



An Evaluation of the Ritual Contents and Dramatic Aesthetics in Igbo Traditional Wrestling Festival

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Abstract. Wrestling in Igbo is not merely a sport but a means of preserving and passing down cultural tradition from one generation to the next. It embodies the core values of the Igbo people, such as bravery, resilience, and unity. By engaging in wrestling, young Igbo individuals gain a deeper understanding of their heritage, fostering a sense of pride and identity. The objectives of this study are to analyse the dramatic elements and ritual contents of Igbo traditional wrestling festival. The study was accomplished through interview and a combination of observation. The historical facts that surround the wrestling festival were obtained through interviews with elders of the people of the area, including the Igwes (community leaders). Participant observation was also a tool that was used in data collection. In the field, data were collected using participant observation and oral interview technique. It was made possible by participating in wrestling festival as a member of the audience, thereby joining in the handclapping. After the wrestling events were over, the data collected from the field were subjected to both textual and structural analysis, using the thematic approach and transcription method. The data collected were later analysed descriptively based on the objectives of the study. The findings of the study revealed that Igbo wrestling festival is significant as it symbolizes strength, skill, and communal unity. Traditional wrestling events are culturally important, serving as a rite of passage for young men and a means of gaining social status. Igbo traditional wrestling festival also reflects the values of competition and honour within the Igbo society, highlighting the community's appreciation for physical prowess and tradition. The study further established that the Igbo wrestling festival is deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and rituals. Before matches, wrestlers often partake in traditional ceremonies and prayers to seek divine favour and protection. These rituals add a spiritual dimension to

the sport, highlighting the connection between the physical prowess and metaphysical forces. The study also found that Igbo traditional wrestling festival showcases the following dramatic elements: actors, costume, arena (obom), audience, plot, spectacle and props. It is therefore, a traditional drama. It has a storyline and there is drumming and dancing during the wrestling bouts. The study further established that Igbo traditional wrestling festival reflects the Igbo people's identity and serves as a channel for cultural and religious socialisation.

Keywords: Wrestling, traditional drama, ritual and festival.

1. Introduction

In Igbo land of South Eastern Nigeria, people engaged in traditional games and physical activities to fill their leisure time or recreation. One of such activities is wrestling, a recreational sport practiced and passed down from one generation to another. In Africa today, as in the past, there are several facets of cultural life which are gradually being eroded and fast going into extinction either because they branded primitive by westerners due to lack of understanding or because they are simply abandoned for so called modern entertainment engagements like television, home video or partying which our younger generation conceive as more civilized. One of such African cultural life which confers a distinct identity on tribal entities is the traditional wrestling festival which is fast disappearing in various Igbo communities. The Igbo people value traditional wrestling festival performance because it provides education, socialisation, recreation, livelihood and identity. Wrestling competition between two communities has the capacity to entertain and educate, upholds morals, preserve traditional knowledge and keep history alive.

This study, therefore seeks to look into the dramatic elements and ritual contents of Igbo traditional wrestling festival.

Igbo wrestling exercise is a form of games in which men come out to test their physical prowess. In the olden days, they use wrestling to test one's braveness and his ability to withstand enemies. Traditionally how brave you are determines the kind of woman you will marry, just as we consider your level of education and your financial capability in our present time as criteria for marriage. Wrestling is normally done on Eke and Afor market days depending on the community's choice. Wrestling is a dramatic art that belongs to the aspect of oral drama in Africa. In most cases, they form part the extended festival celebrations to honour either seasonal changes or rite of passage.

Wrestling festival is a major for of relaxation In Igbo land in the olden days. It has a season and is greatly celebrated all through Igbo land. It gets the interest of everybody, men and women, young and old. It is one aspect of Igbo culture that modern world has not taken away.



Wrestling gives young men a chance to show off to their parents, friends, and possible mates. A young man's reputation in the society might improve with success in the arena, therefore increasing his eligibility for marriage or leadership positions. Therefore, the celebration is rather important in determining the social structure of society and in supporting the moral principles of duty, honour, and strength.

