

## The Significance of Five Major Festivals in Nigeria

Winifred E. Akoda

Department of History and International Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria

### Abstract

This paper examines the origin, nature and significance of some major festivals in parts of Nigeria. Among the festivals being studied are Argungu, Igue, Ofala, Leboku and Osun-Oshogbo festivals. One common feature of these festivals is that, they are usually characterized by long periods of merry making. The duration or interval of this celebrations performed, however, varies from society to society and from one event to another. Their significance cut across religious, social and economic factors. The research concludes by encouraging the organizers of the various festivals to ensure the continuous survival of these events as a means of preserving African values and culture, enhancing group re-union, promoting the existence of communities and encouraging business and tourism.

**Key words:** African values; Festivals in Nigeria; Argungu; Igue; Ofala; Lboku; Osun-Oshogbo

### Introduction:

Nigerians love to celebrate, and festivals are occasions characterized by much celebration. There is virtually no Nigerian ethnic group devoid of an annual festival. Birth and death, adolescence, adulthood, kingship, planting and harvesting, and even victory in warfare are all commemorated through festivals.

Festivals are a people's identity constituting part of the traditional and religious activities. For this reason, rituals, incantations, retreats and sacrifices in some sacred places almost always form part of the celebrations. Festivals are also social events characterized by long processions of people drumming, dancing, singing and making merry. Masquerades, gaily dressed men and women, irrespective of religious affliction add colour and grandeur to such occasions.

Nigerians have many festivals, some of which are observed annually and others after a longer duration. For example, the Argungu Fishing Festival of Northern Nigeria is an annual event while the Omabe festival of the Nsukka people is held every two years. Their duration also differs from one society to another. While some festivals last a day or two, others like the *Eyo* festival of Lagos and the *Leboku* of the Ugep in Cross River State last for two weeks. Regardless of these differences, it is evident that one plausible factor that binds Nigerians to their society are their various festivals. These festivals serve as a source of cohesion and continuity for the diverse Nigerian ethnic complexities. From the Argungu Fishing Festival, to the Leboku Festival and the Igue Festival in the South and from the Osun-Oshogbo in the West to the Ofala in the South-East, all predate the arrival of Europeans into Nigeria. Some Nigerian festivals are merely social events like the *Sharo* of the Fulani, yet many are religiously inspired, like the Osun-Oshogbo festival which is performed as a mark of honour to the Osun River goddess.

It is against this backdrop that the next section examines five major Nigerian festivals celebrated annually. They are the Argungu Fishing festival of the Kebbi people in Northern Nigeria, the Osun-Oshogbo Festival of Western Nigeria, the Leboku Festival of the Yakurr in Southern Nigeria, Igue Festival of the Binis and the Ofala Festival of the Onitsha people in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

### The Argungu Fishing Festival:

Sixty-four kilometers from Sokoto, the seat of Nigeria's Caliphate is the town of Argungu where the annual fishing festival is held between February and March. The Argungu Fishing Festival is always one of Nigeria's oldest and most celebrated festivals in Northern Nigeria. Indeed, very few festivals have attracted so many national and international acclaim and elicited so much support from the government of Nigeria as this Festival.

The Argungu Fishing Festival which spans several days marks the end of the harvest and the beginning of the fishing season in Argungu, a riverside town presently located in Kebbi State of Nigeria. Its origin can be traced to the sixteenth century, the era of great *Kanta*, founder of Kebbi (Nigeria Magazine, Dec., 1969/Feb., 1970; Vol 103; P. 573). In 1934 the Sultan of Sokoto at the time, Dan Muazu paid a historic visit to Argungu town ([www.onlinenigeria.com/festival](http://www.onlinenigeria.com/festival)). As a mark of honour to the Sultan, the Emir of Argungu, Mallam Mohammodu Sama organized this grand fishing festival which later became an annual occasion. Initially, the Festival was not celebrated every year, but from the 1960's, it became an annual event attracting both national and international presence.

