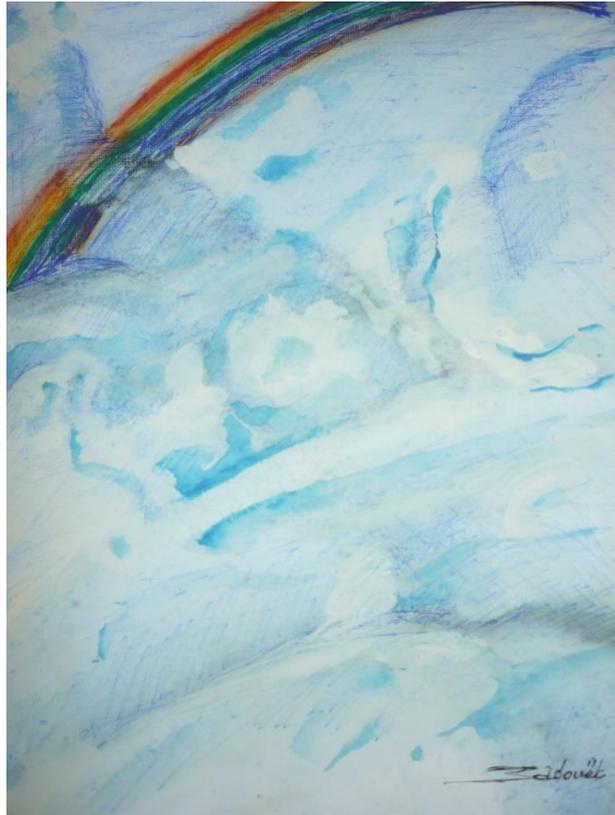


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Festival as a Means of Social Integration and Alienation: A Study in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart*, and AyiKwei Armah's *Fragments*.

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Introduction

Festivals are commonly characterized by the joy brought to both partakers and spectators, since they are entertainments organized with dancing, much food and drink. However, as Duvignaud has pointed out, festival transcends mere entertainment to locate man and society in a significant transformational and organizational process.¹ In the current analysis about “*Festival as a means of social integration and alienation: A Study in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God And Things Fall Apart, And AyiKweiArmah'sFragments*”, we intend to disclose this otherness or significance of festival through the analysis of Pumpkin Leaves Festival and New Yam Festival in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God and Things Fall Apart*, and AyiKweiArmah's*Fragments*. For, we are convinced that the sacredness of these traditional festivals is bound to produce, beyond the different rituals, a profound sense of genuine social integration that is overtly corrupted in modern festivals inclined to provide artificial and superficial integration depending on the amount of disbursed money. Thus we shall first of all introduce the characteristics of traditional festivals as social integration forces. We shall then indicate the distorted manifestation of festivals in modern societies before analyzing finally their alienation capacity as an implication of the actions of a culture industry and carnivalesquemarket directed to the promotionof ambivalent values.

I- FESTIVALS IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

Festivals are mostly perceived as moments of negation of daily realities and important instruments of neworder creation in the society. As such, they are credited with major otherness or significances that are located beyond their apparent manifestation. These social significances include mainly their capacity to operate social purification and relief, to bring moral consecration and social integration to individuals, and to regenerate the entiresociety.

¹Duvignaud, J , *Festivals : A sociological approach*, Cultures 3, 1976, pp.13-28

I-1. A Means of Social Relief and Purification

The occurrence of Pumpkin Leaves and New Yam Festivals in the two novels of Chinua Achebe indicates the capacity of both celebrations to extend relief and purification to man and society. Indeed, as mentioned in *Arrow of God*, the pumpkin Leaves festival is celebrated after the appearance of the new moon; but it intervenes mainly in a moment of tension and social conflict between Ezeulu, the chief priest of Ulu (the supreme God) and Nwaka, a rich and titled man, as a result of their different views on the way to manage a land matter opposing Umuaro, their village, to Okperi, another village. This conflict situation has occasioned a dangerous atmosphere of mutual poisoning among the belligerents.²

The advent of the Pumpkin Leaves Festival turns out to be a break intended for peoples' reconsideration of their social relation. In this wake, it tends to bring relief to the entire society exposed to the permanent and threatening presence of death. This social development is clearly perceptible with the newly acquired cohesion and harmony prevailing among the inhabitants of Umuaro:³

In the atmosphere of the present gathering the great hostility between Umuaro and Umuachala seemed, momentarily, to lose significance. Yesterday if two men from the two villages had met they would have watched each other's movement with caution and suspicion. (..) But today they drank palm wine freely together because no man in his right mind would carry poison to a ceremony of purification.

