one culture from another. Culture being the generality of the people’s existence is manifested in shared peculiarities that define the social structure of every society. Jude Obichere notes that:

The fundamental element or building block of culture is the cultural trait. Traits assume many forms varying from material artefacts; tools, house structures, art works- to behavioural regularities-family interrelationships, economic exchanges and legal sanctions-

to abstract concepts and beliefs. All of these diverse and complex manifestations share one feature in common; they are symbols and as such express meaning. (12)

The sum of these material and nonmaterial composition of culture establishes the fact that all cultural elements, including dance, exhibit symbolic characteristics which in turn has obvious meanings that are intentionally created to represent the identity of the people.

Dance is the rhythmic movement of the body in time and space and serves several functions for both the dancer(s) and a community (in the case of traditional dance). Basically, dance is one of the symbolic ways of cultural representation. Dance communicates the essence of the people by showcasing the cultural belief, heritage and value of the dancers' community. It further connects the audience to a society or culture in many universal and personal ways that deepen an understanding of the world of the dancer and helps to reveal the ideas and perspectives of the community that own such dance. The involvement of cultural elements like songs, musical instruments, costume, makeup, props, space, and time of performance are important cultural symbols that reveal the philosophy of a particular dance and further lends credence to the communicative essence of dance in human society. Sunday Abraye and Rudolph Kansese in their evaluation of the use of cultural symbols in indigenous traditional dances in Nigeria affirm that:

The cultural behaviour of Nigerian dance does not rely on the movement of the body alone. There is display of various expressive modes of culture; these are usually incorporated into the dance. As a matter of fact, most Nigerian dances cannot survive on the dancers' movement alone. These cultural modes are appurtenances to dance movement, and together, dance is able to communicate ideas to the comprehension of the audience. (326)

Abraye and Kansese view on the use cultural symbols in traditional dance highlights the obvious significance symbols in aiding dancers to communicate relevant information to the audience. Ultimately, the medley of these artistic elements in dance performance defines the potency of dance as communication beyond ordinary aesthetic representation of body movements and further helps to enhance the underlying message of a dance performance.

Traditional dance is one of the cultural activities in Nigeria that reflects the cultural identity of a people. It highlights the worldview of the

indigenous communities, which include their religious belief, mythology, legends, social norms, as well as values which are passed down from one generation to the next. Lykesas Georgios succinctly notes that:

Traditional dance bears elements of our cultural tradition and heritage and passes them down from generation to generation. Therefore, it contributes substantially to the reinforcement of our cultural identity and plays a crucial role in the "cultural development" of our society. (105)

Beyond the representation of cultural identity, traditional dance is significant in preserving major historical moments that define the existential essence and structure of some traditional communities. Hence, dance plays a significant role in communicating such important historical facts and information to the audience. Thus, Dominika Byczkowska-Owczarek affirms that:

Dance... had an important role in the preservation of human history. Together with legends and mythologies, it was a carrier of social norms, philosophy, and culture before the invention and popularisation of writing. The stories were present in the movements of the dancers and the messages were passed to following generations. (72)

Obviously, the historical message and significance of any traditional dance is portrayed through the use of unique cultural symbols. This is why it is important for dancers to consider their own cultural background when searching for symbols for their dance, because symbols are similar in appearance across cultures even though diverse interpretations are possible due to diverse cultural orientations and significance. Hence, cultural symbols can best be understood or interpreted through the eyes of the culture that they pertain to; otherwise they may lose their unique significance.

Traditional war dances in Nigeria can be understood better from their cultural importance to the people that own them. These war dances portray the strength of the people in preserving their existence and also showing their dominance within a geo-enclave. For instance, the *ikpirikpogu* war dance of the Ohafia people, *Iduu* dance of the Akpo people and *Egwuike* war dance of the Egbu people are expressions of the people towards validating their strength of existence. The motifs of traditional war dances are most often couched in certain cultural symbols used by dancers when performing. But, because of the appealing nature

of body movements most of these unique cultural symbols are hardly ever recognized and studied in order to unearth their role in the overall composition and meaning of the dance. Hence, the potentials of these dance symbols in aiding the dancers to construct meaning and communicate effectively to people on issues that affect society are not fully explored. Therefore, the problem of this study is the poor interpretation of cultural symbols inherent in traditional war dance in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop, that this study examines *Ogbo* war dance of Asaba in Delta State to interrogate the significance of cultural symbols as used in the dance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged on the theory of semiotics as propounded by Ferdinand de Saussure. Semiotics examines the production of sign and how a sign is used to communicate ideas in society. According to Elam:

