

## ‘NGBUU’ Dignified Dance among Ibagwa-Aka Women

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### Abstract

The art of dance goes concurrently with music-making in Africa. Folk praise songs in Ibagwa-Aka is always heralded with dignified dance steps called ‘*ngbuu*’ or ‘*omagaga*’. This unique dance steps are only performed according to how the dancer is emotionally captivated by the praise showered by the singer who is known as ‘*Onye-egara*’. The lead singer is answered by people that have gathered, often made up of co-wives and well-wishers. It is usually performed during a presentation of cow, during a funeral homage by a married woman foreither of her diseased parents to her family. Even though there has been much study of African musical dance, nothing has been said about ‘*ngbuu*’ a unique dance among Ibagwa women. This study through historical and descriptive methods investigates the changes that have taken place in the mode of presentation of the dance steps before independence and now. It attempts to bring out the components involved in its composition. This research contributes to knowledge in general by providing data on the compositional makeup of the women dance then and now. It provides scholars with insight of the social impact of the dance steps on women personality or ego in her community.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Dance is a sequence of rhythmic steps or movements usually performed to music, for pleasure or as a form of social interaction. It occupies an important place in the social structure of all human cultures throughout history. Dance is usually defined as a way of human expression through movement but cannot be limited to movement. While it is true that movement is indeed fundamental feature of dance, because it can be defined as a specific art, based on the expressive moves of the human body. Dance is also much more. A number of theoretical definitions of dance define it as a conscious way of rhythmic movement of the body in a defined bounded space, but these either sport-kinesiological or art theories of dance usually overlook many aspect of dance. Our study in this work is based on Ibagwa-Aka, an egalitarian community with a mix up of people from different Nigerian tribes, who were originally attracted by the great Nkwo market (Asadu 2014) Ibagwa-Aka is the headquarters of Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu state Nigeria whose music and dance infiltrates to other nooks and cranes of Igbo land including nearby Igala land in the neighbouring state of Kogi. Ibagwa as the headquarters of Igbo-eze south local government area is an urban community with suburbs of rural settings and farmlands with palm trees, oil bean trees and other cash crops as an African community, dance is one major component of their cultural heritage.

In many cases, they reduce dance to its physical component in terms of aesthetical perfected rhythmic activity, but they overlook the multiple roles of meanings that dance has for the society in which it appears. This definition agrees with the meaning of *ngbuu* as adance in Ibagwa community because it goes far beyond just any person dancing to display body fitness or aesthetical display of body movement. On the other hand, (Ekezie, and Osele, 2012) defined dance as “the art form in which human movement becomes the medium for sensing, understanding and communication ideas, feelings and experiences. Dance may also be defined as movement, consciously or compulsively articulated with the intention to express, communicate as well as promote feelings and experiences”. Pp, 238.

Dignified-according Oxford Dictionary of English, is an adjective which describes a state of having or showing composed or serious manner that is worthy of respect; maintaining manner of respect. The noun form dignity, has to do with the state of being worthy of honour or respect. It is women with dignity and honour in the community of Ibagwa-Aka that dance *ngbuu* dance.

### Classification of Dance

Dance could be classified according to Osele and Ekezie based on the following criteria,

1. The people who perform the dance, such as women, elders and maidens.
2. Occasion for the dance, like marriages, birth, religious activity

3. Degeneration (age) and value of dance such as traditional, folk, model.

4. The uses of dance such as entertainment, worship

Over time, dance has been a strong tool in which Africans depict the unique cultural values of their people. Dance is a gate way through which indebted feelings are expressed.

Ibagwa-Aka people from origin are referred to by their neighbours as people that hold themselves at a very high esteem. Like every other African society, they have occasions that call for celebrations. These celebrations and functions are usually embellished with music and dance. Rigorous dancing activities are mostly done by young maidens on individual capacities. Solo dance performance among women is only done in dignity or with self-respect to the honour or appreciation or praise of her husband especially when her husband acknowledges her as a virtuous wife by giving her cow to do the funeral of her late parent. This act of doing the funeral of a diseased parents or loved relation in the olden days is deemed as the highest accomplishment of any successful person in life. The person can now gladly raise his or her shoulders high among her equals that he or she accomplished a life time responsibility and he is dying a free person. This is because according to traditional belief, the person's offspring will not have accumulation of people from the lineage to do their funeral. Average Ibagwa person or Igbo at large believes that until you do the funeral rite of Such outing is also occasioned when a woman is recognised in her community by giving her the honour and privilege to become matron to aesthetic masquerade (*manwu-ododo*) of her people like ‘*Ikorodo*’ ‘*Odo-Asadu*’, and ‘*Oshimuri*’ masquerades. an individual with cow, his spirit will not settle to rest. In the case of funeral outing, the woman has to dance honourably for the sake of the honour her husband accorded her, she publicly dances to the honour and appreciation of her husband as she processes from her husband place to her father house where the funeral is taking place. Her husband and his people holding the cow will be coming behind her. This resulted to the emergence of *Ngbuudance*.

