

Esoteric and aesthetic features of Hungan dance performance among the Ogu people of Badagry, Lagos State

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Abstract: Abstract: This study explored the esoteric and aesthetic features of Hungan dance performance among the Ogu people of Badagry in Lagos State. Hungan is the traditional dance performance conducted as rite of passage for the dead among the Ogu people of Badagry in Lagos, Nigeria. The rite is performed by the beating of special drums also called Hungan. It is a mixture of rites performance and exhibition of the cultural aesthetics of the Ogu people. Until this rite is performed, the departed is not seen to have gone to meet his ancestor. This paper, therefore, investigated the orphic and beautiful features of Hungan dance performance as a tool for socio-cultural cohesion among the Ogu people of Badagry, Lagos. The paper aimed at revealing the cultural importance of Hungan as a means of celebrating individual's sense of social responsibility and contribution to the growth of the society. The performance was commissioned with over 30 performers comprising six expert Hungan drummers, twelve dancers, and twelve ritual singers before over eighty members of the audience. The research method adopted was a combination of observation, interviews and textual analysis of songs and chants. Employing Bauma's performance theory, the study discovered that Hungan has both esoteric and aesthetic features as ritual dance and means of entertainment among the Ogu people of Badagry. Findings further revealed that song rendition and dance performance during Hungan are spontaneous and a confirmation of the creative ingenuities of the performers on stage. The study concluded that Hungan as ritual and entertainment performance is a highly revered culture among the Ogu people, a status symbol and a way of measuring an individual's social responsibility and commitment to societal growth.

Keywords: Aesthetic, Audience participation, Creativity, Eclectic, Performance

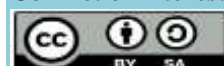
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1. Introduction

The place of dance in ritual performance cannot be over emphasized in African oral tradition. Ritualism finds expression in dance, song and traditional drama or theatric enactment of the African past which bears relevance to their achievements, feats in battle, defeats, socio-cultural lives, the living and their ancestors coupled with the rites of passage and atonement. This paper examines Hungan dance and its ritual and social relevance among the Ogu people of Badagry in Lagos State. The paper put the Ogu people in historical perspective and situates Hungan dance within its ritual and entertainment contexts. The research employs observation, interview, audience passive participation, electronic recording and commissioned performance as its methodology within specific time frame. In the process of this study, it was discovered that this rich cultural and artistic artifact has suffered serious neglect in terms of source materials, documentation and preservation. This neglect is as a result of modernization that resulted from culture contact with the West.

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The destruction of African culture and glorious past is echoed in the norms of fences and birth place which is a reminder of a society in transition having left behind its pastoral essence. Our tradition in Africa has for centuries been stored and preserved in the performance memories of the people and passed from generation to generation by words of mouth. This very simple process has been the only means of preserving and keeping alive the rich cultural heritage of the African people. Africa is known to be abundantly rich in all the oral literary forms which include drama, poetry and prose. All these forms of course are inter-related in terms of rendition and performance. For instance, the performance of some ritual elements in their traditional context require songs or poetry composed centuries ago via inspiration complete with musical accompaniments. Such performance, ritual dance and dramatic forms usually evolve from myth which according to Else (1957) cited in Ibitokun (1993: 9) is not “used for itself, but rather for social reconstruction.” By extension, myth is a product of ritual because it is created from it. Laurence and Wishart (1941: 8) says:

Myth was created out of ritual. The latter term must be
Understood in a wide sense because in primitive society everything
Is sacred, nothing profane, every action- eating, drinking, tilling,
fighting- has its proper procedure, which being described as holy.

It stands to reason then that if dance performance evolved from myth and myth is created from ritual, Hungan dance perfectly fits into the ritual and entertainment context of oral tradition. It can also be said that as a dramatic form, it also qualifies as traditional theatre of a kind for which Hubert Ogunde was renowned. Ibitokun (1993: 9) speaking on the nature of African drama and theatre says that:

Ogunde highlights dance, décor, drumming music, song
And costumes as its (African theatre) soul and essential
Aspects.

Semako-Aje and Kotin (2015) both natives said in an interview with the researcher that Hubert Ogunde picked so much from the rich culture of Ogu people. They both agreed that, much of the energetic dance, the careful orchestrated dance steps, and the esoteric performance enacted on stage by this father of African popular theatre were actually developed from the tradition of the primitive Ogu people of old Dahomey from where they originated. The collective and individual experiences created and acknowledged in what Kinpp (1980). terms “Collective confession” is in the real sense of the word myth. It is an integral part of ritual. Kinpp (1980: 16) says:

In remembering, every individual creates his own past: in perceiving
He limits and defines his world. This is as true of the collective
as it is of the individual, the two being intertwined in reciprocity
and this subjective confession dimension of the collective mind under every aspect- political,
social, religious, economic, scientific- is myth.

