

The Odo Masquerade Institution And Tourism Development: A Case Study Of Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area Of Enugu State

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Abstract

Generally speaking “Odo” popularly known and addressed as “Odomagala” or “Ekewo” in some towns like Ukehe, Aku, Diogbe, Umunko, Ohebe, Umuna, Ochima, Ikolo, Umuoka, Onyohor, and Udueme communities that make up the “Igbo-Odo” sector of Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, simply means the ancestral spirit of their forefathers that usually visit them once every two years. The activities of the Odo masquerade such as the worshipping, returning from and going back to the land of the spirit and outing ceremonies associated with the Odo and the Odo leaders (Dikwu or Akpara Odo or Ekewo) is seen as a cult or an institution. Odo masquerade plays both cultural, tourism and religious roles. The Odo is worshipped and people confess their sins and beg for forgiveness and longevity from the masquerade. On Odo and tourism, the outing ceremony of the Odo is displayed in public places usually the town’s public square ‘Otobo’ where every body both indigenes and non indigenes would gather and even photographs of the masquerade taken either freely or on the payment of a token fee. By so doing, it enhances the economy of the people of the destination area through income- multiplier principle. African culture is embedded in oral tradition passed on from one generation to the other. The chief priests of the Odo masquerade play vital role in this aspect. It is our contention here that the institution should be harnessed and conserved for posterity as it is an important aspect of our cultural patrimony.

Introduction

The oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of contemporary English defines masquerade as “drama in verse, often with music, dancing, fine costumes and pageantry etc”. It further described masquerade as “ball in which masks and other disguise are put etc”. Masquerade festival commonly is a cultural festival, procession, dance or religious event involving the wearing of mask. Masquerading in Enugu state is an important institution accompanied by an elaborate festival which comes up in November every year. It is esteemed because it bridges

the gap between the living and the dead (www.wikipedia.com/masquerade institution). In our study area, no specific month or year is mapped out for masquerading. All depends on the people's Odo traditional calendar which has to be announced by the 'Dikwu' or 'Akpara' Odo. Nwosu (2002) noted that "among some Igbo traditional societies, secret societies play vital administrative roles. The commonest among them was the masquerade society known in some Igbo areas as *Mmanwu* or *Mmuo*". According to him, membership usually was open to all the youngmen of fifteen and above. For one to be initiated, it involves some periods of tutelage. At the end, new members were often under oath not to reveal the secrets of a masquerade society to non members. According to Ozoemena and Njeze (1998) "Odo masquerade in Ojebe-Ogene (to which our area of study belongs) is conceived of as the incarnation of the dead ancestors who continue to take an active interest in the affairs of their living descendants and relations". The masquerade generally in Igboland takes up the attributes of the ancestors, gods, or supernatural beings or force drawn from the myths of the people. All the above descriptions constitute the attribute of 'Odomagala' masquerade in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area. As earlier stated, 'Odo' which is generally acknowledged by many in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. is the ancestral spirits of the people that visit their people once every two years. According to Amankulor, (1985), "The Festival associated with the Odo (Ukehe) is celebrated to mark and recreate the return of the spirits of dead to their living relations". In our area of study culturally, we have two sections – viz, the Igbo-Odo-those communities that worship and celebrate Odo masquerade festivals and the Igbo-Omebe – those that worship and celebrate the Omebe festival. On this, Amankulor (1985) has this to say, "The Igbo of Nsukka are divided into two central groups based on the ancestral cults of Odo and Omebe. Some communities are known as Igbo-Odo while others are called Igbo-Omebe. The people of Ukehe in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. of Enugu State belong to the Igbo-Odo group because Odo is a cult which symbolizes their ancestors and their dead relations.

