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Origin, Composite Elements and Performance of Anzalu Dance of the Eggon People of Nasarawa State

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Abstract
Dance is an integral part of human society; it stands as a form of identity, livelihood, recreation and educational exercise. The absence of documentation of most of our traditional dances has given room for the near or total extinction of these dances. The values of our traditions, customs and cultures are being lost to dynamism of civilization. Improvisation and adulteration of most part of these dances give it another meaning away from its origin. The paper seeks to document the origin, essence, composite elements, performance and social value of *Anzalu* of the Eggon people of Nasarawa State of Nigeria. Participant observation, In-depth interview (IDI) Key Informant Interview (KII) and documentary observation are methodologies that will be explored for this paper, while sociological theory will be adopted. The paper concludes with origin of the dance being hazy but documents the necessary and available information about this dance from the supposed originator of the dance. It also recommends more research on this dance and others that are already gone into extinction.
Keywords: Dance, Documentation, Extinction, Origin and Dynamism

Introduction

Dance has ever been seen as a way of life, while it has also formed integral part and parcel of a given society through culture, tradition, customs, norms and heritage. The steps/movements in a dance sure indicate one's culture and tradition without many questions. Original creation, formation and evolvement of some Nigerian dances have almost if not gone into extinction due to civilization, modernization and contenporaneity which now makes it difficult for its origin to be ascertained. The historical background or evolvement of these dances are becoming hazy while the adulterated version is being doled out to the new generations of dancers and even been exported as the original in the name of cultural exchange. It is even worse at this period of social media where dances are contemporarised, reconstructed, modified and re-modified in the name of dynamism which is currently eroding our cultural heritage and essence of our being. Politics and religion are not left out of this disintegration and acculturisation perverting our core cultural milieu. The dishearten part of it is that foreigners are the ones now writing/telling our own cultural stories which the new generation of scholars pick from the internet as authentic. However, most scholars are so lazy to the extent that they do not do in-depth research any more but solely depend on social media information and same is being passed unto the student as authentic.

Dance in Perspective

Many articles, papers, journals and books have been written on dance in different genres or areas of dance, origin of dance, dance therapy, choreography, and notation, contemporary and so on. The origin of dance is hazy and clumsy but many scholars have one way or the other dug into its origin within the available materials and research, while many definitions have been propounded by different scholars at different times within the purview of their areas of specialization and level of experiences. Hilda Wengrover and Sharo Chaiklin assert in an introductory page of their book the *art and science of dance/movement of therapy* that: "Dance is used in a broadest sense of body movement which may involve a small gesture or total use of it. It lasts over time, perhaps merely a brief movement, and may use rhythm or not. It may spread out over space or use only that which one's body inhabits. However, in all cases, it is a motor action that emanates from an individual in response to internal sensation or perceived external stimuli". (xvi) Judith Mackrell asserts that: "dance as the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself. She further observes that dance is a powerful impulse, but the art of dance is that impulse channeled by skillful performers into something that becomes intensely expressive and that may delight spectators who feel no wish to dance themselves" (Academicroom.com)

While Mark Gasper Tekena opines that: "Dance as a term is not new to man; it has been present right from the developmental stages of man and this is evident in the fact that unborn babies respond to sounds by dancing in their mothers' womb". Walter Sorell also asserts that "Dance can also be described as an art by which human movement is used as a means for transmitting messages in the form of ideas, feelings as well as experiences". Lange agrees that the art of dance is said to be "as old as man and his desire to express himself, to communicate his joys and sorrows, to celebrate and to mourn with the most immediate instrument: his body" (9). Ojo Bakare posits the act of dance as "the rhythmic movement of the human body in space and time to make statements" (1). Roderyk Lange opined that "It is a universal phenomenon that serves a vital function in human society in an effort to achieve social cohesion or togetherness, causing them to feel a deep sense of communion with one another and as a result, people are liberated from the bonds of individuality" (92). Looking at all these positions, assertions and opinions of these dance scholars, it is evident that dance has started from birth and has also been part and parcel of human existence. Dance has formed part of the Eggon cultural beliefs, norms and traditional inheritance.

> Dance provides numerous functions in a society. People experience dance in different ways and for many different reasons. Most people are aware of dance as a performing art on stage, screen and media, but dancing can also be a social activity, a form of physical fitness, or a prime means of expressing cultural heritage and identity. Historically, dance was often performed in rituals, worship, social celebrations, and as a means of entertainment and self-expression.

