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A Comparative Study of Igala and Igbo Culture and Communication Systems in Ata Igala Coronation and Ofala Festival, 2013

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Abstract

The culture and communication systems of the Igala nation of Kogi State and the Igbo nation of Eastern Nigeria were comparatively studied using the coronation of Ata Igala at Idah, Kogi State between 5 and 10 March; and the Ofala Festival at Onitsha, Anambra State between 7 and 13 October, both in 2013. The concern of the study was to among other things identify the aspects of the cultures of the two neighbouring ethnic nationalities that were similar and how the similarities could be better harnessed towards the attainment of cultural unity and national development in Nigeria. I adopted participant observation as an instrument of ethnographic design of fact finding, hence, my physical presence at both ceremonies. Pictorial description was also adopted to bring home points. It was found that the Igala and Igbo communities had common cultural practices manifesting in names of objects, cultural ideologies, seasonal celebrations and the institution of traditional leadership. It was observed that the existing cultural harmony could be properly harnessed into creating a forum for cultural unity among different groups in Nigeria to foster unity and national development. The paper therefore recommended among others that modern media of mass communication should do more in terms of the promotion of African culture

through transmission of Africa-oriented programmes to champion the cause of development on the continent.

Key Words: Ata Igala, Obi Onitsha, African culture, African communication systems, coronation, Ofala festival

Introduction

There is no doubt that the culture of a people is a typical definition of who they are. No people ever existed without defined cultural practices which are linked to their religion, economy, communication patterns, political life, arts and traditions. Because culture is the way of life of a people, it is closely linked with the people's communication systems and evolves over time. Also, aspects of the cultures of different people within a geographical entity overlap, while other aspects differ. Such is the case of Nigeria in which the over 250 ethnic nationalities cohabit among different cultural affiliations. A compendium of Nigeria at 50 says "this coexistence over the years forms the tradition of the people culminating in the culture which ultimately becomes the heritage." It explains further that Nigeria's rich culture is well demonstrated through art, dance, literature, folklore and music. According to Ugboaja (1985), "African indigenous communication which could be called oral media include mythology, oral literature, (poetry, storytelling and proverbs), masquerades, rites of passage and other rituals expressed through oracy, music, dance and drama, use of costume, social interplay and material symbol which accompany people from womb to womb and beyond."

The Igala people occupy the Eastern Senatorial District of Kogi State and constitute the dominant population of the state. Aruwa (2012) noted that the history of the Igala nation is problematic. This is because there are divergent versions about the origin of the people. Some of the claims of Igala origin are that they migrated from Benin (Miachi, 2012); they are a faction of the Kwararafa kingdom (Aruwa, 2012); they have a link with the Yoruba, Benin and Jukun (Enemaku, 2013); and are said to have a link with an invisible superbeing called Atinolo, which descended from heaven (Adegbe, 2012). These differences in claims is a common phenomenon with the histories of most nations of the world, the reason being that there were partial or no available written records of the origin of the people. Thus, perhaps for lack of education, the Europeans who attempted the documentation of Igala history had some distortions due largely to their limited and short-term understanding of the people. In the face of all these however, Aruwa (2012) maintains that the Igalas come from nowhere. Where they live is their origin and they are ruled by a paramount traditional ruler, the Ata Igala.

The Igbos, one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, occupy the whole of the South-Eastern Nigeria states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. Just like the Igala case, the ancestry of the Igbos has bothered many people as historians,

philosophers, sociologists, archeologists and anthropologists have raised a lot of dust on the issue. According to Mazi Nweke, “majority of the Igbos are satisfied to accept the Israel hypothesis supported by the triple testimonies of oral tradition, Eri migration, and archeological evidence (www.ndigboswitzerland.org). They are said to have migrated from among the children of the biblical Eri, descendants of Abraham. Although the Igbos have a long standing history of a decentralized traditional government, one may say the paramount ruler of the Igbos is the Obi of Onitsha.

The Igala and Igbo communities have a common boundary between them at Ibaji and Igalamela/Odolu areas on Kogi side and Aguleri, Adani, Ogurgu and Nsukka areas of the east. Because of their nearness to each other and other factors that accompany such proximity, there are similarities in their cultural practices which they have communicated from generation to generation.

