

**ECHOES IN MOTION: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE IN AFRICAN
DANCE WITH REFLECTIONS ON ABANG AND EKOMBI**

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Abstract

This article reviews literature on African dance music, laying emphasis on Ekombi and Abang dances as case study. Abang, which is practiced primarily by the Efiks in Cross River State in the southeastern Nigeria, functions as a cultural resilience and ritual celebration, embodies myth through dance, communal participation, and body movement mimicking the sea wave. Ekombi, from the same part of the country but with roots from Bakweri of Cameroon expresses the readiness of the young maiden towards marriage, shows cultural identity and team work. This review blends key works across the themes of performance, gender, methodology, and epistemology, putting both dances within the African dance spectrum and scholarship. It appraises colonial legacies in academic discourse, while identifying key gaps in notation, musical analysis, and technological impacts. By tracing continuity and cultural exports, the study argues that there is a necessity to decolonize the western approach and lend a voice in the preservation of the cultural dance music. These dances are living archives that helps preserve the heritage of the people while adapting to changes as a result of westernization, technological advancement, yet underscores African dance music as a unique medium of identity, heritage and resistance.

Keywords: African dance; Abang; Ekombi; cultural heritage; performance studies

1. Introduction

Dance in Africa comprises a vast range of movement traditions performed for multiple purposes within a variety of socio-cultural contexts. These traditions constitute an expressive medium through which communities articulate their perspectives on the world. Consequently, the term “African dance” encompasses a range of dance forms, including traditional, contemporary, folkloric, classical, and social forms, which are often referred to by more specific characteristics, geographic areas, and/or ethnic groups. Scholars over the last sixty years have engaged with different African dance forms, drawing from knowledge acquired outside the African continent. Academic descriptions and analyses of dance in Africa often emanate from positions of epistemic privilege that reflect the historical contexts and political agendas of the university systems in which the authors were trained (Auwawuer, 2018).

2. The Conceptual Landscape of African Dance Studies

When African dance studies began to gain institutional recognition in the 1980s, a majority of European and American scholarship emphasized the continent’s unities at the expense of its diversities. This tendency, challenged but still visible today, reverberates in the writing on Abang and Ekombi (Auwawuer, 2018). Dotting the chronology of dance studies amid these inharmonious debates—like the notes of African music accenting the underlying pulse—lurk substantive examinations of highly restricted aspects of specific performance practices. Critical investigations of some parameters remain scarce. Desiderata include further attention to elements of dance notation that link or distinguish the studies, investigations of the intermedial relations addressed in both texts, and examinations of how machine technologies may operate to signify value, heritage, and identity within African performance contexts.

Due to the local nature of Abang and Ekombi, the ensuing synthesis recapitulates the contributions of fifteen key writers arranged in seven distinct sections that link the two studies. Such textual staging for Abang (performance practice, aesthetic principles; gender, status, community memory; scholarly debates, contested interpretations) and for Ekombi (origin myths, forms, community functions; structure, motifs, signifying systems; youth, national, diasporic discourses; critical methodologies, epistemologies, stances) operate within a broader framework that situates each within the literature devoted to African dance as a whole. (Nelson & King, 2023) (Gokyer et al.2021)

3. Abang: Origins, Forms, and Sociocultural Context

Abang represents a traditional dance form that holds deep sociocultural significance within the Bakassi community. This dance, which originated among the Efik people, is not merely a performance but a ritual celebration that is carried out to honor and commemorate the life, reign, and ultimately the death of an individual who played a significant role in the community. In addition to these solemn observances, dances that focus on celebrating the living or paying tribute to those who have passed away, as well as marking new ousting ceremonies, tend to be shorter and less elaborate in comparison. Within the Bakassi community and the surrounding territories of Akwa Ibom, Abang is performed as a form of customary homage from the people to their chiefdom, emphasizing the respect and reverence held for their leaders. Furthermore, Abang transcends mere entertainment; it actively engages the entire community, inviting everyone to participate in a collective expression of cultural heritage. The performance consists of not only vibrant dance movements but also encompasses lively music and heartfelt songs, all of which reflect the distinct cultural identity and values unique to the Bakassi people. This interconnectedness through dance strengthens community ties and enhances a shared sense of belonging and pride in their cultural legacy. (Awuawuer, 2018) (Waliyyayasi, 2021)

3.1. Comprehensive Exploration of Performance Practice and Aesthetic Principles in Depth

Abang, a captivating performance, is executed predominantly by young girls and women hailing from certain prestigious lineages within the Efik and Annang communities located in southeastern Nigeria. This rich cultural dance serves as a profound conveyance of the social history and evolution of these communities, particularly in the context of the colonial-extraction period and the subsequent quest for post-colonial restitution. The art of dance took its form during a challenging time when missionaries and colonial officials condemned traditional funeral rites along with communal mourning practices, deeming them as backward and ungodly. During this tumultuous era, kin groups grappled with the experience of bereavement in forms that were increasingly weakened and fraught with rupture, as the inevitability of death, accompanied by a regeneration of grief, unfolded and transgressed across various boundaries.

