

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND
ADMINISTRATION OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN
NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF ARTS/EDUCATION
COLLABORATION**

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Abstract

This paper is structured to give a detailed analysis of the art practice in Akwa-Ibom state, South East Nigeria, with the emphasis on matters relating to policy and administration and their effect on educational projects and community development. The focus of this paper is on the dance practice of the state as seen in the state's council for arts and culture which is an institution functioning under the Ministry for culture and tourism, and houses the state's dance troupe. This institution is charged with the responsibility of preserving, protecting and promoting the state's arts and cultural heritage that are deemed as valuable, and also (re)presenting these artistic expressions as identity markers to the local communities, the Nigerian nation and the international audiences. The research findings are gotten from a nine week internship/fieldwork, which was done for the completion of a Master degree, in the council for arts and culture between June and August 2014. This research problematizes the gap between policy, administration and execution of these policies as seen in the actual daily practice of some cultural institutions. It also highlights the impact of education, both formal and informal, on the development of artistic expressions and how this can positively affect the community. Finally, it identifies the importance of

collaborations between the arts industry and educational sector, as both can work together to develop a better understanding of the arts and increase the level of arts appreciation and community engagement in Nigeria and the world at large. Research methodologies for data gathering include observation, participation, interviews and past experience in the field.

Introduction

The Nigerian government, through its cultural policy, has established and charged certain institutions with the responsibility of preserving, promoting, presenting and administratively managing artistic expressions and cultural practices like dance, music, drama, pottery, arts and crafts in Nigeria. These institutions include the Council for Arts and Culture, a government parastatal under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, educational institutions like Schools and Museums, theatres, 'traditional, religious and chieftaincy institutions, guilds, age grades, and voluntary associations, craft guilds and co-operatives' like private dance troupes (FRN,1988:19).

The emphasis is not only on cultures of the past as practiced in local communities but also how these cultures have evolved in recent times considering the demands of change and development. One of the focuses of the implementation of this policy is to create a platform for arts, culture and education collaboration or the inclusion of arts and culture in education. Education here is not limited to formal education but also recognizes informal education as can be seen in family upbringing, communal activities and events in community/public spaces. Research is also a major part of education and this is also stressed in the cultural policy.

However some of the institutions whose responsibility is to ensure the proper implementation of the cultural policy are not receptive of research and researchers and thus hamper this kind of arts-education collaboration.

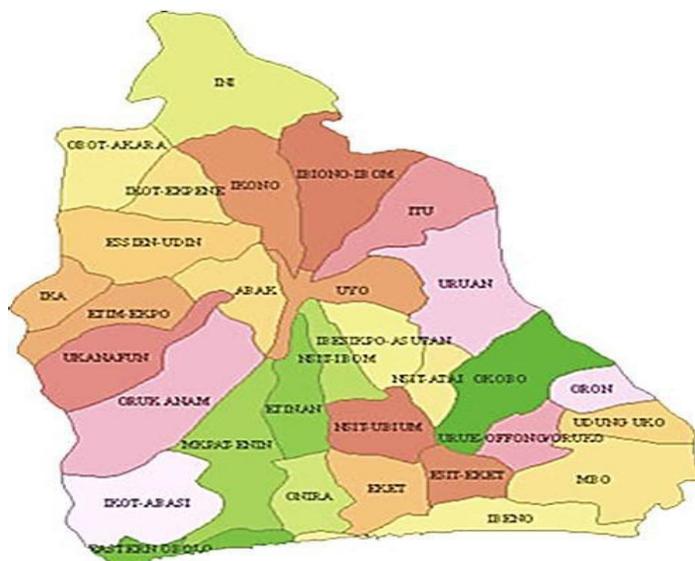
It is on this premise that my essay is founded as the researcher draw upon research/field work experience during her MA study on dance as a tool for identity representation and construction in a multiethnic society in Nigeria. Because of the population density of Nigeria, one state was chosen as a case study, Akwa-Ibom state in south east Nigeria. Two institutions concerned with preserving and presenting the dance identity of the state was the focus of this research, the Akwa-Ibom state Council of Arts and Culture and a private dance group in the state. The primary research was conducted through an internship with the State Council for Arts and Culture in Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria. It hosts the state's dance troupe and represents the state in both local, national and international festivals and competitions. It is in charge of promoting and supporting the arts and culture within the state.