Semiotics can best be defined as a science dedicated to the study of the production of meaning in society. As such it is equally concerned with processes of signification and with those of communication, i.e. the means whereby meanings are both generated and exchanged. Its objects are thus at once the different sign-systems and codes at work in society and the actual messages and texts produced thereby. (1)

The core of Saussure's semiotics is that "language is a system of signs that express ideas" (*Visual Communication...* 3). Basically, a sign is anything that communicates a meaning that is not the sign itself to the observer of the sign. Thomas Sebeok succinctly explains that Saussure defined sign "as a form made up of something physical, letters, gestures, etc - which he termed the signifier; and of the image or concept to which the signifier refers - which he called the signified. He then called the relation that holds between the two signification" (6). By implication, the meaning of a sign is contextual and serves a parameter in representing an idea which may not have any natural connection with the object of representation.

Decoding the meaning of a particular sign or symbol is determinant on a people and by extension the society where such signs and symbols are used as a means of cultural expression relies on people and indeed societies to attach meaning to such sign or symbol. Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick observe that the problem with reading signs is that "a

signifier may have many signifieds, and a signified may have many signifiers (312). This is because signs and symbols are products of culture and thus each cultural background determines what a sign can possibly represent or stand for.

Consequently, the place of a critic/audience in the analyses and interpretation of sign in order to deduce the inherent meaning is important for a performance to communicate beyond its aesthetics. This is because, “a sign consists of two entities that cannot be separated from each other. Signifier represents its “form”, whereas the signified represents the idea the sign expresses” (*Visual Communication...* 4). Hence, it is the duty of the interpreter to evaluate both the signifier and the signified in order to make useful inference based on observable events.

Semiotics plays a significant role in the study of dance as communication, because in actuality, dance goes beyond mere body expression to become a medium of communication through signs, symbols, codes, in addition to other nonverbal attributes. More so, semiotics is of importance to this study and in the practice of dance because “dance is born in the midst of a ‘language’ or an ‘atmosphere of language’...” (Karen Bond 12), and “possesses multiple semiotic resources with which a choreographer may, if s/he wishes, recreate a literary text in kinaesthetic form” (Bond 65). Nicoleta Bianariu affirms this by observing that “semiosis is ensured by a cultural system of conventions and given as such to the user” and that “this only occurs if the choreographic signs are strictly encoded, such as in magic, ritual or religious expressions” (“Towards...” 6). Hence, dance communicational abilities depend on the existence of codes which implies the "culturalization" of some physically perceptible elements (Bianariu “Paradigms...” 3). Therefore, Bianariu summarily infers that:

Certainly, dance is a composite of signal and symptom, but it acquires simultaneously symbolic features, the latter derived from its location in socio-cultural codes. Dance particularly reveals a process which is specific to semiosis — the "culturalization" of the natural and an inextricable relationship between "natural" and "cultural" in human behaviour. (“Towards...” 2)

Edgar and Sedgwick expand on the importance of codes to semiotic reading of dance by arguing that semiotics analyzes communication:

in terms of the codes or rules and conventions that determine the meaningfulness of any message, in terms of the selection and combination of meaningful elements (or signs)... which in turn, leads to an interest in texts (be these written and spoken texts, or other carriers of meaning and significance, such as clothing and social actions) and the process of producing and reading them, as well as problems of how (if at all) the sign can refer to a world that is external to the text. (56)

Henrique Rochelle explains that code is the structure that allows for the transcription of a message from one form of presentation to another and forms a correlation between emissary and receiver. He further argues that code is what allows for the understanding of the message because it is an organised element commonly known by the users of this code. Hence, the place of the receiver/ audience is critical to the appreciation, interpretation and valuation of codes. Therefore “the receiver is fundamental” because “dance cannot be studied (or presented) as sign without consideration to the necessity of audiences who the work of art is presented” (Rochelle 120). Thus, examining a dance performance using the semiotic theory is one that offers numerous insights into the nature and characterisation of the signs and symbols inherent in a dance performance.

