

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PRACTICE OF THE ANCIENT EYAAL-ABUA NEW YAM FESTIVAL OF ABUA PEOPLE IN RIVERS STATE

¹George, Ilayira Samuel; ²Nwuche, Michael Nwuche; ³Thomas, Uzhiyekachi G &
⁴Madumere, Ifeoma Perpetual

^{1,2,3} Department of Fine and Applied Arts,

Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers State.

⁴ Department of Fine and Applied Arts,

Federal College of Education (Technical) Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria

Corresponding Email: unclemikenwuche@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper analyzed the practice of the ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival of Abua people in Abua/Odua Government Local Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria and how foreign religions formed the basis of changes that effected regular its practices in Abua land. This is because; in time immemorial, Abua people are known as a people who conserve the spectacular Eyaal-Abua as one of their cultural contents that linked between the living and the dead or ancestral spirits. Owing to the advent of civilization, many communities in Abua are no longer practicing the annual Eyaal-Abua festival; they classify the festival as primitive outside modernity, which other tribes queue in with. By these trends, this study analyzed the attributes that involved in the changes and continuity in the practice of Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival. The study considers the types of costumes, dance-style and cultural performances if they transform or affect the people when celebrating Eyaal-Abua. Finally, this study recommends among others that, the supreme council of Abua traditional rulers should ensure that they reform and regulate the modus of operandi of Eyaal-Abua in all Abua communities as to suit modernity and avoid primitive performance and harmful practices in the land. Lastly, the old members should organize training of Eyaal-Abua compulsorily among the youth and new members against extinction.

Key words: *Ancient eyaal-abua, historical analysis, yam festival*

Introduction

Abua Kingdom is one of the ancient kingdoms in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Appiah (2015) the theory of independent origin, which strongly rely on oral traditions according to Talbot gave his account that Abua was the first man from heaven to settle on earth with his wife, *Egula* who also descended from the heaven with a rope-let down by *Ake* (Supreme God) and touched down at *Olokpogha* (shrine). *Olokpogha* is currently an ancient forest site of the central shrine of *Abua people* also referred to as *Erugh-Ogboko* ancient playground covered by oil-bean trees. The second oral accounts linked Abua people with Benin exodus. The Abua oral traditions traced Abua ancestor with Odua, Ogbia, Ogba, Ikwerre and Ekpeye groups' migrations from the Benin Kingdom through River-Niger. Under the sovereignty of the Benin Kingdom, the leadership of

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

Benin who then was demanding human heads to sacrifice for the burial of a princess led the migrations of *Abua*, *Ogbia*, *Emeni* and *Obenya* who fled out of Benin. They escaped by sea with three wooden canoes to the coast of the Brass River and anchored at *Okoroma* (now *Okoroma War-House*). *Abua* and his family later relocated to a new settlement called *Erugh-Ogboko*, now the ancestral home of Abua Kingdom. However, Abolga (2021) opines that Abua Kingdom situates in Abua/Odual Local Government Area of Rivers State, in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, covering about 7,000 km square between the latitude 4.5° and 6.5° N and longitude 6° and 7° E. Abua is bounded on the South by the Ijaw tribes; on the West by the Ogbogolo and Odual tribes, on the North by the Ekpeye tribe and on the East by the Ikwere tribe. Abua Kingdom has four sons or clans namely; *Agana*, *Emughami*, *Okpeden* and *Otami*. Each of them grew independently and later dispersed and settled within her neighborhood except *Agana*, the eldest son who stayed behind to manage the estate of his late father, *Abua* in the *Olo-Okpogha* ancient settlement (George, 2015). Presently, the four sons of Abua later became sub-regions of Abua kingdom otherwise known as clans. The sub-regions are *Ogbo-Abuan - Agana clan*, *Emughan - Emughami clan*, *Okpeden- Okpedien clan* and *Otapha - Otami clan*. The *Ogbo-Abuan* thus becomes the *Central-Abua* where the *Olokpogha* is situated where all rituals are performed for the ancestors, and the clans are expanded with a host of communities and culture that make up Abua Kingdom today.