Statement of the Problem

The Igalas of Kogi State and the Igbos of South-Eastern states share some common grounds in their cultural practices communicated over time. These common grounds manifest in names of objects and people, political and religious practices, commercial activities and patterns of leadership. Yet there are varying degrees of departure. These similarities and differences need to be studied and analysed for both historical and academic purposes to allow for availability of reference materials on the aspects of African culture and communication practices that overlap. A study such as this is also needed to create an avenue for cultural unity in diversity, which would lead to communal and national development. This aspect of communication study is an under researched area.

There is the need to study the Igala and Igbo traditional communication media, their modus operandi and mutual relationship and or diversity that exists between them. In this study therefore, we are interested in how the cultural dynamisms of both ethnic nationalities cohabit and how they can be harnessed towards the attainment of cultural unity and national development.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify aspects of African culture and communication systems among the Igala and Igbo communities in their major ceremonies.
2. To ascertain the similarities and differences in the cultural practices of the Igalas and the Igbos in Ata Igala coronation and Ofala Festival.
3. To determine aspects of their cultural communication processes that should be upheld and promoted by the modern media for national cultural harmony and development.

Conceptual Clarifications and Literature Review

Communication and culture are closely linked. Ottah (2015, p. 209) argued that “culture cannot be transmitted without a medium of communication. One affects the other positively or negatively, depending on how it is utilized.” Culture refers to characteristic traits that are formed in all human societies. The culture of a group of people defines everything about them—communication pattern, greetings, eating habits, leadership style, occupation, business, religion, dress code, etc. It gives the identity of a people (Ottah, 2016).

Agbanusi (2015, p.81) said “the culture of a people is the totality of their life because their way of life includes their language, feeding, proverbs, wise-sayings, religion, clothing, technology, health system, etc.” He noted further that the culture of a people is what gives them their identity as a people. Culture is like a living thing among those who harbour it. When people’s culture dies, the people no longer exist. Since culture lives, it can also change. The changing of culture is what is referred to as cultural dynamism.

Before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, the various ethnic groups that constitute the present-day Nigeria had lived independently with their respective cultural affiliations. With the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates, all those cultures which had common and differing characteristics among the ethnic nationalities came together to now make up what is known as Nigerian culture (Ottah, 2016).

In spite of the glaring differences among the ethnic groups that make up Nigeria, the people have had a unique cultural heritage which they guard and guide jealously, despite the influence of the western world. A major threat to the cultural advancement of Africa was the impact of colonialism and media imperialism on the African nationals. Agbanusi (2015, p. 81) aptly captures it as follows:

Colonialism provided the platform for the British to introduce western culture into Nigeria through education and religion. The resulting conflict of culture gave birth to cultural dynamism and the crises of identity which still lingers in Nigeria over half a century of the nation’s independence from colonialism. The truth is that the nation is yet to completely extricate itself from the shackles of colonialism. Culture is one area where colonialism has been strong.

Culture is dynamic. It changes with time either positively or negatively. Positive change occurs when cultural development involves either the absorption of acceptable norms, ideas and practices or extrication of unacceptable practices. It may also involve modification of a practice or belief to meet the yearnings of the people. The use of mobile phones has become part and parcel of all African nations. So also is the use of the media of mass communication. These are positive developments

accepted by Africans. Today, the culture of slave trade, female genital mutilation, killing of twins and deadly widowhood rites have faded away from most African countries. These are products of either outright abrogation or modification of the earlier practice.

Cultural dynamism becomes negative when unacceptable practices and beliefs are absorbed or introduced. For instance, pornography is alien to African culture; so also are same sex marriage and human rituals. So, depending on the type of dynamism, both positive and negative developments have the chance to book in people's culture. However, it is expected that we embrace positive cultural developments and practices that are not against natural laws of justice and equity.

Okodo (2003, p.93) states that "it is as a result of acculturation that cultural dynamism takes place." He notes that acculturation is either planned or unplanned. Planned acculturation is when the objects of one culture are deliberately introduced and consciously imparted or imposed on another culture. Planned acculturation was the prevailing situation during the colonial era. At the time, the Europeans who colonized Africa introduced their own culture, language, doctrines and religions and forced the colonies to adopt.

Unplanned acculturation on the other hand is when one culture begins to imitate another culture sub-consciously until it becomes part of that group. Usually, unplanned acculturation exists among people of the present generation. The way we dress, eat and greet keep changing. The changes result from imitation of other cultures.

