

Dance and Culture: Identification Ethos of Global Society

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Abstract

Dance and Culture world over has been the bedrock of every society's identification ethos, which form part and parcel of the fabric of their existence. It is believed that a society without a culture is like a tree without a root and base, such society is susceptible and therefore imbibes, emulates and indulges in other people' culture. Dance on the other hand projects such culture to the world through the costumes, dance step/movement that are synonymous to such culture. For instance, when one sees 'Kente' and Fumefume dance of the Ghanaians, 'Aso Oke' and Bata dance of the Oyo people of Nigeria, the animal skin of the Zulus of South Africa and the Scottish black and red check skirt, one can easily relate to them in quick succession as form of identity. Culture of a people or society tend to form the basis of their socio-political and socio-economic pseudo and ethos that guide the hierarchical and monarchical powers that controls such society, hence the dance movement and dignified steps at that level describes or speaks volume of decorousness embedded in such class of personality. This paper tend to chronicle the socio-political and socio-economic viability embedded in culture and dance thus their sustainability as identification ethos of a given society, hence the world at large. However, sociological and eclecticism theories will be harvested for the methodology of the paper.

Keyword: Dance, Culture, Ethos, Identification and Sustainability

Introduction

Culture and dance are indivisible elements that make the fabric and contribute to the sustainability of a society. Culture is dance and dance is culture. They are two perceptible elements that give identification to a people via their tribal marks, drama, poetry, storytelling, oral literature,

which are sometimes theatrical performances in nature. Dance on the other hand projects such culture to the world through the costumes, adornments, dance step/movement that are synonymous to such culture. For instance, the tribal marks of the Yoruba man is different from that of the Igala or Hausa man. The dance costumes are equally different, the same way adornment are of different variables. The outfit of these different ethnic groups stands out as an identity whenever they are worn. The Hausa's 'Baba Riga', Yoruba's 'Aso Oke', the Igbo's 'Isi-Agwu', also the various cuisine of all the ethnic groups are pointer to the fact that Nigeria is vast in cultural heritages. Such foods are the 'Amala', 'Gbegiri' and 'Ewedu' of the Yoruba, 'Ofe Nsala' of the Igbo, 'Tuwo-Nkuka' of the Hausa are other aspects of the various Nigerian diverse culture.

However, dance(s) in Nigeria are too numerous to mention due to our diverse culture which also allows for formation of different dance pattern and styles. Few of them are very prominent and visible for different groups' identification, meaning very popular/noticeable to almost all the culture, which at the mentioning of their names they are easily attached to an ethnic group. Such dances are the 'Bata or Dundun' dance of the Yoruba, 'Koroso or Maliki' of the Hausa people of the Northern Nigeria, 'Atilogwu or Egwu-Odum' the Igbo people of the Eastern Nigeria and the 'Isapaide/Ugho' of the Edo people. These dances form part of their history, theatrical performance, national identities and even their livelihood. However, culture is dynamic and not static, as the world evolves so also the culture of the world changes. Although, many of our beliefs, norms and cultural/traditional mannerism are almost at the verge of extinction but for those who still strongly believe in them continue to its practice for proper preservation and documentation.

Dance and Dance Culture in Nigeria

Over the years, dance has been arguably perceived by many as an art that its origin lost in antiquity, simply mean its origin is not known while many are still of the opinion that is divine of God. However, it is an art that is synonymous with merry and funfair. Dance means various things to different individual depending on one's assumption, perception or intuition within the intent of the dance in question. The definition of dance also varies from race to race, creed to creed and society to society,

which also depend on their cultural beliefs, environmental and climate situation. Therefore, dance has no singular definition as it has been defined numerously by different scholars across the globe within their understanding of the word dance. Dance is not just a singular art form but multi-faceted and as motorized action that conveys different messages at the same time. Sondra Fraleigh asserts that:

Dance is not a precise concept or singular activity; it is richly diverse. Dance is not just any movement, but movement that has been created for some particular purpose. Although we may lose track of the creative origin of traditional dances, all dance is the product of human inventions⁶.

Therefore, dance as an art has been use for many things apart from merriment; it has been used educationally, for propaganda, cultural exchange and even healing. Dance is no more a mere hobby as perceived by many before now but now a profession and a source of livelihood to many. Itsewah Steve posits that “the art of dancing is an innate in man. Though it is ephemeral in nature, it could have lasting effect on both the dancer and the audience, though it deals with abstract but has never existed in a vacuum as it has played a vital role in different stages of man's development”. (201). Dance culture in Nigeria can be said to be noticeable in the 40s when Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladiipo and many other theatre practitioners introduced opening glee dance that always preludes their stage plays. Though, not as professional as today but was noticeable and appreciated. However, dance culture continued with the natives in their different settlements while it evolved to the point of recognition and professionalism.

