

Traditional Safety and Preservation Measures in The Heritage Industry In Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

The identity of a people is embedded in their traditional heritage resources which have served and still serve as the mirror of a people's culture and tradition. Studies have revealed that the value of heritage resources transcend culture and traditions, but incorporate at the same time social, political and economic aspects. Heritage tourism is a significant typology of tourism in Africa where indigenous values, culture and tradition are still held in high esteem. However, owing to the forces of westernization, modernity, materialism, etc, the preservation and sustenance of heritage resources have become an issue of concern. Efforts are being made to preserve these heritage resources so as to harness their tourism potentials. Using detailed ethnographic methodology, this paper examined the various traditional safety and preservation measures in Eastern Nigeria. The aim is to see how these resources have been preserved through time, the challenges posed to such methods, and the way forward.

Keyword: Safety, Heritage resources, Heritage industry, Preservation, Sustainability.

Introduction

The significance of heritage resources in the sustenance of socioeconomic and cultural values of Africans has been echoed by researchers. In most parts of Africa, an understanding of the unique identity of a person is a function of one's indigenous heritage resources. What then are heritage resources? So many authors (Andah, 1990; Canclini, 1995; Clifford, 2004; Nwankwo, 2012; Scham & Yahya, 2003; Hall, 2000; Nwankwo & Agboeze, 2014; etc) have tried in the past to define the concept, more especially, in the African context. Scham and Yahya (2003); Nwankwo and Agboeze (2014) succinctly defined heritage resources as the essential external components of human existence. These include "cultural (festivals, traditional ceremonies, language, belief systems, norms and value system, dress pattern, cultural objects, traditional dishes, unique religious centers, etc), natural (caves, historical hills/mountains, water bodies, unique vegetation/climate, unique land formations, etc) and built (architectural pattern, traditional habitats, village squares, settlement pattern, etc) heritage resources" (Nwankwo & Agboeze, 2014, p.143). A summary of their views shows that heritage resources include those tangible and intangible natural, cultural and built endowments of a people within a given cultural, geographical or ethnic boundaries. While the intangible endowments include climate, language, belief system, folklores, cultural dance, value system, festivals, etc, the tangibles include caves,

masquerades, water bodies, wildlife, cultural objects in museums and other places, shrines, sacred groves, land resources, etc. These and other related resources make up the heritage industry of a place and they may equally have heritage tourism potentials if adequately and sustainably harnessed.

Some studies (Deeben, Groenewoudt, Hallewas & Willems, 1999; Ashmore & Sharer, 2005; Nwankwo, 2012; Ekechukwu, 2008; Nwankwo & Ukaegbu, 2011; etc) have reported the endangered nature of these heritage resources in most places especially Africa. Some of them have been exposed to both intentional and unintentional human destructions in a number of places. Nevertheless, effort is being made in some places to resuscitate them. For instance, some Igbo speaking parts of Nigeria are currently reviving their indigenous Igbo language through a programme tagged “Na asu nu Igbo” (Be speaking Igbo Language). This is aimed at sustaining the language heritage of the people which is fast being lost to modernity and English language. So many other programmes have been put in place to preserve other heritage resources in these parts. Modern measures namely, security agents i.e. The Police, etc, legislation, fencing, organized monitoring activities, signals/sign posts, etc (Nwankwo, 2013) have been employed but these have not achieved the desired results with respect to the preservation of the indigenous heritage resources of the people under investigation. This paper revisits the traditional / pre-colonial safety and security measures in the heritage industry with a view to determining how these can be integrated into modern practices so as to ensure the sustenance and preservation of the industry in Eastern Nigeria and beyond. Ethnographic data was collected from selected communities in the study area (See Figure 1). Cluster and purposive sampling techniques were used to select fifty-three (53) informants that provided useful information. Finally, descriptive and evaluative methods of data analysis along with SWOT Matrix were used in analyzing the data collected. ArcGIS Extension Tool was subsequently used in locating the sampled communities on the map of the study area.

