

FUNCTIONAL AESTHETICS OF AFRICAN DANCE:
A STUDY OF AKOTO DANCE

BY

AFOLABI OMOBOLA ABIKE

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by AFOLABI, OMOBOLA ABIKE with the matriculation number TMA/11/0091 in the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, under the guidance of the following:

Mrs.Oluwatosin Koshima TUME
B.A. (Hons) M.A (Abuja)
Supervisor

 15-09-2015
SIGN AND DATE

Dr. Bifatife Olufemi ADESEYE
B.A (Hons) M.A. (Ibadan) Ph.D.(Abuja).
Head of Department

 15 09 2015
SIGN AND DATE

Prof. Rasaki Ojo BAKARE
B.A(Hons) M.A (Calabar) PhD (Zaria).
Dean of Faculty

SIGN AND DATE

External Examiner

SIGN AND DATE

DEDICATION

To my creator, the conquering Lion of Judah,

For seeing me through,

All the Glory, Honour and Adoration belongs to You.

To my parents and siblings;

Words cannot express my love for you.

To my Professor Ojo Bakare and my Supervisor Mrs. Tume,

May you reap the fruits of your labour.

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ABSTRACT

Dance as a non material culture can only be perceived and appreciated via the auditory and sight sense organs. This fact can be said to have reduced the chances of preserving and documenting Akoto dance, as the initiators and pioneers of the dance were non literates. This poses a problem to the later performers of the dance as they are ignorant of the origin of the dance as well as its true functions. Some researchers claim that Akoto dance is a sugar cane occupational dance, while some insist that it is a mere entertainment dance that starts slowly towards a crescendo . In the course of this research, we shall attempt to establish the history of the Egun people; who own Akoto dance, trace how Akoto dance emerged, unearth the traditional music ensemble and theatrical embellishments as used in performance of the dance. This research work is basically to project a deeper understanding of the relevance, functions and aesthetics of Akoto dance through the elements of culture, tradition, transformation and social justice. The work also examines the origins and significance of the dance within the Egun worldview. For data collation therefore, this research employs the use of observation by participation method, interviews with some custodians of the Egun culture, a wide consultation of variety of relevant published and unpublished books, journals, articles and theses. This study finds that the Akoto dance is a vital component of the history and culture of the Egun people. Our findings also reveal that Akoto dance performs multiple functions in the Egun worldview.

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CHAPTER ONE: 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Dance is the movement of the human body to organized sound or music using planned or improvised steps and gestures. Dance is an expressive, non-verbal communication that can be identified in the day to day lifestyle of humans and even animals. Bakare opines that "Dance is the rhythmic movement of the human body in time and space to make statements". (Bakare;1994;3). Dance makes use of rhythm, the human body and space to convey messages. It communicates louder than words if expressively displayed and reveals characteristics of a particular people, person or culture. Dance is a medium through which culture is interpreted, communicated and nurtured especially in Africa. Abiodun observes that "in Africa for example, each ethnic group has her dance and music peculiar to the norms, folklores, mores and rites guiding her practice". (Abiodun; 2000). In light of the aforementioned statement, dance is a dynamic cultural art that allows for artistic innovations.

African dance has traditionally played an essential role in the culture of the tribes. Much more than entertainment, it communicates emotions, celebrates rites of passage and helps to strengthen the bonds between members of the tribe as a whole. Pearl Primus posits that;

The subject matter of African dance is all inclusive of every activity between birth and death- the seed which trembles the struggle for existence – the reaching beyond the everyday into the realm of the soul –the glimpsing of the great divine – ecstasy and sorrow which is life, and then the path back to the earth. This is dance. (Primus 1994;6).

In Africa, we find that dance forms mirrors the cultures of each society and ethnic group. African dance teach social patterns and values and help people work, mature, praise or criticize members of the community while celebrating festivals and funerals, competing, reciting, history,

proverbs and poetry; and to encounter gods. In the raw, African dance is the integrated art of movement that is controlled by her music which is governed by her languages. Doris Green opines that "African dance is not like every form of dance. Its relationship to music, thereby language, is what chiefly distinguishes it from any other art form". (Green 1994; 13).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is an alarming dearth of documentation and preservation of African dances. In the theatre, dance is one of the best mediums of telling a story. Various dances from different tribes in Nigeria also serve as a form of entertainment in the theatre. Akoto dance is popular amongst theatre dancers. Infact, it is performed in most of the art councils in the country, but the unfortunate thing is that it is popular in practice but has no particular record on paper. This is because the dance lacks proper documentation.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

A good research work should contribute positively to mankind and its with this mindset that we embark on this research work. This work is aimed at projecting the relevance, functions of Akoto dance to the Egun people and the aesthetic and cultural values embedded in Akoto dance and this study is determined to give solutions and provide sources for other researchers to fall back on during the course of their own research. This study also helps to know that the Egun people were part of the struggle for Nigeria's Independence and have contributed in no small measure to national development

1.4 SCOPE OF STUDY

The Egun people are mostly found in Badagry, Lagos state Nigeria. Some of them can be found in Dahomey, Republic Of Benin. They have quite a number of dances among which are Ajugbo, Akaun and Sator. Due to the fact that it will be impossible to study them all due to time restraint, therefore; Akoto dance has been chosen as a case study here in order to have a definite scope.

The first chapter of this study gives a general introduction and highlights on the background of this work. The second chapter is a review of oral information and literature related to the work. It explores the various aesthetic theories and focuses on the concept of dance in the African worldview, historical background of the Egun people, a review of beliefs, concepts and practices in Egun worldview. Chapter three gives details of the content and context of Akoto dance and theatrical embellishments as used in Akoto dance; while the fourth chapter summarizes the work.

1.5

AIMS AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This long essay is aimed at exploring and revealing the relevance, functions and aesthetics of African dance through Akoto dance. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assert that performance aesthetics is put into consideration. This brings about the need for the re-orientation of African choreographers towards the study of aesthetics so as to put up beautiful theatrical dance performances.