Since culture is seen as a living thing, it is possible for it to die. A culture dies when it is no longer practised. The death of a culture is referred to as cultural extinction. If the culture of a people dies, they technically cease to exist, because it is culture that gives them identity. To avoid cultural extinction, leaders of thought and opinion leaders are of the view that cultural revival projects be embarked upon from time to time to rekindle any dwindling aspect of culture or the entire culture. In recognition of this necessity, the United Nations set aside 21st May every year as the World Culture Day.

The Link between Communication and Culture

Culture cannot be transmitted without a medium of communication. People's way of life is transmitted through a process of communication. That is why both are inter-related. In the distant past, African communities devised means to carry out their daily businesses through their own unique communication media. Those means of creating, copying and sustaining the cultural heritage of the people only became useful because there were media of communication to transmit them. For instance, the way people greet is transmitted through the communication media of light waves or sound waves. People utter words of greetings and gesticulate to suggest exchange of

pleasantries. They practise what they grew into. If there is no communication, how will they get to know those practices in the first place?

Essentially, communication is the tool through which culture is transmitted and appreciated from generation to generation. At the mass media level, communication helps in spreading the people's culture over a large expanse of the population. To this end, McBride (1981) in Ukonu and Wogu (2008, p.83) posits that "The role of communication may be regarded as that of a major carrier of culture. The media serve to promote or influence attitudes, to motivate, to foster the spread of behaviour patterns and to bring about social integration."

In the African setting therefore, the traditional media of communication served as veritable instruments for cultural dissemination. In the modern African society, the mass media also serve in transmitting and reshaping African culture (Ottah, 2016). Programmes on African television and radio on African continent project the African culture. Some of them include *Kaakaki* on Africa Independent Television, *Art Review* on Channels Television, *African Pot* on the Nigerian Television Authority, etc. similarly, some stations have the African perspective and bias in all their programmes; and it reflects in their names such as *Africa Magic* Channels 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157 and 158 on DSTV. On those channels, most of the movies shown portray the culture, history and beliefs of Africa. Dede (1997, p.5) stated that "Africa's traditional modes of communication form the interplay or synthesis of the traditional customs or conflicts of a community, its harmony and discord, its cultural affinities and disparities as well as its culture-specific values and practices."

African Communication Media and Setting

Scholars have attempted several definitions to describe the African traditional mode of communication, for instance, Ansu-kyeremeh (1998) in Akpabio (2003, p. 2) defined it as "any form of indigenous communication system which by virtue of its origin form and integrate into a specific culture, serves as a channel for message in a way that requires the utilization of the values, symbolism, institution and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes." Ochigo (2006, p. 88) described the African communication symbols thus:

The key to African symbols is in what those who have made it say about it, how they use it and how together they behave towards it as each symbol expresses the artist's expression of society's world view which becomes an icon that is accepted and understood by the society. The symbols represent things of physical importance and relevance to the African traditional belief. They are a vehicle for the transformation of ideas, beliefs, behaviours, dogmas and philosophies of African societies as a legacy handed down from one generation to the other.

Ugboaja (1985) in Ebo (1999, p.31) said that:

Oramedia or folk media are grounded on indigenous culture produced and consumed by members of a group. They reinforce the values of the group. They are visible cultural features, often strictly conventional by which social relationships and world view are maintained and defined. They take many forms and are rich in symbolism.

Also, Kombol (2010, p.3) gave his perspective of African communication as follows:

African communication systems are the ways of passing messages which are peculiar to various communities in Africa. In passing messages from one person to another, Africans use a number of instruments, objects and phenomena. Apart from the many languages which are used to communicate in Africa, leaves, plants, brooms, gongs, flutes, clothes, hair styles, town crier form, traditional festivals, plays, puppet shows, dance, songs, story-telling, poetry, the opinion leaders, rituals and carnivals, names of people are used to express thought forms in the human mind.

