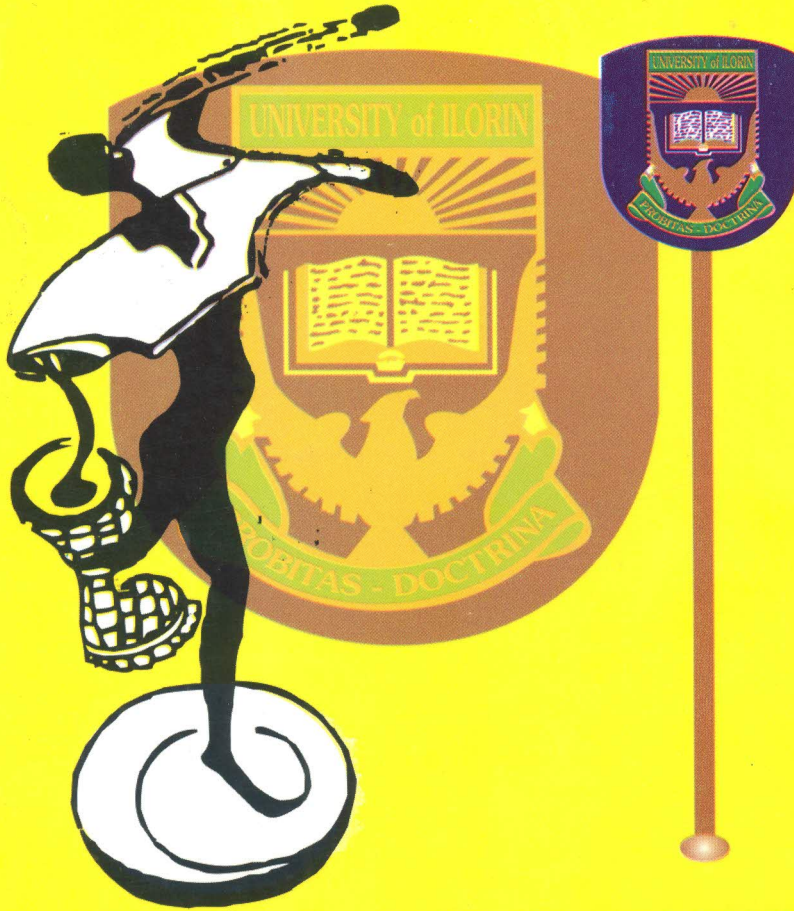


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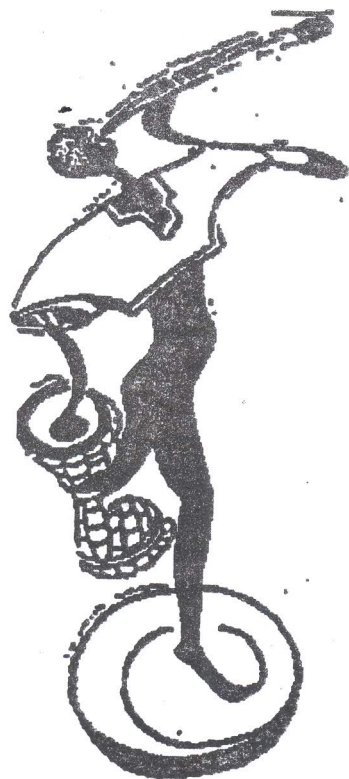
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New Skin of the Old Wine

The intellectual essence of the 26 papers (13 each) in the present Volume 21 of 2019 and Volume 22 of 2020 respectively can be described as the theoretical summation and extrapolation of the re-writing and expansion of the known or visible borders in the inspiration of the new skin of the old wine. Old wine in this context represents commonness. Researching on the uncommonness makes such academic endeavour to tilt towards originality. We can all chorus originality till tomorrow, what, however, defines the essence of originality remains researchers' abilities to be dialectically and materially different from the known common culture, hybridising the entire process to accommodate new things.