Although Igbo wrestling customs have been mostly unaltered, the festival has evolved to fit the changes brought about by globalisation and modernism. Many Igbo groups, both rural and metropolitan, still honour "igba mgba" in modern times, still a vivid statement of Igbo cultural identity, the celebration links the past with the present.

"Igba mgba" (wrestling) has grown to be a major focus for cultural tourism in certain areas, drawing people eager to experience traditional Igbo life. Beyond Igbo land, festival has also become well-known as

wrestling contests are part of cultural celebrations and festivities all throughout Nigeria and beyond. This has spurred cultural preservation and increased knowledge about Igbo culture.

Notwithstanding these developments, the fundamental Igbo values: strength, bravery, honour and community resonate with the people. Reminding the Igbo of their rich legacy and the need of preserving their customs in a fast-changing environment, the celebration continues to be a potent emblem of cultural pride and resilience

A major cultural event in Igbo land embodying the ideals, history, and community spirit of the Igbo people is the traditional wrestling festival." Igba Mgba" as it is called in Igbo is more than simply a sport, but also a rite of passage, a test of strength, and a celebration of the continuity and vitality of the community. Deep roots in Igbo customs, the celebration is still very important in helping the Igbo people to preserve their cultural legacy. The background cultural value, customs, and contemporary relevance of Igbo "mgba" in Igbo land are investigated in this study.

For millennia, Igbo people have embraced wrestling as a fundamental activity from which their roots are strongly ingrained in their customs. In Igbo civilization, wrestling has many uses historically. It was a technique of settling disputes, deciding on leadership, and highlighting young men's athletic ability. With wrestling events were scheduled during harvest season, a period when communities celebrated strength and plenty, the sport was intimately connected to the agricultural calendar.

Wrestling was also a means of young men seeking respect and recognition within their societies in pre-colonial periods. In the wrestling ring, success may result in social elevation as winning wrestlers were often revered as heroes and could win the respect of powerful members of the society. The sport was recognized as a fundamental component of masculinity, and young men entering maturity was expected to go through wrestling events as a rite of passage. It is seen as a rite of passage for young men, symbolizing their journey from boyhood to manhood. Through wrestling, young men prove their physical strength and demonstrate their ability to protect and provide for their families.

Wrestling tournaments attracts a significant number of spectators, contributing to the local economy. These events stimulate economic activities such as food vendors, traders and artisans, who sell their products

and services to the attendees. The revenue generated from wrestling events helps support local businesses and boost the overall economic development of the region.

Concerning the existence of indigenous drama in Africa, some scholars have come out strongly to deny the existence of indigenous drama in Africa. These scholars include Echeruo (1981) who asserts that a story has been forced of ritual. Kalu Uka (1973) further claims that traditional drama is not yet drama; rather it is vestigial element which drama may draw its ideas from. He goes ahead to assert that what some people call traditional drama should be merely referred

to as elements of drama. This study is here to counter their assertion because Igbo wrestling festival is an indigenous drama which has proved itself dramatic because it has plot, characters, settings, costumes, make-up, conflict, dialogue, music/song, dance, audience, performer and spectacle. Characters in Igbo wrestling festival performance include clansmen and women, maternal uncles, grandparents, neighbours and friends from the community, wrestlers and spectators that are members of the Igbo community. This inclusivity in choice of characters is lingered on the fact that the performance is communal and the space is fluid.



Wrestlers engaged in a wrestling bout at Nsukka Enugu State. (Source: During wrestling festival contest at Nsukka, Enugu state)

As Nigeria continues to modernize, traditional cultural practices risk being overshadowed. Wrestling serves as a powerful tool in preserving the cultural heritage and cultural identity of the Igbo people. By keeping this activity alive, the Igbo community can ensure that their unique customs and traditions are passed down to future generation. Thus, the need to investigate the dramatic elements and ritual contents of Igbo wrestling festival, document and preserve it in print for future generation before it fades away.

2. Literature review

The related literature is reviewed under the following sub-headings: Conceptual framework, previous studies and theoretical framework.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Under conceptual framework, the definitions of the following concepts are provided: Wrestling, festival, traditional drama and ritual.

