

The Impact of Globalization on *Izara* Festival in Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract- Globalization poses a great challenge to the survival of traditional performances such as *Izara* of Amo people of Plateau State. The phenomenon of globalization is one that is dubious and has influential capacity to disrupt the intrinsic and extrinsic workings of such performances in terms of their performative idioms. It will boil down to intellectual naivety to subscribe to the persuasive somewhat advantages of globalization as it affects Africa in its basic structures or its superstructure which consists of socio-cultural aspects. Volatile as it may seem as the nature of traditions, *Izara* has been exposed to the negative currents of globalization, and this has led to the erosion of some vital aspects of its ritual vivacity and performance. This paper casts its probing eyes on the impact of globalization on *Izara*, assessing the negative effects and the dynamics of the operations of the festival in the face of the phenomenon. In order to achieve this objective, the paper compares *Izara* and the Igbo's Ikeji masquerade drawing from the survival variables of the latter. The paper utilizes qualitative data obtained from performers of *Izara* and literature that has touched on this subject matter. This will be carried out from the premise and framework of Richard Schechner's performance theory. Members of the literati, theatre artists, film makers, anthropologists among others can benefit from this study.

Keywords: Globalization, *Izara*, Global Future, pastiche, parody, bricolage, Amo

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globalization as a contemporary phenomenon that has shaped the global socio-economic and cultural landscape, and which has had an ambivalent impact on Africa's traditional heritage. There is no nation or people that have the capacity to exist without cooperating with others in terms of complementing each other's gaps. But beyond this cooperation, the realities of such interrelations entail the economic and cultural setbacks of weaker nations. Cooperation among the nations can sometimes have a face value that when looked deeper reveals some intrinsic and harrowing effects which have structural effects on the development of the weaker nations. Structural effects consist of critical behavioural patterns that compound and intensify dependency on the stronger nations and what is exported from them. This is why it is said that globalization is the last stage of imperialism because of it somewhat subtly enforces of its imperialistic tendencies.

2.0 Amo People and Significance of *Izara* Festival

Amo people are found in two states of Nigeria namely Plateau and Kaduna States. Amo originated from Kondon Kaya, a place in present day Bauchi State, Nigeria (Waziri, 2012). History has it that it was as a result of wars fought by Amo warriors that made the people to spread in Kaduna and even in some parts of Kano. Oral sources have opined that *Izara* is as old as the Amo people. This is to confirm the centrality of the festival to the ontology and cosmology of the ethnic nationality.

Izara festival is held once in seven years to initiate boys to adults. In order to fulfill this rite of passage, goats are slaughtered by parents of the initiates to celebrate such a lofty and memorable ceremony. The skins of the goats are tanned and used as costumes for the performance.

2.1 Performance Theory

This study has deployed the theory of performance by Richard Schechner. The choice of this theory is informed by the fact that analysis goes beyond the text not as one finds it in Western drama because an African traditional performance is hinged on the community's cosmology and ontology. It is the people's way of existing and surviving.

Performance theory, according to Schechner (2009), is rooted in practice and is fundamentally interdisciplinary and intercultural. Apart from being ethnic, intercultural, historical, and ahistorical, performance is also aesthetic and ritualistic as well as sociological and political.

Schechner's perspective on performance which was greatly influenced by Victor Turner (1988), is broad and inclusive

(www.icosilune.com/200901/richardschechner-performance-theory). He views it as including much more than theatre, but along an entire broad spectrum, which ranges from daily life to rituals and art. He draws this theory from his works amongst the Australian Aborigines, the New Guinea tribesmen and the Balinese.

Performance theory uses two models, the fan and the web. Performance is seen as an organized spectrum of categories and the web reveals the dynamic influences and interconnections among these categories.

For *Izara*, performance depends on many categories of human activities. It becomes crucial for this study to utilize Schechner's performance theory. As will be seen in the work especially in Chapter Two, *Izara* depends on what Amo people do every day; daily conflicts, tensions and pressure of life, different rites and ceremonies that have been ritualized in the society. Participants of *Izara* lament about the general happenings in their lives during the performance. They also sing by praising or praying for male children to enable them to participate in *Izara*; they pray directly to *Kutelle* (Almighty God) for blessings.

