

**IGBE DANCE: ADDENDUM APPROACH TO THE  
ACT OF SPIRITISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON RHYTHM  
AND MOVEMENT (IN SCULPTURE)**

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**Abstract**

*The purpose of this research is to examine the hypnotic influence of the supernatural beings (gods) propelled by rhythm or sounds (various musical instruments) to body movement or dance steps and to extract the traditional*

*symbols of the ceremonial motifs for the creation of a new generation of costumes for Igbe ceremony. It is also to explore the possibility of interpreting or representing the dynamic bodily movement in relation with the costume in three dimensional forms or (solid) as regards sculpture and to show the relevance (or significance) of these movements in the context of hystierism but within cultural values.*

## **Introduction**

Igbe generally is a social cult. It started in eighteenth century. It originated from Delta State and other areas where the Urbobo dwell. Urhobo and Isoko, worshipers were estimated to be about one million in 1982 (Nabofa 1982:249).

Igbe has the sole aim of liaising between the spirit world and the physical, residing within the cosmological force of water, influencing material wealth, psychic abilities, dreams, meditation, mental health, water-based healing and playing a vital role in the administration of justice in society. Igbe is one of the Orise (gods) who provide women with children. It is also worshiped by those who seek political and social ascension, not to only protect them but to give them prosperity too.

Membership is voluntary. The religion is believed to serve as a sanctuary for confessed wizards and witches who (who practiced what is known as white witchcraft). It protects rather than harming them, membership also includes those who seek protection from bewitchment and anyone who submits, offers, his/her life to the god for safe keeping. Although they (members) are not Christians, they also pray to God who is

known" as Orise. These sets of "believers" frown at counting their offspring, which they feel could instigate bad omen.

In terms of treatment, they make use of herbs, native chalk, water and prayers. The prescription of any of these methods is determined by divination to ascertain the involvement of super human and spiritualised forces.

Members' main precepts are purity, love and charity. Igbe is significant as an entertaining cultural entity. Its hidden meaning is the search for inner purification by purging the mind of evil deeds or thoughts. Most of their activities take place in a central hall of worship in each town known as (Ogwa) which is constructed and decorated in white apparel, with small carvings and mouldings of various sizes, native chalk (orhe), animal skin on walls which are also used to construct hand fans, mirrors of various sizes, cowries, synthetic flowers, breakable plates of various sizes and minerals mostly Fanta, Mirinda, etc. They are generally associated with yellow-coloured drinks. When it is time to offer sacrifice, worshipers carry food stuffs such as yam, goat, plantain etc. (depending on the demand and purpose) to the river. They carry these on their heads while singing along too.

Igbe is sub-divided into three individualized units such as Igbe Uvbiesha (having to do with beans) Igbe Ame (water bound) and Igbe Ohre (native chalk based). Igbe is experienced in male and female personifications, depending on which region in (West Africa) where he/she fellowship. Igbe personifies several human characteristics: patience, endurance, sternness, observation, meditation, appreciation for history, vision, and royalty. Its characteristics are found and displayed in the depths of the ocean and his name denotes

unfathomable wisdom, that is, the instinct that there is more to discern than we can ever learn, especially the spiritual aspect that most people spend a lifetime pondering. Pondering. Igbe also influences material wealth, psychic abilities, dreams, meditation, mental health and water-based healing. Igbe is one of the Ohens who provide women with children. Igbe also is worshiped by those who seek political and social ascension, she not only protects them but proffers prosperity.

Igbe is associated with various communities, apparel, chalk or white powder and small images etc. and ceremonies that have to do with births, deaths, marriages, social dances, victories, in fact, those which reflect in the entity of man endeavours as regard culture.

Obasanjo (1977, p.6) says that: People and culture are inseparable, for culture is the aggregate of concepts and values which characterize a community. It then follows that people without cultures are in themselves not fully in existence.

In the Urhobo cosmogony, they have always believed in the existence of a supernatural being and had attributed their survival on earth to the influence of this God or god. This recognition revolves around the physical and spiritual realms & although to an extent with clear boundaries. The physical tends to infuse itself into the spiritual depending on the inspirational or spiritual level of individuals or the princess. The prominent fact in Igbe worship is that one's progenitor carries a part of one's source of life whose sacredness the purity of the Igbe.

