

**AESTHETICS IN AFRICAN CULTURAL PERFORMANCE: A CRITICAL STUDY
OF *OTE'GWU* FESTIVAL AMONG THE IGALA PEOPLE IN NIGERIA**

By

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As the candidate's supervisor, I certify the above statement and approve this thesis for submission.

.....

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.....

Signature

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the sweet memory of my late father, Mr Valentine (Adem de Great) and to my mother Mrs Victoria Valentine for their boundless love and care.

To my darling husband Timothy Adujo Obaje (PhD) for his unending love, encouragement and support throughout this journey and to my lovely children Enyojo Obaje and Olaika'jo Obaje for always putting smiles on my face.

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Abstract

The Aesthetics of African cultural performance is predominantly understood through non-African conceptualisations. Notably, such conceptualisations focus on the general analysis of the beauty of art as possessing intrinsic value, meaning and significance. As a result, the notion of African aesthetics has been misunderstood and misinterpreted, since it is subsumed under this general and in most cases Eurocentric conceptualisation. As a point of departure, the current study explores the aesthetics of African cultural performance from an African perspective. It focuses specifically on the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival among the Igala people in Kogi State, Nigeria, providing a perspective of the aesthetics of African cultural performance through an analysis of this cultural festival. The study interrogates the various facets and elements of the *Ote'gwu* festival with the view to identify and analyse the aesthetics perception in an African cultural context.

This study is qualitative in nature and adopts an exploratory research design. The research sample comprised of fourteen purposively selected interview respondents. Primary data was generated through semi-structured interviews, which was adopted as it facilitates access to deeper probing of the respondents in the effort to elicit a deeper response from the interviewees towards answering the research questions. Additionally, the researcher adopted a process of reflexivity/positionality to make explicit the researcher's biases, values, identity and location in relation to the study and the ways these could impact the findings and analysis. Collected data were thematically analysed.

The study shows that African cultural performance encapsulates various functions and values including religious, social, moral and economic values. These functions and values inform the aesthetics of African cultural performance. This shows that the aesthetics of African cultural performance have great-bearing on the life cycle of African peoples. African cultural performances are meant to appease or elicit favors from the ancestors. Also, it is evident from the study that African aesthetics does not exist as "art for art's sake" but as "art for life's sake". Such performances hinge on human cultural realities and experiences of the environment. The study concludes that an Afrocentric aesthetic theory is of significant relevance in the study of African aesthetics.

Key Words: Igala; Cultural Performances; Ote'gwu Festival; Afrocentric Aesthetics

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1. Chapter One

Introduction and Background of the Study

1.1. Introduction

This study explores aesthetics in African cultural performances, with a specific focus on the *Ote'gwu* festival among the Igala people in Nigeria. It interrogates the various facets and elements of the festival with a view to identify and analyse aesthetics dimension in an African cultural context. This introductory chapter offers a succinct background towards establishing the relevance of African cultural performances while drawing attention to the *Ote'gwu* festival amongst the Igala people of Nigeria. The Chapter, additionally, discusses and justifies the objectives and broad research questions of the study. It is expected that such presentation of the relevant research objectives and questions provide clear and comprehensible justifications for undertaking this research study. The concluding part of this chapter succinctly discusses the validity, reliability, limitations, delimitations and structure of the study.

1.2. Background to the Research Study

Igala is the major ethnic and linguistic group, found primarily in the North-Eastern part of Kogi State, Nigeria. Igala people are also thinly dispersed across a few other states in Nigeria. The traditional headquarter of the Igala is at Idah, a town in Kogi, that houses and preserves the Igala royal seat which symbolizes the indestructible tie between the Igala ancestors and those who are alive (Tenuche 2005 and Omotola 2008). Igalas have several cultural practices and festivals that have been orally transmitted across generations, and which constitute a significant aspect of Igala community life in terms of the frequency of celebrations and the relevance that seems to be attached to them (Negedu 2014: 115). One of such cultural practice in the celebration of the *Ote'gwu* festival. According to Mohammed (1990: 2) *Ote'gwu* is “the most important cultural festival amongst the Igalas”. It is an event during which indigenes and their friends from far and wide come back to their ancestral home to celebrate the ancestral lineage and their spiritual connection to the ancestors. Etymologically, *Ote'gwu* is an Igala compound word that combines *Ote* which means “wine” with *Ibe-egwu*

which means “ancestors” or “masquerade”. *Ote’gwu*, therefore, literally means “wine for the ancestors” (Mohammed 1990: 13). The *Ote’gwu* festival takes place annually during the dry season (February –April) at Ankpa, Kogi State.

The festival is regarded by the Igala people as sacred and therefore, held in very high esteem. Sacred rites, such as the killing of a goat and a cock are performed during the festival to spill their blood as an offering to the ancestors. Wine is spilled as libation to honour the ancestors, and in the process, participants pray for the guidance and blessings of the ancestors. Another aspect of the festival is the visit and roaming of masquerades¹ who visit villages, clans and houses. For the communities, these visits symbolize the visit of their ancestors to purify the land of any infirmities and diseases. Thus, members of the communities participate in the festival by joining the masquerades in prayers, music, dance and acrobatic movements (Egwuda-Ugbeda 2010: 145).

Despite the significance, liveliness and high appreciation that the performance of *Ote’gwu* festival appears to generate in Igala communities, its relevance to the communities and the participation of Igala people during *Ote’gwu* seems to be declining. This decline has been a source of questions for me (the researcher) as an Igala descendant who grew up in an Igala community and has participated in the *Ote’gwu* festival and other cultural activities for over two decades. Perhaps, factors such as shifting personal or cultural values, declining level of appreciation, usefulness, the nature and method of performance, among other things, contribute to the observed diminishing effect and plummeting participation in the festival. Thus, the study employed the notion of Afrocentric aesthetics as a theoretical lens to examine the aesthetic elements within this festival (Molette and Mole 2013). Eurocentric theory of aesthetics is acknowledged as well. However, it is noted that the Eurocentric theory generally focuses on analysis of the beauty of art as possessing intrinsic value, meaning and significance. As a point of departure, the current study adopts the notion of Afrocentric aesthetics, since it pays attention to additional aspects of aesthetics including: the usefulness, good taste, creators, interpreters, audience and their response, materials, methods, personal values, cultural parameters of beauty and ‘evocative power’ such as the ‘ability to amaze’, in its evaluation of the aesthetics of visual, verbal and other forms of art and cultural performances (Molette and Mole 2013, Douglas 1993). Moreover, “aesthetic value”, from

¹ Masquerades in Igala culture are believed to be re-incarnations of dead elders

this perspective, and as would be used in this work, means the quality of an art or performance that makes it desirable or appreciable (Chinyowa 2015).

1.3. Preliminary Literary Review

The classical philosopher, Plato, theorized aesthetics from a metaphysical perspective, which is concerned with such ideas as truth, goodness and beauty. Plato's beauty includes things that are a joy to behold and hear, and everything that causes admiration, arouses delight, appreciation and enjoyment. Plato also understood beauty as "suitability" and "pleasure for the eyes and ears"(Tatarkiewicz 2006, Hofstadter and Kuhns 2009). In a similar manner, Aristotle based his aesthetics on the Greek poetry and art; his understanding of beauty emphasizes harmony of parts. In this understanding, what matters in the works of art is their composition and harmonies, not particular things such as colours and shapes (Gilbert 1936, Marshall 1953 and Tatarkiewicz 2006). Furthermore, aesthetics, for Aristotle, goes beyond what only is pleasing to the eye to include the arrangement and bringing together of an art. These classical philosophers have inspired and shaped studies in aesthetics. In Brincker's (2015: 1) observation, "most theories of aesthetics focus on 1) features of the perceived object and its presentation or 2) on psychological evaluative or emotional response and intentions of perceiver and artist." In order to illustrate that aesthetics does not have to be tied to art Santayana (1904: 2) cites Croce's comprehension of aesthetics as "purely and simply the science of expression; expression being itself so defined as to be identical with every form of apperception, intuition, or imaginative synthesis...." This understanding suggests that aesthetic is not subjective – it has nothing in particular to do with individualistic appreciation of art or beauty, neither does it have any kind of individual preference but is a collective appreciation of art or beauty.

The scholars cited above represent Eurocentric aesthetics which according to Welsh-Asante (1993: 5) given its Greco-Roman underpinnings, prescribe a profile (outline), posture and positioned mind-set. Welsh-Asante (1993) notes that a "profile is an example of what African scholars call a linear mentality." This mentality, according to Peng and Akutsu (2001) is a psychological tendency to show distaste for ambiguity and contradiction, and a preference for consistency. Profile, thus, creates challenges for Eurocentric analysts when dealing with the ambiguities and contradictions in Afrocentric aesthetics. Welsh-Asante (1993: 5) also

describes posture as the antithesis of stance, and that “while posture is an attitude that is limited (only belongs) to the art itself, stance represented in an art is a reflection of the values of the society itself.” Thus, Eurocentric aesthetics emphasize posture at the expense of “stance”, which promotes the general view that European arts stem from the idea of “art for art’s sake”. European scholar Saintbury does emphasize form and technique, and conscious artistry in European Aesthetics, Thus, art, to some extent is art dominant and life for art sake (Richardson 1944). This is different from the African understanding of aesthetics which conceptualizes arts as serving different functions. Hence, scholars such as Molokwane (2007: 2) hold that in the African context, the notion of “art for art’s sake” is replaced with the notion of “art for life’s sake”. Art is integral to life and to human well-being (Jegade 1993). The African goes beyond the art itself to encapsulate its functions and purpose for the individual or society. It would appear that life-force is the inspiration behind art in the African context.

Welsh-Asante (1993: 3) further observes that aesthetics from African perspective are “specific” (individualistic) and “general” (communal). It is individualistic to the extent that the individual person constructs their response in accordance with their ability to comprehend the highlighted rudiments of aesthetic within a particular object/experience. This would most likely be influenced by the person’s history, experiences and disposition towards the art in question. Aesthetics is communal, where there exists a constructed communal understanding of what beautifies the art with respect to such communities’ relationship and interaction with the art and other areas of their endeavours. Thus, the nature and complexion of aesthetics differ from one culture to another, depending on its history and mythology, and often, religion (Irele and Jeyifo (2010:2).

Welsh-Asante (1993) Irele (1993) Molette and Mole (2013) Molokwane (2007) and Chinyowa (2015) uphold that functionality is a normative in traditional African aesthetics. This is further highlighted by Chinyowa (2015: 534) who claims that “aesthetics does not only serve to reinforce what the people already know, but also provides the basis for new ideas, values and perception. It helps to mediate the way in which people interpret, understand and relate to their world.” In other words, it also reinforces African people’s cultures, and is a source of insight and a platform for building the community and its relationships with other communities as well as with ancestors. These perceptions reveal the different dimensions and elements that inform aesthetic evaluation and the appreciation of

art forms within the African context. They also reveal the significance of context in such analysis. Thus, they offer a lens to critically examine the current research's chosen case study, the Igala context and the aesthetics of *Ote'gwu* festival within this context. This study conceptualises this festival as an art form that appears to serve a specific purpose and function in the Igala community, beyond enjoyment and appreciation. Moreover, the present researcher's position as an insider in the Igala community gives a vantage point that allows a nuanced analysis of this festival. The nature of Afrocentric aesthetics, as compared to the Eurocentric requires such nuance in analyzing African cultural performances like the *Ote'gwu* festival.

African cultural performances are often a way of life for Africans. Chinyowa (2015) views such performances as symbolic ways through which people come to understand and interpret their world. Such performances are expressed through many different art forms such as cultural festivals, storytelling, ritual ceremony, song and dance (Chinyowa 2015). These cultural practices are also located within the context and practice of oral traditional performance found among many African tribes. Adedeji (1971: 134) refers to oral tradition as a "complex corpus of verbal or spoken art created as a means of recalling the past and based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of people." Similarly, Finnegan (1992: 6) understands oral tradition to include any kind of unwritten tradition. These could be physical monuments, religious statues or frescoes. Thao (2006: 14) asserts that the practice of "oral tradition transforms knowledge through performance, repetition and memorization of oral performances such as poetry, songs, stories, chants etc." Scheub (1985: 1) expresses the magnitude of African orality in his assertion that "African oral tradition distils the essence of human experiences, shaping them into remember-able, readily retrievable images of broad applicability with an extraordinary potential for eliciting emotional responses....." This assertion echoes the oral nature of the *Ote'gwu* festival as it embodies various aspects, values and beliefs of the Igala people. It is an enactment, an event, a ritual, a performance that has been handed down orally across generations. Such rituals performances according to Canonici (1995: 17) are ways through which traditional Africans live in a community and find their fullest expression in and through it. The annual repetitive nature of the *Ote'gwu* festival thus possesses the potential of distilling and transforming the people's experience, appreciation, expression and reception of the festival.

1.4. Rationale and Significance of the Study

The study is informed by the researcher's personal motivations, curiosities and envisioned relevance of the study to the Igala society and to the theoretical discourse on aesthetics of African cultural practices. This study applied an insider's perspective that draws on my significant knowledge of the Igala people and several cultural practices such as traditional marriage ceremonies, funerals and cultural festivals, including the *Ote'gwu*, which is an annual highlight among the Igalas. Although the researcher had experienced *Ote'gwu* festival for over two decades, the researcher is still left with questions about the value and significance of the festival in contemporary society, considering what appears to be a decline in the performance quality and general appreciation of the festival evidenced by declining numbers of participants. Thus, the study established more clearly whether the changes perceived in the festival signal an actual decline or not, and the factors that might be responsible for such a decline within the Igala community as facilitated by the festival. It is expected that this process will also facilitate a better understanding of the phenomenon of social and cultural changes. This arguably could be beneficial to social actors, policy makers and theorists who seek to understand the changes in African cultural performances.

As an Igala descendant, my participation in the festival has been minimal, mainly as an observer of the cultural activities. As a member of the community, I often enjoyed the ceremonial banquet and followed the masquerades around. This participation obviously, was nonetheless disconnected and disorientated from the mythical and spiritual elements of the festival. This is because of the disparities between my personal beliefs and those held by the elders and ancestors. However, it is worth mentioning that members of my family engage with the latter elements with an intense degree of solemnity and dedication. This study is considered important and significant due to its ability to help me and other interested parties (scholars, participants of the festival and more importantly the Igala community) to better understand the mythical and mystical elements of *Ote'gwu* festival. It will also help to understand the people disconnect from the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival. Understanding the disconnect with the festival in the Igala communities will facilitate the management of personal and communal tension with respect to engagement with the festival.

More importantly the study will shed more light on the aesthetic elements of the *Ote'gwu* festival, the meanings, usefulness and values (or lack thereof) attached to the festival by Igala

people. This is particularly important because of the approach applied to this study and its privileging of African locations, values and worldviews. Thus, the study could enhance a better appreciation of the festival as an art or cultural form whether for its beauty, ability to evoke positive response among participants and spectators, or for other values associated with such festivals such as their ability to link the living to the protection of their ancestors, increasing the bond of the community members and entertainment as a way of celebrating the life of the community (Egwuda-Ugbeda 2011). Arguably, these could contribute ultimately to the quality of life and harmonious co-existence of a community through aesthetic appreciation.

1.5. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to explore the meaning, significance and aesthetic value of African cultural performance through a critical examination of the *Ote'gwu* festival among the Igala people.

Other objectives include:

- To develop a deeper understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival and associated meanings through an exploration of its practices, performances and symbols.
- To explore Afrocentric perspectives on aesthetics of cultural performances.
- To examine the significance and aesthetic value of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala community.
- To find out the extent to which the significance, meanings and aesthetic values associated to the *Ote'gwu* festival have (or have not) changed, and the motivating factors for such change, if applicable.

1.6. Research Questions

The key research question for this study is: how does a critical investigation of the *Ote'gwu* festival contribute to understanding aesthetics in the context of African cultural performance?

Sub-questions:

- What are the different practices, performances, meanings and symbols that constitute the *Ote'gwu* festival?
- How is an African cultural performance, such as the *Ote'gwu*, to be understood in light of Afrocentric aesthetics?
- What is the significance and aesthetic value of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala people?
- Are there changes in the perceptions, associated meanings, practices and significance of the *Ote'gwu* festival in recent years compared to previous years? And if so what are they and how have they come about?

1.7. Theoretical Framework

The study will utilize Afrocentric aesthetics as presented by Mollete and Mole (2013) as the preferred theoretical lens for exploring *Ote'gwu* festival in the context of African cultural performance. This is primarily because it privileges African realities, modes of knowing and African locations as the best place to “observe, understand, appreciate and evaluate” African cultural art forms (Mollete and Mole 2013: 125). Privileging² African realities in this study is important due to its ability to explicate a distinctive comprehension of aesthetics through the lens of the Africans. Afrocentric aesthetics falls within the broader theory and paradigm of Afrocentricity proposed by Asante (1991). According to Asante (1991: 1) Afrocentricity “is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person”. It is a mode of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate. It is the study of, and approach to, concepts, issues and behaviours based on African cosmology, axiology, aesthetics and epistemology (Asante 1988, Mazama 2001).

Afrocentric aesthetics moves beyond the classical Eurocentric concern of aesthetics with “what is beauty?” which sees art as having intrinsic values, significance and meaning rather than something created for its usefulness or functionality. According to Mollete and Mole (2013) Afrocentric aesthetics contend that the value of art forms or works partly comes from the usefulness for which they were intentionally created, and that beauty does not necessarily

² The privileging of the African reality in the context of this study denotes the conscious focus and adoption of African experience in the discourse of aesthetics.

exclude moral values such as “good”. Also, Afrocentric aesthetics acknowledges the differences in cultures and holds that the standard for what is good or beautiful is also shaped by the principles of individuals and specific cultural norms and values. Thus, people see beauty to the extent that their values and the parameters of their culture or socialization allow. Moreover, factors such as display, presentation and the economic factor of demand and supply could influence the aesthetic value of things – for example, the “good” or “beautiful” status of a performance may rise because it is in high demand but in short supply. Mollete and Mole’s Afrocentric aesthetics theory, therefore, makes possible a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the *Ote’gwu* cultural festival because it does not restrict aesthetics to the notion of beauty. Rather, the theory privileges the context, acknowledges cultural variation and offers a more dynamic understanding of aesthetics. Thus, the chances of misrepresenting or under-representing the aesthetics of the *Ote’gwu* festival are limited.

Afrocentric aesthetics suggest that studies of African cultural performance should not only analyse the finished product but include the methods and materials used to produce it, the creators of the art, the audience and its response to the art, and other people’s analysis and theories on such performance or art. Afrocentric aesthetics also helps me avoid the limitations of Eurocentric conceptions of aesthetics which historically labels non-European arts and cultures as primitive, crude, and uncivilized without actually giving a close consideration to such arts and cultures. Using Afrocentric aesthetics, the researcher draws on her personal experience of *Ote’gwu* festival and those of other Igala individuals to examine aesthetics in African cultural performance.

1.8. Research Methodology

An empirical qualitative methodology was adopted for this study. This is because the study deals with empirical issues such as perception, values, meanings, experiences and appreciation in relation to the *Ote’gwu* festival. This requires detailed narrations that are best acquired using qualitative methods. Qualitative methodologies, according to Patton (2005: 144) “are concerned with understanding the ways people construct, interpret and give meaning to their experiences.” The qualitative methodology, through in-depth questioning and interrogation of issues, enabled a collection and engagement of rich content and

narratives of the Igala people's experience and understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival and its aesthetics.

1.8.1. Methods of Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary method of data collection. Semi-structured interviews require the researcher to have a written list of questions and topics to guide them but it allows the interviewer some level of discretion in the pursuit of leads that spring up in the course of the interview (Bernard 2000). Semi-structured interviews facilitated a space for the researcher to probe the respondents in the effort to collect data that responds to the research questions with some level of depth and detail.

In support of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher adopted a process of reflexivity/positionality in the effort to make explicit the researcher's biases, values, identity and prior experience that could impact on the findings and analysis of the collected data through interviews. According to Finlay (2002: 209) reflexivity gives rise to an explicit "awareness of the self while developing a meta-analysis of data from the participants and the researcher." It is a process that demands a critical self-examination and interrogation of one's own creation of empirical data and personal interpretation of the various data gathered for the study (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009). Since I have personally experienced the *Ote'gwu* festival several times, I consider myself to be an insider, However, as a researcher, I also position myself as an outsider at the same time.

My insider's position enabled me to access and analyse aspects of the festival that I have personally experienced which further enriched the data that were collected through interviews. This positioning and my identity as an Igala descendant allowed me to reflect on my insider's knowledge and experience of *Ote'gwu* festival in relation to the experience and knowledge of participants to enhance my analysis. According to Chavez (2008: 475), insider positionality refers to "the aspects of an insider researcher's self or identity which is aligned or shared with participants". I was cautious of projecting my personal beliefs and experiences onto my participant and the analysis of my data; Yet, I did acknowledge instances where my personal engagement with the festival affected the research processes. My outsider position enabled me to clearly analyse the collected data with the lens of an academic scholar. This

was useful in managing my personal bias effectively and ensuring that the voices of participants were represented and valued and not influenced by my personal stance on the issues covered (Dwyer and Bucle 2009). This research is essentially about a community, not an individual and I endeavoured to maintain the communal dignity and stature of the participants in this research.

1.8.2. Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select respondents for this study. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method that allows the researcher the use of his or her own judgment in the selection of sample on the basis of their knowledge of the research objective (Mouton and Babbie 2012: 166). In addition to my observation of the festival, 14 respondents³ were interviewed. Amongst the fourteen interviewees were the *Oketa* of *Opulega* (king of Opulega) and four other custodians of the festival (in other words, the Igala chiefs and four respondents from the council of elders were interviewed). These respondents provided detailed and adequate historical information about the festival which were not readily available to others. Additionally, three people who had participated in the festival for more than a decade but are no longer participating and three individuals who still participates in the festival and have thorough knowledge of the festival in recent years, were interviewed. These sets of interviewees provided a detailed account of their experiences both as performers and keepers of customs and tradition amongst the Igalas. Respondents were eighteen years and above. This was because younger persons are not allowed to play significant roles in the festival such as wearing of costumes and ritual killing of animals.

Interviews with these respondents were largely telephonic as there was no budget for a field trip to Nigeria for data collection. However, these people had been consulted in person prior to the commencement of the research. To avoid envisaged linguistic barriers and challenges, interviews were conducted in the Igala language, which is also my first language, and that of my participants. The use of Igala language also facilitated easy disposition of the respondents and enhanced access to in-depth information on relevant issues during the interview. The interviews were transcribed into English for coding, analysis and discussion of relevant

³ The concept respondent will be used interchangeably with other concepts such as interviewee and participants.

findings. It would have been ideal to travel to Nigeria and engage with the research participants in the context and atmosphere of the festival. However, bearing in mind that the scheduled day for the festival ought to be proclaimed three times prior to the celebration, funding and perhaps the changing timeline of the festival were perceived as a challenge.

1.8.3. Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using thematic analysis and the lens of Afrocentric aesthetics. This method was useful for searching, identifying, organizing and interpreting themes in the data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 79). According to Braun and Clarke, it is a flexible method of analysis which is not biased towards any particular theory or research philosophy. Through an inductive process, the themes were allowed to emerge from the data rather than the data being forced to fit into pre-existing categories (Aronson 1995). This independence and flexibility of thematic analysis made it the researcher's preferred method of analysis. Also, since the method allows the themes to emerge from the data in a "bottom-up" fashion, my study stands a higher chance of being a true representation of the aesthetics-relevant experiences of my research subjects rather than a manipulation of data to speak to my theoretical interest. Braun and Clarke (2006: 81) further offer specific guidelines for the application of thematic analysis, and these were used for this study. Thus 1, the transcribed data was thoroughly and repeatedly read to be aware of patterns and noted information that were considered useful for coding or as themes 2, words, ideas, phrases and patterns that stood out were colour-coded, 3, these were then organised into themes based on similarities. These phases were used to guide the analysis of the data: Attention was also paid to the relationship between themes and the context of each specific code. The themes were then interpreted and analysed in relation to the broader contexts of the Igala and African cultural performance.

1.9. Anticipated limitations, scope and delimitations of the study

It is understood that limitations in a study refer to the variables that will have certain consequences on a study over which the researcher has no control. Purposive sampling frequently adopted in a qualitative study is an example of such a variable with inherent limitations and weak points. One of the criticisms against purposive sampling is its

susceptibility to the researcher's bias. This study's adoption of purposive sampling, rendered it vulnerable to the abovementioned biased.

In addition to the above-mentioned point, the researcher acknowledges the possibility of biased responses from respondents chosen for the study. This could have happened when a participant chooses to incorrectly speak out of his or her own judgement of the festival because of personal sentiments. A Christian or Muslim participant, for instance, may undermine the value of the festival and therefore not speak from the angle of the embedded value for the Igalas but rather from what suits him/her in line with his/her religious belief. It is therefore, acknowledged that nothing can be done to ensure specific responses from the study's participants, and more importantly, any such attempt would be deemed unethical in an academic study. It is considered unethical on the account that the "perceived biased information" may indeed be the participants' personal "truth" given his or her subjective experiences. Regardless of the researcher's awareness and sensitivity to the possibility of this limitation, the researcher is not in the position to actively prevent such bias from happening.

Following the above limitations, the researcher stipulated clear requirements that defined the eligibility of respondents to participate in the research. The researcher was resolute in ensuring that all the respondents who are no longer participating in the *Ote'gwu* festival had an in-depth knowledge and experience of the festival. This explains the researcher's choice of the present participants and previous participants with an interest in the festival as research participants.

The researcher was sensitive to the possibility of a biased response from participants chosen for the study. The possibility of such a biased response will question the reliability and objectivity of the study. Although the researcher had no direct control over what the data or information received from the participants, adequate effort was made to lessen the effect of this challenge by interviewing relevant and various people from among the Igalas who have in-depth knowledge of the festival.

1.10. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Chapter One, introduces the study while providing the background to the research. The second section of the chapter discusses existing literature on African cultural performance and *Ote'gwu* festival. In addition to this, the chapter articulates the research problem, research objectives, the key questions and a clear justification of the study. The theoretical framework is briefly introduced, and the chapter concludes with a discussion on the research methodology and justification of the chosen research paradigm and methods of data collection.

Chapter Two provides a detailed review of literature focusing on the African cultural performance and aesthetics. It begins briefly with a review of broader perspectives on cultural performances and aesthetics and the critical discourse of the key concepts in this study. The primary objective of this chapter is to engage critically with existing literature on African cultural performance and aesthetics with a view of establishing the semantic relations between these concepts.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical and analytical framework of this thesis. It examines Afrocentric aesthetics theories. It delves into Afrocentricity as an expression of African cosmology and as an African centred philosophy and concludes with the understanding of Afrocentric aesthetic for a better comprehension of African aesthetics.