### **A Historical Overview of Asaba**

A cursory look at the origin of the people of Asaba shows that the people are descendants of Mazi Nnebisi, a migrant from Nteje in the present Anambra state, whom according to Elizabeth Isichei “lived in the seventeenth century” (421). Hence, they are one of the igbo speaking communities in Delta state. Meanwhile, an online article *Asaba: A Long History and Tradition*, notes that what we know today as Asaba has its historical roots in both Kogi and Anambra state. This account has it that a woman named Diaba from Agbakuba village in Nteje got pregnant for Onojob, a prince and trader from Igala in the present day Kogi state. At that time, Diaba was a court girl serving in Eze Anyanwu’s court. Nnebisi was born, but loses his mother shortly.

Due to discrimination against him by his maternal relatives, he consulted a native medicine man who told him that his ancestry lies beyond the river Niger. Hence, in a bid to truly identify with his origin, he embarked on a journey by the river with a small canoe and a magical pot that was given to him by the medicine man. Eventually, the medicine pot fell and

crashed at Cable Point, which is an off shore area of the river Niger by the great Onishe rocks, in fulfilment of the prophecy by the medicine man. The crashing of the pot indicated that he had reached his father's home land. In ecstasy he exclaimed "ahabam" which means, "I have appropriately chosen". The origin of the name Asaba is traced to this symbolic exclamation while the people are rightly known as Ahaba people. According to Ejama Okogbma, the change of name to Asaba was done by the British colonial government. Asaba is currently a city in Oshimili South Local Government Area of Delta State and is the current capital of the state. Asaba people are by nature fishermen and businessmen due to their location at the western bank of the river Niger. In addition, the people "are known for high levels of education and for producing many high-ranking members of the civil service" (Bird and Ottanelli 4), cooperate business, and politics.

### **Evolution of *Ogbo* Dance**

Historically, *Ogbo* dance is a ritual performance in honour of Asaba warriors who fought and killed territorial enemies from Benin during the ancient war. Okogbma narrates that, during the wars, a tribal clash ensued between warriors from Asaba and Benin. Incidentally, Benin warriors shot and killed the captain of Asaba warriors, which consequently led Asaba warriors to retaliate by killing some Benin warriors, and also hijacking one of the royal stools in Benin as a spoil and in recompense for the death of their captain. Hence, *Ogbo* dance evolved as a ritual dance performed in order to assuage the spirits of their war veterans who died during the cause of the war. Involvement in this dance became imperative for all war veterans that are alive and those who are noted to have killed at any point in their life to become initiates of the dance.

### **The Significance of Symbols in *Ogbo* Dance**

*Ogbo* dance is generally a symbol of strength and fierceness that Asaba people in Delta state are identified with. The dance evolved as a way of honouring gallant warriors in the community for their conquest over Benin warriors in the past. Hence, the dance is revered and widely accepted as a metaphor for strength, agility and defence which the people perform to recount the threats to their existence and consequent struggle for survival. The dance is often a solo performance done in two phases by an initiate member before the full glare of other initiates, family members and the people in general who serve as the dancer's audience.

The first phase of the dance is the ritual dance for thanksgiving and supplication. This dance is usually performed in the homestead of an initiate member of *Ogbo* cult. Fundamentally, the highlight of the dance performance starts with the taking and returning of the *Ikenga* from its reserved enclave by the initiate dancer. This process is riddled with eulogizing chants to the *Ikenga* accompanied simultaneously by solemn dance steps of slow, swing and forward movements. The initiate dancer carefully carries the *Ikenga* while making thanksgiving and supplications to it for successes in the past and future endeavours. The dance is often witnessed by the family members of an initiate member who serve as witnesses to the whole ritual exercise. The supplication dance is expressive in form and content and allows the dancer to rhythmically dramatize the offering of coins and sprinkling of palm oil on the *ikenga* as votive offerings in order to receive more blessings and protection from the deity.