Igbe shrine is an embodiment of the spiritual abode on a physical level. She mainly manifests herself in rivers, waters, mirrors, white apparel, white powder, small images etc. As a medium of worship, she reveals herself in different names in diverse communities; Igbe to the Urhobo and Olokun to the Edo and the Yoruba.

Igbe Ohre originated from Ukokori town Ughelli North of Delta State, and was founded by a man known as Ubiesha. He was born in Agbarha Oto. His father's name is Mr. Etakepo who is of Agbarha Oto, while his mother hailed from Ukokori town. Ubiesha had three children namely: Bogi Akpokovo, Ameganase and Onu-meyaone. He eventually settled in Ukokori and was a farmer by profession. One day, as he was working on his farm, he heard a voice called out to him three times consecutively. He turned around searchingly and he eventually answered the third time out of fear because the ordeal was quite strange. The voice which said "I have come to bless you" also commanded him to stretch forth his hands and a large native chalk of about ten inches, oval in shape which later became their symbol of worship suddenly and mysteriously appeared on his hands. There followed other spiritual rituals and further instructions for him to go home with the chalk, place it among other ones for "in it I have vested powers with which you will do wonderful things." It was at this time that he learnt the spiritual science and worship practice that is associated with Igbe.

The goddess further instructed him to marry Erhokanure, a certain woman in the town who would assist him in the course of his new adventure. Erhokanure was barren. The three children of Ubiesha were a result of his marriage to another woman known as Medemian.

Back home, his family and neighbors, assumed he had gone mad carrying white chalk in his hands. They were even more surprised when he started telling them about his encounter and revelation. They mocked him more on his perverted nature. People refused to accept him for what he proclaimed - prophet of Ohre. Their doubt was hushed when started performing great things, such as mental and body healing and purification. He became a great priest and physician and because of his new status, people used him to settle land and community disputes.

One day, as he was working in his farm, he was attacked by a notorious warrior known as Omonedo-Orhomorher who wanted to kill him. Suddenly Ubiesha called on his god Igbe Ohre and the warrior suddenly stood still, transfixed. Ubiesha captured him and took him to his shrine and after series of purification rites he crowned him Olorin (chief) and later became Ubiesha follower. He also blessed him with a native chalk (initiation). Thereafter, he became a strong devotee of Igbe orhe and also started performing great things through the power of the orhe.

Ubiesha and Erhokainure reigned in the land as great priest and priestess of Igbe Orhe. Their fame went round the neighboring villages and towns and even beyond. Ubiesha flouted one of the laws of the gods and for this reason he was punished for twenty-seven years by some strange mental disorder. Border. He walked about like a lunatic. He was kept under surveillance day and night by his followers and family members. But one fateful Igbe day, he was discovered missing.

No one actually knew how he got out of the shrine. His disappearance was mysterious because the shrine was fully guarded day and night. He was later found after three days in the forest, dead with native chalk in his hands by group of children on their task of wood fetching. They ran back to the town to report. His followers went and discovered that his death was at the instance of the deity, Igbe Orhe because of the presence of Orhe (native chalk) in his hands. He was later buried according to their traditional rites.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to examine the hypnotic influence of the supernatural beings (gods) propelled by rhythm or sounds (various musical instruments) to body movement or dance steps and to extract the traditional symbols of the ceremonial motifs for the creation of a new generation of costumes for Igbe ceremony. It is also to explore the possibility of interpreting or representing the dynamic bodily movement in relation with the costume in three dimensional forms or (solid) as regard sculpture and to show the relevance (or significance) of these movements in the context of hysteresis but within cultural values.

### **Other intents for this study**

To identify the various costumes of Igbe

To describe the characteristics of the identified costumes, movements, significance, forms and colours.

To examine the relevance of these spiritually driven steps (movement) to contemporary dance and fashion with regards to the costumes of Igbe.

To analyze, interpret and synthesize the relevant data gathered in the sub-problem 1-3 and report it in both narrative and visual forms (solid) for a proper understanding of the Igbe dance.

### **Delimitation**

The research focused on the spiritually driven dance steps to rhythm and costume of Igbe using tessoduro and gypson armed with the simplicity and flow of oil-based ament (universal Stainers), emphatic projection of a polished marble with the incorporated flow of underlayered scumble/glaze to ensure optimum transparency in sculpture of two- and three-dimensional forms. Data gathered in the course of the study shall form the basis of generalization.