1.6

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The researcher faced the problem of language barrier, which was a major problem in the course of the research; this was so because this researcher is a non indigene of Badagry, Lagos state. Another is the fact that due to money restraint, this researcher would have loved to go to Dahomey where some Egun people are found to have an interview with one or two people. Also, this researcher was not opportuned to watch the real performance as it is done in Badagry because there is a particular season for the festival in which the dance is performed. This factor leaves this researcher with no choice than to analyze the performance of Lagos state council for arts and culture; which is the state body of the Egun people. There are no written texts on Akoto dance and this made the research a little difficult for the researcher.

1.7

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Secondary and primary methods are used as sources of information. The primary information consists of oral data collections and the participatory observation approach. Unstructured face to face interviews and interactions were carried out to draw out authentic information. Our secondary source of information comprises of wide consultations of articles, published and unpublished books, internet browsing of relevant websites, paper, theses as well as audio visual documentations.

1.8

DEFINITION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Some words are used in this research work that needs to be defined in order to aid an easy understanding of this work. Some of the words are "Aesthetics", "Egun" and "Akoto".

Aesthetics is the philosophical branch of inquiry concerned with beauty, art and perception. It is also a branch of philosophy dealing with such notions as the beautiful, the ugly, the sublime, the comic, etc., as applicable to the arts, with a view to establishing the meaning, validity of critical judgments concerning works of art and the principles underlying or justifying such judgements. (www.dictionary.com).

“Egun” is the language and identity of a minority ethnic group in Nigeria. The Egun people are indigenes of Badagry kingdom in Lagos state.

“Akoto” is an Egun word which means ‘we must be united’. It is also the name given to their most popular dance.

CHAPTER TWO:REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

2.1 CONCEPTS OF DANCE IN AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

Dance has always been an indispensable element in life in the African worldview, binding together communities and helping individuals to understand their roles in relation to the community.

Dance in social ceremonies and rites of passage has helped keep community life vibrant, contributing to a sense of security, safety and continuity. African dance is an essential element of Africa's cultural heritage, providing a vital expression of the region's philosophy, and the living memory of its cultural wealth and its evolution over the centuries as observed by Alphonse Tierou;

Because it has more power than gesture, more eloquence than Word, more richness than writing and because it expresses the Most profound experiences of human beings, dance is a complete And self sufficient language. It is the expression of life and of its Permanent emotions of joy, love, sadness, hope and without emotion, there is no African dance.(Tierou 1992;56).

In the African worldview, dance plays an essential role in the culture of the tribes. It communicates emotions, celebrates rites of passage and helps to strengthen the bonds between members of the tribes.

Africans see dancing as an expression of a physical psychological and spiritual state of being that enables people to give meaning and content to their greatest joys, hopes, frustrations fears or sorrows. (Snipe; 1994;63)

This expression contributes to a sense of wholeness. African dance is entertaining and it functions primarily as a cultural and artistic expression of the community. Geoffery Gorer observes that;

Africans dance for joy, and they dance for grief, they dance for love and they dance for hate; they dance to bring prosperity and they dance to avert calamity; they dance for religion and they dance to pass time. (Gorer 1962; 213).

African dances are varied and changing as the communities that create them. Although many types of African dance incorporate spirited, vigorous movement, there are also others that are more reserved and stylized. African dances vary widely by region and ethnic community as observed by Doris Green;

All African dances do not look alike even when they contain the same Movement. When I first went to Africa, I had a perplexing question –why are there so many pelvic contractions in African dances”? This Movement pelvic contractions, was used in all categories of dances – War, Religious, recreation and puberty. Puzzled by this movement, I demanded an answer and found that many of my cultural informants did not have plausible answer and had accepted the answer of a “sexual notion” to explain the existence of this movement. My retort was “if so, then why does it appear in your war dance -To which there was no response.(Green;1994;13)

In light of the aforementioned there are numerous dances within each given community and at the same time, there is a great deal of similarity in the role the dance plays in each African community.

The history and development of African dance in early days was never written down, but has been passed from generation to generation through an oral tradition of word of mouth. In

West Africa for instance, the griots - members of the dance and musician caste - related the ongoing story of their people through the medium of music and dance. It is impossible however to know exactly what had shaped Africa's early history. Archaeology and genealogy (including DNA research) give us some clues, as do the histories of other peoples and nations with which Africa had contact with in the past. It is clear that many cultural exchanges took place between the people of Africa, and between Africans and non-Africans, and that Africans' music/dance was affected and enriched by these exchanges, as was that of the peoples who had contact with Africans.

Other factors influenced African music and dance over time. Some of these are wars, invasions, migrations, new religions, climate changes, population, ecological and economic pressures, (*Alphonse Tierou – Doople, The eternal Law of African Dance*).

Africa is a large continent made up of many countries, each country having its own unique diverse cultural mix. African dance is a movement expression that consists of a spectrum of many different dance forms. Each form defined by its own individual technique, style and cultural reference. It would take a lifetime and beyond to fully understand or experience the complete spectrum of African dance forms.

Sijuwola, (1995) believes that;

Dance in Africa is used as a functional tool of expression and is used for a variety of reasons. Dance is used in ritualistic purposes, as a secular activity engaged in for recreation or entertainment, embracing such factors as physical exercise, performance of skill, aesthetic enjoyment, courtship, personal communication and cultural continuity. (Sijuwola 1995;105).

Sow (1980) also asserts that;

Dance to the African is a way of life, a true representation of a people's existence expressed through rhythm and movement. In

the African cultural paradigm the relationship between rhythm and movement is one that is inseparable; one cannot exist without the other. (Sow 1980;66).

As the dancer is given breath through the drummers rhythm so does the drummer feeds of the dancers breathe of expression as movement articulates rhythm; a perfect marriage where two become one in a synchronization of rhythm and movement that creates dance.

In general, dance is used to commemorate important events in African life and society and since every second is an important event in the life of an African, dance becomes a way of life.

It is said that there is no art for art sake in African dance culture, emphasizing the extreme functionality of African dance. Monteiro points out that the organisation of traditional African dances was motivated not only by the theatrical, but also by sociological, historical, political and religious considerations

2.2 AESTHETIC THEORIES

The word aesthetics was derived from the Greek word 'asthetikos' or 'aisthetis' which means perception and it is concerned with feelings. Scholars both home and abroad have defined Aesthetics. Many of them have developed so much on their argument through different perspectives and perceptions on the theory of aesthetics, principles of Art and Philosophy of Beauty.

