

Interpreting Nigerian Dances Within the Context of Socio-Political and Economic Changes

Music and dance can respond to and also generate socio-political and economic change. Conversely, that change could be identified, analyzed, and understood in terms of social currents and societal conditions. This is the reason why music dance productions in any society are based on life and practical issues bordering the citizenry within a socio-political context. Therefore, this paper scores Nigerian contemporary dance as it is interpreted differently by different people within different socio-political and economic backgrounds. This follows that dance as an art form transcends the ecstasy of mere entertainment which recycles within the ambiances of art-for-art's-sake. Thus, this paper, using Swange dance of Tiv from Central Nigerian as a model, observes that dances in Nigeria have taken new roles within the fast growing features of socio-political and economic pliability. The paper, therefore, concludes that in Nigeria, dances have assumed the lead characters in socio-political and economic commentaries because of their popularity, thus becoming a popular culture capable of sustaining buckle patterns of ideology and hegemony.

Introduction

Sociologists understand the economy as that social institution which encompasses organization, customs, and practices focused on the global

1 production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Global
 2 economic systems are dependent on market trade of commodities for profit,
 3 rather than barter-based or gratuitous exchange. The logic of this system—known
 4 as *capitalism*—is strong enough to expand wider and wider to multiple areas of
 5 life that also affect dance practice in any given economy. Thus, within capitalism
 6 many goods and services that have traditionally been exchanged without the
 7 mediation of money (like music and dance, to some extent) have now become
 8 commodified. An astute commentator from the Frankfurt School of Critical
 9 Theory, Walter Benjamin, observed that the commodification of original
 10 expressions like art is typical of a society in which the mechanical reproduction of
 11 artistic texts and performances is possible. While mechanic reproduction takes
 12 away from the “aura” of the original, it makes every copy a product valuable on
 13 its own.¹ In turn, the uses and gratifications that people derive from exchanges of
 14 the original and its copies have become commodified as well. This process,
 15 known as *commodification*, is of great interest to critics of both performance writs
 16 large and popular dance will also be the object of our attention in this paper.

17 Within a post-industrial society, dances, as well as other related commodities
 18 are uniquely significant goods and services, because their study allows us to
 19 understand the logic of capitalism, with its efficiencies and contradictions. *Post-*
 20 *industrialism* is a historical period— the one in which we currently live—

¹Benjamin, W. ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, in H.Arendt (ed.) *Illuminations*, London, Fontana, 1992.

1 characterized by a global manufacturing system based on the utilization of
2 advanced technologies of production, service work, and decentralized and
3 hyperspecialized corporate production. Popular dance and music within this
4 period are mostly characterized by the preponderance of the exchange of sound
5 recordings and related products manufactured through the latest technologies; by
6 the paid work (writing, performance, promotion and, distribution) of a wide
7 variety of professionals (rather than amateurs) working in the tertiary sector of
8 the economy; and by musical production under an enormous multitude of labels
9 dispersed around the globe that are controlled by a small number of
10 multinational corporations. More importantly, post-industrial economies and
11 societies revolve—both in financial and cultural terms—around practices of
12 individual *consumption* for survival and growth. The use of music and dance in
13 everyday life within this system is thus best understood as a multifaceted form of
14 symbolic consumption. In addition, dance, in its capacity to draw and form
15 communities may then be said to be a social and political force. Thus, Politics
16 enters dance, and dance enters politics, in numerous and often subtle ways. A
17 philosophical and sociological approach to dance might find political, social and
18 economic values even in dance movement vocabularies and music that are
19 performed without recourse to these by the performers.

20 Therefore, a reading of any contemporary dance refers to the critical theory of
21 dance as description, explication, interpretation, analysis, deconstruction, or

1 discussion of a dance work and its historic, social, economic and political
2 identifications which is a nexus of discourses that surround the dance work and
3 its affective interactions with other theories of the world of fine arts and culture.
4 Because of its supple nature in response to the expanding and sinuous society, the
5 theory and practice of dance are a jagged knot that is hard to untangle because
6 apparatuses are not just the 'esoteric of discourses' or 'intensity of discourses', but
7 also an array, mixture, multitude that fundamentally alter the real relationship of
8 the one to the other regarding dance.

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Dance and Nigerian Society

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According to Walter Terry,

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Dancing should deal with such serious matters as poverty, racial bias, neuroses, and even war. Some of these dances would not be entertaining. They would be disturbing to the mind and to the guts. They would demand that audiences feel deeply and think deeply. (1989: 56)²

² Terry, W. *Frontiers in dance: the life of Martha Graham*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1989.

1 Inferring from the above therefore dance as a performative genre of art
2 should be able to make statements that discuss societal problems. This confirms
3 the notion that every work of art reflects and represents to a greater or lesser
4 degree the society that produces it in an essential aesthetic quality. To this extent,
5 most of the dances emanating from contemporary Nigerian society reflect and
6 represent to a greater degree the decay that characterises Nigerian society. The
7 political and socio-economic problems that bedevil Nigeria are what feed the
8 country's contemporary dance; quite a number of Nigerian dances have treated
9 such issues. In most cases it is presented through satire, parody and metaphor in
10 these dances.