#### *Ngbuu* Dance

This is a dance step found among Ibagwa women and other neighbouring communities characterized by self- carriage to mark dignity or self-esteem, making magnificent, bold but gentle and subtle body movement that synchronizes with the gestures to display- affluence and sign of a great achiever. Normally, *ngbuu* starts with bold steps, hitting the feet strong on the ground, allowing the ‘*izere*’ (metal ankle rattle) to sound distinctly. As the dancer moves, she pushes her chest up with shoulder high to display her elegance and beauty as a deserving bride to her husband. Expertise is displayed by varying the steps with ability to come low and go up, going front, back or sideways to greet spectators and bowing before them. They do in return spray money on the dancer.

Occasions for performing *ngbuu* dance;

Originally, *ngbuu* dance is performed for acclamation of a great feat which in the olden days is mostly occasioned by a woman being privileged to present a cow to her people during the funeral of her diseased parents. If the woman performs this dance well during such outing, it brings honour to her husband and his people. Because of that, women as soon as they know that their husband is going to give them cow in such function they go out of their way to learn the dance steps ahead of time. Any woman that her husband gives a cow in this manner is as sign that she is well mannered in her husband's family. This motivates the husband and his people to go out of their way to fulfil the funeral rite of an in-law by providing cow for their wife. He can go to the extent of even borrowing or selling his land to meet up with this all important social and cultural demand in support of his people. According to Okafor (2005) marriage enjoys a pride of place in Igbo life rites since it is very central to Igbo life and culture; ‘In Igbo society, two persons do not marry, two families do. By their very nature, Igbo marriages are community affair’.

Coming down to Ibagwa-Aka, *ngbuu* dance is a strategic and powerful tool that is used to express self-glory or self-worth of a woman of dignity and honour in the community. It is a special kind of dance that is channelled towards unveiling the social status and life time achievement of an individual in public according to Ibagwa-Aka tradition. It is mostly enjoyed by married women but some wealthy unmarried women can package themselves and enjoy this special honour usually done to a successful woman by her husband and his people. An *ngbuu* dancer is usually dressed in gorgeous costume like carrying of umbrella (*ncheanwu*), wearing of metal ankle rattles (*izere*), wearing of special beads called ‘*akaa*’ but in modern times, cow tail (*nzaa*) is used in place of umbrella and ordinary, bold, fashion beads are worn according to individual's choice. The changes that have taken place are not only about costume.

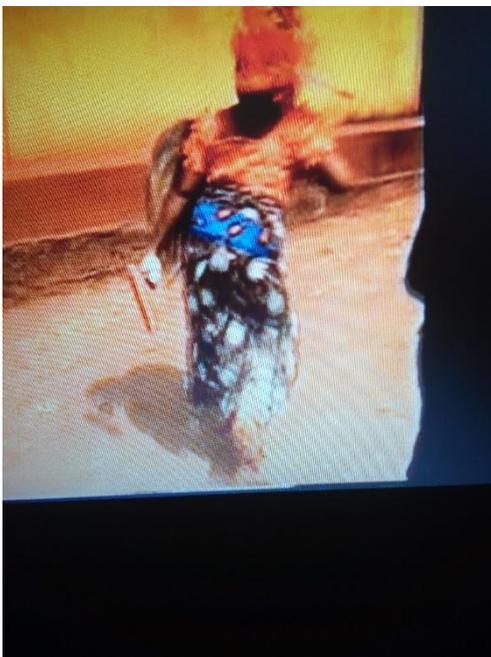
Originally the services of the praise singer (*onye-egara*) is engaged officially. *Onye-egara* normally plays dual role of playing the horn and at the same time intones the praise played by the horn. The horn therefore serves as an interlude to the praise that is intoned. Gradually, people that are buoyant enough move with organised cultural dance group like *ikorodo* or *eke* depending on the available group. Most times people prefer to use the group from their own clan. These cultural groups also make use of aero phone musical instruments that play the praise songs and it is replied by voice. What is in vogue today, is that people make use

of these raining cultural groups which are not purely indigenous like 'Akwu-necheenyi' or 'ogene' cultural groups. Some people even see cultural groups as idle worshipping and as such they make use of brass band which goes with Christian songs. In the absence of onyegara proper, well wishers and co-wives could be singing folk praise songs with clapping of hands for the celebrant.

