

Exploring the Theatrical Elements of Lisabi Festival of the Egba People in Abeokuta, Nigeria.

Olanrewaju Isiak BALOGUN¹

Abstract

This study explores the theatrical elements of Lisabi festival of the Egba people of Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. Out of several festivals that exist in the African society, certain number of them projects the total theatre idioms which are used by playwrights and other theatre professionals as part of the narrative device in their work of art. The study therefore, analyses all theatrical elements inherent in Lisabi festival. The paper adopts the descriptive research method and utilises the participant-observation approach which involves the researcher's participation in the festival processes. It employs Herbert Spencer's Functionalism as the theoretical framework for this study. In this research, it is discovered that Lisabi festival of Abeokuta is an annual festival that projects the total theatre idioms and uses theatrical elements to project its celebration. The festival is done over a seven (7) days period and involves several developmental activities that are beneficial to the people and the society at large. The paper concludes that, Lisabi festivals embodies many elements of the theatre, as it preserves, promotes, exemplifies and projects the African cultural values. Therefore, for effective preservation, African playwrights are encouraged to embrace their cultural values and proudly promote it through their artistic works.

Introduction

African festivals involve the coming together of people to celebrate a particular historical event peculiar to their society, in honour of a god or goddess, hero or legend, agricultural produce or farming, and in respect to a particular profession in the African society. African festivals promote peace and unity amongst the people and also foster societal development. It also serves as an avenue for re-union amongst the people who have the opportunity to only see themselves during such festive period. African festivals give rooms to foreigners who are passionately in love with the African culture and tradition to partake in the non-sacred processes of the festival. This also involve celebrations, merriments, exhibition of African costumes and make-ups, dances, songs, drumming, chanting, pantomimic dramatizations, evocation, incantation, and countless other theatrical elements that are imbedded in the African festival. The regular celebration of these festivals, promote the cultural heritage of the African people to all nations and tribes of the world. It also helps the African society to pass on this cultural heritage to the younger generation as it reflects the cultural values of the people and their total way of life.

African festivals have also contributed greatly to the work of art especially in the academic world where different scholars have had several deliberations and write-ups on African festivals and also use it as an instrument of enhancing the successful outcome of literary works. It is through this medium that many people all over the world gradually discovers the aesthetics of African culture and traditions. This leads to the foreigner's interest in visiting some African societies in the course of wanting to know more about our culture and traditions. Therefore, African culture and traditions

¹ Olanrewaju Isiak Balogun studied Performing Arts at University of Ilorin, Nigeria, and recently secured

a provincial doctoral admission in Performance and Cultural Discipline, University of Leeds, England

must be guided and protected jealously and transferred from one generation to another to ensure that it lives forever.

Conceptualising Festival

Festival is a common phenomenon that is observed all over the world. As a matter of fact, there is no community or society in the world that does not celebrate festival especially in the African society. Festivals, therefore, are part of our lives and one of the things people do on the face of the earth from time to time. It is most times a period of celebration, unification, merriments, jubilation, entertainment, magical display, to mention but a few. This is why Awaolalu and Dopamu (2010, p. 11) view festival as:

religious phenomenon that is functional to social cohesion and solidarity... festivals are concerned with social relations. They give rhythmic to the social, political, religions and everyday life of the town where they are celebrated.

In similar view, Omosade and Adelumo (2005, p. 153) also observe that:

Festivals are observed by adherents of traditional religion. They mark important social and religious events in the lives of the people and they culminate in series of performances, entertainment, merry-making, rites, and ceremonies. In a sense, festivals are the most joyful and the most important social and religious activities in the West African traditional society.

The celebration of African festival is usually based on one particular reason, be it in honour of a god/goddess, legend/hero,

occupational festival, agricultural produce/harvest, or based on historical event which occurred in the past within the community where the festival is celebrated. This assertion is justified by Ikibe and Ikibe (2007, p. 88) as they view that “festivals are public celebrations by communities to commemorate special events like harvesting of crops (e.g. new yam festival) and appeasement of various gods against enemies in time of war”.

Festivals are usually events that take place from time to time. That is, it is a re-occurring events which is most times annually observed in the communities where the festivals are being celebrated. Although there may be many festivals in a society within a year, nonetheless, each of these festivals are periodically celebrated as peculiar dates are being assigned to each of them. No wonder Kofi (1990, p. 71) opines that “festivals are ritual which re-occur at regular intervals and which have their purpose as the expression of beliefs held by a particular community”. In the same view, Heritage Dictionary (2006, p. 108) also sees festival as “an occasion for feasting or celebration especially a day or time of religious significance that re-occurs at a regular interval; an often regularly re-occurring program of cultural performances, exhibition or competitions”.