### **The Dance**

In Igbe, worship dance is very spectacular because it forms the basis of worship, sacrifice, oratory, prophecies and even entertainment. It is also one of the many ways of invoking the Igbe spirit to action and it is mostly carried out by the Ikpenes (choristers). It usually takes place on specific market days, four days in a week or every fortnight. The grand show occurs twice a year and lasts for nine days. The first Okpevbe (thanksgiving) takes place every May, while the other comes up between October and December and signifies crowning up of the year, a way of showing gratitude that the Igbe had protected one till the end of the year just like thanksgiving ceremonies in Christendom.

There are specific dance steps for each day of the ceremony and most of them are symbolic. The various dance steps with the days of the ceremony are as follows:

**Day One:** Egbohorho Dance this is more like a Benin traditional dance where the dancers arrange themselves in a role of three, dancing choreographically, moving their bodies to the rhythm simultaneously.

**Day Two:** Afaobo (clapping of hands): This is more like cultural dance with the sound of clapping dominating the ibani (drums) and Ukuse (maracas).

**Day Three:** Kenighomo (chanting/oratory) this is an act of singing praises to the goddess or God. Example Igbe Ovie (my king).

**Day Four:** Isia (story telling) This is where members learn legends, myths and various stories that could boost their faith. Day five: Ugie-uyevbi dance: This is the usual Urhobo traditional dance step which is very vigorous and requires a lot of strength.

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**Day Six:** Ekpe-Ene this involves every member of the concerned Igbe group. It is an aspect of singing individually, one after the other. It is also an aspect where individuals are selected into various groups, more like the contemporary orchestra, some to base, soprano, tenor etc.

**Day Seven:** Afao-owo (hitting of the leg with a small skin fan): This dance step is most common among the various Igbe dance (ritual dance). This is usually performed by a smaller group of about twenty members in a group of three with each

role forming a small circle or fold, holding a small skin fan the right and swinging it against their right legs in accordance with the rhythm provided by the Ikpené. They are all bare footed stamping their right leg to the group with their left hands stretched out. The dance requires energy.

**Day Eight:** Uvwowo (Reaching out): It's usually done twice at the end of the ceremony. On day one, members move around the village or town in groups, dancing and singing. Most times gifts like biscuits, sweets etc. are given out as they move along.

**Day Nine:** Achiyede (an act of matching Palm Kernel in the old): This characterizes the climax' of the ceremony. It requires no songs and a preparation of a delicious Isha meal (beans meal) which is shared among members. The dance step is different from every other one as the small skin fan is held with both hands and slightly tilted to the left like an owl while dancing as if they are paddling a canoe or boat.

**The various dances required energy and other things in order to make up the dance.**

Occasionally, while the dance session is on, the leader or members get possessed by a spirit. Such or spirit possession and membership provoke more drama and sensitivity. The person tends to dance vigorously as inspired by the spirit. This time, it is for entertainment only but result oriented and it depends on the level of susceptibility, revelations and prophecies which are revealed about the life of an individual or the fortunes of the group.

According to extract from the library, think-quest, or/12819/text 8/04/2008, Dance is the expression of soul through lines of the body and bur movement, it is the visceral thrill of blood pumping faster and heart thumping harder ring higher, reaching farther and by gum, it is a burned away to keep a body fit.

In addition to this ceremony, there are other meeting days (edewo) members organize yearly, like religious outing, where they dance through various streets. This usually takes place between October and December. Members carry food stuff such as plantain, yam, fowl etc. to their natal Urhobo land from several villages and “the twenty-two Urhobo political assembly” to the compound of their founders for example Omote-Uku Mami Okareje Compound.

### **Definition of Terms**

For clarity and to help facilitate easy understanding of the research, some basic terms were defined and explained.

Ikwa - Bed

Omorho - small native mortar Olori - Chief

Ogbanje - somebody possessed by marine spirit

Ogwa - Hall

Orhe - Native chalk

Some chants that are associated with Igbe worship

Wah do Igbe

Igbe wa do

Ise wa do

Owokowoko

Igbe oghene

Igbe ovie

Igbe Ore

Igbe Ame

Ame! Ame! Wa do

Urhobo wa do

Isoko wa do

Egbene wa do

Avbi-ye-elu

### **Initiation and Ranking (Titles)**

Ranking in Igbe shrine has a lot of spiritual undertones, pending on the level of spirituality of individuals or the type spirit that is at work in an individual which could be by birth (ogbanje), education/cultivation or revelation. However, it is left for Emeganase (secretary) to decipher. These are the various titles that are associated with Igbe and it is stated in descending order.