On the other hand, *Eyaal-Abua* is the most adored ancient festival, which is celebrated yearly to mark the beginning of a new year between March and April in accordance with Abua native laws and calendar that is synonymous with the *Egwu-Ogba (Nchaka) festival of Ogba people* and *Ogwu-Ekpeye festival of Ekpeye people* in Rivers State of Nigeria (Vincent, 2021). At the eve of the *Eyaal-Abuan festival*, a vigil lot of ritual performances are observed which includes flying of burning arrows into the dark sky as a means of warding off the evil spirits from the land. The inhabitants jubilate in groups singing songs (folklores) and echoing as..... “*toe te; toe te, baaghaph, kuukula*” meaning woe to evil spirits in the land with the belief that the flying arrows with fireworks will cast away the evil spirits in the land. The purpose of the folklore and arrow fanfare is displayed to re-unite members together believing that God has dispersed evil spirits away from Abua land. During this celebration periods, cultural displays from different groups are also observed in their village squares such as *Arughu-Ema* (village masquerades), cultural dance, wrestling contest and other traditional competitions are aimed at entertaining the living and the dead (George, 2015).

However, this study is focused to analyze the ancient practice of *Eyaal-Abuan* festival from the pre-colonial era to the present day. The study looked toward if there are changes in the practice today influenced by foreign culture that are yet to encourage the promotion of African arts and culture in Abua land. This connotation may reduce Abua as mere a people without cultural heritage or nothing to the progression of mankind (Oluoba, 2013). Perhaps, based on the advent of western influence, the people of Abua are reluctant to celebrating *Eyaal-Abua festival* over five decades ago, which is against the purpose of what their forefathers put into practice before they left and has contemporarily posing problems like extinction in the society, especially to the present

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

generation from imbibing the values of *Eyaal-Abua festival* among other new yam festivals in Rivers State and Nigeria at large.

Therefore, this study will help the inhabitants of Abua and the public to understand historically how and when *Eyaal-Abua festival* started; the role *Eyaal-Abuan* played in the promotion of Abua arts and culture and finally what is responsible for the changes and continuity of the practice of *Eyaal-Abua festival* now and before. The objective of this study will base on historical analysis of *Eyaal-Abua festival* from the pre-colonial era to the present time and the extent of changes in style and organizational structure as well as factors responsible for the extinction of *Eyaal-Abua practice* in *Abua land*.

Concept of Festivals in African Religious Practice

Festivals are essential components of religious practices in Africa in which are celebrated by the people to bring people together with their ancestors and function in solidarity. The practices of African festivals are therefore aimed at waving away the evil men and women, including wicked spirits from the land and to fluff up people to social control during and after the festival. During festival celebrations, people of integrity from various communities initiate members into groups and in conveying absolute peace and unity amongst the inhabitants. Most festivals in Africa engage dancing of masquerades and traditional songs in the community ancient playground by the inhabitants in groups. Masquerade displays in organized festivals are considered as ancestral spirits or protective spirits of a family or community (Nwuche, 2022).

Therefore, masquerades are considered important in *Eyaal-Abuan festival* are performed to merry or commemorate the events and it is believed that an appearance of a masquerade(s) in an open event like *Eyaal-Abuan festival* is assumed to entertain the people, or to unite the ancestral spirits or to initiate new members. For social purpose, it is believed that the masquerades perform to ensuring peace and security of the land because they were bestowed the authority to summon the evil spirits away from the land before celebrating new yam festival or to appease the spirits against wrong doers who violate the social norms or laws of the land before the commencement of community festival, especially the *Eyaal-Abuan festival*.

Though, majority of masquerades are attached with religious affiliations apart from social intention like entertainment and enforcement of community bye-laws. Those masquerades or masks with religious intentions can be seen in the shrines or play as sacred images that render spiritual functions to the people. The above belief in no little measure does not affect the form and practice of *Eyaal-Abuan festival* or its masquerades. In this case, Egonwa (2017) sees African art-masquerades and religion as intertwined aspects of life of African people. According to him, African belief systems are to a great extent is useful in the examination of social aspect of most African festivals, but religion contributes greatly to people's evaluation of art objects, which gives credit to African belief systems (Nwuche, 2022 ; Naibi, 2019). He further explained that the appreciation of African art as a product of characteristic cultural background lies on the belief in a Super God who works through several intermediaries, semi-gods and deities through whom he