2.2 The Impact of Globalization on Izara Festival

A spectre is haunting the world today - that of globalization (Obidah, 2014). Goldbalt (2002) defines globalization:

... as the growing interconnections; a stretching

of social relations across space to the point where they are transcontinental or interregional such that day-to-day activities in one part of the globe are increasingly enmeshed with events happening on the other side (p. 12).

Information communication technology (ICT) has made this closeness possible. These growing interconnections have brought about multiculturalism, multi-lingualism, and stiff competition within a global space. Modern art works have reflected and refracted these tendencies. Nations are not at the same level of development. No matter how Africa tries to domesticate ICT, Europe and America are far more dominant in this regard. Globalization in cultural studies implies hegemony and Africa is at the receiving end. Culture itself now refers to a space for the contestation of ideas, ideologies, technologies, and traditions. What does Africa compete with? *Izara*, from Amo people with the population slightly above two hundred thousand suffers the same fate as the other traditions which are not known. African traditions such as *Izara* are either suppressed or preyed upon to the detriment of the communities that practice them.

Inequalities will always characterize international relations. Nations and people will never be equal no matter how the world tries to collapse frontiers and intensify consciousness. Lechner (2002) makes it clear that global consciousness does not imply global consensus. Globalization is imperialistic to Africa because the continent has become a dumpsite of Europe, America, and now Asia. Amo land is a miniature of this disharmony as a result of the cultural fusion and fission that takes place. This can be seen from the films, clothes, and the alien cultural traits and values that have been infused into the Amo cultural milieu. This is why most aspects of *Izara* performance have been affected. If the scenario were to be of fair cultural diffusion, we would say *Izara* is also on transit now into other continents and cultures to the benefit of Amo land.

It is because of this lack of fairness that African literati and theatre intelligentsia have risen to defend the continent. There is little wonder why Gikandi (2002), opines that globalization and postcoloniality are the most important terms in social and cultural theory. While Europe and America are striving to consolidate their positions culturally and emotionally, Africa is making efforts to further de-robe itself from the remaining vestiges of imperialism that are being enforced onto it by globalization and postmodernism.

If *Izara* festival and other lofty and attractive festivals in Africa are labeled undramatic by European cultural anthropologists, the aim is to make Africa silent and inept. Africa's absence is the presence of alienness in the canonical disparity of dramaturgy and drama itself. It is pathetic that in an era when sociologists should be studying African society, Africa is still subjected to anthropological enquiry. This is why Euro-American anthropologists have pitched their tents in Africa, Asia, and Latin America churning out new-fangled theories that are aimed at maintaining Africa at the periphery of contemporary artistic and philosophical discourses.

Izara as a cultural practice within a globalized world must showcase itself or be extinct, or it might even be plundered, to the benefit of other continents. *Izara* has the capacity and the artistry to attract attention in a multicultural world because of its uniqueness. *Izara* offers African festivals a new angle of balance and wholism in terms of its aesthetic appeal. Some festivals depend merely on dance movements. But *Izara* spreads the attention of the audience to what is said and the movements that are ontological.

Globalization ignores the humanity of things. Its aim is to further free borders and expose people to the movement and acceptance of what is produced elsewhere. Africa should speak out about its uniqueness amidst the confusing and dominant forces of an indeterminate postmodern world of arts.

Asia has already established itself as an able competitor culturally and economically in a globalized world. In *The Asian Conference of Arts and Culture, 2013*, the Editor of the annual journal,

Prit Supasetsiri, says that Asian identity can be observed through its art and culture. This comprises of theatre, music, language, literature, painting, sculpture, and architecture among other ways. Africa must also become bolder and resolute to sustain its identity through such festivals as *Izara*. This is one of the avenues that *Izara* festival can be brought to lime light.

2.3 Izara Festival Tradition: Residual, Dominant, and Emergent

This section deals with *Izara* traditional festival in its depleting form and content. There is no tradition that is static including *Izara*, as it has experienced changes and mutations over the years (Obidah, 2016). This concern of the volatile or delicate nature of traditional festivals meets in today's intellectual space with the prevailing counter-currents of postcolonialism and postmodernism. This has dictated the shifting grounds of aesthetic discourse, and has generated new terms and ideological linings. The epoch in arts and particularly theatre is that of indeterminacy, aporia, syncretism, consumerism, bricolage, pastiche and incrustation of mutative elements in artistic products.

