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CONTENTS

1.	The Birth of Theatre Arts and Music Department in Lagos State University - Professor Olusola Fosudo & Professor Tunji Azeez	1
2.	Beyond Tokens: Towards a description of the textual structure of signage in the Lagos State University landscape - Dr. Ayo Ayodele	13
3.	Contextuality and the efficacy of Gender Rebirth in Effiong Johnson's <i>Install the Princess</i> - Dr. Olympus G. Ejue	30
4.	Style, Form and Structure in Femi Adediji's <i>'Super Resurrection'</i> - Dr. Olugbenga Olanrewaju Loko	45
5.	Complexities and Indulgences of Nigerian Audience in Contemporary Dance/Theatre Performances: 'Ori' and 'Akeregbe' as Paradigms - Itsewah Steve James	62
6.	Rethinking Western Interculturalism: Towards an African Intercultural Theoretical Model - Dr. Bisi Adigun	73
7.	The State of Music in the Anglican Church Worship in Lagos State: Contemporary Issues - Dr. Isaac A. Yekini-Ajenifuja	87
8.	Ebibì Festival: A Critical Appraisal of Performance and Thematic Relevance to African Societies - Dr. Nkemdirim Olubunmi Adedina	101
9.	Discourse on Tragedy in African Drama: A Study of J.P. Clark's <i>The Raft</i> & Ahmed Yerima's <i>Akuabata</i> - Dr. Chris Omotosho	116
10.	Exploration of Costumes and Make-up in Selected Yoruba Films - Joseph Bankola Ola-Koyi	128
11.	Traditional Dance, Dialectic Spaces, and the Identity Question: <i>The Alija Dance</i> in View - Princewill Chukwuma Abakporo	143
12.	Wale Ogunyemi's Commitment and Tragic Concept in <i>Partners in Business</i> and <i>The Vow</i> - Dr. Adebisi Ademakinwa	153
13.	Enhancing Theatrical Performance through Music, Voice, Visuals and Speech - Adebukunola Atolagbe, Dr. Abayomi Bello & Pauline Oyebowale Adekoya-Oduntan	162
14.	The Dearth of Vocal Instructors as an Albatross to Production of Professional Singers in Nigeria - Dr. Nweke, Florence Ewomazino and Iyabo Adeola Leigh	175
15.	Omọ Oròlòbà: Migration, Reintegration, Oral Performance, and Social Development - Dr. Adewale C. Oyewo	185

Ebibi Festival: A Critical Appraisal of Performance and Thematic Relevance to African Societies

By

Dr. Nkemdirim Olubunmi Adedina

Abstract

African festivals provide opportunities for socialisation and communal gathering to promote unity and peaceful co-existence among people of same cultural bias and interest. Ebibi, a festival in Owu-Ijebu is in focus as one out of many expressions of cultural heritage among the Yoruba's of Western Nigeria. In this light, this article examines Ebibi festival from a thematic perspective and its relevance to communal life. Apart from being an avenue for celebrating a rich cultural heritage; investigations were made into how Ebibi transcends the physical to become a spiritual product developed over time to perform religious, economic and social roles. To ascertain the authenticity of data collected, oral interviews, discussions and visits to scenes connected to performance were employed. Also retrieval of archival documents such as pictures, video clips and other relevant items used during performance were available for appraisal and close study. All these efforts are geared towards ascertaining and establishing the role of Ebibi festival to life and living of the people of Owu-Ijebu and African societies at large. Forthwith, observations and suggestions are made to re-vitalise and re-position Ebibi festival for continuity, preservation and promotion of this rich cultural practice beyond Owu-Ijebu community.

Key words: Festival, Culture, Cultural heritage, Ebibi, Performance.

Introduction

Festivals represent the strength of a people. As a cultural heritage, it is an outstanding and intrinsic aspect of African ethnic life that also serve as their identity. The numerous festivals practised and celebrated in many African societies is a testimony to this fact. To a large extent, festivals have constantly gone through the process of erosion, derogation and truncation which is almost leading to their extinction due to pre-conceived opinions and bias of Western scholars as well as Africans themselves. The latter can largely be attributed to the effects of modernization, education, religion, globalisation and acculturation. Most Africans pay little or no attention to their culture as they are now tagged as idol worship, barbaric, outdated, devilish and demonic.