Okpene –( chorister)  
Onori  
Ochere (cook)  
Oghara (waiter)  
Ove-Odibo (clerk)  
Oni-Igbe (Igbe mother)  
Emeganase (secretary)  
Oguiobo (overseer)  
Aye-Oba (Queen) - sits on umorho  
Omote-uku (Priestess) sits on Ekwa

Number one to seven is determined by Emeganase and her groups of prophetesses while Aye-Oba, which is second to the highest rank involves a lot of spiritual undertones and the person to be crowned will have to go to Okokori for coronation where the chief priest will perform all the necessary rites, and the end would pray on a chicken which will be expected to die on its own to prove that the ceremony was successful, hereafter the title will be given. But contrary to this fact, the vitiation is not complete. The case is different for Omote-uku title which is the highest rank and who is expected to sit on a bed in the shrine or oḡwa and the chief priest and a host of others come down to the shrine of the priest or priestess in question where all the necessary rites are performed. This is characterized by the level of spiritualism or possession.

### **Need for the Study**

Igbe ceremony has a psychological, emotional and spiritual value as the dance steps is occasionally influenced by supernatural forces which enhance these unique strides. The

researchers therefore, believe that merely developing dance skills as - a result of incessant practice, or those that are imbued or propelled by the influence of some sort of drugs or the others are not enough. The dynamism of spiritually driven steps imbued within cultural values must come to play through a revolutionary and creative interventionist programme such as this study represents. This way, the historical dance steps and custom, symbols and character of our culture as represented by the Urhobo people would be projected as an instrument of ceremonies and entertainment through the creation of awareness in the music or entertainment industries, and pictorial representation in this case plastic. These shall be promoted over a period of time for acceptance and adoption as the contemporary dance steps for music and entertainment industries.

Fortunately, Nigerian music and entertainment industry is growing rapidly with enough innovations here and there. This will be one of the many ways of showcasing this spiritually induced dance rhythm and even our traditional instruments.

The *ogwa* should be modernized to standard theatre halls where movies and music of related concepts would be played. Libraries and galleries should be constructed within these halls for monumental records which could be in the form of recreational centre.

The visual forms shall serve a historic function. The research shall also translate the artistic essence of the various dance steps and costumes into aesthetic forms such as statute, ornaments, relief etc. Finally, they will serve as a source of inspiration to artists of all ages.

Costumes like other cultural values are a principal index for identifying a people or an ethnic group in a polity. The Yoruba men are known for their agbada, the Hausa for their babariga and the Urhobo and Isoko for their wrappers. They are therefore, an important means for identifying groups of people or national institutions.

### **The Literature Review:**

Igbe started long ago among the Urhobo communities more like the Olokun in Benin and Yoruba communities with same aim or purpose but with diverse ways of worship. However, white is a dominant colour among' the worshipers, though, some incorporate red and black fabric as symbols or merely for aesthetic purposes.

According to an extract from Wikipedia (2008 p.7,8), in Orise culture, it appears that some stories contradict or compete with one another. The disparity or differences that exist are well understood by indigenous practitioners. While the stories are regarded as fact, they are also understood to be indicators of historical and social factors which obviously differ from region to region.

It must be noted that Igbe is very relevant to Urhobo culture. Culture is not merely a rehash of the customs of the people, it embodies the attitude of a people to the future of their traditional values.

According to David J. Parkin (2008:118), symbolism and the politics of cultural performance are never absent from the real life of the Urhobo. The celebration also provides refreshing break and refrain from hard work because the Urbobo are very

hardworking. No matter the gender, they could go to the farm as early as 7am to return at 6pm daily. And since the ration mostly take place on weekends, it affords them the opportunity to relax.

As in many Nigerian communities, Igbe is celebrated with singing, drumming, dancing and general pomp which range from the mellow to the wild. The duration of the ceremony depends, on the nature of it because there are some that are held every weekend, and others like the Odi-ewo is celebrated twice a year while the annual thanksgiving is once a year, like the Christians' Christmas.