Chapter Four is an appraisal of *Ote'gwu* within the broader context of African cultural performances. It commences with a discussion of the Igala people, offering a brief historical account of the Igalas within the socio-cultural context of Nigeria. The discussed historical account of the Igalas, this chapter further offers a detailed narration and description of *Ote'gwu* festival, festivity and fundamental practices in *Ote'gwu* festival. Finally, it concludes with a succinct discussion of the uniqueness of the *Ote'gwu* festival in relation to other Igala festivals.

Chapter five makes a critical analysis of the overall research findings. Such findings from the empirical component of the research are judiciously discussed along the lines of Afrocentric aesthetics.

Chapter six is the concluding chapter of the study. It summarizes the thesis while drawing conclusions on the research findings. The chapter also highlights the study's key claims.

2. Chapter Two

Literature Review: Unpacking Aesthetics and Cultural Performances

2.1. Introduction

The nature and complexion of aesthetics differs from one culture to another, depending on the culture's history, mythology, and (often) religious values and dispositions (Irele and Jeyifo 2010: 2). Hence, aesthetics and cultural performance could be understood or explored via various lenses, which could be African, European, Asian or American lenses. Given that this is an African centred study, the thesis focuses on African aesthetics and African cultural performance such as masquerades, ritual, music and dance performance. The focus on these performances is informed by their inherent role as African cultural performances. For instance, the masquerade is an embodiment of *Ote'gwu* festival. In other words, it does not only play a role in *Ote'gwu* festival; rather, it is the core expression of *Ote'gwu* festival.

This chapter, while focusing on the African perspectives, begins briefly with a review of broader perspectives on cultural performances and aesthetics. The rationale underpinning this section is a critical discourse of the key concepts in this study. Hence the study presents a critical appraisal of these concepts: cultural performance and aesthetics as conceptualised in various scholarly publications

2.2. Evolution of Aesthetics

There are various schools of thought on aesthetics. This is indicative of the vigorous evolution of meanings and practices associated with the concept from traditional and contemporary aesthetics. According to Petsch (1974: 21) the evolution of aesthetics is manifested, in "the state of art and poetry, the aspirations of artists and poets, philosophical trends often radically different from one another, orthodox and reformatory religious beliefs and the political and economic situation." This also shows that aesthetics is influenced by many factors and in turn influences perceivers in diverse ways.

Traditionally, aesthetics has been defined as the study of beauty. However, some aestheticians contest this definition, arguing that the concept of beauty is indeterminate and vague (Pooler 2013). Hence it could be said that conceptualising aesthetics has become challenging for both academic and non-academic researchers. Notably, available conceptualisations have been narrow, limiting aesthetics investigation to a focus on art and a conception of aesthetics as the study of art (Gude 2008). Other conceptualisations also look at aesthetics as the study of art and beauty (Guarda 2005). However, Tatakiewicz (1974) opposes such understanding and suggests that beauty and art have distinctive forms. According to the author, “beauty is not confined to art, and art is not solely the pursuit of beauty” (Tatakiewicz 1974: 1). This understanding suggests that beauty is not exclusively narrowed to art, but can be seen in many things. Tatakiewicz’s (1974) understanding suggests that beauty goes beyond the consciousness of art to include other functions such as personal, spiritual, educational, social and political functions.

This trajectory of aesthetic theory can be traced back to Ancient Greece which was generally considered the centre of earliest contributions to the development of aesthetics. The ancient Greek probed art and beauty separately. Art, for the ancient Greek, involves everything that pleases, attracts and arouses admiration (Destrée and Murray 2015). Its scope was broader than it is now to include that which pleases the eye and ear, that which pleases by virtue of its shape (Dennett 1990). Beauty, on the other hand, comprises a host of other things which are considered pleasing in different ways and for different reasons. Included in the medium and rationale in ascertaining the beauty of an art are sights, sounds and the quality of human mind and character in which we today see a value of a different order (Tatakiewicz 1974: 25).

Philosophers up to the 18th century probed into beauty, and broadened its inquiry, hence the emergence of the more inclusive, “aesthetics” coined by Baumgarten to denote the “art of thinking beautifully” (*ars pulchre cogitandi*) (Lothian 1999: 6). Baumgarten argued that the endpoint of aesthetics is the appreciation of beauty (Tatakiewicz and Harrell 1970, Shimamura, 2012). Baumgarten holds that an object may evoke feeling, but the experience of it is purely a mindful event (Shimamura 2012). Contemporary art critics and philosophers find Baumgarten’s term to be outdated and inappropriate to the experience of today’s art. Scholars such as Shimamura (2012: 3), argue that “Today’s art can arouse emotions in many ways – from beauty to anger to horror or disgust. Art also may pique our sensory processes through artistic balance and form, remind us of our own past or force us to think about the

world in new ways.” This view is supported by Schipper (1986), Adler (1980) and Neelands (2010) who understand art as the mirror of human existence and the expression of art as always linked to a specific time, place and culture.

Thus, Baumgarten’s achievement seems to be in establishing the term “aesthetics” rather than his conception of the nature of the discipline (Wessel 1972). Other philosophers such as George Dickie had at an earlier time referred to the same idea as a theory of beauty or philosophy of taste (Cohen 2004). Drawing from this, Tatarkiewicz (1972: 1) reckons that “the study of aesthetics proceeds along many lines, containing both the theory of beauty and the theory of art, investigating both the theory of aesthetics objects and of aesthetics experiences employing both description and prescription, both analysis and explanation.”

The classical philosopher, Plato is one of the philosophers who theorized on aesthetics from a metaphysical perspective which is concerned with such ideas as truth, goodness and beauty. Plato’s conception of beauty includes things which are joy to behold and hear, and everything that causes admiration, arouses delight, appreciation and enjoyment. He understood beauty to be “suitability” and “Pleasure for the eyes and ears” (Tatarkiewicz 2006, Hofstadter and Kuhns 2009). Plato conceived the advancement of “the beauty of the human body, of the mind, of institutions and laws (his ideal state), of the sciences (i.e. philosophy), culminating in absolute beauty itself which is outside of time and space – transcending the visible world” (Lothian 1999: 7). Plato’s aesthetics theory was influenced by his “metaphysical and ethical theories. His concept of art and beauty reflects his spiritualist theory of man, his moralist theory of life, his idealistic theory of existence and his aprioristic theory of knowledge” (Tatarkiewicz 1979: 113).

Plato in his metaphysical theory brought the idea that physical manifestation of things is not perfect because the ideal form of things could never exist in the physical world. Elaborating on this Russo (2001) states that, everything we experience in the world of sensation is constantly changing “the table will start to get worn down, the beautiful model will age with time” (Russo 2001: 3). All these are in the realm of appearance and it is obvious that appearance is deceptive. The perfect realm deals with the idea that forms are perfect, eternal and unchanging: This realm is grasped not by the sense but by reason which therefore represent the most accurate reality. Thus, for Plato, there are two fundamental realms of realities which are senses and form - with more focus on form as the true object of

knowledge. Plato's ethical theory deals with virtue and proposes the subjectivity of morality. Moralistic theory deals with the idea of human conduct as it relates to both qualities of humankind and form (the formation of the human beyond the physical). Plato's idealistic theory of existence is concerned primarily with the search for truth, with the understanding that truth is perfect and eternal (Guttek 1997). Truth according to Plato cannot be found in the physical world which is imperfect and constantly changing. Thus, the primary nature of things is spiritual or non-material and the material world is secondary. The objective world is not the real world but the world of ideas which is imperishable, immutable and eternal (Natorp 2004). The world of ideas has the good as the highest point and source of all true knowledge. The world of matter, the ever-changing world of sensory data, is not to be trusted. Plato's ideology focuses on the view that people need to free themselves from a concern with the material world for them to advance towards the good. This can be done by transcending matter through dialectics or critical discussion, in which one moves from mere opinion to true knowledge (Nath 2014). The idea of true knowledge rests upon the idea that knowledge must satisfy "adherence" and the understanding of some aspect of the forms which must be totally indefeasible⁴ (Wedgwood 2009: 3). Plato's aesthetics goes beyond the physical to encapsulate the knowledge and understanding of things. His aesthetics did not consider the role of art in aesthetics. He condemned art and poetry because they did not fit into his ideology which states that "what is beautiful in itself is not this object or that but that which conveys their own nature" (Tatarkiewicz 2006: 23).

Aristotle according to Packer, is another philosopher who focused on "tragedy" as a specific art form. He broke away from the metaphysical framework of Plato focused on imitation. Imitation is one of the primary concepts of Aristotle's theory of art. His definition of tragedy as the "imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in appropriate and pleasurable language; in a dramatic rather than narrative form; through pity and fear affecting the proper purgation of these emotions" is a classic example of his aesthetic theory (Packer 1984: 142). Aristotle saw a relationship between art and nature. He stated that arts either complement nature with what she cannot do or imitate her in what she can do (Gilbert 1936). Imitation is one of the dominant concepts in Aristotle's theory and informed his definition of art. He maintained that in imitation, the artist may present reality not only as it is but also as uglier or more beautiful. His understanding of beauty also

⁴ Indefeasible as used here means that, it cannot be annulled or lost

emphasizes the harmony of parts (Gilbert 1936, Marshall 1953). For Aristotle therefore, “what matters in the work of art are not particular things, and events, colours and shapes but rather their composition and harmony” (Tatarkiewicz 1970: 143). Aristotle, Plato and other classical philosophers have inspired and shaped modern studies in aesthetics.

2.2.1. Modern Aesthetics

Plato’s appraisal of beauty which states that “if there is anything worth living for, it is to behold beauty” and “beauty is the only thing worth living for” has often in the modern times been invoked whenever there is an attempt to give precedence to aesthetic values (Tatarkiewicz 1979: 113). To more clearly articulate the distinctive strands of thinking on aesthetics, several scholars, as expressed in the next section, approach and categorise relevant developments and thoughts through concepts such as Eurocentric and Afrocentric aesthetics. In the following sections, attention is paid to these two approaches to aesthetics.

a) Eurocentric Aesthetics

Eurocentric aesthetics is based on Plato’s concept which separates the mind from the body, places the mind above feelings, and divides art into components (Welsh Asante 1993). On his own, Aristotle in his poetics lists these components in a descending order of importance to include, plot, character, theme, music, rhythm, and spectacle (Tigerstedt 2013). Plot is the underlying principle of tragedy. It is the arrangement of incidents (action) which contains a beginning, a middle and an end. Character is the agent of a plot that provides the reason for the events of the plot. Each character has their distinct personality such as age, appearance and beliefs. Music is the rhythm or sound of the dialogue in a play and rhythm is the heart of the play. Plot, character, language and spectacle have their individual unique rhythm, and their combination create the impelling force of the play leading to a final climax and ending. They establish the mood and lend variety and pleasure to the play. Theme is the main idea or subject of the play, the meaning of the play as opposed to the happenings in the play (plot). Spectacle involves the visual aspects of the play created for the theatrical event which create the atmosphere for the audience’s eye (Boje 2014 and Greene 2012). This order of arrangement indicates that Eurocentric aesthetics is structural (Sekayi 2013).

Welsh-Asante (1993) observes that Eurocentric aesthetics prescribes positioned mind-set, a profile (outline) and posture for understanding aesthetics. Positioned mind-set in Eurocentric aesthetics highlights a predetermined way of interpreting and evaluating the work of art which are based on a structural approach to art as conceptualised by some of the Eurocentric scholars. A profile is “a linear mentality” (Welsh-Asante 1993). This, according to Peng and Akutsu (2001:108), is a psychological tendency to show distaste for ambiguity and contradiction, and a preference for consistency. Profile, thus, creates challenges for Eurocentric analysts when dealing with the ambiguities and contradictions in aesthetics. Welsh-Asante describes posture as the antithesis of stance, and that “while posture is an attitude that is limited (only belongs) to the art itself, stance represented in an art is a reflection of the values of the society itself” (Welsh-Asante 1993: 5). Thus, Eurocentric aesthetics emphasizes posture at the expense of “stance”, which justifies the general view that European arts stem from the idea of “art for art’s sake” (Prettejohn 2007). In other words, art is viewed as self-centred. Barnett (1938: 265) expresses this idea succinctly when he argues that whatever is done without any practical purpose, for the sole satisfaction of one’s inmost sensibility, is done “for art’s sake”.

In addition, Saintbury in Richardson (1944), emphasizes form and technique of art and conscious artistry, rather than the purpose. Guerard argues that the idea of art for art’s sake, is a refusal to serve but not a refusal to act (Richardson 1944). The idea of arts for art’s sake is narrow and excludes several other meanings, functions and relevance attached to art. Eurocentric notions of art and fine art further exclude rituals as art forms which seek to serve useful purposes, because Eurocentric ideas of art do not include usefulness as a criterion for aesthetic worth (Mollete and Mole 2013: 141). As Brincker (2015: 1), further acknowledges from a Eurocentric aesthetics standpoint, that “most theories of aesthetics focus on 1) features of the perceived object and its presentation or 2) on psychological evaluative or emotional response and intentions of perceiver and artist”. In order to illustrate that aesthetics does not have to be tied to art, Santayana (1904:2) cites Croce’s comprehension of aesthetics as “purely and simply the science of expression; expression being itself so defined as to be identical with every form of apperception, intuition, or imaginative synthesis....” Croce’s view of aesthetic suggests that aesthetics is not subjective; This means that it goes beyond the individualistic appreciation of art or beauty or any kind of personal preference; It is rather, a unanimous appreciation of the art or beauty. Again, Eurocentric aesthetics focus on light and

dark as good versus evil. Such understanding of Eurocentric aesthetics set the dichotomy of essential features of white and black aesthetic and the concept of superior versus inferior beauty, light and darkness, to quantify beauty as pervasive.

The above section of this chapter has made an effort to demonstrate an understanding of aesthetics from the emergence of aesthetics down to a contemporary Eurocentric understanding of aesthetic. The next section delves deeper into an understanding of African aesthetics. The analysis is necessary given that this study is an African centred research.

b) African Aesthetics

Aesthetics as discussed in the previous sections is a concept that denotes a science of perception. Perception is part and parcel of the African life, hence aesthetics, construed as a science of perception establishes the reality of aesthetic in the African society (Welsh-Asante 1993: 1). The concept of “African aesthetics” according to Argenti (1992) is a transposition of Western aesthetic standards to non-Western contexts. Western aesthetics up until recently was the dominant in studies of material culture of Africa which was both a “Kantian tradition” and essentialist in outlook seeing/viewing aesthetics with little or no relation to a wider social context.

The emergence of African aesthetics studies was a reaction to this tendency in the studies of aesthetics. Notably, African aesthetics began to emerge as the most suitable approach for looking at African aesthetics. Aesthetics in the African context is traceable in both traditional and non-traditional African cultures. This is visible in festivals, music and dance; theatre, film, art, traditional performance including body adornment arts and colours (Ugwueze 2011). However, Sirayi (1997) notes that academic debates predominantly focus on aesthetics in African contemporary performances at the expense of the indigenous African performance. The discourse on the aesthetics of contemporary African performances is largely embarked upon within the framework of Euro-centric theatrical elements. Such a framework emphasises various elements such as the beginning and the end of a performance, plot, theme etc. These elements, though not absolutely alien to the traditional performances, complicates the debate on African performances, since most of such traditional performances do not align themselves with Euro-centric theatrical elements. This consequently leads to a rapid growth

of scholarly engagement with contemporary African performances at the expense of the traditional performances. It is worth noting that although critical discourse on African performances emerged in academic debates just about a decade ago, the existence of this genre is arguably as old as Africans. This is because African traditional performances are understood as part and parcel of African life. Hence such performances cannot be separated from the African life. Nkosi (1981: 76) sees art in Africa as a “collective working in a symbolic language of the fears, hopes and wishes of an organic community, a placation of the gods and a place for the dead who are called upon to intercede for the living. There is no script and therefore no single author, sometimes not even a proper audience since the audience itself is fluid and indefinable, constantly merging with performers.”

Asante (1993) in his contextualization of African aesthetics, named spirit, rhythm and creativity as the criteria in the discourse of any African aesthetics. He mentioned the importance of having an epic memory which are derived from spirit, rhythm and creativity in trying to understand African art. This means that a person must have experienced and appreciates people’s culture for a holistic appreciation of their aesthetics. Rhythm in African aesthetics is the life force or vital energy that infuses all things and all beings. The life forces bring together everything and flow through everything in the perception of African aesthetics. Sengor cited in Floistad (2007: 10) holds that the basic foundation of African aesthetics is rhythm. It is the architecture of African being and the vital force and dynamism behind the variety of forms. African aesthetics is rooted in rhythm, rhythm is infused and direct in all performance and acts.

Welsh-Asante (1993) in his assertion, comprehends rhythm in African aesthetics to be the life force that permeates and guides all acts of creation and the material results of artistic thought. It is an integral part of the life force of every African, “it is omnipresent; it permeates the existence of all beings and is expressed in human being, time and place and things” (Welsh-Asante 1993: 5). Creativity has a dual role in African aesthetics, Welsh-Asante (1993) also establishes that it is the most identifiable and attainable yet the most intangible. It widens the world or universe by adding or uncovering new dimensions as committed to the visible and the invisible (Welsh-Asante 1993). This is the first manifestation of the life force or vital energy. The spirit is most closely connected to the soul. The spirit never dies, and it is ever living and cannot be seen. The spirit provides the supernatural extension to both the world of the deities and the inner word of ideas, thought and emotions. Art performances in Africa are,

thus, a symbolic expression of shared beliefs among most African societies, which draws upon the “history, mythology, motif and creative ethos of a group of people” (Welsh-Asante 1993: 6). These expressions are rooted in the experience and reality of the past and are still vital in the future for the purpose of existence. In the same vein Abbiiodun (2013: 15) holds the view that African art should be understood from inside the culture that gave birth to it rather than from outside.

From the foregoing, African art is evidently an ever-existing art. Consequently, it is understandable that the science of perception (aesthetics) is an ancient phenomenon in Africa. Asante (1993: 3) observes that aesthetics from African perspectives are “specific” (individualistic) and “general” (communal). It is individualistic to the extent that the individual person constructs their response in accordance with their ability to comprehend the highlighted rudiments of aesthetics within a particular object/experience. This would most likely be influenced by the person’s history, experiences and disposition towards the art in question. Aesthetics is communal where there exists a constructed communal understanding of what beautifies the art with respect to such communities’ relationship and interaction with the art and other areas of their endeavours.

A very important element in the discourse of African aesthetics according to scholar such as Welsh-Asante(1993), Irele (1993) Molette and Mole (2013) Molokwane (2007) and Chinyowa (2015), functionality. Welsh-Asante (1993: 2) upholds that “functionality is a normative in traditional African aesthetics.” African aesthetics in this sense is said to exist within its functional context of serving several purposes in the society. This implies therefore that the functional element of African aesthetics requires that the aesthetic perception of an art goes beyond the art to the consideration of the function of that particular art in the community. This was stressed by Hobart and Kapferer (2005: 5) in their work entitled *Aesthetics in Performances...* They hold that “aesthetic is what ties art (as all other human endeavours) to life. The aesthetic and its compositional forms are what human beings are already centred within as human beings.” They further drew attention to the argument that “while ... aesthetics is not reducible to art, most of the issues relevant to an aesthetic focus emerges through discussions of art forms or objects. The way these engage the senses and constitute or produce experience (exert force or power) is a major concern in the work of a diverse field of scholars in the humanities and social sciences towards general understanding

of the human condition” (Hobart and Kapferer 2005: 6). An example of such acts is in the performance of the *Asafotufiami* festival of big Ada in Ghanaian society.

The *Asafotufiami* festival is a rich annual cultural heritage that is celebrated in the first week of August in remembrance of the achievements in the war of settlement fought by their ancestors. It is a festival that requires extensive understanding and appreciation of the Ghanaian’s history to comprehend its aesthetics as understood by the Ghanians. This festival serves various functions within the local communities and for the entire country. It serves as a point of connection between the people and their ancestors, a means of reconciliation of intergroup animosities for peaceful co-existence and a revalidation of local leadership (Clarke-Ekong 1997: 50). The embedded functionality of this festival, as an African festival differs from the Eurocentric understanding of “art for art’s sake”. This element of functionality is further stressed in the work of Chinyowa (2015) who claims that “aesthetic not only serves to reinforce what the people already know, but also provides the basis for new ideas, values and perception. It helps to mediate the way in which people interpret, understand and relate to their world.” (Chinyowa 2015: 534). This, brings to light the unique place of aesthetics of art in Africa as it facilitates the reinforcement of culture and is a source of insight for building community relations and relationship with the ancestors.

It is vital to note that the axiological premise of African aesthetics is that beauty and good are not only synonymous but they are interchangeable, and that the opposite of beauty is not ugliness but not synonymous with bad. The scale of value in African aesthetics embraces the good, bad, ugly and beautiful. Thus it is the perception of an object or experience that leads to aesthetic judgement or the value of the art (Mamukwa 2014). African centred aesthetics embodies an extensive collection of distinct aesthetics from the central core, no matter how removed, how distant and filtered, the link to the core (Africa) is there

i. African aesthetics as art for life’s sake

In the African world view, art is an exceptionally high creative expression that is rooted in the experience of reality. Africans are not separated from their arts, and the art is part and parcel of their existence. In this context, the notion of “art for art’s sake” is replaced with the notion of “art for life’s sake...art is integral to life and to man’s well-being” (Jegede, 1993).

African art goes beyond the art itself to encapsulating its functions and purpose for the individual or society as earlier demonstrated. Similar to the Asafotufiami festival, Hobart and Kapferer (2005), assert that carnival in Brazil cannot be understood outside the context of the everyday life of the Brazilians. This underscores the view about the intrinsic and central nature of art to life. It would appear that life-force is the inspiration behind art in the African, and some non-African contexts. African art is rooted in the life of the people Welsh-Asante holds that the African artist does not detach himself in order to create art, rather the society actively gives vision and perspective from which to express oneself (Welsh-Asante 1993).

Unlike the European art where there is a distinction between society and the artist, and where the relationship between spectator and performer is linear and separated, in African societies, the artist and spectator are one. Everybody is a performer and spectator. This is evident in the performance of *Ote'gwu* festival. The performers and audience are basic components of the performance. Performers are often involved in the recreation and actualization of the performance. The performers are usually receptive to the audience reactions, and cultural expectations of the festival. The understanding of unison amongst the performers and audience in *Ote'gwu* festival, ensues from the audience's profound and comprehensive participation in the performances at the festival. This is because the role of performers and audience alternate amongst the people present at the performances, owing to the fact that everyone participates in the performance to a certain degree. The audience through their chorus-music, back-up instrumentalism serves as both audience and performers at various points in the performance. The only way to differentiate the "ceremonial performers" and audience is through costume and properties that are used. The audience also engage actively in the dialogue, music and dance with the performers, thereby making the performance an interactive one. At some points the masquerades who are the performers exit the stage for the audience who take over as performers. This way, they adopt the status of performers performance while the masquerades becomes audience. There are also moments when both the "ceremonial performers" and audience simultaneously perform in the festival.

Scholars such as Molokwane (2007: 2) through the notion of "art for life's sake" suggest that art in the African context is life-giving. The life-giving nature of traditional performance or art demonstrates the centrality of art to the people's life and wellbeing in traditional African societies. Such art, according to Jegede (1993), is an expression of people's worldviews and its absence inevitably creates an obvious and uncomfortable vacuum. This is evident in

Ukusoka the male circumcision practice popular amongst South African men. Regardless of the recent reproach of the ritual/festival due to the increasing number of fatalities, the absence of the festival leaves people with some vacuum. As such, people who do not undergo the *Ukusoka* cannot be considered men, and therefore, cannot participate in duties culturally reserved for men, irrespective of their age or maturity (Nkosi 2013). This example further grounds the view that cultural performance in African societies is vital to the African person given that, art permeates aspects of traditional life that are rooted in culture, history, experience and environment.

African art is tied to life, it deals with African cosmology, and it is the physical manifestation of life realities and experience. Jegede (1993) highlights two distinct and closely interdependent spheres on which African arts functions. These are the spiritual and secular spheres. The spiritual involves religion, which relates to elements of ancestral worship and the various communal and personal shrines which are installed. African societies believe and rest faith in their ancestors. They believe that the living-dead will continue to get involved in the affairs of the living and have the power to influence the happenings of the living. Wanamaker (1997: 287) refers to these two worlds as the “visible and the invisible”. There is an inseparable unity and continuity that is believed to exist between these two worlds. This unity and continuity has a significant role in the perception of reality among the African people. This reality in African societies is that “culture and tradition have religious conceptions...the cosmos, God, spirits, ancestors, man and indeed nature are in continuous consortium” (Mbachaga and Ukuma 2012: 9). Integral to the African worldview is the aesthetic value that is infused in the functionality of their arts. Thus, in the usefulness of an art lies the aesthetics value

African art finds expression in activities aimed at a range of purposes such as societal cleansing, the eradication of untruths, augmenting social cohesion, demonstrating respect and making religious offering for traditional norms and values. It is an art or performance that is in consonance with reality. Its tricks are simply not for make-belief but a communion of the natural with the supernatural in a fashion that reminds people of their obligations in a communalised society (Mbachaga and Ukuma 2012). Murdoch in Lin (2012) holds that “art is for life’ sake Or else it is worthless. The experience of art is itself a spiritual pilgrimage of soul from selfish fantasy to a clear vision of reality” (Lin 2012: 314). Art for her enriches

moral understanding, cultivates virtue, and helps us to achieve better lives. Arts through its enactment or portrayal brings out the “reality of the human condition and in turn enhance our moral perception of the real and cultivate the virtue of loving attention to other” (Lin 2012: 316). Arts therefore, includes the society’s world view in the manifestation of performance. Its significance lies in the desirable quality of people for better existence. This assertion is evident in Ngugi wa Thiongo in Kirby’s (2009: 6) view which sees art as a “way of seeing the world of man and nature through visual, sound or mental images” In the African worldview, artistic expression is an exceptional representation of the society that is rooted in the people’s reality or experiences. It is a demonstration of the philosophies and values of a given society.