Based on the fact that it re-occurrence at regular interval, festivals perform the role of exhibiting or showcasing the aesthetics of the cultural heritage and tradition of the people where the festival celebration takes place. During the festival, viewers are exposed to the values, norms, culture, and traditional ethics of the people celebrating the festival. Through this, we are able to know more about the people’s dressing codes, the type of food they eat, their ritual aesthetics, their language, and so many other things that has to do with their culture and traditions. This is why Aremu (2010, p. 11) asserts that: “festival is the conglomeration of rites and rituals. It therefore, exposes the values,

norms, culture and traditional ethics of a particular community or society in Africa”.

Festival gives the people a great opportunity for re-union. Indigenes living abroad comes back home to observe these festivals which helps the people to re-connect with one another. It also strengthens their love and unity thereby fostering a peaceful co-existence between among them. Festival also brings about the development of the community where the festival is celebrated. Most times, it improves the economic status of the society as it involves the influx of people from different communities and as a result of this, the foreigners purchase a lot of the people’s cultural materials such as beads, cloths, ceramics, art works and many more things that exhibit the culture of the people that are celebrating the festival. A good example of this is the Osun Osogbo Annual Festival in which people from all over the world come to celebrate thus, improving the economic status of the community and society of Osun state at large.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the theoretical preposition of Herbert Spencer’s functionalism. A common analogy, popularised by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of the society as ‘organs’ that work towards the proper functioning of the ‘body’ as a whole”. Some of its characteristics are:

1. The approach looks at society through a micro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole
2. It believes that society has evolved like organism
3. The approach looks at both social structure and social functions
4. In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes the effort to impute, as

rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or system

Following the above characteristics, Talcott (1975 p. 5) on the other hand, describes functionalism as “a theoretical framework that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability.” He argues further that “Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions, and institutions” (5). Thus, functionalism as seen from the sociological perspective, shows the relevance of the festival to the host community as one that brings about the spirit of oneness, love, and unity amongst the people. To link this to Lisabi Festival, the continuity on an annual basis reminds every generations of the Egba descendant of the historical evolution of their forefathers, and also informs every visitor that comes during the festival. Olu Owolabi (1977), documents this aspect of history in his play, *Lisabi Agbongbo Akala*. Functionalism, equally helps portray the evolutionary trends of the Egbas as social entity that operates and function for the development and onward progression of the people both home and abroad. It also helps in reinforcing the belief system, custom and norms of the people through the annual celebration of Lisabi’s heroic deeds. For instance, the formation of “Egbe Aro” by Lisabi in his time which has now transformed to be a social cultural group under the aegis of Abeokuta Sport Club. The group functions to promote the spirit of oneness, solidarity, unity, and peaceful co-existence amongst the people of Egbaland and its environs.

Attributes of Lisabi Festival of Abeokuta

Lisabi festival is an annual celebration in honour and remembrance of the hero; Lisabi Agbongbo Akala who led the fight for freedom from the oppression of Alaafin’s representatives (the Ilaris) in their

land. Few years after, the Egbas started the Lisabi festival which usually comes up between the month of February and March every year. The festival usually takes seven (7) days involving lot of developmental activities. This year 2017 marks thirty-one (31) years of celebration in honour of the great hero.

The performance witnessed by this researcher in 2017, started on Monday, 27th February, 2017 with the sound of many guns at Olumo rock. This action is followed by the youths cleaning the environment of the different palaces in the community. There is also the mobilization of the people of the city, to be part of the annual quiz competition at the Centenary Hall; the opening of exhibition at Ake palace; and Lisabi football competition semi-final at M.K.O Abiola stadium, Kuto, Abeokuta. This mobilization is done by women. The second day of the festival, Tuesday, 28th February, 2017, opened with traditional “Ayo” game competition and distribution of prizes at Ake palace ground; farmers’ empowerment programme; debate competition at the Centenary Hall; social programme for children, and musical performances by the youths at Ake palace ground.

