



'Choreoclecy': Beyond the Borders of Choreography

FELIX DAMILOLA EMORUWA
University of Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract. The framework upon which the structure, form, contents and chronological sequencing of dance hinges has always been considered to be choreography for as long as it fulfils the requirement of being consciously and purposely done. However, since there are two sides to dance especially in Africa; the secular (that which warrants consciousness to do) and the sacred (especially the trance inducing ones - that abhors being consciously done), the term 'choreography' has often been inadequate to capture the science of creation of such latter kind of dance. This is why this paper is concerned with examining the extent to which the term can really fare where it concerns esoterically inclined African worship dances with propensity for trance. To atone for this noticeable gap, this paper has adopted being descriptively analytical in its approach to navigating the strength and weaknesses associated with the term choreography in dance composition situations. The paper goes beyond pointing out the gap to making frantic efforts to solving it by introducing the term 'Choreoclecy', being; that which converges both the sacred and secular motifs, movements, actions, patterns, designs and forms with the ontological and worldviews of a people in evolving as well as inducing dances for worship irrespective of the depth of consciousness that is required. This term is articulated through the basic principles and formulae that are required to aid easy dissection and analysis of the inherent compositional structures in most worship dances.

Keywords: Choreography, Choreoclecy, trance, worship, dance

1. Introduction

The question of whether or not there can be dance without choreography deserves more attention than it has ever received, bearing in mind that what makes

choreography is the 'consciousness' with which the dance was meant to be 'meticulously', 'purposefully,' and 'deliberately' composed. Basically, choreography in its broad sense is a process that combines the art and act of compiling, coordinating, arranging and packaging of movements, actions and other semiotic devices into an aesthetically pleasing artistic dance product. Leveraging on the above explanation, let us ask, can there really be a dance without choreography? Substantively put, the answer ought to be NO, since choreography is popularly believed to be the skeletal framework upon which the form, content, structure and nuances of a dance piece is built. This implies that without choreography, there most likely can not be a dance as, such an experience will, at best remain an amoebic experience that is without form or essence. Premised on this assertion therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine if the term 'choreography' is adequately appropriate in devising a process for all dance composition especially those that are trance inclined.

Now, if we are to ask again; can there be a trance inclined worship dance without choreography? The answer may not be as easy as we have tried to clarify above. Bearing in mind that most dance experts are of the opinion that every African dance is essence-driven which means it must either be saying or expressing something, commemorating an event or at best, be representing, documenting and propagating the communal beliefs, aspirations and worldviews of the people. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (1998:267) gives credence to this assertion in positing that the only absolute rules in choreography are that "it should impose order upon dance beyond the level of pure improvisation and that it should shape dance in the three dimensions of space and the fourth dimension of time, as well as according to the potential of the human body". Consequently, this means that the absence of choreography in a dance performance implies that

there is no message that is thoroughly conceived, articulated and relayed in the performance.

In a worship situation therefore, due to the fact that it is linked to faith, religion and the worldview of a people, all the socio-aesthetic criterion for dance appreciation are grossly inadequate as the context of appreciation a worship (especially the ones with high propensity to induce trance) far surpasses moves from a 'man to man' engagement to a 'man to the spirits/ god(s)' experience. In addition, the criterion for valuation and validation differs from mere on-lookers perspectives to an initiate's perspective. The paradox created here is aptly noted by Anderson, who observes that "All dance styles are not alike, and some, to the uninitiated, may look decidedly odd" (Anderson, 1974:9), this puts the choreographic merits in such a dance to some questions. Such a referred dance case may warrant plausible 'infrared mirror-cast situation' to dichotomise the differences between the sacred and the secular dance orbits.