Hence, many educated (Christians and Muslims) would not participate in these festival. The festivals, however, are still relevant as they provide a rallying point for people in a particular society, create cultural awareness and avenue in getting

practical experience of the people's customs, their way of life and their belief systems. (Oderinde, 2018: 1)

This paper therefore provides a good avenue for the excavation and propagation of cultural ideas and heritage borne out of the need for appreciation, documentation, preservation, presentation and promotion of African culture to Africans and non-Africans alike. To achieve these objectives, one out of the many festivals in Owu-Ijebu, a village in the hinterlands of Ogun State in South Western Nigeria, will be the focal point. This festival, known as Ebibi, will be the point of discourse in this research.

A Brief History of the Owu People

The Owus are descendants of Oduduwa, the founding father of the Yoruba's. They are an integral part of the Yoruba's of the Western Nigeria. They were pivotal in the much orchestrated Owu wars that are believed to have broken up the old Oyo Empire (Adedina, 1982). The Owus believed that their kingdom was the first to be created in Yoruba land. As one popular song states,

"Owu la ko da,
be d'owu e bere wo".

Meaning:

Owu was the first place to be created.

Find out when you get to Owu land.

Oduduwa had a special love for his grandson (the first Olowu) born of his daughter, Ero-Olu and often played with him in the palace. On one of such occasions, Oduduwa placed his crown on his grandchild, when he pulled at it he placed it on his head; but when an attempt was made to remove it, the Olowu cried and did not stop until the crown was replaced. This gave Oduduwa great concern because tradition forbids two kings with crowns to reside in the same town. He therefore carved out a kingdom for his grandson and gave him a crown. This action gave the first Olowu the appellation "Asukungbade" (that is, one who obtained a crown with tears) and "Agbadesire", (that is, one who plays with the crown). The first Olowu founded a city at the location known as "Orile-Owu" or "Ago-Ofin".

The Owus who were very militant and valiant are also known to be naughty, haughty and stubborn and this resulted in their splintering and migratory traits. They ruled Apomu, Ikire and other towns after they defeated the Ife's. However, a quarrel ensued at the market one day between an Owu man and Ijebu woman over alligator pepper. This later resulted in a war, which the Owus won. Angered by this act, the Ife's and the other allied bodies over ran Owu. This experience informs Osofisan's (2006) adaptation of The Trojan War in his play *Women of Owu*. The reason given by the amalgamated Yoruba tribes was that no Yoruba city-state or group should attack Ile-Ife. Hereafter, the Owus scattered all over Yoruba land to places such as, Ogbere in Ibadan, Modakeke, Ogbomosho, Ode-Omu, Osogbo and Ijebu land. The Owus in Ijebu moved from Orile-Owu and for forty years

they settled in the forest at a place called Erila. They also founded some settlements like Odumosoruta, Ifodo, Oke-Ekiti, Ilara, Igudu, Odesentaba etc. Some finally settled near Ijebu and presently a part of them are still located there while another breakaway went to Ode-Omu in Epe Division of Lagos State.

History of Ebibi Festival

The origin of Ebibi festival is traced to two legends. The first is that of a barren woman whose co-wives mocked so much that, out of frustration she went to an Ifa priest who instructed her to make a sacrifice of all delicacies that are edible. This ritual is what Kerr (1997:1) refers to "as an action which is undertaken to, obtain assistance from, or in some way intercede with supernatural forces". She gave birth to four children (after her compliance), namely, Igbe, Osu, Erele and Ebibi. She later used the birthday of Ebibi her first son to commemorate this sacrifice and she also involved other barren women in the land. After her death, the town resolved to continue this practise by celebrating the birthday of her children and round up with Ebibi. Some Yoruba names for months such as Erele, Erena, Igbe and Ebibi (February, March, April and May) are derived from here. The second account states, that a valiant leader of the Owus went on an expedition that took him to the creeks and villages of Ijebu waterside. He conquered the villages and later imported their water dances into Owu even after his death two of the masquerades that he brought were incorporated into Ebibi festival. It is worth noting that the Owus would have participated in many traditional festivals in Ile Ife before their defeat and migration. One of such festivals is Edi, which themes and aims are similar to Ebibi, a festival celebrated widely in Ijebu. Another of such festival is the Okosi festival in Makun Omi (Ijebu waterside) which Ogunpolu (in Adedina, 1982:21) says "is closely connected with the rituals of the Ebibi festival celebrated annually in all parts of Ijebu land between the months of April and May".

