

Odo Masquerade in Northern Igbo Land: A Cultural Resource in Demise

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Abstract

Odo masquerade, which is known to use satire in admonishing evil doers in the society, wields both spiritual and administrative powers. Its celebration is regarded as a time of justice for the oppressed. This remarkable masquerade has attracted little or no attention, and where it is documented, it has been through formalist scholars like Meek and Basden. Ethnographic method, basically, in-depth interviews was adopted for the study. The study aims to document Odo masquerade practice in Neke and its contribution to tourism development. The study revealed that its practitioners have abused its powers. Odo masquerade has deprived people of their rights, disrupted their life and intimidated women and children. Consequently, there is disenchantment and loss of interest in the practice among the younger ones, while modernity and foreign religion are also taking their toll on the institution. The paper recommends an appraisal of the method of practising Odo and how tourism can be used to revive and promote Odo masquerade.

Keywords: Masquerade, Odo, Neke, Tourism.

Introduction

Masquerade is a common feature in the cultural milieu of the Igbo people. It is seen as a means of communication between the living and the dead where the spirits through a messenger, usually masquerade, bless or curse the living. In the African tradition, the living maintains a close tie with the dead and this is manifested in different festivals which invariably feature different masquerades, and these celebrations are filled with merriments, dances, music (Ezenagu and Olatunji, 2014; Onyeneke, 1987).

Odo and Omabe are the common types of masquerades in Nsukka area. They are believed to have a common origin that is related to Ehamufu and Ikem (Onyeneke, 1987 and Meek, 1930. Odo masquerade is exclusively a male dominated enterprise that is shrouded in secrecy, but it is taken in IgboOdo communities as a traditional administration that plays both spiritual and social leadership roles. Odo is also a moralist and an entertainer at the same time' (Ezechi, 2010:148). It serves as an agent of social change, arbiter of justice, entertainer, messenger of the gods etc. Odo masquerade institution is threatened by factors such as the practice of Odo itself, foreign religion, abuse of human right, un-fair treatment of opposite sex, aging among men practising Odo, and so on.

Due to paucity of written records on Odo masquerade and its activities, the concept was misconceived. Furthermore, there is the issue of colonization in which certain cultural manifestations like shrines and masquerade were termed evil and fetish. Secondly, with development and urbanization, some of the areas that were designated as sacred like shrines, groves and houses of Odo were pulled down. With this new quest for development, the love and interest in Odo have dwindled; the younger generation see it as something to do away with.

There are different schools of thought concerning the origin of masquerade in Igboland. Scholars like Enekwe (1987) pointed to Nri, Basden (1983) believed that it came from Eha Ihenyi. Meanwhile masquerades like Odo and Omabe were traced to Igala area by Shelton (1971) and Afigbo (1981), but Aniakor (1978 in Onyeke, 1987) argued that both Odo and Omabe came from Idoma. Nzekwu (1981) cited by Ezechi (2010) gave credence to the claim of Igala being the probable center of origin while Ezechi (2010) added that Igbo masquerade institution must have been influenced by their neighbours which Igala is one of them.

The controversy surrounding the origin of masquerade in Igboland is equally the same in our study area. The origin of Odo as a word and a culture is a myth. There are two schools of thought about the origin of Odo in Neke. The first is that a woman from Ikem discovered Odo while in search of firewood. She was said to have encountered a strange object which terrified her; she ran home and reported to her husband who hurried back to the spot with her. When the man saw the strange figure, he exclaimed: *Ele o!* The strange figure responded: *'Ele nwam'* and from that time, *'Ele'* became a password for Odo masquerade institution. Another theory or myth has it that Neke people were involved in a lot of wars and as a result of several attacks on them by several villages and communities who were then under the rulership of the Oba of Benin. In their efforts to survive the incessant attacks, they decided to come up with a creative defense and protective mechanism to protect themselves from weapons used to fight them. They built protective structures around people who put on the masquerades using the spear of palm trees. This school of thought strongly believes that it started as a defense structure to protect the wearer from attacks of the enemy and not as a god. This work addresses the socio-cultural values of Odo masquerade, its potentials for tourism development and how the art can be revived.