2. Understanding Worship Dances in Relation to Choreography

Dance and music are inseparable in religious acts emphasizing worship. Thus, in a worship situation, dance provides a vehicle for the merger of body and spirit. For that reason, dance seems to provide a unique experience by which the constraints of the flesh are broken down and the spirit taking possession by transforming the body into a malleable pulp. Thus, the use of prayers, songs, chants, drumming, clapping and dancing characterizes the worship in almost all Christian sects under the Organization of African Churches especially those ones wearing spiritual gabs like the Aladuras, Celestial Church of Christ, the Christ Apostolic Church, the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches and the Olumba Olumba Obu. However, the heavy reliance of the worship mode of the Cherubim and Seraphim church on dance acts is unparalleled in comparison with these other Christian sects. This is why Harper (1999:43) further corroborates that in worship situations "the question of sacredness or profaneness is defined by the variety of occasions and performance places in which the dances are observed". Nonetheless, worship modes differ considerably depending largely on factors such as:

- The myth or belief that establishes and sustains the deity, phenomena, or element that is being worshiped;
- Reason(s) that necessitate the worship/ occasion;
- The place and materials for the worship;
- The nature of songs, chants or rhythms that are devised for the worship, etc.

In relation to liturgical worship dances therefore, three distinct dance typologies or categorizations exist. These basically are the

- Dance modes that are strictly or purely secular in nature.
- The partially secular and semi ritual dance types. and
- The purely sacred dance type which often lead to ecstatic frenzies or trance-like moments.

Nonetheless, it must be stressed that all the three categories of the liturgical worship dance can either occur separately or simultaneously within a worship situation.

The ritual dancers believed that whatever experience that is being physicalized (by the dancer) must first have been composed and relayed in the esoteric realms, hence the physicalized dancer is merely complying with or animating instructions, order and injunctions as shown or handed to him/her by the visiting spirit/ angels. The dancer may be manipulated by a spirit being who has temporarily 'borrowed' his/her body or simply walking through a familiar routine of actions that is derived from a dream, vision or any other medium of means of contact between man and the spirits.

'Deliberateness' in the course of most liturgical worship dances is akin to the African way of explaining the mystery of orderliness and purposefulness in most ritual dance situations. This explains why Idowu (1962:142) observed that religious dances (of which the liturgical dance types form a part) are often of considerably

...fixed patterns and must be done correctly – which foot goes forward first, which movement of the hands and body accompany it, which turns are taken next and how many times each component of the pattern is to be repeated – all these must be carefully observed.

Hunningher (1968:57) also corroborates this idea of fixed patterns in the demonstration and adherence of orderliness in the various features of the dance movements when he observes that during ritual performances "...the dances are exact... a single misstep and the dance must be repeated from the beginning, to prevent the spirit from becoming confused and to preserve the order of the dance itself".

This view of strict adherence is further corroborated by Awolalu (1979:142) who asserts that in worship dance situations the '... songs (*and dances*) are not

sung (*and danced*) accordingly, the sacrifices will not be acceptable to the divinities... this is because the ritual dances are not mere emotional response to the rhythm of music. They are symbolic, often re-enactments of something sacred’.

In the light of this, it is apparent that dance acts in worship modes are often done to emphasize order or mapped-out outline of procedure, a convention that is composed. Its structured instances imply that all actions (codes) are deliberately knitted together to make a complete whole which can neither be omitted nor added to in the cause of its performance whether consciously or sub-consciously.

It is a sort of ‘being led’ syndrome by the muses. Horn (1981:196) observes that in ritual (performances) the actor (dancer) is seen either as a representative ... (a priest) or as another being entirely (a spirit). As a priest, he is ...the repository of certain arcane knowledge and the skilled or even inspired master of magical processes. As a medium, he is presumed to become another entity, to cease entirely being himself. Whatever the degree of his dissociation, whatever the depth or duration of his trance, he is perceived by the audience, if not always by himself, as the spirit incarnate.