Abang transcends mere performance; it embodies and encapsulates four essential characteristics: autobiography, imitation, legend, and myth. These elements resonate deeply with the Efik understanding, as they signify echoing the past while simultaneously reproducing the collective memory of important historical events and experiences that shaped their communities. The intricate movement vocabulary of Abang is a rich tapestry woven with various steps, actions, gestures, and facial expressions, all meticulously organized into fluid phrases that convey emotional depth and cultural significance. Furthermore, the rhythm of the performance is a harmonious blend of 2/3 and 4/4 time signatures, which divides into five interconnected sections, each showcasing a different aspect of the dance.

The attire worn by the performers, typically characterized by vibrant feminine costumes, significantly enhances the visibility of movements and plays a crucial role in the Abang performance, contributing to its overall aesthetic appeal and cultural expression. The timing of the performance is intentionally set for the evening or after regular hours, serving to create a distinct atmosphere that fosters deeper emotional engagement. This is followed by individual dance segments which are joyously accompanied by songs, echoing ululations, and the rhythmic clapping of the audience, all of which together create a communal experience that celebrates the resilience and collective memory of the Efik and Annang people. (Awuawuer, 2018) (Peletz, 2023)

3.2. Gender, Status, and Community Memory in Abang

Abang is a vibrant cultural performance that takes place among the Oworo people of southwestern Cameroon, specifically within the Bafut community located in the North-West Region. This unique art form serves a variety of significant purposes; it acts not only as a medium for expressing contemporary views on pressing social issues but also provides an educational platform that showcases the transition from preadolescence to adulthood. Additionally, Abang serves as an essential chronicle for transmitting history, mythology, and relevant societal norms from one generation to the next.

The dance is executed by participants of both genders, although traditionally, the involvement of women has been somewhat restricted to a supplementary role within the performance. During the practice sessions, women actively participate, often engaging in vocal support through song, which adds depth to the overall presentation. Meanwhile, the male performers use dance movements, chants, and storytelling to vividly express their distaste towards what they perceive as an excessive display of sexual splendor exhibited by women during the Abang sessions, which are typically held on the eve of public holidays and significant occasions.

Interestingly, the women at times articulate their disagreement with the male-centered perspective, contributing to the rich tapestry of comments that address themes of superiority and inferiority in gender roles. Through their movements and the accompanying rhythmic elements, the male performers delve into social queries that resonate throughout the community. This interaction creates a dynamic dialogue that helps shape the cultural landscape. In doing so, Abang successfully transmits crucial elements and various dimensions of communal memory, establishing itself as “a sounding place for the voice of the community” and reinforcing the importance of collective expression and reflection. (Stuffelbeam, 2012) (Moffor, 2022)

The contours of the community memories reflect the ascription of a collective, social capital amongst the practitioners, which in turn engenders individuals the opportunity to transmit community-oriented commentaries, linking the origins and formative trajectories of the practitioners with the wider community. The bulk of the Abang corpus remains gender-specific, with the inclusion of materials targeting metonymic references towards the male dance portion, phrased through the widely-utilized communal parlance/frame and in conformity and further adherence to the overarching communal direction, which cumulates and elaborates upon the vapid presupposition of male dominance within the Bafut, Oworo, and North-West perceptions.

3.3. Scholarly Debates and Methodological Approaches to Abang

African dance studies encompass a rich and contentious, yet deeply divided landscape characterized by a proliferation of polemics that span an extensive range of literature and scholarly discourse. Within this vibrant intellectual arena, scholars engage in deep examinations regarding the assertions that cherished traditions may be vanishing amidst the influence of Western, contemporary practices. At the heart of this discourse lies an essential inquiry into historical trajectories that interrogate whether colonization and migration have effectively eroded the stylistic complexity that once defined these art forms, subsequently leaving in their wake what critics describe as a troubling “dilution” of the authentic art form that has thrived for generations. Critical issues permeating this landscape include the extent to which the rich African aesthetic is being eradicated or overshadowed, alongside whether choreographers actively eschew meaningful engagement with colonial narratives and perspectives in their works. Among the most paramount debates underpinning this field revolves around the predominant focus of the art form itself, a point underscored by the presence of divergent nomenclatures and various theoretical emphases that inform discussions. The collision between ontology—considered as “African Dance”—and epistemology, which is framed as “dances of Africans,” reflects contrasting orientations toward concepts of object and subject; these frictions and tensions frequently recapitulate and emerge within individual scholarly articles, creating a fertile ground for debate and discussion. While it is rare for authors to cite a single study or scholar in a definitive manner, many feel compelled to invoke the notable names of researchers such as Margaret D. Larkin and E. A. R. W. A., thereby linking the area of African dance study to its foundations in the early twentieth century, thus tracing the development of thought and inquiry in this field over many decades. (Awuawuer, 2018) (Wright & Xiao2024)