Data for this study was obtained from a nine week internship with the state institution and field work in the state as the researcher interacted with private choreographers and dance troupes outside the institution during the course of research. The choice of field stems from the researcher's previous contact with the state. Between years 2011 and 2012, the researcher conducted her National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) with the Council for Arts and Culture of Akwa-Ibom State. The researcher served in the capacity of a dancer in the performance unit of the institution. Also the researcher represented the State in the National Youth Service Corps annual cultural and sports festival in the categories of Dance and Drama (regionally and nationally)

and performed with the NYSC theatre troupe on the Akwa-Ibom State day in September, 2011. All these allowed the researcher to participate in the dance rehearsals, learning the traditional dances of the state and this was when the researcher fell in love with the dance and mode of culture and identity representation used by the State Dance Troupe. At that time, my interest was not in research, but the researcher was enthused about the prospect of increasing my dance knowledge and adding to the repertoire of traditional dances in Nigeria the researcher had mastered. Thus during the researcher's MA research, there was an evident shift in position from a dance lover cum youth corp member to a dance researcher and masters student.

Locating the Field





Akwa-Ibom State Council for Arts and Culture is situated in Uyo, the state capital of Akwa-Ibom State. Akwa-Ibom has thirty one (31) Local Government Areas and about twenty languages. In 2005, its inhabitants numbered over five million, with ten percent of that population residing in the State capital. The State is located in south eastern Nigeria between latitude 4°32'and5°53' North and Longitude7°25'and 8°25'East, and it covers an area of8,412 square kilometres. Bounded on the east by Cross-Rivers State, west by Abia and Rivers State and south by the Atlantic Ocean, Akwa-Ibom State is a major oil producing State in Nigeria and the third largest producer of petrol in Nigeria. The climate is tropical with two different seasons: the dry season which usually lasts between November and March and the rainy season from April till October.

Methodology

This research relies solely on qualitative research methodologies. Because it is a critical analysis of the researcher's MA fieldwork experience, the essay takes on the reflexive ethnography dimension with the researcher taking a distance from the happenings that she was involved in and critically engaging with the experience, with as much subjectivity as possible. Interviewing was a major tool for data gathering. Several officials and employees of the Council for Arts and Culture, Akwa-Ibom state, were interviewed. However, the researcher not only analyses what was said about the institution and its daily practice, but also what was not said because this gives information about the conventions and silent rules that govern their art practice.

Another research method employed is the participant-observation. This method was also vital to my research as dance scholar and anthropologists Janet O'shea posits;

The ethnographic method of participant-observation, through its emphasis on immediate experience, generates a personal involvement that can challenge dichotomies and problematize assumptions of unity within a form. It also produces a familiarity with a practice that can highlight difference between practice and interpretation (O'Shea, 2007: 145)

Although the notion of the term participant observation has been criticized by scholars like Favret-Saada (2012), opining that it is an oxymoronic expression in itself, and Bourdieu (2003: 281) whose states that it 'presupposes a kind of doubling of consciousness that is arduous to sustain', some other scholars like

Paul Willis (1980) have attempted to explicate this technique by breaking it down into bits that are simple. Just as Willis (1980:94) proposes, the researcher explored different aspects of participant observation, which are; 'participation, observation, participation as observer, observation as participant, just being around, group discussion' amongst others. The crux of this paper is hinged on the conversations between the researcher and the head of performing arts department of the institution. The next segment of this paper will address this encounter.

Fieldwork Experience

For the purpose of this study, the researcher worked directly with Mrs. Abigail Akpakip, the Head of the Performing Arts Department, here in after referred to as HOD. We agreed to meet for two hours every day for what she termed as tutorials. These tutorials took the form of formal interviews where the researcher questioned her about the state troupe's dance practices, construction, performances and representation. Soon the researcher became tired of these tutorials as the researcher was running out of questions to ask her and there were no performances or rehearsals form to participate in or observe. Because it was not the intention to get a one-sided perspective of a research subject, the researcher decided to speak to some of the state dancers.