Philosophies and values are norms and ethics which keep the society together. Among the Yoruba people for example, the *Osun Osogbo* festival is an annual traditional festival that involves the Osogbo community and the Osun goddess. It is an occasion in which the Osogbo people celebrate the significance of the river goddess (Osun) and her mythical deeds. The ceremony plays an integral role in the festival connected with the “regulations of the spiritual, political and social forces with society, in a way that activities which are seen as immoral and destructive to the society are looked at with disdain to the delight and satisfaction of the audience” (Probst 2004: 48). The people of Osogbo attach mythical figure in the philosophical names they give to their children such as *Osun somo* (osun gives child), *Osun tobi* (Osun is mighty). By inference, the *Osun Osogbo* festival is an expression of the Yoruba reality and experience that reveals their way of life as related to their existence and the values embedded in such existence.

2.3. Unpacking the Concept - Cultural Performance

Performance is a broad concept that includes various events such as concerts, theatrical events, sporting events, religious events, rituals and ceremonies. Scholars such as Turner (1982), Fernandez-Vara (2009), and Schechner (2013), hold that a performance embodies a variety of contexts, which include ethnic, cultural and intercultural aspects in its expression. They argue that sometimes it is historical and ahistorical, aesthetic and ritual, sociological and political. At other times it involves emotional release and a social fun, or is centred more on the religious. Turner (1992) defines performance as a mode of behaviour, an approach to

experience that is manifested as a play, a sport, aesthetics, popular entertainments, experimental theatre and more. He further asserts that, cultural performance ⁵is an “aesthetic family which includes genre such as folk-epics, ballads, stage dramas, ballet, modern dance, the novel, poetry readings, art exhibitions and religious ritual” (Turner 1982: 42). Guss (2000) however, emphasises other aspects of cultural performance, including the medium through which cultural performances are expressed. For Guss (2000) cultural performance encompasses both verbal and non-verbal media of expressions. Each genre and specific performance is underpinned by social structures and processes of the times in which they appear (Guss 2000). This means that performance includes various forms and styles in its presentations which are shaped by social structures. Different from Guss (2000), Turner understood performance to have originated from, and be rooted in, the French *parfournir* which means to “accomplish completely”. He theorized that “performance does not necessarily have the structuralise implications of manifesting form, but rather the *processual* sense of ‘bringing to completeness or of accomplishing” (Turner1988: 91).

Macaloon (1984: 23) conceptualizes cultural performances which the author takes to mean not only entertainment, didactic or persuasive formulations and cathartic indulgences, but also “occasions in which as a culture or society, we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others.” Macaloon (1984) also emphasises the essence of performance in culture including history, realities and myth. Cultural performances from this point of view reflect culture performed from cultural perspectives. These involve the beliefs and practices of a group or community in which members reflect upon and define themselves, by performing their collective myths and history.

Unlike Turner (1988), Macaloon (1984), emphasizes “reflective” and “reflexive” aspects of cultural performance. By reflective, Macaloon (1984) means that the performance mirrors a people’s life and by reflexive, he means that the performance spontaneously arouses the consciousness of oneself to the performer. In cultural performance, one may come to a full

⁵ Given that this thesis and this section of the literature review centres on cultural performance, preference will be given to the discourse of cultural performance over other forms of performances. It is also worth mentioning that the term performance and cultural performance could be employed interchangeably.

consciousness of his/her human capability and human desire. Turner (1998: 42) expounded that such full consciousness requires skill, craft, a coherent, consensually validated set of symbols, audience in addition to performer and social arena for appearing. The dance of the *Tyi Wara*, is an agricultural dance performed by the Bambara people of Mali, is an example of a cultural performance that reflects the life of the Bambara. The dance shows their spiritual connection of the people to the earth. The Bambara believe that they were put into contact with all of the elements of the universe through agriculture. Farming is glorified among the Bambara people as the highest accomplishment of man which bring him into intimate concert with the sun, stars, moon land and the seasons of the year. They therefore performed the dance asking the gods and ancestors to bless the farmers, and for a successful harvest (Imperato 1970). The performance of the *Tvi Wara* dance among the Bambara people symbolise and reflect the realities of their existence and value which is linked with agriculture as the utmost achievement of man.

To develop an understanding of African cultural performance and the ways scholars have approached the subject. It is important to also understand the underlying conceptions of culture that informed these perspectives. Scholars such as Abercrombie, Joan and Pegrum (1971), offer a general understanding of culture as the total way of life of a people, a bounded world of beliefs and practices that is usually employed to refer to a concrete, historically specific entity that is equivalent to or synonymous with a society. The bounded world of belief and practices constitute the unique experiences of a people who exist within a geographical location. This includes their attitudes, beliefs, language, dress codes, tastes in food, music or interior decoration, and a host of other features which comprise their way of life. In line with Spiegel 2005, Abercrombie, Joan and Pegrum(1971), Mbachaga and Ukuma (2012) construe this idea as a complex whole that involves knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Scholars such as Ashkanasy, Wilderom and Peterson (2000) and Sewell (2005), found the above understanding of culture to be too broad and somewhat problematic. Hence, Sewell (2005) construe culture as a “system of common symbols and meanings”. Culture for Sewell (2005) therefore is a structural common belief, social reality and the use of symbol in social interactions. To bridge the gap amongst scholars’ varying definitions of culture, Kroeber and Kluckhohm (1952: 181) provide what may be considered a complete and useful definition of culture. Culture in their view,

Consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human group, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other hand as conditioning elements of further action.

Definitions of culture such as that offered by Ashkanasy, Wilderom and Peterson (2000), which views culture as a system of common symbols and meaning are very limiting. This is so because such a definition fails to take into consideration the historical account of the referred symbols and meaning. Thus, it fails to make the distinction between culture and the social life of a people sharing a geographical space. Kroeber's and Kluckhohm's (1952) definition of culture as highlighted above articulates aspects of people's life that makes them unique and distinct from others. Also Williams (2014: 82) echoes this assertion when he notes that the distinctiveness is sharpened by values, tradition, beliefs, material objects and lifestyle of ordinary people in everyday existence. Kroeber and Kluckhohm (1952) for instance, highlight the relevance of traditional ideas and values which are explicitly or implicitly transmitted from generation to generation. Such emphasis distinguishes contemporary societal life of a people sharing a space from the culture of a set of people.

Deducing from the above comprehension of culture, culture is, thus, an essential part of African lives and future development. Lull (2000: 66) elaborates on the compound understanding of culture as,

A complex and dynamic ecology of people, things worldview, activities, and settings..... Culture is context, it is how we talk and dress, the food we eat and how we prepare and consume it, the gods we invent and the way we worship them, how we divide up time and space, how we dance, the values to which we socialise our children, and all the other details that make up everyday life

Thus, cultural elements are historically passed on in a pattern of meanings personified in a system of symbols which are hereditary and expressed in a way that enables communication within the society. Such expressions, according to Mbachaga and Ukuma (2012) perpetuate and develop the society's knowledge about, and attitudes towards life. The central meanings,

values and goals of a culture are seen in action or performance as they shape and explain human behaviour.

From the above understanding of culture, it can be deduced that cultural performance is primarily the expression of culture by means of presentation and manifestation as it relates to a people's way of life which is centred on their history, realities and experience. According to Alexander (2004), Cultural performance is the social process by actors, individually or in concert, displaying for others the meaning/essence of their social situation which may or may not be one to which they themselves subjectively adhere. This understanding of culture indicates that cultural performance is not just that which is performed by the community and for the community alone. It also includes the performance that involves actors and distils the reason of societal statue; this could be what the society adhere to or not. Alexander's (2004) comprehension differs from that of Chinyowa (2015) who views the idea of cultural performance as symbolic performances that are expressed through many different art forms such as cultural festivals, marriage, ritual ceremony, funerals and other festivals. These art forms are performed or expressed in a community's unique way of life. Culture as a way of life is a distinct body of beliefs and traditional institutions which distinguishes a society. Such tradition is embedded in their beliefs, norms, and values and their general ways of life, all of which reflect their cultural existence. This manifestation of norms and values according to Ezenagu and Olatunji (2014) is reflected in many festivals in which art is a part and parcel of African people.

Cultural Performance in the African context cannot be substantially discussed in a vacuum or isolated from the concept of oral tradition. This is because African cultures are located within the context and practice of oral traditional performance which is found among many ethnic groups across Africa. The next section discusses cultural performance within the context of African oral tradition.

2.3.1. Oral Tradition: An African Perspective

Schechner (2001) posit that African performance consists mostly of oral traditions given that they are passed down through direct oral transmission. The manner or mediums through which these traditions are passed on are of central importance. Oral tradition/communication

goes beyond the words to include gestures made in the processes of communication. Oral tradition has a significant role in African societies and it is a means of communication through which African histories and ancient stories are safeguarded. This tradition is rooted in culture and it is the channel through which culture is passed down from generation to generation. Finnegan (1992) echoes the importance of oral performance as a key factor of African communal life. In African societies, it is very common for people to gather around a fire at night to enjoy their evening. This is sometimes accompanied by oral performances such as storytelling with dancing, singing and chanting. In agreement with Finnegan (1992), Taylor (2006: 43) observes that among the Bemba ethnic group in Zambia, stories are generally told at home in the evening following the meal. An expression among the Bemba people says “if you tell a story during the day, your father will change into a monkey, your mother into a cold lump of porridge.” The prohibition on telling stories in the day time, while not a hard and fast rule, is what the Bemba people have heard from childhood. Similarly, the performance of *Ntsomi* stories by women among Xhosa speaking peoples of Southern Africa is a unique and a momentary experience. The performance is usually done at leisure hours especially at sunset when a grandmother, an aunt or a mother performs in the home before the children go to bed. The children gather around the fire, or lie in their beds, and the artist is at the centre during the performance. In this performance, there is no use of other illumination except the illumination from the fire. The performance is the fairy tales and a storehouse of knowledge of Xhosa societies whereby the wisdom of the past is remembered and transmitted through generations. Such performances express the value of the Xhosa world view (Scheub 1970). Storytelling in most African societies is interactive and also a performance. It is also a means of transmitting the norms, values and traditions of various cultures.

The rudiments of oral performance as stated by Finnegan (1992) are further highlighted by Scheub (1985: 3) in his assertion that “African oral tradition is never simply a spoken art; it is an enactment, an event, a ritual, a performance.” Such performance is a basic part of African shared life. Africans for instance, in the day gather under the shades of trees to tell stories, proverbs and tales, while at night they do the same thing around the fire. Sometimes this includes dances, songs, proverbs and chants. This view is upheld by Okpewho (1992: 43) in his assertion that “some of the simpler kinds of performance have to do with games played at times of relaxation. An example is the practice of telling proverbs and riddles in competition when the evening meal is over and the immediate or extended family is gathered in the

compound to relax before going to bed.” In line with Okpewho (1992), Adedeji (1971: 141), assert that African audiences do not want to be passive. Oral tradition, therefore, provides them with a means of vicarious participation in the traditional performance. This view of Adedeji (1971), presents African cultural performance as the act of the people by the people and for the people. They are part and parcel of the performance. They react to lines or dialogue, often join in the songs, repeat dialogue and sometimes move in rhythm with the action. In agreement with Adedeji (1971), Schipper (1986) points out that in most contemporary performance forms; the oral tradition constitutes a source of inspiration to the centre of the performance (Schipper 1986: 123). With these affirmations, it is evident that most African performances today reflect the oral tradition of the societies, in its imitations of real life and recollection of the past, present, and projection of cultural performance.

Oral tradition as a concept has been understood by scholars from their different viewpoints. According to Adedeji (1971: 134) oral tradition is a “complex corpus of verbal or spoken arts created as a means of recalling the past and based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of people.” Similarly, Finnegan (1992: 6) understands “oral tradition sometimes to denote any kind of unwritten tradition (including physical monuments, religious statues or frescoes.” The addition of “oral” to tradition according to Finnegan (1992) often implies that the tradition in question is in some way verbal or non-written often supposedly transmitted over generations by community or folk rather than conscious individual action. However, contrary to Adedeji (1971) and Finnegan (1992), Henige (1982: 2) conceives oral tradition strictly as speaking, “recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture and have been handed down for at least a few generations.” Henige’s (1982) comprehension of oral tradition in a way excludes any unspoken art such as statues and physical monuments from the sphere of oral tradition. Such exclusion highlights the limitation of Henige’s (1982) definition in the discourse on oral tradition. Thao (2006: 14) offers a glimpse into the importance of oral tradition in his assertion that “the practice of oral tradition transforms their knowledge through performance, repetition and memorization of oral performances such as poetry, songs, storytelling, chants etc.” Not different from Thao’s (2006) conception, Scheub (1985: 1) clearly expresses the magnitude of African oral tradition in his understanding that “African oral tradition distils the essence of human experiences, shaping them into remember-able, readily retrievable images of broad applicability with an extraordinary potential for eliciting emotional responses.....” This assertion echoes the centrality of *Ote’gwu* festival as it embodies various aspects, values and beliefs of the Igala

people. It is an enactment, an event, a ritual, a performance that has been handed down orally through generations. According to Canonici (1995: 17), these are ways through which traditional Africans live in a community and find their fullest expression in and through it.

It is within this sphere of oral tradition that African cultural performance is understood. *Ote'gwu* festival is one of the many cultural performances amongst the Igala people that have no written literature. However, it is highly valued among the locals as a form of cultural expression which stems out of their oral traditional practices. The festival has been successfully passed down from generation to generation through the people's participation as a means of recalling the past based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of the Igala people (Egbunu 2011 and Adedeji 1971). The annual and repetitive nature of the festival possesses the potential to distil and transform the people's experience, appreciation, expression and reception of the festival.

From the present researcher's understanding and experience of the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival, oral tradition is a significant aspect of the practice. It is at the centre of the festival and has played a significant role in its sustainability. The knowledge acquisition and structure of the performance of *Ote'gwu* festival is enhanced and acquired by means of verbal transmission which is expressed via songs or spoken tales in social or ritualistic contexts. This means that *Ote'gwu* festival is one of the various examples of oral tradition. Its history, experience and mythology are located in memory. The festival draws on the power of memory of the past which is actualised through narrative of the history and myths to the younger generation as the latter celebrates and participate in the festival. The people's participation in the festival linked them to the past, the present and future generation as one people. This shows the element of continuity in orality. Oral tradition as a means of expressions serves as a very important medium for the Igala people's expressions of the festival. It has been instrumental in transmitting and understanding the beliefs, values and ideas embedded in the festival. This is why the performers depend on the strength of oral tradition as the most succinct way of authenticating experience and educating them on the performance of the festival from generations to generations.

Oral tradition is an active and a continuing practice among the Igalas. It is evident in most of the Igala performances. The *Ote'gwu* festival is not only a celebration that has been handed down over generations but, also a continuing festival among the Igalas. It is an "unending

festival” due to its repetitive and active nature that is embedded in the past experience of the Igala people and celebrated in the presents for future purposes. oral tradition has maintained the records of every aspect of the Igala people ways of life and tradition. Oral tradition among the Igala people is used for variety of purposes including dance, songs, storytelling, teachings etc. Every aspect of an Igala live is exclusively transmitted through oral traditions. According to Moss and Mazikana 1986, oral tradition is a recollections of the past that is orally transmitted and recounted by spoken word. They hold that such tradition are organic expressions of the identity, purpose, functions, customs, and generational continuity of the culture in which they occur.

Having explored the concept of oral tradition, the next section exhaustively engages the concept of festival and its intricacies, such as masquerade, ritual, music and dance. These will be discussed with the view of providing well-defined understanding since they are integral elements of the *Ote'gwu* festival that will be discussed in subsequent chapter.

a) Cultural Festival

Festivals in recent years have become one of the most pronounced cultural phenomena of the African cultural scene (Getz 1991, Gursoy, Kim and Uysal 2004, Picard and Robinson 2006), and a vital part of a new socio cultural and geographical environment (Ryan and Wollan 2013: 1). Cultural festivals in most African societies are rooted in the communities' early history. They are a tool for gathering, unifying and placing community members at the heart of culture and social environment. They play a significant role in preserving cultural heritage, transmitting knowledge and experiences from generation to generation. Owusu-Frempong (2005) made visible the importance festivals in his assertion that festivals “must not be seen merely as an annual congregation of street and food vendors, marching bands, and musicians but also as a tool of cultural reconstruction and transmission of knowledge to the younger generation.” Owusu-Frempong (2005: 730). Cultural festival celebrations mark a period of cultural reflection as they evoke certain historic events in the history of the communities. African cultural performance, according to Ebong (1995), is the oldest and most indigenous form of performance in Africa. It has its elements and traditions deeply rooted in the ontology and cosmology of the society. Thus, African traditional festivals reflect the nature of a people in relation to their geographical locations. There is arguably a variety of African theatre

modes reflecting the nature of various people in their distinct geographical locations. Examples of such performance include the *Adaekese* festival amongst the Ashanti people of Ghana and the Reed Dance celebrated by the Zulu's and seSwatis in Southern Africa. The Reed Dance by the Zulu's in South Africa is a cultural celebration that take place once a year at the Zulu king's residence. The reed traditionally symbolises the power of nature and the myth that the Zulu ancestors originated from the river bed. It is a tradition that encourages young women to abstain from sexual activities and preserve their virginity until they get married. It is significant in its symbolism as a way of paying homage to the king and the queen mother (Nkosi 2013).

Traditional festivals are still very much alive today in many parts of the African and beyond. Thornbury (1999) and Ezenagu and Olatunji (2014), assert that an integral part of human life from conception to death is festivals. Some traditional festivals are norms that denote various stages of life. Some of these rites and rituals in festivals are important events of life to the African people. A common trait in most traditional performances is their reflection of the history, and experience of African traditional life, including rituals, mythology and social engagements. Traditional festivals in African societies are an incarnation of knowledge through which people's ways of life are expressed. It offers a learning opportunity for the members of the community to know more about the people's culture and tradition). Beyond festivities and merriments most festivals in Africa are traditional ways of building a wealth of knowledge about a community (Oyeweso nd).

Festivals in Igala society for instance, are moments when communities or group of individuals commemorate important events which are often connected to gods, ancestors, deities and spirits and also relate to transitioning from one season to the other or one stage of life to another. Examples of such cultural practices are the *Ogani* and *Egbe* festivals.

The *Ogani* festival originated from Angwa⁶ in Hausa land. The Angwa people were invited from Bebeji local government area in Kano state by the late Ayegba Idoko, the then famous Ata Igala (Igala king) to assist in the war against the Junkun people. The victory of the Igala people over the Jukun led to this cultural festival. This festival is celebrated only at the Idah and Ankpa axes of Igala land. It is celebrated at Idah in memory of the victory of Igala forces

⁶ According to Yunisa (2005), *Angwa* is Hausa words which means a group of people that come together and settle in a particular place

during the Igala-Junkun war in the fifteenth century. Similarly, the festival is celebrated at the Ankpa axis in honour of the victory of Ankpa people over a dreaded disease that claimed several lives. The festival in both axes of Igala land is celebrated by the descendants of Islamic scholars who came out victorious in the Igala-Junkun war (Yunusa and Umar 2013: 23).

The *Ogani* festival is celebrated on a particular Saturday. On this day, all the sons and daughters of the Angwa people are expected to be in their respective clans. The participants use a symbol which is called *Akpata* (imitation of a corpse) as an instrument for criticising and making mockery of despised individuals in the community. This is accompanied by songs and dances. By this act, leaders and followers are challenged into re-organising their leadership and followership style.

On the morning of the festival, the youth and elders gather at a particular place in a bush called *Ojaina*, where all the acrobats are decorated with different colours. The performers are costumed with *Igba* (animal horn) in their hands. The celebrations begin from the Ohiado palace (chief of Angwa) to pay him homage. They move from there to all Angwa clans. The acrobats move to the Ata Igalas palace for his blessing to mark the end of the festival. Unlike the *Ote'gwu* festival, no blood sacrifice or ritual is associated with the *Ogani* festival (Ogba 2007: 55).

Cultural festivals in African societies are unique in their various ways of expression and communication. They also have some common elements. Ogunba (1978a: 4) defines the term traditional festival as an “indigenous cultural institution, a form of art nurtured on African soil over the centuries and which has developed distinctive features.” He further asserts that “a festival is an integral, dynamic part of the culture of an un-alienated African, an occasion to which he responds spontaneously. Traditional festivals are, therefore, still very much alive today in many parts of African continent and have an existence almost totally separate from the art forms of Western inspiration” (Ogunba 1978a: 4). Clarke-Ekong (1997) brings to light the ways that some of these festivals are expressed; traditional festivals, are performed through certain rituals or events that communicate vital cultural themes using special forms of languages, music and dance.

Traditional African societies are embedded in communal lifestyles and rooted in ancestral linkages which are reflected in some of the festivals. Each festival has a story to tell and makes use of its own distinctive style in the dramatic realization of the story. In this process, the act of costuming, masking, drumming, chanting, dancing, acrobatic movement, incantation invocation and more are not totally dissimilar to their usage in the modern or western of theatre (Akinta 2013). Some traditional African societies, such as the Igala, Yoruba and Tiv communities, are embedded in communal lifestyles and are rooted in ancestral linkages and traditions which are reflected in some of their festivals. “Festival, particularly those involving the appearance of masquerades are total arts par excellence. For it is at a festival that the drummer talks in rhythms to the masquerader who in turn responds with the appropriate dance steps. Poetry finds resonance in the mouth of the singer while, in some situations the theatrical and demonstrative musicality of masquerades explode under colorful costumes” (Jegade 1993: 4).

i. Masquerade Festival in African Societies

A masquerade is understood by scholars such as Cohen (1993) and Camara (nd) to mean a cover-up, concealment and a disguise by an individual wearing a costume or mask with the view to represent a spirit, animal, or idea. This understanding negates the idea of the masquerade in some African societies. Such negation challenges from Ododo’s view (2008) that all African traditions recommend that masquerades should be perceived as supernatural beings that are guests of the living from an extra-mundane universe. They object to the perception of masquerades as actors wearing costume, rather the costumed actors are regulated as the spirits themselves that are respected by the community. In line with Ododo’s assertion, Nwabueze (1987) posits that, among African societies or ethnic groups, masquerades are believed to be the spirits of ancestors that are visiting humans. It is also understood that they could just as well be natural spirits or gods that are manifested in material forms at the invitation of the living human community. As previously highlighted, Masquerades are embodiment of the ancestor. For this reason, they are carriers of goodwill and good governance (Akubor 2016). Masquerades given their oneness with the world of the living-dead are believed to be defenders of the society through their unique ability to communicate pertinent issues, warnings and insights to the community.

The institution of masquerade is a common practice and one of the unique ways of communal cultural expression in the African societies. Most times, it serves as an expression of beliefs and shared life-force of an ethnic group which engages in the act of masquerading. This belief is embedded in the ways of life of most ethnic and cultural communities in Africa. According to Ganyi, Inyabri and Okpiliya (2013: 52) masquerading in Africa, goes beyond the communal portrayal of the artistic and creative impulse to having a deep symbolic meaning that goes farther than the superficial (physical) beauty of the artistic creation. It includes other deep-rooted meanings, in relation to the society of performance. Masquerade festivals in some of the African societies, especially in the south-east and western parts of Nigeria), besides their entertainment purposes, embody several ideas and cultural beliefs of the people. Such beliefs are manifested in the reincarnation of the ancestors as masquerade to the world of the living. When a person puts on a mask, he undergoes a transformation that endows him with the power to gain influence over spirits, although himself remains human. Thus, it is believed that masquerades are endowed with a spiritual or supernatural power that is meant for the execution of certain communal duties for the enhancement of social cohesion (Ganyi, Inyabri and Okpiliya 2013).

Masquerades are usually employed to display cultural values and aesthetics. They occupy a significant role in the people's belief system (Ezenagu and Olatunji 2014). The Igala people for example, believe in the world of the living and in the world of the living dead. The Igala believe that the ancestors come out in masquerade form to visit the land of the living. In Adama's (2013: 178) understanding, masquerades are part and parcel of Igala traditional practices. It is believed that when an elderly person (male) dies, his soul and spirit transcend to the spirit realm to join his ancestors. Notably, in most African cultures, death does not alter or end the life or the personality of an individual, but only causes a change in its condition (Mbiti 2015). The *Ibegwu* (ancestors) therefore, visit the world of the living in the form of masquerade during the *Ibegwu* festival and when necessary. This link according to Egwuda-Ugbeda (2003: 357) is the "continuity of life and the recycling of life which is referred to as the reincarnation." The concept of reincarnation in Igala land denotes the return of the ancestors to the living world in masquerade form or the return of the ancestor (*adawa*) by being reborn to an offspring or a close relation. The masquerade in Igalaland is seen as sacred, secret and powerful, highly revered and dreaded – the Igala people hold masquerades in high esteem. Masquerades "thrive on the myth that a balance must be maintained in the relationship between the living and the dead" (Illah 1983: 17). It is believed that these beings

(masquerades) are a vehicle of expression for the ancestor as they continue with the desire to participate in the activities of the living (Illah 1983). In some parts of Africa, Masquerades perform political, social, spiritual and ritual functions. Abdukadir (1990: 3) draws attention to the importance of this function when he notes that

in every culture there are certain ideas explicit in the interaction of different elements which in turn sometimes act as an instrument of social control with different cultural segments are held together... People believed in a complex structure of spirits and ancestors who influenced the living. Traditional beliefs reflect the wholeness of the universe. The various elements of which constituted not only the living, but also the dead and spirits ...Throughout history, ancestors performed the rites of transference and played protective and regulatory role in the affairs of the living. Specifically, it governed the laws which ere irrevocable and punishable by death.

Among the Igalas in Nigeria, a married woman is prohibited from cheating on her husband as this constitutes an abomination. In the occurrence of such an act, it is expected that the issue be taken to the ancestors through the elders of the husband's clan for the necessary appeasement. Where the women ask for forgiveness from her husband and the husband forgives her without appeasement, the act will be punished by the death.

Furthermore, Sargent (1988: 24) stresses the importance and roles of masquerades among African societies in his assertion that

Masquerades are a mechanism for social control, and are effective in the elimination or control of aberrant or unacceptable behavior Masquerades can be a source of historical evidence and are mechanism of social identification and a reflection of ethnic origins. Masquerade can be technique for establishing political legitimacy, and are a mechanism whereby devotion and loyalty are generated within a diverse population. Masquerades are a culturally significant institution which defines relationships of the individual or clan to state, lineage and family

The functionality of masquerades ranges from "entertainment to religion, from judicial to political administration. There are those who challenge man's physical and athletic fitness, just as there are masquerades who test the efficacy of their medicine⁷ on others" (Jegede

⁷⁷ Medicine as used in his context does not mean medications which are prescribed by medical personnel. It is made up of powerful herbal concoctions, believed to be capable of exerting supernatural control over people.