The third day, Wednesday, 1st March, 2017 started with a seminar on Self-Reliance through Agriculture for a secured tomorrow at the Centenary Hall; final match of the Lisabi football competition and presentation of trophies at M.K.O Abiola Stadium, Kuto, Abeokuta. The fourth day, Thursday, 2nd March, 2017 began with procession to “Igbo Lisabi” (Libasi’s Forest) by Obas, Chiefs, Baales (Dukes), eminent personalities, and the youths. The fifth day, Friday, 3rd March, 2017, started with a visit to Olumo Rock by the Alake of Egbaland (the paramount King of Egbaland) and other Obas (kings), Chiefs, and others; performances by cultural groups within the city; traditional prayer at the top of Olumo Rock; rendition of Egba Anthem; Jumat prayers by the

adherent of the Islamic faith at the central mosque, Kobiti, Abeokuta; Royal banquet and recognition of Global Telecommunication (Globalcom) and other corporate and individual sponsors of the year 2017 Lisabi festival.

The six day, Saturday, 4th March, 2017, tagged as the grand finale started with “Woro” dancers beginning from different section of the city amid drumming and dancing which terminated at the Ake palace ground, after which there is break. The cultural displays are followed by the people and group paying homage to the paramount king in groups (social clubs, associations, Chiefs, Baales; Presentation of bursary award by Egba National Association in the United State of America and Canada; congratulatory goodwill messages/speeches, music/social entertainment. Finally, on the last day, Sunday, 5th March, 2017, there was a thanksgiving service at the cathedral of St. Peter, Ake, Abeokuta, and the movement of Oro (Masquerade forbidden to be seen by women) at midnight.

The Legendary Exploration of Lisabi Agbongbo Akala

The Egba acknowledged lordship of the Alaafin of the Oyo – Yoruba Empire through the rule of “Ilaris” (the Alaafin’s representatives) in the remote dependencies. How the authority of the Oyo-Yoruba came to be superimposed upon the Egba people was not explained but geographically, the Egba Forest, at that period, lay within the Oyo Empire. The Egba at the time paid tribute to Oyo perhaps in return for protection given to them against external aggression. This supremacy of Oyo Empire over Egba people was between 1770 and 1780, as the authority of the Alaafin was challenged and overthrown by Lisabi, an Igbein man who astutely reorganised a militant movement under the guise of a traditional mutual aid society – “Egbe Aro”, which assumed a

military undertone and carried out the decimation of about 600 Ilaris- the Alaafin's representatives, sometime around the year 1780. A punitive Oyo army was ambushed and defeated afterwards, thus signifying Egba liberation from the bondage of the Alaafin of Oyo.

To ensure a complete independence from the Oyo empire, Lisabi built walls and trenches as fortification against outward forces and signed military treaty with the Oke-Ogun people for an active frontier policy especially against Dahomey invasion. After achieving the victory over Oyo, Lisabi is reported to have disappeared in the Egba forest. The cause of his mysterious disappearance from the forest till date is yet to be established. Therefore, the mystery has birthed a myth, which made him to be deified, as he was believed by the Egba people to have been a semi-god. Today, Lisabi is proudly remembered as the Egba liberator and law giver who raised them from bondage and obscurity.

Exploring the Theatrical Elements of Lisabi Festival in Abeokuta

The theatrical elements in Lisabi Festival can be referred to as the elements of the theatre that are inherent in the celebration of the festival. Lisabi festival encompasses so many theatrical elements which can be discovered from both the circular and sacred part of the festival. These theatrical elements are used in the theatre to achieve the successful outcome of a performance or production. These elements can be classified under the following:

- Ritual
- Music
- Dance
- Costumes and Make-up
- Language
- Spectacle

Ritual

According to Turner (1968, p. 159) ritual is opined as "a prescribed formal behaviour for occasion, having reference to beliefs in mystical or non-imperial beings or power, a corpus of beliefs and practices performed by a specific cult association". Ogunbiyi (1981, p. 183), clarifies that:

In ritual, man attempts to communicate directly with the supernatural, with the world that forces his control. Communication he may make to the priest or the medium is not to that person but through him to the spirit and it is through the medium that the supplicant is addressed by the spirit.

