THE ZANGBETO MASQUERADE CULT OF THE OGU OF BADAGRY, LAGOS STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LAGOS STATE AND NIGERIA

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Abstract
Cultural tourism is gaining exponential momentum internationally, and domestically, becoming a subject of interest to national governments, industry operators, and researchers. Its products, like masquerade cults and their associated elements are crucial to the development and marketing of tourism, especially in developing economies like Nigeria. However, masked cults have largely been underexplored and their inherent symbolisms and values for cultural tourism development underutilised. This study examined the Zangbeto masked cult among the Ogu of Badagry, Lagos State, and its symbolism, with a view to ascertaining its values for cultural tourism development in Lagos State and Nigeria. Designed as both an exploratory and a descriptive case study, it engaged the qualitative methods of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and key informant techniques. Using the convenience and purposive sampling methods, eighty (86) persons were sampled from an approximate population of 811,000. Primary data were analysed using a univariate method in simple descriptive and narrative styles, while secondary data were content analysed for appropriate inferences. The study reveals that Zangbeto as a masked cult has established and sustained a functional cultural and social relevance within the Ogu sociopolitical milieu, with cultic symbolisms and influence. Though confronted with the challenges of oversubscription, commodification, and demystification, Zangbeto embodies and radiates the values of anthropocentrism, inclusiveness, professionalism, honesty, accountability and resourcefulness that provide useful paradigms for cultural tourism development in Lagos State and Nigeria. The study concludes that cultural tourism development should follow specialised, professional and entrepreneurial mechanisms rather than be the function of governments.
Keywords: Zangbeto; Cultural tourism development; Masked cult; Symbolisms; General systems theory.

Introduction

The enormous prospects for tourism development in Nigeria are unarguably predicated on the rich geographical, cultural and ecological diversity of the region. However, tourism development, like a number of other components of national development, has over the years, remained

largely in a state of latency. This is attributable to a number of factors that range from imprecise cultural development policy directions to dysfunctional institutional frameworks for policy implementation, among others. Besides, the Nigerian state has been perennially plagued by what seems like the politicisation of development issues, which often prevents a circumspect and objective attitude in this direction. Among the genres of tourism most affected by this is cultural tourism, which additionally tends to be a victim of lack of clarity about what constitutes authentic Nigerian culture.

The aspects of cultural tourism development that have generated the most interest are those that pertain to the realm of intangible cultural heritage, which includes 'the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated in addition to that – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage' (UNESCO, 2003). Masquerade cults are among Africa's foremost intangible cultural heritage items, occupying the ambiences of symbolism and spirituality, which assigns them specialised significance. In Nigeria, for instance, the masquerade tradition, which has been a vital and significant aspect of the nation's cultural heritage well into the late 20th century, constituting a veritable but latent resource for cultural tourism development, seems to have shaded some of its associated mystique and potency, especially in the wake of the 21st Century. A few masked associations, however, have been resilient, retaining and even soaring in their relevance regarding social integration and economic development. This includes the *Zangbeto*, a traditional masked cult organisation among the Ogu of southwestern Nigeria. *Zangbeto* has been noted to have evolved from local vigilantism to wider community policing, conflict mediation and justice delivery. It achieved this through a system of rich material and ideological symbolisms, organised leadership, and modes of operation, which have also assigned it multiple identities and roles among various Ogu communities (Hunsu, 2011; Okure, 2015). As a cultural element, *Zangbeto* is rooted in the history and long-established traditional practices of the Ogu.

The increasing quest for cultural content by tourists and the dynamic and its ubiquitous nature make culture indispensable to the vitality and sustainability of tourism as a whole and cultural tourism in particular. Similarly, cultural tourism as a tourism genre is gaining exponential momentum internationally and domestically, accounting for over 39% of international tourism arrivals in 2018, with a forecast to increase in the following decade (UNWTO, 2018; Richards, 2018). This makes it a subject of interest to national governments, industry operators, scholars, and researchers. However, the template for Nigeria's cultural tourism development seems to be non-existent or lacking in visibility. Besides, Entrepreneurs, development agencies and researchers of cultural tourism are usually confronted with various issues that variously touch upon the

accuracy of cultural and ethnographic interpretations, accessibility of authentic sources of information and data, and others, which are sometimes challenging to navigate, leading, thereby, to incomplete, unilateral, perfunctory and idiosyncratic presentations of culture that are deficit in veracity. These challenges invariably call for in-depth enquiries and intellectual scrutiny.

This discourse, which derives from an ethnographic study of the Ogu, investigates contemporary cultural tourism development in Nigeria from the perspective of cultural product evaluation and interpretation, and with a general systems theoretical underpinning. In so doing, the *Zangbeto* masked cult is the point of reference as one of the cultural attractions that have captured and sustained the attention of researchers in recent times. It focuses on the structure, practices and symbolic elements of the *Zangbeto* masked cult as obtained among the Ogu of the Badagry region of Lagos state, Nigeria. Because *Zangbeto* is also celebrated in other regions outside of Badagry, there are bound to be variations in organisational structures, practices and symbolic interpretations among the various regions. Similarly, the masked cult is examined primarily from the perspective of its continued cultural relevance and prospects for cultural tourism development in Lagos state and, by extension, Nigeria.