You can see the pictures of example of *ngbuu* dance step.



A woman posed in Ngbuu motion holding a cow tail {nza}

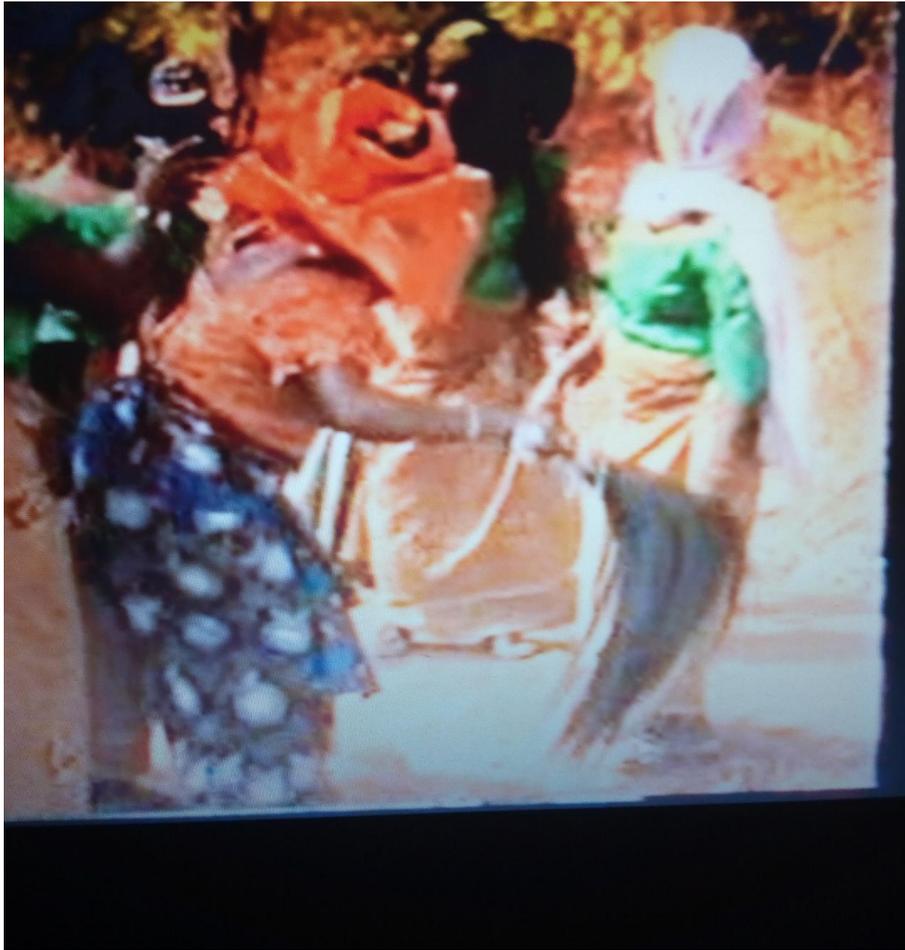


Ngbuu motion



Ngbuu motion





Here are some lyrics of such folk praise songs.

**1.OMAR'UCHE DI**

**IGBO**

**ENGLISH**

Call

Omar'uche di, omar'uche di

He that knows the mind of the husband,  
He that knows the mind of her husband

Response

Omar'uche di ekporuigodo di

He who knows the mind of the husband has collected  
the key of the husband

Call

O ji udo soribemar'uche di She that use peace to follow others knows husbands mind

Response

O mar'uche di ekporuigodo He who knows the mind of the husband has collected  
the key of the husband

Call

Nwanyib'ulo o mar'uche di Woman is home, that knows husband's mind

Response.

He that knows the mind of the husband has collected  
the key of the husband

Call

Ego nayaije o mar'uche di Money that prevents journey, that knows husband's mind

Response

He that knows the mind of the husband has collected  
the key of the husband

It goes on to mention as many names as possible, in order to prolong the song.