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

could be approached; this encouraged the tendency to deify objects. Therefore, *Eyaal-Abua festival* and masquerades can be looked or evaluated based on established conceptual parameters developed within Abua culture. Though, the *Eyaal-Abua festival* is not as it used to be again because the people that are supposed to uphold the *Eyaal festival* are shying away from it, which has led to its neglect for over ten decades now, and even when it was unintentionally organized and celebrated by the Abua council of chiefs and elders, especially between 2010 and 2017, there were major changes confronted the whole celebrations due to cultural changes associated to cultural revolution (Millious, 2021).

Symbolic Influence of Eyaal-Abua on Religious Practice

From the earlier discussions, religion is a presumed culture that reflects the exercise of human will and mankind where rules and values operate together to build human faith and survival through festivity. (Nwuche, 2022) agrees that cultural practices allow the people to fix their convictions on symbolic representation and believed that symbolic objects have been the subject of myths in which the gods, even human beings used objects to declare their convictions resulted from man's curiosity, Thus, the *Eyaal-Abua* upholds cultural symbols to portray their beliefs and adulations that are connected to spiritual beings. When viewing African mask for instance, you first consider the symbols or forms it has because mask intertwined with religious attachments, values and belief system etc. Therefore, the *Eyaal-Abuan* symbolic objects play both positive and negative roles, but function differently because of their iconographic quality and values. On stylization of the masks, the *Eyaal-Abua festival masks* were carved extraordinarily in animal and human forms, but the styles are adopted from the Egbukele masks, which replicate water spirits skillfully appeared in fish and animal forms like shark, whale, hippopotamus etc (Beardsley, 1982 & Bier, 1968).

However, Millious further stressed that participants of *Eyaal-Abua festival* appear in regalia (symbolic objects) include *Adighule* (Rod) and *Okpeti* (Staff) which is been held exclusively by the *Uwema-Abua* to signify authority and power. Perhaps, the *Okpeti* as always embellished by the *Uwema-Abua* during *Eyaal-Abuan festival* symbolizes kingship, greatness and strength in Abua. The *Uwema-Abua* appears in the playground with *Oji* used to hold the *Okuru-ileeph* (Sacred bag) against touching the ground during the festivity. The *Okpoki-Abuan* (Manilla) and *Emuton* are always put inside the sacred bag against touching the ground that may term grievous to the gods during cleansing of the land (Mercy, 2019). Another sets of symbolic objects used in promoting *Eyaal-Abua festival* are *Okama-ake* (sacred drum) symbolizes gods of the sky according to Abua myths. The *Okama sacred drum* was used to assemble the gods and other spirits, while *Ozu-Okama* (sacred drum) was made of human skin used to appease the spirit beings, especially when the people are in terrible situation. *Uzu-Okama* forbids touching the ground during celebration. It is said that the *Uwema-Abua* does not misses his dance-step of the drum during the *Eyaal-Abuan festival*, but if he eventually misses his dance-step he will eventually die and sacrifices will be offered to the *Okama-Ake* drum in order to appease the sky-god of Abua (Ilayira 76year old). Apart from the throne of the *Uwema-Abua* that is decorated with 14 eagle feathers, the ancient *Okama-Ake drum* is decorated with 49 eagle feathers, which believed to rank and

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. THE COLLOQUIUM, 7(1), 53-65

measured as the highest gods in Abua tribe with the following duties: (1) to destroy evil minds, curses, plagues and wizardry in Abua land after the celebration of *Eyaal-Abua festival*. (2) to bring down *Ake-Abua* during *Ake-Abua* or to awakening the spirits of *Aka-Abua* and every other spirit of benevolence in Abua during *Eyaal-Abuan festival* so that members will be blessed for increase of fertility in childbearing and farming and take away sickness and premature deaths from the land (3) to defend the land from all attacks including invasion by enemies and evil spirits that might come (Agbara, 2022, Alabo, 2021; Akainy, 2022 & Aselemi, 2020)