Argungu, the town whose name was obtained from the festival, was originally called Birnin Lelaba Dan Baden. It was later renamed Argungu from the Kebbi saying "Ar! Mu yi gungu"- a fishing expression meaning, "let us get together in one place" (Nigeria Magazine, Dec 1968/Feb 1970, Vol. 103; p. 573).

The Argungu Fishing show has been held in the same location for many years- the Northern end of the town where the river sweeps through a rice field (Nigeria Magazine, Dec 1968/Feb 1970, Vol. 103; p.573). For a whole year preceding the festival, fishing is prohibited on the river, venue of the event, and traditional rituals are performed to prevent all the fish in the water from migrating to neighbouring waters ([http://www.africa-ata.org/Nigeria\\_3.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/Nigeria_3.htm)). On the eve of the main show, the *Homa*, traditional chief of the fishermen, and the priest of the *Kebbawa* people (from Kebbi) along with the *Sarki Ruwa*, chief of the river and *Jirgi* the chief of the ferrymen arrive at the riverside. There, sacrifices of honey, rice, flour, a she-goat, chickens, onions, paw-paw, watermelon, kola nuts and milk, are offered by being thrown in the river (Nigeria Magazine, 1981: Vol. 136, p. 33). In addition, supplications are made to the gods and ancestral spirits for peace, good health, progress and good fortune in the years to come (Nigeria Magazine, 1981: Vol. 136, p. 33).

At dawn, young men numbering about 5,000, equipped with only two hand nets with hooks at both ends, and a large gourd assemble in a line around the river bank. Once the signal is given, the fishermen dive excitedly into the waters with their nets aiming for the biggest catch. This is usually done amidst singing and drumming from canoes filled with local musicians, in praise of the participants. At the end of the show, all kinds of fish are trapped in the nets; examples include the Huge Nile Perch weighing up to 63kg, and the Balloon Fish (<http://www.e-nigeria.net/festivals.html>). This festival which lasts between forty-five minutes and one hour, has today incorporated many other attractions like the *Kabanci* display, craft exhibition, traditional wrestling and boxing, agricultural fair, canoe racing and diving competitions.

Argungu, the festival town has over the past years, undergone modernization especially with the involvement of the state and federal government. This has impacted positively on the erstwhile riverside town. The town which lacked infrastructural development, today, prides itself with the presence of hotels, water reservoirs, banks, clinics and transportation to satisfy the needs of its teeming guests that visit annually. It has also become a tourist haven, attracting presidents, ministers, government personnel, businessmen, artisans and many more. People in the community, young and old, rich and poor, male and

female from within and outside Nigerian have in addition seized the opportunity to socialize with one another.

One other impact of the Argungu Fishing Festival lies in its ability to create wealth for the local people who thrive on the sales of relics and souvenirs associated with the festival, foodstuff and water as well as transporters who convey guests to and from the venue. The importance of the Argungu Fishing festival to Nigerians cannot be in doubt. It is an avenue for social entertainment, economic enterprise and religious rejuvenation.

### **The Osun-Oshogbo Festival**

The Osun-Oshogbo Festival is an annual event which is held in August and lasts for about eight days. It is held in Oshogbo, a town situated in Osun State, South West of Nigeria. It can be traced to the founding of Oshogbo town. The festival commemorates and renews the pact between the Osun goddess and Oba Laroye, the founder of Oshogbo so that the town continues to enjoy the protection of the goddess (Interview with Aderogba, Ajayi, Trader/Osun devotee, 52, Iyana Ipaja, Lagos, 8/12/2010). Osun is a Yoruba goddess and the water spirit of love, marriage and gold which possess unlimited powers (<http://guides.hotelbook.com/sisp/index.htm>). She is also known to be the goddess of fertility and invoked by women during difficult pregnancies, and for children.

