
Masquerades And Funeral Rites As Symbo-Media Of Communication in Igboland: A Study Of Onitsha Area, Anambra State

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Abstract

This work explores the meaning, message, and interpretation arising from symbo-media of traditional communication in Igboland. It focuses on masquerades and funeral rites as symbo-media of communication in Igboland as it relates to Onitsha in Anambra State, Nigeria. The researchers assessed the extent the natives of Onitsha continue to depend on masquerades and funeral rites for message dissemination and how relevant and effective these messages are even in the face of modern media. It was discovered that masquerades and funeral rites still play traditional roles and are still relevant in the communication culture of Onitsha, though the modern media of communication (globalization) and the high level penetration of Christianity in the community have affected significantly. It was recommended that the Igbo people should establish the continuity of funeral rites and masquerade roles in the society since they are still relevant. Also, instead of the present endeavor to replace these indigenous forms with modern media, they can be juxtaposed to enhance community understanding and survival.

Introduction

Traditional system of communication refers to modes of meaning exchange that are rooted in a people's culture, and which began from the era of pre-literate and pre-modern man (Ukonu and Wogu, 2008). It is a means by which indigenous people communicate with one another and which survive to the present, despite the passage of time and the smothering influence of the modernity. These systems of communication are passed from one generation to another and are as such derived from society's experience and thoughts over a long period of years.

Dobb (1961:95) describes indigenous communication media as ranging from conscious activities like dancing and drama to unconscious and involuntary ones such as belching and even growing. In addition, Dobb outlines the following as constituting indigenous communication: speech, non-speech sounds like whistle, belch, colour, gesture, imagination, dreams, drama, fiction, poetry, music, scarification, drums, preserving symbols, rites, rituals, masquerades e.t.c.

According to Ugboajah (1985:116), indigenous communication could be called ora-media. These media include: mythology, oral literature (poetry, story telling and proverbs), masquerades, rites of passage and other rituals expressed through oracy, music, play and material symbol which accompany people from womb to tomb and beyond.

Wilson (1997) reclassifies indigenous communication in the following order: Idiophones: these are self sounding instruments or wares that produce sound when beaten. Membranophones: these are media whose sound comes from the vibration of beaten membranes, example, and drums. Aerophones: these produce sound that has the result of the vibration of a column air, example, flutes, pipes and horns. Symbology: this refers to representation using objects and symbols understood within a particular cultural context. Signals: These are physical embodiments of a message. These include fire, gunshots and drum beats. Objectifs: these are media presented in concrete forms which have significance for a specific society only. These include kolanut, palm frond, charcoal, flag and sculptures, colour schemes - colour combinations that produce certain significant meaning for certain societies. Music: this includes songs of praise or criticism. Extramundane: this involves rituals, prayers, libations, chants, trance, hysterics through which the living communicates with the dead. Symbolic displays: these are culture specific. They are smiling, sticking out of tongue, expression of fear, etc. According to Wilson (1997), traditional modes of communication can be divided into two major categories: verbal and non-verbal communication.

These classifications and definitions of indigenous communication, whatever their limitations, remain valuable to Igbo society even in the face of modernity and scientific discoveries (Onwubiko 1991:28). It is important to note that some of the communication systems are peculiar to specific societies because they are borne out of the people's culture, religious convictions and experiences. Their interpretation may vary from one society to the other but in any case, they reveal the ethics of each society. Thus, communication is not something separate from the society or imposed upon it but it is an integral part of the society and is subjects of moral rules. And because communication is a human activity, it can be evaluated from the moral point of view just as any other human activity can be.

Non-verbal symbols (symbo-media) of communication per se, form the backbone of this study, of which masquerades and funeral rites are the main focus. It is believed in Igbo land that masquerades possess peculiar attributes (warrior-like prowess, mystical powers, youthfulness and old age) and specializes in one or more skills (dancing skills, acrobatics and other ritual manifestations), masquerade is a gross for *mma onwu* (beauty dead) which draws a range of ideas about funerary commemoration in which the deceased is displayed lying in state.

Semantic and aesthetic parallels are drawn between the decoration and display of the deceased during funerary rites and the elaboration of decoration of masquerades which locate masquerade conceptually in the spirit world where the dead reside. Death separates a man's spirit from his physical body. It is a force that changes identity of a victim. When death strikes, it triggers off a funeral, a be-fitting 'send off' that should ensure the safe return of the victims ghost to its proper place in *ani mmuo* (ghost land), from where all human beings come, and keep it in a state of peaceful contentment.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study include the following are to:

1. Examine the relevance of masquerades and funeral rites in Onitsha in the face of modern communication media.
2. Find out the roles of masquerades and funeral rites in the communication culture of Onitsha.

