

CHAPTER FORTY

HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF EGELEGE (WRESTLING) MUSIC FESTIVAL OF ALAKAHIA COMMUNITY IN OBIO/AKPOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This paper x-rayed the *Egelege* (wrestling) festival of the Alakahia community in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. *Egelege* is a wrestling festival that takes place once a year in the community, especially in August. This paper aims to examine the potency of the *Egelege* festival in the Alakahia community. An oral interview was conducted to get first-hand information and books, journals, newspapers, thesis, projects were also consulted. It was discovered that *Egelege* is a yearly contest used to usher in love, unity, progress, success, peace among the people of the Alakahia community. It is recommended that the contestants should be encouraged to participate in wrestling contests both national and at the international level. The music of *Egelege* should also be scored and sold to raise funds for the community. also, the musical instruments should be preserved for continuity.

Introduction

Music and culture are interwoven. There is no culture without music and also there is no music without culture. Adegbite (2006) asserts that “the heterogeneity of African music cuts across cultural banners, in other words, there is music for every aspect of African life – ritual, religious, social, political, entertainment, recreational, culture.” (p. 41) *Egelege* festival which is referred to as a wrestling festival in the Alakahia community is a reflection of the culture of the community, the *Egelege* music embodies the historical events, folktales, entertainment, love, and music-making of the Alakahia community. Oluwaseyi (2013) opines that "the Yoruba community and its socio-cultural assessment in view of oral tradition is expedient to validate the knowledge of music and preservation of culture." (p. 55)

The *Egelege* music which comes up once a year in the Alakahia community is used to preserve their culture. The culture which is a way of the people is performed and through their performance which is greatly attached to their culture is highly preserved in their culture because the texts of their songs are always entertaining, informative, historical and also to check deviant characters. Oriloye (2011) confirms that "culture is the product and expression of people's social-economic, political, religious and philosophical experience acquired by the group in relating to their environment." (P. 17) The Alakahia community which inhabits the upland part of Rivers State are predominantly Ikwerre speaking indigenes and has a large population of both indigenes and non-indigenes residing in the community and they protect their environment through their social, economic, political and religious experience.

Economic Activities of Alakahia Community

According to Amadi (2019). Narrates the economic, religious and social life of, the Alakahia community. He informs that the Alakahia community are predominantly farmers. Before the

advent of western civilization, farm products was their major means of livelihood and the farm products were mainly vegetables, yams, cassava, garri, palm oil, etc. William (1995) sees "ecology as a condition that determines the type of economic activities that a people could carry out in an area." (p. 10) With western civilization, the community experienced an improvement in their economy through citing of companies, industries and in the flock of non-indigenes residing in the community as employers of labour to work in the companies and industries. This brought improvement in the standard of living for the Alakahia people by erecting good structures, constructing good roads, pipe-borne water and other infrastructures to make life comfortable for the people and also to improve on their farm products.

Religious Life of Alakahia Community

Mr Amadi G. in continuation narrates that the Alakahia religious beliefs are centred on the people's beliefs and practices concerning the Supreme Being (God), divinities, spirits and the ancestors. Before the advent of Christianity, the Alakahia community practised traditional religion. During this era, the people worshipped Ngbabuezemeni popularly known as the 'god of rain'; the deity is believed to be a representative of the Almighty God, the creator of the universe. During that era, Ngbabuezemeni god forbids the killing of human beings, stealing, rape, lovemaking on the ground, etc. Apart from Ngbabuezemeni which is being regarded as the central god, individuals have their gods and goddesses which they believe in and practice in their various homes.

Gberegbara (2012) affirms that "before the advent of Christianity, Africans have developed the idea of God from time immemorial and they have their way of worshipping the Supreme God through the ancestors and divinities." (p. 71) Traditional worship was in existence until the advent of Christianity. When Christianity came into existence, some idolatry practices of the Alakahia community was forbidden and people began to embrace Christianity. Today the community is well known for its religious activities. Although the community practices freedom of worship, the traditional religion still exists in the community.

Social Activities of the Alakahia Community

The Alakahia community is a community filled with ceremonies that brings the people together for mutual love, unity, continuity and maintenance of culture. The social activities include different festivals like wrestling festival, masquerade festival, fish pond festival. Other activities include burial ceremonies, moonlight stories, naming ceremonies. Okafor (2005) affirms that "even though music and dances usually migrate through communities as more and more people learn about them, they are cultural exports at the same time and reflect certain things about the place of origin." (p. 87) During these cultural events, people showcase the culture which they are known for and friends who visit the community to watch with interest learn about the culture of the community, also it inculcates the norms and values of the Alakahia community.

Theoretical Framework

Instrumental conditioning theory by Edward Thorndike, Iwundu (2004) in Thorndike's theory a puzzle box was constructed with a release mechanism. Based on this experiment, Thorndike concluded that the human organism as well as the non-human organism learns through active behaviour by accident and also by chance. The Egelege (wrestling) festival was introduced by a hunter who by accident and also chance, came across a gorilla and the gorilla pleaded with the hunter not to kill it. The hunter through active behaviour spared the gorilla's life and the gorilla, in turn, thought the hunter how to wrestle and the hunter through active participation learn the techniques of wrestling and came back to the village to teach members of the community how to wrestle and this brought about Egelege (wrestling) festival in Alakahia community.