Ritual is therefore a means of communication between the spirit world and that of the physical. These are the activities involved in the sacred aspect of African festival which is usually shown only to selected people based on the tradition of the land. Ritual is also common in the theatrical production. Drama as it is generally known is the imitation of life therefore everything that happens in the African society is reflected in the African theatre. We see the ritual processes most times in stage performances and that gives us a clue or an idea of how it is done in real life. Invocation and evocation can be seen as an aspect under ritual process as it is peculiar to the African society. While invocation is the process of human transmission from the physical realm to the spiritual realm, evocation involves the consultation of the spirit by the chief priest in order to have the spiritual present in the physical. Invocation most times occurs when an individual transcends into the spiritual world while performing a particular ritualistic action which may involve dancing or singing. When such individual performs this act perfectly to an extent, he or she transcends into the spirit world whereby he or she begins to utter prophecies or message from the spirit realm

to the physical realm. This is an event that takes place both in the theatrical world as well as in African festival celebrations. Evocation is usually carried out by the chief priest or herbalist of the community where the festival is being observed. This action is usually carried out to invoke the presence of the ancestors or gods of the land in order to receive their blessings during the festival. These two phenomena are elements common to African theatre and festival.

Lisabi Festival would be said to be incomplete if we do not mention the ritual performance aesthetics within it. The ritual aspect of the festival majorly took place at “Igbo Lisabi” where necessary rites are performed to appease the spirit of Lisabi Agbongbo Akala. Within this ritual process, there were use of invocation and evocation as discussed above. One of the significant things that occurred in the forest is the presence of ‘Oro’ (a masquerade that is forbidden for women to see) throughout the ritual process. Only men are allowed into this forest and such men are mostly indigene of the land. This is so because of several ritual processes that are forbidden for the site of any woman as it is believed that this would have spiritual implications such as inability to reproduce and loss of mental senses.



Fig.1 The procession of the Obas, Chiefs, and traditional group at Igbo Lisabi. Credit: O.I. Balogun 02.03.2017

Finally, there are still certain activities carried out behind the scenes of the festival as these activities involve certain sacrifices that can only be witnessed by the traditional group according to the tradition of the land. The traditional group or traditionalists are selected herbalists and priests (mouthpiece of the gods) ordained by the culture and traditions. The activities of this group are strictly secretive, unannounced, and carried out at a time where no man can see the process of their dealings. There are certain speculations concerning the practices but they all remain a rumour since no one can really confirm the truthfulness of the information.

Music

Music is the rhythm of life. It is a melodious arrangement of sounds that are pleasant to the ear or hearing. According to Adesanya (2006, p. 1), music is defined as, “An arrangement of sound so organised by the connoisseur to make meaning in our ears that stimulates or excites our emotions when it is played with a kind of arrangement of pitches to make a pleasant sound.” Therefore, music dictates the mood of a particular event or occasion. Kiplang’at (2009, p. 2) sees music as “a song or pattern of vocal or instrument sound that characteristically evokes emotional behaviour in individual.” The kind of instrument played and song sang determine the genre of that particular event. As Schopenhauer, says, in his magnum opus, “music is the food of the soul” which is the essence of our being. Human being responds to music right from birth even without being taught, as long as the sounds and melodies are pleasant to the ear of the listener. Music speaks directly to the feeling and emotion of the listener.

Music is one of the core aspects or elements of the theatre. As a matter of fact, orchestra is the life wire of any theatrical performance. Reason being that music dictates the moods as it expresses the

actor's sadness, happiness, anger, love, and whatsoever feelings that is running through the mind of the actor. Music in the theatre helps us to know the genre of the performance we are watching. This is evident in the lyrics of the songs and the tempo of the song. Tragic moments always come with slow tempo while happiness or celebration moods comes with high tempo of music. Amazingly, music plays similar role in any festival. Although in most festival celebration, the tempo of music is usually fast and high as this dictates the happiness mood. People celebrate festivals in the happiness mood expressing their emotion with different dance steps as the music is being played. Music plays vitals roles in the theatre as well as in any festival. As a matter of fact, music plays a very significant role in our everyday living.



Fig.2 Local Drummer's Performance. Credit: O.I. Balogun 28/02/2017

The musical aspect of African festival also includes chanting. Chant is an act of praise poetry carried out to persuade or invoke an individual or spirit's attention. It is often used as an instrument of persuasion to calm the anger of the king when he is angry and make him happy when necessary.

This is common to the Yoruba culture and tradition. Chant usually appeals to the emotions of the person being praised. This is very common in most African theatrical productions as well as African festivals.

The music in Lisabi Festival

therefore, refers to the songs, chants, drums, local and modern instruments used within the festival. During Lisabi Festival, there are lot of music which involves beating of local drums and singing by young and old in expression of their joyous mood. The music includes both old and modern songs which make use of local and modern instruments.