11 In spite of the fact that the dance is perhaps the least generally understood of all
12 the arts, it employs as its medium a material that is closer to life experience than that
13 employed by any of the other arts, namely, the movement of the body in its reactions
14 to its environment. This, indeed, is the very stuff of life (Martin, 1983: 1).

15 This therefore, follows that, dance can generate social change, conversely,
16 that change in dance can be identified, analysed, and understood in terms of
17 social currents and societal conditions. This is the reason why dance production
18 in any society is based on life and practical issues bordering the citizenry within a
19 socio-political context. Dance is interpreted differently by different people with
20 different socio-political and economic backgrounds. Thus, dance as an art form
21 transcends the ecstasy of mere entertainment that recycles within the ambiances

1 of art-for-art's-sake. Dance in recent times has taken a new role within the fast
2 growing features of politics and globalization. In Nigeria dance has assumed the
3 lead character in socio-political commentaries because of its popularity thus
4 becoming a popular culture capable of sustaining patterns of ideology and
5 hegemony. Dance is thus an integral part of theatre which has existed throughout
6 man's history. It is obvious that, almost every nation uses dance to express
7 different emotions. Thus, dances are aimed at expressing something functionally.
8 In this position, Oscar Brockett says that:

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10 Dance may convey themes and ideas. By providing the proper mood, by
11 characterizing agents, by condensing action or elaborating upon emotion or
12 attitudes, it creates emphasis that point up relationships and patterns of meaning
13 (1979: 664).³

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15 The quotation above expresses the symbiotic relationship between dance and
16 the society. It therefore touches on the use of dance for societal issues by
17 reflecting on themes and ideas.

18 In the same vein, Dennis Teghtegh asserts that:

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³ Brockett, O.G. *The Theatre; An Introduction* 4th Edition, New York: Holt Rine Hart, and Winston, 1979.

The fact that through dance, ideas are conveyed, and themes are also suggested which portends that, apart from the entertainment value dance possesses, it can be used for something as serious as National Integration....Body movement, also referred to as non-verbal cues are quite potent depending on the situation they are exhibited at. (1997:155).⁴

It is thus not an over statement to emphasize the potency of the language of dance within the context of social change. Acholonu in the same direction posits that:

The art of dancing is the art of moving the body in a rhythmical way, usually to music to express an emotion or ideas, to narrate a story or simply to take delight in the movement itself. ... Dance is communicative, it can tell a story sometimes better, more effectively, and powerfully than words (1996:51).⁵

Thus, one obvious thing to note about dance is that, it speaks for itself. A good dance will thus automatically appeal to someone who is not from the background such dance is coming from because of the universal language of dance. According to Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen:

⁴ Teghtegh, D. "Dance and National Integration: Focus on Swange Dance" in Angya et al (eds.) Third Faculty of Arts National Seminar of the Benue State University, Makurdi, 2004

⁵ Acholonu.C. "Role of Nigerian dances" in *Nigeria Magazine* Vol. 10, 1996.

1 Dance functions in all the major manifestations of human life: religion, love, art,
 2 works, and morals. For the primitive, to dance is to worship and pray, and to take
 3 part in controlling the world... at all times dancing has been customary and has
 4 decisively influenced the socialization and moralizing of the species... Indeed, apart
 5 from war, dancing is the chief factor making for social solidarity in primitive life...
 6 The value of dance as a method of individual and national education was recognized
 7 as civilization became increasingly self-conscious. In the laws Plato remarked that
 8 good education includes knowing how to dance and sing well (1983:473).⁶

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 10 In the same strand of reasoning, a dance historian, Jane Harris, et al (1988)
 11 state that:

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 13 Dance and the dancer have belonged to every age and culture since the beginning of
 14 time and it is evident that dance and the dancer have played a significant role in the
 15 evolution of mankind. In all ages, the human body, as an instrument moving in space
 16 and time, has made dance unique among the arts (4).⁷

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 18 According to Martin, J. (1983) "Dance can be seen to be a basic, fundamental
 19 element of man's behavior and one which is motivated by impulses and
 20 intuitions to express that which lies inside and is too deep for words" (8). This

⁶ Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism* (eds.) Oxford University Press, 1983.

⁷ Harris, J. et al. *Dance a while: Handbook of folk, square, contra, and social dance*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1988.

1 presupposes that dance is a means to express with our bodies and to
2 communicate our inner selves to others. As such, all cultures have dance and the
3 universal urge to dance can be seen throughout the ages as expressed by all
4 human beings. Primitive man probably first used dance to bridge the gap
5 between himself and his Creator and to communicate praise, thankfulness or
6 supplications. Dance has always played a part in human social interactions and
7 celebrations. However, dance goes beyond being only an activity that is
8 important to share at social functions. Curt Sachs (1937), a notable dance
9 historian, makes this profound statement about dance as one of the foundational
10 arts of humanity:

11
12 Dance is the mother of the arts. Music and poetry exist in time, painting and
13 architecture in space. But the dance lives at once in time and space. The creator and
14 the thing created, the artist and the work are still one and the same thing. Rhythmical
15 patterns of movement, the plastic sense of space, the vivid representation of a world
16 seen and imagined—these things man creates in his own body in the dance before he
17 uses substance and stone and word to give expression to his inner experiences (3).⁸

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19 From the above statement about dance, someone may be forced to submit
20 that, dance may thus be considered as one of the first art forms or ways human
21 beings shared their experiences with others, before the creation of the more

⁸ Sachs, C. *World history of the dance*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc. 1937.