History recounts that Oba Laroye, the king of Oshogbo made a pact with Osun when he offered sacrifices at the river bank, and in response, a mighty fish (Osun's messenger) appeared and spat some water into his hands (Nigeria Magazine, 1981, Vol. 136, P. 35). This sacred water was said to have made barren women who bathed in it fertile. Although the ancient shrine or sacred grove of Osun is located in Oshogbo, her devotees come from within and outside Nigeria to do obeisance annually to this goddess referred to as "Venus of the African Continent" ([http://www.africa-ata.org/Nigeria\\_3.htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/Nigeria_3.htm)). From Cuba, West Indies, Brazil and North America, Osun devotees arrive in great numbers during the month of August. In 2005, an Obatala priest from Cuba, Manuel Mendive Hoyo was in Oshogbo during the festival to pay homage for the second time to the Osun goddess (True Love magazine, 11, November 2005, p. 44).

The Osun- Oshogbo Festival is actually the climax of a series of other festivals like *Egungun*, *Sango*, *Ifa*, *Obatala* and *Ogun*. It is usually accompanied with drumming, dancing merry-making and a long procession of people making their way to the Osun grove from the palace. Sacrifices are offered to the goddess by the *Ataoja*- Chief priest of the deity – and other worshippers for peace, harmony and protection. The Festival commences with sanitation of the town and progresses to other activities such as sacrifices to the late wives of the pasts *Obas* (Kings). The last point is significant because Osun herself was believed to be the favourite wife of *Sango*, the god of thunder who was an *Oba* in his lifetime. The fifth day of the festival is significant as on this day, the *Ataoja* proceeds to the riverside to renew his pact with Osun (Nigeria Magazine, 1981, Vol. 136, p. 35). He is followed by a large procession of people among them, barren women who advance to the river bank to worship the goddess and seek divine assistance. The women invoke the goddess and drink the water believing that Osun will grant them children. A beehive of activities accompanies the Festival, and the town of Oshogbo is usually crowded with devotees adorned in white garments, a sign of peace and purity. The climax of the Osun-Oshogbo Festival is usually the appearance of the *Arugba*, the teenage virgin from the royal family who carries on her head, the sacrifice to the goddess covered with a thick orange cloth. The *Arugba* is believed to be divinely appointed by the goddess who makes her decision known through *Ifa* Oracle. People wait anxiously to have a glimpse of this teenage virgin who is accompanied closely by body guards and *Iya Osun*, the Chief priestess of Osun. The *Arugba* is usually under a powerful spell, one who gives her strength for her journey and the rigours of the day(

Interview with Aderogba Ajayi, Trader/ Osun devotee, Iyana Ipaja, Lagos, 8/12/2010) and although she may feel weak, once in a while, chants of incantation revive her.

Sacrifices are offered on arrival at the sacred grove, and the *Arugba* return again to the grove to make prophecies for the year (Nigeria Magazine, 1981, Vo. 136, p. 35). While in a trance, other priests and priestesses prostrate before her, for it is believed that Osun is speaking through her.

It is important to emphasize that the Osun –Oshogbo Festival has brought about an awareness of the need to preserve African values and culture. In realization of this fact, the festival has been largely witnessed by Africans in the Diaspora. It has, in addition, served as a focal point for the people of Oshogbo, Osun devotees, artists and tourists from far and wide (Interview with Aderogba Ajayi, Trader/Osun devotee, Iyana Ipaja, Lagos, 8/12/2010). Aside the unity created by this festival, the gathering has enabled the indigenes to do brisk business by selling goats, chicken, pigeons, and other sacrificial items to Osun worshippers for sacrifice. Moreover, it is gratifying to note that the Osun Sacred Grove has been included in the world Heritage list thereby enhancing its tourist image.

In spite of the above, the Osun-Oshogbo Festival has been influenced by modern trends, for it has not only become rowdy, but an avenue for politicking. Don Berber, one of the Nigeria’s foremost photographers who attended the festival in 1979, 2004 and in 2005, maintained that, in 1979, “it was a solemn affair then, you could come and see people praying”. In 2005, he asserted that, “the essence of the Festival is completely lost now. It has become a platform for noise making and politics”(True Love magazine, 11, November 2005, p. 45).