Fig 3: Live Band Performance. Credit: O.I. Balogun, 4.3.2017

Furthermore, the music also reflects in the rendition of "Egba Anthem" sang severally in most locations of the events that took place within the festival. The song goes thus:

1, Lori oke o'un petele
Ibe l'agbe bi mi si o
Ibe l'agbe to mi d'agba o
Ile Ominira
Chorus: Maa yo, maa yo, maa yo o; L'ori
Olumo (2x)

Abeokuta Ilu Egba
N mo ni gbagbe e re
N o gbe o l'eke okan mi
Bi ilu odo oya
Emi o f'Abeokuta s'ogo
N o duro l'ori Olumo
Maayo l'oruko Egba o
Emi omo Lisabi e e
Chorus: Maa yo, maa yo, maa yo o; L'ori
Olumo (2x)

Emi o ma yo L'ori Olumo
Emi o s'oogo yi l'okan mi
Wipe Ilu olokiki o

L'awa Egba n gbe
Chorus: Maa yo, maa yo, maa yo o; L'ori
Olumo (2x)

English translation
On the mountain top and valley
Is where I was born
Is where I was brought up
Land of freedom
Chorus: I will rejoice, I will rejoice;
on mountain top (2x)

Abeokuta the land of Egbas
I will never forget you
I will put you in my utmost mind
Just like the land of Odo Oya
I will make Abeokuta glorious
I will stand on the mountain top
I will rejoice in the name of Egba
I, the descendant of Lisabi
Chorus: I will rejoice, I will rejoice; on
mountain top (2x)

I will rejoice on the mountain top
I will be glorious in my mind
That it is the land of fame
That we the Egbas lives
Chorus: I will rejoice, I will rejoice; on
mountain top (2x)

The song gives a great inspiration to every indigene of Egbaland. It is an anthem that the Egba people are so proud of. It is also cherished and unique amongst them. The song is a clarion call for the unity, love and peaceful co-existence among all the Egba people both home and abroad. It helps every indigene to remember their root and also find a reason to contribute and partake in the developmental process of their home land, Egba.

Dance

According to Arbeau (1583, p. 20):

Dancing is to jump, to hop, to prance, to sway, to tread, to tip-toe, and to move the feet, hands and body in certain rhythms, measures, and movements consisting of jumps, bending of the body, straddling, limping, bending of the knees, risings on tip-toe, throwing-forward of the feet, changes and other movements...

This definition gives a full insight of what could be considered as dance to a layman. It describes how dance could be achieved with various movements of every parts of the body. Blacking (1984, p. 9) further see dance as "a wordless action, but dance analysis is verbal discourse... and words become pointers to the meaning of movement". In like manner, Obongko and Onwuka (2016, p. 93) also see dance as "a medium of communication, communicating people's aspiration, dreams, attitude, behaviours, culture" *such as to* "preserve, protect, promote the culture, history as well as orientate and shape the lives of the people to fulfil their different cultural roles and functions". This therefore gives us an insight of the function of dance as described by dance scholars above that dance serves as a means of communication in which only the movements of the body speak and not the mouth. The above definitions so far also give us an insight on the relationship between dance and music. This therefore defines dance as the rhythmic movement of the body to pleasant sounds in order to pass a message or entertain the audience or viewers.

Furthermore, dance can be said to be as old as man. This assertion is supported by Hanna (1983, p. 3) who says:

Dance is nearly a universal behaviour with a history probably as old as humanity itself. Since antiquity, paintings, friezes,

sculpture, myths, oral expression and then literature attest to the existence of dance. Dance is embedded in our being. Even when not physically manifest, the concept and vision of dance emerges in our thinking.

This is the reason why a little child does not need to be taught how to dance. It is simply inborn. Every one of us naturally without being taught could move and shake our bodies in response to a sound that is pleasing to our hearing. Dance also comprise acrobatic displays. These acrobatics can be seen in most African festivals being displayed most times by masquerades and in a theatrical performance. Dance is also one of the core aspects of the theatre. Without dance, we cannot have a total theatre. As dance plays a substantial role in the theatre, so does it in festivals. Festival as earlier opined is a form of celebration and within the course of any celebration especially in the African settings, people must dance, that is, people must move their body in patterns to express their feelings which is usually a feeling of happiness. This therefore justifies dance as a means of emotional expression. There is no festival in Africa without dance just as there is no total theatre without dance.

