



A dramatic analysis and interpretation of the Ekombi dance of the Efik people of Nigeria

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Abstract

This research report identifies and crystallizes the aesthetic properties which underscore the Ekombi dance performance as indigenous dramatic art form. This is done through the appreciation, interpretation and analysis of a performance situation. The significance of this research lies in its rigorous and meticulous documentation and analysis of the performance. Our assertions gain credence because they are validated and substantiated by video and print media of data collection. The research report emanates from a live performance and includes analysis of interviews. Deconstructed resources were carefully examined in performance as well as from recordings. Field work and library research were employed for data collection, analysis and evaluation. These were the means by which to identify and crystallize the aesthetic properties of the Ekombi performance.

Keywords: Ekombi performance, indigenous, dramatic art, aesthetic properties, dance

1. Introduction

Literature is a mirror of society bearing the nuances of all human endeavors. Traditional literature is especially so because it appears to be an embodiment of people's ideology irrespective of generational shifts in time and space. Traditional literature is a compendium of information regarding a people's ways; it serves the purpose of recording the society. It is a tool for reconstruction, unity and coherence. One major form of manifestation of traditional drama is dance. Dance is an art form which provides the performer an opportunity for the expression of ideas, perceptions and feelings as well as an opportunity to aesthetically interpret self, community, environment and culture. The "Ekombi" dance, the subject of our study here, precisely does so.

Apart from the almost infinite possibilities of communicating ideas and transmitting elaborate messages via dance, the origin of dance from rituals, just like drama, is very instructive. During ritual observances, dance plays an important part. Many rituals were/are largely manifested in dance. Deities are said to enjoy the dance in the ritual honoring them. Minekke Schipper-de-Leeuw writes:

As to the origin of drama, we can only assume that it developed from religious rituals.... As far as Africa is concerned, one may think of the masquerade in Nigeria and a great many dances and rituals.... (55).

Without prejudice to the existence of ritual drama in Africa, some scholars aver that when dance moves away from its ritual origin, into the realm of entertainment, then it fulfills its obligation as drama. To this end Adeoye Julius(2008) writes:

... a ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency (21).

Ritual embodied the earliest form of literature. Dance is a vital part of that literary tradition. So dance takes its root from ritual and other festivities. From earliest times, dance has been a form of appeasement as the sudden energetic swaying of hips, rushed gusto of quick stumps, and dramatic flips have always been soothing edifices to deities. These edification ceremonies grew into dated displays which announced the arrival of festivals. The newly introduced festivals saw the ushering in of concepts of beauty as entertainment became a feature of the performances. Joel Adedeji's narration of the genealogy of the "Egungun" as cited by Adeoye Julius is instructive. Routines of sway movements, accompanied by drumming and costuming began to gain preeminence in these festivals.

As masquerade performances and other festivals grew, there came the addition of peculiar music, gestures, new themes, new directions, new reasons for enactment, new directions to dance as well as new routines. Dance became more expressive and more of entertainment than worship. The aesthetics of dance inadvertently grew.

The role of churches in the emergence and growth of dance as a dramatic form should be mentioned, even if briefly. Adeoye Julius avers that the church, faced with the difficulty of preaching to an audience majority of who did not understand the English Language, resorted to drama to communicate with the people. The churches and the schools which they built began to stage plays in which music and dance were the major elements of plot (30). This structure of indigenous drama continued with the emergence of Hubert Ogunde's traveling theatre, to Soyinka's Operas and to the enactment of plays in the closed spaces of the national theatre in which dance became a special feature of indigenous African drama.

This essay examines the Ekombi dance performance of the "Efik" people of Cross River State of Nigeria as a manifestation of this literary and dramatic tradition. The essay

will highlight the aesthetic contents of Ekombi as an indigenous dramatic art form.

2. The Efik and their world – view

The Efik are a group of people located in the South- Southern region of Nigeria. They occupy the coastal area of the Cross River comprising Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Akpabuyo, Bakassi and Odukpani. The label Efik refers to the people and their language. Their history and migration trajectory are riddled with very many controversies. These arguments are not of reasonable significance to this essay and will, therefore, not be delved into. It is, however, important to point out that they are predominantly fishermen and farmers.

