


The Sociocultural Significance of the Emedjo (Masquerade) Dance Among the Abraka People in Delta State, Nigeria.



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ABSTRACT

Dance serves an important role in the cultural lives of a people and transcends the overall aesthetics of the body to convey the cultural essence of the dance. Among the *Abraka* people, the *emedjo* dance is an art form that reflects their cultural beliefs and thus goes beyond mere aesthetic dancing. The foremost challenges to the survival of the *emedjo* dance are Christianity and Western influence and if not addressed, these can adversely affect the cultural potency of the dance and in turn the intrinsic cultural elements thereof. This paper, therefore, serves as an avenue to bring to the fore the social-cultural significance of the dance, using social-cultural material to illustrate the intrinsic nature of the dance, thereby preserving the cultural context thereof. To accomplish this, the researcher used a range of data gathering methods, including interviews, participant observation, and a review of related literature. Dunham's conceptual and ethnographic theory was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the social-cultural significance of the *emedjo* dance as both an observer and a participant observer during the dance performance. The study concludes that *emedjo* dance is an art form that can entertain, inform, and educate the *Abraka* people about the uniqueness of their cultural heritage and remind them of their cultural roots. The study, therefore, recommends that, for sustainability and continuity, the *emedjo* dance should not be limited to the dance performance alone but should also include the dance's many artefacts. Such factors ensure the **emedjo** masquerade dance culture's continuity and originality.

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Publication History

Received 10th June, 2022

Accepted 22nd July, 2022

Published online 14th

September, 2022

Keywords: *emedjo* dance, masquerade, *Abraka* people, cultural dance, ceremonial dance.

INTRODUCTION

Dance has been one of Africa's ancient art forms, and it is intertwined with many aspects of cultural traditions. Traditional dances, according to Akomeah, Asante, and Arthur, are mostly recognized and valued in the contexts of the cultural traditions to which the dance is related; hence showcasing the

cultural values and identity of the people that perform the dance.¹ Among the *Abraka* people, the *emedjo* dance is an important cultural element in their cultural life, they use *emedjo* dance performance as an avenue to create a sense of ethnic identity and to preserve their rich cultural heritage. The *Abraka* people are in the southern part of Nigeria in the Delta State, with rich cultural practices that transcend their way of life. They are one of the 22 *Urhobo* Kingdoms² in Delta State, Nigeria and they are the major ethnic group in Delta State.³

Although there are other traditional dances found in the *Abraka* culture, which include the *ikenike*, *ikerigbele*, *arigo*, *opiri*, *ema*, and *emedjo*. This paper focuses on the *emedjo* dance, exploring its history, related cultural elements, social and communal significance, and symbolic meanings in enacting the dance among the *Abraka* people. The cultural elements of the *emedjo* dance illustrate the *Abraka* people's unique cultural qualities and express their traditions and communal value. According to Kariam and Hanley, dance in the African culture is a holistic part of the society that is not segregated as an entity; it is utilised to facilitate all cultural phenomena in most African societies.⁴

The *emedjo* dance has an implicit cultural function in that it reminds the *Abraka* people about their common history and values even as their society continues to transform in response to modernisation. The cultural significance of the *emedjo* dance is an appreciation for the history of the *Abraka* people's culture. The distinctive features and function of the *emedjo* dance make it more than an aesthetic performance; it is a religious and cultural display that provokes a deep sense of connection among the participants. The function of the *emedjo* dance, as exemplified through the tale of the *Abraka* people's origin, is to document their cultural heritage in a manner that will ensure its celebration among future generations. According to Persaud, traditional dance, in addition to integrating the past and present, instills an appreciation for a common tradition shared among a people.⁵

According to Harper, traditional dance is an important part of life in a social-cultural community, and for one to understand its cultural meaning one has to ascertain what purposes it serves in that community.⁶ Adekanye observes that most African traditional cultures utilise dance to summon spirits in times of strife or drought in the hope of bringing them good luck, as they believe that dance connects them to their ancestors and nature.⁷