Consequently, the 13 papers in Volume 21 of 2019 opens with S. O. Oyewo's Psychometamimesis, a picturesque and theatrical intervention in the management of mental illness while two apostles of Arnold Van Gennep in Nigeria, Alheri P. Sarki and Victor O. Ihidero celebrate the aesthetics of liminality and the liminoid. We have two historical studies on traditional wrestling sports and music art and militarism from Theresa N. Odeigah and Adeniyi J. Aboyeji who researched on the metaphor of commonness through the gaze of uncommonness. This Volume has two papers on Theatre for Development, two on Dramatic Theory and Criticism and one each on Dance, Play Directing, Costume and Make-up, Technical Theatre and on the ageless doyen of the Nigerian theatre, Hubert Ogunde.

Taiye S. Adeola's paper on Health Humanities – the healing potentials of gospel songs in Nigeria, is the lead paper in Volume 22 of 2020. Indeed, research on music dominates this Volume with works from Morohunfola Kayode, Adebayo Mosobalaje, Olatunbosun S. Adekogbe and Hameed O. Lawal, and their papers centre on interculturalism, erotic parody, contemporary music and musical aesthetics. Oluwole T. Okewande's critical work on Yoruba artists and cultural symbolism is a well-researched paper that opens up on the metaphor of the common and the uncommon in the reality of the highly celebrated and richly endowed hunter's transitional rite and ritual of Yoruba people. We have two papers on Theatre Administration – Kazeem Rufai-Ahmad and Idris Bello and Taiwo O. Afolabi while the papers of Joseph A. Idogho and Timi H. Kayode and Abdulmalik Abubakar center on Theatre-in-Education. We also have one paper each on Acting/Yoruba Native Film, Directing and the Style, and Technical Theatre from Adetoun A. Adeniyi and Eunice Uadinma-Idemu, Adewale O. Ademuyiwa and Aminat T. Adebayo respectively.

Yes, visible borders, all! Yes, a systemic graduation and refraction from commonness to uncommonness! Yes, the deliberate representation of new things and in the end, yes, the editor has an important request to make; please enjoy Volumes 21 (2019) and 22 (2020) that are presented here.

However, do not keep your impressions or disagreements to yourself, use them, very intellectually too, to produce other great works. We will appreciate you more for this and you will be part of the counter-discourse family. Read ...

Prof. AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye
Editor

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A Historical Perspective of the Rise and Decline of Traditional Wrestling Sport among the Anioma People of Delta State

By
Theresa N. Odeigah (Ph.D)*

Abstract

This paper examines the prominence of traditional wrestling and its decline among the Anioma people of Delta State using oral interview and multidisciplinary approaches. It concludes that due to increasing Western education and Christianity, rural-urban migration and the emergence of modern technology, traditional wrestling has become extinct among the Anioma people of Delta state of Nigeria

Key words: Decline, Wrestling, Tradition, Sport, History.

Introduction

Traditional wrestling is a very common sport among the people in Anioma area of Delta State. The Anioma people make up ten of the twenty five local government areas in the State and farming is their main occupation. The Anioma people of Delta State were originally part of the old Benin Empire from where most of the component parts derived their origin. The people of Anioma migrated from Benin just like some of the other ethnic groups in the state, even though several of them now speak a number of different languages (Okoji, 2018). They practically have identical customs, beliefs and culture. This cultural identity is made manifest in their festivals, religious beliefs, marriage, ceremonies, and traditions of kingship and chieftaincy. Some of the towns in Anioma area of Delta State include Asaba, Onicha-Ugbo, Issele-Uku, Ogwashi-Uku, Okpanam, Onicha-Ukwu and Ibusa among other towns (Okeibunor, 2018).