Kombol (2010) stated that African communication systems have a set of properties or characteristics that makes it distinct. These are:

1. The systems are generally oral. It usually involves utterances from the mouth. Whether in form of music, song or dance, African communication deals most with words of the mouth.
2. It is multi-media and multi-channel. This means many media and channels are adopted to pass information on the African soil. A good example is the town crier who uses two modes at once—the iron gong as a sort of signature tune; and his natural voice which conveys the message proper.
3. It has limited audience. It has no facilities with which to transmit information as far as the media of mass communication like radio and television can. It cannot reach large and scattered audiences within a short period of time. No matter how much the town crier stretches his voice or how hard he hits his gong, he covers a limited space.
4. The system is imprecise. Since it is mainly oral and not usually documented, precision is not always possible to achieve.
5. It is consumer friendly. The community within which a traditional system is adopted is familiar with it. The people like it and they enjoy its peculiarity.
6. No specialized training is required. Once you are within the age, you can pass for an African communicator. Emissaries, drummers, flute players and chief priests do not go through training to become authorities on their assignments.

One does not need to have a certificate to become a village announcer as the case is for one to become a newscaster today in radio and television industries.

7. It lacks fidelity. In most cases, the message received is not very clear and complete. In most cases, oral messages are repeated with variations at various points in the community.
8. It is cheap. You do not need a radio or television set to be an audience of the African communication. Once you are present, you receive it.
9. It binds people together. It is a unifying entity and an avenue through which the people identify societal problems and sort them out.
10. It is non-alienating. This is from the same angle of its accessibility to all irrespective of who you are in society. In the modern setting, one needs to have access to the mass media to be informed, educated and entertained, but the African communication is for every member of the community.

Africa, for all time, has had distinctive, formal mode of social interaction. Proverbially, she has always had sufficient (communication) firewood in her forests to cook her food (Ukonu and Wogu, 2008). In the present dispensation of the mass media, the social media and cultural imperialism, all of which spread at an alarming speed, the temptation is to forget the traditional modes of communication, which have been branded archaic, barbaric and primitive by some people. But that is not to be. According to Ukonu and Wogu (2005, p.1) "Indigenous communication systems have always existed to dialogue, inform, educate and solve social conflicts." They stress further that rural residents who constitute the majority of the continent's population used traditional means to disseminate information. Till now, a town crier walks through the village at night striking his gong to summon villagers to community activity. The market squares are still being used to punish miscreants and deter others. Masquerades or incarnate beings are still being celebrated across Africa, just as extra mundane activities are still honoured.

Verbal Modes and Settings of Communication

These are media put to use mainly through expression. The verbal media provide for use of words mainly through a common language and it usually happens at the personal, small and large group levels of communication. Thus, the verbal media of communication, according to Ugboaja (1977), Wilson (1997), Dede (1997) and Ebeze (2001) come in the following settings and forms: the family, age groups, the open market, the town crier, the village square, religious groups, emissaries, songs, proverbs, folk tales, riddles, narratives and dance.

Non-Verbal Media of Communication

This refers to the mode of communication that does not necessarily involve the direct use of words or utterances to put message across to the receiver. It involves the use of instruments or gadgets and signs or symbols. It also involves body language or

gesticulations to communicate. Ebeze (2002, p.30) identifies the segments of traditional communication considered non-verbal as: idiophones, membranophones, aerophones, signals, objectifics, colour schemes, music, extra mundane communication, symbolic displays. In both ceremonies of Ata Igala coronation and Ofal Festival, these modes were put to maximum use as would be seen later.

But one is quick to note the point raised by Akpabio (2003, p.9) on classifying African communication media. He says “classifying variables in a field as dynamic as indigenous communication is quite a daunting task.” It is a challenging task because unlike classifications in the natural sciences and other fields of human endeavour, which have come to be accepted, traditional communication processes and elements vary from one society to another. As a result, faultless rules about classification is almost impossible as marginalization of components occur innocently, based on the background of the scholar involved in such classification. This argument is substantiated by the fact that writers on African communication have more bias for their immediate culture and environment. This reflects in the instances they cite in their work. The justification for the bias is that they are more familiar with and (probably) are in direct touch with their own communities than the others.

Theoretical Perspective

The theory adopted for this study was the cultural norms theory. It emerged during the era of cultural theories. According to Yaroson and Asemah (2008), these theories share the underlying assumption that our experience of reality is an ongoing social constitution, not something that is only sent, delivered or otherwise transmitted to a docile public.

The theory holds that people tend to pattern their lives according to dominant ways in which media present selected issues. Ukonu and Wogu (2008, p.82) note that “the media select some themes and purposefully emphasize them or portray them in special ways to influence people.” They further stress that through selective presentations and hype on certain themes, the mass media create the notion among their audience that such themes were part of the structure of society or given cultural norms of society.