1 sophisticated art forms, which require language or specific materials. Dance only
 2 requires the body and its inhabitant's desire to express something, for dance is the
 3 art of gesture and movement. It transforms images, ideas, and feelings into
 4 patterns and narratives that are personally and socially significant. Dance
 5 organizes physical energy within time and space. Dance is a natural means of
 6 communication and expression, integrating movement, feeling, and intellect.

7 Dance is thus placed within the Fine Arts strand. After all, dance is an art
 8 form. Dance is different from sports: although both are useful physical pastimes
 9 and promote physical health, sports do not address moving the body as a means
 10 of expression. But what is expression and why is it important for us to experience
 11 it? It could be said that expression is getting out your inner emotions, and
 12 according to David Best⁹, "Artistic expression is thought to be a release of feelings
 13 through the artist's particular medium, a sort of emotional catharsis" (1989:3). Are
 14 people who know how to express themselves artistically, and particularly
 15 physically in dance, healthier mentally, physically, and, dare we say, spiritually?
 16 Are they made happier and more complete by exploring their inner landscape
 17 and sharing it with others? It would seem that people who know how to express
 18 themselves physically and express their emotions are people who are more

⁹ Best, D. (1989), "Feeling and reason in the arts: The rationality of feeling". in Abbs, P. (Ed.), *The Symbolic Order: A Contemporary Reader on the Arts Debate* London: The Falmer Press, 1989, pp. 70-88.

1 empathetic and in touch with others and are thus better communicators, as well
2 as being better able to appreciate all aesthetic qualities inherent in the world.

3 Thus, dance is always taken as a serious performative art because it is
4 religious in a self-expressive and communicative sense and it is social, because it
5 is an integrated part of life. The above opinion further illustrates why in African
6 traditional festivals, participants find solace in using dances to express
7 themselves better. By so doing, dance now forms a part of their existence, social
8 interactions, co-existence and well-being. Instructively, dance does not exist in a
9 vacuum. It reflects truthfully the society, which in turn creates its own styles,
10 codes, attitudes, mannerism and cultural traits in its entirety. From several
11 communal activities, events, ceremonials, such as annual festivals, different dance
12 movements are developed, out of which ideas, emotions and feelings are freely
13 captured and expressed irrespective of people's background.

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Conceptual Discourse

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18 From the anthropological point of view, dance can be defined as a cultural
19 practice and as a social ritual, whereby dance is seen as a means of aesthetic
20 pleasure and a means for establishing ties and specific structure in the
21 community. Thus, dance as a social ritual can be considered in the light of the

1 symbolic aspects of a specific culture and in the light of the processes of
2 identification and differentiation through the meanings that it produces for the
3 individuals in that culture. It therefore becomes difficult for us to brand a
4 particular dance vocabulary indecent. Bourdieu Pierre (1994) postulates that:

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6 Dance as a specific language is a socially-historical phenomenon, dependent on the
7 space and time in which it exists and dependent on the power structures that rule in
8 that time. Or to sociologically illustrate this with another example, in a certain
9 segment of modern Western societies, women's powerful and enthusiastic
10 movement of hips and buttocks is labeled as obscene, excessive and signifying
11 vulgarity and immorality, but this same movement in some other segments of the
12 same society indicates female confidence and self-esteem and serves as a sign of
13 female emancipation and gender equality (109).¹⁰

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15 Commenting on this, Cresswel asserts:

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17 Moreover, this very same hip and buttocks movement in ceremonial ritual dances of
18 some African tribes can bear only the meaning of worship and glorification of a
19 woman's uterus and thus of fertility of the female being. Such semantic signification
20 of dances is also the reason that nowadays we often characterize some urban, street
21 dances, which emerge as sub-cultural dance styles, as inappropriate or even harmful

¹⁰ Bourdieu, P. *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994.

dances. However, bodily moves, dance figures or even dance styles are not indecent or inappropriate by themselves, but such semantic baggage is always put on them by the society in which they appear. (2006:203)¹¹

Considering the above therefore, one may be force to say that the physical and social environmental factors play significant roles in determining the kind of dance styles within a given time and place. For example, in many municipal areas within Nigeria, dance styles have evolved and will continue to evolve because of the prevalent socio-political and economic unfolding. It is pertinent to juxtapose the Nigerian socio-political and economic terrain at the time of emerging dances during Buhari/ Idiagbon austerity measure, Babanginda /Abacha eras of SAP (Structural Adjustment Programme), the Goodluck Economic meltdown, and presently the Recession period. There are clear evidences from dance movements crafted by most of these popular Nigerian musicians. Fela Anikulapo-Kuti in his reaction to this negative economic development during the military evolved.

Using the Swange dance of the Tiv people as a template, Saint Gbilekaa (1993) commenting on the Tiv music and dance as forms of communication posits that “music and dance in Tiv society are used to express various emotions” (56)¹².