Lisabi Festival, therefore, showcases various kinds of dance steps both by the people and the masquerades that perform within the festival. These dances are peculiar to all Yoruba speaking communities. One of these popular dances is Bata explored by male and female as well as the 'Sango' dance performance within the festival. Although in this 21st century, contemporary dances are introduced by the youth but the elders still adhere strictly to the traditional dances. There are various kinds of local and contemporary dance steps accompanied by local and contemporary songs and instruments respectively.



Fig. 4 Cultural dance by female dancers. Credit: O.I. Balogun 04/03/2017

Costume and Make-up

Costume and Make-up is an inevitable aspect of our daily activities most especially when it comes to special occasion such as a festival celebration. According to Utoh-Ezeajugh (2010, p. 131):

Costume and make-up are elements of play production which complement other elements to enhance a production. The story of any play could be easily told through the costume and make-up design, because one of the aims of costume is to characterise the wearer, such that the audience could easily understand the kind of person that the action of the play is going to unfold. Make-up design on the other hand consolidates costume by giving a physiognomic classification to a character and as such could be considered in extension of costume.

The above definition, clearly demonstrates the significance of costume and make-up in the theatre as well as how costume and make-up work hand in hand on the characters within a theatrical performance. Costume and make-up tell a lot about the character's status, gender, age, and culture and tradition. No wonder Bade-Afuye (2016) opines that:

Costume is an interpretative tool in the theatre that enhances the actor's

appearance during a performance. The use of costumes is dictated by the form of the play and the directorial concept. Choice of costumes usually adds aesthetics value to the actor's role. Costumes are designed to denote character's occupation, mood, status, religion and political traits.

Costume and Make-up play an essential role in the theatre as well as in any festival. Most times in African festivals, it is the costumes and make-up that help viewers to differentiate the king from the chiefs, the masquerade from the people, the young from the old, the male from the female, the dancers from the drummers, and so on. Costume and make-up are non-verbal means of communication between the viewers and the viewed in African festivals. This means that merely seeing an individual, based on his costume and make-up, you can easily tell the tribe and social status of such a person. According to Emoruwa and Maryisabella (2013, p. 75):

Costume is anything worn on stage. Costume and make-up are to some extent very indispensable in both traditional and contemporary performances as in stage, film and screen plays. It is often asserted that, "clothe makes man". To understand a person's nature, there are three factors: appearance, tone of voice and what the person says. Costume and make-up give the interpretation of the production concept, exhibit a unity of style, and provide visual information about the world of the play including locale, period, season, time of day, culture, as well as the play's socio-economic, religious and political environment.

Costume and make-up therefore play significant roles in both the theatre and

in any festival celebration as the first priority of costume is to cover one's nakedness. So, everyone present at the festival must surely be on one costume or the other as it is also applied to the theatre where the actors are wearing costume and make-up including the audience.

The costumes used in Lisabi Festival are common traditional attires peculiar to the Yoruba speaking people. 'iro and buba' for the female while the male wears either 'kembe and buba' or 'sokoto gigun and buba'. Some other people use the popular Yoruba material known as 'aso ofi'. This material is mostly used by the royalty personalities, chiefs and the rich and famous citizens of the society while the ordinary personalities uses 'adire' also known as 'kanpala' (a material peculiar to the Egbas) to sew their various cloth styles. Furthermore, make-up refers to substances applied to the face to make one look more beautiful than natural and this is used mostly by women within the festival. Make-up is also applied on the faces of the children. Traditional eye pencil popularly called 'tiro' and powder called 'atike' are used by most women, children and few men.



Fig.5 Men attired in kanpala (Adire) playing an ancient game called "Ayo".
Credit: O.I. Balogun 28/02/2017.

The tribal marks on the faces of men and women, young and old within the festival as observed by the researcher is placed 1 - 1 on each side of the people's chick. These tribal marks are peculiar to the Egba people. The mark is part of the culture and tradition of the Egba people. It is also a

significant part of their identity such that when anyone sees the mark, such person would know without being told that this is an Egba person.

Language

Language is a crucial and very important aspect of the human society as it encompasses their medium of communication. Language is very powerful and influential. It is also unique and peculiar to a certain group of people who share similar culture and tradition. Language helps to create an avenue of understanding and agreement amongst the people who speak and understand it. This mirrors Zakariyah (2013, p.21) who sees language as “probably the most important instrument of socialization that exists in all human societies and cultures”.