It was not evident to the researcher that speaking with junior staff members was not included in her job description as an intern/researcher. The researcher could only speak with them if she got the consent of the HOD and she referred the researcher to one of them. This was demonstrated as the researcher got a shocking look and mouth-lash, from the HOD as she passed by, while speaking with a junior staff on information the researcher needed. The researcher later discovered that in the rule of civil service,

junior staff members are not allowed to speak unless authorized by their superiors. My ignorance of this unknown procedure led to a strain in our working relationship until the matter was brought before the Head of Administration. The HOD saw this act of negligence as a sign of disrespect to her person and position, and since respect is vital to the Akwa-Ibom culture, she didn't take the matter lightly. The researcher resorted to playing by her rules as the research took place within an institution whose rules the researcher had to abide. Away out was to speak to the dancers outside the office premises and after working hours, or in the absence of the HOD.

At this point the researcher would like to state the aims of the researcher's MA study as a background to the experiences the researcher had on the field. The first aim was to investigate the politics of identity (re) presentation in a Nigerian state. A second aim was to examine the use of dance as a tool for identity construction and representation in multi-ethnic societies and the process of codification, construction and negotiation of identities through bodily movements in such societies. Thirdly, the study probed the influence of government decisions and policies on the art of dance. Because the researcher's MA work was on the politics of identity construction and representation through dance in a multiethnic state, the researcher could not rely solely on interviews but needed to have video material of dance performances that were representative of the state as staged by the state troupe.

Analysis of this video material was to help the researcher map out the percentage ration of ethnic representations in their dance performances and also help check the claims of interviewees concerning the choreographic strategies employed for dance identity representation as well as make visible patterns in their choreographies.

However, this task was almost impossible and efforts frustrated as there were many issues raised concerning recording the dances of the troupe. This was because the head of performing arts believed that video recording of their dancing would reveal the secret of the dance. This made the researcher question the notion of intellectual property and ownership of culture. Thus she restricted the researcher from recording any dance, except for when the researcher went with them for a performance outside the institution's building and not recording a show organized by the institution or their rehearsals.

It was surprising to the researcher that an institution whose permission the researcher received, via the sealing of an internship agreement contract with the signature of the Head of administration and approval of the Head of performing arts department, which stated the objective and focus of the research, would obstruct my research process. The researcher was under the impression that they had given her their full support, seeing that the researcher was interested in their cultural practice, first as a Nigerian student and then a researcher.

The researcher believed the fact that this studied on the cultural practice when concluded would be presented to an international audience. The researcher also thought that the previous one year service (NYSC) experience with the institution between year 2011 and 2012 allowed her enough familiarity to carry out the study. It became clear that the international dimension to the research was a stumbling block. While on the field the researcher was charged a certain amount by the institution for research, and this supposedly allowed her access to their library and archives only, without room for borrowing some materials.

Whilst the Head of Performing Arts vehemently opposed recording of videos, the reverse was the case with the Head of Administration, who fully supported the researcher's desire to record their dancing and asked to be informed whenever the researcher wanted to do so. While discussing the issue of video recording with the HOD, she explained her reasons thus;

We will not allow you to make a video because if we do, we would have exposed everything to you. We might allow you to take clips but you will not record our dance from beginning to end...rehearsals you can take part because everything will not be involved in it, like our costumes, but when we are ready for a show you cannot take it here but if we go out for that engagement and you come then you can record it. If we allow it then many people outside the country will have our dances and we may not be able to (someone interrupts and walks into the office) (Formal interview Akpakip, 2014)