What is of relevance to this research is their world-view as this has considerable bearing toward understanding the people and their ways, which include their perception of art and their art forms. Consequent upon their riverine location and habitat, and because they depend on the sea, rivers and creeks for sustenance, they succumbed to the boundless mass of mysteries in the waters. As a corollary, their religious worship is centered on an almighty and powerful Supreme Being (God) known as “Abasi”. This Supreme Being is considered and believed to be the creator and ruler of the universe. In the onerous task of controlling the universe and regulating human conduct, Abas is aided by a multitude of minor or lesser divinities or spirits known as “Ndem”. These divinities (Ndem) are believed to be water spirits which are assigned, and consequently carry out, distinct responsibilities. They include:

Ekpenyong Abasi	-	god of courage
Affianwan	-	goddess of beauty
Ekanem Abasi	-	god of truth
Ekpo Abasi	-	god of bravery
Nanebenke	-	goddess of justice
Oboyeme	-	goddess of wisdom
Anansa	-	goddess of fertility
Udom Inyang	-	goddess of divination

The Efik believe there is a relationship between the living and the dead. The ancestors are believed to protect and intercede for the living. This belief is partly manifested in the pouring of libation which is a means of talking to and consulting the ancestors on delicate matters.

Marriage is considered a tool for and a means of, fostering unity between families and the society at large. Women are seen as the foundation upon which homes are built and the society is founded. This is so because they are the mothers who will bring forth generations upon generations. In view of these, women are respected and preeminence is given to the care and upbringing of the girl child. As part of measures to achieve this, the Efik created the “Nkuho” (fattening room) ceremony for unmarried maidens who have come of age or betrothed maidens prior to the marriage ceremony. Activities of the fattening room ceremony are designed to make her an awesome beauty endowed with the skills, emotional, intellectual and physical capacity to deliver on society’s expectations of her. The Ekombi dance has since become an important part of the graduation ceremony which marks the coming of age and transition from girl child to woman, mother

and wife.

Generally, the Efik celebrate various events, whether they are religious, political or social, with dance and songs. Among these performances are: “Ukwa”, “Ekpe”, “Mbuk”, and Ekombi, which is the subject of this study.

3. Origin, history and development of the Ekombi drama.

We have already stated that the Efik believe in a Supreme Being who is assisted in running the universe by a number of lesser deities individually, known as Ndem. Consequent upon their riverine and coastal location, the Ndem are conceived of as resident in the creeks, rivers and ocean. Hence an Ndem is a water spirit. Ndem are renowned for their beauty and love of beauty. Arising from their love of beauty, they sometimes take on human form by possessing an extraordinarily beautiful woman or handsome man.

It is believed that sometime in the indeterminate past, during a moonlight play, an Ndem took possession of a beautiful maiden. While under the enchantment of the water spirit, the maiden began to dance. The dance steps and entire body movements of the maiden including her demeanor were remarkable, enthralling and riveting. This dance was named Ekombi. The dance became the dance of the initiates of the cult of water – sprits, in praise of and worship of water gods and goddesses.

At its inception, the performance had no musical accompaniment, no costume, no make - up or properties. The growth and development of drama from ritual is not a novel subject. This dance of appeasement of the water spirits, meant for their edification eventually grew out of its religious environment of origin into the world of secular art.

The routines of undulating and sway movements were developed as various creative patterns along with traditional symbols and symbolisms based on delicateness, flexibility and grace, all attributes associated with water spirits were added. Musical accompaniments, including songs, costumes, make-up and properties have also been added to produce a secular drama with artistic clarity and beauty. Though the dance still centers around, and has as a major theme, the maiden’s love of beauty and facets of marine life are seen in the performance, it now belongs to the realm of secular art reverberating Efik tradition and culture, beauty and artistry and is performed at various events whether religious, political or social. Its performance is no longer the exclusive preserve of maidens or devotees of the cult of water spirits. Today, it is performed by Efik indigenes, irrespective of gender and age, who have learnt the skills required to perform the dance.

4. Dance (and) dramaturgy

In spite of its transient and ephemeral nature, the fluidity of dance is a characteristic that makes it a vehicle for dramatic synthesis. Charles Uji (2014) affirms this view of dance as he sees dance as an art through which ordinary, functional and expressive movements can be transformed into extra ordinary purposes. He defines dance as patterned and rhythmic body moments, usually performed with musical accompaniments, which serves as a form of communication or expression (251). This implies that dance is a form of language, a means of communication that can be used among other purposes, to tell a story. Ruth Finnegan (1970) opines that the human body is

not a passive object. She avers that bodily movements could be used to perform multifarious actions. Dance, as a phenomenon, she avers further, is wrapped around the body and movements of the body in aesthetic patterns with musical accompaniments (235). Different and several movements of different parts of the body together with musical accompaniments, costumes, make-up and properties, carry connotations with inferences which are tied to the motifs and themes of the stories presented through dance. This seems to confirm the existence of the dramaturgy of dance. Dance, then, as a medium of dramaturgy or of dramatic synthesis is entertaining, educating, therapeutic as well as historically and culturally edifying.

