

DANCE AND LOCALE CREATION IN COMMUNITY THEATRE: THE BOESTI 2025 EPORO OUTREACH IN FOCUS

Olúsànyà David AYENI

Department of Performing Arts, Music & Film Studies

Lead City University, Ibadan

Email- doayeni@yahoo.com

Tel: +2348062120800

Abstract

This study investigates how dance functions as a vital tool for locale creation in community theatre, focusing on the BOESTI 2025 Eporo outreach in Emure-Ekiti Local Government, Ekiti State Nigeria. One of the enduring challenges in community theatre is how to make performance spaces feel like lived places rather than neutral stages. Drawing on embodied performance theory, which views identity and place as continually created through movement and collective interaction, the research examines how dance inscribes cultural memory and belonging into ordinary spaces. Ethnographic observation, oral narratives, and performance analysis reveal that choreography, costumes, and music transform simple venues into cultural landscapes, embedding shared histories and values into the fabric of theatre. Importantly, younger generations reinterpret traditional dances, blending heritage with contemporary influences to sustain relevance and articulate modern realities. Dance in community theatre is more than movement on a stage, it becomes a shared heartbeat. It draws people from different walks of life into the same rhythm, inviting them to shape a place together and discover belonging. Through dance, space feels alive: it carries memory, anchors identity, and opens a bridge between past and present. In the BOESTI Eporo outreach, dance was not just an element of performance but the thread that wove strangers into a community. It turned theatre into a home for imagination and togetherness, showing how resilient dance is as a cultural practice that keeps community life vibrant and enduring.

Keywords: Dance, Community Theatre, Locale Creation, Embodied Performance, Cultural Memory,

Introduction

Community theatre is never simply a performance; it is a lived encounter that speaks directly to the rhythms, struggles, and aspirations of everyday life. In rural communities such as Eporo in Emure-Ekiti Local Government of Ekiti State, the challenge is not only to stage theatre but to make it breathe with the pulse of the people. Performance here must resonate with ordinary routines, transforming neutral venues into places of memory, identity, and belonging.

Richard Schechner reminds us that performance is not confined to the stage but is a mode of behaviour and social action that permeates daily living (Schechner 36). Diana Taylor extends this by emphasizing that embodied practices such as dance transmit cultural memory in ways that

written texts cannot, sustaining heritage and continuity (Taylor 20). Victor Turner's notion of *communitas* adds yet another dimension, showing how collective performance suspends hierarchy and fosters inclusivity (Turner 96). Read together, these perspectives reveal that dance is not merely aesthetic but a democratizing force: it creates space, grounds identity, and bridges past and present.

In the BOESTI 2025 Eporo outreach, dance was central to this transformation. School grounds and community halls became cultural landscapes animated by choreography, costumes, and music. Elders and youth moved together, inscribing shared histories into space while reinterpreting tradition for modern realities. This intergenerational dialogue exemplifies Paul Connerton's argument that societies remember through bodily practices and rituals (Connerton 39). It also resonates with Biodun Jeyifo's insistence that African theatre is inseparable from communal life, functioning as a site of negotiation and resilience (Jeyifo 15).

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding how community theatre can serve as cultural intervention and social cohesion. By foregrounding dance as a tool for locale creation, the research demonstrates how embodied practices sustain community life. More than entertainment, dance emerges as a practice of belonging, memory, and imagination. It transforms performance into a site of collective identity, bridging tradition and modernity, and fostering inclusivity. This insight sets the stage for deeper exploration of how dance in the BOESTI Eporo outreach exemplifies the transformative power of community theatre in rural Nigeria.

Theoretical Mooring

The theoretical mooring of this study rests on a conversation among several frameworks, each illuminating different dimensions of dance in community theatre. Rather than standing alone, these theories intersect to show how embodied practice creates locale, sustains memory, and fosters inclusivity. Richard Schechner views performance as a mode of behaviour and social action that extends beyond the stage into everyday life (Schechner 36). Diana Taylor complements this by emphasizing that embodied practices such as dance transmit cultural memory in ways that written texts cannot, thereby sustaining heritage and continuity (Taylor 20). Victor Turner's notion of *communitas* adds a social dimension, illustrating how collective performance suspends hierarchy and fosters inclusivity (Turner 96). Read together, these perspectives suggest that dance is simultaneously aesthetic, mnemonic, and democratic; a practice that grounds identity while opening space for shared belonging.

