

Carnival Calabar: Articulating Africa's Indigenous Theatre

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Abstract

Regardless of the intrusion of colonization and modernization, many African communities and cities have tenaciously held on to their traditional modes of edutainment entrenched in their Oral traditions and culture. One such mode with an uncanny ability to bring together diverse acts and arts is the Carnival whose roots are deeply etched in popular indigenous drama. Devoid of any scripted text, ephemeral in nature, yet enthralling in presentation, this communal art form held annually in Calabar, the Cross River State capital, has no doubt become the major attraction of the Christmas festivities in the State. Boasting of five bands alongside Masquerade displays, the Bikers Parade, Children's Theatre, Choreography, Music, Cultural Processions, Dance troupes, Acrobatic sketches and talent hunts, this week long event draws its stylistic appeal from the interconnectivity between content and form, the past and the present, artists and audience, arts and reality. Rightfully earning itself the moniker 'Africa's Largest Street Party,' this communal theatre, no doubt is one huge ensemble of visual splendor achieved via a framework of indigenous performative expressions that have emanated from the Efik culture to gain prominence as a global performance steeped in the dynamics of total theatre. As such, in recognition of all of these, this paper unravels and examines those defining characteristics of indigenous theatre, that continually imbues Carnival Calabar with its aesthetic and contemporary relevance.

Key words: Carnival, Calabar, Indigenous Drama, African Theatre, Performance

Introduction

This paper examines the indigenous African traditional cultural trajectories of Carnival Calabar performance. According to Isidore Okpewho, indigenous

traditional drama is “entertainment conveyed basically through suggestive or symbolic action and movement and defining an experience” (262). In addition to this definition, Ola Rotimi's criteria of what amounts to indigenous drama is hinged on the evidence of suspense, conflict and mimesis – “Drama when used to refer to traditional displays should imply an immanence of Suspense and or Conflict within the body of the approved action. Where suspense or Conflict is absent, then the meaning of the term must needs [sic] rest on the broader sense of mimesis in the performance” (80). As such, from the two definitions, one can deduce that mimesis which implies imitation is the principal thing and unifying thread of all indigenous performances.

Therefore, indigenous drama is an imitation of human experiences (episodic or epic) that are poised to provide edutainment via symbolic gestures steeped in music, songs, dance, spectacle, costumes, etc., by both actors and the audience. Clearly, in recognizing and inviting the audience to participate as actors, through commentaries, criticisms or adding generally to the narrative, African indigenous drama invariably becomes communal property which thrives on the spectacularization of African culture.

As an ancient and distinct art form, drama generally has always been linked to religious rites and rituals, but interestingly, its roots stems from ancient man's attempt to establish contact with the supernatural and come to terms with an alienating and ever changing universe. Andrew Horn admits that “its roots, in fact, lie even deeper and, like those of all art, are to be found in the very origins of religion, in sympathetic magic, in the earliest attempts of man to comprehend, order and control his environment.” (182) As such, by resorting to the dramatic forms of dance, masks, songs, incantations rituals, magic, mime, processions etc., early man devised an efficacious means to contest existentially with the hitherto hostile forces of nature. Of course, these dramatic acts did not stop there, they became even elaborate and were subsequently grafted into periodic festivals, rituals, carnivals, rites of passages, celebrations, pageants, etc. – dramatic traditions which has remained even till now.

Yet, the classification of indigenous drama and theatrical performances in Africa poses a conundrum amongst Oral Literature scholars and artists alike. This is so, primarily for two reasons. Firstly, because of the composite nature of its forms and secondly, it appears that as a budding academic discipline,

Oral Literature is still in its teething phases of conceptualization and operationalization.