Performance of Ebibi Festival

Ebibi festival is controlled by a collection of traditional chiefs known as 'Osugbo'. They serve as the executive council that sees to the smooth running of the society. They also serve as advisers to the king and judiciary. Most importantly, they are empowered to install the king. The Osugbos therefore perform a significant role in the festival of Ebibi. The performance of Ebibi festival is divided into three major sections which would be fully discussed in preceding paragraphs.

Preparatory Stage

Ebibi festival marks the end of the traditional year and ushers in a new one. Neighbouring and smaller villages such as Ilese and Odomefi, observe their own festival to herald Ebibi. Irele and Gikandi (2004:38) observes that most of these festivals 'dramatize myths relevant to significant and important events in the community'. The first festival known

as 'Id'emmum' is held at Ijebu-Ilese, a town of about four kilometres to Ijebu-Ode and between fifteen to twenty kilometres to Owu-Ijebu. The Elese (king of Ilese) is expected to pay homage to his ancestors during this ritual in his town.

The second festival, Igbe, is held at Odomefi, a village less than two kilometres from Owu-Ijebu. This takes place fifteen days after the celebration at Ilese. It is aimed at appeasing ancestral spirits and involves the whole village. This Igbe is preceded by Osu ceremony, the third of the festivals. It is held as one of the pre-requisite ritual ceremonies before Ebibi and is performed in Owu Ijebu. It is also celebrated in honour and worship of departed ancestors. Individual families mark it with the preparation of pounded yam and egusi (melon) soup. Some of the food is placed in front of the houses as an offer to the departed souls. The belief is that if the food is no longer there on the second day, then the ancestral spirits have accepted the sacrifice.

The Oba (king) is also actively involved in this ritual ceremony since he also prepares sacrifices of kola nuts, a ram and foods to his predecessors. This ritual last three days and culminates in the king's dance. The Osu ritual ceremony comes up nine (9) days after Igbe and eighteen (18) days before Erena festival. Irele and Gikandi (2004:39) confirm 'these festivals could last a few hours, days, weeks and months'. Erena festival, aimed at appeasing the ancestors, is similar to Osu, although only celebrated only in Ikija-Ijebu, those people who have link with Ikija may also observe it in their various localities. It is believed that during Erena, masquerades or 'heavenly beings' visit the 'earthly beings'. These masquerades are expected to rid the society of all evils. This 'heavenly beings' also known as Jigbo go about the streets blessing people who offer them tokens of appreciation. Jigbo also performs for the audience. Their performances involve magical and acrobatic displays as well as whipping with very long whips. A lot of whipping activity is also engaged in by followers and audience especially, the youths. The essence of this is to test their strength and ability to endure pain without flinching. These are great signs of manliness and bravery in their cultural context. Although, there are times when the participants protect themselves with potent and prepared charms to still pains so that they do not flinch, cry or appear weak and be disgraced before the women who continually cheer and encourage them.

The performance of Jigbo go on for thirteen days and ends by the afternoon that leads to the eve of Ebibi. The whole community participates in Jigbo's last dance, (Moloku). The performances involve magical acts, acrobatic displays, ridiculing and satirizing offenders within the community. The offenders are not to feel offended or bear grudges when being lampooned during the performance. Since it is a festival of masquerades, the townspeople take the opportunity to also lampoon the king because he can neither respond nor punish them.

Performance

The performance of Ebibi festival will be viewed from three perspectives, the beginning, middle and end. Rituals by the priests and chiefs kick off the beginning of Ebibi during

the night. These rituals, not meant for the public view, are held in secrete. The torchbearer, usually the king's steward or guard bears a torch made from a tree, 'Igi Palafin'. He can be referred to as the 'messianic image', a term used by Umukoro, (2009:45) in her discussion of Femi Osofisan's revolutionary heroes in his plays, *Moshoodism and Fungba Yungba and the Dance Contest*, because of the role he performs in this festival. He moves round the town stopping to perform some rites such as recitation of panegyrics, recount of acts of bravery, praise singing and pouring of libation at graves of departed kings and different entrances to the town. His final stop is the palace of the incumbent Oba's palace. The latter is to flee the palace before the 'Ofoman' arrives. The torchbearer continues his rites round the house imploring malevolent spirits, witches and wizards to leave the Oba's house and town. He chants the following lines,

Oso yoo! Aje yoo!