Historical Background of *Egelege* Wrestling Festival

In an oral interview with Mr Linus Dick, a 75 years old farmer and wrestler who has participated in wrestling both within and outside the community, he discloses that the wrestling festival in the Alakahia community is an age-long tradition. He narrates that a hunter named withheld, from the community went to the forest to hunt and during the hunting, the hunter had an encounter with a gorilla. As the hunter wanted to shoot the gorilla, the gorilla signalled him not to kill him, which the hunter obliged and spared his life. The gorilla in return for sparing his life taught the hunter how to wrestle in self-defence from any attack. During the wrestling contest, the gorilla taught the hunter wrestling techniques and defeated the hunter three times. In the fourth contest, the hunter having learnt the wrestling techniques defeated the gorilla from the experience he acquired from the gorilla. The gorilla instructed the hunter to teach the act of wrestling to others. The instruction was obeyed. As soon as the hunter returned to the community, he introduced wrestling to members of the community and this brought about the introduction of the wrestling festival in the Alakahia community. Also, this wrestling festival has spread to other communities within Ikwerre communities. The Ikwerre has held this culture tenaciously as their tradition. In the Alakahia community, the *Egelege* wrestling festival comes up yearly and usually in August. The festival is heralded with music and friends as well as well-wishers visit the community for the celebration.

Ritual rites are carried out a day before the main *Egelege* wrestling festival in the morning hours before the wrestling proper in the afternoon. The rituals are performed by the elders of the group and the items involved in the ritual are kola nuts and alligator pepper, palm fruits, white wrapper, hot drink and fowl. All these items are used to appease the gods of the land for a hitch-free *Egelege* wrestling festival. The ritual rites are carried out within the playground. The oldest man among the members carries out the ritual. First of all, he does some incantations (greetings) to the gods, secondly, he ties the white wrapper around the gods (tree) where they believe the spirit dwells. Thirdly, he ties palm fruits around the tree, fourthly, he cuts off the fowl head with his bare hands and pours the blood on the tree, and fifth, he pours the hot drink to the gods amidst some incantations and lastly he throws the alligator pepper and kola nut to the gods. All these processes go with incantations. When all these items are presented to the gods of the land and the acceptance by the gods of the land, the *Egelege* wrestling festival holds the next day.

The *Egelege* wrestling group recruits their members during rehearsals and recruitments are based on the recommendations by parents and elders. After recruitment, they are trained on how to wrestle, dance and play musical instruments. Training and recruitment take place to carry out the responsibilities and continuity of the *Egelege* wrestling festival in the absence of the elders. The *Egelege* wrestling group as a social group honours invitations both within and outside the community. invitations like wrestling competitions with other communities, political campaigns, remembrance day. Also, invitations are honoured as soon as the following items are provided to the group: a bottle of Schnapp, kola nuts, garden eggs, alligator pepper. The elders' requirement is one carton of small stout and the youths, one carton of Hero beer or Gulder and one carton of Malt, food is also involved.

Costume

The *Egelege* wrestlers have a specific costume for the identification of the wrestlers, drummers and the referees who coordinate the wrestling. The drummers and the referees have the same dress code which includes a white singlet, shorts and a George wrapper which they tie around their waist while the wrestlers dress on shorts, george wrapper tied around their waist and an animal skin placed on their shoulder. Makeup is also applied to the body of the wrestlers. The makeup kits are made up of clay or charcoal, chalk and powder and this transforms the wrestlers' bodies into a form of artistic expression which beautifies the wrestlers.



***EGELEGE* WRESTLERS IN ACTION**

***Egelege* Wrestling Festival Musical Instruments**

The *Egelege* wrestling festivals make use of numerous musical instruments which includes drums of numerous sizes, slit wooden drums and metal gong. The drums are the major instruments performed during the wrestling festival, other instruments play supportive roles, the drums are played to motivate the wrestlers in action. The wrestling is performed at the market square and the drums because they are bulky are stationed at the market square especially the *Rukwa oke na enwere* (male and female drums). These instruments are played only during the *Egelege* wrestling festival or the death of a wrestler, they are played to pay last respect to the wrestler as a sign of remembrance during his active wrestling days.



**THE *EGELEGE*
MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS**

Findings

Egelege wrestling festival in the Alakahia community promotes love, peace, culture, unity, norms and values among the members of the community. The *Egelege* wrestling festival holds once a year and in August. Members of the community, well-wishers gather at the market square to watch the wrestling and celebrate with the winners and the losers in the contest are also encouraged to improve and participate in the next coming year for better performance. Songs are

sung to motivate the wrestlers and musical instruments are played to accompany the songs. The musical instruments include male and female drums (*rukwa oke na enwere*), small drums (*rukwa mantie*), male and female slit wooden drums (*ikwirike oke na enwere*) and metal gong (*oborbor*). During the week of the celebration, music is used to communicate to the members of the community of the various stages of the *Egelege* wrestling festival.

Conclusion

Egelege wrestling festival is an age-long tradition. The founder of the festival, a hunter has left a legacy for the community to continue to maintain their culture and live together as a community and also to practice self-defence from any violent attack. *Egelege* wrestling festival is a social activity in the Alakahia community. the *Egelege* is performed based on invitation and the fulfilment of their requirements. Music in the *Egelege* wrestling festival promotes social interaction among the people and this fosters unity, love, progress among the people. Music stimulates the wrestlers to participate actively in the competition for the entertainment of the audience.

Recommendations

1. The contestants should be encouraged to register and participate in national and international contests
2. The *Egelege* wrestling festival should be recorded and produced on CD plates for sale and the proceeds from the sales should be used to fund the festival
3. The musical instruments should be preserved for the continuity of the festival
4. The music of the *Egelege* wrestling festival should be scored and preserved in the Rivers State archive.

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