Neke is one of the five autonomous communities that make up Isiuzo Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. It is traversed by the lines 6° 46^N latitude and 7° 37^E longitude of the equator. The other towns within the Local Government Area are Mbu, Ikem, Eha-Amufu and Umu-

Alor. Their other surrounding neighbours are Obollo in Udenu Local Government Area and Nike in Enugu-East Local Government Area. Neke has satellite towns and settlements such as Onueme, Agudene, UgwuAkparata, Ugwu-Ochinkpu, Echiku, Obodo - Mbeze, Ekpurum, Ugwu-Adaka etc (Agbo, 2002:2).

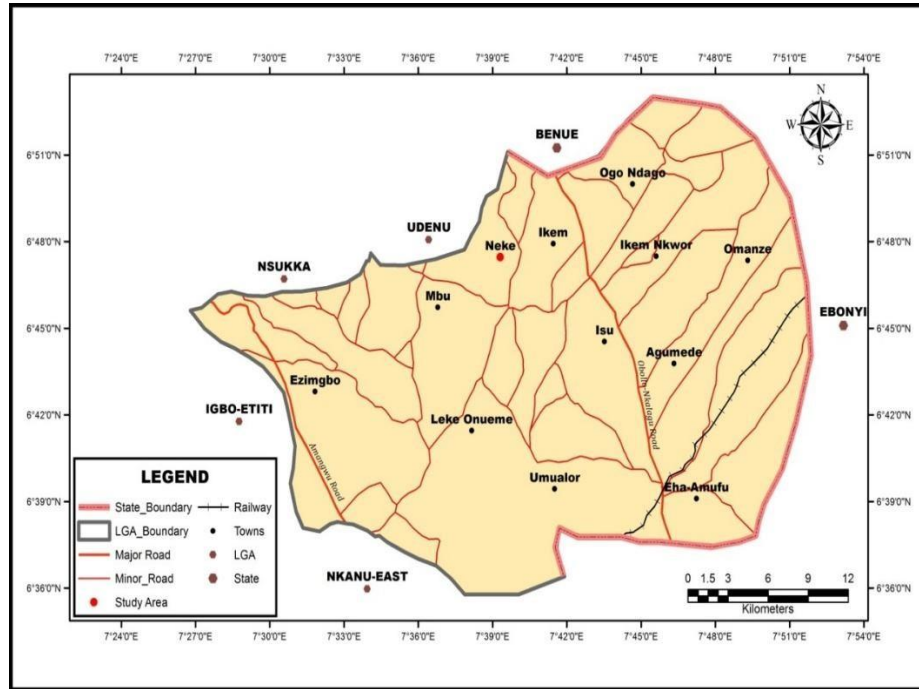


Fig.1: Map of Isi-Uzo Showing the Study Area.

Findings

The Meaning of Odo

Etymologically, Odo is the Igbo word for the colour yellow. The colour is locally got from extracts of certain plants or woods and from seeds, flowers or tubers, ground and mixed with water. The paste or dried 'glorizza' powder is used for decoration in traditional arts and it is believed to have a ritual effect. The Odo colour is used in decorating the Odo mask, blended with white and black colours all cast on the light green or yellowish background of the fresh palm frond - *omu nkwu* - that forms the basic costume for this masquerade. Odo colour also assumes a mythical link with the Odo masquerades (Ezechi, 2011:78).

Odo is equally a generic name for the various species of masquerades within the Igbo - Odo subculture. A short form of *Odomagana*. The meaning

of Odo magana (otherwise called *Akawo*) is not very clear; but Okeke and Okechukwu think that it suggests 'well-set' or that which sets things right. They argue that "this is appropriately the mission of Odo bringing some system into an otherwise chaotic world." This moralist definition is favoured by Odo's ability to take on evil doers in society and to promote righteousness and industry through its satirical demonstrations among other means. Ultimately, Odo as a masquerade is very powerful in the people's world view. It supplies all their needs, assures their maximum security and is capable of great feats. Consequently, anyone who achieves some great feat among the people is metaphorically called Odo.

Some natives also believe that *Odomagna* is mystically related to *Anumagana*, the porcupine. This thorny animal is linked by traditional mythologies to the spirit of the Odo, and given the people's belief about the security of the just man, the *Anumagana* link points to the moral probity of anyone who celebrates the Odo. However, the Odo, like many other human cultural institutions, has often degenerated to the very opposite of this fundamental usage, this will be discussed later in this work.

