

SEKOMBI DANCE: CULTURAL HERITAGE, ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE, AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH TIV AND CUBAN DANCE TRADITIONS

By

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Abstract

The Ekombi dance, which is a vital cultural expression by the Efik Ibibio people, is an important aspect in the preservation of heritage while at the same time promoting the value of art and economics. The study focuses on the historical background, complex dance steps, and aesthetic value, which is depicted by colorful illustrations. The study is compared with Tiv dance in Nigeria and Cuban dance, which shows unique and common cultural expressions in terms of dance, thus showing the importance of dance in cultural identity and social cohesion. The study is important in showing the economic value of the Ekombi dance, mainly in terms of tourism and related activities. The study is important to anthropologists, cultural historians, policymakers, economists, and others interested in cultural heritage and economics, while to artists, performers, and teachers, it is a motivational aspect in promoting cultural dialogue and protecting intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: Ekombi dance, Cultural preservation, Economic impact, Efik Ibibio, Traditional dances

Introduction

The Efik Ibibio people, who primarily inhabit the southeastern part of Nigeria, in Cross River and Akwa Ibom states, have a rich cultural heritage that is demonstrated through traditional performances such as the Ekombi dance. This dance is acknowledged for its elegant movements that mimic the wave action. This dance is significant in that it symbolically reflects the Efik Ibibio people's historical relationship with the sea. This dance is significant in that it is not only a form of entertainment; it also serves to promote

storytelling. This paper seeks to evaluate the cultural and economic importance of the Ekombi dance by examining its historical origins and relevance. This paper also seeks to present a comparative analysis by relating the dance to other cultural practices such as Cuban dance and the Tiv people in Benue state.

Economically, Ekombi plays a role in the development of tourism, festival promotions, and income generation in the community, thus providing job opportunities and empowering the community. The paper, therefore, provides

a structured approach, beginning with cultural history, followed by economic value, as depicted through artistic representations. The paper concludes by providing an overview of the implications on cultural preservation, as well as socio-economic development, not only in the Efik Ibibio community but also in other communities, as depicted in the concept of heritage.

Historical and Cultural Context of Ekombi Dance

Origin and Evolution of the Ekombi Dance

The Efik people, an ethnic group mainly found in Cross River State, Nigeria, have a traditional cultural expression known as the Ekombi dance. The history and cultural customs of the Efik people are intricately linked to the origins of the Ekombi dance, which reflects their social structures, rituals, and relationship to the environment.

Historical Origins

The dance is believed to have originated in the pre-colonial era, although the exact origins of the dance are unknown. Dance is one of the numerous artistic forms that make up the rich cultural heritage of the Efik people, who are recognized in history for their significant contribution to trade and interactions with Europeans. According to Effiong (1995), Ekombi

dance is believed to have originated as a ritual dance that was conducted at crucial social events such as weddings and group events.

Cultural Significance

The Ekombi dance is a significant manifestation of the Efik people's cultural identity, transcending the literal movement of the body to encompass their values and beliefs. The dance is characterized by fluid movements that symbolically emulate the ebbs and flows of the ocean tides, echoing the people's affinity for life near the ocean. Every movement of the Ekombi dance is laden with multiple meanings that are anchored in historical tales and traditions, fostering a sense of unity among the people (Akpan, 2003).

Ekombi also signifies a form of respect towards nature and collective endurance. It acts as a cultural medium through which information is passed from one generation to another. Traditionally, the dance has been performed by young women at the threshold of marriage. The performance has been a rite of passage, showcasing maturity, sophistication, and a readiness for womanhood. The dancers have been dressed in beautifully decorated costumes, which have been adorned with beads and other ornaments. This has added a touch of beauty to the performance, thus enriching

it (Inyang, 2010). Through the aforementioned practices, Ekombi has been a culturally esteemed symbol, a lasting representation of Efik culture.

Evolution over Time

The Ekombi dance has thus evolved with changing social and cultural conditions while preserving its traditional essence. In colonial and post-colonial times, traditional cultures in Africa had to contend with challenges to their existence due to modernization and globalization. Many traditional dances had to prove themselves to be relevant in changing social settings (Nya, 2012).

