

Aringinya (maiden) Festival in Ikare Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria: A Salient Tool for Promoting Moral Values.

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Cultural Festivals are ancient traditional events that played a pivotal role in the development of societies in the past generations especially of the African descent. It is through festival that cultural bonds are maintained and strengthened. In Africa, cultural festivals are an integral part of the cycle of a traditional Africa man and woman; a momentary occasion for celebration with a purpose attached to different aspects of a communal life. Globalization and Western culture have contributed greatly to the waning and less acceptance of traditional cultural festivals by young people despite the cultural, social and moral roles they play in various African communities.

This paper therefore, examined the significance of Aringinya (maiden) traditional cultural festival in Ikare-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria as a salient tool for promoting moral values among adolescent teenage girls using exploratory design method. The paper found out that despite the influence of globalisation and western culture, Aringinya traditional festival has constantly served as moral regulator for adolescent young girls. It therefore recommends identifying and packaging of the festival to an international standard, preservation of the festival by government to serve as purpose of promoting moral values for adolescent girls across the country and, also, encouraging participating girls in the festival to cover their nakedness as means of preserving the Aringinya traditional cultural festival

Keywords: Aringinya Cultural Festival, Ikare-Akoko, Maiden, Moral Values, Nakedness.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural festivals are ancient traditional events that played a pivoted roles in the development of societies (Adom, 2016) festivals are symbolic base on which the unity of community rests (Ezenagu & Olatunji, 2014). It is a traditional institution often which the embodiment of knowledge through which cultures are expected. According to Kuada, (1999) centuries of old traditions of the people of Africa and the diversity of the distinct ethnic groups have created a rich culture that has become a lasting legacy of contemporary Africa. Cultural festivals influence has become a control element in development affairs (McClinchey, 2008).

According to Getz (2007) cultural festivals are instrument for expressing the historical traditions of a group of people. Odotei (2002) agrees that the events in cultural festival usually show the traditional history of a group of people. O' Sullivan and Jackson (2002) confirm that festivals are used as platforms in unveiling and sharing the rich culture and history of towns,

villages and societies. Also, they are used in affirming or denouncing certain values and social structures in the community. According to Quinn (2006) cultural festivals give local people a sense of belongingness and promote unity among the rural folks. Cultural festivals are the sign of culture in any traditional community. It unites the people, makes them homogenous community and provides a platform by which people can be identified. Despite the importance of cultural festivals as an integral part of culture, most of the cherished African cultural values like admiration for traditional institutions of which cultural festival forms part of it is fast diminishing.

Ezenagu and Olatunji (2016) report that despite the value of the African traditional institution (festival) in preserving, promoting and showcasing the glamour of the traditional African life, the publicity given to cultural festivals are not commensurate to its worth. African cultural festivals are despite because of its associated roof in African traditional religion. Because of the tie between festivities and traditional religion, derogatory word such as ‘fetish’ is used in describing such traditional events (Ezenagu & Olatunji, 2016). This has made cultural festival less enticing to people to participate and therefore lose its other impacts (Adom, 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional cultural festivals are often the epitome of knowledge through which cultures are expressed (Ezenagu & Olatunji, 2014). According to Kuada (1999) aged long old tradition of the people of Africa and the diversity of the distinct ethnic groups has created a rich culture of a lasting legacy of contemporary African. This legacy is the vital heritage which gives community its sense of identity and that has been passed down from one generation to another. Nold (1998) observed that cultural festivals are communal celebrations involving events out pouring of respect and high revering by customs. Enezagu and Olatunji (2014) asserted that African life is enclosing with customs which essentially makes festival, a manifestation of these custom an important part of the African world view. Busia in Opoku (1970) as cited in Enezagu and Olatunji (2014) highlighted the ritual importance of festivals saying ‘Ritual surrounds important seasonal community activities as well as the critical periods of an individual’s life. Planting, harvesting and fishing, birth, puberty, and marriage-these are occasions for the community or kin group to come together, to join in song and dance or in ritual to give expression to the sense of dependence on the ancestor or other supernatural powers’.