Oikelome posits that, dance is a way of life for Africans, a true expression of a people's existence through rhythm and movement. It is replete with meaning and symbols that reflect the people's cultural values and way of life.⁸ Oikelome opines that cultural dance demonstrates the cultural values and ideals of a specific community, and dance has a story to tell that tends to reflect specific values or beliefs in every culture.⁹ Dance is thus more than learning new dance steps; it tells a story that enables a culture to share its way of life. According to Peick, through dance movements premised

¹ Ronit Akomeah, Eric Appau Asante and Nana Ama Pokuaa Arthur, "A Descriptive and Historical Analysis of *Sanga* Traditional Dance of the *Asantes*," *English Language, Literature & Culture*. 4 no.1 (2019): 9, <http://dx.doi:10.11648/j.ellc.20190401.12>.

² The *Urhobos* are the majority ethnic group in Delta State with more than a million people. They occupy Delta Central exclusively but are also present in limited numbers in Delta South. They have 9 LGAs out of the 25 LGAs in Delta State. The *Urhobos* effectively constitute the 5th largest ethnic group in Nigeria

³ "Abraka, the epitome of Delta's beauty". Vanguard Media Limited, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/abraka-epitome-deltas-beauty/>

⁴ Kariam and Hanley. *African Dances*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2010), 13.

⁵ Davida, Persaud, "Traditional Ghanaian Dance and Its Role In Transcending Western Notions of Community" (2011). Richter Research Abroad Student Scholarship. http://scholar.oxy.edu/rrap_student/2

⁶ Peggy, Harper, "Dance in Nigeria." *Ethnomusicology* 13, no. 2 (1969): 285, <https://doi.org/10.2307/850150>.

⁷ Modupeoluwa, Adekanye, "5 African Indigenous Dances". *The Guardian (Life)*, July 23, 2019, <https://guardian.ng/life/types-of-african-dances-where-and-how-they-are-performed/>

⁸ Albert., Oikelome, "The music of the dance: A study of music and dance in African culture." *Awka Journal of Research in Music and Arts (AJRMA)* 13, no. 1 (2021): 185-202, accessed January 24, 2022,

<https://www.nigerianjournalonline.com/index.php/ajrma/article/download/1385/1362>

⁹ Oikelome, "The music of the dance: A study of music and dance in African culture", 185-202.

on cultural themes, the body conveys messages.¹⁰ Harper posits that dance usually has a core function and a variety of secondary functions that reflect society's way of life.¹¹ Oikelome posits that dance serves a wide range of functions in Africa with every performance typically depicting the people's societal values and social interactions.¹²

Okafor is of the view that, dance has always been a form of cultural representation in African communities. He is of the view that dance creates social connections and serves as a link between ethnic societies, providing community members with a sense of belonging.¹³ According to Oikelome, dance is utilised as a functional method of expression in African societies for a variety of purposes.¹⁴ For example, dance is used for ritual purposes and the commemoration of significant events in African tradition, and because every event is important to African society, dance is a way of life. Oikelome asserts that there is a dance for every event in African society and that dance performances incorporate body movements, symbolic gestures, and music to express cultural beliefs and traditions. Cultural elements such as costumes, instruments, and accompanying songs for dance performances hold respective cues that, when known, lead to a clearer understanding of the dances in relation to the culture in which they originated.¹⁵

In recent times, performances of the *emedjo* dance have been dwindling due to the increasing number of people who are converting to Christianity in the *Abraka* community. The foremost challenges to the survival of the *emedjo* dance are Christianity and Western influence and if not addressed, these can adversely affect the cultural potency of the dance among the people and in turn affect the sustenance of the cultural heritage of the *Abraka* people. Although the *emedjo* masquerade dance tradition could already have lost some of the religious philosophies upon which the dance was founded, it still commands respect and deep spirited feelings among the *Abraka* people during the performance thereof.

