

INDEGENOUS PERFORMANCES AND ECONOMIC RECESSION: IKEJI ARONDIZUOGU FESTIVAL AS A PARADIGM

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Abstract

The need to uncover the dramatic elements in a traditional festival and to expose the rich cultures of Arondizuogu is the pivot of this paper. Festival is a product of culture. Culture is the totality of the way of life of a people. Culture and festival are intertwined and inseparable as festival touch all aspects of the people's life and is not restricted to any particular sphere of their living. Drama is the representation of life; it mirrors life. Therefore, drama as embedded in festivals is used as a machinery to portray the culture of the people through the particular festival being celebrated. This work examined the Ikeji festival of Arondizuogu, which is a traditional festival that necessitates the renewal and group reenactment of the shared past experience of the life of the people of Arondizuogu with a view to uncovering the dramatic performances in the festival. It used the ethno research method of participant observation as well as the library to explore the dramatic elements and contents in the performance of Ikeji Festival. The research is hinged on Joseph Pieper's theory that festival takes place through the arts as festival is the celebration of existence under various symbols through the arts which is a medium and contributor to the joy of festival. The paper acknowledges that Ikeji Festival embodies dramatic elements and contents of dance, costume, setting, properties, languages, make up and also attracts large audience from far and near to make it a total theatre; and concludes that in an economic recession period, these dramatic elements and their appurtenances could be exploited for economic gains by the people to fight recession. The paper recommends that more studies be carried out on Ikeji Arondizuogu to expose grey areas particularly in tourism development as this will lead to the provision of more jobs for our teeming youths as well as raise the internally generated revenue of Government.

Keywords: Festival, Drama, Performance, Culture, Arondizuogu

Introduction

Aronduzuogu, is the largest and most dynamic of the numerous ARO settlements outside Arochukwu, their ancestral home from where they migrated. Aronduzuogu may have been founded around the early eighteenth century by Mazi Izuogu Mgbokpo Ogbunukpo Akuma Nnachi, a great merchant and warrior, son of Ogbunukpo whose father, Akuma Nnachi hailed from Amankwu, Arochukwu. Izuogu's mother Mgbokpo is from Ohafia. Aro-Ndi-Izuogu means "Izuogu's people" (Ohia Uche,8). However, Okoro was more detailed in tracing the meaning of Aronduzuogu. According to him, The name Aronduzuogu is apparently a coinage of four distinct words, namely, Aro-Ndi-Izu-Ogu. Aro is a prefix inherited from "Arochukwu". "Ndi" stands for "The people", Izu means "Council", "Ogu" means "War". Pieced together, the four words give the name, "Aronduzuogu" a name which literally means the "Aro peoples war council" (58). Presently, Aronduzuogu is in three local Government Areas of Imo State, namely Ideato North, Okigwe and Onuimo Local Government Areas.

The origin of the ikeji festival of Aronduzuogu is traced to Arochukwu, the ancestral home of the Aronduzuogu people from where they migrated. The Ikeji Arochukwu is celebrated in September of every year. Ikeji is "a shortened form of ike ji isi (to detach the tendril of the yam) which is usually done in preparation for the farming season or for the preservation of seed yams in the yam barn" (Ohia, 4). The former, preparation for the farming season applies to Aronduzuogu while the later, preservation of seed yams in the yam barn applies to Arochukwu people who celebrate the Ikeji during the harvesting and storing for yam seeds in the barn. Mazi IHEME, a trusted servant of Mazi Izuogu, having been appointed the Regent was compelled "by the circumstances of his appointment to move and live in the new settlement" (Okafor-ogbaji,12). He would travel to Arochukwu to pay homage to his master during this period with large quantities of food items donated to his master to assist him in hosting his guests.

Ikeji Aronduzuogu is usually celebrated between late March and April of every year which is the beginning of the planting season. The change of the period for the celebration from September to March/April as it is celebrated in Arochukwu is linked to the annual visit of Mazi Izuogu to his territory to perform the ceremony of laying of hands onto the farmland. "Emume Ibinye Aka N'Ubi" (Okafor Ogbaji,16). This visit/ceremony is done to receive the blessing of his master, Mazi Izuogu before Mazi IHEME and his people, "Ndi ya" begins the clearing of the farm lands in preparation for the planting season. It is this time of visitation

(March/ April) to the Izuogu territory to perform this “Emume Ibinye Aka N’Ubi” that accounts for the celebration Ikeji festival at the beginning of planting season instead of the harvesting season.