2.1.1 Wrestling

Beyond the sport of wrestling, the Igbo “Mgba” celebration captures the ideals and character of the people. The celebration is a group activity that unites individuals of all ages, therefore promoting continuity and togetherness. This is a moment when the society comes together to praise moral values such as justice, bravery, and honour in addition to athletic ability.

According to Nzewi (2009) wrestling is defined as the sporting event. Wrestling is believed to be indigenous being part and parcel of the Igbo land. Buttressing the game as indigenous, Obi (2008) portrays “Mgba” as potentially lethal activities. Simply put, wrestling is a sport in which two opponents try to pin each other’s shoulder to the floor. The performers use manoeuvring

technique called holds to grip their opponents and control their movements.

Wrestling in Igbo culture provides a platform for individuals to showcase their skills and gain recognition. Accomplished wrestlers are revered as heroes and serve as role models for younger generation. Their achievements in the wrestling arena are celebrated not only by their own communities but also by neighbouring villages, further enhancing their reputation. Wrestling tournaments in Igbo land bring communities together, fostering a strong sense of social cohesion. These events attract participants and spectators from various villages, fostering connections and strengthening social bonds. The shared experience of supporting wrestlers creates a sense of belonging and collective identity within the community.

2.1.2 Traditional drama

According to Duruaku (2003:11) “traditional drama refers to indigenous performing art forms that have not been corrupted by modernisation over the years”. The festivals which combine dances, songs, music, chants, speech/dialogue, spectacle, and so on, are examples of traditional drama. According to Iwuchukwu (2009), drama as an art form thrives on performances because it involves the imitation of an action, an enactment or re-enactment of a story in life situation.

2.1.3 Ritual

Rituals are those repeated activities that produce desired results. Rituals are action taken in order to relate with supernatural powers through worship, incantations, enchantments, use of sacrifices, magic and spiritual means so as to exert control over situation, as well as acquire power and fame. According to Robbie (2003: 8), “a ritual is a patterned, repetitive, and symbolic enactment of cultural (or individual) beliefs and values”.

2.1.4 Festival

Festival is an organized event when people meet some time of the year to celebrate special events of religious or cultural significance. According to Seidu (2002) festivals are collective rituals of both religious and historical importance and characterized by such activities as the pouring of libation, sacrifices to the gods, washing and cleansing of ancestral stools and shrines, merry-making among others depending on the circumstances surrounding a particular celebration or festival. Traditional festivals are centred on religious, socio-economic, political and cultural beliefs and values of a society. During festival period, people

return to their homes to celebrate their family ties and reinforce the customs and values of the community.

2.1.5 Previous Studies

This section presents some of the studies conducted on wrestling festivals in Igbo land and beyond. Not much research work has been done on traditional wrestling festival. However few scholars have done sketchy works on traditional wrestling festival in Nigeria and their works has been reviewed hereunder.

Ikegwu (2011) examined the effect of globalisation on Igbo cultural heritage for tourism development: A case study of Mgba (wrestling). In the study he noted that mgba predates the colonial period in the Igbo nation. The skill, stamina, joy, honour and fame that mgba confers on an individual in those pre-colonial days is sought after by every male child born in that community. Every male child desires to be “dimgba” (a wrestler) using his age-grade, as it confers recognition by the community. Communities are feared for the number of ‘ndi mgba’ (wrestlers) they parade. Though it is not uncommon for one to challenge his fellow man to wrestling, it is usually done during festivities such as the celebration of new yam festival (iri ji oḣurṽ). Today, only few communities in the remote villages still observe the cultural fiesta. Globalisation has masked wrestling competition in Igbo land. The death of some Igbo cultural values such as ‘mgba’, that could have resulted in a rich cultural tourism stems from the appeal for western cultures and acculturation. The young and the old in Igbo land, especially in urban centres, glue their eyes on the television screen to watch white-man’s footballing and wrestling competitions to our detriment.

