



**INTERNATIONAL
JOURNAL
OF
CURRENT RESEARCH
IN THE
HUMANITIES**

NO 17 SEPT. 2013

27

ISSN: 0855-9740

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

OF

CURRENT

RESEARCH

IN THE HUMANITIES

NO. 17 SEPTEMBER 2013



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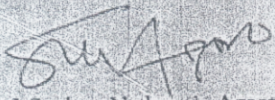
Dear Madam,

LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE

I am glad to inform you that your paper entitled "The Sustained Theatric and Pragma-Aesthetic Values of The Annual Traditional Festival Performance in Nupeland, Nigeria" has been accepted for publication in No.17 (2013) *International Journal of Current Research in the Humanities*.

Accept our congratulations.

Sincerely,


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**THE SUSTAINED THEATRIC AND PRAGMA-
AESTHETIC VALUES OF THE ANNUAL
TRADITIONAL FESTIVAL PERFORMANCE IN
NUPELAND, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This critique examines the annual Nupe, Nigerian festival and its performance aesthetic values. The theatric oral forms; both visual and verbal are categorized according to their socio-cultural, religious and pragmatic functions. The research aims at deducing Nupe aspirations, cosmos, visionary worldview and ideology; which are signalized in the Nupe annual practices. Through a detailed exposition of the nature of the mode production of the annual Nupe traditional festival performance, aspects of the people's raw culture, existence and behavioural pasterns become 'glaring'. The pragmatic aesthetic parameters examined in this cultural phenomenon include; drumming, singing, dancing, praise poetry, chants incantations, invocations and prayers. The research methodology adopted here is the archetypal literary theory which best accounts for ways in which the festival performance is produced and transmitted within Nupe community. With a further aid of oral interviews, field work recordings and observations made, most of the performance materials deduced are from the religious, pragmatic and social structures. And the ultimate comprehensibility of the traditional forms is through their archetypal placements. Archetypes are reoccurrences of settings, events themes and characters that reflect in modern times, some kind of their types in the past. An archetypal review of a festival becomes crucial in modern African literary studies such as this,

especially because previously known studies on Nupe are more visible in fields of anthropology, sociology and history of culture.

Introduction

Traditional festivals and performance in Nigeria are similar to the common phenomena all over African settings. Most importantly is the fact that they involve rituals and ceremonial outrage of processes manifested by different communities according to their traditional beliefs.

African festivals are held in commemoration of the mythical and legendary history of the traditional society. It is observed in the particular case of Nupe community in Nigeria and in accordance with other festivals of different African communities that festival days are important feast days i.e. they are days of joyful public celebrations in which sense of performances are featured. And Dopamu (2004:651) confirms this in the following assertion:

Festivals are important and significant aspects of life. They are the most important activities for the social and religious practices in a traditional society. In the actual sense, festivals are days or times or occasions for feasting and celebration involving series of performances, entertainment merry makings, rites and ceremonies. (Dopamu 2004:651).

Feasting, an integral part of festivals is an aspect of tradition imbibed in the cultural activities of the land for the purpose of communal rehabilitation in spite of the present flood of modernization and civilization. This is perhaps the reason why.

James: 1786, 197 further adds that: Throughout the history of human culture, certain days or period out of the history of human culture, certain

days or periods of time have been set aside to commemorate, ritually celebrate, re-enact or anticipate events or seasons-agricultural, religious, social and cultural that gives meaning and cohesiveness to an individual and his community. James 1786: 197.

Generally therefore, festivals as observed in the Nupe, Nigerian circumstance are sacred community meals taking place at a given period of the year to portray the mode of life and culture of the people. Ogunba 1978:3 rightly concludes that the Nigerian festivals are generally celebrated with pomp and pageantry". He further noted that such ceremonies are associated with diverse beings, gods and goddesses ranging from various worshippers in different African societies. This is perhaps why African festivals do not only promote the culture of the people but also strengthen the unity of the people in a given community, the Nupeland under critique here inclusive. Oduyoye 1988: 153 also further observes festivals as the source of recurrent opportunities for communal re-creation and social revival. This fact reinforces the conclusion of this critique that from the annual traditional festival in Nupeland, one can reconstruct aspects of Nupe worldview, cosmology, culture, metaphysics religious icons, myth, rituals philosophy and behavioural, patterns as a set of distinct cultural people within Nigeria.