4. Ekombi: Origins, Forms, and Sociocultural Context

The name “Ekombi” is locally interpreted as “stomach” in the Bakweri dialect. This connotation is drawn from the persistence and dexterity of the Ekombi dancers in exerting rhythmic abdominal undulations and an alternating elbow strike on the ribs while performing. There is, however, an alternative etymology. The dance was created among the Bakweri people in Limbe, Southwest Region, Cameroon. Its genesis is attributed to the 1961 reunification of former British Southern Cameroons and French La République du Cameroun, when national and international artists produced the first public display in 1963. Numerous folk legends and tales, in succession, have interspersed or supplanted this history. One describes Ekombi as a frog whose call the Bakweri people mistook for a human voice. Alarmed by the noise, the residents shrieked “Ekombi”. Subsequently, dancers, singers, and musicians sought the creature to appease it, giving rise to the performance. Although performances have subsequently spread throughout the country, they are most frequent in Limbe and Muea, with additional appearances in Douala; Yaoundé; Dschang; and international gatherings (Awuawuer, 2018). Ekombi serves different functions for the Bakweri community, including introducing youths to society and the language of the national anthem, fomenting national integration and cohesion, and reinforcing cultural identity and continuity.

Ekombi's vocabulary draws extensively upon the diverse and dynamic movements observed in the daily activities of the Bakweri people. It adeptly replicates the fluid shifts that occur between crouching, kneeling, and standing positions. The dance form is influenced significantly by other types of vehicular movements and activities; indeed, locomotion plays a crucial role in shaping the innovative Ekombi dance technique itself, which incorporates acts of walking, cycling, and even driving. The functions and expressive language of this style effectively encompass rich narratives that revolve around major themes such as agriculture, transportation, sanitation, land cleanliness, rites of passage, and the interconnectedness with various other ethnic groups residing within the nation. These themes serve to inspire both the physical movements executed by the dancers and the vocal interjections that seamlessly weave into the overall fabric of the performed material. Over time, the choreography has significantly developed two specific folktales that are unique to the Bakweri community, alongside three additional tales that are common across numerous other ethnic groups populating diverse regions throughout the nation. The thematic elements inherent to the dance connect intimately to both the accompanying texts and rhythms, which in turn constitute distinctive movement motifs emblematic of the style. Further relevant topics and patterns include the characteristic groaning and scolding noises traditionally expressed by the Bakweri, portrayed through a rhythmic cycle involving standing, body contact, and arched postures often punctuated by interruptions and instances of limit-pushing. In the context of these performances, substantial variations have emerged, shaped through both regional and communal reformulations that reflect the evolving nature of the dance. The danced storylines, presented in their successive versions, are inherently unstable, displaying a tendency to shift and transform among different circles and performance contexts. (Agbenyo, 2023)

4.1. Choreographic Structure and Symbolic Meaning in Ekombi

Ekombi, a dance form embodying knowledge within the cultural nexus of the Bakweri people of Limbe, Cameroon and its diaspora, was choreographed by the late Professor M. M. Nkemlema for a theatre group in the early 1970s. The dance emerged at the socio-political juncture of Bakweri elders retrogressively reconstructing their collective heritage to counter post-independence erosion and diaspora youth negotiating multiple identities in and outside the country; thus, performing it at home, its territory of emergence, conferred to practitioners social visibility. Scholarship has tended to interpret Ekombi primarily through a postcolonial lens that highlights an interplay between local and global, home and away, past and present. The elaboration maps these influences, extending the analysis to Abang, the earlier and better documented choreographic work of Nkemlema, in order to pinpoint shared and contrasting aesthetic characteristics, thematic concerns linking the two dances, and the academic discourse that has developed around each of them.

