



## Department of Theatre and Film Studies

Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State  
University, Nkpolu Oroworukwo,  
Port Harcourt

# BOOK OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS AND ABSTRACTS

Sekiology, Spinning Deep, Branching  
Wide and Intensifying Potentials

### THEME

## SEKI PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE NIGER DELTA



The Amphitheatre  
(Main Campus)



25th - 27th  
March 2024



9:00am

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo, PhD





## **National Anthem**

Arise, O compatriots,  
Nigeria's call obey  
To serve our fatherland  
With love and strength and faith  
The labour of our heroes past  
Shall never be in vain  
To serve with heart and might  
One nation bound in freedom,  
peace and unity.

Oh God of creation,  
Direct our noble cause  
Guide our leader's right  
Help our youth the truth to know  
In love and honesty to grow  
And living just and true  
Great lofty heights attain  
To build a nation where peace  
And justice shall reign.

## **National Pledge**

I pledge to Nigeria my Country  
To be faithful, loyal and honest  
To serve Nigeria with all my strength  
To defend her unity  
And uphold her honour and glory  
So help me God.

## **The University Anthem**

RivSU, RivSU we sing of thee  
Flower of Knowledge and peace  
In the Garden City stands a tree  
From whence inspiration comes  
The people of many a tongue  
Come and Seach and find the Golden  
All for a simple and humble song  
All for excellence and creativity

RivSU, RivSU we sing of thee  
Flower of Knowledge and peace  
Busy we all toil as the bee  
Fruitful Science and Tech we grow  
Keeping in motion the wheel of truth  
All for excellence and creativity

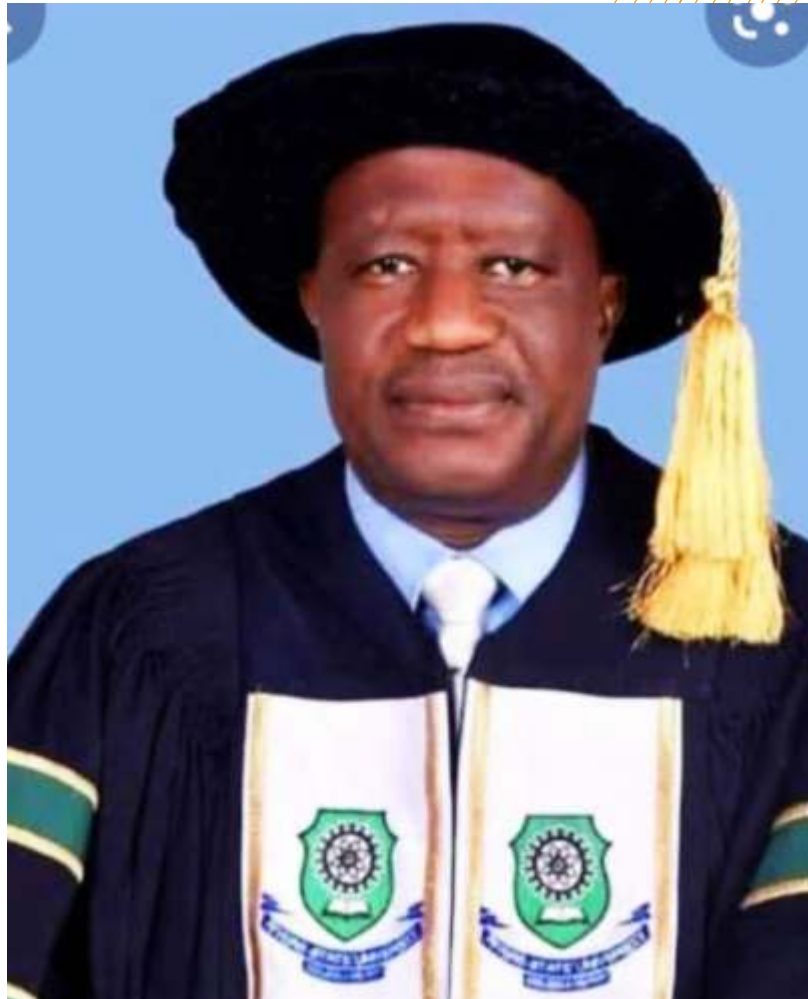


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SEKIOLOGY, SPINNING DEEP, BRANCHING  
WIDE AND INTENSIFYING POTENTIALS

**THEME** Seki Performance and cultural  
Identity in the Niger Delta



**PROF. NLERUM SUNDAY OKOGBULE**, DSSRS, FCI Arb  
LL.B (Hons) Ife, B.L. (Lagos) LL.M (Ife), PhD (Glasgow)

**VICE-CHANCELLOR**





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Seki Performance and cultural  
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**PROF. VICTOR A. AKUJURU**

Bsc (Bristol), Msc (Reading), PhD (Salford); FNIVS, RSV, MRICS, RWA, KSC, PPAfRES

**DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, ADMIN.**





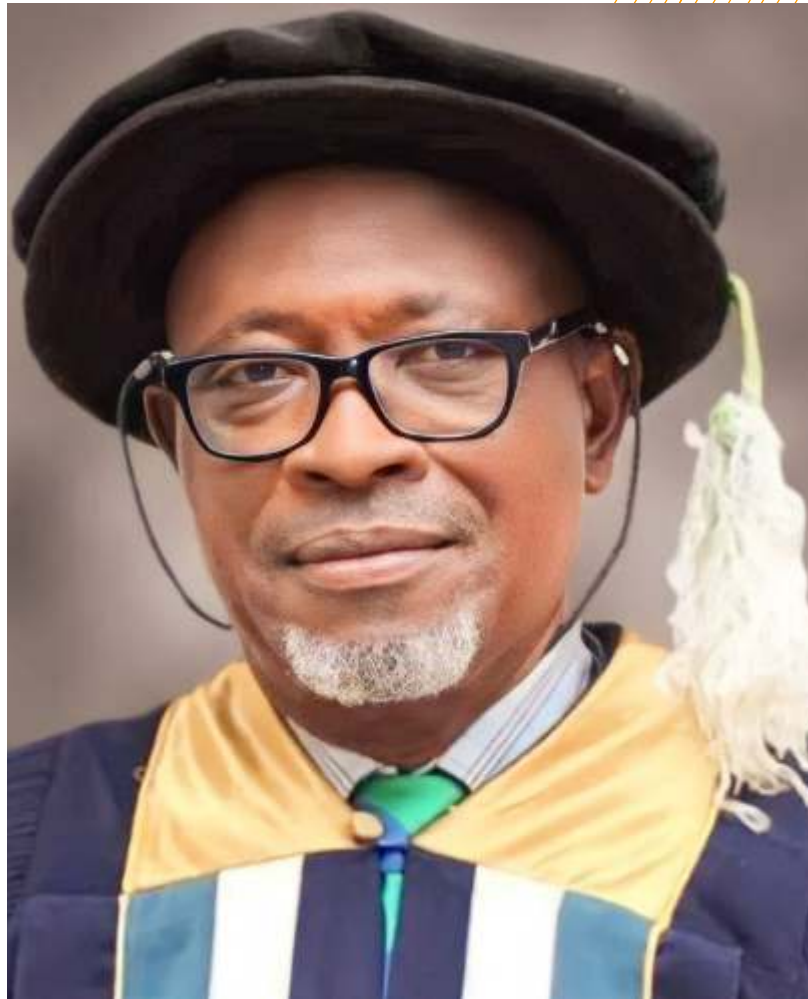
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**PROF. VALENTINE B. OMUBO-PEPPLE**

H.dip., M.Phil, (RSUST), MNIP, MPWSC, MNSA

**DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, ACADEMIC**



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**MRS. IBIMONIA, B.S. HARRY**

B.A (Hons.) (IBADAN), PGDE (Uniport), (RSUST), FCILRM, MNIM

**ACTING REGISTRAR**



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**PROF. (MRS.) JENNIFER NGOZI IGWELA (CLN)**

BLS (ABU), MLS (UK), MED (RSUST), PhD (UNN)

**UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN**





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**MR. JAMES ORJI EBERE**

B.Sc (RSU), PGD (RSU), Msc. (IAUE), PGPD (NCA), CNA, FCCSA (USA)

**ACTING BURSAR**

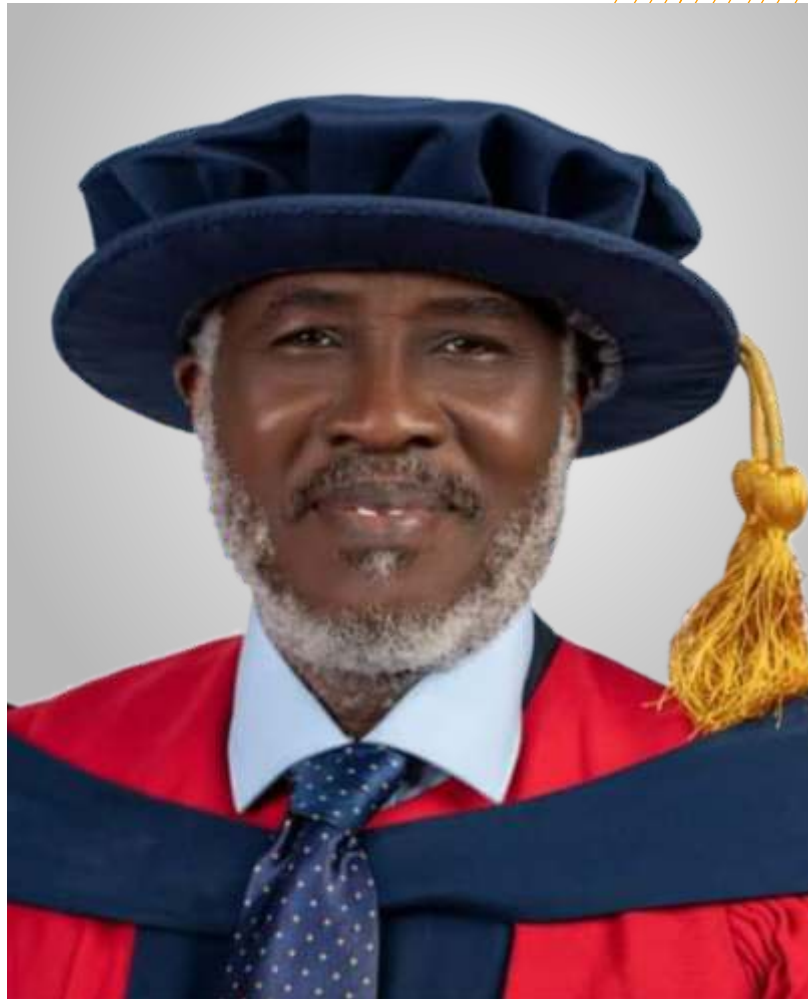


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**PROF. JONES M. JAJA**  
**(DEAN, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES)**



**Department of Theatre  
and Film Studies**

Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State  
University, Nkpolu Okpara, kwo,  
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**DR. EZIWHO EMENIKE AZUNWO**

**AG. HEAD OF DEPARTMENT, THEATRE & FILM STUDIES**





Profile of Prof Nlerum  
Sunday Okogbule,  
DSSRS, FCIARB  
Vice-Chancellor, Rivers  
State University Nkpolu  
-Oroworukwo,  
Port Harcourt

Born on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1960, to the family of Late Elder Sunday and Mrs Azonwo Okogbule at Ovelle-Nvakohia, Rumuekpe in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, **Prof Nlerum Sunday Okogbule, DSSRS, FCIARB** demonstrated his love for education at a very early stage in life. He started his primary education in 1965 when his hand could hardly cross the other side of his head which was the customary measurement index in those days. It took the insistence and passionate plea of his father who had himself been denied the opportunity of going to school for the Headmaster to accept the young Okogbule as a pupil then.

Upon completion of his primary education in 1971, he proceeded to Government Secondary School, Creek Road, Port Harcourt in 1972. His first West African School Certificate Examination result was seized alongside others in 1976 but he re-took the WASC Examination in 1977 from home and was still able to pass the examination in **Division One**. For an educationally backward community then, this was a no mean achievement; and young Okogbule became an instant idol and reference point in the community.

He concluded the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) degree programme in **Second Class Honours Upper Division** in 1984. He proceeded to the Nigerian Law School, Lagos and concluded the Barrister at Law programme also with **Second Class Honours Upper Division**. He was accordingly called to the Nigerian Bar on 20th August, 1985. Upon completion of his National Youth Service at the University of Ilorin, he commenced his Master of Laws degree programme at the University of Ife in 1986 and was the **Best LL.M**

**Student of the University in 1987.** After several years of working at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, he was compelled by a combination of desire and circumstances to travel to the University of Glasgow, Scotland for his **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Law** which he obtained in March, 2012. He is also a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators of Nigeria.

#### Teaching Engagement

Prof Okogbule was employed as a Lecturer 11 in this University in October, 1988 and rose through the ranks to become Professor in October, 2012. He was promoted Lecturer 1 in 1993, Senior Lecturer in 2001 and Reader in October, 2005. Finally, he was promoted to the rank of **Professor of International Law** in October, 2012.

#### Religious Life

Prof Okogbule is a committed born-again Christian worshipping with the Church of God Mission mt Inc. at the Rumuepirikom Provincial Headquarters, Port Harcourt. For several years he served as Chairman of the Church Committee and Men's Fellowship at the Mgbuosimini, Rumuolumeni Branch of the Church. In recognition of his services in God's Vineyard, he was ordained a Deacon in November, 2012 and **Elder** of the Church in November, 2015.

#### Marital Life

Prof Okogbule is happily married to Deaconess (Barr.) Mrs. Uchenda Bibian Okogbule, and they are blessed with seven children and four grandchildren.

**Prof Nlerum Sunday Okogbule, DSSRS, FCIARB** is an accomplished academic, a humane and unassuming administrator, a prolific writer, a consummate human rights activist, Legal luminary of repute, and an Award-winning International Scholar. He is a **Fellow, Chartered Institute of Arbitrators of Nigeria (FCIARB)**, and a recipient of Rivers State Government Award of **Distinguished Service Star of Rivers State (DSSRS)**.



**WELCOME ADDRESS BY PROF. JONES M. JAJA, DEAN,  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY AT  
THE 2024 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SEKIOLOGY,  
SPINNING DEEP, BRANCHING WIDE AND INTENSIFYING  
POTENTIALS, HELD ON 25<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2024 AT THE  
AMPHITHEATRE, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY (MAIN  
CAMPUS) PORTHARCOURT.**

Our Amiable, Vice Chancellor,  
Deputy Vice Chancellors,  
Registrar,  
Distinguished Guests of Honour and Special  
Guests,  
Esteemed Scholars,  
Respected Colleagues,  
Honoured Participants,  
Gentlemen of the Press  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure and profound enthusiasm that I extend a warm welcome to each one of you as we gather here today for the 2024 International Conference on Sekiology. This momentous event represents a significant milestone in our academic journey within the Faculty of Humanities, and I am truly honoured to stand before you as we embark on this scholarly endeavour.

This conference represents a pivotal moment in the academic discourse surrounding Sekiology. The theme of our conference, "Seki Performance and Cultural Identity in the Niger Delta," holds profound significance in the context of our academic pursuits and the broader cultural landscape of the region. It speaks to the intricate interplay between artistic expression and cultural heritage, shedding light on the unique role that Seki performance has played in shaping the collective identity of the Niger Delta.

At its core, Seki performance serves as a repository of cultural heritage, embodying the collective memory, values, and traditions of the communities within the Niger Delta. Through its dynamic blend of music, dance, storytelling, and visual spectacle, Seki offers a window into the rich tapestry of indigenous cultures that call this region home. It serves as a means of cultural transmission,

preserving age-old customs and narratives for future generations while adapting to contemporary contexts.

Seki performance serves as a powerful expression of identity, both individual and collective, within the Niger Delta. Through its vibrant rhythms, evocative movements, and symbolic gestures, Seki reflects the lived experiences, aspirations, and struggles of the people who inhabit this diverse landscape. It is a testament to resilience in the face of adversity, a celebration of cultural diversity, and a reaffirmation of community bonds that transcend linguistic, ethnic, and social boundaries.

Furthermore, Seki performance serves as a catalyst for social cohesion and empowerment within the Niger Delta. As communities come together to participate in or witness Seki performances, they forge connections, foster solidarity, and reaffirm shared values and beliefs. It serves as a platform for dialogue, advocacy, and social change, amplifying voices that are often marginalized or silenced in mainstream discourse.

In essence, the theme "Seki Performance and Cultural Identity in the Niger Delta" invites scholars, artists, and enthusiasts to explore the multifaceted dimensions of this art form and its profound impact on the cultural landscape of the region. It encourages critical inquiry, creative expression, and interdisciplinary dialogue as we seek to deepen our understanding of Seki performance and its role in shaping cultural identity in the Niger Delta.

The tagline of our conference, "Spinning Deep, Branching Wide, and Intensifying Potentials," encapsulates the essence of our collective endeavour. It speaks to our commitment to delve deep into the depths of Seki performance, to



explore its multifaceted dimensions and to unearth its hidden treasures. It signifies our aspiration to reach across disciplinary boundaries, to branch out into new avenues of inquiry, and to unleash the untapped potentials of Sekiology.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge how Seki performance has evolved over time and become a global phenomenon. From its humble origins in the Niger Delta to its widespread recognition on the international stage, Seki performance has captivated audiences around the world with its vibrant rhythms, mesmerizing movements, and rich cultural symbolism. Today, Seki stands as a testament to the enduring power of artistic expression to transcend borders, bridge cultures, and foster greater understanding and appreciation among diverse communities.

As we immerse ourselves into the very essence of Seki performance, we are presented with a remarkable opportunity to explore the myriad dimensions of this art form – from its historical origins to its contemporary manifestations, from its traditional roots to its digital adaptations. Through rigorous scholarly inquiry and interdisciplinary dialogue, we aim to unravel the complexities of Seki performance and its enduring significance in the cultural milieu of the Niger Delta.

Throughout this conference, we will engage in a diverse array of discussions, presentations, and workshops, each designed to stimulate critical thinking, foster intellectual exchange, provoke learning, and ignite innovative ideas. From keynote addresses by esteemed scholars to panel discussions featuring emerging voices in the field, we have curated a programme that promises to inspire, challenge, and enlighten.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the individuals and organizations who have contributed to the success of this conference. To our distinguished keynote speakers, esteemed panellists, and dedicated organizers, thank you for your invaluable

contributions. Your expertise, passion, and commitment have been instrumental in shaping this event into a truly transformative experience.

I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to our sponsors, partners, and supporters, whose generous contributions have made this conference possible. Your unwavering support underscores the importance of academic collaboration and community engagement in advancing our shared goals.

In closing, I invite you to embrace the spirit of inquiry, curiosity, and collaboration that defines our conference. Let us approach our discussions with an open mind, a keen intellect, and a genuine spirit of camaraderie. Together, let us explore Seki, celebrate its cultural significance, and chart a course for future scholarship in this vibrant field.

Once again, welcome to the 2024 International Conference on Sekiology. May our time together be filled with insightful conversations, scholarly rigour, meaningful connections, and enduring memories.

**Thank you.**

**Prof. Jones M. Jaja**

**Dean,**

**Faculty of Humanities,**

**Rivers State University.**





**Profile of the Sekiology Conference 2024 Convener, Eziwho Emenike Azunwo, PhD, Ag. HoD**

Dr Eziwho Emenike Azunwo AKA Academic Rabbi is a born again Christian. He is a Senior Lecturer and the Ag. Head, Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the Rivers State University and at present.

He hails from Rundele in Emohua LGA of Rivers State. He was a lecturer at University of Port Harcourt where he served in different capacities including ASUU UNIPORT Finance and Investment Committee Convener, Member, University-Wide Examinations Committee, Hall Warden for the university, Examination Officer, Secretary Faculty of Humanities Electrification Committee, etc.

He is Nigerian Playwright, University don, a Critic, a theorist, etc. He has over 50 articles published in reputable journals. Some of his plays include: Gbuji , Suffering in Paradise , Apogee The Last Resort, The Last Don Other drafts that are in the press include but not limited to: The , “A Tale of Nine Months”, "Ele Gbaka", “Shan Inna”, “Shame in his glory”, “Jane in crisis”, "Artificial Ignorance", "The bouncer from Igodomigodo”, “Kaposi in Sacoma”, “The state’s cake”, “Untimely death”, “The Last Don”, “Rinyah Chiokike”.

Some of his plays have been produced several times for several occasions, especially at UNIPORT Theatre (CRAB), Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (Sea Side Theatre), Rivers State University (Amphitheatre). His unpublished play, "The good man had a standing ovation in USA at the end of the performance.

One of his plays, “Shan Inna” was read via zoom to commemorate the World Polio Day 2020. His article was “Women Empowerment and Domestic Violence in Selected Nigerian Video Films” which was published in Journal of Gender and Power, was classified among the 700 best articles in 2018 by

<https://noussommesfans.com/2019/01/06/articles-memoires-et-theses-de-lannee-2018-la-liste/Fan-studies-et-culture-populaire-in-Paris>. He is married to Mrs Precious Uchechi Azunwo who also a lecturer in the same university. Their union is blessed with a son.

Finally, the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Rivers State University is currently in collaboration with the Séki Dance Drama Foundation



## PROFILE OF SEKIBO, IFIESIMAMA MELVIN PRECIOUS

**M**r Sekibo is a thorough-bred alumnus of the renowned Harvard Business School OPM class (2006-2009) and Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (2002) with over two decades professional work experience spanning across the financial services and energy sectors.

He is a tenacious Entrepreneur, passionate game changer and result oriented professional with a proven track record in turn-around management. These attributes consistently drive his vision to lead tenacious teams which mobilize strategic investments and capital injection to resuscitate and restructure moribund Companies to the path of sustained profitability. In 2003, he led a team which acquired Global Assurance Company Limited, previously under the technical management of the National Insurance Commission. As Executive Vice Chairman, he steered the new institution, International Energy Insurance (IEI), which emerged as a frontline Insurance Company in Nigeria, undertaking a successful capital raise and listing on the Floor of the Nigerian Stock Exchange.

Again in 2009, he led another team of professionals which nurtured the re-birth of the erstwhile Societe Generale Bank which was transformed to an Innovative Commercial Bank with Regional Authorization called Heritage Banking Company Ltd where he served as the pioneer Managing Director/CEO. His passion and relentless drive for turn-around management is further evidenced by the successful acquisition of Enterprise Bank Ltd, to create a bigger, better and stronger Heritage Bank Ltd following rigorous and novel regulatory approval processes leading to the dissolution of the erstwhile Institutions comprising HBCL & EBL to birth the New Bank.

Mr Sekibo is a valued member and Fellow of a number of Professional Institutes including the Institute of Directors; Institute of Petroleum, London; Nigerian Institute of Management; Chartered Institute of Bankers of Nigeria.

He is married, with children.



## PROFILE OF **HIGH CHIEF BARR. DUMO LULU BRIGGS**

**H**igh Chief Barr. Dumo Lulu Briggs was born on the 13th June, 1964 into the family of Late High Chief O.B. Lulu Briggs and Late madam Irene Lulu Briggs from the Briggs compound in Abonnema in Akuku Toro Local Government Area of Rivers State.

DLB attended his primary and Secondary school here in Port-Harcourt, he holds an LLB degree in law and was called to the Nigerian Bar in October, 1986 with over 27 years as a seasoned legal practitioner.

DLB as a brand is an accomplished businessman, philanthropist, he is the Chairman, Platform Petroleum Limited. A reputable indigenous oil company. DLB is a grassroots mobilizer/Politician, he was a gubernatorial candidate during the 2023 gubernatorial election in Rivers State.

Dumo will do More





# Profile of Yibo Koko

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

CREATOR/DIRECTOR CNN RECOGNIZED SEKI DANCE DRAMA

JUDGE ON NIGERIA'S GOT TALENT(NGT) SHOW

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER/CREATIVE DIRECTOR NIGERIA'S GOT TALENT FRANCHISE.

CONSULTANT: BONGOE TV SOUTH AFRICA.

PRODUCTION CONSULTANT: AFRICA MAGIC MNET WEST AFRICA.

HEAD OF PRODUCTION: AFRICAN MAGIC MNET WEST AFRICA

### Very Recent Projects

SEKI DANCE DRAMA - TRACING THE AMERICAN TAP DANCE TO THE INDEGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE CORE NIGER DELTA AREA OF NIGERIA

FEATURE FILM – THREE TRAMPS AND THE LAW IN - POST PRODUCTION (SHOT ON ARRI ALEXA)

He the Chairman of Teen Africa Tv on DSTV channel 315

Yibo Koko is currently the DG/CEO Rivers State Tourism Development Agency.

Yibo Koko is a creative and innovative individual with a strong academic & professional background in the dramatic arts. Experienced in initiating and managing highly successful events including those designed to raise awareness of cultural and development issues.

This Rivers State born consummate professional possess a qualification from the New York Film Academy at St. Catherine's College, Oxford University and at the Universal Studios, Hollywood, California.

University of Port Harcourt, Creative Arts Department where he graduated with a B.A in Theatre Arts.

He is a recipient of the “Outstanding Achievement in Film making Award” by Women of African Descent Film Festival at the 42nd Brooklyn Arts Council International Film Festival. He speaks as a guest at creative events within and outside Nigeria. Over the last decade, Yibo Koko has served on different boards, committees in the creative and tourism industry as a creative consultant and set/production designer.



## An address by the Ag. Head, Department of Theatre & Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University, Dr. Eziwho Emenike Azunwo.

The Vice-Chancellor, Rivers State University, Prof. Sunday Nlerum Okogbule, DSSRS.  
Principal Officers here present.  
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

**Theatre:** A laboratory for creativity and innovation:  
The Rivers State University experience.

I am the happiest person here in this Auditorium today and the reason is quite simple.

A young Department like ours is having her International Conference titled: Sekiology, Spinning Deep, Branching Wide and intensifying potentials with the theme: Seki performance and Cultural identity in the Niger Delta. Where bundles of knowledge will be assembled to interrogate this subject matter, dance.

Conferences of this magnitude only happens at Cambridge University, Oxford, University Essex especially as it concerns Theatre & Film Studies

Let me at this juncture, wholeheartedly appreciate the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Sunday Nlerum Okogbule for all his support and encouragement towards the growth of the Department.

The Department has recorded countless successes since its inception: the Department has gained full accreditation, the Department has graduated her first set of undergraduates. The Department's Postgraduate Programme has reached its climax as the department is set to examine its second set of the Postgraduate students in the next few weeks, while the first set is awaiting the External Examination.

As a Department which is theory and practice based, we have always delivered in all fronts, all thanks to my ever working, untiring and dedicated colleagues as well as our workaholic students for being good learners and ambassadors waiting to be seen in the near future.

The rider to this International Conference is Sekiology, Spinning Deep, Branching Wide and intensifying potentials. This in a nutshell touches every facet of Humanities as in philosophy, it is appreciated in the realm of aesthetics. In literally studies, it is well understood in analytical interrogation using mother tongue. In history, the subject is preserved. In Religious and Cultural Studies, it is used as a form of worship. In modern languages, dance is an interconnectivity. This is why the psychologist use dance in counseling.

Dance which is the rhythmic movement of the body in time as space is also an element of culture showcases our rich cultural heritage. There are so many benefits of dance in our various communities hence, the title of this International conference today.

Today is historic for us as a department because we have planted a seed that will surely germinate and yield fruits. We have conquered the space of creativity, entertainment and art education within the Rivers State University Community and beyond. This is why Friedrich Nietzsche submits thus; "And those who were seen dancing were thought to be insane by those who could not hear the music"

I thank you all.

**DR. EZIWHO EMENIKE AZUNWO**



**PROF. RASAK OJO  
BAKARE CITATION**

Performance director and Professor of Choreography and Performance Aesthetics, Prof Rasaki Ojo Bakare started his career as a Graduate Assistant in 1990. He became a Lecturer II in 1992, Lecturer 1 in 1997, Senior Lecturer in 2000, Associate Professor in 2005 and full Professor in 2011.

He was artiste-scholar in-residence at the University of West Indies, Edna Manley School of Performing Arts and National Dance Theatre Company, Jamaica in 2003. Also, through a grant from PASMAE and UNISA, Prof Bakare was in University of Pretoria, South Africa for a collaborative research on African Musical Arts Education in 2003.

A member of the Teaching Artists Research Group, Oslo, Norway, 2013 and the Carnival Research Roundtable, Trinidad and Tobago, 2012, Prof Bakare has also benefited from research and workshop grants provided by Fords Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, SWAAN, UNFPA, C4C and NCWS.

His works have represented Nigeria in international competitions winning laurels for the country. Some of them are Friendship International Festival, North

Korea, 1997, Afrika- in Tyrol Festival, Austria, 1999, Africa Peace Tour, Mozambique, 2002, Gauteng Carnival, Soweto, South Africa, 2010. He was a leading member of Nigeria's contingent to Cervantino Theatre Festival, Mexico in 2001.

Prof Bakare was choreographer, Gambia National Troupe, 1994- 1996, acting Head of Drama, National Troupe of Nigeria, 2001, and Artistic Director/ CEO Nigeria National Carnival, Abuja, 2009-2013.

Among his over 200 directed performances are three presidential inauguration command performances: Jagunmolu, 1999, Voyage, 2007 and Langbodo, 2011. He also directed the performances of the opening and closing ceremonies of National Sports Festival, 2004, NUGA 2009, Nigeria Police Games 2016 and supervised the performances of the opening and closing ceremonies of FIFA U-17 World Cup 2009.

A member of International Dance Council (CID), UNESCO, Member, National Academy of Letters, Fellow, Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists, Fellow, Dance Guild of Nigeria and National Adviser, Theatre and Motion Pictures Practitioners Association of Nigeria, Prof Bakare has over 50 publications in peer reviewed journals and books across the globe.

Before joining Federal University, Oye – Ekiti in 2011, Prof Bakare, at different times had been a staff of University of Calabar, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, University of Uyo and University of Abuja. He has also worked in Imo State University, Delta State University, Kogi State University and Olabisi Onabanjo University in adjunct capacity. He is currently, Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti.

Currently, he is the State Commissioner for Arts, Culture and Creative Economy, Ekiti State.



**A KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR  
RASAKI OJO BAKARE AT THE 2014  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
SEKIOLOGY ORGANIZED BY THE  
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND FILM  
STUDIES, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY,  
PORT HARCOURT, ON 26<sup>TH</sup> MARCH  
2024.**

**TITLE:**

**“BEYOND KOKO'S SEKI: PERFORMANCE  
TRADITIONS AND THE CREATIVE  
ECONOMY OF NIGER DELTA”  
PROTOCOL**



**INTRODUCTION**

**D**istinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, It is a great honor for me to deliver the keynote address at this very important forum. I would like to first congratulate the creator of Seki, Mr Yibo Koko, for powering this conference which, I assume, aims to spin deep, branch wide and intensify potentials and possibilities for growth and advancement in the performing arts industries and the Nigerian society. It is in the same measure that I would also like to thank the Founder and CEO of Heritage Bank, Dr. Ifie Sekibo, for providing cooperate support to the Seki project. Also, I would immediately thank the Chief Host of this conference, our able Vice Chancellor Prof Nlerum Sunday Okogbule, for accepting to Host this conference. My appreciation to the Chief Host; Dean Faculty of Humanities and our Host; the Acting Head of Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Rivers State University for undertaking the responsibility of intellectualizing “Seki”; a performing arts industry experiment for purposes of social advancement. To all stake holders and participants at this uncommon conference: The Society of Nigerian Theatre Artistes, The National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners, The Association of Nigerian Authors, my Colleagues, the Lead Paper

Presenter, our respected winner of the 2023 prestigious NLNG/Nigerian Prize for Literature, and distinguished members of the academia who will be making paper presentations at the different plenary sessions, I thank you all for having me here as requested by the organizers to give the Keynote address. First, I will establish the background of my interest in Seki since its premier on 26th of March 2016. Then, I would enunciate the essence of the conference from its etymology- Sekiology, before spinning deep, branching wide and intensifying on the potentials of Seki as a panacea for economic liberation and how this can also be used to combat the spate of insecurity in the society.

**BACKGROUND**

On the day that Seki was premiered at Eko Hotel, Lagos State, it was witnessed by a classified audience that included the then Minister of Information, a powerful delegation of Rivers State Council of traditional rulers, industry stake holders, the cream del a cream of Lagos and Rivers states, media stake holders, and very specially invited guests. I was not available in Lagos that evening, but I watched it from my Hotel room as it was streamed live on Television. One of my protégées. and staff of Theatre and Media Arts Federal University Oye-Ekiti, Dr Isijola, who once trained





under Yobo Koko at some point, also, got an invitation to the event, as a scholar. After the Lagos premier, we did a critique of Yibo Koko's experiment which was peer-reviewed and published in a foreign journal in August 2017. The paper, which expectedly was not received in good fate by the creator of Seki as at the time of publication, did exteriorize Seki: the Dance drama, to examine the observable lacuna that exists between pedagogy and practice in the experiment. It made useful recommendations on flexibility of content and for the curator to accommodate further modifications that can endow the Seki project with enduring success. The concluding paragraph, which provides the premise for this keynote address, states thus:

With the example of Seki, this paper recommends that the Nigerian dance practitioner and indeed performing arts community, should endeavor to intellectualize their experiments, and be open to useful critical evaluations for the development of their experiments. As a result products of the Nigerian creative industry can be roundly developed as world-class commodities that raise the sector to the level of self-sustenance, which can play a significant role in the Nigerian economy (Bakare and Isijola, 2017, 55).

I reckon, as established, that the “Sekiology...” Conference is indeed an endeavor in the direction of positioning Seki for intellectual engagement in the interest of its development. Therefore, it is projected that most of the paper presentations that will arise from the plenary sessions will focus on evaluating Seki in the interest of further developments. However, the focus of this key note address is to highlight Seki as a “synecdochical” paradigm for the creative arts industry, and thereupon explicate how the success of this symbolic representation can be exploited for the advancement of the creative industry, and indeed the Rivers state society at large.

#### **ETYMOLOGY AND THE CONCEPT OF SEKI**

The etymology of Seki derives from the word 'dance' in the Riverine communities of Rivers state.

Seki means 'dance' in Okirika and Kalabari languages. This same term extends in meaning to other Ijaw communicates in Rivers state such as Opobo and Bonny as well as in Bayelsa where Dance is called Sei. As the culture is in western Nigeria, where a common term stands for the entirety of its related expression, Seki and Sei is conceptualized in this paper as a signifier for a sundry presentation of spectacles. In the Yoruba culture, the word Ere stands for music, dance, drumming, mime, acrobatics arts, sporting activities, magic art, chanting etc. Thus, without onward specificity, all spectacles prepared for presentations are regarded as Ere; an entertaining display. This generalization is convenient because all forms of Performances seek to achieve the same goal' to excite the spectators or audience. This paper gleams on the same conceptual framework to establish Seki as a metaphor for the creative energies of Rivers state People, albeit in the entire Niger Delta Region, as may be domiciled in performing arts, visual arts, indigenous crafts & culture and other activities that can fit into the creative economy of the communities.

#### **THEAMATIC VALUE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY OF SEKI PERFORMANCE**

Just like every indigenous society in the world, the functions of dance in the tribes and ethnic nationalities of Rivers state and other states in the Niger Delta region are diverse and most invaluable. The indigenous dance performances of a people exhibit the historical antecedents, political experiences, economic activities, aesthetic preferences, spiritual worldview, environmental peculiarities and the biological temperaments of the people. This is glaring in Seki, where apart from the aesthetic and rhythmic contents during its performance, the Seki dance succinctly provides a summation of the cultural identities and values of the Rivers People. Such identities that reflect the unique temperament, natural environment, predominate preoccupation, worldview, self-development, self-pride and preservation of the Rivers people, are presented through the creative use of dance, costuming, visual designs,



movements, music, mimesis, rhythm, verbal and other non-verbal performative arts as orchestrated by Yibo koko. There are many views to the meaning of the Seki performance. However, this paper is anchored on the thematic thrust of “Unity in spite of wide diversities”, which the curator has explored with keen dexterity. Indeed, this has endowed the production with huge relevance and timeliness; enhancing its value for institutional support.

The drive for all dramatic actions in the performance derives from the strange encounter of two fishermen who witness a masquerade display on the waters, while at expedition, and get the instruction to recreate the masquerade display for the benefit of the community. As they two communicate the charge, a communal fete ensues for the reenactment of Ogwein masquerade on land, as seen on the water. The festival features other cultural displays such as the Boat dance, Iria dances (of Okirika and Kalabari), Pioru masquerade dance (of Okirika), and the uncommon spectacular and most delightful display of Owemebe masquerade from Ikwerre ethnicity; an upland region.

The feature of the upland masquerade in the Riverine region is a strong statement on Unity in Diversity which the performance promotes. The movement of an ancestral trajectory from an ethnic nationality (Upland communities) to collaborate with that of a different area (Riverine communities) in support of their development; in spite of wide differences is instructive. The unification and collaboration at festival display brings color and excitement to the performance experience and underscores the need for support. In this context, collaboration expresses the beauty of a united front which is a necessary ingredient for development.

Worthy of note also are the cultural identities derivable from the salutations and selected dances such as Boat dance and the Iria dances, and their import in the performance. The performance was sporadically punctuated with divers hailing and

salutations that identify the representative cultures. These performative art of salutation also serves to vary the rhythm, while drawing on audience participation through responses.

“Iriah weh!” [...] “Ikwerre n'Meka o!” [...] “Asa mina...” [...]

The energetic chant salutation, which gets its peculiar communal response, is a characteristic hailing pattern in the Niger Delta region. As deployed in the performance, it is a social impulse that speaks to positive energies of the Rivers people in self-assertion, self-dignity, self-alacrity, solidarity, patriotism and togetherness. Beyond getting the audience's participation by response, the recurrence of the divers' salutations is socially and psychologically healthy for the audience members.

The boat dance as used in the performance go beyond some occupational enactment or the mimesis of water locomotion. It is a significant identity that reinforces the unity, resilience and progressiveness of the Rivers people. Paddling against the tide is an energetic task. In the performance, the crowd of voyagers join hand to support the progressive movement through paddling, notwithstanding the status, stature and gender. Everyone on board beam with excitement as they paddle and move, even against the tides. That was another bold statement in the direction of advancement through collective efforts.

Through the Iria dances, the performance gives a place of pride to women in the society. Seki features the Kala Iria, which is a maiden dance by virgin girls, in the traditional sense of it, and the main Iria dance; an age grade display by married women. The distinction is identified by significantly different physical appearances and the vigor that comes with movement and dance steps. The Kala Iria steps are swift and more vigorous than those of the age-grade Women Iria dancers. The upper region of the dancer's body is revealed, while that of the age-grade women is covered by elegantly sown costumes. The revealed part of the body of the



maiden virgin is adorned and decorated. The drawings of Manila, an earliest form of legal tender in the Riverine area is impressed on the body to show that her value and bride price is huge, for the value of chastity. The Kala Iria dancers also engage the Ngepu dance sequence that engages erotic snaps. This communicates good parenting that enables the maidens to exercise their waists and loins in preparedness for matrimonial responsibility. On the other hand, the Age-grade Women Iria dance is for married women to exhibit their self-endowment and the pride of their husbands. The dance, which supports the popular myth that the Riverine man derives satisfaction from being with a bodily endowed woman, exhibits women in well-fed, fat and rotund appearances, especially with enlarged waist region. Hence, in the elegance of costume and the use of beaded walking stick, the Iria dancer dances in lofty but exciting movement, holding a saucer on the other hand. With the saucer, she receives money gifts from her husband and people who appreciate the care her husband provides for her. Iria dances celebrate women in their elements while also displaying the pride of their men.

With this profuse overview of Yibo Koko's model production of Seki, Yibo Koko played the role of a preserver of history, a communicator of the people's identity and an exhibitor of their environment and other elements of their culture. However, beyond Yibo Koko's dance, I see Seki as a metaphor for the layers of possibilities that exist in the creative economy of the people of Niger Delta.

### **POSSIBILITIES IN CREATIVE ECONOMY**

The dances of the people of the Niger Delta should be intentionally mainstreamed into the economic development of the region. The multiethnic layers of the Niger delta region speak of diversely rich possibilities in the creative industries and this should inspire robust creativity. The variety of cultures provides an abundance of resources for creative expressions. In reality, Rivers state enjoys the most of these diversities, with 26 distinct ethnic nationalities followed by Cross Rivers, which is over

9, Edo- 6, Ondo-6, Akwa-Ibom- 5, Delta- 4, Owerri-4, Anambra- 2 while Abia state consists only in Igbo ethnicity. The derived ethnic diversities in the region is an indication of cultural enrichment for creative innovations, and the creative economy, which can develop the region and its people more rapidly. However, this has been underexplored, partly due to the abundance of oil in the region.

So far, efforts made by industry practitioners appear to be like scratching the surface of potentialities. The creative sector in the Niger Delta region has the possibilities of monumental growth that will richly benefit practitioners and the society. If the sector is economically positioned, it will strengthen its institutions and regulate its outputs to support the development of the society.

Apart from putting food on our tables, our dances should also be used for positive mobilization, towards moral/behavioral change, change from social ill, embracing patriotism, enhancing public support for government policies, improving democratization and leading the path to good living. The foundation to these possibilities begins with having the creative practice as a profession that contributes to the prosperity of practitioners. The era of art for art sake should be gone. The prosperity for practitioners and creative minds requires dedication, commitment and professionalism. The artiste will need to take his art as a trade, and not just some flair, and this will require purposeful branding and marketing. As practitioners begin to prosper thereby, the sector will draw to itself and engaged untapped and undiscovered talents. The youths and young adults, who could otherwise be turned to the wantonness of crime and nuisance will become ambitious to divert and devote their excess energy to the creative sector. This, by itself will make the region a more peaceful place to live.

On the other hand, as the sector prospers, it also attracts well-meaning collaborations and sponsors from corporate entities that find value in the aspects from which the creative sector is developing the society. This stance will further draw the interest of government to enhance the development of the



industry, which will consequently better the lots of the people. For these support and enhancement to take place, this paper asks the following questions, which stake-holders must consider critical to attract the desired support that can develop both the industry and its practitioners:

- i. How well is the impact of the creative sector felt in the Niger Delta, and in what direction?
- ii. In what dimension can the sector contribute to cultural reorientation, thereby curbing the spate of negative traditional practices in the region?
- iii. How is the creative industry combating social problems like drug abuse, rape, child molestation, cultism, terrorism, criminality, corruption and other negative identities that daily embarrass the region?
- iv. What approach can the sector employ to strengthen public support for government policies, systems and institutions, and for a more democratic society?
- v. How can the sector explore myths, legends, historical happenings, and history of great and patriotic people from the region, to communicate values and virtues that can help re-construct the society for enhanced development?

- vi. In what way can the sector rewrite the negative identities that had ensued from immediate past political happenings, and restore the positive image of the region?

These questions point the way forward as regards what the new focus should be. Beyond art for art sake, and beyond the propagation and preservation of cultural identities, the sector has a huge role to play in providing an alternative economy and in engendering a better society. Our dance should combat poverty and the creative energies of our people should provide a better life for all and sundry.

While Yibo Koko has created a performance which sells our cultural identities and which we are here to celebrate, his protégées and other creative entities within the region should take it further by positioning their works at the intersection of cultural identity and contemporary socio-economic development.

Esteemed personalities here present, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for listening.







**John Ochinya Onah**

## **AT THE CROSSROADS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY? RETRIEVING AND FIXING NIGERIAN DANCE PERFORMANCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Problematizing the Dance Field in Nigeria**

From an experiential perspective, in my undergraduate school days, a student from another discipline cynically marvelled at a textbook I held in my hand titled: "Dance". His rhetorical question was: "you mean dance also has a textbook?" Unfortunately, today like yesterday, little is known of this universal phenomenon called 'dance'. Ironically too, dance as a human behaviour, holds so much of our nature, our identity and yet suffers undeserved neglect.

Beyond the problematic of the under-value of the phenomenon of dance in a general sense, and its marginalization within the academy in specific terms, the art of dance experiences a robust dearth of literature and consequently its under-theorization. Music's development, on the other hand, is arguably more advanced in terms of documentation and even contemporary acceptance compared to its twin (dance), especially in Nigeria.

Within the performance genres of dance, music and drama (what Rasaki Ojo Bakare calls "the Performative Trinity"), the twin arts of music and dance, which have been acknowledged as preceding formal drama, are however subordinated and respect is accorded drama within the context of theatre practice and discipline. This problem, to my mind, is partly due to the volumes upon volumes of dramatic texts and the concomitant dramatic theories and criticisms that are churned out daily. Or is it the recent wave of unprecedented development of Nollywood, which

essentially favours acting while music and dance barely associate at the fringes? Could it also be the attitudes of contemporary dance artistes who contribute to the devaluation of the art, consciously and unconsciously? Is it also the dearth of critics in the field who should generate curiosity among dance enthusiasts? Conversely and sadly too, rarely does one, in recent times, experience disparaging outlook on music as does dance, especially with the fame of musicians like our own Tuface Idibia, Davido, D'banj and the likes. This condition of lacklustre attitude towards dance has partly orchestrated the nightmare scenario or stunted growth and under-development of dance in Nigeria.

The near absence of documented history of Nigerian dance experiences, that should engender knowledge and enlighten the populace, as well as provide aesthetic criteria for critical discourse in histrionic criticism generally, has sadly enabled over reliance on Western technique of dance and critical literature. Besides, the lack of knowledge or the evolution of indigenous dance notation that will be flexible enough to accommodate the multiplicity of dance styles and culture, as well as 'trap' the characteristic ephemerality of dance in Africa, is a major problem we are yet to overcome. It is within this frame of thought and context that we can appreciate the dance performance landscape especially in Nigeria.

No doubt, the level of discourse regarding dance and choreographic practices has been raised considerably, especially in the West, compared to



the mid or late twentieth century. Dance research has established itself as a viable discipline in the university; moreover, research into dance composition and documentation is also conducted by the practitioners themselves, and viewed as a vision of a new 'dance literature' and exploring also various non-linguistic forms of description drawn together by the artists/researchers. In this specific domain of theatre, a deep questioning process reaching into many areas surrounding composition, pedagogy and training, scoring, publishing and dissemination, curating, knowledge transfer, documentation, oral history, reinterpretation of historic repertoire and socially/culturally situated choreography, are robustly becoming current areas of dance studies.

However, in Nigeria specifically, the problem of criteria, theories and methodological tools have not been developed and articulated. This is why Western aesthetic criteria in the context of theories and methodological tools have held sway for several decades and have made in-roads into the performing arts of even the most remote corners of the world. Therefore the indigenous traditions of most nations, including African dances, have continued to be influenced, however with little measure of influence of the West by African dance forms.

In extrapolating the above, studies of non-western dance traditions are usually carried out by anthropologists or dance ethnologists who are unlikely to have the background knowledge that would help them to appreciate and understand dance and other structured movement systems in the larger scheme of cultural forms. However, there are numerous studies of dance by indigenous researchers who work on dance traditions of their own cultures, as well as the dance traditions of others, including ballet and modern dance of the West and indigenous Nigerian dances. What these researchers have in common is that dance is an integral part of a total way of life; a prime means of expressing cultural heritage and identity.

## Introduction

The theme of this conference: **Seki Performance and Cultural Identity in the Niger Delta**, no doubt, is interesting, robust and challenging. This is considering the variables to deal with and how to reconcile them in an attempt to find the constant. At face value, the phrases, **Dance Performance** and **Cultural Identity** appear simplistic but they are constitutively tenuous concepts to unravel especially that scholars are in variance with the terms specifically. It is in the light of the difficulty, or is it the polemics these concepts and phraseology pose that I have evolved a title in order to escape certain intellectual and theoretical complexities that I might trap myself. In this regard, I have opted to be more open and general in my negotiating these issues especially because dance scholarship is esoteric and a complex discipline, yet the profession appears as an activity of the intellectually lax.

In this paper, my approach is philosophical: asking more questions and considering the questions as more important than answers. This is deliberate because the likely answers to some of the posers are inevitably locatable in some complex indeterminism. So indulge the title I have developed for this conference: "At the Crossroads of Cultural Identity? Retrieving and Fixing Nigerian Dance Performances for Sustainable Development."

## The Conceptual Frame: Dance, Performance, Culture and Identity

The conceptual frames: dance, performance, culture and identity are essential terms to be initialized to enable clarity of thought and, of course to lubricate our understanding of the paper.

Can we define dance? Is our concept of dance uncertain and therefore broken? The idiom "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" is germane to the claim of having a definition of dance? However, my prayer is not to be accused of engaging in conceptual nihilism in my bid to insert my view in the polemics



that dance cannot be conceptually grasped, especially Nigerian dance, categorically because of certain aesthetic issues arising from dance's heterogeneity and in fact, Nigeria's multiculturalism; to the extent of the reality that our dance is definitely not uniform. My nihilism or scepticism for the purpose of this paper can be understood in the context that no conception is so correct or so wrong. (Permit me not to go through great pains to clarify the concept of dance here).

The first assumption is that dance is easy to define, and for others, it is difficult or indefinable. For me, we can understand it. This is because judgments about the kind of movements that constitute dance depend on individual, social and cultural preferences and traditions, as well as on particular artistic subcultures' aesthetic and moral constraints. Graham McFee argues in the light of the polemics surrounding what dance means and according to him:

The point then is that what makes a particular sequence of movement dance (rather than gymnastics) involves the context of performance and relatedly, the description under which the action is intended. Only in certain contexts does the intention to perform a dance make sense. And only when dances could be performed (or made) does it make sense to ask if a particular sequence of movement is, or is not, a dance. (54-55)

Although we know that dance is necessarily and essentially movement, not every movement is dance; it involves contextualizing and the context allows the behaviour to be intelligible and hence to be the action that it is. McFee asserts that "movement as such is not what is distinctive of dance, that every sequence of movements could (in principle) have occurred as part of some other activity" (56). The point really is that we must recognize that a dance is something other than just a sequence of movements.

However, to deliberately avoid the polemics surrounding the concept of dance, the Encyclopedia Britannica, nevertheless, provides a pragmatic initial characterization. It defines dance as an art form that generally involves body movements, which are usually rhythmic and performed to music, used as a form of expression, social interaction, or presented in a spiritual or performance setting. This simple definition is certainly quite general, and yet it identifies a number of key concepts that can ground a scientific approach to the aesthetics of dance. The body is the instrument of dance; it is the structure performing the movement that, ultimately, conveys the artist's communicative message. The latter is a key element of what turns a movement into a dance.

Within the ambit of the sociology of dance, the function of each dance in the life of a community show how it may relate to worship, the commemoration of events, the preparation for war, the celebration of victory, birth, marriage, death and mourning. The practice of dancing is presented as marking each point in the passage of life and this is true of the African setting. African societies are presented as being ones in which everyone dances and every context can be an arena for dance. Therefore, African dances have a mimic quality and consequently border on a dramatic performance: thus song and dance unite in achieving a complete image of theatre. The dance also, by the use of the human body, reproduces the passions and actions of men in order to express a collective emotion, to teach a religious rite or simply to entertain. Bernard Dadie, as quoted by Bakare Traore, has eloquently noted that "every gesture has a meaning. This meaning often escapes the Europeans because the gestures are merely outlined and conventionalized; there are conventions in the indigenous theatre... they are more difficult to grasp because the entire village, having the same way of life, very real and mysterious life, has no need to elaborate, the least gesture is capable of



suggestion...(55). This context foregrounds issues of culture and identity which each dance often represents in performance.

The term 'performance' is difficult in conceptual considerations in recent scholarship, especially since its foray into other disciplines beyond its theatrical orientation: "anthropology, sociology, linguistics, psychoanalysis, political theory, cultural studies, feminism, and queer theory" (Krasner and Saltz 1). It encapsulates social actions, and consequently used today in a general context than in absolute sense. The consequence of its diffusion makes it versatile and, as a result, precise definition is nearly impossible. Diana Taylor notes that "performance is not always about art. It is wide-ranging and a difficult practice to define because it holds many, at times conflicting meanings and possibilities (6). Therefore, our attempt here would be to create an understanding rather than defining 'performance' as a contested concept. After all, definitions are not required for understanding. This may be why Graham McFee notes that "we can understand terms perfectly well without being able to define terms ... that means that one can know or understand things without (always) being able to say what one knows." (17).

Richard Schechner provides an elaborate definition: pretending to be someone other than oneself" (Carlson 3). It is this he phrased as "restored behaviour", "under which title he groups any behaviour consciously separated from the person doing it – theatre and other role-playing, trances, shamanism, rituals" (Carlson 3). The import of his phraseology is "its pointer to a quality not involved with the display of skills but with certain distance between "self" and behaviour; analogous to the dichotomy between an actor and the role he plays on stage (Carlson 3). Some scholars have, as a result, associated it with not only doing but also with re-doing. In his seminal work "Performance: a critical introduction", Carlson asserts that "performance implies not just doing or even re-doing, but a self-consciousness about doing and re-doing on the part of both performers and spectators, an implication of great interest to our

highly self-conscious society". David Roman clarifies shades of meaning between performance and production in the theatre: "a performance stands in and of self as an event; it is part of the process of production. A production is generally composed of series of performances" (xvii). He notes that performances are never the same, they are nevertheless consciously repeated copies, and even their deviations are part of the dynamic of "restored behaviour". Richard Bauman makes a highly suggestive attempt to articulate the concept of performance. According to him, "all performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, according to which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action" (Carlson 5). In this view, the double consciousness, not the external observation, is what is most central. Schechner's "restored behaviour" emphasizes the process of repetition and the continued awareness of some "original" behaviour, however distant or corrupted by myth or memory, which serves as a kind of grounding for the restoration.

For ritual, it is a specific sphere of performance; it is a symbolic formation that is self-consciously performative. It is a domain of practice that has been conventionally treated as the primordial space of the symbolic: where human beings are immersed in mythic consciousness and re-originate themselves as distinct from other beings. According to Langer (1964), ritual is a symbolic process that effectively makes present what is empirically absent, discursively engages in the creative materialization of the abstract, and simplifies existential complexities. For Langer and Turner, it is the source of aesthetic forms such as music, dance, and drama. Moreover, it is ritual-performance that can highlight these aesthetic forms as manifesting particular organizational processes. For Turner, the ritual roots of what can be called the performance arts, or arts in performance, contribute to his development of a general sociological/psychological theory for the understanding of human being and its self-generative, creative capacity.





Schechner's conclusion, which is not exhaustive, provides the solace where we can easily anchor our understanding of performance. According to him

Performance is the widest possible circle of events condensing around theatre. The audience is the dominant element of any performance. Drama, script, theatre and performance need not all exist for any given event. But when they do, they enclose one another, overlap, interpenetrate, simultaneously and redundantly arousing and using every channel of communication. (89)

Therefore, performance as used in this context strictly alludes to theatrical or stage productions, usually drawn from play texts, improvised sources or music and dance.

Performance aesthetics refers to the study and appreciation of the visual and sensory aspects of a performance. It involves analyzing and understanding how various elements such as movement, gestures, costumes, lighting, set design, sound, and music that contribute to the overall aesthetic experience of a performance. Performance aesthetics explores how these elements work together to create a specific mood, atmosphere, or emotional impact on the audience. It is an interdisciplinary field that combines elements of art, theatre, dance, music, and other performance arts to examine the visual and sensory aspects of live performances.

In addition to understanding the different elements of a performance and how they come together, performance aesthetics also involves evaluating the performance based on certain aesthetic standards. For example, one might assess a dance performance based on its technical precision, emotional expression, or originality. It's a way of looking at a performance and evaluating it based on certain criteria.

The debate over whether there can be objective standards for judging art is a long-standing one in the world of aesthetics. Some argue that art can be judged objectively based on certain criteria, while others argue that it's all a matter of personal taste and subjective opinion. So, the question is: can art be objectively judged, or is it all a matter of personal taste?

However, there are different ways that different cultures and time periods might evaluate a performance. For example, the aesthetic standards of a traditional Niger-Delta performance would be very different from those of a modern dance performance. So, not only does performance aesthetics involve evaluating a performance based on certain criteria, but it also involves understanding how those criteria might vary across different cultures and historical periods. Nevertheless, cultural factors play a big role in how we assess art. Different cultures have different values and beliefs, and that can impact how we perceive and evaluate art. So, in a way, even our objective criteria for evaluating art might be influenced by our own cultural biases.

The African perspective on art definitely tends to place more emphasis on the socio-cultural and political context, rather than the purely formal qualities of the Western aesthetic formalists. The aesthetic formalists believe that the only thing that matters in art is the formal qualities, like line, colour, and composition. Moderate formalists believe that the formal qualities are important, but they also think that other factors, like the context and history of the art, can be relevant. And the anti-formalists believe that art should be judged based on its social and political impact, rather than its formal qualities.

### **Understanding Culture and Identity**

Culture is ubiquitous and it is a global reality that is inescapable. As a term, it has been used in a number of different ways, both by sociologists and in everyday conversation. It is therefore a truism that the concept of culture is a complicated one.



This is why in his book *Keywords* (1976) Raymond Williams, a leading theorist of culture, claims: “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language: Notwithstanding the polemics about culture, our working definition is the one most usually adopted by contemporary sociologists. This definition sees culture as the “the whole way of life of a people.” According to Ralph Linton (1945), it is “... the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation (727). It incorporates the sociology of culture: the sociology of art; the sociology of music and the sociology of literature. From this point of view, culture is to be found in theatres, concert halls, art galleries, and so on, and in this sense, it is called “high culture”. Paul Nwabuikwu (cited in Ayaoge) espouses culture to be an all embracing force or pivotal to everything:

...it is not an independent thing. It is what we actually are as a people. Our culture guides us in how to behave and is what we ought to be doing. We must nurture and encourage our culture, as it is the expression of our values and belief. (96)

Culture is therefore the sum of what various people share with others within a society with whom they also share common social identities. People with common social identities may further share certain aspects of cultural knowledge, including beliefs about their social contexts, values, attitudes, social norms and practical skills, as part of their group life, in dealing with their common fate, or simply through sharing space and time together.