Researchers have conducted some studies on traditional wrestling and other traditional spots in Nigeria and even Africa, however, not much has been done among the Anioma people of Delta State. Traditional wrestling was one of the most common sports among the Anioma people of Delta State; it was a skill that promotes the indigenous culture, values, norms and language among others (www.facts.ng/culture/igbo-trad). Most Anioma people just like most Nigerians generally have a natural aptitude for sports and they enjoy them as a form of recreation and

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entertainment. Therefore, this study examines the rise and fall of traditional wrestling among the Anioma People of Delta State, Nigeria.

Wrestling as a Cultural Activity

Wrestling is professional sports entertainment which combines theatrical and athletics. The fundamental basis of this sport enhanced co-operation among the different communities. Wrestling as a sport and cultural activity has been with the people from time immemorial. It was organised during special occasions, notably the New Yam Festival also called the *Ine* Festival (Kogolo, 2018). It was also organised during special anniversaries of ancient wars or commemoration of local heroes. Towns and villages or sections of the same town had to compete with one another in wrestling contests. No trophies or prizes were given to winners but the honour of being a champion was the main reward. Good wrestlers were held in high esteem in their communities and were often well sought after by the girls and young women.

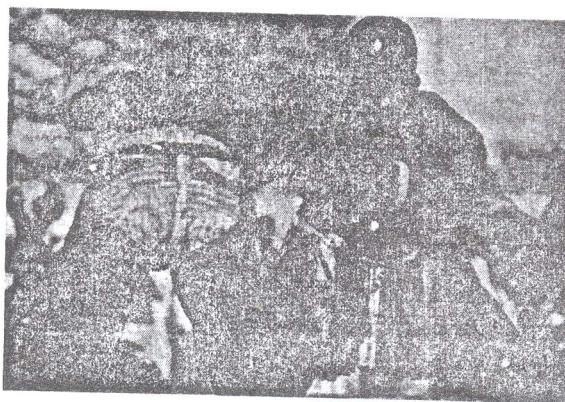


Fig: 1. Internet sources: <https://www.facts.ng/culture/igbo>. Accessed 15th January, 2018

Wrestling was a festival in its own right organised during the harvest season since there was usually not much work to do at that time and therefore the menfolk took to recreational activities such as wrestling (webennigeriaghantogoboutsport.weebly.com, 2015). The Anioma people love music and dance and therefore their festivals, social and religious ceremonies feature songs and dance, as well as musical instruments which were very traditional at that time and occasionally contemporary. The people sang soul-stirring songs which made the wrestlers dance and inspired to defeat their opponents (Osanmor, 2017). Dance was a symbolic art for the cultural essence of the people and also encourages the wrestlers to put in their best during the context (Onyemuchara, 2015).

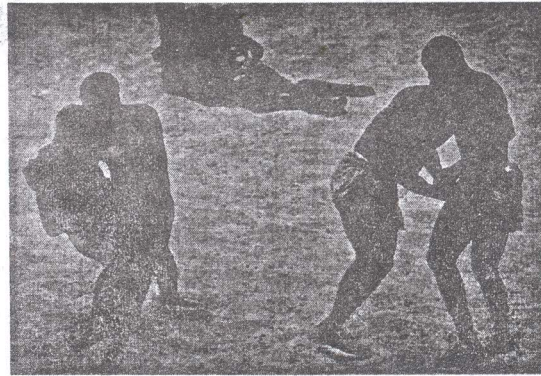


Fig: 2. Internet sources: <https://www.pulse.ng>. Accessed 26th December, 2017

The competition most times took place in the traditional rings or in the community squares. These rings are filled with sand or leaves to prevent injuries. During the wrestling contest, most times wrestlers are accompanied by their supporters, drummers, dances and singers at the venue. During the contest most wrestlers tied fearful materials around their waist arms legs all kinds of esoteric pendants for the purpose of protection against the powers of their opponents. Songs or flute boys played their flute to provide special tunes and songs to encourage and stir the heart of the competitors (Oboli, 1957, p. 188).

