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ORE FESTIVAL AS INDIGENOUS THEATRE: PERFORMANCE AND RITUAL DRAMATURGY IN THE UWHERU KINGDOM OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

African festivals are complex performance regimes that incorporate aspects of ritual, past memory, aesthetics, and social interaction. Ore Festival of Uwheru Kingdom in Delta State, Nigeria, is a theatrical tradition within the indigenous community, rooted in performance and ritual dramaturgy. This research is situated within the theoretical frameworks of ethnomethodology, African Total Theatre, and the Continuum of Ritual and Performance. The study uses a qualitative, performance-based research design that involves recording video footage of the Ore Festival 2023, participating in interviews with cultural custodians, and conducting textual analysis. According to the results, Ore is structured as a consistent dramaturgical unit with cyclical sequencing, mobile staging, symbolic costuming, music, dance, masquerade performance, and participatory spectatorship, all of which are hallmark characteristics of African indigenous theatre. Ore is a recreation of the Uwheru migratory past and a ritualisation of agricultural renewal through embodied performance rather than script-based performance. Ore turns social spaces into vibrant performance arenas. Despite pressures from Christianity and modernisation, the festival remains a performative system rooted in indigenous aesthetics and collective sense. Intensified theatrical critique and ethically executed video recordings are therefore key to legitimising African festivals as theatre and expanding the canon of African performance studies.

Keywords: *African native theatre, festival performance, Ore Festival, ritual dramaturgy, Uwheru Kingdom.*

1. Introduction

African festivals are among the oldest and most advanced performance traditions in the world. They combine ritual duty, historical rendition, aestheticism and the collective action into coherent dramaturgical structures. African festivals are increasingly understood by contemporary African performance scholars as indigenous theatrical forms that operate according to their own performative logic, aesthetics, and meaning-

making (Wright, 1992; Ukala, 2000). Under this understanding, theatricality does not rely on written texts or predetermined stage presentation but is rather created through embodied movements, symbolic gestures, spatial travel, music, costuming, and interaction with the audience. This native theatrical logic can be illustrated by the Ore Festival, which the Uwheru Kingdom of Delta State, Nigeria, celebrates every year during the harvest period.

By re-enacting the migration histories of Uwheru, preserving the territorial balance among community quarters, and creating a nexus between organised human organisations and the world of spirits, the festival fulfils its functions solely through performative and ritual dramaturgy. Unlike Western theatrical culture, in which the emphasis is on narrative created through dialogue and illusionism, the Ore Festival produces meanings through embodied dramaturgy. Through processional movement, Ore expresses histories of migration and settlement, while masquerade interactions convey moral teaching and ancestral presence. Musical chants offer a rhythmical unity, while costume and prop elements act as semiotic systems. Finally, spatial mobility reorganises the whole community into a dynamic performance space.

Ritual does not diminish the theatricality of the festival. In fact, it forms the basis of the festival's dramaturgical architecture. Based on Turner's (1998) ritual-performance continuum, the Ore Festival occupies an intermediate position between sacred action and theatrical performance. The festival opens with religious-imperative uses of sacred invocations, libations, and shrine practices, and then, further on, additional public performances externalise the practice into a performative mode that welcomes collective witnessing and aesthetic involvement.

One of the most important characteristics of dramaturgy in Ore is the use of space. The festival is not anchored in a particular locus; rather, it is conducted through mobile staging as the

procession cuts across different quarters of the Uwheru Kingdom. Streets, squares and precincts of shrines are turned into temporary arenas, both prompting localised histories and social relationships. Such spatial dramaturgy makes it inclusive and collaborative and breaks down the separation between actors and audience, thus supporting the festival's communal ownership. Against the backdrop of dramaturgical richness, however, the Ore Festival, much like most indigenous performance traditions in Nigeria, faces mounting pressures from religious change, modernisation and shifting youth identities. The spread of Pentecostal Christianity is changing how people perceive participation in ritual performance, with festivals often described as incompatible with modern religious life. At the same time, urban migration and the advent of digital media have changed how younger generations perceive and appreciate indigenous performance.