A look at the video clip of the 2007 edition of *Izara* festival, compared to the one of 2014, reveals these changes and mutations. *Izara* has gained and also lost due to modernism. What is left of it constitutes its residual elements; the gains are the emergent aspects. The researcher states that *Izara* has been maintained by the dominant forces within the society of Amo.

According to Dariya, in an interview that about twenty-four years ago, an elderly performer broke down in tears and when quizzed about the cause of his wailing, he said that *Izara* festival has changed tragically. To that elderly performer, Amo ethnic group was in trouble because the locus of the operations which was *Izara* has changed.

The changes that have occurred through the recent years are several. They range from costumes, make-up, music and dance, properties, language,

procedures of activities, arena, horsemanship, and changes in belief system.

Only few performers apart from the male performers use the appropriate costumes. The male performers do not use complete costumes since only *Kukii* (the tanned skin worn to cover the private parts) is used; the decorated one (*tigalgaba*) is hardly used. Female performers who are supposed to wear Ije (sting-like attire) and fresh leaves hardly do so. These performers perform with ordinary clothes, probably because the materials for traditional costumes are expensive, or because they fear being punished by the Church or because the solemnity of the festival has reduced.

The aspect of make-up is also affected. Old women do not shave their heads as is expected. In 2007, mahogany oil was used on the bodies of the performers. However, even groundnut oil was hardly used in the 2014 edition of the festival. This has greatly affected the appearance of the performers and exposes them to cold if the *Izara* takes place during the rainy season. The bamboo sticks no longer have *npasi* (horse hair), but they are decorated instead with nylon materials. The male performers used to have anklets or leg rattles (*Akayau*), but not all the dancers wear them today.

Music used to be emotionally laden because of the essence of the festival, but now it is even used for jibing and derision. So aspects of *Ogozu na wui* (lamentation) is fast eroding as a result of the preponderance of the intrusions of the entertainment elements from modern popular performances. The tempo of *Izara* music has also changed and what was slow has now become fast. It used to be slow for the purpose of communication in terms of comprehensive lyrical flow. But now the audience has to be extremely attentive to get what performers are saying. Also, what is known as “*ukwa*”, the general response of the *Izara* chorus, is no longer spontaneous and unified in a clear ensemble as it used to be. The song leader and the lead drummer usually have some telepathy that coordinates their response. The drumming is faster now and not artistically unique. This is why *Izara* drummer is not the same as say, *Iwawa* drummer. *Iwawa* is the general dance that is meant for ceremonies, and it is

not seasonal. Lastly, the gourd used to be shaken before the response, but now it is shaken concurrently with the response.

Properties such as gourds and bamboo sticks that were strictly handled and used by performers are now used by all kinds of people. A deplorable case is when a woman handles the stick. Also largely missing are the dane guns for hunter-performers and the horsemen for horsemanship during *Libari* (peaceful) contest. Dane guns used to beautify the performance during *Libari* (contest). Language is worst affected. Amo or Timap, as the speakers call it, has been affected by other languages like Hausa and English, which find their way into the performance. Language is a vehicle if not the spine of any performance. But Amo language is becoming eroded and it is replete with elements that are alien to Amo language.

Never in the history of *Izara* have people been so daring like now. It was very unprecedented; they took a group of *Izara* performers out of the territory of Amo to Jos city to perform alongside others during 2014 International Museum Day. This is a major change in the procedures and belief system of the festival. Going beyond the traditional venues of the festival makes the act iconoclastic and revolutionary. The belief in the potency of rules is also waning. Bamboo sticks that were used during the festival of 2014 broke, but the owners of the sticks did not loose their children. Today, Amo people play recorded music and videos of *Izara* in the ambiances of their homes without repercussion. The same *Izara* song could never be recorded some forty or fifty years ago due to the taboo associated with it. It looks like *Izara* is being de-ritualized by modern Amo people, or dominant cultures are busy preying on it. What do these changes portend artistically today?