The term 'identity', according to Jary and Jary, is 'a sense of self that develops as the child differentiates from parents and family and takes a place in society’ (qtd in Haralambos and Holborn 729). It refers to the sense that someone has of

who they are of what is most important about. Important sources of identity are likely to include nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class. To be clear, it is individuals who have identities, identity is related to the social groups to which the individual belongs and with which they identify.

Therefore, Richard Jenkins argues that “social identity' is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others” (759). It is created in the process of human interaction and involves making comparisons between people and therefore establishing similarities and differences between them. Those who are believed by themselves and others to be similar share an identity, which is distinguishable from the identity of people who are believed to be different and who do not, therefore, share the same identity. (759)

Conceptually, the relationship between identity and culture is to the extent that identities can be formed through the cultures and subcultures to which people belong or in which people participate. Some theories see the relationship between culture and identity in rather different ways; those influenced by modern theories of culture and identity are likely to see identity as originating in a fairly straightforward way from involvement in particular cultures and subcultures. A typical example is that people living in the Niger Delta region are expected to have a strong sense of Niger-Delta identity. Nevertheless, Stephen Frosh describes the view that identity draws from culture but is not simply formed by it:

Recent sociological and psychological theory has stressed that a person's 'identity' is in fact something multiple and potentially fluid, constructed through experience and linguistically coded. In developing their identities people draw upon



culturally available resources in their immediate social networks and in society as a whole. The process of identity construction is therefore one upon which the contradictions and dispositions of the surrounding sociocultural environment have a profound impact. (qtd in Haralambos & Holborn 729)

Culture and identity are never entirely separable: It is a defining trait of the concept of culture that whatever beliefs, values, inclinations, tastes, practices, and texts constitute it must also serve an identity function for those who participate in the culture (John Joseph 1). On the other hand, no group can be expected to be culturally homogeneous; the urge to tribalize is too deeply rooted in human nature, indeed its ubiquity in animal behaviour testifies to how deep it runs in our evolutionary heritage.

### **Traditional Dances, Cultural Identity and Globalization: Which Way Forward?**

Traditional Nigerian dances are dances indigenous to the Nigerian people both in form and content. They can be defined as any local dancing tradition, often tied to certain socio-cultural and religious beliefs, political and or economic context. They are performed largely in lines or circles of the dancers and the body is used asymmetrically. In Nigeria, like in the rest of Africa, every parts of the body is articulated: arms, legs and torso all appearing angular, the body slightly forward, bent, while shoulder and hip movement are consequential and common. It incorporates polyrhythm, syncopation, and intricate rhythmic patterns that find expression in the dance movements, music and several other artistic creations.

While there is a call for the idea of globalization to create a global community which, by effect will ensure a cross-fertilization of ideas in politics, economics, social and cultural spheres, it is also greeted with stiff opposition by the inhabitants of the third world. The apprehension is the erosion of

African cultural heritage by some “superior” cultures of the Western world. It is this apprehension that has generated the paranoia that globalization is questioned.

The reservations and hesitations in issues of African arts generally, in the context of globalization, may explain the need for a conversation on cultural identity. Robert Nicholls (41) asserts that “evidence shows, that modernity is having an adverse effect on traditional dance”. Apparently, critical social changes are leading to the demise of many traditional customs which engender dance. The question is whether we have a strategy against the impact of globalization? Are we ready to face the realities of this inevitable global phenomenon?

### **How can we then manage our cultural identity in the context of globalization?**

Evidently, globalization is identified as a development currently changing the physiognomy of global culture and politics, and much of these changes have impacted on dance. A number of scholars acknowledge the demerits of globalization due to its asymmetry of power and cultural interests of the member states of the global village, as well as the lopsidedness in the rules of the game there-in. therefore, despite the corrosive effect of globalization on African culture generally and specifically its dance, I believe that through a genuine and committed cultural, sociological realignment and strategies that are African in orientation, we can manage our identity question. I would assert here that there lies a huge advantage of homogenization of cultural, political and socio-economic spheres for Africa in a globalized context.

Within the modern or contemporary context of Nigerian dances, the question to ask is whether there is a mix up? A number of controversies surround contemporary dance from Africa. There have been the usual questions about the nature and significance of contemporary dance from Africa and productions which draw on African



dance vocabulary. Here are two. The first begs the question as to whether African contemporary dance is a neo-colonialist project. This question has arisen because the audiences for African contemporary dance in Africa are small, the funding comes from the West, and certain collaborators have presented themselves as if they are on a mission to update African culture to a meet a standard set by their own cultures. Within the overlap of local, nation and international institutions that inform the creation of theatrical dance from Africa, the international institutions are not only stronger economically but also produce a stronger discourse and possess a stronger infrastructure for the production of theatre. In comparison to Staged traditional dance which came out of an era infused by Pan-Africanism and Negritude and a desire to forge a coherent identity for post-colonial Africa, African contemporary dance seems to be driven merely by external artistic agendas and economic crisis and has cynically been described as having been manufactured by the West to satisfy appetites for new forms of exotica.

Another controversy has been around the discourse that surround African contemporary dance. Due to the mitigating circumstances, African dance artists and African cultural producers are not in ownership of it. For instance, a number of artistic works by Rasaki Ojo Bakare across various Councils of Arts and Culture in Nigeria are diffused in a number of performing troupes and they are not currently linked to the creator of the works. I stated this elsewhere:

This is nevertheless part of a general problem of the absence of mapping and documentation of specific techniques of choreographers and dancers. The implication is that these works of known choreographers like Arnold Udoka, Ojo Bakare, Chris Ugolo and a number of others, have 'vanished' into general and diverse choreographic works without clear identification of their progenitors in the last three decades or so in

Nigeria; or that their works, if identifiable are definitely declining or are already extinct. (Onah 195)

This condition engenders difficulty in tracking dance techniques or artistic approaches of practitioners, "hardly are the choreographic works of Arnold Udoka, Bakare Ojo Rasaki and several others or even the diaspora Nigerian choreographers like Peter Badejo are documented in prints to avail critical materials of their choreographic experiences." (185)

While Euro-American theatre dance is understood in relation to a history of evolving ideas and how these ideas have informed the generation of dance techniques and artistic approaches, the aesthetics of African contemporary dance are examined through the lenses of generic images of African culture. These are produced by various histories and stories of the continent and the Diaspora. Sometimes they are formed by the de-contextualized African images which flit about in cyberspace and in the media and from advertisements produced by charities and the development industry. Many audiences seem to view African dance, traditional or contemporary only from the point of view of its intriguing otherness with little engagement with the issues that inform the practices or interest in the vision of the choreography and the work is critiqued against Western standards without any investigation into the artistic approaches of the choreographer. Some practitioners find this demeaning as this positions African contemporary dance as a being a practice without a clear theoretical frame of reference defined by racial and cultural stereotypes.

In taking the Nigerian context which should concern us as a paradigm, our dances for instance focus on portrayals of Nigerian culture as and when untouched by Western culture and techniques, emphasize the differences in values and expression between Nigeria and the West. The contemporary artist on the other hand is more likely to draw on in terms of design, dance technique and music, a hybridity of cultural expressions, ranging from traditional and urban African forms to Euro-





American dance techniques. This has sparked controversy. Many ask 'What is Nigerian about these dances?'

This context may be why Rasaki Ojo Bakare would interrogate the contemporary Nigerian choreographer; if he or she is a realistic culture preserver or harmful distortionist. In his paper, he makes a valid case for the contemporary choreographer who is not necessarily limited by the world view of his society and therefore "sympathetic to the relativist theory" but "see their activities as being artistically legitimate" (65), and driven by context to create choreographic pieces. According to him,

... the contemporary choreographer is engaged in the business of making personal statements in accordance with the social, theatrical and aesthetic demand of his contemporary audience. He is not overtly engaged in spiritual efficacy but uses the dances that exist in his cultural background as raw materials and established 'linguistic property' to express his purely creative thoughts. (66)

The kernel of Bakare's proposition is that the "protectionist tendency has made the relativist theorists and their sympathisers to consider the activities of contemporary choreographers in Nigeria as dangerous to the preservation and survival of the traditional Nigerian dances" (67). But while his reprehension of those who insist on cultural preservation is development-oriented in my view, he also fails to strike the necessary balance between the contemporary choreographer's 'poetic licence' as a creative thinker with the right, freedom to use traditional dance materials and make them yield new statements, on one hand, and the need to ensure that contemporary choreographic activities should take cognisance of our cultural identities in the course of re-contextualizing traditional dance forms. I agree that, although "a living dance is the

one a people are doing themselves, not the one done by their ancestors... (and should not) be reduced to a piece of archaeological material kept in the museum" (71), I would insist that innovation in whatever form should recognise Hegel's dialectic of thesis and antithesis. In other words, when a traditional dance idea (the thesis) is challenged by a new context, new historical development or force by the contemporary choreographer (antithesis), a new dance form emerges of the synthesis of the two prior stages which should not become bereft of appropriate cultural identities.

But how corrosive is the creative dance scene? In my view, it should not be so corrosive as to bleach Nigerian traditional dances out of recognition. Where the bleaching process is so severe, it may completely transform such dance altogether. In an assuring manner, Bakare however avers that

The contemporary choreographer in any nation is a creative artist whose training makes him a bridge between the past and the present. He also possesses the skills necessary for the inevitable adaptation, diffusion and hybridisation without making the traditional dances to lose their identities. (71)

### **Is Nigerian Dance at a Crossroads?**

What is Nigerian dance? Is our idea of it confusing or hazy in the light of a globalising force or has it lost its identity. A definition will not end the debate and since a definition is often requested with the hope that it will end debate, the paper would be an abject failure if it attempts to provide one. If our indigenous dances are unarguably Nigerian dances, what do we call the creative works of contemporary choreographers that may be far removed from identifiable traditional aesthetics and identities? However, if their works reflect Nigeria's new social realities, are they not sufficient to be called Nigerian dances? Are we on the edge or at some crossroads of defining and even understanding Nigerian dance?



Therefore, the question as to whether the Nigerian dance space is characterized with myriad aesthetic issues is to state the obvious. To be frontal, I consider these issues which require thorough scholarly attention to include dealing with conceptual problems, the identity question, and the aesthetic dilemma, especially if we must evolve truly modern Nigerian dance aesthetics laced with characteristic identities. Of course, the posers may precipitate certain difficulty in contemporary Nigerian dance discourse and perspectives as well as the fact that positions may continue to diverge until we begin to pull our arts to together. But are our dances coming together or can they not come together? Of course they can, if we deliberately but strategically avoid what some consider as 'corrosive' in the light of the trans-ethnic complexities of dances of Nigerian origin especially in a fast changing world.

Furthermore, are choreographic practices thriving in Nigeria? The answer to this question is definitely affirmative because dances exist sumptuously both in traditional Nigerian communities and urban settings for diverse purposes of expressing cultural heritage and identity. Today, our dances are still a part of traditional events but also as an element of new innovative performing experiences. This may be why it is easy to witness dances in varied choreographic styles reflecting the Nigerian people in their various philosophical, cultural and political contexts.

However, who and where are the choreographers? Today, nearly every dancer lays claim to being a choreographer especially where they are able to piece movements together to form dance pieces. Whether such people qualify to be identified as choreographers in the real sense of the word is a matter for a possible and perhaps unending debate. What is evident is that thorough-bred choreographers are limited and scarce for reasons beyond this paper. Elsewhere I have attempted to articulate the problem of the field by noting that:

...the mapping of choreographic techniques of practitioners in Nigeria and indeed Africa, is still

latent, if not absent. Perhaps, the problem stems from the major dearth of literary documentation of dance arts and practices to indicate shifts, mutations, transitions, traditions and or conventions. This may explain in part, the state of dance and choreography in the context of the hitherto hazy outlook of the art and practice itself in Nigeria. (Onah 191)

There is therefore, no doubt, a fading generation of choreographers who scarcely dot the Nigerian dance landscape. What about the diaspora choreographers? Are they in the business of developing Nigerian dances or responsible for edging them out of recognition? Are their works developmental or inserting confusion into an already confused atmosphere that negates traditional aesthetics and identities? These posers require attention and may possibly get satisfactory answers when we begin to interrogate our dance and choreographic practices in the context of a robust criticism

### **Conclusion: Fixing the Nigerian Dance Space for Sustainable Development**

There is a sense of ambivalence which seems stock in the mind of Nigerians today. This ambivalence is a creation of a false colonial picture which leaves many confused about their identity. The falsity is that Nigerians were not only isolated, but also endowed with an unchanging culture. Even those who have learnt to accept that Nigerian cultures had been changing insist that European colonialism brought a different order of change. This has concomitantly erected a false dichotomy between traditional and modern Nigeria.

To explore this falsity further, the assumption is that African societies lost their dynamism on the coming of the colonial rule and emphasizes what is new in the change induced by colonialism while ignoring the continuities with the past. Therefore, in the dialectics of change, we must emphasize not only innovation but also continuity. Ade Ajayi



admonishes that “in every case of revolution, conversion, modernization, what have you, we need to explore what is old, how it has been adapted, and what is entirely new” (15). He went further to assert that “pre-colonial African cultures have responded to the impact of colonialism not through extinction, but through adaptation and continuities with remarkable resilience.” (15)

It must be noted therefore, that every parts of the world, in one way or the other, may have experienced the historical reality of innumerable compromises and adaptations and conflict resolutions, the dynamic factor which recognises in man, each man, neither traditional nor modern, but just man, a product of history and the constant mixture of continuity and innovation. Evidently, despite the intrusion of foreign cultures, traditional cultures failed to be displaced with its dynamic context and remain a fundamental instrument of survival. Our dances represent our vitality and resilience and a prime means of expressing cultural heritage and identity.

In the light of the above, there is need to engender development through an articulated research strategy, however, recent trends in dance studies suggest that the terms “Western dance” and “non-Western dance” perpetuate false dichotomies and that a focus on who studies the dances, and their points of view, might be more appropriate. Some studies result from turning the anthropological eye upon “ourselves” while others use insights from dance history to explore the “other”. For example, Susan Foster's dance history work is informed by anthropological theory, while Cynthia Novak's anthropological studies were informed by dance history. The work of Margaret Drewal in performance studies is informed both by dance history and anthropological theory as is evidenced by her work on African dance.

Furthermore, there have been several recent developments that have allowed dance to become a greater player within today's intellectual debates. One has to do with a growing fascination with “the body” as important in gaining understanding into human subjectivity. With the popularity of such

philosophers as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, theorists have begun to move away from a hierarchy that split body and mind – and emphasized the mind – to see “embodiment” and lived experience as central to the comprehension of “self”, “other”, “world”. In a number of recent studies, questions are raised about how movement idioms are conveyed and understood in performance, thereby emphasizing the necessity of understanding the total culture in order to understand specific performances. “Performance” refers to an actual rendering of a movement sequence, relative to parole of Saussure, which assumes that the performer has a certain level of competence and the skill to carry it out. A viewer must have communicative competence in order to understand movement messages.

Therefore, in regards to the foregoing, studies of dance in the New Century should focus on two kinds of analysis, that is, Ethnotheory and Movement Meaning.

**1. Theoretical and Ethnotheoretical Analysis.**An important approach in the study of human movement systems is the study of movement theory and philosophy of movement from the point of view of the society in which the movement takes place. The use of Western dance theory for analysis of non-Western dance is inappropriate, and a researcher must attempt to discover indigenous theories about movement. Such questions are therefore tenable: How did the structured movement systems originate? Are they codified into genres? How and by whom can dances be composed? How can (and cannot) movements and postures be combined? Is there a vocabulary of motifs and a grammar for their use? Are there notions about energy and how it should be visually displayed? On the basis of movement, can dance be separated from ritual? And more basic still, does a culture have such concepts? These questions and many more constitute the state of research in dance today. Evidently, researches in Nigeria have given scarce attention to these approaches to dance analysis which is critical to the development of the art.



## 2. Movement and Meaning.

One approach of movement analysis that is gaining currency, yet, still a tenuous enterprise, is the analysis of meaning of specific movements and meanings of movement systems as a whole. Meaning is usually associated with communication and the presentation of the 'self' to 'others' and 'ourselves'. The challenge in this approach is "Competence" or knowledge about a specific dance tradition and this is acquired in much the same way as competence in a spoken language is acquired. Competence in this regard relates to the cognitive learning of the shared rules of a specific dance tradition as 'langue' is acquired in a Saussurian mode. Competence also enables the viewer to understand a grammatical movement sequence that he/she has never seen before. Therefore, issues of meaning in movement system constitute an area of further research and taking into cognisance the diverse semio-cultural entities of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.

Thus, discovering and articulating the meaning of an artistic work is a key to appreciating, understanding, and responding to dance performance. In this connection, we learn to analyze, interpret and critique dances to refine skills of observation. To comprehend the meaning of a dance, we practice finding and describing movements observed. By analyzing dance works of different genres and styles, we look for recurring movement patterns, qualities, and characteristics. In noticing the differences or similarities of various dance genres and cultural movement practices, we are challenged to discover what makes each dance unique. In this sense, we are able to explain how dance communicates aesthetic and cultural values and strengthen the ability to perceive and analyze artistic work.

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**W**e have always contended that the American Tap Dance bears similarity with the Masquerade dance steps of our People.whose content we believe heavily influenced the tap essence.

#Séki, the dance drama masterfully crafted by Yibo Koko, beautifully intertwines the art of American Tap Dance with the rich cultural tapestry of the Core Niger Delta Area. Rooted in the oral traditions of Ijaw, Ikwerre, Igbani, Ogoni, and more, #Séki unfolds a mystical narrative where gods from the aquatic realm forge a profound connection with mortals on Earth.

The dramatic crescendo occurs when protagonists, mesmerized by mystical beings and rhythmic drumbeats, abandon their fishing pursuit to share their extraordinary encounter with the community. Through a blend of Sanford Meisner's total engagement and Stanislavsky's memory recall techniques, the locals are treated to a mesmerizing re-enactment, infused with comedy, buffoonery, and exaggerated expressions. #Séki, as a pantomimic dramatized dance collage, embraces eclecticism, drawing from various forms to captivate its audience.

Beyond the theatrical spectacle, it serves as a non-violent response to foreign incursions, challenging stereotypes about the Niger Delta's cultural disposition. The performance, lasting ninety minutes, encompasses a range of dances and masquerade displays, showcasing the Kabuki tradition's influence and celebrating the region's virtues and values. It stands as a powerful testament to cultural resilience and a call for understanding and appreciation.

**Yibo Koko**



## **THE REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN IN SELECTED AFRICAN WAR NOVELS** By

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### **Abstract**

African parenting system views parenting as a practice that controls and protects children while developing into responsible adults. Early literary works predominantly focused on young individual's involvement in armed conflicts but pay little attention to the psychological and emotional aspects of children involved in such conflicts. It is on this premise that this research focuses on Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*, Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* and Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, to provide firsthand accounts and fictional narratives that bring the issue to the forefront, offering powerful fictional accounts of dysfunctional parenting and child soldiering in Africa at large. There are several parenting patterns which may include, the nuclear and extended family structures. The aim of this study is to historically expatiate the different dysfunctional parenting styles that births concepts such as, Child soldiering and militancy. The theory adopted for this study is the Anna Freud's defense mechanism, a branch of psychoanalytic theory which establishes the interaction between the children's internal and external environment through the regulation of the traumatic events stored in the unconscious minds of children. This paper however, asserts that, against the natural form of parenting which allows parents and guardians to responsibly nurture, shelter and provide for their children, a number of factors, including poverty, illiteracy, drug, alcohol abuse e.t.c. have broken the traditional family chains. This paper therefore examines the representation of children in contemporary African society and addresses the displacement of children at very tender ages while highlighting the post traumatic and psychological effect of war on children.

**Keywords:** Representation, Children, Selected, War, Novels

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SACRED MUSIC IN STRENGTHENING THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA.**

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### **Abstract**

Music has the undisputed capacity and power to culturally, morally and emotionally influence society. A people's sense of their history and their relationship to a deity is always expressed in music. It is believed that music is the vehicle through which the sacred word is brought to human beings. Hence music is used to lift up prayers to a divinity. Music could also function as a binding symbol within a specific cultural or sub-cultural community. It is based on the above assertions that this paper investigates the contributions of sacred music in strengthening the cultural diversity of Niger Delta region. Using historical and sociological analytical methods the paper discovers that the purpose of sacred music is to aid worship by communicating religious stories with the view to enhance togetherness of people of diverse groups and to glorify God who created them. The paper concludes that music is part of Niger Delta people, and that well manageable sacred music can go a long way in unifying their heterogeneous cultures, thereby encouraging development of the region.

**Keywords:** Sacred, Music, Culture, Diversity, Niger Delta



## **Cultural festivals in Niger-Delta: A focus on Ekenta Day (Ogwuwezina) of Oduoha Ogbakiri.**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

Beside the abundance of mineral deposits in the Niger Delta region, the area is endowed with enormous festivals. These Festivals bring people together in love and unity and as is a symbol of identity as it differs from one society to another. One of such festival is the Ekenta Day Festival in Oduoha Ogbakiri in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State of Nigeria. It portrays cultural heritages of the people in an ambiance of nature which tends to unify the people and her neighboring villages in Ogbakiri kingdom and communities. The area could attract tourist if adequately explored through the many cultural heritage it exhibits, thereby making it economically developed. This discourse which is based on cultural economics theory examines the different performances during the festival with a focus on projecting the people's culture to the outside world and as a means of identifying its tourism components. The paper suggests the measures that could be employed to enhance the essential potentials in the festival for a tourist product. The paper concludes that if the festival is given an importance alongside with the other numerous festivals in the area, it will serve as a tourist base for both local and foreign investor thereby developing the region. Finally, it recommends that festivals should be made popular through proper documentation and encouragement been intensified to preserve our cultural heritage for posterity.

**Keywords: - Culture, Ekenta, Festival, Niger-Delta, Tourism.**

Dance As Agent Of Social Change and Activism  
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**Abstract :** Nigeria's vibrant dance scene transcends mere entertainment - it's a potent force for social change. This abstract delves into the history and present of Nigerian dance, highlighting its power to spark transformation across society. Examining traditional forms and contemporary expressions, it shows how dance acts as an agent for advocacy, empowerment, and community unity. From resisting colonial rule to tackling modern issues like gender inequality and environmental challenges, dance serves as a platform for marginalized voices. Women, youth, and indigenous communities find spaces for self-expression and collective action, fostering dialogue and understanding between diverse groups. Digital platforms, social media, and grassroots initiatives amplify marginalized voices and mobilize action for social justice. Case studies and evidence showcase the multifaceted ways dance shapes narratives, challenges norms, and inspires individuals and communities to build a better Nigeria. This abstract also sheds light on the art-activism nexus, illuminating how Nigerian dance contributes to a global understanding of social transformation. It is a powerful testament to the enduring connection between artistic expression and the fight for a more just and equitable world. The article doesn't just explore the vibrant tapestry of Nigerian dance; it also paves the way for its future. By embracing these steps, Nigeria can: Harness dance as a powerful force: Driving social change, cultural enrichment, and collective empowerment. Build a more inclusive society: Where everyone can move to the rhythm of progress and opportunity. Pave the way for a brighter future: Where Nigerian dance flourishes, enriching lives and communities.

**Keywords:** Advocacy, Social Change, Cultural Resistance, Empowerment, Community Cohesion Grassroots Activism.



## **Towards a theorization of Ugbokolo Aquatic Dance and Delineation of its Public Health Implication in Ekpeye Land**

By

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**Abstract**

Ugbokolo is one of the highly celebrated dance performances in which, the people of Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State find deep expression in. Predominantly indigenous to Ekpena and Ihuaba communities of Ahoada East Local Government Area of the state, Ugbokolo is usually performed during special communal events of the likes of chieftaincy installations and royal burials in Ekpeye land. Despite the aesthetic exceptionality and abundant benefits of the Ugbokolo performance to humanity, it is yet to secure any visible theoretical and scholarly attention. This study therefore theorized the theatrical aesthetics as well as delineated the public health benefits of Ugbokolo performance with a dependence on Ferdinand De Saussure's semiotic theory. The qualitative and quantitative research designs were adopted to purposively sample the performance culture of Ugbokolo in two Ekpeye communities, namely; Ekpena and Ihuaba. A critical examination of the dance cultures revealed the prevalence of a distinct setting exclusively based on water for the performance of Ugbokolo dance. This study therefore, contributed to knowledge by theorizing Ugbokolo aquatic dance in Ekpeye. The study also delineated remarkable health benefits associated with the Ugbokolo. This study recommended that relevant authorities and well-meaning individuals in Nigeria and in diaspora should consider it a matter of urgent necessity to encourage the visibility and viability of indigenous African Arts.

Keywords: Towards, theorization, Aquatic Dance, Delineation, Public Health, Implication

## **Cultural and Aesthetic Perspectives of the Niger Delta Drama, Dance, and Performance.**

### **The SEKI Experience.**

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Owing to the exerting influence of globalization and the corroding effect of modernization as driven by technology, salient aspects of our culture are being eroded because we have depended much on the oral tradition as opposed to the literal. Seki, which means dance in Ijaw, is a conscious extraction from the vault of oral tradition and a collage of cultural dances and masquerade displays unique to the indigenous people of the lower Niger Delta. It endeavors to through performance, recalibration and documentation, preserve the cultural mores of the Ijaws and propagate same to a global audience for appreciation and further research. Seki embodies the rites of passage as can be justified for instance in the relationship between the Kala and the Opu Iria in the Iria dance (which speaks to succession planning and knowledge transfer). As a performance, Seki has evolved from its original concept named Owu'ama puti (dance of the water spirits) in May 1997. Seki is audacious enough twenty-seven years (27 years) on to make a theoretical claim that the American Tap Dance owes its origin to the Niger Delta masquerades' Igbiri (the rattles strung on the ankles of both legs as part of the costumes adorned by the masquerade dancers). Within a few years of performance, Seki has grown to become a global brand of sort that is aesthetically appealing and theatrically relevant through the infusion of production design and technology to tell this unique African story to a modern and contemporary audience. Undoubtedly, the deployment of technology has accentuated the story telling technique in Seki, significantly for a predominantly sight and sound generation like we have today. Ultimately, Seki has developed to become a marketable toolkit, creating an ecosystem that creatively and profitably engage creative within a sustainable process of collaboration in the creative economy





**Seki Performance Traditions: A Historiographical Account of Sekiapu Masquerade Dance Group of Okpoama**

By

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&

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**Abstract:**

This article entitled: "Seki Performance Traditions: A Historiographical Account of Sekiapu Masquerade Dance Group of Okpoama", sought to highlight the preponderant role of Sekiapu Masquerade Dance within the culture and traditions of Okpoama people in the present day Bayelsa State of Nigeria. In line with Hamadou Ampâté Bâs remark that when an old man dies in Africa, it is a library that burns down, the authors undertook to interview a nonagenarian self-styled non-historian of Okpoama origin, Engr. Prof. Youpele Orukalama Beredugo, The Godiriede 1 of Okpoama Kingdom, who published his personal recollections on Okpoama history in his seminal work, *New Perspectives in Okpoama History*. This article is, therefore, a narrative based on Beredugos oral account of the history of Sekiapu Masquerade Dance Group of Okpoama. It traced Sekiapu through its different evolutionary stages from its origin to its present state. It unravelled the split between Opu Sekiapu (Big Sekiapu) and Kala Sekiapu (Small Sekiapu) and their rivalry over the performance of a particular dance called Agala which led Opu Sekiapu to obtain a court injunction restraining Kala Sekiapu from any further performance of Agala. It exposed also the legal and/or judicial powers vested on Sekiapu by Okpoama community and the challenges of exercising such powers nowadays. In conclusion, the authors appraised Beredugos historical account of Sekiapu Dance Group in Okpoama as one of the most factual and credible in the light of other existing versions.

**DANCE: A LANGUAGE OF PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE NIGER DELTA TITUS-GREEN 'ABINYE**

PhD

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**Abstract**

Nearly every aspect of the thought system of the Niger Delta people can be expressed through dance and as much as it has been appreciated for its aesthetic strength, there is a lot that has been left unsaid concerning its relevance to the practical ideologies of the people. Using the qualitative research method, every component involved in dance, from the intricate movements of the dancer to the songs and the instruments involved will be analysed. Using the theories of Action and Social Action, patterns of dance as regards the individual and in relation to the Ijaw society will be identified and described. Findings reveal that Seki is part of an embedded existential system which spreads across the identity, culture, history and even the mundane aspects of the people's lives. This study concludes that Seki should become a reference point in the study of Niger Delta philosophical systems. It also recommends that Seki should be developed in accordance with modern academic and technological innovations in order to enhance learning and development among younger generations.

Keywords: Practical Philosophy, Dance, Culture, Ideology, Seki, Performance, Art.



## **THE USE OF SONGS IN MIESOINUMA MINIMA'S ODUM EGEGE.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This work examines the use of songs by the playwright to beautify his work, to reach out to his audience and to give it the African touch .The characters of this text are used by the playwright to compare today's leadership, the moral standard of the society and jungle life of humans, where the preys are at the mercy of the predators .Connotatively, this play represents the marginalized turbulent Niger Delta region. The playwright gives this work, its master piece meaning through setting, plot, character and characterization, multilingualism, language, songs and so on. This work, uses Carl Gustav Jung's Archetypal Theory as the theoretical framework to explore the use of songs in the conquest and subjugation, the mediation and the possession of the supernatural in the affairs of man. Songs are used to beautifully present this work and as a means of comparison between characters, pointing out their strength, weaknesses, powers, thoughts and actions as they contributed positively or negatively or frustrated, as they are represented in the play by the playwright. The playwright, uses the idiophone ,which is an aspect of song to add colour and emotions to the play.

Key Words: Songs, idiophone, King Jaja, Odum Egege,Nene Obu

## **An Interpretation of the Role of Oya in Femi Osofisan's \_Many Colors Make the Thunder-King**

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### **Abstract**

Acting for the stage is a captivating art form that brings stories to life through the embodiment of characters by actors. This paper dives into the intricacies of acting for the stage, shedding light on the multifaceted dimensions of this artistic pursuit. The journey of an actor begins with a profound understanding of the characters they portray. The actor's ability to breathe life into these characters hinges on their capacity to connect with their inner emotions and memories, creating authenticity in their performances. The aim of this study is to explore the fundamental principles of acting, ranging from character development, emotional depth, and physical expressiveness to effective collaboration and storytelling techniques. It is also aimed at giving the reader an in-depth understanding of the interplay between actors, directors, and the production team and how essential it is for the seamless execution of a theatrical production. This study will also serve as a guide to how actors should be apply both the theory and practical aspect of acting in order to be able to interpret a role. This study made use of Konstantine Stanislavski's Method Acting Style for the purpose of role interpretation.



## **Costume and make up as Tools for Cultural Promotion and Preservation: An Example of Students' induction in Rivers State 2020/2021 and 2021/2022**

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### **Abstract**

Costume and make up play very pivotal roles in theatrical productions. They serve as influential tools in character portrayal and storytelling. The aim of this paper is to do an analysis of costume and makeup as tools for cultural promotion and preservation in Theatrical Performances. This research critically looks at the worth of costume and makeup in academic inductions' ritual with focus on how characters were portrayed and how they contributed to the realization of the induction ceremony. This paper x-rays the students' induction ceremony in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies at Rivers State University for two academic sessions: 2020/2021 and 2021/2022. The paper discovers that wearing some specific attires and artificial facial applications at academic ritual induction events have many significant undertones. It also discovers that costumes and makeup enhance the identity and character portrayal of participants, it sways ceremonial connotation to the event thereby fostering a sense of unity and group identity. This paper contributes to the broader understanding of the role of costumes and makeup in academic ceremonies and underscores their potentials in enhancing the overall experience and achieving the intended goals of such events. It therefore recommends regular induction ceremonies for the theatre undergraduates.

## **Dance as a psychotherapeutic model for depression: A study of Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH).**

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### **Abstract**

Dance as a creative exercise, is an integral part of the Nigerian society used at various passage of life rites such as naming ceremonies, initiations, marriages, festivals and burial ceremonies. Despite the varied functions that dance plays, little attention is paid to its therapeutic benefits in relation to the extrication of depression. This study therefore explores the special capacity dance offers as a coping skill to enhance the wellbeing of those experiencing depression and hypertension. This paper employs the quantitative research method via administering questionnaires to patients experiencing depression, interviews of psychiatric doctors and observational method to highlight how dance functions as a healing mechanism to surmount emotional adversity. This work hinges on dance therapy as its theoretical framework. Findings show that overwhelming experiences evokes negative emotions such as depression and suicidal tendencies; dance however, serves as a regulator and aids the release of endorphins and cortisol hormones which improves pleasure and serves as an antidepressant and a curative medium that is central to diminishing sensations of fear, anxiety and emotional pressure while creating an atmosphere of calmness and restoring wellness in patients suffering depression. This research recommends that a responsive dance department be incorporated in hospitals to help depressed patients boost their endorphin levels in place of opioids which has side effects.

**Keywords:** Dance, therapy, depression, opioids, endorphin, antidepressant



## THE ECSTASY OF CULTURAL DANCE IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF OJOJO CULTURAL DANCE OF AROCHUKWU

BY

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### Abstract

Dance, in African society serves a complex diversity of social purposes. Cultural dance, especially can be seen as a physical exercise as well as a recreational activity which also entertains during occasions. A typical African society is characterized by various indigenous performances that culminates to cultural heritage of the given society. It is filled with aesthetic values which makes it distinct from one society to the other. These performances are structured into different forms and they are used mostly during significant events in the community and they embody the cultural attributes of the people. Our work is on “The ecstasy of the cultural dances in African communities: a case study of Ojojo Cultural Dance of Arochukwu”. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Ojojo cultural dance performed by the women of Arochukwu in Arochukwu Local Government Area in Abia State, Nigeria. Of what benefit is this dance to the community? What other dances can the society experience same pleasure? We will use socio-historical method to analyze this work and at the end will propose meaningful contributions that will take the society to a greater height.

Keywords: Arochukwu, Culture, dance, Ecstasy, Ojojo.

### Masquerade drama (Owu-Sekiti) as a dramatic art for Being an Abstract presented By

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Being an abstract submitted to the organizers of the 2024 international conference 'Sociology, spinning deep, branching wide and intensifying potentials' with the Theme: Seki Performance and Cultural Identity in the Niger Delta.

### Abstract

Ekine masquerade drama fulfills the core of drama, even adhering to Aristotle's definition of drama in a sense. But lack of dramatic inclined empirical examination have limited its recognition by scholars as fulfilling the core of drama having actors, audience, embellished language and a designated place of performance. This is because; most documentations of African drama were done by anthropologists. Thus this papers aim and objective will theoretically and conceptually reveal Ekinie drama as regards its functionality in terms of content, sequential arrangement and use of elevated language adhering to Aristotle's dictates and the core of drama in a performance. The research method is qualitative, while utilizing the primary and secondary methods of data collation. Theory utilized is Richard Schechner's Performance Theory while embracing Aristotle's dictates on what constitutes drama. The findings of this study reveal that Ekine drama is performed in one evolution of the sun, having place (stage) actors and an audience, using elevated an embellished language with rhythm, tempo and pace in performance. Contributions to knowledge; this study has contributed to knowledge by revealing Ekine dramas adherence to Aristotle's definition of drama, embracing the core of dramatic art, place, actors and an active audience. Recommendations are; any form of drama that creates an enabling environment of peace, togetherness harmony and human creativity should be encouraged.

Key words; Drama, theatre, dance, masquerade, dialogue , language.

Sub title; Seki and Performance Traditions





## POSTMODEMIC PERFORMANCES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON **EGWU OTU** DANCE MUSIC

BY

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### Abstract

Egwu otu dance music is an envious traditional music of the Ogba community. It is the oldest and commonest musical culture of the Omoku clan in Ogba community. Over eight (8) decades ago, the membership of Egwu Out dance music was opened to only the male folk of the community. Recently, the music is beginning to evolve as a result of postmodern influences. There are some form of changes that are overwhelming some of the groups, in terms of the membership, songs, mode of operations, uniformity and other innovations. The level of positive or negative influence of these innovations on the groups have not been ascertained. The aim of this study is to ascertain the level of postmodern influence on Egwu otu music, analyze its implication on the music and entire community and recommend ways of cushioning the influence. The study will adopt participants' observation and interview as a method of data collection. The subjects of the study are selected members of Egwu Otu dance music group. Recommendations and conclusions will be made using the findings from the study.

Keywords: postmodern, performances, implications, Egwu Otu, music

## SEKI ART AND QUEST FOR REDEFINING THE NIGER DELTA

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### Abstract

The Niger Delta people are mainly located in the Southern and Midwestern Nigeria, an area that is today known as the south-south geo-political zone. There are six states which make up this zone and they include: Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo and Delta States – BRACED. The latter is an acronym coined from initial letters of names of each state which make up the region. It is a brainchild of governors of the region in their spirited effort to form a common economic blueprint and expeditious developmental plan and collaboration among member states. The major ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta include Ijaw (Ijaw), Kalabari, Ikwerre, Ogoni, Igbani (OPobo), Bini, Ekpeye, Ogba, Etche, Wakirike, among others. Before and during anglo-Nigeria, the indigenes of these communities or states shared so many cultures and traditions including arts in common. The people of the zone shared same socio-economic and political experience in today's Nigeria. They are victims of the following: oil exploration and exploitation, environmental pollution and degradation, militia and militancy agitations, illegal oil refining or "Kpofire" and total annihilation of their ecosystem. The soot plague is still ravaging the entire area. However, previous governments in Nigeria had set up interventionists' agencies to ameliorate the sufferings of the people. Such agencies include: Niger Delta Basin Development Authority, OMPADEC, Niger Delta Development Commission, Ministry of Niger Delta and HYPREP. The entire region was engrossed in a war of survival and liberation from the iron clutches of its oppressors mainly the oil multinational companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria. In the quest of the aborigines to interrogate the status quo, violence broke out and prominent sons of the region were gruesomely murdered by the military junta under the watch of General Sani Abacha. However, the crux of this paper is to initiate a new thinking process to redesign the Niger Delta through arts of dancing known as Seki. This is a dance pattern of the people of Niger Delta where dancers tune their waists in unison to the beats or rhythms of the drums. This development would serve as a rediscovery of the positive energies and potentials of the people.

Keywords: Seki, Niger Delta, Art, BRACED, Multinational, Environmental pollution



## SEKI, ACTING, STAGE AND ACTOR TRAINING SYSTEM

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### Abstract

Theatre is a diverse and dynamic art form, which has evolved over time to include many Acting systems and approaches. The Seki acting system is one of such systems which represents different cultural and historical backgrounds. The Seki system has its root in traditional Niger Delta and Ijaw culture and combines elements of dance, and storytelling. The Seki performance is not just an ordinary performance but it is a reflection of the Niger Delta/Ijaw people, which have been performed internationally and its robust performance has attracted attention from the global audience. The Acting system developed by Stanislavsky focuses on the actor as a performer. The Seki and The Method Acting systems are two very different approaches to theatre but they both have significant impact on modern performance practices. They demonstrate the diversity and richness of theatre as an art form. Also, the Seki system as a technique for training the actor, emphasizes the use of traditional Niger Delta/Ijaw dance and movement as well as storytelling and music which has significant impact on the development of Theatre and performance in Ijaw or Niger Delta region. On the other hand, the Acting system by Stanislavsky is an American based approach which has influenced modern performance practice around the world. The research is an analytical study which examines the dynamics and developmental stages the actor goes through using Seki as a training mechanism for achieving a total theatre experience for the actor. Using the 'Involvement Theory' as propounded by Constantine Stanislavsky. Secondary sources include books, journals articles, online and library resources. The research observes that, the storytelling technique is a fundamental part of the Seki system which is a very powerful tool for training actors. It helps them connect with the material on an emotional level and it gives them a chance to explore different characters and scenarios. The storytelling in the Seki system does not only teaches the actors about the culture and history of the Ijaw people but it also affects the way they move and perform. The study also recommends that, it is necessary for all departments of theatre/drama in Nigerian university to adopt the Seki system as an indigenous acting approach which will further serve as a powerful tool for training the actor. Since it avails the actor the opportunity to fully immerse oneself in the total theatre experience.

## SEKI DANCE: ITS AESTHETIC VALUE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE

BY

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### Abstract

Seki dance is a traditional performance art that has its roots in Rivers State, Nigeria's rich cultural legacy. This study examines the artistic worth and cultural significance of Seki dance, following its historical evolution and current applicability in the local cultural milieu. This study examines the symbolic meanings woven



within the dances, costumes, music, and stories of Seki dance using an interdisciplinary method influenced by anthropology, folklore studies, and performing arts. In order to highlight Seki dance's functions as a means of collective expression, identity assertion, and the preservation of indigenous knowledge, the study looks at the sociocultural environments in which it developed. Additionally, it examines the effects of modernization, globalization, and sociopolitical processes. Through fieldwork observations, practitioner interviews, and archival material analysis, this research clarifies the complex rhythmic patterns, symbolic gestures, and choreography that characterize Seki dance. It looks at how Seki dance promotes a sense of pride and belonging in both participants and viewers by acting as a forum for intergenerational conversation, cultural exchange, and community togetherness. The study's conclusions deepen our awareness of Rivers State's rich cultural legacy and emphasize how crucial it is to preserve and advance traditional performing arts in the face of modern obstacles. It highlights the potential of Seki dance to promote cultural tourism, intercultural conversation, and social harmony, and calls for its recognition and preservation as an essential part of Rivers State's intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Seki Dance, Aesthetics, Value, Cultural development

## CODE-MIXING AND CODE-SWITCHING IN SELECTED NIGERIAN GOSPEL SONGS

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### Abstract

The study investigated the act and issues involved in code-mixing and code-switching in Nigerian gospel songs. The study aimed at settling the misconceptions people have against the application of code-mixing and code-switching in songs thereby bringing to the fore, its importance and applicability in everyday life. To realize this aim, the researcher adopted Giles Accommodation Theory and Labov's (1973) Sociolinguistics Patterns to explain the essence for code-mixing and code-switching applied in gospel songs. The researcher further adopted a Questionnaire method of data collection which was distributed to gospel song lovers to air their opinion on how they feel about Code-mixing in songs. Another method of data collection was through Boomplay and Chrome browser where the songs of the artists were downloaded, listened to code-mixed situations identified. The findings of this study show that, though, 35% gospel song lovers see code-mixing and code-switching in songs as language deviation which hampers their understanding of the introduced language, it in greater measure as recorded by 65% respondents served as a unifying means for Nigeria's multilingual nature. It brings a sense of accommodation for different languages which in turn, bring people together and make them familiar with the culture of other places. In the interest for language growth this study recommends that Code-mixing and code-switching in songs should be accorded high esteem since it serves as a means of getting acquainted with the cultures and languages of other people.



## **DANCE, AN ELEMENT OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA**

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### **Abstract**

Dance, an element of social change on community development in the Niger Delta cannot be mentioned without first mentioning dance as an element of our culture which has promoted peace, unity of purposeful development and projected peace and common front. Dance is not just entertaining, it is educative to the mind if critically examine in its entirety across the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria the rhymes of the drums and drumming depict a story line, the costume does, dance steps and the people. It is more than just being entertained, dance is us today, our patrach and matrach of yesterday and the need of preparing, educating and preserving tomorrow for our children.

Keywords: Dance, Element, Social, Drums, Niger Delta, Change, Development, Community and Rhymes.





## A Critical Analysis of the Political Themes in **Julie Okoh's A Haunting Past**

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### Abstract

It is commonly argued that political participation serves as a fundamental cornerstone of both citizenship and democracy. Regrettably, research has consistently indicated a sustained decrease in political participation within numerous Western democracies. This trend is especially evident among scholars and policy analysts who narrowly define political participation as merely encompassing activities such as voting, party membership, or a limited 'arena-centric' perspective of politics. Consequently, the prevailing observation is that political illiteracy is on the rise concurrently with declining political engagement. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that the shift away from established democratic practices and conventional modes of political involvement represent just one facet of this multifaceted issue. The Rational choice theory is applied to achieve a mesmerizing objective. This paper utilizes a qualitative approach to explore the thematic content of *A Haunting Past* and its potential to foster political awareness and engagement among the audience. The research reveals that corruption, godfatherism, and electoral maneuverings have served as significant obstacles, undermining the political engagement of the population. Additionally, the study recommends that civic education programmes aimed at informing citizens about their roles in the political process and their rights within a democracy can be conducted through educational institutions, community outreach, and media campaigns to ensure that citizens are well-informed and actively engaged in politics.

### Introduction

The relationship between arts and political participation has always been seen as a powerful way to engage with society and make positive changes. Throughout history, creative expressions such as literature, visual arts, music, and drama have served as powerful tools to convey political messages, challenge societal norms, and mobilize

public sentiment (Dizard, 32; Kostelanetz 14). Artistic mediums provide a unique platform for individuals to voice dissent, reflect on socio-political issues, and engage in constructive dialogue.

This might be the reason why Michael Kirby's definition of the political drama could be applicable. Hence, Kirby submits:

Political theatre is intellectual theatre. It deals with political ideas and concept, usually in an attempt to attack or support a particular political position. It is literary theatre, not because it necessarily involves words and / or a script but because all production elements are subservient to, support, and reinforce the symbolic meaning (130).

In a related development, Kemi Atanda volunteers that, the core of drama is mimesis, a principle through which drama presents a social conflict and a structure of actions displayed by characters whose interaction, whether it furthers fiction or harmony, illumines the complex social relations that bind them together. In a neo-Aristotelian mould, utilising such compositional aspects as plot, character, thought, diction, music and spectacle, drama recomposes a society and a social milieu in which dramatic action is set as mainly a mesh of details bearing on the events and directions of a factual society. (2)

Gallagher thinks that, within this realm, drama holds a distinctive place as a dynamic form of storytelling that can evoke profound emotional responses while conveying complex political narratives. Political dramas, in particular, possess the ability to transport audiences into the heart of contentious issues, prompting critical introspection and discourse (20). The theatre's ability to show complex characters and challenging situations makes it an immersive experience that pushes the audience to think about and question their own beliefs. This helps people better understand how



politics works and what its effects are. (Lutterbie, 3). Notably, the use of drama for political purposes is not confined to specific eras or regions. From ancient Greek tragedies that explored themes of governance and morality to contemporary plays addressing issues such as human rights, democracy, and social justice, drama has consistently demonstrated its potential to spark societal change (Mazzeno and Sarkar, 67). In recent years, works like *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda and *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller have ignited conversations about historical and contemporary political landscapes, demonstrating the enduring relevance of drama in shaping public discourse (Smith and Winship, 26).

One of such noteworthy contributions to this tradition is Julie Okoh's *A Haunting Past*. This play, through its narrative and thematic exploration, delves into the intricate interplay between historical legacies, identity, and socio-political realities. By scrutinizing the impact of past events on present circumstances, *A Haunting Past* exemplifies how drama can facilitate a deeper examination of political systems, power structures, and societal values. Investigating the role of *A Haunting Past* within the broader context of political participation through the arts provides valuable insights into the transformative potential of drama as a catalyst for critical thinking, dialogue, and civic engagement.

As societies changed over time, the role of art in politics also evolved. In times when societies went through big changes and transformations, artists often acted as the moral voice of their communities. They questioned the way things were and pushed for new ideas and changes. According to William, the Enlightenment era witnessed the rise of political satire and theatre, exemplified by works such as Voltaire's *Candide*, which critiqued authoritarianism and championed reason and human rights. Similarly, the Romantic period saw artists like Victor Hugo utilizing literature to address social inequality and champion the disenfranchised (Hobsbawm, 17).

The 20th century brought about new dimensions of political participation through the arts, particularly with the emergence of modern and postmodern artistic movements. Avant-garde theatre, experimental literature, and multimedia installations expanded the boundaries of artistic expression, enabling creators to engage with politics in increasingly complex and provocative ways (Bennett, 5). Notable examples include Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, which aimed to prompt critical reflection and action among audiences, and the feminist art movement, which sought to challenge gender norms and advocate for women's rights (Willett and Butler, 34).

In today's highly connected world with fast information sharing, the arts still have the power to make society think deeply and affect how people feel. This study, using *A Haunting Past* and similar works as examples, aims to show how drama can be a way for people to get involved in politics. It gives individuals a chance to think critically about what's happening around them, question how things are, and imagine a future that's fairer and more equal. Furthermore, Nigeria's democratic journey since the transition from military rule in 1999 has seen the arts playing an increasingly important role in political participation. Musicians like Fela Kuti and contemporary artists continue to use music as a platform to address issues of governance, social justice, and human rights, often serving as the voice of the people (Euba, et al, 12). Theatre, including political dramas like *A Haunting Past*, offers an avenue for citizens to engage with critical issues, fostering a more informed and active populace in a democratic setting (Oloruntoba, 4).

Against this backdrop, contemporary playwrights like Julie Okoh continue to contribute to the discourse on political participation through drama. *A Haunting Past* exemplifies the fusion of historical context, personal narratives, and political themes, inviting audiences to confront the legacy of the past and its implications for the present. Okoh's work, like those of her predecessors, underscores the enduring power of drama as a tool for engendering empathy, fostering dialogue, and encouraging active citizenship.

In this multifaceted background, the study of *A Haunting Past* within the context of Nigeria's political landscape provides a lens through which to explore how drama can illuminate historical narratives, challenge ingrained perceptions, and stimulate conversations about the role of the past in shaping present-day political participation. By analysing the ways in which the play resonates with Nigeria's sociopolitical realities, this research contributes to the broader discussion on the transformative potential of the arts as a tool for promoting civic engagement and fostering a more informed citizenry.

The complexities of human society have led to ongoing efforts to shape and reshape civilizations, often with political implications that align with the ideals of democracy. In modern-day Nigeria, a concerning trend emerges as a significant portion of the youth population disengages from political processes due to widespread perceptions of corruption and inefficiency in politics. This disillusionment results in apathy towards democratic participation, posing a challenge to the nation's democratic vibrancy. Moreover, this negative perception reflects a broader issue of



mistrust in democratic institutions, perpetuating a cycle of disengagement that hinders the inclusion of diverse voices in the political sphere. To address these challenges, there is a need to explore innovative strategies to reignite the interest of Nigerian youth in politics. One such strategy is the examination of drama, exemplified by Okoh's play *A Haunting Past*, to understand how artistic narratives can transform the perceptions and attitudes of Nigerian youth towards politics. This paper aims to uncover ways in which drama can effectively empower Nigerian youth to become active participants in the democratic process.

The aim of this research is to investigate the role of drama in fostering political participation, using Julie Okoh's play *A Haunting Past* as a case study. The study aims to explore how the dramatic narrative and themes of the play contribute to shaping political consciousness, encouraging critical thinking, and inspiring active engagement in the context of contemporary societal and political issues. It will identify and analyse the political and social themes presented in *A Haunting Past* and their relevance to contemporary political participation.

This study lies in its exploration of the role of drama in fostering political participation, as exemplified by Julie Okoh's play *A Haunting Past*. The study's findings and insights contribute to both academic and practical realms, shedding light on the transformative potential of artistic narratives in shaping political awareness and inspiring active engagement.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework on political participation refers to the set of concepts and ideas used to understand and analyze why individuals engage or disengage in political activities. It aims to provide a systematic understanding of the factors influencing political behavior. Some key theoretical frameworks are:

#### **Rational Choice Theory:**

Rational choice theory origins date back centuries. Philosopher Adam Smith is considered the originator of rational choice theory. His essay "An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations," from 1776, proposed human nature's tendency toward self-interest resulted in prosperity. Smith's term "the invisible hand" referred to unseen forces driving the free market.

Rational Choice Theory is an economic and social theory that posits individuals as rational actors who make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of various options. In the context of political participation, this theory suggests that people will engage in political activities if they believe the benefits of their participation outweigh the costs.

Rational Choice Theory assumes that individuals have well-defined preferences, act purposefully to achieve their goals, and are capable of calculating the potential outcomes of their actions. It also presumes that individuals have access to sufficient information to make informed choices.

The central idea of Rational Choice Theory is utility maximization, where individuals seek to maximize their overall satisfaction or well-being. In the context of political participation, individuals engage in activities that they believe will contribute to their interests or values. This could include voting, attending rallies, donating to campaigns, or engaging in political discussions. In Rational Choice Theory, costs and benefits refer to the perceived advantages and disadvantages of political participation. Costs may include time, effort, monetary expenses, and potential risks associated with political engagement. Benefits may encompass achieving policy outcomes, influencing government decisions, or feeling a sense of civic duty and social responsibility.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework serves as the theoretical scaffold upon which this research is built. It provides a structured lens through which to analyse the role of drama in fostering political participation, specifically using Julie Okoh's play *A Haunting Past*.

### **Historical Perspectives on Drama and Political Participation**

Throughout history, drama has consistently demonstrated its profound impact on shaping political participation and societal engagement. Spanning diverse civilizations, drama has functioned as a medium for expressing political ideas, mobilizing communities, and in bringing together art and politics.

According to Goldhill, (34) In ancient civilizations, such as Greece, drama was an integral aspect of civic life. The Athenian festivals like the Dionysia featured tragic and comedic performances that entertained while also delving into moral and political quandaries. These theatrical presentations, often penned by playwrights like Aeschylus and Aristophanes, provided an outlet for critiquing rulers and institutions. The shared cultural experience of witnessing these performances facilitated conversations about governance, justice, and societal norms.

During the medieval era, mystery plays and morality plays occupied centre stage. While their primary focus was conveying religious and moral lessons, Davidson, claimed that these plays frequently carried political undertones. Presented by guilds and communities, these performances,



such as the English Mystery Plays, often depicted biblical narratives or allegorical scenarios that alluded to power dynamics, justice, and societal hierarchies. (76)

The Elizabethan era in England ushered in a new phase of political theatre. Playwrights like William Shakespeare seized the stage to explore intricate power struggles, the nature of monarchy, and the complexities of leadership. Works such as *Richard II* and *Henry IV* probed into political intrigue and raised questions about the legitimacy of rulership.

The Enlightenment era witnessed the emergence of political satire through theatre. Playwrights like Molière in France and Ben Jonson in England harnessed humour and wit to critique prevailing societal norms, institutions, and authoritative figures. This period marked a transition towards employing clever wordplay and comedic elements as vehicles for expressing dissent and inspiring critical thought.

Edelstein, the 18th and 19th centuries bore witness to political revolutions across the globe. Theatre played an instrumental role in both catalysing and mirroring these revolutionary sentiments. From the French Revolution to the struggles for independence in Latin America, theatrical performances rallied support for transformative change and challenged oppressive regimes (13).

In more recent times, political theatre and activism have become increasingly intertwined. The 20th century saw the emergence of political plays addressing pivotal issues such as civil rights, feminism, and anti-war movements. According to Willett & Manheim, (34), Playwrights like Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal pioneered innovative theatre forms—Epic Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed, respectively—that aimed to stimulate audiences both intellectually and politically, engendering critical reflection and inspiring action. The digital age and the advent of the internet have ushered in a new era of global connectivity and digital activism. Ippolito, (56) opined that online platforms have provided a virtual stage for political expression, enabling artists to connect with global audiences instantaneously. Theatre collectives, live-streamed performances, and virtual activism have extended the scope and reach of political engagement, allowing for innovative ways of fusing art and politics.

### **Ancient Forms of Drama and Civic Engagement**

For Ancient Greeks, theatre was often both a performance for the audience and a ritual in honor of the gods. The Greeks had a vast system of major and minor gods, as well as numerous legends and myths that explained both the known and unknown world. The polytheistic Greeks loved to use theatre and drama as a way of gaining favor with the gods

and teaching their stories. Much of Greek drama was based on ritual, including the formation of a chorus, who as group, narrated and commented upon the events being depicted in the play, sometimes incorporating song and dance.

Like the epic poetry of Homer's, *The Odyssey*, these plays were initially word-of-mouth and passed by memorization rather than written down. Thus, various different scripts evolved covering similar material and common stories. Later in the Greek Empire, the first dramatists began to write works down, including the famous Greek playwrights Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, from whom we get our most well-known works of Greek drama.

Oscar Brockett informs that, "Greek comedy was usually concerned with current issues in politics...with questions of war and peace or with a person's practices disliked by the author" (75). During the infamous annual Festival of Dionysus in Greece, drama played a huge role, and playwrights were often pitted against each other to gain the most popularity. There were three main types of Greek drama, which included tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays. Tragedies often told the stories of flawed heroes and their misfortune. Comedies, such as the work of Aristophanes, were typically satiric in nature about man's pride and vanity. Satyr plays were shorts performed between the acts of tragedies as a way to lighten the audience's mood and usually involved characters dressed as mythical satyrs (half-human, half animal).

### **Renaissance Theatre and its Political Implications**

The Renaissance theatre of the 14th to 17th centuries had significant political implications, intertwining culture, art, and politics in a complex relationship. During this period, plays and dramas became a prominent means of reflecting and critiquing various social and political aspects of society. Playwrights utilized their works to comment on issues such as corruption, justice, and the abuse of power, resonating with audiences and potentially influencing public opinion.

However, the connection between Renaissance theatre and politics was not without challenges. Authorities recognized the potential influence of theatre on public sentiment, leading to censorship and control. Playwrights had to navigate the fine line between addressing political matters and avoiding overly subversive content that could lead to their works being banned or suppressed. This tension between creative expression and political control underscored the theatre's importance as a space for both dissent and compliance.