This article attempts to fill this gap by interrogating the Ore Festival as indigenous theatre, especially its performance and ritual dramaturgy. It is anchored in ethnomethodology, African Total Theatre, and the ritual-performance continuum, drawing on qualitative performance analysis based on the visual recording of the 2023 Ore Festival and interviews with ritual custodians and performers (Nabofa, 2023). It illustrates how the Ore Festival is neither a residual ritual nor an informal spectacle but rather a logical theatrical system interwoven with indigenous epistemology through the foregrounding of dramaturgical

sequencing, role typology, spatial organisation, and participatory spectatorship. The aim is to interpret the Ore festival as a dynamic, meaning-producing system rather than as fixed cultural artefacts, using a theatre-informed analysis. In this manner, the article hopes to contribute to the wider efforts to re-centre African indigenous performance traditions within the discourse of global theatre, despite their long overdue recognition, for their dramaturgical complexity, aesthetic autonomy, and persistent relevance.

2. Literature

African festivals have been re-theorised as indigenous theatrical systems rather than as residual ritual practice or pre-dramatic survival. The early colonial and missionary texts tended to degrade African festivals into religious rituals that lacked any aesthetic or dramaturgical flair. Modern African performance studies have emphatically dismissed this perception, arguing that festivals are multifaceted performance practices subject to indigenous dramaturgical values that are not inferior to, but comparable in rigour to, those of Western theatre cultures (Wright, 1992; Ukala, 2000). The main aspect of this re-conceptualisation is that African theatricality relies not on written texts, set stages, or illusionism. Rather, theatrical meaning is created in embodied action, rhythmic movement, symbolic gesture, costume, music and collective participation. Festivals can thus be seen as theatre-in-action, with dramaturgy performed as a ritualised act rather than spoken. This knowledge

gives the theoretical basis for interpreting Ore Festival as indigenous theatre based on performance and ritual dramaturgy.

Ritual and theatre relations have had a key position in performance studies. The most influential is the ritual-performance continuum formulated by Turner (1998), which is not keen on sharp lines between sacred ritual and secular performance. According to Turner, ritual and theatre are on a continuum, where ritual action is theatricalised when it is externalised, stylised, and shared, and theatre is ritual-potent when it is internalised within belief systems. Performances in African festivals typify this continuum. Ritual activities, which include libation, invocation, and sacrificial symbolism, are organised into performance sequences that create aesthetic effects and foster community interaction. According to scholars, the ritual dramaturgy of African festivals is based on repetition, rhythm, and symbolic intensity, and generates meaning through presence rather than representation (Ukala, 2000; Nwanaju, 2013). Such a structure is crucial to comprehending the Ore Festival, in which ritual is not antithetical to theatricality but forms the dramaturgical basis of that festival.

The theory of African Total Theatre provides a critical perspective on understanding festivals as holistic systems of theatre. This theory rejects Eurocentric hierarchies that favour spoken dialogue and linear narrative, and instead defines African theatre as the synthesis of ritual, music, dance, spectacle, costume, and audience

involvement (Wright, 1992). Later theorists developed this theory, focusing on the multisensory quality of African performance and its dependence on the community's affect, rhythm, and energy (Ukala, 2000; Ndlovu, 2023). In this paradigm, dramaturgy is distributed across several expressive modes rather than concentrated in a dramatic text. Festivals like Ore exemplify this rationale, in which narrative meaning is created through processional movement, masquerade techniques, and choreographed ritual behaviour rather than scripted actions.

Masquerade performance is one of the key aspects of African indigenous theatre. It is both a ritual mediation and a theatrical performance. Scholars believe that masquerades represent the presence of ancestors and moral authority, and that they can punish, entertain, and teach audiences simultaneously (Reed & Hufbauer, 2005; Eze & McPherson, 2025). Masquerades, through costume, movement, and sonic intensity, physically re-enact communal memory and social values. Recent studies highlight the dramaturgical complexity of masquerade performance, noting that masquerades function as mobile narrative agents rather than fixed characters (Popenhagen, 2020). Within the context of festivals, experiences with masquerades establish dramatic tension, humour, fear and resolution, thus forming a part of the overall dramaturgy. These observations directly pertain to the Ore Festival, where masquerade and facequerade acts, as in the cases

of Edjesio and Isheri, hold specific theatrical significance in the festival's sequence.