Dance is a manifestation of peoples' life experiences; it is a sign post to peoples' history, economic and socio-political realities. It is a controlled emotional outlet reflecting a peoples' cosmology through a creative enterprise which relies on an extension of speech through body language and gestures which create various levels of meaning. Though dance is not scripted and many will argue that it lacks dialogue or text, it should be realized that its musical accompaniments provide in most cases, more than sufficient dialogue and word text. It should also be remembered that dance is drama in histrionics, and as a result, it employs all the paralinguistic or extra-verbal resources of performance to tell its story in addition to the dialogue of musical accompaniments. Mark Franko (2004) avers that dance is an art bigger than the grasp of any language. In literary criticism, therefore, dance is treated like an art form, enacted like drama with underlying theatrical elements, like plays.

In furtherance of the dramaturgy of dance, in spite of the absence of elaborate dialogue, Nelson Goodman (1968) says dance is an "allographic" art form. One major technique of this art form is the reliance on notation and scores to capture the full message of the performance.

Of course, dance and drama share the characteristic of fluidity, a characteristic which puts them in the same literary genre. For those who may want to argue that drama is scripted (that is literary drama though) we must remember that drama is meant primarily to be acted. The performance of drama before a live audience, like dance, imposes an unavoidable need to extemporize as various occasions of performance come with different requirements and peculiarities. Fluidity as a major characteristic, therefore, cannot be ignored.

The fluid nature of dance and its extemporized imperative give it meaning and essence and enhance its dramaturgy. A single, extemporized nodding gesture could mean assertion or acceptance and acknowledgment of the arrival of a dignitary or may signify acceptance and acknowledgement of ululations by the audience.

Though lacking in verbose dialogue, the extent to which histrionics and extra verbal resources more than compensate for this in the dramaturgy of dance cannot be over-emphasized. They do as much as ensuring sub-categorization. For example, the histrionics and paralinguistic resources of a war dance like "Ikperikpe Ogu" will be different from those of a bridal shower or the rite of coming of age performance by young girls, like "Moninkim" or Ekombi. The theme of the former is dominated by courage, bravery, valor and dexterity, all of which will induce a mood reeking of violence, blood

thirst and gore.

The gestures in a war dance, like Ikperikpe Ogu, will be very energetic and vigorous; the dance will be full of jumps, abrupt flexing of muscles, increased tension and heroic arrogance and gait. On the other hand, the bridal dance or coming of age graduation, like Ekombi will be full of slow blissful swirling with lively movement connoting pleasure, happiness and satisfaction. While a war dance will manifest a moody and angry demeanor, a bridal dance will be a cheerful display of affection by the performers, manifesting or imitating the joy that the union promises.

Dance is intimately and intrinsically related to human experience. A well organized and choreographed dance is an activity instrumental to the achievement of goals that are culturally and experientially significant. Rhythm is the underlying principle that animates dance. Hence, dance is fundamentally rhythmic. Through its rhythmic nature, dance expresses an emotion or idea and narrates a story. In the process, it edifies as the rhythmic movement of the body is delightful to watch. Dance makes statements, communicates ideas and expresses thoughts. Dance is an expression of thought using body movements in association with music to express emotions, ideas and narrate stories. In order to get the message fully and properly established in the minds of the audience, dance uses appropriate dynamics for every movement. This implies that to enhance meaning and express different thoughts, the amount of energy needed for various movements varies.

Evident from the foregoing, it seems apparent that dramaturgy in dance is largely universal as well as thematically conscripted. Despite the contribution of technology with regards to the recording, documenting and storage of scores, the fluid nature of dance as an art form emphasizes the fact that it is better appreciated in its unadulterated form within the performance environment.

5. Theoretical framework

The guiding critical philosophy of and analytical tool for this essay is the aesthetic theory of art. The suitability of this theory is hinged on the fact that literary appreciation implies appreciation of culture and exalting the beauty of art. From new criticism to post modernism, there has been a shift of focus from author to text. This shift of emphasis implies the need for analyzing a text or performance as an entity of its own.