The main aim of this paper was, therefore, to explore the sociocultural function of the *emedjo* dance in *Abraka* society and how it reflects and perpetuates the people's culture and traditions. This paper also aimed to highlight the social significance of the *emedjo* dance and provide readers with an understanding of the *emedjo* dance culture in the *Abraka* community.

METHODOLOGY

The theoretical foundation of this article was rooted in the conceptual and ethnographic theory of Katherine Dunham who studied the sociological significance of dance and whose theory contributed significantly to the ideas espoused within this study. Her emphasis on dances of the African diaspora in Haiti, as well as her concept of dance as a community expression, makes her approach an invaluable resource in exploring the function of the *emedjo* dance in the *Abraka* community.¹⁶

The qualitative research method was employed, with interviews and participant observation serving as the primary data collection tools, as these approaches provided a framework for focusing on the sociocultural implications of the *emedjo* masquerade dance, as well as allowing the researcher to understand the *Abraka* people in terms of their worldview. The research that culminated in this article was conducted between 2013 and 2016 as part of the researcher's doctoral studies. Given the paucity of literature about the *emedjo* dance, this study largely relied on interviews and first-hand

¹⁰ Melissa, Peick, "Dance as Communication: Messages sent and received through dance." *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 8, (2005): 1-11, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://www.uwlax.edu/globalassets/offices-services/urc/jur-online/pdf/2005/peick.pdf>

¹¹ Harper, "Dance in Nigeria," 285.

¹² Oikelome, "The music of the dance: A study of music and dance in African culture," 185-202.

¹³ Richard, C. Okafor, "Music in Nigerian society. (Enugu: New Generation Books, 2005), 5.

¹⁴ Oikelome, "The music of the dance: A study of music and dance in African culture," 185-202.

¹⁵ Gayle, Kassing, *Discovering dance*. (USA: Human Kinetics Publishers, 2014).

¹⁶ Stephanie, Hall, "Katherine Dunham's Ethnographic Research in the Caribbean". *Folklife Today* (blog). February 10, 2021, <https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2021/02/katherine-dunham-in-the-caribbean/>; Davida, Persaud, "Traditional Ghanaian Dance and Its Role In Transcending Western Notions of Community"; Vèvè A., Clark, and Sarah East Johnson, eds. *Kaiso!: Writings by and about Katherine Dunham*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

experience. The interviews were conducted in *Abraka* communities, and the participants were indigenes from *Abraka* and were selected because of their in-depth knowledge of the *emedjo* dance traditions. The participant included the *Ovie* (king), community chiefs, and the chief priest of *Abraka* kingdom. A brief literature review was also conducted to position the study within the appropriate scholarly discourse.

Although the interviews contributed significantly to the researcher's understanding of the *emedjo* dance and its social implications, the interview conducted with the chief priest of *Abraka* Kingdom was essential for this study, as it enabled the researcher to draw significant connections between the *emedjo* dance and Dunham's theories. His interviews enabled an in-depth insight into the *emedjo* dance's long-lasting cultural experience among the *Abraka* people. In addition to interviews, the researcher attended and observed dance performances during the annual *Ovwuvwe* festival in *Abraka*, which prompted the researcher to reflect on how centuries-old traditional dances may be adapted to the modern world.

Throughout the interviews and observations, the researcher employed Dunham's theories to gain a deeper grasp of the sociocultural significance of the *emedjo* masquerade dance as both an observer and a participant observer, experiencing the moments of mythic performance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The *emedjo* (masquerade) dance is intrinsic to the origin myth of the *Abraka* people. According to the researcher's informant, the dance represents the various elements that make up not only the living but also the ancestors. The *emedjo* (masqueraders) represent the spirits of the departed forebears of the *Abraka* people, whose presence in the form of masquerade dancers plays an important role in the affairs of the living.