Nonetheless, while E.T Kirby (1974) categorizes African traditional drama into seven sub genres; of which are Simple Enactments, Ritual and Ritualized Enactments, Storytelling Performances, Spirit-Cult Enactments, Masquerades and Masquerade Enactments, Ceremonial Performances and Comedies (22), J. P. Clark (1968) on the other hand, pares down Kirby's list to the Sacred and Secular. Under the Sacred he includes the Ancestral and Masquerade enactments and for the Secular; the Magic and the Puppet, Dance/Song drama, Epic and the Festival. (58) Yet, unsatisfied with Clark's classification, Yemi Ogunbiyi (1981) proposes his, which comprises Dramatic Ritual, Popular Tradition, and Yoruba Travelling Theatre (10).

But perhaps, it seems that the most appropriate classification of Indigenous performances so far has been that proffered by Isidore Okpewho (1992). This is because his categorization neatly accommodates all the other aforementioned sub forms. Like Clark, he catalogues them into two – what he terms 'Ritual' and 'Popular' (262). The Ritual performances consisting of Masquerade Drama, Divinity/Cult Worship and Spirit Possession/Mediumship, and the Popular catering to such performances as Rural Revues, Puppetry Displays and Concert Parties. But in any case, the whole idea of categorizing indigenous drama by various scholars definitely negates the opinions of Kalu Uka (1973), Micheal Echeruo (1981) and Ruth Finnegan (1970) who question its existence. Therefore, the question of indigenous drama's existence is not in doubt for it is very much alive in both urban cities and rural communities and continually advertises the totality of the African experience.

The Purpose Carnivals Originated

The word 'carnival' is of Latin etymology. Derived from the Latin words, 'carne vale' which means “farewell to meat”. The carne vale which was closely linked to the Catholic Church, was a public celebration designed to mark the period before Lent in European and South American countries at the time. Heralded by revelry, merrymaking, feasting, raucous processions, mock fights and drunkenness, the event was symbolic for it signified the approaching fast which was a period devoted to total worship and abstinence from food, alcohol and merrymaking. As such, the carnival was and continues to be a festival of music, masquerades, and movement- a time set

aside to abandon one's cares and enjoy the fun. Columba Apeh further defines carnival as “an interdisciplinary cultural festival presented in form of drama, music, dance, and other cultural activities” (179). In essence, the carnival is an aesthetic framework of cultural festivities that is quite synonymous with Africa's numerous and rich festivals.

Originally tailored to propitiate deities/ancestors for successful harvests, these annual carnivals or fetes of dramatic enactments are not unfamiliar customary outlets adopted by Africans for thanksgiving and celebration. Tejumola Olaniyan admits that;

the foremost indigenous cultural and artistic institution is the festival. Organized around certain deities or spirits, or to mark generational transitions or the passage of the seasons... festivals are sprawling multimedia occasions – that is, incorporating diverse forms such as singing, chanting, drama, drumming, masking, miming, costuming, puppetry with episodes of theatrical enactments ranging from the sacred and secretive to the secular and public(355).

However, it is important to note that because festivals are all about masques, movement and music, it cuts across the Western society as depicted in the early religious Dionysus festivals of the Greeks and Romans in the 4th century BC. Albeit, as a result of culture contact and modernization, the religious implications of most festivals and carnivals have been effaced, totally becoming subsumed by popular and secular traditions. In essence, carnivals generally thrive on theatrical multimedia modes that have been grafted from Oral traditions and cultures for the purposes of communal edutainment and cultural preservation.

Therefore, in an attempt at establishing the origins of Carnival Calabar, Apeh asserts that “Carnival Calabar can be traced to the 1980s where visitors and indigenes alike rushed to the roundabout to watch cultural displays performed by the Ekpe masquerades which was tagged “EkpeFestival” (189). The roundabout in question is the popular Eleven-Eleven Millennium Park which is located at the centre of the Calabar metropolis, and the period for this festival was usually during the Christmas holidays (*Emana Jesus*). At that time, and even until the new millennium, the Ekpe Festival was majorly an annual display of the Efik cultural heritage; featuring such maiden dances

like *Abang, Ekombi, Nyok*, etc., to Masquerade displays (*IsimEkpe, Nyori Ekpe, Ebonko, Mbudua*) from various Ekpe groups and also Masques (*Ekpo, Tinkoriko*) and puppetry skits by little children, who went from house to house and performed for pittances. Unarguably, the Ekpe Festival was huge and set the rather quiet town of Calabar agog with colourful performances every yuletide season.