During this period of visit by Mazi Izuogu, his regent Mazi Iheme would strive to impress his master. To this end, he would organize dancers, elderly singers who sing odes to his master while expert cooks were carefully selected to cook the best meals for his master. Also, during this period, lots of animals were lavishly slaughtered and their blood used “for propitiation, libation and prayers to the ancestors and to various gods through whom the people sought to appease the ‘chi ukwu’ the Most High God” (Ohia, 8). This was done so that the gods will protect their farmlands and give them abundant and plentiful harvest. This work is therefore concerned with locating the dramatic elements of ritual, dance, song and entertainment in the celebration of the Ikeji festival of Arondizuogu.

Theoretical Frame Work: An Overview

According to Microsoft Encarta Dictionary, Festival is derived from a medieval Latin Festivalis, classical Latin festum which is a day or period set apart for holiday, anniversary, carnival, event, religious observance. Similarly, Reynolds in Obuh, Stanley asserts that it is a period of feast or holiday, vigorously used to include traditional times of celebration, sacred or secular days especially appointed for local or national rejoicing and in modern times exhibition of art and industry. (25)

Festivals are period’s community celebrate events or seasons. It is a time for merry making, rest or holiday when members travel from far and near to celebrate and are reunited with their kits and kin. This period of merry making affords men and women to make peace with each other. Joseph Pieper observes that festival takes place through the arts as it is only a medium and contributor to the joy of festival. In essence, festival is the celebration of existence under various symbols through the arts (dance, music, songs, spectacle, dialogue, ritual and religious praise) which acts as a fire that kindles festivities. He therefore, submits that festivals without gods (ritual) is a non-concept and inconceivable; insisting that festivals and rituals are inseparable.

Frederickson further submits that dramatic dancing and athletic events also form part of the activities that take place during festivals. This is corroborated by Josef Pieper in Obuh who agrees that “festival is associated with drama because no real festival can be conceived, unless the ingredient of the play has entered it and that

festival concept, like death or love touches the whole of the world and of life" (26). He further asserts that real festivity is accompanied by the arts of singing, dancing, music and other visible forms of celebration" (28). No wonder Pieper postulated that festivals take place through the arts. This is because components of drama are encapsulated in festivals. From the above, it is evident that festivals touch all aspects of the community's life as it is not restricted to any particular sphere of their living.

Some festivals celebrate the history and culture of a people while some reenact their spiritual essence. In all, festival remains an important aspect of our culture. Culture and festival are inseparable. Festivals according to Obuh: "are communal expressions organized to celebrate a people's worldview. The celebration usually involves the recreation of the people's mythic past, their migratory wars, and other heroic exploit. It may also be merely an annual event that marks seasons circle...these festivals are sometimes organized around certain deities or spirits or to mark generational transition or the passage of season whether, climate or agricultural production (25). Culture as espoused in the National Cultural Policy of Nigeria, is the "totality of the way of life, endowed by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to the social, political, economic aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours" (5). This is rightly observed by Soyinka, where he submits that culture is not often a sum of parts but a summation... a synthesis nothing is exempted not even the malfunctions" (2). Therefore, culture contains the norms, beliefs, values, routine, recipes, customs etc of a people

Traditionally, a festival, or a feast, is a day set apart; a day that interrupts the everyday world of work, and into which that world -the world of labour and of practical ends and means cannot intrude. It is a preserve of total theatre as they showcase the historic wind, traditional technology, occupation and other creative expressions. Festivals as celebrated today are only the reenactment of religious ritual of the old which reemphasizes the relationship between drama and festivals. Drama is a part of festival which also has other activities included in the celebration.

In his efforts to trace the origin and contents of African traditional theatre, Ilami stresses that African traditional theatre originated from festivals. This is because the festivals of our local communities use elements like "masks, costumes, sound, music, dancing, feasting, myth, games, sports, stories" (8) which are universally accepted as part of the celebration. He further cites the view of Adedeji who also

corroborated that “Yoruba traditional theatre is rooted in festival theatre which is a courtly form of entertainment, characterized by song, dance, music, costume and spectacle” (8).