There are few previous research works on the relevance of heritage resources and the indispensable need to preserve them for posterity, particularly the various measures put in place to conserve them. In her study titled: *Archaeology and Heritage Legislation*, Eze-Uzomaka (2014) stressed the need for the preservation of heritage resources. She also stated that legislation has been one of the major ways of preserving heritage resources. Using examples from Australia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark and New Zealand she concluded that legislation as a measure has not done much in the preservation of heritage resources in Nigeria owing to some lapses, namely poor implementation, obsolete legislation, lack of institutional framework, poor periodic reviews, etc. Ashmore and Sharer (2005) after identifying the endangered nature of heritage resources in the United States of America and the failure of legislation and other governmental initiatives like the Archaeological Conservancy and cultural agency, opined that there is need for archaeologists to be trained as cultural resource managers and in

collaboration with the host communities preserve their rich heritage resources.

However, Anyachonkeya (2006) reviewed the indispensable position of a people's heritage resources in their socio-cultural identity, sustainability and socio-economic wellbeing. He noted that many heritage resources in Omuma community, Imo State are being threatened by modernity. He avers that credible and sustainable measures should be employed to preserve them. Nwankwo and Ukaegbu (2011) in their study entitled: *The Past and Society*, argued that heritage resources are the major carrier of a people's past; therefore, their preservation provides a spring board for understanding their past and challenges of today. They finally opined that the judiciary, legislators, archaeologists, historians, anthropologists and ethnographers should work assiduously towards preserving the past of a people which are embedded in their heritage resources. Nwankwo (2012) examined the challenges of heritage preservation in these parts, and argued that poor management by relevant professionals constitutes a major impediment. He suggested three major instruments namely; significant assessment, stakeholder involvement and public participation for the effective and sustainable management and preservation of heritage resources.

Also, Andah (1990) in his study appreciated the significance of heritage resources to the growth of human society. He noted that museums and some other cultural institutions have great roles to play in the preservation and sustenance of heritage resources. Eze-Uzomaka (2006) noted the need for effective preservation of heritage resources. She opined that tourism can be used as an instrument for the preservation of archaeological heritage, ingenious cultures and human environment in general. Nevertheless, she avers that tourism can only effectively be used as an instrument to preserve heritage resources if knowledgeable experts are involved, if systematic process is followed, and if the host communities participate in decision making, planning and implementation of tourism projects.

In his study of Nigeria's heritage resources, Ekechukwu (2008) outlined some of the major challenges to the preservation of heritage resources to include illicit trafficking of cultural property, vandalism, and unguided developmental projects. He recommended that there is need to review existing laws so as to strengthen them, while ensuring that our rich heritage resources are preserved for the future. Nwankwo (2013) revisited some of the existing modern measures aimed at heritage preservation and tourism promotion. Some of these measures include legislation, security, orientation and involvement of host communities, use of relevant public agencies, etc. He argued that these measures have not achieved the desired results. Consequently, they need to be periodically reviewed and judiciously enforced to ensure effective preservation of heritage resource.