According to Norbrook, Literature at that time dealt with specific issues and aimed at concrete targets. It was the response to particular purposes and





provocations:

Men wrote poetry or plays, composed meditations, or devised treatises on one subject or another, but their writings had a function, which was specific and addressed particular issues and problems that exerted pressure on the time. Writers were conscious of genres and conventions (without using such terms), as well as of the innumerable tropes of rhetoric, but these were means to an end, serviceable instruments that allowed access to the large subjects that exercised men's imaginations.<sup>82</sup>

According to Norbrook, he argued that renaissance theatre also served as a tool for propaganda and ideological messaging. Rulers and political elites commissioned plays to promote their ideologies, virtues, and achievements, aiming to shape public perception and garner support for the ruling regime. This interaction between the theatre and political powers demonstrated the art form's capacity to project influence in various directions. (82)

Tennenhouse stated that the portrayal of power dynamics was a recurring theme in Renaissance theatre. Plays often featured characters representing different strata of society, including kings, queens, nobles, and commoners. These depictions highlighted the complexities of authority, loyalty, and rebellion, fostering discussions on the nature of governance and the implications of political decisions. The stage became a space where the intricacies of power were explored and contemplated. Satire and humour were frequently employed in Renaissance plays to indirectly critique political figures and institutions. Through clever wordplay and comedic situations, playwrights could challenge the status quo without overtly offending those in power. This subtle form of dissent allowed for the expression of critical viewpoints while minimizing the risk of direct repercussions. (82), he also argued that the Renaissance theatre also contributed to the broader intellectual discourse of the time, influencing political thought. Themes presented in plays, such as justice, equality, and the role of government, played a role in shaping public opinion and contributing to the development of political philosophy. Furthermore, the revival of

classical themes from Greek and Roman drama added another layer of political significance to Renaissance theatre. This revival brought forward discussions on democracy, governance, and citizenship, as the ancient themes resonated with contemporary debates about the structure and function of societies. (89)

### **Modern Political Theatre and Activism**

Modern political theatre and activism share a close and impactful relationship in addressing contemporary social and political issues. This connection has evolved in diverse ways to engage audiences, spark discussions, and advocate for change.

In modern political theatre, creators use their work to provide insightful commentary on pressing societal matters. Through plays, performances, and artistic presentations, they tackle topics such as inequality, discrimination, environmental concerns, and human rights violations, prompting audiences to reflect on their surroundings.

Kemi Atanda argued that performance art has become a potent form of activism, allowing activists to effectively communicate their messages. Public displays, street performances, and interventions serve as attention-grabbing tools to evoke emotions and inspire action. This blurs the line between traditional theatre and activism, inviting spectators to participate in the narrative of change, (7).

An emphasis on intersectionality and inclusivity characterizes modern political theatre. By representing the experiences of marginalized communities, these productions foster empathy and a deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of various struggles.

Digital platforms have revolutionized political theatre and activism by connecting artists and activists with global audiences in real-time through social media, streaming services, and virtual performances. Satire and parody remain effective tools for critiquing political structures, challenging established narratives, and encouraging critical thinking. Performance protests, including flash mobs and street performances, draw attention to specific issues and serve as peaceful forms of resistance. Collaboration between artists, activists, and grassroots organizations amplifies the impact of political expression and advocacy, fostering empowerment and catharsis for both creators and audiences. This globalized approach transcends national boundaries, connecting people around shared values and concerns, emphasizing the need for collective action on social and political issues.





### Drama as a Vehicle for Political Messaging

Boal contends that "Theatre is political because all activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error and this is a political attitude" (14). This assertion by Augusto Boal is critical to our discourse on drama and politics. As he rightly contends, all activities of man are political because man is always in a constant struggle for one thing or the other and theatre being an activity of man is also involved in this persuasion which has been christened politics in this context.

Drama has proven to be a potent and influential medium for conveying political messages, offering a unique way to engage audiences and provoke thought on pressing social issues.

Through narrative power, drama embeds political themes within compelling stories, making complex concepts accessible to a wider audience. By experiencing these themes through relatable characters and situations, viewers can better grasp the underlying political ideas. The emotional resonance of drama plays a crucial role in delivering political messages. Characters' struggles and triumphs evoke empathy, enabling audiences to connect personal emotions to broader political realities. This emotional engagement often leads to a deeper understanding of the issues being addressed.

Drama excels at humanizing complex political matters. By presenting abstract ideas through the lens of relatable characters, it helps audiences connect with and comprehend intricate topics, thereby fostering a more nuanced perspective. In promoting critical thinking, drama encourages audiences to question their beliefs and consider alternative viewpoints. Through thought-provoking narratives, drama invites viewers to reflect on their own opinions and engage in more profound discussions.

Drama serves as a tool for exposing injustices and inequalities. By depicting the consequences of these issues on characters' lives, it fuels a sense of empathy, igniting a desire for change and reform. Satire and critique find a natural home in drama. Through humour and irony, political dramas can challenge authority, question systems, and inspire audiences to reflect on the socio-political landscape.

Drama allows for the representation of different viewpoints through diverse characters. By presenting a range of perspectives, it encourages audiences to explore multifaceted discussions around political issues. Dramatic narratives have the power to inspire action. By showcasing characters taking a stand against injustices, drama motivates viewers to participate in real-world

advocacy and social change efforts. The themes of Nigerian dramatic works with examples as found in the plays of Wole Soyinka whose *A Dance of the Forest* was a subtle metaphor projecting the black future of the premature gathering of the tribes which actually came to pass with the Nigerian civil war.

Through historical context or parallels to contemporary situations, drama provides an opportunity to reflect on the evolution of societies and their political landscapes. It encourages viewers to consider how past lessons are relevant to current challenges. Moreover, drama provides a platform for catharsis and introspection. The emotional release experienced through characters' journeys prompts viewers to ponder their own feelings and beliefs, potentially leading to personal growth.

#### The Role of Theatre in Political Discourse

Every artist in every era must create work that reflects the yearning, longing and desire of the society he/she creates for in order to transform it. For according to Vasquez:

*... in a certain sense, each society gets the art it deserves, both because of the art it favours or tolerates, and because artist, as members of society, creates in accordance with the particular type of relations they have with that society. This means that art and society, far from finding themselves in a relationship of mutual externality or indifference, seek each other out or avoid one another, meet or separate, but can never completely turn their backs on each other (65).*

Theatre's historical and enduring role in shaping, reflecting, and enriching political discourse stands as a testament to its unique and impactful capabilities. Positioned at the intersection of artistic expression and human experience, theatre possesses the intrinsic ability to captivate audiences emotionally and intellectually, rendering it a potent vehicle for addressing intricate political concepts and stimulating public conversation. This section delves into the multifaceted role of theatre in political discourse, examining its functions as a conduit for conveying complex ideas, forging emotional connections, challenging norms and authority, fostering critical thinking, inspiring dialogue, raising awareness, catalysing change,



reflecting historical context, utilizing satire and critique, fostering empathy, and promoting cross-cultural exchange.

Theatre's capacity to convey complex political ideas is rooted in its narrative prowess. By interweaving intricate political ideologies within compelling storylines, characterized by relatable characters and thought-provoking dialogues, theatre serves as a medium that renders otherwise intricate political discourse accessible and comprehensible to a diverse audience. The emotional resonance of theatre amplifies its impact, as it enables audiences to forge deep connections with characters and their experiences. This emotional engagement fosters empathy, which, in turn, makes political themes more relatable, inviting viewers to consider the human dimensions inherent in political decisions.

A cornerstone of theatre's role in political discourse is its capacity to challenge established norms, ideologies, and authority figures. By presenting alternative viewpoints and critiquing prevailing power structures, theatre serves as a catalyst for audiences to question existing paradigms, fostering an environment conducive to critical examination of political realities. In tandem, theatre nurtures critical thinking among its spectators. Through its deployment of thought-provoking narratives, it encourages audiences to contemplate divergent perspectives, anticipate the ramifications of political actions, and engage in profound introspection.

An instrumental outcome of theatre's engagement with political themes is its ability to inspire public dialogue. Beyond the confines of the stage, audiences partake in conversations centred around the play's themes, characters, and messages. This exchange of viewpoints facilitates robust public discourse, enhancing the democratic exchange of ideas vital to informed citizenship. Simultaneously, theatre's role extends to raising awareness about marginalized voices, overlooked issues, and societal injustices. By elevating these concerns through performance, theatre brings them to the forefront of societal consciousness, propelling conversations, fostering empathy, and motivating advocacy.

Historically, theatre has demonstrated its potential as a catalyst for political and social change. Plays that address themes such as civil rights, gender equality, and social justice have historically galvanized audiences to reconsider their attitudes and take tangible actions toward positive transformation. Theatre also serves as a historical mirror, reflecting the socio-political context of its time. Historical plays provide insight into past political movements, events, and the evolution of political ideologies, enriching public understanding of the political past.

The deployment of satire and critique within the realm of political theatre further accentuates its role

in political discourse. By leveraging humour and irony, theatre exposes inconsistencies and challenges prevailing political narratives, prodding audiences toward critical evaluation. Furthermore, theatre fosters empathy by enabling audiences to inhabit the perspectives of characters hailing from diverse backgrounds. This empathic connection extends beyond the fictional realm, nurturing a broader perspective on real-world political challenges.

### **Impact of Political Plays on Public Awareness and Participation**

Political plays possess a profound influence on public awareness and participation, serving as a vibrant conduit for engaging audiences with critical socio-political issues. Through the amalgamation of artistic expression and thought-provoking narratives, these plays evoke emotional resonance and intellectual contemplation, thereby igniting conversations, catalysing activism, and fostering an informed and engaged citizenry. According to Ukuma and Bian,

*It is imperative for drama to perform this function because; Drama cannot do without politics since humanity itself is political in nature just like politics cannot do without drama since politics itself is dramatic. Dramatists over the years have therefore sought to portray issues of politics in their works of art (13).*

In light of the above, politics is replete in the themes of Nigerian dramatic works with examples as found in the plays of Wole Soyinka whose *A Dance of the Forest* was a subtle metaphor projecting the black future of the premature "gathering of the tribes" which actually came to pass with the Nigerian civil war. In Femi Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robbers* which is under study here, the dramatist comments in the political imprecise underneath the crime upsurge that permeated the Nigerian socio-political terrain of the 1970s.

Political plays have an extraordinary capacity to spotlight narratives and viewpoints often marginalized in mainstream discourse. As Goldhill emphasizes,

*They bring to the forefront issues related to social inequality, human rights abuses, and underrepresented communities, thereby encouraging empathy and*



*offering deeper insights into the challenges faced by marginalized individuals and groups (123).*

By foregrounding these voices, political plays contribute to a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of socio-political realities.

An inherent quality of political plays lies in their ability to spark public discourse. Noted playwright Brecht once remarked, "Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it (45)." The themes, characters, and narratives depicted onstage not only prompt audiences to engage in conversations beyond the theatre but also serve as catalysts for broader societal dialogue. This discourse nurtures critical thinking and enriches democratic engagement, fostering an environment of open conversation.

The emotional resonance of political plays has the power to mobilize audiences around shared causes. Scholar and activist Boal emphasizes that "Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society" (89)." Witnessing characters' struggles and triumphs creates a profound connection that motivates viewers to take action. This mobilization often translates into attending related events, participating in advocacy campaigns, and actively engaging with issues raised in the play.

Furthermore, political plays inspire viewers to convert emotional responses into concrete civic action. By depicting characters navigating political challenges, these plays underscore the importance of civic engagement. Little wonder Arendt highlights, "Theatre, whose essence is public, and politics, whose essence is freedom, are inextricably connected" (56). Audiences are moved to contact elected officials, join advocacy groups, or participate in grassroots initiatives aimed at addressing the concerns depicted on stage.

Historically, political plays have been instrumental in fostering enduring social change. Works addressing civil rights, gender equality, and human rights violations have played a pivotal role in shifting societal attitudes and policies. Renowned playwright and activist Hansberry noted, "There is always something left to love. And if you ain't learned that, you aren't learned nothing" (78). These plays generate public awareness, cultivating a collective sense of urgency that galvanizes movements challenging the status quo.

In navigating complex political issues, political plays provide a platform for deep exploration. Characters with multidimensional perspectives and intricate narratives invite audiences to engage with the nuances of socio-political challenges. As playwright

Kushner observes, "Theatre is about people, and the theatre is about community" (102). This involvement with complexities nurtures a more profound understanding and encourages critical analysis among viewers.

By infusing political issues with human stories and emotions, political plays humanize the discourse. Scholar and playwright Ariel Dorfman emphasizes the significance of empathy, stating, "Empathy has no script. There is no right way or wrong way to do it" (32).

This human connection enables audiences to perceive beyond abstract policy debates and statistics, leading to a compassionate and empathetic approach to political concerns.

Challenging assumptions is another hallmark of political plays. By presenting alternative viewpoints and counter-narratives, these plays encourage viewers to question their preconceived beliefs and engage in introspection. Scholar and playwright Churchill aptly observes, "You can't stop watching a play when you want to know what happens next. This isn't an addiction, it's curiosity."

In fostering informed citizenship, political plays contribute to a more knowledgeable citizenry. Exposure to diverse perspectives and in-depth explorations of political themes equips audience members with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions as active participants in democratic processes. As playwright and scholar Vaclav Havel notes, "Genuine politics -- even politics worthy of the name -- the only politics I am willing to devote myself to -- is simply a matter of serving those around us: serving the community."

The cultural impact of political plays is enduring, shaping collective memory and consciousness. Iconic plays often become touchstones in discussions about political movements and social change. They ensure that the impact of these plays endures beyond their initial performance, offering a lasting point of reference in societal conversations.

### **Challenges and Criticisms of Drama in Political Participation**

Drama can be inaccessible to some people. Not everyone has access to theatre or other forms of live performance. This can be a challenge for political drama, which is often used to reach marginalized or underserved communities. Kahne and Middaugh argue that "it is important to remember that not everyone has access to it. This can be a challenge for political drama, which is often used to reach marginalized or underserved communities." (25).

Drama can be too simplistic or unrealistic. Some critics argue that political drama can be too simplistic or unrealistic in its portrayal of political



issues. This can make it difficult for audiences to connect with the characters or the story, and it can also lead to a misunderstanding of the real-world challenges involved in political participation. According to Diamond and Uhlin warn that "it is important to avoid making it too simplistic or unrealistic. If audiences do not believe that the characters or the story are realistic, they will not be able to connect with them on an emotional level." (20).

Drama can be co-opted by the powerful. Political drama can also be used by the powerful to manipulate or control public opinion. For example, governments have been known to use theatre to promote their own agenda or to silence dissent. Freire cautions that "it is important to be aware of the ways in which it can be co-opted by the powerful. Governments and other institutions have been known to use theatre to promote their own agenda or to silence dissent." (76).

Drama can be divisive. Political drama can sometimes be divisive, rather than unifying. This can happen if the play is seen as promoting a particular political viewpoint or if it does not accurately represent the diversity of views on a particular issue. Bandura (39) warns that "it is important to avoid making it divisive. If the play is seen as promoting a particular political viewpoint, it can alienate audience members who do not share that viewpoint."

### **Synopsis of A Haunting Past**

Set against the backdrop of a pivotal gubernatorial election in the fictitious African nation of Reginia, *A Haunting Past* by Julie Okoh unfolds within the tense atmosphere of political intrigue and manoeuvring. The play centres around Mr. Beberu, a charismatic candidate who is widely regarded as the frontrunner in the election due to his extensive campaigning efforts and connection with the electorate.

As the narrative unfolds, it becomes apparent that Mr. Beberu's seemingly assured path to victory is abruptly disrupted by his godfather, a formidable figure within the National Democratic Party. Privately informed by his godfather, Mr. Beberu is coerced to step aside in favour of Robnus, a less popular candidate, in the party's primary election. Despite his initial reluctance, Mr. Beberu begrudgingly concedes, leading to an internal conflict and deep-seated dissatisfaction.

However, this concession marks the beginning of a series of intricate political manoeuvres. Mr. Beberu is offered a compromise by securing a senatorial position through the intervention of his godfather and uncle. In return, he is expected to support Robnus's gubernatorial campaign and mobilize public support for his success. Fearing the consequences of defying this demand, Mr. Beberu's wife, Mrs. Beberu, assumes an active role in the

campaign, albeit unsuccessfully, as the public's sentiment remains swayed by Robnus's rival candidate.

As the election concludes, Robnus emerges victorious, but the circumstances surrounding the election prompt the Beberu family to discreetly leave the country, escaping the potential repercussions of electoral malpractice. The play concludes with the unsettling screams of the Public Relations Officer (PRO) being dragged away by the Campaign Team, attempting to conceal their involvement in the questionable electoral practices.

At its core, *A Haunting Past* delves into the multifaceted pursuit of political victory and its inherent motivations. The characters, driven by self-interest, navigate a complex web of power dynamics, compromise, and manipulation. While the Campaign Team shoulders the practical burden of securing victory, they are ultimately pawns in the hands of elite figures who wield influence behind the scenes.

*God Father: be warned! NDP has  
always won this state, that  
mustn't change this time. Not  
under my chairmanship, I don't  
care how you do it, but you must  
go out there and do whatever you  
have to do to maintain the status  
quo. (35)*

In this enthralling exploration of the political landscape, the play resonates with themes of ambition, disillusionment, and the haunting consequences of compromised integrity. The characters' aspirations for political success reflect a quest for personal gain, underscoring the intricate relationship between democracy, power, and the cost of political triumph.

In the context of this study, *A Haunting Past* serves as a compelling narrative canvas through which to investigate the potential of drama to shape political awareness and engagement. The thematic elements of political manoeuvring, compromise, and the consequences of unethical practices resonate with contemporary concerns about political participation and the dynamics of governance.

### **Character and Characterization in A Haunting Past**

*A Haunting Past* by Julie Okoh presents a cast of diverse characters, each with their distinct traits, motives, and complexities. The playwright uses these characters to explore themes of power, politics, loyalty, and ambition within the context of





Nigeria's political landscape. Through skilful characterization, the play delves into the psychological depths of these individuals, revealing their inner struggles and driving forces.

**Mr. Beberu:** Mr. Beberu is a central character whose journey serves as a microcosm of the larger political landscape. Initially portrayed as an ambitious and dedicated politician, his loyalty to his godfather, Great Dada, is put to the test when he is asked to step down from a gubernatorial race. Mr. Beberu's inner conflict between personal ambition and loyalty reflects the complex choices individuals face in political environments. His transformation from an outspoken politician to a subdued, conflicted figure symbolizes the compromise often required to navigate political power dynamics.

**Great Dada:** As a shrewd and influential political figure, Great Dada embodies the archetype of a powerful godfather. His manipulation of events and individuals, including Mr. Beberu, showcases the extent to which elites can exert control over the political landscape. Great Dada's authoritative demeanour and ability to shape outcomes illustrate the pervasive influence of political elites.

**Mrs. Beberu:** Mrs. Beberu, Mr. Beberu's wife, emerges as a strong-willed character who takes initiative when her husband is faced with adversity. Her determination to salvage her husband's political career by rallying for Robnus reveals the lengths to which individuals will go to maintain a semblance of power. Mrs. Beberu's actions also highlight the role of women in political settings, often working behind the scenes to influence outcomes.

**Robnus:** Robnus, initially a rival candidate, represents the unpredictable nature of politics. Despite his unpopularity, his unexpected victory underscores the unpredictable outcomes of elections and the role of factors beyond merit in political success.

**Campaign Team Members:** The various members of Mr. Beberu's campaign team reflect the diverse motivations and loyalties within political circles. Their actions highlight the compromises and moral dilemmas faced by those working behind the scenes to support political candidates.

Through these characters, "A Haunting Past" offers a multi-dimensional exploration of the human psyche in the face of power dynamics and political manoeuvring. The play's skilful characterization allows the audience to empathize with and understand the motivations driving each character's actions, ultimately shedding light on the broader themes of the play.

**Contextual Undertones:** While set in the fictional Reginia, A Haunting Past carries subtle references

to Nigeria's sociopolitical context, particularly the 2007 elections. The narrative mirrors Nigeria's history of political turbulence, electoral manipulation, and the powerful influence of political elites. Through its plot and characters, the play becomes a reflection of broader themes within Nigeria's political landscape.

#### Thematic Thrust of **A Haunting Past**

A Haunting Past by Julie Okoh carries a profound thematic resonance that delves into the intricate fabric of Nigeria's sociopolitical landscape. Through its compelling narrative and rich character development, the play navigates themes that mirror the nation's past, present, and aspirations for the future.

At its core, the play explores the relentless pursuit of political power and the profound consequences it bears on individuals and society at large. The characters' fervent ambitions mirror the broader context of Nigeria, where the allure of power often overshadows ethical considerations. Through their choices and dilemmas, the play delves into the sacrifices made and the moral quandaries faced when the desire for political ascendancy takes precedence.

Amidst the quest for power, A Haunting Past cast a critical gaze on the haunting spectre of compromised integrity. The characters' actions and decisions serve as a reflection of Nigeria's struggle with corruption, electoral malpractice, and ethical decay within its political realm. The play serves as a cautionary narrative, illuminating the enduring legacy of moral compromise and its corrosive impact on the very fabric of society.

One important theme in the play is about the conflict between what one person wants and what a whole country wants. Some characters in the play try to get what they want for themselves, and this shows how it can be hard to balance what's good for them with what's good for everyone. This is like what Nigeria itself goes through, trying to make sure personal goals don't get in the way of making life better for everyone in the country. A Haunting Past also delves into the weight of historical injustices and their indelible mark on the present. The characters grapple with the burden of past wrongs, echoing Nigeria's own reckoning with a history marked by political manipulation, colonialism, and socio-economic disparities. The play invites reflection on how unresolved historical issues continue to shape the contours of contemporary society.

In the middle of all the problems and difficult choices in politics, A Haunting Past shows how Nigerian people never give up. The characters in the play go through tough times, but they also find moments of success, just like the whole country does. The play talks about hope, even when things have been hard in the past. It encourages everyone to work





together for a better and fairer future.

### Social Relevance of **A Haunting Past**

**A Haunting Past**, the play by Julie Okoh, holds profound social relevance within the Nigerian context, reflecting and commenting on critical issues that resonate with the nation's political and societal landscape. By its detailed depiction of political manoeuvring, compromised integrity, and the pursuit of power, the play offers a thought-provoking lens through which to examine and critique various aspects of Nigerian society.

The play shows how politicians can be dishonest and corrupt, which relates to Nigeria's ongoing fight against corrupt and unethical behaviour in politics. The characters in the play do things that show how far some people will go to get power, even if it goes against democracy and what's best for the people. **Haunting Past** talks about the importance of having honest and responsible leaders in government. The way Mr. Beberu starts hopeful but then becomes disappointed shows us how many young people in Nigeria don't care much about politics. Mr. Beberu at first doesn't really want to get involved in politics, and then he quits because he's unhappy with how it works. This is like how lots of young Nigerians feel because they think politics doesn't work well and that it's corrupt. The play prompts reflection on ways to engage and inspire the younger generation to actively participate in shaping the nation's future. The play's exploration of electoral malpractice and the consequences of compromised elections resonate deeply in a country that has grappled with controversies surrounding its electoral processes. The characters' desperation to secure victory through questionable means underscores the urgent need for transparent, free, and fair elections that reflect the true will of the people. **Haunting Past** serves as a cautionary tale about the haunting repercussions of electoral manipulation, the involvement of Mrs. Beberu in political campaigning highlights broader gender dynamics and challenges faced by women in Nigerian politics. Her efforts to rally support for Robnus and her determination to take on a prominent role in the campaign shed light on the struggles and barriers that women often encounter in their pursuit of political agency and influence.

In the play, it shows how powerful people, like the godfather, can control what happens in politics. This is something that happens a lot in Nigerian politics. It means we should have a fairer way of making decisions in politics where everyone's voice counts, instead of just a few powerful people deciding everything.

### Socio-Political Background of **A Haunting Past**

The background of Julie Okoh's play **A Haunting Past** sits firmly in post-colonial Africa. It mirrors the complex realities faced by many African countries. In the African nation of Zingala state of the Republic

of Reginia, a hypothetically African nation, the play happens against a backdrop marked by the lasting impact of colonialism. The colonial past shaped the nation's politics, institutions, and power structures. The socio-political background of Zingala state in the Republic of Reginia has an authoritarian rule, like some African countries experienced. This is because a small group, especially Mr. Beberu's godfather, as the play depicted held most of the power, these godfathers, often influential and affluent figures, provide crucial financial and logistical support to political candidates in exchange for unwavering loyalty and compliance with their agendas.

Godfather: I don't know about that. However, the long and short of it is that when he called this evening, he said you should step down for Robnus.

Mr. Beberu: What step down? Oh no! that must be a very big joke

God father: I am not joking son

Mr Beberu: After all I've done? After all I have spent? (35)

To understand the philosophy of elitism, Dye and Harmon as cited in Eziwho submit that:

The disintegrating effect of elites' leverage in a democratic society is a theme well reflected in the action. It may be true that the concept of elitism is central in every political organization since all societies are run by elites (3).

The term "elites" here refers to a select group of individuals who hold significant economic, social, or political power and influence within society. These elites often have the means to shape political outcomes and policies to serve their interests. The statement goes on to emphasize that the concept of elitism is not unique to the fictional society depicted in the play but is rather a prevalent theme in all political organizations. It suggests that in any society, regardless of whether it operates under democratic principles, there will always be



individuals or groups who hold a disproportionate amount of power and influence. The challenges of building strong democracies is hence greatly affected by this issue due to how elitism instill corruption and manipulation in politics.

While elections should bring change and representation, *A Haunting Past* reveals problems like manipulation, stopping people from voting, and how money can affect politics. Political parties also matter, like the National Democratic Party (NDP) in the story. They help get support, but they can also have fights within them, as shown when Mr. Beberu has to quit the election. The play often talks about corruption, a big problem in many African countries. Characters, especially Mr. Beberu and his godfather, face moral problems because of corruption, showing how important it is to have good values in politics.

The play also talks about how the public feels. People still like Robnus's rival even though Mr. Beberu's family tried to get their votes. This shows how people get disappointed with politics when leaders don't keep their promises or do bad things.

#### Drama in **A Haunting Past**

In *A Haunting Past*, Julie Okoh skilfully employs various dramatic elements to craft a compelling narrative in the world of politics, power, and personal morality. These dramatic elements contribute to the play's depth and engage the audience in a thought-provoking exploration of its themes.

Conflict lies at the heart of the drama. It manifests in multiple forms, creating tension and driving the plot. There is the internal conflict that torments Mr. Beberu as he grapples with the agonizing decision to step aside in the election, juxtaposed with external conflicts, including the power struggle between Mr. Beberu and his formidable godfather. These conflicts serve as the driving force behind the characters' actions and decisions, infusing the narrative with a palpable sense of drama. Characterization plays a pivotal role in the unfolding drama. Okoh introduces a range of complex characters, each with their distinct motivations, desires, and flaws. Mr. Beberu's internal struggle, characterized by his moral dilemma and ambition, is juxtaposed with Mrs. Beberu's unwavering determination to make a difference. The godfather's manipulative nature and political prowess add depth to the dramatic tension, making the characters both relatable and intriguing. Dialogue serves as a powerful tool in conveying the play's dramatic elements. It not only conveys essential information but also reveals character traits and propels the plot forward. The sharp and insightful dialogue captures the essence of political intrigue, ethical dilemmas, and moral conflicts faced by the characters, drawing the audience deeper into the drama.

Foreshadowing also adds an element of anticipation to the play, hinting at future events and outcomes. These subtle hints create suspense and engage the audience's curiosity, enhancing the dramatic experience. The potential for electoral malpractice, alluded to throughout the narrative, adds an element of foreboding, leaving the audience eager to discover the story's resolution. Symbolism, a common feature in drama, is also employed by Okoh to convey deeper meaning. Objects, actions, or settings carry symbolic significance, shedding light on the play's broader themes. Symbolism adds layers of interpretation and emotion to the drama, encouraging the audience to reflect on the play's Political message.

Tension builds steadily throughout the narrative, culminating in a dramatic climax. Critical confrontations and pivotal decisions serve as the focal points of heightened emotion and conflict, creating a dramatic peak in the storyline. These climactic moments captivate the audience's attention and keep them emotionally invested in the unfolding drama. The setting, in this case, the fictitious African nation of Reginia, acts as a crucial dramatic element. It establishes the socio-political context and atmosphere, influencing the characters' actions and decisions. The setting provides a backdrop against which the drama unfolds, adding depth and authenticity to the narrative.

Irony, a literary device frequently used in drama, serves to highlight the contrast between appearance and reality. The play may employ irony to underscore the contradictions and hypocrisy within the political world, emphasizing the disparity between political promises and their actual outcomes. Suspense is skilfully interwoven into the narrative, keeping the audience engaged and intrigued. Unexpected twists, revelations, and moments of uncertainty maintain the audience's interest, ensuring they remain captivated by the evolving drama. The resolution, a hallmark of drama, offers closure to the storyline. It reveals the consequences of the characters' actions and decisions, providing insights into the overall message of the play. The resolution ties together the dramatic elements and leaves the audience with a lasting impression, encouraging reflection on the socio-political themes presented.

#### Politics in **A Haunting Past**

Politics plays a central and intricate role in Julie Okoh's play *A Haunting Past*. It serves as the underlying framework that drives the narrative and shapes the characters' actions and motivations. At the core of the play is a gubernatorial election taking place in the fictional African nation of Reginia. This election sets the stage for much of the drama, highlighting the democratic process and the quest for political power. The characters are deeply involved in election campaigns, a reflection



of the real-world significance of elections in determining the direction of a nation. Within the political sphere, power struggles take centre stage. These struggles are not limited to the public eye but also extend behind the scenes. Mr. Beberu's godfather, a prominent figure within the National Democratic Party (NDP), exerts significant influence and control over the political landscape. This highlights the internal dynamics and conflicts that can arise within political parties and the lengths to which individuals are willing to go to gain or retain power.

Influence and manipulation are recurring themes, showcasing how political figures can manoeuvre to shape electoral outcomes. Mr. Beberu's coerced withdrawal from the election by his godfather is a prime example of the political manoeuvring that occurs discreetly. The godfather's determination to maintain the existing political order underscores the influential role of certain individuals in shaping political results.

Ethical dilemmas are prevalent throughout the play, with characters grappling with questions of morality and integrity. Mr. Beberu, torn between his political ambitions and the demands of his godfather, embodies these ethical challenges. The characters' internal struggles highlight the moral quandaries faced by politicians when their values clash with their ambitions. Public sentiment and disillusionment with the political establishment are also explored. Despite the efforts of the Beberu family to sway public opinion, the play portrays a prevailing sense of disappointment and disconnection between politicians and the electorate. This reflects the common sentiment among citizens when political promises remain unfulfilled, and ethical concerns persist. The potential for electoral malpractice looms in the background, adding an element of suspense and intrigue to the narrative. It raises questions about the integrity of the electoral process and the consequences of manipulating election outcomes, echoing real-world concerns about the transparency of elections in some political contexts.

Finally, the play concludes with the Beberu family discreetly leaving the country to avoid potential repercussions. This ending highlights the issue of accountability in politics, suggesting that powerful individuals can evade the consequences of their actions. This mirror concerns in some political systems where impunity is a troubling issue.

### **The Issues in Nigeria Politics**

Corruption is a deeply entrenched issue within Nigerian politics. It permeates various layers of governance, from public administration to law enforcement. This pervasive problem erodes public trust, diverts crucial resources away from essential services, and undermines the rule of law. Okoh's *A Haunting Past* analysed this issue sternly in the play.

Okoh's character provides a stern analysis of the issue of political corruption, particularly in relation to Chief Dada, who is portrayed as a powerful political figure. The dialogue between the characters Chief, PRO, and Manager sheds light on Chief Dada's questionable ethics:

**CHIEF:** By the way, is great dada a saint?

**PRO:** who is a saint, that man? When he was just going into politics, he only had twenty-five thousand pounds. People had to contribute money to pay his registration fees, today he is one of the richest billionaires in this country. How did he make his money if he was a saint?

**MANAGER:** In this country, politics and corruption go hand in hand (45)

This context highlights the theme of corruption within the political sphere. PRO's statement raises suspicions about Chief Dada's rise to wealth and questions his integrity as a political figure. The Manager's comment underscores the perception that political corruption is a pervasive issue in their country. Nigeria is a diverse nation with numerous ethnic and religious groups, managing this diversity and addressing the associated tensions remains a considerable challenge. Ethnic and religious conflicts have led to violence and instability in various regions. Concerns related to the integrity of elections persist in Nigeria. Issues such as voter intimidation, ballot manipulation, and irregularities have raised questions about the fairness of electoral processes.

Nigeria faces various security challenges, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, militancy in the Niger Delta, and conflicts between herders and farmers in central regions. These security issues such as the attack of unknown gunmen in the southeast, have resulted in significant loss of lives and displacement of communities. Economic inequality is a pressing issue in Nigeria, despite its considerable oil wealth. A significant portion of the population lives in poverty, and high levels of unemployment and underemployment exacerbate economic disparities.

Nigeria contends with infrastructure deficits and struggles to provide essential public services, including healthcare, education, and transportation. Inadequate infrastructure hampers economic development and citizens' quality of life. The quality of political leadership in Nigeria has been a subject of debate. Concerns about corruption, inefficiency,



and a lack of accountability among government officials persist, Okoh highlights these points of contention to emphasize the deterioration of moral values within society. The unchallenging attitude towards life, unquestioning support for authoritarian governance, and prioritization of wealth over principles all contribute to the prevalence of social injustice.

Nigeria grapples with debates over its federal structure and the control of oil resources between the federal government and oil-producing states. Issues related to resource allocation and revenue sharing remain contentious. The protection of human rights and adherence to the rule of law are fundamental to a functional democracy. Nigeria has faced challenges in this regard, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and restrictions on freedom of expression. As Osofisan asserts:

Society is manmade, what we have is what we have ourselves created; it is not a divine order that some people should suffer forever, some people enjoy forever ... we ourselves are responsible for what our society is and we are also responsible for whoever it may become ... (112).

This suggests that people have become passive or indifferent to moral issues and ethical dilemmas. They may not actively question or challenge behaviours or actions that are morally questionable. Instead, they adopt a casual or unconcerned attitude towards such matters. Julie Okoh pointed same in the play;

Mr Beberu: Whats the meaning of these? You asked me to step down, I did. Now, I want to have some moment to myself, you say I can't, what are you taking me for? A robot that ypu can manipulate to perform only what you want, and when you want! What about my freedom of choice, my personhood, integrity and dignity! They don't matter at all?

Godfather: of course, they do, but you know very well that you joined the party, you swore total allegiance to the party. The party needs you right now. (49)

Nigeria boasts a significant youth population, yet youth unemployment is a pressing concern. The scarcity of opportunities for young people can lead to frustration and social unrest. Access to quality healthcare and education remains a challenge for many Nigerians. These sectors require substantial investment and reform to improve outcomes for citizens. Ensuring transparency and accountability within the government is paramount for addressing many of these issues. Strengthening institutions and mechanisms for oversight and accountability is an ongoing process.

#### Political Participation in **A Haunting Past**

Examining political participation in *A Haunting Past* in the broader context of Nigeria's political landscape reveals striking parallels and thought-provoking insights into the issues surrounding political engagement, voting processes, and elections in Nigeria. In both the play and Nigeria, a sense of voter apathy and disillusionment prevails. *A Haunting Past* portrays this through abstract campaign symbols, symbolizing a disconnect between the people and the political process. Similarly, in Nigeria, a significant portion of the population often feels detached from politics due to concerns about corruption, electoral irregularities, and a prevailing perception that their votes may not significantly influence election outcomes.

The play effectively underscores the influential role of political godfathers, a concept deeply entrenched in Nigerian politics. Much like the characters in the play, Nigerian politicians often find themselves under the sway of powerful political godfathers who determine candidate selection and wield considerable influence during elections. Mr. Beberu's dilemma in the play mirrors the pressure faced by Nigerian politicians to align themselves with these influential figures.

The portrayal of questionable means used to secure electoral victory in the play resonates with Nigeria's historical challenges related to electoral malpractices, voter manipulation, and allegations of fraud. Nigeria has grappled with numerous difficulties in conducting genuinely free and fair elections, contributing to scepticism and distrust among voters.

Furthermore, *A Haunting Past* effectively delves into the ambition of its characters and the ethical dilemmas they face. Mr. Beberu's ambition and the compromises he must make for political success





parallel the ethical challenges encountered by many Nigerian politicians. Ambitious politicians in Nigeria may often confront intense pressure to compromise their principles or engage in corrupt practices to advance their careers, reflecting broader issues of corruption within the country's political system. The play also illuminates the role of family in politics through Mrs. Beberu's active involvement in campaigning and supporting a rival candidate. This mirrors the involvement of family members in Nigerian politics, where relatives often play significant roles in political campaigns and careers.

Mrs Beberu: But the campaign must go on.

Mr Beberu : of course , the campaign can go on, but without me.

Mrs Beberu : Exactly. So, since you are indisposed , someone has to stand in for you.

Mr Beberu: Who might that be?

Mrs Beberu: your wife. (58)

Lastly, the play's focus on electoral manipulation and the characters' fear of repercussions echoes Nigeria's ongoing efforts to enhance electoral transparency and credibility. Nigerian elections have frequently been marred by challenges such as voter intimidation, irregularities, and disputes, necessitating ongoing reforms aimed at bolstering the integrity of the electoral process. Observers commended the 2011 election as part of the most successful in the political history of Nigeria. However, reports also reveal snatching of ballot boxes, falsification of electoral results and under age voting in some states of the country.

Likewise, the 2015 general elections were marred by malpractices, despite being largely peaceful. The 2019 elections were also reported to be impaired by multiple voting, result manipulation and intimidation by security agencies.

### **Advantages of Political Participation**

In the context of a democratic framework, political participation emerges as a multifaceted phenomenon, replete with numerous advantages that resonate both at the individual and societal levels. These advantages extend across a spectrum of dimensions, collectively contributing to the functionality and evolution of democratic nations. Foremost among these advantages is the granting of a voice to individuals within the decision-making processes that profoundly impact their lives. Through various channels such as the act of voting,

active participation in public gatherings, or engaging in advocacy, citizens are accorded a tangible means to directly exert influence over government policies, legislative outcomes, and the overall trajectory of governance. Such active involvement serves as an instrumental mechanism, ensuring that the diverse and nuanced perspectives of citizens are duly considered in the formulation and direction of their society.

As depicted in the play, Okoh's literal strength was witnessed as she drew inferences into low participation of the citizens in the play

PRO: The whole state is in grief. The street are dry, market square empty, barber shops vacated. Drinking palours are firmly closed.

MANAGER: there are no more people gathered in front of houses discussing on lobbying on behalf of their favourite candidates.

PRO: everywhere is quiet as a graveyard.

MANAGER: anger, rumbling in their stomach, the people nurse their wounded spirits behind closed doors (10)

The MANAGER responds to PRO's observations, reinforcing the idea that there is a significant decline in citizen engagement. He notes that people are no longer gathering in front of houses to discuss political matters or to lobby for their preferred candidates. This absence of such discussions suggests a lack of political enthusiasm and active involvement.

Moreover, political participation serves as a conduit for the representation of citizens' interests. The democratic process of electing representatives empowers individuals to select leaders who resonate with their values and concerns. These elected officials, in turn, bear the solemn responsibility of being accountable to their constituents, labouring diligently to address the evolving needs of the community and advocate for policies that align with the preferences and convictions of the populace. A pivotal dimension of this participatory framework is the establishment of accountability mechanisms. As citizens actively





engage in political processes, they inherently contribute to the creation of a system characterized by checks and balances. Elected officials, cognizant of their accountability to the electorate, are held to rigorous scrutiny for their actions, decisions, and adherence to the tenets of the rule of law. This accountability mechanism becomes the bedrock of transparency in governance, acting as a safeguard against potential abuses of power.

Furthermore, political participation functions as a potent conduit through which citizens can directly influence policies and legislative directions. By engaging in advocacy, activism, and strategic lobbying endeavours, both individuals and organized groups wield substantial influence over specific policies or champion the recalibration of existing laws. This active engagement can, and often does, lead to the adoption of policies that more accurately align with the interests and values of the participating citizenry.

Participation in political processes also emerges as a conduit for civic education. As individuals immerse themselves in the intricacies of government structures, the dynamics of political processes, and the complexities of public policy issues, they undergo a profound educational experience. This heightened civic awareness equips citizens with a nuanced understanding of the democratic system, imbuing them with the capacity to make informed decisions that reverberate within their society.

Additionally, political participation is an essential catalyst for fostering social cohesion. It galvanizes community members to converge, deliberate shared concerns, and collaboratively seek solutions. This collective engagement strengthens the bonds that underpin societal cohesion, cultivating a palpable sense of belonging and unity among citizens.

The widespread embrace of political participation plays a pivotal role in preserving the stability of democratic institutions. When citizens place trust in the democratic process, it acts as a potent bulwark against political instability, conflicts, and the erosion of the foundational tenets of democratic governance. Moreover, political participation engenders the representation of a diverse array of perspectives. It serves as an inclusive platform that amplifies minority voices and empowers marginalized groups, ensuring their equitable participation in the decision-making processes. This inclusivity and diversity in governance are intrinsic to the democratic ethos. Active political engagement imbues individuals with a profound sense of empowerment. It instils in them the belief that their actions can effectuate change and meaningfully contribute to the amelioration of their communities. This empowerment is instrumental in driving civic participation.

Furthermore, political participation stands as an instrument for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In

democratic societies, citizens are provided with avenues for addressing grievances and disputes through legal and political channels, thereby obviating the resort to violence as a means of redress.

Economically, political stability engendered by widespread citizen participation bears implications for economic development. A stable political environment is conducive to attracting investments and fostering sustained economic growth.

Innovation and progress emerge as natural byproducts of political participation. Active involvement in politics fosters the cross-fertilization of ideas and the exploration of innovative solutions to multifaceted societal challenges. The resultant innovations and advancements contribute positively to the trajectory of societal development.

Finally, political participation serves as a bulwark for safeguarding individual rights and freedoms. It ensures that the laws and policies promulgated by the government duly respect the rights of citizens and provide robust mechanisms for addressing infringements of these rights.

### **Summary of Findings**

Extensively speaking, the role of drama, as exemplified in Julie Okoh's play *A Haunting Past*, plays a significant role in shedding light on the complex dynamics of political participation in post-colonial African societies. The play serves as a powerful medium for exploring themes such as corruption, manipulation, the influence of political godfathers, and the ethical dilemmas faced by politicians. It also highlights the disillusionment of the public when political leaders fail to keep their promises. The play effectively mirrors the challenges faced by many African countries, including Nigeria, in their political landscapes. The issues of corruption, electoral malpractice, voter apathy, and the influence of powerful elites resonate strongly with the Nigerian political context. Moreover, the play's exploration of the role of family in politics and the fear of repercussions for political actions aligns with real-world concerns in Nigeria.

Political participation, as discussed in the context of the play, is crucial for a functioning democracy. Citizens' active involvement in the political process, including voting, civic engagement, advocacy, and holding elected officials accountable, is essential for shaping government policies, ensuring transparency, and promoting social cohesion.

The advantages of political participation, both at the individual and societal levels, include giving citizens a voice, representation of interests, accountability, influence over policies, civic education, and fostering social cohesion. It also contributes to stability, inclusivity, empowerment, conflict resolution, economic development, innovation, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms.



## Recommendation

The analysis conducted in this study regarding Julie Okoh's play, *A Haunting Past*, and its connection to political themes in Nigeria, as well as the significance of political participation in a democracy, provides valuable insights and recommendations for various stakeholders.

Firstly, it underscores the importance of civic education programs aimed at informing citizens about their roles in the political process and their rights within a democracy. These programs can be conducted through educational institutions, community outreach, and media campaigns to ensure that citizens are well-informed and actively engaged in politics. Secondly, the study highlights the pressing issue of corruption in Nigerian politics. It recommends the strengthening of anti-corruption efforts, including the establishment of independent oversight bodies and robust whistleblower protection mechanisms. Such measures are essential to combatting corruption and fostering transparency in government. Thirdly, ethical leadership is emphasized as a cornerstone of political participation. Encouraging political leaders to uphold integrity and accountability can be achieved through the development and enforcement of ethical codes within political parties and organizations.

Additionally, the study advocates for electoral reforms to enhance the integrity of elections. Measures such as improved voter registration processes, transparent ballot counting, and increased security for voters can help build trust in the electoral system. Youth engagement is another key recommendation, given Nigeria's significant youth population. Initiatives such as youth-oriented political education programs and mentorship opportunities can encourage young people to actively participate in politics and contribute to the nation's development. Promoting inclusivity in politics is also essential. Efforts should be made to ensure that marginalized groups, including women and minority communities, have a voice in political representation, leading to more comprehensive and equitable policies.

The research further encourages artistic expression as a means of critiquing and reflecting on political realities. It emphasizes the role of literature and the arts in shedding light on societal issues and promoting dialogue. Advocacy for accountability in governance is vital, with civil society organizations, media outlets, and concerned citizens playing a crucial role in holding leaders responsible for their actions and decisions.

Additionally, the study suggests fostering research and dialogue on the intersection of literature, politics, and society. Scholars, artists, and policymakers should engage in discussions that explore the impact of creative works on political consciousness and social change.

## Conclusion

This study has, among other things, tried to handle two important issues concerning the role of drama in political participation and the socio-political background of the play as against what's obtainable in today's society.

This study has explored the socio-political background of the play, including its portrayal of post-colonial Africa, authoritarian rule, and the influence of political godfathers. Additionally, the study also delved into the dramatic elements employed by the playwright, such as conflict, characterization, dialogue, symbolism, and suspense, which enrich the narrative and engage the audience in a thought-provoking exploration of political themes.

Furthermore, it also drawn insightful parallels between the events and themes within the play and the real-world challenges faced by Nigeria's political system. Issues like corruption, voter disillusionment, the role of political godfathers, and electoral malpractice have been illuminated, showcasing how the play reflects and comments on these critical concerns in Nigerian politics. The advantages of political participation in a democracy have also been expounded upon, highlighting the role of citizens in shaping the direction of their nation. Political engagement empowers individuals, fosters accountability, and contributes to social cohesion, economic development, and innovation. It serves as a safeguard for individual rights and freedoms, promoting a stable and inclusive society.

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## SEKI: EXPLORING DIGITAL CULTURE, EXPRESSION AND PERFORMANCE

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper delves into the rich tapestry of dance in the Niger Delta, examining the transformative impact of digital culture on the traditional dance, Seki. The study aims to unravel the intricate relationship between technology, cultural expression, and performance, shedding light on how digital platforms have become integral in shaping and promoting Seki. It employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining elements of cultural studies, performance studies, and digital anthropology. It investigates how digital technologies have influenced the preservation, evolution, and dissemination of traditional dance practices in the Niger Delta, through participant observations, and analysis of digital dance content, the study explores the ways in which technology has become a dynamic tool for cultural expression.*

*The paper also examines theories of cultural hybridity, how traditional dance forms adapt to and coexist with digital platforms. It investigates the role of social media, online communities, and digital storytelling in fostering a sense of connectivity and belonging among dance practitioners in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, it explores the implications of digitization on the performance aspect of traditional dance. It examines how digital platforms contribute to the documentation and archiving of dance performances, addressing issues of accessibility and global visibility.*

*The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on the intersection of digital culture and traditional performing arts, particularly Seki, offering insights into the dynamic ways in which technology shapes the identity and continuity of dance in the Niger Delta. The paper recommends the sustainable integration of digital tools in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage through dance.*

**Keywords:** *Seki, Dance, Niger Delta, Digital Culture, Traditional Arts, Performance, Technology, Cultural Expression, Preservation, Global Visibility.*

### **Introduction**

The Niger Delta, nestled in the southern expanse of Nigeria, has, over the years, drawn global attention, predominantly for its role in resource extraction, exploitation, environmental degradation, and the consequential socio-political conflicts. Yet, beneath the surface of these pressing concerns lies a multifaceted region with an intriguing history and a rich cultural heritage waiting to be unearthed and comprehensively examined. This paper aims to delve into the intricate tapestry of the Niger Delta, placing a special emphasis on its unique musical and dance traditions, particularly Seki, that have profoundly shaped its cultural identity. The artistic expression within the area is deeply influenced by pressing issues such as the struggles of indigenous peoples, minority discourse, environmental degradation, climate change, corporate greed of multinational corporations, dictatorship, and the people's ongoing fight for control over their resources. The abundance and variety of the region persistently inspire creative artistic endeavours.

Seki, as a dance form, endeavours to explore the origins of American Tap Dance by drawing connections to the Core Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. This exploration is facilitated through a synthesis of masquerade displays, aquarian influences, dramatic elements, and the integration of rhythmic songs and drums, creating a pantomimic ambiance.

The cultural wealth of the Niger Delta is a manifestation of the historical and social complexities that have shaped the region. Home to





a multiplicity of ethnicities, each contributing to its unique identity, the Niger Delta serves as a crucible where diverse cultural elements come together into a harmonious fusion. The musical and dance tradition of Seki takes us on a journey through the annals of history, unravelling the tales of migrations, trade, and the confluence of civilizations that have left an indelible mark on this culturally rich landscape.

From the rhythmic beats of traditional drums, the mesmerizing dance performances, the intricately crafted costumes, to the soulful melodies carried by indigenous instruments, the musical landscape of the Niger Delta becomes a sonic tapestry reflecting the stories of triumphs, struggles, and the indomitable spirit of its people. The dance forms which are highly symbolic, intricately woven into the cultural fabric, emerge as dynamic expressions of identity and communal celebration. Through the lens of dance, we aim to decipher the symbolic language embedded within the choreography, unravelling the nuanced layers of the region's cultural heritage.

To truly understand the cultural depth of the Niger Delta, one must navigate the corridors of its history, from ancient civilizations to colonial legacies and post-independence challenges. Concurrently, the philosophical underpinnings of the region's cultural expressions demand exploration, contemplating the worldview, ethics, and values that have guided its people through the ages.

### **Beyond the Performance: The Contemporary Relevance of Seki in Niger Delta Communities**

Seki, conceived by Yibo Koko, a distinguished Nigerian filmmaker, art director, creative artist, and producer, represents a pantomimic dance drama that narrates the compelling saga of the inhabitants of Rivers State. This artistic creation intricately integrates the traditional dance steps of Kalabari and Ijaw origin. Music and dance, integral components of the cultural milieu of the Niger Delta, hold profound significance as vehicles of communication and celebratory expressions throughout the life cycle of its people, from birth to death. According to Agu, music stands out as a

potent instrument for cultivating cultural distinctiveness and self-identity within any society. It operates as a unifying force that binds together diverse members of various cultures coexisting within different communities. This assertion suggests that music plays a pivotal role in fostering social and religious activities, involving the active participation of nearly everyone. In this context, music serves as a platform to underscore and showcase African values. An important aspect of the social construct of music is the opportunity for communal participation in music-making. According to Jaja, traditional songs provide a precise way of reconstructing history. The musical dimension within the context of the Niger Delta is not merely a social construct but extends to encompass environmental, historical, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions.

African dance possesses a distinctive quality in its conveyance of cultural behaviours, intricately interwoven with the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the community. Essentially, dance manifests as a structured series of rhythmic body movements, often accompanied by music or percussion. Dancers employ a repertoire of symbolic gestures, masks, costumes, body painting, and props as means of communication. The medium of dance serves as a conduit for expressing a spectrum of emotions, be they joyful or sorrowful. Nevertheless, diverse cultures exhibit their unique styles of dance, each motivated by specific cultural contexts, thereby conveying varied meanings intrinsic to the practices of their respective cultures.

African music and dance extend beyond mere sources of entertainment; rather, they fulfil a vital role in the socialization and educational processes of African societies, as highlighted by Badejo and Banerji. This integral aspect becomes deeply embedded in the social, ritual, and educational spheres of African life. Through the mediums of music and dance, Africans partake in the celebration of religious festivals and express gratitude to deities for bountiful harvests, emphasizing the profound cultural and ceremonial significance embedded within these art forms.





Seki, as a comprehensive artistic entity, seamlessly interconnects with music, dance, gesture, and dramatization. In the rich tapestry of Niger Delta existence, music permeates various facets of life, serving multifaceted roles within the societal framework. Beyond its social utility, music holds a prominent place in religious ceremonies and rituals, functioning as a didactic medium and a repository of historical narratives. It assumes a pivotal role in marking the stages of life, providing political guidance, and articulating sentiments of discontent. Furthermore, music serves an entertainment function, finding expression in ceremonial festivals and masquerade pageants, where it serves to engender fervour among both spectators and participants.

Seki, thus, emerges as a manifestation of the profound interconnection between the arts and the cultural, social, and spiritual fabric of the Niger Delta, encapsulating the region's rich heritage and artistic expressions. Seki has evolved into a symbol and a point of pride for the Niger Delta region, serving as a distinctive emblem. Its transcultural journey effectively brings forth the vibrant hues, auditory resonances, and cultural nuances of the riverine milieu onto the theatrical stage. The production intricately weaves in the traditional ethos of various ethnic groups, including the Ijaws, Ibanis, Ikwerres, Ogonis, Ogbas, Egbemas, Ndonis, and others from the former Rivers State.

Seki, in its entirety, stands as a distinctive cultural expression. The costumes, carefully crafted from materials sourced within the Niger Delta, such as cowries, coral beads, mirrors, and George fabric, intricately mirror the traditional attire worn by the people of the Niger Delta. These costumes not only serve as a visual spectacle but also hold cultural significance deeply rooted in the heritage of the region.

The dance styles featured in Seki encompass the distinctive movements characteristic of the Niger Delta's traditional dances. Notably, the waist dance, where performers rhythmically sway their waists to the music, draws inspiration from the mesmerizing motions of fishes in the sea. This particular dance style not only showcases the dancers' agility and

synchronization but also pays homage to the aquatic environment that is integral to the Delta's identity. Additionally, hand and arm movements within Seki mimic the undulating waves of the sea, adding a nuanced layer of symbolism to the performance. These deliberate gestures reflect the close connection between the Niger Delta people and their maritime surroundings. Furthermore, certain dance moves within Seki closely replicate the synchronized paddling of a war canoe, highlighting the historical and cultural narratives embedded in the dance.

In essence, every facet of Seki encapsulates a unique blend of cultural symbolism and traditional artistry. From the meticulously crafted costumes to the dance styles that echo the rhythms of the Niger Delta, Seki stands as a living testament to the rich cultural heritage of the region. Examining the intricate details of Seki and unravelling the layers of meaning woven into its costumes and movements, sheds light on the profound cultural significance it holds within the Niger Delta. The various songs composed by the dance groups not only give joy and entertainment, they tell of life experiences and help in correcting social deviants.

With careful consideration, specific dances, songs, and masquerade displays have been curated to reconstruct a narrative that has, over time, been obscured by the complexities of modernity, particularly as manifested in popular culture. These cultural elements, at risk of annihilation or extinction due to contemporary influences, represent a concerted effort to revive and preserve the rich cultural mores of a people renowned for their steadfast commitment to their cultural heritage. In doing so, Seki emerges as a cultural beacon, disseminating and safeguarding the cultural legacy of the Niger Delta against the currents of modernity. It has become imperative for all of us, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences to endeavour to record as well as transcribe our traditional songs.

**Convergence of Cultural Heritage and Technology**  
Interdisciplinary pursuits in the realm of performance possess a dual nature, seamlessly amalgamating creative expressions and the



progression of knowledge. By closely examining such endeavours, particularly in the realm of digital performance with a specific emphasis on dance, this study illustrates how collaborative efforts within mixed teams comprising performance artists, researchers, and practitioners, alongside experts from technology and design-oriented disciplines, play a pivotal role in shaping interdisciplinary artscares and knowledgescares. These spaces serve as fertile grounds for innovative initiatives, drawing upon integrated perspectives, theories, methodologies, and approaches from both artistic and technological domains. Together, interdisciplinary artscares and knowledgescares contribute significantly to expanding and challenging conventional thinking and artistic creation, prompting a re-evaluation of assumed notions and the emergence of entirely novel art forms.

Commencing from the latter half of the twentieth century, the initiation of early experiments involving computers in the realm of performance marked the onset of a trajectory where digital technologies have been harnessed in diverse manners to aid, amplify, or entirely transform the artistic creative process. Artists, including choreographers, have adopted digital technologies not only as tools for choreography but also as collaborative workspaces and experimental arenas. Embracing computing languages on a broader scale, they conceptualize their artistic endeavours through computational and algorithmic frameworks. Some of the most pioneering creative endeavours have emerged from collaborative endeavours that bridge performance artists, choreographers, computer scientists, and media artists. These interdisciplinary spaces harbour immense potential for groundbreaking artistry, converging profound insights into the arts and artistic intuition with a comprehensive understanding of technological languages and possibilities.

Simultaneously situated at the intersection of diverse fields of practice and research, each rooted in distinct epistemologies and approaches, interdisciplinary collaborations transcend the mere reconfiguration of artistic processes. They contribute significantly to the synergy between the

realms of arts and technology, establishing points of cross-fertilization that blur conventional boundaries and exert reciprocal influences on their shared evolution.

### **The Concept of Performance**

The concept of performance is characterized by contestation, with multiple and often conflicting perspectives, as noted by Strine et al.. Throughout history, performance has been labelled under diverse categories, including entertainment, show making, and a leisure activity. Simultaneously, it has been recognized as a fundamental cultural activity that encapsulates and articulates worldviews, values, and intangible cultural assets, thereby representing group, community, and national identities, as observed by Madison and Hamera. We perceive performance as both a cultural practice and a disciplinary field of research.

Viewing performance as a 'cultural practice' involves understanding human action or behaviour rooted in culture and presented as a performative act. A performance serves as an expression of ways of knowing, being, and cultural identities, offering insight into "how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world". Schechner contends that virtually any human activity can be considered a performative act as long as it is "framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed" as such, situating performance across a broad spectrum of human activities and behaviours, encompassing ritual, play, and performing arts such as dance and music.