Kunene (1980) corroborated this in his lofty idea of the connectedness of the society and its destiny within what he calls the cosmic arena. Until each society is concerned with its destiny and situate it within the contexts of its historical content, steady progress may be inhibited. According to Kunene (1980: 191):

Without this perspective, the society can only be stampeded into directions it does not fully comprehend or does not feel ready to follow. There is some truth in the claim that change is possible only through myth, for myth can take many forms...It can create an attractive vision defining in familiar cosmic terms the future possibilities of society. Myth can be used to celebrate the achievement of society, making them fall into an acceptable social order.

With a long history in the traditional religion of the Ogu people of Badagry, it is rather surprising the dearth of research and documentation of this rich and aesthetically profound cultural heritage. A close study of the dance performance reminds of Japanese Noh theatre which aims to ‘open the air’ of the mind of a spectator and ‘open his eyes’ to the beauty of forms in its full entertainment capacity. This is not to foreclose its sacred and esoteric nature as a rite of passage despite many decades of encounter with Western civilization that has left it bent but not broken.

2. Background

This study explored the esoteric and aesthetic features of Hungan dance performance among the Ogu people of Badagry in Lagos State. Hungan is the traditional dance performance conducted as rite of passage for the dead among the Ogu people of Badagry in Lagos, Nigeria. The rite is performed by the beating of special drums also called Hungan. It is a mixture of rites performance and exhibition of the cultural aesthetics of the Ogu people. Until this rite is performed, the departed is not seen to have gone to meet his ancestor. This paper, therefore, investigated the orphic and beautiful features of Hungan dance performance as a tool for socio-cultural cohesion among the Ogu people of Badagry, Lagos. The paper aimed at revealing the cultural importance of Hungan as a means of celebrating individual’s sense of social responsibility and contribution to the growth of the society. The performance was commissioned with over 30 performers comprising six expert Hungan drummers, twelve dancers, and twelve ritual singers before over eighty members of the audience. The research method adopted was a combination of observation, interviews and textual analysis of songs and chants. Employing Bauma’s performance theory, the study discovered that Hungan has both esoteric and aesthetic features as ritual dance and means of entertainment among the Ogu people of Badagry. Findings further revealed that song rendition and dance performance during Hungan are spontaneous and a confirmation of the creative ingenuities of the performers on stage. The study concluded that Hungan as ritual and entertainment performance is a highly revered culture among

the Ogu people, a status symbol and a way of measuring an individual's social responsibility and commitment to societal growth.

3. Literature review

3.1. Between Esoteric and Aesthetic Features in African Traditional Performance

The esoteric feature of any tradition is believed to be the secret and deep aspects of the culture opened only to the initiated. The case of *Oro* performance, for instance, requires that only a member of the cult (*Awo*), the initiated can partake in it and not the uninitiated (*ogberi*). Some performances combine both the esoteric and the aesthetic. For instance, in the performance of Hungan as a rite of passage for an Ogu native, there is a creative combination of the two where the esoteric ends where the aesthetic begins. In some oral performances like oral epic it is possible to have only the aesthetic with any esoteric element. What is required are combination of active audience, the performers' artistic dexterity and a good setting. Isidore, (2014) in his critical work on JP Clark's *The Ozidi Saga* emphasizes the importance of a combination of factors for the success of oral epic performance. According to Isidore (2014: x) to achieve some level of success in oral performance, there must be a combination of the following:

a performer who has a viable sense of his place in the tradition he re-creates; an audience of largely fellow citizens who have enough of a patriotic investment in the story to challenge the narrator to rise to his calling; accompanists who prod and guide the narrator through the difficult task of giving a good account of himself as he performs in an unfamiliar (ethnic) setting and who provide him the backing he needs to acquit himself fittingly.

No doubt, the factors of the audience, the narrator and a setting that provides a sense of ownership help to project the entertainment features of the oral epic performance in this circumstance. This is one of the beauties of African culture as emphasized by Lucky Aikabeli (2014), when he says "One significant aspect of Africa and the heritage of its people is the richness of their culture, custom, norms, tradition and ways of life p.51. Hungan dance performance combines both the esoteric and the aesthetic in a way that creates a lasting experience for the performers and the audience. In a similar work on spectacles and aesthetics in Ihuen-Eguare festival performance, Esegbe, (2022) says dance performance shows the "inseparability of African dance and magic and its nomenclature and related excitements and aesthetic decorations" p.248. The combination of the esoteric with the aesthetic features in African performance makes the beauty of her cultural heritage unique and beneficial to the people. By allowing women as *Tanyinos* in the rite of passage, for instance, the Ogu people have again revealed their gender sensitivity that gives women the opportunity to contribute to peace and social cohesion in their immediate environment. This is against the notion that men dominate socio-political issues of the society. Sotunsa *et al*, (2024), believe that the "portrayal of power relation in the continent has been largely imbalanced and this has constituted the most palpable critiqued issue in gender studies in the continent p.5. Unlike the wrong portrayal of the African culture including festivals as deeply esoteric and patriarchal, Hungan performance allows women a place in the performance of the rites of passage among the Ogu people of Badagry.