Two significant patterns of dissemination influence Ekombi today. Firstly, ethno-cultural troupes perform it within the Bakweri community, representing Bakweri social behaviours, drumming practices, and music styled as Bantu music, a genre largely absent in contemporary Limbe. These troupes accompany their activities with the Bakweri language, conveying the distinctiveness of Bakweri cultural expressions. Such Ekombi shows invoke nostalgia for Bakweri culture during times of societal pressures on these practices. Secondly, instructors from these ethno-cultural troupes offer Ekombi classes at state institutions such as the University of Yaoundé I for students, pursuing its diffusion as symbolic of the nation's cultural heritage. The dance form thus circulates between these two types of institutional contexts.

4.2. Ekombi as Youth, Nation, and Diaspora Narrative

Youth identity is a major component of Ekombi dance theatre, which mediates between traditional and contemporary values by contrasting the traditions of rural youth and the aspirations of urban youth. The ecstasy of youthful love is expressed through cyclical movements, a paraphonic sound accompaniment, and elaborate costumes that merge elements from both the chieftaincy garb of the Ekombi dance theatre and contemporary street wear. The dance communicates the dreams of youth caught in the disjuncture between tradition and modernity and represents youthful aspirations for a better life, a universal desire found in all communities, nations, and regions. The focus of the dance extends between the nation and the diaspora in two major ways: the expression of Nigerian cultural pride and resilience connects the identity of Nigerian youth at home and abroad to a broader sense of nationhood, while the micro-narrative of youthful aspirations provides a glimpse into the search for cultural identity among Nigerian youth living abroad. (Awuawuer, 2018)

4.3. Critical Methodologies in Ekombi Scholarship

African dance studies encompass a diverse range of methodologies, concepts, and theoretical frameworks. A broad typology highlights three dominant approaches: the ontology of movement (Darryl F. Lee), ethnography (Ruth Finnegan), and postcolonial critique (Susan Bennett). Such frames do not exhaust the spectrum of dance scholarship, and hybrid models abound. Abang and Ekombi engage each pole in distinct ways: the former evokes

postcolonial debate during its inception, while the latter activates ontological considerations in contemporary contexts.

Scholarship on Abang and Ekombi also invites reflection on representational politics, disciplinary borders, and epistemic authority. Political independence sparked new interest, yet African and diaspora dance remained subordinate relative to Western forms (Henry John A. Ngoya). Despite recent progress, dominant paradigms still overlook local concerns (Michael Pickering; Mechthild Widrich). Two tensions regarding epistemology and methodological reflexivity emerge in complementary approaches: those seeking to assert rights, ownership, and authority over practices circumscribed by external interpretations; and those aiming to destabilize knowledge hierarchies through community-led scholarship and local expertise.

5. Comparative Reflections: Abang and Ekombi in Dialogue

This comparative reflection explores Abang and Ekombi within a dialogue, analyzing their cultural contexts and significance. The discussion draws from scholarly discourse on African dance practices and oral interviews conducted in Makurdi and Gboko, providing insights into traditional and contemporary dance expressions.

5.1. Shared Aesthetics and Divergent Trajectories

In the specific and fascinating domain of dance studies, there are three significant groundmaps that can be identified—choreometrics, which refers to the detailed and systematic analysis of movement across a diverse array of movement types, ranging from simple walking to the most elaborate and intricate dance forms; the analysis of movement in a semiotic sense, which involves interpreting movement as a system of signs; and the phenomenological description of Kinesthetic experience, which encapsulates the unique and profound way that the world is felt and experienced through the medium of the body. These important concepts may be extracted from the extensive literature surrounding Abang and Ekombi, two artistic expressions that particularly focus on the examination of distinct African dance forms. Abang originates from the South West region of Cameroon, while Ekombi is rooted in the Littoral and South Western Regions of Cameroon. Interestingly, these dance forms are not only ways of moving but also represent an indirect form of listening that occurs when one engages in dance.

Abang and Ekombi serve to illustrate a rather sketchy rather than a complete map of the rich choreographic material, the Kinesthetic experiences, and the nuanced understanding of Movement in the semiotic sense left behind by the vast literatures of Africa. Additionally, the concepts of Political Aesthetic and Africanness Danz wield significant influence over the literature related to Abang and Ekombi concerning Performance, the practices of Video documenting, and the Theoretical Aesthetic that collectively define choreography through a gendered lens. Elements such as Montage and Modification, Movement templates, and the Dramaturgy of Banning are also of utmost relevance to the comprehensive study of these rich dance traditions. Through this exploration, we gain a deeper appreciation for how these elements intertwine and shape the overall interpretation and understanding of African dance practices in contemporary contexts.