Furthermore, Odo can be used as an appellation for the male child, used by adult males to greet another when one has forgotten the person's name. In this situation, it literally means my friend. A times, Odo is also used as the child's local word for daddy, *Odom* (my father). And it is also used for personal names like: *Nwaodo* (Son of Odo), *Ododile* (active Odo), *Ugwuodo* (hill/valley associated with Odo). These names depict ideological expression of Odo's inalienable relevance to the people's existence and cultural milieu.

The Making of Odo Masquerade

The people of Neke were said to have decided that they would not procure normal masquerades that are made of clothing as most other clans do. They needed a masquerade that would be intimidating, scary and fearful to behold. The people were also said to have felt that masquerades made with clothes cannot resist arrows, spears, machetes and clubs, especially when attacked from a close range.

The spears of palm trees are used in making Odo, especially the *Omu* or *Igunkwu* usually the new ones that are yellowish in colour. They are usually used to cordon off areas termed to be holy or sacred, demarcate area that is under contest, indicate that a deity is in charge of the area, object or property where it is placed, etc. It is these yellow coloured spears of palm trees that were used in making the masquerade. The preparation of one Odo is tasking; it requires strength, skills, time and total commitment. The preparation of an Odo is done by youth and usually at night when people are deeply asleep. The initiates of Odo masquerade climb palm trees with sharp

double edged knives and rip-off fresh palm fronds quietly. Bundles of newly harvested palm fronds are taken to the Odo forest (*Uham*) for processing.

Next, tough forest climbers are cut to be used in constructing the head and shoulder skeleton of the Odo. The processed yellowish leaves are tied and fixed on this skeleton. The length and bulk of any Odo masquerade depend on the height and strength of the man who would carry the completed mask and regalia. The head of the completed Odo is painted with various colours; red, black, blue and yellow.

The ugliest of all the Odos is *Okurenkpume* (fire cannot consume stone) because its face is painted black. And it got that name because it was said to have been set ablaze during the Nigerian - Biafran civil war (1967/1970), but it was not consumed. It was said to have acquired its black face as a result of the fire. The two flagships of the Odo deity in Neke carry many feathers on their chests usually stuck there with the blood of chickens and goats sacrifices to them. The head is also stuck with the long feathers from the tails and wings of sacrificed chickens. These dreaded Odo flagships are *Nchuma* and *Okurenkpume*. All other Odos (the lesser odos) owe allegiance to these big two. Each of these Odos has its own messenger. For *Okurenkpume*, *Ngbavuru* is his messenger, while *Nchuma* has *Bakawu* as its messenger. Both (*Nchuma* and *Okurenkpume*) have one "wife" called *Ogorozhi* and it is the most beautiful of all the Odo masquerades. In one Odo year, *Ogorozhi* will return with *Nchuma*, in another Odo season, "she" will come with *Okurenkpume*. But in addition, *Okurenkpume*, has a young messenger called *Adaka*. Every other odo in all the villages has an *Adaka* each.

Below is the list of the Odos in Neke: (i) *Nchuma*, whose custodian is *Umu-Onoka* clan (ii) *Bakawu*, the messenger of *Nchuma*, (iii) *Okurenkpume*, whose custodian is *Egbe - Aneke* clan (iv) *Ngbavuru*, the messenger of *Okurenkpume*, (v) *Adaka Okurenkpume*, (vi) *Ogorozhi*, the "wife" of *Nchuma* and *Okurenkpume*. The six Odos mentioned above belong to the entire Neke community. The *Egbe-Aneke* and *Umu-Onoka* families or clans are custodians on behalf of the people. And they enjoy about 80% of the proceeds from the sacrifice to these Odos.

Table 1: List of Odos in Neke and the villages they come from

Name of Odo	Village it belongs to
Oshitowere	Isi -enu
Akpasuru nwenwu	Umu-egwu
Omegu Omaru	Umu-egwu

Okwu Anyigu oha	Umu-egwu
Azhi - Akwu	Umu-egwu
Oji Amigu Negu	Akpani
Okwu anyiagu oha Echie Obodo	Akpani
Ede Awogu nwa-Ngwere	Umu ugwu
Egu Amagu Ukaducho	Obeguaba
Odo Ugwu Eku	Umu Ezenohe

Source: Fieldwork.

