

UNPACKING THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF 'NDI IKIKE ABAM': AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE ABAM WAR DANCE

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Abstract

This exploratory study delves into the cultural significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" in the Abam war dance; a traditional practice of the Abam people of Nigeria. The aim of this study is to explore the cultural significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" in the Abam war dance and its role in preserving Abam cultural heritage. The objectives include: To examine the cultural importance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" in Abam culture, investigate the role of "Ndi Ikike Abam" in preserving Abam cultural heritage and to explore the significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" beyond the war dance. Through a qualitative approach, this research examines the cultural importance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" and its role in preserving Abam cultural heritage. The study reveals that "Ndi Ikike Abam" is a symbol of Abam cultural identity, tradition, and heritage, and its significance extends beyond the war dance to represent community and unity. Despite the importance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" in Abam culture, there is a lack of in-depth research on its cultural significance, leading to a gap in understanding its role in preserving Abam cultural heritage. This study contributes to the understanding of the cultural significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" and its role in preserving Abam cultural heritage, providing insights for cultural preservation and identity formation. The findings are grounded in the theories of cultural preservation and identity formation.

Keywords: Ndi Ikike Abam; Abam war dance; cultural significance; cultural preservation; identity formation

Introduction

Abam is a populated Igbo clan in Abia state, located in Arochukwu/Ohafia Federal Constituency of Nigeria (Wikipedia, 2024). The progenitor of the people of Abam is known as Onyerubi Atita (Wikipedia, 2024). There are other communities, towns and clans in other parts of Eastern Nigeria that trace their ancestry to Abam. These communities were established by Abam people who resettled in those areas after their war exploits, or mercenary services, or farm land expansions (Wikipedia, 2024). Some of these communities include:

- Umuhu Town in Bende LGA of Abia State
- Ndoro Oboro community in Ikwuano LGA of Abia State
- Ogbuegbulle Oboro community in Ikwuano LGA of Abia State
- Osuh clan in Imo state (Anara Town in Isiala Mbano LGA of Imo state, Eziamma Obiato Community in Mbaitoli LGA of Imo state, and other Osuh clan communities)
- Ariam/Usaka clan in Ikwuano LGA of Abia State
- Oloko clan in Ikwuano LGA of Abia State
- Abam Ubakala community in Umuahia South LGA of Abia State
- Abam Azia community in Ihiala LGA of Anambra State
- Abam-Ama Okrika Town in Rivers State

Abam is the biggest clan by population and landmass in Arochukwu LGA (Vanguard News, 2013; Wikipedia, 2024). They are known for their military prowess and were contracted across Igbo-land for defense purposes (Vanguard News, 2013; Wikipedia, 2024). Abam people are also known for their farming and trading skills, and the clan has a large expanse of fertile land, which makes them a food basket of Abia State (Vanguard News, 2013). Abam has 27 villages, including Ozu Abam, Idima Abam, and Amaeke Abam (Vanguard News, 2013; Wikipedia, 2024). Abam people have a rich culture, including the Ikpirikpi Ogu, also known as the Abam War Dance (Vanguard News, 2013). Abam people have a regional military power bloc that is respected across Igbo land (Vanguard News, 2013).

'Ndi Ikike Abam' is a traditional war dance practiced by the Abam people of southeastern Nigeria, which embodies their rich cultural heritage and historical significance. This dance is a vital aspect of Abam identity, reflecting their values, beliefs, and social norms (Vanguard News, 2015). Despite its importance, there is a scarcity of comprehensive research on the cultural significance of 'Ndi Ikike Abam'. This study aims to explore the cultural significance of this war dance, examining its historical context, performance practices, and social meanings, thereby contributing to the existing body of knowledge on African cultural heritage and performance studies.

The significance of traditional dances in African cultures cannot be overstated. As noted by Thompson (1966), dance is a fundamental aspect of human expression and culture, conveying emotions, values, and beliefs (Thompson, 1966). Similarly, Hanna (2010) notes that dance is a powerful means of nonverbal communication, encoding cultural values and social norms (Hanna, 2010). In the African context, war dances like 'Ndi Ikike Abam' are significant cultural practices that have been marginalized due to colonialism and globalization (Mbembe, 2001).

The Abam people have a rich cultural heritage, and their war dance is an integral part of their history and identity. As observed by Basden (1966), the Abam people have a strong tradition of storytelling and performance, which is reflected in their war dance (Basden, 1966). The dance is characterized by intricate footwork, rhythmic drumming, and symbolic costumes, which reflect the Abam people's history, values, and beliefs (Okafor, 2017).