A growing body of literature is highlighting spatiality and mobility as central dramaturgical elements in African performance cultures. Researchers highlight that meaning and place are simultaneously created in such situations by foregrounding the physical landscape as an active agent in the performative process. Unlike Western theatrical traditions, which often place the action in a predetermined architectural space, African festivals frequently employ mobile staging. This strategy converts streets, shrines, and community routes into makeshift performance areas, thereby adhering to the mobile logic of space-of-place (Ndlovu, 2023; Akpobaro, 2022). Movement in space is not a setting but a narrative tool by which processions play out migration narratives, territoriality, and social hierarchies, utilising choreographed pathways and ritualised stops. In turn, the spatial dramaturgy of such festivals encourages participatory elements, as the community's performative experience is dispersed across multiple locations rather than concentrated in a single central site (Bakare, 2022). The movement through the Uwheru quarters during the Ore Festival exemplifies such praxis, as the procession serves as the historical passage, thus establishing the festival as a form of theatre-in-motion.

The involvement of the audience is generally considered a characteristic element of African indigenous theatre. Such an active engagement by

the audiences in co-creating performance, as opposed to an inactive spectator position, involves singing, dancing, call-and-response, monetary gifts, and bodily associations with performers (Turner, 1982; Ukala, 2000). The effect of this kind of participatory dramaturgy is what Turner (1998) refers to as *communitas* (an increased sense of social bonding and common identity). Recent performance research argues that participatory spectatorship should be understood as a dramaturgical approach rather than the absence of theatrical discipline (Ndlovu, 2023). The performance of rituals in festivals such as Ore justifies the authority of rituals and finalises the performance experience, thereby supporting the collective authorship and communal ownership of theatrical meaning.

Documentation of indigenous performance has become a significant area of scholarly inquiry, particularly in contexts where festivals are being transformed by the forces of religion, urbanisation and digital media. Visual ethnography and audio-visual documentation allow a researcher to describe the multimodality of festival dramaturgy, such as movement, sound, spatial sequencing, and interaction, which cannot be adequately conveyed by text alone (Van der Ryn, 2019). There is the view that mediatisation can transform the aesthetics of performance in a way that alters modes of reception, thereby risking de-contextualisation and commodification. Podara (2021), however, insists that the distribution of performances on video platforms can help make

performances more visible and foster intergenerational transmission, especially if mediatisation is governed by strict ethical guidelines. It is the nature of these controversies that drives the need to develop theatre-informed methods of documentation that respect ritual boundaries while allowing rigorous scholarly analysis and cultural transmission.

Although scholarly attention paid to the Nigerian festival performance is quite significant, it is not evenly distributed. Most academic literature focuses on major festivals, while local festivals are under-documented and under-theorised, a pattern especially acute in the Niger Delta area (Diminyi et al., 2022). Moreover, few studies systematically use performance and ritual dramaturgical approaches. They instead prefer to focus on either heritage conservation or the tourism potential of festivals. This paper attempts to fill these gaps by providing a performance-based analysis of the Ore Festival as an indigenous theatre. The article hopes to enrich understanding of African festivals as well-structured theatrical systems grounded in native epistemologies by applying the lenses of ritual dramaturgy, African Total Theatre, and participatory performance theory.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Orientation and Design.

It is a qualitative, performance-based investigation involving interpretive performance scholarship and a visual ethnographic approach. The methodological position is based on the view that

the Ore Festival is an indigenous theatre system in which meanings are created through performance and ritual dramaturgy, rather than through predetermined dialogue or textual vignettes. The embodied praxis, spatial choreography, symbolic gesticulation and participatory involvement were therefore foregrounded as the major categories of empirical data. The ethno-methodological principles that inform the study focus on the importance of indigenous interpretations and situational comprehension. Extrinsic interpretive systems were replaced by an interest in how Uwheru participants organise, manifest, and legitimise performance enactments in relation to their cultural logic. The dramaturgical exegesis is grounded on epistemologies dictated by the communities to prevent exoticization and reductionist interpretations of ritual performance.