1993: 244). It is apparent that in some African societies, masquerades or masquerading is an enormous phenomenon with a deep-seated and mysterious character as it relates to individuals or a community world view and with community ceremonies.

The fascinating features of masquerades in African traditional communities as affirmed by Enendu (2014), is reflected their diverse attributes that are inherent in their physical features and cultural functions, which places masquerades in their distinct categories. Similarly, masquerades can also be grouped and identified by their medium of performance such as song, music, dance, lampoon, violence, mimicry, vocalization, magic/spell and pageantry. In all these mediums of performance their distinctive qualities include “costume, the relationship with the crowd, mask or body structure, the beauty or ugliness, its complexity or simplicity in the performance of mythology and social belief systems” (Enendu 2014: 262). In the same light, some masquerades in Africa for instance, are made to mimic and honor women although, they are made and performed by men. This view is supported by Cameron (1998: 72) who notes that “throughout Africa, men portray their ideals of and ideas about womanhood through such masquerades, providing a means by which woman gender roles are discussed and negotiated within a community.” Among the Ashiru of the Democratic Republic of Congo, *mukudj* masquerade appears during celebrations of funeral and other important events in the community. The masquerade is costumed and masked with an idealized woman’s face whitened with kaolin. The whiteness symbolizes the color of death and spirit which references the earthly beauty of the woman that is represented and the spirit of the past ancestors. However, there are some parts of African society that do not welcome women into the secrets of masking art (Cameron 1998). Ogunba (1978b) posits that women are prohibited from sharing in the secret of the masquerades phenomenon because they are weak and fickle and thus not fit to be part of the secret.

Again, Nzekwu (1981) suggests that women are seen as mysterious and sometimes unclean and therefore, cannot approach these ancestral manifestations, whose characters are completely opposed to theirs. Any contact between them will cause harm to the women and the masquerades would lose something of their virtue. Apart from this fear, there is the desire to avert the wrath of these spirits whose condescension to visit mankind in the form of masquerades is a great honour that must not be abused. They are mindful of the fact that

ancestral spirits are superior to mere mortals and constitute an unusual phenomenon when they assume physical forms. In modern times, however, women are beginning to pick up bits of information on the secrets of masquerading without being participants. Nevertheless, the mystery surrounding the masquerade cult is still intact, as attempts to neutralise this always met with stiff mystic and physical opposition from custodians and a cross-section of the people who believe strongly in the inviolability of the cult (Nzekwu, 1981: 132).

ii. Ritual in African Cultural Performance

Rituals simply denotes a solemn or religious ceremony that consist of a series of action performed in a sequence or according to a prescribed order such as worships rites and sacraments of organised religions or cults (Fofie-Nimoh 2014). The solemn and religious elements of the action distinguish most cultural rituals from the more secular rituals that are performed without substantial meaning or religious values to them. According to Ife (1993) rituals are practices that develop in series into formalised behaviours which function to indoctrinate society's members through the validation of the structural values of the group. In line with Ife (1993), Burkert (1982: 54) maintain that a ritual need to be seen in a communal context, given that its function "normally lies in group formation, the creation of solidarity, or negotiation of understanding among the members of the species." Rituals therefore can be seen as a tradition that is binding in its nature for the attainment of a common goal among individuals and community.

In traditional African cultures, there are rituals that are performed for a certain goal. One of such rituals among the Shona people in Zimbabwe is the ritual ceremony for the dead. This ritual is performed when a Shona man or woman dies to deliver the deceased spirit into the world beyond. The ritual is normally performed by the village elder who will evoke the names of the ancestors according to their hierarchy to inform them about the death of a son or daughter. The ancestors are called upon to prepare to receive the spirit of the deceased in their midst (Chinyowa 2015). Also, African traditional rituals are pervasive and all-encompassing in their nature. This is evident in the rites of passage where the initiates of a variety of African societies participate in ceremonial rituals such as circumcision, clitoridectomy, age grouping, marriage, birth and harvest (Conant 1974, Burkert 1982, Ife 1993). The ritual activities are a fusion of awful and fascinating things such as fire, blood and

weapons on the one hand, and food and sexuality on the other. In some African societies, some of these ritual are inherently connected to the laws, morality and religion of the societies. Such connections are clear in the ceremonies of birth, death, marriage, initiation, which are found in many African cultures. This ritual speaks to people's core emotions and reveal values that societies hold dearest because their expressions are conventional and obligatory. They join the individual in solidarity with the group and as such they are part of a society's essential constitution (Miller 2005). People's participation enhances the solidification of the community's moral order. Rituals exist simultaneously as a bond within a society; They serves as an umbrella under which a community unites as one (Burkert 1982: 54). Thus, some African societies have a shared belief ensuing from the inherent common value of certain rituals and the united energy that emanates from the interactions among the participants. Ritual energies among people serve to connect them to one another. In so doing, rituals within the broader context of festivals are identified as a symbolic means of communication. Ritual understood as a solemn religious ceremony, which consist of a series of actions performed in a sequence or according to a prescribed order, was a quality identified with the earliest form of human organization. According to Alexandra (2004: 29) this is demonstrated in their ritualistic predisposition and approach to embracing and managing various moments from "birth to conjugal relationships, moments of peaceful foreign relations to the preparation for war, from the healing of the sick to the celebration of collective wellbeing, moments of transitions through the age structure to the assumption of new occupational and political roles, the affirmation of leadership and the celebration of anniversaries". This social process is marked by ritualised symbolic communication.

iii. Music and Dance in African Festival

Music and dance is, and always will be part of all aspects of African life, whether it is performed by individuals or by groups in formal and informal gatherings or settings. Music is an integral part of African cultures and is unique in itself. It includes sound produced by playing indigenous African instruments like wooden drum, flute, gung and bell, accompanied with singing. It does also include sounds produced by Africans with their mouth popularly known as "African voice" (Mbaegbu 2015: 2). "African voices adapt themselves to their musical contexts as a mellow tone to welcome a new bride; a husky voice to recount an indiscreet adventure; a satirical inflection for teasing tone, with laughter bubbling up to

compensate for the mockery – they may be soft or harsh as circumstances demand” (Bebey 1999: 115). Karolyi (1998) and Kubik (2010) broaden African Music to include sound not only from the abundant types of drums or xylophones as is widely believed and identified with, but to include all four major groups of instruments (chordophones, membranophones, aerophones and idiophones) with diverse construction methods, materials, shapes, playing and tuning techniques, scales, musical styles and repertoires.

The underlying concept of music performance in Africa and African-derived cultures is that music making is a participatory group activity that serves to unite African people into a cohesive group for a common purpose (Berliner 1993). In most, if not all, African societies, drum, dance and song are not separated from the daily life of the community. Ife (1993) observe that African communities are deeply-rooted in music, African’s understood the holistic nature of the rhythm⁸ of music as it relates to the kind or land of performance. Music and dance is an important part of African life and their performing art, it contributes to the integration of the society by “expressing social organisation, validating instruction, perpetuating values and promoting group solidarity” (James 2000: 145). Traditional African music and dance, by means of their performance, serves as tools for inculcating the societal values and knowledge into the life of African persons. Igbo folk music, for instance is a channel through which idioms and proverb are learnt, noble ideas and vices are acknowledged or condemned, encouraged or discouraged. Music is often used in folklores to warn, praise or entertain. The tortoise in tales, for instance, is reflected as a trickster that at the end is jeopardised by its activities. The ability to listen through the tales teaches children to pay attention and listen, and to persevere (Nnamani 2014). However, some music are purely for entertainment purposes.

Dance is a true representations of an African life. It depicts the existence of Africans through the manifestation of rhythm. The connections of African music and dance distinguishes it from other art form. African dance is based on spoken language, is a source of communication through which it demonstrates emotions, sentiment, beliefs and other reactions through movement. African dance functions in various ways, for ritual purpose, or

⁸ “Rhythm is the architect of being, the inner dynamic that gives it form, the pure expression of the life force. It is a vibratory shock, the force which, through which our senses, grips us at the root of our being it illuminates the spirit” (Efe 1993: 44) Rhythm is an important aspect of music and dance in Africa. According to (Greene 1996: 12) It is an integrated art of movement that is controlled by music and govern by language.

as a secular activity engaged in for recreation and entertainment. In African dance, it is difficult to separate the rhythm from movement because the relationship between the two is one (Hanna 1973). African dance is a cultural behaviour that is determined by people's belief. The dancer is given breath through the drummer's rhythm, the drummer feeds off the dancer's breath which communicates the dancer's expressive range. The birth of a child for instance, is welcomed amidst dancing, rejoicing and songs of jubilation. The same episode is experienced in the moment of sorrow and joy. Such expression of music in African events and cultural activities makes it one of the cultural characteristics that makes the African who he is as a distinct cultural being in the world, for it binds Africans together.

Additionally, traditional African music includes all traditional or folk music that serve as media of expression for African people's culture are being transmitted orally from one generation to the other (Nwara, 2009: 534). The *Hoso amabiza* music and dance performed when problems arise in the community by the Ndebele in Zimbabwe helps the community to cope with anxieties about problems and circumstances that they are faced with. Such problems could be absence of rain or drought (Impey and Nussbaum 1996).

2.4. Conclusion

It is evident from the reviewed literature that reasonable amount of research has been done around African aesthetics and African cultural performance. However, there is an obvious dearth of literature and scholarly materials with respect to the aesthetic of specific cultural performance like the *Ote'gwu* festival. This study, therefore, builds on previous studies in African aesthetic and African cultural performance, through its exploration and facilitation of a new and unique dimension to the discourse of aesthetics of African cultural performance. This chapter reviewed the evolution of aesthetics in its broad sense. The discussion on Aristotle's and Plato's view of aesthetics gave some historical background on the long-standing understanding of aesthetics. This established a platform for the review and analysis of modern aesthetics. Within the realm of modern aesthetics, the chapter delved into Eurocentric and African aesthetics. Eurocentric aesthetics emerged from Plato's idea of aesthetics, emphasizing the idea of "art for art's sake" (Prettejohn 2007). But contrary to this, aesthetics via the African lenses unite the art with the people, hence the common phrase "art for life sake".

The final section of this chapter unpacked the concept of cultural performances. Bearing in mind Africa's longstanding association with oral tradition, this chapter opted to explore African people's development of the oral tradition as a means for the transmission of their cultural festivals and performances, indigenous knowledge, rituals, music and dance. The next chapter engages the adopted theory for this research.

3. Chapter Three

Afrocentricity: An Analytical Tool in the Aesthetic Comprehension of African Cultural Performances

3.1. Introduction

Mkabela (2005) and Wahab, Odunsi and Ajiboye's (2012), in their attempts to acquire authentic and in-depth understanding of African cultures reaffirm the longstanding concerns about the adulteration of a host of existing literature on African cultures. It is widely argued that this adulteration of literary text on African cultures has its foundation in the Western historical domination of the African continent and the prevailing predisposition to interpret the African cultures from the coloniser's precepts. Such attitude results in the relegation of African values and pedagogical systems to the margin, which is reflected in Mkabela's (2001: 178) claim that "there was no adequate references to the indigenous education that Africans already had or to the depth of the ancestral opinions that influence African thinking ... in brief, Africans were often judged in European contexts and not in terms of their own in the establishment of formal education." Flowing from Mkabela's (2001) assertion, the value and essence of African cultural aesthetics may have been watered down and lost its real worth and understanding. This is due to scholars' attempts to understand Africans realities through f different external approaches, such as the Eurocentric and Asian approaches, which might not be suitable⁹ such realities.

Mindful of the above shortcomings, this study explores the aesthetics of African cultural performance with a focus on *Ote'gwu* festival among the Igala people in Nigeria using an Afrocentric perspective. This chapter, therefore, discusses Afrocentricity as an African philosophy and as an analytical concept in this study.

The Chapter will further consider this theory with the view to understand African cosmology as it relates to aesthetics in order to facilitate a better comprehension of African aesthetics.

⁹ The unsuitability of these approaches rests in fundamental differences between these approaches and the Africans' understanding of reality.

The choice of Afrocentric aesthetics as a theoretical framework was strongly guided by its centrality and the advancement of shaping aesthetics by the principles of individuals and specific cultural norms and values as experienced in an African context. It will also explicate the distinct nature of African aesthetics from the perspectives Igalas as an agent of the *Ote'gwu* festival. Thus, elucidating the aesthetics of African cultural performance. As noted by Egwuda-Ugbeda (2010: 142), “the people’s cosmology is *sine qua non* to their overall lives and endeavours. In other words, the people’s world view is the conglomeration or synthesis of their spiritual and secular lives.” The chapter will further discuss of African cosmology with the aim of unpacking the relationship between African cosmology and Afrocentricity.

3.2. Afrocentricity: An expression of African cosmology

Afrocentricity is the study of, and approach to, concepts, issues and behaviours based on African cosmology, axiology, aesthetics and epistemology (Asante 1998). It is widely established that the African worldview has been dominated and controlled by influences from other cultures. Naidoo (1996: 3) refers to such control and imposition of concepts as ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism in his view is the dominating power and control of cultural patterns, behaviours and attendant values of a particular ethnic or racial group by another. Emerging from Naidoo (1996) and Mkabela’s (2001) arguments, Dei (2000) noted that it will be difficult to understand the present until we place Africans in the context of their history and cultural value. It is also difficult and critical to affirm the values that uphold African philosophies from foreign social and political contexts. Welsh-Asante (1993: 2) further is of the view that “a universal aesthetic that is applicable to all of the arts is only valid within the context of a particular culture based on criteria derived from history and mythology.” Hence, the cultural dynamics of a people create a specific aesthetic complexion which differs from one culture to the other, depending on the guiding factors.

In the words of Mungwini and Viriri (2010: 30),

What constitutes contemporary Africa both metaphysically and epistemologically is, arguably, to a large extent a product of the European gaze. As the gazing subject, the European enjoyed the privilege of seeing its ‘Other’, the African, without being seen for some time and in the process took this opportunity to define the African as its negative Other. As a result, much of what goes into defining African cosmology is what is developed from a privileged position of

the outsider. This representation, or call for representation of the Africans at various levels did not only end with the westerners but a few African protégées in the mould of mostly the first crop of African scholar bought into this misinterpretation about their own people.

The call for Africanisation was a response to this misinterpretation of African cosmology. As a result of this misconception, scholars such as Welsh-Asante (1993), Makgoba (1997), Ramose (2004) and Crossman (2004) call for the African worldview to be at the centre of any African study.

There are various ideas and theories on the term cosmology in philosophy constructed on religious or cultural background. Scholars such as Onuoha (1987) and Larbi (2002) discuss cosmologies primarily as religious practice that bequeath societies with a feel or sense of purpose and guidance to people's lives and make them to act purposefully and exercise a measure of control over their environment. Metuh (1987) and Chalk (2006) hold that cosmology responds to fundamental questions about the origin and nature of the universe, God's relationship with the universe, the meaning of time, laws and causality that govern the universe, the relationship of man with the universe that cannot be done outside the ambience of supernatural powers and religion.

Asante and Mazama (2004) understood it as a system of thought that is informed by people's history and culture and which focuses on questions around the issue of reality and creation, truth and value, meaning, process, and people's place within creation. Hence, the worldview that is upheld by a group of people in a specific culture has a significant influence on their "attitude to and evaluation of life and death" (Onyibor 2016: 36). In line with this assertion, Okafor (2004: 13) is of the view that "cosmological and metaphysical ideas govern the central or vital notions underlying our cultural, religious and social activity." These notions sometimes shape our behaviour and guide our actions. Similarly, Udefi (2012) sees cosmology as a branch of metaphysics after ontology¹⁰ that treats the world or universe as an ordered system. Cosmology therefore is the fact, perception, together with the assumption and beliefs of a people that are structured and developed in its totality.

¹⁰ The study of the meaning and nature of being.

Africa is a continent that is rich in cosmological ideas. This idea varies across cultures. The difference is sometimes influenced by geography and regional histories but amidst the diversity lies the core of shared beliefs and similar practices across the continent which introduces the idea of African cosmology. African cosmology in the words of Kanu (2013) is

simply the way Africans perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe; the lens through which they see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations; it is the African's search for the meaning of life, and an unconscious but natural tendency to arrive at a unifying base that constitutes a frame of meaning often viewed as *terminus a quo* (origin), and as *terminus ad quem* (end). This cosmology is the underlining thought link that holds together the African value system, philosophy of life, social conduct, morality, folklores, myths, rites, rituals, norms, rules, ideas, cognitive mappings and theologies (2013: 534).

African cosmology is the way Africans view their world. The African worldview according to Unah (1995) and Chimakonam (2012) is of physical and spiritual dimensions. Despite their separate existence, the two worlds interact with one another. The physical world is engrossed in the milieu of spiritual relationships, consequently, in some African societies or communities, it is believed that the affairs of the living are ordered by the gods (spiritual) thereby placing human (the living) at the benevolence of the gods for direction. Among the Igala people for example, continuous cries of a new born baby is a call by the baby's ancestors who is believed to have re-incarnated in the baby to seek appeasement and sacrifice. This sacrifice is believed to be a source of blessings and direction as the baby journeys through life. In agreement with the above view, Nyang (1980) Asante and Mazama (2004) observe that in the African cosmological order, the physical existence of human beings is a harmonious representative expression of the cosmic order. The existence of man is as a result of the actions and determinations of gods, deities and ancestors. Man, therefore is continually influenced by God, gods, ancestors and deities. The control of the cosmic order over man creates a continuous tie between the two worlds (human being and cosmic order). These ties between humans and the cosmic order are not breakable given that the existence of man ontologically lies in the hand of his creator. Man, as a result 'has' to keep the connection with the beings in the spiritual world. This is because Man's day to day activities are designed to balance his relationship with the divinities and the departed ancestors. In the African context the existence of man is connected to the ancestral line that he is a part of. This line extends from the creator, the deities, and clan ancestors. Human existence is linked to the lineage or continuum. Thus God, ancestors and this never-ending relationship between

the two worlds are fundamental in Africa given the influence that they exert on human behaviour (Kamara 2000). Again, man is also motivated by the fear that bad or ugly relations with these spiritual forces may endanger the life and safety of a community. The inability or unwillingness of man to identify himself with these forces compromises the possibility of success in his endeavour.

The African cosmology is the foundation upon which African aesthetics is built. African aesthetics is consequently connected to the African worldview. This connection is clearly articulated in Ozumba (2007: 154) assertion that “the African way of appreciating nature, creating aesthetic objects, evaluating and improving on nature’s aesthetic raw materials for the overall improvement of their well-being hinged on man’s multi-layered relationship that is in tune with God, nature, spirit and ancestors, plants, animals and other seen and unseen terrestrial and celestial forces”. Man is a composite of soul, spirit and body. This means that African aesthetics is concerned with the tripartite of human nature and the connections between these three that is hinged on the cosmological order and value. The life force or/and the cosmic order is the motivating factor in the expression and the product of African arts and aesthetics. Hence the life force or the cosmological energy is at the centre of African aesthetics and thus, permeates all things. For this reason, it is firmly held that everything in the African worldview is interconnected. The process of perception in an African centred aesthetics is of the “sacred and the profane, mind and body, the natural and the supernatural as organic dynamic entities, able to manifest themselves in all sort of combinations or discipline” (Welsh-Asante1993: 17).

3.2.1. Afrocentricity: An African Centered Philosophy

The origin of Afrocentricity, as a theory, is ascribed to Asante’s work titled “Afrocentricity: Theory for Social Change” published in 1980. This was the scholarly piece of work that launched the discussion on the Afrocentric theory. While the concept was used by a few scholars including Asante himself in the 1970s and Nkrumah 1960s, Afrocentrism was only ascribed a philosophical recognition in the 1980s.

Afrocentric theory presents the idea that Africans are subjects (human agents) working out their destinies “within the context of our own historical experiences as opposed to being

objects in the centre of our culture and social environment” (Asante 1998: 11). It directs and centres our attention on our own “language, folktales, root rituals, Ebonics, music, and the symbolic boundaries and iconic signposts” (ibid) for locating a text and generating substantive discourse that would guide the understanding of oneself as African. Afrocentricity is a philosophy that is centred on the understanding of African realities from an African perspective. It focuses on the African way of viewing things as the starting point for any conceptual analysis of African people, their worldview and experience. Schiele (2000: 18) described this world view as a “set of philosophical assumptions that are believed to have emanated from common cultural themes of traditional Africa and to have survived the effects of European and Arab colonisation and imperialism.” Eurocentric theory focuses on the construct and understanding of a phenomenon such as reality, behaviour, and theory from a predominantly American or white cultural perspective (Naidoo 1996: 3). Such constructs and comprehension from an Afrocentric standpoint may not be sympathetic towards or cognisance of the cosmological make up of African realities.

The Afrocentric paradigm challenges the understanding of African phenomenon, sense of totality and wholeness from conventional commanded claims to knowledge. Such claims were rooted in the notions of superiority based on race, gender and class distinctions (Ince 2010). The central point of Afrocentric theory is African centeredness. It “does not violently confront any persons or people, but a resolute attempt to put the records right. It is about placing African people within their own historical framework. It is a demand that the contributions of Africans in all areas of civilization be reflected in world history” (Chukwuokolo 2009: 33). Expressed in simple terms, this is a theory that propagates the understanding of reality – events, history, appreciation of beauty from the worldview of the African person (Asante 2009: 2). Rephrasing the words of the pioneer proponent of this theory, Afrocentric theory expresses African centrality through the domination of their values, interest and perspectives in African phenomenon. It advocates for the relocation of history and re-education of human mind (especially Africans) towards the comprehension of reality through the lens of Africans or the specific ethnic group in question.

Schiele (2000:18), points out the duality of an Africa-centered philosophy in his arguments that Afrocentricity as the study of African reality from their stand point does not victimize or discriminate against any sects or race but promotes the African’ agency in their perception of reality. Asante (2000: 116) claimed that “to be for one self is not to be against others; this is

the most authoritative lesson that can be learnt from the Afrocentric school of thought.” The author maintains that Afrocentrism is essential towards establishing “a frame of reference where phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person” (2000: 116). With this establishment of Afrocentricity as an African centred philosophy, the next section ascertains aesthetic expression and aesthetic perception through the lens of Afrocentricity. Accordingly, the next section will build on the understanding of Afrocentricity as an African centred philosophy in its engagement with Afrocentric aesthetics.

a) Afrocentric Aesthetic

Afrocentric aesthetics falls within the broader theory and paradigm of Afrocentricity proposed by Asante (1991). The understanding of African aesthetics makes possible the interpretation of the re-centring process in human history, mythology, culture and realities. Afrocentric aesthetics moves beyond the classical Eurocentric concern of aesthetics with “beauty” which sees art as having intrinsic values, significance and meaning to include something created for its usefulness or functionality. According to Mollete and Mole (2013) Afrocentric aesthetics contend that the value of art forms or works partly comes from the usefulness for which they were intentionally created, and that beauty does not necessarily exclude moral values. The authors also assert that Afrocentric aesthetics acknowledges the differences in cultures and holds that the standards for what is good or beautiful is also shaped by the principles of individuals and specific cultural norms and values (*Ibid*). Thus, people see beauty to the extent that their values and the parameters of their culture or socialization allow. This is quite evident in various artwork and performances such as tattoos on human bodies. Subject to a person’s worldview, for example, a tattoo may be considered beautiful to some people and disgusting to others simply just because it is a tattoo. Furthermore, Afrocentric aesthetics teaches that patriotism, criticism and collection of African art should be directly connected to history and mythology (Mollete and Mole 2013). In other words, Afrocentric works of art should be created and received/appreciated based on tradition, heritage and reason and merely for pleasure. This view affirms the argument for a multifaceted nature of the elements considered in the aesthetic evaluation of an art. The claim that an Afrocentric work of art should be created based on tradition, heritage and reason and not just for its pleasure reaffirms the need for African arts and performances to be evaluated through the consciousness of Africans. This, however, does not suggest that African art and

performances are not capable of being experienced just for their pleasure. This is possible, but such aesthetic experiences will be evaluated outside of or partially within the parameter of Afrocentrism. Consideration or argument for Afrocentrism need to consider African, their values, experiences and heritage among other things.

Within the framework of the above arguments and requirements for African centred aesthetics, Welsh-Asante (1993: 5) holds that “the Afrocentric aesthetics dictates and defines what is good, beautiful, and valid. In this also, a person can be influenced or inspired by other cultures; based on the understanding that historical transmutation and synthesis¹¹ do occur, but to the extent that it does not insult, undermine or destroy existing values, beliefs and cultures. Bearing this in mind, Mollete and Mole’s (2013) and Welsh-Asante’s (1993) Afrocentric aesthetics theory, therefore, make a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the *Ote’gwu* cultural festival possible. This is because they do not restrict aesthetics solely to the notion of beauty, rather, they privilege the context, acknowledge the cultural variations and offer a more dynamic understanding of aesthetics.

The Afrocentric aesthetics, as proposed by the its proponents, invites us to move beyond equating aesthetics to the notion of “beauty for beauty’s sake” or “art for art’s sake”. Instead, they argue for the incorporation of people’s experiences, values and history in the aesthetic evaluation of their art. In so doing, this alternative aesthetic evaluation offers greater room and opportunity for a more comprehensive analysis and appreciation of the aesthetics of an art. By the same token, the adoption of Afrocentric aesthetics offers greater room for a more comprehensive aesthetic evaluation of *Ote’gwu* festival than the predominant Western or Eurocentric aesthetics. Thus, the chances of misrepresenting or under representing the aesthetics of the *Ote’gwu* festival are limited. This is because multiple facets and elements, such as the heritage, values, significances, and the implications of performing (or not performing) *Ote’gwu* festival was considered in the aesthetic discourse of the festival. Additionally, in view of the argument that Afrocentric aesthetics is somewhat subjective given that it is dependent on the history of the people, clan, family or individuals concerned, there is likely a minimal room to argue for the erroneousness of a people’s aesthetic perception once the above requirements are met.

¹¹ Transmutation and synthesis here is the change and a bringing together of forces that are harmonious with that society and do not disrupt, destroy or insult existing traditions, values and beliefs.