The Ogu of Badagry

The Ogu ethnic and socio-cultural group, referred to as 'Egun' in some literature, is primarily found in Badagry Kingdom of Lagos State, Nigeria (see figures 1 & 2) as the second largest indigenous group after the Yoruba, numbering about 811,000. Badagry kingdom is located on the southwestern coast of Lagos with latitude 6.4150200 and longitude 2.8813200 south of the Equator. It is bounded to the west by Seme, a border town in Benin Republic and on the east by Ojo Local Government of Lagos State. It is bordered to the south by the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean and to the north by Ogun State. It occupies a total area of 441 square kilometres. Like Lagos Island, it lies on the bank of the inland lagoon, a system of creeks and waterways navigable to Lagos and Porto Novo (see figures 1 & 2). Comprising about fifteen (15%) per cent of the Lagos state population in terms of spatial distribution, the Ogu of Lagos are mainly found in Kweme, Badagry, Apa, Tafe, Gbaji, Topo, Povita and Agido towns of the Badagry Kingdom. There is also a significant number of Ogu-speaking population in Makoko, a fishing and trading settlement located by the lagoon between Yaba and Ebute-metta and the Tarkwa Bay region, all in Lagos State. Salt production also encouraged the development of some Ogu village settlements, which also extends to the Yewa community of Ogun State, though in a marginal proportion. At the same time, some much smaller pockets of Ogu indigenous communities can also be found in some parts of Abeokuta and Ifo in Ogun State of southwestern Nigeria.

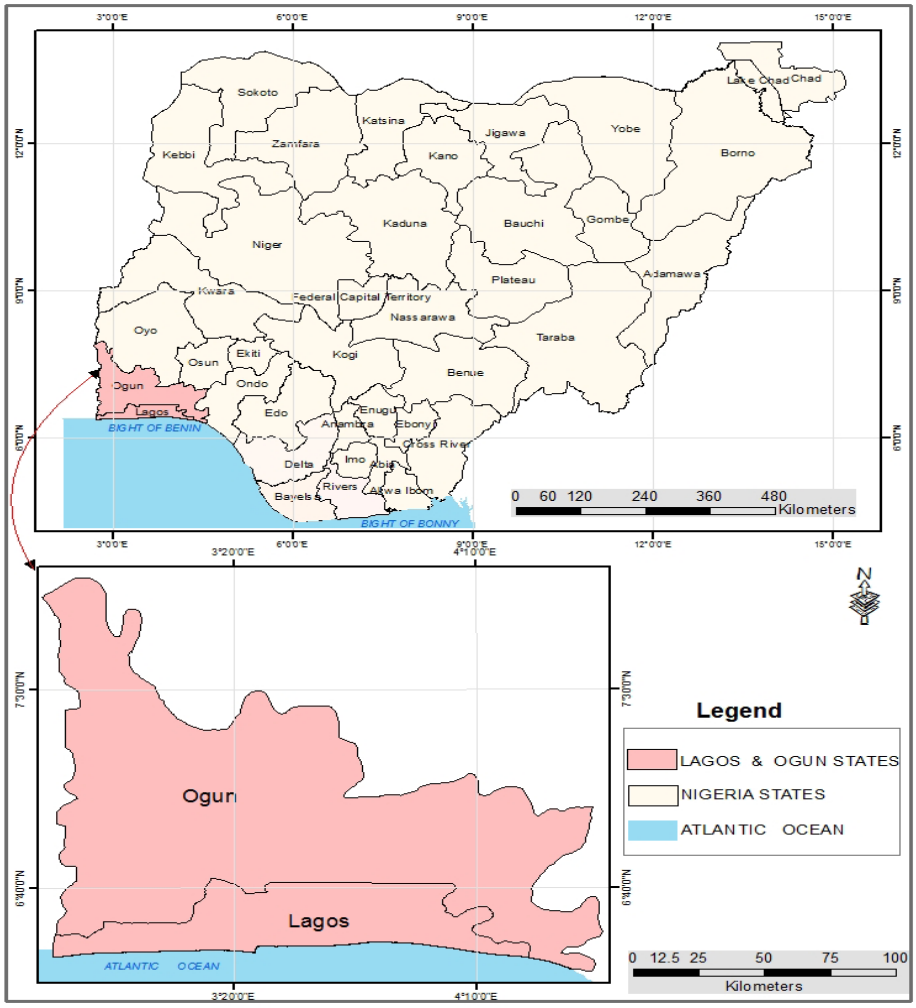


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria Showing Lagos and Ogun States (Source: Okure, 2015)