Regardless of this observation, the Osun-Oshogbo festival continues to be an annual ritual attracting people from diverse background and a symbol of identity for the Oshogbo people and Nigeria in general.

### **The Ugep Leboku Festival**

Yam is a crop widely celebrated, particularly by the people of southern Nigeria. The crop occupies a premier position among other crops in the lives of the traditional communities and constitutes the peoples most important diet. Yam, referred to as the king of crops is very sacred to the southern communities. Its importance is such that in the past, thieves stopped stealing the crop to avoid a death sentence (Nigeria Magazine, 1981, Vol. 136, p. 28).

Leboku is a yam festival celebrated by the Yakurr people of Cross River in the southern part of Nigeria to thank the gods of the land for tending the yams and getting them ready for food. It is an annual festivity which is held for fourteen days during the month of August. The festival is characterized by carnivals and other social events, as well as religious rites in the various shrines located in parts of Ugep town, home to a large number of Yakurr people (Interview with Okoi Ibiang, lecturer Egbizum-Ugep 01/03/2011).

The Festival commences on the first day with “material fetching”. At dawn, the women walk excitedly to their farms to harvest the new yams while the men (Palm wine tappers) leave to tap palm wine. As both groups depart for their designated chores, selected men are stationed along all routes leading into the town to wait for both parties. On return, every female deposits one new yam and piece of wood with the road collectors while the men do the same with a specified amount of palm wine. In the afternoon, these items, yam, wood and palm wine are conveyed to the palace of the Paramount Chief where all the *Yabol* (chiefs) and *Bi-ina* (High Priests) are gathered in preparation for the thanksgiving and religious rituals. The religious rites occur only at night and out of the sight of everyone except the participants. The high point of this

exercise is when the *Obol Lupon* (Paramount ruler) picks out a splinter from the fire and hands it to an *Ina* who in turn bears this torch around the town. This signifies the commencement of the *Leboku* festival.

The second day is dedicated to merry-making which is held in the Paramount Chief's domain. A ritual dance, *Ekoi*, is performed as early as 4:00am until 9:00am when they take a break. Entertainment continues during the day in the presence of the chief priests, and the guests, after which people are allowed to dispose of their yams, eat or sell them (Interview with Utum Bassey, Trader, Ijiman – Ugep, 24/02/2011).

At about 2.00pm, talking drums begin to announce the arrival of the different batches of priests. The last to be ushered into the arena by the talking drums is the chief of one of the secret societies who is seated conspicuously at the center of the dance floor. Intermittently, he stares at the large magical charm lying on the ground before him, occasionally picking it up, he walks around and swings it before returning to his seat to neutralize all other harmful charms brought by any individual (Interview with Utum Bassey, Trader, Ijiman-Ugep, 24/02/2011). Dancing and drumming continues, and at the end of it all, the *Ekoi* dance gives way to *Ekeledi* dance, a popular female dance. Young women file in group and dance around the town towards evening.

The third day is also for merry making and friendly visits as young maidens, adorned in beautiful attires walk around the town to the admiration of the young unmarried men and exchange gifts with their admirers. The fourth day is a popular female dance, which serves as an opportunity for young men to choose their would-be-brides. The dance is restricted to young unmarried women in their early twenties (Interview with Okoi Ibiang, lecturer, Egbizum – 01/03/2011). These girls are gracefully costumed in a pair of *Liman*-spiral leggings of heavy brass which stretches from the ankles to the knees. They are also decorated with various types of beads, *ezigiza*, which are worn on the waist. Their hair is worn in plaits or left flowing with peacock feathers, *njelikanda-se*, tucked into the hair. Artistic drawings made with chalk, cam wood and indigo are reflected on the trunk and on the hand, a bracelet – *Leniga*- made from elephant tusks is worn. A horse tail is held by every dancer, as they dance in circles singing and praising the gods for enriching their harvest. This celebration continues on the fifth day, and on the six day, magical displays are held. This is also a day when people make jest of themselves, playing pranks- *yekpi*- on each other. The day is also set aside for soothsaying, and making of predictions and revelations.