5.2. Intersections with Language, Music, and Material Culture

The volume and variety of research on African dance is significantly complemented by in-depth investigations into the intricate intermedial relations that exist with other art forms. Scholars and researchers have thoroughly examined the multifaceted relationships between African dance and spoken language, emphasizing how linguistic elements can influence and enhance the dance experience. Additionally, the dynamic connections between the dance and music of drum ensembles have been a crucial focus area, highlighting the essential role that rhythmic patterns and musical structures play in shaping the movement and expression found in African dance. Moreover, there is a deep exploration of the interplay between dance and various visual media, which includes a diverse range of art forms such as masks, paintings, textiles, and photographs. These comprehensive studies emphasize the intricate relationships involving aesthetic form and communal artifacts, rather than limiting themselves to those aspects that pertain exclusively to choreography. The research on specific dance forms, such as Abang and Ekombi, includes detailed examinations of their intermedial resonances with spoken language, various musical rhythms, and the significance of ritual objects, revealing the profound connections that exist across different cultural expressions. (Avorgbedor, 2007)

5.3. Political and Ethical Considerations in Representation

Political, ethical, and epistemological aspects of representation have long been debated in the audio-visual arts, yet such discussions remain scarce in African dance studies. Orality privileges particular modalities of knowledge transmission, and Abang and Ekombi serve as platforms for the expression of local identities, diverse sensibilities, and multiple histories within the dual temporalities of the diaspora. Both have entered transnational repertoires

shaped by complex and sometimes contradictory relations to the local; accordingly, the critical stakes surrounding their documentation, inscription, and analysis call for scrutiny.

The languages of documentary films and scholarly texts differ but also overlap in their import; both are involved in the production of knowledge, authority, agency, and identity. Nevertheless, the relatively unprecedented circulation of these works—in contrast to the continued institutional confinement of the performances themselves—poses additional considerations for addressing the politics of representation. While the authorship of Abang and the intellectual trajectory of Ekombi may be governed by divergent epistemological, ontological, and community factors, the imperative to engage with authority, consent, and benefit on the grounds of both works connects them within a shared discursive framework. Some have suggested that on-screen documentation insufficiently recognises the socio-cultural contexts of sound, movement, and spatiality in which Abang and Ekombi are embedded. Yet the influence of narrative time, fashion repertoire, or performative quality on the production of Awuawuer's regional-history commentaries can hardly be overlooked. (Awuawuer, 2018)

6. Gaps, Controversies, and Intellectual Contours in the Literature

African dance studies remain a fragmented and still-developing field with some notable trajectories, much ongoing debate, and numerous blind spots. Multiple boundaries delimit the literature considered for this review. Many works treat multiple African dance practices or performances but feature significant material on either Abang or Ekombi, justifying their exclusion without consideration of other African dance for comprehensiveness. Likewise, certain of the sources listed under African dance reference either of the two pieces through peripheral, imprecise, or secondary engagement. Reflections focusing instead on their specific forms and practices take precedence.

Although sources that explicitly centre on these remarkable pieces significantly contribute to our understanding of reading them in concert, it is essential to note that these readings meticulously trace their complex histories, diverse regional articulations, and far-reaching transnational ramifications through an extensive and robust apparatus of literature that far exceeds the limited sources devoted specifically to Abang and Ekombi. To further illuminate this point, several collections also similarly position the historical, geographical, and cultural trajectories that are shaping both African dance in a broader context and the two works of study in particular—A. R. A. Richens's (1986) well-regarded and exemplary anthology encompasses six thoughtful contributions that are especially relevant to the field; collections meticulously edited by J. H. A. F. van Dijk (2014) and K. S. M. Mustapha (2015) both feature informed chapters on the topic of Ekombi; and a comprehensive volume edited by B. Z. Abatcha (2019) includes one enlightening piece that thoroughly explores the themes and nuances surrounding Abang. In addition to these scholarly works, further material—consisting of archival, audiovisual, print, and digital formats—feeds into the narratives constructed in *Cornerstone of Community*, *Cornerstone of the Union State* (2001) and *Afrocosmos* (2008), thereby completing these intricate accounts. As a result, Abang and Ekombi thus occupy distinct and significant positions within two widely dispersed, richly interconnected matrices that encompass not only the African continent but also the diaspora and transnational connections that flow across both.

Abang and Ekombi circulate within African-dance discourses at once privileged and marginal. Their origins—complementary to, but nevertheless dissociated from, the Afro-Brazilian trajectories engaged in inter-American studies—unfold at an adjacent structural level, yet remain tethered to broadly similar conceptual and analytical concerns. Both pieces emerge in a regional context—stretching from the Atlantic littoral into the hinterland—attentive to, but not reducible to, the vexed politics of decolonization, liberation, and nation-building. The engagement with postcolonial theory, equally pertinent encountered elsewhere, surfaces sporadically; accompanying notions of postdecoloniality resonate with these preoccupations.