This process is believed to have given them strength to stand for the competition. Usually the high and low chiefs and their chieftain's gather round the village square to watch and other spectators were always happy watching the contests (facts.ng). Traditional wrestling help to promote the indigenous culture, values tradition and norms. They were engaged and pre-occupied with developing their skills and agility as wrestlers and so this shielded them from being idle and being engaged in any form of criminality. Wrestling was a way for the young people to keep fit and healthy. It was therefore a health positive life style for the young people by ensuring the promotion of physical fitness and the spirit of competition among them (Egbo, 2018). In the preparation for the traditional wrestling contests, referees and the officials were very important in the organization of the game. Referees were drawn from different communities and the officials were from the Obi in council and his cabinet members. These council members ensured hitched free and entertaining tournaments during the period of the contests. The referees had the responsibility for presiding over the traditional wrestling game and also enforcing the rules and regulations on the wrestler (Oboli, p. 189). The spectators were important in the traditional wrestling, because they gave support to wrestlers either by singing, dancing and drumming among others as a way of encouragement (Okeibunor Louis, 2018).

Organogram Showing the Organization of Traditional Wrestling

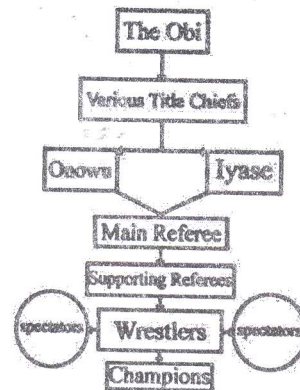


Fig 1 Organization of Traditional wrestling

Wrestling among the Anioma people of Delta state was a well organised sport and great cultural event. The various villages and sections of the villages would normally start the wrestling season which was usually around the harvest period when the workload on the farm would have been reduced to the minimum. The wrestlers were graded according to their age and experience. This ensured that every age group was represented and there was fair play in their assessment (Kogolo, 2018).

Rehearsals were usually in the evenings and most times at night with the moon light providing the necessary illumination. Rehearsals held in the various village squares but the contests held in the main village square. Various rehearsals went on at the same time in the villages before the emergence of the local champions at various levels and age groups. By mid-October of every year, the various towns and villages would start fixing the dates for their wrestling competition. The dates were usually chosen to avoid clashes and to enable people move from one village to another to watch the wrestling contests (Ukwuoma, 2018). It was usually on *eke* day which is the second day of the traditional four day week and on which day it was not mandatory to go to the farm. Occasionally to mark the burial of a prominent king or warrior or hero, there could be wrestling contests between champions from two or more villages. These were very special contests and the best wrestlers in the villages were usually involved in such special contests (Uge, 2017).

By the end of October, all wrestling contests in the towns and villages would have taken place with the emergence of champions at various levels and age groups. The wrestling contests had local referees who were usually highly respected men with integrity. They could easily determine the winner following several manoeuvres or movements by the wrestlers. Occasionally some in-experienced or overzealous wrestlers got injured sustaining some bruises on various parts of the body (Nkechi, 2018).

Benefits of Wrestling

Wrestling encouraged physical fitness and being physically active especially among the men folk and young boys was a common expectation of the people. A good wrestler was therefore like a good model for healthy living thus encouraging most young people to be physically active and alert. Wrestling occupied most of the young people at that time and therefore prevented them from being idle and engaging in various criminal vices (Ugboaja, 2017).

Wrestling encouraged the spirit of co-operation among the villages because they had to have several rehearsals to produce champions at various grades and levels. It also was an opportunity to form and develop the spirit of communal togetherness and self-reliance. It was an all-encompassing sport because the elderly people came to be entertained, while the girls and young women provided a lot of moral support by their music, songs and dance (Nwaokolo, 2018). Below are some of the motivational songs used to usher the wrestlers into the wrestling arena.

Songs

Omulunwakwonwa! Parents keep away weaklings from the wrestling ground!

Omulunwakwonwa!

Omulunwakwonwa!

Ife nfukamkwuo!

What I see at the wrestling contest, I will report!