The *emedjo* dance tradition is an ageless practice, as its performance serves various purposes (social or cultural) within *Abraka* cultural settings. Each masquerade performance typically has the main purpose as well as several secondary purposes that usually reflect the people's communal values. The *emedjo* dance is believed to be a vehicle of expression for the ancestors, as they continue with the desire to participate in the activities of the living, the reason the identity of the masquerader is regarded as a secret is that he is not regarded as a living being and is believed to have emerged from the underground world known only to the gods.

The *emedjo* dance is a cultural rite that involves the wearing of masks and costumes, playing music, and dancing. The mask is the key element of the dance. Where the masquerades form a part of a religious rite, music and dance help to create an atmosphere that is conducive for the masquerade dancers to be possessed by ancestral spirits. According to Akubor, in most African societies, masquerades are linked to ancestors, good fortune, and ensuring that life in the community runs smoothly and accordingly prevents any potential threats to the community.¹⁷

Origin of the *Emedjo* Dance

The *emedjo* dance is an indispensable and ageless practice in the *Abraka* community. According to the informant, the *emedjo* dance, is believed to have emanated during the symbolic *Ovwuvwe* festival, which is an annual celebration to commemorate the victory of *Avwaeke* (founder of *Abraka*) over his foes who drowned in the *Ovwuvwe* stream, thereby making it possible for *Avwaeke*, the ancestral father of the *Abraka* people, to establish his settlement with members of his family.

Avwaeke believed that his victory was made possible by the compassionate spirit of the *Ovwuvwe* god. To appease and offer sacrifice to the god and goddess of *Ovwuvwe* as a form of remembrance was the original rationale for the festival and this tradition has been upheld to the present day. The festival is a period of thanksgiving among the *Abraka* people for finally finding a peaceful settlement. The *emedjo* dance was incorporated into the *Ovwuvwe* festival from its inception to serve

¹⁷ Emmanuel Osewe, Akubor. "Africans concept of masquerades and their role in societal control and stability: Some notes on the Esan people of southern Nigeria." *Asian and African Studies* 25, no. 1 (2016): 32-50.

sacred, spiritual and cultural, and entertainment purposes. The dance can also be performed during other important occasions in the community.

Description of the Dance

As part of the *Abraka* indigenous tradition, the *emedjo* dancers are mostly featured during the annual *Ovwuvwe* festival and other special occasions in the community. These masquerades are in various forms and sizes. The dance is performed only by men, but women can participate in parts of the proceedings. According to the informant, the *emedjo* masqueraders' dance skills are not learned through practice and there is a common assumption in *Abraka* that these skills are inborn. Some people develop their skills through active involvement in religious groups, but most dancers develop their masquerading knowledge through inheritance from their fathers or relatives. The *emedjo* dance is mostly associated with religious rites and held in high regard because of the sacred functions it performs during ceremonies.

Whether or not the dance is accompanied by musical instruments is immaterial to the audience, as they become engrossed in the dance performance and are only separated from the performers during specific ritualistic aspects of the performance. The dance, which has sociocultural significance during celebrations such as the *Ovwuvwe* festival and other important ceremonies in the community is generally performed in an outdoor space or a central village square.

The dance is characterised by acrobatic movements performed by masked dancers with energetic thrusts of the arms and legs directed towards one another, thereby creating excitement amongst the audience, who shout for joy. The performance may consist of a drummer, well supported by clappers, rattles, and costumes. The drumming, singing, clapping, and rattling produce a polyrhythmic sound that drives the dance movements. There are two main highlights during the dance performance; the drummer who plays the rhythms and the audience who takes turns dancing.

Emedjo Dance Performance

This study employed the sociological aesthetic theory to describe the *emedjo* dance performance. According to Uji and Tijime,¹⁸ this theory explores the ethnic features of dance, considering the diverse facets of dance as a conduit of socio-cultural interaction. The characteristics of various dance forms are analysed according to their cultural contexts; for instance, the *emedjo* dance expresses the community's cultural identity more than any individual can.