3. Find out the extent to which the natives of Onitsha understand the signs and symbols used by masquerades and in funeral rites.
4. Determine the effectiveness of masquerades and funeral rites in message dissemination in Onitsha.

METHODOLOGY

The design for this work is historical research design of which the method of data collection is ethnography, since it is a written description of a particular culture which involves their customs, beliefs and behaviours that cannot be statistically analysed, but involves descriptions and views or opinions of the people. Conventional archival research, interviews and observations will also be used. These methods will help produce data: quotations and descriptions resulting in the narrative descriptions.

In this study, cultural understanding of masquerades and funeral rites will be views or opinions cross-validated through repeated, in depth interviews with a broad cross-section of representative informants using sampling to obtain a saturation of informants in Onitsha North Local Government Area which is made up of nine (9) clans with twenty one (21) villages.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have been formulated to address the problem of this research.

1. Are masquerades and funeral rites still relevant even in the face of modern media of communication?
2. To what extent do the natives of Onitsha depend on masquerades and funeral rites for information dissemination in the town?
3. Do the natives understand the specific signals and symbols of masquerades and funeral rites and to what extent?
4. Do masquerades and funeral rites disseminate messages effectively in Onitsha, Onitsha North LGA, Anambra State?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand this study effectively, the symbolic interactionism theory was used. This theory was propounded by Herbert Blumer in 1969. It states that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning they ascribe to it. These things do not have inherent or unvarying meanings, rather their meanings differ depending on how people define and respond to them, how people define or give meaning to the things they encounter will shape their actions towards them.

Therefore, to understand human behaviour, we must know how people define the things- objects, events, individuals, groups, structures they encounter in their environment. Symbolic interactionism is very pertinent here because through the symbols used by masquerades and in funeral rites, the way Onitsha people understand the symbols and also, how they handle it determine their behaviour towards these symbols. This is because these symbols shape their behaviours and how they interact with others.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ONITSHA

Tradition has it that Onitsha has its cradle at Ile-Ife. His father or progenitor was one of Oduwa's sons begotten him by a vagrant Arab woman. On account of his addiction to hard

work, his father nicknamed and called him “Oni ishe,” a Yoruba term meaning “a man of hard work” of which his descendants’ habitation on the Eastern bank of the Niger derives the name “Onitsha or Onicha”. (Ekwerekwu: 1989). Some Yoruba words that still survive as part and parcel of Onitsha Igbo language include Ogbadu (Ogbado) corn, *Odo* (Odo) motor, *Onogbo* (Ologbo) cat, Ogede (Ogede) banana etc.

From Ife, Oni Ishe moved with his children to Benin, where he died and where his children multiplied as they inter married with the Binis. Some of the Onitshas who could not meet up with the Oba of Benin’s tyranny left Udo (Onitsha people’s residential area in Benin) as early as the 10th century and settled in Ika land founding the towns of Obior, Obamkpa, Isele-Uku, Isele-Nkpitima, and Isele-Azagba.

Following the intensified tyranny of Oba of Benin, Oba Esigie, Chima, Ahime and the entire people of Onitsha fled from Benin in the 16th century, they naturally wondered their way in the above Ika towns founded by their kith and kin. Because of their majority in these towns, Obior, Obamkpa, Isele-Uku, Azagba and Isele-Nkpitima together with those founded by Chima’s followers viz Uzo Onitsha Ukwu, Onitsha Ugbo and Onitsha Olona came to be known and called Umu Eze Chima towns. The people of Onitsha left Benin to seek a new place of settlement in the 16th century during the reign of Oba Esigie who ruled the Benin Empire from 1504 to 1550. (Egharevba: 1960).

Like some Yoruba words survive in Onitsha Igbo language, so also, some Edo words are still in use by the Onitshas’ and these include *Ebani* (Abani) state brass sword, *Ezuzu* (Azuzu) chief’s fan, *Ododo* (Ododo) red, *Osebuwa* (Osebuluwa) God e.t.c. Also, the following chieftaincy titles are of Benin origin: *Iyasele* (Iyase) Onowu, *Ajie* (Agie), *Isagba* (Esogba), *Ozoma* (Ozomo), *Osuma* (Osuma), *Ogene* (Oghene), *Omodi* (Omodu), *Daike* (Daiken), *Owele* (Owele), *Ike* (Iken) e.t.c.