To the African communication setting, the theory is also relevant as it means the establishment of a particular norm by repeated dissemination through the traditional media. In most African communities, certain practices are accepted because the traditional media have continued to adopt them. It reflects in African music, dance, greeting, dress code among others.

Study Methodology

Ethnographic method, interviewing, participant observation and pictorial method were all adopted in the study. Ethnographic method involves the interpretation

of people's cultural practices from the native's point of view; an analysis of a phenomenon based on natural experience or observation of human activities directly as against assumptions or hypotheses.

The researcher was at both scenes of all the major events of the Ata Igala's coronation and the 2013 Ofala Festival and had the privilege of interviewing relevant persons during the ceremonies. Also, as a member of the NTA Idah reporting crew, the researcher had video clips of the Ata's coronation. In addition, the protocol director of Ata, Peter Enemaku, provided the researcher the video clip of the 2013 Ofala festival, because, he was at the ceremony with the Ata (who was a special guest). Finally, the researcher is noted for his professional photography. So, he took relevant shots of the coronation, and the Ofala which now serve the pictorial purpose in this study. Responses from those interviewed along with the personal observation of the researcher were harmonized to constitute the descriptions and positions held in this work.

Ata Igala Coronation

The coronation of Ata Idakwo Michael Ameh Oboni II began on 5th, and ended on 10th March, 2013. The process began after the selection and ratification exercise had been completed by the king makers and the state government, then headed by Captain Idris Wada.

On 5th March, 2013 the Ata-designate at this stage of the exercise, called *Aidokanya*, came into Ugwolawo, the capital of Ofu Local Government Area amidst a large crowd of supporters and well-wishers. He put up in a thatched hut in which there was a locally designed bed and a mat on it. He went into the hut to retire while different cultural troupes performed outside the hut throughout the night.

The following morning, the Ata-to-be set out for Idah on foot. As soon he stepped out of the hut amidst cheers, some men who had been assigned set the hut ablaze. He left for Idah, having received a message from the *Achadu* through his emissary *Ikabi*, with a red cap and horse tail, that the Ata-to-be should come to Idah for coronation.

The burning hut after Idakwo's departure



On the way to Idah on foot

On arrival, the Ata-designate went into the palace of the Achadu Igala, where he was warmly received for orientation on palatial administration. It was at the Achadu's palace that the Aidokanya had his ears pierced as part of the coronation exercise. On the third day, the Ata rested and nursed his pierced ears, while cultural activities were going on at Idah to welcome the new Ata. On the fourth day, the Ata designate went to the east of Idah called *Ojaina*, a forest where all former Atas were buried. There, the custodian of Ata's regalia, *Egwola*, received the candidate for the throne, and decorated him with *Oka* (hand beads), *Odugbo* (neck beads), *Otihi* (horse tail) and gave him the staff of office (*Okwute*). All the while, there were seven Jukun delegates who were always with the candidate.



Egwola, decorating the Ata-designate at Ojaina

On the final day of the coronation exercise, the Ata-to-be took a second trip to the ancestral royal cemetery, this time, right inside the forest, where he performed some rituals with the assistance of *Egwola*. At the time, the *Egwola* was Chief Hassan Haruna. Part of the ritual was the laying of stone where the Ata would be buried when he passed on. As tradition demands, once an Ata lays a stone in the *Ojaina* forest, he will not return to the forest (alive) again. After the ritual, the prince took another route out through the *Inachalo* stream to *Ede*.

He was carried on shoulders by men so that he would not have contact with the *Inachalo* water. At *Ofukolo*, the *Onu Ubi Ogbo* the “father” and *Onu Ede* the “mother” performed a traditional mating to result in the birth of the new Ata. Having done that, they officially announced that an Ata had been born. From that point the *Aidokanya* or Ata-designate became *Ata Igala* proper.

There were other activities that characterized the coronation such as the visit to the earth shrine, *Ere-ane*, at Igalogba for more rites and the eventual march to the Ata Igala’s palace. Before entering the palace through the eastern gate, the Ata took 3 anti-clockwise treks round the palace. At the third revolution, the Ata pronounced his three power names as:

1. *Akpochi neji ochi*, meaning a tree is identified by its bark.
2. *Una jo kerebo omi, I mowo ka*, meaning no matter how fierce a fire is, it ceases to burn when it meets with water.
3. *Ogijo dunyi k’ache ma che imoto*, meaning when an adult is at home, the child does not lack.