Ziky Kofoworola (2004:2) defines aesthetics by first explaining perception, he believes that perception is connected with the ability to acquire an insight in something, an object or a subject. He explains further that the ability is not dependent mainly on the physical manifestation

of the eyes- sight the reflection that is transmitted into the eyes, the sense of sight. Khali Gibran for example, defined aesthetics in his book, 'wisdom of Gibran' as quoted by Kofoworola as;

The thing called beauty or the pleasant is intangible. Its emblem or traces could never be found in the object perceived neither in the properties that makes the whole but in the hearts of the perceivers which is now reflected in a form of judgement and reactions. Beauty is a light in doldrums of beings.(Kofoworola2003;3)

Hegel in his perception sees aesthetics as a form of beautiful experience by which; "The rational rendered sensible the sensible appearance of being the form in which the rational content is made manifest?" (Lavine, 1984: 204-210). Defining the idea of beauty, David Hume is of the opinion that; "Beauty is not on objective equality of objects but exists in the mind, man takes a disinterested pleasure in certain structures and calls them beautiful". (Lavine, 1984: 147-167). According to Immanuel Kant; "Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy that criticizes the taste of an art analysed by spiritualizing it to a divine plane and giving it a metaphysical meaning".(Kant, 1822:6).

According to Zulu Sofola, "Art emanates from the soul of man, the center of his being which reaches out beyond itself to transform and make intelligible the prodding within the inner recesses for the ultimate truth". Zulu Sofola goes further to assert that, "Art is a product of the powerful stirring in the artists essence which is a reaction to the disequilibrium created in the universal by the negative forces in the cosmos".(Sofola 1996:2).

Furthermore, Aesthetic concept can be explained through the form of functional art among the igbo people of south eastern Nigeria. Kofoworola explains further that the context goes beyond the visible which provides forum for experience of the arts. He quotes that Chike C. Aniakor observes:

In Igbo aesthetics therefore a work of art is considered beautiful by the extent to which the skill of either the carver or designer, wall painter is made manifest subject of course to other factors. These are the social and economic status of the patron in relation to the art object commissioned.....(Aniakor1982;34).

In the African worldview, art and beauty is viewed from a metaphysical perspective, the contents of African artworks are therefore symbolic. Kofoworola as quoted by Kofoworola in his article in the journal of performing arts Ilorin, attests to this when he posits that:

Symbolism is a feature of aesthetics of performance in the african theatre concepts. For example, the communality of the societies is usually under the leadership of a king or chief who acquires the depository of power and authority. The symbolic representation of such power and authority are therefore of significance in the aesthetics of performance in the African theatre. Symbolism in this context becomes an art of performance which sets in place not only the societal status and system dictating the flow of and character of events: but is also responsible for certain acts in the performances. Above all, it also influences the flow, tempo and rhythm of the dramatic orientation while it invest the performance with artistic colour in the diversification of the functions of the costumes and make up.....(Kofoworola, 2004)

Africans assess both extrinsic and intrinsic values in the evolution of art. Tume believes that "In Nigeria for example, the concept of beauty is in the positive values of an object or subject. In many languages, the same word is used to mean beauty or good. Hausas call it 'Kyau', for the ibos it is 'Mma', the yorubas call it 'Ewa' or 'Dara'". Ziky Kofoworola (2002) as quoted by Ogunjobi (2011;41), explains that this word usually means well- made, beautiful, pleasing to the senses, virtuous, useful, correct, appropriate and conforming to the customs and expectations, and stands in contrast to the word meaning vicious, useless, ill made, unsuitable or evil.

In the Critique of the Power of Judgment, Kant claims that the judgment of taste is based on a subjective principle, but it has universal validity. This subjective principle determines what pleases and what displeases us only through feeling not through concepts. The priori character of taste reflects the transcendental principle of the general acceptability, and only such a transcendental principle can be a *sensus communis* (common sense). His contention is that this principle emerges from the free play of our cognitive faculties, and has to be common sense that everyone has since everyone has the same cognitive capacities. In Kant's view, universality and necessity are the two indications of a claim that has an a priori character. In the Critique of Pure Reason, he says:

Experience teaches us, to be sure, that something is constituted thus and so, but not that it could not be otherwise. First, then, if a proposition is thought along with its necessity, it is an a priori judgment; if it is, moreover, also not derived from any proposition except one that in turn is valid as a necessary proposition, then it is absolutely a priori. Second: Experience never gives its judgments true or strict but only assumed and comparative universality (through induction), so properly it must be said: as far as we have yet perceived, there is no exception to this or that rule. Thus if a judgment is thought in strict universality, i.e., in such a way that no exception at all is allowed to be possible, then it is not derived from experience, but is rather valid absolutely a priori. (Kant 1997;93).

T.W Adorno believes that;

Art is the social antithesis of society. The constitution of the domain of art resembles the constitution of an inner space of ideas in the individual. Both areas intersect in the concept of sublimation. Hence it is natural and promising to attempt to conceptualize art in terms of some theory of psychic life. (Adorno 1967; 78)

Aesthetic refraction is as incomplete without the refracted object as imagination is without the imagined object. This has special significance for the problem of the inherent

functionality of art. Tied to the real world, art adopts the principle of self-preservation of that world, turning it into the ideal of self-identical art, the essence of which Schonberg once summed up in the statement that the painter paints a picture rather than what it represents. Freud's theory of art as wish-fulfillment has its antithesis in the theory of Kant. Kant states at the start of the 'Analytic of the Beautiful' that the first moment of a judgment of taste is disinterested satisfaction, where interest is defined as 'the satisfaction which we combine with the representation of the existence of an object's.

The Aristotelian notion of *sensus communis*, the primary unifying cognitive faculty, is merely about combining various perceptions in unity and does not contain the Kantian thought that *sensus communis* emerges from the free play of our cognitive faculties. It follows that the Aristotelian notion does not include the disinterestedness and universality features of the Kantian notion of it. Therefore, the meaning that Kant assigns to the term, the a priori character of taste, is different from the Aristotelian meaning of the term, which includes both reason and practical reason. Since taste is based on our senses, that is, taste is a *sensus*, there is not any principle that applies to the process of judgment.