During the masquerade display of *Eyaal-Abua festival*, *Eduer* (trumpet made of elephant horn) is an instrument used to create more rhythms. Apart from musical instrument, elephant trumpets are always held by the *Uwema-Abua* (king), leaders, heroes or wealthy men and women in Abua. The trumpet symbolizes authority and nobility in accordance with African traditions. Another symbolic object as costume of *Eyaal festival* is the *Aroghoony Ikia* (Lion caps) is worn by only by traditional rulers, elders, titled chiefs or noble men and women. The preferable lion color cap is red, and no child is allowed to wear it, while defaulters meet sanctions or charmed traditionally in accordance of Abua native laws. However, the *Aroghoony cap* symbolizes men and women of wisdom, greatness and honor etc. *Omur-Ukpe* (white cloth), *Omur-Alhe* (Palm frond) and *Jini* (*Kai kai*, alcohol) are three significant materials helped in adding more colors in the promotion of *Eyaal-Abua* cultural heritage. During the celebration, those who appeared dancing with *Omur-ukpe* are individuals who are pure and blessed with children, because *Omur-ukpe* symbolizes purity and fertility. *Eyaal-Abua festival* cannot be performed without been decorated the playground with palm fronds. This is because *Omur-alhe* is used for the cleansing of sacred quarters or shrines together with *Omur-ukpe* and *Jini* (illicit gin) otherwise known as Abua first-eleven is not left from Abua culture. *jini* is used for libation to the gods of Abua when consulting them. At the pronouncement of *Eyaal-Abua festival* by the deity priest through the *Uwema-Abua* (the overall king of Abua), the *Eesi* (strand grass) is given to the family heads to go back and distribute parts of the grass in their families as a sign that a date has been fixed for the *Eyaal-Abuan* celebration. This exercise cannot be performed without pouring *jinni* on the land to enable the gods take cognizance of the dating.

Ohuoba, (2013b) posits that there is no part of the world that does not make use of colours because of its in-depth psychological meanings and content. These colours signify many things to the individuals, communities, countries and religion. The Western world makes use of varieties of colours and they are not restricted to any number of colours. The African traditional artists or custodians exercise some restrictions in the utilization of colours, they worked towards the dictates of the kings, *Uwemas*, Obas, chief priests and the entire community desire. Unlike the Western world who makes use of all categories of colours, the African society are restricted to only three major traditional colours– white (*Omur-Ukpe*), Red (*Odoor*), and Black (*Odiil-Enu*).

The use of colours in Africa has spiritual and emotional implications which are widely believed that colours helped to facilitate communication between the ancestors and the gods. This is because Abua deities are known or go with different meaning of colours; white colour symbolizes moment

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. THE COLLOQUIUM, 7(1), 53-65

of peace, purity and fertility. The red colour symbolizes danger, ritual and blood, while the black colour symbolizes mourning and spirit (Oluoba, 2018). One of the differences between the use of signs and symbols is the degree of qualitative information conveyed through them. Thus, the signs provide simple information, while the symbols communicate complex abstract of truth and idea about existence and its meaning. A simplest example of a sign is personal name to introduce someone. Symbols provide an enriched understanding to a ritual or festival. Oluoba, (2021) posits that symbols also occur not only in the art but also in literature and ritual. In Christian art, the lamb symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ.

However, the culture of Abua deeply promotes peace, love, harmony, charity, tranquility and respect for elders. The *Eyaal-Abuan* festival starts with *Ogu-Eyaal-Abua* (date consultation/fixing) which begins with the *Abhi* royal family of *Emilaghan*. The *Abhi* royal family is the second brother of *Osuani* and *Agana* who are siblings of *Ogudu*, the wife of *Ogbo-Abuan*. The *Abhi* family leads a procession to the *Osuani* royal family of *Omokwa* to formally notify them that the year has ended and hence, a new year (*Okiton Ala*) needs to be ushered in. The *Abhi* family will present four bottles of drinks to *Osuani* family as a mark of respect and obeisance, after some rites have been performed at the *Osuani* family hall, the head of the *Osuani* family will then lead the procession of elders of both families to *Esidia Ogudu* (*Ogudu* water front) located at *Omokwa* community. The significance of this is that both families have gone to seek the face of their mother notifying her of their intentions. After some rites at the *Esidia-Ogudu* (*Ogudu* waterfront) both families will announce a date which is counted as four *Ogudu* market days (not *Anyezi*) not market day. The head of the *Osuani* family will lead the procession back to make a formal presentation of the date to the *Agana* royal family of *Omalem* who will formally announce the date to all *Abua indigenes* after the rituals at *Erugh-Ogboko* (playground of the Oil bean tree). Meanwhile all these processions are done around January and February which precedes the celebration in March.