Among the communities that celebrate the Odo masquerade are Ukehe, Aku, Onyohor, Ochima, Ikolo, Diogbe, Umunko, and Udueme. In Ukehe, Odo is popularly called Ekewo'. Odo are of various types and differ from one community to the other. They bear various names depending on the community. Thus in Ukehe, we have Obodike, Ewuru, Odo-Ukwueke and Mluamlua. Among the Aku community we have Okikpe, Aghu,

Ogada, Ekwereke, etc. These masquerades take up different social-cultural and religious functions. While a group of masquerade like the Omebe put cloths as part of their regalia, the traditionally, generally accepted costume of the Odo masquerade is the young petiole of palm leaves (Omu-nkwu). Some may choose to put up raffia palm material (Agwo). Some heads of Odo masquerade look like carved wooden object in design but, in most cases, they look like the plated hair of a woman. The Odo masquerades live in both grooves and mud- houses with thatched roof. Presently, corrugated iron-sheeted houses with brick blocks are built for the Odo especially among the Ikolo, Aku and Ochima communities. This may be to reduce the labour and cost of re-roofing the house each time the Odo returns. On the other hand it may be a way of boosting their faith and belief in the masquerade. The masquerade produces music and dances which add entertainment value to its aesthetic and other values. During such entertainment periods, people came from far and near to grace and witness the occasion. The tourism role which the masquerades play at this period is of immense importance. In the early 1960s and 70s when we have foreign lecturers in the University of Nigeria Nsukka, they visit and take photographs of some of these masquerades when they (the masquerades) are performing. Their music is also taped and stored in various forms. Also, the video recording of the activities of these masquerades are done during this period. If these materials are well preserved in the museum, they would help boost tourism development in our area of study. Culturally, the Odo cult unites all the communities that belong to the society.

Apart from our area of study, we have Odo masquerade institution in Umulumbe, Okpatu, Ohum, Ebe, Umuoka, Eha-Amufu, Mbu, Ngwo, Neke, Ugwuogo-Nike and Lejja all in the present day Enugu state. All these areas mentioned have cultural ties and affinities as a result of the presence of Odo masquerade existing among them. It is worthy mentioning here that unlike other communities where only Odo cult is practiced, the Lejja people in the present Nsukka L.G.A. practice both the Odo and Omebe masquerade institution simultaneously.

Aims And Objectives

Researches have been going on, on the different aspects of the culture of the people of Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. in particular, and Igboland in general, but little or no emphasis has been laid on the masquerading aspect of the Igbo people's culture except a few work from

Onyeneke (1987) on *The Dead among the Living: Masquerading in Igbo Society*. Here, Onyeneke x-rayed the place or roles of masquerades in socio-cultural, religious, economic, and political lives of Igbo society.

This research was therefore inspired by the fact that there is little or no in-depth ethnographic work on this aspect of the culture of the study area in particular and Igboland in general. The aim of this research was to study the roles of Odo masquerade institution and its tourism potentials towards the development of Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. if well harnessed.

The specific objectives of the research were;

- i. To document and conserve the Odo masquerade activities in the study area for posterity in the face of the fact that the influence of the introduction of Christianity is leaching a devastating and negative effects towards the survival and existence of this institution.
- ii. To bring to lime-light the socio-cultural, religious, economic, and political roles of the Odo masquerade towards the development of the study area.
- iii. To study the tourism potentials of the Odo masquerade in the study area if well harnessed.
- iv. And finally recommend ways through which the Odo masquerade institution could be harnessed for posterity and as tourism potential. Thus, four research objectives guided the study.

Methodology

The method applied in this study was descriptive survey. Primary and secondary source of data were used. The primary source of data came from ethnographic information collected from knowledgeable people on the topic of research from the study area. Such people include chief priests of the Odo masquerade (Dikwu, Atama or Akpara) and elders from the towns where Odo masquerade institution is practiced. Secondary source of data came from books, journals, newspapers, magazines and archival materials, theses, dissertations, and interim project reports that are relevant to the topic of research.

Odo Masquerade And Culture

The origin of 'Odomagala' masquerade is obscure as the history of the institution is embedded in oral tradition of the people. Traditions from elders and Odo masquerade leaders interviewed have it that they came out to the world and met the institution. This they have to