The Nupe in Nigeria are better ethnographically placed by Nadel, 1942, Mason, Michael 1916, Obayemi, 1978 and Idress-Rofyen, Aliyu 1998. However, the Nupe, in Nigeria exist in the present Northern part of the country, specifically in Niger State, Kwara North, Kogi State, Lagos municipality and in Badagry of Nigeria. The Nupe are a group of people who dwell mainly in the Trans-Niger area. They speak Nupe as their first language despite being divided into the following subgroups: Binis, kyadya, Batachi, Chekpan, Ebangi, Kusupakpachi, Kintichizhi, Gbedegi Ebe and Dibo. The Nupe

sub groups share common culture, similar modes of worship, same beliefs and practices. And based on this, Nadel, S.F. 1942 rightly concludes that:

The West African society dealt with in this book, A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria, is half a million strong. It is far from 'simple and primitive', its social and economic complexity is comparable only with the civilizations of Imperial Rome of Byzantium, of Medieval Europe Nadel, S.F 1942:5.

The Nupe annual festival referred to by the natives as 'Nkwo' is not only a bond for the natives but also a reinforcement agent of a social and collective solidarity in the preparation for the socio-cultural tasks ahead of all and sundry. The festival takes place every August in every year. This study is an exposition of the functional basis of an African performance. And it is aimed at supplementing existing works on performance aesthetics of other types and forms of festivals in Nigeria and Africa.

A Review of the Archetypal Approach

The archetypal theories of Jung, Carl 1972:8 Bodkin, Maud 1934:2 Freud Sigmund 1954:164 and Frazer, George 1922:14 are considered for the analysis done here. Bodkin, Maud 1934 is for instance of the opinion that archetypes can be in symbols and imagery forms and can be observed from the collective psychological point of view. Bodkin Maud's opinion of an archetype is therefore a significant diversion from Jung, Carl's own assertion of archetypes. Jung defines archetypes as "a priori determinant of individual experiences" Individuality and collectivity are being juxtaposed in this research and it is noted that the individual

experience is gained from the collective communal experience. The group collective experience is what guards and shapes the individual psyche and responses. The future possibilities of the society are psychologically predetermined through the creation and moderation of an acute vision defined in performance act in familiar cosmic terms to enable these possibilities fall into an acceptable changing social order.

We should note that the acceptable changing social order are the archetypal representations in the societal performance. Archetypes are in the real sense, the depiction of social dynamics of the society. Through archetypal representations of events characters and setting, society retains its image and identity. Since archetypes are reflections of the traditional structures in a "modern society, all aspects of any society therefore become archetypal representations.

The Aesthetics of Nkwo: Nupe Annual Festival Performance

Aesthetics as a component of performance is the study of beauty and sometimes its opposite (ugliness) in works of arts. It is the evaluation, appraisal and a critique of any form of literary composition. In this case, it is the study of the Nupe 'Nkwo': annual traditional festival of the Nupe community: Hospers, John 1969: 21 defines aesthetics using the following terms:

An object is aesthetic only when it holds the audience or the reader's attention. Consequently, aesthetic parts include the linguistic, stylistic and dramatic stimulus that brings about a kind of instance response in the audience, during and after performance. Aesthetics include the general metaphysic of the lives of a people.

Various standards and values such as sublimity, imitation, virtue, ridicule etc have been discussed as further criteria for judging aesthetic values. Ogden, Richard, 1946:68 gives a more elaborative explanation and relevance of aesthetics. The aesthetic values of 'Nkwo' the Nupe annual festival performance will be discussed via its visual, verbal and auditory components. Performance in the oral literary situation is therefore an emphatic communication system in which a social discourse takes place between the performer and the audience.

The Visual Forms in Nupe Nkwo Festival Performance

In the visual performance there are concrete displays and demonstrations of how certain phenomena are realized and related in actual situations. The life context (performance) of any festival is therefore very crucial to its overall realization. Without the performance context, a festival or ceremony would be lifeless. Performance involves the instance stimulus and response of the audience who are the natives to whom the entire celebration means a lot. The visual forms of 'Nkwo' festival includes gestures, facial expressions, movements of the parts of the body, the setting or stage, pauses and emotional reactions. They serve as developers of episodes and are in themselves sources of beauty to the performance organized at the 'Nkwo' market square used as the stage. The visual features recorded further include the drums and drum types (all made of wood) the drummers composition, other musical instruments highly decorative, artifacts, costume of the title-takers and dancers, dance and dance steps, use of talisman, signals, gesticulations, body and house paintings, facial and chest drawings, finger voice, individual misbehaviour, psychological attractions and distractions, stage architecture, the raising of dust, standing at akimbo, prior to performance, fumes of gunshots, foot stamping. etc.