**PLATE 1** Ejama Okogbmain a solo ritual dance with his personal *Ikenga*



*Ikenga* is the most significant symbol of *Ogbo* dance. *Ikenga* which literarily means the place of one's strength is generally a composition of a person's personal god (*chi*), ancestors, and the human physical strength which is represented with the right hand. It is a miniaturized picture of a man's identity symbolizing his strength and courage which are the basis of *Ogbo* dance. *Ikenga* is made of carved wood that portrays a human figure with two horns. Horn is the symbol of aggression and power. Some horns are either straight or spiral depending on the intention of the master carver. The potency of any *Ikenga* is activated through prayers and ritual sacrifice. Basically, in Igbo cosmology the human *Ikenga* (*ikenga mmadu*) which is the most popular type of *ikenga* is categorized into: personal *Ikenga*, community *Ikenga* and the *Ikenga* for titled men. The personal *ikenga* is owned and worshipped by an individual who has attained a certain height in society. The community *Ikenga* represents the collective strength of the people and is owned and consulted by the people. On the other hand, the *Ikenga* for titled men is owned by a man of authority in a community. For instance, in Asaba, *Ikenga Odogwu* and *Ikenga Iyese* are the two prominent community *Ikenga* that play a significant role in the initiation of eligible men into the *Ogbo* cult. Okogbma notes that "these deities are consulted during and after the initiation process into the *Ogbo* cult and during the *IkaIne* traditional festival. Consequently, after a successful initiation, members of the cult are entitled to have their own personal *Ikenga* or *Ikenga* for titled person, depending on the person's portfolio in Asaba community.

**PLATE 2 Photo of a personal Ikenga: a symbol of strength and courage**



Okogbma further reveals that “once the ritual dance is completed, the *Ikenga* is returned to its sacred reservation in order to protect its sacredness from any form of profanity” (interview). Therefore, *Ikenga* plays a significant role in the initiation process and actual performance of *Ogbo* dance. *Ikenga*’s power is activated through appropriate obeisance and sacrifices before and after each dance performance. Hence, the first phase of *Ogbo* dance is highly ritualized and relies heavily on the potency of an *Ikenga* to direct the activities of the initiate member in every sphere of his life.

Coins are one of the very important symbols of *Ogbo* dance that shows the financial capability of the dancer, and his intended desire to increase his wealth through confidence in his personal *chi* (*Ikenga*), physical

strength and hard work in all areas of endeavour. A Coin is a universal/national symbol showing the currency of a nation. The coin used in *Ogbo* dance is the old one Naira coin. Ejama Okogbma in a personal interview, states that “the coin serves as bait that attracts financial blessings and spiritual protection from his *ikenga*” (interview).

**PLATE 3** shows a pile of One Naira coins which is one of the votive offerings symbolizing financial strength of the *Ogbo* initiate dancer



Joining the *Ogbo* cult is an expensive ritual that exerts significantly on the finances of an initiate member. Hence, the coin plays a symbolic role in portraying the wealth of *Ogbo* initiates. The constant offering of coins is to validate the financial capability of the initiate both as a status symbol and as a symbol of appreciation to *Ikenga* for its continuous protection and provision although the season and circle of life.

The second phase of *Ogbo* dance is social in form and content and is usually performed during the annual *IkaIne* festival. Unlike the first phase, this dance pattern is done with fast pace, swing and tapping of the feet, accompanied by the rhythm of a local flute *opi*. The *opi* is very instrumental during this stage because it serves as the dancer's code of communication between the dancer and the flutist. This communication is mythopoetic and esoteric in nature and can be understood through observing the dancers' reactions to the rhythm of the flute. *Opi* is a wind musical instrument that is commonly/ universally used in Igbo speaking areas for sacred and ceremonial activities. It resonates a solemn and eerie feeling when used in any musical composition. *Opi* is made of carved

wood craftily designed to enable the instrumentalist to produce melodic rhythm through the whistling of sound that is quickly transduced from the mouth of the player to the instrument. The sound produced through an *Opi* is often accompanied by percussion instrument to add quality to the rhythm of the dance.

**PLATE 4 shows the *Opi* used as a sacred symbol of communication**



However, at this stage the most symbolic tool of expression is the iron spear which generally suggests the underlying meaning of the dance. This stage of dance reveals the dancer's combative skills following a successful initiation process. The aim is to validate the dancer's antecedence and claim of success during a combat or fight with an opposition. To achieve this, dancers are allowed to play around with an iron spear to show finesse and skill to the admiration of his audience. The dancer's ambidexterity, pace and techniques form the basis of evaluating the dancers combative and defence strategy. *Ogbo* initiates

dancers are not restricted to a particular type of iron spear but are free to select any type.