Amadi-Ikpa (2020) investigated the visual expression of Ikwerre wrestling festival through mixed media painting technique. This study, “Visual expression of Ikwerre wrestling festival in mixed media painting is designed to examine the effective and synergy of enamel paints, sand and fabric as media to produce painting of Ikwerre wrestling festival on canvas. Wrestling is one of the most celebrated cultures of the Ikwerre people. It is one of the physical exercises that bring the people together in Ikwerre land. The aim of the study is to document the culture in such that might trigger the people’s interest to encourage its revival using mixed media technique with enamel, sand and fabrics. The study was guided by empathy and institutional theories. The research design that was employed for this study is studio experimental research design. The findings of the study revealed that there is need to explore other materials like

enamels, paints, sand and fabric to produce paintings. For conclusion, it is believed that the study had enlarged the scope of media, knowledge in painting and as well project the rich culture of the Ikwerre people to a worldwide view.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by performance theory propounded by Schechner (2009). According to Schechner (2009), performance theory is rooted in practice and is fundamentally interdisciplinary and intercultural. Schechner's perspective on performance was greatly influenced by Turner (1988). Turner asserts that performance entails daily repetitive practices which are artistic in nature.

According to performance theory, performances simply depend on every day conflicts, tensions and pressures of life, different rites and ceremonies that have been initialized in the society. The performance in this case acts as a tool for societal commentary where people comment on the general happenings in their daily lives during the performance.

Bauman (1986) adds that the performance can be seen as special mode of communication and the performance itself provides the frame within which messages being communicated are to be understood and interpreted. In any performance, the performer assumes the responsibility for a display of communicative competence. On the other hand, the audience also assumes the right to regard the performance and performer with special intensity. The performance itself becomes constitutive of the domain of verbal art. Performance is always controlled by the rules of a given community about speaking in general. As an example, it takes up the question of the relationship of aesthetic and ethical values.

Performance theory is relevant to this study because it plays a significant role in exploring drama in Igbo traditional wedding performance. Performance theory is about the ritual performances which are of important to a particular community. Igbo traditional wrestling festival brings the Igbo people together in celebration through dance, song and music.

3. Methodology

The study was accomplished through interview and a combination of observation. The historical facts that surround the wrestling festival were obtained through interviews with elders of the people of the area, including the Igwes (community leaders). Participant observation was also a tool that was used in data

collection. In the field, data were collected using participant observation and oral interview technique. It was made possible by participating in wrestling festival as a member of the audience, thereby joining in the handclapping. After the wrestling events were over, the data collected from the field were subjected to both textual and structural analysis, using the thematic approach and transcription method. The data collected were later analysed descriptively based on the objectives of the study.

3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and analyses the data collected from the fieldwork under the following sub-heading: Dramatic elements and ritual in traditional wrestling festival among the Igbo people and the influence of modernization on the performance of Igbo traditional wrestling festival

4. Ritual contents in Igbo traditional wrestling festival

One of the captivating aspects of Igbo wrestling festival is the symbolism attached to the sport. It embodies the spirit of overcoming obstacles and challenges, reflecting the resilience and tenacity of the Igbo people. Through wrestling, individuals learn the importance of perseverance and the rewards of hard work and dedication.

Moreover, wrestling in Igbo culture is deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and rituals. Before matches, wrestlers often partake in traditional ceremonies and prayers to seek divine favour and protection. These rituals add a spiritual dimension to the sport, highlighting the connection between physical prowess and metaphysical forces.

One of the informants who were once a renowned wrestler noted that during their days, they use to offer sacrifices to the gods in order to achieve the feat. He further stressed that for one to emerge victorious in a wrestling contest, he has to perform incantations, enchantments and make use of supernatural power of the highest order to exert control over the situation and acquiring power and frame amount to ritual. Some wrestlers even go as far as sleeping in the graveyard in order to have communion with the spirits while others deprive themselves of sleeping with a woman a week to the day of the wrestling festival. Some wrestlers may even deprive themselves of eating any food prepared by a woman.

Some wrestlers run to touch the drums and touch his chest in return while others touch the ground and touch their chest in the process. Other wrestlers engage in

symbolic washing of their hands with sand before the commencement of the wrestling with an opponent.