Furthermore, Afrocentric aesthetics suggests that studies of African cultural performance should not only analyse the finished products but include the methods and materials used to produce them, the creators of the art, the audience and its response to the art, and other people's analysis and theories on such performances or art. Afrocentric aesthetics also helps avoid the limitations of Eurocentric conceptions of aesthetics which historically labels non-European arts and cultures as primitive, crude, and uncivilized without actually giving a close consideration of the intricacies of such arts and cultures (Morphy and Perkins 2009, Errington 1994). Molette and Mole (2003: 116) present various aspects of aesthetics that should be considered in an Afrocentric aesthetic study. These include works of art, the finished product, methods and materials of achieving the finished work, the persons who create the art, the intended audience and its responses to art as well as its behaviour generally and other people's theories, analysis and responses to art. It is, thus, evident that the work of art can only be beautiful or have an aesthetic value, if or when these aspects of the art are considered as relevant to the art. In observing these aspects of aesthetics, the risk of assuming the existing of an objective beauty with which others are compared is limited. Aesthetics through the concept of Afrocentricity "keeps it real" due to its accommodation of the subjective nature of aesthetic perception which highlights the differences in people's values and cultural heritage.

It is hoped that the Afrocentric theory will aid the researcher in filtering through the various activities, language, folktale, music, dance, costumes and rituals for the identification and examination of the embedded aesthetics in the *Ote'gwu* festival in light of the Igala world view. According to Rafapa (2005) the concept of artistic creativity is manipulated by those who evaluate art using Eurocentric standards which defines the value, the validity and the quality of the art. Contrary to such manipulation, Afrocentrism should enable the researcher to engage with the various segments of *Ote'gwu* festival from the perspective of the Igala people (who are the agents or creators of this festival) with the goal of ascertaining their aesthetic perception of the festival. In line with the central point of Afrocentric theory, this study situates the African person, their experiences, values and other perspectives at its centre of its study. The aesthetics of *Ote'gwu* festival shall be explored through the lens of Afrocentrism using the narratives of the Igala people of Nigeria. The extrapolation of such aesthetics embedded in this festival will throw some light on the aesthetics of African cultural performance.

3.3. Conclusion

This Chapter principally discussed the theoretical approaches to the aesthetics of cultural performances especially within the African context. Having adopted Afrocentric aesthetics as the suitable theoretical lens for the realization of the key objectives of this study, the chapter commences with an engagement of Afrocentricity as an African cosmology. The focus on African cosmology enabled an exploration of the historical and cultural values of the people. This discourse on Afrocentric cosmology logically led the chapter into the exploration of Afrocentricity within the broader field of African philosophy. This facilitated the establishment of a clear distinction between African and non-African philosophies. The chapter, however underscored the set of philosophical assumptions that are believed to have emanated from common cultural themes of traditional Africa. It is held that to better understand the African person and their realities, it is essential to develop an adequate understanding of the cosmology and philosophy of Africans.

This chapter finally presented an appraisal of African aesthetics, referred to as Afrocentric aesthetics. One of the outstanding assertions of the proponents of Afrocentric aesthetics is the acknowledgement of the differences in cultures while maintaining that the standards for what is good or beautiful is shaped by the principles of individuals and their specific cultural norms and values. Consequently, within the framework of Afrocentric aesthetics, what is considered “good”, “beautiful” and “valid” are dictated by the values, history and cultures of the African people. It is with this understanding, therefore that this theory will facilitate an understanding of aesthetics of African cultural performances through the lenses of Africans.

4. Chapter Four

A Descriptive Appraisal of *Ote'gwu* Festival within the Broader Context of African Cultural Performances

4.1. Introduction

The *Ote'gwu* festival, in literal terms, communicates the relationship between humans and the living-dead via various attributes, artefacts and activities, highlighting the masquerade as the ultimate facet of the festival. Unlike the previous chapter that discussed masquerades as part of the festival, this chapter discusses *Ote'gwu* as the celebration of the masquerade (ancestors). In contrast to other festivals that masquerades may be a part of, the *Ote'gwu* festival is about the masquerade. This places the masquerade at the heart of the festival without which the festival remains either incomplete or no longer *Ote'gwu* festival.

To sufficiently address the first objective of the study, this chapter discusses and contextualizes the Igala ethnic group and the *Ote'gwu* festival within the broader Nigerian ethnic communities and African cultural performances. This chapter, therefore, serves to ascertain the status of *Ote'gwu* festival through a detailed description of the festival. To do this is imperative, considering that it could help facilitate peoples' (especially the non-Igala) comprehension of the historical account and dimension of *Ote'gwu* festival, and equally deepen the Igalas' knowledge and understanding of the festival. To better achieve this objective, it is pertinent to throw some light on the Igala people as an ethnic group. Thus, the chapter commences with a brief historical account of the Igala people within the socio-cultural context of Nigeria. Subsequently, the chapter offers a detailed description of the *Ote'gwu* festival. The description will focus on the core activities, artefacts, and rituals in the festival. This is done with the aim of providing a meticulous comprehension of the performance of *Ote'gwu* which better prepares the reader for the analysis of the aesthetic of the festival in subsequent chapters.

Considering the notable dearth of scholarly literature and standard documentation of *Ote'gwu* festival, this chapter becomes important as it seeks to contribute to extant literature on the *Ote'gwu* festival. The aim is to presents some primary data generated for the purposes of

answering the main research questions which focuses on the *Ote'gwu* festival. The incorporation of the primary data in this chapter will specifically strengthen the argument of this thesis through the provision of relevant, recent and up-to-date data to facilitate a robust engagement and comprehension of the *Ote'gwu* festival. Although this chapter may possess some resemblance with chapter five due to the incorporation of primary data in both chapters. While Chapter five is very critical and analytic in its approach, this chapter is largely descriptive even in its usage of the primary data. Ultimately, the incorporated primary data is aimed at contributing towards a better comprehension of this thesis, a broader appreciation of *Ote'gwu* festival and strengthens the foundation or premises for addressing the growing need for more scholarly and recent literature in this field.

4.2. Who are the Igalas

The name Igala refers to both the people (*Abo Igala*) and the language (*Ichi Igala*). The Igala people are the dominant ethnic group in Kogi State, although they are considered a minority ethnic group in Nigeria. Geographically, they are located in the central part of the country, commonly known as the “middle-belt”. The Igalas are predominantly found in the North-Eastern part of Kogi State. According to Egbunu (2014: 4) “Igala land is 120 kilometres wide and 160 kilometres long. It is 6 30 and 8 North and longitudes 6 30 and 7 40 East and covers an area of about 13,665square kilometres.” This is located in the East of the River Niger and River Benue Confluence, Igala people are also spread out in fragments across a few other states in Nigeria (Boston 2009).

Figure 1: Nigeria Map



Source: The Guardian Online, August 2015.

The above map of Nigeria clearly presents the location of Kogi State where the Igala people are situated. It is a region with good vegetation on which the people rely for their large-scale and continuous farming. Additionally, the central location of the Igala people in Nigeria's geographical landscape positions them to enjoy some influence from neighbouring ethnic groups, especially from Yoruba, Edo (Benin), Jukun, Idoma, Nupe, Ibo, Hausa, Igbirra, Bassa-Nge and the Kakandas (Oguagha 1981 and Egbunu 2011).

According to Oguagha (1981), the Igalas are an amalgam of various ethnic groups in Nigeria and have been in contact with their neighbours since centuries ago. In the same line of thought, Egbunu (2014) offers a figurative depiction of Igalas as a "cultural melting pot" Egbunu's (2014: 116). This figurative depiction of the amalgamation presents the Igalas as an

ethnic group or a culture with diverse cultural heritage, but with a solitary cultural or ethnic identity as Igalas. Implicitly, this comprehension of the Igala presents a people united with a common sense of identity, values, language and general way of life, however different their ancestral origins might be. The reality of this fusion of various cultures diminishes the distinguishing attributes of these other cultures resulting in the dominant identity and practice of Igala attributes values and way of life. This viewpoint was also expressed by Egbunu (2014) in their assertions that regardless of the differences in origin, the natural and well-defined habitation has joined the Igalas firmly as brothers and sisters.

4.2.1. Contemporary Account of the Igalas and their Worldview

The traditional headquarter of the Igala people is at Idah, Kogi State. Idah serves to retain and preserves the Igala royal seat which symbolizes the indestructible tie between the Igala ancestors (the living-dead) and the Igala living people (Tenuche 2005 and Omotola2008). Igalas have several cultural practices and festivals that have been orally transmitted across generations. These cultural practices and festivals constitute a significant aspect of the Igala community which is reflected in the nature, frequency, and relevance attached to its various festivals (Negedu 2014: 115). Examples of such cultural practices include *Ote'gwu*, *Ubi* and *Ogani* festivals.

Ote'gwu and *Ubi* according to Apeh (1998) are the two ancestral festivals¹² in Igala land. While the *Ibe'gwu*¹³ is performed annually as a remembrance festival and feast, the *Ubi* festival is only performed at the death of old people. The two festivals are an embodiment of the Igala beliefs and they clearly communicate Igalas relationship with their ancestors within their cultural world view. Illah (1983), however, highlights the Igalas' divergent but compatible convictions about their ancestors. Some of these convictions or beliefs with respect to the good ancestors are edifying and positive.

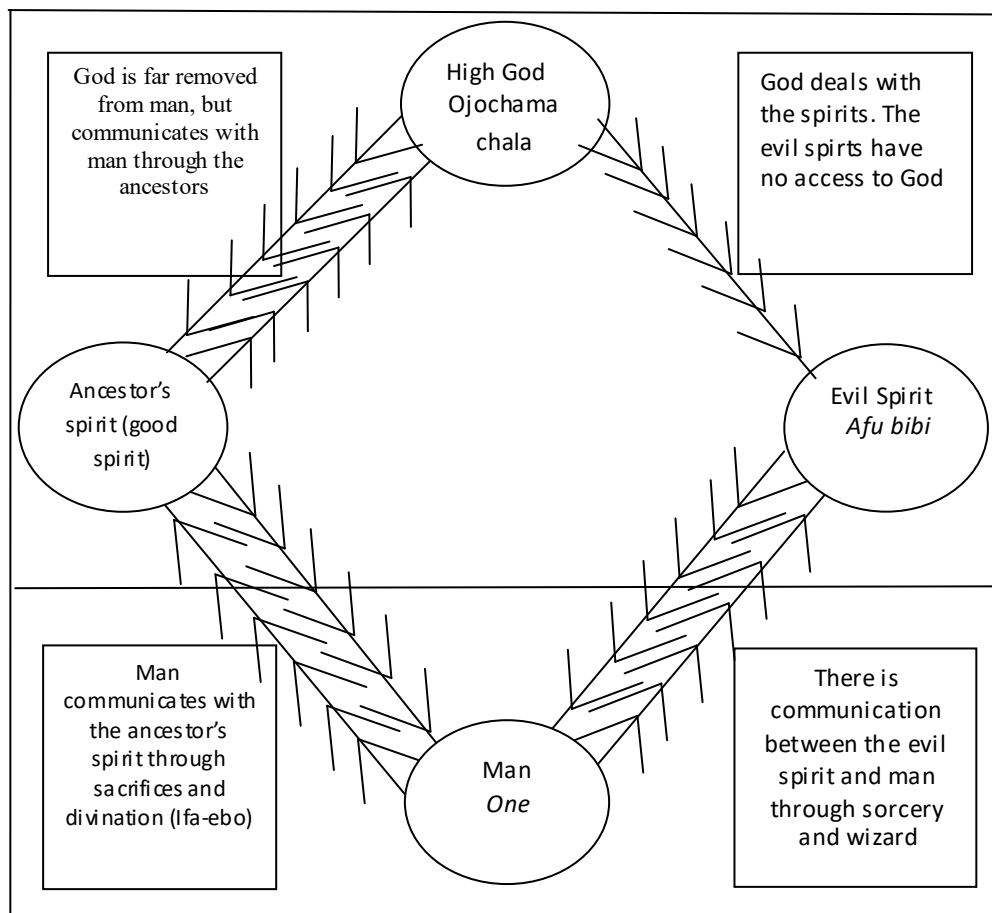
With respect to the bad ancestors, the people are, to a large extent, reserved and vigilant due to undesirable beliefs about the ancestors. Consequently, Illah (1983) holds that there is a

¹² These are the festivals that have strong links with the living and the dead.

¹³ It is worthy of note that *Ibe'gwu* is another name for *Ote'gwu* festival. The two terms practically mean the same thing.

continued sense of awe with simultaneous embodiment of reverence and trepidation in the people's relationship with the ancestors. These elements of reverence and trepidation in the Igalas' relationship with their ancestors are reflected in their structure of worship that reflects continual appeasement, celebration and veneration of the ancestors through sacrifices, offering and prayers. In addition to the traditional practice expressed in the ancestral beliefs, the Igalas are also largely Christians and Muslims. They believe strongly in mysterious powers that come in various form such as incantations (*ache*), Medicine (*ogwu*), magic (*ifamu*) and Witchcraft (*ochu ogbe*). The four Igalas basic elements of worship include sacrifice, prayer, music and dance (Egbunu 2011).

Figure 2: Igala view of Life



Source: Apeh (1998)

The above diagram succinctly depicts the Igala worldview. As depicted in the diagram, the Igalas hold the High God in the highest esteem without a disregard of the ancestors (good

spirit) and the evil spirit. Man placed in the lowest ladder relates to and connects with these beings in their levels, each according to the people's beliefs about them. With this background in mind, the next section draws attention to *Ote'gwu* festival.

4.3. A Descriptive and Historical Analysis of *Ote'gwu* Festival

As already stated, the Igalas in a cultural and sociological sense is an amalgamation of various homogenous groups. They are a unification of people with diverse and distinctive dialect. Thus, while the Igalas are established and acknowledged as an ethnic group, they are a people with multiple dialects. Consequent upon the diversities inherent in the various dialects, the Igalas commonly have multiple words to symbolise a particular reality or thing. For this reason, *Ote'gwu* festival according to the majority of my respondents, is identified differently by different dialects. Some referred to the festival as *Ibe'gwu festival*, others call it *Egwu* festival and still others *Egbe* festival. *Ote'gwu* festival is one of the Igala most ancient festivals and has been in existence almost since the inception of the Igala kingdom around the 12th century CE (Igala Association USA 2015). It is commonly held that there is no definite date with respect to when the festival was established given that the founders of this ancient tradition were oriented in the oral tradition. Thus, there are no written texts or documentaries stipulating the era of its establishment (Ogba 2007).

Emerging from the primary data, some of my respondents' assert that the *Ote'gwu* festival started in a time when the Igala kingdom was confronted with several calamities such as death, barrenness and bad harvest. Additionally, Respondent 12 from the council of elders affirmed that due to the aforementioned calamities, a group of elder gathered together at sunset for some drinks and to deliberate possible remedies to the tragedies befalling the land. It was emphasised that while they were deliberating on the various possibilities, there was an apparition of spirit in their midst interrogating them with the imploration "can you offer me a drink? I will really appreciate it, if I can have one" (Respondent 2). The elders ignored him as they were so engulfed in their drinking and discussions. The spirit who became irritated due to their silence disappeared from their midst. The disappearance of the phantom got them surprised and confused. This led them into asking a question of who the person was and discovered that he was actually a ghost.

It was highlighted by these Respondents, that the elders' failure to discern and understand the appearance of the spirit as an emissary from the ancestors provoked the continuation of the calamity, disaster and misfortunes. The elders, on the account of pain inflicted on them by different misfortunes opted to consult with a diviner. It was in the process of divinations that they got to understand that their ancestors were angry with the land because of their selfish refusal to offer a ghost drink, which epitomised their failure to offer them of drinks and food. This revelation marked the beginning of their hope for peace and restoration. Consequently, the Igala community decided to schedule a date to offer foods, animals and drinks as a sacrifice to their ancestors. The sacrifice were performed on the approved date and the successful appeasement of the ancestors marked the end of the calamities.

The *Ote'gwu* festival therefore has since become an annual celebration among the Igala people, held in memory of the ancestors to re-enact the event of the past for the continuation of peace and progress in the land. Oduyoye (1998) points out that the significance of traditional festival is embedded in the fact that they illustrate among other things, historical event, harvesting of crops and appeasement to various gods for protection against enemies and evil epidemic diseases.

Building on the above illustration, it is comprehensible that *Ote'gwu* is a compound word merging "*Ote*" and "*Ibe-egwu*". The direct combination of "*Ote*" which means wine with "*Ibe-egwu*" which means ancestors or masquerade, accounts for its meaning which is "wine for the ancestors" (Mohammed, 1990: 13). It is an annual event organized during the dry season (Feb –April) at Ankpa Local Government of Kogi State in commemoration of all the departed members of constituent clans in the Igala kingdom (Idakwoji 2015). According to Negedu (2014), the day for the performance of the festival occurs shortly before yam harvest and it marks the beginning of yam harvest.

As depicted in Fig 3, the Igala people during the *Ote'gwu* festival revere and worship God almighty through the *Ibe'gwu* (ancestors). The act of worship via the ancestor is mostly carried out through (*ichebo*) rituals. According to Apeh (1998), ancestral veneration is very important and vital among the Igalas. It is so central to the Igalas that even the "Christians amongst them could either renounce their faith in favour of it or become involved in Christians syncretism - practicing ancestral veneration and at the same time remain a Christian" Apeh (1998: 254).

4.3.1. Demystifying the Concept of Ibe'gwu

Ibe'gwu is a concept with dual meaning. As a result, its precise comprehension is subject to the context within which the concept is employed. According to respondents, “*Ibe'gwu*” sometimes refers to the ancestors in the “land of the living dead” and “*Ibe'gwu*” to masquerades in the land of the living. Like *Ote'gwu*, the expression *Ibe'gwu* is derived from two independent terms – “*ibo*” meaning people and “*eqwu*” which means the living-dead. The expression *ibo-egwu*: therefore, means people of the land of the living dead (Idakwoji 2015). The *Ibe'gwu* are the departed relatives of the living, who, while in the land of the living lived a good life and have found abode with the rest of the ancestors in the world of the living dead (*ojona*). Egbunu (2011) further articulates this understanding in his assertion that “*Ibe'gwu* are the spirits of elderly members of one’s family, lineage or society that died non-violent or non-evil death and have promising offspring”. The *Ibe'gwu* rank second in authority to the Supreme Being¹⁴ and they are understood to be in constant relationship with the living (Respondent 9 and 14). Once transformed, the *Ibe'gwu* become indestructible, consequently, they are ever-living and active. According to Negedu (2014), the world of the living dead is the continuation of the world of the living. Owing to this fact, it is believed that a king in this world is also a king in the hereafter and a slave in this world is a slave hereafter.

In the Igala worldview, the ancestors are the essential force behind the people’s existence. It is believed that through their intercession and communion with the Supreme Being, they watch over crop-yields, human fertility, peace and progress in the society. Irrespective of their human history and origin as discussed above, the ancestors are extolled by some persons as having a direct link with God. This “is due to their role as a messengers or representatives of God. In some cases, where the Igala culture is practiced to its fullest, God is not mentioned when *Ibe'gwu* is the topic of discussion because it is taken for granted that the *Ibe'gwu* act in place of God” (Negedu 2014: 118). The *Ibe'gwu* are mostly and specially remembered once every year during the performance of (*Ote'egwu*) festival. The ancestors appreciated for their guidance and protection throughout the previous year and are appealed to bestow more blessings in the coming year (Negedu 2014).

¹⁴ The Supreme Being as understood in this thesis as God. This, in the Igala worldview is the ultimate Being, the Creator and may be worshiped in various ways.

In the next section, the focus is on the Igala belief that the ancestors are spiritually present in the shrine and partake in the consumption of the sacrificial animal during the *Ote'gwu* festival. They visit the people in the form of masquerade after the sacrifice. This is because the Igalas believe that anyone who sees the ancestral spirit will die. The *Ibe'gwu* are believed to be more powerful than the living because they have become spirits which are invisible. As invisible beings, they are better disposed to bring about a desired state of being in comparison with humans and their abilities in the physical world. Consequently, the *Ibe'gwu* are feared and respected (Apeh 1998). The next section also looks at the various performances that form part of the expression of the *Ote'gwu* festival.

4.3.2. The Performance of *Ote'gwu* Festival

Preceding the performance of *Ote'gwu* festival in Igala land, preparations are made by men, women and children. These preparations which come in various forms are considered central in the celebration of the festival due to the value the festival uphold among the Igala people. The council of elders as presented by some of this study's respondents, first and foremost consults the diviner¹⁵ (also known as the *Abifa* or high priest) to ascertain the appropriate date for the first announcement of the festival. The diviner in consultation with the ancestors cast cowries or colanut on the floor. In looking at the cowries, he transcends to the spirit realm where he communicates with the ancestors, and in his physical being disseminate the information across to the elders.

a) *Ote'ane* Ritual – a prelude to *Ote'gwu* Festival

Having established the date of the festival, attention is then shifted to the next significant phase of the festival which is the performance of *Ote'ane* ritual. Prior to the performance of *Ote'gwu* festival, the *Ote'ane* ritual is performed. *Ote'ane* ritual literally means “wine for land”. The *Ote'ane* festival is a celebration carried out for a period of two days to cleanse and purify the land of any abominable act for the easy entrance of the masquerade from the land of the living-dead to the land of the living. Jegede (1993) affirms that, in most African

¹⁵ This process of consulting the diviner is a very significant part of the festival called “*Ifa ebo*” amongst the Igalas.

societies, the anger of ancestors against a misdeed is appeased by means of sacrifices offered at the community shrine. This may involve the appearance of masquerades to cleanse the society of the desecration. Most masquerades in African societies serve this purpose of “atoning for a misdeed, cleansing any defilement, purifying the soil, supplicating for rain or asking for a successful harvest” (Jegede 1993: 246). Like Jegede’s reference to sacrifices offered at the community’s shrine, in the Igala context, the traditional ruler (*Onu*) of the community and the elders on the eve of the celebration of the *Ote’ane*, goes to the grave of their ancestors (king’s ancestral lineage) with *Okwute* (the staff of authority) to offer a sacrifice of items such as a he-goat, and a black cock. The sacrificial items are laid on the floor and slaughtered by any of the elders present at the grave. These animals as stated by Respondents 5, 8, 9 and 14 are offered to enhance the proper cleansing of the land. After the sacrifice, the king breaks the *Obi* (kolanut) and cast it on the floor. When the three pieces comes together to form the three edge of a triangle it shows that the sacrifice¹⁶ has been accepted by the ancestors and the remaining animals are cooked and eaten. Majority of this study’s respondents hold that “*Obi*” is one of the valuable sacrificial items in the *Ote’gwu* festival. *Obi* is a fruit that is widely used by Nigeria. Many chew it on social basis, both individually and collectively. There are used in every occasions, such as naming ceremonies, funeral ceremonies and marriages. Without the *obi*, no traditional marriage can be held because it is an indispensable item especially in traditional marriages among the Igalas. According to Iyere (2011), *Obi* is one of the ritual symbols that is widely used in many cultural performances and even in diverse Nigerian tribe’s traditional religions. In his words, it is “one of the fruits created by *Ojochamachala* (God Almighty) for mankind to use” Iyere (2011: 10). The *Obi* that is mostly used in sacrificial offerings by the Igalas has five cotyledons which must be broken into pieces before usage. After the sacrifice of the *Obi* and animals, the *Oketa* (King) holding the *Okwute* (as a staff of office) along with his council of elders in the middle of the night, move from compound to compound as they stroke the ground with the *Okwute* chanting:

Eche kwo egba kwo,
eche kwo, egba kwo. (2x)

¹⁶ Sacrifice is an indispensable aspect of Igala cultural practices, it is a means to placate the malevolent powers which exist side by side with the divinities who are regard as benevolent...it is also a means to provide the divinities and ancestors with food, for it is the duty of an individual to feed his ancestors (Iyere 2011).

This means “depart o evil from our land, depart abomination depart”. With this performance, it is understood that the land is free of atrocity and the ancestors can now come to the land in peace. This ritual is always carried out when everyone might have gone inside for the night. No one apart from the king and elders is allowed to be seen outside. This is because of the fear that such a person can be affected negatively by the evil that has been driven away. From my experience, of the ritual, there were nights that I was awake on such occasions in my bed. The ritual seems to be a fearful one. The deep sound of the elder’s voice as their sing the song “depart, evil depart” makes it so scary to even turn in your bed. The gravity and vibration of the sound is capable of shaking one’s wall.

On the morning of the *Ote’ane* festival, masquerades (*ukpokpu*) moves around the community making some unique noises such as (*Yahuhu, huuu u u*) and prophesying good health, abundance of blessings, healings and lots more, on the land. The language of masquerades according to the king and some members of the council of elders is only understood by the masquerades followers¹⁷ who serves as the interpreter between them and humans.

b) Festivity and Fundamental Practices in Preparation of *Ote’gwu* Festival

Included in the performances of *Ote’gwu* the festival is the act and the announcement by the town crier (*Atakoya*), who is bequeathed with the responsibility of announcing the date for the performance of *Ote’gwu* festival to the community. The town crier makes this announcement on the king’s order after his meeting with the council of elders. The voice of the town crier is usually heard preceded by the sound of a gong, to draw the people’s attention before he announces the date for the festival to the whole community. This is done at sunset as it is understood that most of the people are back home from the days’ activities. The town crier (*Atakoya*) cries out to the whole community as a way of publicizing the date of the festival. Ugoboajah (1985) sees the town crier as a significant village broadcaster who summons the elders for decision-making and relays their decisions to the village masses for implementation. The town crier as understood by this study’s respondents from the council of

¹⁷ Masquerade followers is an initiates of the masquerades cult who according to the believe is endowed with a spiritual power to understand the voice of the masquerades.

elders is always loaded with news and serves as the traditional communication link between the officially authorized head (king and council of elders) and the villagers. His effectiveness usually lies in his oratory skills and thorough knowledge of the community norms, values and heritages. Also, as stated by respondents from the council of elders and the present participants of *Ote'gwu* festival, it is a common tradition that the date for the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival is shifted for at least three consecutive times with the belief that the ancestral representatives (masquerades) have not returned from the journey they embarked on - a journey to prepare them for the task ahead. Hence the festival is usually postponed for a maximum of three consecutive times. Following the third announcement of the festival date, it is believed that the ancestors have arrived in the land, therefore, the festival commences on the third given date.

Although the festival is often considered a three-day event, there is always a variation in the length of the celebration, ranging from a period of three to nine days. The difference in the duration of the festival is dependent on the size and disposition of the communities' concerned. A small community, for instance, may choose to have a three days' festivity while a reasonably larger community may opt for a nine days' event. This is due to the size difference between the communities, given that the masquerades need to visit and perform their artistic and religious rituals in various homes and with families of participants. The first two or eight days (depending on the duration of the festivity) are characterized by rituals, eating, drinking, and dancing between the ancestors (masquerades) and the community members. In the early afternoon of each day, while the people awaits the arrival of masquerades, and enjoying their ceremonial dine, the masquerades proceed to their assembling point which is situated outside the community in a dense bush called *Ajewu* to prepare themselves for the day's activities.