Awolalu (1979:112) affirms also that those who are possessed always “find it difficult to explain how it all happens”. This means in plain terms, that the dancer (mounted person) is unconscious during the act of trance. This incidentally explains why terms like ‘possession’, ‘mediumship’, ‘multiple personality’, and ‘religious ecstasies’ are often used by researchers in the course of relating the experience(s) of the trance medium personality. Horn (1981:187), in his analogy (based on Raymond Firth’s explanations) agrees that in both cases of spirit mediumship and that of spirit possessions, a person’s actions are believed to be dictated by an

... extra-human entity which has entered his body or otherwise affected him. Both kinds of phenomena may often be regarded as instances of multiple personality, that is the individual concerned assumes another identity, refers to his normal self as “he” and sincerely differentiates this new identity sharply from his everyday self (Horn, 1981:187).

The possessed and the medium character are not treated equally in most societies. Whereas a person possessed is believed to be sick, those in the categories of medium are regarded as hale and hearty. However, in the case of spirit-possession, the behavior does not ...necessarily convey any particular message to other people... It is just regarded as “bodily expression of spirit manifestation”. While in the case of spirit

mediumship, “the emphasis is on communication...” This implies that the verbal and non-verbal behavior of a person, who is possessed by a spirit, acts as a medium, must be more highly controlled than that of a person simply possessed ... They are regarded as people who are just “carrying out a special role, and the behaviour of both tends to be largely stereotyped, to conform to a kind of code” (Firth, 1969:xii).

Adelugba (1981:217) approached this discourse from the point of their ascribed designates for medium characters as being the “horse” or the “mounted” when he asserts that

...the relation between the god and the man of whom he has taken possession is comparable to that of a horseman to his mount. Thus it is said that the god ‘mounts’ or saddles his (cheval). Possession being closely associated with the dance, the image of a ‘spirit (sic) which dances in the head of its horse’ is used. The invader is a supernatural being who takes possession of the body; hence the current expression: ‘the loa (the spirit) seizes his horse’.

By religious ‘ecstasies’ and ‘frenzies’ (being other kinds of terms that is used) however, we refer to a situation where the possessed is

...consequently transformed into the essence of the god himself or the goddess herself, and during the trance, characterized by ritual sacrifices, incantations, music, song and dance, the possessed is capable of the prophet’s sight, communicating with man as a first-person representative of the deity (Adelugba, 1981:210).

3. Choreography and Choreoclecy: the Twinning Twinning Context

Fodeba’s (1959:20) proposal that “African dance is not detached from the lives of the people, but a spontaneous emanation of the people”. Fodeba’s assertion, like most other African dance -based theories is, first and foremost, anchored on the notion that every dance by an African is holistically created to reflect both the tangible and the intangible experiences that characterize the African worldview as a unique experience and understanding in itself. By this, Fodeba seems to have subsumed the culture of the people in its entirety under their dance practices, bearing in mind that a people’s culture itself is believed to imply the “sum total of a people’s way of life; their shared beliefs, practices and social behaviour (Lynne, 1979:3). This further implies that the dance of a people is therefore an inalienable part of their everyday living because it documents their habits such as eating, walking, singing, dancing, dying, celebrating, talking as well as other patterns of relating and living.

As mentioned earlier, unlike the secular dances in Africa, the sacred (worship dances) are yet to enjoy sufficient theoretical choreographic attention, especially when they have trance attributes. These are largely due to the several knotty problems that are found to characterize the nature of ritual/worship dance performances both in their content and in context. Some of these difficulties are:

- (a.) drawing the boundary between the esoteric and the mundane world or spheres (as reflected in the body motifs, movements and actions) of the dancer, where like the self tail-chewing snake, one aspect of the two worlds dovetails into the other (the sacred and the secular).
- (b.) unearthing the nature of trance in most worship dances is often very obscure and scary because of its subconscious and sometimes unconscious (esoteric) attributes.
- (c.) Insufficient knowledge of the ritual processes of a sacred dance based on the idea of secrecy of practice that often characterizes the nature of most trance inclined dance practices.