The Igba Mgba wrestling contests are ceremonial events governed by certain rites and conventions, not just about physical struggle. Usually, including bathing in holy water, using certain medicines, or being blessed by seniors or spiritual leaders, the wrestlers go through purifying rites before a bout starts. These ceremonies are supposed to release any bad energy from the wrestlers and get them ready for the fight.

The celebration may also be attended by spiritual authorities like diviners or conventional priests. To guarantee that the wrestlers are spiritually ready for the tournament, they carry out the rites meant to call for the protection and blessings of the ancestors and gods. These leaders stress the deep-rooted ideas that support Igba Mgba and therefore strengthen the link between the physical and spiritual sides of the celebration

4.1. Dramatic Elements in Igbo Traditional wrestling Festival

The following dramatic elements found in traditional wrestling festival among the Igbo people will be discussed: Arena (stage) plot, spectacle, characters (actor), setting, song and dance, rhythm.

Arena (stage)

Usually occurring in an open field or village square, the festival provides the wrestling venue. In the village square fans swarm to see the battles, support their favourite wrestlers, and engage in the celebration. Playing traditional instruments, drummers and musicians provide a rhythmic background that energizes the wrestlers and increases the intensity of the battles. Arena is the performing area or performance space. The Igbo performing area is called theatre-in-the-round. Wrestling performance is normally done in “ama egwuregwu” (village square). This is actually a preferred stage type for traditional Igbo wrestling festival. In Igbo land, the audience seats around the performing arena. The Igbo people are used to encircling their performers for an effective relationship.



Wrestlers with loincloths as costumes in a performance arena at Elele, River state (Source: Facebook ng).

Plot

A plot comprises the events that make up a story, particularly as these events relate to one another in a pattern, or in a sequence, as they relate to each other through cause and effect. The plot of drama contributes enormously to the thematic development of the story and the emphasis mostly falls on cause and effect.

Plot in traditional wrestling festival is scenario which is an imaginatively constructed plot upon which a performance is based. The traditional Igbo wrestling festival has a story that surrounds it. This story is embedded in the music and songs that the performers or referees render to the audience. Music and songs are very important dramatic elements in Igbo traditional wrestling festival. Music gives aesthetic pleasure to the performance and helps to create mood and pace to the wrestling activities.

Spectacle

Spectacle in drama entails aspects of costuming and enhancement in production. Spectacle is one of the aspects that have elevated arts, especially drama as the playwright creates the mood of the play in order to captivate the audience. Crow (1983) calls it the 'larger than life' element in every dramatic production. In the context of this study spectacle is seen as something exhibited to view as unusual, notable, or entertaining. The focus is on Igbo traditional wrestling festival and those eye-catching aspects worn by the actors which make them stand out from the rest.

Costumes and make-up play very functional roles in traditional African drama. Costumes are visual re-enactment of a people's history and a reminder of their traditions. Apart from appealing to the eye, they also send a message to the audience. For Instance, the beads worn by the actors reminds the Igbo people of available resources to invent something new.

Costumes are utilized as a type of emblematic articulation of oneself just as an open device that deciphers its sociological impacts at some random time. Ensemble has the feature of catching the audience mental focus, increasing their disposition and passing on the message, through non-verbal methods. Costume does not only serve the purpose of clothing but most importantly plays the role of cultural identification.

Props

Prop is very important for the actors to master the use of their stage properties. Props are those artistic materials used by the actors on set. In the Igbo traditional wrestling festival, a bell is used by the performer as one of the stage properties. Props add glamour to the performance. In some Igbo communities, the prop used during wrestling contest is the broom held by members to control the inflow of the audience into the arena. Sometimes, it is used to regulate the wrestling, separate contestants that have locked themselves as well as to push the audience backwards from the wrestling arena.



Wrestlers in action at Umu ahia, Imo state (Source: Facebook ng)

These costumes worn during the performance make it aesthetic and artistic. These costumes reflect the culture of people of this particular group of people.

