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Ekeleke Dance: *Cultural Journey From Ekwe to Western Igbo Areas*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**Ekeleke Masquerade at
Ewuru, Agbor Delta state
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EKELEKE DANCE

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The Ekeleke dance is a clear emblem of Igbo culture, which originated from Ekwe, Umundugba, in Imo state.

At first, it was a dance that was initially for celebration performed by women, and it is known for its beautiful costumes and elaborate focus. Ekeleke, as the name implies, means to dress beautifully, further highlighting the importance of dressing neatly over the dance itself.

Initially, the Ekeleke dance was a type of dance that performed by women during special occasions and festivals to showcase their beauty and Grace. However as time went on the dance narrative moved when males from neighboring places decided to adapt the dance, Men from communities like umudede ibioma and obureku were the people who modified the ekeleke dance, they introduced more things that would reflect political, religious and social nuances. The men went ahead to add more vigor to the movement of Ekelele. They also added sacred items into a movement that symbolizes not just beauty but community values and strength.

The Spread of Ekeleke by Arochuku

The spreading of Ekelele beyond the regions of Imo can be widely attributed to the men of Arochukwu. Arochuku, widely known for their extensive trading networks, the traders of Arochukwu from Oguta played a big role in facilitating the diffusion of the Ekeleke dance to Western Igbo areas.

They introduced the Ekeleke dance to various clans intertwining the

dance with the local traditions and also using it to expand their variations and influence across the Igbo regions

Ekeleke dance is more than just a movement. It is also an initiation into community responsibility and maturity. Only the freeborn and those who have come of age can have the opportunity to be initiated.

The initiation of Ekeleke happens around June, which is the planting season, showing a sign of the community's hope for progress and prosperity via the blessings of the ancestors. The ritual of the initiation process doesn't just serve as passing down cultural practice but acts as a connection between the ancestors who have taken part in the practice and the living.

Furthermore, from its origin in Ekwe Imo State, the dance has metamorphosed into a cultural widespread phenomenon among the Igbo people. Courtesy of the Arochukwu trading routes and exchange of cultural practices, today, the Ekelele dance not only entertains but also teaches and connects younger generations thereby reinforcing the rich identity of Igbo tapestry across various clans.

The Ekelele dance has, over time, transformed in different communities whilst holding on to its core essence.

° Egenti, M. Semiotics in Indigenous Dance Performances: Ekeleke Dance of Ekwe People of Nigeria as Paradigm.

° Ogueri, K. Ekeleke Dance of the Ekwe People: A Cultural and Semiotic Exploration.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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An enthusiast in tech with deep passion for studying and showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of southern Nigeria . Combining my skill with my obsession towards African history and traditions to create contributions that impacts the digital space.



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