

## **Traditional African Festival: Elements and Properties in Akashiede Kingdom's Ikenge Festival in Ukwuani Local Government Area, Delta State**

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**Abstract:** Culture is a broad spectrum of human phenomena, including material accomplishments, conventions, ideas, emotions, behaviours, morality, and more. It is the structured manner of living of a certain group of people which serves as a source of identification. The term traditional festival implies an indigenous cultural institution, an integral dynamic part of a culture of an un-alienated Africa, and the occasion to which it responds spontaneously not just a religious occasion, because it commends more than a tiny fraction of interest among the people. Ikenge festival of Akashiede kingdom is a very important festival as it is the most widely celebrated in Ukwuani Local Government Area, Delta State. The dramatic elements which make up the Ikenge festival and which are associated with the life experiences of Akashiede people includes the Igbudu dance, Ukwata dance, Ogbenegbe dance, Omu-Enu dance, and the Iwu-Olie. These activities build up dramatic tension and throw the community into festive and celebrating mood. The Ikenge festival in its unique form just like other traditional festivals across Africa, Nigeria in particular is derived from ritual activities that connect the worship of gods and deified beings. Apart from the religious nature of Ikenge festival, it assist in channeling the artistic life of Akashiede people like costume and make-up, mask, dance, song and music. In traditional African festival celebration there is always an attempt to achieve effective interplay of various factors of performance, the Ikenge festival is not an exemption. The Ikenge festival attempts to achieve effective interplay in the various factors of its performance.

**Keywords:** Traditional, African, Festival, Functions, Elements, Ikenge.

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### **Introduction**

Akpochafo (2020) stated that culture as a big concept in the social science will take pages upon pages to define (p. 2). It is important to note that culture is a wide concept as it covers all aspect of human life; social, political, moral, religion etc. Culture also is evident in all aspect or areas of study; arts, science and social science. Culture can be defined as the complex of unique material, spiritual, and intellectual traits that define a community or social class (Soetan, 2001). Cultural practices are the ways in which members of a society, or groups within a society, live their lives. These practices include their marriage customs, language, and family life, patterns of work, religious ceremonies, and leisure activities. While culture is typically thought of as being synonymous with higher things of the mind, such as art, literature, music, and painting, sociologists view it as encompassing aspects of daily life.(Giddens, 2005). According to Onuorah (2021) culture is derived from a French term which in turn was derived from a Latin word 'colere' meaning to tend the earth and grow or cultivation and nature (p. 232). Hanurah (2002) viewed culture as the outcome of shared response of a populace to their background. From Harunah's view culture can be noted as the result from either group or individual interaction either intra or inter-tribal with a focus on their different background. Schein (2008) shared that culture is fashioned around significant occurrence from which lessons are learnt about unpleasant or unwanted behaviour. Soetan (2021) asserted that culture is both evolutionary and revolutionary. Culture goes through an internal evolutionary process involving growth greater heterogeneity and coherence. It also goes through a process of change and adaptation as a result of contact with other cultures... (p. 14). In addition, Anyanwu (2019) asserted that culture "is a vehicle for evolution, being dynamic, it is tradition, conservative as well as has the capacity to create and recreate itself"(p. 1). Though there are conceptual differences between culture and society, the two concepts are closely related. A society is a system of relationships that binds people together. All societies are the same in that their members are arranged in structured social relationships that are specific to

each society. Societies cannot live without cultures, and cultures cannot survive without societies. We wouldn't be "human" in the traditional meaning of the word at all without culture. Our capacity for thought and reason would be severely restricted, and we would lack the ability to express ourselves through language or self-consciousness.