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Characters (Actors)

Finnegan (1970) in regard to drama states, “Most important is the idea of enactment, of representation through actors who imitate people and events” (P.501). In the African traditional drama, the choice and signification of character is vital and fundamental to the expression and conveyance of meaning. The characters symbolize values, beliefs and philosophy of the community, this brings people together.

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Wrestlers in a wrestling bout in Afikpo, Ebonyi state (source: Wrestling festival contest at Afikpo)

During the Igbo traditional wrestling festival, the wrestlers are the main characters in the occasion and are surrounded by the audience who sing praises and chants as they merrily dance. The elders, clans' people, the referees and the audience constitute the characters in the drama as all of them have a role to play in the actualisation of the wrestling festival. Igbo traditional wrestling festival just like most traditional African festivals, the audience is a participating one, and it is part of the community of the active performers. The audiences who are also part of the characters come and go at will depending on force of spontaneity brought by the tempo, rhythm, and inspiration experienced by the audience. The performance is fluid. The performance is for all present at the wrestling arena. Without audience participation, the beauty of wrestling festival is lost. It is as a result of the audience that wrestling contest becomes profoundly interactive. The audience joins in the dance and also singing the chorus. This participation of the audience forces the active performers (wrestlers) heightens their level of performance. The only way to differentiate the audience and the performer is through costumes and properties that are used. The performer popularly known as “dingba” (wrestler) is crucial to the wrestling festival. In Igbo traditional wrestling festival, the wrestlers use their bodies and voices to entertain the audience. In Igbo wrestling festival, the wrestlers become the performers. The numbers of contestant that will wrestle at a match are not exactly fixed. One contestant comes out to challenge opponent from the opposing team, community or village. Wrestlers were trained to abstain from sex at least a week before every contest. The first wrestler springs onto the arena at will and throws challenge at opponents. If a man refused a challenge, the challenger collects sand in his palm, rubs it against his buttocks, and pours it on the coward, or he is permitted to pull at the weakling's hair.

If the challenge is accepted, the contest begins. During this hot contest, in which their muscles are taut and stretched to breaking points, the wrestler who passes over his opponent's back has defeated him.



Wrestling festival contest at Ogrute Elugwu Ezike. (Source: Collected during wrestling bout)

Song, Dance and Drumming

Songs are an important genre of oral literature. Igbo traditional marriage ceremony would be incomplete without songs. Basically, they are poems and chants composed to be sung during the performance Igbo traditional wrestling festival. Songs are a sub-genre of oral literature and hence a literary form normally composed and sung on this particular occasion. The song is just one way of conveying a message to the audience. These songs are highly repetitive with the purpose of stressing the message to the intended person. Repetition is a literary feature which renders this Igbo traditional wrestling performance

In Igbo culture, wrestling is not merely a form of entertainment, but a symbol of communal unity and pride. It is a way for individuals to demonstrate their strength and agility while upholding the values of honour and respect. Wrestlers are highly respected within their communities and their skills are admired by both young and old. The traditional wrestling matches are not just about physical strength; they also emphasize strategy, technique, and mental fortitude. Wrestlers undergo rigorous training to hone their skills and prepare for competitions. This dedication to training reflects the discipline and determination valued in Igbo society.



Wrestlers and drummers performing in a village square at Nnewi, Anambra state. (Source: Facebook ng)

This Repetition of words, phrases or even whole verses not only contribute to the rhythm of the song but also emphasize important points in this song. This repetition also enhances the theme of the song.

Dance

In wrestling bout, victory is a celebration of community rather than just a personal one. Usually placed on the shoulders of his fans, a wrestler's triumph is paraded around the village square. Celebrating the wrestler's power and ability, the community honours the triumph with eating, dancing and singing. As a mark of the community's respect, the winning wrestler can also receive presents like cow or other priceless objects.

In every chant, drumbeat, song chorus and dance replicate nuances that serve as part of a ritual; dance expresses the conviction, attitude, norms and value of a specific culture. It is what is installed the way of life that can be reflected in the dance of a particular social group. Dance during traditional wrestling festival recount to a story, or serve strict, political, monitoring or social needs. This is of Igbo traditional wrestling as the dance is not merely a way of passing time but it expresses the mood of the day with brings joy and bliss as it is a celebration of one of the pleasant lifetime events in the community. Therefore, the characters who are involved, dance with vigour, and an expression of happiness written all over their faces.