During this period of emigration and for many centuries after, the people of Onitsha who now live on the eastern bank of the River Niger were part and parcel of the Edo tribe. It is for this reason that Onitsha people fondly call their town “Onitsha Ado N’Idu” meaning Onitsha of Edo origin.

It is remarkable that Onitsha consists of nine clans with six traditional divisions. These nine clans include Umueze Chima (Obikporo, Isiokwe, Umu Aroli, Ogbendida, Ogbeoza, Ogboli Olosi, Umudei, Ogbembubu, Ogbeabu, Ogbeodogwu and Ogbeotu quarters), Obior (Obior quarter), Awada (Ogbozoma quarter), Ulutu Mgbelekeke (Mgbelekeke quarter), Ubulu na Ikem (Umu Ikem quarter), Ogboli Eke (Ogboli eke uwali quarter), Ubene (Odoje quarter), Ugwu na Obamkpa (Umu Ase, Iyiwu and Odoje-Umu Odimegwu Gbuagu quarters) and Agbanute (Odoje quarter) now merged with Ubene clan. The six traditional divisions is derived from the clans and they include Ugwu comprising of Ogboli-Eke, Odoje ozi (Ubene); Obamkpa comprising Odoje Odu, Umu Ase, Iyiwu and Ndugbe; Umu chimaevi comprising of Olosi, Isiokwe and Obio; Umu Eze Aroli comprising of Umu Aroli, Ogboza, Ogbendida and Awada (Ogbozoma); Okebunabo comprising Ogbabu, Ogbodogwu, Umudei and Ogbembubu; and Ogbeolu comprising Ubulu na Ikem, Obikporo, Ogbotu and Mgbelekeke. Each clan was headed by a king, that of Umu Eze Chima being the paramount of all. Onitsha was operating on a confederal basis until the advent of British colonialism which made it plain that it would deal with only one of them, that is the king of the Royal clan. Others fell into the shades although they still maintain some degree of traditional autonomy as each keeps alive its Nze, the emblem of governing authority in a clan which makes it impossible for the Obi of Onitsha to carry out Ozo

purification rites except in the Umu Eze Chima. Presently, for traditional equilibrium, each of the divisions must be represented by an Ndi Ichie Ume (red cap chief) in the Obi's (king) cabinet since disequilibrium causes conflicts and chaos.

It is also important to remark that other elements that joined the Onitshas after their arrival in the Eastern bank of the Niger include the Egbemas from the Ahoada area of Rivers State. These are merged in Ogbolieke quaters while some of their kith and kin traveled to Ozubulu to found the Egbema clan there. Others are the Igalas who arrived with their long juju in the 18th century to form the larger segment of Obikporo quarters with the Oreze family at the centre.

Ugbum, a Nando blacksmith operating at Onitsha, got married to Eze Aroli's sister, Olosi, to produce residents of the quarter known as Ogboli Olosi. They are within the royal clan but cannot aspire to the royal throne of Onitsha; their traditional assignment is the burial of the deceased king. (Ekwerekwu: 1989).

SYMBO-MEDIA OF TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION IN IGBOLAND

Symbols in Igbo society consist of palm fronds, kolanut, charcoal, sculptures, clothes, colour, masquerades, fire or smoke, canon shots, rites, rituals, white chalk (nzu), ofo, uli, e.t.c. These are referred to as symbols because they communicate certain messages to the people of Igbo land by the usage of it unlike verbal forms that require words to communicate the intended message.

Palm Frond (Omu): According to Jen Uchem (2007), palm frond is one of such expressive actions used in the Igbo cultural context to convey lots of meanings.

In certain circumstances, they are used to express meanings like: very grave danger, when an individual has trespassed into another person's property (land or artifacts), to express the presence of death or bereavement, the presence of a corpse in a place. When hung round a square or market or any other place, it expresses that entrance is forbidden; it is also a sign of supernatural depicting shrines, medicine man, soothsayer's place or where traditional rituals are performed or that one is going to be performed, the beginning of farming season festival celebrated with the presence or appearance of various masquerades.