Onumamagbunmo! I will not die for reporting the truth!

Akpiriaha gwunwaokpao! The fowl will never stop crowing!

Awesenwobo! The giants are coming!

EheAwese! Yes they are!

Eheawese! Yes they are!

Wrestling was a form of socialization because it brought various people together. A lot of other activities such as meetings and discussions went on usually before rehearsals and wrestling contests. The people went from one village to the other to watch wrestling contests and in the process this brought about a lot of socialization among the various villages and groups of people and therefore enhanced unity (Elumelu, 2018).

Wrestling encouraged tourism in the sense that there was usually a large turnout of people during such periods. Most of the people in the cities and towns travelled back home to observe the wrestling contests. Some people came accompanied by their relatives, friends, colleagues and business associates resulting in an increase in the level of commerce in the various towns and villages. Transportation and accommodation had to be provided among other services that people needed at that time (Nkechi, 2018). Wrestling contests, because of its ability to bring a lot of people together for leisure, reduced conflicts within the villages and also

between the various villages and towns. Because there was always music and traditional dance accompanying such contests it tended to showcase the rich traditional heritage and culture of the people. The Anioma people were united through the wrestling contests that brought a lot of interaction between the various towns and villages (ask.naija.ng:2017).

The Decline of Wrestling among the Anioma People of Delta State

Traditional wrestling as part of the tradition and cultural heritage of the Anioma people has now to a large extent become extinct because of several factors. One of such factors is the increasing level of western education among the young people resulting in a lot of them regarding traditional wrestling as primitive or barbaric. Instead of the leisure of observing wrestling contests most young people would rather now get very engaged in the social media and they also remain indoors and sedentary in their life style. This is not a health positive behaviour because it encourages the onset of non-communicable diseases among others such as obesity and high blood pressure that are common illnesses among our people (Ugboaja, 2017).

Because of western education and paid employment, most young people have migrated to the urban areas where traditional wrestling contests are not held. Rural-Urban migration is a major factor responsible for the decline of traditional wrestling among the Anioma people. Rural-urban migration is also responsible for the poor cultural orientation or the cultural decadence among the youths resulting in our young people not having value for our culture and heritage (Okwuogoli, 2018).

The level of crime and criminality in the various communities with the associated insecurity is a major factor why traditional wrestling contests are no more being held in most parts of the Anioma area of Delta State. With insecurity most young people would rather remain indoors than go for a traditional wrestling contest. In the pre-colonial period, the insecurity in the area was low and people could afford coming out at any time of the day (Uzoma, 2018).

The increasing influence of Christian religious education in the area is another reason that traditional wrestling is no more being held among the Anioma people of Delta State. Most Christians and adherents of other religions regard traditional wrestling as fetish or demonic and therefore will not be part of it neither will they encourage other people to participate or even observe it as a leisure activity (Nwafor, 2017). Other people now consider traditional wrestling as too physical and could result in injuries and ill-health eventually among their children and young people. Also with the advent of television as well as satellite television and the internet, sources of entertainment have become protean and people would rather sit in front of their television sets to be entertained instead of going to village squares for wrestling contests (Ugbo, 2017).

Conclusion

Traditional wrestling and the associated music, dance and our cultural heritage are generally being lost due to the poor cultural orientation of our young people. The strong character and confidence that traditional wrestling helps young people to build which eventually helps them later in life has also been lost. In the process of our development as a people, physical activity and mental fitness which are major components of wrestling and characteristics that young people should be desirous of are also lost. Development has taken its toll on various aspects of our traditions and culture, and traditional wrestling happens to be one of them. Traditional wrestling in the olden days provided an avenue to settle local disputes and conflicts among communities. Men who were champions in wrestling were admired and respected, and were seen as warriors. Their personality was distinguished and they were admired by many including the young women. Traditional wrestling was a reputable sport and possession of such skill was acknowledged to the extent that it gave class difference in the society.

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