### Elements of Culture

- **Symbols:** Symbols are visual aids that convey a certain meaning that are easily understood by individuals from the same cultural background (Lawley, 1994).
- **Language:** A system of symbols that permits people to communicate with one another (Swartz, 1997).
- **Values:** culturally established standards of beauty, goodness, desirability, and many other attributes that act as general rules for social interactions (Griswold, 2004).
- **Beliefs:** Certain words that people hold to be true (Swidler, 1986).
- **Norms:** Guidelines and standards that govern how members of a society are expected to behave. The two categories of norms are folkways and mores. Mores are generally accepted standards with a high moral value. Folkways are customs for informal, daily communication (Corchia, 2010).

Cultural beliefs are one of the things that differ among cultures. However, there are other things that differ among cultures. The diversity of human behaviour and practices is also remarkable. Acceptable forms of behaviour vary extensively from culture to culture and often contrast considerably with what people from Western societies believe is "normal". For example, in some cultures children aged twelve or thirteen are regarded to be too young for marriage; but in some cultures, marriages are arranged between children of that age. Jews do not eat pork, while Hindus eat pork but avoid beef. Westerners regard kissing as a normal part of sexual behaviour, but in many other cultures the practice is either unknown or regarded as disgusting. All these different traits of behaviour are aspects of broad cultural differences that distinguish societies from one another (Giddens, 2005). Culture is crucial for upholding a society's norms and values; it also presents numerous chances for innovation and change. Groups known as counter-cultures and sub-cultures, who primarily reject societal norms and values, might advance ideas that offer alternatives to the dominant culture. Social movements and communities of people with similar lifestyles are significant agents of social change. Subcultures give people the ability to freely express and act upon their ideas, aspirations, and convictions. (Giddens, 2005).

It is said that Edward B. Taylor, in his work *Primitive Culture* (1871), which was reissued in 1958, is the academic who originally invented and defined the term "culture". According to Taylor, culture is the intricate sum of all human knowledge, beliefs, morality, laws, conventions, and any other skills and behaviours that people develop through their interactions with other members of the society, this definition captures the exhaustive nature of culture. This definition deviates from the unambiguous definition that one would have anticipated. The number of definitions of culture that exist actually corresponds to the number of academics that study this phenomena. The term "culture" refers to a broad spectrum of human phenomena, including material accomplishments, conventions, ideas, emotions, behaviours, morality, and more. It is the structured manner of living that a certain group of people who identify as having a common ancestor or lineage share. Seeking to convey all-encompassing quality of culture, Bello (1991, p. 189) sees it as "the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours". Culture serves to distinguish a people from others, and Aziza (2001) asserts that the entire behavioural pattern of a specific group of people is referred to as their culture. Their greeting customs, attire, social mores and taboos, cuisine, music, and dance styles, customs surrounding marriage and death, rites of passage from conception to death, customary jobs, and their philosophical and religious beliefs are all examples of what sets them apart from other group of people. (p. 31).

Culture is passed on from generation to generation. The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialisation process. Etuk (2002) posited that "an entire way of life would embody, among other things, what the people think of themselves and the organise their lives in order to ensure their survival". It is acceptable to say that a society is necessary for culture to exist. Another way to put it is that culture is something that is specific to humans and is shared by members of a society. When it comes to absorbing or accepting ideas from individuals outside of a specific cultural group, culture is discriminating. It has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic, and technological expressions and processes of a people usually ethically and /or nationally or supra-nationally related, and usually living in a geographically contiguous area; what they pass on their successors and how these are passed on. Culture could therefore depict glaring similarities between people within the same territorial space that fosters a feeling of oneness that they would wish to preserve for future

generations. In addition, Shoremi (1999) opined that "...any culture is a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and two other men...cultures produce needs as well as provide a means of fulfilling them". Everyday rituals are both infused with and reflective of culture. Culture is the main source of ideas, attitudes, language, sense of time (whether time is thought of in precise minutes and seconds or in larger chunks like hours and days), and personal efficacy (the conviction that one is in charge of and accountable for one's life. The symbols used to depict elements of life, such as significant life stages, relationships, accomplishment, position and power, group identification, and the meaning of life and death, originate from culture.