The previously disordered society has obtained, from the common heritage of its people, the means and necessity of pacification. For, in revitalizing this sense obscured by daily conflict, the current ceremony is prone to preserve the common "purification" myth of the people of Umuaro. The peak of the process is attained with the coming of Ezeulu, the Chief Priest, since the tremendous subsequent jubilation of villagers has confirmed that he is actually, despite some discording voices, the ancestral representative of the six villages composing Umuaro. This unanimous acceptance of the chief priest of Ulu and the subsequent rituals are essential for the preservation of a deep rooted tradition and the cohesion of the Ibo society. Such a development tends to consecrate the individual in terms of shaping and consolidating his moral stands in accordance with the norms accepted by the tradition.

²Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God*, London, Heinemann, 1974, pp.66-75

³ Chinua Achebe, , *Arrow of God*, op.cit, p.66

I-2. A Means of Moral Consecration

Indeed, the purification ritual itself is cut out to consecrate each individual in rising and consolidating progressively his sense of morality. This consecration process ranges from the strangeness of Ezeulu's ritual dressing to his retreat in the sacred hut through the beating of the sacred drum, the conjuring up of ancestors and gods, the throwing of pumpkin leaves onto the running chief priest and the treading down of the remaining leaves by the women. The enthusiasm and dedication in the performance of this purification ritual reveal with certitude the acquired willingness of people to conduct their social actions in conformity with the moral values that have regulated the life of their ancestors.⁴

This moral consecration stands certainly at the root of the joyful atmosphere prevailing among people after the celebration, despite the return to the contingences of their social differences. They have indeed emerged from a moment of disconnection with their daily life and activities. The disconnection has been obvious with the sojourn made in the past with the ancestors standing for the founding fathers of their society. The ancient sacred words conjured up by Ezeulu and the sacred scenes of his encounter with these spirits indicate the spiritual presence of the past in the present. In this context, man is able to visit the space of the departed (deceased people), the imaginary spaces and the spaces of gods with a view to contemplating genuine values. As Van Gennep has pointed out, this temporal and spatial interconnection locates man in a liminal position where he has to negotiate his identity through a complicated process of rite of passage.⁵

The process is a self-definition journey made up of the different stages of Departure, Initiation and Return. Indeed, in the framework of the Pumpkin Leaves Festival, the departure of man into the sacred realm of ancestors is motivated by the need of purification from the sins of the human society. However, the attainment of this objective is possible only with an initiation process performed through ordeals designed to make individual familiar with the wonders and moral building values of the ancestors' wonderland.⁶ The

⁴Derrett, R, Making sense of how festivals demonstrate a community's sense of place, *Event Management*, 2003, 8 (1), pp.49-58

⁵ Cf. Arnold Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*, Paris, Picard, 1981

⁶N'Da Pierre, « L'espace initiatique, figuration, fonctionnement et sémantique dans la cruche » in *Revue de Littérature et d'Esthétique négro-africaine*, no.9, Abidjan, Université Nationale de CI et ILENA, 1988, pp.63-79

completion of the initiation is materialized with the return of the initiated to the human world with the quest object of purification. Thus, the individual in Umuaro is now a new being rid of his previous sins likely to hinder social harmony.