Traditional drama is invariably music oriented with the attendant features of dance and song. Clark (1981) asserts that if drama is elegant initiation of action with elements of ritual, language, song, mine, music and dance, then there is evidence of drama in Africa. This is quite evident in Igbo traditional wrestling festival because the performance will not be complete without dance. During the dance, the characters sing songs of praise to the bride as they dance Igbo traditional marriage dance is significant as it brings people together, for instance, when group of dancers are performing, there are audience who gather to watch and participate in the performance. In line with the above view, Enekwe (1991) states that dance play an important role in the society in realizing societal harmonious living and togetherness. This leads to deep sense of communion with each other. This brings an end to individuality in the society and in broader perspective help in preserving the people's culture of its people. The dance helps to preserve the people's culture in the sense that the language of the people which in Igbo is used in their dance, during the performances. This showcases the beliefs, attitudes, norms and values of the Igbo people. This dance also goes a long way into improving the physical wellness of an individual. This is because in dancing, every aspect of the human body in exercised Imagery

Imagery in drama refers to the use of descriptive language that is appealing to the human mind. It leads to formation of a mental picture. Imagery adds layers of deeper symbolic meaning to the performance. Aspects of imagery include symbolism, simile, metaphor and personification. Use of imagery in performance is very crucial as it contributes to the effective conveyance of the intended message.

Drumming

The importance of drum during traditional wrestling festival is to evoke the emotion of the wrestlers, and create an excitement in the arena. Drumming during wrestling festival is also used to welcome wrestlers into arena. Wrestlers react to this welcome beat in different ways, based on the beat of the drum. Sometimes, they dance to the beat to show their strength. They also react by shouting their names, raging at their opponents or walking boldly round the arena. The beat of the drum also invokes another level of excitement in the wrestler by encouraging him to fight and defend the honour for which he was known. Here, drumming is introduced to trigger fire and desire in the wrestler to conquer and subdue his opponent. The sound of the drums becomes essential in stirring up emotions in the match to inspire excitement and passion. The effect of the beat of the drum resonates as the wrestler vows not to let the people down. In the midst of the excitement of the inspiring drumming, the wrestler boasts, "whoever doubts the depth of the great river should step into it".

The "Nkwa Mgba" (wrestling ensemble) is the most accomplished musical ensemble in Ngwa land, and keeps the wrestling arena charged with their music. This energizes the atmosphere, evoking a strong masculine feeling in the contestants' blood, and fills their bones and marrows with renewed energy and vigour to contest. The drums of the Nkwa Mgba are arranged in linear order and are about ten. They have the bass, tenor, treble and alto ranges. These

drums were made of animal skins (akpukpo anu), usually from a bush animal called Mgbada. The next instruments were the wooden gong, rattle, the metal gong (agogo) and the drumming sticks.

The drummers are not less than four. These drums were well arranged in parts. While the energetic beating of the drums rent the air, holding it captive and charged, the chief drummer who is very skilful uses the drum to call out the names of the wrestlers and warn the potential contestants of how adroit they were

Meanwhile, a group of lively youths would wave the palm fronds in the air to keep off the crowd from trespassing and launching themselves into the wrestling arena.

Drumming also has an intoxicating effect that further brings the wrestler's masculinity to the fore. During matches, wrestlers engage in both attacking and defensive movements with the aid of the rhythm from the percussion instrument. However, the effect of drumming during matches sometimes reaches a maximum peak of intoxication. Finnegan (2012) affirms that wrestling tournaments are sometimes accompanied by a kind of praise on a talk drum. The participants are welcomed as they enter the ring while the match continues to offer comments and encouragement. This is also echoed by Marshal (2001) who posits that during wrestling festival in Senegal, wrestlers are always accompanied by personal drummers who usually play sabra, a traditional African drum which possesses deep symbolic meaning to the wrestlers.