Harmon and Holman aver that aestheticism rejects the idea of literature serving didactic purposes or conveying a moral message (7). Put differently, the aestheticist believes literature (and all art) has no utility; it is rather a reverence for beauty. It is art for art's sake. The movement was a nineteenth century literary movement that swept across Europe and was then transported to other parts of the world. Its proponents include Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Andrew Lang and Edmund Gosse among others. According to Abrams and Harpham, the historical roots of aestheticism are found in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) where he states that the "pure" aesthetic experience consists of a "disinterested" contemplation of an object that "pleases for its own sake," without reference to reality or to the "external" ends of utility or morality (4).

6. The Ekombi performance.

Adequate rehearsal is important and crucial to the achievement of a successful performance in any drama performance. This is without prejudice to the ephemeral and fluid nature of drama which makes improvisation and extemporization imperative. The case of Ekombi is not different. Of great importance is the rehearsal period. We have to keep it in mind that the performance is the product of three groups of performers, namely: the instrumentalists, the singers and the dancers. Of course, we do not discountenance the artists whose roles are performed off stage, like the costumiers, make-up artists and properties master.

Adequate number of intensive rehearsal is needed to achieve a synchronized, orchestrated performance of the art of these various artists. In Ekombi, at the outset of rehearsal, the instrumentalists, the singers and the dancers first embark on separate rehearsal. This will be done until each arm of the performance masters and fine tune its performance. When this has been achieved, then comes the integration and synchronization of the performances of the three arms. Let us clarify this issue by stating that Ekombi rehearsal is carried out in three stages as follows:

Stage one: Each arm: instrumentalists, singers, dancers, rehearse separately.

Stage two: The instrumentalists and singers proceed on integrated rehearsal.

Stage three: instrumentalists, singers and dancers proceed on integrated rehearsal to produce a synchronized performance. This is only done after the dancers have mastered and fine-tuned the routines. Days of integrated rehearsals will then be followed by a dress rehearsal for evaluation of the state of readiness of the performance to go public. The dress rehearsal provides an opportunity to ensure harmony and coherence of purpose and ideas as for example, the gestures must convey the ideas in the instrumentals and the songs.

The public performance begins, after the stage is set, with the choral leader making a call, which comes in the form of a chant. This call-chant is followed by a response or salute by the other members of the music crew. Immediately after the response, the musical instruments swing into action. As the music progresses, the dancers dance in either in single file or in pairs. The leg movement at this time is a stamping two-footed gesture to the rhythm of the drums which is repetitive. This leg movement is complemented by an undulating movement of the upper body mimetic of the waves of the sea. When all the performers have entered the stage (performance area), the performance continues in earnest.

The performance is actualized and transmitted by visual and aural means into a tangible impression which lingers in the minds of the audience. Shortly after the dancers settle down on the performance stage/arena, they absorb the tune of the music and get into track having sufficiently warm up for the performance. All movements and gestures are characterized by flexibility, suppleness, subtlety and grace complemented by a lovely demeanor and mien.

There is great scope for creativity and artistry via extemporization and variation of style. The performers have the freedom to formulate styles of movement, drawing from

their creative abilities and flexibility of the body. The dominant trend and pattern is: dancing in with a foot movement executed by a stamping two-footed gesture to the beat of the drums. There is an act of protrusion of the chest and the breast to show femininity, sensuousness and glamour. This is complemented with a calculated movement of the waist, accentuating the flexibility of the dancer and of the dance itself. The dancers will then dance in pairs exhibiting rhythmic synchronized movements which will include lively circular stirrings of the shoulder while at the same time moving the body from the waist up in rhythmic undulating movements. Each pair of dancers dances facing the right and then the left in synchronized harmonic sequence.

The dancers will take three to four steps forward, then back, repeatedly before returning to the two-footed stamping routine. As the pair-dancing continues, the dancers will execute semicircular turns facing and backing each other. This routine is executed repeatedly and concurrently in standing and then in squatting or crouching position. A dancer is likely to move the body slowly and flexibly, right, and then left throwing a decorated staff skillfully up and down, passing it from one hand to the other and making a u-turn with the body at each passing of the staff from one hand to the other. The dancer sways majestically from side to side and rotates in a manner symbolic of the turbulent nature of the sea, yet surmounting its hurdles. As the performance approaches the end, music and songs continue as the dancers leave the stage. The choral leader rounds off the performance with a solo performance after the dancers leave the stage.