This explains that there are music and dances for funeral occasions, marriage

¹¹ See Cresswell, T. “You Cannot Shake That Shimmie Here: Producing Mobility on the Dance Floor”, *Cultural Geographies* 13 (1): 2006, 55–77.

¹² Gbilekaa, S. “Tiv Popular Music and Dance: Myth and Reality” in Ahire, T. (ed.) *The Tiv in Contemporary Nigeria*, Tiv Studies Project Publication, No.1, 1993.

1 ceremonies, installations, ritual processes, and the different festivals in Tiv
 2 society. Historical events, social-cultural political and economic issues usually
 3 provide abundant materials for creative dancing. Charles Keil (1979) reveals that
 4 one of the reasons for this is the need for historical re-enactment:

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6 In Tiv, dance provides historical documentation as well as historical trends. For
 7 example, the kuza dance represents the forceful conscription of Tiv youth to provide
 8 cheap labour at the Tin industry in Jos. Ingyough dance is a re-enactment of
 9 epidemics that swept across Tivland and left many with several bodily distortions
 10 and maimed limbs. Dasenda is portraying police brutality of the colonial era (35).¹³

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12 Kur and Iwokwagh (2011) have in the same direction point out that:

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14 Traditional music and dance occupy a very important place in Tiv society. As
 15 communication devices, traditional Tiv music and dance have done a great deal in
 16 the preservation and transmission of Tiv history, culture and folk love. They are
 17 extensively used in religious, social, political and economic life. Thus, they contribute
 18 immensely to the wellbeing of the Tiv people and bring about development in the
 19 Tiv society (101).¹⁴

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¹³ Keil, C. Tiv Song, University of Chicago Press, London, 1979.

¹⁴ Kur T.J. and Iwokwagh, S.N. "The Information Value of Traditional Tiv Music and Dance in the Age of Modern Communication Technologies" *Asian Journal of Information Technology*, 10 (3): 2011, pp. 101-107.

1 Charlse Keil (1979) again acknowledges the following as the depth of dance
2 among the Tiv people:

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4 The Tiv have gained some reputation in the wider world both as warriors and as
5 song-and –dance-men. The soldiers fought well for the British in Burma during the
6 World War II...Tiv dance groupe have won top prizes at African arts festivals, and if
7 anyone were to organize the diverse song -and – dance resources in Tivland, the
8 variety and quality of Tiv African would put multicultural “ballets” of most African
9 nation-states in the shade (10).¹⁵

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11 This position corroborates the ideas expressed by various experts that I
12 interviewed on the subject. Various interviewees stated that historically, the Tiv
13 people were grossly sidelined politically on the basis of their persistent and
14 strong willed resistance against the Jihad (Islamic religion). During this time,
15 dances and other forms of oral performances were aimed at attacking the alien
16 Islamic culture and religion.

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¹⁵ Keil, C. Op. Cit

Contextual Analysis

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3 Several oral interviews the researcher conducted mainly to deduce a cogent
4 reason why *Swange* dance, which initially, was a morally pristine dance, has later
5 in its transformation gone smutty. The study gathered that, capitalism and socio-
6 political crisis had caused the major shift in the moral values of the already
7 distorted cultural norms and values, and that, there was also a shift taken
8 together of standards or rules of behavior in the society.

9 This is an obvious reason that in such socio-political atmosphere, people's
10 ideas of justice and injustice, good and evil, honour and dishonor are not
11 necessarily recorded in law but are maintained by the forces of public opinion,
12 customs, habit and education. This is because morality is a product of society and
13 is not eternal but changes with society under the influence of transformation.
14 Therefore, when such a wind of transformation blows, it sweeps virtually all
15 other segments of human life. Dance, and in particular *Swange* cannot be immune
16 to such social revolution characterised by the tenets of capitalism which does not
17 emphasize communal enterprise but individual enterprise and acquisition, and
18 the standard of what is good becomes a matter for the individual idiosyncratic
19 judgment. Hence, the moral chaos manifest by broken homes and prostitution,
20 which became the hallmark of bourgeois moral standards became replicated in

1 the world of arts. *Swange* dance is responsive to the society that produces it as
 2 affirmed by Gbilekaa:

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4 The impact of the Nigerian Civil War was felt on all aspects of the society. Therefore,
 5 if the *Kpingi* variant of the *Swange* captured sexual promiscuity and moral
 6 permissiveness, it was the general Nigerian picture that it presented and not
 7 particularly that of the Tiv. It would therefore be an error in judgment to conclude
 8 that the Tiv are sexually lax or that they have no moral gumption. Rather, one would
 9 argue that as a creation of the urban setting itself, *Swange* and the *Kpingi* variant for
 10 that matter, was a veritable attack on sexual excesses of the young women who
 11 indulged in prostitution (1993:47).¹⁶

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13 The researcher's finding is therefore justified considering the affirmation
 14 from Gbilekaa. To make it more explicit, one of the *Kpingi* songs best captures the
 15 *Kpingi* attack on commercial sex or prostitution.

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Apu gba yan Ashawove

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Kpookpookpoo

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Nomoozahanna?

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Ashawo, kaNyiyen u er nom ga?

¹⁶ Gbilekaa, S. "Tiv Popular Music and Dance: Myth and Reality" in Ahire, T. (ed.) *The Tiv in Contemporary Nigeria*, Tiv Studies Project Publication, No.1, 1993.