The seventh day of the festival marks the closing ceremony. Elderly women, convene with their leader carrying a carved calabash containing a potion called *Libowe* ( Interview with Utum Bassey, Trader, Ijiman-Ugep, 24/02/2011). With this they move around the town, and sprinkle water intermittently while declaring the festival closed.

The *Leboku* festival is very significant in the life of an Ugep man. Its major objective is religious, that is, to show gratitude to the gods for the abundant blessings of good harvest and fertility bestowed on the community. Besides its religious character, the festival is a form of social entertainment for the Ugep people and the innumerable guests that participate in it. Correspondingly, the traditional beliefs and customs of the Yakurr people of Ugep are exhibited when the *Leboku* is celebrated. Differences are forgotten and bonds of friendship are renewed.

Interestingly, this New Yam festival is celebrated in almost every community in South-Eastern Nigeria and parts of the South-South- although with some variations. For instance, among the Igbo, the yams are cooked with palm oil, water and chicken (Nigeria Magazine, 1981, Vol. 136, p. 28) and eaten publicly. In addition, only dishes of yam are served since the festival is symbolic of the abundance of the produce ([www.motherland.nigeria.com/festivals](http://www.motherland.nigeria.com/festivals)). The oldest man of the community or the king eats the first yam

because of the belief that their position gives them the privilege of being intermediaries between the communities and the gods of their land.

To assert that the *Leboku* festival has become a focal point for tourism is to state the obvious, although westernization has taken its toll on the festival. Today, attractions like beauty contests, “Miss Leboku” and “Mr. Leboku” best farmer of the year, wrestling matches and the like have been co-opted into the festival to enrich its content. Cash awards and gift of cars for the contestants have made it more sophisticated, with the Cross River State government being one of the major sponsors of the festival.

### The Igue Festival

*Igue* is a ritual and traditional ceremony among the *Binis* of South-South Nigeria held annually to show gratitude to the gods for a successful year and to usher in good luck in the coming year. The ceremony is also a period used to ward off evil spirits and bring blessings to the *Oba* (paramount ruler) his palace, harem and subjects (<http://www.edofolks.com/html/pub142.htm>).

*Igue* festival is believed to have been initiated by *Oba* Ewuare the Great who reigned in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (<http://www.dawodu.net/edocerem.htm>). The festival has been celebrated for more than five centuries. Allan Ryder, author of *Benin and the Europeans* states how the Spanish people who came to Benin in 1651, had difficulty seeing the *Oba* because he was marking the *Igue* festival (<http://www.edonation.net/igue.htm>). This is a pointer to the fact that the festival predates the coming of the Europeans. The *Igue* festival has been described as the oldest cultural festival in Ancient Benin for peace and prosperity in the New Year ([http://www.africa-ata.org/nigeria\\_3htm](http://www.africa-ata.org/nigeria_3htm)). The ceremony lasts for seven days and is performed in the month of December. Typical of Nigerian festivals, the occasion features religious rituals and entertainment in the form of dancing and singing. This period is one of the rare occasions the *Oba* is seen publicly by his subjects and confers on some deserving individuals prestigious titles. Besides the conferment of titles, the *Oba* pays homage to the shrines accompanied by some chiefs (<http://www.edofolks.com/html/pub142.htm>) during this period.

The festival features Bini chiefs, members of the harem and the royal family in their rich traditional accoutrements, paramount of which is the women’s artistic hair-do adorned with choral beads. The presence of *Esakpaide* and *Ohogwo* traditional dances as well as the display of the royal insignia- *Eben* – by the chiefs while paying homage to the *Oba* amidst dancing (<http://www.edofolks.com/html/pub142.htm>) adds flavor to the festival.

The ceremony made public to the people through a town crier begins with the greeting –*Otue*– whereby members of the various palace societies together with important Bini chiefs pay homage to the *Oba*.