HRM Idakwo Michael Oboni, Ata Igala in full regalia on the day of coronation

Thus, the long journey into becoming Ata came to an end. He entered the palace amidst cheers. The men greeted *Gaabaidu* and the women, *Amideeju* or *Deeju* for short (Ottah, 2015). That was how the Ata Igala Idakwo Michael Ameh Oboni became the paramount ruler of the Igala nation.

Ofala Festival

Ofala Festival is celebrated in Onitsha, Anambra State of Nigeria. It is also regarded as *Ofala Nnewi*. It is celebrated annually to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Igbos and also foster unity and love among them. The term *Ofala* is derived from the words, *ofo*, meaning authority, and *ala*, meaning land. A merger of the words therefore means authority of the land. According to oral history, the Ofala Festival dates back to the 1950's. It used to be celebrated twice within the Obi Kingship era. The first was a day after the coronation of the Obi; and the second, after his death. Today, the Ofala is celebrated annually because of civilization, social and political influences.

Another version of the history of Ofala Festival was the myth attached to the yam, a food crop considered alien to the people. It says many believed it was dangerous to eat yam because it was not an indigenous crop. They believed that eating the yam could spell death for the Onitsha and indeed the entire Igbo nation. So they avoided yam. But the small communities that ate it did not die, a thing that made more people to begin attempting the consumption of yam. To commemorate the fear and the myths attached to the crop when it first sprouted in the kingdom, the people began to celebrate the Ofala, which means "the killing of yam." By this, they meant that instead of the yam to kill them, they would kill the yam first.

Five days to the Ofala, the Obi goes into seclusion or isolation. The 2013 edition of the festival commenced on Monday 7 and ended on Sunday 13 October. Inferably therefore, the Obi went into seclusion as from Wednesday 2nd October, 2013. Nobody saw the Obi within the period as he did everything strictly alone in "hiding." In fact, it is believed that the five days of seclusion was the period of intensive communion with the gods on behalf of the people. As he did everything all alone, the subjects ate the new yam. The festival usually begins with twenty-one-gun salute, followed by an all-night *Ufie* music and other cultural activities such as incantations, prayers, among others. Such was the case as the Obi celebrated the Ofala with the entire Igbo nation.

On the fourth day, the Obi was to temporarily and briefly appear for the people to have a glimpse of him and for him to eat the yam. On the fifth day, he appeared fully in his majestic regalia. The Obi's appearance after the five days of seclusion was the Ofala itself. When all the *ndichie* (elders) and other leaders as well as different cultural troupes were gathered, the Obi came into the square taking dancing steps and receiving cheers from the crowd. His emergence was heralded by thunderous rendition of

traditional music which he danced to, waving his royal sword (*ada*) in absolute salute of his subjects who joyously cheered him.

Because the palace of the Obi was not large enough to accommodate the large crowd, the Ofala was celebrated at the stadium.



Obi Onitsha, Agbogidi Alfred Nnaemeka Achebe displaying at the 2013 Ofala Festival

After the emergence and the first round of dance, speeches were made, different groups and titled chiefs came one after the other to greet the Obi. Kolanut was broken as an important aspect of African culture. Then, the Egwuota (royal drums) dancing by Ndichie Okwa/Okwareze followed. Another group of elders, Ndichie Ume, also did their Egwuota dance before the Obi again returned to the scene for the second round of dance. After that, he addressed the people, allowed them to do some cultural displays before getting on his feet for the final round of dance and departure.



Elders in African Attire at the Ofala



Women in African attire at the Ofala

A significant aspect of African culture and communication at the Ofala festival was the array of incarnate beings that were beautifully dressed to perform. One of them was the popular Ireleth. Also, the feathered or bedecked caps of the dancing chiefs and their wives was very colourful.

The Ofala festival communicates the Igbo way of life and belief. The egalitarian nature of the Igbos is shown in the ceremony as the Obi, who should have been seated as a royal father, watching the events, was the main dancer.



The Obi Returning Greetings

In addition, the pattern of greetings among the Igbos is also displayed. The Obi received each and every one that came to greet him by clinging his long *ada* with those of the subjects left-right twice and right-left once.