Each village's Odo has its own priest, shrine, temple and house where the Odo is kept when no one is inside it. Worthy of discussion among all the Odo's in Neke is Odo Ugwu Eku.



Plate 1: Odo mask made fresh palm fronds.

Plate 2: Odo entertaining the people

Source: www.youtube.com

Source: www.thenationonline.net/odo-masquerade

Odo Ugwu Eku (The Most Dreadful Odo in Neke)

Odo Ugwu Eku is a rebellious Odo. It is designed to be a far from both Nchuma and Okurenkpume. The Odo deity is obviously a resource generating venture. The Umu Onoka and the Umu Egbe-Aneke appropriate a large percentage of the sacrifices made to Nchuma and Okurenkpume, respectively. These sacrifices include cows, goats, rams, cocks, yams, monies, clothes, etc.

A clan in Akpani village, the Umu Ezenohe, felt dissatisfied with the way the proceeds from the Odo worship were being shared. Since the Odos from all the villages owe allegiance to one of the two big Odos, a percentage of whatever the village Odos (who have their own priests as well) could raise is usually sent back as tributes to these two flagship Odos. The chief priests

of these two powerful Odos also became affluent and men of great standing in the society because they were said to have been favoured as a result of their being chosen by these powerful deities. They, therefore, represent the gods among men. In a bid to show their annoyance, the Umu Ezenohe clan perfected a grand design to institute her own Odo, which would be as (if not more powerful than) the two big Odos. One of their sons was the one in charge of carrying (wearing) the “Messenger” of Nchuma called Bakawu. And in about the year 1938, they grabbed Bakawu, took it to their clan and from it built the Odo Ugwu-Eku. The Odo became so powerful and so dreaded that a lot of people believed in its efficacy much more than any other Odos in Neke.

Odo Ugwu -eku had a messenger (not another Odo but just a god) which was so deadly that many people appealed to it. This god was called Ogenegba. If anyone steals from you and you go to Ogenegba to kill the person, it would kill that person instantly. And if the family fails to quickly go and appease the gods, it would start killing the members of the victim’s family. The stolen property cannot be used by anyone again otherwise the person would incur the wrath of the deadly god. So at the shrine of the god, one could easily see properties such as bicycles, hoes, machetes, money, goats, etc.

The Return

Odo is believed to return from the spirit world at the expected season. This return” is technically known in Igbo vernacular as “*Odida Odo*” (literally “fall of Odo”), a concept which conjures the image of coming down from on high, a glorious descent. The mystery of the return makes it awesome and the people are enthusiastic about it. Once the first moon of the Odo season is sighted, which in the native week’s calculation falls probably within November, the exact day for the return of Odo is fixed by native calendar makers, usually priests and elders of each village with the help of diviners. Nchuma comes back first with elaborate celebrations at Ugwu Odo where it will be seen. After Nchuma, Okurenkpume comes back. The celebrations to mark the return of these Odos are characterized by elaborate festivities in families and the community at large. The celebrations involve racing by able men representing various units of the village and lashing bout in which youths pair up to test their bravery and strength as they flog themselves with canes on their bare bodies, all to entertain the spectators in the market square (a practice that is equally associated with Egwu-Imo Awka, in Anambra State). The elderly men thrill the crowd with mellow drama that captures local stories. There is free-for-all drinking in the midst of

all these, while some rich people among them take friends home for sumptuous feasting. Odo stays about two weeks to allow other ceremonies to happen before it comes out to the village to dwell in the compound of the Atamah Odo.