learn and practice and later pass it on to another generation or their offspring's. The general opinion of the people interviewed was that 'Odomagla' masquerade came from the spirit world. This can be well understood when we look at the work of Onyeneke (1987) "Chukwu si n' mmanwu sili Owelle bia" (The chukwu oracle said that the masquerade came through the back yard). He dismissed the argument on the origin of masquerade thus "it is therefore taken to be a very subtle and cunning innovation, a ruse, the moment and mode of origin of which is very obscure". Odomagala masquerade does not depict only the mask and images, but is rather understood in the concept of ritual symbolism. In support of the assertion, Onyeneke (1987) noted that "man himself has a special spiritual soul which continues to live even after the death of the individual. At the death of a given community, the ancestors live in the spirit world, but continue to be actively connected with their living progeny in various ways. They can be re-incarnated in new-born children, they can bestow blessings or curses on the fortunes or otherwise of the living. In this relationship of the spirit and the living, the spirits have the upper-hand. They are the masters while the living has to try to respond to them in obedience and submission". Emphasis on this relationship between the living and the ancestors was buttressed by Ezike and Ochiaka (2009). In their words, "Aku people see Odo as a link between the dead and the living. The mask is a representation of the spirit deity. The spirits refers to the ancestors and the deity refers to the gods". Odo masquerade is highly respected and revered. It can be referred to as the symbols of the "dead come back to earth". Odo is always treated, greeted and addressed to as 'Nnanyi' (our father or our lord). It is a taboo to fight Odomagala no matter how provocative one may be.

In Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, masquerade institution is a vital aspect of their culture, especially among the traditional religionists. Culture as we know is the total way of life of a given society. Some people saw it as extra-somatic acquisition of knowledge. Most aspect of the culture of both the living community of Igbo-Odo section of Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. and their ancestors are exhibited in the Odo masquerade institution. The feast of Obodike in Ukehe town and Ogbeje-Ochigo in Aku town are living testimonies to this fact.

Odo Masquerade Institution And Tourism

According to B.W. Andah (1980), "Tourism connotes in the main the mobilization of a people's cultural and natural resources, especially those aspects which make people unique from other peoples, viz..." By cultural resources, one may refer to those rich, material and

non-material attributes acquired within a given society and which can be transmitted from one generation to another. Among some of these are festivals, belief, dances, diet, architecture, wood working, metal working, stone working, law etc. There are some other cultural resources which may appear as artifacts of different kinds. Monumental building and shrines etc. also form part of cultural resources. There are others which because of their importance in society have been recognized as part of their culture. This has to do with features and landscapes. Most of these cultural resources form centres for tourism/tourist activities.

As regards to our present work, the central point is Odo masquerade institution, and tourism development in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. From our earlier studies, one could understand that the main role of Odo' in tourism development is focused on the festival associated with it in which people come from far and near. Mention has been made on the occasion of the outing ceremony of the Odo; both the returning from, and going back to the spirit world ceremony which is commemorated with elaborate festivals. Among the Ukehe people in particular, one of the greatest feast of the Odo which is of great tourism importance is the 'Awuru Odo' Ukehe festival. This celebration occurs around September once every two years after the Odo must have returned around April.

This feast is the grand-finale of Odo appearance because, immediately after it, Odo will climb the Ukehe hills in an atmosphere of great distress and disappointment, and descend once more into the land of the dead (Amankolor, 1985). The main stage of this festival is located at Ikpogwu and Nwankwor Ukehe market square – where all the Odo in Ukehe display for a period of twenty- four hours (a day). The same is applicable to the Odo Aku. On such occasion especially the' Ula' Odo – going back of the Odo Aku to the spirit world, all the Odo Aku will gather somewhere around Eke Aku market square (near Girls Secondary School) and tracing their route from there, they will start climbing the" Ugwu Ase" (Ase stream hills) from where they will descend into the thick forest at the foot of the hills and from there disappear to the spirit world. At the same time, their melodious, ballad music's and other chanting incantations are recorded or tapped in various ways. Different types of masquerade dancing groups perform on such days. Among the Aku community, we have the 'Oso-Ovuruzo' (the Ovuruzo masquerade racing day), Odo Ogwugwu, Idvu Ichiachi and Ejegochigo entertaining days. On such days, people from far and wide are invited and

entertained lavishly. Photographs of these masquerades are also taken and their music recorded and stored in various forms. The mask photographs and images are of great importance to the tourists. Of great tourism importance are the houses and groves of the Odo masquerade. L.C. Ekechukwu (1990) noted that, “among the cultural site resources which help in the promotion of Nigeria are, archaeological sites, historic site, museums and monuments, scared groves (which include Odo masquerade groves and shrines)”.

As at present, Odo masquerade institution in our area of study has not been well harnessed to play a great role in Tourism development in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. in particular and Enugu state in general.