He presents his guests with Kola nuts who in turn bless him and his household. The *Oba* is then entertained by various dance troops in which he participates. The second day is dedicated to religious rites and begins with the anointing of the *Oba*’s head by the chief priest with chalk- signifying purity, and the blood of animals sacrificed during the festival (<http://www.dawodu.net/edocerem.htm>). This is performed in the presence of other chiefs and palace societies. The chiefs then dance to the *Oba* and his family, holding their royal insignia –*eben*- (<http://www.edofolks.com/html/pub142.htm>).

On the third day, members of the royal family take part in the traditional rites, after which the public take their turn three days later (<http://www.dawodu.net/edocerem.htm>). The festival dance also called *Igue* dance is a traditional dance performed by important Bini chiefs to honour the *Oba*. The later usually sits dressed in his ceremonial clothes while they pay homage and express their loyalty to the monarch. Every

participating chief, leaves home robed in his traditional regalia with two escorts beside him, each holding his hand to and from the palace (<http://www.edofolks.com/html/pub14.htm>).

The Igwe Festival is one of the festivals that has maintained its original features and resisted external influences. This does not come as a surprise as the Bini people have a highly conservative traditional institution, exemplified by this festival, described as the heart and soul of Edo nationalism.

By celebrating the Igwe annually, the Binis have strengthened their resolve to uphold and protect their traditional institutions while leaving a legacy for on coming generations.

### **The Ofala-Onitsha Festival**

The Igbo, the second largest ethnic group inhabiting South-Eastern Nigeria is made up of various sub-groups, among them, the Onitsha. The group today referred to as the Western Igbo traces their ancestry to the Benin Kingdom and they possess a rich tradition akin to the Binis. One of the surviving legacies passed on by their ancestors is the Ofala Festival which is annually celebrated to commemorate the anniversary of the *Obi*- ruler of Onitsha.

The Ofala Festival is the most important cultural event of the Onitsha people spanning over seven hundred years (<http://www.newswatchngr.com/index>). The festival, also referred to as the Festival of Colours is marked by various Igbo towns and cities, and serves as an occasion for family re-union and merry making (<http://www.vanguardngr.com/content/view/18353/45>). The indigenous Onitsha people and their neighbours, local tourists, and Africans in the diaspora congregate in the commercial nerve centre of Igbo land to observe the Ofala, a ceremony for elderly men and women. In an interview with a daily newspaper in October 2008, an Onitsha chief, Ogbuefi Johnson Okolo Adibua remarked that *Ofala* was not a child's play or some festival for the underage. Rather, it is a festival for elderly men and women who have come of age (<http://www.vanguardngr.com/content/view/18353/45>) and celebrated with enthusiasm.

Many activities transpire during this festival, one of which is the visit of the *Obi* (chief) to his subjects. This social contact between the *Obi* and his subjects represents one of the rare occasions the *Obi* interacts with the public (<http://www.newswatchngr.com/index>). The religious relevance of the *Ofala* is brought to the fore when the *Obi*, in solemn retreat, invokes the ancestral spirits and gods of fertility during the ceremony. Social events are numerous and include age-grade dancing competition, homage to the *Obi* and a long procession of participants through the commercial city of Onitsha.

The festival is held annually in the month of October, and although it is a weeklong celebration, it climaxes in two days. In preparation for the occasion, streets are cleared and decorated. The ceremony commences at midday with the arrival of guests at *Ime Obi*, the venue of the event. The *Obi* and his red cap chiefs, *Ndichie*, graciously arrive in order of seniority – a pointer to the fact that among Africans, age is highly respected. Adorned in colourful traditional outfit and caps, the *Ndichie* add flavor to the ceremony by displaying their magnificent dance steps while pledging their loyalty to the *Obi*.

The *Obi* whose arrival attracts cannon gun shots acknowledges cheers from the crowd. Adorned in a long but colourful hat of Ostrich feathers, he is greeted with shouts of '*Abgogidi*'. He addresses the public, after which *egwuota* the royal drums are played. Dancing takes place with the *Ndichie* leading and thereafter, the *Obi* himself dances graciously to the drum beat before returning to his throne (<http://www.vanguardngr.com/content/view/18353/45>).