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2 **Translation:**

3 The vulture is devouring a harlot

4 Kpookpookpoo

5 Where is your husband?

6 Harlot, why did you not marry?

7

8 In trying to understand the deeper meaning of this song during the
 9 researcher's interaction with some *Swange* dance troupe leaders and dancers, it
 10 was confirmed that the song was a depiction of the way in which morally lax
 11 women and prostitutes in urban centers were indiscriminately killed while plying
 12 their trade by unknown men purported to be their customers. They are murdered
 13 and dumped on the streets where their corpses decompose beyond recognition
 14 and vultures feast on their carcass. This explains why the songs collections by
 15 *Swange* musical groups heavily attack prostitution.

16 A critical study of the Western history of dance reveals that dance is one of
 17 the fundamental elements of human behavior and has evolved over the years
 18 from primitive movement of the earliest civilizations to traditional ethnic or folk
 19 styles, to the classical and modern dance genres popular today. The term dance is
 20 broad and, therefore, not limited to any selected genre. For instance, in the
 21 twenty-first century, Western dance includes ballroom, jazz, tap, aerobics, and a

1 myriad of other movement activities. The joy derived from participating in dance
2 of any genre and the physical activity required provides the opportunity for the
3 pursuit of a healthy lifestyle in today's world. The richness of cultural traditions
4 observed in the ethnic or folk dance genre offers the participant as well as the
5 spectator insight into the customs, geography, dress, and religious nature of a
6 particular people.

7 Originally passed on from one generation to the next, many ethnic or folk
8 dances continue to evolve as civilization and society change. From these quaint
9 beginnings of traditional dance, a new genre emerged as a way to appeal to the
10 lower and the upper levels of society which is termed popular. For example,
11 when the era of modern dance emerged as a contrast and a challenge to the
12 rigorously structured world of ballet, it was not readily accepted as an art form.
13 Modern dance was interested in the communication of emotional experiences -
14 through basic movement, as well as uninhibited movement - not through the
15 academic tradition of ballet masters. Modern dance, however, found its
16 aficionados and is a popular art form today. No dance form is permanent,
17 definitive or ultimate because changes occur, but the basic elements of the dance
18 endure.

19 Dance is a cultural phenomenon, and it is not a static set of traditions and art
20 forms but rather is a medium to express actual and contemporary joys, sorrows
21 and ideas, using existing forms enriched with the thoughts and ideas that will

1 eventually develop into some of the future's cultural affluence. This
2 interconnection, through culture, of the past, the present and the future
3 accentuates the continuous transformation that any vivid culture is constantly
4 undergoing.

5 It is based on the above premise that one may rightly situate *Swange* dance as
6 a folk and popular dance because it is in its "popular" form that theatre is able to
7 reach the unreachable – the dwellers of the rural and urban areas. The popularity
8 of *Swange* resides in the fact that it employs movements that are enveloped in
9 satirical lyrics and several oral poetic art forms that are performed consisting of
10 derisive songs that are used to ridicule caricature or lampoon perpetrators of
11 things that are considered evil in Tiv communities and the entire nation.
12 Therefore, it should be kept in mind that people's theatres can serve not only as
13 entertainment but also as a means of moral influence on the popular masses.

14 *Swange*, the people's dance, aims to transform its audiences, and also, the
15 music of *Swange* - popular and otherwise - has a political structure and polity-
16 forming capacity of its own concerning issues of national development. The ever
17 growing popularity of *Swange* is based on its acculturation of patterns that are
18 modern and graphic. This adaptation is based on one of the cultural theories
19 concerning cultural modification of groups and individuals, material culture,
20 behaviours, beliefs, and values caused by borrowing from or adapting to other
21 cultures. Whenever cultures come in contact, change takes place in a number of

1 ways: One group may destroy the other, one may completely adopt the other's
2 culture and become a part of it, the two may merge to create a fusion, or both may
3 adapt and borrow from one another. The group that is politically or economically
4 subordinate to the other usually does the most immediate and extensive
5 borrowing. *Swange*, as performed presently by the Benue State council for Arts
6 and Culture (BSCAC) has been transformed from its primordial stage to a more
7 contemporary form utilizing modern dance techniques - floor patterns, balance,
8 form and other choreographic neoteric aesthetics. This transformation follows the
9 position of Thomas, A. Green that:

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11 Classic research studies, furthermore, demonstrate that the degree and extent of
12 acculturation within a culture depends on and ultimately occurs at the behest of the
13 culture that is doing the borrowing (the receptor culture), rather than the culture
14 from which the other is borrowing (the donor culture). An individual culture's
15 emphasis upon and mechanisms for maintaining its cultural boundaries, the relative
16 degree of flexibility of its varied internal structures, and the degree and functioning
17 of its mechanisms for self-correction are all major cultural traits that directly and
18 indirectly affect acculturation. The existing values and patterns of the receiving
19 culture serve as a filter that controls the process of acculturation and allows the
20 enthusiastic and wholehearted acceptance of some traits while providing for the firm
21 rejection of others. Thus, acculturation does not proceed at an even rate in terms of
22 all elements of culture within the same group. Research also has indicated that

1 technology tends to be altered more readily than non-tangible elements such as
2 beliefs or values (1997:12).¹⁷

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4 In light of the above, what is “popular” dance? If we agree that the word
5 popular more or less means “of the people,” then popular dance is the dance
6 preferred by the people. So, we are left with little distinction between folk and
7 popular music and dance, at least in terms of the sociological dimensions that
8 undergirds this study. In light of this, we can state that the general aim of
9 sociological music and dance studies is to examine the social aspects of the
10 production, distribution, and consumption of popular music and dance. Because
11 all of music and dance is equally produced, distributed, or consumed by people,
12 and because sociology examines people’s interactions of all kinds, sociologists of
13 popular music and dance are equally well prepared for dealing with all aspects of
14 the study of music and dance, any kind of it, as a social product.