To harness Odo masquerade institution into a tourism resource, the organs directly responsible for the planning, developing and transmitting information about tourism like National Tourism Boards, Historical sites and monuments should come to the aid of the people of our study area.

Secondly, other governmental agencies and bodies like the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) and other bodies involved in the conservation of Nigerian cultural patrimony; especially their museums, conservation and resources management agencies etc. which are responsible for preserving, presenting, promoting, producing and utilizing cultural and material resources of Nigeria has a great role to play. These bodies mentioned should help modernize the public places and / or arena where these masquerades perform by setting up certain modern amenities like, electricity, pipe-borne water and healthcare facilities within the arena of the display of these masquerades. By so doing, it will help attract not only Nigerians, but also foreigners. Hotels and other recreational activity centres should be sited near such arenas. The government should help improve on this by encouraging the villagers or the Odo masquerade leaders through their information bureau by announcing such eventful days in the government owned media like radio and television stations as being done during the ‘Manwu’ festivals. Certain incentives, both in cash and materials should be extended to the Odo leaders. Those houses within the arena of the Odo masquerade performance should be well decorated, but not to the extent that their indigenous and traditional cultural values are distorted. The general public like the Christians who usually destroy Odo houses under the auspices of Christianity should desist from such “civilized”, but religious negativism. In addition, to help boost tourism

development in our study area, museums should be established in the area where the cultural materials associated with masquerading should be preserved. More over, the photographs, radio cassettes/tapes and video cartridges of both the music of the Odo and the masquerade itself should be preserved in such museums. This is very important when one considers the fact that the Odo does not return every year. Tourists and even indigenes in need of such materials can easily consult such museums and be satisfied with their needs. By establishing such museums, it will help enrich not only the community where it is located, but also the government as the researchers or visitors will be required to pay some amount of money before making use of the museum. In addition, by establishing such a museum in our area of study, it will help create job opportunity for the youths of Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. as many of them may be deployed to work there as curators and museum attendants.

Conclusion

From the ongoing, it is established that the people of Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. engage Odo masquerade institution as an aspect of their culture and this is enmeshed in their African traditional religion.

Further more, it has been established that Odo masquerade institution in our study area if well harnessed is a great tourism resource and will help a lot in the tourism development of the study area if the recommendations and/or suggestions made by the researcher is taking into consideration. Thus, from the foregoing, it can be seen that the greatest aspect of the role played by the institution in boosting tourism development in our area of study is enmeshed in the elaborate feasts associated with the coming home (to the land of the living) of the Odo from the spirit world and her departure to the spirit world. On such days, people gather from far and wide and pleasantries are exchanged. Gift of different kinds ranging from money, fowls, sheep, goats and even cows are given to the masquerades in return for protection. The gathering of people on such days exactly depicts what tourism is all about, as it involves the temporary movement of people or persons from one destination to another. Such movement may be aimed at achieving some desired objectives (washing the Odo feast) and may be within or outside one geographical zone. Photographs of the

masquerades taken and their video or radio cassette tapes can be preserved as our cultural heritage. The money given to the masquerade is used in purchasing the masquerade costume.

In addition, realizing well that tourism is utilized to boost and stimulate a people's creativity in the fields of Arts and humanities, philosophy, science and technology, the researcher is of the opinion that the Odo masquerade institution in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. should be harnessed and encouraged. It is through the Odo cult that the people communicate with their ancestors and exhibits greater facet of their culture. Looking at the socio-religious and belief systems of the Igbo people, Ikenga Ozigbo (1990) noted that "The Supernatural and the magical pervaded every aspect of Igbo man's life. He believed in spiritual beings (Chukwu), deities, abstract spiritual forces and ancestral spirits and their influence on human affairs. He believed in the need to offer them occasional and periodic prayers and sacrifices".

Finally, for the Odo masquerade institution to be harnessed, the Odo leaders, the general public and the government have greater roles to play. To make participation more enjoyable, those aspect of the institution which seem to be harmful like the day of 'Mkupta or Uhuruanyia' – an occasion where by the Odo runs round the village nude and is not expected to be seen by women, uninitiated and at times by men – should be modernized and specific months mapped out for the feast. This should be done in consultation with the Odo leaders to make for peace and tranquility.

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