The researcher adapted the sociological aesthetic theory to provide a detailed description of the *emedjo* dance to drive an understanding of the socio-cultural significance of the dance among the *Abraka* people. According to Uji and Tijimie, sociology in this theory includes ethnographic study, ethnomusicology, as well as other dance characteristics from the culture where the dance originated. It thus includes costumes, musical instruments, and the actual performance.¹⁹

The *emedjo* dance performance usually begins with rhythms produced on local instruments with accompanying songs. The instrumentation may include the *igede* (drum), *agogo* (single and double bell gong), and *shege shege* (maracas). The single bell leads the others instruments during performance, with accompanying songs sung by a singer while simultaneously playing the clappers or clapping hands. During the performance, the *emedjo* dancers descend into the dancing space with their backs facing the audience as the people believe that the sound of the music spurs them to come out from their sanctums. They swing close to the instrumentalists to display their dancing prowess. Some will unexpectedly spring up high into the air, descend back down, bang their foot rattles, and sprint back and forth before taking their cues. They wear several idiophones attached to their wrists, ankles, or waists that give rhythm to their movements, adding to the rhythm produced by the drums and voices.

¹⁸ Charles, Uji and Awuawuer Tijime Justin. "Towards the theories and practice of the dance art." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 4, no. 4 (2014): 251-259, accessed September 5, 2021, http://www.ijhssnet.com/view.php?u=http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_4_Special_Issue_February_2014/29.pdf. (accessed September 5, 2021)

¹⁹ Uji and Justin. "Towards the theories and practice of the dance art."

These features are sometimes required to invoke power through rhythmic movement. Whether heard or not, the dance steps are important and felt by the dancer, who expresses the rhythm through movement. Idiophones give sound to the rhythms they are dancing to, just as an instrument gives sound to the rhythm produced by the instrumentalist's hands.

The highlight of the dance is its spectacular, colourful costumes. To portray mystery, there is a dazzling display of red and white throughout. According to the informant, the *emedjo* has several symbolic costumes, both visible and concealed, but the most prominent is white with red colours. These two symbolic colours are vital in intensifying the spiritual potency infused in the costumes during the dance performance. The people believe that red is associated with danger, hence the masquerade's red indicates its inherent mystical abilities and propensity to elicit fear.

The *emedjo* dancers also adorn their bodies with charms affixed to their costumes with the notion that it assists the dancers during their performance. The charms are customarily affixed to the dancers before the performance because they enable the ancestral spirits to possess them before the dance. Among the ingredients utilised in preparing the charms are charcoal and native chalk.



Figure 1: Masquerade dancer



Figure 2: A group of celebrants during the dance procession.

***Emedjo* Dance Performance during the *Ovwuvwe* Festival**

To the *Abraka* indigenes, the impact of the *emedjo* dance during the *Ovwuvwe* festival cannot be overemphasized, as it is generally believed that people who participate in the dance receive blessings of various dimensions, which according to their beliefs could culminate in desired changes in their lives. Dancers/participants usually enter the dance arena in groups and the emphasis is always placed on their arms and feet. As the festival climaxes, the *emedjo* dancers can be seen holding machetes in their hands, their movements complementing the rhythm of the drummers, while their arms receive much attention. The *emedjo* masquerader's movements communicate his mysticism, enhanced by staccato movements, depending on the dancer's capability.

Interestingly, the masquerade dance performance during the *Ovwuvwe* festival initiates reconciliation amongst members of the audience that might have previously experienced conflict and misunderstanding; it unites them to settle their differences. The impact of the *emedjo* dance performance during the *Ovwuvwe* festival is also noted in the traditional affairs of the community in that it is used alongside ritual proceedings to appease the gods so that throughout the ensuing year the people will experience abundant prosperity in their businesses and enhanced wellbeing.