This above excerpt communicates the value placed on the dance practice and knowledge and the need to keep it as a "secret". The researcher reiterated that the materials were for academic purposes and not commercialization and my willingness to sign an agreement to that effect but just as Juha Laurilla (1997) posits organizations may not necessarily value academic studies and are usually doubtful about the role of outsiders. The researcher would consider herself as an outsider in this research situation as she does not come from Akwa-Ibom state but Imo state in eastern Nigeria and the researcher does not speak the language of the state. The HOD further expressed her fears of allowing video recording as she narrated a similar incident to the researcher. Her friend based in London demanded for the video clip of a particular

dance performance and she declined, even though this friend is a native of Akwa-Ibom state. Her declination of the request was because she had the perception that making available that video is a way of empowering her friend to speak on behalf of the dance practice. This, in turn, would reduce the chances of the council for arts and culture and state dance troupe to be invited for a performance abroad. She further addresses this issue as she states;

she can speak for that.....and she can create dances from that video...we will automatically render ourselves useless because if she gets that video she can use it, train people there and collect plenty of money. Instead of asking Council for Arts and Culture to come over, which will be more beneficial, we would have used our hands to stop ourselves. (Interview Akpakip, 2014)

This has caused the researcher to question the role of the Council for Arts and Culture. Are they really the custodians of Culture? If they are 'custodians of the Akwa-Ibom culture' as posited by the HOD, then it implies that they are safeguarding, preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of Akwa-Ibom state. Thus, why safeguard if the intention is not to share and make it readily accessible and available to people interested in the practice? Are they aware of the contents of the Nigerian cultural policy and its stand on cultural presentation, promotion and preservation as well as the role of research and education in achieving this? It is evident that arts and culture which translate to a people's identity is 'something in which people invest huge value' (Cohen, 2000:5).

It is important for the researcher to mention that the research department of the council for arts and culture recommended my

communicating with a notable lecturer, dance professional, and researcher from Akwa-Ibom state, whose research work for undergraduate studies is in the institution and a major point of reference for anything concerning Akwa-ibom dance in the institution. She also plays the role of a guest choreographer for the state dance troupe on certain occasions. Efforts to get her to contribute to my research proved abortive as she was always too busy to give the researcher a listening ear and provide the researcher with the materials in her possession.

Critical Perspectives on the Nigerian Cultural Policy

The Nigerian cultural policy was created by the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1988 with the view to shaping the arts and culture sector of Nigeria. Although scholars like Olu Obafemi opines that the policy document was a result of ‘several uncoordinated efforts by the successive governments from colonial period, having obvious deficiencies that militate against its effective implementation from the onset’ (Dandaura, 2011:17), the idea of a policy document that details the rules and conventions that govern the arts and cultural industry of Nigeria is commendable, with or without flaws. The document is divided into three parts; the first part gives an introduction and background to the need for a cultural policy, indicating its objectives and various methods of implementation. The second part focuses on implementation and the various avenues for it and the third part emphasizes administration and financing of culture.

Section one subsection four of the Nigerian cultural policy states that ‘culture is the fountain spring of all policies whether educational, social, political or economical. The strategies of national development would thus depend on the understanding of the culture, the adaptation of its elements for political, educational

and economic development, as well as its strengths for social integration and development' (FRN, 1988: 5). With this it can be established that culture is the spring board of development in the country in every sector.

It can further be said that the proper or improper management of the components of culture, which includes the art practices, would determine how much development can be achieved in other sectors of the country's economy. Thus the reason for a cultural policy is to establish ways and means of proper cultural management that would yield to development. It is one thing to have a policy and another to implement the contents of the policy. Under the section four of Nigeria's cultural policy which highlights methods of implementing the Nigerian cultural policy, preservation of culture was listed as one of the ways to implement the policy. In order to preserve culture, transmission must be encouraged and there has to be some record keeping, documentation and research. The importance of research and documentation is emphasized in subsection 2.3 as the policy states that for 'cultural preservation, to be meaningful and have integrity, it must be aided by research' (FRN, 1988: 7). The policy further mentions the various ways to go about this kind of research as it states that 'documentation on audio and video tapes, film, etc. will constitute an important part of this research' (FRN, 1988: 7).