He further located secular activities such as economic, political and social which are derived from daily ordinary events that make up the everyday life of an African traditional societies as a primary origin of African theatre and festivals. It is on this premise that we shall now turn to examine the Ikeji festival of Arondizuogu to see its conformity with the above submissions and to extract the dramatic, ritualistic and spectacle dimensions of the festival, as well as examine how these components can be utilized during economic recession to turn things around. This is the pivot of this work.

Ikeji Iheme

Ikeji Arondizuogu is preceded by a one-day Ikeji Iheme celebration which holds at the Obi Iheme. It is at this one-day event that the date for the Ikeji Arondizuogu is pronounced. Ikeji Iheme also marks the beginning of dramatic activities which are embedded in the Ikeji festival.

Act 1 Scene 1(Inside; Ime Obi)

The scene opens with the male descendants of Mazi Iheme and the descendants of his servants seated inside the Obi Iheme (which is the oldest Obi in Arondizuogu community), known as Iheme na Asato exchanging greetings. The chief priests walk in and takes his proper place at the low stool (oche mpata) positioned directly in front of the traditional alter. Kolanut in a wooden tray (Okwa Orji) is brought to him by one of his attendants. Okafor Ogbaji specifically noted that the kolanut must be native kolanut and must be eight in number to reflect the Iheme na Asato.

The kolanut is then celebrated by passing it round to all the persons present from the youngest to the oldest. The Igbo refer to this by saying that the kolanut has started travelling but will surely come back. When the kolanut has finished going round and comes back to the chief priest, he offers prayers to their ancestors, breaks a kolanut and first feeds the ancestors by dropping a lobe on the shrine. A bottle of hot drink is handed over to him. Holding the drink in his left hand, he uses his right hand to uncork the drink and pours a part of the drink into a wooden cup. He again offers prayers and pours libation to the gods.

The kolanut is then passed dramatically to the youngest in the gathering to split. He diligently finishes the assignment and returns the okwa orji to the high priest,

who places it in front of the altar. All the members of the IHEME na ASATO (descendants of Mazi IHEME) will now go to the altar to pick the kolanut according to seniority. Each of them, on getting to the Okwa Orji picks a lobe, raises it up to the direction of the altar before eating it. Thereafter, he picks the bottle of hot and pours the drink into the wooden cup and drinks. This further serves to bind the community together as anybody who has dipped his hand into that bowl will not contemplate evil for his fellow brother.

Act 1, Scene 2 (Outside the Obi)

Some young men from Ndiakunwanta village which is the youngest village in Arondizuogu will prepare the cow for sacrifice by tying the fore and hind limbs. The chief priest comes outside from the "ime obi" with a sharp knife and slashes the throat of the cow. The blood is collected in a clay pot and as the chief priest retires back to the ime obi with the blood-stained knife, the blood of the slaughtered cow is carried in.

Act 1, Scene 3 (At the Altar; Inside)

The blood of the cow is placed at the altar. The chief priest cleans his knife on the sacrificial mat (Akpukpo Aja) and sprinkles the blood on the Ofo IHEME, Ogirisi leaves spread on Akpukpo Aja as well as all the artifacts at the altar. He picks the horn from the altar and knocks it four times on the floor, signifying the four market days of Eke, Oye, Afor and Nkwo. Thereafter, he picks the native Nzu from the altar and draws four parrarell lines on the floor in front of the altar and at the entrance. At the end of this, some gun shots are fired. This is followed by other gunshots by all the villages. The chief priest now returns to the altar to announce the date for the Ikeji Arondizuogu festival which is usually falls on the Oye market day after seven native weeks (28 days from the date of Ikeji IHEME).