Instruments used in the *Emedjo* Dance

Instruments are a component of the dance that are imbued with varying interpretations, both as objects and as instruments. Through analysis of the dance, the context of the performance, and the instrument itself, it is evident that the instruments hold significant meaning for the people who make and play

them. The most prominent instrument is the *igede* (drum) due to its size and it is made from an indigenous tree selected for its hardness and qualities of resonance.

The art of drumming requires skill, stamina, and discipline and the drummer must be aware of everything occurring in the dance arena. Traditionally, the men do the drumming, and the women use the rattles and clappers. The features and uses of the individual instruments that are currently utilised are explained hereunder.

Initially, all the instruments were constructed by local craftsmen but in recent times instruments have been imported from neighbouring communities. The *agogo* is one of the most important instruments due to the unique sound it makes. The information provided hereunder was gained from observations during fieldwork.

The *agogo* (gong) is made of iron and produces a louder sound when beaten with a metallic rod than when struck with any other object. It is the focal point of the entire dance performance. The dance's pace is dictated by its player, and there is no known inventor.



Figure 3. Agogo (single and double bell gong)

The *igede* (drum) is a rhythmic instrument known for having a distinctive calling effect that inevitably adds drama to the performance. Dual drums are normally used, while skilled drummers can use more than two drums at once. The *igede* has the characteristics described hereunder.

Materials such as wood and animal skin are utilised for the construction. The drumhead is made from animal skin and is attached with laces to the frame. The drum is beaten with wooden sticks or bare hands to generate sound. Drummers hang the drums under their armpits when mobile or place them on the ground when static, and they are used to accompany other instruments during a performance. They are made in diverse sizes and shapes and have no known inventor.



Figure 4. Igede drum

The *shege shege* (maracas) has the following characteristics. It is made from a gourd, and the gourd is wrapped with laced beads. It emits sounds when shaken. In *Abraka* history, there is no known inventor.



Figure 5. *Shege shege*

Lastly, wooden clappers are used to accompany the singing and drumming to provide a well-organised rhythm. The wood utilised is selected for its strength because it is required to survive being struck together during the performance. The rhythmic clapping by the clappers makes the performance entertaining, and it takes exceptional skill for people to balance between vocal humming and clapping. The clappers have the following characteristics: They are made of wood or bamboo and are struck together to produce sound. They are mostly used by female performers.



Figure 6. *Clappers*

The rhythmic patterns created by the accompanying instruments complement the songs during performances. The songs are rich in sarcasm and are sung in the Indigenous *Urhobo* (language spoken by the *Abraka* people). They serve as motivators for the masquerade dancers to perform more dance steps with the songs.

The Socio-cultural Significance of the *Emedjo* Dance in *Abraka*

The *emedjo* masquerade performs several socio-cultural roles in the *Abraka* community but is traditionally danced to honour the gods and the ancestors. It serves as the link between the spiritual and the physical worlds. The masquerade dance also serves as a means of communication between the gods, ancestors, spirits, and living beings and appeases the gods on behalf of the community. The *emedjo* masquerade dance also serves to entertain during special occasions such as a coronation and at festivals. The masquerade dance performance at cultural festivals adds glamour to the occasion with the appearance of the dancers in their regalia. The *emedjo* is the embodiment of the *Abraka* people's culture and tradition and serves to preserve that culture and those traditions.

Within the *Abraka* culture, the *emedjo* dance performance usually has a specific purpose that reflects the people's common values. To determine the cultural strength of the *emedjo* dance performance, it is essential to ascertain the purpose for which the dance is being performed. For instance, during important occasions such as the *Ovwuvwe* festival several traditional dances are performed, each of which portrays the essence of its performance at that moment. The *emedjo* dance performance is usually an avenue for the community members to unite for a common purpose.

The cultural effects of the *emedjo* dance performance in the *Abraka* community also provide the indigenes with opportunities to promote and sustain their cultural inheritance. The masquerade dance is appreciated culturally as a communal heritage but based on its cultural potency, it is an art form that can entertain, inform, and educate the people about the uniqueness of their cultural heritage and also remind them of their cultural roots.