The operations and nature of most of these worship dance practices are shrouded in mystery and coded gestures, movements and actions that make it difficult for non-initiates to penetrate or decipher. This has been taken into cognizance in our devised theory of *Choreoclecy*, which essentially relates to the fusionistic tendencies of both the sacred and secular factors in the motifs, movements, actions, styles, patterns and dance designs as used in a worship context.

'*Choreoclecy*' is a derived term, whose root words are based simultaneously on the concepts of "choreography" and "eclecticism". The peculiarity of the worship dance as a performance entity is broadly conceived, understood, relayed and preserved as a cultural aesthetic and potent worship activity. This is because dance performances in the African perspectives are always an eclectic experience in which several factors often combine in varied proportions to form the style, techniques, contents and context of the performance. As an ephemeral and transitory art which takes its form in the performance rather than in the 'outlined' designs (scripts), dance creation experiences (whether viewed as a sacred or a secular activity) are therefore as dynamic as the processes and the essence that necessitate their creation. This eclectic chord is viewed from the functional purview of the compositional process while its aesthetic values compliment such outcome.

The creation patterns in the choreography and performance aesthetics of liturgical worship dances highlight both the sacred and the secular dance features (as exemplified by the worship practices of the C&S Zion Church) hence, their creation patterns and processes are hinged on the medley of the notion of 'conscious', 'sub-conscious' and the 'unconscious' intentional levels of human actions.

Attempts at unearthing the worship dances by isolating these three parameters often amount to treating a microcosmic unit of the dance as against the macrocosmic entity. This is why most existing choreographic theories of note are not considered adequate in the treatment of liturgical worship dances, especially that of the C&S Zion Church. For instance, the '*Emotionalization*' choreographic theory in dance as pioneered by the likes of Isadora Duncan and made popular by the likes of Martha Graham, Anna Sokolow and other such Modern choreographers is of the opinion that 'dance must reflect the emotional states of the dancer'. This is considered inadequate in the analysis of worship context, especially in trance inclined dance situations. If this happens, the performance would have lost its worship potency as it would only be analyzed based on its theatrical features alone as a conscious act. Subsequently, the '*Motionalization*' choreographic theory of dance as pioneered by Alwin Nicholais and pursued by other such avant-garde radical choreographers like Merce Cunningham's (chance method), Doris Humphrey's (fall and recovery technique), etc., is a theory that is concerned with studying the motional attributes of dance rather than the trivialities of storytelling and vagaries of emotional displays in dance (curled from Reynold and Reimer-Torn's *Dance Classics*, 1991:233-287).

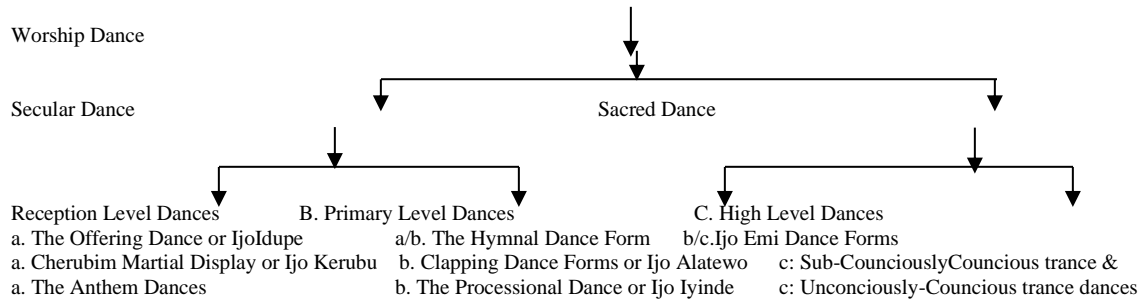
If this theory is to be applied as the basis of the analysis of a worship dance, the '*motionalization*' theory can only go as far as determining the aesthetic formations and perhaps the scientific analysis of the movements and other mannerisms of the dance while the ontological realities of the worshiper's world as meaningfully relayed in the movement compositions will be left out. Worship dances are in themselves unique experiences that thrive in layers of consciousness; hence, it demands a unique compositional analysis that will take care of all its attributes wholesomely. This has always been the philosophy behind the cautious formulae for the handling of sacred matters such as this, by the practitioners of such worship tradition that "*E je ki a se bi won ti n se, ki o ba le ri bi o ti n ri*" implying that "things should be conventionally followed in order to ensure that the desired result be as it is meant to be".