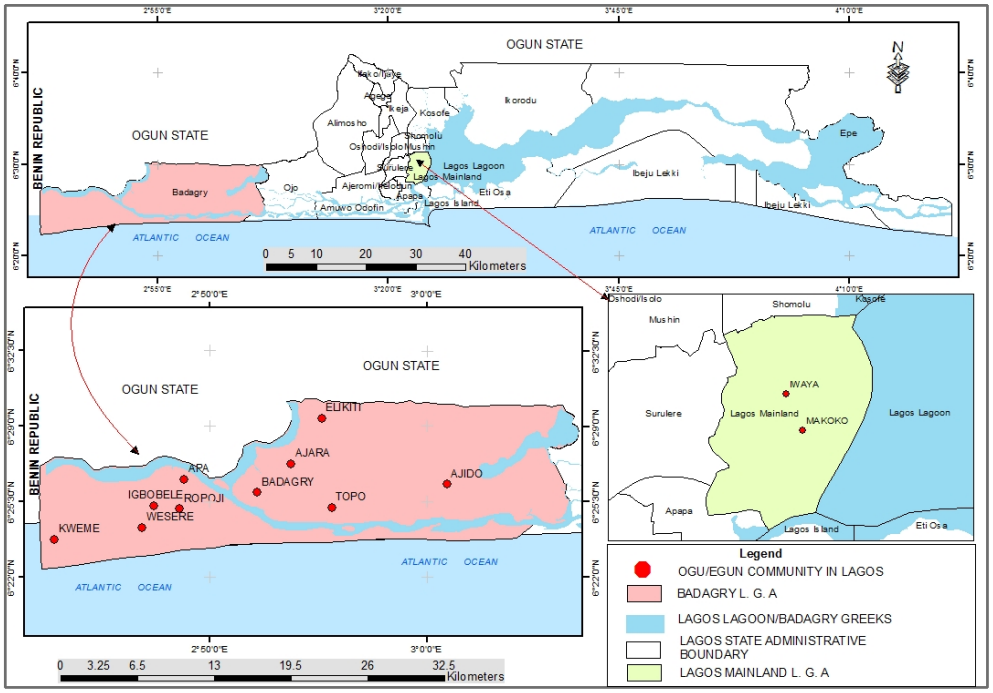


Figure 2: Map of Lagos highlighting Ogu Settlements in Badagry and Makoko (Source: Okure, 2015)

Conceptualising 'Culture', 'Tourism' and 'Cultural Tourism'

From a socio-anthropological perspective, and even by their very nature, *culture* and *tourism* have always shared an inextricable bond that arises from their mutually inclusive dynamics. People travel globally for new cultural experiences, artefacts and cultural benefits. These movements occasion the exchange of ideas, goods and services, yielding new cultural perspectives. It has indeed been argued that all touristic activity is cultural because cross-cultural encounters from tourism create opportunities for cultural experiences based on otherness, whose complexity largely depends on the degree of the tourism's connection to the life of the communities visited (Allis, 2017). However, research enquiries into the relationship between the two fields and those that probe into the nature of culture as a motivation for tourism and a tool for tourism development are relatively novel and evolving.

Concerning *culture*, a good number of researchers have tended to engage the definitional and conceptual frontiers, especially in anthropological, sociological, and other social scientific discourses. Some classical definitions of culture emphasised its social attributes, viewing it as the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of human lives (Sapir, 1921). Culture has also been conceptualised as essentially a construct that describes the total body of beliefs, behaviour,

knowledge, sanctions, values, and goals that mark the way of life of any people, comprising the things that people have, the things they do, and what they think (Herskovits, 1948). Again, a society's culture has been opined to consist of whatever one has to know or believe to operate in a manner acceptable to its members (Goodenough, 1996). From the ethnographic perspective, culture has been described as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871). Additionally, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) attempted to examine the concept of culture from such diverse perspectives as the topical, historical, behavioural, normative, functional, mental, structural, and symbolic, at the end of which they identified three major components of culture, namely, what people think (ideational), what they do (praxis), and their tools for survival (material). Though these definitions converge on culture as essentially social in character and attributes, their generalising tendencies make it difficult to delineate between non-cultural social attributes of humanity and the cultural.

From an African perspective, culture occupies a reverential position, which portray it as a people's social identity, that which is fundamental to their collective well-being and is tied to their spirituality; it shapes their worldviews and moulds their interpretation of existence (Ogbonnanya, 2017; Gyekye, 2014; Oko Elechi *et al.*, 2010). Culture, therefore, 'means more than arts, song and dance…The culture of a people is their total way of life, and this is seen as well in their work and recreation as in their worship and courtship; it is also seen in their ways of investigating nature and utilising its possibilities and in their way of viewing themselves and interpreting their place in nature (Wiredu, 1997, p.10). It is, therefore, essentially about social wellbeing, having to do with how a people derives and interprets wellness regarding its interactions with nature and other humans within the family, community and social context. It is defined within group norms, values, kinship relationships and ties. Thus, the view of culture as a means and subject of exploitation or as being open to commodification is entirely alien to the African consciousness. It is, therefore, meaningful to affirm with Kroeber (1948) that culture is better understood as it works rather than by definition.

Notwithstanding their diverse approaches, the above perspectives on culture tend to converge on three elements that seem fundamental to the understanding of culture, namely, that it is a complex interrelationship of values, customs, beliefs and practices that constitute the way of life of a specific group, which assigns it a social value. Secondly, that culture is learnt through socialisation. It is neither genetically transmissible nor genetically acquired (Eagleton, 2005), and thirdly, that culture defines communities, characterising and differentiating them from others, which makes the idea of cultural boundaries meaningful. However, since contemporary research perspectives on culture span across multiple disciplinary frontiers, leading to

a wide variety of theoretical, methodological and ideological viewpoints that are difficult to capture in any single work (Alexander & Seidman, 1995), scholars have sought to bridge these frontiers by seeking to view culture as humanity's *heritage* in its *tangible* and *intangible* components. Though often used interchangeably with *culture*, heritage is arguably distinguishable from culture because while all of culture is located within the realm of heritage, not all of humanity's heritage is cultural (Okure, 2022). Heritage is significant in linking social groups to particular locations and has always been a vital element in development plans and their execution (Ashworth, 2013). It is also trans-generational, which is why cultural heritage products and the intellectual curiosity they evoke bond it so intimately with tourism.