It also express secrecy by holding a little palm frond between the lips; to express readiness to execute somebody, a criminal or to show that the death sentence has been passed on him and he is dressed in shreds of palm fronds with elders and the executor carrying a palm frond each between their lips; to express public disgrace to a criminal for corrective purposes. He is dressed in shreds of palm fronds with snail shells and ridiculing objects tied to the fronds, that person is covered with and paraded round the community; a masquerade wearing palm frond expresses that it is a dangerous one, and would want to challenge anyone who dared him to a test of fetish practices; if put in front of a compound, it connotes that somebody has just died but no condolence visits are yet allowed till the inmates are ready.

It is also, an expression of social authority, when it is tied on trees with fruits depicts that nobody should touch any of the fruits on the authority of the community executed by community masquerades; it is also used to express beauty- as when a young man who is notorious for being too choosy of would be 'brides' is called to order and challenged by his father or elders of the community to choose among the palm fronds the best one. He is unable to select the best from the heap of palm fronds. Thus, he is called to order that physical beauty is not the only requirement for a blissful marriage; it is also a sign of playfulness as children dress up in palm fronds and play junior or unserious masquerades.

Kolanut (Oji) {*Cola Acuminata*}: In Igboland, it is believed that kolanut is the first fruit tree that God caused to grow on the land. To eat it is always an act of commensality with God (chukwu), land (ani) and spirit beings (ndi mmuo). Thus, it is an indispensable medium of man's regular interaction with God and the spirit beings. Because, at every turn, an Igbo man has recourse to the spiritual elements, the ritual breaking, sharing and eating of the kolanut (iwa oji), becomes the most pervasive phenomenon in Igbo land and a priceless commodity among them.

In Igboland, oji is a prerequisite for proper social visiting. For an Igbo man, its presentation by a host to his guest is a most cherished act of hospitality. It is proper etiquette for a host to apologise to his guest for not serving him kolanut. Kolanut is a basic element in Igboland especially in Onitsha traditional acts of worship like prayer (igo mmuo), offering (ilo mmuo), establishing ancestral shrine (inyedo mmuo), placating vital forces that serve as agents of mortality (iru alusi), making sacrifice (ichu aja), divination (igba afa), cow-slaughtering (igbu efi). It is used to invite God to come in the midst of celebrants and/or worshippers, thereafter, the nut is broken and eaten as an act of commensality with them (Nzekwu 2002:39). Also, in Igboland, talks are neither begun nor agreements sealed if the parties involved do not break, share and eat kolanut.

When disputes are settled, the settlement is sealed with the breaking of a kolanut, the pieces of which are shared out among and eaten by members of the feuding parties. Kolanut is an item of tribute payment (Ife nru) and also, an initial sacrificial ingredient as no sacrifice is performed without kolanut, its size notwithstanding.

In Igboland, a kolanut that displays four cotyledons is associated with abundant blessings as it is with Igbo market days. The ones with three cotyledons are identified as *oji ikenga* and signify power, strength, physical clout and good fortune. Five cotyledons hold out possibility of extra luck to all who may eat it. Six cotyledons reflect fertility (omumu), the gift of children and a peaceful family. Seven or more cotyledons are rare, when noticed; they may be replaced (Nwana 1997:35).

In Onitsha, the presentation of kolanut involves only prime numbers. A hostess may only present one, two three, five, seven or nine kolanuts, the exact number depending on the occasion or the status of guest. A non titled visitor is served a minimum of one kolanut. It is however, normal to present him with two nuts, one of which is broken and eaten, then while the other one represents "when kola gets home, it tells who presented it". When the visitor is an Agbalanze (ozo titled man) or a non titled elder, he is served a minimum of two kolanuts. At a gathering of kindred, clan or community elders, only a maximum of seven kolanuts may be presented. The Obi (the king) alone is made a presentation of nine kolanuts.

Colour and Clothes: Colours are symbolical and hence, subject to several interpretations from one time to another and from one culture to another. They convey ethical messages to people whenever they are used in certain circumstances. The colour red has a strong association with blood and fire. It is therefore, a colour that is coupled with emergency and danger. In Igboland, it is seen as a danger when it is placed on an object, article, and property e.t.c. For example, in traditional Igbo setting, farm owners are fond of placing a red colour cloth, or any object on their farm land indicating, "Don't enter" or "don't steal" to prospective thieves (Webster 1948:29). Whoever sees the object will not enter the farm land or tamper with objects with red colour, or any object placed on them. Failure to do so is to either die instantaneously or experience other untold danger which may involve shedding of blood of the victim. This colour does not only create psychological fear

to a potential thief, but also inculcates the principle of discipline and responsibility in Igbo society. The warning that one should not enter to steal made stealing (which is a moral vice) less common in traditional Igbo society.

