



Anambra Book and Creativity Festival: Partaking in the Pleasures and Rewards of Culture and Knowledge Production

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What do book festivals do for writers and readers? What do they do for communities as a whole? In other words, why do book festivals matter? Books have always been harbingers of conversations and debates, friendships and rivalries and with the instrumentality of book festivals, more excitement, keenness and imagination will be generated to bring together readers of all kinds at intervals for enriching exchanges. Book festivals create an atmosphere which fosters support for local artists and businesses, support for local readers and love for reading in children. But the Anambra Book and Creativity Festival encompasses more than the above stated gains as it has over the years given the Fine arts, Music, Poetry, Fashion design and various genres of art, equal pedestal for a holistic development of the arts.

Writing on the multi-dimensional concepts of the traditional Igbo festival complex, Meki Nzewi divided it into two parts, some which are realized as visual manifestations and others that are not so easily distilled from a mere superficial observation of the time-space panorama of a festival scenario. Since its inception, The Anambra Book and Creativity Festival (ANBUKRAFT) has achieved these two aspects of Igbo festival format within the context of a modern society. Founded in 2012, and now in its 5th edition, the festival has through these years been a means of bringing together the various aspects of art under the umbrella of one ceremonial celebration.

At ANBUKRAFT festivals there is usually a persistent desire for the injection of the emotions of appreciation, reverence, and love for knowledge and culture, which are the fundamental forces in education as in life. This explains why the festival reserves a special place for the young, represented by students who are usually well accommodated in the festival's activities. The accommodation of the young helps the festival fulfill the second part of Nzewi's classification, which is the ideational perspective aimed at incorporating the values, philosophies and principles imbedded in the manifested actions and symbols of the festival. The focus on the young may also be anchored on the grim realities in our nation's educational sector as can be noted in the World Culture Score Index recently released, which showed

the result of its survey on world's reading countries in which Nigeria was adjudged as unreading. The result of this survey becomes frightening when we compare or contemplate the unending researches and discoveries that spring up yearly from institutions in the same country. This situation casts dark shadows on the quality of most of those researches as well as the intellectual capacity of the students and graduates that are churned out annually. Thus, one finds a correlation between the prevalent lack of reading culture and the culture of plagiarism that is going on among researchers in the country; which could ultimately lead to intellectual bankruptcy in the nearest future.

How did our nation get to this abysmal level? The factors responsible may be seen from two perspectives. One is the prevalent socio-economic conditions in the country which manifests among the citizenry in the form of the pursuit of crude materialism in almost all strata of the society. Another reason responsible for the high level of apathy exhibited towards reading and learning is the inverted reward system whereby one's excellent performance in aptitude tests is placed behind patronage. The marginalized persons without "connections," are seldom considered for employment or appointment. This produces a feeling of despondency which leads to loss of interest in focused learning. The second approach to understand the dwindling reading culture in Nigeria is from the angle of inadequate yearly national allocations to the educational sector which falls sharply below the recommended United Nation's budget provisions for education. These have exacerbated conditions and have led to the unbridled quest for materialism metamorphosing into a subculture. Many commentators have also recently pointed at the negative effects of the Social media, as almost every child you see knows how to operate a mobile phone or similar gadgets despite its potential as a huge source of distraction. Young people are often glued to it for hours in unending cycles of chats in Whatsapp and Facebook, with friends, instead of reading their books.

One of the evangelizing missions of ANBUKRAFT is to make participants and the general public to become increasingly aware that reading can be a form of entertainment, something that can be done in leisure independent of a specific end; which subconsciously stimulates the mind and enlarges one's worldview. It is a slow process of dis-information from such thinking among students that learning largely resides in the 'precipice' of test or exam where they grudgingly swallow instructor's notes and regurgitate them verbatim. But the ANBUKRAFT initiative and other Art and literary festivals across the country are on an urgent mission to contribute in

salvaging and revitalizing the lackluster reading culture in Nigeria. In this regard, Stakeholders have again reiterated the need for the implementation of policies that would improve reading among Nigerians. This was the concern of participants during the Nigeria International Book Fair (NIBF), which took place recently in Lagos. Advocates urged government to review policies hampering the book industry as a matter of urgency to enable it function better. Part of the recommendations of the fair was the encouragement of regular book festivals as it enlightens the mind and increases knowledge.

ANBUKRAFT has consistently hearkened to the NIBF call to engage in regular book and art festival. The organizers headed by Assoc. Prof. Chuu Krydz Ikwuemesi sees the regular organization of the festival as a clarion call to National duty and Community service. Already in its 5th edition, the Anambra Book and Craft Festival (ANBUKRAFT) have come to stay. It has through these years, maintained its stated aims, to foster creative interaction between artists, actors, musicians and authors in a synergy that offers intellectual nourishment among the disciplines. With ANBUKRAFT's interactive sessions for writers and authors, an exhibition space for artists, book fair stand for writers and publishers as well as programmes like essay writing sessions for school children, its contributions to the beautiful experience of partaking in the appreciation and nurturing of the pleasures of culture and knowledge production are commendable.

References

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