Tourism, on the other hand, has become increasingly recognised as a complex and globalised phenomenon with demonstrable socio-economic importance (Darbellay & Stock, 2012). Towards the end of the 20th Century, a famous drift in conceptualising tourism was the systemic approach proposed by Molina (1997). Tourism was seen as a system composed of a set of parts or subsystems, namely, the *Superstructure* comprising public and private sector organisations and their laws, regulations, plans, and programmes; *Demand* made up of tourists living in the country and abroad; the *Infrastructure* that includes airports, roads, water supply networks, sewage, telephones, and others; *Attractions*, which include the natural and the cultural; *Equipment and facilities*: hotels, motels, campgrounds, trailer parks, restaurants, cafes, travel agencies, pools and tennis courts, among others; and the *Hosting community*, which comprises residents directly and indirectly linked to tourism. These subsystems interact to achieve a common goal in maintaining the tourism system. Robust as this approach was, it fell short of providing directions for a definitional consensus for tourism.

Among contemporary researchers, *tourism* has yielded various shades of definitional and conceptual approaches from international and national regulatory bodies, researchers and entrepreneurs within the multi-sectoral constituents of its value chain. Contextual and other contingent factors have broadly defined these approaches. Whereas Netto (2009) argues that the various definitional and conceptual approaches to tourism by multiple experts within the tourism value chain and subfields pose the threat of reducing the whole of tourism to its subfields, the approaches themselves remain legitimate for such diverse purposes as research, statistics, industrial practices, as well as legislative and administrative objectives, which have their respective specific nuances. Similarly, it has been argued that the elements that cannot be overlooked in any veritable conceptualisation of tourism are the author's worldview, the tourists' perspective (nature, duration and purpose), and the extant industry practices of tourism itself (Gilbert, 2004). These submissions converge on the impracticability of a monolithic approach to conceptualising tourism. However, a commonly accepted definition is desirable for consistency, standardisation, measurability and regulatory procedures.

The most universally accepted of the conceptualisations of tourism for various intents and purposes emanates from the world regulatory body, the United Nations' World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in its *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008,* drafted in close cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Tourism Statistics, which was created in 2004 at the request of the United Nations Statistical Commission. The Inter-Agency Coordinating Group comprises UNWTO, United Nations Statistics Division, ILO, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The recommendations incorporate findings and conclusions of the UNWTO Committee on Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account, inputs from national statistical offices, national tourism administrations and international organisations during a worldwide consultation. The document (hereafter referred to as IRTS, 2008) contains some basic concepts and definitions meant to guide and serve as a standard reference in the compilation of data, which have been adopted mainly by scholars, researchers and industry operators as legal definitions and concepts. The strength of the document not only derives from the high calibre and blend of its auctorial sources but also from its incorporation of tourism practices and issues from such broad perspectives as tourism demands, tourism products, tourism supply, employment in the tourism industry, and tourism's relationship with macroeconomic frameworks.

Accordingly, tourism is 'essentially a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the everyday motivation' (IRTS, 2008, p.1). Similarly, and with specific emphasis and focus on the economic perspective of tourism, 'tourism is defined as the activities of persons, identified as visitors. A visitor travels under certain conditions, namely, for holiday, leisure and recreation, business, health, education or other purposes.' Therefore, 'Tourism comprises the activities of all these categories of visitors' and, in this regard, 'is much wider than the traditional perception of tourists, which includes only those travelling for leisure (IRTS, 2008, pp. 1-2). The document also navigates between such concepts as 'travel', 'traveller' and 'visitor' about tourism and tourism statistics. Accordingly, 'Travel refers to the activity of travellers. A traveller (domestic, inbound or outbound) moves between different geographic locations for any purpose and duration'. Similarly, 'A visitor is a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited'. The document affirms that "*These trips taken by visitors qualify as tourism trips', and that 'tourism refers to visitors' activity. Therefore, a subset of travellers and visitors are a subset of travellers. Moreover, 'A visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) is classified as a*

tourist (or overnight visitor) if his/her trip includes an overnight stay, or as a same-day visitor (or excursionist) otherwise" (IRTS, 2008, pp.10-11). Such delineations are particularly useful for statistical purposes and data generation for tourism research and studies.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the discrepancies and seeming divergence in the conceptualisation of tourism and allied definitions and terms can effectively be streamlined by contextual clarity, specificity and consistency by authors and scholars. This equally applies to the genres of tourism viewed from the perspective of activities engaged in by tourists as defined by their intentions, which also suggests that there could be as many tourism genres as tourists' intentions and activities.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is understood from the standard perspective of the United Nations' World Tourism Organisation and is usually undertaken with the essential motivation of learning, discovering, experiencing and consuming tangible and intangible cultural products in a tourism destination (UNWTO, 2017). Moreover, tourism has been described as culture or cultural experience (MacCannell, 1993; Urry, 1990). This builds on the assumption that cultural consumption cannot be conceived outside people's way of life in tourist destinations.

McKercher and Du Kros (2002) distinguish between four definitional twists of cultural tourism: the tourism-derived, the motivational, the experiential and the operational. However, such twists or approaches to understanding cultural tourism do not provide the necessary clarity. Perhaps a less conflicting definition of cultural tourism would see it as the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their usual place of residence to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs (Richards, 1996). For instance, cultural tourism differs from heritage or archaeological tourism as it revolves around cultural needs and activities.