15 This is also predicated on the philosophical assumption that, every work of
16 art has a significant form that is, whatever is being constructed has an aesthetic
17 form. An aesthetic form and content deal with the way an object or pictorial
18 display is put together. In such a display, the objects must be considered in
19 relation to one another compositionally. The relationships here would refer to the
20 elements that make the performance functional for the practicing society. These

¹⁷ Green, T.A. *Folklore: an Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*, Oxford, England, 1997.

1 include the mode of body language, dressing (costuming), songs, rhythm,
2 movement, pace, tempo, etc. or mimetic acts within the performance. These make
3 up the aesthetic character of the performance. How this feeling is expressed
4 differs from one society to another. Considering the various versions of *Swange*
5 dance movements, it is right to say that each of the versions has a particular
6 message to pass across to the audience through body movement. It is based on
7 this notion that the researcher had earlier in this work defended the rationale
8 behind the so called erotic movement in *Kpingi*, a version of *Swange* dance.

9 Just like any other dance, *Swange* dance has various contexts that one could
10 interrogate as an artistic genre. There are specific dance motifs for specific
11 occasions. This is to say that by semiotic interpretation, a *Swange* dance
12 performed at funerals will not be the same like a *Swange* performed during
13 conjugal occasions. Even in funerals, a *Swange* performed during a young
14 person's funeral will be strikingly at variance to that of an aged person. The
15 performers of *Swange* are much sensitive to these sociological factors and are
16 always responding to the social demands within the context that the dance could
17 be performed. For example, *Swange* dance during conjugal celebrations will
18 definitely be erotic in terms of body language and vulgar in songs and music,
19 while funerals are solemn or glum, just like the dances during party rallies will
20 express energy with an aim of marketing the party's ideology. Above all, the
21 semiotic interpretation of *Swange* dance is hinged on the frontiers of community

1 development where the economic, social, and physical dimensions of community
 2 are often considered together. Looking at *Swange* in this regard is because
 3 community development increasingly includes culture as one of these core
 4 dimensions and may also aim to advance youth development, health, recreation,
 5 human service, and other community goals and the ideological underpinnings.

6 The body language in *Swange* dance varies from one position to another
 7 regarding the message. For instance, when dancers raise their hands above their
 8 heads, waving graciously, they are likely at this point expressing happiness or
 9 praising a personality. This is mostly found during occasions that have to do with
 10 politics and other joyous moments.

11 Monica Shanyo¹⁸ pointed out in an oral interview that, the redesigned *Swange*
 12 dance steps by the BSCAC are deliberately linked to the assemblage of similar
 13 social issues which were presented periodically in times past in the forms of
 14 *ayegh*, *gbányi*, *agbuugh*, *ange* and *agburkigedege*. Evidently, it was these various
 15 social issues that necessitated the formation of these dance steps that became
 16 popularized by *Swange* Arts Council dancers. It is worthy to note that issues that
 17 occurred several years back are still relevant and are captured in *Swange*
 18 performance. Some of such issues include those dealing with relationships
 19 between men and women. Interestingly, people still find them relevant and
 20 interesting in contemporary times. Such issues are used in composing *Swange*

¹⁸ Shanyo, M. Oral interview in Makurdi, Benue State Nigeria on 5/1/2015

1 songs, and spread through the different dance steps. In *Swange* dance
 2 performance, everything from dance steps, movement, rhythm and even
 3 instrumentation flow based on the songs. Subsequently, as mentioned earlier
 4 through creative means, the BSCAC under a team of theatre practitioners like
 5 Bose Tsevende, Joseph Beegu, Richard Tsevende and others were able to work on
 6 the various dance styles into a formidable repertoire, which is what is performed
 7 by the BSCAC. While the researcher was on the field for the data collection, he
 8 discovered at the rehearsal of the BSCAC that their version of *Swange* is
 9 undergoing some choreographic changes of the rhythmic patterns, change of
 10 direction and levels of dance forms, dramatic or lyrical use of movement, the use
 11 of music and many other fundamentals of creative dance. In an interview with
 12 the Head of Performance, Boniface Onogwu¹⁹, the researcher gathered that, the
 13 changes were as a result of some artistic criticisms that the dance was becoming
 14 stereotypic and rigid without elements of new choreographic styles and
 15 approaches. For Onogwu, artistically speaking, nothing can be added or
 16 subtracted from any art form without a logical motive. Therefore, the other main
 17 purpose of the reworking on *Swange* dance steps was to serve a dual purpose.
 18 First, the reworked dance step was more suitable for foreign audiences that the
 19 Arts Council *Swange* group was going to perform before them abroad. A
 20 sophisticated audience of that class that is thirsty for spectacular dance would not

¹⁹ Unogwu, B. Oral interview in Makurdi , Benue State, Nigeria on 5/1/2015

1 want to watch anything less spectacular than what they are used to. This
2 therefore is a reflection of the reason for transmutations found in most Nigerian.