Falassi (1987, p.2) as cited in Bassey and Mbaze-Ebock (2009) sees cultural festival as a periodically recent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degree, all members of a whole community, United by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a world view. Dunstan (1994) expressed that festival provide a forum for a share purpose, cultural values or tradition to be manifest. According to Dugas and Schweitzer (1997), cultural festivals develop a sense of community long term, hard work, especially building connectedness, belonging and support.

Goldbard (2001) suggest that people turn to their cultural festivals to define and mobilize themselves, asserting their local values to present them to other people in a positive sharing of values. Cultural festivals are historically are used as a mechanism of social control (Javis, 1994).

Cultural festivals have been acting as an building block for communities, promoting ethnics understanding, preserving and celebrating local tradition, history and culture (Getz, 1991). Turaki (2001:149) as cited in Ezenagu and Olatunji (2014) opined that cultural festivals serves as social control mechanism in the society by establishing patterns of loyalty, and prescribing parameters of acceptable conduct integrating people into the religious system. The framework of social cultural customs and meeting the socio-psychological needs of man. Cultural festivals meet the diverse needs of man in society be it social, religious and cultural (Ezenagu & Olatunji, 2014). Dissecting the above literatures, it is obvious that cultural festival is one of the important factors that have helped in fastening together community life in traditional African communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper adopts social bond theory also known as social control theory. It is a criminology theory that explains what prevents people from committing crime and what stops them from realizing their natural motivation to break the law. Social control theory is regarded as one of the major contributors to the understanding of juvenile delinquency. According to Gottfredson & Hirsch (1995) explained that social control referred to different types of criminal delinquency and also the adolescence age grade which criminal activities begin. The theory attempts to explain what prevents people from committing crimes and what stops them from realizing their natural motivation to break the law. Its main contribution is that most people are conformists due to the social control that is imposed on them.

Bartol and Bartol (2011) explained that social control theory contends that crime and delinquency occur when an individual's ties to the conventional order or normative standards are weak or largely non-existent. The theory deters the tendency of the individual to adopt deviant behaviour patterns by means of formal mechanism (Police, prisons, courts) and non-formal mechanisms (religious, cultural leaders, cultural and historical tradition). Hirschi (1995) emphasize the enormous impact of non-formal mechanism in determining criminal and immoral behaviour, mainly with regard to attachments to parent and socialization agents. Non-violation of the law is the result of the internalization of conventional belief, laws and social norms, including traditional cultural festival (Meier, 1982) and respect for the socialization agents that impart these law and norms (Fagan & Pabon, 1990).

Hirschi (1969) explained that the forces controlling criminal behaviour as a social bond comprises of four elements: Attachment, commitment, involvement and Belief. Commitment referred to the manner and degree of the individual's investment in adhering to rules and norms and subsequently, the individual's assessment of the loss incurred by violating the law. Commitment to long-term education, occupational or other conventional goals. Involvement refers to participation in conventional activities such as studies, work and hobbies. Involvement examined terms of activities with parents, peer groups and in school while element of belief in the moral validity of the law refers to the acceptance or non-acceptance of social norms, laws and convention (Hirschi, 1969). Social control theory helps to analyze how people especially adolescent young people conform to law and tradition. It emphasizes that the stronger and more positive the fabric of these relationship is, the more conformist is the individual's behaviour, the weaker it becomes, the more liable is the individual to turn to criminal & immoral behaviour

(Bartol & Bartol, 2011). The internalization of conventional belief, law and social norms, including traditional cultural festival helps to prevent juvenile delinquency criminal and immoral acts among adolescence young boys and girls (Meier, 1982).

Aringinya (maiden) Traditional Cultural Festival in Ikare-Akoko.

Ikare – Akoko, the headquarters of Akoko North/East Local Government Area of Ondo State, South Western Nigeria, plays host to an annual cultural and traditional event known as **Aringinya** festival, where virginity, regarded as the greatest virtue of women is celebrated. The festival is one out of many festivals that is set to celebrate the virginity and chastity among female genders as the Yoruba land is known for her worth and high value pertaining to decency and purity. The festival, is such that helps to improve the mindset of dignity and purity as well as the value of a woman staying pure and reserved until her marriage and only to her husband.