Cultural activities in tourism operations and research have been categorised into three broad headings encompassing the various engagements in which cultural tourists usually partake (IRTS, 2008). These include the *creative, arts and entertainment activities*, which concern the production and promotion of, and participation in, live performances, events or exhibits intended for public viewing, the provision of artistic, creative or technical skills for the production of artistic commodities, live musical, sports, amusement and other performances. There is also the category of *museums activities and operation of historical sites and buildings*, which includes the operation of museums of all kinds and operation of historical sites and buildings, excluding renovation and restoration of historical sites and buildings, restoration of works of art and museum collection objects, as well as activities of libraries and archives. The third broad category concerns *botanical and zoological gardens and nature reserve activities*, including the operation of botanical and zoological gardens, including children's zoos, and

the operation of nature reserves, including wildlife preservation. This excludes landscape and gardening services and the operation of sport fishing and hunting preserves.

The above categorisation of cultural activities seems to draw mainly from the scopes along which UNESCO views the various components of humanity's tangible and intangible heritage, which also harbours substantial scholarly research. For instance, Ruiz and Fernández (2015) analysed the evidence available in international literature (Scopus database) on tourism research in UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Their analysis examined 178 contributions from consolidated and emerging destinations and revealed that the UNESCO World Heritage List as of 2015 held 1,052 properties, 814 of which are cultural. This indicates that not only does culture nurture and sustain tourism, but also that tourism is at the vanguard of cultural preservation.

Masquerade, Masquerade Festivals and Cultural Tourism Development

Masks are a universal art form referring to anything worn or used to disguise a person. Even though they have been known to man since pre-historic times, as shown in some cave paintings, modern society still uses them. They give the wearer a different *persona* – the Latin word used for the carved wooden facial masks worn by actors in the Greco-Roman theatre. Masks take various forms; some are used to conceal the face, while others may be headdresses worn over the head. Sometimes, elaborate facial makeup or body painting serve as masks. Various cultures around the world have indigenous masquerades, which are spiritual and religious. Merriam-Webster (1998) defines masquerade in a general sense as a social gathering of persons wearing masks and fantastic costumes. The term also applies to the masked costume worn for such gatherings and an action or appearance that is mere disguise or show. In this regard, masquerade could be synonymous with such concepts as façade, playacting, pretence, disguise or charade, which would connote impersonation, camouflage, perfidy or gloss. As such, it is firmly attached to the mask. 'Masquerade' used in this loose or generalised sense fails to capture the essence of the Nigerian and African masquerade traditions in their genuineness and candour, and to some extent negates the reality they symbolise and opens them to easy misconception.

Asigbo (2010) observes that masquerade culture might be universal, but to an African, the masquerade is a severe engagement that requires mental and physical alertness and spiritual fortification. The cult of the ancestors that has animated the principles of governance and social control (Nwoliseh, 2004; Afigbo, 1993; Mbiti, 1981), has also constituted the fundamental basis for masquerade traditions among most peoples in Africa, including Nigeria. The cult of the ancestors is so central that there is hardly any aspect of African indigenous cultural practices that does not involve it – directly or indirectly. In the context of this study, therefore, 'masquerade' is

used interchangeably with 'spirit manifest' and 'ancestral mask' (Ottenberg, 1982; Isichei, 1988; Hunsu, 2011) to refer to the entity designated as *Ekpo* among the Efik/Ibibio, *Mmanwu* among the Igbo, and *Egungun* among the Yoruba – that is regarded as the physical manifestation of ancestral spirits, which vitalise their performances as well as their sacred rituals. Thus, it is not the mask that makes the masquerade but what it symbolises.

One of the foremost areas in which the challenges of researchers in navigating the terrains of masked cults are most visible, especially in the Nigerian context, is evaluating and interpreting the latter as a product or merchandise for cultural tourism's consumption. Cultural tourism in Nigeria has primarily benefited from the practices and celebrations of masquerade cults and organisations, especially in the regions of the Yoruba, Ogu, Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, and Annang, among others, where they are still present (Okure, 2015). Researchers who have dared to explore this critical domain include Bakare & Akinbileje (2010), Nwankwo (2015) and Uzoh & Ogboagha (2022). For instance, Uzoh & Ogboagha (2022) acknowledge the place of what they describe as *an avalanche* of masquerades that include *Ijele, ojionu, Okwomma*, and *Achuikwu Ojii*, in ensuring the vitality of cultural tourism in the Anambra region of the Igbo nation. These masquerades, though assigned specialised roles in the indigenous socio-political setting of the people, also serve as a medium for tourists' attraction and entertainment. Nwanna (2017) laments that Nigeria did not establish an official tourist board until 1976, which partly accounts for the gross underdevelopment of the sector and the actualisation of its multiple potentials, including those found in the masquerade traditions. The broader negative implication here is not only the short-changing of Nigeria's global cultural popularity and relevance but also the mortgaging of vital resources for researchers and theatre managers and depriving posterity of its rightful heritage. Ezenagwu (2020) appraises the masked traditions of Nigeria from the broad context of traditional festivals, mainly as found in the south-eastern region. As a cultural form, they provide ready merchandise for the cultural tourism market with its ever-increasing demands. Itanyi (2011), examines the bi-annual celebration of the event as a source of local revenue generation through visits from tourists from within and outside the locality, concluding that the masquerade celebration should be preserved for both economic sustenance and patrimonial purposes.