The drums, are used to intensify the intended messages put in songs. This is to say that the drums serve as aiding instruments for the vocalization of ideas and messages. The biggest drum is known as Gate. It is covered with the skin of a goat and made of hollow tree trunks usually roundish in nature. This drum can be likened to the Nigerian Yoruba 'Bembe'. It is the nerve centre; the xylophone. There is the kanangugi, a small drum usually hung around the shoulder and beaten from there. There is Congo drum with a curved stick beater' other Nkwo Nupe festival drums include Kpadondo, gbaguarasasa, Tambari and Lambawure as the flute Kakati. These musical instruments psychologically control the performance as the audience listens to the informative given by the talking drum and act suit the drums speak the language that the natives understand. Hence, they are used for maintaining order, peace and stability. These among other structural artifacts like Tsofengi; designed hand fan makes the Nupe 'Nkwo' festival quite elaborate and expressive. In the Nkwo group performance, the chief performer is a symbolic representation of the accumulated heritage of the people. His is out to display, amplify and re-establish the traditional norms and values of his land He leads the way in re-creating the progressive forms of his communal collective myth.

The group of performers are the people that come from the different wards to form cultural assemblage. They wear the native kpasa (the Nigeria Yoruba Ofi cloth. And only the group leader holds the staff of authority, brandishing it in the air at intervals as if to re-assert assurance.

Music and dance refer to the sounds from the auditory materials meant for effecting a movement of physique in commensuration with the sound made. These two element go hand in hand and are used as means of communication and expression. Music in Africa therefore represents the heartbeat of the people and serves as entertainment, an accompaniment to dance, religion rituals. It features in different settings like

funeral, traditional sports, palm-wine drinking sessions, marriages, crop festivals and so on. And the way Africans react to music varies depending on the message the music is communicating.

Performance in Africa in its artistic perception and concrete expression, reflects the African's desire to sing, dance, act, and decorate, to alter the natural state of things and beauty it. This is reflected in the ways of dressing in colours, making patterns of various figures on the body by Nupe women. They also make different kinds of hair styles e.g. gbaragi like the ones we find on new bride's heads during the elaborate performances in the festivals. This involves large performances plus the manipulation of intrinsic hums apart from vocation. Lets us take the use of raffia threads and pieces of clothes of the Chief performer into consideration. These performance elements contribute to the entire overall socio-cultural and pragmatic realization of the festival.

The Verbal Forms in Nupe Nkwo Festival Performance

This section discusses the verbal forms as the aesthetics in the ndakogboya masquerade performance. The verbal forms include the chants, poetry and songs involving other aesthetics in language use as aphorisms, appellations, incantations, ritualized lines, hyperboles, rhetorics, metaphors, seasoned wits, philosophical sayings, proverbs, storytelling techniques etc.

For easy comprehension, the verbal forms discussed in this section are categorized according to types and purposes although they were gathered at various times and by different groups from the sample area. The verbal forms are: Chants, Songs, Praise, Poetry, Prayers, Incantations and Invocations. These are high poetic qualities of the artistic composition of the people's poetry. It is poetry that put into record, its people's belief, history, ideology and emotions. The Nupe religious poetry which is used for the 'gboye' are for example, mystic, mythical; and philosophical reflections of life and life

after death. The tune of the music varies according to the theme expressed at that point in time. The mood could be solemn initially and change to happy hailing at the end, only to end in chants, slow wailing songs and in incantations. Most importantly, is the fact that these poetic strategies are used to function as identifiers of two worlds, both of which are temporary.

Poetic chants and songs in Nupeland are composed according to the social (cultural or ceremonial) needs of the community and according to the existing traditional forms derived from the material culture, and from the religious beliefs of the people. No formal or conscious techniques are introduced into it, yet, it is varies expressive. What is traditional therefore remains domineering and remarkably persistent in the rhythm that comes out during the masquerade's festival performance. Certain iconic materials are the weapons which the poet and the chanter use to depict historical and social circumstance.

The praises of the land are in proverbs and are full of philosophical sayings. The group being a kind of entertainment group at well also sing praises of past heroes and the well behaved individuals or abuse the whole town or a particular lineage that is out of tune will the norms of the society. The masquerade's direct criticism is usually on the individual. The multi-dimensional essence of the people's ancestral role is evident in its praise. Apart from protecting the communal members against witchcraft, illness and all sorts of calamities, once there is a change in the head-ship of any district, the compound of the district head or Hakimi is, cleansed by the chief performer who is also capable of sighting the evils of the new generation. The title holder is praised as one who protects the lives of the members of the society in the lines of the songs. Hence, no evil magic can be placed in the official residence of a new district head, for example. The songs therefore act as a 'checks and balances' on the society. This is perhaps why the ancestral praises and allusions are made to God, forefathers and Saman (heavens)

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as the symbol of the place where the most high, resides. Applications or praise poetry helps to reveal much about the features and functions of the spiritual

During the Nkwo festival present tradition and ritual patterns of rebirth in Nupeland. The opening formula of the poem can be further observed to include the appraisal of the function of the soloist, the cultural custodian. He also appraises "the hidden" the image of a hidden mystical object is to indicate transcendence and mystery. And the opening question form is to capture the attention of the audience. A true Nupe man is presented as a spiritual figure full of revelations long awaited by its audience. It is the hope of people; hence we have another line of Nkwo poetry as 'gboya mejini' – a reference to the owner of human blood.