Dance in this part of the globe Nigeria inclusive has grown tremendously to the point of livelihood to many and as an academic exercise to professorial level. It is no more a hobby and rubble-rousers feat but a noble profession to behold. Nigerian dance has metamorphosed over time from cultural, traditional to modern and contemporary status which has placed it on the world plinth. It is worth of note that even as these dances are contemporarised, their origins and authentication are still formidable with the peoples' culture where these dances are domiciled. They also have functionalities and values, sometimes ritual and religious elements are embedded for purposes of norms, beliefs and traditions.

> Traditional dance is an essential element of all aspects of life in a homo- generous society, and the first step in studying dance in traditional society is to identify the functions it performs. A dance usually has a principal overt function and a number of related subsidiary functions which may be a conscious expression or an implicit reflection of the structure of the society, and its way of life in Nigerian traditional societies dance is the vortex of religious ritual and ceremony: a priest or priestess is the leading dancer, using dance and symbolic gestures to lead initiates in dances designed to appease the supernatural powers, solicit divine protection, or give thanks to the guardian spirits of the community.

Anzalu Dance Origin

There are various agreed origin of *Anzalu* dance because its documentation was not assertive hence its oral different versions. Some believed it was a madman called Anzaku Allumbugu whose love for Eggon music fascinated the steps and movement in the *Anzalu* dance, at the sound of any Eggon music, Anzaku demonstrates dance steps that are graceful, enticing and fascinating while people gathered to watch him for his display and therefore got used to his dexterity in those dance movements that have become the identity of the Eggon ethnic dance. Ovey Marie asserts that:

> Literature on the formation of the *Anzalu* dance is scarcely available. However oral literature attributed the formation of *Anzalu* dance to a lunatic called Anzaku Allumbugu who was found around 1940 to be walking between the towns of Akwanga, Nasarawa Eggon and Mada station of Nasarawa state. He was known for his love of Eggon music as he was always seen dancing the combination of the three different types of Eggon dances. Interestingly, although Anzaku Allumbugu was not able to differentiate these dance steps, it was recorded that it was a beauty to behold. Furthermore, the beautiful nature of this dance was adopted during the coronation of Aren Eggon Alhaji Abdullahi Idde in 1953. The Aren Eggon called it Anza-lu as a compound name of Anzaku Allumbugu.

While AK Ezekiel in his own narrative of the *Anzalu* dance asserts that: 'the *Anzalu* Dance is a combination of the three Eggon types of dances, which are *Allu*, *Ngbasa* and *Ebugu* dances. He also opines that:

> The Dance can be likened to an epistemological activity derived from an Eggon man who is said to have hailed from Wana clan. *Anzalu* is a compound word gotten from Anzaku Alumbugu, name of the man who was reported wandered from place to place expressing his love for the Eggon traditions and culture especially music and dance. Whenever, he heard Eggon sounds of music, he simply hopped into the dance and danced in the contrary bringing in some kind of creative steps emanating from the three dancing styles of the Eggon people. His unique dancing steps are free from the original three styles known to the Eggon people.

On the other hand, it is believed that the dance was named after Anzaku who is believed to be a renowned choreographer whose name (Anzaku Alumbugu) is a recurring decimal in the two assertions that literally means 'dance lovers' but never attributed to him a lunatic status. The dance was named after him simply because he teaches the dance steps and movements as form of training and entertaining to the Eggon people when there is any ceremony like festivals, traditional marriages and coronation before the advent of recorded cassette music. It is recorded that *Anzalu* dance steps and movements are the only distinctive and acknowledged movement that is tantamount to the Eggon nation and its culture. However, the uniqueness of their movement, costumes, instruments and props are a sight to

behold, the subtle but aggressive stumping of their legs guarded with iron shackles produce sounds that is combine with rhythm of the wooden drums to arouse and appease their god (*Ahogbre*) and their visitors at any event. *Anzalu* Dance is basically the most popular social dance in the Eggon nation, always used in almost all celebrations in the Eggon community. As an agrarian society, it is use to celebrate and appreciate god for good harvest.