Olusola, Adekunle & Agbeyan (2017), in their paper titled "*The Remileke Festival of Eti-Osa in Lagos State, Nigeria*", used the participant observation technique to collect data on the festival to portray it as a potential tourist attraction with lots of cultural attachments that could be exploited for cultural tourism and national development. Makinde (2011) examines the impact of the *Egungun* festival in Ogbomosho, Oyo State on the economy of the people and that of the community, querying the relationship of other tourism sectors to the *Egungun* festival. Other works (Ikegwu & Uchenna (2014); Nwanna (2017); Uzoh & Ogboagha (2022) also agree that masquerade performances and festivals are a veritable merchandise for

cultural tourism that could be more effectively harnessed to facilitate the integral development of the cultural tourism industry in Nigeria. Similarly, Agba *et al*. (2010) view Nigerian masquerade traditions, especially the ancient *Ekpe* masquerade among the Efik of Cross River State, as a vibrant component of indigenous cultural heritage that has constituted a significant supply for cultural tourism over time, and on which tourism stakeholders can leverage for contemporary tourism purposes.

Reed (2005) presents a rather interesting argument in which the masquerade traditions in Igbo land and other areas in southern Nigeria have, over time, become victims of *secularisation* and *Christianisation*. Despite the development, there is a deliberate attempt by tourism stakeholders to organise and celebrate the masquerade traditions in a manner that generates and sustains tourist attraction. Omitola (2017) also argues that masquerade carnivals and festivals can contribute significantly to Nigeria's cultural and economic development, as they significantly impact the development of cultural tourism in the immediate host communities. Okure (2021), arguing for the nationalisation of Nigeria's intangible cultural heritage – which includes masquerade traditions like the *Zangbeto* of Lagos State – for an optimised cultural tourism experience, submits that cultural tourism could immensely benefit from a determined effort and political willpower by the government to prioritise certain cultural practices to give them more prominence than is currently the case. The *Zangbeto* masked tradition is one such practice, which occupies the spheres of indigenous knowledge forms, informal social control, and traditional spirituality. Its unique symbolic representations, musical expressions, and other creative skills transcend local parochial ambiences, making it a cultural tourism product.

Theoretical Underpinning

The General Systems theory was applied in this study. The theory, believed to have been largely popularised by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901–1972) in the twentieth century (Lohmann & Netto, 2017), was defined as a complex of elements standing in interaction. Irrespective of the nature of the elements that make up the system and the relations or forces between them, general principles apply in holding them together as a system. In other words, a system designates a collection of parts that interact to achieve a given end according to a plan or principle or a set of procedures, doctrines, ideas or principles, logically ordered and sufficiently coherent to describe, explain or direct the functioning of a whole (Beni, 2021). The key word here is *system*, which can be considered as any organised totality or whole. It can be used for different systems, such as the human body, a country's economy, a municipality's political organisation and tourism in any region (Lohmann & Netto, 2017). This is because the theory allows these systems to be analysed as a whole or divided into parts to facilitate their understanding and study. To be complete, a system should have an environment: a location. It should also have units, relationships, attributes, input, output, and

feedback, referring to the system's control to keep it working correctly, and a model to facilitate its understanding. The interconnectivity within the various sectors or sub-systems that comprise a socio-economic or political system and the general principles they hold together propel the available systems theory.

Leiper (1990) proposed a tourism systems model that is composed of five elements, three of which are geographical, namely, the traveller-generating region (the origin or environment where the travellers usually live); a transit region that connects the origin to the destinations; and the tourism destination region. The other two elements are the tourist, and tourism and travel. The interaction of these five elements, he opined, is influenced by external environmental factors and, in turn, the system impacts various environments (e.g. the human, socio-cultural, economic, technological, physical, political and legal environments), influencing how travellers pass through the transit region and how the tourist interacts with the tourism destination based on their intents and attractions. As such, cultural tourism is governed and influenced by elements and factors within these broad categories, even as the tourist's and destination's elements appear more critical. Similarly, cultural tourism products, such as masquerade celebrations are to be understood as part of the environmental factors that can be positioned to influence how tourists engage with tourism and destinations.

Methodology

This study was both exploratory and descriptive. The study population for the study comprised all identifiable Ogu indigenes residing within the Badagry Kingdom of Lagos, Nigeria. There were, however, some formal and informal interactions with other non-indigenous residents to complement particular views and responses. According to available census figures in Lagos state (2006), the Ogu population in Badagry stands at approximately 811,000. Using the two-level convenience sampling method, the first level was to sample a wide range of community members on their perception of Zangbeto and its sociocultural effectiveness. The second level, which comprised the purposive method, mainly targeted *Zangbeto* experts and initiates and was meant to enable the researchers deepen insights into the structure, organisation and methods of Zangbeto operations. The study selected participants who were identified as knowledgeable in the affairs of the Zangbeto organisation and community matters. The sample size for the study was eighty-six (86). Using a univariate method of data analysis, the data obtained from the primary sources were presented and analysed in simple descriptive and narrative styles. Data from secondary sources were given to the content analysis process, compared with other data, and used to make appropriate inferences.

Study Findings and Discourse

The study data is here presented as an explanatory and descriptive analysis along with the discussion. The analysis follows a framework that is derived from the earlier stated objectives, namely, examining the Zangbeto masked cult and its symbolism among the Ogu, Lagos State; evaluating the mechanisms that have guaranteed the continued preservation of the Zangbeto masked cult, and identifying the challenges the Zangbeto masked cult faces, and ascertaining the values of the Zangbeto masked cult for cultural tourism development in Lagos State and, by extension, Nigeria.