### **Traditional African Festival**

According to Ejikemeuwa (2022), Africa is known for her unique communal spirit. This distinctive spirit of an African is made manifest in many traditional festivals in the African world (p.1). Ejikemeuwa (2022) further asserted that "a festival is generally a joyful period set aside for celebration. It is an event organized by a particular community of group of people to commemorate a remarkable event in their historical life (p. 3). Oliver also noted that "festivals in general are joyous occasions celebrated specific aim or aims in view and as such, they have some beliefs necessarily attached to it. From the above definitions, traditional festival refers to practices that are largely indigenous Anigala (2005) asserted that in traditional African festival celebrations there is always attempt to achieve effective interplay of various factors of performance (p. 24). The term traditional festival implies an indigenous cultural institution, an integral dynamic part of a culture of an un-alienated Africa, and the occasion to which it responds spontaneously not just a religious occasion, because it commends more than a tiny fraction of interest among the people.

Most traditional festivals derive from ritual activities that connect the worship of gods and goddess and deify beings. Apart from their religious nature, African festivals also assist in channeling the artistic life of the people like costume, dance, music, audience participation and mime. Ogunba and Irele (1978) opined that in "traditional Africa, the great artistic institution is the festival. Contrary to popular understanding, festival is not just a religious occasion, if it were, it would hardly command more than tiny fraction of the interest it generates among the people (p. 5). Apart from their artistic aspect, African Traditional festivals also celebrate and portray social relationships among the people. Festival strengthens the bond of love and spirit of togetherness existing among people in the community. It is at this period that the people show more love for the people from neighbouring villages by opening their doors to them and also offering them gifts. Traditional festival in some places is regarded as a holy period when the community is ritually cleansed from evil. Those who have deviated from the societal norms are ridiculed in order to provide and promote a change of attitude.

### **Ikenge Festival of Akashiede Kingdom**

The Ikenge festival of Akashiede people is a very important festival in Ukwuani Local Government Area of Delta, this is because it is the most widely celebrated festival in Ukwuani. The dramatic elements which makes up the Ikenge festival and which are associated with the life experiences of Akashiede people includes the Igbudu dance, Ukwatadance, Ogbenegbedance, Omu-Enudance, and the Iwu-Olie. These activities build up dramatic tension and throw the community into festive and celebrating mood. In this festival, one dramatic activity leads to another and this sustains the interest of the people, this festival is enacted within a period of nine days.

The Ikenge festival is performed annually in the early part of the year (February). The festival is ushered in by the Okpala-Ukuwho is known as the oldest man by pouring libation to the ancestors, known as Ika-Nmor. This is done in a sacred place called Isu Ani and immediately after this is done, the festival is declared open or ushered in. Some acts which are considered as deviant behaviour are suspended within the community during this period, some of these acts include going to the farm throughout the festive period and burying of corpses, except after some sacrifices have been performed to appease the gods.

### **Elements Used in Ikenge Festival**

#### **Dance**

The various dances performed during the Ikenge festival include the Igbudu dance. The Omu-Enu dance which is done in the late hours of the night, the Ogbenegbe dance which is performed on the fourth day of the festival the Ukwata dance happens to be the climax of all the dances performed during the festival period. The sequential arrangement of these dances makes the Ikenge festiva unique. These dances are artistically designed to effect dramatic characterization, to propel dramatic action, and enhance entertainment.

#### **Igbudu Dance**

The Igbudu dance is an introductory dance that is done as a means of declaring the festival open. This takes place on the second day. The Igbudu dancer carries palm frond wrapped with white cloth and dances

round the entire community accompanied by youths (both male and female), children, men and women proclaiming that the Okpala-Uku has ushered in the Ikenge festival. This is known as Igba Ogene. It is mostly done either in the early hours of the day or towards evening time.