**2. AGBENU IGURUBE OYOKO**

**IGBO**

**ENGLISH**

Call

Agbenu o, igurubeoyoko (DC)

Wealthy person, locust gatherer (DC)

Response	
Agbenu o, igurubeoyoko (DC)	Wealthy person, locust gatherer (DC)
Call	
Ilukonuonyenyelutaezigbomadu	When marrying a woman, marry a good Person
Response	
Agbenu o, igurubeoyoko (DC)	Wealthy person, locust gatherer (DC)
Call	
OnyenyeAjibobuezigbomadu	woman Ajibo is a good person
Response	
Agbenu o, igurubeoyoko (DC)	Wealthy person, locust gatherer (DC)
Call	
OlanyaAjiboshi neezigbomaduOlanyaAjibo is from good people	
Response	
Agbenu o, igurubeoyoko (DC)	Wealthy person, locust gatherer(DC)
And so on.	

As the backup music started shifting from its originality people of this age can no longer do *ngbuu* dance rather they do the dance of the cultural groups or band that they have recruited during their outings. This is the adulterated *ngbuu* dance. It is therefore rare to get women that can actually do *ngbuu* dance in the real sense of it in this present time. This has resulted to gradual loss of cultural heritage and resources enshrined within it. In Ibagwa-Aka, the funeral of an elderly person that has many daughters attracts so many musical groups from different backgrounds, among these, the most appreciated the original *ngbuu* no matter how sophisticated other ones might be.

The taking of cow to the woman's place was usually on the Nkwo market day preceding the funeral to give the woman the opportunity to make a show of what her husband did for her to the whole community. In recent times, the woman and her entourage moves from her husband's place straight to the arena of the funeral ceremony on the very afternoon of the ceremony when the atmosphere must have heated up with full blown presence of the guest so that people will see what she brought to do the funeral of her parents. Though women of dignity in their husband's place are looked upon to be honoured by her husband's people with cow but poverty cannot be ruled out completely from the society. In this situation, such wretched people or in some cases share stingy people could go for their in-law's funeral with ordinary few tubers of yams.

Components involved in the Composition and organisation of *Ngbuu* Dance

Okafor(2005)observed that the musician has a role as a keeper of public conscience and as a man who has his hands on the social control lever. He guides the society; drawing, of course from the collective wisdom and pool of knowledge and proverbs of his people. In line with the above observation, the organisation and components involved in the packaging of an *ngbuu* dance is informal. This is because in most cases, any talented praise singer who knows the celebrant's background very well automatically takes up the role of a lead singer(*onyeegara*) or in some cases renowned singer could also be invited specially. The singer composes what she or he intones in promptly to suit the mood in line with public conscience and paint a glorious picture of the celebrant. The co-wives and well-wishers following the celebrant, automatically echoes the expected response as guided by *onyeegara* who is both the composer and the lead singer. *Egara* is always original from person to person. The rhythmic density is enhanced by the clapping of the supporters to the rhythmic movement.

The sense of decorum exhibited by the original dance steps of *ngbuu*, carries weights of unspoken words about the characteristic quality of a responsible wife or woman in the community.

This investigated "*ngbuu dance step*" which is a dignified dance among Ibagwa-Aka women. The Ibagwa-Aka women speak amongst its dance value the glorious position accorded a woman in amongst her husband's kindred has been established. The ability to do the dance to appreciate her husband's good gestures publicly brings honour and dignity to the woman. This dance practice still exists but not without some kind of adulteration both in the steps and accompanying music.

## II. COCLUSION

*Ngbuu* dance in Ibagwa-Aka is not a constituted dance group, rather it is a dance that only women of high repute in the community dance at appointed occasions or outings like processing around the community with funeral cow. It was also danced by a woman who is made the matron of the art masquerade (*manwuododo*) of her people on the day of market outing of the masquerade. This existed in the pre-independence and Christianity era. As a result of the influence modern approach to the people's culture, acculturation, Christianity and modern trends there is a clear shift from the original *ngbuu* dance that marks the honour of a woman with dignity to women dancing to any of these hi-breed musical forms in their public outings. By this work the

researcher is recommending that it is pertinent that this all important dance step that brings the glory of a woman in society should not be allowed to vanish or get carried away totally by new trends. This could be kept alive by performing it in schools as a kind of enlightenment.

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