The Ekombi dance has thus shown its flexibility and ability to endure in changing times. Its adoption in cultural festivals and events has helped to promote its cultural value. This has thus helped in its preservation and enhanced its cultural value to society (Nya, 2012). In contemporary times, the Ekombi dance is not only performed among Efik people but also in various cultural events at the national and international levels and in academic circles as part of Nigeria's intangible cultural heritage. This has thus helped in its preservation and its continuation to future generations (Obot, 2018).

Modern Adaptations

The modern versions of the Ekombi dance have helped to enhance the cultural significance of this dance by incorporating traditional culture with modern artistic styles. This modern dance incorporates both traditional and modern instruments, such as drums, flutes, guitars, and keyboards, to create a rich sound that resonates with people of all ages while maintaining the dance's authenticity. Another significant modification to the Ekombi dance is the inclusion of both men and women. This dance used to be performed by young women, while men have been incorporated into the dance to add strength, variety, and dynamism to the dance while maintaining the traditional aesthetics. This modification to the dance has been influenced by changing social values regarding gender inclusivity. The support of local governments, cultural organizations, and other stakeholders helps to revitalize the Ekombi dance by promoting it through workshops, competitions, and education. This dance has been transformed from a ceremonial dance to a widely celebrated symbol of Efik culture, thus promoting the preservation of this dance while maintaining its relevance and popularity in modern society.

Cultural Significance and Symbolism

The Ekombi dance embodies the beliefs, traditions, and social values of the Efik people. It functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for storytelling, cultural transmission, and community identity formation. Through performance, the dance reflects the social structure and worldview of the community, reinforcing shared norms and collective memory.

Cultural Significance

It is worth noting that Ekombi is integral to community celebrations and social events, such as festivals, weddings, and rite of passage events. One such celebration is the New Yam Festival, which celebrates the end of the farming season and is symbolic of gratitude and renewal. During the celebration, the dance is symbolic of abundance and thanksgiving, promoting social unity and cultural preservation (Effiong, 1995). Traditionally, the dance is performed by young women as they come of age and is symbolic of qualities such as grace, discipline, and responsibility (Inyang, 2010).

Symbolism

Ekombi dance movements are characterized by smooth movements which resemble a wave. This represents

the Efik people's close association with water as a source of life. Costumes decorated with wrappers, beads, and ornaments illustrate beauty, status, and identity (Edet, 2020). Traditional musical instruments such as drums and flutes are used to provide rhythm and convey stories, promoting history and culture (Obot, 2018; Nya, 2012).

Economic Importance of Ekombi Dance

The role of Ekombi dance in the economic development of Efik Ibibio society cannot be overstated, especially in relation to its contribution to tourism development. This is because Ekombi dances are an important aspect of tourism in the region, given that they attract people from within Nigeria and beyond who are interested in learning about the rich heritage of the community. This, therefore, creates economic development through increased demand for hotel services, which in turn boosts economic growth in the region. In essence, Ekombi dances play a catalytic role in promoting economic growth in Nigeria (Obot, 2018).

However, apart from tourism, Ekombi also provides employment and income generation for the local population. The performance of the culture provides employment for dancers and musicians, while the locals benefit from the provision

of support services such as tour guiding and transport. The income from these activities goes towards the development of the local community and the enhancement of the quality of life for the locals (Akpan, 2021).

The involvement of both the government and private organizations in Ekombi also adds to the potential for economic benefits from the culture. The government promotes the performance through various activities such as cultural festivals, tourism promotion, and cultural preservation. Private organizations also contribute to the promotion of Ekombi through sponsoring the event and building the required facilities. Case studies from the annual cultural festivals in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States show that Ekombi tourism can provide significant revenue, employment, and reinforce the link between culture and sustainable development (Akpan, 2021; Obot, 2018).

Artistic Representation: Painting Illustrations

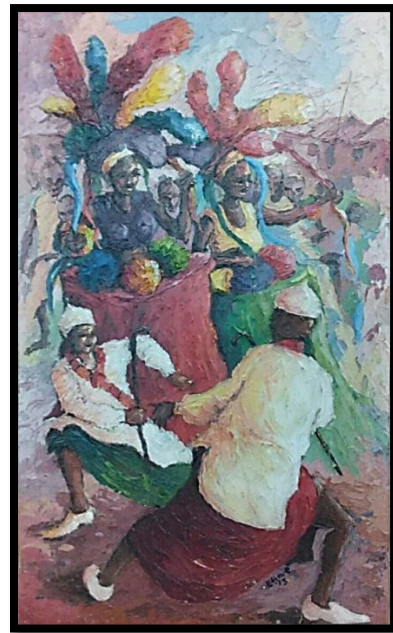


Fig 1

Title: Flowing with the Rhythm
Medium: Alternative water-soluble paint
Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon

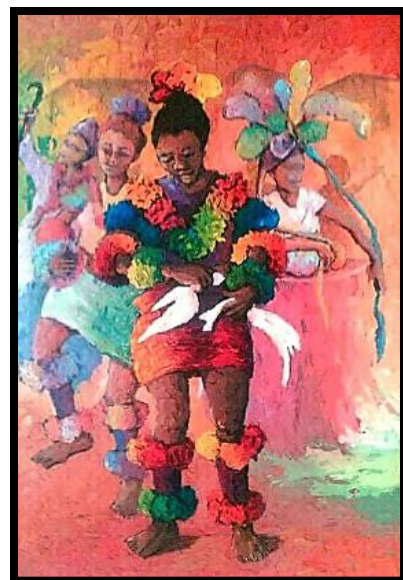


Fig 2

Title: A Graceful Current
Medium: Alternative water-soluble paint
Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon



Fig 3
Title: Rendezvous
Medium: Alternative water-soluble paint
Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon

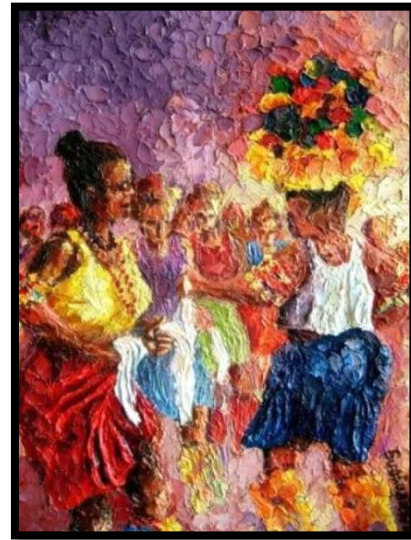


Fig 5
Title: A Graceful Current II.
Medium: Alternative water-soluble paint.
Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon



Fig 4
Title: In the Spirit of Dance
Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon
Medium: Alternative water-soluble paint

Explanation of the Painting Illustrations

The vibrant spirit and cultural importance of the Ekombi dance, a traditional dance performed by the Efik Ibibio people of Nigeria, is well represented by the painting illustrations. Each painting depicts a scene of dancing people with vibrant costumes engaging in the smooth and rhythmic dance steps characteristic of the Ekombi dance. The vibrant spirit of the dance is well represented by the vibrant colors and the joyful nature of the dance.

Description of the Artistic Process and Choice of Scenes

The process of artistry involved in the creation of the Ekombi dance illustrations was informed by a critical understanding of the dance in its cultural setting, historical context, and performance

aspects. The process of artistry involved in the creation of the Ekombi dance illustrations was informed by a critical understanding of the dance in its cultural setting, historical context, and performance aspects. The process of artistry involved in the creation of the Ekombi dance illustrations was informed by a critical understanding of the dance in its cultural setting, historical context, and performance aspects. The process of artistry involved in the creation of the Ekombi dance illustrations was informed by a critical understanding of the dance in its cultural setting, historical context, and performance aspects. The process of artistry involved in the creation of the Ekombi dance illustrations was informed by a critical understanding of the dance in its cultural setting, historical context, and performance aspects.

In translating movement into visual form, the artist used a combination of realistic and abstract art techniques. Dynamic brushstrokes, rhythmical composition, and vibrant colour schemes were all used to convey a sense of movement, vitality, and emotion. There was a specific emphasis on

conveying images of costumes and adornments such as beads and fabrics, which play a major role in defining the symbolic identity of the performance. This emphasis on visual elements adds a greater level of depth to the artwork, particularly in relation to the relationship between art representation and meaning.

Analysis of the Visual Elements and Their Cultural Significance

The visual elements depicted in the paintings convey a deep sense of cultural symbolism, which reflects the perspective of the Efik Ibibio culture. For example, the use of bright, multi-coloured costumes with raffia and beads reflects a sense of prosperity, beauty, and continuation of heritage. Similarly, the use of white cloth in the dancers' hands reflects purity and spiritual connection, which is a common theme in dancers' performances in most cultures in Africa.