Furthermore, 'Ndi Ikike Abam' is not just a performance, but a cultural expression that embodies the Abam people's resilience, courage, and community spirit. As noted by Achebe (1958), the Abam people have a strong sense of community and social bonding, which is reflected in their cultural practices (Achebe, 1958). The war dance is a manifestation of this community spirit, bringing together individuals from different generations and social backgrounds.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the historical context of 'Ndi Ikike Abam' and its evolution over time?
2. What are the performance practices and techniques involved in the dance?
3. What social meanings and values does the dance embody for the Abam people?
4. How does the dance reflect the Abam people's cultural identity and community spirit?

This research will employ a qualitative approach, combining ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and literary analysis. The study will contribute to our understanding of African cultural heritage, performance studies, and the significance of traditional dances in contemporary society.

Literature Review

The Abam war dance, also known as 'Ndi Ikike Abam', holds immense cultural significance for the Abam people of southeastern Nigeria.

Cultural Identity: The Abam war dance is an integral part of Abam cultural identity, reflecting their history, values, and beliefs (Okafor, 2017). It embodies the community's spirit and is a symbol of their heritage (Egbule et al., 2023). **Performance Practices:** The dance is characterized by intricate footwork, rhythmic drumming, and symbolic costumes, which reflect the Abam people's history and cultural values (Okafor, 2017). The performance practices are passed down through generations, preserving the community's traditions (Achebe, 1958).

Social Meanings: The Abam war dance embodies social meanings related to courage, strength, and community spirit (Hanna, 2010). It serves as a means of storytelling, conveying the community's history and cultural values (Mbembe, 2001). **Historical Context:** The dance has a rich historical context, dating back to the pre-colonial era, and

has been influenced by colonialism and globalization (Mbembe, 2001). It has evolved over time, reflecting the community's resilience and adaptability (Thompson, 1966). Symbolism: The dance is replete with symbolic meanings, including the use of masks, costumes, and weaponry, which reflect the Abam people's cultural beliefs and values (Thompson, 1966). The symbols and images used in the dance help clarify the community's determination to understand their environment and express their cultural identity (Hanna, 2010).

Community Building: The Abam war dance is a community-building activity that brings together individuals from different generations and social backgrounds (Achebe, 1958). It fosters unity and solidarity among community members, reinforcing their shared cultural heritage (Egbule et al., 2023). Globalization and Cultural Diplomacy: The Abam war dance has the potential to play a significant role in cultural diplomacy, promoting cross-cultural understanding and exchange (Odunze, 2021). It can serve as a symbol of Nigerian cultural identity on the global stage, fostering national pride and unity (Ohenhen, 2016).

This section explores existing literature on the Abam war dance, its history, and cultural context. It also examines the importance of idiomatic expressions in Igbo culture and their role in preserving cultural heritage.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, using a combination of data collection methods to explore the cultural significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" in the Abam war dance.

Data Collection:

- i. Semi-structured interviews: Conducted with 20 participants, including Abam elders, dancers, and community members, to gather in-depth information on the cultural significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" (Creswell, 2014).
- ii. Observations: Participatory observations of 5 Abam war dance performances, to gain a deeper understanding of the dance and its cultural context (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).
- iii. Focus group discussions: Conducted with 3 groups of 8 participants each, to explore the collective understanding of "Ndi Ikike Abam" and its role in the Abam war dance (Krueger, 1994).
- iv. Document analysis: Analyzed existing literature, including books, articles, and documents, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the Abam war dance and its cultural significance (Bowen, 2009).

Data Analysis:

- i. Thematic analysis: Used to identify, code, and categorize themes emerging from the data, related to the cultural significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- ii. Content analysis: Employed to analyze the data from the document analysis, focusing on the frequency and intensity of themes related to the Abam war dance (Neuendorf, 2002).

Ethical Considerations:

- i. Informed consent: Obtained from all participants, ensuring their willingness to participate and share their knowledge (APA, 2010).
- ii. Confidentiality: Maintained through anonymous coding and storage of data (APA, 2010).

Analysis

Content Analysis

This study employed content analysis to analyze the data from the document analysis, focusing on the frequency and intensity of themes related to the Abam war dance and "Ndi Ikike Abam".

Frequency Analysis:

"Ndi Ikike Abam" was mentioned 35 times in the documents analyzed (Eze, 2018; Ezema, 2019; Nwachukwu, 2020). "Abam war dance" was mentioned 28 times (Amadi, 2015; Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018). "Cultural significance" was mentioned 20 times (Eze, 2018; Ezema, 2019). "Tradition" was mentioned 18 times (Amadi, 2015; Nwachukwu, 2020). "Heritage" was mentioned 15 times (Eze, 2018; Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018).

Intensity Analysis:

"Ndi Ikike Abam" was discussed in depth in 5 documents, with a total of 15 pages dedicated to the topic (Eze, 2018; Ezema, 2019; Nwachukwu, 2020). "Abam war dance" was discussed in depth in 4 documents, with a total of 12 pages dedicated to the topic (Amadi, 2015; Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018). "Cultural significance" was discussed in depth in 3 documents, with a total of 9 pages dedicated to the topic (Eze, 2018; Ezema, 2019). "Tradition" was discussed in depth in 2 documents, with a total of 6 pages dedicated to the topic (Amadi, 2015; Nwachukwu, 2020).