**PLATE 5** shows Ejama Okogbma perform the *Ogbo* dance with a spear before his fellow initiates.



*Ogbo* dance is very ritualistic and sacred that celebrates the use of violence as mean of survival. Unfortunately, the use of violence portends various injuries that lead to bloodbath and eventual death in severe cases.

Hence, the dance questions the morality of violence as an ultimate means of survival in human society. Therefore, the choice of costume to symbolize the idea of life and death, danger and safety, evil and good is central. Costumes worn by *Ogbo* dancers are red lace material for their top, which suggests the blood of Asaba indigenes that died during past wars and all other forms of violence that involved bloodletting. The red lace goes with a white wrapper tied around the waist and flows down to the ankle. The choice of white symbolizes the purification Asaba people have undergone to purge the memories of their gruesome past. In addition, they dancers wear a red or black chieftaincy cap to match their top. A pluck of feather is usually attached to the cap. Also, the dancers wear neck and wrist beads of either red or white colour. The colours are symbolic representations of the danger and horrific experience Asaba people went through during the tribal war with the Benins. The dance also makes reference to the gruesome massacre of indigenes of Asaba by the Nigerian soldiers during the Nigerian civil war. Therefore, the dance is a way of reminiscing past realities of the people which had threatened their existence. Hence, *Ogbo* dance becomes a means renewing the dancers' identity from their past tragedy of lost and waste of human lives through wars other threats to human security.

### **Conclusion**

Dance is unarguably one of the oldest cultural medium of entertainment, identity, expression, and communication. It has always been part of man at every stage of his life, serving various personal and communal functions in society. An analysis of the use of cultural symbols in a war dance shows that they aid the understanding and interpretation of the underlying messages of the dance, thus making traditional war dance a veritable tool for communication for the dancers that perform the dance and for the audience who see the performances during cultural festivals and other important ceremonial functions in society.

The *Ogbo* dance, as a sacred dance performed to expiate the traumatic experience of past wars which the people of Asaba had experienced in the past has therapeutic purposes. It is believed to have helped in assuaging the pain and memories of attack, death, economic loss, poverty, dissension among other psychosocial issues which the community suffered in the hands of their enemies in time past. The dance thus becomes a clarion call for survivors of past wars to celebrate their fallen heroes, as well as, a means of advocating for recovery of all

aspects of their identity and existence that were lost due to war and insecurity. This is reflected in symbols and artifacts used in the performance of the dance. An example is found in the expressive use of *Ikenga* as both a deity and a vital symbol of the dance that depicts strength and bravery. The efficacy of *Ikenga* lies in the rituals performed with votive offerings like coins and red oil which are symbols economic abundance. Hence, these offerings demonstrate the initiates' need for protection and economic recovery and growth for his family and the society at large. Similarly, the use of spear during the dance is aimed at revealing the ability of the dancer to exhibit survivalist skills and defence strategies in overcoming threats to his human existence and that of his family. Therefore, the dance is a pointer to the growing need of the community to brace up and safeguard their present and future existence through the celebration of their past heroics as expressed through dance.

Consequently, *Ogbo* war dance as paradigm highlights the nibbling insecurity situation facing Asaba in particular, and in Nigeria as a whole. It also proffers solution to this problem through the dancer's expressive use of the spear to showcase defence strategies which are evaluated to underscore their relevance. Equally, *Ogbo* war dance underscores the interrelatedness of religion and dance in the pursuit of an African identity. It shows that most traditional war dances depend mostly on religious ritual for their performance thus establishing the sacredness and ritual origin of traditional dance in Africa.

Finally, the expressive use of cultural symbols in traditional war dance is one of the ways meaning is made and certain information about a particular individual and people are revealed. It is hoped that dance scholars should examine the various symbols and cultural elements used in traditional war dances in Nigeria in order to underscore the implicit and referential meanings of such symbols because of their obvious role in reflecting the identity of the people who own the dance. By so doing, dance becomes a veritable tool for cultural reengineering and social change.

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