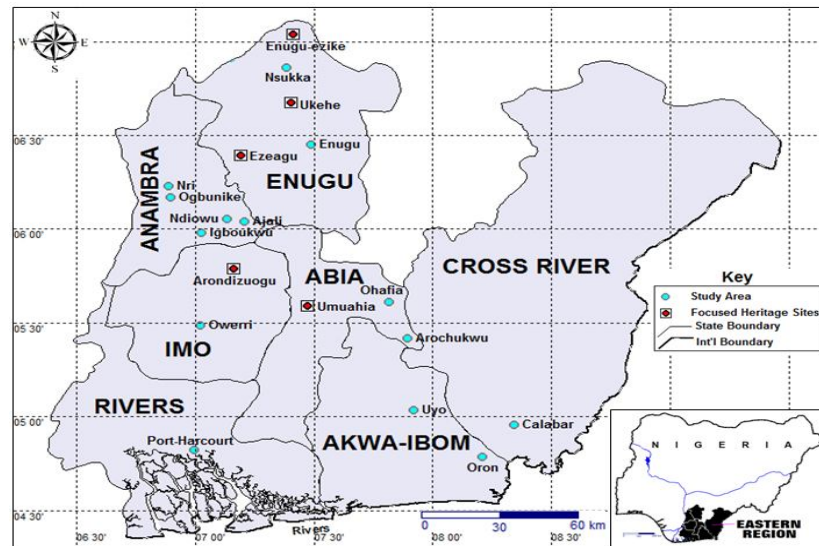


Figure I: Map of Eastern Nigeria Showing Study Locations
(Source: Nwankwo, 2013)

The Study Area

Eastern Nigeria is used here to refer to the present South-East and South-South geo-political zones of the nation excluding Delta and Edo States. This comprises Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa and Cross River States (See Figure I). The region has many small ethnic nationalities but Igbo culture and tradition predominate (Onwuejeogwu, 2002). The region has 21.48% (30,076,661) of the Nigerian total population judging from the 2006 Population Census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discusses how traditional safety and security measures were employed to manage the heritage resources in Eastern Nigeria. The paper notes that the measures and their usage were determined by individual societies. Indeed a number of institutional structures and regulatory provisions have over the years guided the management and preservation of heritage resources in these parts.

Community heads were the major custodians of the heritage resources. They housed and protected the cultural materials and various objects of worship as found today in the modern museums in their palaces (Obi), shrines and sacred places. They equally ensured that festival norms and values are protected. An informant from Enugu-Ezike clearly noted that in the past, community leaders had major tasks of ensuring the protection and preservation of the heritage resources. And that any failure in the protection and sustenance of these heritage resources were interpreted as weakness on the part of the community head that was either chosen unanimously by the

community or assumed by hereditary. Apart from ensuring the protection and preservation of the heritage resources, they equally ensured the safety of genuine visitors to the community. In most cases, the visitors were meant to report at the palaces of these community heads to register their presence and mission in the community. Once satisfied with the mission, the community head will ensure the safety of the visitors and their comfort by assigning some palace security details to them throughout their period of stay in the community (GHF, 2008). As was noted by an informant in Arondizuogu, if the visitor was distinguished, the community head would summon the entire community to his palace and introduce the visitor to them. In some cases this will involve some form of cultural display.

Village heads come next in the hierarchy of powers for heritage resource protection and preservation. Like community heads, they equally ensured the safety of visitors to their areas of jurisdiction in the past. An informant at Oron noted that in the past, village heads used to hang charms and amulets on the neck or waist of a visitor in order to protect him from harm by nefarious indigenes or outsiders. Furthermore, various village festivals, shrines, sacred groves, etc, were entrusted to their care. Objects of worship, festival materials, regalia of the past village heads, and other material cultural inheritance of the community are kept in their custody either within their houses or at the village square. Indeed, the prowess and dignity of a particular village head during the said period, is adjudged by his ability to preserve both the material and non-material heritage resources.

Furthermore, the custodians of family shrines, objects of worship, cultural regalia and other cultural materials of the family were the family heads. Secret Societies in some places served as an institutional mechanism for the preservation of heritage resources. A typical example is the *Ekun* society in Oron, which was charged with the responsibility to ensure the preservation and protection of shrines, festivals and sacred groves. Similar functions were undertaken by the *Ekpe* society in parts of Calabar and the present Abia State. Another secret society that was very significant in the past for the preservation of people's cultural heritage is the *Ekpe-Mboko* amongst the *Aro* people who scattered in various parts of Igbo land of the region under study. For instance, they determined the modalities for title taking, burial rites and activities of the masquerade cult in their respective communities. Masquerade Cult is also notable in most Igbo communities as protectors of heritage resources. Among the *Aro* communities, both at home (*Aro-uno*) and in diaspora (*Aro-ezi*), the famous Ikeji festival (See Plate 1) is celebrated to mark the beginning of the new farming season between the months of February and March as may be determined by the celebrating communities. Masquerades were said to have helped in the protection and preservation of the traditional norms of some societies (Anyachonkeya, 2006). Anyone who violated any socio-cultural norms was visited by masquerades and made to comply with the necessary sanctions (Magesa, 1998). In most cases, the masquerades visited defaulters by night or very

early in the morning (between 3am and 5am) and generally made away with goat or any valuable possession of the culprit as ransom.