3 Thus, the content and form of the songs in the music and dance of *Swange* are
4 significantly glued to the semantic and stylistic values and principles that are
5 ingrain in collective consciousness and the attendant meanings. This characteristic
6 antecedence in *Swange* within the realm of communal sensibility is what makes
7 the discourse of the dance structured around the praxis of development. This is
8 no doubt the reason why the semiotic dissertation of *Swange* dance is always
9 tilting towards subjecting the dance as a quintessence of powerful expressive
10 gestures conveyed via songs, tempo and other paralinguistic features so as to
11 launch attacks directly and mutually to the economic and socio-political pattern
12 of the Tiv people and Nigeria at large. Because of the radical and topical nature of
13 *Swange* dance in terms of subject matter and content, the performers were
14 harassed daily just like journalists are sometimes arrested and detained or killed
15 silently when they are out to put up criticisms on the other bad side of the
16 government. The *Swange* performers because of their consciousness and reactions
17 to the ills of the society were sometimes detained and that brings into the
18 composition of the song which explains politely that performing *Swange* dance is
19 considered to be an enviable art as can be deduced from this popular *Swange*
20 song below:

21

- 1 2
- 2 *Gbidye gbande gema ityor tingir*
- 3 *Ishaade*
- 4 *Tor Tiv Gondo*
- 5 *Gondo ka zum ne*
- 6 *Ne fa Tiv asema ye*
- 7 *Mba ve maren kpa ngi mbayaga*
- 8 *Wan Aguji udoo a or*
- 9 *Kpan nan lu a jime ga yo nenge*
- 10 *Achiu gbande tseegh*
- 11 *Tso tyo mbativ korom wuhe*
- 12 *Alu kwagh u nyar ya*
- 13 *Mbayaga*
- 14 *Man m we imo je kpa*
- 15 *Geme hingir ityo yam yongo*
- 16 *Nyiakura oo*
- 17 *Nyiakura oo*
- 18 *Ka we doo a or*
- 19 *Zamber kuma nan ke zwa*
- 20 *Er iji a ivav*
- 21 *Mbayaga kwagh u a tseren*
- 22 *Ne ka u mbayev ga*
- 23

- 1 **Translation**
- 2 Beat the drum and turn it upside down
- 3 It is too much
- 4 Tor Tiv Gondo
- 5 Gondo it is now
- 6 You will know the mind of the Tiv people
- 7 My parents, Ngi Mbayaga
- 8 The daughter of Aguji
- 9 If you have a friend
- 10 But he has no support
- 11 Look, just because of drumming
- 12 These people locked me up
- 13 If singing required cash
- 14 Mbayaga
- 15 Would I ever have sung?
- 16 But my people took offence
- 17 Nyiakura oo
- 18 Nyiakura oo
- 19 If you love a person
- 20 And begging fills his mouth
- 21 As flies to a sore
- 22 Mbayaga
- 23 My predicament is beyond

1 The power of children.

2

3 A critical interpretation of the above song reveals that, *Swange* music and
 4 dance at this period had become part and parcel of the cultural life of the Tiv
 5 people, with the capacity of sending out painful messages to people in authority
 6 and at the same time entertaining them. This follows that there can be no
 7 meaningful development when there are no constructive criticisms. *Swange* as a
 8 dance is employed here as a popular art that is capable of evoking change.
 9 Hagher reacting to the above song asserts that:

10

11 The youth received a lot of repression from the political authority, controlled at its apex
 12 by the Tor Tiv. The jobless turned to music making, dancing and singing to criticize the
 13 misrule. As can be seen in the song, the song is heavily coded in self-censorship, that
 14 there is no single completed logical idea. Instead, issues are hinted at, and then
 15 dropped, to be hinted at and dropped again. ...The dance song moves on to assert the
 16 universality of dance as being a free commodity not to be bought by the highest bidder,
 17 although this assertion cost him displeasure of the authority (72-3).²⁰

18

19 Again, a critical study of the music and songs of *Swange* dance, one is made
 20 to understand that the composers of the songs and music of *Swange* were very
 21 conscious of the fact that the society was facing injustices and all sorts of

²⁰ Hagher, I. *The Kwagh-hir Theatre*. Caltop Press, Ibadan, 2003.

1 maladministration. Because of this fact the composers of Swange songs were
 2 indirectly attacking the authorities through carefully selected lyrics. For example,
 3 the song below gently attacks members of the authority that imprisoned one the
 4 Tiv illustrious sons, Asom Shande.