Wrestlers in action with the audience enjoying their performance at Ikpamodo, Elugwu Ezike, Enugu state. (Source: Collected During one of the wrestling festival at Ikpamodo)

Rhythm

Rhythm is defined as the pace of dramatization and further more alludes to the beats of the presentation. In drama rhythm must be altered, regardless of the drama's length, and it corresponds to the emotional state of the performers. In drama rhythm is realized in exchanges of dialogue between the performance during singing and dance. This is evident in Igbo traditional wrestling contest as the performers of the songs converse at a regular interval during the performance. Most Igbo traditional wrestling festival songs are in call response mode this involved a soloist singing a line then the others respond. This creates rhythm as it happens regularly. Rhythm is also seen in the movement of a performer. This is evident in his/her dance steps, which has synchronized. This is the case

in Igbo traditional wrestling festival as the dancers during the performance portray unity in their body movements. For instance, they all move their legs forward and backward as they hit the ground and the same is repeated in the successive performance.

5. Application of the Performance Theory

Performance theory by Schechimer is relevant to this study because it deals with ritual performance which Igbo traditional wrestling festival is one of them. Schechimer states that the theory depends on everyday conflicts, tensions and pleasure of life, different rites and ceremonies that have been ritualized in the society. The performance in this case acts as a tool for societal commentary where people comment in the general happenings in their life during the performers

and audience to complement the performance. Performance therefore is not only about the performers and the audience it encompasses art forms, which include dance/music song, dialogue, poetry which are fused with other dramatic elements. Therefore, this study concurs with the fact that Igbo traditional wrestling festival suits Schechimer model on performance in relation to drama. Performance theory is about the ritual performances which are of importance to a particular community as it brings them together. Igbo traditional wrestling festival as a ritual performance brings the Igbo people together in celebration through dance, song and music. During the performance of Igbo wrestling festival, songs are sung accompanied with the dance. The characters put on special costumes and make up and this makes performance theory suitable for this study because it deals with performance.

6. Findings of the Study

The findings of the study revealed that Igbo wrestling festival is significant as it symbolizes strength, skill, and communal unity. Traditional wrestling events are culturally important, serving as a rite of passage for young men and a means of gaining social status. Igbo traditional wrestling festival also reflects the values of competition and honour within the Igbo society, highlighting the community's appreciation for physical prowess and tradition.

The study further established that the Igbo wrestling festival is deeply intertwined with spiritual beliefs and rituals. Before matches, wrestlers often partake in traditional ceremonies and prayers to seek divine favour and protection. These rituals add a spiritual dimension to the sport, highlighting the connection between the physical prowess and metaphysical forces.

The study also found that Igbo traditional wrestling festival showcases the following dramatic elements: actors, costume, arena (obom), audience, plot, spectacle and props. It is therefore, a traditional drama. It has a storyline and there is drumming and dancing during the wrestling bouts.

Furthermore, wrestling in Igbo culture serves as a platform for social interaction and bonding. It brings people together, fostering a sense of camaraderie and mutual support. Spectators gather to witness the matches, cheering for their favourite wrestlers and celebrating the display of athleticism and sportsmanship. It serves as a means of showcasing masculinity, physical prowess and courage. The sport is often accompanied by vibrant music, drumming and

enthusiastic spectators creating a lively and engaging atmosphere

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, wrestling in Igbo culture is a testament to the strength, resilience, and communal spirit of the Igbo people. It embodies the values of honour, discipline, and unity, serving as an inspiring and educative tradition. The spectacle of the wrestling matches illustrates the value that is placed on physical agility and strength in Igbo culture. In the ways similar to today's sports, the wrestling events, even in their violence, provide vicarious pleasure for the spectators who consider the victors heroes and often carry them on their shoulders.

Wrestling in Igbo land holds immense cultural significance, serving as a cherished tradition that promotes physical and mental development, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural identity. This ancient sport not only celebrates strength and athleticism but also embodies the spirit and value of the Igbo people. By recognizing the importance of wrestling, we can appreciate and uphold the rich cultural heritage of Igbo land for generation to come.

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