According to oral traditional history, the first settlers in the ancient town, settled at a place now called ‘oke iba’ that is sited behind a hill and brook called ‘omi atan’ which literally means a water that never dries despite coming out from the rock. This water is said to be a supernatural water as it’s about a goddess. The goddess named **Aringinya**, appears to the people of the land and blesses the people yearly at the month of May. Therefore, the community reserved this period when the goddess visits as a festival period, and since the appearance of the goddess as described by the people showcase purity of womanhood and any young woman who has lost her virginity is not allowed to move close to the brook. Though, the festival is celebrated by the whole community, it is only the maiden of the land that participates in the festival. The festival is celebrated during the early months of the planting season. The festival always precedes the **Egungun** festival (Gbadamosi, 2018). The **Aringinya** festival depicts the custom of the people of Ikare-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria and the dignity for womanhood, because of the purity of the goddess. It is a celebration of virginity and any maiden who has lost her virginity cannot move near the brook.

The festival is of a great sociological importance to the people of Ikare-Akoko as the cultural practice does not only encourage young ladies to preserve their purity and virginity, but equally serves as a moral tool against sexual abuse and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Procedural of Aringinya Festival

Aringinya Festival is celebrated in the fifth month of May every year. It lasts for one week. Maidens, participating in the celebration of **Aringinya** festival will remove their clothes with only beads tied around their hips. Traditional tattoos are drawn on their faces and all over their body with native chalks/white lime, and the maidens dance to traditional musical instruments such as drums and gong, while the men do the clearing and cleaning of the brook.

The peak of the festival is when the men having finished the cleaning work, the water becomes still as it will stop flowing and all the maidens will go down on their knees and bow their heads. At this point, it is believed that the **Aringinya** goddess will come out to receive the

maidens. A masquerade known as “Igede-Oka” whose cognomen is Apaje-buje (meaning the one who kills witch and have a bite of her) will descend from the Owa-Ale Hill with a long cutlass in his hand, he will jump across the brook and identify any maiden that has lost her virginity but conceal the truth and deceitfully followed the other girls to the side of the brook. The masquerade will fish out such maiden and she will be publicly disgraced. She and her family will be ridiculed everywhere in the community. The masquerade will also pray for married women who visited the brook for the fruit of the womb and pray for good harvest for the farming season. All the girls will ascend the Owa-Ale hill, while the virgin among them will dance out from the side of the brook and dance round the community. They will proudly sing and dance around the village naked, showing the community with pride that they have kept their virginity for their would-be future husbands.

The climax of the festival is the assembly of all the girls at the palace of the King with all the guests, friends and spectators, and women that came the previous year to ask the **Aringinya** goddess for the fruit of the womb are called out to give testimonies of wonders that had occurred in their lives. During the **Aringinya** festival, it is a taboo to rain on that day and if it rains, it is an indication that one or more of the girls participating in the festival has already lost their virginity or are pregnant. Maidens are always enthusiastic about participating in the festival and non-participation means guilt on the parts of the girls who refuse to participate. **Aringinya** festival is for girls between the age bracket of 14 and 18 years and their participation is to ascertain that their pride (virginity) is still intact and to avoid bringing shame and ridicule to their families.

The Cultural Aesthetics in the Aringinya Festival

Aringinya festival is a traditional event which thrills its spectators with the following aesthetics:

Mock Battle

In the olden days, men have to be battle ready at all time and this took the form of mock battle called (udi). The essence of this battle, apart from making the men battle ready was to test one’s strength and endurance of pain. This form of battle is basically for male folk though the female folk could watch. It is an interesting part of the **Aringinya** festival as many male folk test their strength through the mock battle.