3.2 Performance as Primary Data

Performance, according to the long-established traditions of theatre and performance scholarship, is the primary source of data for this study. The analysis is mostly based on the audiovisual records of the 2020 Ore Festival, which document the entire performative cycle of the festival, including the preparation of rituals, invocation, communal procession, masquerade and face-queradism performance, symbolic confrontation, ritual peak, and communal reintegration. The given corpus of documentary allows studying dramaturgical sequence, choreography, space dramaturgy, costume semiotics, sound textures, and the nature of the interaction between the audience and the performers. The audiovisual data come especially

in handy when trying to analyse ritual dramaturgy because the ephemerality of performance, the dynamics of movements, the rhythmic coordination, spatial shifts, and the affective intensities cannot be adequately described in texts alone. As a result, video and photographic content are utilised not just as illustrative accompaniments but as the key analytical resources to the analysis of performance.

3.3 Additional Ethnographic Engagement.

To contextualise and make sense of the documented performances, the current study will involve semi-structured ethnographic interactions with key cultural participants, namely ritual custodians, masqueraders, elders, and festival planners. The results of these engagements provided emic accounts of ritual activities, including the roles of performance, symbolic objects, and spatial pathways, thereby enriching the dramaturgical analysis with indigenous interpretative perspectives. Instead of treating the interviews as a tool for expressing abstract opinions, the study uses them to explain the pragmatic reasoning that drives performance decisions. Responses to interviews were therefore examined directly in relation to the observed performance actions, thus allowing verbal explanations to clarify the embodied practice rather than replace it.

3.4 Sampling Strategy and Performance Roles.

Participants with first-hand experience of the Ore Festival were identified through a purposive sampling strategy. The criteria were based on participants' roles in rituals, their performance

duties, and custodial knowledge, rather than demographic representativeness. This methodology is in line with the traditions of performance-based research, which place more emphasis on interpretive richness than statistical generalisation. The most important categories of participants included ritual authorities (Ovie Ade and shrine custodians), masquerade and face-querade dancers, processional leaders, dancers, and community elders. These roles were approached analytically as separate types of performance, not separate biographies, and thus as an expression of the role-based dramaturgy of indigenous festival theatre.

3.5 Analysis of Data: Performance and Ritual Dramaturgy.

Qualitative performance analysis was used to examine the data, incorporating descriptive, dramaturgical, and interpretive methodologies. Audio-visual recordings were carefully viewed in several sessions to recognise:

- i. the stages of dramaturgy and interstitial transitions;
- ii. role differentiation and interpersonal interaction patterns;
- iii. space structures and that of a mobile staging;
- iv. figurative use of costume, objects, and physical decorations;
- v. musical and rhythmic organisation; and
- vi. modalities of audience engagement.

The named elements were theorised as part and parcel of ritual dramaturgy, as an organised series of ritualised performance acts that generate theatrical sense. The interpretive implications of this analysis were situated within an integrated theoretical framework that included

ethnomethodology, African Total Theatre, and the ritual-performance continuum, thereby yielding a consistent set of theoretical assumptions, methodological approach, and empirical results.

3.6 Methodological Limitations.

As a qualitative study with a performance-focused approach, it intentionally avoids making claims of statistical generalisation. The results are relative and tied to the cultural logic of the Uwheru Kingdom. However, the analytical rigour and methodological richness provide a framework for comparing other indigenous festivals and performance cultures in similar studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.0 Results

The video records, photographic records and ethnographic observations of the Ore Festival are documented as the empirical findings of this study. The results are organised into themes, and photographic personalities are then added as visual documentation to support further analysis of the performances.

4.1 Ore Festival as a Structured Aboriginal Performance System.

Examination of the Ore Festival reveals that the indigenous performance system is structured, despite the belief that it is chaotic. The festival follows a set of recognisable phases: ritual preparation, opening rituals, group procession, symbolic dramatic action, ritual climax and group reintegration. Each of these phases plays a

particular dramaturgical role. This structural coherence is graphically supported by repetitive spatial and action-based imagery in the photographic content, suggesting that the festival is grounded in an indigenous, familiar dramaturgical order rather than in a disorder of improvisation.