7. Dramatic aesthetics in Ekombi

7.1 Theme

The Ekombi dance is performed primarily to entertain the audience. In the process, however, it tells a story of aspects of the life of the Efik people. The performance consists of dance routines, costumes, make-up, properties, music and songs which entertain and reveal aspects of the beliefs of the people. The mimicking of the waves of the sea reveals the people's habitat and means of sustenance. They are riverine, coastal people who are fishermen in the main. The entire performance which is built around water goddesses reflects the people's traditional religious world-view. The universe is created, owned and governed by a Supreme Being who is assisted by lesser deities who reside in the waters that virtually surround their habitat. These water spirits which are meant to be worshiped are considered to be tutelary deities who ensure the unity of the people and serve as a link between the spirit world and the world of the living.

The performance reflects the Efik people's love of pulchritude. Efik women are known for their pulchritude. The water spirits around whom the performance revolves are well known for this as well. The theme of beauty is a major theme of the performance. To showcase beauty, the maidens are adorned with very beautiful and colorful costumes and accessories like necklaces, brass combs, and elaborate hair do, facial and body make-up and a host of other beautifying items. The costumes of the dancers (maidens) are skimpy in order to expose the skin, particularly the navel, the lower belly and the thighs. The performance is a celebration of and an advertisement of femininity. It depicts young women that have

been properly raised and groomed to perform their roles as women. Young intending suitors are thus invited to woo these wife materials.

Like the water goddesses, who are perpetually looking at their own images in the mirror and smiling, satisfied with their own beauty, the dancers through the dance routines and histrionics of performance exude confidence and self assurance arising from their beauty. They, as well, wear a perpetual smile of satisfaction implying a love of self. The self confidence arising from the assurance of having been generously crafted gives rise to inviting gestures manifested in various ways, including revealing of cleavage, bare laps, navel and lower belly. The flexibility, suppleness, graceful movement, protruding of the chest to push forward and advertise the breasts, the demeanor and mien of the dancers are all aimed at one thing: an advertisement and appreciation of the pulchritude of womanhood cum motherhood.

As a corollary to the theme of beauty, the performance is a celebration of and reverence of womanhood / motherhood. The Efik respect and accord women a pride of place in their society. As a matter of fact, in traditional Efik society, unlike many other African societies, daughters partake fully in inheriting their father's estate. In some cases, the first daughter is given preference. The performance highlights the Efik society's recognition of women/mothers as the foundation upon which the society is built. She is the one who will bring forth future generations and, thus, ensure the preservation and perpetuation of the Efik race.

In addition, the responsibility of raising wholesome citizens rests on her shoulders. She is in-charge of the home, a fact which implies that the health and well being of the family, hence the society is her responsibility. To ensure that she is positioned to achieve all of these, the society invests her with the authority required to do so. The authority so given to her by the society is symbolized by the staff which the maidens carry during the performance.

7.2 Histrionics of the performance.

In our discussion of the performance, some of our students of Efik origin opine that there is not much use of the histrionics of performance in Ekombi when compared to many other performances. They are of the opinion that this is so because being a performance originally meant for maidens, it lacks energetic and abrupt routines, and lacks the jumps and falls commonly found in other performances like war dances, masquerade performances and other male age group and coming of age performances. We must continually bear in mind, while examining the use of histrionics in the performance, that as underlined by its sleek and supple nature, the performance originated as one for maidens. This accounts for the absence of abrupt jerking or force in its routines. Notwithstanding these assertions, Ekombi has a fair amount of histrionics relevant and adequate to communicate its message. Indeed, just a few of them, such as facial expressions, swirling of the hips and stamping of the feet, sufficiently contribute to the overall thematic development of the performance. Ekombi is an example of Richard Bauman's assertion (1975) that a good performance is underlined by the effective manipulation of the linguistic and paralinguistic resources available to the performer.

Some of the histrionics of performance utilized by Ekombi performers are: facial expressions, swirling of the waist and hips, stamping of the feet in slow rhythmic succession, swirling of hands, pushing forward of the forearms in quick succession, right first, and then left, protrusion of the chest and crutching. Because, and as Isidore Okpewho seems to rightly opine, the performance situation is a "total act" which includes the context of and the environment involved in the delivery of the oral performance, all of these have to be taken into consideration to derive meaning and understand the thematic concerns of the performance.