Irun bi yoo! Irun bi yoo!

Meaning:

wizards burn! Witches burn!

Bad things burn! Bad things burn!

Afterwards he proceeds to the village square where the community makes a bonfire while singing the following chant:

Yoo! Aje yoo!

Meaning:

Burn! Witches burn

Middle

After the metaphysical cleansing by the torchbearer, the mundane cleansing starts. This is carried out by chiefs and 'Apepe' players (musicians who use sticks made from bamboo tree as musical instruments). They sit in the village square to exhume all misdeeds and misconducts of the previous year by satirising such individuals involved. After this performance, masquerades such as, Okoro, Alewenwe, Ajani and Epa come out to dance. They dance round the town blessing the people and receiving alms. Most of the crowd will then go to the bonfire but the women and young men carry their torches round Ogun's shrine thrice while singing the following song:

Oso Jo lurun se yoo!

Aje yoo!

L'olomo bi yoo!

Aje yoo!

Meaning:

Wizards burn! Burn for your evil acts!

Witches burn!

Those who do not allow women to be fruitful, burn!

Witches burn!

By this time, the women would have completed their three rounds and then run to the stream singing the same song above.

Ending

When they get to the stream/river they will dip their torches (Palufon) in the water after the torch bearer would have done same. Thereafter, they walk through the swamp cutting 'woro' leaves or 'peace leaves'. Each of them make bundles of three leaves, some of which on their return to Ogun shrine, they present to Eleku, one of the priests. Following this ceremony, they move to the king's palace: however, on their way anyone they give the leaves to, is expected to give them money in return. Notably, everyone who receives 'woro' leaves must keep them in their houses until the following year's festivities. Usually, it rains on the second day after the festival because it comes up during the rainy season in the months of April or May. It is believed that this rain will wash away the sins of the community. Meanwhile, once the torches are thrown in the river, no one is supposed to visit or drink its water for a period of three days. The third day after the festival marks the beginning of a new year. In addition, it marks the restoration of calm and peace to the entire community of Owu-Ijebu's.

Functions of Ebibi festival

Ebibi festival performs notable functions in the community, especially in upholding physical and spiritual societal order and these will be fully highlighted in the following discussions.

Religious and metaphysical function

As a traditional festival, Ebibi festival provides an avenue for the people to cleanse their community of all evils. It brings renewed hope and prepares the society for a clean start with great expectation for a prosperous new year. In addition, it solicits blessings from benevolent spirits and deities after the malevolent ones have been swept away. Although this is done collectively, family units still offer sacrifices to their ancestors /progenitors during the festival to ward off evil, grant them peace, joy and progress in the coming year. There is a saying to this effect:

'Ebibi re mbi iku

Ebibi re mbi arun'

Meaning:

Ebibi wards off death,

Ebibi wards off sickness.

In further fulfilment of this function, Ebibi festival creates a forum for blessing. For instance, a barren woman can get a child if she is involved in the festivities and offers the same sacrifice as the first woman who performed the same ritual and was blessed with children. The religious essence of the festival is handled by the Ougbon, who belong to a secret cult. They perform rites of atonement and appeasement for the entire society; but non-initiates are not allowed to participate or be in attendance. The symbolic burning of the evils, through the Ofosan, which the entire town's people participate in, signify spiritual cleansing, purgation and purification.

Social function

Many Africans believe in communal co-existence for social cohesion in society. In this way, Ebibi festival creates a forum where everyone, irrespective of class, age, gender status, integrate and work collectively for the good of the society. This festival serves as a leveler for all ill feelings or dislike that people might have harboured against one another in the course of the outgoing year. The absence of hatred or anger brings about harmony and sanity to the town. This in effect results in stability and peaceful existence. In time immemorial, when the Owu people owned slaves, the festival was the only time of the year they were treated as free born. Hence the saying:

'Ebibi r'e ru mi je laye'

Meaning:

'Ebibi is the only festival that a slave partakes in as a free born'