Ajewu according to this study's respondents from, the council of elders, present participants and the former participants of *Ote'gwu* festival is a location reserved as a meeting point of the masquerades. Here the *Agboji Ukpokpu* (masquerade leader) lay down the ground rules and the structure of the performance for the day. Non-masquerades initiates dare not go close to the *Ajewu* when the masquerades are getting prepared for the activities of the day. Should trespasser(s) be caught, it is required that they serve a penalty by offering nine gallons of *Oburukutu* (Igala local wine), nine basin of pap and nine plates of cola nut for their

misconduct. Failure to serve the penalty attracts the anger of the ancestors which could be manifested in the destruction of the people's valuables and belongings.

The final day of the *Ote'gwu* ceremony is called (*Kpalikpagbo*). According to Respondent 2 from the council of elder and Respondent I0, a former participant, *Kpalikpagbo* is a day filled with a variety of emotions. The day is characterised with mixed feelings of joy and sadness among the ancestors (masquerades) and the Igala people. These mixed feelings, in the words of Respondent 13, from the present participants of *Ote'gwu* festival, is due to the fact that *amibegwu adabi alo tefojegwu*. This means the journey of the ancestors back to the land of the living dead. *Kpalikpagbo* as understood by most of the respondents denote, goodbye my people and at the same time, it also means chastisement, and that is manifested in the scourging of the people out of anger. The anger and bitterness of leaving their loved ones behind in the land of the living, induce the ancestors to discipline the people harshly. This is often demonstrated in the merciless whipping of individuals that are perceived or caught in unpleasant and abominable acts such as fighting, quarrelling, stealing and other societal misconduct. The ancestors' punishment of individuals and the general performance of the final day is accompanied with a unique song by the people titled *Kpalikpagbo Imoneno*. The wording of the song is as follows:

<i>Kpalikpagbo imoneno</i>	Chastisement knows no bound
<i>Ifone kpa</i>	if it kills
<i>Ino'lano (2x).</i>	They cannot be held accountable

The song is a demonstration of their affirmation of the ancestors' chastisement of immoral and unacceptable acts and behaviour. Consequently, the community, on this day, is usually terrified by the masquerades bearing in mind that anyone could fall victim to the ancestors' chastisement. The ancestors instil this punishment to serve as a warning and a reminder to the people that, their departure does not create a room for unacceptable, unsocial and immoral lifestyle. Rather the community ought to continue to living in peace and unity and with the borderline of the moral dictate of the culture. It is believed that the togetherness of the community pleases the ancestors and disposes the ancestors to continue raining blessing on the land.

Below is a tabular representation of the *Ote'gwu* festivity. The table is meant to facilitate easy comprehension of the activities, participants and venues of the various performances in the *Ote'gwu* festiva.

Table 1: Days of Festivity

DAY ONE OF FESTIVITY				
	Activities	Venue	Participant	Remark
Morning	Slaughtering of sacrificial animals	Shrine	Council of elders for the community	
	Slaughtering of sacrificial animal	Ancestral grave	Families to their ancestors	
	Preparation and eating of food	Various home	Women and daughters	
Afternoon	Gathering of masquerade (ancestors)	Ajewu	Masquerades (Ancestors)	
Continue from Afternoon until Sunset	Music, Dance, Libation, Intercession et al	From home to home (beginning from the Chief's home)	Masquerades and community members	
OTHER DAYS OF THE FESTIVITY				
	Activities	Venue	Participant	Remark
Morning	Visit of families in the community	Homes and families within the community	Masquerades	

Afternoon	Assembly of the masquerades in Ajewu	Ajewu (Thick bush)	Masquerades	
Continue from Afternoon until Sunset	Music, Dance, Libation, Intercession et al	From home to home (beginning from the Chief's home)	Masquerades and community members	
FINAL DAY OF FESTIVITY				
The final day of the festivity is by and large the same as the other days of the festival. However, the unique element of the final day is the view that it is as a day of Kpalikpagbo which introduces the element of mixed emotions from the people and the masquerades (ancestors) as a result of their imminent departure.				

Source: Designed by the author

By the same token, the various practices within the context of *Ote'gwu* festival are performed within broader historical and social realities of the Igala people. They play unique roles in the affirmation and acknowledgement of the Igalas' beliefs in both the vertical and horizontal (divine and human) relationships respectively. This contribute towards the creation of meaning and structure amongst the Igala people.

i. Rituals in *Ote'gwu* festival

Rituals are an indispensable aspect of most Africans festivals; this is especially evident in the festivity of the *Ote'gwu* festival. Majority of respondent assert that, the most significant ritual in the festival is *eju'dude-ojinoji amata* (the visit to the ancestors' graves). The *eju'dude-ojinoji amata* ritual takes place on the first day of the festival with the king and kinsmen's visit to the ancestors' graves. According to Mohammed (1990: 19), the king carrying the totem of the family (*Okwute*), together with his kinsmen goes to the graves of their ancestors to perform sacrifices according to the customs of the land. The significance of this ritual was

further highlighted by Respondent 2 from the council of elders in his distinct description of the ritual and the importance of *Okwute* in the sacrifice. He asserts that the visit to the ancestors' graves is one of the high points of the festival.

The performance of sacrifice is done at the feet of *Okwute* which is a totem of ritual worship. It is a shrine and point of worship. Sacrifice before *Okwute* involves first and foremost the identification of oneself, invocation of the spirit of the ancestor and presentation of ones' request. This is accompanied with incantation, and simultaneous hitting of the *aba*¹⁸ into *Okwute* after which the libation is done with *khanyi-khanyi* (distilled drink), whisky or *oburukutu* (local beer). It is believed that any member of the family that partakes in the ritual which culminates in the consumption of the sacrificial items are bounded together. It was noted by the respondent, that the blood of the slaughtered animal is used in the cooking of the meal which must be consumed in the place of sacrifice by the king and elders.

The narrated ritual is followed by various individual, and generally smaller, rituals to the ancestors in their lineages, clans and families. These rituals are fundamentally characterized by the invocation of the ancestral spirit for the protection and wellbeing of the people (Iyeh and Onuche 2015). Unlike the visit of the ancestral graves, the sacrificial items for these rituals are primarily cocks and hen. According to majorities of respondents, the cock is offered to the male ancestors while the hen is dedicated to the female ancestors in one's clan. With this acknowledgement of the ancestors' gender while on earth, only the males are permitted to partake in the consumption of the cock offered to the male ancestors and only females may consume the hen sacrificed to the female ancestors. This is largely due to the belief that in the consumption of such sacrificial item rests the unification of the ancestors with the living females and likewise the male ancestors with the living males.

It is important to once again acknowledge the literal understanding and translation of the concept of *Ote'gwu* which means "wine for the ancestors". Hence, the pouring of libation for the gods and ancestors is a common denominator in the rituals discussed above.

¹⁸ Ritual nail in Igala land that is used to join things together. Its nailing into any ritual object means "so shall it be"

ii. **Igala masquerade in the performance of *Ote'gwu* festival**

The masquerade institution in Igala land stem from their traditional worldview, it is a significant part of the Igala culture. The Igalas believe in life, death and after death. Adama (2003: 178) draws attention to a common belief of the Igalas that when an Igala person dies, his or her soul ascends to the spiritual realms and takes another body and reappears in masquerade form in the land of the living. Such appearances of masquerades are generally carried out during cultural events such as festivals, burial ceremonies, and initiation rites. Egwuda-Ugbeda (2010), in the same light understands the appearance of masquerades in Igala cultural events as the spirit of the ancestors that have come back to the world to perform various roles such as music and dance, conscientization, sensitization, ritual displays, and above all to bring in spiritual messages from the immortal world to the mundane world. Masquerades among the Igala people are inviolable, irrespective of their category.

Masquerades in the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival are sacred and are feared, revered and esteemed by every member of the community. Masquerades in the performance of the festival are of diverse types and forms representing various ancestors. Their roles span from spiritual to social roles such as cleansing of the land, restoration of good health and the enhancement of bounteous harvest in the land. Masquerade performance in the celebration of the festival is at the heart of entertainment. These masquerades are of different types and are classified according to their locations, behavioural manifestations, structures and forms. In their classification, they are categorised under mystic and mythical entities with different functions (Apeh 1998 and Egwuda-Ugbeda 2010). Unlike Apeh and Egwuda-Ugbeda Adama (2003) approached it from a more pragmatic angle. In his words, “there are ugly masquerades, there are beautiful and handsome masquerades; there are male and female masquerades, there are gentle types and there are stubborn types, there are rich looking types and there are poor looking types” (Adama 2003: 181). From a broad spectrum, he further emphasizes that the major classification of Igala masquerades are:

- a. Royal Masquerades (Egwu Atta)
- b. Social Masquerades

Masquerades are identified with clans, forebears or lineages (Respondents 2 and 8 from council of elders). Miachi (2012) on the category of masquerades postulates that the clan members give much regard to and even venerate the masquerades. Royal masquerades (*Egwu Attah*) according to Miachi (2012) are linked with the Attah (Igala king) who rank as the highest authority in Igala society. Examples of such masquerade are *Obajaka, Ekwe, Ichawula, Ochchono, Ingelekpa, Ujamadeko*. Social masquerades according to Adama (2010) are the spirit of the ancestors who appear in social gathering to provide adequate entertainment for spectators with their acrobatic displays. Examples of such masquerades are *Egwu Igba, Agbaka, Egwu alijenu*. These categories of masquerade are also found in the performance of *Ibe 'gwu* festival. Each of these masquerades wears their own kind of unique attire. The higher rank of masquerades wear a wooden head gear, some with horns and the lower rank wear Abo¹⁹ from head to toes. The body of the higher rank masquerades is adorned with wrappers and traditional hand-woven material (*achi*). Some of these masquerades in their costumes are friendly and some are fearsome. The masquerades in their performance during the festival start from the head of the masquerade (*onu ukpokpu*) to the *omadachi* (kingmaker) and then to the king's palace followed by others.

All of the masquerades mentioned above perform different kinds of Igala cultural dance like the *ogba, iyaogwu, okrimocho, one in* rhythm to the sound of instruments such as the *odechi* (a big drum), *olili* (flute), *ukelegwu kongu* (small drum with different unique sounds). It is a common tradition that before the arrival of masquerades in any compound, water is poured on the ground as a sign of peace and welcome. Masquerades (*ukpokpu*) on each morning of the festival move to different compounds as they pray and hum to chase evil away from the land. The people in turn reciprocate the kind gesture of the ancestors by offering them money to travel back to the land of the living dead after the festival.

Based on the present researcher's experience/knowledge of the *Ote'gwu* festival and supported by some of respondents views, the masquerades in the performance of the festival do not go in the house of a woman as it is seen as a taboo. This is because the women in the Igala land are not part of the masquerade institution and therefore have no direct contact with the masquerade. Apeh (1998: 12) underscores that masquerades and their secrets are prerogatives of the men and they remain the only initiates.... women are weak, fickle and

¹⁹ Abo is the costume of the masquerades made out of a big tree call abo

easily air out what they have seen and heard”. This is evident in my respondents affirmation of women’s relationship with masquerades exemplified in the masquerades’ inability to accept money from women. They drop the money on the floor for the masquerades to pick up.

iii. Music and dance in the performance of *Ote’gwu* festival

As earlier discussed, *Ote’gwu* festival is one of the most unique and revered festivals coupled with different cultural performances. It is one of the joyous events in the Igala community that is celebrated with different cultural music and dance.

The various musical instruments in the performance of music and dance include, *Ode chi*; a big round drum mostly used in pair’s, *Okelegwu*, a cylindrical drum that produces a unique sound, which backs up the *ode chi*, *Olili* (flute), a set of whistles and metal gongs which are arranged according to their sizes. The Instrumentalists in this performance are all members of the council of elders. The flutist who is the lead instrumentalist plays the flute by calling on the masquerades. The flute produces a melodious tone which in turn triggers the other instrumentalists, as the masquerades get engulfed in dance. Iye and Onuche (2015) assert that flutes in the performance of cultural festivals have the potential to stimulate aching hearts and troubled minds. Similarly, the utilisation of flute in *Ote’gwu* festival arouses minds and attunes the dispositions of its listeners to the mood of the festivity. Its sounds are capable of captivating the audience and its listener to jump hedge the stage and join in the dance. “The yodelling and sonorous sounds of the flute can stir one’s spirit to bring out the best in one’s dexterity as a listener or dancer” (Iye and Onuche 2015: 131).

Furthermore, cultural songs generally accompany the instruments in the creation of music and melody throughout the festival. Cultural songs are chanted along with the instruments to create unique and diverse melody. Although, the songs and the lead vocalist are believed to be inspired, the chosen songs are at the discretion of the lead vocalist (or the song coordinator) as there are no stipulated songs. Contingent upon the phase of the festival, the vocalist chooses songs that represent the value and significance of the moment. Hence, songs such as

Ibegwu lia me 2x
Ibegwu kuna ka
ma dogba magwu yo
ma dubi ma gwu yo

Our ancestors have arrived 2x
We have been taking about and e,
xpecting them.
They Presences is accompany
with all the good things in life.
Praise them, we praise them.

These songs which are in praise and reverence of the ancestors are generally chosen in the opening or first days of the festival while songs of bereavement and departure are used on the last days of the festival (Rspd 1, 4, 7 and 9). Similar to the role of song in *Ote'gwu* festival, Okpewho (1977) holds that, in the performance of African art such as ritual, the nature of the gods is revealed through songs. He went further to assert that African theology reckons that the gods are responsible for good and evil, and the whimsical nature of the gods is revealed by songs that mirrors some of the prevailing convictions and reasoning about the gods. Songs, according to Canonici (1996), are a powerful medium of expression that propagates idea(s) or sentiment(s) and engage the entire community in a response. He distinctly makes the point that "concurrent with offering enjoyment, the performance criticizes social customs or conveys an opinion" (Canonici 1996: 11). The audience is extremely important in the performance of African traditional songs, as the leader leads the song, the audience respond accordingly. Consequently, the performers modify the performance in accordance with the audience's reactions. Such modification enhances the audience's disposition to be influenced by the message, criticism and opinions conveyed by the songs.

With respect to the dances, cultural dance within the African context is understood within the frame of various movements and expressions. Each of such movements (dance) is characterized by its unique technique, style and cultural or traditional reference and value. Some writers such as Welsh-Asante (2010), consider dance to be physical expressions of culture. Thompson in Welsh-Asante (2010), also notes that "dance facilitates all phenomena and provides a link to both the ancestral world and the divine world". This is not different from what takes place in the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival. Dances in *Ote'gwu* festival, over and above the social dimension, are a tangible expression of the Igala culture (the beliefs, values and way of life). Dance within the *Ote'gwu* festival as affirmed by my respondents from the council of elders are divided into various categories, these include *Ogba*, *Okirimochu*, *obe* and *Ote* dance.

1. *Ogba* dance

This is one of the most famous dances in the Igala cultural festivals. This dance is very beautiful to behold. Ogba dance is energetic, stylish and speedy. It involves dancing on one's toes with the waist a bit bended downwards while moving both the left and right leg simultaneously and repeatedly as fast as possible in a dancing manner. Other styles sometimes are included to further beautify the dance steps by either moving forward or backward, turning around and kneeling while performing.

2. *Okrimocho* dance

Okrimocho dance is another unique dance that requires energy, attention and drive. The dance is performed by first squatting on the ground, placing the left hand in between one's left and right legs, then the right hand outside and beside the right leg. The performers then straighten the right leg and move it repeatedly and as fast as possible in a circular motion to pass under the left leg. The left leg is therefore raised each time to pave way for the continuous motion of the right leg and the same applies to the hand. Any performer or masquerades with these steps are applauded for the sporadic technique and dynamic performance.

3. *Obe* dance

Obe dance, is a traditional dance among the Igalas. It is a dance movement that involves putting up an imbecile behaviour with the left leg straightened and the waist bended sideways, with both hands kept in one direction while moving forward at intervals. This dance is known for its unique emphasis on the legs and hands. Like every other dance in the festival, obe dance instil the spirit of togetherness among the performers as both the masquerades and the people celebrates. It creates the sense of belonging among the people and expresses their feelings of joy and happiness.

4. *Ote* dance

This dance, according to my respondents, entails acrobatic movements, stunts, summersaults and fearful display. The stunt style depends on the performer. Amidst the entire mentioned dance, the masquerades sometimes in their dance mimic the dance, gesticulations and movement of the people.

Dance is an integral part of the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival, and a means of communication with the gods and among humans, the dance as I have in my experienced is entertaining and a basic source of enjoyment. The performance of music and dance bequeath the igala people insights into the traditions of the people. All the forms and styles of dances, described above, in the performance of the *Ote'gwu* festival are believed to help the Igala people make spiritual connections to their ancestors and to serve as an expression of their happiness and joy. The performance during the festival mostly takes place in circular form (arena stage). However, the performers at the exit from a compound or a place of performance depart in a file while the crowd join the performers in an unorderly fashion.

4.4. Conclusion

The first objective of this study is the development of a deeper understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival and its associated meanings through the exploration of its practices, performances and symbols. This chapter contributes towards the realization of this objective through a detailed description discourse of the various performances and practices of *Ote'gwu* festival.

The chapter commenced with some illumination on the Igala people through an exploration of their world view and way of life. This facilitated a holistic presentation of the rationale that grounds the Igala people's relationship with the *Ote'gwu* festival, its rituals and performances. Bearing in mind that this study centres on the aesthetics of African cultural performance with a focus on *Ote'gwu* festival, effort was made to clearly unpack the historical and factual understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival in this chapter. The second section thoroughly engaged with the concept of *Ibe'gwu* (ancestor) and how it is understood by the Igala people as the bedrock of the *Ote'gwu* festival. The section zoomed in on the

performance of the festival and explored into the diverse activities of the *Ote'gwu* festival. This section facilitated the demystification of the festival through a clear explanation of the composition of the term *Ote'gwu* and its associated meaning for the people. Additionally, a firm attention was drawn to the elements of ritual, masquerade, music and dance in the performance of the *Ote'gwu* festival.

In summary, this chapter serves to ascertain the status of *Ote'gwu* festival amongst the Igalas by giving detailed description of the festival. This was essential as it facilitates a detailed comprehension of the festival. The next chapter integrates the acquired knowledge from the preceding chapters into its analysis of the aesthetics of African cultural performances with a focus on *Ote'gwu* festival.

5. Chapter Five

Analyzing the Aesthetic of African Cultural Performances in view of *Ote'gwu* Festival

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival vis-à-vis research findings from the conducted interviews. The fieldwork part of this study explored and scrutinized the practices, performance, significance and the value of *Ote'gwu* festivals among the Igala people of Nigeria. Such findings from the empirical component of this research are judiciously discussed along the lines of Afrocentric aesthetics.

To realize the remaining objectives of this thesis which include (i) the comprehension of Afrocentric perspectives on the aesthetics of cultural performances, (ii) the appraisal of the significance and aesthetic value of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala community and (iii) unpacking the evolution of the festival over the years. This chapter goes about the realization of the objectives of this thesis through its analysis of the study's primary data and relevant literatures in its quest for better comprehension of the aesthetics of *Ote'gwu* festival and by extension the aesthetics of African cultural performances.

The first section commences with an interrogation of the aesthetics of African cultural performances. It recounts the Afrocentric arguments that people see beauty to the extent that their values and the parameters of their culture or socialization permit. In so doing, it provides the premises that espouse arguments for the appropriate comprehension of the practices and performances in *Ote'gwu* in the context of their significance and values for the people.

The second section of this chapter focuses on determining to what extent the significance, meaning and aesthetic values associated with the *Ote'gwu* festival have (or have not) changed. The chapter will also evaluate the motivating factors behind the changes in this festival. This section specifically focuses on the impact of time and technology in the evolving appreciation of the festival and how issues of cultural nostalgia have contributed to people's appreciation and celebration of the festival.

5.2. Grasping the Aesthetic of *Ote'gwu* Festival via appropriate comprehension of its Practices and Performances

The key argument of Afrocentric aesthetics as alluded to in chapter three is the view that art work, performance and other objects of aesthetic evaluation have intrinsic values, significance and meaning rather than being things created solely for its usefulness or functionality. Afrocentric aesthetics also acknowledges the differences in cultures and holds that the standard for what is good or beautiful is also shaped by the principles of individuals and specific cultural norms and values. Bearing in mind the key argument of Afrocentric aesthetics as alluded to in chapter three that art work, performance and other objects of aesthetic evaluation have intrinsic values, significance and meaning rather than being things created solely for its usefulness or functionality. this chapter embarks on the analysis of the study's primary data and relevant literatures in its quest for better comprehension of the aesthetics of *Ote'gwu* festival and by extension the aesthetics of African cultural performances.

The aesthetic perception of the *Ote'gwu* festival is evaluated within the context of people's appreciation of the values and significance embedded in the practices and performances of the festival. As aforementioned in the previous chapters of this thesis, as an insider of the Igala culture, I largely understand the *Ote'gwu* festival as the celebration of the ancestors. Such comprehension of the festival resonates with the general understanding of the festival amongst the Igalas as the unification of the values, ideas and beliefs of the people. Hence, the festival serves as a unique instrument for the transmission and comprehension of the Igala cultural beliefs, values and ideas from generation to generation. A systematic analysis of the people's unpretentious comprehension of the values of the festival facilitates the appreciation of the aesthetic of the festival through the isolation of the distinct values embedded in its practices and performances. Such distinct values as comprehended in the *Ote'gwu* festival are categorised as religious values, cultural values, moral values and social values.

5.2.1. Comprehending the Religious and Cultural Values in *Ote'gwu* Festival in the Quest for the Aesthetic Perception of African Traditional Performances

As already presented, *Ote'gwu* festival comprises of a variety of rituals. These rituals and other practices and performances in the festival express the values espoused by the festival. An illustration of such ritual is the *Ote'ane* ritual. *Ote'ane* rituals, as aforementioned, preludes or introduces the planning and celebration of the festival and *aju'dude-ojinoji amata* (the visit to the ancestors' graves) ritual that is done during the festival. An insightful illustration of the *Ote'ane* ritual by Respondent 7 reads: "*Ote'ane chucholo kuma che to du kiwa kidane kwigbele ki tenyu bi kane kife*". A verbatim translation of Respondent 7's view goes as follows, "*Ote'ane* is a ritual that is carried out to clear the land of whatever abominable act that might have been committed in the previous year". This respondent's understanding of the festival explicates the embedded aesthetics of religious value in the celebration of the *Ote'gwu* festival. Although the *Ote'ane* ritual preludes the festival, the ritual is considered an integral practice that precedes the *Ote'gwu* festival. In line of Afrocentric understanding, the *Ote'ane* ritual demonstrates the inherent religious values of the *Ote'gwu* festival as it serves to open the discussion and planning of the festival between the living and the ancestors (the living-dead). From this understanding, it is comprehensible that the aesthetic value of *Ote'ane* ritual is inherent in its potency of connecting the living and the ancestors and as an object of purity.

Ote'ane ritual, as previously discussed, literally means "wine for land". A detailed description of the *Ote'ane* ritual in the previous chapter noted that the traditional ruler (*Onu*) of the community, during the celebration of *Ote'ane*, performs a sacrifice at the grave of their ancestors (king's ancestral lineage). The sacrifice is done with sacrificial items, which according to Respondents 11, (who is a custodian of Igala tradition), is referred to as *ame nwu ohidaka kane nyere amibegwuwa efucholo Ote'gwu che obuko, aiko efufu, ajuwe edudu* – the sacrificial items that we take to the sacrificial shrine are he-goat, while hen and a black cock. Corresponding with Respondent 7, some other respondents (Respondents 5, 8, 9 and 14) offered enlightening views about the *Ote'ane* ritual. They are of the view that the aforementioned animals are offered to enhance the proper cleansing of the land. Subsequent to the sacrifice, the king breaks the *Obi* (kolanut) and cast it on the floor, when the three

pieces comes together to form the three edge of a triangle it shows that the sacrifice²⁰ has been accepted by the ancestors and the remaining animals are cooked and eaten. Majority of my respondents hold that similar to the *Ote'ane* ritual, respondent 2, (a member of the council of elders), provided a clear description of *Eju'dude-ojinoji amata* (the visit of the ancestors' grave) in the sacrifice. He asserts that the ritual (visit of the ancestors' grave) is one of the high points of the festival, and is done at the feet of *Okwute*. He further illustrated that that

The performance of sacrifice is done at the feet of *Okwute* which is a totem of ritual worship. It is a shrine and point of worship. Sacrifice before *Okwute* involves first and foremost the identification of oneself, invocation of the spirit of the ancestor and presentation of ones' request. This is accompanied with incantation, and simultaneous hitting of the *aba*²¹ (ritual nail) into *Okwute* after which the libation is done with *khanyi-khanyi* (distilled drink), whisky or *burukutu* (local beer). It is believed that any member of the family that partakes in the ritual which culminates in the consumption of the sacrificial items are bounded together. It was emphasised by the respondent, and it is worthy of mention, that the blood of the slaughtered animal is used in the cooking of the meal which must be consumed in the place of sacrifice. (Respondent 2)

In the light of this study's previous arguments, the recognition and adequate comprehension of the rationale behind practices such as rituals have profound impact on individual aesthetic perception of the festival. Taking a closer look at the *Eju'dude-ojinoji amata* ritual, as an example, the reviewer or researcher ought to have an in-depth knowledge of the value and symbolism of the festival in order for such a person to have a realistic chance of comprehending the aesthetics of *Eju'dude-ojinoji amata* ritual.

Encapsulated in the above respondents' extract are evidences of the symbolism and the aesthetics of religious values among the Igala people. The ritual sacrifice exemplifies the Igala beliefs and trust in ancestral power through which they come to terms with their journey

²⁰ Sacrifice is an indispensable aspect of Igala cultural practices, it is a means to placate the malevolent powers which exist side by side with the divinities who are regard as benevolent...it is also a means to provide the divinities and ancestors with food, for it is the duty of an individual to feed his ancestors (Iyere 1975)

²¹ Ritual nail in Igala land that is used to join things together. Its nailing into any ritual object means "so shall it be"

of life. The identification of oneself before the totem of worship symbolises a person's submission to the guidance and ordinances of ancestors under the umbrella of a clan or kinfolk. In essence, *Eju'dude-ojinoji amata* ritual within *Ote'gwu* festival is a symbol of spiritual and cultural communication given the transmission of messages, information and decrees between the ancestors and living. *Ote'gwu* ritual in its nature functions to bind the participants and also for the attainment of a common goal among individual and community as well.