Culture is the totality of a people's way of life. It is societies identify, a product of man's creativity and encounters cultural products like customs, technology, entertainment, arts, science, sport and religion. These attract and bring people together for educational information.

According to Ate (2003, p.29), culture is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of giving in their environment. This gives order and meaning to their socio-political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organisation and thus distinguishes a people from their neighbors.

Unfortunately, dance which should play an important role in these ceremonies appears to have been given less or no attention in the past irrespective of the fact that it adds glamour. These spiritually driven dance steps also add, testimonies, revelations, prophesies and other meanings to the events. It enables the audience without much difficulty or cost

to identify the highly spirited dancer and could even get revelations about themselves and their families.

These unique dance steps are indispensable to the initiated, highly spiritual or those possessed by the marine spirit popularly known and referred to as Ogbanje, which likely by birth, education or revelation, create an avenue to explore, interpret, express and communicate Spiritualism in relation to the movements of the body.

According to Wikipedia (2008, p.12,18), in Benin and Urhobo, it is said that Igbe only chooses the most beautiful omen to be his priestesses. His children tend to be physically attractive. Even if you are not his child, you can count on special protection from Igbe if you are physically beautiful.

Igbe is the predominant Orixá in western hemisphere. She is also worshiped in Brazilian candomblé ketu with the name spelled oxum, while in Santería in Cuban, she is also worshiped with the name Ochun.

### **Igbe Costumes**

Costumes are special clothing for certain activity or clothes worn in specific periods. Costumes are very important in identifying the root of an individual, which is why Diagbare (2006, p. 22) says, "... modern life is fast, contacts are brief, and often we get just one chance tell another human being who we are. She further stated that without the identity clue provided by clothing we'd find life more difficult and much less interesting" (ibid).

The statements above simply imply that costumes could be made not only from cloth but also from other materials, such as animal skin, raffia, cowries, horse tail, beads etc.

The New Encyclopedia Britannica (1998 p. 222) however, says, "... costume is a covering or clothing and accessories for the human body." The variety of dress is immense, varying with different sexes, cultures, geographic area and historic eras.

According to Barbara and Anderson C. (1984, p.20)

...anything worn on stage is a costume whether it be layers of riling or nothing at all. More specifically, this definition, includes all clothing, under clothing make up, and accessories »:h as hats, scarves, fans, canes, umbrellas, and jewelry, \* m or carried by each character in a production.

### **The Nature of Costume Design**

According to Barbara and Anderson (1984, p. 377),

... in fashion design, primary attention is given to creating a striking it visual design that gives little, if any, thought to the personality or character of the person who ultimately will wear the cloths, the fashion designer may follow the fashion currently in vogue, or may look to historical antecedents, or may strike out in a new stylistic direction. In. a fashion collection, there may be little if any stylistic consistency, from one design to the next.

## **Contemporary Costume**

The word “contemporary” has to do with styles of a particular period. Therefore, it is used to describe activities of a period. According to A.S. Hornby (1974, p.184), contemporary is defined as a “... captivating time or a period to which reference is being made.” Igbe costumes are basically white which signifies purity.

The buildings, shrine, the interior and exterior are always painted in white colour including, the furniture. But there are no hard feeling as to the designs of the fabric. It could be a shirt and wrapper, skirt and blouse, or only wrapper which they tie or wrap around the chest depending on individual choice of design. But in all ramifications, it must be white in colour.

## **Methodology**

The materials collected has been reduced to sketches which will form the basis for the production of mac-quite that will be further developed into statues and reliefs of various sizes, three- and two-dimensional arts. Armed with simplicity and flow of oil-based pigments (universal strainers) emphatic projection of a polished marble with the flow of underlay scumble glaze to enhance optimum transparency, medium P.O.P, tesso-duro and gyson to ensure stability, proper and smooth surfaces.

## **Data Source:**

**Oral Interviews:** The researchers interviewed the priests and priestesses of Igbe, men and women, members and non-members, who have had personal experience.

**Library:** The researchers sourced for relevant books (published and unpublished) and information which related to this research and browsed the Internet to source for current information. Journals were also employed. These were employed to get good theoretical framework upon which this arch would be based.

### **Source of Materials**

For studio work, all materials were sourced from art shops that include POP scumble, tesso-duro, gypson fixatives resin, accelerator, catalyst and Acrylic paints.