Origins of *Zangbeto*

Like most masquerade cults in West Africa, the origin of *Zangbeto* has been shrouded in obscurity. However, available informants trace *Zangbeto* to a certain Te-Agbanlin from Agbome in Dahomey (Benin Republic), who was the son of Zeririgbe, the brother of the king of Allada. Te-Agbanlin migrated to Porto Novo as a professional farmer in search of new farmlands around 1684. He met the *Nago* (Yoruba), who offered him a location for settlement. According to a community elder:

> *"Te-Agbanlin" is a nickname meaning "antelope's leg", for he was tall and lanky. To ward off wild animals and human invaders from his domain, he designed and erected the figures of "Azo" (which later became Zangbeto) at the entrance to his domain, and with the horn of an antelope, made a device which he would occasionally blow into to produce a terrifying sound that would scare men and beasts away. The antelope horn would later become the distinguishing mark of Zangbeto (Personal Communication, 2022).*

From Te-Agbanlin came the idea of an institutionalised community security organisation, with the *azo* (traditional mascot) as its main symbol, which later became *Zangbeto*. 'Zan-gbeto' literally means 'man of the night', which indicates that *Zangbeto* initially operated at night. However, with the development of society and the emergence of more complex organisational and social structures, other elements of the Ogu socio-cultural values, including religious beliefs, were incorporated into *Zangbeto* to give it its present form and content.

Organisational Structure and Symbolisms of *Zangbeto*

The structure, categories and various symbolisms of *Zangbeto*, both as a masked entity and as a masquerade organisation or cult, are the very elements that define its unique place and functionality among the Ogu. Each *Zangbeto* masquerade has one or more male attendants or bodyguards known as *Kregbeto,* meaning 'man of the day', as *Zangbeto* does not need them at night. They are responsible for giving directives to the crowds from *Zangbeto* and coordinating the affairs of Zangbeto generally while it is performing. There are also the *Kogan*, who rank higher than the *Kregbeto*,

with the task of supervising and overseeing the logistical and ceremonial aspects of the organisation. There is the *Zangan* who emerges by choice of the group members, in consultation with the *Aholu* (King) or *Totagan* (Chief) as the case may be. He oversees the cult and also performs the legitimate duties of a ruling council member. Consequently, he mediates between *Zangbeto* and the community on sensitive issues, advises the *Aholu* or *Totagan*, represents the people before him, and acts as a special adviser to him.

As a masquerade, *Zangbeto* is formally structured in various sizes, colours and specifications. The costumes are usually made of special threads obtained from the bark of raffia palm leaves, dyed with desired colours and dried out for use. Palm leaves, especially the fresh fronds, symbolise potency in most West African cultures and are typically associated with traditional spirituality. The colouring agents, which may vary from – red to green, yellow, purple or brown, -- are obtained from a mixture of some special herbs known for their unique magical qualities and some local dye. They represent the various aspects of life in the natural order, such as vitality, fertility, progress, pain, sacrifice, and maturity. They also signify that '*Zangbeto* embraces every aspect of life. The raffia shreds, also known as *Zanshan,* are arranged into a cone-shaped (horn-like) costume, worn or inhabited by the 'spirit', with some other apparel sometimes attached to the upper (head) region, which serves different purposes. This costume is known as *Zanho (*see plate 1), literally meaning 'the house of night.' It gives *Zangbeto* the semblance of a moving house. Sometimes, especially during ritual processions *(homa)*, *Zanho* is made of ropes from grass or banana leaves, which create the impression of darkness, intensifying the awesomeness of *Zangbeto*.



Plate 1: *Zanho* – *Zangbeto* Costume in a Local Shrine.

There are four identifiable types or categories of Zangbeto in terms of structure and symbolism, namely, Zanholu, the head or king of all other

Zangbeto, which is usually more extensive and taller than the other forms (see plate 2**)**.



Plate 2: *Zanholu* – The Head of *Zangbeto*.

Second in the category is the *Ataho*, which is the most popular and commonly seen in the *Zangbeto* hierarchy, especially at cultural displays (see plate 3).



Plate 3: *Ataho* and *Oho yin-yin Ataho*

The third masked form in the *Zangbeto* hierarchy or category is the *Oho yin-yin Ataho* (see Plate 3). This *Zangbeto* is less complex in its costume but is more agile and remarkable in its dancing skills and acrobatic displays. The fourth masked entity in the *Zangbeto* 'family tree' is the *Ohosi* – the war-like *Zangbeto* also referred to as '*O-gbo*' (Goat) because of its warrior-like 'recalcitrance' and seemingly stubborn behaviour (see plate 4). This particular *Zangbeto* symbolises strength, masculinity and resilience for the Ogu in general and is not usually seen in regular performances. It is often used as the symbol of all *Zangbeto* in cases where an effigy is erected.



Plate 4: *Ohosi-* 'The Warrior'. Source: http://www.google.com

Apart from the symbolisms inherent in the formal and organisational structure of *Zangbeto,* as mentioned above, there are other dimensions of the Ogu socio-cultural structure within which the cult's symbolisms thrive. First, it is an organisation that provides security and maintains law and order within the community. Secondly, it stands as a masquerade cult that embodies, preserves, and celebrates the presence of the spirits of the ancestors among the people. Thirdly, it is a cultural masquerade that thrills, entertains and perpetrates the Ogu heritage and identity. Within this triple framework of the organisational, the cultic, and the cultural, *Zangbeto* establishes and sustains its symbolism and powerful influence on the entire Ogu community. It is also within this framework and other exigencies that the relevance of the masquerade tradition and its implications for contemporary cultural tourism development in Nigeria are articulated.