Anzalu Dance Performance

The *Anzalu* dance performance is energetic in nature, vigorous feet stomping and swinging of both hands intermittently and simultaneously from the waist level to the shoulder with elbow bent. The dance gets serious with bending of the waist that gives it a beautiful posture and picturisation that also allows for the dexterity and velocity of the dance movements for the performance. The stomping and shoving of the feet allow the beautiful and elegant of the costumes to flourish, while the adornments such as the horsetails, the leg rattles and bangles sound are loud enough to accompany the drums and other instruments. The dance is always done in a cyclical manner to the right with right foot leads the left foot simultaneously, which in dance term is referred to as sign of formidability and unity. Ovey Marie corroborates that:

> Acrobatic display of *Anzalu* dance steps are performed in a cyclical formation with movement mostly towards the right, in bent knees and bent back. Base on the survey, the dance starts with the *Manga* which is a small sized drum, followed by the *Mada* (whistle) and then the *Ewa* or *Aganga* (leg rattles) which could either be made of iron or palm font. The *Shishe* (talking drum) usually two and played under the arm, the *Adu* which is the biggest base drum usually played on the ground all start to play followed by the *Nangum* or the *Gberu* (wind instruments) both base instruments made from animal horns and gourds. The dancers then raise the song that is being whistled by the *Mada*, swaying their bodies and swinging their arms in a synchronized manner while they create rhythm and melody by stamping the leg rattles or using the *Shasha* (local tambourine) which is an alternative for *Aganga* and *Ewa*. The peak of the dance is mostly done with instruments playing and a more bent posture. The *Mada* (whistle) gives cues for change of songs and the singer or the *Manga* picks up the song and the circle continues until the *Manga* gives another cue for the change of dance style.

Costume and Props

The Eggon costumes and props are unique and also bright and colorful, they are very important and integral part of the cultural heritage and visual appeal of the dance. Every piece of the costumes and props has their significances to the Eggon historical values. The following are *Anzalu* Dance costumes and their significance; Alemoh Thomas and Itsewah Steve assert that:

> The costumes, props and instrumentation includes *Eshi'ako* (the headwear), *Ebi'akpa* (the waist band, it is believed that it aids stamina), *Oru'aben* (the cross belt on their shoulder, that depicts bravery), *Ewa, Nga or (Ganga Ara) Ara* is the shackles they tie on their legs which is used for cultural performance, while e*wa* is used for Eke festival. *Amanga* (Drum), *En'yre* (horsetail), *Dzogu* (Gong, it is normally held by the lead dancer), and *Echi'manga* (Drum sticks). It is worthy of note that these dance and many more are identification and social ethos of the people of Nasarawa State, it gives them sense of belonging and create social reforms from their historical background, essence and functionalities. (218)



Fig.1: ***Isakwo* (headgear): An extraction from a video performance at a marriage ceremony 2024**

***Isakwo* (headgear):** The headgear of an *anzalu* dancer is from the real hair of a baboon. It is asserted by Ezekiel, that the baboon headgear is very significant to the people of Eggon because of the fact that the baboon has been the number one enemy of the Eggon man. The baboon is considered Eggon enemy because it ruined their crops and harvest and sometimes rape their women, so as a symbol of conquest of the baboon, the men used its hide as headgear for *anzalu* dance. Ovey Marie asserts that "the Eggon man killed the baboon and used the hide to create the cap. They wear it and dance with it to show a sign of victory over the baboon. It is cyclical so it can enter the head and also because that is the architectural designs the Eggon have at that time as their houses been built in cyclical forms".

***Gbegu* (Locus beans fruit):** It is made of woven wool made into big lumps with small drops with strong belts. It is worn to cross the shoulders. It is heavy and signifies the major economic tree in the Eggon land called *Ena* (locus beans tree). It is used to make *Eshe* (locus beans cake) which is a local spice. Anyone who destroyed that tree in the community is fined.



Fig 2: ***Akpa Ebi* (Leopard hide): Dispalay of costume at a photo shoot at Eggon hill**

Akpa Ebi (Leopard hide): The epka ebi (skin of the leopard) is worn round the waist to cover their nudities and also for aesthetics. Before now, the Anzalu dancers used the Bente (ancient panties) that is no more in vogue, so, in recent times, the dancers use clothes that have the leopard pattern or check materials to substitute the originality of what was used in the past since one can hardly get the real leopard hide.



Fig 3: ***Ewa*** **(Iron rattle):** From a dance performance at a wedding ceremony at Lafia, 2023

Ewa **(Iron rattle):** This a very heavy metallic object shaped like an eclipse, curved with a hole in the middle with cycled wires around the edges. For avoidance of injuries the lower part of the knee is padded before the rattles are tied to the knee, it enhances both the movements of the dancers and accompanies the drumming and the instrumentations during the performance. It is significant because it shows the strength of the Eggon man.