Izara is open to the phenomenal forces of a post-modern world that is in the midst of agitative postcolonial tendencies. The theatre today is indeterminate. This implies that it is a theatre of everything and every possibility and impossibility, because it is eclectic. It is also a theatre of nothing since it may not instruct society morally.

The practice of *Izara* now coincides with forces in the theatre that either batter it, or free its potentials by a way of pulling out new artistic vistas, which can be explored in other genres of arts. This assertion makes it pertinent to state clearly that this study is not attempting a dialectical mediation between postmodernism and postcolonialism. But to draw attention to the fact that *Izara* festival sooner than later may find itself within the crossfire of these two opposites - postmodernism and postcolonialism. *Izara* is now exposed to the key attributes of postmodernism which comprise of aporia, bricolage, consumerism, and normless pastiche, in an indeterminate state of artistic production.

Izara festival will now find itself in works which capture the uncertainties and fears of a technologically-based world. This is where aporia comes in as an expression of real or pretended doubt or uncertainty in today's system. Aporia expresses itself in the radical contradictions that characterize works of art today.

Bricolage and syncretism take *Izara* through a process of disposal and convergence, where a work of art is a patchwork of many elements interlaced to form a "hybrid". This can be compared to P-Square in Nigeria, picking some key elements of *Izara* dance movements, and mincing and mixing them with popular Western or Nigerian steps to appeal aesthetically to a postmodern audience.

Quayson (2011) calls it "normless" pastiche. No artiste shows any dignity or regard to an original work that is copied or imitated. Today in the arts, and precisely in performances, the original work is battered rather than improved. It looks like postmodernism has taken the arts to a stage of artistic menopause. Adaptation, adoption, and transposition are "holy" words in this regard. Is that the fate of *Izara* that is exposed to the outside hot breeze of a postmodern world? Perhaps, it will be treated with some dignity and regard.

Izara festival encounters a globalized world where money is everything. Artistes spend day and night x-raying the matrix behind changing interest and desire of consumers of works of arts. This is why

issues of morality and conventions are being thrown to the wind. Consumerism is shifting the goal posts to different positions. In this higgledy-piggledy and topsy-turvy scenario, *Izara* may be found worthy of utilization in the process of artistic production.

This study cautiously concurs with objectives of postcolonialism but is critical of postmodernism, because it has made theatre rather sloven where the first, second, and third rates, are busy exchanging positions. It is something of a slipshod. As it has been argued by Ekpo, (as cited in Quayson, 2011), that postmodernism is nothing but another stage in the West's crisis of consciousness. He adds that Europe still wants to continue dominating the earth. But Afrocentric theatre scholars are responding appropriately with issues of arts and the genuine questions of this 'divide' a festival like *Izara* appears 'to be or not to be'.

All things being equal, the residual elements will remain even if the strict ritual elements are shoved off. The dominant elements are what the dominant forces within a postmodern artistic world produce through a process of selection and de-selection. In the process of selection and de-selection, the emergent tendencies spring up. *Izara* has been susceptible to this fate. A society such as that of Amo will always select and de-select aspects of its cultural and traditional heritage to uphold or dismiss. But even to that extent, it interplays with a higher process of selection and de-selection outside of Amo worldview.

2.4 A Lesson from Ikeji Festival of the Igbo for *Izara*

Izara is a festival that is fast declining and needs to be revitalized in terms of sustaining its vital aspects amidst the tendencies of erosion from a globalized world. Ikeji masquerade festival offers a way forward in this regard.

Ikeji festival is well known in Eastern Nigeria and it belongs to the Arondizuogu people in Imo State. There are different views as to the origin of Ikeji festival. However, the widely accepted one is the version connected to the New Yam celebration (Ayakoroma, 2011). Yam is the main reason for

celebration of Ikeji. In traditional Arondizuogu society, only men plant yams. There is usually a feast to give thanks to Chukwu (God) just like we find in the celebration of Izara, where the whole performance is in thanksgiving to Kutelle (God) for the lives of the initiates who have survived circumcision.