The importance of the *emedjo* dance in the *Abraka* culture cannot be overemphasised and numerous factors contribute to the survival of the dance. The dance is not only for entertainment but also to communicate in-depth knowledge of the people. The performance transcends the masqueraders' ability to move their bodies to the rhythm of the drums and other instruments but to be viewed as art that expresses the core value of *Abraka* culture. A good grasp of the *emedjo* performance accord the *Abraka* indigenes a sense of self-esteem, pride, and dignity, as it exposes them to their history and culture.

The Material Culture Associated with the *Emedjo* Dance

Although the dance patterns are an essential component of the *emedjo* dance performance, the masquerade itself represents a rich material tradition. The dance ideologies add meaning to the dance, but it is the material culture that accord the *emedjo* dance its uniqueness. The variety of indigenous materials that it utilises from nature demonstrates the connection between humans and nature. The prevailing physical element of the dance is the mask worn by the *emedjo* dancer, which is associated solely with the dance. According to Mataga, these artefacts give tribal dances their distinctive identity and differentiate them from other performances.²⁰

In describing the importance of material objects, Mataga posits that 'material objects have practical and symbolic purposes and are a source of ingenuity and craftsmanship within the performing groups, indicating the connection between the dance and its habitat.'²¹ An analysis of the objects offers knowledge demonstrating memory, dynamic abilities, artistic expression, and connections between individuals and nature, as well as the performance's continuity; the preservation of cultural artefacts allows one to have a deeper knowledge and appreciation for the multifaceted lives of those who interacted with them. According to Swan, material culture, which comprises a people's costumes, instruments, music, dance, and values, provides insight into cultural identity.²²

With the foregoing discussion in mind, alterations to the objects linked with the *emedjo* dance can alter the continuance of the indigenous knowledge and expertise associated with the *emedjo* dance. In this regard, Mugovhani, while speaking about *Mbilamutondo*, a local *Venda* instrument, opined that with current deforestation happening on a large scale in many sections of the ancient *Venda* territory, *Mbilamutondo* construction materials are in scarcity.²³ With the decrease in the performance of this intangible African cultural practice and its musical instrument, the continuation of this distinctive cultural practice and its musical instrument may be in jeopardy. Consequently, the sustainability of the *emedjo* dance should not be limited to the performance alone but should also include the dance's many artefacts. Such factors ensure the *emedjo* masquerade dance culture's continuity and originality.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A society's culture can be identified through the common art forms that are a part of that people's cultural heritage. Music, drumming, and dancing are the various art forms practised in *Abraka* culture and these have been incorporated into their culture to indicate the relationship between art and culture. The *emedjo* dance movements, the cultural worth of the dance among *Abraka* indigenes, the local

²⁰ Jesmael, Mataga, "Beyond the dance: A look at Mbende (Jerusarema) traditional dance in Zimbabwe." *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 3 (2008): 100, accessed September 5, 2021, <https://www.ijih.org/volumes/article/37>.

²¹ Mataga, "Beyond the dance: A look at Mbende (Jerusarema) traditional dance in Zimbabwe." 100.

²² Kamaria, Swan, "Material Culture in Sociology: Definition, Studies & Examples." study.com, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/material-culture-in-sociology-definition-studies-examples.html>

²³ Ndwamato, George., Mugovhani, "Mbilamutondo music and instruments in Venda culture." *South African Journal of Art History* 24, no. 3 (2009): 52, accessed December 12, 2021, <https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/EJC94067>.

musical instruments that are utilised during the dance, and the skills required to make them all form an important cultural identity. This study examined dance as a viable tool for identity formation among African communities employing the *emedjo* dance as a case study. This paper indicated how the *Abraka* people have utilised the *emedjo* dance to construct their cultural identity. It is hoped that further studies will explore other cultural groups in Africa to ascertain how music and dance address issues of historical rejuvenation and identity preservation that influence their existence and that are reflected in their songs and dance movements.

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