Political function

In every society, there is the need for organisation and coordination of people for about a stable co-existence. This gave rise to various forms of governance classed under the term 'politics' which according to Raufu is 'everywhere, in private primary clans, and families...' (2000:12). Politics is therefore a necessity for human interaction and relationships. In order to achieve this political aim, various institutions are put to use including the theatre, which can be employed for providing information, education, enlightenment, development and ultimately for entertainment. Ebibi festival is a traditional theatre form and is one of the institutions that perform functions in the society. For instance, the handing over of 'Woro' (peace leaves) by the Oba has two political undertones. First, it is an action that asserts the king's authority over all and second, it also symbolises peace within the polity. Furthermore, the songs guard the principle of fair play which is necessary for a good political system. It exposes anti-social behaviours which were previously kept secret and curbed by a despotic or autocratic ruler. This helps to stabilise the political climate since the king or individuals satirised have no right to quarrel or sue for damages.

Satirical function

Bamidele states that 'Satire is not just to provide laughter but for social commentary and ... they provoke serious thought' (2001:3). From this perspective, the satirical function of Ebibi festival cannot be considered as mere jesting or caricature because of the moralistic and metaphysical aims achieved through satire. It uses this satiric vehicle as a check on kings, chiefs, rich men, poor men or individuals without fear or favour. The realisation that any secret misdeed will come to light makes people maintain discipline, self-control and integrity through self-restraints and discipline. During this satirical aspect of the festival, names of offenders as well as facts and details about their offence are also made public. This act is, shameful and painful to the person satirised especially as one is not opportune to make excuses or exonerate himself or herself when and after being lampooned or ridiculed. In a way, this restores balance and imposes ethical values on these societies. The person lampooned becomes an example to others thereby restraining them from misbehaviours. Satire as used in Ebibi is no respecter of person(s). Important personalities are freely attacked if it is discovered that they have engaged in any bad conduct secretly. The essence of this satire is that it makes good personalities out of the people through hard work, truthfulness, honesty and love for others. Overall, it encourages peaceful co-existence.

Theatrical elements in Ebibi festival

Ebibi festival can be described as '... full-fledged theatre that is dynamic, spectacular and inventive' (Irele and Gikandi 2004:38). In explaining this concept, they identify diverse art forms incorporated in festivals such as, chanting, dancing, drama, drumming, miming, masking, costuming and at times puppetry. It is no doubt that Ebibi festival just like most African festival possesses these theatrical features or art forms and more. The combination of these elements make Ebibi fit into the concept of total theatre. Some of the outstanding features of total theatre are going to be discussed as employed in Ebibi.

Open theatre

Ebibi festival takes place in the whole village. It is a kind of theatre which takes place at various locations in the town. It is one in which everybody is expected to participate and the total space of the town becomes the performing area. Apart from rituals performed exclusively by the Oshugbos out of public view, all other activities surrounding this festival are in full public view. The actions unfold in the palace, compounds, and streets, main entrances to the town and by the river.

Acting

Although every member of the community participates, there are four major categories of actors in Ebibi festival. The first is the 'Agunren', the torch bearer. He assumes the main role as an intermediary between the dead and living. He enacts the act of cleansing the

town with and of his prop, the torch which he holds on to in his hand as an element to ward off evil spirits out of the land. Symbolically, just like a scapegoat or mensah, he is the carrier of the community's evils are heaped on just like a scapegoat or mensah. The other actors are the king and the Oshugbos who perform the preparatory rites. They can also be seen as directors present before and during performance. They remain unseen during the rites yet their impact is felt by all the people. They give directions and guidance as events unfold during Ebibi. The third sets of actors are the musicians. Though they can be seen as minor actors yet they play a significant role through the performance of satirical songs that criticise unworthy actions of some individuals in the society. They compose songs intended to promote good human relationships as well as those that preach eradication of all evil acts and encourage metaphysical and physical cleansing of the people. The fourth category of minor yet important actors, are the women. They bring peace to the land by distributing 'Woro' to the people.

Audience

Members of the audience are at the same time participants in the festival and not just on lookers. In Ebibi festival, the relationship between the spectators and actors is very close. These people are involved in the ritualistic cleansing of the town. At the same time, they are attentive to the satiric songs lampooning individuals in the community. They are permitted to stop the music if need be, in order to provide new information musicians might be ignorant of. Such information stands as source materials for their compositions. They stand or sit around the performers. The performers/audience relationship encourages interaction between them. Additionally, this interplay allows the audience to play the role of the chorus. The most active audience are the women, who from time to time, participate by singing, dancing and clapping. The male audience participate by shouting, jeering or whistling to appreciate the musicians and masquerades. This way, they contribute to the force of the performance of Ebibi festival by merging with the performers, thereby breaking down the imaginary wall of divide between performers and audience in modern Theatre.