4.2 Masquerade and Facequerade Performance.

Masquerade and facequerade performances are also key theatre components of the Ore Festival. Two documented cases are Edjesio and Isheri, who played different dramaturgical roles. As shown in Figure 1, Edjesio masquerade reflects how the dressing style, body mask, and animated patterns of movement are used to convey playfulness and controlled chaos, thereby eliciting laughter and audience engagement. This masquerade serves as an intermediate figure between amusement and education.



Figure 1: Edjesio masquerade costume and movement during the Ore Festival. (Source: Nabofa, 2023)

On the other hand, Figure 2 depicts a masquerade of Isheri, whose body, with bareness and scant garments, and spear in hand, is deliberately made to frighten, especially young children. The performance tests bravery and emphasises group values of endurance and heroism.



Figure 2. Isheri facequerade enacting fear-inducing performance for social discipline. (Source: Nabofa, 2023)

These findings indicate that masquerade performance at the Ore Festival serves as an embodied pedagogy, in which social norms are passed on through theatrical practice rather than narration.

4.3 Performance and Role Differentiation.

The Ore Festival uses differentiated performance functions typified by costume, movement vocabulary and spatial position. These functions include ritual masters, militants, dancers, virgins, masqueraders and cult members. The image of Ade Cult and Ogberha members setting up the performance area (Figure 3) demonstrates how the

ritual posture and white clothes signify power, a higher order, and spiritual authority.



Figure 3. Ade Cult members and Ogberha are preparing the ritual-performance space. (Source: Nabofa, 2023)

Figure 4 depicts dances of young, attractive girls in staged performances. Their costumes and synchronised moves represent purity.



Figure 4. Young maidens performing a choreographed dance during the Ore Festival. (Source: Nabofa, 2023)

These graphic records testify to the deliberate distribution of performers' roles across the festival's dramaturgical spectrum.

4.4 Mobile Staging and Spatial Dramaturgy.

Mobile staging itself comes out as a major finding. The performance space is constantly changing as the procession passes through different spaces of the Uwheru Kingdom, making streets and open spaces the stage. In Figure 5, we see the collective

procession at work, with the performers and spectators moving in unison.



Figure 5. Festival procession demonstrating mobile staging and communal participation. (Source: Nabofa, 2023)

This observation supports the view that spatial dramaturgy is a narrative that records the history of migration and sustains the balance between the territories.

4.5 Props and Ritual Objects, Symbolic.

The basis of visual dramaturgy in the Ore Festival is found in its symbolic props. The animal skin (ENEGBE) is the most noticeable, and it signifies ancestral strength and continuity of history. Figure 6 documents its ritual carriage in procession and how it is handled so carefully that emphasis is made on its symbolism as well as its ritual importance.



Figure 6. Transportation of the ENEGBE (animal skin) as a symbolic ritual action. (Source: Nabofa, 2023).

There are other props, such as spears, cutlasses, and horse tails, which refer to Uwheru martial history but are used more for theatrical than combative purposes.

4.6 Costumes, Body painting and Visual Symbolism.

The Ore Festival uses costume and body adornment as a semiotic system. Spiritual purification, peace, and unity are represented by the use of white chalk and powders on participants' bodies. Figure 7 illustrates the implementation of collective identity through visual uniformity, as those who attended the festival carry white chalk during the procession to attest to their belonging to the collective.



Figure 7: Uwheru indigenes during the festival procession with white powder rubbed on their bodies. (Source: Nabofa, 2023). Use of white chalk and powder as symbols of unity and peace.

Figure 8 shows Ovie Ade in his complete costumes, with his layers of wrappers, red beads

and white body paint. This process is a symbol of supreme control over rituals and the spiritual focus of the festival.



Figure 8: Ovie Ade in ritual costume performing during the Ore Festival. (Source: Nabofa, 2023)

4.7 Denouement of Rituals and Mediation with the Spirit.

Dance and symbolic enactment are used to reach the highest point of the Ore Festival spiritual meditation. Figure 9 captures a choreographed spiritual dance that combines ritual motion and aesthetic performance performed by a priestess of Onidjo.



Figure 9: Onidjo Priestess performing ritual dance at the climax of the festival. (Source: Nabofa, 2023)

This scene affirms the existence of a spectrum of the ritual-performance in which the sacred activity

becomes an open spectacle but still has a spiritual impact.