Every social being in the community is dependent on his or her past and this past is the weight metaphors of myth and history revealed in lines. Such is stated above. It is a divine/ancestral figure image that we are given in the song. The ndakogboya deity is regarded as the controller of the life and death. Without blood, man cannot live and the masquerade is the determining agent of either survival or non-existence. History, and myth, are treated as raw materials in the songs in the case; it is mythology of a hero which has over the continuous years become elevated into archetypes of good and evil. The group leader is believed to be in possession of power and magic and in control of witchcraft. The role of the title taker is therefore a dual one- the father of all in support of the well behaved individuals but in negation to the existence of the evil dwellers. This in essence is used as rhythmical co-existence of the seasons. What is divine juxtaposed with what is devilish.

The soloist serves as a fortune-teller. The symbol of the hill here is to indicate a demarcation between the physical and the spiritual. It is from the environmental image of the Nupe people's existence that the performer picks his materials. The hill is recognized as a visionary hill. The use of the hill is

therefore not only a geographical reference, but an additional pointer at the archetypal symbol of the people. The hill is seat of blessedness. It is also replaced where Tsoke, the ancestral figure of the people hid when he was pursued by his enemies, it is the hill of vision; the use of the hill is therefore not only a geographical reference but also a pointer at the archetypal symbol of people. This is seen as a source of inspiration. It has a spiritual area.

The Pragmatic Relevance of the Nupe Nkwo Annual Festival Performance

The multi-functional, multi-dimensional, and multi-expressional and multimedia (Ebong a fnim 1968 &:72) essence of the Nupe (NKWO) festival performance can be reaffirmed through an analysis of its functional value in the context of its performance.

The performance units for the festival include: ceremonial parade, ritual processes, hunter's warfare, rites of passages, Nupe conventions, ethical displays, demonstration of loyalty, royal horse riding and acrobatic dances. All of the theatrical activities during Nupe 'Nkwo' festival performance reflect and reveal the socio-cultural ideology, beliefs, philosophy and the metaphysics of the people. However, this research dissects the significance of the elaborate celebration beyond its cultural archival recorder purpose. In the words of Marian w. Smith 1961:x "as experience overlap, cultural expectations come to be integrated with other aspects of life in beautiful forms of realities of family affections, law and order.

This is perhaps why the Nupe cultural appreciation is thus rooted in the social heritage of the people and fashioned towards keeping the socio-religious and pragma-political economy. Despite urbanization, the ritual activities and ceremonies that hold the people together remain intact and strong through these repeated ritual practices. The relevance of Nupe Nkwo festival performance can summarily be classified as follows:

1. The Performers Costuming As a Cultural Identity Format.

The culture-political outfit of the performers are used to identify and distinguish the Nupe from other Nigerian tribal groups. The costume is a long garment regalia covering the entire body of the performer from head to heels. They perform bare footedly. Through customing, the cultural conventions of the Nupe society are laid down as this serve as an aesthetic composition of the general performance. The singer displays gbadu; an expensive Nupe jewelry on her chest with leaf strips around the waist. This is aided with artistic drawings of scorpion, snake and other fearful reptiles on the upper part of their feet. The drawings symbolize possession of medicine and power and they assert this, in the successive dancing steps that follow.

The belief in the acquisition of power is typified by further with the action of slightly raising their right leg and holding it in that position for seconds in a vigorous shaking of their pectoral girgle i.e. vigorous scapular vibrations in rhythmic fast movements. The costuming technique is therefore a cultural signifier.

2. Scarification and Ritualization Purpose

Sacrifice is a kind of gift offering to the unseen forces and the peoples ancestors. With a common belief, the Nupe use the sacrificial mode of performance to maintain peaceful relationship with their creator.