By FESTAC 77, a lot of transformation came into the art of dance, formation of dance troupes, and the establishment of Art Councils in all states of the federation, the National Council for Art and Culture (NCAC) and finally the National Troupe of Nigeria. The inclusion of dance in the Nigeria Universities and some other higher institutions' curriculum that allows for the study of dance to professorial level further gave credence to Nigeria dance culture. The culture of dance in Nigeria nowadays is no more a crying baby but a fly baby with many dance professors, Doctors,

masters and graduate scattered across the country and the core dance professional gracing the stage every now and then doing dance for living.

Dance and Culture as a Symbol of National Identity

In conceptualizing or defining these two elements of human endeavours, it is germane to know them separately by definitions. Culture has always been seen or view by all as a way of life of given people or society, what make up such people, their language, food, clothing, tradition, norms, beliefs and even tribal marks. Many scholars all over the world have at different time defined culture to suit their curiosity. However, it all based on the fact that culture is agreed way of life by the people. According to Terry Eagleton; “Culture is not vague fantasy of fulfilment, but a set of potentials bred by history and subversively at work within it”. Which simply mean an arranged, agreed and accepted norms and tradition by a given society.

Dance and culture as national identity cannot be over emphasized, they are the bases of most societies' essence and even livelihood, they constitute their day to day activities. Yerima agreed that “if culture is defined as a way of life of a people then dance, which is a central part of culture, is also a way of life of any given people. This is because both culture and dance are intertwined”. (17) The history a people cannot be complete without their cultural background, their dialect, tradition, custom, and norms of such society. The people's culture defines who and what they are, dictate what they do and do not do, their culture is them. Sesan and Shittu also posit that;

Culture is human because every human society is expected to demonstrate a specific cultural identity as evident in dressing, human relationship, eating, literature and art. It is all these that determine the cultural identity of a group. The form and content of literature serves as a pointer to the way a people can be studied and understood. Hence, it can be argued that literature is a potent tool of cultural identity of a people. In most literary text produced across culture of the world, the thematic pre-occupation of such text reflect and comment on common cultural paradigms

that are peculiar to such group. It is on this not that it is argued that any consideration of the cultural identity of a people should include their literary and performing arts. (5)

Umukoro Matthew opines that:

Culture, earlier described as badge of the society, is an all-embracing phenomenon, covering all aspect of human living from day to day. It proceeds not by legislation, but by a long and sustained tradition, found upon a variety of beliefs and historical circumstances. It proceeds from communal issues like religious and governance, to more mundane issues like clothing and feeding. The distinction between culture and tradition is to be noted at this stage. Tradition is any habit or event, whether individual or group, which is sustain over a considerable stretch of time. But, to transform into culture, a particular tradition must be deeply rooted in the lives of a people, must be capable of defining and distinguishing them. Thus, culture is a living tradition, always a group phenomenon in which individuality is submerged in a subconscious commitment to a group or collective idea. That explains why culture can be such powerful unifying force in any community. (25)

Therefore culture is dynamics and varies from society to society, ethnic to ethnic with different approach in content and context. Though there have been paradigm shift in many area of our culture, performance ideals and even National identity but however did not change the core tradition and value of our being. Dance can be seen as a theatrical performance aspect of culture which is enact or imitating of life through festival, carnival and music as the case maybe. Dance cut across all culture and has no age limitation and it is generic. Many scholars have debated on dance forms, concept and its cultural affinity. Olokodana-James Oluwatoyin asserts that:

Discussions about what constitutes dance or what does

not has been further complicated by nature of dance. On one divide of the discourse are scholars who perceive dance from a generic point while on the other are scholars who would rather zero down to identifying the cultural relativity of the term 'dance'. Generically, the word 'dance' may be described as vague, seeing that many scholars perceive dance from diverse perspective base on utility and essence. In spite of different definitions, however, dance is said to be a signifying system wherein both the coder and the decoder are entangled in a web of cultural and artistic interpretations which often is expressed in the decoder's response. (27)