The contents of the policy categorically spell out arts and education collaboration and inclusion as a means of keeping the arts relevant to every generation and not reducing its relevance to history and people of the past. In the second part of Nigeria's cultural policy, section five sub-sections 2.6, the policy details on curriculum for education that inculcates arts and culture in the various levels of education. It states that 'the State, at the university level, shall give emphasis to cross-cultural researches'

(FRN, 1988:8), but this was not applicable in my research experience. It is obvious that the people who are in charge of institutions that manage the arts and culture are working devoid of the policy that is supposed to guide their practice and managerial role. Personal interests and biases have also affected the industry.

Professor Abraham Adedokun's proposes that 'Nigeria's rich diverse cultural heritage could be preserved through the introduction of cross-cultural studies into the educational curricula. Governments encouragement and sponsoring of researches on existing cultural practices in Nigeria;' (Adedokun, 2011:69). Since Nigeria is a country where research is minimally or not sponsored at all, shouldn't the attitude to internationally sponsored research that would be of benefit to the country be that of support and encouragement? Many times we bemoan the sad situation of westernized perception and writings on our cultural practices, yet have we paused to consider our attitude to preserving and communicating our practice through research and education? It is not enough to include traditional songs, folklore and dances in the primary and secondary schools.

How many scholarly works have been written on them? Has there been any documentation of these presentations by children and students? Most times it is only the lived experience of the spectators that we go home with. The efforts of these children are not put into productive use. We are living in the glory of our rich diverse cultural heritage but if there is no adequate research done, this heritage will soon be lost without trace and the younger generation find no interest in them.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Academics and literate dance professionals in the field should endeavour to help and encourage young upcoming

professionals. It is useless to assume the establishment of the younger generation in the academic field as a threat to the older ones. Rather it should be openly welcomed as this allows for more voices to be heard, and more academically sound articles from natives of the country to be produced. It is important for professional to put aside our ethnic differences and focus on improving our nation by supporting and contributing to research. Many times we complain that the western descriptions and analysis of our cultural practices are either culturally biased, untrue or ethnocentric, but when we see young Nigerian scholars who are investigating their native culture, we do not readily make ourselves accessible and available to them.

The institutions that hold the position of safeguarding cultural practices like dance in Nigeria need to get acquainted with the cultural policy that guides their profession and practice. They also need to diligently carry out their roles without undermining the importance of research. Research is important in order to draw conclusions about state and national cultural practices. Research here is more than accepting the norm but questioning the reason for the norm and getting diverse perspectives to the same issue. It is also insufficient to make judgments based on assumptions or personal knowledge without verifying the facts from the field. Adequate research will positively influence art productions and presentations of institutions like the council for arts and culture. Nigeria's cultural policy identifies the objective of presenting culture as 'facilitating the accessibility of arts and culture to the widest spectrum of Nigerians' (FRN, 1988:7). Thus, research would make the arts and culture accessible to Nigerians and bring a better understanding of the practice. Many of the issues we face today as a country could have been avoided if there had been provision for research in those areas before the escalation of

the problems. The Nigerian government, arts professionals, educators and research community need to find a middle ground and create a platform for more arts and education collaboration. There is urgent need to bridge the gap between policy, administration and implementation. All sectors involved with this responsibility should be working towards a common goal and share the same vision as detailed in the cultural policy.

Finally, the researcher would speak particularly about the field of dance and drama because this is where her arts background stems from. Dancers need to think highly of their profession and find more ways to stay relevant in the field of arts. Their ability to eloquently speak about their profession and performances, as dancers, will distinguish them from any local troupe. It is not enough to know how to dance but knowing how to speak about your profession is an added advantage. These steps can help elevate the status of dance as an art in Nigeria. Thus, the researcher would recommend that one's ability to dance as well as knowledge about dance should be considered before employing dancers for the institutions like the council for arts and culture and the state dance troupe. Dance critic and performance specialist Ikike Ufford terms this inadequacy as the 'calamity' of the institution and the artistic and cultural industry (Ufford, 2014). In a nut-shell, practical knowledge/experience alongside academic and informed knowledge should come to play in recruiting staff for institutions concerned with arts management.

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