The Sojourn

The period of sojourn describes the stay of Odo among the people, from the time of arrival to its departure. In Neke, it lasts for about six to eight months. During its sojourn, Odo does not come out on *Orie* day, one of the four native market days in Igbo calendar to give people the liberty to go about their businesses without fear of any sort. But on the remaining market days, namely Eke, Afor and Nkwo, extra care is taken in order not to offend the gods of the land in any way. During this period, also, Odo moves about from village to village and even compound to compound to visit important men who present rich sacrifices to it. There, sacrifices are made by both men and women and each worshipper prays to Odo and presents his/her requests. Odo replies in coded secret cult language which is interpreted to the worshipper by a selected member of the secret cult committee. The Odo also displays what it can offer its worshippers by way of justice and fairness. Initiation of youngsters into the Odo cult is also held during the sojourn. The initiation ceremony is a significant ritual in Odo culture, which symbolises the formal admission of youth into the male society.

The Departure

The departure of Odo to the spirit world is celebrated with pomp and pageantry. People who made promises to Odo if they found solutions to a particular problem they complained of the previous year fulfil them if they were successful and new requests are made. The people are usually sad at the departure of Odo even though they are aware that the ancestral spirits never leave the community in the 'real' sense. Odo's continued presence can be deduced from the customary libations of the priest to it as well as the incessant recourse to its counsel by litigating parties.

The smaller Odos leave before the two principal Odos. They do so on fixed dates. Each of the two principal Odos has its own day of departure. Women and children are prohibited from witnessing Odo the last two or three days to its departure. The masker at this point does not wear his mask, but still speaks and acts satirically. A metal gong (Ogene) is usually sounded to herald this episode. The aim is to maintain the secrecy of the Odo cult, while ensuring that all the uninitiated persons do not partake in its secret activities.

The Odo moves around the village silently and unseen by people, tracing not the normal village roads, but the traditional pathways of the ancient generations. It then departs to the land of the dead. The departure of Odo is often associated with ascending the hill or crossing the stream, and in Igbo mythology, hills and streams usually depict boundaries between the living and the dead. When Odo ascends the hill, it is usually escorted by male youths and spiritual persons (especially, titled men and chief priests), who would stop at a certain point and return to the village because they cannot follow Odo to the land of the dead, for that would amount to death. The Odo must proceed alone to the land of the spirit world. The departure of Odo is also accompanied by the disposal of cult materials used during the season, some are burnt and the more valuable ones stored away. In the past, conflicts and dangerous competitions in occultism amongst rival Odo units, who tried to prove their mettle by any means whatsoever, ensued as the Odo departs to the land of the spirits.



Plate 3: Odo masquerade (Source: www.nairaland.com)

The Secret of Odo Cult

The Odo deity operates one of the most sophisticated secret networks that the world of traditionalism has ever known. "In fact, the driving force of the Odo deity is the secrecy surrounding the procurement and manifestation of its masquerades" (Agbo 2014. Per.comm). Ugwueze (per.comm. 2014) added thus: "Secrecy is the secret of the secret cult." It is around this secret that most activities of the Odo deities hangs. The masquerades that the human beings wear is said to have come from the spirit world, as a result, it is held in awe and many would gladly do anything for Odo as far as it is said

that it was a pronouncement from the spiritual world. Everything must be done to preserve this secret, no cost is too much, no price is too high to pay, as long as the secret is kept intact.

To carry the Odo mask is a big task. So, during the night, the cultists do not wear the Odo mask to avoid the obvious suffocation that usually results. To ensure that the masker remains unknown, a myth was built around it which says that any woman or uninitiated person who sees Odo in the night would die. In those days, if a woman inadvertently kills a scorpion, both at home and in the farm, the woman's husband would go and tell Odo devotees. They would come with one Odo in the night and tell the woman to bring a piece of cloth, a cock, tubers of yam etc to be used in "burying" the scorpion, Odo usually claims that the scorpion is its son. The woman not knowing that it was her own husband that told them, the poor woman would quickly produce the items and then add some money to it. It is worthy of note that most of the vengeance or deaths attributed to the judgmental wrath of Odo were actually carried out by its devotees or agents who were under oath to do whatever it took to keep the secret of the cult group.

Language of Odo Cult

In order to safeguard its secrets, the custodians of the Odo cult had to develop their own diction. This is a language that no one else in the world can speak except those that have access to the cult's secrets. Not even all the initiated males could understand the language unless they can diligently study it. The impenetrable secrecy guaranteed by the language makes the entire Odo worship very mysterious; only the person carrying an Odo is allowed to speak it. On no account should anyone not wearing the mask speak the language, except inside the various Odo forests.