### **Spiritually Induced Dance**

The symbolic movement of the body becomes more evident within the sacred itself frisson state, and subjugating the intellect of the victims, the deity therefore, suppressant the natural body. Inspirational and trance dance have no similarity with a chorus line or ballet dance where dancers follow strictly laid down choreography and facial expression, hut in inspirational or trance dance, facial expression is characterized by the true inner experience of the dancer or the true nature of the deity itself.

Note that it's not a dramatic performance for an audience. A trance induced by an ardent religious devotion, does not show reduced bodily functions that are typical of other trances. This state can only be induced through prayer and incantations in

an aura of rhythm which can happen voluntarily or involuntarily.

According to philosophical inquiry by Omofolaba Soyinka Ajayi (p.189), the semiotic of sacred dance becomes fully relevant. Within both the contextual and conceptual meaning of sacred itself, a close affinity evidently exists between the nature and concept of dance and the subjects of sacred rites. Essentially, both are intangible and evanescent but able to reach deep down to profundity of human perceptions and emotions. In addition, both are made “real” through actual experience and or through some concrete symbolic representatives and through movements and patterns.

For sacred dance almost associated with ritual robes, special colours, regalia, music etc., the ritual colour usually expresses an aspect of the deity. No matter the decoration on the regalia, whether with cowries, feather, jewels etc; will also reveal something about the deity to the worshipers.

The conventional dance is derived from cultural ideas or by cultivation while the sacred is a conceptual thought made manifest as culture on earth. Though, at a certain degree of perception, a similarity of form which allows the dance to serve as a demarcation i.e. as a tool with which to transcend to the ethereal infinite and also to act as a sign of the devotees’ conception of the sacred, the anchor point of communication, is that area of illuminating where the ephemeral nature of dance fuses with transcendental powers which is the peak of worship. Probably, these are the means and ability to cross over to the beyond and establish a communication line between gods and men hence, most cultures regard dance as a sacred art itself.

The dancers' own bodies establish a "communication" within him or herself or gods which can develop into unexpected insights and solutions to problems for the victim. There is a salient release of emotions and pressures through the heart which transcend the intellect. This enables - deep and valuable connections to be made at the level of mind-body and spirit. The energy of the dance must suffuse the whole of the dancer's body. There is a perceptual feeling of being part of the cosmos and of the earth's energy.

In religious practice, dance serves as an effective pathway that bridges the improvised and trance dance and unites the physical and the earthly. This which becomes an acceptable form of worship and together with other means of sacred, i.e. prayers, incantations etc, and a means of communication that is acknowledged within the culture, is a defined pattern.

The purpose of worship is to achieve communion with a powerful but intangible force. Worship generally is a movement from the earthly and physical to the spiritual and ethereal. It is a process of comprehending the unknown primordial existence that separates man from God. The worship process is likened to van Genep's. classification of "rite to passage" or transitional rite" into three parts; (1) post liminal (2) preliminary (3) liminal. Worship is a drift from the known preliminary state of earthiness to the unknown liminal state of spiritual nonphysical and back to a spiritually enriched earthiness.

Inspirational dance may become trance dance but trance dance is definitely inspirational but not always improvisational. Therefore, improvisational dance can lead on to inspirational dance. However, inspirational dance can only occur when

there is harmony among these three factors such as mind, body and soul. The attained harmony is a spiritual state which has nothing to do with established religion as such, but a state in which the victims personally experience that ultimately all paths to the divine are one and the same. One notable fact is that there could be some sort of cleansing prior the dance, such that it is a taboo to eat certain food, avoidance of sexual contacts and almost universally in traditional societies, the non-participation of women who are under menstruation, as it is considered polluting.

Trance dance is like a vehicle or a process toward a possession which functions in manner as a tool in achieving a purpose. The first stage of transcended dance is a conscious act and part of the medium. A progression dance features and resounds specific and powerful characteristics of the deity being invoked while accompanied by specified music that is associated with that deity. While performing the progression dance the victim or medium has given him or herself to be possessed by the deity. The process may be boosted up by sacrificial (visual) words such as prayers or incantations (oral) or in most cases by the use of drugs (smell/taste). These signs have been inculcated into the semiotic system of religious drama or rites and whose magnifying powers intrigue appropriate meaning in the initiated and interested individuals. The expected and inevitable response is heightened memories of the deity in possession.