3.2. Historical background of the Ogu people

The Biblical account of the people of the world in the beginning as recorded in Gen. 11:6-9 where in unity of purpose and language built the Tower Babel until God scattered them has resemblance with the Ogu people of West Africa. Ogu people of West Africa are majorly concentrated in the South and headquartered in Aja, Dahomeh in the present day Benin Republic. The Ogus wrongly but commonly referred to as *Eguns* or the "Fons" (in another word) like other early African tribes/races loved to worship gods and goddesses represented in images especially those adorned with gold, silver, bronze, etc. This religious practice is still prevalent among the Ogu people till today. Although there is no archeological artifact or anthropological evidence to confirm the origin or root of the Ogu people, it is however believed that they must have originated from Middle East with close affinity with the Israelites. Looking at Ogu historical origin from linguistic perspective Semako-Ajo (2000) says Ogu people's belief and system of worship manifest in the similarities in the two languages. For instance, God is "Yawhe" in Hebrew language as it is also referred to as Jewhe in Ogu language. The author goes further to say that the Ogus or Fons like the early inhabitants of the world were scattered across West African countries of Benin Republic, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Cote D'ivoire, Liberia, and many others. This spread Semako says is majorly through trade apart from slave trade. Semako-Ajo (2000: 3) says that:

Factors that contribute to the spread of the Ogus across the countries, include apart from the slave trade and inter-tribal wars of the old, their occupations e.g. fishing, hunting, farming, trading, crafts, etc and other influences.

Ogu people have close relationship with the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria. This is as a result of their proximity to each other, 'the interwoven nature of their towns, customs and tradition.' They share so many things in common ranging from their food, trade and commerce, political and belief systems including chieftaincy affairs. For instance, the monarchical heads in Yoruba are Obas, Kabiyesi, Oloye while the Ogus also have their parallel in Aholu, Hhawe and Ogan respectively. The Ogus also have a lot of similarities with the Yoruba social lifestyles such as marriage and mode of dressing among others. The Ogus have very rich language called the "alatha" which has general intelligibility to many Ogu race with many dialects which include the Seto, Ajla, Tofin, Toli, Aja, Weme, Aganyin etc. Music among the Ogus is a way of life. Like the Yorubas, the Ogus are also fun-seekers and lovers of entertainment music. This explains why their kind of music is energetic and entertaining. One of the things unique to the Ogu people is the fact that they hold their tradition in high esteem and not only preserve but sustain it in the names they give their children.

3.3. The Setting for Hungan Performance

Hungan dance is performed as the final funeral rites of the deceased, among the Ogu people of Badagry, Lagos State. Traditionally, venues of the performance can shift from the deceased's open space to an open field depending on the choice of the children. However, for the purpose of this commissioned performance, it was performed under the coconut plantation at the outskirts of Ajara in Badagry. Many things informed the location. First, because of the sacredness and esoteric nature of the Hungan drum itself and the funeral songs that accompanied the drum beat. The drum beat has the tendency to attract the elderly who see as pristine everything about the Hungan drum. For instance, when Hungan drum is taken from *Yoho* (ancestral shrine) to the venue, traditionally no one should stand on its way. Again, anytime and anywhere Hungan sound is heard, the general belief is that someone has 'fallen.' However, even at that location, the drumbeat still attracted passersby who could not resist the attraction of the energetic dance steps and dramatic enactment. The performance maintains the essential unities – of time, place and action.

4. Research methodology

The study utilized qualitative method which involved life performance, observation, interviews, reports and textual analysis of songs and chants. The performance was commissioned with over 30 performers comprising six expert Hungan drummers, twelve dancers, and twelve ritual singers before over eighty members of the audience. This method was adopted because Hungan as a rite of passage for the dead requires that a member of the society must have died for Hungan to be performed. However, since there was no such event at the time of carrying out this performance, it was therefore commissioned. The commissioned performance was done in the presence of elders, chiefs who were custodians of the tradition before active audience in the outskirts of the town. Many elders were interviewed, especially some who were initiates of some secret societies responsible for the cultural renaissance of the people. Songs and chants were analysed for the purpose of identifying their esoteric nature, aesthetic values and contributions to the process of transition of the dead to the land beyond. All the interviews, chants, songs and observations were transcribed and analysed based on descriptive and report approaches using Burma's performance theory.

5. Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework for this paper relies on the performance theory propounded by Tedlock (1981), Hymes (1981) and Bauman (1981) respectively. Performance theory conducts tests in order to determine and make manifest in text, the artistic relevance of a particular performative event. This theory recommends that aesthetic sensibilities should be understood according to local understanding of language, speech patterns, genre etc. According to Bauman (1981) cited in Jegede (2014: 33), performative concept acknowledged "...that not all performances are equal. Full performance involves a level of competence that produces artistry, though measures of competency are to be discovered in each situation and with awareness of local measures of artistry."