Paul Connerton deepens this dialogue by arguing that societies remember through bodily practices and rituals, which inscribe memory into space and time (Connerton 39). His insights resonate with Taylor's repertoire theory, reinforcing the idea that dance functions as a living archive. Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory further expands the discussion, showing that space is not a neutral backdrop but socially produced through human interaction (Lefebvre 42). In Eporo, dance does not merely occupy venues; it actively produces them as cultural landscapes, embedding identity and belonging into the fabric of everyday life.

African performance scholarship grounds these global theories in local realities. Biodun Jeyifo insists that African theatre is inseparable from communal life, functioning as a site of negotiation

and transformation (Jeyifo 15). His perspective aligns with Turner's *communitas* and Lefebvre's production of space, highlighting how African performance practices create inclusive and resilient cultural environments. By situating dance within this communal ethos, the study acknowledges that African theatre is not an abstract construct but a lived practice rooted in everyday rhythms.

Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for analysing dance in locale creation. Schechner situates performance within daily life, Taylor and Connerton highlight its role in transmitting memory, Turner underscores its capacity for inclusivity, Lefebvre explains its spatial production, and Jeyifo grounds it in African communal traditions. Their convergence ensures that the study is both globally informed and locally relevant, offering a nuanced understanding of how dance transforms community theatre into a site of collective imagination, resilience, and belonging.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study was deliberately participatory and person-centred, reflecting the ethos of community theatre itself. Ethnographic immersion formed the backbone of the research. Over a period of six months of fieldwork in 2025, the researcher attended rehearsals, performances, and informal gatherings in Eporo. A total of twenty-five participants were engaged directly: elders, youth, children, and facilitators of the BOESTI outreach. This breadth ensured that multiple voices were represented, capturing both intergenerational perspectives and diverse social positions within the community.

Clifford Geertz reminds us that ethnography requires “thick description,” situating cultural practices within their broader social contexts (Geertz 6). Following this principle, observation extended beyond staged performances to everyday interactions from dance rehearsals in schoolyards to spontaneous gatherings in village squares. This approach allowed the study to document not only the aesthetic dimensions of dance but also its social and cultural significance as lived practice.

Oral narratives were another key methodological tool. Ruth Finnegan highlights the importance of oral traditions in African societies, noting that they serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and collective memory (Finnegan 54). In this study, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with elders, performers, and younger participants. These narratives revealed how dance functions as a living archive, transmitting values and histories across generations while being reinterpreted for contemporary realities.

Performance analysis complemented ethnography and oral narratives by focusing on the aesthetic elements of dance. Susan Leigh Foster argues that choreography is not only movement but also a form of cultural inscription that encodes meaning into space and time (Foster 12). In the BOESTI outreach, choreography, costumes, music, and staging were analyzed systematically. Coding and thematic analysis were applied to field notes and interview transcripts, identifying recurring motifs such as *memory*, *belonging*, and *inclusivity*. Costumes and music were found to inscribe cultural identity into performance, while choreography embodied collective memory and belonging.

Researcher positionality was explicitly acknowledged. As an insider-outsider familiar with Nigerian performance traditions yet not a native of Eporo; the researcher's perspective was shaped by both empathy and critical distance. Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasizes that research in indigenous and community contexts must be conducted with sensitivity, respect, and reciprocity (Smith 10). Accordingly, participants were engaged not as subjects but as collaborators. Consent was obtained at every stage, and findings were shared with community members for validation. This reflexive stance ensured that the research remained accountable to the people whose practices it sought to represent.