Zooming further into specific practices, parts of the festival, such as worship at the shrine, libation, and the religious artefacts, are endowed with inherent religious and cultural values. It was repeatedly echoed by various respondents that, the rituals are considered sacred events with specific value of thanksgiving and appeasing the ancestors. The offering of white chickens and a black cock are specifically offered to the female and male ancestors respectively while the libation, the spilling of animal blood and incantations are distinctively geared towards cleansing the land. The Igala people are strongly guided by their religious values in their celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival. Respondent 12 in his assertion on the offering and ritual to the ancestors holds the view that *Ote'gwu* festival is engrossed in supernatural power with many benefits. Aesthetically, the sacrifices thus renew and consolidate the bond between the living and the ancestors. the embedded value in the worship at the shrine and libation functions to appreciate the ancestors and distil the land of any atrocious committed by the land. Consequently, peace is restored as libation functions to bring peace among the ancestors and the living.

The Igala people uphold *Ote'gwu* festival as sacred due to its religious dimension and the profound sacred rites that are performed during the festival. The festival goes beyond entertainment, it is instrumental in the process of land cleansing, and restoration. It is an occasion that serves as a medium through which the participants of *Ote'gwu* festival consult the ancestors. *Ote'gwu* is thus the channel through which the Igalas reaches out beyond the physical manifestation of the festivals to understand the meaning of their existences. Through this, Igalas are placed in the cosmos, their relationship with the ancestors and fellow human is at the centre of their existence. *Ote'gwu* festival as an aesthetic celebration is an art that is life and life as an art among the participants. Thus, the *Ote'gwu* festival is the backbone of the Igala's existence and a platform for continuous interaction between the living and the living dead.

5.2.2. Moral and Social Values of *Ote'gwu* Festival

The moral and social values are demonstrated in the *Ote'gwu* festival through the variety of ways that people's consciousness is reawakened to the expected moral standards and social life of the Igala people. The celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival presents a unique opportunity for denunciation, criticism and condemnation of evil in a very definite and resolute manner. Afrocentric aesthetics contend that the value of art forms or works partly comes from the usefulness for which they were intentionally created, and that beauty does not necessarily exclude moral values. As such, one of the respondents of the study, an elder in the community with profound experience of *Ote'gwu* festival, upholds *Ote'gwu* festival as

one of the rare occasions that the community go extra mile in the quest for the truth and justice against suspected criminals and wrongdoers. He maintains that "in some instance, suspected offenders were taken to the high priest or soothsayer and be made to take an oath to prove his or her innocence (Respondent 4).

Building on Respondent 4's view above, I witness a woman, in the year 2001 during the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival, who was being made to take an oath to establish her innocence over an allegation of poisoning her co-wife by his brother in-law. Memories of that event further corroborate this respondent's arguments promulgating *Ote'gwu* festival as a moral and social watchdog in a community. Critics may draw attention to the legitimacy and justness of the employed methods at establishing the guilt or innocence of suspected criminals. Though such critics are highly encouraged and worth taking up in other research study, the gathered data and the researcher's earlier experiences of the festival do highlight the moral and social values of the festival. This is because the practice of Oath-taking in *Ote'gwu* festival serves to promote and create an enabling environment for peace and justice. In so doing, the festival helps the community to clearly spell-out the acceptable and despicable moral and social behaviours in the community. In line with the above argument, Respondent 3, a Chief from the Council of Elders, emphasizes that the *Ote'gwu* festival brings together the Igalas for the reign of peace, love and harmony in its celebration and

merriments. Establishing the innocence of the accused helps to reintegrate the individual(s) back into his immediate community. The aforementioned woman, for example, after the affirmation of her innocence is reconciled back with her family while if guilty, she will be made the face the consequence of her action.

From a more social dimension, Respondent 14 from the present participants of the festival asserts the festival as an avenue for socialization and promotion of Igala culture. The performance of music and other art shows during the festival explicates socially acceptable and pleasing behaviour that are worth adopting. The festival's popular music such as *Ali Kin`yo*, (with the lyrics below) exemplifies this value of the festival

Ali Kin`yo

Mechali kin`yo 4x:

Be of a good conduct

Ali bibi akpu nyi, uja eja akpunyi:

As evil can destroy you and the land

Ama gbadufu me mola dabalukin`jima.

Dress in a respectful way

Ote'gwu festival in this light distil cultural aesthetics as its significance is rooted in educating and instructing the community about the Igalas acceptable way of life, especially as it relates to young people's proper and improper dressing code, issues of decency, good work and sexual ethic. This aspect of the festival is evident in the commonly known practice of the ancestors (masquerade) whipping people that considered to be engaged in unacceptable conduct in the community. In this way, the Ote'gwu festival fulfils its role of instilling Igala social and moral values in the life of the people. However, it is generally understood that in every given society, there are always breakers of rules, values and custom. This is not different in the performance of the Ote'gwu festival. Even though the masquerades give these messages to the people, there are people in the community that still go against the given messages, nevertheless some other members of the community are made to obey these rules due to fear of the consequences.

Some of the elements of the Ote'gwu celebration, as discussed in chapter four, are parts of what informs the social and moral aesthetics value of the festival. These elements include ceremonial dine, music and dance. The way of life of the Igala people according to Respondent 13, is revealed in their songs which are within their cultural milieu. It expresses the permissible and the impermissible way of their social life. From the lyrics of the song and

dramatic expression, the younger generations get to understand the dos and the don'ts of the communities. In essence, messages are communicated through songs to either inspire or warn the people, praise or condemn bad behaviours. A respondent from the present participants makes clear that songs are used to encourage love, peace, hard work, cooperation and unity. The different styles of dance discussed in the previous chapter enhance socialization and bring the people together in unity as a large crowd performs together. The dance involves a variety of movements of the body and different gestures, which makes the festivity a pleasurable one. Ceremonial dining as mentioned earlier in this study, is also another socializing element that bring families, friends and the entire community together. Each family, as mentioned by the study respondents, prepare a particular meal known as “*obo igogo kpai Oje-uchu*” during celebration of the festival. *Obo-igogo kpai oje-uchu* is a meal made out of yam and a culturally illustrious seeds (*Igogo*) to have and dine during the festival. The meal, as I have experienced, in my teenage age by dinning together from the same dish with my family and same peers creates a bond among partakers. Respondents 7 echoes the same understanding as he mentioned that partaking of the same meal from the same plate during the Ceremonial dine in *Ote'gwu* festival serves to unite families together. It serves to reinforce family ties, customs and values of the community. It affords the sons and daughters of the soil who have travelled far and near the opportunity for family reunion as they eat of the meal. Respondent 5, from the council of elders, holds that *Ote'gwu* festival provides an avenue for the people to socialize and maintain cordial relationships between old and new friends.

Other respondents, further highlight their love for the last day of the festival, which is called “*kpalikpagbo*” unofficially translated as the day of reckoning. The love for this day ensues from the ancestors' chastisement and reprimand of whoever defiles or goes contrary to the laws and moral codes of the land. Respondent 4 specifically points out that he loves the *Kpalikpagbo* day because of the fun of the day as the ancestors hunt to trap whoever defiles the law. This understanding of the *Kpalikpagbo day* is further stressed by Sergeant (1988: 36), a day in the festival that the ancestors employ simple and uncomplicated method to control and eliminate weird and unacceptable behaviour from the community. *Ajamalede* masquerade for example, is one of such masquerades in the Igala community which exposes any evils in the society using his spiritual power. *Ajamalede* masquerades throughout the celebration of the festival expose and disciplines people through verbal (proverb) confrontation during the festival. Such proverbial words are embedded with facts and

meaning to chastise offenders like thieves, sexually promiscuous, indolent and naughty people, sorcerers, diabolical men, murderers and anyone guilty of acts capable of tarnishing the image of the Igalala community. Respondent 6 in his word state that “my sister experience of Ajamalade masquerades has up till today made her who is now. My sister was once an adulterous woman who always clashes with people living that same kind of life. She lived in pretence, claiming to be critical of adulterous lifestyle. Everyone in the family sees her as a very decent person until the *Ajamaledede* masquerade exposed her person by referring to her as *ajo`ko* (adulterous woman) during the celebration of *Ote`gwu* festival. She was made to confess to her husband and embraced a new live thereafter. Masquerades such as *Anagatele*, *Ikonyi* and *Iye Abioma*, including their roles such as dancers, singers and carriers of blessings, are also mostly cane-bearers²² who punish offenders by flogging. Concurring with this view, Onunwa (1994) also noted that offenders of public morality (thieves, adulterers, witches) are mercilessly beaten or flogged by masquerades to inculcate societal values in them. The act of punishment in the Igalala traditional cultural context can only be carried out by the ancestors, embodied by the masquerades. As an Igalala person, it is believed that you are subject to ancestral spiritual punishment (poverty, sickness, death etc) but the physical punishment (flogging, proverbial word) is constrained to those present at the arena of the celebration. From this understanding, it is deduced that the aesthetics value of ancestral punishment to the Igalalas is inherent in its tendency to instil in the Igalala people the values upheld by their societies. Such values go against indulging in grievous immoral act as defined by the society.

As expressed by the respondents, which is strongly substantiated by the researcher’s experiences, reconciliation and peace-making aspects of the *Ote`gwu* festival is of a great value to the Igalalas. This is because of its functionality in enhancing restoration of peace through dispute settlement. The functions of this aspect of the festival in line of Afrocentric portray the understanding of art for life sake which emphasis the African aesthetics value. Respondent eight strongly emphasize that in the course of the festival, the ancestors/masquerades in their spiritual eyes have a vision of the happenings in the land including clashes as well. Hence they call for dispute settlement among disputing parties. The ancestors in settling disputes adjudicate, by telling who has wronged the other to apologise to the other person. The ancestors’ judgement is always considered final because it is believed

²² This is a stick or staff that the masquerade carries to chastise (and sometimes scare) people.

that nothing is hidden from them. No party, after such settlement and adjudication, dares to go back on the grudges as it will attract penalty of appeasing the ancestors. Such penalty according to most of my respondents involves the offering of he-goat, local and pounded yam as a sacrifice to the ancestors. The items are left at the feet of Okwute where it is believed that the ancestors will consume of them. Through such sacrifice, peace (at least in its minimal sense as absence of violence) is maintained and good prevails over evil because in the Igala worldview, nothing can be kept secret from the ubiquitous eyes of the ancestors²³. Notably, a person's lack of adequate understanding of this aspect of the festival as it relates to the Igala worldview will, to some extent, negatively impact their appreciation of the aesthetic of the festival. This is because their inability to comprehend this element of the festival blinds them to considerable values that inform the people aesthetic of the festival.

Aside the various cultural expectations and obligations in the performance of *Ote'gwu* festival, the festival remains a symbol of unity and solidarity amongst the Igalas. This is evident in the festival's propensity to assemble people from far and wide²⁴. On the announcement of the festival, messages are communicated to the Igalas in diasporas via diverse channel of communication as to enable them get prepared and travel down for the festival. This is largely done by relatives and friends who appreciates and desires the presence of their loved ones. The festival via its embedded value as an object of reconciliation, peace-making, its reprove and criticism of unacceptable behaviours serves to bring people together. As a consequence, the festival as noted by Respondent 1, 2, 14 and from the researcher's experience, actively contributes in building strong ties and a resilient sense of togetherness within a community. This is because the simple celebration of the festival creates the room and need for the gathering of the people. This is furthered through its indispensable acts of reconciliation and reproof of undesired conduct. Hence, socialization remains an indispensable element and activity in the festival. The Majority of my respondents alluded to *Ote'gwu* festival as a spectacular event to behold as drumming, dancing and chanting constitute a regular feature in the performance of the festival. The remarkable and spectacular feel of

²³ Although there are possible reservations and questions about the authenticity and reality of this supposed occurrence, it is however beyond the scope of this study to respond to such questions since this objective of this study is geared towards the validation or substantiation of the belief system of the Igalas. Rather, given the beliefs, values and practices of Igalas, the study employs Afrocentric theory in comprehending the aesthetic of *Ote'gwu* festival.

²⁴ The Igalas with the awareness of the annual *Ote'gwu* festival celebration between the month of February and April are always prepared within this period to travel for the celebration. Hence they are readily prepared to travel once communicated the date

the festival emanates from the aura of joy, ecstasy and delight embedded in the celebration of the festival.

5.3. Conceptualizing Aesthetics of African Traditional Performances within the framework of Afrocentrism

Similar to the discourse of the aesthetic valuation of *Ote'gwu* festival, aesthetic conceptualization of African traditional performances via the Afrocentric lens also requires an individual's (or researcher's) comprehension of the core values and the deep-seated significance of the performance(s). Some of the values that were explored in the previous section of this chapter are religious, cultural, moral and social values. These values are by no means exhaustive considering the numerous values in African traditional performances. As a result, researchers and interested parties are encouraged to be aware and appreciative of the common and distinctive values upheld and transmitted by specific African traditional performances.

It is worthy of note that the embedded values and significance of a performance may not be obvious nor visible in all given situations. It is, nevertheless, the responsibility of the individual concerned to seek and acquire the depth of understanding and appreciation needed for the genuine perception of the aesthetics of African traditional performance. Revisiting the *Ote'gwu* festival once again, some of my respondents in their understanding hold the view that, *Efucholo Ote'gwu, ako amomawa enwu kilugbo enwu ogwu abo Igala kpai abo ogijo igbele kuma dunyi ogecha lefeli kpai oluka*. This means that the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival is a channel through which the Igalas teach the culture, values, history, experience and identity to the old and the new generations of the Igala for the purpose of continuity and its benefit for the Igala land. This value of the festival as a strategic instrument of communication amongst the Igalas, is nevertheless important and worthy of attention in the aesthetic comprehension of the festival. Akin to the *Ote'gwu* festival, some African traditional performances are instruments of both verbal and non-verbal communication amongst the people. This is because they serve as a medium through which relevant messages are transmitted from one generation to another. Like the *Ote'gwu* festival, most traditional performances in Africa are endowed with some inherent values beyond the religious, cultural, moral and social values discussed in the previous section.

To arrive at a comprehensive aesthetic valuation of African traditional performances, in line with Afrocentric aesthetics, the researcher or the individual needs to be attuned to the performance(s) at a specific time and place. This includes the aesthetic appreciation of the performance's costume, artistic displays, communication with the people etc. as understood by the owners of the art. The aesthetic of the people's reaction and communication with performance, as Asante (1993) observed, could both be specific (individualistic) and general (communal). The communal aesthetic value is evident in the earlier discoursed section detailing the ritual and ceremonial dine. Individualistic aesthetic perception in the researcher's experience of *Ote'gwu* festival for instance is manifest in the visit of the masquerades, the individual reception of the masquerades as they move from compound to compound differs. A masquerade at certain times, in a particular compound is seen to be from that compound and from their clan. Hence the masquerade is received as an ancestor from that particular clan. The aesthetic expressions of people's response to performances are perceived individually, but in accordance with the individual's awareness and harmony with the value and symbolism of the performance; while the communal aesthetic perception refers to the communal appreciation of the performance and its art. Egbunu asserts that "groups and societies cultural values are largely shared by their members. Such cultural values emanate from tradition rather than from any particular moralist, writer or thinker" (2013: 12). In other words, values are closely connected with beliefs, moral, codes that are handed down from generation to generation within a culture, subculture or community. This element of individualistic and communal approaches suggests that the acquired or perceived aesthetic of the African traditional performances are sometimes subjective regardless of the seemingly common aesthetics perception amongst a people.

Afrocentric aesthetics invites us to move beyond the idea of equating aesthetics to the notion of "beauty for beauty's sake" or "art for art's sake". Instead, they argue for the incorporation of people's experiences, values and history in the aesthetic evaluation of the art (Welsh-Asante 1993 and Mollete & Mole 2013). It is argued that a complete valuation of aesthetics within the Afrocentric framework demands an in-depth comprehension of the values and significance of the various practices in African traditional performances (Welsh-Asante 1993 and Mollete and Mole 2013). It is becoming common knowledge that people's worldviews are to a large extent, informed by their values, which inevitably have some bearing on what they consider right or wrong, beautiful or ugly. Value occupies a central place in societies and in people's cultures. According to Akpan and Etuk (2002: 22), "no group of people can

survive without a set of values which holds and guarantees their continued existence.” Akpan and Etuk (2002) mean that each party and society has a sense of what their value is and there is no society without a value system. To understand people’s worldviews therefore, there is a need to understand their values, what they consider good or bad, what they consider aesthetics and the reasons why they consider them aesthetic. This is equally applicable to the aesthetic valuation of the *Ote’gwu* festival amongst the Igala people. It is necessary to understand the religious, moral, social and cultural value of the various practices in the festival as understood by the Igalas.

In summary, the aesthetics of the *Ote’gwu* festival, and by extension African traditional performances, are better analysed through the lenses of the African people to arrive at an undiluted understanding of the aesthetics, for the benefit of both African and non-African people. But this is sometimes not even the case amongst the Igalas and Africans as some attitudes, values and circumstances have changed over time. The next section illustrates the evolving attitude and approaches of some (especially the young generation of) Igala to the celebration of the festival. Some of these evolutions will be discussed as a way of rounding up this chapter.

5.3.1. Evolving Response to the Celebration of *Ote’gwu* Festival in the Contemporary Era

It is a common maxim that “evolution” or “change” is the only “constant” in the reality of the human person. The continual evolution of the society revolutionizes people’s attitude towards their society. By the same token, the *Ote’gwu* festival is also susceptible to the consequences of ongoing evolutions in the society. People’s evolving attitude and philosophy of life, and the alteration in their comprehension of the festival have consequentially led to a shift in the disposition of the Igalas towards the observation of *Ote’gwu* festival. Emerging from this study are suggestions and indication that these changes strongly contribute to people’s lack of enthusiasm towards their cultural belief and appreciation of the festival. The attraction of the urban life, technological inventions and diffusion of traditional lifestyle are some of the elements that pioneer the evolution of a culture (Idang 2015). The relationship between some

of these highlighted impacts and Ote'gwu festival is adequately unpacked in the succeeding section.

It was repeatedly highlighted by some of the study's respondents that the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival has experienced some form of transformation over the years. It is worthy of mention that the changes in the performance of *Ote'gwu* festival are an extension and a reflection of the global changes in different societies. Globalization²⁵ has intensified competition not just among industries, markets and investments but also among nations, culture and ethnic groups. Since the advent of globalisation, many nations have begun to lose their identity (Egbewole 2003). The pristine cultures, tradition and heritage of the world are fast disappearing as a new global image is being adopted (Ibid).

Ote'gwu festival, since the advent of Christianity, Islam and modern technologies, has experienced a rapid evolution in the perception of some members of the Igala community. According to Adama (2013) the missionaries' arrival in Igala kingdom introduced pessimism amongst the Igalas. The European's pessimistic attitude to Igala cultural practices was vividly expressed in their indisposition to embrace the culture and tradition of the people (*ibid*). The European attitude laid a benchmark in the interaction between Christians, non-Christian and adherents of Igala traditional values and culture. The Europeans attitude served as a model and a standard in the non-European Christians' relationship with the African traditional practices including the *Ote'gwu* festival. This was emphasised by one of the respondents, a member of the Council of Elders, asserting the discord between the Igala Christian and participants of the Igala traditional festivals.

The Igala Christians are of the view that the festival undermines their religious obligation of observing Sundays as a day of rest and charitable work. Consequently, participants of the festival who are Christians are perceived by their fellow Christians as traitors or people of double standards. This is largely because such festivals, including *Ote'gwu* festival, are held on Sundays. Bearing in mind the symbolism of Sundays to Christians as mentioned above, participants of *Ote'gwu* festival were constantly antagonized by Christians on the basis that the festival is not to be held on Sundays. Hence, some Christians label the festival, an

²⁵ Which is commonly understood as the growing interaction with other states via cultural, economic, religious, technological and even religious exchanges.

iniquity, which cannot be held on the same day as their day of worship²⁶ (Nduka and Scanlon 1965). Contrary to this cynical attitude towards traditional festivals, the relevance, significance and value of the festival is still acknowledged by some Christians. Although it is not necessary that the festival and its values are acknowledged by Christians, it is nevertheless evident from Respondent 2's²⁷ assertion that some Christians do believe in the festival and its values. According to this respondent, "*about sixteen masquerades came to my house in the last festival. I considered their visit as a privilege. I came down, interacted with them and they left*" (Respondent 2). The reality of believing in the traditional and Christian values simultaneously is a common phenomenon among the Igalas that reflect the dualism of beliefs. Hence, some of them are capable of concurrently upholding different value without external compulsion. Notably, other people would have frowned at the visit of the masquerade, approached them with disdain or even dismissed them. As an Igala lady, I have been opportune to watch and admire them from a distance. Another respondent, also a Christian and a member of the council of elders, holds that "*the Igala persons cannot be detached from their ancestors because there are personal connections with them. Even the so called Christian secretly contacts Ibe'gwu through divination and offer sacrifice to them*" (Respondent 3). Although, I do not approve of people's double standard with respect to the profession of the Christian faith while still succumbing to idolatrous beliefs and lifestyles, I concur with Respondent 3's claim that the Igala person cannot be detached from their ancestors.

The centrality of the ancestors to the Igalas and their choice of upholding the Christian values that are sometimes in conflict with the traditional values underscores some Igala's ability to succumb to more than one belief system. Nevertheless, my discomfort and apprehension towards the adoption of such duality also points to the tension between the cultural and Christian values. In my view, the relationship between the ancestors and the Igala Christians can be fostered in various ways rather than offering of sacrificial items. In my family, even though we may not be ardent believers of the sacrificial elements of the festival, we feel that we remain strongly connected to our ancestors by upholding their legacy and values that the propagate in their lifetime. Such legacy is reflected in the continuation of the names which is

²⁶ It may be worth of note that the acrimony between the Christians and the traditional Igalas is not resolved. Although the uneasiness between the two belief systems (Christianity and Traditional Igalas) remains, both parties have learnt to manage it without much violence.

²⁷ A Christian and member of the Council of Elders

carried on by us (their children and grandchildren), living out and propagating the value of education and peace of which my grandparents (now ancestors) propagated. In so doing, though we are Christians, we remain strongly connected with our ancestors without necessarily succumbing to the sacrificial aspects of the festival. In addition to the respondent from the Councils of Elders, one of the respondents who once participated in the festival, emphasized that *“we the Igala even as Christian still believe in the ancestors. I personally believe in the ancestors, the only thing I will not do is sacrificing blood to the ancestors. There are certain things that could bring about negative effect if not done or done properly”* (Respondent 8).

To all intents and purposes, there is an ongoing evolution in people’s approach to or reception of the *Ote’gwu* festival. Amongst the numerous factors responsible for these changes in people’s attitude towards the festival is the reality of globalization as discussed earlier. This element of globalization will be subsequently discussed.

5.3.1.1. The Impact of Technology and other Religious Beliefs on people’s approach to the *Ote’gwu* Festival

The speedy global change in technology in modern time as I have conceptualised from the respondents understanding, has affected the celebration of the *Ote’gwu* festival negatively. As upheld by Respondent 2, a member of Council of Elders, the changes in the celebration of the *Ote’gwu* festival are as a result of the global change in contemporary society. Building on the view of Nduka and Scanlon (1965) that Christians label the festival as a thing of iniquity, a view that was to some extent supported by some respondents, it could be easily concluded that belief in and the commitment to, the ancestors are in decline because of the advent of Christianity and Islam. Their perception of the festival as a thing of iniquity and their strong reservation or disdain with the festival being held on Sundays dissuade a number of Christians from participating this in the festival. This is evidenced in their low turnout and participation of the festival. It is important to note that the festival is celebrated parallel to the Sunday services and masses (for the Roman Catholics); this implies therefore that some Igala Christians that may have participated in the festival celebration on such days would opt for church rather than *Ote’gwu* festival. This impact of Christianity results in the gradual decline and weakening of the Igalas’ (especially the Christian converts) appreciation of the inherent

values of the festival. It is in fact arguable that their lackadaisical attitude is an expression of their dwindled comprehension of the embedded significance and values of the festival. Lackadaisical attitude as used in this context reflects the laidback and half-hearted attitude of the Igala Christians. Such attitude emanates from the existing conflict and tension between the Christians and traditional Igalas. The decline in participation as displayed by the Igala Christians' attitude negatively impact on such people's aesthetic appreciation and value of festival. The profundity of the decline in participation is highly subjective to individuals depending on depth of tension and conflict within such a person which has direct impact in the depth of such a person's aesthetic appreciation of the festival.

Furthermore, from the participants' responses, it could be deduced that some Igalas approach at the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival with some depth of resentment. The gathered data firmly suggest that even some elders no longer have the aesthetic consciousness required for the genuine appreciation of the festival. It was noted, for instances, that the festival is no longer, considered a priority by some elders (e.g Respondent 2 who is a member of the Council of Elders express his reservation with some aspects of the festival). His resentment as he pointed out came from the fact that he finds it strenuous to keep awake when some of the ritual in the festivals are done at night and so, he prefers to enjoy his sleep. On a second point, he emphasizes that as an academic, he could be out having a conference during the festivals or lectures parallel to the celebration of the period. Therefore, it's challenging to come home and be part of the festival. Hence, they could afford to either travel or be less committed to the celebration of the festival. The decline in such people's disposition towards the festival, consequently, makes it difficult to assist the younger generation to acknowledging the values and significances of festival that will adequately dispose them further to participate in the festival. It is alleged by Respondent 5, that the exposure to urban Western lifestyles via modern technologies (phones, television programs, internet and even travels) negatively affect the people's disposition and availability for the festival. *"The attraction of urban lifestyle does not only lead to the emigration of the people from the rural setting (where the festival is held), but it also leads to undermining of the cultural values and festivals"* (Respondent 5). This assertion is corroborated by another respondent from the council of elders who holds that *"the young ones who are supposed to be initiated into the cult of the masquerade are no longer available; they are now acolyte of the churches"*.