Costume and make up

It is believed that even when an actor appears nude on stage, it is part of his/her costume as long as it is in the context of the play. Costumes enhance the visual aspect of a production and overall aesthetics of performance especially design arts. However, costumes in African performance do not just fulfil the above function. They act as symbol as seen in Ebibi where they are two-dimensional. The first is mystical while the second is mundane. There is an interchange in male and female clothing for satiric purposes. The men wear blouses, tie wrappers and make their flat chest and buttocks pronounced through padding. The women on the other hand, put on men's traditional attire Baba, (top) Sokoto, (trouser) Agbada and fila (cap). Both, sexes then make attempts to imitate and ridicule some actions that characterise the opposite sex. Others, male and female

alike, can also wear rags while others put on excess clothes to make them bigger or smaller than normal. The latter is due to the fact that these clothes act as shields against the whiplashes during whipping. The rags worn by some individual is to create discomfort in their dress mode and also to signify the passing away of the old traditional year. In fact, they do this just to create fun and add entertainment value to the festival. In Ebibi festival, costume enhances both the physical and spiritual aspects. The use of blue and white chalk paintings on the faces and bodies of especially the musicians shows the state of the old year just as their looks are disfigured. Although this is the only make up used in Ebibi, it speaks volumes about the state of being of the society and the people. Make up in this light serves theatrical purposes as well as ritualistic essence.

Mask and masquerades

Masquerading is a cult of ancestors. 'It is used for political, judicial and entertainment purposes' (Ogundeji 2000:5-6). In most African societies, when masquerades wear masks, it transforms the wearer from a physical being to an immortal being. The whole community no longer sees him as one of them but as a spiritual entity representing the deities or ancestors. Masquerades are often referred to as 'ara-orun kinkin' meaning 'heavenly beings'. As mentioned earlier, there are two major masquerades in Ebibi, Alewenwe and Okoro. They are both said to be couples. Alewenwe is the husband while Okoro is the wife. There are other masquerades such as Epa and Ajani. Epa is believed to be an agile young man who can perform acrobatic displays while Ajani is an old respectable man. These masquerades join the crowd and lead them to the town hall. They stop to dance and display their dexterities at different points. The masquerades are representatives of all spheres of the society including the married, the young and the old.

Music

This is a very important element in Ebibi festival. Music here entails the songs composed by the musicians which are mainly satirical in nature. Some of the musical instruments used during Ebibi festival are, Apepe (Bamboo stick) Kuge (small male drum), Uke (tortoise shell), Agbe (Big drum) and Agogo (gong). Uke has a symbolic feature. The opening and beating of Uke marks the beginning of the festival and it is used throughout. However, Uke is only used for Ebibi festival. There is a lead and refrain. The lead singer sings songs that will reveal who will become the subject of criticism while the rest will respond with just a phrase or two from his rendition. For example, the song that mocks Elese, Oba of Ijebu-Ilese,

Lead: 'Elese demunu'

Refrain: E e e, o o o

Meaning:

Elese spilt his palm wine

Yes, it's true.

the lead singer's songs are comments on events in the society especially vice such as theft, sexual immorality, gossip or any other misdemeanour. At the same time, they use songs to praise heroic actions of illustrious men of the land. Songs in Ebibi festival are also used as supplications to the gods for fertility, longevity and prosperity. Notably significant are the lyrics and renditions of the songs, their styles and structure, the entire and ritualistic function of the songs. All these highlight the theatrical side of songs in Ebibi festival.

Dance

Dance is an embodiment of body movements to a particular rhythm. Dance in Ebibi festival starts at a slow pace but later accelerates as the festival reaches its climax. The slow movements arise out of the ritualistic nature of this aspect of the festival. As the torchbearer runs to the river to destroy the evil spirits, his movements and that of the women bearing torches, changes to a fast one. However, on their return from the river with 'woro' leaves, the dance steps become slower and are taken leisurely. The masquerades also have specific dance movement that are identified and peculiar to each of them. Ranging from the dignified and well-calculated dance steps of Choro, to the graceful movement of Alewenwe and Ajani; then comes the vigorous, energetic, high spirited dance and acrobatic displays of Epa. Ebibi festival can be seen as a theatrical performance which has the potentials to be transformed to a scripted theatre form.