As disclosed earlier, the liminal negotiation of the new identity is related to this three dimensional process of Departure, Initiation and Return. It is then bound to locate the individual at the threshold of two worlds: one is the sinful society of Umuaro and the other is the virtual cleansed society to build. The interstitial space between the two spaces is the place of identity negotiation from where the individual should emerge into a purified state. This identity negotiation is conducted in an unsafe interstitial space where the individual is confronted with the challenging choice between bad and good in the initiation process. In the traditional perspective, this choice is supposed to be in favour of good or positive values, for the process is exclusively intended for the promotion of positivity and social harmony. The acquired identity is a dynamic one since the individual, acquainted with the supreme ancestral values, is supposed to maintain the contradiction between the interior of his own liminal space and the exterior of the corrupted social space.⁷

This contradictory stance between the interior and the exterior tends to create a third space that turns out to be an emergence as it is the contradictory sum of the previous interacting two spaces. The quality of emergence is an implicit acceptance of the traditional space as the outcome of the interaction between sacred and profane values. If the sacred has watchful eyes on the profane, the latter is inclined to draw resources from the sacred to humanize its social actions. This simultaneous intervention of the sacred and the profane allows traditional festivals to operate the social balance necessary for both the regeneration of the society and the integration of man.⁸

I-3. A Means of Social Regeneration and Integration

I-3-1. Social Regeneration

⁷Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The human seriousness of play*, New York, PAJ publications, 1982, p.25

⁸Guy Rocher, *L'organisation sociale*, Paris, Editions HMA, 1968, pp.104-105

Regeneration or renaissance is indeed the profound significance to be associated with the Pumpkin Leaves Festival, since it is cut out to celebrate human and social totality as the implication of the conjugated actions of man and nature. The pumpkin leaves symbolize the natural creativeness present in the trees through their life providing sap generated under the guidance of the creative power of the moon that regulates the cyclic celebration of this festival in the Ibo society of Umuaro. The relation of the pumpkin leaves with the moon is a metaphor of the natural vitality refusing the seeds of fragmentation and extinction planted in the society.⁹ The treading down scene of leaves by women symbolizes the subsequent failure of any eventual social barrenness and disharmony through the melting of the material and spiritual worlds into a dynamic social unity. Traditional festivals are then designed to defeat social stagnation and promote dynamism through the integration man to the organizational and transformational process of the society.

I-3-2. Social Integration

The quest of purification is a metaphor of the refusal of the traditional world to confide its destiny to individuals unable to conduct positive and productive social actions. This option is standing on the conception that sins are negative forces that cripple the steps of people toward the ancestors. Purification is then perceived in the broader scope of liberating the individual from the yoke of the sins and integrating him to the dynamics of social actions. As a new being having visited authentic ideas in the world of the ancestors, this purified individual is able to organize social forces and transform the society according to traditional norms that apprehend development as a total process taking into account both spiritual and material values in the building of the society. Festivals in traditional areas are remembrances of this permanent influence of the spiritual complete and poetic world over the fragmented and prosaic world, the interaction of which tends to humanize society in placing the integration and wellbeing of man at the core of any social action.

⁹ Guy Rocher, *op.cit.*, pp.105-106

This sense of totality and integration is also encountered with the New Yam Festival in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.¹⁰

The pounded yam dish placed in front of the partakers of the festival was as big as a mountain. People had to eat their way through it all night and it was only during the following day when the pounded yam "mountain" had gone down that people on one side recognized and greeted their family members on the other side of the dish for the first time.

Beyond the festiveness of the celebration and the bountifulness of meals, "the pounded yam" symbolizes the social cement that keeps together all the fragments of the Ibo society. The compactness of the food is a metaphor of the close link necessary between members and kinsmen of the society. This gathering power has something to do with the mystic connotation associated with the tubercle that functions as the intermediary between the human society and the spiritual one. For, its presence in the ground during the different stages of its maturation is undoubtedly a metaphor of the close relation created between this tubercle and the ancestors.

In this wake, the New Yam Festival transcends the mere consumption of the tubercle. It is the dynamic and spiritual implication of the performance of different stages ranging from WAJI (breaking of new yam) to the *iwaji* and *irijiohuru* through the sacrificial offering of slices of the new yam to the shrines on farms. It must be understood that the *iwaji* and *irijiohuru* or new yam eating is inclusive of all the members of the society. For, children are also admitted to the celebration after a cleansing session preparing their body to accept securely the new yam. However, friends and acquaintances from other villages are also invited to the celebration as a manifestation of generosity and opening to the exterior.¹¹ This openness has brought economic prosperity to the Ibo society through the business potentials the visitors and producers have found out in this tubercle.