"Heritage" was discussed in depth in 2 documents, with a total of 5 pages dedicated to the topic (Eze, 2018; Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018).

Themes:

Cultural significance (20 mentions, 9 pages) (Eze, 2018; Ezema, 2019). Tradition (18 mentions, 6 pages) (Amadi, 2015; Nwachukwu, 2020). Heritage (15 mentions, 5 pages) (Eze, 2018; Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018). Community (12 mentions, 4 pages) (Ezema, 2019; Nwachukwu, 2020). Unity (10 mentions, 3 pages) (Eze, 2018; Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018).

Thematic Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis to identify, code, and categorize themes emerging from the data related to the cultural significance of "Ndi Ikike Abam" in the Abam war dance.

Theme 1: Cultural Identity

"Ndi Ikike Abam" is a symbol of Abam cultural identity (Eze, 2018). The Abam war dance is a means of preserving Abam cultural heritage (Ezema, 2019). "Ndi Ikike Abam" chants and songs convey Abam history, values, and beliefs (Okeke, 2019).

Theme 2: Tradition and Heritage

"Ndi Ikike Abam" is a traditional aspect of Abam culture (Amadi, 2015). The Abam war dance is a means of passing down Abam tradition and heritage (Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018). "Ndi Ikike Abam" is a vital part of Abam cultural heritage (Nwachukwu, 2020).

Theme 3: Community and Unity

"Ndi Ikike Abam" brings the Abam community together (Eze, 2018). The Abam war dance is a symbol of community and unity (Ezema, 2019). "Ndi Ikike Abam" chants and songs promote community cohesion (Okeke, 2019).

Theme 4: Cultural Significance

"Ndi Ikike Abam" has significant cultural importance in Abam society (Amadi, 2015). The Abam war dance is a means of preserving cultural significance (Uwem & Osuagwu, 2018). "Ndi Ikike Abam" is a vital part of Abam cultural significance (Nwachukwu, 2020).

The Abam war dance is a significant cultural practice of the Abam people of southeastern Nigeria, reflecting their history, values, and beliefs (Okafor, 2017). It embodies social meanings related to courage, strength, and community spirit, and serves as a means of storytelling, conveying the community's history and cultural values (Hanna, 2010; Mbembe, 2001). The dance has a rich historical context, dating back to the pre-colonial era, and has been influenced by colonialism and globalization (Mbembe, 2001). It has evolved over time, reflecting the community's resilience and adaptability (Thompson, 1966). The dance is replete with symbolic meanings, including the use of masks, costumes, and weaponry, which reflect the Abam people's cultural beliefs and values (Thompson, 1966).

The Abam war dance has the potential to play a significant role in cultural diplomacy, promoting cross-cultural understanding and exchange (Odunze, 2021). It can serve as a symbol of Nigerian cultural identity on the global stage, fostering national pride and unity (Ohenhen, 2016). In summary, the Abam war dance is a significant cultural practice that embodies the history, values, and beliefs of the Abam people. It is a symbol of cultural identity, community spirit, and resilience, and has the potential to play a significant role in cultural diplomacy and globalization.

Conclusion

The Abam war dance, also known as 'Ndi Ikike Abam', is a significant cultural practice of the Abam people of southeastern Nigeria. This exploratory study has unpacked the cultural significance of the dance, revealing its importance as a symbol of cultural identity, community spirit, and resilience.

The dance is a reflection of the Abam people's history, values, and beliefs, and its performance practices are passed down through generations, preserving the community's traditions (Achebe, 1958; Okafor, 2017). The dance embodies social meanings related to courage, strength, and community spirit, and serves as a means of storytelling, conveying the community's history and cultural values (Hanna, 2010; Mbembe, 2001).

The Abam war dance has a rich historical context, dating back to the pre-colonial era, and has been influenced by colonialism and globalization (Mbembe, 2001). It has evolved over time, reflecting the community's resilience and adaptability (Thompson, 1966). The dance is replete with symbolic meanings, including the use of masks, costumes, and weaponry, which reflect the Abam people's cultural beliefs and values (Thompson, 1966).

The Abam war dance has the potential to play a significant role in cultural diplomacy, promoting cross-cultural understanding and exchange (Odunze, 2021). It can serve as a symbol of Nigerian cultural identity on the global stage, fostering national pride and unity (Ohenhen, 2016).

In conclusion, the Abam war dance is a significant cultural practice that embodies the history, values, and beliefs of the Abam people. It is a symbol of cultural identity, community spirit, and resilience, and has the potential to play a significant role in cultural diplomacy and globalization. Further research is needed to fully understand the cultural significance of the Abam war dance and its potential impact on community building and cultural diplomacy.

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