This principle of ‘systematic formulations’ and ‘systematic adherence’, has equally guided us in adopting the theory for the analysis and understanding of this worship dances.

Thus, our introduced theory of ‘Choreoclecy’ in worship dance discourse implies that the designing and formation process and patterns of a worship dance are of various dimensions, hence, it is to be perceived as an interwoven galaxy of beliefs, motives, cultures, artistry etc, in order to make operative or functional statements using the dance art. It conjures up an

emerging scenario of two or more identical or un-identical intentions, purposes and worldviews to form a new identity that is complete in itself. The principles of the theory of ‘Choreoclecy’ gives credence to three kinds of worship dance variables that is marked according to the levels of consciousness that they thrive in. Based on the worship dances studied for this study being the the ilaje’s version of the C&S Zion churches, there were seven dance categories or forms, which in turn characterize the features of the worship situations.

Fig. 1. The Ilaje C&S Zion Church model dance chart.



Category A. This refers to dance modes that are strictly or purely secular in nature but are performed in the course of worship as an essential aspect. This dance mode demand full consciousness since it places very high priority on performance aesthetics. The dances in category A are done with full Consciousness of the dancer/ worshipers. The common denominations here are that they are all meant to serve as inducements for entertainment purposes and to induce monetary appreciations to the church either directly or to the individual or group dancers based on the measure of their virtuoso and performance dexterity. The dances are often rehearse-able and they are often infused as separate segments into worship segments and are thus not considered a part of the ‘living worship’.

As mentioned above, this category features such dances as; The Offering Dance and Ijo Idupe (Thanks Giving Dance modes), Kerubu Martial Display and the Anthem Dances. The formulae for arriving at the composition of such dances within the framework of *Choreoclecy*, is

$$\frac{C_i + E}{W} \times \frac{S}{A} = D \quad (\text{Secular Worship Dance}).$$

- Key**
 C I = Conscious Intention
 E = Dancer’s Experience
 W = Worldview(s)
 S = Skill
 A = Aesthetics
 D = Dance Experience

Category B. This refers to the partially secular and semi-ritual dance types. The level of consciousness here is equally full but it may fluctuate into the sublime, especially if done under the isoji or revival services atmosphere. The dances in category B are considered the preliminary stages to the actual ‘living worship’ known as “*Isin Emi*”. Not only do they usher in the actual climax moment of the service, they are in fact so crucial that without them there is no worship. Each of the three dances in this category often starts ordinarily with full consciousness and gets accelerated as the worship progresses.

The momentum gathered often transcends the consciousness or controllable abilities of the worshipers into a state of sub-consciousness. The situation here is flunctuative as a worshipper who for instance is engaged in the clapping

action, finds himself or herself entrenched in the clapping action beyond his limit of comfort yet he can feel the pains and perhaps injuries sustained in the course of the uncontrollable clapping action.

This category features such dances as The Hymnal Dance Form, Clapping Dance Forms and The Iyinde Dance form. Also, the formulae for arriving at such dances (choreographically) within the framework of *Choreoclecy*, is

B. Primary Level Dances (Sacred Secular Worship Dance)

$$\frac{Q + W + E + C}{A} + i = D \text{ (Sacred-Secular Worship Dance)}$$

Note: Variables are denoted by the keys below.