On the grand finale day of Ikeji festival which is for four days, women exhibit their cooking talents; different types of foods are prepared in each family home. People eat and drink very well. All the masquerades from the villages in Arondizuogu usually assemble at the village square to perform on that day. The people call it 'Agbaa- Anaa Ogu' meaning 'anything can happen'. They thank God through out the period of the festival like it happens in Izara when the performers thank Kutelle and ancestors in their lamentable lyrics that myth-poetic.

There are features that Ikeji is known for traditionally, but these do not happen when then the festival is being observed in New York. Aspects such as: the incitation into the Mmonwu society where elders and youths abstain from lies, sex and injustice. The second feature is that people move around the whole town to witness masquerade performance and thirdly, sacrifices are made to the ancestors in order to balance the gap between the mortals and Chukwu (Akobundu, 2010)

If Izara is to survive globalization, it must borrow survival strategies of Ikeji. In Igbo land in Nigeria, there is no one-man masquerade, but it is practiced in the United States. The people use audio cassettes for background music. Of course, the background music is supposed to be sung by some expert singers if it were to be in Arondizuou.

Again, the masquerade comes out only once, and possibly without all its regalia. This is opposed to the usual four days that the festival usually lasts in Arondizuogu. Since they do not have enough skilled drummers to play for the occasion, they resort to recorded music. A masquerade is supposed to move freely in traditional festival, but it is restricted from this open interaction with the audience to avoid unnecessary lawsuits. The same is the case with

Ofirma masquerade (shark) of the Igbo people in Washington D.C.

Izara festival should be projected in such manner by the practitioners and the custodians of the tradition for its survival. It should be allowed to be practiced in towns and villages other than those of the Amo people in Nigeria, and from that point, it will go beyond the shores of the country like that Ikeji festival.

2.5 Izara and the Global Future

Scholars and public figures have continued to entertain fear about the possibility of a bleak global future for all nations and peoples economically and culturally. A renowned realist diplomat and strategic thinker, George Kennan warns that whoever thinks that the future of the world is going to be easier is mad (cited in Kegley et al, 2010). Martin (2007), in his book, 'The Meaning of the 21st Century', "warns us that we are living in a "make-or-break century". We are traveling at a "breakneck" speed into an age of extremes – extremes in wealth and poverty, extremes in technology and the experiments that scientists want to perform, extreme forces of globalism. People in the globe are apprehensive about the future. As a consequence to this uncertainty, art will never remain the same.

The prospects for a positive global future for Africa depends solely in the hands of Africans as the global north will continue to pursue its agenda in the global south. If the progress and development of the North depends to a large degree on what it sends or shares with The South, in arts, technology; culturally, economically, socio-politically, the former will stick to it for as long as the benefits keep coming ceaselessly. Interestingly, to make matters more sophisticated and complex about globalization with all its concomitant intricacies, knowledge is being globalized now (Kennedy, 2015). But there are dimensions to this that portend more hard times for Africa. Within the South, countries are not at the same level of development in all these ramifications mentioned above. For instance, China and Japan are not at the same level with Nigeria and Kenya or South Africa. The same way, within a country like Nigeria, the Igbo

traditional performances are not at the same level with those of the Amo people.

Ikeji masquerade and others belonging to major Nigerian ethnic nationalities are already performing on the global stage to stamp their presence and eschew being swallowed in the damp of globalization and postmodernism. Such communities are adapting to the dynamics and challenges of survival in a complex globalized world. Izara risks its survival if it is not exported in such manner with most of the images that define it. This is why extrapolating from Wa Thiong'O's 'Globlectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing' is necessary in this regard. In this book, Ngugi insists on the need for the local to radiate to the supposed centre, not only the other way round. Africa and its peoples must remain afloat by radiating its plethora of traditional performances like Izara with their peculiar aesthetic appeals. This is because the globe is not in any consensus to have the same performances with same patterns and forms. The language of its performance should not be allowed to be lost in the process. Its costumes, dances, music and fluidity should be centralized in this exportation. Film and literary theatre can also tap from its materials meet up with the trending taste of lovers of art of a postmodern age.

CONCLUSION

This paper looks at the depleting vital materials, and the interference of other trends within the arts, that have affected *Izara* festival. The paper compares Ikeji and Izara and why the latter should learn from the former. This leads to the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

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