A ground that is based on concepts does not explain the application of the rules. Taste makes its judgment in such a way that it cannot be separated from the actual situations that it proceeds and cannot be reduced to any rules or concepts. In aesthetic evaluation, we do not trust the power of proofs, but we trust our contemplation about our state of feeling by leaving the concepts and principles outside. Therefore, taste is a principle of itself: it does not contain the knowledge of its reasons in the process of the judgment of taste.

Kant says:

Morality is not based on our feelings, but it is based on our reason, it is based on our practical In the logical power of

judgment one subsumes under concepts, but in the aesthetic power of judgment one subsumes under a relation that is merely a matter of sensation, that of the imagination and the understanding reciprocally attuned to each other represented form of the object, where the subsumption can easily be deceptive. (Kant 2000:291).

This connection or harmony, regarding our senses, among the faculties is a special kind of connection, a special kind of harmony, and the power of judgment, when it is used in relation to the representation of the object, requires the harmony of the two representation powers. According to Kant, since the feeling of aesthetic taste is universally communicable, it creates an interest to beauty, which is disinterested. Since every interest contains a relation to our way of existence, there is an existential tendency in humans toward beauty. In other words, our feeling of the aesthetic sense must have a close connection to our way of existence. In the phenomenon of beauty, our mind discovers that nature reflects a kind of purposiveness for us.

2.3 BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE EGUN PEOPLE

The Egun people are natives of Badagry Lagos state. They are mostly found in Badagry Lagos state and some of them can be found in Dahomey, Republic of Benin and other states in Nigeria. Badagry was founded in 1425 AD by a farmer whose farm stretched across the lagoon called Agbede. Agbede's farm covers the island along the coast of Badagry lagoon. Agbede in Egun language implies Agbedegreme but this was latterly changed into Agbadarigi by the Yoruba alien of the south west Nigeria and later to Badagry by European slave dealer and missionaries when the coast of Badagry was discovered.

Badagry is located on the south west of Lagos state in Nigeria. The main language of the people is Egun language and Yoruba language of the south western region of Nigeria and the lingua franca is English language. The Egun people are industrious, courageous and painstaking people. They are noted for their characteristic hospitality. Traditionally, the occupations of the people are chiefly fishing, farming and animal husbandry. Cottage industries which from time to time immemorial engaged the attention of the people ranged from boat building, net making, bamboo furniture industry, food processing mills and traditional house building.

Before the beginning of Christianity, in 1842, and Islamic religion, the main religion of the Egun people were different types of traditional religions and beliefs which is still existing till date, but people have chosen to embrace Christianity and Islamic religion, than the fore religion with about 65 percent Christians, 30 percent Islamic and 5 percent traditional religion.

By 1600s Badagry had become a thriving community reputed for trade and saltpetere by evaporation at Gberefu beach which was soon to be known as the ancient slave part of Badagry, but this legitimate trade soon gave way to the obnoxious slave trade and for its first four hundred years of existence, slave trade was to dominate all other interests in Badagry. It became host to European slave traders led by George Freemingo, a Portuguese slave merchant who came to Badagry around 1660s. By 1770 Badagry had become a thriving centre flourishing on the export of slave trade through the creeks and lagoons across the Atlantic to Europe and Americas.

In the course of history and particularly being the first community in Nigeria to have contact with Europeans, Badagry had recorded many firsts in the annals of the Nigerian history and today regarded as a cradle of western civilization in Nigeria for being the first community to have contact with the Europeans, to serve as a major slave market and slave port in Nigeria and

the first community in Nigeria to be urbanized. Western education in Nigeria took its root in Badagry with the establishment of the first elementary school called the "Nursery of infant church" in 1843 by the church missionary society (CMS).

2.4 A REVIEW OF BELIEFS, CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES IN EGUN WORLDVIEW

In Badagry and environs, the religion of the Egun people became closely associated with the various festivals. While the Christians celebrate Easter day, the Christmas day and some other less popular festivals, the muslims equally celebrate Eld-el-fitri and Eld- el-kabir and the birthday of Holy prophet Mohammed and the traditional religious groups continue to rekindle the torch through the celebrations of Avo – Hunwe festivals, the Zangbeto, Kubiito (Egungun), oro, Gunuko and other festivals where costumes, traditional drums and other musical instruments feature prominently. Badagry day festival is today a major event of the Egun people, just as the black heritage festival, the abolition of slavery e.t.c.

Among the people of Ikoga community in the Badagry area, the chains (Gede) that were used in keeping captives who were to transported to the slave market were claimed recently to have been converted to use as material components in ceremonies of worship of the diety ogun (known as Gu among the Egun). Ogun is the god of iron among the Yoruba and Egun , and devotees usually consider iron –based materials as being symbolically expressive of the powers and characteristics of that diety. Based on this belief, devotees often swear oaths of truthfulness and fealty to Ogun. This adoption of slaves' chains within religious observations of Ogun has not yet been elaborated to fully articulate the symbolism of how diety's characteristics are served by the use of such iron elements within enslavement. Nonetheless, the conversation of surviving

examples of historic – period slave chains into ritual implements in Ogun worship in an indication of the preservation across the years of this remnant of the slave trade.(www.Wikipedia.com).

CHAPTER THREE: AKOTO DANCE; CONTENT AND CONTEXT

It will be inappropriate to discuss Akoto dance in performance without discussing the origin of the dance. Akoto dance is one of the dances of the Egun people of Badagry. According to my source, Chief Hungbo Yinvo, the Ayajeto 1 of Badagry Kingdom, their fore fathers started the dance during the first Dahomey war which is popularly known as the Republic of Benin today. During this war, their forefathers always wore "Elenpa"(raffia) and "Elengo"(rattle). They wore it on their legs, arm and on their waist. They even wore one on their head, only that the one for the head is different from the other ones. They used the raffia to scare away enemies during the war. When the enemies see them in the raffia, they get scared and run away from them thinking that they are spirits. They didn't know that they were actually humans in the guise of spirits. As for the rattle, they used it to trace one another when anyone of them is going off track. The moment they hear the sound of the rattle, they are able to trace themselves. This went on and on for about 15 years. It was the war that brought them down to Badagry.