In performance theory, the focus is more on formal elements of textual representation and context. It associates stories with a particular event and then credits a narrator who takes responsibility for its performance. The strength of the theory is its ability to associate a story, folklore or epic form with a particular event and for a performer to claim responsibility for its performance. It must be noted that performance of an artistic material complete with setting, situation and audience is actually its written form. Therefore, an assumption of responsibility for an event, no matter how novel, by a performer is germane to each performance. Looking at the nature of oral literature with particular reference to folklore, Bauman (1986: 2) counsels that we recognize that:

...the symbolic forms we call folklore have their primary existence in the action of people and their roots in social and cultural life. The texts we are accustomed to viewing as the raw materials of oral literature are merely the thin and partial record of deeply situated human behavior.

It stands to reason therefore that the oral literature of a people is the full definition of who they are because in it are their mores, dos, don'ts, aspirations, growth system and developmental milestones. Again, the oral material or element may be a collective property of the entire community which makes ownership or authorship impossible, performance theory comes to the rescue as the performer claims responsibility of its performance. If conceptualized, Hungan dance as ritual and entertainment performance is without author, though associated with funeral rites, performers can claim the performance. And this adds to its depth and creative nature since no two performances can be the same. So each performance is but a novel and unique experience.

6. Findings and discussions

6.1. Hungan and the Ogu Rites of Passage

Hungan is both ritual and entertainment dance. It must be stated that it started first as ritual dance and grand finale in rites of passage for the dead among the Ogu people of Badagry. Hungan derived from *Ohun* which linguistically has two conceptual meanings in Ogu language. First, *Ohun* means tradition, the ways of life and secondly it refers to drums. In this context, the *Ohun* for drum applies here. So, broken into its syllabic forms, we have two syllables in the word Hungan which are /**hun**/ and /**gan**/. *Hun* is *ohun*, 'drum' which has undergone the initial elision process of /o/ from *Ohun* to become /hun/ while the second syllable /gan/ means 'heighten' or 'height' (something at its zenith, peak or apogee). The combination of the two that is /**hun**/ and /**gan**/ as /drum/ and /height/ gives us the word **Hungan** translated literally to mean 'height of drumming.' Gauged against the background of the nature of Hungan as talking drum and its importance as the grand finale in funeral performance, 'height of drumming' becomes descriptively and functionally apt.

So Hungan which is translated as 'height of drumming' produces the drumbeat to which the performance called Hungan dance is done. It is a very big and long drum of about 5ft tall usually slanted on a Y-shaped trunk and beaten by

a sickle shaped stick close to the type used to beat the gangan drum. The Hungan drum is a form of complete ensemble because it is supported by the twin drum and steel maracas to create a symphony. Hungan drum is sacred to the Ogu people because it is the major drum used to celebrate the passing on of the dead to the land beyond. No wonder the appearance of Hungan in any funeral signifies a grand finale of the funeral rites for the deceased.

In fact, the sound of Hungan drumbeat in any funeral connotes a tone of finality in the burial rites of the deceased. This informed the popular saying among the Ogu people that after Hungan has been sounded, in a funeral arena, it is believed that it has been accomplished. In fact, the appearance of Hungan drum even when it is not beaten at the final burial rites of the deceased caps all the rites and ceremonies. There is also the popular saying that with Hungan, burial is done even when food is not served.

The above underscores the fact that the study of Hungan dance will be incomplete without a fair understanding of burial rites of the Ogu people. It must be pointed out here that rites of passage can either be for the dead, passing on to join their ancestors or a process of maturation or movement from one stage of life to the other. For instance, the rite performed for a young boy who is becoming an adult or a young girl maturing to becoming a woman. The rites of passage for the dead apply here in this context. Hungan is not known to have been founded by any particular person or community because it is a communal tradition of the Ogu race across West African sub-region. According to one of the interviewees:

I'm a traditionalist. I was born into it and we have been practicing it since we were born. I can confirm authoritatively that Hungan has no founder or any particular family known for its performance or display. It is the funeral rite of all Ogu race everywhere

Funeral rite among the Ogu people has stages until it culminates into the final stage where Hungan is performed and concluded by the eldest son of the deceased. He is expected to come face to face with the drums, holds Hungan, the tallest drum, then drops it to mark the end of the ritual cum entertainment display. Whatever performance that happens thereafter is anticlimax. The affinity between Hungan drum and the rites of passage can only be appreciated in the sacredness of the drums. For instance, the drums are not kept anywhere but among the spirits of the ancestors in the ancestral shrine called *Yoho*.

This further confirms the fact that Hungan drum is exclusively for rites of passage; for the drums literally sleeps and wakes up with the ancestors in the ancestral shrine. Inside *Yoho*, many ritual and sacrificial enactments go on which Hungan is made to witness. *Yoho* is very important to the rites of passage of an ordinary Ogu man because every clan is expected to have one serving as the collective assembly of the departed members of the clan. *Yoho* is believed to be the abode of the forefathers of the Ogu people and also a meeting point between the dead and the living. At *Yoho* also, sacrifices called (*saara*) are offered for the dead. Consultation is also made for people by the diviners to unravel certain mysteries of life or to find out some hidden things from the ancestors. Just as *Yoho* is like the resting place of the departed souls of the ancestors so it is for Hungan drums in traditional Ogu setting. This further reinforces the importance of Hungan as a significant aspect of the funeral rites among the Ogu people of Badagry. The interviewee insists that:

Discussion about Hungan will be incomplete without going back to the funeral rites of the Ogu people, because Hungan is like the denouement or a kind of resolution of the funeral rites. Therefore any discourse on Hungan dance will just be like watching the end of a play without actually knowing the beginning.