Relevance of Ebibi Festival to African Societies

Scapegoatism

Many African societies celebrate the passing of an old the coming of a new one. In Nigeria, the concept of the carrier, who serves as the scapegoat, laden with the burden of carrying away the evils of an old year and bringing the goods of a new one, is a normal and accepted phenomenon. Wole Soyinka's, *The Strong Breed* and *The Bacchus of Euripides* aptly portray this. Emma in *The Strong Breed* is a carrier by birth. The same is the case in Ebibi festival where individuals from a lineage or by virtue of position perform the role of the carriers. It behooves the carriers as a matter of duty not choice, to fulfil the desires of the people. The 'Agunren' (torch bearer) in Ebibi festival is the scapegoat of the community. Historically, in Owu-Ijebu, the king's guard performs this task.

Ritual

As earlier stated, most African festivals are designed to acknowledge deities or ancestors. People believe that these terrestrial beings make their existence possible. Therefore, they worship their existence, daily or during special events like planting or harvest seasons. These occasions of religious worship depend on the deified being involved, the mode, form and structure assigned to the worship. Some of the rituals in Ebibi are made public while others involve only the members of the inner caucus, the Oshugbos. Some of these

rituals also possess both qualities in Ebibi festival seen in the aspect involving *Oduduwa* and that of the people when they can ask for favours. Rituals events in festival usually showcase the dramatic and theatrical features in various kinds and degrees. For example, speech is highly restricted to lead and response or question and answer. It also has as common features; music, chants, dance, music, songs, mime, and acrobatics.

During these rituals, the people can also make requests as they wish depending on their needs. Barren women can ask for children in Ebibi festival just as applicable in Okeebadan festival in Ibadan (a sub-ethnic Yoruba group in Nigeria). A woman in this category sings thus;

Okeebadan mo gbekun de o

Mo wa gbare mi.

Meaning:

Okeebadan, I am here with my stomach,

I have come for my blessing.

Also, during Ebibi, there are ecstatic moments marking the peak of worship when the worshipper, the Oshugbos in particular, truly unites in spirit with the ancestor in a 'trance' or 'spirit possession' to enable departed souls communicate with humans. To substantiate this fact, Lewu and Shuaib (2011:3) see this act "as the deity taking possession of all the faculties of the individual possessed...without having to take responsibility for their actions". Details of this experiences were held back from the researcher on grounds that she is not an initiate of the 'Oshugbos' just like some other Owu-Ijebu indigenes who fall under same category.

Masquerading

In Africa, masquerading is a cult of ancestors therefore they are classified as divinities. They come out for displays during festivals using some art forms in the theatre, such as costume, mask (make up) dance, music and songs. Apart from this cultic function, they are also used for political, judicial and entertainment purposes (Ogundeji 2004:4-5). This does not imply that all festivals in Africa have masquerades. It is true that only the members of the society that belong to Egungun (masquerade) cults or lineage are permitted to mask in most cases. Even though they are well known by the people yet they are accorded the same respect as divine beings.

The tradition of masking in sacred ceremonies is characteristic of early dramatic forms in African theatre. The Alarinjo and Apidan theatre in Western Nigeria are offshoots of this form of theatre. Masks are made from different materials like raffia, cloth, wood, and leaves. It could also be a combination of two or more of these. At times, only parts of the body are masked especially the head region all. In other instances, all parts of the body are masked as seen in Epa and Alewenwe masquerades in Ebibi festival. It could be acrobatic displays, dance movements or even whipping as seen in Ebibi festival.

Satire
The satiric vehicle in Ebibi festival is used to organize and coordinate communal affairs. Since time, satire has been an effective tool to expose the follies of man. It can adopt any of these, "...monologue, dialogue, epistle, oration, narrative, numbers-poising, character drawing, allegory, fantasy, transversion, burlesque, parody" (Clark in Adedun, 2002:54). In Africa, it is always a thing of shame not only on the offender but also on his family members and friends to be an object of ridicule in the society. The effect is such that it could make such a fellow feel ostracized. While serving as a corrective measure, it becomes a preventive measure for others not to be caught in the same act.