When they got to Badagry, they discovered that there was no war, and so they felt that the raffia and rattle helped and safeguarded them throughout the war. They decided that they would not do away with it. They started re- enacting everything that happened during the war in dance. It later developed to the extent by which they started going out to entertain people with it at burial and birthday ceremonies. They wore the raffia and rattle which became the major costume and begin to dance. After a while, they decided to name the dance "AKOTO" which means "we must be united". The dance is always done in a circle, regardless of how much the dancers are. There was no particular choreography for this dance. People just did solo dances and sang random songs. This is how it was done until the slave trade began.

During the slave trade, some of the slaves still had the knowledge of their culture and tradition, and so whenever they were free to eat or sleep, they played music with their farming implements in the plantation and start to dance. Most of what they were playing was an abuse to the slave merchants(white men). Whenever the sound is played on the talking drum (farming implements), they come out one after the other and mimic the slave merchants. At this time, the dance still was not choreographed, they were still doing their solo and random movements, e.g the cutting and throwing movement and the hoeing and cutting movement.

After the slave trade, the people in Badagry found out that there was no longer slave trade and their people that were enslaved are free, they were very happy. They decided to continue the dance but this time they renamed it "slave freedom dance "Akoto. They started doing the dances, they added new songs and some theatre scholars were invited to watch the dance. They found the dance very interesting and this was how Akoto was developed to become socially accepted in Nigeria and beyond.

3.1

AKOTO DANCE IN PERFORMANCE

In an Agricultural programme organized by the ministry of Agriculture, the dancers of Lagos state council for arts and culture performed Akoto dance and the former Governor of Lagos state, Babatunde Raji Fashola was in attendance.

The performance starts with music, four male dancers dance on stage with tapping forward and backward and kicking leg movements and cutting and throwing hand movements. They wear round neck tops and Ankara skirt that looks like raffia and they tie raffia on their skirts, with another one on their legs and arms. They dance on stage and establish the

movements. Four ladies dance in with hoeing and cutting movements in slashing effort action. They dance round the stage and form an ark of four ladies on one side and four men on the other side of the ark.

They do tapping movements forward and backward in eight counts and clean their sweat in pressing effort action. There is a cue after this and each lady pairs with a man and dot the stage with hoeing and cutting movement in slashing effort action. They do a duet facing and backing themselves with tapping forward and backward and kicking movement. When they are through with their duet, they all face the audience with their legs akimbo, and their weight on their balls. They move left and right shaking their shoulders in wringing effort action.

After this, they go back to their dance motif, the cutting and throwing hand movements and the tapping and leaping and kicking leg movements, but this time they form a circle with it. A man in between every lady and a lady in between every man. The men jump up, turn left and right and raise their right legs up in eight counts. The ladies jump up, turn left, clap and jump up simultaneously and go under the legs of the men. They do this four times in pressing effort action.

The ladies file out of the circle and form a straight line with cutting and hoeing movements. The men also file of the circle and form a straight line behind the ladies in a dotting manner. They continue the hoeing and cutting movement until a cue comes. They respond to the cue by pointing their right hands forward and tapping their legs forward and backward and turning 360. After this, another cue comes up and they clap their hands up, tap their lap and fall down in pressing effort action. They move forward and backward with their hands pointing to the audience and their legs propelling them to move easily. Another cue comes after this and

they respond by getting up in punching effort action and they turn 360 to take position. They go back to their dance motif and each lady pairs with a man and they dance out with hoeing and cutting movement in slashing effort action.

This dance is a slave freedom dance. The movements in the dance are informed by the experiences of the slave trade. The slaves were made to work on the farm and this is what brought about the cutting and throwing movement, hoeing and cutting movement. The cutting and throwing movement are re-enactions of the cutting of sugar cane. The hoeing and cutting movements are re-enactions of the weeding they do on the farm with their hoes and cutlasses. The tapping forward and backward and kicking leg movements are added so as to create rhythm and timing to the cutting and throwing movement.

The movement by which the dancers take position with their legs and arms akimbo and their weight on their balls, shaking their shoulders up and down is the dance of the Egun, Dahomey territory. They infused it in their dance because they all had the knowledge of their culture and tradition even while in slavery. The movement that the men jump up, turn left and right in 360 and raise their right legs for the ladies to come under signifies unity. It explains that even if they are sold into slavery, they are still one and they still love one another. It was also a way of forgetting their sorrows and grief during the slave trade. Other movements are movements done to mimic the slave merchants.

3.2 MUSICAL ENSEMBLE AS USED IN AKOTO PERFORMANCE

Dance to the African is a way of life, a true representation of a people's existence expressed through rhythm and movement. In the African cultural paradigm the relationship between rhythm and movement is one that is inseparable; one cannot exist without the other. As

the dancer is given breathe through the drummers rhythm so does the drummer feeds of the dancers breathe of expression as movement articulates rhythm; a perfect marriage where two become one in a synchronisation of rhythm and movement that creates dance.

Tume postulates that; "the core of African dance performance is the music, which motivates and punctuates the body movements. It is not possible to appreciate African aesthetics without understanding the music". She further asserts that; "in the African worldview, music and dance are considered as Siamese twins because they complement each other.(Tume, 2012;166).Peter Badejo agrees with this when he posits that;

In any African performance, be it ritual or entertainment ,music and dance are inseparable. In both traditional and contemporary theatre,dance and music are vital elements which must be incorporated into both forms of African theatre.(Badejo 2006; 192).

Dance and music to the Africans are not only inseparable but are also often indistinguishable for both are highly rich artistic activities, centering on the notion of rhythmic expression vis- a -vis a textual and structural order. Kariam W. Asante (1997:206) sees these pivoting links and puts it more succinctly that;

African dance and drums are two distinct expression of the same entity; namely rhythm. Both dancing and drumming require accompaniment. One, dancing demands physical involvement and the other, drumming demands human participation. In other words, the requisite tool of both dancing and drumming is the human body. This requirement is demonstrative of the ontological order and structure of the African worldview... at the core of African culture is a humanistic philosophy that serves the people while serving the deities...(Asante, 1997:206).