In a fervent bid to preserve the cultural heritage of the Efik people and promote the tourist potential of the State, the erstwhile governor, Mr. Donald Duke inaugurated the Carnival Calabar in December, 2004. By introducing five bands (Passion 4, Seagull, Bayside, Freedom and Masta Blasta) to the already existing cultural troupes and Masquerade groups, he, no doubt, reinvented, restructured and upgraded the Ekpe Festival to a carnivalesque status open to the entire public. Apparently, with every passing year, the Carnival Calabar has grown to accommodate various dance troupes and theatrical performances from not only within the state but also beyond Africa. In all, the Carnival Calabar stems from Efik indigenous cultural performances and popular culture that have been revolutionized for the global stage.

Interestingly, the dramatic sub-genre of indigenous drama that comes closest to the Carnival procession is the Concert Party. Rightly classified under Popular drama and detached from any religious base, Okpe who defines the Concert Party as “a communal dramatic celebration which, by combining folk traditions with elements of contemporary life, provides amusement and relaxation to the urban masses in an idiom they can easily relate to” (281). Common in city centres, the Concert party is markedly participatory and celebrative in nature and primarily arched towards amusement. Thus, it is this element of folk traditions and contemporary culture that gives it its convivial nature, and typically constitute the major aesthetics of Carnival Calabar alright; especially with all the accoutrements of folk songs, urban music, choreography, mimesis, costumes/make up, spectacle, dance, masques, kinesics, props, symbols and symbolisms etc.

Furthermore, as a communal celebration, the audience is implicated in its organizational framework as they are active 'spectators' as depicted in their flamboyant appearance, body/ face masques, loud ululations, jeers and cheers, dance and even by accompanying the carnival float on the twelve kilometre walk to and back to the Stadium. Nonetheless, amidst the glam and

glitz, the thrills and frills, the basic fact remains that the Carnival calabar is an artistic reenactment of a vision or a philosophy that is of topical relevance to the society. Even so, in stressing the therapeutic benefits of the event, E. O. Frank avers that it is a platform that offers leisure, relaxation and holidaying to Nigerians (18).

Carnival Calabar Performance Overview

Of course, for such a high energetic dramatic performance like the Carnival, adequate rehearsal is key to its success. It all begins with calls for auditions, then orientation and training for those members of the public who have indicated interest in the art. After which, the selection and grouping process follows based on participant's talents and technical skills which may involve dance, acrobatics/gymnastics, disc jockeying, choreography, scriptwriting, drumming, magical prowess, oration, make-up, sculpting, acting, props construction, designing/costuming, repairs etc. Once every member of the band has been grouped, then practice sessions pick up steam within the various groups. Ifure Ufford-Azorbo avers that dancers are “trained in techniques and skills which relate to such aspects as balance, alignment, weight shift, elevation, landing and articulation of isolated body parts...to achieve the aim of the performance”(145).

Usually, the band managers function as supervisors and tutors but more often than not professionals are invited as facilitators whose duties are to interpret, plan and communicate the central theme to the rest of the band; whilst members keep learning and embarking on dry runs until they are found worthy to participate in the Carnival.

The performance proper begins at the U.J. Esuene stadium at about 9am where members of the various bands converge to put finishing touches to their body/facial masques, floats or make-up. Taking their cue from music blaring from the carnival floats, the bands take their formation beside their elaborately decorated floats and proceed to commence the twelve kilometer parade.