Key

- Q = Intention
- E = Experience
- W = Worldview(s)
- C = Culture
- A = Aesthetics
- i = Intuition (level of spirituality which in this case is always fluctuating depending on the level of muse)
- D = Dance Experience

Category C. This category is about the purely sacred dance types, which often lead to ecstatic frenzies or trance-like moments. In this category, the dance that is featured is the Ijo Emi Dance Forms (Ijale or Egungana concept). The dance in category C marks the climax of any worship especially in African liturgically devised worship situations. It refers to the state of already being in the spiritual muses or realms, a sort of completely given to the muses syndrome. The peculiarity of its manifestation is culturally binding as the Ilaje C&S Zion churches manifests their peripherally (called *Ijale*) while the other C&S churches, Celestial church of Christ and other churches in the Organization of African Indigenous Churches operates their Ijoemi within the core space limits.

The formulae for arriving at such a dance (choreographically) within the framework of *Choreoclecy*, is in two phases;

C. High Level Dances (Trance inclined)

Peripheral or Mobile Trance Dancing

$$\frac{Sc^1 + Wc \times W}{S + P} \times I = TD^1 \text{ (Peripheral or Mobile Trance Dancing Dancing}^1$$

Note: Variables are denoted by the keys below.

Key

- Sc¹ = Casual Case of Sub-Consciously Conscious-ed
- Wc = Worship conventions
- W = Worldview(s) of the people
- S = Skill or dexterity of the dancer
- P = Physique/ presence/ weight and height of the dancer
- I = Intuition (message intended and as may be seen to have been communicated)

Core or Restrictive Trance Dancing

$$\frac{Sc^2 + W \times W}{S + P} \times I = TD^2 \text{ (Core or Restrictive Trance Dancing}^2)$$

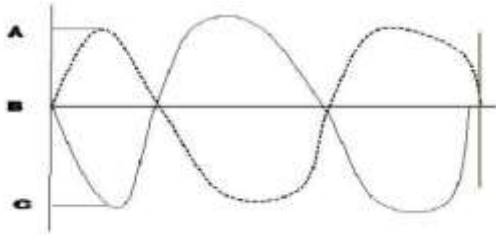
Note: Variables are denoted by the keys below.

Key

- Sc² = Extreme Case of Sub-Consciously Consciousness
- Wc = Worship conventions
- W = Worldview(s)
- S = Skill
- P = Physique
- I = Intuition

The above show that worship dances occur within the limits of three dance poles as mentioned above. Also, that the dance experience as might have manifested in the secular situation may not be termed secular in the worship situation but sacred, even though the content and structure, style and form of the dance remain same (as exemplified in prototype 'A'). The content of dance prototype 'A' category is secularly inclined but the context is now for a religious purpose at a religious arena and that automatically transforms it into a sacred activity.

Fig. 2. Frequency Chart in the Conscious Levels during Worship Dances

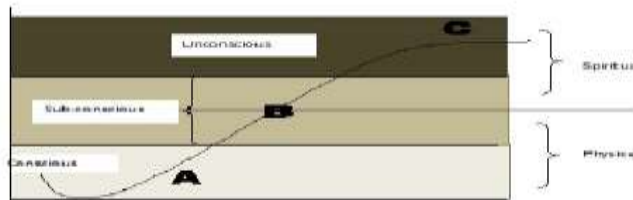


Key:

- A- Exoteric Spheres/ Unconsciousness
- B- Sub-Consciousness
- C- Conscious sphere

The case of prototype ‘B’ is the same, even though the attitude in this case is revered and more disciplined. This in turn transforms the ‘secular’ formatted dance into a kind of ‘secular-sacred’ oriented dance. These two mentioned dance cases that is ‘secular-sacred’ dance form, is according to the worldviews of the Zionists considered ‘ordinary’ irrespective of the degree of aesthetics or intricacy of patterns that it thrives in. This is because it is devoid of the essential ‘life force’ that is functional and required for the assurance and communication between the world of the spirits and of man.