According to Tume, music and songs as perceived in the African worldview, goes beyond the entertainment, they are instruments for dissemination of information. She further observes that;

In Africa, every event attracts one form of music dance . The music and dance art forms, serves several purposes in the African community, ranging from celebrations during events such as birth, marriage, mourning during calamities, burial and motivation during professional occupations and house chores..(Tume, 2012;166).

In Africa, dancing and drumming go hand in hand. The dancer requires good music to exhibit his dancing skills, so also the drummer needs a beautiful dancer to accentuate his good drumming. Ogunjobi also states that;

Drums are used to communicate on long distance and to accompany celebrations and rites within a clan or group. Ceremonies like war, birth, death, marriage and festivities are underscored with the thunder of drums with shouts, singing and stamping accompaniments.(Ogunjobi 2011;96)

The African concept of music is totally different to the Western one. Traditional African musicians do not seek to combine sounds in a manner pleasing to the ear. Their aim is simply to express life in all of its aspects through the medium of sound. The African musician does not merely attempt to imitate nature by music, but reverses the procedure by taking natural sounds, including spoken language, and incorporate them into the music. To the uninitiated this may result in cacophony, but in fact each sound has a particular meaning. To be meaningful, African music must be studied within the context of African life.

The Akoto music ensemble consists of Paure, a very slim and tall drum which is played with 2 sticks, Akuru, two short drums, which are played together with two sticks, Apesi, a base pot drum which is always louder and higher than other drums, Aya, popularly known as shekere, Azehun, a bass drum and ogavi which is popularly known as metal gong. All these instruments are very important in the Akoto music ensemble so as to make it rich in sound and rhythm as each instrument has its own role and functions to the ensemble.

Akoto music started from the slave port, when the slaves used their farming implements to make sound. When they left the slave port, they still continued the dance but they started using their indigenous musical instruments. They are Pahunre, Sangantan, Ogavi, Apesi and Aya.

PAHUNRE; The paure is the lead drum. It is very slim and tall and it is the drum responsible for marking all the movements.

SANGANTAN; This is the timer of the music and it serves as a back. If there is no Sangantan, the Apesi will not function because they work hand in hand.

OGAVI; This is the metal gong which is also known as Agogo. It is responsible for the timing of the music, rhythm and pace.

APESI; This is the pot bass drum. It is louder and higher than the other drums. It supports the Pahunre and it gives the rhythm continuously so as to enable the dancers enjoy the overall music and their dance. There are two types of Apesi. They are the same thing, only that one is bigger and taller than the other.

AYA; This is popularly known as the shekere. It is responsible for timing the music and rhythm.

SONGS

SONG 1

Medenami medeteve

mukololo

Eye eye eye eeeee

Gbangban medenave

TRANSLITERATION

If you are for us Gbangban

Let us know

If you are against us

Let us know

This song was sung to encourage their fans and discourage those who are against them.

SONG 2

Mosabode para mode weme devo

Eya e azaminado

Mosabode para mode weme devo

Eya e azaminado

TRANSLITERATION

We will dance to Weme

We will hang our hoe on our neck

We will dance to Weme

We will hang our hoe on our neck

SONG 3

Eble eyan eble

Gongo awele walawele gongo

Eble eyan eble

Gongo awala walawele gongo

TRANSLITERATION

Gongo went to war

He was caught

Today is today

He was caught

This is one of the songs they sang during the period of the war in Dahomey.

SONG 4

Wami walo oo

Iyamosa voduado e

Wami walo ooo

Iyamosa vo due

TRANSLITERATION

We are back

No more slavery

Don't be scared

No more slavery

When they got back to their home town; this was the song they sang to their people, letting them know that they are free from slavery.

CHANT BY THE DRUM

Oje odepe oje

Kiniwe kiniwe

Oje odepe oje

Kiniwe kiniwe

Oje odepe oje

Odepe oje

Odepe oje

Ago ago tonke tonke

TRANSLITERATION

Everybody

Men and women

It is time

It is time

Let us dance

This chant is used to gear all of them both men and women to dance and forget their past.

3.3 THEATRICAL EMBELLISHMENTS AS USED IN AKOTO PERFORMANCE

Theatrical performances are well defined and given aesthetic touches through decorative details and features added to them. These are ways of elaborating theatre performances as it provides details, give more flesh and interpretation to the dance. Costumes, props, makeups and

waists. The female dancers on the other hand tie white wrappers and they wear beads on their neck and both arms. They plait their hair in shuku and they use the rattles on their legs.

Because of civilization, theatre dancers now use round neck tops on Ankara skirt which is sewn like raffia and then they tie the raffia on it. Each of the dancers wear long and colourful beads on their neck. The female dancers tie a tiny scarf or wear beads on their heads to help the audience differentiate the male dancers from the female dancers.

3.3.2 MAKE UP

The main purpose of makeup is to make the dancer's face look right to the audience in the context of the production and its design, and in the theatre which it is being performed. As an art form, make up is different in manner, matter and motive from make up in real life. While make up in real life merely seeks to be glamorized, to lend the hair, face and body a new grace, charm, theatrical make up is basically for characterization.

The chief objective of makeup according to Ford (1940;3) as quoted by Lawal 2010 "is to give the face the appearance an audience expects it to have according to the character the dancer portrays. The appropriate complexion and shape is erased in terms of tint, light and shade respectively".

In Akoto dance performance, the dancers wear straight make up. Straight make up speaks for itself. The aim is to stage in costume and under stage lighting as it is done in real life. The main purpose of straight make up is to adjust the colour of the face of the dancer to the stage lighting and to enlarge and exaggerate details, which the audience cannot see at a distance.

3.3.3 PROPERTIES

Popularly referred to as props, stage properties are traditionally defined as all objects carried or handled by the dancer while dancing. They are separate portions of the set on which the actor or dancer stands or sits such as rocks, stumps or logs. The classification of props used in Akoto dance fall under hand prop.