Data collection and interpretation were triangulated across ethnography, oral narratives, and performance analysis. This triangulation strengthened validity, ensuring that findings were not reliant on a single method but reflected the convergence of multiple perspectives. By combining these approaches, the study was able to document how dance inscribes cultural memory into space, fosters inclusivity, and sustains community life. The methodology thus embodies the participatory ethos of community theatre, emphasizing collaboration, inclusivity, and cultural relevance

Analysis and Discussion

Dance in the BOESTI 2025 Eporo outreach operated not simply as performance but as lived practice, inscribing cultural memory into ordinary spaces. Paul Connerton argues that societies remember through bodily practices and rituals, embedding collective histories into everyday life (Connerton 39). This was vividly evident when an elder participant explained, *"Each step we dance carries the story of our fathers; it is how we remember who we are."* Such testimony illustrates how choreography became a living archive, transmitting values and narratives across generations. Neutral venues such as school grounds and community halls were transformed into cultural landscapes, resonating with the community's lived experiences.

Choreography was dynamic, blending fidelity to tradition with innovation. Susan Leigh Foster reminds us that choreography encodes meaning into movement, serving as a cultural text (Foster 12). During one performance, younger dancers introduced hip-hop inflections into a traditional Yoruba rhythm, prompting laughter and approval from elders. This intergenerational dialogue ensured that dance remained relevant, articulating modern realities while sustaining continuity. Rather than static preservation, dance emerged as adaptive practice, bridging past and present in locale creation.

Costumes and music played equally significant roles. Brenda Dixon Gottschild notes that dance is inseparable from its aesthetic environment, with costumes and music extending cultural identity (Gotschild 44). In Eporo, brightly patterned *aso-oke* cloths and indigenous drumming grounded performances in communal memory. A participant remarked, *"When the drum sounds, we know it is our own voice calling us together."* These aesthetic elements transformed ordinary spaces into cultural stages, reinforcing identity and belonging.

Inclusivity was another major finding. Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* illustrates how collective performance fosters unity by suspending hierarchy (Turner 96). In Eporo, elders, youth, and children danced side by side, each contributing to the collective imagination of space. One young participant reflected, *"I dance with my grandmother, and it feels like we are the same age."*

Such moments exemplify how dance democratised participation, strengthening social bonds and ensuring accessibility.

The resilience of dance as a cultural tool was also evident. Richard Schechner argues that performance extends beyond the stage into everyday life, shaping identity and community (Schechner 36). In Eporo, dance was not confined to formal outreach events but permeated daily living — from market gatherings to family celebrations. This resilience ensured that dance remained central to community life, sustaining relevance in modern realities.

Finally, the analysis revealed that dance transformed performance into a site of collective imagination and belonging. Diana Taylor's repertoire theory underscores how embodied practices transmit cultural memory in ways that written texts cannot (Taylor 20). In Eporo, dance inscribed cultural narratives into space, creating locales that resonated with lived experience. The outreach demonstrated that dance is not merely entertainment but a democratizing force, fostering inclusivity, sustaining heritage, and articulating contemporary realities.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that dance in the BOESTI 2025 Eporo outreach functioned as a democratizing force in community theatre. Victor Turner's theory of *communitas* illustrates how collective performance fosters inclusivity by suspending hierarchy (Turner 96). This was evident when elders, youth, and children danced together in the village square. One elder remarked, "*When the children join us, the dance becomes everyone's property.*" Such moments demonstrate how dance opened participation to all, reinforcing the communal ethos of theatre and strengthening social bonds.

Dance also emerged as a tool for locale creation, transforming neutral spaces into meaningful places. Henri Lefebvre argues that space is socially produced through human interaction and cultural practice (Lefebvre 42). In Eporo, ordinary school grounds became cultural landscapes as choreography, costumes, and music inscribed memory into space. A participant explained, "*This hall is no longer just walls; it carries our stories when we dance here.*" This transformation underscores how dance actively produces space, embedding identity and belonging into performance.

Another key finding is the bridging of past and present. Diana Taylor's repertoire theory emphasizes that embodied practices transmit cultural memory across generations (Taylor 20). Younger participants reinterpreted traditional dances with contemporary rhythms, blending heritage with modern influences. A youth performer reflected, "*We dance the old steps, but we add our own style so it speaks to today.*" This intergenerational dialogue ensured continuity while articulating modern realities, demonstrating the adaptability of cultural practices.