While colour red is associated with danger, colour white symbolizes purity, love, joy, glory. It is a general belief of the Igbo's that love is the core moral value which others surround. Because the colour white symbolizes purity, many people both within and outside religious circle use white clothing to indicate righteousness, purity, cleanliness, open-heart e.t.c. In traditional religion, some divinities, especially, Ojedi shrine in Onitsha is associated with white colour as the shrine is painted white and the worshippers wear white clothes for adherence of pure heart and character.

Colour green stands for peace in Igboland. Thus, whenever green leaves are carried by group of people, it symbolizes peace. Peace is an important moral value in Igbo society because it means freedom from quarrel, strife, disorder, violence, hostility or war. Precisely, green is an atmosphere of calmness, security and safety.

In Igboland, the sight of a man or woman putting on sackcloth that could be black or white as the case may be communicates that the man or woman is mourning the death of his or her spouse. When the mourner loses other relatives, the sackcloth is different as he or she would not likely put on its top and down but might just put on only the top or the down (Webster, 1948).

Canon Shots (Nkponani): Canon shot in Igboland generally marks the happening of great events. The sound of canon shot when fired signifies to people from far that a ceremony is going on somewhere or that an aged person is dead or being buried. Sometimes, it is used in occasions such as visit of an important person. It is commonly used during New yam festivals, funeral ceremonies, Ofala festivals in Onitsha to welcome the Obi, when he is about to parade round the palace and when he is about to leave the palace.

White Chalk (Nzu): Nzu is a symbol of peace and harmony. When nzu is presented in Igboland, it is to signify and to convey some friendly affection as opposed to ill feelings. It symbolizes cleanliness and purity of the presenter's mind towards his visitor and the place it is found.

The presence of nzu in a shrine shows that such a place is sacred and should be revered. The same thing could be said of places where they are found, like an herbalist medicine house. Of course, they are kept in a conspicuous corner for visitors to see easily.

The nzu is more often than not presented first to a visitor and it is to indicate in no unmistakable terms that the person is most welcome. The visitor further accepts the nzu and draws four parallel lines on the ground to show the four days of the week-Eke, Oye, Afor, and Nkwor. Prayer is then offered with the nzu and the prayer usually, is that within four cyclic days, they would be sustained in good health and energy.

However, an occasion might arise when the nzu is presented to a visitor and he declines the offer. The information passed across in this nature is that something is wrong or that the person has an ax to grind with the supposed visitor. This happens when the visitor and the visited has had some quarrels over an issue which had not been settled amicably. It is only when the matter has been harmonized that the visitor can then accept his hospitality by first accepting the nzu.

The herbalists as well use nzu for advertisements. Once the nzu is smeared on the one corner of a person's eyebrow, the communication is that he is an herbalist and can come

to the service of anybody on demand. It also communicates the message that they see the other half of man which the ordinary man cannot see.

Nzu is also used when a woman delivers a child. In this case, it is served in both a plate or clay dish and the person who has come to pay homage to the newly born baby and the mother smears it on the palm or on the neck to show that he came to wish them good.

Smoke: Smoke in Igboland signifies emergency. For instance, when somebody dies, smoke is set so that the community would assemble at the village square immediately. Also, when a chief or eminent person in a community is sick which is in doubt whether he will recover or not, smoke is set to assemble the people of that community.

Masquerade: Masquerades in Igboland are very useful for understanding the use of symbols. The functions of social control and local administration have led to the use of masquerades as the legitimizing voice of the ancestors (Leach, 1976).

Among the Igbos, common belief held that the dead communicates with the living through masquerades and through their tranquil appearance, they welcome the spirit of being ancestors rather than to evoke fear (Basden, 1966). In Igboland, any troop of masquerade be it Ijele, Agbogo mmuo, Otu iche or any other masquerade is associated with the spirit world, a being from the weird land and above ordinary mortal. Masquerades are not just ordinary human beings but a spirit that links the dead and the living.

Ofo (*Detarium Senegalense*): Ofo is symbolic in Igbo land. It is a peculiar stick that falls from a tree called Ofo tree. The tree is never made or fashioned by man. Everything about it is designed by nature and cannot be altered. Ofo is an embodiment of truth and honesty; it endears one in a position of trust.

According to Nzekwu (2002:16), an Ofo holder is not expected to tell lies. Anything said or any testimony given in a case by anybody holding Ofo is regarded as the truth and it is unquestionable. It is believed that people who hold bad intentions or malice against their fellow human beings are always afraid to touch or come near Ofo.