The Convergence

African cultural convergence exists between the two nations in the ceremonies here described in many ways. These are:

1. Music and Dance

This is one of the modes of communication in Africa reflected in both Igala and Igbo cultures. Music has always been part of human existence. It has grown with man and has transformed from generation to generation. Every African community has a unique music that the people cherish. They are unique in both the instruments utilized and the styles adopted in the display. During the *Ata Igala* coronation, varieties of music in Igala were displayed. There were *Agwonu, Abele, Alo, Agale, Ogwu, Ogba, Olele, Idologo, Ibele, Sabada, Igba, Iya, Oye, Onukikpo, Oganyi* among others (Johnson, 2013).

The flute player was at the entrance gate to the hut and displayed throughout the night.

A group of women known as *amakpugwa* (the women who chanted greetings) were always on ground with the royal chant:

*Alimi Gw'ata taku meni omi gw'Ata
Amideeju*

The Igbo people have a melodious music style into which they incorporate various percussion instruments; the *Udu* which is essentially designed from a clay jug and *Ekwe* which is formed from a hollowed log and the *ogene* a hand bell designed from forged iron. Other instruments include *opi*—a wind instrument similar to the flute; *igba* and *ichaka*. They also have a style of music called Okorodo, which involves a vocal performance accompanied by several musical instruments.

The *ogene* gong accompanies dance, songs, religious and secular ceremonies and its tunes have been developed to transmit messages by a sort of lyric prose. *Ekwe* is a tree trunk, hollowed throughout its length from two rectangular cavities at its end and a horizontal slit that connects the cavities. The different sounds of the drum summon citizens at the monarch's palaces or town squares. The rhythms of the slit-drum have special signals for inundation, meetings, announcements of fire, death and other emergencies.

During the 2013 ofala festival, the Igbos used those instruments to provide befitting music to which they danced and to which the *Obi* danced round the square.

2. Kolanut Breaking

Kolanut breaking is a very crucial aspect of African cultural activities. In Nigeria, every ethnic group pays special attention to the role of kolanut as a unifying object and a symbol of peace. During the coronation of *Ata Igala*, the *Achadu Igala* and the *Ata* broke and ate kolanut to suggest their oath of allegiance. At *Ojaina forest*, the *Egwola* broke kolanut which the *Ata* and other elders took as a mark of their communion with the ancestors. The same process was observed at *Ere Ane* the earthen shrine where the *Ata* prayed on behalf of the *Igala* people.

Similarly, the *Ofala Festival* observed breaking of kolanut after the emergence of the *Agbogidi*. As expected, the *Obi*, *Alfred Nnaemeka Achebe*, picked up a four-lobe kolanut, prayed for the blessing of the land and the people, threw it into the *kalabash* for interpretation, took his own lobe and sent it round for others to pick and eat as a demonstration of oneness. This, perhaps, justifies the position held by *Ottah* (2016, p.72) that “breaking of kolanut has become an integral aspect of all ceremonies. To the African nations, kolanut is life and when broken and eaten together, it means unity, hence the popular statement, he who brings kola brings life.” As manifested in both the *Ata Igala* coronation and the *Ofala Festival*, both the *Igala* of north-central Nigeria and the *Igbo* of south-eastern Nigeria attach great importance to the breaking and eating of kolanut in their major ceremonies.

3. Special Greetings

Africans, especially Nigerians, have a culture of special greeting appellations for different groups of people or individuals. The *Ata Igala* is greeted *Gabaidu* by the men and *Amideju* by the women. *Gabaidu* is an onomatopoeia that suggests that *Ata* is

the mightiest of the mighty lions. As for Amideju, it is the abridged version of the submissive expression of the women folk for the Ata, Ata jemi deju mi deju; Ata jemi leku mi leku, meaning if Ata says I live, I live; and if Ata says I die, I die.

The Obi Onitsha is greeted Agbogidi, an onomatopoeia that suggests the mightiness of the Obi and the great respect accorded the stool by the people. Other traditional rulers in the region are greeted Igwe. In African culture and communication systems, special greetings characterize the relationship between the leaders and the subjects and even among leaders. In this comparative study, the Igala and Igbo have a common ground in ascribing specific accolades to their paramount rulers in terms of greetings.