The dancers' movements, which convey a sense of flow and beauty, are depicted through the use of curved lines and dynamic colour transitions, which convey a sense of movement like ocean waves. This style of representation reflects the coastal perspective of the Efik Ibibio people, which conveys a sense of harmony with nature, continuation of life, and continuation of heritage. Similarly, the drums and flutes depicted in the

background convey a sense of integration of music in defining the rhythm and synchronization of the performance. Music provides a sensory component to the performance, which helps to engage the audience more.

Comparative Analysis

Tiv Dance Traditions (Nigeria)

Tiv dance traditions in Benue State are an essential part of cultural heritage and reflect social organization, spiritual values, and group identity (Amali, 2017). These dances take place during ceremonies such as harvest celebrations, weddings, and funerals and convey messages of thanks, remembrance, and solidarity (Orkuma, 2005). The synchronized dance routines, costumes, and rhythm display an aesthetically pleasing spectacle with great cultural significance.

The dances have different functions and purposes. Some of the dances, such as the Aondo ceremonial dance, have the function of honouring ancestors (Iyorwuese, 2014; Orkuma, 2005). On the contrary, the war dance known as Tor Diye was a symbol of unity and strength (Iyorwuese, 2014; Orkuma, 2005). The dances are usually performed to the accompaniment of traditional instruments such as drums, flutes, and rattles and emphasize the importance of group participation (Amali, 2017).

Tiv dances also have economic implications in the sense that they attract tourists, boost local hospitality and craft industries, and provide employment for the dancers, musicians, and artisans. In this respect, the cultural and economic implications of Tiv dances promote community harmony and tradition.

Cuban Dance Traditions

Cuban dances are recognized worldwide for their dynamic rhythms and multicultural influences. Among the most famous Cuban dances are Rumba, Mambo, Cha-cha-cha, and Salsa. These dances have distinct histories influenced by African, Spanish, and Native American cultures. Rumba, for instance, is a traditional dance from Afro-Cuban culture known for its complex rhythms and body movements, especially when accompanied by percussion instruments such as Conga Drums (Daniel, 1995). Mambo, which originated in the mid-twentieth century from Afro-Cuban and jazz music, became famous worldwide for its fast and dynamic style (Morales, 2003). Cha-cha-cha, introduced in the early 1950s, is known for its fast and syncopated steps and formal dance styles. Salsa, which evolved in the latter part of the century, refers to a combination of various traditional Latin dances that are now recognized worldwide.

as a form of performance art (Bocafloja, 2010; Giro, 2007).

Cultural Significance and Symbolism

Cuban dances, in general, showcase and symbolize the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Cuba and, in this respect, are considered expressions of identity, endurance, and social unification. For example, the Rumba dance is a symbol of the cultural endurance of African descendants in Cuba and, in this respect, is an expression of shared experiences that are historically and spiritually informed (Daniel, 1995). Furthermore, other dances such as Mambo and Cha-cha-cha are expressions of the mix of cultural influences that make up a typical Cuban society. This is in respect to the fact that, in their choreographic and musical composition, they are considered to be a form of storytelling that conveys historical and social information (Giro, 2007).

Economic Impact within the Cuban Community

Cuban dance traditions have also played a vital role in the national and local economies. Dance festivals, performance troupes, and training institutions have attracted many tourists from around the world. Tourists want to learn and experience the beauty of Cuban dance traditions. This has provided many economic benefits to the country,

including the development of music productions, event management, and cultural tourism services (Feinberg, 2016). Furthermore, the global recognition of Cuban dance traditions has provided opportunities for international collaborations and tours. This has provided economic benefits to the artists and has promoted cultural exchange. Government and private sector efforts to conserve and promote this vibrant tradition have enhanced the economic viability of this tradition. Morales (2003) and Bocafloja (2010) have supported this argument.