The mere presence of Ofo carries a lot of aura and has many communicative messages. Anybody seeing Ofo being brought in any gathering knows that it is only the truth that is demanded by the members present. The office of the head of the family (okpala) is founded upon Ofo. Functionaries who interact with spiritual elements derive their power upon inheriting the relevant Ofo. In Onitsha, there are different kinds of Ofo- Ofo okpala, Ofo dibia, Ofo isi ada, Ofo ndi iche, Ofo eze, Ofo omu and so on (Nzekwu 2002:16).

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the interviews (indepth oral interview) and observations conducted, it is clear that despite the presence of modern mass media of communication the people of Onitsha are still very much involved in their customs and traditions. Information I gathered proved that masquerades and funeral rites still have relevant roles they play in Onitsha. These roles as gathered include final judgment of very serious cases by masquerades, warnings, corrections and communicating with the spirit world for relevant information especially during funeral rites of which the answers are gotten through revelation, public relations where masquerades dance to entertain people in different occasions or festivals like iwa ji, olili Akasi e.t.c; and also in funeral rites during Ososo, the patrilineal daughters sing while pounding cassava and yam. This helps to enhance the image of the town. Another role as gathered is that masquerades are used as corrective measures by appearing where an offence is committed which may be quarrels and fighting. He said that these roles are still relevant since Onitsha is

a community that regards its cultures and traditions more than anything else, and since these masquerades perform their duties as required that they are still relevant. Funeral rites are still relevant because without the performance of these rites even in the face of globalization and new technologies or modern media of communication, the person is not regarded as being buried in Onitsha and no matter how technologically advanced or westernized the person is, the funeral rites must be performed and masquerades must perform their own duties in the funeral as far as the person is buried in the traditional way.

Also during funeral rituals, there is communication with the spirit world of which the people get feedback through revelation. This shows that communication takes place during funeral rituals which results to feedback that is not immediate.

It is also clear that modern mass media of communication affects masquerades and funeral rites as channels of communication to some extent but they are still highly regarded and relevant in the communication culture of Onitsha. From the observation of the researcher, modern media of communication and the increasing urbanization in Onitsha have moderated some of the roles of masquerades and funeral rites. This can be seen in the removal of Ikposu Ozu (wake keeps) in Onitsha tradition. Every rite is done from morning to evening, both wake keep and the burial proper of which after, everybody disperses. Also, it can be deduced that Christianity has affected the roles of some masquerades and funeral rites to some extent but the people still regard funeral rites and masquerades in Onitsha.

Furthermore, understanding of the messages of masquerades and funeral rites require some skills and initiatives which results from active participation of the natives in their customs and traditions like Iwa ji, Ifejioku, olili Akasi, Ofala and burials. From the research, it was found out that even the elites and religious people in the Onitsha partake, understand and see masquerades and funeral rites as relevant and effective channels of communication despite the presence of modern mass media. It was also found out from the research that masquerades and funeral rites are limited in the kinds of messages they disseminate due to special skills and initiatives required to understand them.

CONCLUSION

The basic aim of this study is to find out the roles and relevance of masquerades and funeral rites despite the presence of modern mass media of communication and Onitsha was used as the study. From the research, it was gathered that masquerades and funeral rites are still relevant, and have not relented in playing their roles for message dissemination in Onitsha.

In the same vein, the researcher found out that as Herbert Blumer stated that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meaning they have. These things do not have inherent or unvarying meanings, rather their meanings differ depending on how people define and respond to them, how people define or give meaning to the things they encounter and this shape their actions towards them.

Therefore, to understand human behaviour, we must know how people define the things-objects, events, individuals, groups, structures they encounter in their environment.

Symbolic interactionism is very pertinent here because through the symbols used by masquerades and in funeral rites, the way Onitsha people understand the symbols and also, how they handle it determine their behaviour towards these symbols. This is because these symbols shape their behaviours and how they interact with others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Igbo people should establish the continuity of funeral rites and masquerades since they are still relevant. The modern media should not be allowed to replace the roles of masquerades and funeral rites; rather, modern media should be used side by side with the symbo-media of communication in Igboland that is, allowed to co-exist without affecting the existence of the other.

Igbo people should understand that we cannot continue to undertake the white man's way of life and leave our culture to die with the sands and decay. We should try and appreciate our culture by practicing it since they are still relevant with significant roles they play in the society.

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