Ikeji Arondizuogu

Ikeji Arondizuogu is usually celebrated in four days. Using the native Igbo calendar, it lasts for one native Igbo week, from Oye to Eke. Okafor-Ogbaji reports that "Ikeji Arondizuogu begins with Eke-Odu" (29). Eke Odu Ikeji ushers in the Ikeji festival. It is on this day that all the food items needed for the ceremony is purchased and stored by members of the community. The activities at the market start as early as 6am and lasts beyond 7pm. The atmosphere is usually rowdy

because of the rush be people to buy up what they will need for the next four days. But one spectacular event that happens on this day is the procession of the prestigious Ekpe na Mboko society. This procession takes place once in three or four years. Usually, members of the Ekpe na Mboko Society will come from Arochukwu to join their counterparts in Arondizuogu for the procession.

Act 2, Scene 1 (Village Square)

The procession usually takes off from either from Ama Edward or Nkwoachi, where the members of the Ekpe na Mboko society assembly. After the exchange of pleasantries and banter in their traditional manner, the drummers call the members to order as they dance to form three lines. The drummers continue to dish out rhythmic tunes. The sound rises to a climax as the Manwu Ekpe (ekpe masquerade) appears. There is a loud ovation that heralds the arrival of the Ekpe Masquerade, the manwu ekpe performs and after the performance/display by the manwu ekpe, the procession takes off to the Eke market.

Describing the procession and the costumes of the members of the Ekpe na Mboko, Ohia reports that it “features elegant rows of the members of the association decked out in ukara Cloth and traditional top with a matching woolen cap (okpu George) ululating to regal dance of the pulsating drums of the revered organization”(6). The procession moves to the market where they dance round the market to the admiration of all. The only spectacular event that happens on the Eke Odu Ikeji is the display by the Ekpe na Mboko Society at the market square and along the road to the market where people come out to catch a glimpse of the group.

The first day of the festival is the Oye day. This is regarded as a day of propitiation, when supplications are made to the ancestors, gods of the land and personal chi’s for continuous favour in the incoming new season. Oye egbugbu which literally means slaughter day is set aside for the killing of animals bought the previous day at eke odu. It is a day of feasting when subjects pay special respect or homage to their masters or to the eldest member of the family known as “ibu-ihu”. The killing of the animals for sacrifices has dramatic connotations similar to what happens during the Ikeji IHEME. The difference here is that almost every kindred perform the ritual simultaneously at their individual obi or at the entrance of the compound.

Act 2, Scene 2 (Family Altar Scattered in Different Kindreds)

As early as 5am, the head of each family calls out his children to the obi in front of the family altar. Some people have a make shift altar while some have a permanent one. Whichever they choose, the sacrifices are performed there. Whether in a family or kindred setting, the eldest in the setting presides. Kola nut is handed over to him by the first son to the family head who offers prayers to the gods. This is followed by the pouring of libation with hot drink. Sometimes a greater quantity of the hot drink is poured /splashed on the artifacts, leaving a small quantity for the people around to sip.

The libation is closely followed by the killing of an animal. It may be a fowl, goat or cow depending on the economic weight of the family. The first son of the family binds the animal and positions the neck for the father or the eldest in the family who slashes the head of the animal with a sharp knife. The blood is collected in a bowl and the chief priest who is the eldest in the family sprinkles this blood on the artifacts on the altar while making some incantations.

However, some families who have since accepted the Christian faith no longer join in this ceremony. While their counterparts are worshiping and pouring libations, they attend church services and sometimes invite the clergy to their homes to pray and bless their animals before they are slaughtered. The ceremony and the coming of the clergy to the family are also dramatic in nature. It involves rehearsals and preparations before the arrival of the priest. Here the head of the family sends out invitations to his friends and relations of the visit of the clergy. Canopies are hired and a table decorated.

The audience is sited before the arrival of the clergy who walks straight to the high table. He opens the event with praises and prayers. He is led to the store where food items are kept and he prays and blesses them before going to where the animal is tied to bless the animal. He comes back to the audience for some words of exhortation before saying the grace. At the end of the blessing, the head of the family now kills the animal without collecting the blood. The meat is shared and used for cooking. The ceremony continues with visits to friends and exchange of gifts till the evening.

Act 2 Scene 3 (Late Evening: Masquerade Coven; Ima Mnanwu)

It is a tradition that people must be initiated into the masquerade group before they join or start following masquerades around. After this initiation which is also

very dramatic, the secrets the group are revealed to them (inductees) which they must not divulge to non-initiates no matter how closely related they may be. The highlight of the ceremony is the izi nmanwu (presentation of the masquerade) to the inductees.