The medium of communication in Lisabi festival is Yoruba language but a kind of Yoruba peculiar to the Egbas, it is known as ‘Egba’ dialect. This dialect is used within the festival by men and women, young and old. The Egba dialect is reflected in the general eulogy of the Egba people:

1. Egba ni mi, Egba lemi,
Egba Omo Ajibodu, Omo Erinjogunola,
Omo Abatabutu Oloro
Omo Eringbo gbon, o ko Omo tie sabe ewe,
Ogongo gbon, o ko Omo tie sabe akitan,
Olumo gbon, o o ko Omo tie sabe apata nitori ogun...

English Translation

I am Egba, Egba represents me
Egba the child of Ajibodu, the child of Erinjogunola

The child of Abatabutu Oloro

The child of wild elephant is wise, it gathers its children under protection

Ostrich is wife, it gathers its little ones on the refuse dump

Olumo is wise, it gathers its children under the rock in the event of war

This eulogy reflects in the historical evolution of the Egba people, the importance of certain geographical structure in their land and community. It should be noted that all of these praise chants or eulogies are expressed through Egba dialect and this gives them a deeper meaning and interpretation by those who can fluently speak and understand the Egba dialect. Finally, Egba dialect is mostly used by the elders of the land. This is seen in all the programs of the festival that are anchored by the elders. They strictly speak Egba dialect.

Spectacle

Spectacle refers to the unique aesthetics that projects the beauty of a performance. Most times during Lisabi festival, these spectacles are spiritually inclined that is, metaphysical in nature. The spectacle in Lisabi festival can be explored through certain areas of the dramatic elements which are imbedded in the celebration process of the festival. Most of the spectacle can be located in the ritual process and the ‘Sango’ and ‘Igunuko’ dance performance. During the ‘Sango’ dance performance, he displayed several metaphysical acts that amused the audience. These acts are not circular performance but spiritually inclined. A good example of this is when a long and sharp iron is stung through Sango’s tongue yet without bleeding. More so, during the ‘Igunuko’ (masquerade) performance, as tall as the masquerade is, it reduced its

height to nearest minimum height which is as short as a dwarf.



Fig.6. Sango performer with Calabash of mysticism. Credit: O.I. Balogun 03.03.2017

Furthermore, there are several spectacles during the arrival of the Egba war lords. Each of them came on a horse and pulled several stunts while on the horse. At the arrival of one of the war lords, his accompanies over-powered the armed securities that serves as barricade between the general people and the royalties. Other spectacles can be found in the ritual process of the festival at 'Igbo Lisabi' where there is the presence of 'Oro'.



Fig.7. Iggunuko Performance. Credit: O.I. Balogun 03.03.2017

In spite of stern warning against taking of photograph and video-recording of the cult activities in the grove, out of curiosity, the researcher went ahead to cover the display of 'Oro' within the shrine. However, in a mysterious twist, the recorded video did not play. Till this moment it is difficult to explain what actually went wrong, but for a fact the recording was done and it turned out blank.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the theatrical exploration of Lisabi Festival in Abeokuta attracts both indigenes and non-indigenes to its celebration. People come together all over the world to participate in the festival as it serves as a means of unity, love amongst the people, peaceful co-existence amongst the people, and re-union amongst people who only see themselves during the festival. It serves as spiritual cleansing process for the land and the people. It also contributes to the economic growth of the society as the attendants of the festival purchase commodities peculiar to Egbaland. This indirectly, projects the culture of the people to the entire world as the festival attendants go back to their community showcasing the things they acquire from the festival.

Lisabi festival contributes to the developmental process of the society as it involves the participations of traditional rulers and the government. It attracts investors such as Globacom Limited who happens to be the official sponsor of the festival throughout the seven (7) days of the celebration. The artistic and dramatic aesthetics within the festival such as drumming, singing, chanting, dancing, costuming, make-up, to mention but a few attract the attention of people to the festival and this influences their interest and participation in the festival. Playwrights and other theatre scholars are therefore, encouraged to make researches into African festivals in order to explore its theatrical elements, using it to enhance an aesthetic theatrical performance and also to project the cultural and traditional values of the Africans to the entire world to appreciate. However, the researcher noticed that the entertainment aspect of the festival was poor in terms of food and drinks as this provision was made available only for the royals. If this is made available to everyone, it will attract more attendance and this will boost the popularity of the festival.

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