Plate 1: Members of the Masquerade Cult Coordinating Activities During an Ikeji Festival in Arondizuogu. (Source: Okoye, n.d.)

Special Committees were equally constituted in the past by the leadership of the communities for the management of cultural heritage. Such committees existed and still exist in Enugu-Ezike. An informant from the community noted that they had a socio-cultural and religious committee called *Oyima-Omabe* which was charged with the responsibility to organise and preserve the *Omabe* festival, a notable festival in Nsukka culture area of Igbo land. He affirmed that this committee indulged in all sorts of sacrifices and ritual practices during this festival and worked tirelessly for the protection and preservation of this festival and its materials. The influence of Christianity has however, whittled down the powers of this committee. In Oron land, *Esuoro* performed similar functions. These committees worked in collaboration with the village or community heads and defaulters were duly punished. Ndiowu in Anambra State had a similar committee in the past that was charged with the responsibility to protect and preserve the Ikeji festival.

The Igbo traditional society, during pre-independence and colonial periods, had various categories of community sanctions as was determined either by the leadership or community assembly that were effective instruments for maintaining law and order (Nwankwo and Agboeze, 2014). People strongly adhered to laid down rules to evade social sanctions, which could either be in monetary form or socio-economic restrictions, when defied. For instance, in some parts of Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State (i.e. Ndiokoro, Ndiowu and Ajalli), the secrets of the masquerade cult were not meant to be divulged to women or uninitiated members of the community. Defaulters were banned from communal activities in the community. In some cases, their domestic animals were confiscated by a masquerade called *Achikwu* that was charged with such responsibilities. Sometimes, defaulters were asked to embark on impossible missions, including bringing a basket-

full of tsetse flies (*Abo-Ijiji*) to ensure strict adherence to rules. There were also cases where an offence led to someone being barred from trading in the community's local markets (Arinze, 1970). In extreme cases, their kinsmen and women were barred from visiting them. This was mostly when the norms guiding sacred places, festivals and masquerade cults were defied.

Palm Fronds (*Omu-nkwu*) (See Plate 2) were and still significant leaves among the Igbo and their closest neighbours. According to one of the interviewees from Arondizuogu, palm fronds were among measures that have aided the protection and preservation of some heritage resources in the Igboland. They were used to indicate some dangerous spots and/or areas or things that must be avoided. Indeed, once palm fronds were used to surround a given forest, farmland or placed at the entrance of a sacred grove, it implies 'No Entry'. Palm fronds were used to protect sacred places and festival materials from unnecessary human encroachment. Thus, the messages 'do not use; do not trespass; do not enter', etc, were passed to the public by the presence of palm fronds (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004). At Oron, palm fronds convey similar messages to the people when used to surround a place. The removal of these palm fronds at designated place was seen as 'abomination!' (*Aru*).



Plate 2: A Masquerade using Palm Fronds to perform during Ikeji Festival at Arondizuogu, Imo State. (Source: Okoye, n.d.)

Age grades (*Otu Ogbo*), constitute an integral part of the social structure of traditional societies in Eastern Nigeria and their membership was restricted to males. The oldest member of a given age grade was expected not be more than five years older than the youngest in that particular age grade. In the past, age grades were used for the maintenance of law and order in the society (Amucheazi, 2002). They protected heritage resources by ensuring full compliance to restrictions and norms protecting religious and cultural objects, sacred places, festivals, etc.