Before the celebration, intercessory prayers are made by the *Uwema-Abua* who was also the priestly king on behalf of all villages of Abua. On the eve of the celebration there will be wild celebrations and vigil by elders in the various *Aroboghotus* (family sacred houses). The highlight of this is the traditional fireworks, which is the shooting of fired arrows into the dark sky which symbolizes driving away evil spirits from the land. In the various clans of Abua kingdom, before leading a delegation to meet with the people of *Ogbo-Abua* (Central Abua) the sub-*Uwema's* of the various clans will converge in their respective sacred grooves to consult their fore fathers before proceeding to *Ogbo-Abua* for the general traditional and religious rites (Enighe, B. 2021). Between the days when the date has been fixed to the celebration date, there is a period when the *Uwema-Abua* will go into seclusion to offer prayers on behalf of the kingdom for prosperity, fertility, wealth and other favors that the phenomenal will bestow on the nominal and also a process of purification for the pilgrimage to *Erugh-Ogboko* (the sacred groove) on the day of the celebration, the *Uwema-Abua* is accompanied by all the chiefs in Abua kingdom, all the adepts and the "*Arephelegbekirokiro* (sects of warriors), the *Araman* society members, the *Oko-emukun* society members, *Ughel-Ekpar*, will make a divine image in procession to the Abua sacred groove, the *Erugh-Ogboko*, to receive the prophesy of what the year holds for the Abua people (Fyngirl, 2022). Inside the sacred groove, there is a free space like a playground where all the *Oko-Emuton*

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. THE COLLOQUIUM, 7(1), 53-65

and the *Araman* society members and all males that are qualified to accompany them are initiated into sectional groups that holds the Abua Kingdom together. George (2021) asserts that people who are from the ages of 70 and 80 are initiated into the *Oko-Emuton* society which was the highest cult group and the *Araman* to support the *Uwema-Abua* who was also the head of all societies and they are initiated based on the pre-qualification standards. Obiene (2021) also confirms that inside the groove, there is another place which could be described as inner-chamber where only the *Uwema* is qualified to enter and communicate with the *Ake Abuan* (god of Abua) others outside offer prayer for his safe return. While in the chamber or holy of holies, the *Uwema-Abua* receives the message for the year for the kingdom which he will communicate with the people when he comes out. There is a wild celebration throughout the kingdom because his coming out will be made known to all people through the *Eduer* (traditional trumpet) Then the procession will move back to the *Otor-Agana* (*Agana* family) where the *Uwema-Abua* will do the traditional step dance and *Odagh-Okama* (climbing the drum with one leg) and no one is allowed to cross their way when coming back from *Erugh-Ogboko* to the *Ogiga* (Palace). There are traditional spots he must do the step on and is believed that if he misses a step or a spot, he will die.

Thereafter, the *Eduer* (traditional trumpet) will be blown to alert and inform all communities that the celebration should kick off, the guests are received from various communities and visitations are also made to other communities and families within the Abua kingdom, with various festive activities ranging from masquerades, wrestling's, dances, etc by various communities to entertain their visitors and exchange of gifts. The trip to *Erugh-Ogboko* is normally done twice except for emergency cases. The first trip is preliminary visit to ascertain what form the annual sacrifices would assume, and what sort of arrangement and dates would be suitable, thereafter the main visit is done and relevant sacrifices made: which includes; goats, dogs, fowls, then a date is fixed for the annual celebration of *Eyaal-Abuan*. This practice dated back to the early settlement periods of Abua people between 1420 and 1450, when the vicinity was besieged by wild animals some of which were carnivorous and dangerous. These fired arrows were targeted toward them off because they symbolize evil forces. The annual visits are to renew contact and reaffirm allegiance to the Supreme God and lesser gods and to thank God for the past years as well as ushering into another new year by His infinite mercies (Enighe, 2021). However, the visit signifies time of prayers by the traditional leaders and deity priests who profess for peace of members in Abua land. See below are symbolic religious objects and activities of *Eyaal-Abua*:



Plate 1& 2: Erugh-Ogboko/Olokpogha (Ancestral home of Abua) and Uwema-Abua (HRH Moses Ukwu)

Purpose: Symbolic Ancient Square where Sacrifice is performed to the gods by the King with his entourage during Eyaal-Abual Festival

Source: Personal Collection 2021

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65



Plate 3& 4: Okama-Ake (Drum for sky god) and Ikpoaboli (Arrow Clays)

Purpose: Symbolic Eyaal-Abua Ritual Drum and firework arrow clays to disperse evil spirits

Source: Nwuche, 2022 in Eyo Ekpo 1982



Plate 5&6: Omur Ukpe (White Cloth) and Odoor (Red Cloth)

Purpose: Symbolic fertility clothsworn by leaders, Elders during Eyaal-Abua festival

Source: Personal Collection 2021



Plate: 7 & 8: Omur-Alhe (Palm frond) and Dry Gin (kai-kai)

Purpose: Symbolic palm frond/dry gin for libations used by the priest during Eyaal-Abua festival

Source: Personal Collection 2021

Symbolic Influence of Eyaal-Abuan on Socio-Cultural Activities

Naibi, (2019) asserts that socio-cultural is related to those organizations that have common traditions, habits, patterns and beliefs in a group. The term is mostly used in sociological context and in addition, the anthropologists referred socio-cultural as the focus of the study on society and culture, while often interested in cultural diversity and universalism. Therefore, *Eyaal-Abua festival* is seen a socio-cultural activity that showcases cultural heritages and beliefs of Abua people from time immemorial. During the practice of *Eyaal-Abua festival*, people were reminded of the culture of Abua thus; respect for elders and those in authority, abiding the norms, values and traditions of the land, and what have you.

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

The *Eyaal-Abua festival* also encompasses series of cultural performances include: masquerade displays, wrestling contest, cultural songs and dances, folk tales and all sorts of religious entertainments. See below *Eyaal-Abua* socio-cultural group with symbolic cultural representations:



Plate 9 & 10: Pilgrimages at Olokpogha

Purpose: Symbolic picture of priests and Abua people in Eyaal-Abua Festival

Source: Royal Mogenni Appiah 2015



Plate 11 & 12: Eghoony-Ikia (Lion Cap) and Agada (Native Abua three-leg Chair)

Purpose: Displaying Lion cap and native chair used by leaders, Elders in Eyaal-Abuan festival

Source: Personal Collection 2021

Symbolic Influence of Eyaal-Abuan on Politics and Economics

Historically, the *Eyaal-Abua festival* is one of the annual cultural organizations in Africa that boost politics and economy of the land because it depicts the importance of kingships and organizational hierarchy and they used money to build houses and marry wives. See below some symbolic economic and political objects embrace by Abua people:



Plate 13, 14 & 15: Mannilla (Okpoki Abuan), Oji and Eduer (Elephant Trumpet)

Purpose: Displaying Mannilla, Oji and Eduer used during Eyaal-Abuan festival

Source: Personal Collection 2022

Aesthetic Representation of Eyaal-Abua Costumes and Native Attires

Abua people have been using both visual and oral pictures and words to consider time to express, transmit and store their thoughts, emotions, culture, values and attitudes. Aesthetics studies shows how people feel about art and their culture and how it affects their moods, beliefs, culture and

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

attitude towards life. Asante, (2007) as fashion conscripted artistic dress, historic period were plundered with a myriad of styles indiscriminately thrown together under the term ‘aesthetic’. This is about how people choose to appear and the way they want to look. The dress attire of the Abua people is one that is unique and second to none, their men wore *Ijiri* and *Owoko* during this festival, with a hat and walking sticks. The women with *Ijiri* (Native cloth) bedecked with beads around the waist and neck. The *Uwema-Abua* wears a white cloth with a hat with feather and a bare body during the festival, while the *Araman* with *Ijiri* and the lion caps. See below the *Eyaal-Abual* costumes and native attires:



Plate 16& 17: Uwema-Abua and Womanin Eyaal-Abua

Purpose: Symbolic Ancient Regalia of Eyaal-Abuan Festival

Source: Personal Collection 2021



Plate 18, 19 & 20: Elite, young Girls and Boys Participating Eyaal Festival

Purpose: Symbolic modern Regalia in Eyaal-Abuan Festival

Source: *Eyaal-Inmenian* 2021

From the above pictorial views, the extent of changes and continuity in modern Abua replaced an aged long *Eyaal-Abua festival*. In the pre-colonial era, *Eyaal-Abua* has so many members with responsibilities; organize regular *Eyaal-Abua* practice; preserve their integrity and policing etc. What changes *Eyaal-Abua* has as an organization that was put in place by the ancestors because the festival practice has become a belief system of Abua people, but the present generation of youths have not been giving opportunities to participate *Eyaal-Abua* masquerade, which mysteries surround Abua before now has become a ceremonial of the past. Many African countries today have a wide range of religious beliefs and statistics has shown in Nwuche’s work that religious affiliations are difficult to come by. According to him, Christianity and Islam have make up the largest religions in the contemporary Africa that less than 15% still follow traditional African religions. Despite the drastic decrease in traditional African religions, some modern art in Africa has worked to reincorporate traditional spiritual beliefs. For example, modern Ekpeye and Ogba man is still celebrating their yearly new yam festivals, which has turned to important role in entertainment like the Egbukele masquerade festival (Otto, 2000). Beside, the contextuality of this

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

study, cultural festivities like *Eyaal-Abua* involve the wearing of elaborate out fits carved face and headdress masks to celebrate the spirit being, but today majority of the Abua people are Christians also maintaining diminutive traditional religious practices because of the veneration of ancestors. This aspect of life plays central role in the proliferation of African traditional religion. Apart from the insinuations, it is believed that *Eyaal-Abua* celebrates with masquerade nowadays in low key despite the advent of Christianity in the land because the practice of *Eyaal-Abua* forms divination of protection of souls in which recently deceased individuals may be interrogated on the causes of their death (Ohuoba, 2019).

Conclusion

The perception of western ethnocentric has negatively influenced *Eyaal-Abua festival* because of the negligence the people posed due to modernity and changes in forsaking their cultural values. Uche (1982) “we were concerned about the nature of Nigerian art and culture; what it could mean in the face of our traditional and transitional art, we were to Jettison these and embrace the kind of culture taught by western education and churches. This is because the modern doctrines provoked African man from celebrating or propagating their cultural heritages. We do not see anything extraordinary in the colors they jumble together, which that is not in our traditional art” (Onobrakpeya, 1988). This historical reviewed has shared more relevant information about the Abua people and the practice of *Eyaal-Abua festival* (among the New-Yam Festivals) in Rivers state. On the other hands, the symbolic influences on costumes and dressing attires reviewed some important material objects and celebrations accompany with the *Eyaal-Abua* celebration such as the *Okama-Ake Abua* that represents the sky-god, the *Okpeti* (staff) and the *Adighule* (rod) are referred to as the rod and staff of authority including *Oji* (iron rod) the *Aribine* (local spirited seats for the *Araman* society members) the *Omur-Ukpe* (white cloth) are for cleansing. Other symbols include *Omur-alhe* (palm frond) odor (red cloth), *Ejike* (lion caps) *Eduer* (trumpets) *mammilla (Okpoki Abuan) Emuton*, and other sacred items that promote Abua cultural heritage and values. It was also reviewed that the annual socio-cultural *Eyaal-Abua* festival was a religious activity that brought the entire *Abuans* home for celebrating peace and unity and cleansing of the land against evil happenings. And the political head is the *Uwema* who is the only one that could commune with the god of *Abua*, brought in a lot of economic value because during the festival, people sold their goods which in turn changed the economy of the society (Abolga, 2021). The *Eyaal-Abua festival* showcases the rich agricultural heritage of *Abua* kingdom because they usually cook only yams and offer sacrifices to their farm implements against famine in the land. Finally, the study reviewed that the *Eyaal-Abua festival* was now prefer to Western modernization and this is seen in their traditional marriages, burials, festivals and other traditional ceremonies of the Abua people.