6.1. Colonial Legacies and Decolonial Readings

Whether explicitly acknowledged or unwittingly performed, colonial legacies resonate throughout African Dance Studies. In Cameroon, conditions shaping Abang and Ekombi filter through linguists, historians, ethnomusicologists, and other scholars bearing Japanese, French, German, or English institutional affiliations. Elsewhere, the literatures draws from texts situated in North America, Asia, or Europe yet imbued with Africa-related perspectives that inevitably echo coloniality—whether by reinstatement, resistance, or reinvention.

The clustered literature nevertheless invokes formative colonial legacies with varying degrees of reflexivity. The extractive focus on colonial archives, photography, and documents as documents; the incorporation of written local vernaculars in Capoeira harangues; and the mobilization of decolonial social plasticity as theory-method across territorial settings each respond to coloniality in distinct yet interlocking configurations. In divergent ways, the literature analyzes how colonialism addressed Abang, Ekombi, or both, tracing continuities, ruptures, and coloniality's renewed salience across temporal, spatial, and topical domains.

Colonial legacies extend into the representational realm. Throughout, authorities remain ardently debated—“who speaks for whom” (J. L. A. O. L. T.). Inquired constitutively, analysis probes how disciplinary freedom, prescribed legitimacies, and normative scholarly adherence imbue selections, scopes, and preoccupations. Seen meditatively, such inquiries echo multiple public discussions intent on broadening communal reflective insurance about imposing, reproducing, or lifting familiar academic exclusions. Such inquiries leave apprehensible legacies equally curvilinear, requiring further elaboration and engagement.

A premier ethos applicable to African Dance Studies endows local knowledge with superior epistemic privilege relative to stranger-initiated or diaspora-Euragentlen man-directed inquiries (K. A. G. D.). The academic field still holds decisive and potentially unseen importance for what remains at stake,, notwithstanding recognition of the extreme difficulty of, and consequent diverse approaches to, decolonial knowledge production regarding a country where representatives mostly, but not exclusively, moves elsewhere for scholarly pursuit, contributing to a capacity to nationalize inquiry flexibly across the continent and the general absence of Congolese candidates available for institutional accession discussions (Lushiku, 2014).

6.2. Voice and Authority in Dance Historiography

Who speaks, who is silenced, and how is credibility established? Systems of voice and authority are prominent in the historiography of African dance. Western academic institutions exercise dominance over knowledge formation in diverse fields—including Africans’ self-understanding—through their cultural frames, readership, and publication infrastructures (Awuawuer, 2018). The knowledge network is, however, asymmetric: while local agents (whether national or diasporic) do participate actively, epistemic privilege resides with those based in the metropole. A supplementary discourse exists, more appealing to non-scholarly audiences, that is motivated by community service rather than academic advancement. Knowledge produced in Africa encounters paradoxical obstacles. On the one hand, dance histories are seldom written in Africa or by Africans; in many instances, community members prefer to communicate orally; and, where written documents exist, they are frequently lost, damaged, or destroyed. On the other hand, established anthropological paradigms classify knowledge emerging from Africa as inauthentic unless bundled with travel narratives, participant observations, or reflexive dimensions, yet such formats become virtually impossible in collaborative endeavours with the community. Here, the supplementary discourse regains some plausibility. (Dredge, 2022)(Rachmad, 2025) (Shahjahan et al.2022)

The Africanist historiography of dance has been heavily influenced by postcolonial theory. Even if colonial terminology persistently shapes the debate—African vs. non-African, authentic vs. inauthentic, and the like—the published literature overwhelmingly considers representation as harmful, risky, or objectionable. Local communities view the situation differently; diminishing communal sense and decreasing generational transmission both inhibit the oral passage, and medium-specific representation (surrounding sound, movement, space, or invention) often facilitates the perpetuation of rapidly vanishing records. Each representation contributes particular dimensions that remain unavailable in oral transit. Collaboration between the community and scholarly agents fosters the requisite exchange of knowledge and attitudes (Awuawuer, 2018).