4.8 Summary of Visual Findings

The photo evidence demonstrates that the Ore Festival:

Is an indigenous integrated theatre;

Facequerade and masquerade performances are dramaturgical agents;

The elements of mobile staging and spatial narrative utilised;

The message is coded with the help of costumes, props, and bodily symbolism; and

The festival combines ritual power and spectacle.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the Ore Festival is a holistic system of indigenous theatre typified by the ritual-based, mobile, and participatory dramaturgy. The results are consistent with the theoretical frameworks, specifically the ideas of African theatre as a multisensory totality developed by Soyinka (1990) and the ritual-performance axis described by Turner (1998). As a result, the investigation introduces a subtle definition of festival performance that goes beyond the visible aspect of ritual; rather, the festival is offered as a socially

grounded dramaturgy that creates and perpetuates social meaning.

The present findings provide one preliminary methodological conclusion. The use of video and photographic documents was essential for recording the multimodal nature of Ore's dramaturgy. The dramaturgical form of Ore includes processional sequencing, choreography, micro-interactions, sonic textures, and reciprocal interactions between audiences and performers, none of which can be properly transcribed into textual form. This methodology aligns with recent literature on visual ethnography and performance-as-archive, which holds that only ethically informed audio-visual practices are capable of preserving embodied repertoires in such a way that can be transferred to communities and academic users (Van der Ryn, 2019; Podara, 2021). By the Ore documentation, the careful audio-visual archiving will not only document the existence, but also the style, rhythm of time, relationship clues, and dramaturgical connotation, and add to the repertoire of the festival without replacing the live performance.

The findings could be contextualised in the light of mediatization processes that have already started to shift the aesthetics of masquerade and festival in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and beyond. Surveys of Ndokwa and other deltaic masquerade practices reveal that enhanced visual circulations via local television, YouTube, and micro-social spaces induce a hybrid aesthetic reception. The performers adjust the costumes and rhythms to the

camera screens; the audience watches the shows on stage and from a distance; new forms of expression develop at the border between ritual grammar and media norms (Epochi-Olise & Omoera, 2022; Okeke, 2023). These mediatisations have complicated consequences for Ore. On the one hand, they are able to boost cultural pride, promote responsible cultural tourism, and supply the youth and communities in the diaspora with pedagogical content. Conversely, de-contextualised clips have the potential to misrepresent the meaning of a ritual and promote spectacle-driven performances instead of rituals that are practical (Epochi-Olise and Omoera, 2022). Therefore, the policy and ethical dilemma is the development of documentation and presentation guidelines indicating the indigenous priorities and providing favourable presence.

The strategic position of the selective public presentation and ethically managed tourism is outlined herein. Festivals can also produce livelihood without diminishing the core rituals (AR and MR) and the audio-visual archiving can produce new channels of knowledge distribution about festivals. These channels serve educational and archival purposes as long as the communities retain control over the presentation modalities, as stressed in the sustainability literature (Soini and Dessein, 2016; Diminyi et al., 2022). The performances targeted at visitors in the Ore context, whether performed or happening on a festival day, need to be negotiated to ensure it does

not infringe the timing of rituals, limits access to sacred performances and provision of clear interpretative frameworks that will put the visitors into perspective. The extractive propensity that is usually linked to the tourism spectacle can be mitigated through guides and local capacity building programs such as revenue sharing schemes.

There are technical and curatorial innovations that could be considered. The current progress in the immersive technologies (VR/AR/MR) and audio-visual archiving offer new options of mediating the festival knowledge through combinations of educating and preserving the knowledge and minimizing the exposure of the sensitive ritual practices (Zhang, Wan-Yahya & Sanmugam, 2024). VR reconstructions can make staged signed sequences pedagogically; graphical metadata can mark out between public and confidential information; and rights-managed repositories can ensure community control. Technology is however not neutral or universally available as the literature warns. Therefore, technical interventions should be coupled with training, local infrastructure and community governance to avoid digital colonialism and exploitation of the data. The custodians of Ore Festival would need a guideline that outlines digitisation of what, accessibility concerns, and management of revenues.