Funeral rites in Ogu have a lot to do with the status of the deceased. By status it means whether the deceased was an initiate, as it is commonly said, 'whether he has gone through the shrine, or just simply an Ogu person who is of age'. Although age does not matter because any child that has grown a tooth is qualified to be given all burial rites when he/she passes on, only that Hungan dance will not be performed. So between the initiates and non-initiates the traditional rites differ but Hungan performance is general to them both. Generally, when a person dies in Ogu land announcement is made to that effect by the "Iyawos", that is the collective wives of the family of the deceased through their band called "Iyawo gbe." These women gather themselves moving from one compound to the other where the deceased has relations in the whole of Ogu land. As the Iyawo gbe band sing dirge sweeping from one compound of the deceased to another, they give information as to when the deceased will be buried and when the funeral rites (celebration) will be performed. The example below gives information about the burial arrangement:

Wa yi wen yo boyitho.....Take this message and deliver it
Osokan lari ton die.....This is Osokan's message going over seas
Ajethon do na Hunsu.....If you get there tell Hunsu that
Do mo do Agosan mi.....the burial month
Ton lo po sun do po.....remains one month.

It is important to note that committing the deceased to mother earth which is the burial complete with all the rites is different from the funeral rites, which are activities or rites performed to mourn and celebrate the deceased. It takes about three days for the deceased to be buried in Ogu land and this is to give room for sons, daughters and close relations of the deceased to be aware in order to give last minute respects.

At the expiration of the three days, it is expected that those who matter to the deceased must have arrived before the deceased's remains are taken to the burial ground. The rites begin immediately as the deceased is taken to the cemetery led by the *Oblu*, a kind of modern day brigade band. The *Oblu* is a social event that requires that the children dance in front of the deceased as the remains are being taken for burial. This is the first step towards the purgation of sad emotion of the bereaved children because they have to cheer up, smile and dance away their sorrow. The drum ensemble that makes up the *Oblu* are **Tahule** and **Bembe Elenu meji**, like the gangan drum of the Yoruba people. The drum also provides poetries especially philosophical words about life and existence because it is a talking drum. This is the responsibilities

of in-laws. The deceased is therefore committed to mother earth to signal the beginning of the rites that will eventually culminate into Hungan ritual dance.

6.2. Hungan as Ritual Dance and Entertainment

Some rites are performed after the burial of the deceased which are meant to send him/her peacefully to the land beyond. It is the belief of the people that the deceased may not be admitted to join his ancestors in the realm of the spirit except those rites are performed by the living he left behind. So immediately the deceased is committed to mother earth, a little of the mound (*yori*) on his grave is taken, mixed with Oguso (the dredge of the palm oil, dried and usually used in making fire) and lighted on a broken pot or traditional lamp. This fire is lighted in *Yoho* by the *Tanyino* for seven days. *Tanyinos* are the elderly women in the family who may as a result of divorce or death of their husbands have returned to their family house or elderly women who still live with their husbands but are members of the deceased family. A wife in the deceased family cannot be a *Tanyino*. They are in charge of *Yoho*. They put on the deceased's light for seven days, offer prayers for visitors who throng the ancestral shrine, and ensure that the light does not go off. The light is the symbol of the deceased, a kind of reminder of his life and existence. Again, the light is a re-enactment in symbolic signification of the process of birth as man lives and eventual dies.

Traditionally on the seventh day, the light goes off connoting death or end of a life once lived. Meanwhile during the seven days, the family, especially the children must have met to choose a date for the final funeral rites. Also within that seven days especially the second day of the burial, the family of the deceased must have conveyed an expanded meeting of all members of the family, extended family including friends and acquaintances of the deceased to ask if he owed or being owed money, landed property or some other things, by any one. This is necessary in order to avert any kind of disruption on the day of the final rites when Hungan will be on display. Again, it is yet another opportunity to make sure the deceased owe nobody and nobody owes him.

A traditional rite called Agoji: follows also the second day the deceased is buried. This rite requires that some of the deceased's property especially the cloths, personal effects used in the twilight of his life are set ablaze with cowries thrown into the fire. The significance of this rite is not lost on the living as it reminds them that man comes to this world with nothing and when he shall depart, he goes with nothing. Again, those personal belongings that will quickly bring back the sad memory of the deceased are burnt. It is also a time of giving out by the bereaved. Each member of the family is expected to hold a fowl or cockerel meant to be taken from them by any of their in-laws. The gift is for all in-laws without prejudice because as they hold the hens or fowls in their hands any of the family in-laws can collect from anyone of them. More importantly, they must not be preferential or refuse to give to any of the in-laws on demand. It is a culture of payback to the in-laws whose responsibility it is to arrange for the performance of *Oblu* and Hungan dance in terms of finance and logistics.