The carnival procession is an enthralling presentation of mime, masques, songs, gestures and dance to the accompaniment of musical accoutrements. F. B. O. Akporobaro reminds us that it is “often highly dramatic and picturesque in form...and provides dramatic and theatrical expression of history, belief and social experiences” (54). In any case, at the front of each

band is usually a bevy of beautifully clad female revelers who though adorned scantily are a cynosure of attraction to the crowd. These young ladies are not only carriers of their band's name but they also serve as the opening montage to the performance ahead. Taking rhythmic dance steps or in freestyle patterns, but certainly gyrating their hips, they lead the train amidst loud music and drumming from the float. Following closely at their heels are performances from the Queen's maidens and the King's guards who usher in the elaborately costumed King and Queen of the bands. With highly exaggerated gesticulations, the King and Queen showcase their enormous paraphernalia of either flapping wings or elaborate body masques. Behind them comes the entire line up of various sections of the train who present all the drama in motion. Most times, some segments of the drama are set on the carnival float or on the tarmac in view of the gathering crowd.

However, because it is primarily mime, there is an audible narration of the dramatic sketch by a narrator (a folkloric technique borrowed from African moonlight tales) who devises upon voice modulation, tempo, pauses and accents to achieve the desired effects. Evidently, the drama presentation is repeatedly staged at all adjudication points along the twelve kilometer route, this is to enable the panel of judges evaluate each band's artistic expression of the theme. The drama which involves acrobatics, mimesis, spectacle, magical illusion, choreography, music and dance incorporates a lot of stage props which are symbolic of the cultural heritage of Africans alongside typifying the central theme of the fete. Thus, the revelers are dressed in costume characters, decorated with feathers, flags, raffia, bows, horse tails, fans, false swords, wands, staffs, beads, jingly arm and shin bands, head gears, leaves, body masques etc. which speak volumes about their thematic engagements. Importantly, the five bands involved are clearly distinguished by their signature colours. Passion 4 band is known for its bright green colour; Freedom Band for yellow, the Masta Blasta band spots a bright orange, and while the Seagull band is all red, the Bayside band is distinguished by its sky blue hue. Invariably, more than their iridescence and alluring appeal, these colours are symbolic of the bands' vision.

Carnival Calabar: Indigenous Dramatic Elements

In propounding a theory for the criticism of Indigenous Drama, Uwem Affiah and Ndubusi Osuagwu in their “Ethnodramatics: Towards a Theory for Indigenous African Drama” outline the defining characteristics of indigenous drama to include “dance, mime, gesture, music and songs, costumes, make

up, symbols and symbolisms (9). Therefore, it is on these parameters that the Carnival Calabar performance is appraised.

Songs, Music and Sound

In his drama treatise, *The Poetics*, Aristotle posits that 'Song' holds the chief place among the embellishments of drama(24). This is because it is a harmonious and pleasant arrangement of sounds (vocal or instrumental) that are delightful to the ears. Okpe who ascribes to it the highest degree of musicality in any performance as a result of its constituent elements of musical instrumentation (134). Therefore, a characteristic element of indigenous performance is Songs and Music. In Carnival Calabar, African popular music with indigenous rhythmic patterns and drumbeats are primarily played to lead the bands. This fast-paced and highly energetic genre of music is more often than not accompanied by peculiar dance steps or dance styles that are culturally familiar to the people. For example, Inyanya's *Kukeresong* comes with the Etighi dance step which stems from the Efik cultural dance; the popularly played *Azonto* music has its roots in the Ghanaian *Kpanlogo* dance; the Cameroonian *Makossa* which originates from the indigenous *Kossa* music of the Doulas. Other genres played at the event usually range from rap, hip-hop, reggae, afrobeat, hi-life etc. Regardless of the genre, music in Africa is tremendously functional.