Recommendations

The above findings and conclusion reveal that the practice of *Eyaal-Abua* festival is influenced by western ethnocentrism, which has led the practice to extinction. This is because the Abua people prefer western practices like Christian festivals than Africa

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

traditional religion hereby neglect the practice of *Eyaal-Abua festival* in the south-south region of Nigeria. Therefore, the following are the way forward:

1. The Uwema-Abua (Abua King) should enforce a compulsory participation of *Eyaal-Abua festival* among the communities in Abua in order to enhance cultural relativism and conserving the unique culture from extinction;
2. In promotion of arts and culture, Abua/Odua Local Government Authority in conjunction with Abua Council of Chiefs should endeavor to organize periodic *Eyaal-Abua* carnival among the four clans of Abua. A periodic carnival will attract international and national tourism, and economic values to the people;
3. *Eyaal-Abua* symbolic material objects need to be conserved or explored regularly by members so as to enlightening the youths of its values against acculturation of western cultures;
4. Cultural relativism in Abua should be encouraged and guided for practicing their culture and religion wherever they are without threat;
5. The traditional rulers should organize regular training and seminars for the youth to imbibe the values and cultural traditions of participating *Eyaal-Abua*.

References

- Abolga (2021). *Abua/Odua local Government Authority Archives*. Rivers State Nigeria
- Appiah, M. (2015). *The Abuan and the Abua-Nembe War 1791*. Emhai Printing and Publishing Company.
- Asante, M. (2007). *The History of Africa*. Routhledge.
- Beardsley, M. (1982). *Foundation of Social Anthropology*. Cohen and West Publishers.
- Bier, U. (1968). *Contemporary Art in Africa*. Fredrick Press Praceser Press
- George, I. (2015). Influence of Western Art on Nigerian Contemporary Art. An unpublished NCE Project submitted to Federal College of Education (Technical) Omoku, Rivers state.
- Mercy, E. (2019). Symbolism and Semiotics of Ekwa-Ogba Esoteric Motifs: Implications of Western Hegemony. An unpublished B.A (Ed) Project submitted to University of Nigeria Nsukka , Nigeria
- Naibi, A. (2019). Adaptation of Efa Festival Motifs Ovu People through Computer Aided Design for Fabrics. An unpublished B.A (Ed) Project submitted to University of Nigeria Nsukka , Nigeria

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65

Nwuche, M. N. (2022) *Continuity and Change in Egbukele Cult Masquerade Practice of Ekpeye People*. A Seminar Paper Presented at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State.

Ohuoba, I. (2013a). *Aesthetics and Criticism of African Art*. Abbey Publishers.

Ohuoba, I. (2013b). *Rudiments of Art history and Theory*. Abbey Publishers

Ohuoba, I. (2018). *Fundamentals to Art and Analysis*. Abbey Tech. Publishers

Otto, G. (2000). *Ogba in Socio-Economic Perspective*. Emhai Printing and Publishing Company.

Vincent, I. (2021). *Aesthetic and Function of Egbukele Cult Masks as Basis of Promoting Ogwu Ekpeye (New Yam Festival) in Ekpeye Land*. An unpublished B.A (Ed) Project submitted to University of Nigeria Nsukka , Nigeria

Oral Interviewees

Agbara, E. interviewed in 2022 at Emilaghan Village

Alabo, O. interviewed in 2021 at Otari Village

Akainy, G. interviewed in 2022 at Emilaghan Village.

Aselemi, E. interviewed 2020 at Omalem Village

Enighe, B. interviewed in 2021 at Omokwa Village

Fyngirl, U. interviewed in 2022 at Arukwo Village

Millious, O. interviewed in 2020 at Arukwo village

Obiene, P. interviewed in 2022 at Arukwo Village

Ilayira Umor interviewed in 2021 at Otari Village

Cite this article as

George, I.S. , Nwuche, M.N. , Thomas, U.G, & Madumere, I.P.(2019). Historical Analysis Of The Practice Of The Ancient Eyaal-Abua New Yam Festival Of Abua People In Rivers State. *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 7(1), 53-65