4. Use of Masquerades (incarnate beings)

Both ceremonies witnessed the emergence of several masquerades (called incarnate beings by Miachi, 2012). At the Ata's coronation, royal incarnate beings like Ekwe, Agbanabo, Inelekpe, Epe, Ikeleku Afuma, Ichawula, Abilifada, among others. The Ofala festival had the presence of colourfully adorned incarnate beings, notable among them, the Ijele. Also, the Obi in his regalia of feathered and flowered cap was a Being of a sort. The incarnate beings are dressed in different stripes of colourful cloths running up-down or sideways as can be seen in these pictures.



Ijele incarnate being at the Ofala

By African culture and communication systems, the common belief is that incarnate beings are the dead ancestors back to the human world by African incarnation. They come with messages from the spirit world and go with the prayers and petitions of the living, thereby making them perfect mediators between the dead and the living. This falls under extra-mundane communication system of Africa in which the people believe there are powers that control the affairs of man; and those powers come from the dead.



Incarnate being at the Ata Igala coronation

5. Use of Symbolism

Both ceremonies had the extensive use of symbolism. This is a literary term used to describe an object that stands on itself and conveys other meanings. We have already mentioned the role of kolanut as a symbol. The leading figures at both ceremonies of coronation and Ofala were symbolic in their attires. On the Ofala, according to OYASAF (2012), “the whole ceremony was enhanced by the red cap chiefs (ndichie) colourfully dressed in their various traditional attires as well as symbols of their respective villages.”

In the same vein, both the Ata and the Obi in their respective ceremonies had the eagle feathers on their heads. Those of the Ata Idakwo Michael Ameh Oboni were 100 pieces fixed round the cap designed with the tail of octopus. The feathers formed a ring around his head. The Obi Onitsha, Alfred Nnaemeka Achebe, had about 20 eagle feathers round his head. They were carefully fixed on the giant flowered cap which he carried each time he danced round the square. The feathers symbolized authority, uniqueness and popularity. Note that the eagle is the king of the aquatic community, and using

the feathers meant that the people accepted the king as theirs. It corresponds with the saying that an eagle feather on display cannot be hidden.

Another important symbolic object was the hand-held horse tail called Otihi by the Ata and the machete called Ada by the Obi. Ata Idakwo waved his horse tail at the cheering crowd during his coronation. Obi Nnaemeka waved his machete the same way during the Ofala and even used it to receive greetings from elders who equally had their own machetes in hand to wave. It is said that the objects have the potency to bless or curse a person, depending on the paramount rulers' intention and utterance.

The Differences

Despite the similarities in the African culture and communication displayed at both ceremonies, there are aspects that differ in operation. First, the Ata is seen as one super being by reason of his rebirth such that he is forbidden to dance, no matter the level of his joy at any public function. In fact, when he is forced to laugh for any reason, his assistants quickly block people's view of his face so that they do not catch a glimpse of his teeth. On the other hand, an irrevocable activity of the Obi during the Ofala was the rounds of dance at the arena. He took dancing steps back and forth, waving his Ada the direction of the cheering crowd. He as the father of the entire Igbo nation took dancing steps on three different slots before the end of the Ofala.



Obi Taking Dancing Steps in Front of Ndiichie

Again, the Obi used his royal machete to exchange greetings with the other chiefs, both men and women, as seen in this picture. The Ata, both in the palace and outside, would not have any other chief with a horse tail. What happened at the grand

finale of the coronation was that people came to greet by prostrating while he waved his horse tail to answer them.



Conclusion

African culture and communication systems reflect the way of life of the typical African as seen in the ceremonies of Ata Igala coronation in Kogi State and the Ofala Festival in Onitsha, Anambra State, both in Nigeria. The media of African communication such as music, proverbs, masquerading, objectifications, symbolism, extramundane means, folktales, dress code among others are still being used among us. The comparative study of the coronation of Ata Igala and the Ofala festival brings to the fore the fact that different ethnic groups practice their laid down cultures. These cultures have series of semblances with other ethnic groups, with degrees of differences.

The study has, through ethnographic investigation, revealed that the Igala and Igbo communities have some common cultural practices. These manifest in names of objects, cultural ideologies, seasonal celebrations and the institution of traditional leadership. The existing cultural harmony can be properly harnessed into creating a forum for cultural unity among different groups in Nigeria to foster unity and national development. Modern media of mass communication should do more in terms of the promotion of African culture through transmission of Africa-oriented programmes to champion the cause of development in the continent. This will go a long way to nip inter-community clashes in the bud.

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