Amasun rite must be performed to re-invite back to the homestead the family deities and spirits. Like the Igbo's, personal *chi*, the Ogu people also believe in household deities and spirits, believed to have fled the family when the deceased died. It is believed that the spirit of the dead and the deities cannot co-exist in the family, so they have to leave the family pronto. However, having committed the deceased to mother earth, *Amasun* rite is performed to bring family deities back.

This rite involves the sprinkling of boiled herbs ("*agbo*" or concoction) with a very prominent leaf called "Akoko". When the spirit of the dead has been exorcized and staved off the house, the deities are invited to come back to continue to perform their roles as protectors, guards and providers for the family. While all these rituals are going on, the *passa* group is constantly performing to keep the family lively and entertained. The *Passa* performance is a form of invective called *Ate* or *Omahan* where scathing jokes are made in songs either from women to men, or even the group to the deceased's family. For instance, the song below taunts the family of the deceased to the effect that they can choose not to bury their dead:

Me de na kuo eo ku.....the deceased is already dead
Ni mi joro mi gan diyi.....if you like bury him
Ni mi joro mi hun mini ma diyi o..... if you like don't bury him
Me de oku o eo ku.....The dead is already dead
Ema yon edo mi di yi, abi mima diyi.....He doesn't know, bury him or not
Me de oku o magan mo wiyen de pepe ba...He is not here to face any shame
Mede o ku o ku.....He is gone, he is gone!

The deceased himself can also be a butt of such jokes and mimicry. It is important to stress that these are rites performed preparatory to the grand finale, where Hungan takes pre-eminence. *Passa* is accompanied by a slow drumbeat, a technique that allows the message of the invectives sink to the hearers and again because it gives allowance for song composition some of which come spontaneously to them.

6.3. The Aesthetics of Hungan as Ritual and Entertainment Dance

Historically, Hungan dance is the ritual dance of traditional Ogu people of West Africa. It has its origin in the ritual performance of the Ogu people for their dead. The Hungan dance is done for the release of the soul of the dead to its ancestors. This underscores its sacredness and esoteric nature. For instance, the Hungan drum usually goes to rest just like the dead in the ancestral shrine where the spirits of the dead also reside. No wonder before Hungan is removed from *yoho* for any funeral performance, certain rites and rituals are usually performed by the eldest man in the family to further attest to its spiritual essence. After the performance, the eldest person in the family lowers the drum signifying the end

of the funeral. It becomes an abomination with dire consequences for anyone to raise the drum again let alone beat it. Hungan is a talking drum that initiates the dance steps. The fast tempo of the drumbeat is initiated and heightened by the prodding of Hungan drum. The ritual dance is divided into two: the fast tempo, energetic dance with serious rendition that compels the dance steps to be swift and short and the slow drumbeat initiated and controlled by Hungan drumbeat coupled with the philosophical songs. The dance performance also has two phases with different songs polarized between the serious, esoteric philosophical one on the one hand and the purely satirical, comic, ludicrous, laced with incongruous caricature-like entertainment performance.

Hungan dance usually begins with the serious, esoteric and philosophical cum ritualistic moves and songs before it glides almost without notice to the comic and entertainment phase. The seriousness of the Hungan dance is first seen in the sitting arrangement in the funeral arena. The Hungan is laid on the Y-trunk supported by the twin drums while the drummers all sit on the mat. The children of the deceased are made to sit facing Hungan directly also on the mat. The seriousness is prompted by the Hungan drum beat, a talking drum passing serious messages to the bereaved. The dancers, dance round the Hungan several times in a circle which is a symbolic representation of life as a circle of birth and death. This is usually followed by a fast tempo drumbeat, energetic dance and serious song such as:

Azan janhu gigo no krano no wa	God does what he likes
Omon jan eno wae iye he	That is what He does
Me de ena hu o ahu	Whoever He wants, He kills
Me de e maa huo, ema ahu	Whoever He will not kill, will not be killed
Azan janhu gigo no krano no iwa	God does what He likes
Omon jan eno wa	That is what He does
Bono woren gbeto	So much that He saves.