Hand props are small objects handled by the dancer on the stage. The hand prop used by the dancers in Akoto performance is a hoe. The traditional name for hoe in Badagry is "Kople". The hoe is hung around the neck of the dancers as they dance to show that the dance involves farming activities. All costumes, makeup, props contribute to the aesthetics of the performance for audience appeal.

3.4

AKOTO AS A SLAVE FREEDOM DANCE

Slave freedom dance continues to serve as local depiction and reminder of the experiences of slavery even in modern times and always performed at important occasions and celebrations in Badagry. The dance plays an important role in national festivals and other celebrations and commemorations and still remains very popular in Badagry. (Simpson;1992). In current times, this performance serves the dual function of commemorating the freedom of Nigerians from the gruesome jaws of trans- Atlantic slave trade and their eventual emancipation from the imposed domination of colonialism. Simpson has this to say about Akoto dance.

The opening of the dance verbally indicates the idea of freedom. One specific factor that may seem to have enhanced the level of awareness generated among the people of Badagry regarding the notion of freedom of the colonial masters is the unique position held by the area as a prominent slave port. The roundabout movement of the dancers as presented in the initial part of the performance can be depicted as pointing attention to two major

turning points in the history of Nigeria. The first is the period that marks the end of the slave trade era, while the second is the period when Nigeria attained independence from the colonial masters.(Simpson 1992;11).

Diverse forms of musical instruments which are local in presentations are used by the dancers to add rhythm to their dance movements. Although Adegbite (1981) has suggested an indispensable linkage between the survivals of traditional African instruments among African in the Americas, his view that slave owners may have encouraged the transfer of light musical instruments from the African shores to the slave fields appears contestable as far as the case with Badagry is concerned. This is because the patterns of forceful captivity and transport of enslaved persons did not allow for accompanying transport of such personal belongings.

In view of the forceful aspect that was involved in the movement of the captives, It does not appear plausible that enslaved persons could have carried their musical instruments with them to the New world, however they used their farming implements to play music. Rather, the likelihood remains that enslaved Africans carried with them their cultural knowledge and skill, including both material and intangible aspects of their belief systems and traditions, which were reproduced over time as part of the strategies for survival on the slave plantations in America.

The culture ofvodun among the Egun people provides an example of this aspect of sub conscious retention of the cultural beliefs and practices among the people as they were carried away from their homeland in Africa.

The history of Badagry will in no way be complete without the overall hanging impact of the slave trade era and its influence on the culture of the people in that area.....The experience of slavery itself has been identified as providing for the captives' great reliance on the ideas of culture which they carried in their sub conscious into captivity.(Simpson 2001;111).

So entrenched is the notion of the "slave freedom dance" in the current cultural repertoire of the people in Badagry that students, particularly those in secondary school, often perform a new version of this dance at the completion of the final writing of their graduating examinations to indicate their newly acquired freedom from the demands of secondary school requirements.

3.5

AKOTO AS A UNITY DANCE

Akoto; an Egun word which means "we must be united" is literally transferred into the essence of the dance. It is perceived to be a unity dance as it is performed in a circle regardless of how many dancers are involved. This suggests that even in slavery, that they are still one family. This corroborates what Bakare says in his *Rudiments of Choreography* that;

If it is in a dance drama form for example, it may mean that are members of the same society or members of an occupational body, for example; hunters, fishermen etc. it may even mean they are members of a particular town, village or ethnic group. The formation suggest that it is a bond of some sort amongst them. (Bakare 1994; 35)

3.6

AKOTO AS AN OCCUPATIONAL DANCE

Dance is an expression of beliefs, attitude, norms and values of a particular culture. It is what is embedded in the culture that can be reflected in the dance of a community.

Akoto is a farming occupational dance of the Egun people of Badagry. Tume opines that; "occupational dances are dances performed by guilds of craftsmen or professionals who are bound together by their work experience". Felix Bergho agrees to this assertion by saying;

There are special dances for blacksmiths, hunters, and some other traditional professional guilds. These are the dances the

guild members resort to in the expression of their guild's character on eventful occasions in the guild's particular life.(Bergho,1988;168).

Occupational dances are usually aimed at providing encouragements for the workers while they work and also to stress the importance of their profession. The dance, Akoto is a reflection of the occupation and culture of the Egun people. Through their dance and movements, one can figure that it can also be perceived as an occupational dance. Some of the movements suggest planting and harvesting of sugar cane.

CHAPTER FOUR: OBSERVATIONS AND SUMMARY

4.1

FINDINGS

This research work was undertaken to study Akoto dance of the Egun people of Badagry Lagos State Nigeria. The study focused on the functional Aesthetics of African Dance for analysis and proper documentation.

In the course of this research, the following fundamental movements of the dance were analyzed: the rhythmic patterns, movement patterns. Other features of the dance examined the chants, songs and costumes as used in the context of the performance. The study also examined the music and music instrumentation.

During the course of this research, we have observed first and foremost that Akoto dance of the Egun people of Badagry will forever remain unique as it is a slave freedom dance. The dance is informed by the experiences of slave trade and it also carries richly the aesthetics of the cultural values of the Egun territory in Lagos state. Just as Doris Green said, that;

Africans dance about their everyday experiences or happenings or events in their lives which they choose to remember. The event could be of great historical significance such as war, famine or the independence of African nations or everyday significance such as birth, puberty or the pounding of maize to make a meal.(Green: 1994:14).

It is observed that the Egun people cannot do away with the dance because it safeguarded them during war and it was used as a medium of relieving the slaves of their grief and sorrows during the slave trade. It also enhanced a communal way of living among the Egun people.

4.2

RECOMMENDATIONS

The dance traditions and culture of Egun are part of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage which needs to be documented, interpreted and preserved. Therefore, the beauty and artistic nature of Akoto dance is worth being preserved and practiced in order to promote Egun's rich cultural heritage.

Our recommendations are that more research is needed on this dance to uncover hidden treasures and values of Akoto dance on the Nigerian stage. Also, it is recommended that new styles should be introduced to our traditional dances in order to have a global recognition. It is also recommended that the government should sponsor the Zangbeto festival where Akoto dance is performed so as to boost national economy and tourism.