It is thus obvious that traditional festivals are powerful means of integrating the individual to the general social system. Their rituals are efficient instruments of socialization that conducts man to accept the responsible role of organizing and transforming the society. However, modernism tends to weaken the spiritual and integrative foundations of these

¹⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, London, Heinemann, 1958, p.34

¹¹ David Carroll, *York Notes on Arrow of God*, London, Longman York Press, 1980, pp.6-8

traditional festivals, since the breakthrough of migratory movements has caused people to live away from their traditional lands and forced on them alien values and practices

II-FESTIVALS IN MODERN SOCIETY

The modern materialistic approach of the notion of festival has discarded the integrative rituals inherent in traditional festivals. This situation of social alienation results from the actions of a culture industry that has produced both a low value popular culture and ambivalent social values.

II-1. From Social Integration to Social Alienation

Alienation, as a separation from one's cultural background, is an outstanding problem in modern societies. According to Chinua Achebe's novels, Even the Ibo remained in their original lands are undergoing, though in a minor extent, the same alienation undergone by those in the diaspora whose interest in these festivals stands on some profane celebrations deprived of the original sacredness borrowed from the rituals of spiritual invitation of ancestors. Such a development in the perception of traditional festivals is not limited to the Ibo society.

This festive corruption is the plague encountered in the entire modern societies organized with the precedence of the greed of financial gain over traditional genuineness. It tends to reject the slowness of traditional rituals, and stands in favour of the ritualized speediness of modernism characterized by mere entertainment and quick money making. AyiKweiArmah's *Fragments* provides an interesting example of this situation of festival corruption through the conspiracy of Araba and her mother Effua to organize an anticipated outdoor ceremony for the former's baby with the hope of benefiting from civil servants' September salary:¹²

"The month is almost dead," Effua said. "Wednesday...This is such a bad time. But we'll have to think seriously about the outdoor ceremony."

"I thought there were fixed times for those things," Baako said. "Like a week or a month or whatever it is after birth?" Neither his mother or his sister seemed to have been listening.

"An outdoor ceremony held more than a few days after payday is useless," Effua said.

¹²AyiKweiArmah, *Fragments*, London, Heinemann, 1974, p.88

BaakoOnipa, despite the weakness of his protest, denounces the distortion of the mainstream nature of the outdoor ceremony that is traditionally supposed to occur a week after the birth of a child. It is Naana, the grandmother, who presents the alteration as an abomination that may induce the return of the child into the world of spirits. However, Effua and Araba are determined to attain their goal of collecting sufficient money from this anticipated ceremony. For, even Baako, the child's uncle, who has an insightful view on the situation, is wittingly manipulated by the two ladies and made an instrument of their orchestrated business.¹³

"You will receive the guests and later you can give them drinkables. Serve the VIP's first."

"Is that all?"

"Yes," his mother answered, turning to go. "Oh, and also, take care of the collection." Before he could say anything, she had left, closing door very softly after her.

In "closing" the "door after her" before Baako "could say anything" Effua seems to recognize the futility of any opposition to their determination. Their conviction is deeply rooted in the corruption conscious of the modern post-colonial Ghanaian society dominated by the outstanding presence of the money earning actions of a culture industry inclined to produce poor quality cultural realities. Baako, a university graduate in creative writing, is thus driven away from genuine creative values and made prisoner of a general culture of social alienation.

II-2. Alienation and Culture Industry

Modern societies are oriented toward the promotion a culture of leisure and spectacle that considers festivals as a means of profit gain in a consumer society dominated by competition, mass consumption and communications. This culture industry happens to be more interested in profit earning activities than in the quality of the cultural products which are forced on consumers through aggressive communication techniques.¹⁴ The aggressiveness resides in the promotion and imposition of false needs on the consumers who tend to perceive wrongly their purchase actions as a sign of liberty. This corrupted

¹³AyiKwei Armah, op.cit., p.99

¹⁴Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, London, Routledge, 1991, p.92

choice liberty or pseudo individualization turns out to be a profound source of man's alienation with regards to his incapability to differentiate between genuine Festivals and artificial Festivals overwhelmed by a general context of mass culture or popular culture committed in the promotion of lower value cultural products.