Usually, when any Odo visits a family, it comes with a gang of devotees, and when it begins to speak its usual language, one of the devotees would be interpreting whatever it says to the people in the compound.

Examples and meaning of the Odo language are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Language of the Odo Masquerade Cult

S/No	Local Language	Odo Language	English Language
1	Nwanyi	Ahon	Woman
2	Ishi	Oji	Head
3	Aka	Njegere	Hand
4	Obi	Nguduma	Heart
5	Ihu	Egedege	Face
6	Mmiri	ogbam geregere	Water

7	Mmanyà	otum geregere	Wine
8	Onye Obia	Ahetugo	Stranger
9	Anu	Ajigbu	Meat
10	Ji agworoagwo	Uputu	food especially pottage
11	Nwata	mie tete ebi	Child
12	Kusie ike	mie kpoo	Beat or hit hard
13	Egbe	ode girigiri	Gun
14	Okuko	ikok etc	Cock

Source: Fieldwork

Like any other language that is alive and dynamic, when new words are needed, they are produced. When the white men came and brought some new things, the following words entered the cult's lexicography.

Table 3: Other Languages of the Odo Masquerade Cult

S/No	Local Language	Odo Language	English Language
1	Akwukwo	Hachakpa	Book
2	Ego Igwe	Gwegiri	Money (coins)
3	Ego Akwukwo	Hakpara	Money (note)
4	Ugboala	Oya wuwuwu	Lorry
5	Mma agha	Ogbugu etc	Sword

Source: Fieldwork.

Odo and Women

Odo, in general, is customarily conceived in masculine terms but the Odo is not necessarily anti feminine. Some Odo characters play women roles in the masquerade family and these women, therefore, refer to themselves as wives of these Odo characters. In spite of this, women are generally excluded from real participation in Odo, their exclusion seems to be inspired by the patriarchal hegemony in the Igbo worldview. Sometimes, reasons given for their exclusion are superstitious and seemingly irrational. It is usually said that women are incapable of tolerating hazards, that they cannot keep secrets and most especially, that their periodic menstrual flow makes them unworthy to appear before the sacred. In fact, it is known that the chief priest of Odo does not touch his wife (wives) or eat food prepared by a woman during his period of purification and preparation for the major rituals of Odo. Within that period, which is often not prolonged, he may have to live on roasted yam eaten with palm oil and salt.

Nevertheless, the Odo season brings stress for women in terms of labour, cost and restrictions in movement and expression, yet they supply

the services, provide the food and gifts for Odo. For instance, it is traditionally an abomination for a woman to see an unmasked Odo or even to discuss publicly a number of issues about Odo. The affairs of Odo are not discussed to the hearing of women. On no account will a woman venture into the Odo forest or taste any edible, which has been touched by Odo even if she prepared the food.

It is believed that the violation of these prohibitions attracts dire consequences ranging from terrible ailment to death, unless some cleansing rituals are performed. Thus, in spite of all the arguments that women are included in Odo culture, there is an overwhelming evidence of discrimination against them.

Taboos Associated with Odo Worship

The culture and traditions of the people of Neke are structured and built around their belief and worship of Odo, which have greatly influenced their lifestyle, dos and don'ts because things have to be done in a way that the gods would not be angry and unleash its wrath on the people. It is to this effect that the killing of scorpions and snakes, most especially when Odo is on ground, is considered a taboo. This is as a result of their belief that these creatures are sons of Odo.

Also, during the Odo period, no woman dares to ask any man about his movements, they can go out and come back any time they want. Also, during the period, strangers or uninitiated men as well as women and children are not permitted to come out to the streets for any reason whatsoever, if for any reason there is need for movement by women, children, strangers or uninitiated men, there must be a person who is an Odo devotee to accompany them and he would shout "*ogbanedu*," meaning, "I am uninitiated," as they move. As the Odo and its devotees roam around the streets, they are usually vigilant and upon hearing the word "*ogbanedu*," they look for a hiding place to allow the uninitiated pass without seeing them. Any violation of these taboos is usually visited with either a serious ailment or death. Often, very costly animals and rituals are used for purification and appeasement of the gods.