The dancer (victims) usually cannot recollect the nature of dance when he or she has regained consciousness. In the course of dance (sacred) they “vacate” their individual bodies to allow themselves to become a vehicle through which the deity can express himself and give help and guidance in terms

of healing and revelations. In a state of trance, dancers often show stamina and physical strength such that a weak or frail person can suddenly become strong when the deity is in possession of his or her physical body. It could require quite a surprising number of people to restrain a person in trance.

The state of trance dance is a proof that the chasm between this world and the other has been bridged. It is an “alteration of consciousness,” state where the deity would now take control over the body of the medium for as the Urhobo will say Igbe mu-o - the deity has “mounted” (the medium).

The transition to possession dance can either be very mild, marked by slight changes in the dance pattern or it can be distinct or abrupt in which the medium may mourn or even shout or fall down or run in a brief trance before assuming the possession dance proper. There could also be certain visible changes which are characteristic of the deity which may also be observed in the dancer. Whether’ mild or not, the change is usually applauded by the other worshipers. They may start chanting praises or fall into total silence. The drummers increase their beats and change rhythm to harness the new dance steps. In most cases the rate of possession is propelled by the introduction of some other sacred paraphernalia on the victim.

In the possession state, the full personality of the deity comes to play such as habits, emotional, deposition and the social more or even symbols. These states boldly indicate that communication has been achieved with the deity. The transcendental dance can be performed by any of the devotees but the level or the rate with which the deity possesses the medium depends on individual spiritual qualities. Sometimes,

religiously, a body may find it essential to have an individual or a group of people specially anointed to the dance. Those that mediate between two worlds are often given special titles and preferences such as Omote-uko in Igbe worship (daughter of the sea). They are often specially chosen by the deity himself either from birth or later in life through frequent possession by the spirit of the deity.

Possession state seldom occurs when the medium is alone as this could be very dangerous because it requires the support of people in a non-trance state to guide the victim or medium from doing anything harmful, more so, to guide them to the state of consciousness. In fact, this dance should be taken in a controlled setting or group where you have the priest of priestesses or even the chief priest etc. Precisely, it is usually a form of worship and the mediums are believed to serve as a bridge between the earth and the spiritual world.

These forms of expression may appear frenzied as in certain African and Asian shamanic dances or very contemplative and calm as in the dances of whirling dervishes of Turkey and Middle East.

### **Nature of Dance**

Dance is both a sign and a means of communication, being able to express an action, idea and at the same time, it is the sum total of the action and idea it expresses. For example, a person dancing can be a sign of happiness. At the same time, this sign is a medium to communicate and express a state of mind. Since a sign derives its meaning from its nature, and a tool assumes its significance from its usefulness, the use of dance in sacred rituals is both intrinsic and for worship.

Dance in African context is undoubtedly an important means of communicating with the sacred. In African religious practice, it is an expressive form fully incorporated within the worship system. Already a favoured art form among the numerous cultures of Africa, it is not surprising that it holds a prominent position among methods of communication with the divine. No religious worship was considered complete in the past without at least one dance performance by the devotees.

The importance of dance to religious worship in Africa today and in the past cannot be over emphasized due to these factors (1) the intricate qualities of the dance (2) cultural concept of the sacred (3) and the people's attitude toward the body/movement.

Inspirational dance has much in common with sacred dance but sacred dance acknowledges a spiritual element which is not necessarily the case with inspirational dance. Trance dance in traditional societies is almost in form of sacred dance. However, all forms can be highly therapeutic.

### **Generic Questions**

Is the Igbe worship still very popular among youths?

What are the financial implications in participating in initiation or becoming a member?

Why are Igbe costumes always white?

What does it entail to be possessed by the deity (Igbe) during dance?

What does it require to bring back the mediums to conscious state?

Does Igbe dance involve any special rituals?  
If yes, what are they?  
What are the relevance of these costumes/dance in  
this contemporary period?  
Are the Ohre (native chalk) and water (river/sea) the  
only source of contacts with the deity?

### **Source of contacts with deity**

#### **Persons Interviewed include:**

Okparuku - Chief Benjamin Akposheri  
Omote-uku, Mami Ikareje (Mrs)  
The secretary - Christiana Eboje (Mrs)  
Chief Edore Obiwevbi  
Chief J.M. Edafe (The lyase of Agbarha  
Mr. Obriki (of Awhire)

7.Mr. Tobi Akposheri

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