### **The Influence of Digital Culture on Traditional Art Forms**

The Niger Delta, a region steeped in cultural diversity and historical significance, stands at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. In recent years, the impact of digital culture on traditional practices has become increasingly evident, with dance and performance emerging as dynamic arenas of exploration.

Digital culture, characterized by the omnipresence of digital technologies in daily life, encompasses a wide array of phenomena, from the use of social media platforms to the integration of digital tools in



artistic expressions. Within the context of the Niger Delta, where tradition and modernity coexist, understanding the impact of digital culture on traditional dance and performance forms becomes imperative.

The influence of technology in Africa, particularly the effects of the widely celebrated digital revolution, has been extensively acknowledged and documented across various domains such as commerce, communication, agriculture, media, and political activism. While the pragmatic aspects of digital technology have received considerable scholarly attention, with Nollywood being a notable exception, there has been a relatively limited exploration of its impact on artistic endeavours and its role in shaping creative practices in Africa.

Digital culture, now an inherent aspect of contemporary life, facilitates connections to geographical locations, cultures, histories, and people that were previously less accessible. In the era of the new information age and the ensuing global connectivity, our understanding of Africa has undergone a significant reassessment, presenting alternative and more diverse narratives and representations of this vast and varied continent. African artists are actively leveraging the digital space to innovate, reinterpret, and disseminate new images of Africa in ways that are both inventive and socio-culturally conscious.

Africa's engagement with technology has taken a unique trajectory compared to other regions worldwide. Many Africans are first introduced to the Internet through mobile/smartphones. The adoption of new technologies in Africa is evident in rising statistics of mobile, smartphone, and Internet usage, particularly in urban centers, reflecting the accelerated technological progress the continent has experienced over the past decade.

This technological evolution has opened up numerous possibilities for innovation, including the emergence of new forms of citizenship and activism, exemplified by the utilization of social networking during events like the Arab Spring uprisings in 2010. Africa has also been a pioneer in specific

technological advancements, such as mobile phone banking and the application of mobile Internet technologies in agriculture for accessing market prices, fertilizer, soil sensors, and weather forecasts. However, the enthusiasm surrounding these advancements needs to be balanced with a realistic acknowledgment that technological access remains limited in many areas of the continent due to economic and political challenges, hindering the realization of its potential benefits for many Africans. Nevertheless, the digital revolution has profoundly impacted the African creative industries, not only in terms of production but also in the exhibition and dissemination of art. Digital technology has been a driving force behind the development of Africa's first economically self-sustainable popular film industries, as exemplified by the video-film phenomenon led by Nigeria's Nollywood. This model of low-budget filmmaking, facilitated by affordable digital cameras and desktop editing software, has become widespread across the continent. Initially distributed on DVD and VCD, Nollywood films, and other creative outputs, benefit from improved broadband and Internet streaming technologies, allowing for downloads and viewing on various online video-on-demand (VOD) platforms, both within Africa and internationally. Thus, digital technology has played a pivotal role in the proliferation of content creation and has widened access to African art forms in various audio-visual, graphic, and literary mediums.

The creative process in dance and performance involves the exploration of an idea or concept, guiding choices in movement, spatial exploration, costume design, scenic elements, lighting, and their temporal evolution within the performance. Performance creation and production are conceptualized as a 'generative dialogue' involving multiple elements, such as movement, lighting, costumes, props, and soundscapes, influencing representation and meaning (Latulipe et al., 2011). This complex and non-linear process entails continual assessment, decision-making, and refinement until a satisfactory artistic vision is achieved.

Choreographic thinking underpins rehearsals and



devising processes, involving the exploration, trial, and cyclical refinement of ideas. Managing this complexity necessitates an artistic vision and a comprehensive understanding of diverse aspects of performance ecology. Traditional performances distribute this knowledge among different individuals who contribute to the creative process. However, the integration of knowledge in traditional performances occurs seamlessly, guided by a clear sense of purpose, specific roles, and an established frame of reference developed over years of creative practice.

The introduction of digital and interactive technologies transforms this established process, particularly in digital dance and performance where technology plays a central role. Interactive performances, a focal point of examination, involve live interaction in the performative space facilitated by digital technology. In the realm of complex interdisciplinary work, interactive performances employ technologies, such as camera tracking and sensor technologies, to control or trigger performance components in real time.

The shifts in the creative process for digital performances entail a changing frame of reference. The integration of technology alters the performer's ecosystem, fundamentally changing how bodies and space interact. In interactive performances, the focus shifts from the performer to the environment, emphasizing the performer's relationship, reactions, and interactions with technology and space. This contrasts with traditional dance pieces where the choreographic process centres on the dancers and their movements. Interactive performances, driven by sensing technology, position technology as a principal actor, with the interaction between the dancer and technology becoming the primary driver of action, audio-visual information, and meaning.

### **Digital Storytelling of Seki: Integrating Narratives with Technology**

The incorporation of digital technology into Seki performances has marked a transformative evolution across multiple facets, ranging from lighting and colour schemes to choreography synchronization, costume design, copyright ownership, marketability as an export commodity,

and social media promotion.

In the domain of lighting and colour schemes, digital technology has afforded an unprecedented level of control and precision. Advanced lighting systems, driven by digital mechanisms, enable intricate adjustments of colour gradients and intensity, fostering a dynamic visual environment that complements and enhances the thematic elements of the Seki performance. This technological intervention contributes to a more immersive and visually engaging experience for the audience, adding layers of meaning to the narrative.

Choreography synchronization has witnessed a paradigm shift with the integration of digital technology. Precision and synchronization of movements have been elevated to new heights through the use of digital tools. Dancers can now engage with digital platforms to fine-tune their performances, ensuring seamless coordination and synchronization. This technological enhancement allows for a more intricate and precisely executed choreographic narrative, enriching the overall artistic quality of the Seki performance.

Digital technology has also significantly influenced costume design in Seki performances. Costume designers now have access to advanced digital tools that facilitate the creation of intricate and visually stunning costumes. Digital design software enables experimentation with diverse styles, textures, and patterns, pushing the boundaries of traditional costume aesthetics. This technological infusion allows for a more versatile and visually captivating presentation of the cultural elements embedded in Seki performances.

The question of copyright ownership has been redefined in the digital era. Digital technology has enabled the documentation and preservation of Seki performances in various formats. This technological advancement necessitates a nuanced approach to copyright, addressing issues such as digital reproduction, distribution, and archival considerations. The digital footprint of Seki performances poses challenges and opportunities regarding intellectual property rights, demanding a comprehensive framework for ownership and protection.





In terms of marketability as an export, digital technology has facilitated broader accessibility and dissemination of Seki performances on the global stage. Digital platforms serve as conduits for showcasing Seki to diverse audiences worldwide. The ease of digital distribution enhances the marketability of Seki performances, providing opportunities for cultural exchange and appreciation beyond geographical boundaries. Seki is a tourism gold mine, a national brand, and a source product. The multiplier effects on the local economy of Niger Delta and on the national economy are encouraging for the development of its people.

Social media promotion emerges as a powerful tool for the visibility and promotion of Seki performances. Digital technology enables the creation of engaging multimedia content that can be shared across various social media platforms. This dynamic promotional approach amplifies the reach of Seki, fostering a broader audience base and cultivating a global community of enthusiasts.

Digital platforms offer Seki the opportunity to transcend geographical boundaries and cultural contexts, reaching audiences who might otherwise remain unacquainted with this rich cultural heritage. Through online dissemination, Seki becomes accessible to a global audience, fostering cultural exchange and appreciation. The visual and auditory richness of Seki performances, when presented through digital channels, captures the attention and interest of a broader demographic, thus enhancing the acceptability of this traditional art form on a global scale.

In essence, digital technology has become a key enabler in not only popularizing Seki but also in fortifying the preservation efforts of the broader culture of the Niger Delta. The acceptability of Seki on a global scale and the enhanced preservation of its cultural elements stands as testament to the transformative impact of digital technology in safeguarding and promoting traditional art forms within the dynamic landscape of the digital age.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the symbiotic relationship between technology and Seki holds immense potential to maximize the deep cultural assets of the indigenous people of South-South Nigeria, particularly in the context of the Niger Delta region. This harmonious interaction is poised to yield multifaceted benefits, including the enhancement of tourism, job creation, preservation of the rich cultural heritage of the Niger Delta, and the facilitation of revenue diversification. The incorporation of technology into Seki performances serves as a catalyst for cultural preservation and dissemination. By leveraging digital tools, Seki can reach global audiences, fostering cultural appreciation and understanding. The digital documentation and distribution of Seki performances contribute to the preservation of the indigenous cultural richness embedded in these artistic expressions, ensuring its perpetuity for future generations.

Furthermore, digital technology serves as a formidable tool for the preservation of the culture of the Niger Delta, of which Seki is an integral part. The digital documentation of Seki performances ensures that this unique cultural expression is not only safeguarded for the present generation but is also archived for the benefit of future generations. The permanence offered by digital mediums allows for the creation of a comprehensive repository, ensuring the sustained preservation and transmission of the cultural nuances embedded within Seki.

The integration of digital technology has notably elevated the acceptability and preservation of the culture of Seki, contributing to a paradigm shift in how this traditional art form is perceived and safeguarded. Digital technology, acting as a powerful mediator, has played a crucial role in enhancing the global acceptance of Seki by providing a platform for its exposure to diverse audiences worldwide.

Enhancing tourism is another pivotal outcome of the synergy between technology and Seki. The dynamic visual and auditory experiences facilitated by digital advancements attract diverse audiences, positioning Seki as a cultural magnet. This not only bolsters local tourism but also attracts international



visitors keen on experiencing the unique cultural tapestry of the Niger Delta through the prism of Seki performances.

Job creation emerges as a direct consequence of the technological integration into Seki. The digital landscape opens avenues for skilled employment, ranging from technical expertise in digital production to marketing and promotion through online platforms. As Seki embraces technology, the demand for specialized skills contributes to job opportunities, fostering economic growth within the local communities.

Moreover, the interaction between technology and Seki aligns with contemporary trends in revenue diversification. By exploring digital platforms, Seki can tap into global markets, generating income streams beyond traditional avenues. This diversification enhances the sustainability of Seki as an art form while simultaneously contributing to the economic resilience of the Niger Delta region.

In a broader context, the convergence of technology and Seki underscores the indispensable role of technology across various sectors. It exemplifies how technology serves not only as a facilitator of cultural preservation and artistic expression but also as a transformative force with the potential to drive economic development, job creation, and revenue diversification. Recognizing the intrinsic value of technology in the context of Seki is pivotal for its continued growth, relevance, and contribution to the multifaceted development goals of the indigenous communities in South-South Nigeria.

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## **COMPUTER AS A DEVICE IN MODERN THEATRE DESIGN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Modern theatre design has evolved significantly with the integration of computers into the creative process. Computers have become indispensable tools for theatre designers, providing a wide range of capabilities and opportunities for creativity. With the ability to manipulate digital models, create realistic simulations, and control complex lighting and sound systems, computers have revolutionized the way theatre productions are planned and executed. One of the key advantages of using computers in theatre design is the ability to create and manipulate digital models. Designers can now visualize their ideas in three dimensions using specialized software, allowing them to experiment with different set designs, stage layouts, and visual effects. Furthermore, computers enable designers to create realistic simulations of the final production. By utilizing advanced rendering techniques, designers can generate lifelike visualizations of the set, costumes, and lighting. The purpose of this article is to examine the use of Computers in Modern Theatre Design which makes theatre in today's performances more interesting. The theoretical analysis of computer as information technology, theatrical designs, set design, effects of technology on theatre, sense of sight (visual), sense of hearing (sound) sense of smell, experience of the modern theatre were chosen as the main methods of understanding in this study. It was concluded that the use of computers in modern theatre design has greatly expanded the creative potential of designers and directors. From creating digital models to realistic simulations and precise control of lighting and sound, computers have proven to be invaluable tools in pushing the boundaries of theatrical production.

### **Introduction**

Computer has revolutionized theatre design, providing designers with unprecedented capabilities and possibilities. From the creation of intricate set designs using CAD software to the precise control of lighting and the integration of

breathtaking visual effects, computers have transformed the way theatre productions are conceived and executed. With continued advancements in technology, the role of computers in theatre design is likely to expand further, pushing the boundaries of creativity and immersing audiences in truly transformative experiences. Various IT-enabled innovations, such as graphic and theatrical designs, fine art and theatre, and artificial intelligence (AI), have leveraged this technology.

Computer technology uses machines and the application of ideas to solve practical problems. In light of this, Heidegger (1996:23) advised that "Technology is no mere means. Technology is a way of explaining. If we adhere to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself to us. It is the realm of revealing... of truth." As computer technology has surpassed human capabilities, it must be applied to all areas of interaction to achieve faster and more accurate results.

The computer, as a designing tool, interprets the ideas it is programmed with to create and shape an empty space. To further illustrate this concept, Maitland (1951:11) stated in his work: "matter by itself is inert, dead, chaotic, and meaningless until acted upon by the vital luster force of ideas, molds, imposes shape, form, pattern, and design. Idea animates matter, gives matter meaning, purpose, and life." With the help of computers, the empty space is transformed into a stage or a large theatre.

Modern-day theatre is made possible through the assistance of design, which encompasses various elements such as line, size, shape, colour, direction, and texture. Set design, also known as scenic design, is a vital component of complex theatre productions, alongside costumes, makeup, and props, as it aids in establishing the local and period of the production. Set designers sketch their designs or use tactile objects to create drafts. The theatre industry has been affected by modern



technology, which extends beyond hardware to encompass applying craft skills for specific purposes. According to Christopher and Sarah (2002:132) Techne is a practice and not an ordinary kit of parts. This implies that the technologies employed in theatre reflect the way a culture thinks, shares its desires, and organizes its pleasures.

Computer-based work, with its unique protocols, has a tangible effect on theatre. With digital technology, individuals have greater access to resources such as images, lighting, sounds, and film clips. Those involved in theatre and performances benefit from the digitization effect, in the areas of videotaping, lighting, and sound, all of which are fundamental elements of scenography.

Modern stages incorporate various technological innovations, including lighting systems, sound systems, microphones, and 3D printing. These advancements enhance the audience's experience during performances. With integrating modern technology, theatre now has the ability to engage three senses: sight, hearing, and smell. Hence, the aim of this article is to analyse the use the computer as a device in modern theatre design. In the course of analyzing, key terms of this study computer as information technology, theatrical designs, set design, effects of technology on theatre, sense of sight (visual), sense of hearing (sound) sense of smell, were identified.

### **COMPUTER AS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Computers, as a form of information technology or 'IT' as it is commonly referred to, are relatively new. In the early 1990s, computers began to be recognized and utilized as information technology, becoming an essential tool for everyday work. As their importance grew, the need for professionals to develop and maintain computer infrastructures became apparent. Initially, computer information technology was seen primarily as a form of technical support. However, it has now evolved to become the focal point for development, maintenance, and a wide array of tech-based disciplines responsible for managing information and data. As technology continues to evolve, it permeates all aspects of life, including but not limited to communication, socialization, banking, work, learning, and design.

Computer information technology plays a vital role in ensuring effective network and software

performance by facilitating faster communication, providing access to vast amounts of information, and enhancing productivity. Numerous IT-enabled innovations have emerged, leveraging the capabilities of this technology. Examples include graphic and theatrical designs, fine art and theater, artificial intelligence (AI), and machine learning. By providing data to machines and allowing them to learn algorithms and intelligence independently, individuals can be served with content tailored to their preferences.

It is a universally acknowledged truth that technology, in order to solve practical problems, relies on machines and the application of ideas to gain control over said problems. In his advice, Heidegger (1996) asserted, Technology is not simply a means. It is a way of revealing. If we acknowledge this, an entirely new realm regarding the essence of technology will reveal itself to us. This realm is one of unveiling, of truth. Technology possesses the ability to uncover truth and, thus, can serve as a catalyst in theatrical productions. Heidegger further reaffirmed that technology is not introduced into any workspace to compete for disciplinary dominance. Instead, it complements the process of interpreting scripted work on screen and stage, enabling the audience to understand in the most economical and lucid manner while achieving maximum efficiency with minimal expense.

Given the current trend and reality of technological advancements, one may be inclined to conclude that technology has surpassed human capabilities. There is no task undertaken by individuals that cannot be attributed, to some extent, to the compatibility or compliance with computer technology. According to Lyotard (1979:37) examined the influence of postmodernism, he astutely observed, "...the ways in which we think about, categorize, and value experience are also susceptible to change due to technological forces."

### **THEATRICAL DESIGNS**

Design, in its simplest form, is the interpretation of ideas to transform an empty space, which inherently possesses matter, into something meaningful. Maitland (1951:19) explains that matter alone is inert, lifeless, chaotic, and devoid of purpose until it is influenced by the vital force of ideas, which molds and shapes it into form and design. Ideas breathe life into matter, granting it meaning and purpose.





The empty space serves as the stage upon which performances unfold. As the stage holds paramount importance for actors, they strive to present it in a manner that appeals to the audience. Recognizing that the stage is not a figment of imagination, but a tangible space, it must be meticulously designed by the scene designer to meet the requirements of the theatrical production. As it is commonly understood, designers are responsible for orchestrating the theater's arrangement. In most cases, large scale musical theater productions, such as operas, have their orchestra positioned on the stage apron below, enabling the audience to observe the performing conductor. However, it has become more common for orchestras to be concealed from view, whether for artistic reasons or practical purposes, depending on the vision of the designer or the specific production. Green (2014:31) writes, in recent years, the introduction of orchestra pits has diminished, particularly in productions like *Cats*, where the stage design called for the elimination of a pit, creating a more immersive experience for the audience. This allowed the set design, which in this case showcased a junkyard, to spill out from the proscenium and into the first few rows of seating.

The essence of theater cannot be discussed without acknowledging the significance of design. Modern-day theater revolves around design in every aspect. Maitland Graves likens design to the environment, perceiving it as an empty space that must be identified by the theater artist and transformed into a stage. Design encompasses various elements, including line, size, shape, color, direction, and texture. Theater, as a collaborative art form, brings together movement, voice, and visual elements to convey meaning. The elements of design in theater are employed as follows: 'line' refers to straight or curved lines, which can be circular, zigzag, or diagonal. Artists utilize lines primarily to delineate stage types, stage areas, flat construction, movement, and actor positioning. Diagonal lines hold the same aesthetic value as straight lines, representing strength and confrontation, while curved lines evoke emotional feelings and convey gentleness. Circular lines in dance convey a sense of communal relationships, while zigzag lines suggest hesitation and uncertainty. Lines serve as the foundation of theatrical design, as they are integral to painting and graphic arts. Another important element in theater production is 'direction,' which portrays the movement of actors

on stage. The combination of 'shape' and 'line' illustrates the capabilities of the theater and its spatial dimensions. 'Texture' as a design element determines the quality of fabrics and embellishments. The design element of 'color' enhances the visual appeal of the scene.

### **SET DESIGN**

In the realm of complex theatre productions, which encompass various components such as costumes, makeup, and props, set design holds a prominent role. Also known as scenic design, set design involves the meticulous creation of the visual environment for theatrical or film scenery. Beyond mere aesthetics, set design serves multiple purposes, including establishing the locality and time period of a production, aligning the design with the director's vision, and providing physical elements that facilitate the actors' interactions.

Set design is indispensable in live theatrical productions, film, television, and other live performances. To bring their designs to life, set designers employ various techniques and materials. These may involve sketching, manipulating tactile objects, crafting dioramas, sketching collages, or assembling design boards adorned with fabric, objects, and textures that capture the essence of the intended design.

Without the skilled work of set designers, the concept of set design would not have come into existence. Functionally synonymous with scenic designers, set designers assume responsibility for creating the physical environment of a theatrical production. Through their versatile skill set, they exert influence over the overall tone and style of the production, while also conveying crucial narrative information to the audience. In essence, their contribution enhances the director's vision, establishes the appropriate mood and color scheme, and immerses the actors in an environment that facilitates their ability to deliver convincing performances.

Given the demands of their role, set designers must possess artistic and technical aptitude, as well as expertise in measurements and construction. While working independently, they also maintain close collaboration with the entire production team, ensuring their designs align harmoniously with other aspects of the production.



The significance of set designers cannot be overstated. Through their artistry, technical proficiency, and collaborative efforts, they play a pivotal role in shaping the visual landscape of theatrical and film productions, ultimately crafting environments that enhance storytelling and captivate audiences.

### **EFFECTS OF TECHNOLOGY ON THEATRE**

There are many ways in which technology has enhanced the capabilities of theatre, and it plays a crucial role in almost all theatre productions, from set design to performance. Whether it enables the actor's voice to reach every member of the audience or assists the set designer in creating a breathtaking backdrop, technology has had a remarkable impact. Understanding the history of technology in theatre will pique your interest in the way theatre operated without these advancements, as well as the achievements made by theatrical productions through technology and other technological growth in the stage and related areas.

The modern stage consists of various technological innovations. For example, lighting, sound systems, microphones, and 3D printing systems greatly enhance the audience's experience at the performance venue. Prior to the advent of modern technology, the appearance of theatres greatly differed from those of today. It is recorded that theatre originated in ancient Greece in the 6th century BC.

In ancient theatre, one of the technologies employed was the use of cranes to assist actors in portraying flight. Additionally, actors projected their voices to the audience using the acoustics of the amphitheater, rather than relying on microphones. Most of their performances relied on the audience's imagination, unlike present-day technology, which amplifies everything beyond the audience's initial expectations. Modernization, aided by new technologies, revolutionized the stage to enhance the theatre experience for all involved in the production. Technological advancements have had a profound impact on modern theatre; they often immerse the audience in a thrilling experience. Through modern technology, the theatre is capable of stimulating three senses: sight, hearing, and even smell. To address the impact of modern technology on these senses, we have.

### **SENSE OF SIGHT (VISUAL)**

The sense of sight and the sense of hearing are fundamental aspects that should be appreciated

while in the theatre. With the advent of new technology, theatres can easily be upgraded to cater to the visual aspects of any play. Furthermore, 3D printing and automation can be utilized to swiftly create captivating and visually stunning stage productions. Videos and other multimedia resources are also integrated into performances through the use of modern technology, whether it be video backdrops portraying sunny or rainy weather and raindrops. Set designers can effortlessly create and manipulate the desired production through the use of cutting-edge technology.

In the case of 3D, set designers no longer need to rely on hand-painted backdrops or freehand construction. Instead, they can leverage 3D printing to alleviate their workload. Prior to sending their work for printing on a plastic prototype, designers employ 3D software to meticulously design their sets. This innovative technology significantly saves designers a considerable amount of time and effort in producing set pieces.

Another very important area in which the theatrical experience is significantly impacted by modern technology is the lighting element. Theatres in the past were constructed without a roof, allowing the stage to be illuminated directly by natural light from the sky. However, as time went on, limelight was introduced and used until the 19th century, when it was replaced by electrical lighting in the 20th century. Since then, lighting technology has continued to evolve, leading to the development of modern lighting systems. Nowadays, modern theatres are typically equipped with specialized lighting systems that are made easier to operate thanks to LED lights and electrical systems. With the introduction of digital light boards, capable of controlling hundreds of lights used in productions, the control and manipulation of light has become more precise and sophisticated. By simply turning a dial or pressing a button, not only can the lights be turned on or off, but their intensity, pattern, and colors can also be adjusted.

### **THE SENSE OF HEARING**

The sense of hearing, specifically sound, has also been greatly influenced by modern technology in the theatre. Instead of creating music or sound effects manually, the production team now has the ability to download them from the internet. Another significant development is the microphone



technology. Actors can now use microphones to amplify their voices, projecting sound through speakers strategically placed in the theatre, rather than relying solely on the acoustics of the amphitheater, as was done in the past. With further advancements, performers now have the option to wear skin-colored, discreet headsets or hide microphones in their hair, ensuring high-quality sound production without the distractions caused by handheld microphones.

The sense of smell may be one of the least considered aspects when constructing a theatre, but it can still captivate the audience's attention. For instance, an actor may choose to light a cigarette on stage, desiring to immerse the audience in the smell of the smoke. Recent advancements in technology have made it possible to incorporate smell in theatrical productions. Although the sense of smell is often overlooked in design, it can enhance the audience's experience. For example, if an actor is cooking a meal on stage, the aroma may waft through the theatre, allowing the audience to catch a whiff. Designing smell as a component in theatrical production is referred to as "aroma-turgy." The development of dry vapor scenting systems has given production teams the freedom to use various scents in the theatre. These specialized diffusing devices release desired scents or aromas at the press of a button or the adjustment of a dial. To ensure even distribution of the scent throughout the theatre, these devices are strategically installed in designated spots. This technology provides theatrical productions with another method to create a deeper sensory experience for the audience.

## CONCLUSION

Modern theatre experienced a significant technological breakthrough with the application of computer-aided designs. The rapid growth of this technology was necessitated by its wide range of uses, which now extend to almost all aspects of life. The stage, initially an empty space, was transformed into a performance area through the use of design elements such as line, size, shape, color, direction, and texture. Set design, also known as scenic design, is a crucial component of complex theater productions. It involves creating the setting and time period of a production while remaining faithful to the director's vision. Set design also incorporates physical elements that allow the actors

to interact with their environment.

Technological advancements have greatly enhanced the capabilities of theater and play a vital role in all aspects of production, from set design to performance. Technology ensures that the voice of each actor is heard by every audience member and assists set designers in creating stunning backdrops. Its impact on modern-day theater has revolutionized the stage, providing a more immersive experience for all involved. Furthermore, it has transformed lighting and sound systems. The introduction of digital lighting boards allows for precise control over hundreds of lights, including intensity, pattern, and color, via a simple dial or button press. Microphone technology has also been integrated into the theater, enabling actors to project their voices via strategically placed speakers. Performers now wear discreet, skin-colored microphone headsets, ensuring high-quality sound without the distractions caused by handheld microphones.

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## **Digitization of Nigerian Dance Performances: A Case Study of Sekilbe Ogbobuibe Ibe, PhD**

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### **Abstract**

The 21st century is undoubtedly a digital era with technological advancements permeating various aspects of human life. Dance as an art form, has also found its way into the digital space, serving its full purpose virtually, even in a greater dimension as it does physically. This paper sets out to expound on how digitization influences the presentation, reception and preservation of traditional Nigerian dances, particularly within the context of Seki, through an exploration of the relationship between dance and modern technology, the influence of digital society on Nigerian dances, and how digitization can function as a pivotal, easy and faster way to immortalize Nigerian dances. Anchored on cultural preservation theory, this study explores the potential of harnessing digital innovations for the preservation and promotion of Nigerian traditional dances, using Seki dance drama founded by Yibo Koko as a case study. This study employs the descriptive research design and utilizes the survey research method in a qualitative approach. And it is found that digitization can have both positive and negative impacts on traditional dance performances in Nigeria, and so, it is recommended that technology can be effectively harnessed to enhance the spectacle and accessibility of Seki dance drama performance while also addressing challenges and potential implications for the preservation of dance as a cultural heritage.

**Key terms:** Seki, dance, dance drama, traditional dance, digitization, performances.

### **Introduction**

The term "dance" evokes the concept of rhythmic body movement synchronized with music to convey emotions. It is regarded as an amplified physical expression occurring across temporal and spatial dimensions to articulate or elaborate upon mood. Dance is further delineated as the familiar coordination of bodily movement with rhythm, implying that individuals can only execute steps to which their minds and bodies are accustomed. It serves as a universal language transcending cultural boundaries, capable of conveying emotions, narratives, or celebratory sentiments. Possessing its own aesthetic qualities, dance can manifest as

either choreographed or improvised movements, often accompanied by music.

Dance has remained an integral facet of human culture for centuries, serving diverse purposes such as religious rituals, social gatherings, entertainment, and artistic expression. Hanna (2008) posits that dance as human behaviour, composed from the dancer's perspective, of purposeful, intentionally rhythmic, and culturally patterned sequences of nonverbal body movements, occurring in time, space, and with effort.

Dance, distinct from ordinary motor activities, embodies inherent "aesthetic" values, encompassing appropriateness and competency. "From an anthropological viewpoint, dance is conceptualized as both a cultural practice and a social ritual" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1994, as cited in Pusnik, 2010, p. 5). It serves as a means of aesthetic pleasure and a mechanism for establishing communal ties and specific structures within the community. The social ritual of dance is examined through the symbolic aspects of specific cultures, illuminating processes of identification and differentiation among individuals within these cultures.

The significance of dance varies depending on the society in which it is performed, with the interpretation of rhythmic movement heavily influenced by psycho-cultural factors. For instance, gestures involving hip and buttock movements may be perceived as vulgar and indicative of promiscuity in some societies, while in others, they symbolize female emancipation and strength. Dance holds cultural relevance as a means of identifying the diverse cultures of the world and serves as an essential component of ritualistic practices. A dance is achieved through the use of routine practice and discipline.

The connection between dance and religion stems from the integral role of dance in rituals, a fundamental aspect of religious worship. Members of specific religious communities engage in dance to worship and entreat their deities. The origins of dance can be traced to humanity's instinctual drive to placate divine forces and mitigate existential threats.





Over time, dance evolved into a means of expressing a spectrum of emotions; whether positive or negative. Dance has this potential capability of communicating and evoking emotions at the same time.

Since the twentieth century, advancements in science and technology have elevated dance as a form of entertainment, showcasing some of the most renowned artists in history. Choreographers for instance, eager to get away from ballet's reputation for "intellectual" dance, helped popularize modern dance. While classical dance was considered more of a variation of group gymnastics, modern dance favours the freedom of the dancer as such. Incorporating new movements from different styles (jazz, modern dance, classical dance), contemporary dance plays with the change of rhythm and dance improvisations.

Indigenous dances in Nigeria hold a vital place in the socio-cultural, economic, and political makeup of the country. It is on this premise that Hayes writes that "a single theatrical piece gives a panoramic view of the entire life of the people" (As cited in Abakporo, 2018, p. 224). Starting from traditional religious rituals, dance in Nigeria has spread to all aspects of human life, helping to shape, differentiate, structure, nurture, harness, and pass on core communal beliefs and norms. Abakporo compares dance to a mirror reflecting the past, evaluating the present, and projecting the future, serving as a way to preserve and express cultural norms and values (2018, p. 224). He further argues that the beauty of a dance depends on how well it achieves its goals. Dances are considered beautiful when they fulfill their purposes, such as pleasing gods and deities in ritual dances, passing down community values to younger generations in festivals and moonlight plays, or honouring spirits and ancestors in masquerade dances, among other reasons. "Nigerian cultural dances have a way of unifying the people in one way or the other and sometimes telling stories via accompanying music" (Ugobude, 2016).

Some Nigerian traditional dances include; bata dance, ukwata dance, adamma masquerade dance, ekwombi dance, koroso dance, nkwa umu-agbogho dance, among several others. It is important to note that Nigerian dance tradition transcends the primitive setting of Nigeria as it is inclusive of the contemporary dance scene. Contemporary dance is

an alternation of traditional folk dances, to the rhythm or waves of modern music. The people-unifying factor that is attributed to traditional folk dances, also exist in contemporary dance.

Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) refers to those kinds of heritage which are passed from one generation to another like oral tradition, cultural expressions, presentations, knowledge and skills. These are used to produce traditional crafts and festive events, and thus acquire an important role in maintaining quality cultural diversity in growing globalization.

According to UNESCO, cultural heritage does not only include monuments and collections of objects, but also contains traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed to our descendants. Folk dances represent part of cultural heritage and their preservation for the next generations appears of major importance (Kico, et al, 2018, p. 1).

The advent and quick spread of digital platforms have revolutionized the way arts and entertainment evolve, operate, communicate, and are consumed globally. This paper delves into the myriad ways in which Nigerian dance performances can harness and respond to the opportunities created by digital platforms in the 21st century, while retaining the core of their social frameworks. By examining key aspects of digitization of Nigerian dance performances such as increased connectivity, online activism, virtual gatherings, digital learning, e-commerce, and collaborative efforts, this paper aims to elucidate the profound impact of digitalization on the dynamics and social cohesion of Nigerian dances, especially the critically acclaimed Seki performance.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs the descriptive research design and utilizes the survey research method in a qualitative approach. The qualitative technique is used in the interrogation of the artistic structures of Seki dance drama, while the survey research technique is used to analyze the influence of digitization on Nigerian dance performances, using Seki as a case study. The research design also utilizes a case study design to provide in-depth analysis of the digitization of Seki performances,



focusing on specific examples and instances within the context of Nigerian cultural heritage. Primary and secondary sources of data are collected and used for the content analysis of Seki and the examination of how Seki is represented as a dance drama, disseminated and received in the digital space, and the effects this portends for Nigerian dance performances. Finally, this research acknowledges limitations on the access to some important Seki performances of the past, important Seki players, as well as biases inherent in the research process.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Cultural preservation theory delves into the role of digitization as a vital tool for safeguarding African dances, emphasizing how digital platforms, archives, and recordings contribute significantly to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage. In this context, digital technologies offer innovative solutions for documenting and disseminating traditional African dances, ensuring their longevity and accessibility for future generations.

Digital platforms provide a virtual space for communities to showcase and share their dances with a global audience. Online platforms, such as social media and video-sharing websites, as well as virtual dance archives, enable individuals and groups to upload videos, tutorials, and documentaries showcasing various African dance forms. This democratization of access allows dancers from diverse backgrounds to connect, learn, and preserve traditional dances, overcoming geographical barriers and fostering cultural exchange.

Highlighting the limitations and eventual importance of cultural preservation theory, Cordelli argues that “cultural preservation may not be guaranteed but it should be facilitated. This may require a state to move beyond neutrality of treatment and take action directly aimed at cultural preservation” (2017, p. 4). Cultural preservation theory is used in this paper to explore how digitization serves as a tool for preserving Nigerian cultural heritage, specifically focusing on Seki dance drama. This theory aids in the analysis and investigation of how digital platforms redefine audience engagement, spatial dynamics, and the potential nature of Seki performances, both in traditional and virtual settings.

### **Historical Overview of Seki**

Yibo Koko, the founder/director of Seki dance drama postulates that Seki is a spectacular dance about the Niger Delta people aimed at tracing the American tap dance to the indigenous people of the Niger delta of Nigeria. Yibo Koko hails from Rivers State, the Ijaw tribe to be precise. “He is no ordinary choreographer, one of Nigeria's celebrated entertainers. He has enjoyed a rich variety of show biz roles before deciding to concentrate on a dance that celebrates his culture. He calls it Seki” (CNN African Voices, 2018). Seki sponsored by Heritage Bank, is an assemblage of traditional dances from the Okrika people in Rivers State. Seki, founded around 1995, is made up of five different masquerade groups that set to recreate the indigenous response to the struggle in resistance against foreign culture and the promotion of indigenous culture.

Yibo Koko asserts that “Seki dance drama is an embodiment of creative, artistic, economic, academic, and other components strewn together and geared towards human capital development and within the gamut of the creative economy” (2023). Going by his position, Seki dance drama is a multifaceted contemporary dance entertainment, encompassing artistic creativity and economic viability. Seki serves not only as a form of artistic performance but also contributes to broader objectives such as human capital development and the advancement of the creative economy. In essence, Seki represents a comprehensive approach to cultural expression and economic development through the integration of various components within its dance drama.

Critiquing Yibo Koko's Seki as performing arts or performance arts; Rasaki Ojo Bakare & Oluwatayo Isijola posit that:

The Seki was initially prepared as an entry for the 1998 Atlanta Georgia National Black Arts Festival, but got its premier at the Eko Hotels and Suits, Lagos, on Saturday 26 March, 2016 . . . For the most parts, some audience members would have experienced Seki as a re-enactment of selected Rivers State house-hold masquerades' display on stage. . . . Seki was performed with about fifty-seven masquerade dancers sourced from the traditional society (2017, p. 52).

Seki has evolved since its creation into a haven for creatives, for those eager to embody the archaic



cultural essence of the Niger Delta region. Artistes in Nigeria and in the diaspora key into the Seki-vision, submitting their talents under the direction of Yibo, to recuperate the dying traditional practice in the Nigerian contemporary society. This explains why horde of artistes from different states mustered in response to Seki's audition call on Sunday, the 14th of May 2023, at the Atlantic Hall, Presidential Hotel, Port Harcourt (Koko, 2023).

### **The Significance of Seki**

Seki is a creative performance of indigenous culture, folklore and heritage of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Seki was created to expose the rich cultural heritage of the Niger Delta to the world, to trace the American tap dance to the indigenous Niger delta people; and to serve as entrepreneurial venture by the founder -Yibo Koko, his quota of contribution to the Nigerian federal government's attempt to commercialize the artistic cultural heritage of the Nigerian society. The essence of Seki is to explore a new vista to 'feed' contemporary theatrical productions by drawing on the Nigerian rich traditional heritage.

The fundamental purpose of Seki is arguably to delve into uncharted territory in order to enrich modern theatrical productions by tapping into Nigeria's abundant traditional heritage. In essence, Seki serves as a vehicle for innovation and creativity within contemporary theatre, leveraging the wealth of cultural traditions present in Nigeria. By incorporating elements of these traditions into their work, practitioners of Seki aim to infuse their productions with authenticity, depth, and resonance, thereby creating a bridge between the past and the present. This process not only breathes new life into theatrical endeavors but also serves to preserve and honour Nigeria's cultural legacy for future generations.

### **Digital Technologies in Cultural Preservation**

The impact of digital technologies in the preservation and promotion of cultural items and creations in today's digital age is undeniable. Digital technologies have brought about a profound transformation in preserving cultural heritage. By offering high-resolution formats, these technologies ensure accurate documentation of artifacts, sites and traditions. Consequently, this allows for the sharing of cultural heritage with a global audience, transcending geographical boundaries. Moreover, digital technologies have simplified the storage,

organization, and accessibility of cultural materials. This ease of access enables researchers, scholars, and enthusiasts to remotely study and analyze these materials, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural heritage and promoting appreciation for its richness and diversity.

In essence, digital technologies have brought forth a revolution in cultural preservation, providing new avenues for documenting, safekeeping, and sharing our collective cultural heritage. Digital technologies have played a crucial role in the preservation of cultural artifacts through the digitization process. This method not only safeguards fragile objects from deterioration but also ensures their accessibility online. By digitizing culture, we not only protect their physical state but also democratize access to cultural heritage. This means that people from all over the world have the opportunity to engage with these valuable treasures.

Technology has transformed the ways in which people create, consume, and share cultural content, leading to new forms of artistic expression, communication, and interaction. Experts have identified two directions in the use of electronic technologies for the preservation of cultural heritage.

a) e-form (electronic copies) of traditional cultural storages (such as electronic museums, libraries, exhibitions, databases, etc.)

b) electronic forms of new cultural objects (computer programs, networks, technologies, digital works of art etc.), which may eventually become objects of cultural heritage, but according to the method of preservation are similar to the category of intangible heritage.

Each of these types has its own characteristics, but can be very similar and complement each other.  
Changes in Consumption Patterns

The rise of digital technologies alters the ways in which cultural contents are consumed. Streaming services, e-books, and digital art galleries make it easier for individuals to access and enjoy a wide range of cultural products from around the world. However, these changes have also led to concerns about the devaluation of cultural content. Authenticity problems in cultural heritage preservation through digital means persist. The



creators of digital reconstructions often overlook a significant disadvantage of digital technologies—the loss of authenticity. They develop specialized computer database software to compile electronic copies of objects, including various details about styles, techniques, or materials, in an attempt to simulate authenticity.

The allure of visual appeal, installation possibilities, animation, and three-dimensional transformations can obscure the limitations of digital technologies for faithfully replicating real cultural heritage objects. Rather than gaining additional opportunities to explore monuments through alternative methods, the attention of the mass audience becomes fixated on the impressive visual representation of a new virtual cultural heritage object. When virtual reconstructions are utilized on the internet, the laborious work involving sources, synthesis methods, and attribution remains obscured, with users only seeing the final output such as a movie, picture, or program itself.

### **Digital Initiatives for the Preservation and Promotion of Seki**

Digital initiatives are more of improvement programs that aim at providing business improvements by using digital technologies such as Cloud, Mobile, AI, etc. In the realm of organizational endeavours, a digital initiative, in its essence, pertains to a strategic undertaking wherein digital technologies are harnessed to accomplish specific goals or objectives. The nature and scope of these initiatives may vary extensively, contingent upon the organization and its unique requirements. Digital initiatives serve as the conduit through which organizations harness the formidable power of digital technology, propelling them towards growth, competitiveness, and triumph in the ever-evolving digital landscape of the modern era.

### **Digital Initiatives for the Preservation and Promotion of Nigerian Dance Performances**

In today's digital age, there is a remarkable shift in the ways in which we connect and interact with others. The rise of social media platforms and online communities have revolutionized the concept of community, blurring geographical boundaries and enabling us to form connections with people from all over the world. A social community is more than just a group of people brought together by common interests or goals. It is a dynamic and interactive space where individuals come together to share

ideas, engage in discussions, support one another, and build meaningful connections. These communities take on various colorations, from online forums and Facebook groups to niche platforms dedicated to specific topics.

One overriding reason for the change in our sense of community is technology. The widespread availability of smartphones, internet access, and social media platforms have made it easier for people to stay connected virtually. We no longer need to rely solely on face-to-face interactions or physical proximity to build relationships; instead, we can foster meaningful connections through online forums, group chats, or even video calls.

The advent of digital platforms has also revolutionized the way communities operate, communicate, and evolve. Digital initiatives for the preservation and promotion of Nigerian dance performances can be harnessed through the following five (5) channels:

1. **Digital Archives:** Nigerian dance performance stakeholders could create a comprehensive digital archive for their cultural heritage, including historical documents, artifacts, and traditions. They could also utilize cloud storage and digital preservation techniques to ensure long-term accessibility and protection of these resources.
2. **Virtual Tours and Exhibitions:** Dance creators and founders within the Nigerian cum African periphery could also develop immersive virtual tours and online exhibitions showcasing their cultural landmarks, museums, and historical sites as obtains by Seki. These could also include the incorporation of multimedia elements such as videos, interactive maps, and 360-degree photographs to provide an engaging and informative experience for virtual visitors.
3. **Mobile Applications:** Nigerian dance creators, promoters, practitioners and enthusiasts could design mobile applications that serve as digital guide to their dances, offering users access to information about local attractions, events and cultural activities. These could incorporate features such as augmented reality overlays, audio guides, and geolocation services to enhance user experience.
4. **Digital Marketing Campaigns:** Nigerian dance creators and promoters could also launch targeted digital marketing campaigns to





promote indigenous dances like Seki as destinations for cultural tourism. This can be done through the utilization of social media platforms, email marketing, and influencer partnerships to raise awareness and attract visitors to the region.

5. **Community Engagement Platforms:** Furthermore, they could create online forums or social media groups where residents and visitors can share stories, memories, and photographs related to Nigerian dance cultural heritage, and foster a sense of community and connection through digital channels.

### **Digitization and the Future of Seki: Opportunities and Challenges**

Digitalization is the cause of large-scale and sweeping transformations across multiple aspects of businesses, providing unparalleled opportunities for value creation and capture, as well as being a source of major risk. Technology has always shaped and changed industries, from the printing press to the first industrial revolution's steam engines and cotton spinning looms – smashed by Luddites who feared for their livelihoods. There is no doubt, however, that the complexity of these transformations, the impact they have across industries, and the pace at which they are occurring is truly unprecedented.

Seki; a vibrant cultural dance of the Kalabari people of Nigeria, holds immense potential to benefit from digitization. While preserving traditions is crucial, embracing technology can expand its reach, enhance learning, and create new opportunities for both artists and audiences. Embracing digitization responsibly presents exciting opportunities for the future of Seki. By addressing the challenges and harnessing the potential, creators and promoters can ensure the cultural heritage of Seki thrives while reaching new audiences, empowering artists, and fostering innovation. Below are some of such exciting future directions and potential challenges for the digitization of Seki:

#### **Opportunities:**

##### **Virtual Performances and Archiving:**

- Utilizing platforms like virtual reality (VR) and 360° video recordings to create immersive experiences for global audiences, even those unable to travel to Nigeria.
- Digitizing and archiving traditional dance performances to preserve cultural heritage and provide valuable resources for future generations.

#### **Educational Tools:**

- Developing interactive learning platforms that utilize augmented reality (AR) and gamification to teach Seki dance steps and cultural context in engaging ways.
- Creating online courses and workshops by renowned Seki dancers, expanding access to knowledge and training beyond geographical limitations.

#### **Economic Empowerment:**

- Building online marketplaces for Seki dancers to showcase their skills and connect with audiences worldwide, generating income and promoting cultural tourism.
- Utilizing blockchain technology to create transparent and secure royalty distribution systems for artists and musicians involved in Seki performances.

#### **Enhanced Creativity and Collaboration:**

- Utilizing digital tools like motion capture and animation to create innovative dance interpretations and artistic expressions of Seki.
- Facilitating online collaborations between Seki players and artists from other disciplines, sparking new creative fusions and global exposure.

#### **Challenges:**

##### **Digital Divide:**

- Addressing the unequal access to technology and internet connectivity in Nigeria, ensuring inclusivity and participation in the digital transformation of Seki.
- Developing localized and low-tech alternatives for communities with limited digital infrastructure.

##### **Cultural Appropriation and Authenticity:**

- Implementing ethical frameworks to ensure respectful representation of Seki culture online and prevent its misappropriation.
- Involving communities in decision-making processes related to digitization to preserve cultural control and authenticity.

##### **Data Privacy and Security:**

- Establishing robust data protection measures to safeguard personal information collected through online platforms and digital technologies.



- Educating individuals involved in Seki dance drama about the importance of data privacy and responsible online practices.

#### **Sustainability and Long-term Preservation:**

- Ensuring the long-term sustainability of digital initiatives related to Seki dance drama, including funding, maintenance, and accessibility in the future.
- Integrating traditional preservation methods like oral storytelling and apprenticeship models with digital solutions for a holistic approach.

#### **Conclusion**

While the digital landscape offers exciting opportunities for sharing Seki globally, challenges like unequal internet access demand inclusive solutions. Balancing this technological push with respect for cultural integrity and individual privacy necessitates the development of robust ethical frameworks and active community involvement. Importantly, this integration of tradition and innovation must prioritize long-term sustainability, ensuring that valuable preservation methods continue to flourish alongside digital solutions. By navigating these opportunities and challenges thoughtfully, we can pave the way for a vibrant, interconnected future for Seki and other Nigerian dance performances, enriching both cultural heritage and artistic expression for generations to come.

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Appendix



## **THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN PROMOTING AND CURBING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

Domestic violence in Nigerian society is on the increase on daily basis. Marriages are breaking-up due to family crisis and violence. Domestic violence involves brutality and abuses by the stronger over the weak. In Nigerian families, women and children are very vulnerable to domestic violence. However, in some cases, women who tend to be stronger than their husbands do beat and brutalize their husband on bases of domestic violence. This research addressed the meaning and nature of domestic violence, causes of domestic violence in Nigeria, reasons most women do not leave a violent partner or report her violent experience, signs/effects of domestic violence in Nigeria, types of domestic violence, the place of religion in promoting and curbing domestic violence in Nigeria. The analytical method was utilized as well as books, journals, internet sources and recommends amongst others that government should arrest and prosecute all who indulge in domestic violence to serve as deterrent to others in Nigerian nation.

Key words: Religion, domestic, violence, curbing, brutality, women, family

### **Introduction**

The influence of religion in the family cannot be over emphasized, it has contributed to the reduction of conflicts and promotion of peace in various families in Nigeria. In as much as the religion has played a vital role in promoting peace and tranquility, unifying the family and promoting progress in the family, it has its negative effects as well. Family violence is an overarching label for a host of interpersonal behaviors that range from the minor to the major. It constitutes a largely "hidden" form of crime because of its dependence on reporting levels and its reliance on limited data sources. The known patterns are skewed because of its politicization,

which have rendered some victims invisible. For example, it has been established that males are subject to all forms of domestic abuse and yet their victimization receives scant attention.

Family violence is primarily perpetrated by men against women and children, sometimes this is misunderstood to be based upon the biological differences between men and women. However, men's violence against women is linked to discriminatory and sexist attitudes, held by individuals and supported by the broader community, often in very subtle ways.

Often we excuse men's use of violence as their inability to manage anger or frustration on childhood trauma, alcohol or drug-misuse or financial stress. Evidence shows these are not causal, although they are often associated factors. For example, not all men who drink alcohol use violence against their partners nor do all men who are unemployed or in financial stress. Evidence tells us that violence against women and their children is globally pervasive and not confined to culture, religion, or particular groups of women within society.

### **Meaning and Nature of Domestic Violence**

The term family violence is often used interchangeably with domestic violence. Family violence can take many forms. Lackton, (1921) opines that the more frequently a woman was struck as a child, the more likely she is to become a victim of violence. Family violence is any behavior that in any way controls or dominates a family member that causes them to fear theirs or other family members for safety or wellbeing. It can include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or economical abuse and any behavior that causes a child to hear, witness, or otherwise be exposed to the effects of that behaviour.



Family Violence describes a systematic pattern of abusive behaviours within a relationship that is characterized by intimacy, dependency and/or trust. The abusive behaviours exist within a context where their purpose is to gain power, control and induce fear. All forms of abusive behaviours are ways in which one human being is trying to have control and/or exploit or have power over another as stated by Sanders (2001). The terms family violence, domestic violence and spousal abuse are often used interchangeably to describe a deliberate, reoccurring, pattern of behaviours. These behaviours can take any forms, and often increase in frequency and severity in the course of the relationship.

Domestic violence involves the abuse of power in intimate relationships within a household. On the simplest level, a man is guilty of violence when he beats his wife with hand or with a stick or belt. Also he is guilty of violence if he forces his wife to carry heavy burdens and take on totally disproportionate workload, or if he infects her with a sexually transmitted disease such as HIV/AIDS, or forces her to endure numerous pregnancies (Kunhiyop, 2008). Physical abuse refers to actions that cause physical discomfort, pain or injury. Physical abuse can involve slaps to full physical assaults involving kicking, pushing and punching causing serious harm. Physical abuse is considered assault. Physical abuse in violent relationships may also evolve to the point where the mere threat of physical violence can be effectively used in order to intimidate the victim to comply with the wishes of the abuser. According to John and Ferraro (1955), in order to understand the nature of a person's use of violence, you have to understand its role in that relationship.

### **Causes of Domestic Violence in Nigeria**

The basic reason of family violence is to control somebody by force. Umberson and Bob (2023) says that several studies of perpetrators of domestic violence have found that violent men often attribute their behaviours to a "loss of control". The following are the major reasons for domestic violence in Nigeria:

1. **Demonstration of Power and Control:** African traditional beliefs often hold that a woman is a man's property. Umberson and Bob (2023) said in order to prove this and to uphold his image as the lion in the family, a man will not permit any insubordination by his wife or children, and resorts to physical and verbal violence to assert his control over them.
2. **Denial of Sex:** Since the woman is often assumed to be the man's property, he assumes

that he has a right to have sex with her anytime he wishes. Abrahams and Jewices (2004) said that if the wife should refuse this may lead to physical and verbal abuse. Most men commit homicides against their wives due to their refusal of initiated sexual intercourse.

3. **Physical and Emotional Weakness of Women:** Men are regarded as physically and emotionally stronger than women, and this becomes a major reason for a woman's inability to resist their abuse. At any time, the men who are muscularly advantageous always demonstrate their power by beating the women who are seen to be weak. On the other hand, there are women who beat their husbands because they are stronger than their husbands
4. **Social Tolerance of Violence:** Family members such as parents, uncles and aunts do not encourage women to leave violent and abusive relationships. According to Hamilton and Marsh (2016, p.10), "parents urge their children to stay in violent marriage, particularly when there are young children, for they would not be allowed to take the children with them". The husband's right to use violence is seen as social norms that supports a husband's use of violence to discipline his wife and to have sex with her even when she does not want. Sibani (2024) posits that "tolerance of domestic violence has left so many deformed and maimed. Some have died in the process of enduring violence in marriage".
5. **Lack of Sanctions on Perpetrators of Domestic Violence:** Many communities in Nigeria have no measures for controlling or punishing those who abuse their wives. Their behaviours are simply explained away as a character or flaw involving bad temper or lack of self-control. There should be prescribed punitive measures for wife and husband beaters at very high cost as well as social stigmatization.
6. **Alcohol Abuse:** Some men abuse alcohol and other drugs. In their drunken state, they are unable to tolerate any disagreement from their spouses or children and are liable to interpret any action as insulting or insubordinate, and they respond to this with violence. There is a misconception that if an alcoholic who commits domestic abuse or violence, becomes sober, they will no longer be abusive or violent, as opined by (Buddy, 2018).
7. **Religious Believes:** There are other religious believes that brings conflict in the family. For example, "in the African Traditional Religion, it is believed that a priest must abstain from sex for certain periods of time when performing ritual rites" as stated by (Abogunrin (1986, p. 54). This





practice is active in some parts of Yoruba land, where the wives of these priests cannot exercise patience for their husbands abstaining for a period of time, they fall into the temptation of having extra-marital affairs with other men. No wonder St Paul stressed and warned about a deprivation of sex

#### Reasons Most Women Do Not Leave a Violent Partner or Report Her Violent Experience

People often stay because the abuser has threatened to kill them if they leave, or to kill themselves, or to kill the children. Leaving could mean living in fear of being stalked, hurt or killed. People experiencing abuse believe these threats for good reason – the most dangerous time for an abused woman is when she attempts to leave her abuser. About 25% of all women who are murdered by their spouse had left the relationship (Maire, 2010). It is discovered that half of the murdered women were killed within two months of leaving the relationship. Holly (2006) averred other reasons as follows;

1. Friends and family may not support their decision to leave. They may feel ashamed or embarrassed, or fear of being stigmatized by others.
2. Their cultural or religious community may not support separation or divorce and focus to “save the family”, rather than to “stop the violence”.
3. Their partners may have systematically and socially isolated them for years in an attempt to gain full control of their lives. Victims may feel they literally have nowhere to go and no one to turn to.
4. Some are unemployed or underemployed. Many fear being a single parent with little or no access to the money and resources necessary to adequately support themselves and their children. To further buttress this point, Statistics Canada, (2007) holds that “in 2007, 23.6% of female lone-parent families were living in low income and continue to have one of the highest incidences of low income, more than four times that of two parent families”.
5. The women may still care for their partners and hope that they will change. Many women do not necessarily want to leave the relationship; they just want the violence to stop.

#### Signs/Effects of Domestic Violence in Nigeria

Domestic violence happens to one in four families and it is very clear when you come across anyone who is experiencing it. However, those experiencing family violence often do not tell anyone because of threats to life. Also, people experiencing family

violence sometimes blame themselves for the abuse or feel ashamed about it and do not want to talk about it. There are signs you can look out for when one is experiencing domestic violence:

1. Physical injuries like scratches or bruises – the person might say that the injuries do not matter or are because of a clumsy accident. Some abused wives will immerse themselves in activities outside the home, such as church meetings, weddings, funerals, and the like in order to avoid having to be at home with their abusive spouses. The children are not left out when talking about family violence. Children learn from what they see happening around them. They will learn violence as they watch their fathers beat and molest their mothers. Children who have been abused often become delinquent and abusive in their relationships with other children. The bullies in the streets are often those who have been physically abused at home. Some children may even end up fearing marriage itself. Some emotional and behavioural problems that can result due to domestic violence include increased aggressiveness, anxiety, and changes in how a child socializes with friends, family, and authorities. Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations, and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization.
2. Fear or being afraid of their partner or speak about their partner as being jealous, moody or bad tempered is very common in a violent home. They also describe their partner as controlling – for example, the person has to get their partner's approval to do things or go places.
3. Psychological effects of domestic violence have caused so many spouse and children to be more anxious, jumpy, distant or depressed than usual. High amounts of stress, fear, and anxiety are commonly reported by victims still living with their perpetrators. Domestic violence is enormously destructive of its victims, who live in an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. Depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for 'provoking' the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. A reported 60 percent of victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship, and have a greatly increased risk of suicide. Once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken away their autonomy.
4. Sexual violence on domestic basis includes spousal and child abuse. Cases are more readily identified and brought to public attention. Some elements that determine these intentional



injuries due to socio-economic status, alcohol use, and the family history of such spouse. In Nigeria, over 60 percent of women has experienced rape, stalking, or physical violence by an intimate partner with the view that women are men's property. Men who experienced violent sexual assault also reported similar short and long-term effects. Homiak (2007) surprisingly posits, these acts of violence are even perpetuated by the religious leaders who are revered and feared. The report by premium times with the headline "Islamic Cleric rapes 16-year-old, but claims she's his wife" is a clear example. In a country where these religious leaders are revered and feared, who will put them in check? Women are told to be prayerful and hopeful for a change in situations where they report cases of brutality. Victims find strength in their "faith" and would not give up, but rather endure the violence at all cost to keep a family or marriage together.

5. Evidentially, the victims often criticized their partner publicly.
6. The victims of domestic violence do not socialize as much as in the past.
7. Another important sign is that they do not want to leave children with their partner or family member.

These are only some of the signs of family violence, and sometimes these signs happen because of other things going on in a person's life. But a combination of these signs over time might mean that someone is experiencing family violence.

### **Types of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence has one purpose: to gain and maintain control over the victim. Abusers use many tactics to exert power over their spouse or partner: dominance, humiliation, isolation, threats, intimidation, denial, and blame. We shall be considering physical abuse, emotional abuse and economic abuse

**Physical Abuse:** This is a form of violence involving contact with the intention to cause feelings of intimidation, pain, injury, or other physical suffering or bodily harm. Physical abuse includes hitting, slapping, punching, choking, pushing, burning, and other types of contact that result in physical injury to the victim. This can also be manifest in behaviours such as denying the victim of medical care when needed, depriving the victim of sleep or other functions necessary to live, or forcing the victim to engage in drug/alcohol use against his or her will. Sexual abuse is any situation in which force or threat is used to obtain participation in unwanted sexual activity. Coercing a person to engage in sexual activity against his or her will, even if that person is a

spouse or intimate partner with whom consensual sex has occurred, is an act of aggression and violence.