The conceptualisation of dramaturgy in the context of African theatre and festival studies has theoretical implications of the performance analysis. Ore Festival uses strategies of cyclical

sequencing, role typologies, mobile staging, and participatory spectatorship to develop a more expanded concept of dramaturgy with focus on process, rhythm, and relational authorship instead of linear narrative and authorial scripting. This is in line with the views by Soyinka (1990) that African theatricality needs to be understood in its own terms, and through its modes of expression which are integrated. It also welcomes the performance scholars to come up with analytical instruments to pre-empt the temporality, spatial choreography, and co-authorship (Effiom & Abeeb, 2025). In this way, the work can be added to the growing body of literature that attempts to theorise non-proscenium drama conceptually, rigorously and culturally resonant (Sonning, 2024; Effiom & Abeeb, 2025).

Overall, the Ore Festival is an excellent example of how ritual dramaturgy and indigenous theatricalism may be recorded, examined, and validated in a manner that acknowledges local meaning-making and reacts to modern-day mediations. The challenge among the scholars, then, is not keeping the tradition under amber, but rather working with the custodians to come up with documentation and presentation systems that will carry on the living dramaturgy of the festival to the next generations.

5. Conclusions

This article shows that the Ore Festival is a vibrant indigenous theatre. The recognition of festivals as a theatrical genre greatly expands African

performance studies and legitimises indigenous aesthetics based on their distinctive features. Moral recordings and community-based interpretation become crucial measures for maintaining African festival performances in a changing world.

Recommendations

Based on the performance-focused analysis developed in this research, the following suggestions are offered to transform knowledge of performance and ritual dramaturgy in the Ore Festival into a sustainable practice. These suggestions are based on the study's main argument that theatre-informed documentation and community agency could work in unison to maintain the vibrancy of indigenous festival performance without subjecting it to other market logic.

The study proposes establishing a community-owned Ore Festival archive in collaboration with the ritual custodians, performers, and other members of the local community. Such an archive will need to be guided by a well-defined set of protocols that define the scope of documentation and metadata standards, access privileges and usage conditions. Such an audio-visual archive would be capable of holding records of ritual sequences, masquerade performances, space dramaturgy, and interpretive narratives with regard to cultural limitations and indigenous epistemologies.

The study recommends the formation of community-based documentation workstations, with a focus on community training of youths as custodians and arbiters of culture. These training sessions should focus on applied skills in audiovisual recording, basic archiving, and critical narrative, so that younger generations can record performances within the festival's cultural rationale. The integration of documentation into the community can convey dramaturgical knowledge across generations and protect it from misrepresentation by outsiders.

This paper also suggests that interpretive media, such as multilingual guides and short documentary films, should be created to put the work of Ore Festival into perspective in order to respect and enable respectful viewers. It is because the explanation of ritual importance, dramaturgical form and group significance are more important than spectacle in such materials. Therefore, effective interpretive materials can be used to foster knowledge among all visitors, researchers, and diaspora viewers without compromising the authenticity of the ritual performance.

Finally, the article recommends the careful development of small-scale, community-managed cultural tours that align with the ritual calendar and the festival's performance logic. These efforts should continue to be locally controlled, small in scope and focused on community good rather than commercial growth. Taken in moderation, these tours can offer small-scale economic benefits, cultural pride, and performance practice.

These recommendations, combined, will realise the main idea of this research: that documentation created in theatrical practice and maintained by the community agency can be a two-fold approach to indigenous performance preservation. With documentation and community control working together, Ore Festival may remain a functioning indigenous theatrical machine and stay strong against outside forces and against being reduced to market-driven spectacle.

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Ethical Statement

The ethical framework used in this study goes beyond institutional requirements by taking into account indigenous cultural procedures. The consent to document and further interpret by scholars was informed by consultative engagements with the community leadership and custodians of the festival. The writing of sensitive ritual practices was confined to instances in which a clearance had been granted. Material considered restricted was not to be made public. Audiovisual material is utilised only for strict scholarly analysis, pedagogical purposes, and culturally appropriate museum records. The ethics of respectful visibility are upheld in the study, with the understanding that not everything related to indigenous performance is meant to circulate freely. This methodology is in line with the current best practices of performance research and visual ethnography.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declared no potential or competing conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and publication of the article.

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