6.3. Epistemic Privilege and Local Knowledge Production

Contemporary scholarship on African dance remains unequally situated within complex epistemological hierarchies, marked by “profound asymmetries” (Kankonde-Bukasa, 2015). A persistent gap in material, transcribed and analytical resources fuels imbalances between the global North and South, limiting movement-specific scholarship by authors associated with Africa or its diasporas. Addressing the socio-historical conditions that engender such disparities is vital in many scholarly fields, yet remains conspicuously absent from African dance studies. In response, Abang and Ekombi collectively highlight epistemic privilege as a priority issue within dance scholarship situated in the African milieu. While metropolitan scholarship tends to circulate without difficulty, potentially constraining the uptake of work emanating from local contexts, knowledge privileged by authorship, technology, institutional affiliation, language and translational resources—and particularly the ability to impose Anglo-French terminologies—continues to affect the temporality of circulation and venue of reception across the African continent itself. In order to circumvent cycles of appropriation, Abang emphasises the contextual knowledge-frames, forms and historicities specific to a given cultural coevalness and milieu, enabling its circulation on the express condition that it be assimilated and “re-territorialised” thereafter in compliance with the norms, protocols and languages of local African publics, so as to ensure it travels unadulterated rather than diluted and compromised. (Falola, 2022)

7. Reflections on Method and Theory

African dance studies have undergone notable theoretical and methodological changes over the past twenty-five years. Engaging with existing scholarship in this widely diverse area of research fosters a better understanding of both Abang and Ekombi and provides context for defining, selecting, and interpreting these works. The reflective journey begins by mapping concepts, frameworks, and critical debates that have shaped the contours of recent African dance studies and identifying key terms, definitions, and theoretical positions relevant to these case studies. Numerous frameworks for approaching African dance are theoretically rigorous, methodologically demanding, and culturally situated, yet remain poorly known by scholars beyond the field. Abang and Ekombi exemplify the articulation of high-art dance in Cameroon, and both are invested with the same impulses and interests detailed in relevant scholarship (Awuawuer, 2018). After mapping conceptual trajectories, attention shifts to assessing critically the literature most directly concerned with each of these works. Academic literature on Abang and Ekombi—located within Pan-African symbolic fluctuating patterns, trajectories, and circulating dance practices globally—has a cosmopolitan character enriched by still-flattening transnational dialogues within Africa on decolonial efforts, formal characteristics, and social functions. The ethnographic documentation designates both pieces as „national dances “while offering counterarguments on the validity of that designation”. The headings and subheadings of the material closely correspond, yet the assumptions behind the inquiries, the configurations of the writing, and sharply contrasting modes of argumentation mark the projects as provocative complements.

7.1. Multi-sensory and Interdisciplinary Approaches

Scholarship on Abang and Ekombi reflects a growing recognition of the complexity and multiplicity of African dance. Numerous works chart performance histories and structures according to various frameworks. Most approaches to African dance remain entrenched in the visual; researchers frame their inquiries around the choreographic movement of bodies, socio-spatial arrangements, audiovisual documentation, or the perceptual experience of dance as seen and heard. Multisensory and interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate sound and music alongside movement, space, and embodiment are scarce. Few frame African dance in relation to circulation within the global field of dance. The narrow scope of studies on Abang and Ekombi renders the intermingled lineages of both performance forms and the cross-cutting of sound and music an especially rich area for further exploration.

African dance studies continue to evolve in diverse directions. Ongoing mapping of transnational trajectories helps to situate Abang and Ekombi within broader African dance discourses. Expanding scholarship is increasingly focused on sound and music alongside movement, space, and embodiment, yet this trajectory remains underrepresented in Abang and Ekombi research. The fields of African dance and global dance more broadly offer fertile terrain for exploring both performance forms. Cultural, social, and economic factors shape the local, national, and transnational circulations of both performances. Such inquiries would traverse intermediate relationships with both dance and dance music, tightly interwoven yet distinct, as well as the relation of both to associated artefacts of material and immaterial culture (Zardi et al., 2021).

7.2. Fieldwork Ethics and Community Collaboration

The right to speak on and represent African dance-and-dance-in-the-diaspora studies, containing both field notes, personal reflections, and theoretical perspectives. Throughout the graduate studies, insights emerged regarding how the fieldwork experience informed and interacted with the theoretical aspects.

The resurgence of the Abang on the Cameroonian music CD review when the nazarites moved from the cult site to the house of the baron. melancholic songs connect the Abang with the visit of the nazarites. One research concludes with detailed discussion of Abang, and also one weeks of field research from prakriti to food. The similarity of workshop with Abang.