**Emotional Abuse:** This is very common and include humiliating the victim privately or publicly, controlling what the victim can and cannot do, withholding information from the victim, deliberately doing something to make the victim feel diminished or embarrassed, isolating the victim from friends and family, implicitly blackmailing the victim by harming others when the victim expresses independence or happiness, or denying the victim access to money or other basic resources and necessities. Degradation in any form can be considered psychological abuse. Abraham (1996, p. 39) posits:

Verbal abuse is a form of emotionally abusive behavior involving the use of language. Verbal abuse can also be referred to as the act of threatening. Through threatening a person can blatantly say they will harm you in any way and will also be considered as abuse

**Economic Abuse:** It is a form of abuse when one intimate partner has control over the other partner's access to economic resources. Economic abuse may involve preventing a spouse from resource acquisition, limiting the amount of resources to use by the victim, or by exploiting economic resources of the victim. Due to economic abuse and isolation, victims usually have very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely when seeking help. These are the financial effects of domestic violence.

### **The Place of Religion in Promoting and Curbing Domestic Violence in Nigeria**

Religion and family cannot be separated too far from each other in their functions. Family as it is, is the shoot of every organization, be it social organization, traditional and religious organizations. Without the family, there will be no existence of any of the above mentioned organizations. It has been rightly said by the sociologists that the family is the smallest unit of the society. This is true because these organizations that made up the societies are from one family or the other. We have different types and forms of religions. These religions are also made up of human beings from different families. In fact, religion is the coming together of different volunteered families with common belief. The whole world is fitted up with families from different tribes and different languages. However, religion controls members of the family. It has influenced the family in different ways both



positively and negatively as follows;

#### Religion as Catalyst for Domestic Violence:

Cultural and Spiritual abuse can be a particularly complicated form of abuse within multicultural communities and those with religious beliefs. In a family with mixed faith or where the man is not religious, women and children are often forced to stop practicing or participating in spiritual practices. In another form, spirituality or religion can also be used as a means of controlling and forcing family members to accept spiritual beliefs or engage in spiritual practices that are not their own. Religious texts and cultural customs are often distorted by the abuser for their own benefit to justify their position of power.

Many people experiencing violence in their relationships do indeed leave. Leaving, like any life altering change, often occurs as a process, rather than as a single event. The average woman experiencing abuse will make many attempts to leave, on average seven times, before she is able to permanently remove herself from the relationship. For those who do stay, their reasons for doing so are as varied as the people themselves, but for many the following are true. Many grew up in families in which they were routinely beaten and emotionally abused as children, or exposed to violence—they know no other patterns of behaviour and have learned to expect frequent incidents of violence. Abuse becomes their normal.

#### Religion as Promoter of Patriarchy in Families:

Nigeria is a highly religious country with Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam being the major belief systems. Religious leaders are held in high esteem with fear, respect and love. Thus, religion plays a major role in the life of the people. The patriarchal system in the country enforces violence against women as a tool for correcting behavior and exerting male dominance, especially in marriages. Religious bodies play major roles in shaping beliefs and perceptions in the country. Thus, it is no surprise that religious bodies play a role in encouraging such practices. For example, there are religious ideologies on women being inferior to men, the perception of women as “unclean” and the portrayal of virtuous women as “submissive”. Also, the frown on divorce by some religious sects makes it further difficult for women to leave abusive marriages. Most domestic abuse

arises from a man's determination to prove that he is the head of his household. The Bible does not deny him this position as the head of the wife (Eph 5:23). However, the biblical definition of what it means to be the head of the house does not allow the husband to beat his family into submission. Rather, he is to be their servant and love his wife, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Eph 5:25).

#### Peace-building in Marriages via Religious Mediation:

This positive side of the religion brings peace in the family by way of mediation and settlement of disputes. Religious approach to peace has made many families to embrace religion such as Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion as practiced in Nigeria. According to Norman (1996, p. 99), “Matt.5:32, 19:9 said that Christ was against divorce except for marital unfaithfulness”. By implication, there would have been a very big conflict where there is marital unfaithfulness between a woman and another women's husband. When fighting and quarreling abound in family, peace will be lacking. However, a family with the same religious practice is less likely to end their marriage in separation and divorce, rather finds solace and settlement within themselves due to their religious belief. According to Fagan (2006), if religious practice is combined with marital relationship, it promotes a strong, successful and stable marriage. The men, women and the children of a religious family often have the same intellect, mental and emotion. Christopher and Brad (2013) agreed that the family that takes cognizance of the divine purpose in their family often collaborate and obtain more benefits from their marriage. They also avoid using aggression in what they do, but settle their disagreement within the family. It also unites the polygamous and extended family together by their faith.

Consequently, Sibani (2022) maintains that religion makes a family of the same faith to deal with their difficult times, also serves as moral guidance of the family in their decision making without any conflict. The religious parents who attend services together are more likely to maintain a close relationship with their children than non-religious people. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God”. There are rising cases of family disputes on daily bases with violence which impact scares on many spouse and children. Religion is committed to settlement of family disputes and uniting them.



## Recommendations

1. Religious leaders should be sensitized while the female leaders in the church should be encouraged to help younger ones get justice; not trying to cover up by making them pray.
2. Advocacy messages should be directed to the male genders who are most likely to be perpetrators of this violence. It is advisable to also report the matter to the pastors and elders of the church. Violence is perpetuated by silence. When reported, it can be monitored and checked.
3. There is need to interrogate how the social construction of men as authority figures has been used to subject women to abuse across the different religious traditions.
4. Reporting of violent cases involves recognizing that domestic violence is not a private offense but a criminal one. As such, it must be reported to the police who must act to restrain the perpetrator and prevent future violence.

## Conclusion

In the light of domestic violence, some religious influences have a modest impact whereas another portion seems like the mental equivalent of nuclear energy. The starting point for our response to domestic violence must be the recognition that all violence against women and children are morally unjust. They are all human beings created in the image of God, and as such they are not inferior to men and should be treated with respect. This truth needs to be communicated to boys and girls at young age. Family violence can happen to both men and women, in heterosexual and same-sex relationships. It happens regardless of age, income, education, culture or religion. But women are more likely than men to experience domestic violence. Women are also more likely to live in fear of an intimate partner or ex-partner and to be injured or killed because of domestic violence. Loving and caring families will produce loving and caring members of the society. However, no matter the conflict that religion has caused in the family, it is still very needful for the smooth life living and good relationship in the family and the entire nations of the world as she intervenes in domestic violence in Nigeria.

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## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF EGBUKELE MASQUERADE PRACTICE IN EKPEYE FROM THE PRE-COLONIAL ERA TO THE PRESENT TIMES

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### **Abstract**

*Majority of Egbukele masquerade literatures posed some immense concerns to the study of visual and performing arts by scholars who were thrilled by reportage of John Picton during his fieldwork on Ekpeye Egbukele masks and masking saying that, "the profusion of materials and vitality of the carving tradition in Ahoada were as much shock to David as to me; we could hardly do justice to the extraordinary wealth of materials of Egbukele that we discovered. That since then, more than twenty years have passed, but the Egbukele of Ahoada remain little known; offering a note of invitation to field research for any graduate art student looking for a research project" Picton (1988:46). Therefore, the dynamism of Egbukele necessitated the prominent role it played amongst social, cultural and religious people of Ekpeye, and when these elements emerged, acculturation is often observed from cultural fusion of perishable nature of materials (fabrics and wood) used in Egbukele recreational activities. As a matter in reference, the fleeting changes require prompt documentation as recommended by Picton in establishing Egbukele history as well as identifying ancient outfits and practice that dominated hugely in Ekpeye land. The conclusion of this article supported the improvement of art history, cultural performance and development of Egbukele masquerade in promoting Niger Delta arts and culture.*

**Keywords: Egbukele, Ekpeye, Osu, Ekpekede, Headdress/Horizontal Masks, Water spirits, Cultural affinity.**

### **Introduction**

Ekpeye is a people that constitute an ethnic group in Rivers State of Nigeria and lies between the Latitude 4 46' N and 5 15' N and Longitude 6 26' E and 6 46' E. Ekpeye has common boundaries with the Ikwerre speaking tribe to the west, the Ogba speaking tribe to the north, the Abua speaking tribe to the south and Engenni speaking tribe to the east; bound by two popular rivers; Orashi and Sombrero that link up to the Atlantic Ocean. Ekpeye people occupied the whole Ahoada East Local Government Area and two-third population of Ahoada West Local Government Area. Ekpeye ethnic group has eight aboriginal families (obodo) and they include imaji'olo, agwo'olo, uchi, uzhi, akpa, edhiwulo, odogu and ishikoloko spread within the seven traditionally recognized clans (Igbu) namely Ubie, Akoh, Igbuduya, Upata, Ehuda, Ugbobi and Olukwo. The population of Ekpeye people is perhaps put at an estimate of 200,000 people of the 2006 Nigeria National Census figure (Isaac, 1998; Nwuche and Oguzor, 2011 and Nwuche, 2004).

However, Ekpeye people are among the most dynamic performers of masquerade in Rivers State due to aesthetic combination of Ijaw and Igbo cultures. Thus, Ekpeye masquerade culture is similar to that of Ijaw and Igbo cultures because of their earlier contacts during and after the pre-colonial era. Although the differences are not much and among them is Egbukele traditional masquerades that flourished from the Kalabari Ijaw. The Egbukele



masquerade practice is distinct from the Igbo representations because the osu, otuya and aminikoro masks are typically carved in human and animal forms of which many of them can be found in Ijaw land.

In spite of the above accounts, Ekpeye as a people owns over six sets of masquerade groups namely Egbukele, Owu-ele, Owu-mini, Owu-ala, Oganipelo, Okwambele, and in all Egbukele masquerade is obviously the most utilized by the people to establish their cultural affinity, consciousness and professing soul values in performing arts. In Egbukele dance, there are secular and sacred masquerades performed by the inhabitants. The secular masquerades are mere water and land images performed in community and government functions, while the sacred masquerades are deities with marine influence and powers over the people and cannot be performed in commonplaces. They are adoration cult masquerades that represent marine gods and goddesses performed specially in the village square to protect members from evil spells, burdens or attacks. The sacred Egbukele masquerades are believed to be surrounded by invisible and visible superlative beings (Nwuche, 2024).

During Egbukele masquerade performances, the masqueraders are assured to escape from their real bodies to the spiritual realm in order to experience the divine existence to be able to identify them in the physical selves. It is believed that, aquatic masquerade practice is mostly championed by the coastal fishermen and later spread to nearby tribes like Abua, Ekpeye, Ogba, Ikwerre and Engenni in Rivers State. The Egbukele masquerade culture was later scrounged by the Igbo people in the southeast Nigeria and both tribal Egbukele masquerade iconography is instilled with similar cultural engagements amidst changes in practice (Ekpo, 1990).

### **Masquerade as a Moving Theatre in Visual Arts**

Masquerade practice in most African groups is performed to conceal the identity of the wearer of the mask from the crowd regarding his personality as a representative of the spirits evoked by the mask. Masquerades on the other hand, are regarded as ancestral or protective spirits of a family or community. Apart from spiritual aspect of masquerade, masquerades are practiced to entertain the people periodically, and to function as peace keepers who supervise communal activities as well as protecting the inhabitants from stealing, criminality and other social vices. African masquerades also perform other duties like

enforcement of community bye-laws, curfews to ensure compliance, and arbiters in civil strife among community members when regulated through masquerade display round the community.

Masquerades also displayed in organized festivals set aside by the people for merriment or to commemorate epic events happened in the community. Most time, masquerades are performed during initiations of new members, or are utilized to commiserate a departed soul during burial ceremonies where a member dies. Therefore, it is believed that, an appearance of a masquerade(s) in an open space is assumed to entertain the people, or to unite the ancestral spirits or to initiate new members. Also, for social purposes, Egbukele masquerades for instance, perform the action of judge or police in serious dispute resolution for ensuring lasting peace and security in the land. Perhaps, masquerades are bestowed with the authority to arrest, summon, punish or pass judgment on wrong doers or violators of the social norms or customary laws of the land (Fagg, 1990 and Nwuche, 2024).

Though, majority of Nigerian masquerades have religious affiliations attached to them apart from social intention like entertainment and enforcement of community bye-laws etc. They as well as masks insured with religious intents mostly witnessed in the shrines to engage in recreation significantly as sacred images for consultations amongst the people that own them. Egonwa (2017) asserted that, Africa belief system is to a great extent useful in the examination of social aspects of the people. He further explained that appreciation of African art; especially masquerades are characteristics of cultural backgrounds lies hugely on the belief of a Super God who works through several intermediaries- semi gods and deities through whom he could be approached. This is because; masks are worn by the people to re-incarnate the spirits of the dead in a community. By wearing the mask, the masquerader is believed to have spiritual powers that are conducted through the mask. The masquerader is solely responsible to perform both ritual and entertainment roles during the display.

Though, Emiemokumo (2012) asserted that masquerade is a moving theatre art because when a masquerade performs on the stage, the audience



thinks mainly the figure (mask) they see is the visual art form, while the figure is the focus of attention. He therefore believed that masquerade is a product of performing art serving societal purposes as well as satisfying aesthetic expression needed to offer recreational values (tourism) and promoting unity between the people among factions. In furtherance of his observations, Emiemokumo also believed that masquerades help us to realize religious ideas and upholds the traditions and social norms of a people. It is a moving theatre because when masquerader is assigned to transform into visual figure, he would be representing the spirits or entertaining and nobody seemed to bother to know about the man (masquerader) because his identity is hidden. Therefore, the wearers of Egbukele becomes extraordinary humans or spirit beings during the time of participation, is assumed to be filled with divine forces that controls everything until the end of the performance. Majority of Egbukele masquerades are sued to abide by the instinct powers within and re-adjust themselves into human reality (Oguzor, 2011:64).

### The Early Egbukele Masquerade Practice in Ekpeye Land

Egbukele masquerade is believed to have been imported from Ekpeye and Abua speaking tribes to the southwest Nigeria with few antiquities like the Aarungu masquerade who claimed to be a less ritualized version of Egbukele that was traced from the Kalabari, or as one informant put it that Aarungu masquerade came from the Salt River area (John, 1988:46). Ekpeye became the major partaker of Egbukele masquerade dance in Nigeria tracing its origin from the Kalabari of the Ijaw tribe through Abua- a neighboring speaking tribe to Ekpeye in Rivers State of Niger Delta. The first place where Egbukele masquerade anchored after Kalabari was in Abua and later spread to Ekpeye land in 1830. In Egbukele, Ekpeye and Abua were highly embellished as very important groups divinely sent by God to salvage the people during the pre-colonial era. Egbukele masquerade group was regarded as powerful cult group in the whole of Ekpeye. Cole and Aniakor (1984:210) supported the view that Ekpeya Igbo peoples of the Ahoada area dance water-spirit masquerade called Egbukele or Ogbukere in which large swordfish, sharks, crocodiles and other carved wooden headdresses of predatory aquatic creatures are worn atop the masker's heads. That Abua, a neighbouring non-Igbo group claims to have gotten their version of this dance from the Ekpeya (or Ekpahia) who according to Ekpo Eyo (1990), Ekpeye takes the cult practice more seriously than the Abua.



**Figure 2.** Okoma-osu ritual drum crafted with images and placed behind a wooden pole decorated with wild animal skulls and bones (divine of altar of deities at ahoada square), Note. The drummer at ahoada 1928 egbukele festival. From "Ogbukere ahoada," Jones, G.I., 1930.

**Figure 1a&b.** Masquerades in theatre play, Note. Osu and elewu masquerades in original traditional mood. From "Ogbukere ihuaba and emene ogbor," by Jones, G.I., 1930 and Nwuche, 2024.





**Figure 3.** *Egbukele scepter*; Note. Scepter holder controlling ekpekede masquerade at the square. From “Ogbukere ahoada,” by Jones, G.I., 1930.



**Figure 4.** *Egbukele character*; Note. Osu masquerade displaying at ihuaba square. From “Ogbukere ihuaba,” by Jones, G.I., 1930.

According to Cole and Aniakor, their research is conflicting with Gwilym Iwan Jones' 1928-1930 visits to Ekpeya and Abua include Ahoada, Ihuaba, Ozochi and Ogbo. Others were Aminigboko and Okogbo-Abua etc. According to Jones, at least some of the masks in Ekpeye were borrowed from Abua and that the fish headdresses at that time had become largely secular been danced by Christians—a half of the society with two different or more powerful makers representing the earlier, non-Christian sector of Egbukele.



**Figure 5.** *Egbukele characters*; Note. Different masks stored in Egbukele house (udho-Egbukele) located in ahoada town square. From “Ekpeye masks and masking,” by Picton, J. 1988.

Besides, Egbukele men's society was once powerful among the Ekpeye people and no adult would be regarded as a well built man in the society if he was not known as a member of Egbukele cult group in the village. Secondly, Egbukele was known as a powerful cult group because most Ekpeye parents preferred initiating their male children and sometimes menopause females into Egbukele cult group than allowing them attend to school in order to be honored with titles. Giving of titles among the inhabitants was a great thing, whilst the title men are also known as agbeka and the women known as ezewhenyi would always be decorated at the village square during Egbukele masquerade festivals. The Egbukele masquerade festival exceeds to three days event usually organized by the entire villagers after tremendous arrangement practices and preparations including night fanfare have been organized as well as ancestral consultations (Oguzor, 2011:65 and Nwuche, 2024).



**Figure 6.** *Early members and onlookers*; Note. Both cult members and Christians with Egbukele outfits at ihuaba square. From “Ogbukere ihuaba,” by Jones, G.I., 1930.

The Egbukele festival often proceeds after the farming season. The reason been it is that Egbukele itself has spiritual incarnation from the water and land that are displayed in every seven year because the people used masquerade festival to appease the gods of famine against starvation and tragedies. In the first ewhor week day to the commencement of Egbukele masquerade festival, the town crier at the instruction of the village head (eze-nwe-ula) in agreement with the chief priest (nye-nwe-ele) and the head of Egbukele cult (eze-Egbukele) announces the date of the masquerade festival to the village men, women and the youths. Again, after the announcement of the date by the town crier, the Egbukele festival would commence with a lot of colourful activities in the community and each lineage (ekpe) or family (obodo) would come together to prepare their masquerades in all forms of maintenance or cleaning to suit their outings. Some Egbukele masks kept in the shrines were duly





prepared to replete the shadow of visitors who may come either for consultation or to ensure all necessary sacrifice is observed to enforce the reality of purpose.

From the pre-colonial era till post-colonial periods, every family unit was involved in every Egbukele festival, while their sons and daughters of the village were invited and encouraged come home for merriment and blessings from their ancestors. However, Egbukele masquerades are representations of deities from both land and sea and those wearing the masquerades are decorated in an enclosure (udho-uya). After the dancers have worn their masquerades, they would line up with agbeka who would lead them to the playground and on their arrival, opportunities were given to each masquerade to entertain the spectators with dance-steps songs called Ikemini and then they would enter into the Egbukele house (udho-Egbukele) for the second dance.

During the Ikemini dance, Egbukele masquerades perform acrobatic dance-steps following the beating of musical instruments - wooden xylophone, wooden drums and gongs, talking drums, animal horn and metallic gongs etc. The masquerades typically ranged from seven varieties and dancers are usually selected from families in the village. Thus, each family must produce one or two best dancers at night, but only those who have been initiated in the cult were allowed to dance or partake in Egbukele festival. Their modus operandi of Egbukele was traditionally championed by the following groups or units. They include Iku-agbeka, Iku-ubio, Iku umu-egwele and Iku-ebena. The Iku-agbeka is the most influential cult unit that comprises noblemen; the highest group selected among the wealthy personalities who would shake hands with the masqueraders during Egbukele dance or functions Nwuche, Iyang and Adausi, 2013).

Their style of hand shake was done by the use of ankles – the first ankle shakes with the right hand ankle and then with the left ankle. During hand shake, both members must face each other while paying pleasantries. Though, no initiates would be allowed to perform ankle hand shake with initiates during and after Egbukele masquerade festival. Meanwhile, the iku-ubio unit comprises the masqueraders. They are influential cult unit because of their involvements in the performance of Egbukele and sometimes after the play, the wearers of the masks were tormented and act indifferently like the spirits. Perhaps, the Iku-ebena unit comprises members who play the instruments like wooden xylophone, drums, while Iku-egwele unit comprises deity priests, native doctors and diviners etc who are seen as special squad to intervene or protect

masqueraders, members and spectators against spiritual attack or charm during Egbukele performances.



**Figure 7.** *Early iku agbeka, Note.* Early agbeka outfits. From “Egbukele masquerade festival,” Photograph by Nwuche, in 2019 field work at live performance

Initiation of new members were done in the night, while those intending members would come with initiation items like he-goat or male dog, red cock, jars of palm wine, and bottles of both schnapps and native gin, white and red clay chalks and other condiments for night rituals. The intending members would also come with local hand fan fully crafted with tiger skin to attract the spirits of ekpekedede (male ubochi goddess) or osu (female ubochi goddess) into their souls. This ritual ceremony must be performed in the present of sponsors who would witness the comic. Oguzor (2011) also added why initiations of members would not be performed publicly in day time. According to Oguzor, extraordinary Egbukele masquerade practice is held at night where only cult members are expected to be seen around the playground and if a non indigene who is not a cult member is seen around during rituals would be flogged and his family would come to claim him with payment of fines.



**Figure 8.** *Egbukele night fanfare, Note.* Early cult initiation session. From “Cult initiation performance at olu-u-de camp ahoada in1973,” by Nwuche, 2014



During the night practice, the young males would cover their bodies with fabrics without wooden masks known as adabala elewu is commissioned to move the village to wake members who instead of coming to the playground slept in their houses. Elewu was in-charge to destroy valuable property(ies) seen in the compound of any offender, except the offender comes out immediately with red cock to plead to elewu deity for forgiveness. Besides the cult laws were enforced by elewu masquerade (unu-ubochi). The cult members were at their liberty to kill and eat domestic animals seen outside or individuals' compounds during community night parade. This aspect prohibits the inhabitants too. Nobody allows his or her domestic animals to roam about the village during night fanfares after a town crier had informed the villagers. Any unfortunate animal like bird, goat or dog finds at night would be killed to entertain the cult group and the owner would do nothing. Also, women were not being allowed to come out in the midnight because Egbukele deities forbid women to see or come closer. During the colonial period, non-indigenes who mistakenly appear in the night of Egbukele fanfare may be used for sacrifice at the square and nobody would reveal it to outsiders (Oguzor, 2011 and Nwuche, 2024).

Although the rituals in Egbukele practice is no longer in existence because of government laws and law enforcement agencies as well as the advent of Christianity have completely wiped out the barbaric activities in Ekpeye land. In this case, the paper is consciously prepared to overview the dynamism and evolutionary methodology of art history in discourse about Egbukele masquerade cult practice of Ekpeye people. The stylistic relationships of Egbukele masquerade practice is supported with oral traditions and integral connections between Ekpeye and Kalabari people of the Niger Delta. The oral account was supported by Oguzor (2011) as established in his book that what brought the link between Ekpeye and Kalabari people was trading through River Orashi and Sombreiro.

### **Changes in Egbukele Masquerade Practice**

In art, changes can affect the activities of artwork or play such as the modus operandi and elements of art. Thus, changes can occur at a distance time and it could be positive or negative in a social organization, but change does not really guarantee progress as well as negative. In this study, change is seen as something that causes inactiveness in human organizational practice through comparison between points in history; the past and present events taking place at the same time or period, or

between contemporary and early times. In Egbukele masquerade practice, change can occur in the areas of dance style, costumes and mask forms etc (Kehinde, 2021).

Changes may have caused by inputs of western civilization over traditional ideas are being encouraged. John Picton's 1932-1939 fieldwork has drawn some findings in Ekpeye Egbukele masks and masking that, "presently Egbukele is very much an all-purpose cultural celebration; all explanations are likely to be valid. One must expect such an event to be imbued with layer upon layer of significance; it is a time of celebration, refreshment, and renewal at all level, from clothes to one's self and one's relationship with spirits". Secondly, Picton admitted that, in Ahoada, our principal guide on the tour of Ekpeye Egbukele culture was Chief Cheta Tom Imo, who was in charge of Egbukele claimed to have Christianized Egbukele to eliminate the preliminary sacrifices because of the position Ahoada town was, an administrative center with large population of immigrants that comprised a substantial number of Christian communities. Due to these factors, Egbukele masquerade dance and styles have changed even in almost all communities in Ekpeye where dancing and mask carving have disintegrated.

This in-depth analysis exposes the era of change in Egbukele from the pre-colonial time to the present identified by highlight of costumes to interrelate their cultural intentions in the dynamic art of Ekpeye Egbukele masquerade is no longer witnessed with performative ritual of ekpekedede, osu and elewu masks have aged histories with moving art forms. Therefore, this study will showcase some changes through pictures:



**Figure 9.** Egbukele day fanfare, Note. Modern cult initiation session instead of night. From "Initiation at ubarama in 2023" by Nwuche, 2024

Although this may also lead Egbukele losing more cultural relevance due to increase of fear and demarketing by religious organizations like the churches. The purpose of calling for transformation by the people is to modify Egbukele masquerade to complement the dance-style of "Seki Masquerade





practice” outside ritualistic values it traditionally occupied. It is therefore believed that changes can occur as a result of modification in the practice of Egbukele masquerades. In those ancient times, Egbukele masks were embraced and exaggerated in forms of animal and human being in mythical creation of deities to represent the departed souls. But today, the modification has overtaken the aesthetic values of Egbukele masks. Masks are no more sculpted in uniformity of their ancient times, while the costumes are like rags and sometimes in customized uniform, which was not the original intention of the artists or people.



**Figure 10.** *Egbukele secular group*, Note. Ochigba masquerade group in a public function. From. “*Secular group dancing with asawa group (noblemen)*,” by Nwuche, 2024.



**Figure 11.** *Maiden native attires*, Note. Maidens in coral beads and hand fans promoting *Egbukele* festival. From “*Maidens cheering during Egbukele masquerade festival in ehuda*,” by Nwuche, 2024



**Figure 13.** *Egbukele secular group*, Note. Ochigba egbukele masquerade performing in a public function. From. “*Masquerade dance at palace eze ekpeye I’ogbo III*,” by Nwuche, 2024



**Figure 12.** *Egbukele character*, Note. Agbani masquerade at odiemelu *Egbukele* masquerade festival in ehuda. From “*Agbani masquerade dancing in an empty arena*,” by Nwuche, 2024

**Conclusion**

Visual images in this article expresses pertinent understanding about the aged long Egbukele practice that threatened by slight extinction because of change following few modifications put by the people. The modification could be a means of transforming Egbukele to suit today's modern reality like Seki cultural group. However, this article believed that the root causes of modification in every African cultural group are advent of Christianity and civilization against cultural affinity. In spite of all these, there is continuity in the practice of Egbukele masquerade in few villages of Ekpeye because of its essentiality in Egbukele society as a defensive culture exploited in securing human life and ritual compliance to members rather than entertainment against other religious practices. Today many Egbukele masquerade dance arena is empty to due Christian influence see figure 12.

The paper also revealed how change and civilization cannot be under estimated in the embellishment of Egbukele cultural heritage of Ekpeye people as well as the values the people derived from the recreational activities. In spite of all these, Egbukele culture still exists in Ekpeye land because of cyclical journey of Ekpeye traditions to those who believed in “life after dead, while death and reincarnation are cyclical manner that exceed through Egbukele theoretical play. It is important to note also that, because of the consequence of life-after-dead,



Ekpeye people believed in reincarnation and this must be conformed through Egbukele society for the death souls to be accepted back into human form. Although those who died without initiated into Egbukele society cannot reincarnate back into human form, instead they will be forced to live formlessly in spirit within the space. Their delight is geared towards harming more fortunate members who departed from participating Egbukele deities (Nwuche, 2024).

Secondly, the article believed that changes in Egbukele today are traced from circumstances that surrounding our societal existence. Ezenwaji, (2002) in Nwuche (2024) opined that no two societies function alike, while society is classified into four namely traditional society, transitional society, modern society and contemporary society. These classifications imply that, the physical and social conditions of these societies as mentioned distinguish the features of marking out one society from the other. On classification of society, Ekpeye before the advent of colonialism is referred to as traditional society. Ezenwaji gave an illustration of traditional society as where traditional life and social organizations are based on traditional settings handed down from the past, informal innovation and population fairly homogenous. Since every society progresses from traditional to modern, Egbukele practice changes along side with changing culture.

Under traditional society, Egbukele masqueraders lack the right of entry into technology to adopt new art elements, especially into mask carving and textile productivity. Thus, different Egbukele group members in Ekpeye faced artistic deficiencies in preserving ancient outfits in their respected villages. Though, from 1990 till date, Egbukele members seem to put their best in producing different masks and masking in low profile as well as disincentive art technique with perishable materials that can take test of time. Again, during the pre-colonial times, Egbukele masks were ornamented with high profile materials, while clay and vegetable dyes were pigmented on the body of the masks (Picton, 1988; Ekpo, 1990 and Ejima, 2017). The expensive paints today like the enamel or acoustic paints were not easy to afford by the local wood carvers under the traditional period. Finally, this article advised Egbukele masquerade groups in Ekpeye to go on secular too and compete with Seki Cultural Group who is touring the world with art performances. The secular Egbukele masquerade groups should be encouraged with modern costumes see figures 10 and 13 and many more.

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## **CINEDANCE: SEKI ON SCREEN**

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### **Abstract**

There are many forms of storytelling in cinema; one of the most captivating and indeed creative forms is dance (Seki). The fusion of dance and cinema creates a communication that transcends philological and cultural boundaries. The threshold of filmmaking was marked with many arts and cinematic forms, including musical films, melodramatic movements such as dance and choreography, which were the highlights of film. Dance began to raise its bars of popularity, especially as a form of nonverbal communication shortly after the silent film era. This paper sets out to interrogate the relationship between cinema and dance as well as highlight the thin line marking their divergence and convergent features. It is guided by Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm and Cognitive Valence Theory (CVT). Among its findings is the fact that Cine-dance indeed defines the unity between on-stage and on-screen dance performance, giving the basis for which the paper is useful to both scholars and modern practitioners of dance and choreography. It conclusively recommends cinema as a viable and immersive medium for communicating with dance medium (non-verbal communication) as well as a tool to market and promote dance and other off-screen performances. **Keywords:** Dance, Seki, Cinema, Film, Choreography, Communication.

### **Introduction**

The art of dancing has significantly undergone an irrevocable configuration by the cinema in many ways. Evidently, one can enumerate scores of examples in terms of dance and choreographic performances ensued from contacts with the cinematic process. For instance, in music video dance performances, innovative composition of intimate

moves within corporeal surfaces and particular parts of the body have become a major subjective (close-up) shot often used in communicating nonverbally to the audience. This gestural lingo of dramatic screen performance has not only informed the choreographic practice to produce gestural dances, but also, various screen editing techniques such as jump cuts and match-on-action have brought about new dance forms. This is because these techniques result in choreographic continuity, which is spread across dancers and locations and sets. Even non-figural dances are produced from inanimate objects. In the nutshell, through the use of experimental film techniques, exigent dances that may not be possible in performance are presented before the camera lens to be revealed and manipulated. Sincerely, the foregoing indicates the extent to which choreography and dance have impacted upon the screen arts as much as the screen arts have modified dance and choreography. Therefore, like screen acting, or acting in general, it could be said that dance is an element within the cinematic performance chain. Perhaps, it was owing to the same line of thought that Walter Sorel stated, "the affinity between the dance and the movies seems unquestionable. Difficulties arise, however, when the camera abandons its role as the mere recorder of movement and begins to assert its own personality" (Brannigan 2011, p. 3). Although, there have been several studies on dance in many contexts, very little research on dance as an elemental form of cinematic communication do exist, especially within Nigeria, thus this paper.

There is a healthy union between cinema and dance in Nollywood, which made Nollywood industry and off course, film industry worldwide entertaining, and a complete pop culture. Music and dance are serious elements of popular culture and when fused with cinematic content becomes a wholesome cultural



heritage exhibition. Seki on screen helps audience to connect with the actor, deliver emotions and the filmic mood the story intended. Every dance scene in Nollywood films have shown to be intriguing, not only because of the dance steps and bodily movements, but the messages they communicated without a dialogue. For instance, films such as: *Sugar Rush* (2019) and *Omo Ghetto - The Saga* (2020) had different beautiful dance scenes, and each of those dance performances depict a particular situation and mood the directors intended to interpret non-verbally. Notwithstanding these movies made huge commercial success in terms of return on investment (ROI) and box office earnings.



A Long Shot of a Dance performance Scene in *Omo Ghetto-The Saga* depicting the gang's rough and inordinate lifestyle. (Source: Net Naija.com).



A Medium Close-up Shot of a Dance performance Scene in *Sugar Rush* expressing celebration and joyous mood. (Source: NetNaija.com).

### The Conceptual Framework of Cinedance

The idea that encircles the acronym “cine-dance” may ring a bell in the minds of rooted scholars of the arts, especially those of us who are void of bias for genre, forms or the marriage of any two or more art forms. It is a dance composition or performance especially devised for cinematographic framing and preview. The term and ideology emanated from Maya Deren in the 1940s, which considers the human bodily movement in favour of motion-picture camera, editing and montage to create a realistically movielike dance. Lund (2010, pp. 66-75) affirms that,

“filmmaking came with many art and cinematic forms”. The action sequences were pure entertainment as seen in Anna Pavlova's Solo Dances of 1924 (Delamater 1981, p.13). In their work “Dance: An Art in Academe”, Bartenieff and Pauley, advocate the study of dance as a form of communication (as cited in Phillips 2006, p. 5). Indeed, dance could be used as a metaphor for a much larger idea or to describe the characters involved in the performance. It could be used in place of interpretational roles with vociferous acting; a situation where instead of having screen actors engage in dialogue, the director uses dance steps and bodily movement in certain film genres to express communication between actors in such a manner that the viewer seamlessly understands the message. After all, before sound and colour pictures came into existence in film production (silent era), dances were the rave of the moment that captivated the audience, created beautiful emotions and entertained the viewer.

It may be a bit confusing to refer to the dancer as an actor. However, it is in such context that this study sees dance within the cinematic framework. Every act put up by a character (especially a human) is considered acting. Dancing is a skill; every actor is required to acquire it in order to showcase the beautiful romance that bodily movement creates. More so, acting is a “process of communicating ideas through the use of the body. An actor impersonates a character documented or imagined to express ideas (Bell-Gam 2017, p. 16). Therefore, whether in dance or any other performance form (screen or stage), what is important is the expression of idea or message, which still boils down to what has remained a driving force in this paper (communication). Expounding on the forgoing, Bell-Gam posits:

In his desire to have the three basic needs of life: Food, shelter and clothing, the early man engaged himself in farming and hunting. First he built a hut for himself using tree branches, made fire by cracking of rocks, used the leaves to cover his nakedness, wild fruits and the proceeds from his hunting afforded him enough food. He was happy and contented with his family. Observing the smartness and quick escape by the animals during hunting, he decided to disguise himself by wearing the skin of the animal he killed



to deceive his prey. He imitated the animal which ignorantly drew closer while he shot and killed it. On getting home, he gathered members of his family, other associates, appointed one person to impersonate the animal while he played the role of the hunter, thereby demonstrated how he executed the hunting. This was acting (2017 pp. 6 -7).

These thoughts expressed by Bell-Gam, revealed acting or dancing to be either an informal or formal performance with the aim of communicate to the family a message he could probably not express verbally. This implies that in dance performance, steps and other forms of bodily movements have the capacity to explain mood and also convey messages without voicing them. For instance, Oweigiri Dance of Izon people in Bayelsa State is considered a seductive dance due to its steps and costumes. This is because the dance communicates the suggestive actions the dancers portray.

Numerous musicals use dance to speak for the characters. Such examples include Yemi Alade's *Johny* (1955) directed by Clarence A. Peters, Sotonye's *Seki Siki* (2010) directed by Ombo K9 and Preye Odede's *Ebesina* (2012) Directed by Akin Alabi. Reinforcing this submission, Chumo avers:

...the other characters communicate with their bodies, that is, find an ideal discourse through dance, all Lina can do is rely on her studio contract and publicity stories she has planted in the newspapers to try to stop Kathy's career and guarantee that Kathy will continue dubbing Lina's voice . . . so Lina, another silent-screen star whom time is passing by, tries to create her own reality but relies on legal jargon and publicity columns, "genres" whose veracity we question, especially in a musical that celebrates physical movement as the highest form of communication (1996, p. 52).

Johnstone holds a different opinion about the communicative capacity of dance, although he does not out rightly disagree. According to him:

Soaring leap is not indicative of a soaring leap – it is a soaring leap. If narrative

dance contained a comprehensive indicative language with movements playing a role analogous to that of words, then it would require a vastly expanded system of indicators to symbolize each of the various narrative events: the leaps, huddlings, and so on (1987, pp. 175-176).

In a nutshell, Johnstone tries to explicate the fact that no singular step can be taken literally as a language. Rather it is the meaning behind a collected grouping of steps or movements that makes the language. In buttress of this, he makes us to understand that even though movement is possible to be an aspect in the language in which certain aspects of the tale are told, it is not a language in which the whole tale is told. In replacement of the subject matter, Johnstone suggests "gesture language" instead of calling dance, performance or movement a language. Gesture language is "sign language" that expresses a meaning; for example thumbs up, nodding etc, but dance or performance is a movement of the entire body to express a meaning. Gestures are nonverbal communication that seek attention whereas dance is entertaining and communicates messages in body movement.

### **Fisher's Narrative Paradigm and Cognitive Valence Theory**

Narrative Paradigm as a communication discourse came to life in 1984 following Walter Fisher's article in *Communication Monographs* entitled "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm: The Case of Public Moral Argument". In this article, Fisher describes the "rational world paradigm" while proposing his narrative paradigm. Both of these views would later be discussed in his book, which was published in 1987. In his position, his paradigm is opposed to the rational world view which includes the belief that humans are rational beings; the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is argument – clear-cut inferential (implicative) structures; the conduct of argument is ruled by the dictates of situations –legal, scientific, legislative, public, etc.; rationality is determined by subject matter knowledge including argumentative ability and skill in employing the rules of advocacy in given fields; and that the world is a set of logical puzzles, which can be resolved through appropriate analysis and application of reason conceived as an argumentative construct (Fisher, 1987, p. 4).

Cognitive Valence Theory has the assumption that when a nonverbal violation occurs, communicators





will either accept the violation positively or respond negatively. If the violation occurs under positive conditions, then the recipient will return the same behavior. In other words, the audience is bound to positively or negatively accept every nonverbal violation based on their cognitive schemata. Basically, the CVT seeks to describe and explicate the process of intimacy exchange within a dyad relationship. The theory makes provision for accomplishing this process through: culture, personality, interpersonal valence, situation state and relationship (Phillips 2006, p. 28).

### Socio-cultural / Ideological Aspects

Dancing remains a significant ingredient in the African cultural evolution. Dance communication is greatly culture-related. According to Hanna (1983, p. 43), culture is defined as “shared values, beliefs, and norms that are learned through communication”. Members of the society use perceptions to judge and make decisions about their actions, thoughts and to make meaning of what they see. In this regard, being a determining factor in what is acceptable in particular societies, culture consequently affects dance. Little wonder why Judith Hanna believes that culture shapes the contextual pattern of dance, that is, the cumulative set of rules or range of permissible gestures, locomotion, and posture with different body parts in time and space and with energy as well as the associated meaning.



A photographed Long Shot of *Seki* performance, a Dance Drama stage genre with exquisite mise en scene and lavished cultural fluid set on the Okrika – Rivers State cultural narrative. (Source: *BBC News Pidgin*).

Since we can say that nonverbal communication is culture specific, we can also say that dance is culture specific. For example, totalitarian governments have a strong say in the arts because dance can express flaws, illegal behavior, and mishandling of affairs in government and society. Because of their shared cultural meanings, dancers and audiences have the ability to make connections and understand; and like Hanna believes, effective communication depends on a shared dancer / audience knowledge. In other words, the interplay between skillful performance

and expression on the side of the dancer and sensitive perception on the side of the audience.

Accordingly, Wollen (1992, p.13) remarks on the dance forms in his book *Singin in the Rain*, as the Broadway musicals grew in popularity, the style of dance changed, becoming an American style on its own”. Reasoning does not need to be bound to argumentative prose or be expressed in inferential or implicative structures. It may be discovered in all sorts of symbolic action – non discursive as well as discursive (Fisher 1987, p.5). Buttressing Fisher's opinion is the fact that dances have the capacity to stand in place of verbal dialogue as earlier mentioned. On the other hand, Chatman is convinced that the dissimilarity between the main events and the minor supplementary ones in a narrative is a psychological reality that anyone can prove to himself as consensus is easily reached about which are the thrust and which – the sub trust or the reinforcements of a given storyline (Chatman 1978, pp. 55-56).

### Spatial Arithmetic

In contrast with stage choreography where dancers can leverage the spacious geographical square of the Proscenium Stage, the circular room of the Arena Stage or the open ended framing of the Thrust Stage, sets for film and Television are unpredictable and often less than ideal for exhaustive dance performances. While stage performances present the dancer with so much liberty of movement and spatial coverage, the dancing for film is conditioned by the camera; yes, the camera first, before even the director. Although, with the application of repeat –on –action technique, a film director may wish to let the dancer perform within much more space that is convenient for a single shot and have the dancer repeat same movement on another angle to capture the out-framed aspects of the dance; the reality remains that exactitude is not always guaranteed. This is why most dancers with a strictly concert or stage background find it somewhat stressful transitioning into the screen. This can feel like stepping into the unknown. The heightened pace at which the dancer is expected to dry-run or do line blocking (rehearse), the regularity in structural adjustment of film sets and somewhat alien nature of the camera is a tangible reason to make even the most seasoned professional a little anxious. However, dancers can apply the savvy they acquired on stage to on-camera opportunities. More so, there are dancers and concert performers who have shown much more capacity on screen than can be said about them on stage. A befitting example of this is Nigeria's Guinness Book of Record breaker Kafayat Oluwatoyin alias Kaffy. Kaffy whose dancing career took off on the stage, letter ventured into



screen and has since then continued to feature in both stage and film including dancing for Seyi Shay, D'Banj, P-Square, Olamide, Tiwa Savage and many others.



**Photo of Kaffy on a music video set  
(Source: Bella Naija)**

Indeed, one major challenging aspect of dancing for the screen is the accelerated time-frame usually set out for learning choreography. Especially when dancing with Stars, perhaps a popular musician or a Nollywood actor making a special appearance in a musical video. Film naturally requires multiple takes and not having ample time for rehearsals makes it even more strenuous not only to recall and repeat steps but to also build the stamina to sustain the multiple takes. In line with this, former Miami City Ballet principal, Patricia Delgado advises dancers to retain stamina by dancing full-out only when the clapper board is hit, when the cameras are rolling (Hilton 2019).

The obvious difference between dancing for screen and stage is the camera. When Peter and Paul Okoye also known as P-Square danced on the video of Do Me (2016), it seemed like they could do more than Michael Jackson and Usher. Years later, after the popularity earned via such videos began to fetch them many shows. We could notice something inexplicable about their performances, their costumes, the way and manner they twist their shoulders and shook their head. We could not just tell what it was, yet we knew that there was something different. Although, their stage performances could not be called bad

performances, in fact, they were better in some concerts; however, there was a gap noticed. Even though it may seem difficult to tell exactly what is distinct from these two media (stage and screen), it is possible to at least tell what makes the difference – the camera. Indeed, it is the camera that makes even the filmed stage performances of Daddy Shoky's popular “Galala” lead dancer to have a different feel from his live stage performances by presenting the dance with shots, camera movements and angles that only favour appealing and vantage positions of the dancer per time

### **Ornamental Element of Dance in Film**

Dance has been there throughout humanity's cultural and spiritual evolution, whether in spontaneous expression or conceptualization, a way to communicate through specific codes and languages. The end of the 19th century finds European civilization enthralled with exploring a new artistic language, in which both the artist-creator and the spectator try to find themselves in a very real and authentic way, in terms of time and space, in the representation of the world. Looking at the context in which the modern dance emerged, one would find that the technological advancements of early 20th century electricity, the photographic studies of motion, the new psychology and medical practices, the novel theories of an evolved body and self-awareness – sparked an era of innovation and revitalization in the world of dance. Thus the emergence of modern dance incites new paradigms for exploring and defining corporeality. According to a text by Patrick Bensard, film director and manager of the Cinémathèque de la danse in Paris, it is no coincidence that modern dance and cinema emerged at the same time, that the Lumière Brothers turned on their camera mesmerized by Loie Fuller's swirling skirts (as cited in Gunã1 2021, p. 205). The beginning of dance-cinema relationship can be traced back to the birth of cinema. Both are rich and complex arts. Their coalescing has opened up a whole new realm of possibilities. It is important to note that classical ballet played a rather insignificant part in the process, the star being the “new dance”, modern dance, which, as the Symbolists would proclaim, is able to convey the unique expressivity of ordinary, day-to-day life without any recourse to words.



**Photographed Master Shot of Orukoro Fertility  
Dancers in Bell-Gam's Orukoro stage performance.  
(Source: Bell-Gam 2017)**

As film gained momentum, the two arts – dance and cinema – continued to influence each other, borrowing and adapting specific techniques from one another. Dance kept making an appearance on the silver screen, so much so that a film would often become a danced film, whereas cinema, in its own turn, introduced its techniques to the dance world. The cinematic process becomes a succession of choreographed stances, as both choreography and cinema focus on bodies in motion and their relationship to space and time. Both cultivate bodily capacities for creation and communication that brought forward new types of expressivity, carefully integrated within the given settings and narrative. Deleuze (1995, p. 10) advanced the idea that early 20th century dance and the birth of cinema share a common need of embodying the movement paradigm of the Modernist era. He says that “it is an interesting coincidence that cinema emerges as philosophy is trying to conceptualize movement”. Inspired by Henri Bergson, Deleuze identified a connection between the new movement paradigm engendered by modern dance and the developing art of motion pictures. Brannigan (2011, p. 11) explores in minute detail the position of dance within the larger context of contemporary arts and its relationship with the other art forms. She provides several examples of practices resulting from the “imprints” left on cinema by choreography. Cinema's new means of expression open up new paths of manifestation in dance. Borrowing from the different film editing techniques, this has impacted the new dance and allowed for more abstract means of expression – the non-figurative dance. As it has been observed in this paper, there is a new dimension in the choreographer's philosophy through cinematic approach in terms of both narrative structure and form of expression. For instance, in modern day

contemporary choreography, dance and contemporary language of all performing arts, there are many terminologies now shared in common with cinema, such as slow motion, freeze, black- out and so on.



**Close-Up Shot of a maiden showing an emotive  
expression in *Asawana* (2016). (Source: *Createstars  
TV*).**



**Medium Shot of a Maiden Dancing in the last scene  
of *Shanty Town 6*. (Source: *NETNAIJA.com*).**

One major role of dance in film is the creation of emotions, which it does beyond mere screen acting. Since screen acting is more formalistic in approach with most theatrical and melodramatic traits often absent, it may not expansively create the sort and magnitude of emotion that dance performance would on screen. Acting on stage may equate with dance in terms of the level of emotion because both performances enjoy same special, technical and elemental provisions. The same cannot be said of the screen as screen performances are guided to take place only within the camera frame. However, dance on screen enjoys the leverage of better space, camera movements and multiple shots to contain all of its gestural communication. Take for instance, Diminas' drama thriller *Asawana* (2017), the facial expression of (Queen Wokoma) intending to communicate emotion is shot on a “static” TCU. Whereas in Ajibola's *Shanty Town Episode 6* (2023), camera movement is used as narrative device in both wide angle and close shots to capture the very last scene (dance scene).



Emotions are part of the narrative coherence and fidelity of a film. They are needed to make the story flowing and believable. Emotions are to fiction what truth is to science (Oatley 2002, pp. 39-65). Dance may support or refute linguistic, paralinguistic, and other forms of communication. Its presentation may be through an interpersonal dialogue or a monologue in the presence of others. The power of dance lies in its cognitive-sensorimotor and aesthetic capability to create moods and a sense of situation for performer and spectator alike. According to Blacking (1983 p. 93), "we should recognize that there are coherent, structured languages of dance". Blacking adds that when people talk about 'being danced' or claim that their movements are directed by internal or external 'forces,' they are obviously not describing unconscious states; nor are they necessarily reporting altered states of consciousness but they are trying to describe a non-verbal mode of discourse, whose logic and forms can be precisely expressed and understood without having to always be clearly articulated in words.

Lavender (1996 pp. 40-43) discusses David Best's concept of communication. In Best's opinion, there are two types of communication (linguistic and perceptual). Whereas linguistic communication is common for dance in the nonverbal sense, perceptual communication is quite possible to decode a different message away from that which is intended by the receiver (as cited in Lavender 1996). Commenting on the ambiguity of the choreographers' intention, he adds that it might refer to the artist's interpretation of his or her work or to the "plan an artist has in mind while composing a work". It is the audience who know if they are being communicated to by the dance performance or not. This is made clear through Fishers' concepts of coherence and fidelity. The viewers are the judge over whether or not they believe in the narrative being told to them. Therefore, on the other hand, it is the responsibility of the dancer to "be" the character he or she is portraying irrespective of the having no verbal vehicle of communication. The dancer has the responsibility to become what Fisher refers to as the "author" in order to make a message. In "Languages and non-languages of dance," Johnstone opines that the dance ought to be indistinguishable with the character in the dance narrative. This is because it is one individual who is on the stage during the dance as both the dancer and the character (1987, pp. 171-175). Away from the

dancer as the character, Johnstone also talks about narrative-to-world symbolism as well as movement-to-narrative symbolism. In his opinion, Narrative-to-world refers to the dancer's character being an actual historical figure. Only a small number of dances can reenact a historical event. Rather, a dance will probably fall into the category of a socio historical narrative. This of course is referring to a situation where the dancer plays a character from a particular historical time period, social class, or situation. Moving forward, Johnstone discusses movement-to-narrative symbolism, stating that movement is highly informative and is possible to reveal the mover's (dancer's) feelings and intentions and, indeed, his or her beliefs, character, and personality (p. 175).

### Conclusion

Cinedance defines the unity between on-stage and on-screen dance performance. It is a collaborative force which brings to life, the realities of non-verbal languages through dance and choreography. This paper therefore, argues to dispute Albert Johnstone's assertion and states that dance performance and any other calculated and well-rehearsed movements whether in parts or whole are symbolic languages. This is so because, for instance, a single gesture of the thumb pointing up (thumbs-up) speaks a complete language (well-done or appreciation). In any riverine dance drama, such as Yibo Koko's Seki, a backward pull of the paddle sideways is enough to pass a message, even though there will come some subsequent pulls, they are inconsequential, as the very first has "independently" passed the message (paddling the canoe or ridding on the water). In a more sensitive and in-depth analysis, a performer who crosses his fingers on his neck and afterwards points to another performer on stage could be saying "I will kill you", which is a part of sign language. Agreed, like Johnstone submits, it is a collected grouping of steps or movement that has made the language, however, it should be noted also that just crossing same fingers on the neck without pointing at another character could also mean "Kill" in which sense a person is ordering or approving the killing of a captive.

Therefore, it is hereby asserted that dance and other non-verbal performances are not just elements of language, neither are their moves – in part – mere constituents of language, rather just like any



language can be identified by “a word”, for example, “come” in English Language or “bia” in Igbo Language – meaning come, the performer can also speak the word “come” by a single movement of his or her fist. And so, it does not necessarily require a collection of moves to form a bodily language or nonverbal communication.

### **Recommendations**

- i. In addition to Patricia Delgado's counsel on how former concert and stage performers can seamlessly acclimatize with the screen, it is hereby encouraged that dancers and choreographers should simplify on-screen performances by bearing in mind that the same geography applicable on stage performances can be applied to the screen. Even rehearsals on a stage can adopt the same technique before a screen by adapting the same movement in a smaller space of a mentally formulated Proscenium Stage. By the way, this stage is also known as “picture frame” (Bell-Gam 2017, p. 17)
- ii. In line with the foregoing, the screen or camera frame can be divided as follows: Up Screen RightUp Screen CentreUp Screen Left Centre Screen RightCentre Screen CentreCentre Screen Left Down Screen RightDown Screen CentreDown Screen Left
- iii. Conclusively, this paper recommends cinema as a viable and immersive medium for communicating with dance (non-verbal communication) as well as a tool for marketing and promotion of cultural and social identity through dance.





## IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY IN EGBUKELE PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN NIGER DELTA

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### Abstract

*The era of colonization in Nigeria has led to the imposition of acculturation in most clans in Ekpeye land. This extrapolation by the colonial power was followed by the emergence of new social class of people who claim to have power and authority in changing indigenous culture conserved by their forebear. This development found some accomplice on the part of Christian missionaries who have decided to attack the institution of Africa traditional religion (ATR). The consequent schisms have mainly affected traditional religion, which faced the dual responsibility of protecting and preserving Ekpeye spiritual life and, at the same time, providing the society with the impetus to resist the emergent consciousness. Therefore, the impact of Christianity in Egbukele performance and cultural identity in the Niger delta is a major concern in this study due to enthusiasm that threatened regular practice of Egbukele masquerade by Ekpeye people. This paper also focused on the life of Ekpeye people and those elements that led to abolishment or acculturation of Egbukele masquerade cult practices since 1960 till today for documentation in the areas of visual arts and theatre arts. The conclusion of this paper will support the driven force for improvement of Egbukele masquerade performance as a means of promoting cultural identity in the Niger Delta, Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Egbukele, Ekpeye, Osu, Ekpekede, Masks, Water spirits, Culture Christianity.

**Introduction** From the pre-colonial times, Ekpeye was politically administered at village level since there was no overall ruler or central government at the top for the entire Ekpeye people. The administrative structure of every village in Ekpeye was ruled by the elders at the top, followed by the elites, age grades, youths and Egbukele masquerade society as organs and each organ has its defined roles. Every administrative decision and action was

decided at the village level. Therefore, Ekpeye was operating gerontocracy suitable to all inhabitants until the traditional political landscape slightly modified in the 1960s with the installation of overall ruler known as *Eze Ekpeye l'ogbo* and with other clan rulers *Eze Igbus* (Ekine, 2017:2).

After the installations of the rulers, the structure of traditional system of government in Ekpeye changed while each clan was re-organized to own its political structure. It is however witnessed in the recent times that the social organizations in Ekpeye did not affect the administrative structure at the village level as existed previously. The Egbukele society to an extent was more interactive between the people and the ancestors whenever there was a crime, community crisis or evil happening etc. Apart from Egbukele been a cult society, Egbukele group also played the role of social and arbitration institutions in Ekpeye land where members' characters were controlled from stealing one's property or committing punishable crimes in the land etc.

Perhaps, the people see Egbukele as a cultural organization that prepares members to engage on existing norms and value like the Ikeji masquerade that transforms Arochukwu people of Abia state. Okafor (2015:74) described Ikeji as an annual masquerade festival of thanksgiving, merriment and propitiation that was celebrated yearly between March and April. The purpose of the masquerade festival is to fill the land with abundance of riches and fertility, and to dignify the narration of Arochukwu people through masquerade comic and display of magical powers among them. In spite of these, the Ikeji masquerade possesses rich cultural events like the Egbukele masquerade that explores at a distance



of restriction of non-member participations during the masquerade festival. Therefore, during the pre-colonial period, the organizational structure of *Egbukele* masquerade society remained the same, but in recent times the practice continued to differ amongst Ekpeye people where *Egbukele* society operates. Their functions and reasons for their formations were clearly established and performed. Though, Forded and Jones (2005:15) assertion supported the position of *Egbukele* society as a socio-cultural institution that helps the society achieve community development and welfare of members. The development and welfare of members include community sanitation, community policing and enforcing penalties, collecting fines imposed by community and providing mutual peace and discipline over their own members who had misbehaved were carried out by *Egbukele* society including levied members for fund raising in order to execute community projects etc.

### Religious Intercession of Community Deities through *Egbukele* Masquerade Dance

The motive behind masquerade dances in African society until recent time was to refresh religious gods. This shows that religion has had a pervading influence on human life since man is posed with environmental problems to confront overwhelming issues of life and death. African people like Ekpeye believed that, the Supreme God is most benevolent to mankind, while the lesser gods are less benevolent. The lesser gods may be those natural occurrences the people belief includes sun, moon, mountain, thunder, sea and forest, or ancestral objects that associated with man on the earth. Thus, the forces of lesser gods can aid human life and at the same time destroy; they possess some indwelling forces that keep watch over man's behavior. Therefore, these forces must be pleased or appeased by organizing regular village masquerade festivals for the intercession of gods so that they do not cause harms or destroy human life.

In view of this, the influence of lesser gods is understood where masquerade practice becomes a cardinal approach to internalizing the forces with human socio-cultural engagements. However, the study of Kalabari religion by Horton Robin in Eyo (1990:14) is important to this because it revealed how image sculptures played significant role in Ijaw society. According to Horton, the proliferation of sculptures brings down spirits to the level of worshippers. Sculptures like the water spirit masks that deposited in the shrines are repositories of lesser spirits. Though, Beier Ulli in Eyo (1990:14) added also that, image sculptures deposited in the shrines are not objects of worship or spirit itself, but

they are in the shrines to fleet spirits temporarily localized in order to concentrate the worshipper's attention. Beier believed that sculptures in the shrines including masks are mere furniture to glorify the spirit concerned.

However, the beliefs about the spirit world are widely represented, especially in *Egbukele* masks because they often used to represent deities or ancestors in African society, believed to have channeled the spirits to perform when masks are worn by ceremonial dancers to connect or communicate the spiritual forces (Naibi 2013:8). Some *Egbukele* masks are displayed to engage human activities and ancestral purification in dialoguing the spirit world.