On the next day of the *Ofala*, more than fifty age-grades entertain the crowd to the people's admiration. Female members of the *Obi*'s family adorned with expensive elephant tusks and horse tails across their shoulders, parade majestically from their houses to the *Ime Obi* while acknowledging cheers from the crowd (<http://www.vanguardngr.com/content/view/18353/45>). They are dressed flamboyantly with hats decorated with eagle and ostrich feathers.

The peak of the *Ofala* festival is reached when the prime-minister leads the *Ndichie* to receive and introduce the *Obi* to the public amidst cheers.

The *Ofala* Festival represents the rich cultural heritage of the Onitsha people assembling together people of diverse cultural groups in a joyous celebration. It has over the years witnessed the presence of traditional rulers, from within and outside Onitsha, politicians, ministers, businessmen and tourist alike. The festival avails the community time to evaluate relationships with neighbouring towns, friends and enemies alike. *Ofala* has remained a ceremony for the elderly in spite of modernization, although social entertainment like football matches are now included as side attractions to further spice up the festivities. Similarly, the role of modern telecommunication networks as sponsors of the occasion has reduced the financial obligations of the organizers to the barest minimum. For instance, the 2008 *Ofala* held on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October was sponsored by the MTN giant whose representative remarked, "Nigerians are very passionate about their cultural heritage festivals. That is why we invest so much every year in promoting this aspect of people's lives" (<http://www.vanguardngr.com/content/view/18353/45>).

There is no doubt that the *Ofala* festival is a home coming of some sort for the Onitsha people. In spite of the influx of extraneous cultures into the society, this festival of colours still provides the link between the Onitsha people and their ancestral roots, and will forever remain cherished by its people as their heritage.

### **Significance of Nigerian Festivals/Conclusion**

Nigerian festivals renew the relationship between man and his ancestral roots. Their significance also encompasses all facets of human existence- religious, social and economic. Religious rituals performed during festivities preserve the life of the community thereby enhancing continuity. Interestingly, most Nigerian festivals encompass religious rituals without which the festival is incomplete. Socially, festivals are means of entertainment and relaxation, a channel for re-union, making new friends and adding more contacts. It is also a medium of showing off the rich culture of the people – their identity. Economically, festivals encourage enterprise through the sales of souvenirs, sacrificial items, food and drinks to participants which serves as a source of wealth creation for the local populace and their environs. Nigerian festivals such as Argungu, Igue, Ofala, Leboku and Osun-Oshogbo festivals portray all these traits and continue to be appreciated by all who love traditions.

It is the contention of this research that these festivals should be upheld as a means of promoting tourism in Nigeria as well as the continuous existence of the communities in which they are practiced.

**Works Cited**

Nigerian Magazine, Dec 1969/Feb 1970, Vol. 103

Nigerian Magazine, 1981/ Vol. 136

True Love West Africa, 11, Nov., 2005

[www.africa-ata.org](http://www.africa-ata.org)

[www.onlinenigeria.com/festivals](http://www.onlinenigeria.com/festivals)

[www.e-nigeria.net](http://www.e-nigeria.net)

[www.guides.hotelbook](http://www.guides.hotelbook)

[www.motherlandnigeria.com](http://www.motherlandnigeria.com)

[www.edonation.net](http://www.edonation.net)

[www.dawodu.net](http://www.dawodu.net)

[www.newswatchngr.com](http://www.newswatchngr.com)

[www.vanguardnigeria.com](http://www.vanguardnigeria.com)

[www.thisdayonline.com](http://www.thisdayonline.com)

Interview with Utum Basse, Trader, 54, Ijiman-Ugep, 24/02/2011.

Interview with Aderogba Ajayi, Trader/Osun devotee, Iyana Ipaja, Lagos, 8/12/2010.

Interview with Okoi Ibiang, Lecturer, Ugep, 01/03/2011.