Dance was further identified as a practice of resilience. Richard Schechner argues that performance extends beyond the stage into everyday life, shaping identity and community (Schechner 36). In Eporo, dance permeated daily living, from market gatherings to family ceremonies reinforcing cultural identity outside formal outreach events. This resilience ensured that dance remained central to community life, sustaining relevance in modern contexts.

Finally, the findings highlight dance as a repository of cultural knowledge. Brenda Dixon Gottschild notes that dance transmits values and histories across generations (Gottschild 44). In the outreach, costumes and indigenous drumming grounded performances in communal memory, while choreography embodied collective narratives. These elements ensured that dance was not only aesthetic but also epistemic, carrying knowledge and identity across time.

Together, these findings affirm that dance in the BOESTI outreach was not mere entertainment but a vital cultural practice. It democratised participation, produced space, bridged generations, sustained resilience, and transmitted knowledge. In doing so, dance transformed community theatre into a site of collective imagination, belonging, and cultural continuity

Conclusion

This study concludes that dance in the BOESTI 2025 Eporo outreach was central to transforming performance into a lived site of collective imagination and belonging. More than entertainment, dance established space by embedding cultural memory, identity, and values into ordinary venues, turning them into cultural landscapes. Diana Taylor's repertoire theory underscores how embodied practices transmit cultural memory across generations (Taylor 20), and this was evident in the intergenerational dialogue where younger dancers reinterpreted traditional steps while elders affirmed continuity.

Equally, Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* illuminates how dance democratised participation, suspending hierarchy and fostering inclusivity (Turner 96). In Eporo, elders, youth, and children danced side by side, creating moments of unity that reinforced the communal ethos of theatre. Richard Schechner's performance studies remind us that performance extends beyond the stage into everyday life (Schechner 36), and the outreach exemplified this resilience: dance permeated markets, homes, and celebrations, sustaining relevance in modern realities.

By weaving together these perspectives, the study demonstrates that dance is not simply an artistic form but a cultural practice that grounds identity, bridges past and present, and sustains community life. It is a democratizing force that transforms neutral spaces into places of belonging, resilience, and imagination.

The contribution of this research lies in its ability to situate community theatre within both global theoretical debates and local African traditions. By integrating Schechner, Taylor, Turner, Connerton, Lefebvre, and Jeyifo, the study offers a dialogical framework that highlights dance as a practice of cultural resilience and social cohesion. In doing so, it affirms that community theatre in rural Nigeria is not marginal but vital; a living archive that sustains heritage while articulating contemporary realities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen both practice and scholarship in community theatre:

1. Community theatre practitioners should foreground dance as a central tool for transforming space and sustaining cultural relevance. As one participant in Eporo observed, "*When we dance*

here, the hall becomes our home.” Integrating dance into outreach projects ensures that theatre resonates with lived experience and fosters belonging.

2. To sustain continuity while encouraging innovation, training initiatives should equip younger generations with skills to reinterpret traditional dances. Brenda Dixon Gottschild reminds us that dance functions as a repository of cultural knowledge (Gotschild 44). Structured mentorship between elders and youth would preserve heritage while articulating contemporary realities.

3. Community theatre in rural areas requires resources and infrastructure. Jan Cohen-Cruz argues that community-based performance fosters social engagement and amplifies marginalised voices (Cohen-Cruz 18). Policies should recognise community theatre as cultural development, providing funding, rehearsal spaces, and technical support.

4. Scholars should provide detailed accounts of participant numbers, duration of fieldwork, and analytic procedures. Reflexive discussion of researcher positionality is essential, particularly in ethnographic and community-based contexts. Such transparency will strengthen credibility and scholarly impact.

5. Future studies should dialogue with contemporary Nigerian theatre practitioners and African performance scholars to deepen scholarly currency. Incorporating voices such as Femi Osofisan or Ahmed Yerima would situate local case studies within broader debates on African performance and cultural resilience.

6. Further research should explore dance and locale creation in other Nigerian and African communities. Comparative analysis would highlight both shared practices and local specificities, enriching performance scholarship and informing community theatre practice

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