In conclusion, *Egbukele* masquerade practice of Ekpeye people is visually regarded as an amplifier of religious intercession where masks and masquerading are intended to intercede for longevity of members and superlative regulations of natural world amid the living and the death. This is because; their idea of spiritual intercession was prominence in the pre-colonial time when they were using masks as contacts to their gods or the ancestors whenever they identify strange and ominous happenings in the land and such as sickness, famine, deaths and misfortunes etc. the people would gather at the village square and perform sacrifices to their deities by organizing *Egbukele* masquerade dance in appeasing the gods or ancestors. During *Egbukele* masquerade dance, the dancers dance into trance communicating the spirit world for the perversion of evil happenings in the land.

### Impact of Christianity over the Proliferation of *Egbukele* Masquerade Dance

Over five decades ago, the advent of Christianity has distorted the continuity of tradition, religion and culture in Ekpeye land. The frequent flourishing of Christian faiths in Ekpeye land has conspicuously challenged the practice of *Egbukele* and the worship of masking deities because of strong war the converts declared in the land. They said that only those who worship God would go to heaven, while those who worship smaller gods would go to hell. Almost all those who practiced juju worship were declared evil men and women. This of course resulted among the Christians not to be allowed to partake in *Egbukele* dance anymore because of the pervasive fear of oracles, deities and minor spirits which dominated the life of traditional Ekpeye man began to wane because of the Christian doctrine that such things did not exist. Moreover, the protection accorded to the early churches by the local administration set up the British emboldened



members to defy masquerades or deities, began decreasing in numbers.

The reason is that, in page 76 of Newington's report in Oguzor (2011) agreed that most important result of the growth of Christian element and development of education is that the power and authority of community chief priest also known as *nye-soja ele* has decreased considerably. That, the fear of opposing juju and *Egbukele* masquerades, even though they are still implanted in the minds of many Christians has lessened. Oguzor further explained that the spiritual influence is welded by masquerade cult in Ekpeye prior to the advent of Christianity was very pervasive and the most prominence in Ekpeye during pre-colonial era was *Egbukele* masquerades. In this case, to become a member of *Egbukele* cult was a very big status symbol. Thus, prominent men preferred initiating their children than sending them to school because the masquerade cult was responsible for the promulgation and enforcement of the laws of the land. *Egbukele* cult group members settle cases brought before them by the community head or members and their rulings were final because people have the fear to refuse accepting any verdict passed on them. They also see *Egbukele* masquerades as wicked spirits, which nobody has the right to question the membership credibility.

#### **The Churches and Egbukele Masquerade Dance**

From 1960, the authority of *Egbukele* masquerade cult stayed behind unchangeable until Christian churches more emerged. Thus, the inflow of churches and Christian converts destroyed the persistent practices of *Egbukele*. The new Christian converts deeply harassed the activities of cult masks, which affected continuity. In some cases, both religious groups clashed with evidence of bloodbaths until government agencies invaded Ekpeye land and arrested the defaulters. Some of them were prosecuted and punished in the native courts. The religious clashes brought to slow practice of *Egbukele* masquerade cult in Ekpeye. Although Oguzor did not give clear evidence of names and offences of those who were arrested, prosecuted and punished by the native authority. The humiliation increased more invasions by the Christian converts to end *Egbukele* cult was eluded by persistent influence of the practice over the years gone into extinction.

In the same vein, Omiko, Taiwo and Adunwoke (2015) spoken the reason why a man should stray from the practice of Africa traditional religious (ATR). They further explained that when a man is born

again, he becomes a new creature. Old things of taking part in just anything that has to do with idolatrous festivals are passed away, as he has a brand new life in Jesus Christ. He has become a heavenly citizen. He is married to Jesus Christ, the Holy One, Who would not want to share his life with any god. Therefore, he has to flee anything that does not give glory to Jesus or those involvements that Jesus would not appreciate or that are questionable and quoted that Jesus says "take my yoke upon you and learn of me". He is inferring that a Christian should know his right from left. A Christian does not dabble into those things that would erode the glory of God in his life. He does not partake in anything that would chase away the presence of Jesus from him. In fact, doing that would amount to the Christian, apart from profaning the name of God, also endangering his own life. The Bible says, "What has light got to do with the darkness and what does a believer have to do with an infidel?" The gap is very wide. However, Christians should not go into extremism. There may be some things that are to be done in the family, which has nothing to do with idolatry.

In such a case, where it is very certain that the name of God is not spoken of in an evil way, then Christians may participate. Of course, he has been warned to flee from every appearance of evil. Whatever legitimate things that bring the family together and which would warrant a Christian's participation must be scripturally legitimate, devoid of any ungodly practice. Now, looking at the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ, when He came, He did not preach Judaism neither did He showed any respect for the tradition of 'men' during His own time, not to talk of traditional festivals. In actual fact, He condemned the traditions of men and pointed them to the laws of God. He was at variance with those religious people that placed the traditions of men, not to talk of traditional festivals above the laws of God. When talking about traditional dancing, singing and instrumentation, one may rightly say that not all of them are against the true worship of God. It is nonetheless very imperative that where any of these conflicts with the Words of God, they are not permitted in the Church. Any form of dancing, singing, or instrumentation that is idolatrous in nature, suggests or encourages paganism should be jettisoned.

Omiko et al further explained that the Supremacy of God cannot be compromised and this is the reason why Christians cannot compromise their faith to have affinity with traditional festivals. For example, when we talk about New Yam Festival, we see it as being synonymous with worshipping a deity. The





name 'Njoku' in Igbo has to do with a deity or goddess that owns yam and this is contrary to the truth and the fact that the Almighty God created everything in the universe, including yam tubers. Participants in the New Yam festivals are invariably giving the glory that belongs to the Almighty God, Creator of all things and Possessor of heaven and earth to an infinitesimal god. This is not in conformity with biblical pronouncement and this applies to engaging in any traditional festival. Concerning age grade meeting, Omiko et al saw this as an avenue for Christians to correct some of those things that are wrong among their peers. It can be an opportunity to speak against some vices and promote Christian virtues. They speak, although Christians can also influence their age mates to serve the true and living God and they may have overriding voice, where they are in the majority. While this meeting is aimed at encouraging development at the village or town level, it can be a platform for evangelism. If we leave the planning and development of place of our origin to those not in Christ, they would hijack the avenue and continue to promote ungodly tendencies. Christians can hijack the original intention of these meetings aimed at community development to exalt God and promote the gospel. 'Christmas' has usurped the original intention of those that started it and has now become an event that proclaims the birth of Jesus Christ across the globe.

Since the Bible disallows Christians to participate in Egbukele masquerade traditional, people believed it as normal to abhor paganism. But, few people would believe it abnormal for embracing indigenous festival by saying "give Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give God what belongs to God." Thus, making heaven does not warrant a man to hate himself and his indigenous culture and traditions. This of course is one of the serious problems African cultures and traditions are suffering today, while Egbukele masquerade performances seemed to be destroyed completely.

### **The Practice of Polygamy in Egbukele Society**

Another invasion by Christian converts into Ekpeye land was the practice of polygamy among Ekpeye people. Initially, polygamy practice was encouraged by the *Egbukele* cult members for the purpose of increasing their social status during festivals and special outings. Though, nobody knows when polygamy practice began in Ekpeye land, but it is voluntary to those who cherish it as a way of life of Ekpeye man. The choice of marrying more than one

wife was highly patronized by the noblemen (*iku abgeka*). Marrying more than one wife was conceived by the *iku abgeka* because people would like to observe how many wives he has when Egbukele festival. In the second day of *Egbukele* festival, every household, especially the *abgeka* group members will be received by their number of wives. The wives will stylishly dance out the village square and decorate their husbands with expensive fabrics.

However, the church was against a man marrying more than one wife through teachings. The church teaching of one man one wife affected the practice of polygamy on the life of *Egbukele* cult group members. Oguzor (2011) explained that the church preached against polygamy, and most polygamists among *Egbukele* society were advised to drive away their wives except the first wife. The intention of a man with more than one wife was achieved as a cultural aspect where noblemen (*iku abgeka*) would dance out the village square with number of wives they married was abolished today. This of course has affected the beautiful aspect of *Egbukele* due to the advent of Christianity. It is pertinent to belief that group existence is perceived as a dynamic system because society can only be sustained when the people have a correct reflection of reality. Despite the challenges derived from change, a lot of changes have taken place in the socio-religious life of the people of Ekpeye (Nwuche, 2024).

### **Abolition of Oath Taking during Arbitration**

The issue of oath taking in *Egbukele* practice is seriously seen as a means of settlement of disputes. Before the advent of Christianity, oath taking was administered in the shrines where *Egbukele* deities were kept. The general concept of *Egbukele* was based on people's belief. The offender would die if the deity found him guilty and during this period, oath taking procedure was first approved by the maternal kinsmen of the accused person who has been interrogated by his nephew. The uncle of the accused person will submit him to the jury and the deity for the administration of oath after agreeing a number of periods the oath will last. Eventually, the oath taker is expected to live till the expiring date to which he will be declared free and innocent, and sometimes award in kind or cash will be given to him.

This may wrongly justifies the person innocent when





he falsely accused, but was declared unchristian by the churches. Therefore, the Ekpeye Christian converts decoded to invade *Egbukele* deities and burnt down some of them. The Christian converts saw the oath taking as barbaric in the sense that some of the oaths were not genuinely administered. Even today, there are evidences or proofs of those oaths taking in Ekpeye are partially administered. Those oaths were stage-managed and controlled by the shrine members or priests after receiving bribes, while the innocent people died. However, the proliferation of Christianity stopped the high spread of *Egbukele* practice, especially the oath taking through those who embraced new life (Christian converts) were advised to shun such barbaric deity oath taking rather than giving their lives to Christ. They asked them to swear Holy Bible than godly image, which is freely accepted by the Supreme God, and not the minor gods. The Christian converts also prevented the inhabitants from consulting *Egbukele* deities using police for arrest whenever they perceived negative practices such as libation and invocation of spirit against a fellow. Thus, the Christian converts through their spiritual leaders preached against *Egbukele* oath taking and swearing practices and prevented the relatives of the new converts from the inhuman and callous practices in Ekpeye land.

Apart from oath taking and swearing of deities, the *Egbukele* practice also take prominence in the aspect of burials in Ekpeye land. Their burials probably involved series of ritual ceremonies like farming tools and basket (*uma-ogbani*) for women, dog cutting (*uwa-akita*), *pond fishing (uma-eba)* and wrestling (*ugba eta*) for men were compulsorily performed to honor the deaths between 80years and above. The burial ceremonies were organized to appease both the water and animal spirits from attacking the bereaved family who are members of *Egbukele*. Perhaps, the prevalent belief was that if the rituals are not done, the dead person has not been properly buried and this failure could result in the family being visited by the hovering spirits of the dead person who has not settled properly in the land of the dead or *Egbukele* masquerade cult (Oguzor, 2011).

In the same vein, the missionaries were against the burial rituals and persuaded the people not to partake in the burial rituals. They also said those

rituals are embarrassment to Supreme God and removed the fears in them. Though, it was very difficult to stop the practices, even today there is a clear distinction between Christian convert burials and pagan burials. Any burial belong to a pagan will involve the presence of *Egbukele* society with some special traditional requirements. During interment, it is only *Egbukele* cult members are responsible to bury their members with ritual items and non members would not be allowed to see grave. Such people were not buried accordingly. In the course of compliance today, churches teach against discrimination in burial of departed souls. This of course brings the falling strength of *Egbukele* masks society from worship. Those who died during *Egbukele* festival or night fanfare were thrown into the river or dumped in the evil forest, wrapped inside a mat and hung on a tree for animals to eat them without being buried to mother earth.

**Abolition of Human Sacrifice during Egbukele Masquerade Fanfare** On the aspect of human sacrifice in Ekpeye land, sacrifice is seen as the atonement of great sin committed before God and man. During *Egbukele* festival or night fanfare, the deity priests were usually in action when non members were wedged, persecuted and brought for rituals. Sometimes when this kind of ambush by members failed, the cult group recommends for slaves from neighboring villages for sacrifice. However, most human sacrifice was done by the request of *ekpekede* or *osu deities* after the *Egbukele* ceremonies at the village square. Oguzor (2011) the spread of Christianity from the post-colonial time to date has helped to eradicate the illegal killings and human sacrifice. This is because the Christian missionaries displayed their spiritual commitments to wage the practice through vigorous campaigns. Shrines were destroyed, while those who were guilty to the crime were arrested and prosecuted by government agencies.

Therefore, the advent of Christianity during the pre-colonial era and today also ushered goodness in the aspect of twin killing in Ekpeye land. Oguzor further explained that the twin babies and mothers suffered unprecedented hardship in Ekpeye land. Mothers and babies were often killed. Thus, mothers who gave birth to twins immediately killed one and let one survive because mothers who gave birth to twins were discriminated against. The twin mothers were



forced to sit on different chairs or separated from others during community gathering. In addition, fathers of twin babies were discriminated too. The *Egbukele* cult group will be assigned not to allow the fathers of twins to take certain responsibilities in the community like becoming paramount ruler or leader and juju priest. They would not be allowed to sit with village council of *eleoha* too. *Elewu*, the vigilante bird deity would monitoring those fathers involved and anyone found defaulting will be sanctioned or punished accordingly.

In course of stopping twin killing, the Christian missionaries declared it barbaric and unaccepted before God. They motivated the fathers and mothers of twin babies to embrace God, became new Christian converts. They embraced Christianity as to avoid being asked to make propitiation to earth and water goddess where *Egbukele* take prominence. Thus, twin babies are now accepted and no one can be exposed to slaughter twin babies or he or she would be imposed with sanction neither disposed to crime punishment.

#### **Life and the People with the Fear of God**

The impact of Christianity over *Egbukele* practice also touched on the aspect of political institution in Ekpeye land. Ekpeye administration revolves around the leadership structure put by the forebear includes *nye-nwe-ele* (village king maker), *eleoha* (forum of elders), *umueze* (forum of elites or active middle aged men), *iku-udo* (forum of married women) and *iku-ugboji* (forum of youths). This kind of Ekpeye political structure was added with appointment of noblemen (*iku agbeka*) before the colonial era. They were influential members of a village for government programmes and policy making. Though, during the colonial era, those influential men and women were conferred with warrant chiefs. According to Oguzor, the introduction of warrant chiefs in some Ekpeye village administrations started revolving around these leaders, while other structures keep on maintaining law and order through the assistance of *Egbukele* cult group. Since the appointment of warrant chiefs, the village *nye-nwe-ele* where the warrant chief hailed from was relegated to the background. Though, in the recent times, there was the introduction of community development committee where members formulated sustainable projects for the inhabitants of a community. Such projects could be community market, toiletries, maternity, drainage system and village hall etc.

Therefore, the introduction of chieftaincy institution by Eastern Government of Nigeria in 1961 created new political institution where the stools of Eze Ekpeye Logbo (overall king of Ekpeye) and Eze Igbus (clan kings) were recognized.

The enforcement of payment of levies and project contributions by individuals were the sole responsibilities of *Egbukele* group. They go round the community enforcing members to comply without pity. Sometimes community members were evicted from the land due to false allegations melted on them and at the same time they are the judge also. Community members were afraid to question their credibility or to stand before them whenever they are on duty or arbitration. Hence, the advent of Christianity emboldened Christian converts to fight against the insurgency and criminality that caused by *Egbukele* vigilante group or deities. Levies and contributions were not made forceful or compulsory to members. One must commend the efforts of the missionaries in making the inhabitants embrace God and became Christians. The Christian converts also made them to realize that not only bullying people go to school. Thus, Ekpeye people preferred initiation of male children into *Egbukele* cult to become community taskforce or vigilante.

Again, during the colonial era, a new socio-religious consciousness was nurtured by the Christianity and Western-European ideas, which was initially manifested in the desecration of shrines and overt disrespect for the indigenous religious order, while traditional art forms became their objects of controversy and history recorded some events of blood clashes between Christian converts and *Egbukele* maskers. Though, long operation before now in secret societies must have retreated further and, to some extent, become the instruments of reaction by Christianity family challenging masquerade practices in Africa. Thus, where individuals were unable to confront the new order, secret societies continued the masking traditions which had in many places been relocated in the cult houses, shrines, sacred groves and other special places. Afigbo (19) asserted that Secret society was another development which probably came later to modify the basic political system....the institution was characteristic of communities in the general area with the exception of such Ibo groups as the Oratta and Ikwerre. In each village, the society or club



embraced all the able-bodied in the community who had paid the necessary entrance fee. The secret societies in their classic type, notably the Ekpo of the Ibibio, the *odo* and *omabe* of Nsukka division, the Ekang of Aba and Bende divisions and the *mmo* of most Ibo areas, simulated the spirits of the dead ancestors reappearing in corporeal form to play a part in the government of the village or its segments.

This basic response by the *Egbukele* mask cult to Christianity challenge is what Basden, Meek, and Finnegan in Ukeagbu (1996) regarded as evidence of the ritual, but non-secular, functions of this performative tradition, its quasi status, and non-theatricality. These early anthropological writings hardly realized that among the tribes, masking did not necessarily retreat into secrecy that continued performance during the period enabled both the public and secret displays to retain their artistic and entertainment motifs. The later membership of Christian converts in secret societies and masquerade groups did not provide a lull in the conflict as some churches excommunicated members who joined these groups. The seasonal nature of performances meant that public displays were occasional and the attacks on them were sporadic and spaced out, and for these reasons, they could neither be successfully engaged nor sustained long enough to destroy the theatre. According to Ukeagbu (1996) Igbo people accolade masking as nostalgic attraction that resurrecting from character continues to draw participants to displays. Though, Ukeagbu agreed that masquerades in Igbo land lost many members and participants, it still survived today. Within this unsettled period, Western-oriented education also stigmatized masking, while many educated Igbo men looked down on masking. The penetration of Islam also abhors totem in Igbo land. The intervening year of political change was the 1960 Nigeria independence where people witnessed the growing trend in political changes in Ekpeye land.

Generally, the Ekpeye people hold some ailment that could be caused by the spirits of the water known as *Egbukele*. Where there is suspect, the *Egbukele* diviner is consulted to secure a cure for the sick. He contacts the water spirits for instruction for herbs or cure. But, before contacting the water spirits for message, a type of rituals are to be performed in the shrine and the home of the sick person. Sometimes, the performance of rituals does

not have a particular rite or style. That is, the rituals differ from one diviner to the other. They will instruct one of the sick relatives to perform a task or provide items needed to cure the sick person. It is apparent that diviners always go to the water side with gin and cock to libate to the goddess whom he pleads to reveal the cause of the sickness. For those in *Egbukele*, libation goes with incantation and cult songs to supplant the spirits of sickness or misfortune. Though, Chief Achenim Krama (62 years) a native of Nwabiri - Ahoada town argued that not all diviners who practiced water spirit go to the river or sea to receive message. That, a diviner can stay in the chamber or shrine, even the house of the sick and get message from the spirits. Thus, the diviner can pour water inside a calabash or bowl and make some incantations to the spirits. Doing that will mediate the spirits inside the water bowl in order to obtain the message.

Otto (2019) believed that the concept and practice of hydromancy in Ogba tribe is one of the alien systems of divination because the system found its way into the area following the emergence of some diviners who derive their potency from the water spirit. He added that all diviners were previously inspired by the "*ahua deity*. The *ahua* is a warrior deity associated with the water and Ogba people and far beyond does the consultations of the water goddess whenever the people fall sick or attacked by the evil spirits. From the above assertions, most *Egbukele* masks or masquerades were incarnated from the sea like *ahua* with enough powers attached onto their ordained associates (diviners or priests or priestesses etc). Thus, Ekpeye people are among other ethnic groups that embellish the practice of divination from the sea or river. The *Egbukele* diviners for instance are regarded as agents of marine beings because of the values they derived from the marine powers never fail whenever the water spirits are graciously consulted.

Another aspect of divination is traditional occultism. Before the introduction of western civilization, any individual who comes to consult the spirit of the dead goes to the *ekpekede* or *onubale deities*, but in recent times, new classes of diviners have come into play to predestine the people on the value of *Egbukele*. Within those practice *Egbukele*, there is a set of diviners who come to stay up till today. Therefore, the diviners could be classified also as members of *iku agbeka*, *iku ebena* and *iku osa* etc who in their powers compete with others during the *Egbukele* festival. The diviners are therefore known





and respected whenever strange events happened in the land or during *Egbukele* masquerade dance or at the event of oath taking. They were called diviners because they were consulted or being in-charge of libations with gin; using native eggs to the river side or home of the person or sick that the diviner decides to pray for.

Besides, during *Egbukele* main festival, libations were properly performed by the *iku osa group* who command the spirit of the dead to dislodge the wicked spirits and human beings trying to disrupt the dance. In this case, the spirit of the dead will be invoked to appear. The diviners with egg in his or her hands canvass the goddess to render an enabling moment and if anyone was found guilty of killing or charming a member or masquerader during dance, the spirit will relate such evil event to the diviners who are part of the festival. Again, if the charming was caused by a witch, the name of the person will be given

### Some Egbukele Deities Used for Spiritual Intercession and Oath Taking



**Figure 1.** *Ekpekedede and osu egbukele characters, Note.* Ekpekedede and osu masquerades at ihuaba and odiabidi community squares. From “Egbukele deities” by Ejima, 2017 and Jones, G.I., 1930.

Figure 1 represents *ekpekedede* masquerade, a male headdress deity appeared in human-like head form with distorted eyes, nose, and mouth, jaws ears, but painted black, red and white colors. *Ekpekedede* mask is decorated with beautiful fabrics and feathers pinned round the forehead, while on the mask base, infant hens and animal skins were attached to invigorate divine powers. During dancing, the masquerader is covered with different set of materials such as include fabrics and palm fronds for the purpose of aesthetics. The two legs are tied with rattle seeds to create amazing sounds when dancing with a red cock and a hand fan. This kind of masquerade costume is common in Seki and Ekpe masquerades found among the Ijaw, Ndokki and Ngwa people. *Ekpekedede* deity symbolizes a spiritual monster from forest who is commissioned to interface human spiritualities and oath taking during arbitration including metaphysical protection among members and heirs (Picton, 1988).

Figure 2 represents *osu* masquerade, a female headdress deity appeared in human-like head form with distorted eyes, nose, and mouth, jaws ears, but painted black, red and white colors. *Osu* is costumed like *ekpekedede* male deity and it symbolizes female monster from the evil used for and oath taking during and protection of members and heirs. During dancing, *Osu* deity blesses women who have no children before final sacrifice at (*okoma-osu*) the ritual drum (Oguzor, 2011)







**Figure 3&4.** *Elewu and onubala egbukele character*, Note. Elewu and onubala masquerades at umu-oji community square in ehuda. From “Egbukele festival” by Researcher, 2021, Field work at live performance.

Figure 3 showed *Elewu deity* appeared in bird-like form with the following features such as beak, wings, rump, and chin etc. The *Elewu* masquerade holds two bunches of brooms to perform acrobatic step dance and dislodge evils in the land. It also arrests unlawful gathering of members whenever it is consulted during masquerade, burial, initiation ceremonies. *Elewu* deity serves as community vigilante who exposes members or inhabitants involving in dreadful occurrences. During *Egbukele* festivals households can prevent elewu masquerade from entering into their compounds if palm fruits are placed in the front of their compounds because; during pre-colonial era Ekpeye cosmos forbids placement of palm fruits in front of a compound.

Figure 4 showed *onubala deity* expressing the outward show of a crocodile carved in wood with the extension of tail and mouth; multicoloured wool tassels hang from underside. It is decorated with fine costumes such as feathers, textile materials and palm fronds and rattle-seeds. *Onubala* masquerade dance style is uniquely similar with *akwilikwa* and *egbele-ebeya*, *ogbogbo masquerade* of Okrika of Rivers State and *eyedjo masquerade* of Urhobo of Delta State who engaged in public functions. Though, *onubala* mask symbolized crocodile deity for oath taking and to intercede for the people in the marine world (Nwuche et al, 2013).



**Figure 5&6.** *Otobo and ashila egbukele character*, Note. Hippopotamus and manatee masquerades at ula-upata and ahoada community squares. From “Otobo and manatee deities” by Researcher, 2022, Field work at live performance.



Figures 5&6 represents otopo and ashila are aquatic animals of hippopotamus and manatee. The masquerades look alike and decorated with fine costumes such as feathers, textile materials and palm fronds with rattle seeds. Others are woolly materials and feathers were fixed round the base of the masks. The carving technique is combined with different motifs to create forms such as the head with tooth and circular and rectangular form representing lights and a man with cap sitting on top of the mask to control the spirit of hippopotamus. However, the two masquerades symbolize deities from the marine world (Nwuche et al, 2013).

Figure 7 represents agbani deity, a fish-like Egbukele horizontal masquerade expressed outward look of a sea shark measured 117cm by 48cm with the features of head, eyes, tooth and gills as well as large and small fins, caudal and pronounced tail etc. Agbani masquerade look like Seki and egbele-ebeya masquerades, while figure 8 represents akwilikwa deity expressed the outward show of a pangolin animal. Akwilikwa symbolizes the messenger of great ubochi- the superlative goddess that intercedes for the people who have mental illness (Nwuche et al, 2013).



**Figure 7&8.** *Agbani and akwilikwa egbukele characters.*  
*Note.* Agbani and akwilikwa masquerade at the square. From “Ogbukere ihuaba and ahoadá,” by Nwuche, 2024 and Jones, G.I., 1930.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, despite different forms of water spirits masks in Egbukele, the purpose of this article has made the practitioners understand the efforts of Christianity over Egbukele cult practice in Ekpeye. The study also keeps amiable records about the original Egbukele masquerade practices and forms apart from changes are uncontrollable concept of life. This of course gives more attention on how Egbukele deities are adored by Ekpeye people and abolished by new Christian converts from colonial era till date. In the first place, Ekpeye people believed in life after death, while Egbukele masks did not smudge the life of members. It is also held that the commitment in members during burials, oath taking during arbitrations and libations of a sick or dead makes the water spirits determine re-incarnation, but are contentiously abolished by Ekpeye Christian faithful.

Ukeagbu (1996) in Emmanuel, (2016) added that the backgrounds of the explorer-missionaries and colonial staff were different from those of the autochthonous groups and civilizations they regarded as primitive. Their hasty generalizations were oblivious of the nature and functions of the institutions and structures of such societies. The facts about traditional societies are different from what is generally inferred. This was the case with Basden (1966) in Ekpo (1968) who dwelt among the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria for thirty-five years and whose sub-title, "a description of the primitive life, customs and animistic beliefs, etc., of the Ibo people of Nigeria by one who, for thirty-five years, enjoyed the privilege of their intimate confidence and friendship " actually obscures some misconceptions. He followed this with an emphatic observation that the chief priests, as semi-spiritual beings, naturally were the ones to hold consultation





with the "spirits" and, so, they were the ambassadors of the gods to the common folk. Indeed, it might almost be said, that they were gods; hence their domineering and superior attitude towards the rank and file. While not detracting from the many merits of Basden's work, this erroneous assertion on the place of chief priests in Igbo land casts doubts on the claim to 'intimacy and confidentiality' for the main reason; there is a dichotomy between the priesthoods and the people who seek for divinity.

Above all, divination practice is based on the principle that Egbukele spirits reside mostly in the water. In the present times, churches have taken over the practice of divination. Churches in Ekpeye land organize crusades and revival Christian programmes in different communities where the sick with different problems or ailments come together for divine prayers and protection. Sometimes, shrines and deities were burnt down by new Christian converts to end the water spirit veneration. There is no doubt that message perceived from the spirits carries potentiality and values ensured they cure adequately.

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## **SEKI: EXPLORING DIGITAL CULTURE, EXPRESSION AND PERFORMANCE**

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### **Abstract**

This paper delves into the rich tapestry of dance in the Niger Delta, examining the transformative impact of digital culture on the traditional dance, Seki. The study aims to unravel the intricate relationship between technology, cultural expression, and performance, shedding light on how digital platforms have become integral in shaping and promoting Seki. It employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining elements of cultural studies, performance studies, and digital anthropology. It investigates how digital technologies have influenced the preservation, evolution, and dissemination of traditional dance practices in the Niger Delta, through participant observations, and analysis of digital dance content, the study explores the ways in which technology has become a dynamic tool for cultural expression. The paper also examines theories of cultural hybridity, how traditional dance forms adapt to and coexist with digital platforms. It investigates the role of social media, online communities, and digital storytelling in fostering a sense of connectivity and belonging among dance practitioners in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, it explores the implications of digitization on the performance aspect of traditional dance. It examines how digital platforms contribute to the documentation and archiving of dance performances, addressing issues of accessibility and global visibility. The findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on the intersection of digital culture and traditional performing arts, particularly Seki, offering insights into the dynamic ways in which technology shapes the identity and continuity of dance in the Niger Delta. The paper recommends the sustainable integration of digital tools in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage through dance.

**Keywords:** Seki, Dance, Niger Delta, Digital Culture, Traditional Arts, Performance, Technology, Cultural Expression, Preservation, Global Visibility.

### **Introduction**

The Niger Delta, nestled in the southern expanse of Nigeria, has, over the years, drawn global attention, predominantly for its role in resource extraction, exploitation, environmental degradation, and the consequential socio-political conflicts. Yet, beneath the surface of these pressing concerns lies a multifaceted region with an intriguing history and a rich cultural heritage waiting to be unearthed and comprehensively examined. This paper aims to delve into the intricate tapestry of the Niger Delta,

placing a special emphasis on its unique musical and dance traditions, particularly Seki, that have profoundly shaped its cultural identity. The artistic expression within the area is deeply influenced by pressing issues such as the struggles of indigenous peoples, minority discourse, environmental degradation, climate change, corporate greed of multinational corporations, dictatorship, and the people's ongoing fight for control over their resources. The abundance and variety of the region persistently inspire creative artistic endeavours.

Seki, as a dance form, endeavours to explore the origins of American Tap Dance by drawing connections to the Core Niger Delta Area of Nigeria. This exploration is facilitated through a synthesis of masquerade displays, aquarian influences, dramatic elements, and the integration of rhythmic songs and drums, creating a pantomimic ambiance.

The cultural wealth of the Niger Delta is a manifestation of the historical and social complexities that have shaped the region. Home to a multiplicity of ethnicities, each contributing to its unique identity, the Niger Delta serves as a crucible where diverse cultural elements come together into a harmonious fusion. The musical and dance tradition of Seki takes us on a journey through the annals of history, unravelling the tales of migrations, trade, and the confluence of civilizations that have left an indelible mark on this culturally rich landscape.

From the rhythmic beats of traditional drums, the mesmerizing dance performances, the intricately crafted costumes, to the soulful melodies carried by indigenous instruments, the musical landscape of the Niger Delta becomes a sonic tapestry reflecting the stories of triumphs, struggles, and the indomitable spirit of its people. The dance forms which are highly symbolic, intricately woven into the cultural fabric, emerge as dynamic expressions of identity and communal celebration. Through the lens of dance, we aim to decipher the symbolic language embedded within the choreography, unravelling the nuanced layers of the region's cultural heritage.

To truly understand the cultural depth of the Niger Delta, one must navigate the corridors of its history,





from ancient civilizations to colonial legacies and post-independence challenges. Concurrently, the philosophical underpinnings of the region's cultural expressions demand exploration, contemplating the worldview, ethics, and values that have guided its people through the ages.

### **Beyond the Performance: The Contemporary Relevance of Seki in Niger Delta Communities**

Seki, conceived by Yibo Koko, a distinguished Nigerian filmmaker, art director, creative artist, and producer, represents a pantomimic dance drama that narrates the compelling saga of the inhabitants of Rivers State. This artistic creation intricately integrates the traditional dance steps of Kalabari and Ijaw origin. Music and dance, integral components of the cultural milieu of the Niger Delta, hold profound significance as vehicles of communication and celebratory expressions throughout the life cycle of its people, from birth to death. According to Agu, music stands out as a potent instrument for cultivating cultural distinctiveness and self-identity within any society. It operates as a unifying force that binds together diverse members of various cultures coexisting within different communities. This assertion suggests that music plays a pivotal role in fostering social and religious activities, involving the active participation of nearly everyone. In this context, music serves as a platform to underscore and showcase African values. An important aspect of the social construct of music is the opportunity for communal participation in music-making. According to Jaja, traditional songs provide a precise way of reconstructing history. The musical dimension within the context of the Niger Delta is not merely a social construct but extends to encompass environmental, historical, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions.

African dance possesses a distinctive quality in its conveyance of cultural behaviours, intricately interwoven with the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the community. Essentially, dance manifests as a structured series of rhythmic body movements, often accompanied by music or percussion. Dancers employ a repertoire of symbolic gestures, masks, costumes, body painting, and props as means of communication. The medium of dance serves as a conduit for expressing a spectrum of emotions, be they joyful or sorrowful. Nevertheless, diverse cultures exhibit their unique styles of dance, each motivated by specific cultural contexts, thereby conveying varied meanings intrinsic to the practices of their respective cultures.

African music and dance extend beyond mere sources of entertainment; rather, they fulfil a vital role in the socialization and educational processes of

African societies, as highlighted by Badejo and Banerji. This integral aspect becomes deeply embedded in the social, ritual, and educational spheres of African life. Through the mediums of music and dance, Africans partake in the celebration of religious festivals and express gratitude to deities for bountiful harvests, emphasizing the profound cultural and ceremonial significance embedded within these art forms.

Seki, as a comprehensive artistic entity, seamlessly interconnects with music, dance, gesture, and dramatization. In the rich tapestry of Niger Delta existence, music permeates various facets of life, serving multifaceted roles within the societal framework. Beyond its social utility, music holds a prominent place in religious ceremonies and rituals, functioning as a didactic medium and a repository of historical narratives. It assumes a pivotal role in marking the stages of life, providing political guidance, and articulating sentiments of discontent. Furthermore, music serves an entertainment function, finding expression in ceremonial festivals and masquerade pageants, where it serves to engender fervour among both spectators and participants.

Seki, thus, emerges as a manifestation of the profound interconnection between the arts and the cultural, social, and spiritual fabric of the Niger Delta, encapsulating the region's rich heritage and artistic expressions. Seki has evolved into a symbol and a point of pride for the Niger Delta region, serving as a distinctive emblem. Its transcultural journey effectively brings forth the vibrant hues, auditory resonances, and cultural nuances of the riverine milieu onto the theatrical stage. The production intricately weaves in the traditional ethos of various ethnic groups, including the Ijaws, Ibanis, Ikwerres, Ogonis, Ogbas, Egbemas, Ndonis, and others from the former Rivers State.

Seki, in its entirety, stands as a distinctive cultural expression. The costumes, carefully crafted from materials sourced within the Niger Delta, such as cowries, coral beads, mirrors, and George fabric, intricately mirror the traditional attire worn by the people of the Niger Delta. These costumes not only serve as a visual spectacle but also hold cultural significance deeply rooted in the heritage of the region.

The dance styles featured in Seki encompass the distinctive movements characteristic of the Niger Delta's traditional dances. Notably, the waist dance, where performers rhythmically sway their waists to the music, draws inspiration from the mesmerizing motions of fishes in the sea. This particular dance style not only showcases the dancers' agility and synchronization but also pays homage to the aquatic



environment that is integral to the Delta's identity. Additionally, hand and arm movements within Seki mimic the undulating waves of the sea, adding a nuanced layer of symbolism to the performance. These deliberate gestures reflect the close connection between the Niger Delta people and their maritime surroundings. Furthermore, certain dance moves within Seki closely replicate the synchronized paddling of a war canoe, highlighting the historical and cultural narratives embedded in the dance.

In essence, every facet of Seki encapsulates a unique blend of cultural symbolism and traditional artistry. From the meticulously crafted costumes to the dance styles that echo the rhythms of the Niger Delta, Seki stands as a living testament to the rich cultural heritage of the region. Examining the intricate details of Seki and unravelling the layers of meaning woven into its costumes and movements, sheds light on the profound cultural significance it holds within the Niger Delta. The various songs composed by the dance groups not only give joy and entertainment, they tell of life experiences and help in correcting social deviants.

With careful consideration, specific dances, songs, and masquerade displays have been curated to reconstruct a narrative that has, over time, been obscured by the complexities of modernity, particularly as manifested in popular culture. These cultural elements, at risk of annihilation or extinction due to contemporary influences, represent a concerted effort to revive and preserve the rich cultural mores of a people renowned for their steadfast commitment to their cultural heritage. In doing so, Seki emerges as a cultural beacon, disseminating and safeguarding the cultural legacy of the Niger Delta against the currents of modernity. It has become imperative for all of us, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences to endeavour to record as well as transcribe our traditional songs.

### **Convergence of Cultural Heritage and Technology**

Interdisciplinary pursuits in the realm of performance possess a dual nature, seamlessly amalgamating creative expressions and the progression of knowledge. By closely examining such endeavours, particularly in the realm of digital performance with a specific emphasis on dance, this study illustrates how collaborative efforts within mixed teams comprising performance artists, researchers, and practitioners, alongside experts from technology and design-oriented disciplines, play a pivotal role in shaping interdisciplinary artscapes and knowledgescapes. These spaces serve as fertile grounds for innovative initiatives,

drawing upon integrated perspectives, theories, methodologies, and approaches from both artistic and technological domains. Together, interdisciplinary artscapes and knowledgescapes contribute significantly to expanding and challenging conventional thinking and artistic creation, prompting a re-evaluation of assumed notions and the emergence of entirely novel art forms.

Commencing from the latter half of the twentieth century, the initiation of early experiments involving computers in the realm of performance marked the onset of a trajectory where digital technologies have been harnessed in diverse manners to aid, amplify, or entirely transform the artistic creative process. Artists, including choreographers, have adopted digital technologies not only as tools for choreography but also as collaborative workspaces and experimental arenas. Embracing computing languages on a broader scale, they conceptualize their artistic endeavours through computational and algorithmic frameworks. Some of the most pioneering creative endeavours have emerged from collaborative endeavours that bridge performance artists, choreographers, computer scientists, and media artists. These interdisciplinary spaces harbour immense potential for groundbreaking artistry, converging profound insights into the arts and artistic intuition with a comprehensive understanding of technological languages and possibilities.

Simultaneously situated at the intersection of diverse fields of practice and research, each rooted in distinct epistemologies and approaches, interdisciplinary collaborations transcend the mere reconfiguration of artistic processes. They contribute significantly to the synergy between the realms of arts and technology, establishing points of cross-fertilization that blur conventional boundaries and exert reciprocal influences on their shared evolution.

### **The Concept of Performance**

The concept of performance is characterized by contestation, with multiple and often conflicting perspectives, as noted by Strine et al.. Throughout history, performance has been labelled under diverse categories, including entertainment, show making, and a leisure activity. Simultaneously, it has been recognized as a fundamental cultural activity that encapsulates and articulates worldviews, values, and intangible cultural assets, thereby representing group, community, and national



identities, as observed by Madison and Hamera. We perceive performance as both a cultural practice and a disciplinary field of research.

Viewing performance as a 'cultural practice' involves understanding human action or behaviour rooted in culture and presented as a performative act. A performance serves as an expression of ways of knowing, being, and cultural identities, offering insight into "how human beings fundamentally make culture, affect power, and reinvent their ways of being in the world". Schechner contends that virtually any human activity can be considered a performative act as long as it is "framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed" as such, situating performance across a broad spectrum of human activities and behaviours, encompassing ritual, play, and performing arts such as dance and music.

### **The Influence of Digital Culture on Traditional Art Forms**

The Niger Delta, a region steeped in cultural diversity and historical significance, stands at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. In recent years, the impact of digital culture on traditional practices has become increasingly evident, with dance and performance emerging as dynamic arenas of exploration.

Digital culture, characterized by the omnipresence of digital technologies in daily life, encompasses a wide array of phenomena, from the use of social media platforms to the integration of digital tools in artistic expressions. Within the context of the Niger Delta, where tradition and modernity coexist, understanding the impact of digital culture on traditional dance and performance forms becomes imperative.

The influence of technology in Africa, particularly the effects of the widely celebrated digital revolution, has been extensively acknowledged and documented across various domains such as commerce, communication, agriculture, media, and political activism. While the pragmatic aspects of digital technology have received considerable scholarly attention, with Nollywood being a notable exception, there has been a relatively limited exploration of its impact on artistic endeavours and its role in shaping creative practices in Africa.

Digital culture, now an inherent aspect of contemporary life, facilitates connections to geographical locations, cultures, histories, and

people that were previously less accessible. In the era of the new information age and the ensuing global connectivity, our understanding of Africa has undergone a significant reassessment, presenting alternative and more diverse narratives and representations of this vast and varied continent. African artists are actively leveraging the digital space to innovate, reinterpret, and disseminate new images of Africa in ways that are both inventive and socio-culturally conscious.

Africa's engagement with technology has taken a unique trajectory compared to other regions worldwide. Many Africans are first introduced to the Internet through mobile/smartphones. The adoption of new technologies in Africa is evident in rising statistics of mobile, smartphone, and Internet usage, particularly in urban centers, reflecting the accelerated technological progress the continent has experienced over the past decade.

This technological evolution has opened up numerous possibilities for innovation, including the emergence of new forms of citizenship and activism, exemplified by the utilization of social networking during events like the Arab Spring uprisings in 2010. Africa has also been a pioneer in specific technological advancements, such as mobile phone banking and the application of mobile Internet technologies in agriculture for accessing market prices, fertilizer, soil sensors, and weather forecasts. However, the enthusiasm surrounding these advancements needs to be balanced with a realistic acknowledgment that technological access remains limited in many areas of the continent due to economic and political challenges, hindering the realization of its potential benefits for many Africans. Nevertheless, the digital revolution has profoundly impacted the African creative industries, not only in terms of production but also in the exhibition and dissemination of art. Digital technology has been a driving force behind the development of Africa's first economically self-sustainable popular film industries, as exemplified by the video-film phenomenon led by Nigeria's Nollywood. This model of low-budget filmmaking, facilitated by affordable digital cameras and desktop editing software, has become widespread across the continent. Initially distributed on DVD and VCD, Nollywood films, and other creative outputs, benefit from improved broadband and Internet streaming technologies, allowing for downloads and viewing on various online video-on-demand (VOD) platforms, both within Africa and internationally.



Thus, digital technology has played a pivotal role in the proliferation of content creation and has widened access to African art forms in various audio-visual, graphic, and literary mediums.

The creative process in dance and performance involves the exploration of an idea or concept, guiding choices in movement, spatial exploration, costume design, scenic elements, lighting, and their temporal evolution within the performance. Performance creation and production are conceptualized as a 'generative dialogue' involving multiple elements, such as movement, lighting, costumes, props, and soundscapes, influencing representation and meaning (Latulipe et al., 2011). This complex and non-linear process entails continual assessment, decision-making, and refinement until a satisfactory artistic vision is achieved.

Choreographic thinking underpins rehearsals and devising processes, involving the exploration, trial, and cyclical refinement of ideas. Managing this complexity necessitates an artistic vision and a comprehensive understanding of diverse aspects of performance ecology. Traditional performances distribute this knowledge among different individuals who contribute to the creative process. However, the integration of knowledge in traditional performances occurs seamlessly, guided by a clear sense of purpose, specific roles, and an established frame of reference developed over years of creative practice.

The introduction of digital and interactive technologies transforms this established process, particularly in digital dance and performance where technology plays a central role. Interactive performances, a focal point of examination, involve live interaction in the performative space facilitated by digital technology. In the realm of complex interdisciplinary work, interactive performances employ technologies, such as camera tracking and sensor technologies, to control or trigger performance components in real time.

The shifts in the creative process for digital performances entail a changing frame of reference. The integration of technology alters the performer's ecosystem, fundamentally changing how bodies and space interact. In interactive performances, the focus shifts from the performer to the environment, emphasizing the performer's relationship, reactions, and interactions with technology and space. This contrasts with traditional dance pieces where the choreographic process centres on the dancers and

their movements. Interactive performances, driven by sensing technology, position technology as a principal actor, with the interaction between the dancer and technology becoming the primary driver of action, audio-visual information, and meaning.

### **Digital Storytelling of Seki: Integrating Narratives with Technology**

The incorporation of digital technology into Seki performances has marked a transformative evolution across multiple facets, ranging from lighting and colour schemes to choreography synchronization, costume design, copyright ownership, marketability as an export commodity, and social media promotion.

In the domain of lighting and colour schemes, digital technology has afforded an unprecedented level of control and precision. Advanced lighting systems, driven by digital mechanisms, enable intricate adjustments of colour gradients and intensity, fostering a dynamic visual environment that complements and enhances the thematic elements of the Seki performance. This technological intervention contributes to a more immersive and visually engaging experience for the audience, adding layers of meaning to the narrative.

Choreography synchronization has witnessed a paradigm shift with the integration of digital technology. Precision and synchronization of movements have been elevated to new heights through the use of digital tools. Dancers can now engage with digital platforms to fine-tune their performances, ensuring seamless coordination and synchronization. This technological enhancement allows for a more intricate and precisely executed choreographic narrative, enriching the overall artistic quality of the Seki performance.

Digital technology has also significantly influenced costume design in Seki performances. Costume designers now have access to advanced digital tools that facilitate the creation of intricate and visually stunning costumes. Digital design software enables experimentation with diverse styles, textures, and patterns, pushing the boundaries of traditional costume aesthetics. This technological infusion allows for a more versatile and visually captivating presentation of the cultural elements embedded in Seki performances.

The question of copyright ownership has been redefined in the digital era. Digital technology has enabled the documentation and preservation of Seki performances in various formats. This technological





advancement necessitates a nuanced approach to copyright, addressing issues such as digital reproduction, distribution, and archival considerations. The digital footprint of Seki performances poses challenges and opportunities regarding intellectual property rights, demanding a comprehensive framework for ownership and protection.

In terms of marketability as an export, digital technology has facilitated broader accessibility and dissemination of Seki performances on the global stage. Digital platforms serve as conduits for showcasing Seki to diverse audiences worldwide. The ease of digital distribution enhances the marketability of Seki performances, providing opportunities for cultural exchange and appreciation beyond geographical boundaries. Seki is a tourism gold mine, a national brand, and a source product. The multiplier effects on the local economy of Niger Delta and on the national economy are encouraging for the development of its people.

Social media promotion emerges as a powerful tool for the visibility and promotion of Seki performances. Digital technology enables the creation of engaging multimedia content that can be shared across various social media platforms. This dynamic promotional approach amplifies the reach of Seki, fostering a broader audience base and cultivating a global community of enthusiasts. Digital platforms offer Seki the opportunity to transcend geographical boundaries and cultural contexts, reaching audiences who might otherwise remain unacquainted with this rich cultural heritage. Through online dissemination, Seki becomes accessible to a global audience, fostering cultural exchange and appreciation. The visual and auditory richness of Seki performances, when presented through digital channels, captures the attention and interest of a broader demographic, thus enhancing the acceptability of this traditional art form on a global scale.

In essence, digital technology has become a key enabler in not only popularizing Seki but also in fortifying the preservation efforts of the broader culture of the Niger Delta. The acceptability of Seki on a global scale and the enhanced preservation of its cultural elements stands as testament to the transformative impact of digital technology in safeguarding and promoting traditional art forms within the dynamic landscape of the digital age.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the symbiotic relationship between technology and Seki holds immense potential to maximize the deep cultural assets of the indigenous people of South-South Nigeria, particularly in the context of the Niger Delta region. This harmonious interaction is poised to yield multifaceted benefits, including the enhancement of tourism, job creation, preservation of the rich cultural heritage of the Niger Delta, and the facilitation of revenue diversification. The incorporation of technology into Seki performances serves as a catalyst for cultural preservation and dissemination. By leveraging digital tools, Seki can reach global audiences, fostering cultural appreciation and understanding. The digital documentation and distribution of Seki performances contribute to the preservation of the indigenous cultural richness embedded in these artistic expressions, ensuring its perpetuity for future generations.

Furthermore, digital technology serves as a formidable tool for the preservation of the culture of the Niger Delta, of which Seki is an integral part. The digital documentation of Seki performances ensures that this unique cultural expression is not only safeguarded for the present generation but is also archived for the benefit of future generations. The permanence offered by digital mediums allows for the creation of a comprehensive repository, ensuring the sustained preservation and transmission of the cultural nuances embedded within Seki.

The integration of digital technology has notably elevated the acceptability and preservation of the culture of Seki, contributing to a paradigm shift in how this traditional art form is perceived and safeguarded. Digital technology, acting as a powerful mediator, has played a crucial role in enhancing the global acceptance of Seki by providing a platform for its exposure to diverse audiences worldwide.

Enhancing tourism is another pivotal outcome of the synergy between technology and Seki. The dynamic visual and auditory experiences facilitated by digital advancements attract diverse audiences, positioning Seki as a cultural magnet. This not only bolsters local tourism but also attracts international visitors keen on experiencing the unique cultural tapestry of the Niger Delta through the prism of Seki performances.

Job creation emerges as a direct consequence of the technological integration into Seki. The digital landscape opens avenues for skilled employment, ranging from technical expertise in digital production to marketing and promotion through online



platforms. As Seki embraces technology, the demand for specialized skills contributes to job opportunities, fostering economic growth within the local communities.

Moreover, the interaction between technology and Seki aligns with contemporary trends in revenue diversification. By exploring digital platforms, Seki can tap into global markets, generating income streams beyond traditional avenues. This diversification enhances the sustainability of Seki as an art form while simultaneously contributing to the economic resilience of the Niger Delta region.

In a broader context, the convergence of technology and Seki underscores the indispensable role of technology across various sectors. It exemplifies how technology serves not only as a facilitator of cultural preservation and artistic expression but also as a transformative force with the potential to drive economic development, job creation, and revenue diversification. Recognizing the intrinsic value of technology in the context of Seki is pivotal for its continued growth, relevance, and contribution to the multifaceted development goals of the indigenous communities in South-South Nigeria.

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**Masquerade drama (Owu-Sekiti) as a dramatic art for  
Being an Abstract presented**

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Being an paper submitted to the organizers of the 2024 international conference 'Sekiology, spinning deep, branching wide and intensifying potentials' with the Theme: Seki Performance and Cultural Identity in the Niger Delta.

**Abstract**

Ekine masquerade drama fulfills the core of drama, even adhering to Aristotle's definition of drama in a sense. But lack of dramatic inclined empirical examination have limited its recognition by scholars as fulfilling the core of drama having actors, audience, embellished language and a designated place of performance. This is because; most documentations of African drama were done by anthropologists. Thus this papers aim and objective will theoretically and conceptually reveal Ekinie drama as regards its functionality in terms of content, sequential arrangement and use of elevated language adhering to Aristotle's dictates and the core of drama in a performance. The research method is qualitative, while utilizing the primary and secondary methods of data collation. Theory utilized is Richard Schechner's Performance Theory while embracing Aristotle's dictates on what constitutes drama. The findings of this study reveal that Ekine drama is performed in one evolution of the sun, having place (stage) actors and an audience, using elevated an embellished language (drum language) with rhythm, tempo and pace in performance. Contributions to knowledge; this study has contributed to knowledge by revealing Ekine dramas adherence to what constitutes drama having place of performance, actors and active audience also embracing Aristotle's definition of drama, complete, in thought, diction and elevated language. Recommendations are; any form of drama that creates an enabling environment of peace, togetherness harmony and human creativity should be encouraged.

**Key words;** Drama, theatre, masquerade, directing, dialogue, language.

**Sub title;** Seki and Performance Traditions

**Introduction**

The primary issue this study examines is the masquerade dance drama being a dramatic art form that needs to be studied in its dramatic content and context, as it brings people together in a playful harmonious environment, encouraging creativity in

dance, stylized movement, and conviviality. Lack of empirical examination has necessitated a loss of performance details in masquerade dramatic art especially details on drum lore, content, storyline, dialogue, as the loss or demise of a master drummer without proper documentation creates a lacuna in adherence to detailed continuity of the performance process. This gap created in terms of not documenting, analyzing, the coordinating, controlling, script, dialogue and language in terms of directorial functions of the chief drummer in a performance process have led to the notion that traditional African masquerade theatre have no sense of language, script, dialogue direction or directing, or fulfilling the core basics of dramatic art of having place, actors and an audience.

This issue has arisen as a result of the perception by anthropologists and sociologists who were the earliest documentarians of African culture, had no in-depth knowledge of the recorded culture's dramatic practices because of cultural ethnocentrism. To scholars like Count Von Gobeneau's (Gobinism) conception, African's are bereft of knowledge, talk-less of creating culture. Thus in respect of the African developing culture, contending positions vary as Count Volney perceived when he saw the Sphinx in Egypt, challenging scholars of Gobeneau's and Finnegan's position, that western civilization was learnt from black Africans even the very use of speech. To this Johannes Fabian contends that western thought see the cultural practices of the developing world as a threat to the dominance of Europe in academics and scholarship thus African civilizations contribution to world body of knowledge need to be dismissed. This has led to the misconceptions of the notion of traditional African drama not having organization, direction, language, script or dialogue in its performance process by some scholars of African theatre (Ikiroma-Owiye 2007).



## Theatre

Theatre can be referred generally to a building, a place where dramatic activities occur. In all dramatic performance culture, performances occur in specially designated areas. Rituals in many African societies had an aesthetic or artistic principle different from the theatre which originated in Europe and was adopted in north and South America and elsewhere. Traditional European theatre is based primarily on mimesis; imitation or representation. It also stresses the importance of individual creativity by performers, playwrights, and others, whereas African tradition on the other hand is generally based on methexis; group sharing. Thus the issues prevalent before this study was that Ekine drama prior to this time had not been dramatically or critically reviewed from its cultural perspective but judged from an anthropological, sociological and historical documentation point of view. This we have evidenced in the documentation of African (Ekine) performance culture, where the anthropologist Jones (1963), and Horton (1968), documented Ekine performance culture for posterity even though their works were bereft of critical performance dramaturgy. Thus we see works of scholars on masquerade performance not examining the role of the various characteristics that qualify a performance as complete drama that make a dramatic production possible, or relating it with other dramatic societies like, place, actors, audience, director, language and dialogue/script of the performance and who coordinates or exercises preeminent control in developing dramatic process especially critically examining the role of the directing in African dramatic performance like Ekine drama. In a sense the works of Robin Horton has given a good descriptive and explanatory history of Ekine drama and to some extent the use of the drum language of communication but not a critical examination of Ekine drama fulfilling the core of drama which is having a place (stage) set aside for dramatic performance, actors, and an audience who have come to watch the dramatic action unfold.

## Drama

Drama has many definitions depending on the social context of the society concerned. In support of this view of the functionality of traditional African masked drama as fulfilling the core of drama in a modern sense of context and content,, the erudite

scholar Okafor (1999, p.40), opines that

The core of drama has three basic elements: performers ... spectators, and place of representation ... all other elements ... costume, scenery, dialogue, mime, and special effects ... aid the performer's imitative action ... are extrinsic characteristics that determine the peculiarity of different dramatic traditions. The Japanese Noh performer uses mime, music, and stylized movements as techniques of representation. the performer of the Indian Kathakali drama uses esoteric gestures and surrealistic costumes and make-up to stimulate action that is being narrated in song, and Chinese shadow players imitate action by the use of "moving figures made of animal skins and cardboard ... different traditions obviously utilize different techniques to imitate action. It would therefore be misleading to review African mask-performance in terms of the dramatic techniques of another culture.

Okafor's conception clearly shows that Ekine masquerade dramatic performance is a kind of drama that has fulfilled the basic concept and context of drama like Chinese, Japanese and Indian drama. There is a space for performance, actors and an audience. The controversies surrounding the misunderstanding/misgivings about Ekine drama practices not being drama resonate. Firstly in the historical images of traditional African cultures painted by colonial writers mostly anthropologists presenting a non-objective/subjective perception of African performance culture, and secondly on the dual functions of Ekine society feeding the gods and educating , enlightening the people through dramatic performances. A non-Chinese, or Indian will not understand Kabuki or Indian Kathakali drama, likewise a non-African will not understand African indigenous drama. This reflection is also coupled with the paucity of works by Africans scholars in the dramatic arts not reflecting the various components of African indigenous drama or theatre deciphering who performs the various production indices space, actors, audience and functions like directing, managing, acting and acting styles etc. In light of the above there is a need for African scholars to present detailed interpretations of performance sequences and who dictates, controls, determines events as they unfold in the dramatic process and documenting same as evidences of traditional theatre practice for posterity. In furtherance of this view we reflect a little on Ekine drama adhering to some of Aristotle's dictates about drama in relation to tragedy as having a





beginning middle and end. In each day the dramatic performance taking place under one in the evolution of the sun, and all the events, taking place in one place. Subsequently as long as African traditional drama meets the criteria of what constitutes drama; actors, place, audience and the performance, with an elevated language encompassing script, dialogue, and storyline then it serves its primary purpose of entertaining, educating and enlightening its audience as evidenced from the above explanation.

Adedeji opines that “the real problem arises from the most important criterion of distinguishing drama from its ritual in a traditional Nigerian society that of the tonal context of the performance including the responses and reactions of the participants and spectators... is not easily verifiable in the absence of records of such performance (3). However concerning the practicability and functionality of African drama in terms of having the qualities of being classified as complete drama , in terms of coordination, narration and who is in charge, or who controls, dictates and directs the performance process there are varying contending positions. While some scholar's like Richard Schechner, Richard Wagner, Johannes Fabian, etc. are objective in their conception that dramatic art in the world, is relative by broadening the intellectual space to accommodate new ideas of communication in dramatic performance studies. Scholars like Finnegan (1970), Echeruo (1981) etc., have argued along western and colonial lines. These scholars reduce theatre performance and communication to the scripted text thus neglecting performances that have tonal communication as not developed by having written script or dialogue or being a form of drama. They also contend that African culture has not developed enough to have theatre/drama, let alone script or language of communication in the performance or dramatic process. But some other scholars on African culture and dramatic practices like Amankulor (1981), Nzewi (1980), Adedeji (1986), Krama (2001), Bell-Gam (2003), Ododo (2004), theatre and drama as relative to the performing culture. In this sense they see African theatre as complete in itself upholding the view that, Africa housed the best experience of theatre ever practiced in the world, of which modern African drama is a carryover from traditional dramatic practices. Like Egungun, Alarinjo Kwaighir, Yakamanchi, Ekine, Ekpe, Ekpo, etc.