The researcher's experiences correspond with the views of the respondents. Growing up in the Igalala community, this researcher was, for instance, sensitive to a growing resistance and animosity from the dance performers. There was an increasing reluctance from the dancers to go to the designated bush-land for the usual rehearsals. This was largely due to the distraction of the exposure to urban and Western lifestyle either via travels and the use of the internet. Such girls now consider the practice of bush-land an outdated practice thus opting not to be involved in either the rehearsal or actual dance performance during the festival. In extreme cases, some of the girls and some Christians in the community had labelled the choice of location for the rehearsals and the festival as demonic. This reality amongst the Igalalas informs the people's changing attitude and disposition towards the festival. These evolving realities arguably are, to a large extent, consequent on technological exposure and the advent of other religious beliefs which are speedily eroding the values and significance of the festival from the consciousness of majority of the people. Without adequate recognition and appreciation of the embedded values and essence of the festival, it might be very difficult even for these categories of Igalalas to develop a genuine aesthetic perception of the festival. Arguably, such categories of people, their aesthetic experience and value is limited to the depth of their appreciation of the festival as it suits them. Thus, their aesthetic perception is perceived to not be holistic

5.3.2. The Shifting Role of the Masquerade

In addition to the highlighted views, it is documented by Adama (2013), and also suggested by one of my respondents, that individuals, in recent times consider the masquerade institution to be a medium or an avenue to fulfil their malevolent and selfish interests. Adama (2013) also throws light on this in his acknowledgement of some masquerades as breakers of peace, law and order in the present society. He firmly holds that "people now camouflage themselves as masquerades in order to steal, loot, rape and retaliate ills committed against them" (Adama 2013). He went further to give an example of such act by some masquerades claiming that "in 2009 in Awo-ojuwo, the masquerades went away with seven hundred naira forcefully collected from a young girl returning from catechism class. Secondly, in 2013 a military patrol team was attacked at Ejegbo by a group of masquerades in a retaliation attack. One of the soldiers lost his life in the cause of the attack or incident" (ibid). Corroborating this argument, some respondents from the council of elders and present participants of the

festival acknowledged that the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival in recent times is being used as a means for evil acts. It was noted that a young man recently lost his palm while separating a fight between two masquerades. Masquerades who are supposed to be seen as a channel of peace to themselves and the people at large have now become a tussle and pain in people's life.

The malicious act of masquerades in the present days has negatively affected, and continues to affect people's perception of the masquerades in the community. In a nutshell, there are changes in the perception and celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival consequent upon such disgusting and unpleasant activities of some masquerades. Unlike in the prior generations, the current generations struggle to view masquerades as their ancestors when these masquerades start engaging in such immoral and nasty activities highlighted above. Additionally, this reality of masquerades' misconducts undermines the values, significances and wealth of the festival as a whole. Bearing in mind that Afrocentric aesthetics demands a strong relationship amongst the experience of a people, the comprehension of the inherent values and significances and how the aesthetics of a performance is perceived, it is reasonable to argue, therefore, that such detestable attitudes of the masquerade adulterate people's aesthetic perception of the festival.

5.4. Conclusion

This Chapter has critically analysed the overall research findings from the various participants. The fieldwork part of this study explored and scrutinized the practices, performance, significance and value of the *Ote'gwu* festivals among the Igala people of Nigeria. Findings from the empirical component of this research were judiciously discussed along the lines of Afrocentric aesthetics.

The celebration of the *Ote'gwu* festival by the Igala people is an important and a glamorous event with different performance and activities. It is the belief of the Igala people that the successful celebration of the festival will in turn enhance the favour, peace and progress of the land. Negation or failure to acknowledge the *Ote'gwu* festival, as believed among the Igala people, will lead to a plague of different afflictions such as poor farm produce, sickness and premature death in the land.

6. Chapter Six

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1. Introduction

This study grappled with the aesthetics of African cultural performance with specific reference to the *Ote'gwu* festival, through the lens of African aesthetics. The primary objective of this study was the acquisition of a deeper comprehension of the aesthetics of African cultural performance with a focus on the *Ote'gwu* festival among the Igala people of Nigeria. As highlighted in the first chapter, the study explored the meaning, significance and aesthetic value of African cultural performance through a critical examination of the *Ote'gwu* festival among the Igala people. In exploring this aesthetics, this study critically investigated how the *Ote'gwu* festival contributes to a comprehensive understanding of aesthetics. This was realised through the context of African cultural performance with the aim to understand the meaning, significance, and values, and ultimately advance an Afrocentric aesthetics perception of African cultural performance. Its primary focus of analysis was the aesthetic perception of the celebration of the *Ote'gwu* festival by the Igalas and the various factors that contribute to that celebration.

This chapter will provide a summary of the research study. The summary taps into the study by looking at the aesthetics of African cultural performance in the understanding of the embedded aesthetic in the celebration *Ote'gwu* festival. It also delves into the reviewed literature and the empirical data gathered from the participants of the study. Subsequently, there is a presentation of some of the key findings and relevant recommendations of this study. These recommendations are considered relevant to the entire African society, but they will however, be of special interest to the Igalas and participants of the *Ote'gwu* festival

6.2. Summary of Research Study Chapters

Although the various chapters commenced with succinct introductions, Chapter one introduced the study and provided a general background and outline of the research problem, objectives, questions, theoretical framework and methodological approach. The chapter's

presentation of the background and the context of the research served to underscore the research problem. It went about this by presenting a brief literature review of the cultural background and relevance of African cultural performances while drawing attention to the *Ote'gwu* festival amongst the Igala people of Nigeria. The chapter also established the research objectives and corresponding research questions. As highlighted in the first chapter and other parts of this thesis, the study's research objectives were as follows:

- To develop a deeper understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival and associated meanings through an exploration of its practices, performances and symbols.
- To explore Afrocentric perspectives on aesthetics of cultural performances.
- To examine the significance and aesthetic perception of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala community.
- To find out the extent to which the significance, meanings and aesthetic values associated to the *Ote'gwu* festival have (or have not) evolved, and the motivating factors for such change, if applicable.

Furthermore, the first chapter delineated the scope and limitations of the study. This was followed by an articulation of the significance of the study and an outline of the structure of the study.

Chapter two was essentially a review and evaluation of relevant literature. It delved into a detailed contextualization of cultural performance and aesthetics. The chapter made an effort to provide in-depth examination of African aesthetics. In the conceptualisation of cultural performance, it started with the understanding of performance and culture as understood by various scholars. Such understanding of the concepts of culture and performance led to the conclusion that cultural performance is an expression of culture through the display and performance of people's way of life. The chapter further examined the concept of cultural performance within the sphere of oral tradition from an African perspective. It was understood that oral tradition is a channel of communication through which African performance and cultural values are passed down from generation to generation (Finnegan 1992, Schechner and Appel 2001). The *Ote'gwu* festival was located within the oral tradition that has been handed down from generation to date, through the people's participation in its performances and arts as a means of recalling the past based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of the Igala people.

Secondly, the various positionalities of aesthetics from ancient to modern periods were explored. It was noted that aesthetics varies as it relates to diverse cultures, ethnicities, countries, and races. The chapter drew attention to European aesthetics and narrowed down to African aesthetics which is the focus of this research. From the discourse of Eurocentric aesthetics, it was noted that Eurocentric aesthetics is a structural aesthetics given its order of arrangement and predetermined ways of understanding, interpreting and evaluating the work of art. It was also understood that Eurocentric aesthetics is of the view that art is for art's sake, it is detached from usefulness and functionality. On the other hand, African aesthetics holds functionality as the basis of African art. Its art is understood within the framework of "art for life's sake" that is embedded in people's realities and serves several functions in the society.

Chapter three presented the theoretical and analytical perspectives upon which this research was carried out. The chapter examined Afrocentric aesthetics via the lenses of Afrocentricity. It continued with the concept of Afrocentricity as an African philosophy which is centred on the African worldview and understanding reality, events, history appreciation of beauty from an African perspective (Asante 2003). The chapter further discussed Afrocentric aesthetics as an expression of African cosmology. It was noted from scholarly materials that African cosmology is the basis of African aesthetics owing to the understanding of the African aesthetic being connected to their worldviews and the African way of appreciating nature, creating aesthetic objects, evaluating the work of art that is in tune with their cosmic order.

Given that the study focusses on an Igala festival, Chapter four started with a presentation which focused on describing the Igala people. It offered a succinct historical account of the Igalas within the socio-cultural context of Nigeria. In line with the discussed historical account of the Igalas, the chapter further offered a detailed narration and description of the *Ote'gwu* festival and the various performances of *Ote'gwu* festival

Chapter Five presented and analysed the overall research findings from the various participants. The fieldwork part of the study explored and scrutinized the practices, performance, significance and the value of the *Ote'gwu* festivals among the Igala people of Nigeria. Findings from the empirical component of the research were analysed and discussed using thematic analysis along the lines of Afrocentric aesthetics. It was understood from the

fieldwork that the *Ote'gwu* festival is an aesthetic festival with various functions including its role as a communication tool in the development of the Igala identity. It was understood also that, inherent in the festival is the religious, cultural, social and moral values.

6.3. Key Findings and Conclusions of the Study: Aesthetics of African cultural performance with a focus on the *Ote'gwu* festival

Using Afrocentric aesthetics framework, this research has underscored the aesthetics of African cultural performance. It is evident from the reviewed literature that most African societies are identified with a kind of cultural performance which exists in oral tradition with various aesthetics values. An exploration of the aesthetics of the *Ote'gwu* festival from this study's findings revealed aesthetic values as perceived by the Igala people who are performers of the *Ote'gwu* festival. The conceptualized aesthetics of the *Ote'gwu* festival as an African cultural performance show that African cultural performances have great-bearing on the life cycle of African people, which are meant to appease or evoke favours from the ancestors. Some of these cultural performances present knowledge about the cosmology, aesthetics and myths of the people. It was also noted that performance of culture in African societies does not exist as "art for art's sake" but "art for life's sake", It is a performance that is hinged on man's cultural realities and the experience of his environment.

Among the Igalas, the *Ote'gwu* festival is specifically the celebration of veneration and thanksgiving to the ancestors, and also a platform for requesting more fruitful years from them. It is a celebration that flows through the world of the living and the dead. Consequently, African cultural performance from this point of view is an integral part of African traditional life which permeates other aspects of human life cycle from birth to death. It is a performance, from systematic organized event (from planning to performance), which is communally celebrated. Such performances are characterized by music, dance, rituals, sacrifice, prayers, incantations and invocations. They are performances that function and serve a utilitarian role in the society.

In the similar attributes of African cultural performances are also dynamic elements among groups and societies in Africa with common aesthetic value. Every human society, according to Modum (Ezenagu and Olatunji 2014) has peculiar values and norms that characterize it

and determine the life of its members. These norms and values in African cultural performance, have made it an indispensable event in African communities. From the findings of this study, it is evident that the aesthetics of African cultural performance convey various messages and values to the people who have ancient attribution to them. However, the perception, understanding and appreciation of the culture influence its performance and reception by the people. The aesthetics perception of an art, therefore contributes wholesomely to its appreciation and celebration by the community of performance.

Cultural performances such as the *Ote'gwu* festival remain important to the society of its practice given that it represents their beliefs, norms, values, hopes, experience and history. It is entrenched in their entire ethos and is sacred in many diverse cultural activities that presents and portray the glamour of the community and indigenous way of life. Some of these cultural performances are the bedrock on which cultural unity converge and the celebration is a unifying force that binds the community. From the findings of this study, African cultural performance encapsulates values including religious, social, moral and economic values.

The social value is manifested in the mutuality and collectiveness of the performances which unifies the community members from generations to generations. The religious value is embedded in beliefs in the existence of spiritual beings, God, divinities, spirits ancestors and mysterious powers. This belief makes community members live in mutual respect. Religious value in the understanding of Ezenagu and Olatunji(2014), is a medium through which the entire community gathers together to worship and commune with gods and man. The communities communally give thanks to the gods for the past and present, and place the future into their hands. Through this, people's faiths in their ancestors are strengthened and covenant renewed.

More so, African cultural performances are a vehicle for learning African traditions and the ethos of the communities. By means of performance, it serves as a communication tool which is both vertical and horizontal (man to ancestors and man to man). Amongst the humans, it transfers the inherent value in cultural performance from one generation to another generation through oral performance and communicates the people's identity to the world. It is a channel through which a group or community can be identified, given that it brings out the idealistic concept and perception of a society. This concept and perception is entrenched in the norms which keep the society together. It serves as a medium of communication between an African

and his ancestors by means of appeasement, chanting, praise, incantation and sacrifice. In the “African pyramidal structure, man is next to his ancestors, before the gods. And traditionally, man needs to communicate with his ancestors (deity)” (Obaje and Yakubu 2012: 22). This communication often depends on the request of the individual and the demand of the gods from the individual. Through these activities and embedded value in the performance of culture, the life of the community as espoused by Mbiti (2015) is renewed. People are entertained and their tension finds an outlet. It brings people together as a group which strengthens unity and cohesion among them. The link between the living and the ancestors is renewed where the performance involves belief concerning the unseen world.

By and large, African cultural performance like the *Ote'gwu* festival is enriched with glamorous festivities celebrated to venerate and commemorate the gods, consolidate social, religious and moral ties and maintain culture.

Despite the celebration and the embedded value of the celebration of *Ote'gwu* cultural performance, changes have become a constant phenomenon in its perception and reception by some of the community members. The role of colonialism, Christianity, Islam, and the embrace of modernity and its values has brought about changes in the perception of life and society. This is gradually leading a steady erosion of some African ethos. The contact with Christianity and technology suggested changes in today's cultural performance in Africa that has led to a gradual loss of the moral, religious and social ideas that brought the festival into being and sustained it (Egbunu 2014). For example, Christianity and the Islamic religion have taken away the younger generation from the institution, which retained the potentials for perpetuating the Igala culture in the celebration of the *Ote'gwu* festival. “Knowing the place of culture in the life of man, one wonders at the pace by which most of the cherished African cultural values like reverence for traditional institutions to which festival belong are fast diminishing. It is not surprising that despite the value of African traditional institution (festival) in preserving, promoting and showcasing the glamour of the traditional African life prior the arrival of the Europeans, it is not given the publicity commensurate to its worth” (Ezenagu and Olatunji 2014: 38).

Using Afrocentric aesthetics, this research has underscored the aesthetics of African cultural performance. Employing Afrocentric viewpoints and arguments, this study furthers the ongoing effort to reposition the discourse of African traditional performances and their

intricacies. Within the context of contemporary society and the crux of this study, the authenticity of African traditional aesthetics is ascertained via the lenses of Africans who have the pleasure and the privilege of fully participating in this and other traditional events. The depth or purity of such authenticity is greatly subjected to the depth of people's appreciation of the unadulterated values, significances and essence of African traditional performances.

6.4. Recommendations

Based on the factors contributing to the gradual decline and erosion of African cultural performance, this study offers recommendations that could checkmate the erosion of cultural values and restore the aesthetic perception of African cultural performances. Some of these recommendations include the deliberate inclusion of the educative element of the festival as discussed below. This study enlightens both Africans and the non-African community on the appropriate and desirable approaches to the aesthetics of African traditional performance. Its recommendations are an effort to further illuminate the Igalas, the African society and of non-African and interested parties on the management of uncovered challenges in the preservation of Afrocentric aesthetics of African traditional performances. Such preservation ensures the continued existence with minimal distortion of the essence, worth and aesthetic of African traditional performances with broader goal of safeguarding and celebrating the identity of the Igalas and Africans in general.

Cultural performances like *Ote'gwu* festival should be celebrated with passion. The Igalas, with special focus on the custodians of the Igala culture, tradition and values, ought to be revived and encouraged to sustain the vitality with which the festival was celebrated. Taking into cognizance the reality of the relapse and regress of the festivals, the relevance of the festival should be rekindled in a manner that embraces and resuscitates the interest of the people that uphold different belief systems. This could be done through a focus on the moral benefit of the festival to all regardless of spiritual positioning. Through the affirmation and clear communication of the worth of the festival, including but not limited to stability, preservation and continuity, a larger pool of people may position themselves to uphold such values in the festival. Soyinka (1998) underscored the need to deliberately inculcate and imbibe the right cultural value as sine qua non for people centred development. In his words

“culture is produced and the producers of culture at all levels should endeavour to make culture work for the purpose of development” Soyinka (1998: 19). Cultural festival should be encouraged, and as well producers of culture should endeavour to entrench the instructive aspects of festivals. This will hopefully keep the essential values of the festival constantly renewed in the consciousness of the people. The celebration of the *Ote'gwu* festival should not be perceived merely as an annual congregation for entertainment or merely as a pleasurable event, or festival for festival's sake but as a festival with an aesthetic value and also as a medium of transmitting the aesthetic value and knowledge to the younger generation

It was noted in Chapter Five that, in recent years, the masquerade activities during the festival are becoming undesirable. This was apparent in one of the respondents' allusion to masquerade robbing people during the festival. Such unholy and immoral acts are capable of dissuading loyalists of the African cultural festivals. It is necessary, therefore, that the community and relevant stakeholders put modalities in place to guide and coordinate all the processes involved in the festival from the beginning to the end. The activities of all the participants of the festival should be guided by some principles and corresponding penalties or consequences. Such a step could go a long way in regulating the attitude and behaviour of the masquerades without making jest of the ancestral symbol and functions. It is expected that this will restore some dignity and aura to the festival which could consequently reawaken people's disposition to adhere to its values, thus increasing participation in the festival.

It was also noted that technological advancement and people's uncritical embrace of modernity are factors that have affected the originality of masquerades in the celebration of the *Ote'gwu* festival. The *abo* tree from which the costumes of the masquerade are made is difficult to find. This is basically because most of them have been felled by tree mongers in the quest for economic benefits. The scarcity of this tree in the present day has negatively affected the aura or personality of the masquerade as an ancestral spirit due to improper physical appearances. This study recommends deliberate cultivation of the *abo* tree. This will provide a readily available destination for the acquisition of the original costumes for the masquerade and other participants of the festival. In addition to the traditional benefits of such plantation, it could also go a long way in contributing towards a healthy ecosystem of the Igalas geographical environment.

Finally, the study recommends that, the previous attires and items used in the celebration of *Ote'gwu* festival should not be disposed of, rather it should be kept in the Igala museum for preservation. Preserving them can contribute in communicating the originality of the historical and archaic value of the festival. It can also serve to preserve the culture, promote the knowledge of the value attached to them in the past, and passing on the essence of the festival to subsequent generation by telling them about the present and the past. This might help the present participants of the festival to compare the two periods and draw a conclusion on how the present celebration of the festival should be done. Preserving them also can enhance the development of the Igala identity and festival by communicating to the world or those who might visit the museum in years to come.

In conclusion, it was discovered from this study that there is a lack of comprehensive research or academic study in the field of Afrocentric aesthetics and cultural performances. This finding is indeed strongly supported by the assertion that although African aesthetics are inherent in African epistemology, social and cultural realities, the challenge in the scholarly discourse lies in knowing the aesthetic discourse that drives this cultural signifying system. This challenge results from the lack of in-depth research and study in this field. Such dearth of studies deprives the field of substantial opportunities to expand the required knowledge that could allay the consequences of this challenge. This study, therefore, recommends further scholarly research that advance in-depth interrogation of the Afrocentric aesthetic discourse from a variety of angles.

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Appendix 1

University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg, Campus,
Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg
South Africa

Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant,

My name is **Joy Ojochogwu Obaje**. I am a Masters student studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus with the student number **(214583048)**. The title of my research is: “**Aesthetics in African Cultural Performance: A Critical study of *Ote’gwu* festival among the Igala people of Nigeria**”. The study aims at exploring *Ote’gwu* festival at Opulega, Ankpa, with a view of investigating the aesthetics of *Ote’gwu* festival. The meaning, usefulness and values attached to the festival by the Igala people. I am interested in interviewing you so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter with me.

May I formally invite you to participate as a respondent in this study, in the form of a telephonic semi-structured interview.

I will like to emphasise that information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only. Your participation is entirely voluntary; you have a choice to choose to participate or not to participate and also to stop participating at any point during the course of the research should you feel the need to do so. You will not be penalized for taking such an action. Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously; your name will not be disclosed in any form in the study, unless you choose to have your identity disclosed. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes long and the record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisor(s). After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, it will be disposed of by shredding and burning.

If you agree to participate please sign the declaration form attached to this statement.

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have questions or need clarity on any aspect of the research. I can be contacted at: School of Art, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. Email: 214583048@stu.ukzn.ac.za
Cell number: (+27) 0624984825

My supervisor is **Ntokozo Charity Madlala** who is located at the School of Art, Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email: madlalan@ukzn.ac.za Phone number: (+27) 033 260 5551

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Kind regards
Joy Ojochogwu Obaje

DECLARATION

I..... *(full names of participant)* hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

Appendix 2

Research Instrument (the *Oketa* of *Opulega* (chief) and Council of Elders

1. To develop a deeper understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival and associated meanings through the exploration of its practices, performances and symbols.

- a. As a chief and custodian of *Ote'gwu* festival, could you please tell me what you know about this festival?
- b. Could you give me a brief historical overview of the festival?
- c. What are the practices, performances and symbols associated with this festival?
- d. Are there meanings or values associated to these practices, performances and symbols? Please explain?

2. To examine the aesthetic value of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala community.

- a. Why do the Igalas celebrate *Ote'gwu* festival?
- b. What are the inherent (and contemporary) values of *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala people?
- c. What is the significance of the *Ote'gwu* festival to the Igalas community?
- d. How important are the performance aspects to the execution and reception of the festival?
- e. Who is responsible for the performances and how do they prepare?

3. To find out the extent to which the significance, meanings and aesthetic values associated to the *Ote'gwu* festival have (or have not) changed, and the motivating factors for such change, if applicable.

- a. What are the processes (practices and symbols) involved for the realization of the various performances during the festival?
- b. Have these processes (practices and symbols) evolved over the years? (If yes, how and why?)
- c. Does the change in processes (if perceived) affect significances, values and meanings of the festival? How so?
- d. There is a perceived decline in attendance and participation at the festival, would you say this is true/ not? If yes, what sort of factors do you think have contributed to this decline.
- e. Are you bothered by the decline, how so?
- f. What are your hopes for the future of the festival?

Appendix 3

Research Instrument for the (present participant of *Ote'gwu* festival)

- 1. To develop a deeper understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival and associated meanings through the exploration of its practices, performances and symbols.**
 - a. As an Igala descendant and a participant of *Ote'gwu* festival, could you please tell me what you know about this festival?
 - b. To the best of your knowledge, could you give me a brief historical overview of the festival?
 - c. Could you give me an account of your past and present experiences as a participant of *Ote'gwu* festival? (how have you participated/ how do you participate)

- 2. To examine the aesthetic value of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala community.**
 - a. What are the processes (practices and symbols) that are involved in the preparations of the various performances of *Ote'gwu* festival?
 - b. Are there meanings or values associated to these practices, performances and symbols?
 - c. What meanings and value did/do you associate with this practices, performances and symbols
 - d. Why do you (and your family) celebrate *Ote'gwu* festival?
 - e. What are the values of *Ote'gwu* festival (communal or personal) for you, what is the most important thing in and about the festival?
 - f. What, do you think, is the current significance of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala community
 - g. How is of *Ote'gwu* festival organised?

- 3. To find out the extent to which the significance, meanings and aesthetic values associated to the *Ote'gwu* festival have (or have not) changed, and the motivating factors for such change, if applicable.**

- a. From your own knowledge as a participant in this festival, has this festival changed since you have been performing?
 - i. If yes, how?
 - ii. If no, why and how do you think it has not changed?
- b. Have the processes (practices and symbols) evolved/changed over the years? (If yes, how and why?) Highlight some of the changes.
- c. Do you think these changes have affected the significances, values and meaning of the festival for its participants?

4. Extended Questions for Performers

As a performer, how do you go about your preparation for your various performances in the festival?

- a. How do you go about with the preparation of the various elements of performance?
 - i. E.g. How do you get your costume?
 - ii. How do you learn your dance steps?
 - iii. Are there specific meaning to your dance steps?
- b. How do you (as a performer) perceive *Ote'gwu* festival,
 - i. What do you enjoy/ not enjoy about performing in the festival?
 - ii. Has your level of enjoyment remained the same over the years?
- c. How long do you intend to continue participating in *Ote'gwu* festival?
 - i. Why would you want to continue?

Appendix 4

Research Instrument (For former participants of *Ote'gwu* Festival)

1. **To develop a deeper understanding of the *Ote'gwu* festival and associated meanings through the exploration of its historic practices, performances and symbols.**
 - a. As an Igala descendant and a former participant of *Ote'gwu* festival, could you please tell me what you know about this festival?
 - b. To the best of your knowledge, could you give me a brief historical overview of the festival?
 - c. Could you give me an account of your experiences as a former participant of *Ote'gwu* festival? Experiences while you were participating.
 - d. What did you enjoy most about the Festival?
 - e. What did you enjoy the least?

2. **To examine the aesthetic value of the *Ote'gwu* festival for the Igala community.**
 - a. Why did you celebrate *Ote'gwu* festival and how?
 - b. What were the practices, performances and symbols associated with this festival? Were there meanings or values associated with these practices, performances and symbols, what were they? What did it mean to you?
 - c. What, do you think, are the significance of the *Ote'gwu* festival to the Igala community

3. **To find out the extent to which the significance, meanings and aesthetic values associated to the *Ote'gwu* festival have (or have not) changed, and the motivating factors for such change, if applicable.**
 - a. Why did you stop participating in the festival? What are the experiences that caused you to stop participating?
 - b. What relationship do you have with the festival now?
 - c. Do you think the festival has changed over time? (processes, practices and symbols) (If yes, how?)
 - d. Why do you think these changes are being experienced/ have happened in the festival?
 - e. Have the perceived shifts affected significances, values and meanings associated with the festival. If yes, how so?

- f. Have your reception and attitude to the festival changed since you stopped participating in the festival?
 - i. If yes, how and why
 - ii. If no, why not?
- g. Would you consider taking part again in the festival? What would make you go back/ not?

Appendix 5

List of Respondents

	Participant's Name	Category	Place	Date
1.	Ojele	Present participant	Over the phone	5/08/2017
2.	Ojochenemi	Present participant	Over the phone	5/08/2007
3.	Ademu	Chief from the council of elders	Over the phone	5/08/2017
4.	Ocholi	Council of elders	Over the phone	6/08/2017
5.	Ajara	Council of elders	Over the phone	6/08/2017
6.	Ojonugwa	Former participant	Over the phone	7/08/2017
7.	Ojoche gbe	Former participant	Over the phone	7/08/2017
8.	Yusufu	Present participant	Over the phone	8/08/2017
9.	Illah	Council of elders	Over the phone	8/08/2017
10.	Mohammed	Former participant	Over the phone	8/08/2017
11.	Alidu	Former participant	Over the phone	9/08/2017
12.	Ochedi	Custodian of Igala tradition	Over the phone	9/08/2017
13.	Ogwu	Council of elders	Over the phone	10/08/2017
14.	Iye	Present participant	Over the phone	10/08/2017