Fig. 3. Levels of Consciousness in most Worship Dances



This type of ‘Ordinary Dances’ (Secular-sacred) in the worship situation refer to the ‘insignificant’ movements that are derogatorily referred to as ‘*Ijo Ara*’ which in local parlance implies ‘dance of the flesh’ or the ‘lifeless’ dances. This further means that they are movements, motifs and actions of mere motions that are devoid of worship ‘life-force’. Among such secularly inclined worship dances, aesthetic considerations are high. Nonetheless, irrespective of their aesthetic appeals, they are not treated as core activities but they play complimentary roles in form of desirable movements, actions and conventional nuances in the course of the worship performance.

The third pole however is directly opposite to the first. It is considered the ‘Living’ dance or “*Ijo Em*” in local parlance. This refers to the dances (movements, motifs, actions, etc) that are considered to contain life force. They may follow a progressive, regular or irregular pattern, or seem impromptu. Yet, due to the fact that these movements have certain efficacies with direct bearing on both the spiritualists, the

congregations and the spiritual world, it is believed that the dancer is only dancing/ communicating or communing in the language of the spirits. The dance is thus considered as polysemic (carrying multiple meanings). In such sacred dances (especially the trance inducing worship dances), the semiological indices of a movement, motif or action counts more than the aesthetic considerations, as it is functional rather than complimentary.

4. Justification for Choreoclecy

The choreographic features manifest in the creative parameters of the content while the context of the worship performance dwells more in the appropriateness and efficacy of the chosen icons that in themselves are totemically coded in the worldviews and belief of the people. In this wise, the eclectic nature of such dance products is of two-fold. First, each dance is a combined product of the worldviews or civilizations that have merged to produce the worship. Hence, to understand such works may amount to understanding all the strands that makes up

the emerging culture. Secondly, the idea that a worship activity is by its very nature a sacred affair is diffused by the fact that most dance typologies that are observed at such worship moments are makeup of the secularly conceived actions and nuances, but with added values. This is why Harper (1999:43) further corroborates that in worship situations “the question of sacredness or profaneness is defined by the variety of occasions and performance places in which the dances are observed”.

This act of dilution in secularly-given movements, actions and motifs within a diverse, heterogeneous, or multifarious sacred characteristics is eclectically inferred in describing the act of selecting what appears to be the best from various doctrines, methods, or styles of one or more cultures to evolving a new ‘culture’. This also includes picking from varied aesthetic and ideological dispositions, art, politics, social science, management, administration, teaching, etc, as well as the creative arts (carving, weaving, painting etc) to make a new, independent and a holistic product. Kofoworola locates this eclectic chord in African performances, though from the aesthetic point of view and declares that the functionality of arts (especially in worship) context goes beyond the ‘visible’ which provides the form for the experience of the arts in form of the creative and the performing arts into the realm of the ‘invisible’ elements or factors by which aesthetic performance of the ‘artiste’ or ‘performer’ is enhanced (Kofoworola, 2004:11)

Furthering this Anozie also affirms that there are eclectic imperatives in the art, religious and cultural practices of the people when he asserts that in every culture in Africa, there exists empirical models, which may be normative or prescriptive, conscious and unconscious, developed to account for other manifestations and events, both creative and cognitive in all fields and cultural life of a people (cited in Obafemi, 2008:176).

5. Conclusion

The New Encyclopedia Britannica (1998:267) declares that the essence of choreography is to “ensure that the evolved movement activities qualify to be called dance rather than mere motor activity”. Similarly, the term choreoclecy as it has been argued all along identifies and accommodates both the conscious and the sub-conscious design patterns and process in dance composition and performance. This implies that all forms of liturgical worship dances qualify for rich choreographically enriched experiences as even the manifestation of trance and heightened ecstasies in worship dances are not mere

display of unstructured actions. Whatever be the movement executed, actions observed or passions relayed, the experience is always in consonance with a manifested experience that is divinely motivated/ devised.

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