Dialogue/language/storyline: Ekine masquerade performance dialogue, script and language in a

performance process are embedded with tonal communication as ushered by the chief drummer in a performance process. . For example a critical analysis of this phenomenon of drummed narrative reenactment reveals that Ekine (African) drama, as a form of masked dramatic performance has a special language of narration which is centrally controlled and disseminated in the drum lore tones of the chief drummer. In this guise the drum lore tone contains the story behind the performance, which in a sense is made up of legends, myths, folklore and history of the people all embedded in 'the drum language of communication. In this performance sense the chief drummer who cultural dictates has imbued with the control and dissemination of information and communication is the third in command in traditional hierarchy after the King and Chief priest in Kalabari society (Ikiroma-Owiye, 2018). Finnegan (1970, p. 467-468) in conformity asserting the communicational nature of drummed communication says that

A remarkable phenomenon in parts of west and central Africa is the literature played on drums and certain other instruments... the instruments themselves are regarded as speaking and their messages consist of words. Such communication, unlike that through conventional signals, is intended as a linguistic one; it can only be fully appreciated by translating it into words and any musical effects are purely incidental.

Thus the drum language is not intended for musical effects but plays a central role in social communicational functions in the performance culture of the people and serves as the language theatre performance of which it also embodies the language, script/storyline of the performance. Even in terms of narration, one of the most quoted utterances proclaiming the central role of narratives in human social performance function in life comes from the French semiology's and literary critic Barthes; 'who in his analysis of narrative in cultural performance explains that

The narratives of the world are numberless. 'Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories.' Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass



windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives ... Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans-historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (as cited in Czamlawska, 2004).

This phenomenon of tonal narrative in performance is embedded in the drum lore tones of the chief drummer in Ekine drama which is a natural phenomenon in African cultures south of the Sahara. The use of the drum language in communication is evident in most African societies and every oral culture without an orthographic tradition in the world though deciphered in differing forms. Based on this observation I agree with Barthes opinion, as he had seen narrative not confined to only one culture but a relative universal phenomenon which can be perceived in the cultural performances contents and contexts of all peoples of the world either in written, spoken, chanted, danced, masked, or musical drama performance forms.

In furtherance of this view of the universality of dramatic/ performance culture narratives in the world Turner (1993, p. 67), also observes vividly while describing cultural narrative in relation to dramatic performance of 'traditional societies especially in Asia and Africa thus

Some societies may have no equivalent to the novel, but all societies tell stories. Story telling can take many forms- myths, legends, ballads, folk-tales, rituals ,dance, histories, novels, jokes, drama- and can be seen to have many apparently difficult social functions- from entertainment to religious construction it seems that story telling is part of our cultural experience, inseparable from and intrinsic to it.

Furthermore Ikiroma-Owiye (2018, p. 24) states that Tonal communicational narrative in masquerade performance clearly depicts that every culture/society tells stories, stories about the past exploits of their ancestors which they narrate to their forebears, through a chosen form of narrative; conversant with the culture concerned which most times in Ekine dramatic convention are embedded in drum-lore tones ushered by the chief drummer

which serves as the communal script of masquerade performance. These communal scripts contain the reenacted story of the ancestors.

These masquerade reenactments are representatives of the ancestor's whose stories and past exploits are reenacted by actors in a dramatic performance. The past exploits of the ancestors in Ekine dramatic convention as embedded in drum lore tones coordinated and controlled by the Chief drummer comes in the form of metaphors and allegories, riddles, jokes etc. thus in representing these notes dramatically, the role of the dramatic characters is to pantomimic ally respond to the drum language signals of the chief drummer in respect to the story behind the play i.e. ferocious warrior, protector of the harem, jester, clown, pilferer etc. which are mostly anthropomorphic characters bearing human characteristics been presented by masked dramatic characters through use of gestures, and dance movements.

#### **Use of elevated language**

In performance communication in Ekine drama is a communally integrated work, coordinated by the chief drummer which also dictates, and controls dramatic composition, movement, rhythm, picturerization, and pantomimic dramatization which are basic fundamentals of performing theatre, as evident in Ekine drama performance. The drum language speaks the elevated everyday language of the people. This study deciphers how the chief drummer in Kalabari society is instilled by cultural dictates to function as an encyclopedia/ text narrator, master communicator, informer, dictator, and all-round communicator i.e. omniscient performer director in social and dramatic circumstances. The chief drummer prior to the performance also uses the drum language to call for rehearsals, call the audience, coordinate the rehearsal process and the performance proper as the drummer is ever present calling for rehearsals, coordinating the rehearsals and directing affairs in performance. Turner (1993, p. 68), furthermore in his discourse on narratives in cultural performance explains that

Narrative can be described as a means of making sense of our social world, and sharing that 'sense' with others ... Its universality underlies its intrinsic place in human communication 'of which every society has developed its own style over the years that are meaningful in their performance culture.

Ekine masquerade drama performances make sense



to the dramatic characters and the audience as they know the story behind each performance, as ushered by the chief drummer, which they might have been told by their parents, uncles, aunts, or elders in the family as a means of narrative transmission of the embodiments of cultural mythology, and cosmology of the people. Which leads us to what theatrical practice in Africa requires, research that documents, critically examines, assesses and interprets performance practices which best express dramatic culture from the differing cultural distinctiveness/uniqueness of traditional African dramatic performance traditions. Echeruo (1980) a critic of the Finnegan school of thought even at the height of his doubts in the course of his studies recognizes the Efik's, Yoruba's and Ijaw's as having dramatic culture's that have spanned centuries. Thus the need arises if there is a dramatic culture in Africa south of the Sahara, there is need to identify the functions of the various dramatic characters in the sense of directing, actors, audience and place of performance. The time of performance, the director and directing in these traditional African traditional theatrical performance practices.

#### **Directing/masquerade drama as complete drama**

According to Ikiroma-Owiye (2007), "in a sense, the orderliness experienced in African traditional theatre performances in terms of composition, movement, rhythm, picturerization and pantomimic dramatization must be the handiwork of some great artist the chief drummer." Especially as it relates to the performance proper when the traditional directors function comes to fore in the omniscient dictates of the chief drummer in performance be it in dance, ritual festival or dramatic reenactment in traditional African societies. His drummed communication renditions embody the script, storyline and dramatic dialogue in Kalabari cultural context which has been interpreted, analyzed and preserved for posterity. Richard Schechner (1973, 9. 5-6), in his article "Drama, script, theatre and performance" explaining the role and functionality of performance in society opines that

Altogether to "theatre" and "performance." Before attempting a concrete, tax-onomical presentation of these words I must acknowledge the

difficulty of using them. Words like "script," "drama," "theatre," and "performance" are loaded, and none have neutral synonyms. We know nothing of the scripts used by the dancer-shamans of the Palaeolithic temple-theatres. I don't say 'texts,' which mean written documents. I say 'scripts,' which mean something that pre-exist any given enactment, which act as a blue print for enactment, and which persists from enactment to enactment.

Form the foregoing we have seen that dramatic performances in African societies do not just occur. They are put together by a specialist group of artists, in relation to the society concerned. From this group of artists someone is assigned the function of coordinating the performance, flutist, master drummer, lead singer as the case may be, for them to achieve the desired purpose of a unified production. That person in-charge of the performance process as prescribed by the community; concerned organizes rehearsals, controls audience performer relations, dictates, composition, movement, rhythm, picturerization, and pantomimic dramatization in the course of the performance. The seen or unseen hand who performs these functions in Ekine drama that cultural distance has blinded non indigenes from identifying especially scholars of African theatre/drama (Ekine drama) is the chief drummer. Performances are not just done but involves processes and are presented by a specialists group of people which involves the elements of total theatre music, dance, mime, costume, make-up and narrative, mostly achieved through the use of sound, and drummed language of communication for the realization of an artistic expression, which entails entertainment, education and transmission of cultural values in dramatic presentations involving all aspects of African cosmic world view. According to Traore (1980, p. 7),

These artists' achievements find their main expression in an abundant oral literature consisting of myths, legends, stories, short pieces in prose and verse, rhymed or free, and finally satires. This is no mere puppet show or exhibition of conjurers, magicians and animal charmers, as is found in certain parts of Africa, but real drama with a perfect sense of plot and unity, aiming through its actors, to develop a given theme.

The achievements of these artists do not just occur



but have a sense of orderliness in presentation. Thus in every form of dramatic presentation we observe that there is sequence, orderliness in movement, dance, mimetic presentations and pantomimic dramatization. Consequently there is need for modern African creative artists to preserve imbibable aspects that create harmony and meaning for posterity, for them not to go extinct in this age of multiculturalism and globalization. Sequel to this trend in support of African theatrical practice Renov (1993, p.1), in his discourse on culture, posits that “the assumption that dominant cultural forms or theoretical approaches should enjoy a right of way had been challenged.” Thus we see emergence of cultural studies, historicism, hermeneutics, as aspects of post-colonial study which has prompted African scholars in trying to rewrite African cultural practical experiences from their own perspective.

### **Relationship between Greek drama and Ekine drama**

Theatrical performance in classical Greece was performed in three days and each day, between one evolutions of the sun this sequential arrangement of events, also occurs in Ekine dramatic convention. In Greek theatre a Goat is sacrificed to announce the beginning of the festival in Ekine theatre too an animal is sacrificed to initiate the festival but the sacrificial animal depends on the type of masquerade to be performed i.e. Goat, Ram, or Fowl is used as sacrificial animals to initiate performances. Ekine performances are communal affairs involving the use of a chorus of Ekine members, as there are no restrictions to which category of people constitutes the audience, men, women, children, chiefs, and people from neighboring communities, the ancestral spirits all constitute the performers and members of the audience and attendance is free for all. In furtherance of these relationships we see a clear perception of the development of Greek theatre with Pisistratus using the theatre to replace public execution as a means of communal excitement. For Ekine drama it is the social education means in Ekine practicing societies the means through which people learn their cultural production processes. Thus we have seen that theatre all over the world share the same functions, values and elicit similar responses to their performative enactments before her audience. Thus theatrical or dramatic performance being a reflection of the cultural

emotion of man must be experienced from its socio-cultural perspective as it is the basic means of education in most African traditional societies. People who are not conversant with African indigenous performance modes often sometimes restrict their appraisal of Ekine theatrical or dramatic performance to the written text or spoken word neglecting all the other modes or aspects of theatrical communication, dance, songs, stylized movements, gestures, incantations, invocations used by the masquerade actors in educating, enlightening and forging the spiritual relationship between the gods, actors and audience, using the drum language of communication which is central in sub-Saharan African communities, are all aspects of relationships between Greek and Kalabarina ekine drama.

### **Conclusion**

Not understanding the cultural contents and context of African traditional theatre presents a blurred vision to the observer hence the study of African culture presents many problems to the contemporary creative artists. This is precipitated by the reason that they do not understand the culture they are recording or presenting. Thus initial recordings of cultural performance and art forms of Africans were carried out mainly by European Anthropologists and Ethnographers who already have a mindset that nothing significant can emanate from these primitive tribes. Not taking time to understudy the cultural significance and communicational modes of African performance process from the custodians of culture. Lack of understanding has led to a misconception of performance practices of African traditional theatrical performances, as they are now judged from a Eurocentric ideological and theoretical perception. But from the presentation of this study we have seen that Ekine drama is a complete dramatic tradition having place, of performance, stage, actors (masquerade characters) and an active audience. Coordinated and controlled by the directorial renditions of the chief drummer, having a beginning middle and an end, using elevated language of communication in performance, having script, storyline all embedded in the drummed communication as ushered by the chief drummer thus fulfilling the core of drama.





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## **CULTURE, CARNIVAL AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT; A DISCURSIVE BAZAAR OF ITS ORIGIN AND INTERPRETATIONS.**

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### **Abstract**

A culture is the self-consciousness of a society. It contains the works of art, literature, scholarship and philosophy that establish a shared frame of reference among its people. Culture is a precarious achievement, and endures only if it is underpinned by a sense of tradition, and by a broad endorsement of the surrounding social norms. When those things evaporate, as inevitably happens, culture is superseded by a culture of fakes, misrepresentation and misinterpretation. Seki represents, Culture, Tourism and an embodiment of the carnival tradition of the Niger Delta people of Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

As an infant I looked forward to the Christmas holiday in the 1970's. It was at this time that the entire family spent a minimum of two weeks at the country side Ovu-Ahu (Ibaa), a town located in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, made up of twenty three villages. Each of these villages was allotted days within the month of December to host their respective masquerade festival. Mgbogizi the author's village hosted its event on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December annually. Before the day of the event rehearsals, ritual cleansing of the artifacts, masqueraders and musical instruments were undertaken via divinations by the council of elders and the wise man of the village that lasted for weeks.

Intriguing to me were the prominent roles my uncles Alele Okachi (deceased) and Israel Okachi (now a Pastor) played. The former was very dexterous in his handling of the musical instruments which ushered in various masquerades to the arena. While the later was a masquerader who adorned the 'Ogbor' (Canoe or Boat) masquerade whose skill in dancing was a marvel to watch. This event attracted huge number of visitors from within and outside the town. Visibly prominent were the white visitors who were often engrossed in recording the event through video coverage and photographing of masquerades and the spectators than the rhymes and rhythms billowing from Alele's masterly crafted and enchanting melodies.

Only recently did I come to the realization that the visitors who graced the festival were cultural tourists who had taken their time off to experience authentic

cultural performances held in its original habitat. Regrettably, the hosting of these festivals in my community have become highly challenged due to persistent kidnappings and cult related activities. This event as an infant besides it's fascination lived up to it's billing with the series of musical rendition, dance, drama and masquerades performances that became a major attraction to numerous visitors to the sizeable village square of Mgbogizi. These festivals has metamorphosed into carnivals, hosted by State governments, prominent amongst them are the Carnival Rivers, Carnival Calabar and Abuja National Carnival.

### **Origin and Historical Development of Carnivals**

The word carnival, according to History of Carnival (nd), is coined from the Latin word 'Carne Valle,' meaning 'goodbye to meat,' alluding to the need to use up meat before lent. Grove Art Online (nd) is of the view that the etymology of the term has long been debated, but the consensus reached by various authors on the origin of carnival is Carmen Levare. (Implying, "to put away the flesh as food"), from which is derived Carnis Levamen, Carneleverium, Carnilevaria and other terms. History of Carnival in the U.S. Virgin Islands(nd), [Baynes](#) (2015) and Caribbean Carnival: It's origin, history and present (2002) all allude to its origin to be from the Europeans, specifically Italy, because of its Roman Catholic tradition of Lent (fasting period) . In elaborating this line of argument, The History of Pre-Lenten Carnival (nd) states that, "considering carnival not as an isolated event but as a part of a wider circle of Christmas and Easter celebrations, there appears to be continuity between it and the winter masquerades that mark the Christmas season in Europe". It narrates further, that the structural relation between the two periods is still explicit in Provence in France, where carnival is known as Carementrant ('coming lent'). In Belgium, Mardi Gras is known as Quaresinia, (the Roman Catholic term for lent).

In the same vein La Rose (2015) argues that the Caribbean Carnival is the creative and artistic expression of dispossessed people. The Caribbean Carnival was transported to North America and Europe through the migration of Caribbean peoples. Carnival he asserts originated as a pagan festival in ancient Egypt which was subsequently celebrated



by the Greeks and then the Romans. The popular festival was adopted by the Roman Catholic Christian church in Europe as the festival of Carne Vale. The Carnival festival the author posited was transported to the Caribbean by the European slave traders. They excluded the African slaves from the festival and had lavish masquerade balls. On emancipation the freed African slaves of the Caribbean transformed the European festival forever into a celebration of the end of slavery. The Carnival festival had a new cultural form derived from their own African heritage and the new Creole artistic cultures developed in the Caribbean. The author concludes that It is the Caribbean Carnival that is exported to large cities all over the world.

Furthermore, Grove Art Online ( nd) asserts that, the opinion widely held by folklorists is that, carnival is a historical and structural transformation of Pre-Christian winter festivals, such as Roman Saturnalia (Kalends of January), Lupercalia (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February), Brumalia (late February) and Matronalia (Kalends of March). The overall symbolism of Saturnalia, for example, is considered by many to be the most probable historical model of carnival – like behaviour. One hypothesis is that the carnival is also linked, etymologically, with carrus navalis, a beat-shaped wagon drawn by horses, which carried the revelers. In the same vein, Livy in the History of Rome 11.xxi in The History of Pre-Lenten Carnival (nd) tells of how the Saturnalia were officially established in 495 BC.

On the contrary, Grisso (nd), and Bethel (2000) suggests a different view to the positions held as enumerated above. Grisso (nd) regrets the falsehood being perpetuated that the received teaching in all countries of the New World where carnival has become an institution- notably Rio de Janero, New Orleans, and Port of Spain, ascribe its origin to white planters and costumed parties, rather than to its palpably African roots. The author argues that, everywhere in the New World (Brasil, New Orleans, Port of Spain, Mexico, Jamiaca, Trinidad and Tobago, Bahamas, Barbados, Haiti Panama, Haiti, Cayman Islans and Saint Loius) where there is a carnival, the creative presence of an African genius is found. He substantiates his position further when he notes that, "in Rio, you have African and Portuguese, in New Orleans , African and French and in Port of Spain you have African and again French, and African presence/ energy is present throughout Hispanophone America. The one constant in all of these variations of carnival is an African presence".

In his robust argument of tracing the carnival historically to African origin, Grisso (nd) further points out that, "...in the Bahamas carnival is known by another name called Junkanoo. There the British, he

contends, never participated to any significant extent and therefore, there was no attempt at European expropriation, and in Bermuda, where again it is an undisputed African engine that propels this form of cultural expression". Junkanoo also took its root in North America when it used to be celebrated in North Carolina and other parts of South America at one time. There, for a time, it even crossed cultures and was adopted in Angelos. Grisso (nd) concludes his position unequivocally, that "carnival is an African expression through and through, whether directly out of West Africa via the slave trade, or indirectly out of Africa (Egypt) via Greece, Rome and Western Europe. He buttresses his view point by stating that, the sounds heard and the variations felt in carnivals in the New World, are clearly "out of Africa".

In support of the above, Crawford (2004) notes that, most summer carnivals however seem to have other roots even further back in time and from another continent. The author remarks, "Listen to the rhythms; view the colourful street parades, the masks and feathers – this can all be traced back to ancient African festivals, of which many are still being celebrated". The author notes that similar ideas seem to have evolved in different parts in the world: an event that breaks the daily life with music and costumes. "Like in Europe, the festivities originated from religious events, celebrations of harvest or in honour of spirits and ancestors. While European masks were often meant to hide a person's identity, the African masks have another purpose: to represent and bring alive some kind of spirit". He also points out that, there are many more differences and similarities between the African and European mask/costume celebrations, but South America and the Caribbean are the places where traditions finally met and merged to some degree. Descendants of slaves kept the African traditions alive to keep in touch with their roots. Europeans brought their religious festivities and masquerades and added the common label "carnival". The world map of the greatest carnivals quite clearly points out where the Catholic Europeans settled and met with slaves from Africa: Brazil, Barbados and Trinidad for instance. Another example is the Mardi Gras in Louisiana (USA) where French settlers also met with people of African descent (Crawford, 2004).

In the same vein, Ugiomoh (2013) in an interview with the author believes that carnival is human, because humans as a social being and animal is one that seeks to enact its actions of what i will call a cluster of human persons. So in many human societies, he asserts humans have always come together in a variety of ways to celebrate and to do things that are communal or have lethargically relevance in the sense of gathering together. Furthermore, he opines





that be as it may i am aware that the carnival tradition in Europe is a recent reinvention. And that reinvention for social gathering or otherwise is opined to have its origin from Africa by some people. Furthermore, these persons are of the view that the slave tradition from Africa to the West actually initiated it. One of the finest carnivals we have had, the Brazilian ( Rio de Janeiro) carnival started simplistically in a way of agreeing to celebrate. If you take a look at the picture of the first carnival in Mexico it was very simple, people wearing a white shirts and white knickers to commemorate the gathering together.

Over the years it has developed into what one can call a monumental artistic performance that actually has become an earth or human moving thing. Therefore the carnival tradition is originally African because the Africans within a given setting of the masquerading social construction are persons who normally do not live within their own enclosure just by themselves. Everything is celebrated, from the naming of a child to the unavailing of anything in the society is celebrated that is where we find the epic nature that the masquerade eventually assumed being part of. So the origin of the carnival is African because any performance or celebration by an African is always an outdoor, unlike the West where eight (8) months of the year they are all locked indoors because of an inhospitable weather. So in generating carnivals in the West generally they had to adopt what they borrowed from the West Indies or the Latin American countries that has an infusion of the African spirit in it. So definitely we will conclude that the origin of the carnival is African and it remains African.

### **Major Carnivals in Nigeria**

Staging of festivals in Nigeria have been an age long event in most localities. Prominent cultural festivals showcased in Nigeria include: the Ofala festival of the Onitsha people in Anambra State, the Argungu fishing festival held in Gurbu Kokuwa, Augie Local Government Area of Kebbi State and Osun Oshogbo festival celebrated yearly in the Oshogbo Sacred Grove, along the banks of the Osun River, in Osun State. Others include; Eyo festival held in Lagos, Lagos State, the New Yam festival of the Igbu people in Ikwerre Local Government Area and the Wrestling festivals of the Aluu and Ovu-ahu (Ibaa) people in Ikwerre and Emuoha Local Government Areas in Rivers State. Worthy of note is the fact that the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) organized by the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) is rotated amongst the States in Nigeria while the Rivers State Festival (RIVFEST) which used to be organized by the Rivers State Council of Arts and Culture, later metamorphosed into Carnival Rivers.

Carnival is a vibrant tradition that some countries for various reasons have begun to take advantage of as a vehicle for national unity and participatory spectacle for its citizens. Some notable carnivals

include the Rio Carnival of Rio de Janeiro of Brazil, Salvador Carnival in Bahia, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival, Jamaica Carnival, Northernham Carnival in the United Kingdom and New Orleans Carnival in the United State of America. However, in Nigeria the three recognized carnivals include the Abuja National Carnival, Carnival Calabar and Carnival Rivers. The Abuja National Carnival is organised by the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Abuja; Carnival Calabar is organized by Cross Rivers State Carnival Commission and supervised by the Cross Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism; and Carnival Rivers (CARNIRIV) was organised initially by the Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism before the Rivers State Tourism Development Agency was created in January, 2012.

### **Abuja National Carnival**

The Abuja National Carnival was initiated by the former President Olusegun Obasanjo as a platform for the people of Nigeria to showcase their rich cultural heritage and tourism potentials to the world. In support to the above statement the former President Obasanjo observes that " the Abuja Carnival was a reaction to carnivals of other nations that he had been invited to, and that such carnivals had historical experiences and contributed immensely to the cultural growth of the host countries in addition to projecting the images of such countries" (Ayakoroma, 2012).

The Abuja Carnival was billed to commence in 2004, after it was endorsed by the Presidential Council on Tourism (PCT), made up of the 36 State Governors with the former President Obasanjo as the chairman but was shelved for adequate arrangements to be made. However, the first edition of the carnival took place in November 2005, when Ambassador Franklin Nchita Ogbuewu was the Honourable Minister of Culture and Tourism. For the Tourism Sector to thrive and make contributions to national and cultural development, the former President Obasanjo reasoned that A Tourism Master Plan was needed for the sector. In order to achieve this objective he initiated a Presidential Committee for the Federal Tourism Development Master Plan. Subsequently, at the request of the Federal Government the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took responsibility to partly fund and implement the production of the Master Plan (Tourism Development International Limited, 2006). The project commenced in Abuja on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2005 after the United Nations World Tourism Organization contracted the Tourism Development International Limited as the consultants to produce the Plan. An inception Report was delivered in March, 2005, a Mid Term Report on 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2005 and a Draft of the Master Plan Report on December 12, 2005(Tourism Development International Limited, 2006). According to Tourism Development International Limited (2006); before the final Draft of the Master Plan Report and its eventual production a





number of Consultative Seminars on the findings, Key Conclusions and initial Recommendations were held with the Stakeholders in October and November, 2005. The conclusion of the PCT assignment provided the country with a guide for tourism. According to Ayakoroma (2012) the Federal Ministry of Culture and National Orientation packages the Carnival through the Abuja Carnival Management Committee, while the Federal Capital Territory, as host, provides facilities and camps for state contingents. Brands in the carnival include, Carnival Street Parade, Masquerade Fiesta, Durbar, Boat Regatta, Children's Fiesta, Cultural Nite/ Traditional Cuisine and Bush Bar, Contemporary Music Fiesta, Polo Tournament and Command Performances.

#### Carnival Calabar

The Carnival Calabar which started in 2004, tagged "Africa's Biggest Street Party" was conceptualized by the former governor of Cross River State, Donald Duke (Babatunde, 2015). In conceptualizing the idea Duke envisioned that the event will place the State as the number one tourist destination nationally and internationally. Carnival Calabar is a Street Parade organized by bands dressed in identical costume (Carlson, 2010) such as, Bayside Band, Masta Blasta Band, Freedom Carnival Band, Passion – 4 Band and Seagull Band. The Carnival Brands include, Calabar Carnival Queen, Kings and Queens, Cultural Parade and Childrens Carnival. Carnival Calabar Commission is the regulatory body for the carnival events. It is responsible for the planning and execution of the event within the laid down rules. The carnival also has other cultural events, such as, music performance from both local and international artists, boat regatta, fashion show, christmas village, Traditional Dances and the annual Ekpe festival (Ayakoroma, 2012). Furthermore, Ayakoroma asserts that there are activities that have been incorporated. These activities include, Essay Writing Competition involving both secondary school and tertiary students. The competitions are aimed at resuscitating the reading culture among the youths in the state. The carnival which is organized annually starts on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December and ends on 31<sup>st</sup> December.

#### Origin of Carnival Rivers

The commencement of the Rivers State Cultural Carnival "CARNIRIV" as it was known, was an inherited idea from Col. Anthony Ukpo which was implemented by the Military Governor, Group Captain Ernest O. Adeleye in 1988. Adeleye (1988) in corroborating this statement in his welcome address states that,

On assumption of office as Military Governor of Rivers State in August, 1988, I was briefed on the Rivers State Cultural Carnival, otherwise known as "CARNIRIV 88" which had already been put in the pipeline by my

predecessor. On close study, I found that the carnival was a very welcome idea with great potentials and laudable objectives. Apart from being a tool for the propagation of the rich cultures of Rivers State and developing her tourism potentialities, "CARNIRIV 88" will harness all the various cultures of the great Nigerian nation as a veritable instrument for unity in diversity. Realizing the determined support of the Government and people of the state to make the carnival a huge success and the great deal of time and effort put into the preparations, it was only meat and proper to lend my whole-hearted support for the fiesta. In order to stimulate worldwide desire for leisure and relaxation, and use the carnival as a focal point of tourism development, in the Rivers State, "CARNIRIV 88" had to be made open for all interested groups or persons to participate. In appreciation of the enormous power such a carnival holds in harnessing the mass mobilization and self-reliance efforts of our beloved country, the Rivers State Cultural Carnival will be made an annual event. On behalf of the Government and people of Rivers State of Nigeria, therefore, I am highly delighted to welcome all and sundry, who have aptly taken advantage of this auspicious occasion, to Rivers state and in particular, to Port Harcourt, the Garden City. "CARNIRIV 88" welcomes you all.

Honourable T. O. Graham-Douglas, the then Commissioner of Youths, Sports and Culture supported the Governor's view in his address tagged "THE IDEA OF "CARNIRIV 88" when he observed that;

For me, "CARNIRIV 88" is a dream come true. When the new Ministry of Youths, Sports and Culture was created in February, 1986, I saw the need to give culture its rightful place in our national aspiration. As a result, having been appointed the commissioner for the Ministry, I took up the challenge and conceptualized what might be the foundation for the development of our future tourism industry. This is the background upon which the Rivers State Carnival, otherwise known as "CARNIRIV", was conceived. I strongly believe that with the staging of the carnival, there will be a new awareness of our cultural values and potentials as a vehicle for establishing a VIRILE TOURISM INDUSTRY both in Rivers State and the nation as a whole. Culture has always been a veritable instrument for national cohesion, inter communal harmony and peaceful interaction in all nations of the world. This quest for harmony is one that has always attracted the singular interest of every peace-loving person. Expression of this desire has been given in various forms of cultural and sporting events, educational exchanges and youth activities. These occasions have enhanced and are still enhancing the eradication of distrust, suspicion



and prejudices and in their place, sowing the seeds of healthy entertainment and enlightenment among the diverse peoples of the world. It is no mistake therefore that the theme of the Rivers State Carnival has been underlined as "Unity in Cultural Diversity". The diverse cultures of the various nations of the world constitute a rich heritage which resides in the heart and soul of the people. Thus, we can make each culture live by not turning it exclusive but stimulating perception of its usefulness as a constant factor of patriotism, national consciousness and international understanding. Welcome to "CARNIRIV 88" (Graham-Douglas, 1988).

The Rivers State Carnival bears a uniqueness as it combines two carnival styles in one, a purely cultural carnival where masquerades and dance troupes from the State's respective LGAs parade and perform and a contemporary Caribbean style carnival where participants are geared up in flamboyant costumes and regalias, which are recognized as bands that can be formed by persons of like minds. Described as the oldest carnival in Nigeria, CARNIRIV suffered a long period of lull after its maiden edition until its revival in 2008 (Itayemi, 2013). During the waiting period, the festival was staged as Rivers State Festival (RIVIFEST) until 1998, when it was finally discontinued until its eventual revival in 2008 by the administration of His Excellency Chibuike Rotimi Ameachi. The Carnival has been in its 5<sup>th</sup> season in 2012, according to Imegwu (2012), the Honourable Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Rivers State.

The 2008 CARNIRIV which held on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> December was tagged "CARNIRIV, Carnival in Rivers State" with the slogan, "Our Culture our Pride." The 2008 event had the 23 LGAs contingents, National Youth Service Corps members, and person's resident in the State in attendance. Corporate organizations such as the MTN, Grand Lager Beer and Sky Bank also participated in the event (Ejii, 2009).

The events highlight included, Cultural Exhibitions, Walk for Life, Gala Night, International Film Festival, Miss ECOWAS Beauty Pageant and CARNIRIV Musical Concert.

The 2009 edition commenced from Monday December 14 to Sunday December 20. The event began with a parade involving the 23 LGAs council masquerade and Dance troupes. The eight day fiesta was flagged off by the Governor and his Cabinet members. The Carnival procession commenced from the specially constructed CARNIRIV Village at the Artillery junction to Aggrey road amidst rhythms of traditional drumbeats by various LGA's floats, dance troupes and revelers. The carnival was supervised by the Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism. According to the Rivers State Commissioner of Culture and Tourism, Mr. Marcus Nle Ejii "the event reiterated the comportment of the people of Rivers State and the return of peace and normalcy within the State". The

carnival was co-sponsored by the International Energy Insurance (IEI) PLC, Total E and P, Oil and Gas Free zone Authority with support from Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), while Yibs Esemble and ZMC served as the Consultant and Marketing and Communication Consultants.

The 2010 event which spanned from Monday December 13 to Saturday December 18 was supervised by the Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism under the leadership of The Rivers State Commissioner of Culture and Tourism, Mr. Marcus Nle Ejii. The Carnival procession commenced from the Rivers State College of Arts and Science compound to Aggrey road amidst rhythms of traditional drumbeats by various LGA's float, dance troupes, masquerade groups and revelers and terminated at the village, the Liberation Stadium, Elekahia.

The 2011 fiesta commenced from December 10 to December 17. That year's edition kicked off with the Economic Community of West Africa Peace Pageant, which was held at the Polo Club, ( in GRA Phase II) Port Harcourt. The Kids Carnival was preceded with the Carnival Opening ceremony in the evening at the cultural village, the Liberation Stadium, Elekahia. The week long event was organized and supervised by the Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism under the leadership of Dr. Nabbs Imegwu, the Honourable Commissioner of the Ministry. The year's street parade which took off from the Rivers State College of Arts and Science had the 23 Local Government Area Councils participating with their respective masquerade groups, dance troupes and constructed floats amongst the bands and revelers. Highlights of the event included Garden City Free style Parade, Boat Regatta at the Rivers State Tourist Beach, Borikiri and Local Government Area Councils performance at the Carnival Village: the Liberation Stadium, Elekahia. Others include Ladies Nite, Reggae 360, Hosh Jam, World Peace Concert, Egelege, and Ekere: Rhythm of the Tribes, Old Port Harcourt town Groove and Miss ECOWAS Peace Pageant.

#### **Carnival and Tourism Development**

The end of the year has begun to witness the hosting of carnival festivals in some States in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Amongst these carnival festivals are the three Major Carnivals already enumerated which were conceptualized to encourage tourism and diversify the economic base of Nigeria amongst other reasons. Hence, the essence of staging carnival festivals therefore, suggests that their role in any society is fundamental in contributing to the every-day existence of that society culturally. Some of such festivals welcome the seasons of the year, such as the harvest, rains, the full moon, religious occasions, birthdays of saints, and divine beings.. Furthermore, were initially associated with key calendar moments as reviewed above, and were linked specifically to particular seasons and celebrations. Festivals have changed over the years especially in Nigeria as there is now a broad and diverse range of festival events taking place all over the world, which are directed towards



community empowerment and development. They are presently considered to contribute significantly to the cultural and economic development of nations in the world. State governments now support and promote events such as carnivals as part of their strategies for economic development, nation building and cultural tourism. The events in turn, are seen as important tools for attracting visitors and building a positive image within different communities. Raj (2003) is of the view that the revolution in festivals has been stimulated by commercial interests to meet the changing demand of the local community groups and increase business opportunities for event organizations and local businesses. Festivals play a major part in a city and local community. Festivals are attractive to host communities, because they help to develop local pride and identity for the local people.

These three major carnival festivals no doubt have served as image maker, economic impact generator, and tourist attractions while overcoming seasonality, contributing to the development of their habitats and businesses, and supporting key industrial sectors. As Mmom and Ekpenyong (2015) confirms cultural activities constitute one of the main motivations in the choice of the tourist destinations worldwide. The empowerment of the “civilization” of “leisure” contributes to the development of this leisure tourism.

### Conclusion

Since carnival festivals play vital roles in destination planning for a host community, in order to enhance tourism and commerce within a community the Federal government of Nigeria and the Rivers state government should have a rethink in rebranding, reinvigorating and reintroducing this festival at the various levels. As carnivals do not only develop tourism potentials with its attendant multiplier effects but equally serves as a panacea to a country's or state's economic diversification and growth.

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## **SEKI PERFORMANCE: THE LIBRARY AS A HUB FOR ENHANCED COLLABORATION THROUGH DIGITAL CULTURE**

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### **Abstract**

Seki sounds like a new term to some persons in this generation because legacies that may have strengthened its performance as our cultural heritage were not documented, shared, and enforced to travel to other regions. It is one of the most beautiful performances of the Niger Deltans valued by our forefathers and displayed with messages passed across through its dance steps, drama, and songs enrolled with beautiful and elegant attires. These attributes are not well noted due to the inability of those who performed Seki to make proper documentation thereby limiting the rate at which this heritage made waves into the regions beyond the Niger Delta, this is where the library comes in. The library is a knowledge hub for the preservation of intellectual materials hence through digital culture making use of digital tools and technologies due to ever-increasing computerization adopted to shape the Seki performance will put the Seki performance in the limelight. This paper will further discuss the Core values of Digital culture and its positive effects on Seki, expose who a digital librarian is in the course of handling the digital culture values of Seki, and digital tools in the library that will help to provide access to information on Seki. Finally, the paper will highlight types of digital culture and how it'll advertise the Seki performance.

**Keywords:** Seki, Library, Collaboration, Digital Culture, Performance, Niger Delta

## **Unraveling the Cultural Impact in Selected Films of Ugezu Ugezu**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the cultural resonance and societal impact of the films created by Ugezu Ugezu, a prolific filmmaker who has made a lasting impression on the cinematic landscape. Ugezu Ugezu's storytelling skills, nuanced narratives, and unique visual style have entertained audiences while also serving as powerful tools for exploring and dissecting cultural norms, values, and societal dynamics. This study aims to analyze how Ugezu Ugezu's films have contributed to shaping cultural perspectives, challenging societal norms, and fostering dialogue on critical issues. The methodology involves a comprehensive review of selected films, considering their thematic elements, character portrayals, and the director's intent. Audience reactions and critical reviews are also examined to assess the films' reception and impact on diverse viewership. The findings reveal that Ugezu Ugezu's films serve as cultural mirrors, reflecting the intricacies of Nigerian society while advocating for social change. The director's ability to seamlessly blend entertainment with thought-provoking narratives has sparked discussions on topics ranging from gender roles and political corruption to traditional beliefs and modernization. The film's impact extends beyond the screen, influencing public discourse and challenging entrenched ideologies. By understanding the cultural impact of these selected works, we gain insights into the potential of cinema as a catalyst for societal reflection and transformation. This study contributes to the broader discourse on the intersection of film, culture, and societal change, emphasizing the need to appreciate and celebrate filmmakers who use their craft to elevate cultural narratives.

**Keywords:** Culture, Narrative, Globalization, Modernization, Audience





## **SEKI PERFORMANCE: ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH THE JA CP PROGRAM AS TOOL FOR SEKI SUSTAINABILITY AND ENTERPRISE CULTURE DEVELOPMENT**

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### **Abstract**

The limited documentation, dissemination, and commercialization of many African ancestral cultures and heritages have impeded their appreciation, optimization, and recognition for decades.

Seki, although unfamiliar to many in contemporary times, embodies a rich cultural legacy of the South-South region of Nigeria. This traditional performance art form integrates dance, drama, and song, adorned with elaborate attire and infused with profound messages.

The lack of proper commercialization by its organizers and performers has restricted its value and reach to wider audiences. Thus, entrepreneurship emerges as a vital sustainability tool. Entrepreneurial principles can be employed to establish and sustain dance ventures like Seki, ensuring their longevity and broader recognition. This paper aims to explore the fundamental values of dance, entertainment, and entrepreneurship and their positive impact on Seki. It will delve into the benefits of commercializing Seki, highlighting its developmental and cultural values, and propose enterprise strategies to enhance access and appreciation of Seki.

Furthermore, the paper will discuss the relevance of programs such as the JA Company program in projecting and commercializing Seki. By leveraging entrepreneurial initiatives, Seki can be propelled into the spotlight, ensuring its preservation and continued relevance in the cultural landscape.

Keywords: Seki, JA, Entrepreneurship, Dancepreneurship, Commercial, Enterprise, Culture, Performance, South-South region

### **Seki Aesthetics of Costume and Accessories**

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Many culture or people in the world have been able to express their cultural value via dressing and accessories, most of the dresses/costumes and accessories are held at high esteem. Seki dance performance is such a dance of the Rivers people that has also showcased the fashion sense of its people. Rivers men and their women are known for traditional wrapper as fashion. It is their pride and identity. This rightly distinguishes them from other tribes in the country. Seki dance performance is a creative work centring on the lives of the indigenous people of people of Niger-Delta particularly the people of Rivers State. The Seki dance performance is aimed at bringing back cultural value to the younger generation. This study attempts to highlight the origin and the names of the different costumes and accessories worn by the dancers to showcase the culture of the people of Rivers state with Okirika as a case study, this study will purposefully analyse each of the costumes and accessories and how they are worn. The methodology of this research is based on qualitative research procedures which will draw from both descriptive and illustrative approaches. The findings will include the origin of the Seki dance, costumes and its accessories, the impression it creates on lives of audience. This study will contribute to the vast knowledge of the origin of the Rivers people's attire. This will influence the appreciation of our rivers traditional attires by the international communities and the world at large.

**Keywords: Seki dance performance, costumes, accessories**



## SEKI, OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE: TOWARDS THE ACTUALIZATION OF TOURISM POTENTIALS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA

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### Abstract

This study examines the potential of Seki, a cultural display celebrated by the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta region, in driving tourism development. The Niger Delta, known for its natural beauty and cultural diversity, has largely remained untapped in terms of tourism despite its immense potential. Seki performance, characterized by traditional music, dance, and art, presents a unique opportunity to showcase the cultural heritage of the region and attract tourists. By leveraging the popularity of Seki, local authorities and stakeholders can invest in infrastructure, promote community engagement, and stimulate economic growth in the Niger Delta. This qualitative paper argues that through strategic planning and collaboration, Seki has the potential to contribute significantly to the actualization of tourism potentials in the region, thereby fostering sustainable development and improving the livelihoods of residents and employs the Cultural Tourism theory as its theoretical framework.

**Key words:** Seki, Tourism, Development, Cultural Heritage, Niger Delta

### Introduction

Situated in southern Nigeria, the Niger Delta holds great cultural, ecological, and economic importance. The Niger Delta is home to several ethnic groups, an abundance of natural resources, and distinctive ecosystems; it has long been acknowledged as a potential tourism hotspot. But in terms of tourism development, the area has remained relatively unexplored despite its rich history and gorgeous scenery. The rich cultural traditions and historical legacies that shape the Niger Delta's identity contrast sharply with this underutilization of its tourism potential.

One of the most significant economic sectors and one that has a significant influence on modern

society is the tourism industry. With a growing weight on the total value created, it accounts for 10% of the global GDP (WTTC, 2020) and employs millions of people globally (World Tourism Organization, 2019). The tourism industry may have a wide range of beneficial and negative effects on people's lives, depending on the situation (Diaz-Parra & Jover, 2020, González-Pérez, 2020, Blal & Choi, 2019, Sequera & Nofre, 2018, Nguyen, Trinh, & Hens, 2020). Since there are nearly endless permutations of the components that make up tourism, there are also an infinite number of possible outcomes. As a result, the actions of any link in the tourism supply chain could have a significant impact on the community as a whole.

The importance of utilizing and promoting the Niger Delta's tourism potential for sustainable development has gained momentum in recent years (Ogbeide, 2019). Celebrating and promoting local cultural events, like the Seki dance, is a viable way to accomplish this goal. The Ijaw people of the Niger Delta demonstrate their rich traditional music, dance, costumes, artwork, and cuisine in Seki, a cultural extravaganza. Seki presents a special chance to draw visitors to the Niger Delta from both local and foreign countries because of its profound cultural origins.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of the Seki dance in driving tourism development in the Niger Delta. By examining the cultural significance, tourism potential, and community impact of Seki, this study seeks to shed light on how local cultural events can be leveraged to promote tourism, stimulate economic growth, and foster sustainable development in the Niger Delta. Given the cultural richness and tourism potential of events like Seki, this study seeks to explore the role of cultural tourism in the



development of the Niger Delta. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to examine the cultural significance of Seki in preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the Niger Delta people, to assess the tourism potential of Seki as a means of attracting both domestic and international visitors to the region, to analyse the socio-economic impacts of Seki on local communities, including its contributions to income generation, employment creation, and cultural preservation, and finally, to identify strategies and recommendations for leveraging Seki to enhance tourism development, foster sustainable livelihoods, and promote inclusive growth in the Niger Delta.

By tackling these goals, the study hopes to advance knowledge of how culture, tourism, and sustainable development interact in the Niger Delta, with an emphasis on the function of performances such as Seki as catalysts for positive change.

One of the most ecologically varied regions in Africa is the Niger Delta, which is distinguished by its verdant farmlands, meandering rivers, and dense mangrove forests. In addition, the Niger Delta is strategically crucial since it is Nigeria's primary oil-producing region and contributes substantially to the country's GDP and foreign exchange profits (Okafor, 2020). Nevertheless, the region's biodiversity and the way of life for its residents have suffered as a result of the extraction and exploitation of oil resources, which have also resulted in serious environmental damage, including gas flaring, oil spills, and deforestation (Akpan, 2016). Moreover, the socioeconomic environment of the Niger Delta is characterized by high unemployment rates, pervasive poverty, and poor infrastructure, all of which exacerbate social inequality and sustain cycles of underdevelopment (Udoma, 2018).

The Niger Delta, which is home to several ethnic groups like as the Itsekiri, Ijaw, Ogoni, Urhobo, and Ikwerre, is known for its rich cultural heritage that spans centuries and includes languages, rituals, traditions, and folklore that reflect the region's unique cultural tapestry (Nwagbara, 2017). Notwithstanding its natural splendor and cultural diversity, the Niger Delta has encountered a

plethora of obstacles such as deteriorating environmental conditions, social unrest, and economic exclusion (Akpan, 2016).

At the heart of the Niger Delta's cultural heritage lies the Seki performance, a time-honored tradition that celebrates the resilience, creativity, and spirituality of the Ijaw people. Seki, which is now a household name as one of the best theatre troupe that travels to various communities across the Niger Delta and of course outside the country, is marked by elaborate ceremonies, colorful performances, and communal feasting. Central to the performance is the display of traditional masquerades, known as "Ekine," which represent ancestral spirits and play integral roles in religious rituals, social ceremonies, and cultural festivities (Okoye, 2017).

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The Cultural Tourism theory serves as the main foundation for this study. This theory, which examines how cultural heritage, customs, and practices can draw tourists and support the social and economic growth of an area, is ideal for this work since it focuses on the nexus of culture and tourism. The importance of cultural attractions, events, and experiences in influencing tourist motivations, behaviors, and experiences is emphasized by this theoretical viewpoint. Seki can be examined under this framework as a cultural destination that provides visitors wishing to learn more about the Niger Delta's rich cultural legacy with distinctive experiences.

The theory of Cultural Tourism acknowledges the significance of safeguarding and exhibiting both material and immaterial cultural assets. Historical locations, monuments, and relics are considered physical heritage; customs, rituals, folklore, and performing arts are considered intangible heritage. The basis of cultural tourism experiences is provided by these cultural assets, which give visitors the chance to interact and learn about various *c u l t u r e s* ( R i c h a r d s , 2 0 1 9 ) . A key idea in the philosophy of cultural tourism is authenticity, which is the sincere and pure portrayal of a place's culture and history. Authentic cultural experiences that offer a window into the daily lives, customs, and traditions of the surrounding communities frequently entice tourists. Retaining



authenticity is essential to keeping cultural tourist places appealing and intact (UNESCO, 2009).

The theory of cultural tourism emphasizes how festivals and events draw visitors and foster cross-cultural interaction. Religious festivals, music events, and traditional rites are examples of events that serve as hubs for cultural tourism activities. These events provide visitors with possibilities for cross-cultural engagement and immersive experiences. These occasions boost tourism, boost the number of visitors, and boost the local economy (Richards, 2018). Cultural Tourism theory places significant emphasis on the role that interpretation plays in augmenting visitors' comprehension and admiration of cultural assets. In order to contextualize cultural attractions and provide visitors an understanding of their historical, social, and cultural value, interpretive programs, guided tours, and educational activities are helpful. Good interpretation enhances the tourism experience by fostering significant relationships between visitors and host communities (Farsari & Sigala, 2019).

Local communities should be included in the planning and administration of tourism, according to cultural tourism theory. Involving communities as active participants in cultural tourism efforts guarantees that decision-making processes take into account local interests, knowledge, and viewpoints. According to Richards and Munsters (2010), community-based tourism strategies empower locals, support cultural authenticity, and encourage reciprocal respect and understanding between visitors and hosts.

Globally, cultural tourism theory has been used in a variety of settings to inform marketing, management, and destination development tactics. For instance, cultural tourism theory guides initiatives to conserve historical sites, support cultural events, and offer visitors interpretive experiences in towns with significant cultural heritage, like Florence, Italy (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Cultural tourism theory is supportive of projects in indigenous communities that enable people to retain control over their cultural heritage and identity while sharing with visitors their traditional knowledge, crafts, and rituals (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2018). Sustainable tourism development

activities in underdeveloped nations that use cultural assets to reduce poverty, encourage economic diversification, and maintain cultural traditions are guided by the philosophy of cultural tourism (Hall, 2008).

Cultural tourism theory has drawn criticism for its emphasis on commodifying culture and maintaining stereotypes, even if it provides insightful information on the relationship between culture and tourism. Commercialization and excessive tourism, according to critics, can dilute cultural authenticity and exploit local residents (Harrison, 2018). In the future, scholars support a more ethical and nuanced approach to cultural tourism that places an emphasis on social responsibility, sustainability, and respect for the rights and self-determination of indigenous people (McIntosh et al., 2018).

The present discourse concludes that cultural tourism theory offers a structured approach to comprehending the intricate relationship between culture and tourism. It emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage, authenticity, community engagement, and interpretation in molding tourist experiences and destination development. Through the incorporation of cultural tourism theory principles into tourism planning and management practices, destinations can harness their cultural resources to advance sustainable development, cultivate intercultural understanding, and augment the guest experience.

### **The Concept of Development**

Since its inception, the term "development" has been a topic of discussion and is fundamentally a disputed idea without a precise definition. Many see development as a society's transition towards a better future, which is pictured, for example, in terms of economic expansion, improved infrastructure, longer life expectancies, and higher rates of individual literacy. The broad concept of "development" is a relatively modern solution to the issue of "underdevelopment," one that is based on a specific representation of the issues of the "poor" and the "marginalized."

The concept of development is complex and includes different aspects of economic growth, societal progression, and human progress. It includes long-term adjustments and advancements in social structures, economic systems,





environmental sustainability, and human well-being. Development encompasses more than just economic expansion; it also includes broader facets like healthcare, infrastructure, governance, education, and environmental preservation. There are several ways to look at development. One perspective is economic development, which is the rise in a society's standard of living and overall financial health. GDP growth, job opportunities, income distribution, and accessibility to basic necessities are some of the elements that are involved (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, there is social development, which aims to raise people's standard of living and general well-being within a community. The United Nations Development Programme (2021) lists education, healthcare, social equity, gender equality, and cultural enrichment as examples of these aspects. Once again, human development highlights the augmentation of individuals' capacities, prospects, and liberties to live satisfying lives. It includes elements like income, health, education, and political engagement, as stated in the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2021). The last category is environmental development, which includes promoting environmentally friendly behaviors, managing natural resources sustainably, protecting biodiversity, reducing the effects of climate change, and safeguarding the welfare of present and future generations (United Nations, 2015).

According to Rostow's Modernization Theory, societies go through several stages of development marked by technological advancements, industrialization, urbanization, and cultural shifts (Rostow, 1960). Moreover, Amartya Sen and Mahbub ul Haq's Human Development Theory emphasizes that improving people's capabilities and freedoms is the ultimate goal of development, rather than concentrating only on economic growth (Sen, 1999). To put it briefly, development includes improvements in people's well-being, societal structures, economic systems, and environmental sustainability.

### **Seki as a Cultural Heritage of the Niger Deltans**

As a colorful representation of their customs, identity, and sense of community, Seki is a vital component of the Niger Delta's cultural legacy for the Ijaw people in particular. In order to understand the significance of Seki as a cultural heritage of the

Niger Deltans, this section examines its historical foundations, cultural symbolism, and current relevance in forming the region's social identity and cultural landscape.

The Ijaw people's oral traditions and folklore are the foundation of the Seki performance, which has ancient roots. The event is said to have started as a harvest celebration, according to Ejaife (2018), to commemorate the conclusion of the farming season and offer thanks to the gods for a good crop. With time, Seki developed into a multi-day celebration that featured a variety of cultural events, including as religious ceremonies, traditional music, dancing, and storytelling (Ukah, 2020). The celebration represents the spirit of resiliency, communal solidarity, and cultural pride that characterizes the Niger Delta's cultural legacy and acts as a storehouse of Ijaw history, rituals, and values.

The Niger Deltans' deep cultural significance and symbolism for the Seki performance represent their kinship with the land, rivers, and ancient spirits. The "Ekine" masquerades are the focal point of the celebration; they are respected as community protectors and as incarnations of ancestral spirits (Okoye, 2017). The Ekine masquerades act as intermediaries between the material and spiritual worlds during religious rites, social festivals, and cultural celebrations (Ukah, 2020). The Niger Deltans' cultural identity and collective memory are strengthened by the Ekine masquerades, who evoke awe, reverence, and spiritual regeneration in festival goers with their intricate costumes, captivating performances, and significant gestures (Ebiegberi, 2021).

Seki still acts as a unifying factor among Niger Deltans in the modern era, promoting pride, solidarity, and community cohesiveness. Elders share customs, tales, and talents with younger generations throughout the festival, which offers a forum for knowledge transfer between generations (Ejaife, 2018). Additionally, by uniting individuals from all backgrounds to celebrate their common cultural history and values, the Seki fosters social networks both inside, between Ijaw communities and the outside world also (Ukah, 2020). Seki fosters a sense of cultural continuity and connection that supports the Niger Delta's cultural fabric, providing communities with a sense of stability in the face of industrialization, globalization, and socioeconomic upheaval (Ebiegberi, 2021).



Seki, which embodies the customs, identity, and sense of community of the Niger Deltans, is a deeply meaningful part of their cultural legacy. Seki is a live example of the Niger Delta's people's tenacity, inventiveness, and cultural pride because of its rich cultural symbolism, long history, and current significance. The Niger Deltans foster social solidarity, preserve their cultural legacy, and enhance the region's cultural landscape for the enjoyment and celebration of future generations by keeping Seki alive as a cultural heritage.

### **Culture as Tourism Attraction**

Tourists' desire to experience something new is often driven by their desire to learn about other cultures, which makes other cultures and its expressions popular tourist destinations. In particular, cultural tourism is the pursuit and appreciation of that which is exceptional and lovely, symbolizing our most priceless inheritance. People's identity, dignity, and self-respect are fundamentally shaped by their culture and cultural background. This is true for both wealthy and underprivileged nations.

The conscious traveler may be able to begin to understand the past and/or current culture through tangible legacy, which has adapted to and influenced the setting the tourist is trying to make understandable. As long as these fundamental truths are recognized and accepted as guidelines for interactions and presentations between tourists and the community, cultural tourism can significantly enhance mutual respect and understanding between cultures and, in the long run, be seen as a means of establishing and maintaining peace. Although cultural tourism has always existed, there are now more and more niche markets in destination nations that cater to specific interests, such as vacations focused on culture, as a result of recent demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural shifts in the primary source countries. Beach, sun, and surf vacations are not predicted to go away, but their relative significance has decreased as more and more travelers go for difficult, instructive, and/or comparatively uncommon experiences. The appeal of tourism that uses nature and culture as attractions has grown as a result of these changes. Some regret that the recent interest in Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT) is more a result of nostalgia than of a "genuine" desire to study about the sites as part of a classical education.

However, this heightened demand can also be seen as a chance to spark curiosity and awareness across a larger segment of the population than was previously feasible. Additionally, market groups with relatively high incomes and educational levels are drawn to cultural attractions, which can result in locations reaping quite large net benefits. Although growth estimates should be regarded with caution, a Stanford University research projected that during the 1990s, nature tourism will expand at an annual pace of 25 to 30 percent. It was anticipated that cultural tourism would increase by 10% to 15% year. It should be emphasized that while some tourists will spend their whole holiday immersed in culture or the outdoors, the majority will go for these experiences as a part of a wider vacation that also includes time at the beach or other attractions. The opportunity presented by this increase in demand is being seized by numerous locations and nations. To draw in tourists who are interested in culture, South Africa, for instance, launched a marketing campaign called "Explore South Africa - Culture" in 1997–1999, while historically the country has depended on its climate, beaches, and natural beauty.

### **The Impacts of Tourism**

The effects of tourism are commonly classified into four categories: cultural, social, environmental, and economic. The categories are a little arbitrary and overlap, and the last two are sometimes blended into one. Many books, papers, and publications on tourism present a list of these implications. Potential benefits include raising community awareness, strengthening a community's or region's sense of identity, encouraging intercultural and international understanding, supporting the preservation or resuscitation of traditional crafts, expanding the community's horizons, boosting outside support for minority groups and the preservation of their culture, funding site management and preservation, and raising local and external awareness of and support for cultural heritage.

According to the Hellenistic world's creation of the Seven Wonders of the World, tourism to locations of cultural and ecological significance has existed at least since Greek Antiquity. Lately, 582 sites have been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List, and 157 nations have ratified the 1972 World Heritage Convention, which safeguards the world's natural and cultural heritage. As stated by F. Mayor, Director General of UNESCO: The potential advantages of



World Heritage go well beyond the locations that have been inducted, as these places have the capacity to lead the way in establishing guidelines for protected areas generally, provide training materials with a broader scope of use, and serve as "flagships" for bringing attention to environmental issues. These World Heritage Sites are crucial tourist destinations that support the entire tourism sector, together with other areas of culture and natural beauty. It is true that a place can grow to prominence as a significant tourist destination very quickly after being included on the World Heritage List.

Although the precise size and rate of growth of the tourist industry are up for debate, it is undeniably one of, if not the largest, global industries. According to estimates from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 1999, tourism contributed \$3.6 billion<sup>2</sup> to global GDP, or 12% of the total, and created 192 million jobs. WTTC projects that global growth will continue, with yearly rates of 3% between 1999 and 2010. To put it briefly, the economic impact of tourism is substantial and continues to increase. Furthermore, a significant portion of the job and related money is earned abroad. Moreover, tourism typically offers jobs of all kinds (from unskilled to skilled, part-time to full-time), for both genders, despite significant regional and destination-specific variations. In light of this, tourism can significantly advance economic growth. Other effects of tourism, both good and bad, are also produced in various ways. It can contribute to the preservation of customs, provide funding for the preservation of natural and cultural assets, and raise awareness of that heritage among tourists, among other benefits.