At around 7pm, the parent of the inductee, having earlier obtained clearance for his son's induction and having provided all the requirements needed for the ceremony will lead his son to the masquerade coven (induction ground) which is usually at the house of the head of the masquerade group in the kindred. A thatched house covered with palm raffia. The parents of the inductees are seated in front of the thatched house in a semicircular format as well as other old members of the group while the inductees are seated on the right side. The inductees are giving palm fronds which they continuously used to beat around ant holes while calling on the masquerades to come out. This is done rhythmically to the beating of the ekwe and the flute as the elders sit down to enjoy their palm wine. The essence of this is to disabuse the popular notion held in the community that masquerades come out from ant holes. After tirelessly trying to call out the masquerade from ant holes, the inductees are now led into the thatched house where the secrets behind the masquerade (ikpa akwukwo nmanwu) are now revealed to them. The climax of the ceremony which may last till mid night is the izi nmanwu (showing of the masquerade) to the inductees. The appearance of the masquerade thus ends the induction ceremony as the inductees are now eligible to follow the masquerade anywhere having been exposed to all that pertains to the group.

The second day of Ikeji festival (afor) is the start of masquerade display when newly acquired masquerades are exhibited. The young initiates now use the day to tell their mates that they have been fully initiated into the group. Some masquerade groups also use the day to pay homage to some prominent members of the community.

The third day of the festival is Nkwo. It is the day for masquerade displays. They come in different sizes and shapes with colourful costumes. Ohia reports that: "Nkwo is the main carnival day when all new, old and ceremonial masquerades assemble at the central arena. It is also the day that masquerades pursue individual spectators in the race known as oso nmanwu" (8). Similarly, Okafor- Ogbaji, more descriptively explained the activities on the nkwo day as a day where: "youths display all kinds of masquerades while some do not even care about masquerading but instead disguise themselves in many bizarre attires. Some young men would paint themselves in various disguising colours like red,

charcoal black and white emulsion paints. Others come out half naked; yet others adorn themselves with snail shells, sea shells and feathers of the ugliest birds ...some men young and old would even decorate themselves with ugly charms and other occultic objects... But all these are their own ways of trying to frighten others. In summary, all these bring joy and jubilation and constitute the mystique of Ikeji Izuogu” (35). However, in the midst of all the above, the day is characterized by many dramatic and theatrical activities as we shall now see below.

Act 2 Scene 4 Central Arena (Nkwo Achi)

The arena is big and a very large crowd has gathered to watch masquerade performances. There are different types of masquerades dancing. A man appears carrying an earthen pot belching with smoke. He places on the centre of the arena and dances round it seven times. Uses one hand to lift up the pot which he places back on his head and jumps up three times with holding the pot, yet it did not fall. He dances out of the arena. As soon as he leaves, another man with a basket full of water appears and drops his basket on the ground. He brings out a plastic cup, fills it water from the basket and turns it back into the basket. He vigorously shakes the basket for all to see yet the water will not spill out.

A “mad man” enters the arena, his face is painted black and he is carrying loads of rubbish on his head. He drops them close to basket. Through a sign language, he begs for water to be given to him. The basket man brings out his plastic cup and gives him water which he tries to drinks but ends up pouring the water on his body. As the mad man is gathering his load to leave, the Ogene boys accompanied by a large crowd and known for their mastery of iron metal gong, arrives with different sizes and shapes of their ogenes. Upon sighting the basket man and the mad man, they instantly compose a song with their names and rhetorically ask them what business they have together or if the basket man is trying to cure the mad man of his madness? The crowd joins in the song, clapping and dancing to the well-coordinated beating of the ogene.

Act 2 Scene 5 (Nkwo Achi; School Field, Ito Ebune)

This is more like a choreographed drama dance. A fat goat is tied to a tree by the school field. The spectators are sitting in a semicircular position. There is the traditional Ikeji masquerade music being vigorously played by a traditional group. It is a competition of who will dance or walk or crawl to the tree and

successfully untie the goat. The first man, (middle aged) attempted but after three steps, shrugged his shoulders and withdrew. The crowd booed him and some called him funny manes like lizard, frog, and chicken. More attempts were made by other men who equally fell by the side.