On a slightly different note, satire could serve the purpose of entertainment without necessarily being targeted at the personality of an individual. The Ebi festival especially in Ife-Ife (Western Nigeria) and Okeebadan (Ibadan), licentious and satiric songs are about human sex organs. Such songs are about those who lived immoral and promiscuous lives and are such songs are not always acceptable in everyday life but only during these festivals. The use of satire in Ebibi festival also encourages peaceful co-existence among the people. They let go of all pent up emotions like anger, malice and hatred. It becomes a leveler of class, education, status, affluence, position and power of the people living in this community.

Observations

Having gone through the many facets of Ebibi festival, germane issues arise that give cause for concern especially its present state. In Africa generally, the Christian religion came under the guise of Western education. This historic event took place in Owu-Ijebu in 1905 when a school and a church were first cited at Isoyin-Ijebu. Literacy came with the imposition of religion, thereby labelling traditional festivals as heathenism and paganism. The youths of the town now have different perspectives and understanding of rites and festivals of the town. The act of migration to foreign lands for education and better living also widened the gap of continuity that should have existed in form of traditional or informal education. This is further widening the gap between education and culture and its gradual erosion. Ebibi festival is now sparsely attended. Children and women form the chunk of participants while a few elders spice it up. Even some of the town's people residing in the community display lack of interest and concern in the yearly event.

Also in traditional African societies, Oba and council were held in high esteem. Then, the Oba was referred to as, 'Alase Ikeji Orisa', second in command only to God. This can no longer be said to be the case in the modern societies. The wielding power of kings has been drastically reduced by the prevailing system of government in Nigeria. In recent times, many Yoruba kings have turned to stooges for governments of the day. This has in no small measure contributed to decline in respect accorded to them by their subjects.

Another thought-provoking factor is that the festival is being truncated on yearly bases during event. It is true that culture is dynamic, so, one does not expect it to remain static.

However, changes that should occur are expected to positively affect or add to the aesthetic value of the festival. For example, older Egunguns hardly display in recent times, only young ones do. More so, only a handful of Youths are predominant performers at the festival. Women on their own part, no longer complete the cycle of going round the town before going to the river, thereby truncating the process of dipping their Ofosan and faces in the river. Anyway, these days, there is hardly any makeup of white and blue chalk so the latter action become almost insignificant and irrelevant.

Suggestions

Education should be seen as a tool and medium of preserving this festival and not a way of eroding it. This could be in form of print or electronic media where more research works, article, documentaries and drama scripts and films can evolve. There is need for a formal traditional education not only of Ebibi, but also other African festivals. These could be achieved by embedding relevant studies in this area in the curriculum right from Primary schools in subjects such as, Social Studies, Civic Education and Cultural and Creative Arts. Globalisation would be a good asset especially as opportunities abound in the social media and should be optimally utilised and explored. More so, forum for discussions, seminars, conferences and symposium on African festivals should be designed regularly and forums for appreciating African Festivals at home and Diaspora should be made popular. This would give a global view to these events, encourage sponsorship and international patronage. Most importantly, there is the need to be open and receptive to African festivals generally, irrespective of religious affiliations. This appeal is particularly made to the people of Owu-ijebu to bring about a positive change of attitude towards the performance of Ebibi festival in this community. This can be further achieved if some aspects of the ritual are demystified. Shrouding some of the rituals in secrecy, gives credence to the misconceptions and preconceived opinions of the people that the festival is evil and can corrupt their faith.

Conclusion

The concept of unity and time is an important aspect of the African worldview that there is continuous communication between the living and the dead; thus, the belief that, the strength and influence of every clan is anchored by the spirits of its deceased heroes (Lewu and Shuaib, 2011). This explains why African festivals are in a class of their own and are an integral part of their entire existence which includes all facets of their cultural system in the communities over the decades. African festivals, such as Ebibi plays a significant role in the cosmos order and continuous existence of man through living and dying to revitalize the essence of human existence. Ebibi epitomizes the above qualities due its structure, concepts and objectives. It contributes to the social, religious, political and moral lives of the people especially by serving as checks and balances to maintain cosmic order in the society. The time is now for a total re-packaging, re-positioning and re-branding of African festivals in this prevailing and dominant age of modernisation and

civilisation. This will help to further propagate and promote Yoruba cultural values and norms for appreciation and preservation especially among elites and future generation

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