5

6 3

7 *Asom Shande oo*

8 *Ior mba ve wuhugh*

9 *Mbela ve hembra ga*

10 *Ka Aôndo A hembe ye*

11 *Kwagh a de vihin we ze ee*

12 *Ita nomkpevu iju yô*

13 *Mbayôngu ember*

14 *Man i tume*

15 *Nom yôngu nguhar yô*

16 *Kpevu ase ase*

17

18 **Translation:**

19 *Asom Shande*

20 *Those that put you in prison*

21 *They are not above all*

22 *It is God who is above all*

23 *Do not feel bad at all*

1 The he-goat has been poked
2 The sheep rejoiced
3 The ram has now been kicked
4 Let the he-goat also laugh

5

6 This song explains the fact that, Asom Shande was unjustly arrested and
7 imprisoned without being given an option of bail by members of the authority at
8 that time. Yamuel Yashi, the composer of the song felt that social injustice was
9 meted out to Asom Shande, the subject of the song. As an agent of social
10 education, the songs are out to conscientize the Tiv people so as to be more
11 enlightened and stand for their rights as they were addressing the case of illegal
12 imprisonment of an illustrious son as well as chastising the setup that was
13 accountable for the cruelty of the negative censorship of the dance by putting the
14 performers into prison. In these songs there are evidences of social criticism and
15 analysis of occurrences within the society. Simon Frith says popular music has the
16 potential to be a form of social critique that can have a positive influence on
17 people's real lives.

18 Music certainly puts us in our place, but it can also suggest that our social
19 circumstances are not immutable (and that other people – performers, fans –
20 share our dissatisfaction). Music is not itself revolutionary or reactionary. It is a
21 source of strong feelings which, because they are also socially coded, can come up

1 against common sense. It may be that, in the need, I want to value most highly
 2 that music, popular and serious, which has some sort of disruptive effect, but my
 3 argument is that music only does this through its impact on individuals, and that
 4 this impact is obdurately social. (277)²¹

5 This applies to *Swange* in the sense that any form of dance is an endeavor
 6 linked to human experiences revealing multifarious unfolding human issues.

7 The statement above affirms an oral interview by the researcher with
 8 Boniface Unongwu²², the Head of Performance Department, Benue State Council
 9 for Arts and Culture, Makurdi, that:

10

11 The potency of *Swange* dance as a tool for national development cannot be
 12 overemphasized; its organization, presentation and lessons have always been unique.
 13 Right from the conceptual fabrics of the dance *Swange* remains the dance that
 14 promotes social balance. Its aesthetic praxis is built on human right and social justice.

15

16 For instance, most of the pioneer composers of *Swange* songs wanted to
 17 express real emotion and address real life issues using poetry. However, the use
 18 of songs in *Swange* is eclectic as several short stanzas are combined in a *Swange*
 19 performance.

20 Two of such social songs (4&5) can be read below:

²¹ Frith, S. *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

²² Unogwu, B. Oral interview in Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria 5/1/2015

- 1 4
- 2 *Tsongur mo oo*
- 3 *A tsongur mo oo*
- 4 *Me due me*
- 5 *Nyôr tazi ee*
- 6
- 7 *Gongoro tsongur mo oo*
- 8 *Me due me*
- 9 *Nyor tazi ee*
- 10 *Gonoro tsongur mo oo*
- 11
- 12 *Tsongur mo oo*
- 13 *Me due*
- 14 *Me nyôr*
- 15 *Tazi oo*
- 16
- 17 **Translation**
- 18 Shook me
- 19 It shook me
- 20 I will drop and
- 21 Board a taxi
- 22 *A lorry shook me*
- 23 *I will drop and*

- 1 *Board a taxi*
- 2 *The lorry shook me*
- 3
- 4 5
- 5 *Gudam gongoro oo*
- 6 *Gongoro fa atindi*
- 7 *Gudam gongoro oo*
- 8 *Gongorofa atindi*
- 9 *Gudamgongoro oo*
- 10 *Mnyôr tazi*
- 11 *Kar ayem amo*
- 12 *Ngu yemen shin tingir*
- 13 *Biriki kpa ami ga yô lanem a*
- 14 *Orya gudam gongoro, gongorofa atindi*
- 15
- 16 **Translation**
- 17 Better a lorry
- 18 Lorries know rules
- 19 Better a lorry
- 20 Lorries know rules
- 21 Better a lorry
- 22 I boarded a taxi
- 23 Over speeding with me

1 build community solidarity. Nigerian dance is also considered in this paper as a
2 strategy for individual and group stress management. And above all, a tool for
3 reconciliation and transformation within the community and an alternative form
4 of internal and external marketing of values and norms, employment, and a
5 resource to improve productivity for national development.

6 It is thus obvious that without cultural intervention and mediation,
7 traditional forms of expressive culture that developed within small communities
8 will gently fade away, except as operations of nostalgia. Those seeking
9 entertainment and spiritual uplift are just out of ear-and-eye range in the more
10 powerful, colorful, but less conflicting performative activities going on during
11 these traditional dances. The historical, political, economic and social contexts of
12 some Nigerian dances suggest a number of themes that have persisted to the
13 present and influence how the dances are represented today: class, politics,
14 cultural, and economic conflict; the perceived threat to the working-class violence
15 and lewdness; the squandering of resources; and a lack of respect for civil
16 authorities and social hierarchies. We cannot separate our analysis of cultural
17 identity, cultural practices, and cultural change from an analysis of work, power,
18 and politics.

19

20

21

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