Finally, this young man ran out to the centre of the arena, danced to the rhythm of drums, salutes the drummers, advances to the elders, salutes them, and points at the tree, nods and energetically jumps up three times and dances towards the tree. Half way he freezes, not moving again. The sound of the drums rose high but he was not moving his body. Two elderly men stood up, one of them raised his staff up and the musicians stopped playing. He beckoned on four young men who carried him off the arena. He was dead. Still holding his staff up and without showing any remorse or pity on the dead young man, the elderly man merely remarked that "Nnunu isi na akaghi aka, anaghi eje akwam ozu oturukpokpo" and as soon as he raised his staff down, the musicians resumed playing again. For some time, no body danced or attempted to untie the ram until a middle-aged man limbed to the stage. After acknowledging greetings from the flutist, he manages to dance, though uncoordinatedly to the tree and unties the ram, drags it to the drummers and temporarily the drumming stops. He greets the crowd with three thunderous Izuogu kwenu! Izuogu kwenu!! Izuogu kwezuo nu!!! and dances out with his goat. As soon as he leaves the arena with the goat, and at the recommencement of the drumming, the crowd jumps into the arena and it becomes an all-comers dance.

Appearance of Okwomma

Okwomma masquerade is the highest masquerade in Arondizuogu and does feature with other masquerades. It is usually owned by a group or a whole village managed by the village council and has in their group all the classes of masquerades which make way for its appearance as well as maintain order during the performance. Okafor-Ogbaji states that "in Arondizuogu, there is no other masquerade as prestigious, powerful and colourful as okwomma" (51), while Ohia reports that "it's grand and stately appearance is planned and coordinated to command admiration and reverence" (19), The Okwoma does not just appear like any other masquerade as a lot of preparations are made before its appearance. Other lesser masquerades must first come to water the hard ground for the arrival of the big masquerade. That subsequently brings us to the next scene.

Act2 Scene 5 (Ama Edward)

This scene opens with a masquerade dressed in police costume known as Okwomma police with a baton coming out to inspect the arena. It goes round searching for harmful objects and warning people to behave themselves when the Okwomma appears. At its exit, another masquerade, nwa abuuja, popularly known for its mother figure in the masquerade family appears with its long-oversized walking stick to entertain the audience with its comic reliefs, storytelling and admonishing the women to stay clear of the Okwomma when it appears. The abuuja is interrupted by the *osi asiri*, (gossip) grotesque and bizarre in outlook, who appears to warn the abuuja that he will report it to Okwomma since it has left its duty to fraternize with women.

The abuuja either rebuffs it or starts begging the gossip. Once the gossip gets the assurance of the abuuja that she will sleep with him that night, the two intimately holds each other as walk out. The *ojionu* appears after their exit with his flogging whips and anybody who disobeys the earlier warnings by the other lesser masquerades is flogged by the *ojionu*. The *ojionu* will not leave arena without entertaining the spectators with his athletic dance steps, popularly called *ime okwe*. The *ojionu* is sometimes so engrossed in the *ime okwe* that it forgets that his time is limited. He is only called to order by the sound of the bell which heralds the arrival the *Mgbadike* masquerade. This gives the audience the notion that the Okwomma would soon arrive.

The *mgbadike*, known as *nna nmonwu* (father of masquerade) is covered with dried raffia leaves on its body and a bunch of date palm husks on its head is more energetic, fearless, and highly aggressive. That explains why a rope is tied around its waist with a restrainer holding the rope and a bell to prevent it from wreaking havoc and warning the people to steer clear of the way. The high point is the appearance of the Okwomma; the king of the masquerades. Its steps are dignified and graceful and it does not engage in the frenetic displays of the lesser masquerades. It majestically and disappear into the crowd to maintain order and ensure the full protection of the big masquerade.