Traditional Games

Traditional games such as “Ayo Olopon” provide entertainment during the **Aringinya** festival. This indigenous game aside its entertainment, it helps to groom the young and old in graphing problem-solving skills, intellectual abilities in arithmetic and many more. During the **Aringinya** festival, the elderly ones played “Ayo-olopon” with the young ones making the traditional games age-friendly

Masquerade Display

Aringinya festival in its entirety entails the parade of a significant masquerade known as “Igede-Oka” whose cognomen is “Apaje-buje” (meaning the one who kills the witch and have a bite). The masquerade descend from the Owa-Ale Hill and jumps across the brook and identify any maiden that has lost her virginity but conceal the truth and deceitfully followed the other girls to the side of the brook. The masquerade is accorded some sort of spiritual status that makes it to maintain its secrecy that it is a spirit and not men. The masquerade adds colourful appearance to the festival by dancing around the community accompanied by enthusiastic men and women depicting local tradition and beliefs.

Display of Traditional Royal Crowns

The display of ancient traditional royal crowns by the king of the community, Owa-Ale is another significant moment during the celebration of the **Aringinya** festival. Most of these Royal Crowns are sacred and hold a special place in the traditional history of the people. The display of many of these crowns during the festival adds glamour to the **Aringinya** celebration.

Cultural Significance of Aringinya Festivals as a Salient Tool for Promoting Moral Values

The festival is an avenue for the display of traditional, customs, belief and values of the Ikare-Akoko people. The rite of tying round hips and drawing of tattoos on faces and all over the body of the girl helped greatly in barring against any pre-marital affair that impugned the marriage rite and curbed abundance of teenage pregnancies and family insecurities. These adolescent girls strictly abstained from sex and any foul acts that defile their virginity. Due to the fear that they will be publicly disgraced and their families be ridiculed everywhere in the community if engaged in pre-marital sex before their eventful marriage, these girls lived a moral life. Thus, any girl that keeps her virginity is not only respected within the community during the festival but the event also served as an advertising tool for the girls who have reached the marital for suitors, mostly men and boys who will come out to watch the girls and their choices of wives

The **Aringinya** cultural festival is significant today, even in the face of globalization since it constantly serves as a moral regulator for girls against teenage pregnancy and its ally sexually transmitted diseases. Marital problems are in ascendency in the society as a result of bad trait exhibit by today’s young girls who are influenced by the carefree moral life perpetrated by western culture and education. Thus, **Aringinya** cultural festival serves as a correcting and sensitization tool for young girls of today on the need to exhibit and live good moral lives.

CONCLUSION

Traditional cultural festivals are cultural events through which a community consolidate social ties and maintain culture. Behind each of the festivals celebrated in many African traditional societies lie a myth of events put together or constitutes the history and traditions of such community. The **Aringinya** (maiden) Festival forms part of the historic heritage of the Ikare-Akoko people. The festival is a regulator of the moral behaviours of residents in that it accentuates the values, norms and belief expected of every adolescent young girl in Ikare-Akoko. The cultural aesthetics of the important festival has sustained this cultural event from going into extinction in the face of modernization.

Conclusively, the use of cultural traditional festival as an instrument for consolidating communal ties is used as efficient and salient tool for regulating moral values in adolescent young girls.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The annual celebration of **Aringinya** (maiden) festival depicts the customs of the Ikare-Akoko people and their dignity for womanhood. A festival of such importance with its cultural aesthetics must be preserved in the following ways:

1. Cultural related institutions, agencies and ministries of Arts and Culture and tourism should identify and package the festival to international standard so as to bring more revenue to the government while at the same time, provides jobs for the youths as well as bringing development to Ikare-Akoko and its environs.
2. The festival should be preserved by Government so as to serve the purpose of promoting moral values for adolescent teenage girls across the country.
3. Both the Federal and State Government should take over the **Aringinya** festival as a way of making it an international cultural festival that could attract tourists from all over the world.
4. Equally, the government can help by reviving and reviewing Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) which is one of the sure means of advertising and promoting the key concepts of traditional festivities.
5. The community leaders especially the Owa-Ale (Ikare-Akoko traditional ruler) should ensure that participating girls in the cultural festival no longer appear naked. This is to prevent a situation whereby spectators in the event are tempted to engage in an immoral act with the girls.

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