At the carnival, it is not uncommon to have bands feature musical artistes from within and outside the continent who sing and perform to the delight of the audience. Clearly, a lot of improvisation goes on here, as most times, songs are manipulated to capture the spirit of the fest. For instance, a call and response pattern may be included so as to ensure that the audience is carried along. However, in analyzing this style of African music, Samuel Akpabot explains that they “are almost always short, many times fragmentary and very repetitive” (5). This is correct, because through the indigenous stylistic effects of repetitions, puns, nonsensical syllables, proverbial sayings, images, slogans, euphemisms, witticisms, ideophones, metaphors, etc., the message/mood is always succinctly communicated.

Amidst all of these, are also sound effects from the disc jockey and drummers who extremely sensitive to the emotions of the crowd know when to increase or decrease the tempo. As such, it is to this effect, that Tracy Hugh argues that “music in Africa means vocal participation, the physical manipulation of instruments and the rhythmic dance movements associated with it”(10).

Interestingly, within the carnival orchestra abound both modern and local musical instruments, from the acoustic guitar to the talking drum (eyaraekomo), from the trumpets to the metal gong (NkongEkomo), the maracas, pot drums, rattles, and xylophone (ikoneto) each contributing to the sound poetics of the event. This mosaic mix of the contemporary and traditional is a major characteristic of the Concert Party, for Okpewho explains that it combines folk traditions with elements of contemporary life”(279). Furthermore, sounds, songs/music not only set the mood, they provide the performers with their cues, and are also used to advance the plot of the dramatic skits.

Dance

“...to dance is to be well educated.” Plato

One of the principal elements of any carnival or festival is dance because dance is the life wire of the fete. Peculiar to all humans, dance is a natural human activity that communicates emotions using the body. Edisua Offoboche describes it as a “structured art...composed of organized experiences meant to show ways of extending our perception of design, rhythm and style” (101). Therefore, dance involves the rhythmic movement of the body in time and space in order to make a statement. No dance is ever complete without music/songs however, the basic elements of dance remains design, step, gesture, dynamics and techniques. Invariably, these elements have to do with skill, energy exertion, paralinguistic features, locomotive and planned movements in order to achieve a pattern.

In Africa, cultural dances are essential parts of celebrations, in fact they comprise a great deal of indigenous drama. Catherine Acholonu reiterates that “the cultural dances of a people are group representations of their collective world view, borne out from their folklore, their memories, their fears and aspirations” (34). Hence, apart from promoting the cultural realities of Africans, dance in Africa is highly steeped in meaning as evinced in the costume, mime, gestures, drumming and actions of the dancers. As such, African dance is a framework of theatricalities that instill morals, ideals and values alongside evoking emotions in the hearts of its audience. Therefore, if the purpose of dance is essentially to express an emotion or an experience, then a lot can be gleaned from the dance patterns performed by the bands at the carnival. For in any case, the dance styles are usually tailored to reflect the theme of the event.

In this regard, the dancers are story tellers, for through their body movements we are drawn into our own experiences, struggles and triumphs. In unison, they wield their bodies rhythmically to re-create dramatic episodes which provoke great ecstasy in the hearts of the audience. Extremely innovative, and full of vitality, the dancers dexterously weave their message into urban dance steps like *Shaku-shaku*, *Shoki*, *Skelewu* etc and also into traditional steps like *Atilogwu*, *Bata*, *Ekombi*, *Intore*, *Zulu*, etc. With hands and legs that are constantly moving, and ever gyrating hips, the dancers perform rigorous sequences - twisting, spinning, shuffling, stamping, jumping, swaying, squatting, running, flipping, jogging, etc., albeit constantly being guided by the songs / instrumentation, all the while expressing a memorable storyline.

Nonetheless, because dance in Africa is participative, spectators are not left out, as they too respond to the music via dance. Okechukwu Mezu corroborates this when he writes that “the audience in the African tradition takes part, a full and lively part in the performance” (95). In essence, dance as an element of indigenous drama, accommodates audience participation. Significantly, the dance steps performed by each band are always in alignment with the theme, invariably relating an issue or a philosophy while at the same time offering therapeutic tendencies.