The song above is poetic and philosophical, meant to soothe the agonizing soul of the bereaved. It reminds them that the almighty God decides who dies, which means that, they are still alive by the kindness and mercy of God. Another very serious enactment is the dance sequence that takes the dancers to the left and to the right, back and forth with energetic body movement that also involves, swaying of the body and raising of the legs in accordance with the dictate of the drum beat. The eclectic nature of the dance is the reason why dancers usually go into a frenzy especially when the muse of the song communicates. As the playmaker, Hungan initiates another song in an unbroken chain of connection. The song is full of philosophical words of wisdom both for the children of the deceased and the audience. It says:

Sena mede mono we	-----	Whatever the creator gives can never be small
Egan na me de yon o	-----	He can give what is good
Egan so na me de ma yon o	-----	He also gives that which is not good
Gan e me sena mitho	-----	The time that the creator gives
Jan na yi tho ma		is what I will collect.
Se na mi tho jan nayi	-----	The time that the creator gives me
Gan eme se na mitho	-----	The time the creator gives me
Jan na yi	-----	Is what I will accept

The text of the song is philosophical about time and season, which is determined by the almighty God referred to as the creator in the context. The song reminds humanity of the appointed time of death to everybody which is believed to be the exclusive prerogative of the creator. The word "time" the second level signification, which is connotative, means death. The song also has fate underpinning inevitability of death in the word "I will accept/jan na yi".

At the height of the performance, the children of the deceased seated directly opposite Hungan are required to stand up and step into the dance floor. For them, the drumbeat changes with a gradual build up of its tempo until it reaches the crescendo. The children's dance to Hungan is significant for sacred and social functions. As a sacred dance, it is believed that they have survived their father. That is, it is a good thing that they are the one burying their father and not otherwise. Again, it is for them to shake off the gloom, sorrowful and mourning mood as a result of the dead. Hungan dance for the family is a mark of honour and last respect done by the children to the memory of the departed parent. The children are required to come out thrice, the first being serious, while the second time, it is to catch fun and put the sorrow behind them. So, for the first appearance, philosophical songs could be rendered thus, and also to sound a note of warning to those who may want to "take over" as a result of the death of the deceased. It is usually rendered for a royal family or municipal head or paramount ruler whose territory may be endangered because of the death of the Oba or clan head. The song sues for peace among the contenders reminding them to allow the *status quo ante*. The song says:

Mi gbo nino ki ede da 2x	-----	Let it be as it is 2x
Mi sa gbo nino ki e de da	-----	just let it be as it has been
Ni tho we o te ku	-----	even if "father" died
To lo mayi to de gigan gba	-----	the city/town is not one that can disintegrate
Mi gbo ni no ki ede da	-----	let it be as it is.
Me no dona yopo ni se	-----	if the elderly tells the young, he should hear
Yo po do na meno nise	-----	if the young tells the old, let him hear
To lo na no dagbe	-----	the city/town will still flourish
Lo lo mayi to das i gan gba	-----	the city/town is not one that can disintegrate
Mi gbo ni no ki e de da	-----	let it remain as it is.

Hungan can sometime be very down-to-earth and daring. At times, it speaks as the mouth piece of the bereaved, asking death or the ancestors some probing questions about the dead, human lives and existence. Amidst heightened drumbeat, the song is rendered with mourning mood and melancholic tone.

The song says:

Azan man then do the de me a e --- there is no palm tree without palm front
The te ho me azan ma then de a --- or is there palm tree without leaves?
Oku gbo ya thona mi na gboje --- Death stop disturbing me, let me rest
Yen jo wa gbe me ma do me de --- I came to the world with nobody
Oku bo so be mese le po yi --- Still death took everybody around me
Oku gbo ya tho a mi nagboje --- death stop disturbing me, let me rest

After series of serious dance steps and philosophical song, the performance swiftly changes tone, dance steps and song to the comic and satirical. The atmosphere changes from gloom, damp and melancholic to the comic, celebration and entertainment. In quick succession, Hungan begins to role in one comic display after the other in a sensational and fascinating manner that delights. The cheers and applauses from the audience light up the environment. The atmosphere is made less serious such that the audience including the bereaved laugh. Even the incongruous caricature display make the audience laugh hilariously. The aim of the performance at this state is to amuse the audience and the family of the deceased. Different dramatic enactments are showcased through dance drama, and songs to inundate and fascinate the audience and encourage the family members.

The family members especially the children of the deceased are made to come out for the second time to dance. This time, it is to lighten their burden and relief them of their sorrow because the enactments on display and the songs will force a smile on their faces. The ludicrous dressing, the creative performances and the jokes will naturally make them laugh and ultimately purgate their emotion. For instance, the song below is a joke about possible indebtedness of the children of the deceased who buys cloth from an Ijesa man who does not even wait till the end of the funeral before troubling them to pay. It says.

Jasanu we sa von de na mi ---- An Ijesa man sold cloth for the burial to me
E do osun pari yena wa yi akwe ---- He promised to collect money at the end of
the month
Azan de ma je gan maje bo ---- The days have gone nowhere and the month has
not gone any far
Jasanu wa se aho bio gbe --- The Ijesa man has started asking for his money.

The song, the dance and the musical accompaniment create fun and laughter for the audience and the bereaved. Depending on the creative ingenuity of the performers/dancers and the drummers, Hungan at its height is an arena of many possibilities. They can start climbing a tree and mimic a tapster who falls off the palm tree or of a quack nurse who gives the wrong injection and the resulting consequences. This is vintage Hungan as theatre of entertainment. There is definitely no end to the fun that can be created so much so that the atmosphere becomes so charged with fun fare, pomp and pageantry that one will almost forget that it is a funeral. In that charged atmosphere with enjoyment in the air, the children of the deceased cannot, but spray the performers some money. This is the realm at which Hungan acts true to its name ‘hun’— ‘gan’, “the height of drumming”. It talks, initiates songs and commands the steps to the delight of the audience.