According to UNESCO, cultural tourism can promote the resuscitation of customs and the preservation of historical places and monuments. Rainer Stadelman, an Egyptologist, claims that "tourism is already a catastrophe." However, we must acknowledge that there wouldn't be any public interest without tourism, and without that, there wouldn't be any funding for our job. It is imperative to acknowledge that cultural heritage can function as a draw for tourists, and that tourism in turn can generate political and financial backing for the preservation of this heritage. An important lever or impetus for attaining sustainable tourism can be development cooperation. Achieving sustainable tourism would benefit development cooperation organizations in

accomplishing both cultural heritage management and economic development objectives. For instance, tourism can make a financial contribution to resource management. Furthermore, jobs in the tourism industry can be perceived by locals as tangible advantages of cultural asset management, which could strengthen public support for that property.

Culture, tourism, and society are closely intertwined: tourism may foster individual and interpersonal connections, while a cohesive and peaceful society can boost tourism. Together, these factors support local cultural development and raise standard of living (Amin, 2020). As David Picard and Mike Robinson show, tourism can also help people around the world get along better, which helps create a society that is more harmonious and cohesive (Robinson & Picard, 2006). Wu et al.'s study, for instance, found that the Suku Temple had an impact on the social, cultural, and economic well-being of the local population in Indonesian society. There was a social impact in addition to an economic one (Wu et al., 2020). This entails a shift in the knowledge, attitudes, and tolerance of society.

### **Tourism and Economic Potentials in Seki Performance**

Travelers from all over the world, eager to see the colorful customs and culture of the Niger Delta, are particularly drawn to the region during the Seki performance. Travelers can experience the Ijaw people's unique cultural traditions and customs firsthand during the Seki performance. Tourists can engage with local artists and performers, take part in cultural events and rituals, and see performances of traditional music and dance (Ebiegberi, 2021). Travelers acquire a more profound comprehension and admiration of Ijaw culture, history, and way of life via these genuine encounters. Tourists looking for meaningful and life-changing travel experiences strongly value cultural immersion experiences, such as those provided by the Seki performance (Richards, 2018).

A major factor in promoting the Niger Delta as a dynamic and culturally diverse tourist destination is the Seki dance. The performance draws visitors from throughout Nigeria and beyond by promoting and marketing the region's natural beauty, cultural legacy, and friendliness (Ejaife, 2018). The event



positions the area as a must-visit location for cultural tourism experiences, acting as a potent branding tool for the area. Additionally, visitors to the Seki performance produce favorable word-of-mouth recommendations and social media buzz that further enhance the Niger Delta's image and reputation as a desirable travel destination (Richards & Wilson, 2004).

The Niger Delta region benefits economically greatly from Seki, especially the local communities and organizers of the performance. There are more economic prospects for local entrepreneurs as a result of the surge in tourists during the time of the event, which increases demand for goods and services (Ogbeide, 2019). There is an increase in activity at hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, and souvenir shops, which generates income and jobs for residents (Ebiegberi, 2021). In addition, the money made from tourism-related activities during the time of Seki performance can be put back into community development initiatives like infrastructure upgrades, healthcare, and education, which will promote socioeconomic growth and the reduction of poverty in the Niger Delta (Ogbeide, 2019).

It is crucial to make sure that development is sustainable and helps the local communities as tourism in the Niger Delta grows. Seki offers a chance to adopt eco-friendly tourist practices that reduce harm to the environment and culture and increase socioeconomic gains for residents (UNESCO, 2009). It is possible to guarantee that tourism growth in the Niger Delta is equitable, responsible, and advantageous for all parties involved by implementing measures like eco-friendly hotels, cultural heritage preservation, and community-based tourism (Richards & Munsters, 2010). Stakeholders can guarantee that the Seki performance survives as a cultural heritage asset while preserving the Niger Delta's natural environment and cultural integrity for future generations by incorporating sustainability principles into tourism planning and management (Hall, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Seki is a colorful manifestation of the Ijaw people's cultural legacy and sense of communal pride in the Nigerian Niger Delta. This theatrical performance is essential to the region's socioeconomic

development and acts as a forum for exhibiting the unique traditions and customs of the Niger Delta. The performance is a driving force behind the Niger Delta's economic development and prosperity because of its effects on local companies, tourism, job creation, and community empowerment.

The performance's capacity to attract visitors and bring in money for companies in the tourism industry is among its most important economic benefits to the community. Seki's genuine cultural experiences, which include traditional music, dance, art, and cuisine, attract tourists from both local and foreign destinations. The surge in tourists results in a rise in the need for products and services, which drives up prices for lodging, restaurants, transit companies, and regional craftspeople. For businesses in the Niger Delta, Seki is a significant source of revenue, which boosts the area's general economic growth.

Local companies and entrepreneurs can display their goods and services to a larger audience by using Seki performance as a platform. During the event, artisans, craftsmen, and vendors can sell their items, which include traditional antiques, apparel, accessories, and regional specialties. These firms benefit from increased visibility and market reach in addition to increased sales and revenue as a result of this exposure. Additionally, small and medium-sized businesses can use the event as a marketing opportunity to reach a wider audience and grow their clientele, which will support the expansion and sustainability of the local economy.

Many different people are employed by the Seki performance, including artists, entertainers, vendors, tour guides, security guards, and event planners. Residents of the Niger Delta have more options to generate cash thanks to these temporary and seasonal jobs, which also serve to reduce poverty and unemployment in the area. In addition, community development initiatives that enhance social services, healthcare, education, and infrastructure can be funded in part by the event's earnings. This empowerment of the community improves the standard of living for residents and helps ensure the long-term viability of the Niger Delta's tourism industry.

Going ahead, it is crucial to make sure that the Seki's economic advantages are utilized in a way that is inclusive and sustainable. In order to maintain





cultural heritage, encourage responsible tourism, and protect the Niger Delta's natural ecosystem, stakeholders must cooperate. The region can minimize the detrimental effects on nearby populations and ecosystems while maximizing the economic potential of the performance by making investments in infrastructure development, skill training, and capacity building. Seki has the capacity to spur economic growth and cultural preservation in the Niger Delta for many generations to come with proper preparation and cooperation.

In summary, Seki is a dynamic force for tourism and economic growth, community empowerment, and sustainable development in the Niger Delta, and it symbolizes more than just a celebration of culture. Stakeholders can guarantee that the event endures as a source of pride and prosperity for the people of the Niger Delta region by utilizing its economic potential and maintaining its cultural value.

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**The Representation of the Ikwerre Woman in Her Songs**  
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**Abstract**

The Ikwerre woman, like any other woman in Africa and the world at large has various ways of expressing her views and beliefs about womanhood. While the female writers express theirs through their works of fiction, others communicate their views and beliefs through songs. This paper, therefore, is a survey of the Ikwerre woman's expression of her image through her songs. It aims to examine the true representation of the Ikwerre woman through her songs. The study adopts Womanism, a strand of Feminism, as its theoretical framework. The data were collected from selected songs of Ikwerre women's social groups randomly selected from Ikwerre speaking communities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The findings of this Study revealed that the different images and presentation of the Ikwerre woman by her neighbours both distant and proximal are results of distorted conceptions. This Study therefore recommends that the Ikwerre woman be accepted as she has presented herself in her songs as a patient and faithful wife, dedicated mother, and hardworking woman. The Study further recommends that any rash decision taken by her neighbours, fathers, and brothers based on the distorted conceptions and images painted the Ikwerre woman be reconsidered.

**Key words:** image, The Ikwerre woman, songs, womanism, womanhood

**Exploring the Thematic Relevance of Egwu Amara Cultural Dance of Oguta Community in Imo State: A  
Regenerative Stand point.**

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**Abstract**

This paper has observed the sudden disappearance of some cultural dances in the South East of Nigeria. One of such dances is the Egwu Amara dance of Oguta community in Imo State. This is of great concern because; Egwu Amara is a dance style that typifies the social, cultural and domestic responsibilities of a riverine woman. The medium of the dance is used to sequentially exhibit and communicate the aesthetic culture of the rural women: from rise to dawn. In essence, it covertly or overtly educates and prepares the young ones on their tasks ahead of time. This study explores this idea through a descriptive analysis of Egwu Amara dance. The aim is to relieve its thematic relevance. Findings have shown that irrespective of the significance of this dance to the community, so many children have neither witnessed nor could authoritatively discuss it. It is on this wise that this paper is taking a regenerative standpoint, geared towards rejuvenation of this dance culture. This is owed to its perceived impact on the younger generation. The paper concludes that dance as an aspect of culture and identity of a people should not be permitted to face total extinction from any society. It therefore recommends that communities with positive dance motifs should leverage on entertainment propensities of the medium of dance to teach the younger generation its pattern of existence. This will go a long way in checkmating loss of identities and cultural values as can be experienced in this contemporary society.

**Key words: Aesthetic Culture, Dance motifs, Rejuvenation, Entertainment and Values.**



## **Audience and Transformation of Performance in African Theatre through Iredi War and the Ekuechi festival**

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### **Abstract**

African theatre encompasses theatrical practices that predate European colonization. Using Sam Ukala's play, Iredi War, a modern Nigerian drama infused with folk elements, and the Ekuechi festival of Nigeria's Ebara people, this qualitative study examines audience participation and the transformation of performance in African theatre, with insights from Segun Adefila, a renowned Nigerian theatre practitioner. It observed that the distinction between the spectator and actor can be clear or fluid, depending on the flow of the performance, with participants exchanging roles and playing space. In this context, audience members may act as spectators, actors, or both, reflecting the communal nature of African theatre. Other elements of African theatre include the festival theatre technique, where the audience encircles the performance area in traditional performances, and the processional staging technique that involves moving with performers between venues. This immersive experience further engages the participant-audience, emphasizing their active involvement in the theatrical event. Moreover, African theatre serves dual purposes as both ritual and entertainment, and the position of the audience in relation to the central playing space, or nucleus, influences the nature of the performance. As spectators move away from the nucleus, the emphasis shifts towards entertainment, whereas proximity to the nucleus transforms the performance into a more ritualistic or worshipful event. In essence, African traditional theatre fosters a symbiotic relationship between performers and audience, blurring boundaries and creating immersive experiences that resonate with the communal ethos of African societies.

**Keywords:** Audience Cycle, Participant-audience, African Theatre, Ritual, Entertainment.

### **Introduction**

The word "theatre" has evolved over time, but two key meanings are relevant here. Firstly, it refers to the physical space, the building itself, where dramatic performances take place. Secondly, it can also encompass the performance itself – the act of reenactment before a live audience or the experience of witnessing a dramatic work. Supporting the first definition, Cohen (2000) traces the word's origin to the Greek "theatron," meaning "a place for seeing" (p. 7).

Regarding the origins of theatre and drama, Ejiofor (2007) suggests a more primal starting point than Cohen. He argues that theatre began with early humans imitating animals around campfires, using movement, song, and masks in rituals aimed at securing prey and survival. This focus on influencing the environment through performance aligns with the concept of sympathetic magic - the belief that by acting on a likeness of something, one can influence the actual thing itself. Hence, by mimicking rain with movements, dancers hope to bring actual rainfall. Ejiofor's perspective helps explain why theatre functioned as a religious activity in ancient Greece, particularly in the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility.

This connection is evident not only in traditional performances but also in contemporary works by playwrights like Nigeria's Wole Soyinka. Plays such as *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and *The Road* (1965) draw heavily on Yoruba mythology and religious practices, reflecting this deep-rooted relationship. However, societal changes and the introduction of Christianity during colonialism have impacted these traditions. Some rituals have evolved, losing their strictly sacred nature and transforming into secular performances that entertain, educate, or inform audiences.

Nigerian playwright and director, Ola Rotimi,





championed a theatrical approach termed "festival theatre" by Adeoye (2011, p.30). This approach emphasizes elements of celebration and community engagement, mirroring traditional African theatrical forms. Ogunyele (2008) observes how Rotimi's extensive use of local music, proverbs, and dances fostered a communal experience for Yoruba audiences. He critiques the proscenium stage setup, calling it a form of "theatrical apartheid" (Ogunyele 2008, p.23) that separates the audience from the performance in a way he considers "un-African." Rotimi, in contrast, favoured directing in the round, believing it better reflected African performance traditions. This preference aligns with the communal nature of many African societies, where traditional theatre often involves a more active audience participation compared to Western styles. This blurs the lines between actors and spectators, creating a unique experience for all involved.

Investigating the relationship between the audience and the performance space is key in defining the African theatrical experience. This qualitative study examines how audience participation and proximity shape the nature of African theatre using Sam Ukala's folkist play *Iredi War*, and the Ekuechi festival of the Ebira people of Nigeria, with insights from a renowned Nigerian theatre practitioner, Segun Adefila.

Segun Adefila is a multifaceted artist, renowned as a dancer, actor, director, and founder of Crown Troupe of Africa, a distinguished theatre company based in Lagos, established in June 1996. With a career that spans decades, Adefila has captivated audiences worldwide with his compelling performances. His repertoire includes an array of highly acclaimed productions such as *The Campus Queen* (2004), *The Narrow Path* (2006), *Windows Talks* (2006), *Belle Full* (2009), *Omo Dumping* (2009), *Whispers in the Dark* (2009), *Arugba* (2010), *Fellow Country Men* (2010), *Iyo* (2015), *Death and the King's Horseman* (2016), *Divorce of Lawino* (2016), *Story of my Vagina* (2016), *One Language* (2017), *The Lion and the Jewel* (2018), *Ajo-Mental Migration* (2021), *Our Duke Has Gone Mad Again* (2022), *Beyond Tears* (2023), *The Road* (2023), *Love is Blind* (2024), among numerous others. Adefila's creative vision and commitment to the craft have solidified his place as

a pioneering force in the Nigerian theatrical landscape, leaving an indelible mark on both local and international stages.

#### African Theatre: Defined

Asagba (1986) identified three critical approaches to the nature of African drama and theatre: the Evolutionary, the Divine, and the Relativistic. The Evolutionary approach theorizes that African drama emerged from a human need to control the unpredictable forces of the natural world. Ritual behaviors such as propitiation and sacrifice – often accompanied by magic and spiritual possession – were attempts to manage and connect with these forces. As these rites developed, celebratory festivals emerged, serving both to combat oppressive natural forces and to unite the community. Proponents of the Evolutionary approach cite classical Greece, Asia, and Japan as examples of cultures demonstrating similar patterns. They emphasize folklore, legends, myths, and history as key source materials for dramatic presentation. Crucially, this approach centres on the profound influence of religion in shaping the development of African drama (Asagba 1986, p.85). Ghanaian scholar and playwright J.C. de Graft (1976) highlights this connection, stating:

It is to the early twilight zone of this middle region that many forms of ritual drama observable in many African traditional societies seem to me to belong — ritual dramas through which the participants seek such desired effects as social solidarity, or through which they attempt to reaffirm, keep alive, or commemorate such facts, beliefs, relationships, and attitudes as the community considers vital to its sanity and continued healthy existence (p.7).

Nigerian scholar and dramatist Dr. Atiboroko Uyovbukerhi (1976) identifies the Divine approach, closely related to the Evolutionary approach. This view traces the origin of drama to divine intervention. According to this approach, a human is mysteriously taken by a deity and, upon release, returns with knowledge of secret rituals, dance steps, and songs from their divine captors. The Ohworhu theatre of the



Ewreni and Uwheren clans (Urhobo tribe, Bendel State) and the Ijaw's Ekine plays exemplify this claim. In the Ekine tradition, a woman named Ekineba was allegedly abducted by a water deity who taught her the Ekine dramatic form. She then shared these forms with her people, establishing the tradition. Similar to the Evolutionary approach, the Divine approach draws heavily from myths and holds strong religious significance. The foundation of both lies in concrete events and figures within the communities where they originated. Moreover, while embedded in religious contexts, these dramas evolved to incorporate secular elements and entertainment value, as seen in later Ekine and Yoruba theatre.

The Relativistic approach, championed by scholars like Emmanuel Obiechina and Ossie Enekwe, insists that interpretive frameworks and aesthetic standards for African drama must arise from its own unique qualities. They challenge the Evolutionary view, arguing that indigenous forms, even with religious and ritual elements, shouldn't be forced to mirror the linear progression of classical Greek drama derived from Dionysian and Apollonian festivals. Africa's distinct history and culture demand a different approach. The focus, they assert, should be on the form, content, and interpretation of traditional African dramatic expressions (Asagba 1986, p.87).

Asagba (1986) is his study of Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (1960) and Zulu Sofola's *King Emene* (1974) as examples of plays showing elements of continuity between the indigenous dramatic and theatrical traditions and contemporary traditions, supports a more forthright and functional use of traditional materials by modern African playwrights and theatre practitioners. Although, while some elites still frown at indigenous African theatre forms, while emphasizing European dramatic forms, as the standard, modern African drama and theatre (plays by Africans that explore African themes, but retain European dramatic style) have not been fully accepted by the masses, due to its language. Enekwe (1978, p. 39) argues that "what we usually consider as modern drama is actually the continuation of European theatrical traditions". In the same vein, Gbileka (1997, p. 212) points out that the

university theatre is elitist and that its use of a foreign language is alienating (cited in Enekwe 2007, p. 17). Ukala (1996, p.285) also shares same view when he observes that Nigerian playwrights have been criticized because of the difficult and highly imaginative language of their plays, which are modeled after European dramatic traditions. Consequently, irrespective of the fact that they draw their themes from the history and culture of Nigerians, these plays seem strange to the Nigerian audience, who cannot identify with them. In response to this challenge, Ukala developed the theory of Folkism.

#### African Theatre Audience

The audience refers to those who have come to be informed, educated and entertained in the theatre. Without them, the theatre is incomplete. Nwamuo (2006) opines that theatre requires audiences every time to criticize and imbibe its messages and reform programmes. As theatre audiences are drawn together by the event and the appetite for art, they also converge to commune, share and enjoy the event and develop relationships with other people. Besides, they engage with the subjects of the play and leave the theatre better enriched than they came (pp.20-21). The communal nature of African societies also reflects in African traditional performances. The audience in African theatre is actively involved in the performance (participant-audience). Dhlomo (1977) asserts that:

Participation by the audience served to spur on the actors and to register appreciation. The audience ceased to participate or did so half-heartedly if the actors did not come up to standard. This was good for both sides - and would be good for many modern productions. However, the tribal audience should not be thought of in terms of a modern audience. Between the tribal spectators and the tribal performers there was no strict line drawn. In most cases the tribal spectators were in fact actors awaiting their turn. Unlike some modern audiences, the tribal spectators came, not passively to be entertained, but to take an active part themselves. The people came because it was a need, a duty, besides being amusement (p.4).

Ukala (2000, pp.92-93) believes that African spectators believe that they too naturally possess



acting skills and are consequently engaged in a rivalry of skills with the performers on stage. This, thus, underscores the critical nature of traditional African performance, where the bulk of the viewers know the story, song, dance, or music, and most spectators consistently compare their own skills with that of the performer, whom they readily correct if he falters, or commend and collaborate with if he does well.

For a better understanding of the nature of the African theatre audience, it is necessary to examine Sam Ukala's theory of "Folkism", which is the tendency to base literary plays on the history, culture, and concerns of the folk (the African people in general) and to compose and perform them in accordance with African conventions for composing and performing folktale (Ukala 1996, p.285). Ukala's study of the conventions of African folktale performance formed the basis for his dramatic aesthetics, which he calls "The Laws of Aesthetic Response." They are eight in number. Godfrey Enita outlines these laws as:

#### **Law 1: The Law of Opening**

The opening of an African folktale performance is anticipated to arouse the audience and to initiate the subject matter and characters of the story. It also offers the audience a chance to encourage or stop a prospective performer, conditional on the individual's rating as a performer (cited in Enita 2008).

#### **Law 2: The Law of Joint Performance**

The traditional African audience co-performs with the story teller by singing along with him, asking questions and making comments for clarity when necessary, and playing parts in the performing of the tale or story (cited in Enita 2008, p.52).

#### **Law 3: The Law of Creativity, Free Enactment and Responsibility**

This law has three main elements and they are creativity, free enactment and responsibility, and it deals basically with the performer's reaction to the story he is performing.

#### **Creativity**

This element is seen in the point that in African folktale performance, the player not just fleshes out the bone-structure of the tale, he also adapts new experiences to the tale, which may enhance its contemporariness and significance to a specific sociocultural milieu.

#### **Free Enactment**

The folktale performer may break off from narrating, discretionally, to do role-play and may also encourage and engage the viewers in a demonstrative impersonation of certain characters in the tale.

#### **Responsibility**

The performer is usually responsible for whatever may happen in the performance process. He, thus, should be discreet and always alert to react to every situation (cited in Enita 2008, p.53).

#### **Law 4: The Law of the Urge to Judge**

This law is seen in the point that the African audience reacts to the performer's abilities against conventional standards of performance. They also judge the characters vis-à-vis societal ethics. They make comments in appropriate audible words if the entertainer is doing well or not by their own evaluation (cited in Enita 2008, p.55).

#### **Law 5: The Law of Protest Against Suspense**

The traditional African audience does not like to be kept in suspense. So it asks questions which could defuse suspense.

#### **Law 6: The Law of the Expression of the Emotions**

The African audience freely expresses emotions such as grief, fear, sympathy, and scorn.

#### **Law 7: The Law of Ego Projection**

The African audience believes that they have potentials for performance and are quick to make unsolicited interjections. Hence, the members of audience function not only as co-performers, but also as critics of the performance (cited in Enita 2008, p.56).



### **Law 8: The Law of Closing**

This law is gotten from the traditional African convention for ending the performance of a folktale. This comprises the entertainer's valedictory statements on the morals of the tale, using a closing formula, and the reaction of the spectators to this formula that may be a finale applause, commendation, or disapproval (cited in Enita 2008, p.56).

Unlike the Brechtian theatre, in which the spectators are permanently alienated, in Folkism, the audience is generally integrated in the creative and performance process, yet any of its members may detach himself/herself, whenever he/she deems it essential, to judge both the characters and the performers they represent.

### **Theatre: Ritual or Entertainment?**

One important element of African theatre is that it involves some form of rituals, the same way the ancient Greek theatre was highly ritualistic. Angelos Chaniotis (2007) describes an example of a religious ritual performed in ancient Greek theatre. He submits that a regulation in the city of Priene which concerns the sale of the priesthood of Dionysos, states that "he will offer the sacrifices that are offered to Dionysos Melpomenos in the theatre and he will burn incense and will make the libation and the prayer on behalf of the city of Priene" (p.51). This sort of sacrifice or prayer, is a ritual performance done on behalf of the ancient Greek city of Priene.

Rituals involve a sequence of symbolic activities or objects, such as gestures, words, actions, or revered items, often performed with a specific purpose. These symbols are the building blocks of a ritual, and Turner (1970, p.1) defined them as the smallest unit carrying the essence of ritual behaviour. In simpler terms, rituals are actions, and symbols imbue them with meaning. Kreinath (2018, p.1) elaborates by describing rituals as formalized performances, distinct from everyday activities. These performances involve choreographed movements, gestures, and utterances following prescribed procedures with varying degrees of precision.

Neelands and Goode (2009, p. 86) argue that

theatre differs from other art-forms in so far as it uses different signs simultaneously. Lights, words, space, gesture are all happening at once. In realist forms of theatre, these signs tend to be used to tell the story of the play by literally following and reinforcing the actors' words. In other forms of theatre, they may be used to create contradictions, excite, introduce tensions and offer a different commentary on the story being told. The results may be difficult to understand if you have been brought up in the realist aesthetic tradition. Neelands and Goode (2009, p. 86) also observe that across cultures, rituals take diverse aesthetic and social forms. Traditionally, they serve several purposes: reinforcing the social order (e.g., coronations, investitures, acts of homage), and guiding individuals through life transitions (naming ceremonies, confirmations, engagements, weddings). These rituals act as cultural anchors, fostering a shared sense of community based on common ideas, beliefs, and values. However, rituals can also be subversive. Events like Mardi Gras, Lenten rites, processions, and protests demonstrate a strain of chaos and challenge within tradition. In Western societies, this unruly aspect of rituals has often been suppressed, Christianized, or replaced by commercialized events that channel aggression and the pursuit of profit.

Theatre therefore is both ritual and entertainment, depending on the context. Schechner (1988) makes between efficacious theatre (ritual) and aesthetic theatre (entertainment), when he notes that:

The move from ritual to theatre happens when a participating audience fragments into a collection of people who attend because the show is advertised, who pay admission, who evaluate what they are going to see before, during and after seeing it. The move from theatre to ritual happens when the audience is transformed from a collection of separate individuals into a group or congregation of participants (p.142).

Drawing from the Schechner's position, the major distinction between theatre and ritual, lies in the role





or level of involvement of the audience in the performance. The performance becomes a ritual when the spectators, rather than merely watching or observing, become active participants in the performance. While ritual becomes entertainment when there is a distinction between the performers and the audience. While the audience enjoys the performance, their primary role is to observe and interpret rather than perform.

Audience Participation in **Iredi War** and the Ekuechi festival

This section examines the unique relationship between audiences and performers in African theatre. It will explore the relationship between the audience and the performers in Ukala's play, **Iredi War**, a modern Nigerian drama infused with folk elements, and the Ekuechi festival of Nigeria's Ebiraland people.

Audience Participation in **Iredi War**

The **Iredi War** is a Nigerian historical drama that explores the 1906 rebellion of the Owa people against the oppressive rule of the young British District Commissioner, O.S. Crewe-Read. Crewe-Read's arrival sparks immediate discontent among the Owa people due to his harsh and domineering tactics. Tensions escalate when the police, acting on his orders, attempt to arrest the Obi (King) of Owa. During the arrest, a young Owa leader is tragically killed, igniting a fiery response from the community. In retaliation, the Owa people, pushed to the brink by oppressive rule, take action that leads to the death of Crewe-Read. The British, outraged by the act, launch a punitive expedition against Owa. In the aftermath, several Owa youths, particularly those who led the uprising, are executed. The Obi and his palace chiefs, deemed responsible for the rebellion, are exiled to Warri.

Inspired by his study of African folktales, Sam Ukala developed the theory of "Folkism," which emphasizes the active role of the African audience in co-creating performances. In his folkist play **Iredi**

**War**, Ukala introduces the character of the Audience (public audience) and M.O.A (Members of the Audience or players seated in the audience) to formally integrate audience participation in his play. Ukala explains his process before crafting a folkist play. In his initial productions of a play, he observes how audiences react to the source stories during the performance. Popular audience interjections that recur across multiple performances become the designated lines for the M.O.A character. As Ukala notes, "Anywhere the play goes in Africa, the members of the audience would interject, they would give that particular line without knowing that it is in the script" (TheNiche 2014).

As indicated in the script, the play should be performed using the three-quarter arena formation, with half of the arena as the performance area, and the other half, as the audience area. **Iredi War** opens under the soft glow of moonlight in the town square. The townspeople, M.O.A and members of the public audience (Audience) are already seated, with others still arriving. Costumed performers gather, some seated, some rehearsing lines or playing soft music in corners. Spotlight illuminates Narrator I, who, seated amongst the audience, rises and casts an imaginary white powder towards the audience with her right hand, with the words, "I give you white chalk!" The Audience responds, "If you concoct, may it be efficacious!" (Ukala 2014, p. 11). In the above exchange, Narrator I casts a spell on the Audience, and Audience responds by praying that the spell or charms of Narrator I be effective on them. Here, the Audience actively participates by responding to the action and words of Narrator I, demonstrating their engagement and familiarity with the performance style. This call and response exchange, is repeated three times as Narrator I approaches the

performance area. On reaching there, she raises a song:

Tell a tale  
Tale of I-gboba  
Tug at the rope  
It's unsnappable  
(Ukala 2014, p. 11).

As her song fills the air, performers begin joining in with drums, instruments, and dance. The infectious energy reaches the Audience, and many of them rise to sing, clap, and dance. This shows another level of the Audience involvement in the performance. The Audience dances till Narrator II, seated in the audience, hurtles out and stops the music. Then he speaks:

Narrator II: Thank you! Thank you! But, please, sit down. (To Narrator I) you shouldn't have turned that song into a dance.

Narrator I: Why?

Narrator II: Tonight's tale is not a happy tale.

Narrator I: A tale is a tale, my brother. Now that the people have sung and danced, they have been activated in their minds and bodies to get the best out of the story. (To Audience) or haven't you?

Audience: We have!

Narrator II: Okay. (To Audience) people, we have this proverb: "one does not sit in his own home and crush his scrotum in the process". But our story tonight bellies that proverb.

Narrator I: Yes. Obi Igboba of Owa was sitting in his palace and he crushed his ...say it, if you dare.

Narrator II: That's why I said it's a sad tale.

Narrator I: But there's also hope in the song we danced to. They tugged at Igboba, the rope, but he couldn't be snapped.

Narrator II: Yes, my sister. But if they made you crush your scrotum, would you say you haven't snapped?

Narrator I: (Checks herself for a scrotum) well, I don't have a scrotum.

Narrator II: I have, and I can tell you that it's a tragedy to crush it. But, sometimes, you sit in your own home and crush your scrotum!

Narrator I: But we must tell this story, whether it makes us cry or not. And ... (Gestures at Performers)...no one here can tell it better than us.

(With loud hisses and shaking of their heads, the Performers exit in different directions.)

M.O.A.: See! They're angry!

Narrator I: No ... they cannot be. They are in us. We merely displayed them for you to know them (Iredi War 2014, pp.12-13).

The above exchange highlights how the Audience and M.O.A are integral to the story as co-creators and performers. When Narrator I, asks the Audience, if they have activated their minds and bodies to get the best of their story, having sung and danced, the Audience responds, "We have!", affirming their readiness. By this, the Audience is actively involved in the story, and have not come passively to sit and be entertained.

Similarly, when Narrator I, gestures at the Performers, and says "no one here can tell it better than us" (Iredi War 2014, p.13). With loud hisses and shaking of heads, the Performers exit the stage, and the M.O.A reacts, saying, the Performers are angry. However, Narrator I, assures them that the Performers cannot be angry. The Audience and M.O.A function to cue, remind and encourage the Narrators in their performance. Their relationship is symbiotic, each one, needs the other, for the entire act or narrative to be complete. The Audience and M.O.A can ask the Narrators questions, react to their actions, sing, clap, dance with them, and the Narrators can equally throw questions at the Audience and M.O.A, to get feedback, while ensuring that they follow through the performance. Hence, the exchange between Narrator I, Narrator II, Audience, and M.O.A, exemplifies how the folkist theatre translates in performance, with participant audience (public audience and M.O.A) actively involved in the execution of the performance.

### **Audience Participation in Ekuechi festival**

The Ekuechi festival, celebrated by the Ebirá people of Kogi State, Nigeria, is a unique celebration marking the end of one year and the beginning of the next. Held annually between late November and early January, this festival features a ritualistic enactment of myths, legends, and symbolic cultural practices of the Ebirá people.

Nigerian theatre scholar, Sunday Ododo, developed the "Facekuerade" theory based on the maskless Ebirá masquerades (eku) featured in the Ekuechi festival. Ododo argues that the term "facekuerade"



describes masquerades who perform without masks but retain their cultural significance and power (Ododo 2009, p. 28). This concept emphasizes that masking in these performances goes beyond the physical object and encompasses elements like darkness, voice, disguise, pseudonyms, and fear. This broader understanding of masking led Ododo to coin the term "facekuerade," derived from the words "face," "masquerade," and "Ekuechi" (Ododo 2015). Five prominent masquerades participate in the festival: Eku'rahu, Eku'ahete, Eku'okise, Eku'echichi, and Eku'oba. Notably, Eku'rahu appears during the night performances of Ekuechi, Ebe, Okehi, and Otu festivals.

Preparations for the Ekuechi festival begin with Unehe, a vibrant musical and dance concert (Ikede) featuring both men and women. This entertaining event fosters social interaction, allowing both locals and visitors to form new friendships. The purpose of Unehe extends beyond marking the festival's start; it also psychologically prepares participants for the highly ritualistic elements of Ekuechi, during which they commune with ancestral spirits. Consulting with Ovavo (diviners) offers insights into the festival and the community's future. Based on their guidance, sacrifices may be prescribed to avert danger, appease the gods and ancestors, and purify the land and its people (Ododo 2001, p.7). The Unehe sets the stage for the festival through music, dance, and social interaction, welcoming both locals and visitors to participate actively, and fostering a sense of community and shared experience. Unlike some traditional events restricted to indigenes, Unehe embraces participation from all, transcending cultural boundaries. Beyond the immediate celebration, Unehe also indirectly prepares participants for the upcoming rituals. The guidance received through divination, while not directly involving the audience, shapes the festival's execution and their expectations, creating a sense of anticipation and shared purpose.

As the sun sets on the main day of Ekuechi, the rhythmic beating of wooden instruments (Agidibo)

echoes throughout the community. This serves as a signal for women and children to return indoors. A flurry of activity ensues as women, having prepared meals for their husbands hosting ancestral spirits, finish their household chores and retreat. A tense calm descends as anticipation builds for the arrival of Eku'ahete, the path-clearing masquerade. The source of its emergence remains shrouded in mystery, adding to the fearful awe it inspires. Eku'ahete's appearance is as unsettling as its purpose. Adorned with strings of small metal gongs (Ireha) and palm fronds, it makes a jarring sound as it wields a large metal gong (uwse) while running through the community, never looking back. This performance symbolizes the clearing of a path for the revered ancestors. Traditionally, no one dares to cross Eku'ahete's path, as legend warns of beheading and anointing with the victim's blood. Though thankfully, no such occurrences have been documented in recent times (Ododo 2001, p.7).

While the audience, specifically women and children, do not directly interact with Eku'ahete, their indirect participation is evident in several ways. Respecting the tradition and returning indoors upon hearing the Agidibo contributes to the sacred atmosphere and respectful reception of the masquerade. This adherence plays a vital role in the overall performance. Furthermore, the tense calm and anticipation that descend, suggests the audience is mentally engaged with the unfolding events. Likely observing from their homes, they share the anticipation for the arrival of the ancestral spirits. This shared experience further reinforces the communal nature of the festival. Also, the audience's cultural knowledge of the legend surrounding Eku'ahete adds another layer of indirect participation. Their understanding of its purpose and significance contributes to the awe and respect it inspires, making the experience more meaningful.

After Eku'ahete completes its path-clearing rounds, the stage belongs to the Akatapa masquerades. These figures embody the spirits of departed women, who reunite on this night as co-wives, their playful banter and occasional outbursts mirroring the age-old rivalries sometimes found in polygamous households. Moving from house to



house, they moan, curse, praise, or wail according to their perceptions. Their critiques satirize those in the community who violate social norms or moral codes, acting as a force of social control. The Akatapa's pronouncements are uncanny and prophetic, their chants foretelling the imminent arrival of ancestral spirits. Their harsh, grating voices, produced through a cylindrical pipe covered in bat's wing or spider's cocoon, signal to men indoors that Eku'ahete's ritual is complete. Now, they may emerge to prepare for the festival's highlight—the performance of Eku'rahu (Ododo 2001, p.8).

While the Akatapa masquerades primarily interact with the community through pronouncements and satires, audience participation in this stage can be seen in a number of ways. The audience, predominantly men who have now emerged from their homes, listens to Akatapa's critiques and satirical pronouncements. This act of listening can be interpreted as indirect participation as the audience reflects on their own behaviour and adherence to social norms. The potential for correction or praise from Akatapa creates a social control mechanism where the audience actively participates by internalizing the critiques and potentially modifying their behaviour to align with the community's expectations.

Akatapa's pronouncements also serve to build anticipation for the arrival of ancestral spirits. The audience, engaged with the ongoing performance, shares this anticipation and their understanding of Akatapa's cultural significance and symbolic language, allows them to actively interpret the pronouncements and participate in the experience on a deeper level. This cultural knowledge is crucial for the audience to fully appreciate the performance and its role within the festival. Also, Akatapa's signal with their harsh voices marks the completion of Eku'ahete's ritual and signals the men to prepare for the next stage - the highlight performance of Eku'rahu. This indirect cue prompts the audience to transition from passive observation to active preparation for the main event.

Multiple Eku'rahu masquerades showcase their

artistry during the festival, each with a dedicated group of supporters fostering a spirit of competition. The intricate organization involves complex rituals and improvisational responses, further emphasizing the competitive aspect of the performance. This intense preparation, witnessed by both participants and audience members, is a defining characteristic of the Ekuechi festival. Beyond the dedicated supporters, the festival attracts spectators from various locations seeking entertainment. However, true enjoyment requires active participation. The dynamic and communal nature of the performance creates space for any participant to contribute their creativity, fostering a shared artistic experience (Ododo 2001, p.8). The intense preparation witnessed by both participants and audience members fuels the competitive spirit inherent in the Eku'rahu performance, and witnessing the dedication and intricate planning contributes to the overall excitement and anticipation. Aside the core supporters of each Eku'rahu masquerade, the broader audience who have come to be entertained, can become active participants by cheering, singing along, and immersing themselves in the festive atmosphere.

According to Ododo (2001), the following levels of organised supporters are mandatorily present: anchormen, security men, club members, and active and passive spectators:

(a) Anchormen: These men possess significant spiritual power, gained through sorcery and herbal knowledge. They are the Eku'rahu's primary protectors, shielding the masquerade from other Eku'rahu, witches, and hostile spiritual forces believed to be present during ancestor worship performances. To prepare, both anchormen and custodians of the Eku'rahu engage in extensive





divination, sacrifices, and rituals throughout the year. These men stay closest to the singing masquerade while it's on stage (Ododo 2001, pp.8-9).

(b) Security Men: These are powerful men, often with backgrounds in combat (retired soldiers, hunters, etc.). They are believed to possess metaphysical abilities that enhance their perception. Their imposing presence is designed to intimidate the uninitiated. Their primary function is to maintain order, protect performers and audience members, and forcefully remove any disruptive elements. It is strongly discouraged to provoke these men. This security role was traditionally filled by the Akisobe masquerade – physically imposing figures usually present in small numbers within each Eku'rahu group. These figures would lead intimidating processions to deter troublemakers (Ododo 2001, p.9).

(c) Club Members: The club system was formed to unite key organizers (a small group) responsible for the Eku'rahu performances. Initially, it functioned as an informal gathering focused on ensuring successful performances. Primarily composed of non-literate cultural experts, the club served as a platform to discuss traditional rituals and offerings aimed at enhancing the raconteur masquerade's performance and safety amidst the complex spiritual atmosphere surrounding the event (Ododo 2001,

p.9). These members, organized by age group, strategically position themselves within the venue to act as a chorus, echoing the songs throughout the performance.

d) Active and Passive Spectators: Although, to actively participate in the Eku'rahu performance is a personal choice, the lines between active and passive participants often blur, with spectators often being drawn into the lively atmosphere. Their engagement is often spontaneous, fueled by the celebratory mood and the captivating nature of the performance (Ododo 2001, p.11). The experience is one of constant movement and energy, with some spectators transitioning from dancing or enthusiastic displays of excitement to simply observing, while others take their place in the active participation.

The manifestation of gods in performances take diverse forms. Sometimes, their presence is embodied in physical objects like masks (masquerades) or symbolic figures (totems). Other times, the gods remain unseen, communicating only through signs or intermediaries like priests. The audience can be further categorized into nominal audience, which comprises those who passively observe the performance; participant-audience, who actively engage in the performance; and spirit audience, which represents the unseen presence of the gods and ancestors believed to be watching over the festival.



# PROGRAMME OF EVENT

**TUESDAY 26TH MARCH, 2024**

- 8:00am** - Arrival and Accreditation of Participants at the venue (Amphitheatre)
- 9:00am** - Courtesy Visit to the Vice-Chancellor of Rivers State University
- 9:45am** - Recognition/Constitution of the High Table
  - National Anthem
  - Rivers State University Anthem
  - Opening Prayer
  - Introduction of the Chairman Dr. Ifie Sekibo (Founder Heritage Bank Plc.)
  - Chairman's Opening Remarks
  - Welcome Address by the HOD (Theatre & Film Studies, RSU)
  - Address by the Dean, Faculty of Humanities, RSU.
  - Music Interlude/Performance
  - Declaration of the Conference Open by the Vice-Chancellor Prof. Nlerum Sunday. Okogbule
  - Citation of the Keynote Speaker Prof. Rasak Ojo Bakare
  - Keynote Presentation by Prof. Rasak Ojo Bakare
  - Lead paper Presentation by Dr. John O Onah
  - Award Presentation
  - Goodwill Messages
  - Chairman's Closing Remarks
  - Vote of Thanks by the Conference Organizing Committee Chairman (Dr. Iloma N. Richard)
  - Closing Prayers
  - Group Photographs
  - Music Interlude/Performances



## PLENARY SESSION

### 2:00PM- 4PM PLENARY SESSION

#### Panel A

**Chairman- Dr Ovunda C. Ihunwo**

**Rapporteur: Ms Chiorma Ejekwu**

**Presenters:**

Dr. Dufua Sharp-Akosubo, Mrs. Sarah Ebenezer BlackDuke, **Moses Onyendu OKAI , Ph.D & Emmanuel Echezolochi AMADI, Ph.D**, Chiorlu, Ndidi, **DR. FLORENCE EZINNE DATUBOYE**, Iloma, Nyenwemaduka Richard ( Ph.D) & Iloma Unwobuesor Richard (Ph.D), Dr Barthelomew Gerald Aguugo, Dr Nkechi Bature-Uzor & Dr Kenneth Chigozie Osunwa.

#### Panel B

**Chairman- Prof Gloria Worujgi**

**Rapporteur: Justice Faruk**

**Presenters:**

Yibo Koko, **Augusta Nsalem Acheru**, Chidinma Ola UKOHA Ph.D & Iloma, Nyenwemaduka Richard ( Ph.D), **Tamunoiyowuna Andrew-Jaja ,Ph.D, UZONDU, Ifeyinwa Ph.D, JULIET C.**

**ALEX-NMECHA, PhD & CHIDAKA O. NYEMEZU, PhD, Precious Uchechi Azunwo & Nwanozie, Winifred Ozioma Prof. E.W Okachi**

#### Panel C

**Chairman- Dr Tekena**

**Rapporteur: Mrs Lydia Fred**

**Presenters:**

**Nwuche Michael Nwuche, Ibifuro Francis Sokari, Ph.D, KELVIN CHIBENUMOSO OPARA**, Ibe Ogbobuibe Ibe, PhD, **CLIFFORD MEESUA SIBANI Ph.D & CLEMENT TIEMO DOYAH, Prof. Wenikado S. Ganagana, Florence Nne Agwu (PhD)**

#### Panel D

**Chairman- Dr Ibe O. Ibe**

**Rapporteur: Mrs Jennifer Chinda**

**Presenters:**

Monivi Dede-Sanipe, **EMMANUEL O. OTURU & JACOB OSAMERE, DR. DORIS KELECHI OFILI**, Prof. Jones M. Jaja, **TITUS-GREEN 'ABINYE PhD IKPO GOODLUCK CHIGOZIE (PhD)**, Dr. Somieari Jariel Ikiroma – Owiye, Daniel Henacho Eluke, Dr. Tekena Mark

#### Panel E

**Chairman- Lady Nneka-Obi**

**Rapporteur: Ms Ndidi Chiorlu**

**Presenters:**

**IKENNA-OBI & Nneka Chigozie, Monday EVBUOMWAN, Job-Wota, Kate Onyinyechi**, Ogbusu Chinenye & Eziwho Emenike **AZUNWO, PhD, TITUS-GREEN 'ABINYE PhD, TITUS-GREEN 'ABINYE PhD**, Orubima, Lydia Fred, Ihunwo Chinedu Ihunwo



Members of the 2024 international conference of the Department of  
Theatre & Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities Rivers State University

**Titled:**

## **SEKIOLOGY, SPINNING DEEP, BRANCHING WIDE AND INTENSIFYING POTENTIALS.**

1. Dr. Eziwho Emenike Azunwo (Ag. HoD)
2. Prof. E. W. Okachi
3. Dr. Iloma N. Richard (Chairman COC)
4. Rev. Don Kester Oshioreame (Alternate Chairman)
5. Dr. Ibe O. Ibe
6. Dr. Tekena Mark
7. Dr. Ikpo Goodluck
8. Dr. Boma Omubo-Pepple
9. Mrs. Monivi Dede-Sanipe
10. Ms. Ejekwu Chioma
11. Mrs. Amadi Daughter
12. Mrs. Jenifer Chinda
13. Ms. Chiorlu Ndidi
14. Mr. Kelvin Opara
15. Dr. Daniel Eluke
16. Dr. Sokari Francis
17. Dr. Florence Datuboye
18. Muritala Faruke
19. Orubima Lydia
20. Precious Bestowe
21. Origbenba, Godprince
22. Dr. Uche Ohagwa
23. Bassej Godsent
24. Hosanna Imbo
25. Jumbo Godsgift
26. Kehinde Aderonke
27. Oghalili Lucia
28. Michele Captain
29. Nengi Epele
30. Ngozi Chukwu
31. Princess Ogonda
32. Vivian Joe
33. Favorite Barinaziza
34. Esther Azunwo
35. Worika Precious
36. Naomi Bestowe
37. Favour Elijah
38. Favour Buba-Orizi
39. Chukwuka Christabel
40. Jumbo Emmanuel
41. Mathew Calista
42. Lady Nneka-Obi
43. Francica Sonia
44. Nwamaka Umeh
45. Monday O
46. Mr. Ihunwo Chinedu Ihunwo  
(Secretary, COC)





**Department of Theatre and Film Studies**  
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University, Nkpolu Okwara, Lkwo, Port Harcourt

SEKIOLOGY, SPINNING DEEP, BRANCHING WIDE AND INTENSIFYING POTENTIALS

**THEME** Seki Performance and cultural Identity in the Niger Delta



**SONTA**  
**OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT**  
**SOCIETY OF NIGERIA THEATRE ARTISTS**

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS, BENUE STATE UNIVERSITY, MAKURDI

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RC – CAC/IT/NO 87764

**Our Ref:** SONTA/GEN/2024

**Date:** 23<sup>rd</sup>, Feb, 2024

The Head  
Department of Theatre and Film Studies  
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt.

Sir,

**GOODWILL MESSAGE**

On behalf of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), I congratulate the staff and students of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Rivers State University, on this bold and courageous step of convening an International Conference on Seki Performance and Cultural Identity in the Niger Delta. More than any other time in the history of our dear nation, do we as a people require a critical peep into our cultural archives to try and recover some of the values that define us as a people living within marked zones and territories. Performances such as Seki which embody the totality of the cultural worldview of people of the Niger Delta abound in the different cultural zones in Nigeria. It is therefore, instructive that a young Department like the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Rivers State University has taken up the challenge to dig deep into culture and in the process emerge with lessons that would help address some of the looming problematics within the Niger Delta Zone. As a Society, we encourage our respective Departments to embark on similar academic voyages with the aim of rediscovering the unique features that define our reality as a people of common origin and ancestry. Culture is the new oil and we, as critical stakeholders must prepare to own and use this resource to navigate some of the many challenges being faced by our people at the moment. I am overtly impressed with members of this Department for thinking culture at a time where culture is actually required. I wish participants at this conference a memorable experience as we prepare to engage with and interrogate the theme.

**Professor Gowon Ama Doki, FSONTA, MNAL.**  
SONTAPRESIDENT

<b>National President:</b> Prof. Gowon Ama DOKI, <i>fsonta, MNAL</i> ; +234 (0)803 636 6634, 08087000395; sirdoks@yahoo.com			<b>SONTA BOARD OF TRUSTEES</b>	
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All Correspondence are to be addressed to the SONTA President



23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2024

The Head  
 Department of Theatre and Film Studies  
 Rivers State University, Port Harcourt.

Dear Sir,

**GOODWILL MESSAGE**

It is with great pleasure and admiration that I extend my heartfelt congratulations to you on the occasion of your inaugural International Conference on Sekiology - "Spinning Deep, Branching Wide, and Intensifying Potentials."

Sekiology, rooted deeply in Yibo Koko's **Seki** and enriched by the vibrant cultural tapestry of the people of Rivers State, embodies a profound fusion of tradition and innovation. The journey of Seki dance drama, from its origins in the heart of Nigeria to its global acclaim, is a testament to the transformative power of art in showcasing the rich diversity of our world.

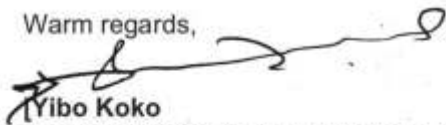
Your conference theme, "**SEKI PERFORMANCE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE NIGER DELTA,**" reflects a deep commitment to exploring the multifaceted dimensions of this art form. From theatre directing to dramaturgy, from choreography to digital culture, each sub-theme promises to unravel new layers of understanding and appreciation for Sekiology.

As scholars, artists, and cultural custodians, your dedication to delving into the essence of Sekiology not only enriches academic discourse but also amplifies the voices and stories of communities that have long been marginalized or overlooked.

I have no doubt that this conference will serve as a catalyst for further exploration, collaboration, and innovation in the realm of theatre studies. May it be a resounding success, sparking conversations that resonate far beyond the confines of academia and igniting a newfound appreciation for the transformative power of Sekiology.

Wishing you all the best for a fruitful and inspiring conference.

Warm regards,



**Yibo Koko**  
 [Creator/Artistic Director Seki dance drama]

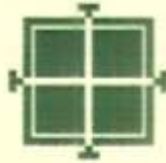
+2348063338444

[www.sekidance.com](http://www.sekidance.com)

Seki Dance Drama Foundation  
 10 Post Office Road  
 Amadi Ama  
 Port Harcourt  
 Rivers State



# Goodwill Messages



## **ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIAN AUTHORS RIVERS STATE BRANCH** email: rivana@gmail.com

Attn: Emenike Azunwo Eziwho, Ph.D

March 11, 2024.

The Acting Head of Department  
Department of Theatre Arts and Film Studies  
Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwu  
Port Harcourt, Rivers State

Sir,

### Goodwill Message From All Of Us In "One Big Family," ANA, Rivers

From all of us in the "ONE BIG FAMILY," the Association of Nigerian Authors, ANA, Rivers State, the first among equals in the literary firmament of the Niger Delta, Nigeria, heartily share in the enduring ingenuity and prowess of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies of the Faculty of Humanities of an emerging world class citadel of learning, the Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt in translating our ethno-cultural identity into the height of cerebral accomplishment. The trado-musical dance drama, SEKI graduated to intense inquisitivism of a case-study; Sekiology, brought live into a stage-play. It is unarguably a renaissance of our Niger Delta's pride and beauty of our forgotten past; a subtle reminder of our missing link to where we truly belonged. A wake up call indeed! We sincerely commend our 'Academic Rabbi,' Dr. Emenike Eziwho and your committed team for evolving a rather novel narrative in education dramaturgy that would further enrich creative writing. Thank you so much. On behalf of the Association of Nigerian Authors, ANA, Rivers I congratulate the organizers of the national discuss centered on revolutionizing the value of African socio-cultural heritage, through live performance, especially those of the coastal people of Nigeria to solving begging global maladies. Glad to be part of this credible innovation in creative art.

**Chief Adi-Wali, *Mama***  
State Chairman, ANA, Rivers State  
+234-7080960721  
[waliadibooks@gmail.com](mailto:waliadibooks@gmail.com)





## National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners

Member: International Federation of Actors (FIA) & International Theatre Institute (ITI)

**RIVERS STATE CHAPTER**  
email: nantaprivers@gmail.com

February 19, 2024

The Ag. HOD  
Department of Theatre and Film Studies  
Rivers State University  
Nkpolu Oroworukwo

### GOODWILL MESSAGE

On behalf of the Chairman and members of the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP), Rivers State Chapter, I extend warm and heartfelt congratulations to you and the entire team on the successful hosting of the maiden **International Conference on Sekiology at Rivers State University, Nkpolu Oroworukwo.**

NANTAP takes immense pride in witnessing Rivers State University take a bold and innovative step in bringing the SEKI concept to the forefront of academic discourse. Your dedication, commitment, and enthusiasm in organizing such a significant event have not gone unnoticed, and it is truly commendable.

The successful execution of the conference reflects not only the academic prowess of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies but also the collective spirit of collaboration and passion for advancing the frontiers of knowledge within the Nigerian Theatre Arts Community. May this conference mark the beginning of many more intellectually stimulating gatherings, fostering a culture of exchange, exploration, and innovation within the realm of **Sekiology**. The knowledge shared during this conference will continue inspiring and enriching theatre studies in our region and beyond.

Warm regards,

**Dr. Ovunda Ihunwo** fta  
Chairman, Rivers State Chapter





## **GOODWILL MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN, POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY, NKPOLU-OROWORUKWO, PORT HARCOURT ON THE 2024 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SEKIOLOGY**

On this auspicious occasion of the 2024 International Conference on Sekiology, I would like to extend my heartfelt felicitations and appreciation to the Faculty of Humanities, and particularly the Head, Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Dr. Eziwho Emenike Azunwo. Your dedication and leadership have played a pivotal role in organising this esteemed event, which promises to be a platform for scholarly exchange and cultural enrichment.

Your vision and commitment to academic excellence have undoubtedly contributed to the success of this conference, and we are truly grateful to God for your invaluable contributions.

Finally, as we engage ourselves in this intellectual fraternity of Sekiology, let the words of Martha Graham, "Dance is the hidden language of the soul," always reverberate in us.

I wish the Department of Theatre and Film Studies and the entire Faculty of Humanities continued success and fulfillment in all your endeavors.

**Prof. Adolphus Joseph Toby**  
Dean, Postgraduate School



**Department of Theatre  
and Film Studies**  
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State  
University, Nkpolu Oroworukwo,  
Port Harcourt

SEKIOLOGY, SPINNING DEEP, BRANCHING  
WIDE AND INTENSIFYING POTENTIALS

**THEME** Seki Performance and cultural  
Identity in the Niger Delta



### **PROF. ISAAC ZEB -OBIPI**

(PhD, MBA, B.Ed. FCAI, FIMC, FIHNR, MAMN, MCIPM, OGULACHA II)  
DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS AND HUMAN RESOURCE  
MANAGEMENT, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY, NKPOLU -OROWORUKWO,  
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### **PROF. ISAAC ZEB-OBIPI**

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RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA  
08033100943; [zeb-obipi.isaac@ust.edu.ng](mailto:zeb-obipi.isaac@ust.edu.ng)

*March 20, 2024.*

The Head of Department,  
Department of Theatre and Film Studies,  
Rivers State University,  
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo,  
Port Harcourt.

Dear sir,

#### GOODWILL MESSAGE ON THE OCCASION OF YOUR DEPARTMENT'S 2024 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

I wish to congratulate you, staff and students of your Department on your Department's 2024 International Conference on “Sekiology, Spinning Deep, Branding Wide and Intensifying Potentials” taking place from March 25-27, 2024. This Conference demonstrates your Department's commitment to not only entrench an academic culture of knowledge harvesting in our young Department but also to leverage on gown-town relationships to expand the frontiers of knowledge; and consequently, assert the Departments relevance to its context and environment.

This is so because of the Conference's focus on the now world-renowned Seki Performance from the Niger Delta; a performance that showcases the cultural identity of the region. Undoubtedly, your theme has its source in this reality. As a traditional ruler and academic from the region, I am literally salivating to have a taste of the large knowledge and performance serving the Conference promises to offer and the icing expected from your assemblage of distinguished speakers and participants, including persons from the industry and real-world art practitioners. You are wished immense success.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Prof. Isaac Zeb-Obipi*  
*Professor of Management (OB & HRM)*  
*Director, Information and Communication Technology Centre (ICTC)*



*Professor Gloria Eme WORUGJI, B.A., MPA, MA, Ph.D., PGDE.*



*Head of Department (HOD)*  
**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES**  
**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**NKPOLU-OROWORUKWO PORT HARCOURT**

### **A GOODWILL MESSAGE TO AN ACADEMIC RABBI**

Dr Emenike has undoubtedly proved his mettle in various dimensions through his quality prowess in theatre production and academic involvement. This SEKI Conference is yet another beautiful outing to be experienced in the Amphi-Theatre of Rivers State University. The promo/advertisement of the SEKI Conference says it all; it is so rich by all standards. The quality of the video clips and personalities showcased hints at the high taste of the conference; what more can one say but congratulations to a great mind. It is an excellent feat to dabble in. This young scholar, aka Academic Rabbi, executed it fearlessly with perseverance, a character quality lacking in some young academics of the same status. The harsh economic conditions and insecurity, among other threats, did not deter you from venturing into this elephant academic task; I admire your courage. **Keep it up.** You are bent on delivering, pursuing and injecting the spirit of academic excellence as you project not only the image of your young department, **Theatre and Film Studies** but also the Faculty of Humanities and the Rivers State University. Dr Emenike, you have delivered, and you have conquered. In a swift, you have exposed your academic prowess through the experiences gathered in the various national and international conferences attended by bringing home the long-awaited thirst for academic food in your study area. Indeed, your academic progress is unlimited. I heartily congratulate you on this successful outing. On behalf of your sister department, I declare, keep the flag flying; the sky remains your beginning. Once again, congratulations.

**Prof (Mrs) G. E. Worugji**



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## Appreciation

The conference organizing committee on behalf of the Ag. Head of Department Dr. Eziwho Emenike Azunwo, staff and students of the Department of Theatre & Film Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University. Hereby express our profound appreciation to God Almighty for making this conference a success.

Our appreciation also goes to the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Sunday Nlerum Okogbule and his team of principal officers. the Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Prof. Jones Michael Jaja and his team of staff. the key note speaker, Prof. Rasak Ojo Bakere, the lead paper presenter, Dr. John Ochinye Onah and other presenters, all invited special guests and the entire Rivers State University community for honoring our invitation to this auspicious maiden international conference of the Department of Theatre & Film Studies, Rivers State University.

Thanks for all your encouragement.

**Mr. Ihunwo Chinedu Ihunwo**

Secretary, conference organizing committee