Symbols and Symbolisms

In Africa, symbols tell stories. In fact, they convey socio-cultural or spiritual knowledge via suggestive references and associations of objects with communal or shared experiences of a people. Symbols are part of any elaborate theatrical performance which comes alive via costumes, character, stage properties, language, actions, colour, mood etc. In essence, symbols are recruited for the vital purpose of deepening the audience's understanding of a performance. Abrams and Harpham define symbol as “anything which signifies something else” (393). Therefore, indigenous African drama is replete with a plethora of signs and symbols that can be located in sculptures, facial designs, masquerades, sound, stage properties, settings, gestures etc. These visual and aural media of communicating emotions and information have long existed in Africa and function beyond aesthetic values to totems of worship, icons of protection or even a mascot for goodluck and celebration. And so, in the realization of the themes of the Calabar carnival the bands resort to symbols and symbolism to drive home their message or to concretize their thematic engagements. As such, understanding the functions of these symbols is imperative to appreciating their significance. Thus, in

creating aesthetic appeal as well as thematic relevance, symbolic sculptures and objects are festooned on the carnival float which invariably projects the subject matter as well as adding splendor to the scenery or 'mobile stage'.

In 2016, the theme of Climate Change was unmistakable, as all the bands brought to the fore the motif of a degraded and despoiled ecosystem through colours, costumes, actions, dance, gestures, artistic paraphernalia etc. Thus, by carrying images, objects and artifacts associated with the environment in their dance procession, each band was able to inspire environmental awareness through symbolisms. Objects like skulls, bones, fire, smoke, knives, dead plants, dead animals etcetera were utilized to tell the story of extinction as a result of pollution and exploitation. Even so, the mimetic dramatization of each band was geared towards creating fear and tension; right from melancholic songs to somber costume colours and frightening masks which screamed of danger (red) and death (black) to sluggish actions that depicted sickness, death, floods, hunger, poverty etc., and also to the stage props like a hospital bed, a cross, a burning furnace, coffin etc., the bands were able to express how vulnerable and fragile the environment is by dexterously weaving these sculptural statements into the context of the performance. Similarly, in another movement, one that tellingly projected hope, the dancers were costumed colourfully in verdant flora and rich fauna attires which were purposefully decorated with peacock feathers - a symbol of pride and the green colour; a marker of fertility - to celebrate the vitality of life. Invariably, symbols and stage props add verisimilitude to the story and are great tools for actors to express themselves and draw their audience into an ongoing experience

In essence, the conflicts and actions in indigenous African drama are primarily apprehended through symbols and symbolisms rather than through elaborate dialogue and verbal logistics. In all, symbols being an integral element of indigenous drama has been used copiously in Carnival Calabar as evinced even in the actions dramatized and the colours associated with the various bands. Passion 4 flaunts a bright green colour which points to the luxuriant rainforests of Calabar; Bayside band sports a bright blue hue which is symbolic for the calm creeks, rivers and oceans that surround Calabar; the Freedom Band is all yellow and gold which signifies the economic wealth of the State. And while the Masta Blasta band is renowned for its bright orange which projects the hospitality and warmth of the Cross River people, the bright red of the Seagull band depicts the bubbly energy exuded by the band

and all Crossriverians.