4.3

CONCLUSION

Dance is not only a carrier of cultural values. It also reflects individual and group identity. The dances of the people have been a potent medium by which information can be deciphered, regarding the social lifestyle of the people. This is because the human body, which is the basic tool and medium of a dancer can potentially produce, ascribe and express meanings during the dance performance. This is apart from the other theatrical elements used in the dance performance like costumes, props and music.

Finally, we therefore submit that there are much values embedded in the aesthetics of Akoto dance. This simply means that the aesthetics of the dance lies in its musical rhythm, the energetic dance movements; it also includes its beautiful songs and chants, the beautiful floor and body patterns and the array of beautiful and colourful costumes.

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Interview with Mr Chukwudi, a 40 year old dancer in the Lagos State Council For Arts And Culture. Lagos: 25th November 2014.

Interview with Mr Omolade Ayanjo, a 42 year old Cultural Administrator, Music And Dance Consultant in National Theatre. Lagos: 2nd June 2015.

DISSERTATIONS

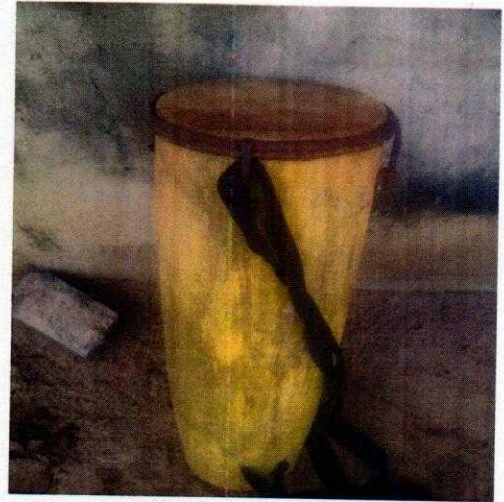
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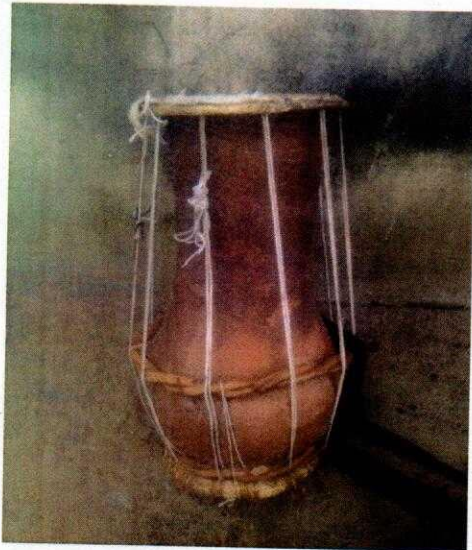
APPENDIX



This is the Ogavi, popularly known as Metal Gong or Agogo.



This is called the Sangantan drum.



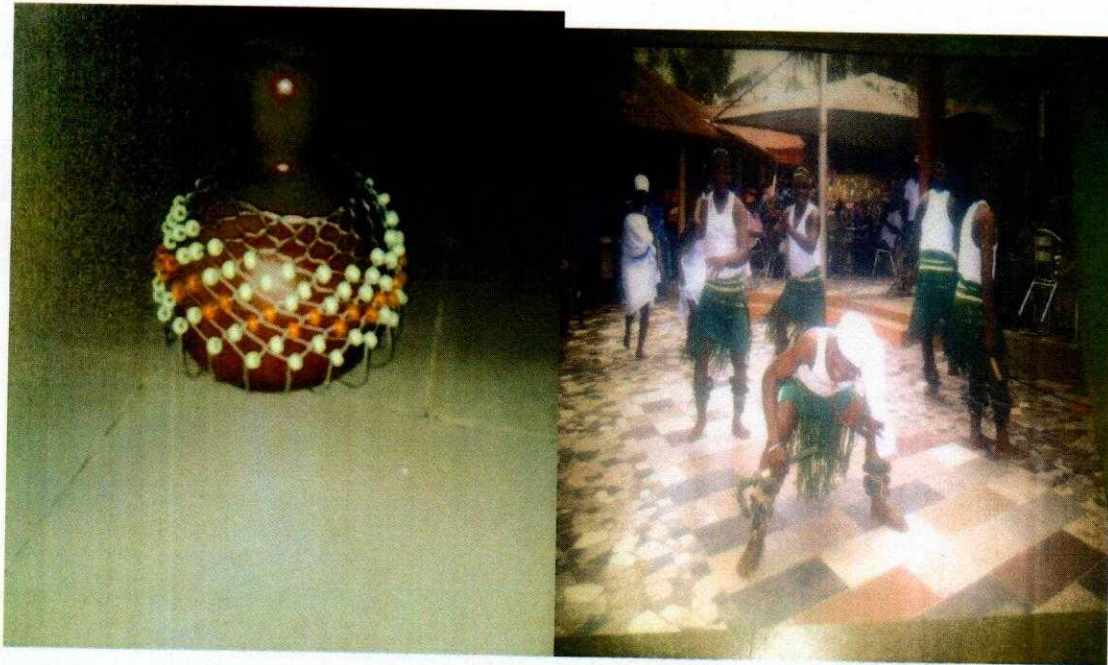
This is the smaller Apesi.



This is the bigger Apesi drum.



This is the Pahunre. It is the lead drum and This is a combination of the four drums. It is played with 2 sticks. The Pahunre, Sangantan, and the 2 Agesi.



This is the Aya, which is popularly known as Akoto dance in performance, by indigenes of Badagry kingdom, Lagos Nigeria.



Original Female costume from Badagry,Original male costume and prop from Lagos Nigeria.Badagry, Lagos Nigeria.



Elengo, popularly known as rattles Tashan, the head adornment



Another variety of costume, used by Lagos state council for arts and culture at a wedding ceremony at Air force base Ikeja Lagos.



This is the raffia, worn on the waist. It is traditionally called Elenpa.



This is the costume used by Lagos state council for arts and culture for their Akoto dance performance. This is another Akoto dance costume used by State Council for art and culture at a burial ceremony infor their sator dance performance. Sator is also one of the Egun people's dance.