Fig 4: ***Aganga*** **(Palm Leg rattle) from a dance performance at a village gathering at Eggon, 2023**

***Aganga* (Palm Leg rattle):** This costume came as alternative result of the scarcity of the *Ewa*. It is made from the palm front tree called Aka. It has a lot of thorns on it. The leaves are used when they are green and freshly plucked and can be blended into any shape to woven with pebbles inside and dried to make sounds. It is tied from the ankle up to the knee. It is tied from below the knee without necessarily padding the legs. Some clans call it Lewa.



Figs: 5 & 6: **Oshe Nyema (horse or cow horsetail) Substitute of Oshe Adaga**

***Oshe Adaga* or *Oshe Nyema* (cow or horse tail):** This is either a costume or a prop. *Osha* means tail made by removing the bone from the tail and using a strong stick inside so it dries and becomes stuck. It is used as costume by dancers who really intend to display the dance with all their skills. It is inserted on the *Asko*, on both

arms. It is a prop when replaced with the hand fan. Recently this piece is gradually being substituted with those mad with sacks.

Osba Adaga (Cow hide): It is a tiny light cow hide, usually tired below the *Aganga*, directly on the two eyes of the ankle, on the wrist and or the neck, leaving the fur hanging. It is for aesthetic purpose and it signifies how peaceful the Eggon are.



Fig 7: ***Asko:*** *Asko* is a brown dried fruit-like plant in Eggon land. It is tied on the left and right arm right under the arm. It is not edible and only used for aesthetic purposes.



Fig 8: ***Bidakpa***: It is a brass material which was used as money in the olden days. It is then well shaped and beautifully designed and worn from one side of the waist to the other passing through the back without reaching the front. It makes beautiful sounds when the dancer moves.



*Fig 9**: Atopgba** extracted from a performance of Anzalu dance at a festive2024*

***Atopgba*:** It is in the form of a prop which is a locally made woven fan held by the dancers who during the course of the dance systematically fan themselves. It is held in both hands; sometimes not necessarily stand to fan themselves. The *Oshe Ndiga* or *Oshe Nyema* can be used in place of the *Atopgba*.

Instruments in *Anzalu* Dance Composition



Fig 11: **Shesha talking drum**



Fig 12: **Adu drum (lead drum)**

These instruments are locally made to suit the purpose of the dance, though the *msdsimsge* flutes and *nangun* wind horn dictate the pace of the dance while the *adu* (lead drum) controls the tempo of the dancer's movements.

Cultural Significance of *Anzalu* Dance

Anzalu dance is a cultural expression of Eggon people. It holds a significant cultural importance, reflecting the rich heritage, social values and community identity of

Eggon people. According to Victor Dugga, "*Anzalu* dance is cultural performance symbol…their elaborate costume and assemblage of eggon dances captures and represent various Eggon communities" (53-54). This fosters a sense of unity and togetherness. *Anzalu* dance is often performed during rites of passage such as initiation ceremonies, weddings, harvest festivals. The inclusion of *Anzalu* dance into these events enhances the transition in individual lives and integrating personal milestones with communal celebrations.

The dance also serves as an educational tool. Through its performance elders teach lessons about respect, bravery and the importance of communal solidarity. The dance has spiritual dimensions, often performed in honour of deities and spirits believed to protect and guide the community. In contemporary times, *Anzalu* dance continues to be a symbol of cultural pride and identity for Eggon people. It's performed at cultural festivals on national and international stage showcasing the rich cultural of Nasarawa state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is registered that the dance steps and movements embedded in Anzalu dance emanated from a man called Anzaku Allumbugu who some say was a mad man, while others saw him as a choreographer. However, either mad or not, his dance movement creations have been adopted as the Eggon people of Nasarawa state as their traditional, cultural identity and heritage. The dance has become a unifying decimal of the people of Eggon to the extent that wherever, the movements are done an Eggon indigene easily connects with it in quick succession. Eggon as one of the largest ethnicities in Nasarawa state has grown their dance culture to the extent of influencing many other cultures like Mada, Alago and Migili, their costumes, instrumentation and adornment are unique but flexible. The paper suggests that with influences from the western world on most of our life endeavors, the people of Eggon extraction still in some ways maintain their unique cultural heritage. The dance has not been totally eroded by modernism and contemporaneity that would have led to neo-colonialism. The paper recommends that deeper research should be carried out on the origin/evolvement of Anzalu dance so as not allow foreigners write the history of our dances for us to study as it is happening in many other professions.

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