Costumes, Accessories and Make-up

The performers at Carnival Calabar decorate themselves lavishly for the procession; this is because apart from realizing their roles, they need to be visually appealing to their audience. Thus, make-up and costuming are vital aspects of the carnival. Adorned in beautiful shiny fabrics made of silk, velveteen, cotton or damask, the performers are made to appear gaudy and flamboyant, and this follows for their various carnival floats. However, while some performers are completely masked as is the case in masquerading, a large majority go unmasked, albeit their faces and bodies are colourfully painted or tattooed. For the women, facial make-up consists of large colourful eyelashes, an elaborate coiffure, heavily painted lips and a sprinkling of glitter or stardust on their fore heads and chest. But even so, artistic shapes, objects, and lines are also made on each performer's face for the purpose of identification. Perhaps, one can trace these facial designs to African tradition, where young ladies painted their faces and bodies with camwood or were scarified to depict their identity and showcase their beauty. Generally, the young ladies in almost all the bands are skimpily dressed. They are clad in a short neck cape, a bustier or camisole to cover the midriff, and a mini skirt or shorts to cover the buttocks and upper thighs. Invariably, these damsels undoubtedly are dressed to duplicate traditional African maidens undergoing maidenhood rites, with slight alterations here and there. However, middle aged female members are dressed modestly more often than not showcasing African traditional attires like the Efik *oyonyo*, the Yoruba *buba and iro*, or the Igbo blouse and wrapper complete with beaded neck pieces, bracelets, anklets and head gears. The male folks are either costumed traditionally or casually. Their costumes may range from a warrior's gear, to a military uniform, or a clergy's habit or even a ship captain's suit complete with elaborate hats, spears, arrows and shields; of course this is dependent on the role they play.

In any case, the star dancers (the King and Queen) are distinguished amongst the various sections of the band because attached to their ostentatious outfits are huge contraptions of enormous wings, or an overtly decorated backdrop or a gigantic frame of embellishments which add aesthetics, meaning and visual splendor to their thematic preoccupation. Significantly, the rolling/mobile parts attached to their costumes stimulate action as they allow for appropriate body movements and gestures. Of course, nothing is worn for

nothing's sake in indigenous drama as every piece of costume speak volumes about the character's/performer's identity and role. Although costume characters, the king and queen's inclusion in the train symbolize political and ceremonial powers as depicted by either the crown or the woven garlands on their heads and their staff of office. Invariably, the different sections of the band are costumed with various colours and objects so as to enhance their specific characters. For instance the 'intro girls' are usually decorated in such a way that they exhibit femininity and grace - most times, holding unto a fan, a feathery wand, a horse tail or an umbrella. Once again, Affiah and Owan remind us that the functional essence of costumes lie in the true reflection of the culture and tradition showcased (12). In any case, being an audience theatre, the spectators are not left out, for they too are magnificently dressed in splendid colours often indicative of their favourite band(s).

Gestures

Gestures are basically non-verbal communicators. They are familiar body/ facial codes used to express emotions, ideas, actions or events amongst people of identical culture. Although, not as extensive as dance or as elaborate as mimetic acts, they are highly dramatic and gravid with meaning. Subtle, yet powerful, gestures are an important feature of indigenous theatre because they enhance communication among the actors and between the audience. Accordingly, indigenous drama devises on this dramatic feature to advance its meagre dialogic status. Undeniably then, what African drama lacks in verbal logistics, it gains in gestures as African culture is replete with gestures that convey such values as respect, loyalty, love, supplication, joy, caution etc. as well as others that connote anger, silence, disbelief, shock, insult, violence, revenge, death etc.

Thus, in narrating their thematic engagement, the different bands at the carnival display a plethora of well-choreographed hand, leg, head and neck gestures and poses in order to drive home their message. Clearly, this is because the fete offers little or no room for verbal expression amongst the cast. As such, it is common to sight male dancers taking up poses as statues or performing intricate footwork during the parade. By and large, to evoke emotions of joy and happiness, hand gestures of waving and clapping are commonplace and cheerful facial expressions are worn by all performers.

Conclusion

Carnival Calabar may be a reflection of contemporaneity and modernity, but taking an enquiring look at its organizational framework, one can espy the

theatrical aesthetics of indigenous theatre as this paper has amply demonstrated. Thus, steeped in the multimedia modes of traditional aural and visual delivery, Carnival Calabar is designed to sensitize the world on the cultural and socio-political realities of Africa amidst a framework of indigenous characteristics that are enthralling as well as edifying.

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