Impact of Odo Masquerade Practice in Neke

Odo worship in Neke has its down sides. In a bid to uphold traditions a lot of negative things happen. These are: (i) Deprivation of the right of movement; the Odo members compel all women and non-natives not to come out of their premises between 7 pm and 6 am any year Odo roams about Neke. The only exception is if such a person would seek the help of an initiated native male to shout "*ogbanedu*". This is supposed to be a public

acknowledgement that Odo holds sway over all persons in Neke, therefore, trampling on peoples' constitutional right to movement. The situation worsens during *una* Odo (Odo's period of departure). No woman or nonnative is allowed after 10am to leave her premises until the next morning two days to its disappearance. No church activity would take place outside the church building, no school would function. In case of any breach, there is no fine, the punishment is death! During this period, the devotees line up stark naked, and walk around the town with lots of charms, talisman (ii) Disruption of social life: During the celebration of *Mgbamike*, a special feast held in honour of Odo which for three consecutive days, Christians are earmarked for torture. Hordes of young Odo adherents and devotees put on hastily made Odo masks known as "*Ujeme*" and go about to assault Christians found outside their premises and often loot their property. In the view of the Odo cult members, it is considered an affront for anyone to go to church, school or to engage in any activity not pertaining to Odo worship. Penalties could be death, maiming or mass looting of property; (iii) Disfranchisement: a new trend which members of the Odo cult adopt in order to ensure that Christians do not participate in discussing important issues that affect the lives of all members of the community, is to schedule meetings to take place at Odo forests. They know that Christians would not submit to attending meetings in such "profane" places. The consequence is that decisions affecting Christians are taken without their participation. (v) Insecurity and loss of access to visitors: as a result of the fear created in the minds of the members of the public, many employees of government and its agencies decline postings to Neke. They elect to lose their jobs if it is inevitable rather than work in a community where Odo cultism subjects everyone to persistent insecurity of life and property. Students who are not natives of Neke refuse to attend schools in Neke where competent teachers have been scared away. Even students who are natives do all they could do to get transferred to Isi-uzo Secondary School from the Community Secondary School, Neke. The result is that the school in Neke has become deserted and dilapidated. (vi) Retrogression: The schism, frustration and confusion which the evil and increasing acts of lawlessness of the members of Odo masquerade have unleashed on Neke community have combined to destroy the patriotism and unity of purpose which Neke needs in order to march forward in this modern period. The above assertions were equally noted by (Ezichi, 2010).

Challenges Facing Odo Masquerade Celebration in Neke

A number of factors have been affecting the smooth running and practices of the Odo masquerade institution and worship. These challenges

have posed serious problems to the effective maintenance of the traditional way of worship of Odo deity in the study area. Some of these challenges are mentioned below:

i. **Foreign Religion:** Foreign religion like Christianity has posed great threat to Odo masquerade celebration in Neke. Christians from Neke see traditional practices as idolatry, fetish, diabolic and devilish. They seek to destroy, at the slightest opportunity, the materials used by this masquerade institution. Also, the regular conversion of these traditional worshippers to Christianity has led to the abandonment of the masquerade institution. Even its secrets are now divulged by former members who claim to have moved from darkness (Odo worship) to light (Christianity). Christianity also has turned the hearts of many young people who are supposed to succeed their ageing members away from this indigenous practice.

ii **Modernity:** In a world of rapid change in structure, civilization and way of life, Odo worship and practices are highly threatened. In a bid to be modern, traditional houses are being renovated with modern building materials, thus detaching them from their original functions and values. Young people see the traditions of the forefathers as archaic and backward. White collar jobs and search for “greener pastures” are also taking them far away from their traditional abode, thereby reducing the importance they attach to these traditional practices.

iii. **Abuse of Power:** Another major challenge facing the Odo worship and practices is the abuse of power. Men hide under the cloak of Odo worship to intimidate women. They also use this opportunity to extort money and other valuable property from strangers or even uninitiated men. The evil ones among the adherents have been observed to use evil powers in dealing with their enemies, some of them using sicknesses, others through various curses, and some others through death. This abuse of power is a major challenge and reason for the decline in Odo worship and practices in Neke.