Fig. 1: Pictorial View of the Igbudu by Ossai-Uloku Chinaza Fidelis

### **Omu-Enu Dance**

This takes place at twelve mid night. The Omu-Enu Masquerade is tall and decorated with light; this is believed to help the masquerade in seeing. The Omu-Enu Masquerade is followed by villagers shouting “Omu-Enu Kweke, Omu-Enu Ike gbufu da” meaning “ Omu-Enu do you want to kill me”. The Omu-Enu Masquerade is seen as a way of cleansing the land to usher in the main festive activities.





Fig. 2: Pictorial View of the Omu-Emu by Ossai-Uloku Chinaza Fidelis

### **Ogbenegbe Dance**

The Ogbenegbe dance is performed by a young man who is either married or not; he dances with just wrapper tied around his waist and without shirt. This particular dance is done at the village square and it ushers in the Ukwata dance.



Fig. 3: Pictorial view of Ogbenegbe by Ossai-Uloku Chinaza Fidelis

### **Ukwata Dance**

The Ukwata dance which happens to be the peak of the festival is performed by a young man either married or not. The dancer carries the Ukwata on his head which is decorated by palm fronds and also either a life or dead animal but not a rabbit. The Ukwata dances three times round the performance arena in different dance steps. On the last round, it is expected of him by the audience to acrobatically stoop and scoop sand. This is considered as a heroic deed because at the point of stooping to scoop sand, he will only use one hand to hold the Ukwata which is not expected to touch the ground as such it is considered risky. An execution of this movement will define the villager's assessment of the performance; whether good or bad, as the Ukwata must not touch the ground. If it does, the dancer is expected to raise the Ukwata with a big live goat. Therefore, when he touches the ground to scoop sand, they see him as a great man (Oke-Onyeke).



Fig. 4: Pictorial view of the Ukwata by Ossai-Uloku Chinaza Fidelis

## **Song and Music**

### **Song**

Songs enhance dramatic characterization intensify mood, propel dramatic action, enhances plot narration, encourage audience participation etc. Thus, encouraging artistic creativity (Herskovits265). Songs also express the world views or philosophies of the Akashiede people. Some of the songs sung during the Ikenge festival display function as scene links for dramatic transition from one event to the other. When the villagers sing or chant; “Omu-Enukwe-eke, Ike-gbufu da” the song links that scene with the next, when the villagers sing “iyokoko iyokoko ngenegebe” this song indicates the beginning of Ukwata dance and when the villagers also sing “Ageofoana, Osue gbune ngbada egbulu ngbadana, agefo agefo ana agefo” and chant “Ilawoko” this signifies the “Inwu-Olie” which has to do with showcasing of power, strength and heroic deeds.

### **Music**

Music is mainly produced through the hitting of short sticks or wood together during the performance of Ukwata, the opi (flute) and Ikweka (clapping of hands) during the performance of Omu-Enu, Ogbenegbe, Ukwata and also during the Inwu-Olie drums are played and after all this, musical performances take place with different musicians displaying. These various forms of music production are means of communication and expression which create melodious moments and regulate the tempo of dance movements. The hand clapping combined with the hitting together of stick or woods reinforces the inspiring effect of songs on the performers and adds musical “colour” to the general performance.

The music produced by hand claps and hitting of sticks or woods can either be slow or fast, when the music is slow, it suggests the end of each dance step performed, when it is fast it suggests the major performance of a particular dance step. During the last performance of the Ukwata, the fast music intensifies the expectation of the audience and propels the dramatic action as it inspires the performers and urges them to perform quicker dance movements, In this way music produced during the performance of the Ikenge festival regulates the tempo of dance movements.

## **Costume and Make-up**

### **Costume**

#### ***Omu-Enu***

The Omu-Enu masquerade is usually costumed with grasses Called “Ekolor” and with lamp with a little opened space to enable him see his way. The Omu-Enu masquerade is a very tall one.

### **Ogbenegbe Dancer**

The Ogbenegbe dancer is costumed with scarf round his waist on-top another wrapper that is already tied on his waist and without shirt.