SWOT Matrix of Traditional Safety and Conservation Measures

SWOT Matrix is an analytical model that was developed by Albert Humphrey in the 1960's and 1970's to aid in the understanding of a

phenomenon, its impacts and sustainability in a given setting (Nwankwo, 2013). It is invaluable in taking necessary and sustainable decisions on a subject. This model was used to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of traditional safety and conservation measures in the heritage industry of the region under investigation. A succinct analysis of the subject matter is shown in the SWOT Matrix below;

Strengths

- Traditional heads were empowered to manage culture and tradition and they are knowledgeable in traditional norms, values and sanctions. They also hold the traditional stool and authority of the community, village or family.
- Secret societies possessed spiritual powers and were feared and respected by the community.
- Men of unquestionable characters were selected by the traditional authorities and community assembly as members of special committees for a given traditional assignment for the community.
- Community sanctions served as safety and preservation measures because respect for traditional value system and traditional order was the order of the day.
- People in the traditional societies lived with great consciousness of the presence of palm fronds anywhere around their communities.
- Age grades were able to carry out traditional orders in their various communities without fear and were uninfluenced.
- Masquerade cults were able to function effectively because the membership comprised mostly fearless and agile youths.

Weaknesses

- There is possibility of negative advice and wrong attitudes coming from sitting traditional heads. Sometimes their age might make them to be weak and slow in taking necessary decisions at the various levels of traditional leaderships in the communities.
- Presence of dubious members could mar the accuracy and unbiased judgments and actions of secret societies in the traditional communities.
- Men of unquestionable character were not always available to be selected to work in special committees for the community.
- The use of community sanctions can be abused consciously or unconsciously by the traditional authority.
- The traditional use of palm fronds can be abused by dubious or ignorant ones in the community, hence sending a wrong signal to the members of the community.
- Sometimes members of various age grades were not always available to perform their traditional duties in the community in times of need.

- Members of the masquerade cults can pass wrong judgments owing to lack of experience and youthful exuberance.

Opportunities

- Traditional heads are always appointed and accepted by both the community and the government; and they also work harmoniously with the village and community traditional councils.
- Activities of most traditional institutions like headship, traditional societies or groups, heads are still cherished and valued in most rural communities in the study area.
- Some traditional rulers still make use of special committees in the administration of justice and other traditional responsibilities in their communities.
- Palm fronds are still given relevance and regard today in most traditional communities.
- The age grades are still found in some communities and are being revived in most communities owing to its irreplaceable relevance.
- Despite the presence of Christianity, masquerade cults are still operating in some rural communities but with controlled activities.
- Most people in the rural area have much respect for traditional institutions and indigenous value system.

Threats

- Kingship scuffles, killings, kidnappings, mischief making, etc, are the major threats to the existence of traditional leadership system, coupled with imminent death, debility, and other aged-related sicknesses in the case of family heads.
- Christianity and civilization are amongst the major forces threatening the existence of indigenous values and traditional institutions.
- Materialism, political influence, corruption, bribery, can mar the trust and respect for traditional committees and groups.
- Ignorance, misrepresentation and deceitful interpretation are amongst the banes of palm fronds and some other traditional safety and preservation measures.

Conclusion

Some of the measures discussed above are still found today in some traditional societies in the study area but the forces of modernism and materialism have diminished their efficacy (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004). That notwithstanding, they provide more efficacious safety and preservative strategies in some areas where they are still upheld. This does not in any way mean that modern measures should be disregarded (Nwankwo, 2013). Instead, a combination of modern and traditional measures will provide a more effective way for protecting and preserving heritage resources in these parts. Indeed, there is need for synergy between the traditional and modern

measures so as to ensure the sustainable management of safety and preservation issues in the heritage industry. This entails removing areas of conflicts and blending areas of agreement so as to promote safety of tourists and preservation of heritage resources in the heritage industry of the region under investigation. The traditional authorities are expected to work harmoniously with the government and other stakeholders in the heritage industry to actualize the best results.

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