Prospect of Odo Masquerade: The Tourism Option

According to Andah (1980) tourism entails the mobilization of a people's cultural and natural resources, especially those aspects which make people unique and spectacular from other people. By cultural resources, one may refer to those Rich material and non-material attributes acquired within a given society and transmitted from one generation to another (Okpoko,

1990). Among them are festivals, beliefs, dance, 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 buildings and shrines, etc. that form part of cultural resources. There are others which because of their importance in society have been recognized as part of culture. These include features and landscapes of historic value. Most of these cultural resources form centres for tourism / tourist activities.

The central point of Odo masquerade institution, from the purview of tourism development, is the festival associated with it which people from far and near come to witness. Mention has been made of the outing ceremony of the Odo, both the returning and departure ceremonies, which are commemorated with elaborate festivals. On such days, people from far and wide are invited and entertained lavishly. Photographs of these masquerades are also taken and the music recorded and stored in various forms. The mask photograph and images are of great importance to tourists, especially as souvenirs. Of great tourism importance are the houses and grooves of Odo masquerades. Ekechukwu (1990) asserted that archaeological sites, historic sites, museums and monuments, sacred groves are part of cultural sites which help in the promotion of Nigeria (tourism). Tourism can serve as an avenue to promote, sustain and develop Odo masquerade festival.

Whitford and Ruhanen (2013) have argued about the importance of tourism in promoting festivals in Australia. Festivals are seen as the appropriate means of exhibiting indigenous culture, so as to create interest and awareness in indigenous tourism. Festivals have attracted the attention of both federal and state governments due to the various sociocultural and economic benefits they offer rural communities and regional economies (Moscardo, 2007 in Whitford and Ruhanen, 2013). Indeed, Odo masquerade institution can offer huge economic benefits to tourism in Enugu. Odo masquerade, being unique and seasonal, can form a 'destination-image' for Neke town. Popescu and Corbos (2012) shared the same view when they admitted that in Romania, festivals and events are used to get new grounds, and organizers try to bring to Romania the ideas from abroad.

In addition, to help boost tourism development in Neke and neighbouring towns, museums should be established in the area where the cultural materials associated with masquerades will be preserved. Moreover, the photographs, radio cassette/tapes and video cartridges of both the music of the Odo and the masquerade itself should be kept in such museums. This is very important when one considers the fact that Odo does not return every year. Tourists and even indigenes in need of such materials can easily consult such museums to satisfy their needs.

To harness Odo masquerade institution as a tourism resource, the organ directly responsible for planning, developing and transmitting information about tourism like Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation and Enugu State Tourism Board should be involved. Furthermore, other government agencies like the National Commission for Museums and monuments (NCMM) and other bodies involved in the conservation of Nigerian cultural patrimony, especially museums, conservation and resource management agencies etc. which are responsible for preventing, presenting, and promoting cultural and material resources of Nigeria have a great role to play. These bodies should help to modernize the public places and / or arena where these masquerades perform by establishing standard amenities like electricity, pipe borne water and health care facilities within the area of the display of these masquerades. This can help sustain the interest of visitors in Neke. By so doing, it will help attract not only Nigerians, but also foreigners.

Conclusion

Odo masquerade celebration in Neke is a cultural heritage that predates the colonial era. With the advent of colonization and development, Odo masquerade institution is under threat. The way and manner the present generation handles the Odo institution is a threat to the masquerade. The sacred forest that houses Odo paraphernalia is being cleared as a result of population expansion and its attendant quest for more houses, road construction, and the activities of over-zealous Christians, etc. It is an institution that unifies the town, exposes evil doers in the town and corrects errors. The outing ceremony of Odo was filled with festive activities that kept the town agog during its hey days and this was appreciated by all. The tourism potential of the masquerade is enormous. It can be repackaged for cultural tourism to generate income for the host communities through the inflow of tourists and visitors in the community. Its satirical speeches and dances can be recorded and sold. It will equally place Neke town on tourist map of Enugu and Nigeria at large. However, the way and manner it is currently celebrated need to be reviewed. This is the only way tourism can be looked at as an option that can help to revive and sustain this heritage, as is the case in some other climes. The wind of development and modernization blowing across Africa and beyond should not wash-off a once cherished and celebrated cultural heritage.

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