The ever smiling, pleasant dancers with a lovely mien evoke and showcase pride at beauty as they flaunt their feminine attributes. The employment of this extra verbal resource produces an imagery of the often talked about mermaid, brush in one hand, mirror in the other, pretending to be combing or brushing her hair but actually just endlessly looking at, and admiring herself in the mirror with satisfaction and pride at her beauty. This touches the feelings of, and impacts emotionally on the audience, leaving long lasting impressions of the performance and a sense of pride in the race. It is difficult for audience members to escape the infectious smile of an Ekombi performer dancing gracefully, dedicatedly and satisfactorily admiring herself. It creates that sense of pride in the tribe.

Swirling of the waist and hips and pushing forward of the chest to call attention to the breast just as the cleavage is revealed is an advertisement of beauty and an invitation to eligible bachelors to come forward and take these maidens as wives. The underlying message is the important place and role of women as wives and mothers who are seen as foundation upon which the Efik society stands. They ensure not only the perpetuation of the race but, also, its well being and wholesomeness.

The improvisational ability of the performers is further manifested in the stamping of the feet in slow rhythmic succession. With the brass anklets on the ankles, this action produces a tinkling sound which combines with the instruments to produce the sound of the surf or distant murmur of waves lapping on the shores.

A number of the histrionics in this performance like the swirling of hands, pushing forward of forearms and swirling of the body sideways, circular and semicircular turns serve to call attention to the mannerisms and movement pattern of fishes and mermaids. They remind us of the setting, the means of sustenance of the people as well as their religious world-view.

7.3 Costumes and make-up

Costumes as vital elements in oral performance help to build symbols, imagery and as a result, aesthetics. It is symbolic in the sense that certain costumes have an additional meaning and essence which they bring when worn in performance. The aesthetic value lies in the fact that they add beauty to the performance. The functional essence of costumes is in the fact that there is a true reflection of the culture and tradition to be showcased. In the case of the Ekombi dance, all participants wear some costume, from the drummers to the singers and dancers. The costumes are referred to as "Mkpo Mbana Idem" (literary interpreted as "items used to adorn the body"), and

may be split into mkpo mbana idem eneg uneg (dancers costumes), mkpo mbana idem ebre ekomo (drummers costumes), and mkpo mbana idem okwo ikwo (singers costumes).

1. Mkpo mbana idem eneg uneg (dancers costumes).

The dancers are the most elaborate group in the Ekombi performance as they are the most adorned, from head to waist, arms and legs. In the early days of Ekombi performances, the maidens adorned their head with brass-like combs called "utwenikan nkugo". These combs were of different sizes with "basun nko" being the biggest of them and often fixed in the middle. The other decorations are called "odwog mbara". In the contemporary setting, the adornments can be varied. Oftentimes, the hair is weaved or plaited into long braids and then several brass combs called "edisat" are used in decorating the long braids. The neck is adorned with beads called "nkwa esit iton which are loosely worn and rested on the breast and cleavage. The cleavage is covered by a vest called "anana ubok". "Anana ubok" is short, leaving the navel open, a sign of beauty. The dancers have "ekpaku" on their arms; this is a fur like wool gracing the upper and lower arms, leaving the elbow bare. On the wrist is a beaded end of the "ekpaku", adding beauty to the arm. On the waist, the dancers wear the "akasi"; a tiny rounded item made of lain, helping them to sway their waists and making each movement elaborate. A lightly sown skirt which is up to knee length is worn to cover the "akasi"; this skirt is called "ofon akasi and is decorated with "mbobo". The legs of the dancers have "mkpat etim" with each ankle having an adorning anklet called "etioro" which makes a rattling sound upon each stamping. The maiden in many cases carries a staff known as "esang".

The maiden is further beautified with the native chalk called "ndom". This is closely related to modern day make-up in function because it serves as a beautifying ingredient in the belongings of the maiden. The ndom is also used to adorn a new mother and her baby or any woman in case of celebration of an event, with a view to accentuating her femininity.