### **Ukwata Dancer**

The Ukwata dancer is similarly costumed like the Ogbenegbe dancer with scarf round the waist on- top of wrappers that is already tied on his waist and without shirt with some designs on his chest, hand and leg with native chalk and a chewing stick in his mouth.

### **Inwu-Olie performers**

The Inwu-Olie performers are dressed in various attires, some in dirty attires, torn trousers, singlet, shirts etc. some are also costumed with the aid of approximation of mask tradition and carrying things on their head called; ochu etc.

### **Mask and Make-up**

Mask and native chalk are also used as either disguise technique or a performing instrument for dramatic expressions during the Ikenge festival. These elements play a major role in the successful realization of characterization as they are used either to disguise the performers or as a performing instrument. The Omu-Enu mask that is dressed with "Ekolor" transforms the carrier into a masquerade.

Also the Akankpu and Okwanuzor masquerade which come out to perform on the Inwu-Olie day transform the carrier into an Akankpu and Okwanuzor masquerade. Nzuor native chalk powder is used to design the chest, legs and hands of the performer either to disguise or to elevate him from the ordinary into a spiritual being, where he becomes vested with power to perform the Ukwata dance which is referred to as the dance for the strong, not the weak.

### **Properties Used in Ikenge Festival**

Anigala (2005) asserted that "properties are those physical objects or instruments with which performers are equipped to aid role realization. These special paraphernalia help to distinguish deified personalities from ordinary human characters". The following are some of the properties used in Ikenge festival and their artistic and cultural values.

### **Palm Fronds**

Palm fronds are an instrument of power or signify the sacredness of something. Palm fronds are used to decorate the Ukwata which symbolically signifies the sacredness of the Ukwata. It is also used in decorating the Igbudu which is used in ushering the festival.

### **Native Chalk Powder (Nzu)**

This is used in decorating the Ukwata dancer. It is also used significantly in pouring libation to the ancestors in ushering the festival.

### **Stick or Wood**

These are properties used during the dance performance to help in enhancing or inspiring the dancers with rhythms of the sounds produced by them.

### **Hand Fan**

This hand fan is used to fan the Ukwata dancer after each performance. The hand fan is also used in the case of the Ogbenegbe dancer and the Okpala-Uku Ukwata.

### **Lamp**

This lamp serves as an instrument used by the *Omu-Enu* to see clearly where he is going and also when performing because the performance is done in the mid hours of the night.

### **Chachagolo and Ekolor**

It is a property that is used in decorating the *Omu-Enu* masquerade

### **Olima**

This is also used in decorating the *Omu-Enu* masquerade together with Chachagolo, Ekolor and lamp.

### Conclusion

Every culture has distinct behavioural patterns that are unfamiliar to those from various ethnic backgrounds. When you travel, you typically experience distinct sensations and emotions because there are often significant differences between what you do and see in your home country. This includes differences in what you hear, see, and even consume. There may be elements of your daily routine that people in other cultures unknowingly take for granted, but which you take for granted in your own. Even among nations that speak the same language, there may be significant differences in daily routines, traditions, and behaviours. It's appropriate to use the phrase "culture shock". A person may experience disorientation when they are fully engaged in a foreign culture. This is due to the fact that they have not yet learnt how to traverse the new society and have lost the familiar points of reference that aid in their understanding of the outside world.

As stated earlier, Ikenge festival of Akashiede kingdom is a very important festival in Ukwuani Local Government Area, Delta State because it is the most widely celebrated. The Ikenge festival in its unique form just like other traditional festivals across Africa, Nigeria in particular is derived from ritual activities that connect the worship of gods and deified beings. Apart from the religious nature of Ikenge festival, it also assist in channeling the artistic life of Akashiede people like costume and make-up, mask, dance, song and music. Just as noted by Anigala (2005) that traditional African festival celebration there is always an attempt to achieve effective interplay of various factors of performance. The Ikenge festival is not an exemption. The Ikenge festival attempts to achieve effective interplay in the various factors of its performance.

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