Every individual of the community is a donar of any of the sacrificial elements. And sacrificial items include; kolanuts, coins, foodstuff, cooked foods, drinks, water, bitter leaf, sugar, living creeping creatures, red oil, red wine and domestic animals like goats, chicken and dogs. The items are displayed after twelve midnight by the chief priest at the market place for the atonement of evil and calamities that are likely to befall the community, once the sacrifice is not carried out, (Madu Checheko 2009 Nupe Patigi, Nigeria), By the

following morning the disappearance of the sacrificial products is believed to be an acceptance of the peoples plea for mercy, continuity, sustenance, peace, progress and stability in the face of visionary developments. A ritual has been described as:

.... Prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical or non-imperial beings or powers... a corpus of beliefs and practices performed by a specific cult association
Turner, Victor 1968:157

Rituals in Nupeland have been observed to be the attitudes of the people to their systems of beliefs and practices. The very moment of man's communication with the supernatural or divine, "the sterling opportunities for mystical experience" (Bu Buakkei Jabbi, 1988, 131). And profoundly mystical" (Wole Soyinka 1976,42) Hence, African rituals have religious undertone. And the Nupe community's intrinsic systems of ideas and world news are displayed as indicators of modes of perception and sensibility. It is observed that the Nupe traditional religion, culture and rituals go hand in hand and beyond their entertainment motif is their functional spiritual placement level.

The Market Place Setting As a Common Sacred Centre and a Popular Worshipping Arena.

The peoples' markets are indicators of the collective mission of coming together in an open arena. The market is a sacred centre of bargaining and communicating. It is therefore more than a place where goods and products are bought and sold. It is an economic centre for social welfarism and collectivity. Nupe festival performance therefore enhances communal relationship, since it provides open opportunity for a face to face interaction between community members shortly before

the land purification carried out through scarification and ritualization.

Training For the Acquisition of Magical Virtues:

The magical prowess displayed during performance is taught, learnt acquired by the magical practitioners of Nupeland who act impossible aspects of man's natural ability in order to prove the existence of a world; the spiritual above the natural physical realm of existence. Some practitioners use sharp knives to cut into two their stomachs and mend these sore parts of the stomach together again after few seconds; some on incantatory statements stiffen their legs in lying down positions, claiming that they have become unbendable logs of woods and truly and physically at that moment no number of the audience can bend those stiff legs. The device is the improvisation of magical fits.

Judicial, Legal and Moral Education Function of Nupe Nkwo Performance

The festival stands as traits of the people's expected behavioural patterns and display actions that negate the codes and conducts of the society; the cultural taboos. The repetition of these in successive years, serve as reminders for the people. Here, there is a psychological play on the inner psyche of the members of the society and the moulding of the behavioural patterns of the young folk of the community. Hence, within the songs, chants, incantations, praises, poetry that accompany the performance, exist instituted laws, orders, rules and regulations of the Nupe society.

Pragma- Social Communication Function An overview of the meaning of the concept of definition of pragmatics defines it as the context of language in use: Adegbiga, E 1998. And the function of any language use is glaringly in its effectiveness in communication among its users. This crucial purpose is fulfilled by the festival performance where the

performers use Nupe language in proverbial sayings, in incantations, in prayers, in song forms, poetic lines to strengthen internal peace, perfect co-existence, faithfulness, uprightness and solidarity among themselves. Even the mere humming and thrilling of utterances, speak a lot to the native audience as they join suit in the utterances and correctly affirms it by nodding, clapping, jumping, laughing, shouting etc. All these are aids to the communication process behind dramatization.

Conclusion

By its nature and form, the Nupe *nkwo* festival performance reinforces communal life. It cannot be done in isolation but rather remain contextualized.

In all observed Nupe sample areas for the purpose of this research there is no such performance without the involvement of the populace. The performance is observed to be a forum for bringing the people together at a given time and given place of the festival. The performance sustains communal experience and enhances collective consciousness. It is a performance that revives both the individual and communal psyche. There is an important religious philosophical concept which the society uses the festival to renew annually. Art and society is therefore affirmed to be inseparable as observed from the performance phenomena. This fact makes relevant a study this kind of contemporary African literature.

Nkwo is an ascertained archetypal representation of the Nupe, an embodiment and essence of Nupe myth history, vision, worldview, culture and aesthetics. The images of hills, fish, river, flood used in some of the recorded chants are ecological reflections of Nupe worldview. The festival has a tremendous impact on the societal daily practices. The performance is a vital premise for deducing Nupe socio-cultural values, political institutions, age group hierarchical structures, economic organizations, laid down norms, rules regulations

and moral attitudes. All African arts, as in Nupe society are therefore influenced by the socio-religious and pragmatic circumstances of their production. The articulation of the aesthetic components of the Nupe festival performance done here is a contribution to trends in contemporary African drama where structurally hidden aesthetic elements of performances serve as paradigms for cultural reconstruction and regeneration.

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