2. Mkpo Mbana Idem abre ekomo and mkpo mbana idem okwo ikwo (Drummers' and singers' costumes)

The singers and dancers have identical costumes since they are always male and stay at a particular part of the stage during performance. But for the "jacket vest" worn by the choral leader, they all have the same adornments. On the head, they wear a cap called "bidac" which is not made to cover the entire head but a considerable part of it. They wear a tail shirt called "mbemtie" and tie a wrapper. This dressing is called "usobo". It is the traditional Efik wrapper for men. The "usobo" is the name for wrapper which is swung to the right. The "usobo" shirt is mostly white. On the feet the men wear a

sandal or shoe, black preferably. A loosely knotted wrapper is worn on the neck like a tie and it is called "okpomkpom". With the elaborate costumes of the dancers, singers and drummers, the Ekombi dance is given color and glamour as it is appreciated not only in terms of the performance but also as a result of the colorful spectacle created by the beauty of the costumes.

7.4 Music

Music is an integral part of oral literature as it is one of the means through which performances is rendered. In Ekombi dance, music sets the tone, rhythm and tempo of the dance. The pace at which the artists engage the text is informed by the tempo of the music. Under this sub head, let us talk about music and songs. By this we are referring to instrumentation and lyrics. The instrumentation controls the performance.

Here are the different instruments in the Ekombi performance

1. Ibid: this is the main drum used by the main drummer. It is the instrument that dictates the major steps of the Ekombi dancers. It is made from felled tree trunk of which internal sap has been carved out. Animal hide is used to cover a part of the carved trunk and then sunned.
2. Ekpri Ekomo: This is the small drum, with "Ekpri" interpreted as small. An accompanist plays alongside the main drummer who is playing the "Ibid". It is produced just like the big drum is done but with a smaller trunk.
3. Uboro Ekomo: This is response drum for "uboro" is interpreted as response or reply. When the big drum calls, uboro ekomo provides the response.
4. Other instruments include the "nsak" (seed drum), a conical shaped container filled with pebbles, which when shaken, produces the desired sound and the "nkong" (gong).

Songs rendered in festivals are like thorough fares to the nuances of a people's customs and traditions. They are the cultural artifacts projecting the ideas of the people. Songs are very rich entertainment, instructional and quite philosophical. These songs touch on several subject matters and themes which explore religious beliefs, socio-political criticism and the environment. The songs in Ekombi performance celebrate the traditions and moral sensibilities of the Efik people while exploring their philosophy. Some are didactic in nature and aiming to create a moral change and enforce positive reinforcement. They are used to chastise and chide wrong doers in the society causing them to turn a new leaf. The satire may take a swipe at the government or her policies. Below are samples of the songs:

Table 1

Songs in Efik	English translations
Kusun! Kusun mmum inuen Nyogh ekpat, Esit ikot idinam didie? kusun; kusun mmum inuen nyogh ekpat, Esit ikot ndinam didie?	Just on my way to the bush, I have caught a bag full of birds, what will I do when I get to the bush?
Domo utenikan da mi ka kayak Eyo okut ama, mme onwongo Nno fi ndisanna k'ikpong nyon, amauke mmo k'usung ada.	Get a lantern and walk me home, the night is near, I have sworn to you never to go home alone as armed robbers lay siege
Anyenebiet emi anammii nditie Mbiat ini mi, mmenyene se nnamde.	The owner of this house has wasted my time here when I have things to do.
Ukabare-isua emi, mmandu Uwem nsim, nyetiene mmo ndia K'idara, ukabare isua emi	If I live to see this Christmas I will join others in the celebration
Mmagha owo efrede Mmagha owo efrede Mmagha owo efrede Mkpong...mmagha owo efrede.	I dislike one who forgets I dislike one who forgets. I dislike one who forgets I dislike one who forgets yesterday.

7.5 Symbolism

Certain adornments in the performance have some symbolic and cultural relevance that enable a general appreciation of the character using them and contribute to the overall thematic development of the performance. The staff is a symbol of authority which underscores the position of a woman in society. The basun nko and utwen ikang nkuyo are two items made of brass – a shining bronze metal. The color of the duo conveys the symbolism that accompanies them. They are royal in properties, making them a symbol of royalty, of “Queenship” and of affluence. According to our interviewee, Etinyin Ekpe Offiong Effiwatt, these brass combs were initially exclusively worn by queens (wives of Kings) and were only given out as a royal prerogative. In the course of time they started lending the combs to young maidens who were celebrating their coming of age. Traditionally, it became an adornment for ladies in general who could afford them. Esang, which is directly interpreted as staff in English Language, is a wooden mace carried by the maiden during performance. It is a symbol of authority as it reveals the maiden's independence which is portrayed in her third swaying of the item. The native chalk, “ndom” is (as the name implies) a powdery non-coerced item used in the make-up of the maiden. The ndom symbolizes beauty and splendor, helping to build the self image of the maiden.