The fourth day of the festival counting from Oye egbugbu is Eke. It is also known as Eke nwusa akpata. The dramatic connotations of the day come when people who have not had enough of the masquerade flogging will flood the Eke Obinikpa and Eke Uwakonye to interact with the masquerades. There they taunt the masquerades by exposing their legs for it to flog them. While chasing them, the masquerade may slip and fall down and is booed by the spectators. If the masquerade flogs a person and the sound reverberates, the crowd acknowledges

with thunderous ovation and rushes to hail the masquerade. One after the other the spectators take turns as the masquerade flogs them. This is also used as endurance test for young men. As they take turns to be flogged by the masquerades, those who are able to endure the pain arising from the floggings are regarded as real men while those who groan are waved aside as mere boys.

Ikeji and Recession

There is no doubt that during recession, sponsorship of the festival which come as monetary grants, provision for souvenirs and entertainment like free drinks may dwindle and, in most cases, out of reach. However, as creativity is the mother of invention, the people of Arondizuogu are therefore called upon to be creative in order to beat the effects of recession and to survive. One of the ways of survival is to cash in on the multiplier economic effect of the Ikeji festival.

During this festival, Arondizuogu community experience influx of people from all over the world. There is economic boom. Therefore, the people should take the opportunity offered by this mass influx of visitors and tourists to seal the holes in their pockets through effectively taking up economic ventures like selling of souvenirs, food vendors or organizing reality and entertainment shows. Poultry products like chicken and eggs will be in high demand during this period. To this end, people are encouraged to start poultry business and supply to hotels and food vendors who will readily buy them during and after the festival.

The production of local wooden instruments like Ekwe (wooden gong), ogene (metal gong), colourful dried raffia leaves, date palm husks, local flutes(oja) should be intensified as they provide alternative sources of income to the people. The costumes of the various masquerades and indeed most of the different traditional entertainment groups could be locally produced within the community. This will in no small measure engage majority of the youths and keep them away from such vices like arm robbery, cultism, kidnapping etc.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that African theatre as noted by Adegbite is “linked with several communal interactive activities” (115) of which festivals as represented by the Ikeji Arondizuogu is one of them. African theatre is total theatre and Ikeji Arondizuogu is embodied with all the trappings of total theatre. Ikeji Arondizuogu has different colourful settings which vary from location to

location. From the alter at the ime obi of obo iheme, adorned with many historical artifacts where the Ikeji Iheme is performed to announce the date for Ikeji Arondizuogu, to the village square where the Ekpe na Mboko society assemble for their procession to Eke Obinikpa on the Eke odu Ikeji day; the different family alters where libations and incantations are done on the Oye Egbugbu day and Christian homes where priests and clergies are invited to pray and bless the animals before they are slaughtered and church auditoriums where church services are held; the masquerade covens where new initiates are inducted into the masquerade cult; to the village squares where spectators gather for the masquerade display are all village settings, appropriate for communal activity.

Furthermore, during Ikeji festival, different colourful costumes are used. The Ukara cloth with traditional top and a woolen handmade cap is the trademark of the Ekpe na Mboko society; the Okwomma group ties a traditional George wrapper on their trouser upon white shirt. The Ojionu masquerade is costumed in a trouser like gear with sewn up legs in cotton material while that of the Mgbadike is made in a net like form with raffia and a date palm husks covering its head. Similarly, the properties used by the performers include bunch of whips by the ojionu masquerades, long ropes and bells as well as wooden reproduction of axes and machetes of the Mgbadike, the long wooden staff of the Nwabuuja, baskets filled with water, earthen pot of fire among others.

There is dance, music, songs, spectacle and dialogue, important elements of drama as seen in Ikeji Festival. Most of the songs are composed extempore as situation arises. The traditional music groups known as Umu Nkwu (masquerade followers) use local instruments like ekwe (wooden slits) ogene (metal gong) tortoise shell, date palm husks, bells of different sizes and shapes to produce the music. Though it may be noisy and rowdy, on the other hand, it is synchronized, coordinated and melodic. The dialogue which ranges from communing with the ancestors through the chief priest and the responses of the audience as well as interactions and conversations of the participants with the masquerades are all indices that qualify Ikeji festival as drama.

The paper therefore recommends that apart from the dramatic dimension investigated in this study, there are many grey areas in Ikeji Arondizuogu which needed to be exposed particularly in the area of tourism development as this will lead to the provision of more jobs for our teeming youths as well as raise the internally generated revenue of the state.

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