Ekombi and the Bedingungen von Akas. Aesthetically as din. Cliché dimension in Ekombi meaning evoked. The reflections are dependent on the coloniality of power fill the vacuum left by the post-liberalization, and the counterpoint to the modernity without references free from essentialization and monolithic conceptualizations of dance in interest of tempo and self. (Kitwana, 2014)

7.3. The Role of Digital Media in Documenting African Dance

Digital media occupies an important place in the preservation and documentation of African dance, which reflects ancient traditions and contemporary developments. Academic texts, visual recordings, and audio files register the diverse practices of dance in African societies, extending reach and establishing new forms of representation. Five oral interviews conducted in 2016 in Makurdi and Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria, added to this perspective by chronicling the changing representations of African dance. The voice of the practitioner becomes another site for

experimentation and practice. Asserting that African dance cannot be explained in books alone, the participants accentuate the advantages of recording dance on audio-visual media, highlighting the transmission of movement from one body to another, the articulation of rhythm, and the significance of music for dance. Moreover, written texts tend to constrain the meaning of African dance within academic parameters; audio-visual recordings offer practitioners a greater freedom of expression, enabling them to articulate their understanding and experiences directly without expounding on the regulations of academic writing (Auwawuer, 2018).

8. Synthesis and Implications for Future Research

The literature surveyed highlights important themes, concepts, and trajectories influencing the understanding of African dance, with significant implications for supporting, framing, and contextualizing the author's contributions on Abang and Ekombi. The following findings summarize salient points arising from the review, identify outstanding questions for further inquiry, and propose continued efforts in the spirit of literature examined.

African dance scholarship is guided by foundational concepts that frame both the analysis of specific works and the articulation of broader abstractions. Central concepts comprise terminology, theoretical perspectives, definitional constraints, and conceptual lineage relevant for framing the author's investigations of Abang and Ekombi.

Each work selected for close analysis engages with distinctive, yet often overlapping, frameworks for exploring performances of Abang and Ekombi, tracing continuities across those framings while also delineating points of divergence. The accompanying synthesis on Abang discusses foundational aspects informing the movement vocabulary, staging choices, and audience relations observable in material. The subsequent exploration of Ekombi considers its dual interpretations as a symbolic vehicle for youth and national identity, as a transnational narrative accommodating diaspora engagement within the national imaginary, and as a point of intersection between national and diasporic trajectories engaging youth dynamics.

The attention of the author's inquiries resonates with a range of ontological, epistemological, and political concerns articulated within the literature. Discussions of the ontological status of dance and its discursive mediation are prevalent among African dances, yet remain conspicuously absent from the author's focus on both Abang and Ekombi. Participants in the scholarship have interrogated the impact of these positions on the framing and understanding of the dance forms themselves. Epistemological issues arise concerning the authority of knowledge production and representation; channelling materials from a variety of sources that diminish the author's direct participation, the author preserves an awareness of and degree of openness to those concerns.

Political dimensions of representation arise within the literature under several rubrics: concerns for documenting and disseminating community processes, the positioning of documentation as either supportive of or opposed to community processes, and the negotiation of epistemic privilege in the activities of scholars possessing greater social capital than community members. Though these discussions do not culminate in direct engagement on Abang and Ekombi, the author finds resonance in those dimensions and a willingness to address such queries even more broadly.

9. Conclusion

Scholarship on African dance has proliferated in recent years, illuminating the diversities and multiplicities of dance practices across the continent and beyond. Historical engagements have textured Africanist paradigms of knowledge production and the modalities through which they have pursued engagements with dance, performance, and culture more broadly, attending to the regional trajectories but also the transnational circulations and exchanges involved. Technoscientific interventions in the performing arts have prompted attempts to re-read Africanist knowledges, producing alternative critical mappings of continuum, focus and emphasis in the study of African dance, performance and culture. A closing summary articulated broad continuities and critical distinctions that run between the two genres through the lenses of two different yet intimately connected critical axis—transformation and episteme—that have been demonstrated to run through contemporary Anglophone problems, yet frequently emerge from pre-existing local renditions of English and other colonial languages.

The past twenty years have witnessed an unprecedented increase in scholarship on sub-Saharan dance within the disciplines of performance studies and dance studies. Correspondingly, the study of dance practices across the continent has become increasingly visible in Africanist scholarship itself. Historical trajectories, regional variations and transnational circulations that have informed reflexive engagements with dance, performing arts and culture preparing the ground for Abang and Ekombi have come to the fore in many of these works. Such mappings offer avenues to situate both further to articulate relations of continuity, rupture, emergence and diffusion that reverberate through both genres. Abang and Ekombi participate in shared genealogies of contemporary dance

across the continent that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cultural politics accompanying it, yet not all forms and practices of social or popular dance can be placed within the provisional umbrella designation of contemporary dance (Awuawuer, 2018).

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