There are symbolisms in expressions which are of non-physical essence. For example

1. The symbol of growth and coming of age is reflected in the socio-spatial status of the maiden. Since the dance is used as a coming of age ritual, growth of the female child from a child to a mother (with a social responsibility is celebrated).
2. The entire performance is a symbolism for the sacredness and sanctity of the marriage institution. Upon attaining puberty, the maiden is taken into seclusion in the fattening room. There, she is trained regarding her role as a wife and mother. All through the duration of her stay in the fattening room, she is given exclusive pampering which is believed will last her throughout her stay in her matrimonial home. Therefore, she is not expected to desire pleasures that would amount to being irresponsible and consequently endanger her marriage. The culmination of this is the public performance of Ekombi which reminds contemporary society of the sacred nature and sanctity of marriage. The maiden and celebrant is

considered as one who has matured and is now transiting into the exalted institution of marriage where she will take up the important roles of wife and mother with all the responsibilities that these entail.

8. Social relevance of the performance

In spite of the philosophy of art for art's sake, literature is, almost always, tied to social values. Traditional literature serves as a repository of the people's consciousness, hence, the Ekombi performance has (communal) roles which it plays for the Efik people.

The performance is a celebration of the African (Efik) women. It is a tool for gender exaltation as nature's reproductive and regenerative prowess are seen to be embedded in, and symbolized by the maiden that is beautifully adorned and ready for cultivation. It is a constant reminder of the religious and spiritual admonition: “go into the world and multiply.” Society is often reminded of this charge by the performance. Aspects of the people's history and world-view are preserved, transmitted and taught via the performance. The songs, as a corollary to this, are a portrayal of the essence of communalism, a form of existence for which Africans are known.

9. Conclusion

Every work of art is a product of a given place at a given time. To understand, appreciate and enjoy it, one has to understand the ambience its birth. To better this point, Chinuama Azounye (1994) ^[4] quotes Milman Parry who asserts that: The literature of every country and every time is understood as it ought to be by only the author and his contemporaries. Between him and them exists a common stock of experiences which enables the author to... express an idea with certainty that this audience will.... grasp the subtleties of his idea. The task therefore for one, who lives in another age and wants to appreciate the work correctly, consists precisely in rediscovering the varied information and complexities of ideas which another assumed to be the natural property of his audience (157).

The shared experiences and collective stock of resources between author and target audience informs every work of art and bestows peculiarity on it. These have formed the basis of our understanding, analysis, interpretation and appreciation of the Ekombi dance performance as dramatic art.

It is important to note that this art form, that is the oral performance, is a living and dynamic art form. It is the

product of a culture and culture is very dynamic and transient. As a result, over time, there are bound to be, and there have been, some changes, minor albeit, in costumes, make-up and even properties. However, these have never been, and are not likely to be, significant enough to cause any change in the thematic concerns and aesthetic principles and qualities of the performance. The theme remains a celebration of the beauty of the African woman, womanhood/motherhood.

The performers are aware that the transient nature of culture has imposed some changes. They are also aware that because the art form is a living and dynamic form, there is bound to be a refining of ideals as well as the incorporation of contemporary materials of costumes, properties and make-up but without destroying the essence and thematic concerns of the performance. Achieving this, of course, is a yard-stick of the performers' precision, artistry and creative ingenuity. For example, recent performances have used braided hair instead of woven hair decorated with "edisat" (brass comb). Many performances still use the latter. There is, also, the use of the short knickers (of on ukot) instead of the short skirt.

The length and duration of the performance in recent times has been reduced from what it was in the past. Make-up and properties have been conceptualized to accommodate current beauty products. Ndom (native chalk) has given way to talcum powder and facial foundation. Tido (native mascara) has given way to eye pencil, eye shadow, eye liner and a host of other beauty products. Remember that the performance is a celebration of the beauty and femininity of the African woman. All of these, however, have not detracted from the essence, intrinsic value and overriding thematic concerns and aesthetic principles of the performance. Rather, some of these changes have only served to accentuate these literary features.

It is also interesting to know that, in moving away from its ritual origin to becoming essentially secular art for entertainment, the occasion for performance is no longer restricted to the coming of age ritual and graduation ceremony. As entertainment, which it is today, it is performed on various socio-political occasions including weddings, burials, house warming, chieftaincy coronations, child naming, graduation, etc, etc.

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