Similarities and Differences between Ekombi, Tiv, and Cuban Dances



Fig 6

Title: Waving to the Tempo

Medium: Watercolour

Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon



Fig 7

Title: Waving to the Tempo II

Medium: Watercolour

Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon



Fig 8



Fig 9

Fig 8& Fig 9

Title: Waving to the Tempo III

Title: Waving to the Tempo IV

Medium: Watercolor

Artist: Etim Ekpenyong Mfon

Similarities between Figure 5 (Ekombi Dancer) and Figure 6 (Tiv Dancer)

The performance characteristics of Ekombi and Tiv dances are similar in that the dancers adopt a semi-crouched position with their knees bent to emphasize balance and a strong connection to the ground. The dances also focus on the significance of the lower body and cultural symbolism. The traditional costumes add to the visual expressions and identities of the dances, and both dances are related to ceremonial functions and cultural heritage.

Similarities between Figure 7 (Ekombi Dancer) and Figure 8 (Cuban Dancer)

The Ekombi and Cuban dancers are also similarly shown in dynamic poses that represent the rhythm and elegance of each dance form in motion. The flowing movements of each dancer, such as the Ekombi's outstretched arms and the Cuban's twirling skirt, create a sense of fluidity and elegance that is characteristic of each dance form. The costumes of each dancer are also visually appealing and colourful, with each costume featuring decorative elements that play a significant role in enhancing the stage presence of each dancer. The visual similarities between the two dancers also emphasize the importance of costume design as a significant aspect of each dance form.

Furthermore, the inclusion of traditional headpieces in each illustration emphasizes the cultural identity of each dancer and the symbolic importance of costumes in ceremonial settings.

Cross-Cultural Influences and Shared Elements

Notably, even as Ekombi, Tiv, and Cuban dance traditions come from diverse geographical and historical backgrounds, there are significant artistic and cultural similarities that unite them. For instance, all three dance traditions place significant emphasis on the use of rhythmic musical accompaniment, often from traditional musical sources such as the use of drums and flutes, to set the pace and rhythm for dance movements (Amali, 2017; Daniel, 1995). The use of symbolic dance movements, body language, and cultural costume is also significant in enhancing the storytelling functions of dance, allowing dancers to pass cultural and historical messages (Edet, 2020; Morales, 2003). The historical exchange and movement of African people from the Caribbean to other parts of the world have also played a role in the exchange and transfer of rhythmic dance patterns and styles (Daniel, 1995).

Lessons and Insights from the Comparison

A comparison of Ekombi, Tiv, and Cuban dances reveals the significance of conserving traditional dances, which is a vital aspect of cultural identity, history, and community values. All three dances have a unique worldview, yet they are all significant in promoting cultural understanding. The similarity between Ekombi, Tiv, and Cuban dances demonstrates that dance is a universal form of human expression, which brings people together socially. Furthermore, traditional dances offer economic benefits, thus showing that traditional culture is a vital aspect of sustainable development, empowering communities, and promoting cultural identity among people

Discussion

Synthesis of Findings from Historical, Economic, and Comparative Analyses

Historical, economic, and comparative analyses of Ekombi, Tiv, and Cuban dances show their various functions in their respective societies. Each of these dances has a history, having evolved over time in response to changing social conditions while maintaining certain aspects that convey a sense of community, shared values, and continuity of culture. From an economic perspective, these dances make a tremendous contribution to the development of their respective

societies, considering their potential to generate revenue from tourism and other creative industries (Amali, 2017; Morales, 2003; Feinberg, 2016). A comparative analysis of Ekombi, Tiv, and Cuban dances shows that, while they are unique expressions of their respective cultural heritages, they also have certain general characteristics that convey a sense of community, shared values, and continuity of culture, and they all serve to communicate social experiences, traditions, and culture in general.

Implications for Cultural Preservation and Economic Development

The findings emphasize the need for the continued preservation of culture in the maintenance of the authenticity and viability of traditional dance forms. The preservation of traditional dance forms contributes to the development of community identities and social cohesion, thus leading to economic growth through cultural tourism. Strategic investment in traditional dance forms by governments

and private bodies can help in the sustainability of the culture for future generations.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the richness and relevance of the Ekombi dance among the Efik Ibibio people, as well as making significant comparative analyses with the Tiv and Cuban dances. The significance and relevance of these dances are revealed through the analysis, which shows that these dances are important aspects of the identities and continuities of these cultures. The Ekombi dance, for instance, is related to the nature and culture of the Efik people through its elegance and involvement in ceremonies and rites of passage. In addition to the cultural importance, traditional dances contribute to tourism, employment, and enterprise development. Thus, the preservation and promotion of these dances are important for the enhancement and sustenance of these cultures.

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