It is then obvious that modern culture industry is keeping us away from the traditional scene where the culture of festival is meant to integrate man to his society through the mediation of values of cohesion inherited from ancestors. The less elaborated subsequent popular culture is characterized by the predominance of ambivalent values resulting from social and market instability.

II-3. From Popular Culture to the Ambivalence of Social Values

Modern festivals are indeed dominated by the ambivalent values of a modern society submitted to the unstable prices of goods on market. On referring to Bakhtin's view about carnival as a way of introducing this ambivalence of values, we may rightly recognize the presence of traditional festivals on a carnivalesque market where their values or prices depend on the principle of supply and demand.¹⁵ This carnivalesque nature should be apprehended in line with festive carnivals where masquerades and special dressings are used to distort the right orders of social values. It is a disorder festival, as opposed to order festivals, meant to criticize safely a social order unwilling to accept alternative views.

Our resort to the expression of carnivalesque market is then designed to shed light on the ambivalence of a modern order located in its implicit alteration of the culture of festivals in the explicit ambition of promoting it. However, this alteration proves to be a pretense to meet the economic requirements of the modern market opposing genuine cultural values to artificial ones. In the framework of this cultural ambivalence, artificiality tends to take precedence over genuineness, since the former is profitably performed in a mass production society interested in easily saleable products. Culture has then become a product or commodity submitted to the requirements of the market. This commodification of culture is a prominent feature of culture industry characterized by the organization of staged performances for public or private audiences.

¹⁵Bakhtine, Mikhaïl, *L'œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen-âge et sous la Renaissance*, Paris, (1965), 1970, Gallimard, p.168

Thus, the culture of festivals is currently related to the problematic of their competitiveness on a market oriented by the taste of modern consumers. It is indeed part of the general strategy of professional organization of events and tourism motivated by the perspective of financial profits. In this wake, spectacle managers are called on to organize public or private staged festival performances which are mostly deprived of original genuineness.¹⁶ This is obvious with tourists on search of original sensations. They tend to resort to irrelevant festival performances due to the inability of managers to discover the link between genuineness and artificiality. For, they are generally business men inclined to make exclusively profit.

CONCLUSION

In completing here this analysis, there is a strong necessity to clarify once and for all the two dimensionality of the otherness or significance of festivals in modern society. The integration dimension originates to the authentic integrative values of traditional festivals that would use rituals to integrate man to the organization of the society and strengthen the sentiment of belonging to its cosmogony. The rituals of Pumpkin Leaves Festival and New Year Yam Festival in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* are edifying examples of this social integrative capacity of festivals through the purification of ordinary peoples and the promotion of social abundance and generosity. As to the alienation dimension, it is related to the predominance of poor quality cultural products and the modern man's subsequent inability to benefit from authentic festival performances. This distortion, as sadly pictured by the anticipated outdoor ceremony in AyiKweiArmah's *Fragments*, is the implication of the unscrupulous money earning conscious of modern societies functioning under the falseness of a carnivalesque market and its subsequent popular culture.

The modern conception of festival is indeed a fragmented one, as it is hesitating between genuineness and artificiality. There is then an irrefutable necessity to remedy this fragmented perception with a view to having a productive orientation of the performance of festivals in the modern societies. In the totality creation perspective of Edgar Morin, these two conceptions might defeat fragmentation in undergoing a contradictory relation of synthesis that will bring out a superior conception standing for the total sum of the previous

¹⁶ Manning, F, Carnival in Antigua : An indigenous festival in a tourist economy, *Anthropos*, 79, 1978, pp.191-204

conceptions.¹⁷ We are hopeful that such new fashioned festivals, even though committed in a competitive environment, will combine efficiently genuineness and artificiality in the wake of the profit earning desire of managers and performers.

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