Here lies the significance of Hungan dance as a grand finale of funeral rites in Ogu land. There is a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment for the family of the bereaved having succeeded in celebrating their father/mother in a glorious way. In fact, Hungan performance as the last rite is believed to be the sound that commands those at the gate of heaven to open it unto the deceased that he may join his ancestors. This explains why if Hungan is not performed for the dead in a particular family, such family is not welcome in another family’s Hungan performance. As a matter of fact, it is an aberration for anyone to attend another family’s Hungan performance when he has not performed same for his own deceased father. It is regarded a reproach unto a family that has performed all the burial rites but without Hungan dance. Hungan to the Ogu people is the height of honour that can be done the memory of the dead.

7. The key findings of the study

After keen observation of the chants, songs and dance performance of Hungan and the active participation of the audience, the study discovered that Hungan has both esoteric and aesthetic features. The esoteric features are those ritual performances undertaken at *Yoho*, the pantheon of the gods and the sprinkling of water before the drum is beaten and as means of entertainment among the Ogu people of Badagry. Findings further revealed that Hungan performance gives room for a lot of creative ingenuities on stage as song rendition and dance performance become spontaneous and the atmosphere made eclectic by the active participation of the audience. It is often said that the height of Hungan performance is determined by the level of audience participation because usually the audience who are also versed in the song and dance step have a way of making the environment charged by clapping and chanting to achieve performance overdrive. It was also discovered that Hungan is a tool for social integration as those who are able to perform the ritual dance for their parents have a sense of being bonafide members of the society just as those unable to honour the memories of their deceased parents are looked down upon.

8. The implications of the study

One of the implications of this study is the possibility of a research into the roles of women in esoteric traditions. In this circumstance, the role of *Tanyinos* in the ritual performance of the rites of passage among the Ogu people of Badagry. Another very important implication of the study is its potentials to draw the attention of the Lagos State Government, Badagry Local Government Council and investors to the possibility of promoting Hungan performance as entertainment venture that will boost the economy of the State. It will also help the unit in charge of tradition and chieftaincy affairs to come closer to the people to help families of the deceased who are not financially buoyant to perform Hungan for their parents to be able to do so. So doing, they are given a sense of belonging as proud members of the society. This is important because children who cannot perform Hungan for their departed parents are considered social outcasts. In fact, they are not permitted to attend the Hungan performance of other people until they do theirs.

9. Recommendations and suggestions

The place of Hungan as ritual and entertainment dance performance cannot be over emphasized. It is no exaggeration to say that Hungan remains for the Ogu people of West Africa, one performance through which the deceased is properly translated to the world beyond. This world is considered the abode of the ancestors and the deceased will not be admitted without the final rites of the Hungan performance. This is particularly so because death is not the end of the journey for the Ogu man, there is life after death which is otherwise known as hereafter. So death is but a means or a vehicle through which the dead joins their ancestors in the world beyond. The esoteric nature of the drum and its beat is not only spiritual but sacred. This spirituality gives Hungan its ritual essence especially because the drums; Hungan, Adugba and Aze all live in *yoho*, the pantheons of the dead. It is recommended that the custodians of this important tradition should, in the process of time, continue to lay less emphasis on the esoteric features of the performance but rather allow the aesthetic values to be more visible. This is because the aesthetics of Hungan come alive in the dance steps, songs and the combination of musical instruments to create a symphony. Due to paucity of research in this tradition, it is suggested here that further research should be conducted into the role of *Tanyinos* in the funeral rites of the Ogu people of Badagry, Lagos State. The Lagos State Government should show more interest in the aesthetic and entertainment values of Hungan as a dance performance and even create a Hungan unit in the State cultural troupe.

10. Conclusion, the contribution of the study and Recommendations

The study contributed to the exposition of Hungan as a tool of social re-engineering because it is a means of regulating behaviours in the society. It is a subtle reminder of individual's social contract and a way of approving good deeds and discouraging anti-social behavior by way of song rendition that catalogue all the good deeds of the deceased to the admiration of the children and the entire family. For instance, a Hungan performance for a deceased known for evil deeds will largely be avoided by the people. Some could choose to go to their farms on such occasion whereas for the good man, everybody struggles to get a seat.

The study is an eye opener for researchers not to lose sight of the entertainment values of every esoteric culture in African society. It, therefore, encourages research into other cultural performances considered no-go areas in African tradition. The findings of this study also contribute to the body of knowledge as a critical source material for anthropologists, historians and cultural enthusiasts. The study is an additional information to tourists who might want to partake of the dance performance thereby boosting the economic potentials of Badagry Division known as the custodian of the relics of slave trade in Africa.

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