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Ogodin'omulunwa: *Funeral Dance Drama and the Celebration of Womanhood in Igbo Culture*

By Chukwunwike Ossai

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FEATURE
IMAGE

1 A picture of the special funeral drums used for the announcement dance Note the relatively small size of the drums which makes them light and easy to carry whilst dancing on the move. Photo By

Article image · caption retained from the published Ozikoro article

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OGODIN'OMULUNWA

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In Indigenous Igbo society, a funeral is not just when a person dies and is buried. It carries a deeper meaning. A special kind of funeral that stands out is the Ogodin'omulunwa performance, a dance drama made for a woman who died. In this performance, dance and song are not just there for a show. They are the real voice of the story.

They do not count the part where mourners came from the deceased's house because that is a normal ritual. The real drama begins with the Announcement Dance. This is the first dance that relatives of the dead woman would perform. Only male relatives not the same age as the woman could join, and outsiders are not allowed. The dance takes place on an open road from the deceased's house to the surrounding area. The dance is like a rhythmic run with stamping legs and short movements, almost like a trot. Drummers would beat small drums that are easy to carry as they move. Apart from the drumbeat, the dancers stamp their feet and clap their hands to add to the rhythm.

There are two important songs inside this section:

Song 1 Solo: "Ewo!" Chorus: "Agana po" This chant is repeated many times, with lines like: "Uzo teka ntite, ete gbue naka po!" Translation: "This long road is exhilarating, it is killing me."

Here, the dancers begin to fall back slowly with backwards steps, a sign of tiredness, not just physical but emotional.

Song 2 Solo: “Unu anugo? Anyi anuho o! N’adanyi nwulanwu o?”

Chorus: “Anyi anuho o!” Translation: “Have you heard? We haven’t heard! That our sister/daughter is dead? We haven’t heard!”

This song is like a broadcast of death but invites people to join in the mourning. The tone used in singing it is heavy with sorrow.



The eldest daughter (ada) is performing the central dance of the funeral dance. Photo By Maduagwu Edith Abisola. Phd

The second song carries a clear message of loss—a cry of pain. It speaks about the people that everyone values being gone. The following dance movement is slow and heavy, as if their spirit is weighed down. It is not an energetic dance; it shows the real weight of grief.

The first song deepens the sorrow. It uses the long road as a metaphor for pain and struggle. “Agana po” does not have a clear meaning, but it sounds like something that describes a far journey, maybe the journey of life or passage to the afterlife. The body movement, the

backwards step, and the repeated sigh of “Ewo!” show how grief would draw a person back and sap their strength.

In all these, the ritual celebrates womanhood. It is a performance reserved for women alone, which means that society recognises that women’s roles in life are not small. They are background figures. It is a strong pillar that the community would use to hold equity.

Ogodin’omulunwa is not just a cultural dance. It is a proper ritual drama that uses music and body movement to tell stories of the deceased and how the community feels towards the loss. Each section has a meaning. The costume, song, dance, and space all speak about their language.

From the Announcement Dance to the deep cry of Agana po, Ogodin’omulunwa shows that sorrow is not silence in Igbo culture. It dances, it drums, and it sings. Every step the dancers take, every word the chorus sings, is adding to the bigger picture: that a woman who died deserves respect, ritual, and remembrance. This dance drama is not just a mourning. It is a sacred plot used in rhythm to honour life, death, and the role of women at the centre of it all.

Parallels Of Dance And Plot In Ogodi Female Burial Dance Of The Ogbaru Igbo Sub-Group of Eastern Nigeria Awogu-Maduagwu
EdithAbisola(Ph.D)

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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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