Dance as theatrical performances have over the years been use for national culture and identity, sometimes in 1977 at FESTAC 77, most countries came to Nigeria to showcase their culture with dance and drama, Nigeria performed Wale Ogunyemi 'Langbodo' which is rich in culture, cultural costumes and adornment of different ethnic dance groups in Nigeria. However, as vast as our dialect and language are so also are our cultural heritage and performative ethos, which form part of our national identity. Therefore, one will want to ask, what form ones identity or a nation's identification ethos, which can also refer to as 'national character? It is the culture, personality mannerism, cuisine (food), adornment (makeup or tribal marks), festival, carnival, tourist attraction, cultural attire, socio-politics, language and dialects, even the anthem and flag. All these aforementioned are those traits that people identify with a nation, ethnic or personality. Federico Neiburg agrees that,

National character is an expression which describes form of collective and self-perception, sensibility, and conduct which are shared by the individuals who inhabit modern nation-state. It presupposes the existence of psychological and cultural homogeneity among the citizens of each country, as well as the idea that each nation can be considered a collective individual, with characteristics analogous to the

empirical individuals who are its inhabitants. (2001).

‘Arguably the best known description of a nation is Benedict Anderson's conception of “nations as imagined communities. They are imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion'. (15). While Martins 1995 and Wodak, De Cella, Reisigl and Liebhart 'have identified language and discourse as the essential means through which the uniqueness of a community and its particular value are presented, making these a key instrument in the social construction of imagined communities' (22)..

Cultural and National Identification In Pictures

Dance / Costume Culture



Fig. 1

Fig. 1 is 'Bata' dance of Yoruba with 'Aso Oke' attire that is synonymous to that ethnic group in Nigeria, while fig. 2 is the 'Swange' dance of the Tiv in Benue with the 'Ange' costume that is known with the Tiv nation.

Fig. 2

Food culture



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Fig. 3. 'Amala, 'Ewedu' and 'Gegiri' are known to be Yoruba food and also part of their culture, fig. 4 is the 'Starch' and 'Banga' soup of the Igbo of the Eastern part of Nigeria and the fig. 5 is the 'Tuwo Shikafa' made of rice, it is known to be the Northerners favorite food.

Adornment / Hairdo



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Hairdo and adornment are also part of national identification; fig. 6 above is an Efik maiden makeup and hairdo while fig. 7 shows the 'Suuku' of the Yoruba, fig. 8 is for the Igbo and the Fulani hairdo is the fig.9.

Festivals And Carnivals As Identification Ethos



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

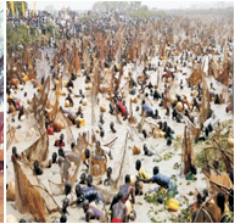


Fig. 13

The figures above are different festival in Nigeria as part of cultural identification that also showcases our rich costumes and dances. Fig. 10 is the 'Ofala' of the Igbo, fig. 11 is the 'Eyo' festival of Lagos of the Yoruba while fig. 12 is the 'Igwe' festival of the Bini and 'Arungungu' festival of the Kebbi of the Hausa in fig. 13.

Tribal Marks And Flags As Symbol Of Cultural And National Identifications



Flags and tribal marks are also symbols of national and cultural ethos, Fig. 14 are some nation's flags and fig.16 are some tribal marks in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that dance and culture as national identity are indivisible as they are intertwined, albeit, culture seems to drive both the theatrical performance and national identity of any society. However, for any of the aforementioned to thrive, the peoples' culture must be considered, a dance theatrical performance cannot be devoid of the culture of the people it tend to further project or promote the culture, while national identity of a people cannot be determined without knowing the peoples' cultural background. Therefore, the people's culture is the bedrock of its existence, but been taken for grant because its nature. Ahmed Yerima posits that: 'culture indeed is ordinary; maybe this is why we tend to take it for granted. It is there, it is part of us; whether consciously or not. Culture lives with and for man to use. It form the identity of man, and becomes man's past, present and future". (43)

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Note:

- Figs. 1&2 are from NAFEST 2010 at Akwa-Ibom and Ivory Ambassadors Dance Company Lagos.
- Figs 3-5 are from Nigeria food culture, retrieved 21 July 2019, 2pm
- Figs. 6-9 are from 2014 Nigeria centenary at the national stadium Abuja
- Figs 10-13 are from Nigeria festival. Com, on 22 July 2019,
- Fig. 14 is from world flag. Com, 23 July by 3pm
- Fig. 15 is from Nigeria tribal marks retrieved on 22 July 2019, by 4pm