Membership in Zangbeto

Membership in *Zangbeto* is open to every Ogu male wishing to identify with the group. Membership in *Zangbeto* is mandatory for every Ogu male. However, there is an essential distinction between two kinds or categories of membership. First, there is the general membership through external identity, solidarity and association, which involves the payment of a token, a simple initiation and the acquisition of a secret coded name that serves as a password for the initiate. The coded name is given at initiation. This is the membership required of all Ogu males. It provides certain immunities to the member from the restrictions that are usually imposed, especially during the vigilante hours. At another level, however, there is membership in *Zangbeto*'s inner caucus, which implies participation and commitment to group solidarity within the cult. This membership usually happens through observation, choice and initiation and is not open to everyone.

There is yet another distinguishing element concerning membership in *Zangbeto* as compared to other masked cults of Nigeria, namely, that being a male cult, there is a level at which women are admitted into membership within its very inner circles. These women are initiated into Zangbeto and play significant roles in the organisation. According to research sources:

> *Some women who are considered suitable can be admitted and initiated into Zangbeto…Zangbeto uses them to do certain things that no one can tell who did or how they were done. We call them Zangan, just like the men, but they are not the same thing* (Personal Communication, 2022).
>
> *This means that there are women members within the inner circles of Zangbeto who are admitted and initiated into the cult based on such considerations as physical and psychological maturity, as well as the ability to keep secrets.*

Functional Relevance of *Zangbeto* in Ogu Communities

The *Zangbeto* masquerade organisation is not just a traditional cultural group but has maintained a high level of functional relevance among the Ogu. It engages in community policing in a manner that has evolved into an operating mechanism of social control within the studied cultural context. This is accomplished through its modalities of socialisation through communication, crime prevention through vigilantism, brokering peace through mediation, enforcement of judgments through coercion, and securing items and property from vandals through its symbols.

The Mechanisms for the Continued Preservation of the Zangbeto Masked Cult

An overwhelming majority of the sampled population believed there was nothing negative about *Zangbeto*, whether in its group operations or formal and informal community interactions. Interestingly, the youth had a great fascination and a cheerful disposition towards *Zangbeto*. Although various explanations could be given for these, the study views them as an endorsement of *Zangbeto*'s positivity by the youth and a reflection of the belief that nothing negative should be attributed to it as an entity or to its actions since they are divinely derived. To this end, a respondent remarked that:

> *Just as the Yoruba have it, Egungun is seen as the spirit of the ancestors. What you cannot say about the ancestor, you cannot say about Egungun. It is the same thing with Zangbeto. We share the same belief* (Personal Communication, 2022).

Similarly, the study found that the future of the *Zangbeto* organisation as a component of the Ogu society is rooted on its continued effectiveness in satisfying the needs for which it was founded. One of the strategies used to evaluate the mechanisms for the continuous preservation of *Zangbeto* was the inclusion of younger persons and their active participation in the organisation. Besides:

> *The regular celebration of the Zangbeto major festival, as determined by the oracle (Ifa or fa), also usually provides direction for the future. It generates specific directives and offers opportunities for the choice and initiation of new members into the ranks of Zangbeto* (Personal Communication, 2022).

Zangbeto also has a well-established system for recognising and rewarding members dedicated to service and committed to organisational principles, community service, and group solidarity. This system not only promotes members across the cult's ranks, but it also provides incentives ranging from money, land, traditional titles and other available privileges within the Ogu socio-political structure. According to study sources: '*Zangbeto has many ways for honouring members who have stood out in their service and commitment. Sometimes, the Aholu (king) confers such honour and rewards based on recommendation*' (Personal Communication, 2022). Such honours, awards and recognition serve as motivators to actual and prospective members, consolidate the cult's social influence and facilitate its continuity.

The study findings indicate that the inextricable link between the *Zangbeto* masked cult and the traditional political organisation of the Ogu, along with the cult's neutrality, functional efficacy, violence-free operations and consistent cultural vibrancy, have, to a considerable extent, insulated the organisation from such operational and other challenges that seem commonplace among most other masked cults of Nigeria and Africa. As such, the *Zangbeto* group has enjoyed optimal patronage and support from state and non-state actors, including cultural product consumers. Nevertheless, the study identified three recently emerging challenges to its smooth operational efficiency. These factors, which seem to share some interconnectivity, can be classified as oversubscription, commodification and demystification traits.

Values of the *Zangbeto* Masked Cult for Cultural Tourism Development

One of the pivotal objectives of this project was to ascertain the values that the *Zangbeto* masked cult projects about cultural tourism development in Lagos State and, by extension, Nigeria. The preceding analysis reveals several factors that have contributed to the vitality, functionality and resilience of *Zangbeto* over time. These factors, which are deeply embedded in the organisational structure and modes of operation of the masked cult as inherent values, can offer specific paradigmatic leads for the development of cultural tourism. One of the most celebrated values of the *Zangbeto* cult is its people-oriented nature. In its organisational structure and modes of operation and engagements, Zangbeto seeks the community's security, happiness and well-being. Avoiding any gesture that could be seen as exploitative, partisan, exclusive or marginalising, it engages people across

age and gender divides, as well as across religious, political, economic and social status. This sets it apart as an anthropocentric organisation. Secondly, the *Zangbeto* masked cult is characteristically inclusive in its ethnographic composition in the sense that it is deeply embedded in the social and cultural values of the Ogu, which it also celebrates, preserves and transmits. However, it does this without antagonising other cultural perspectives and values and without alienating the non-indigenous members of its communities. Even though it is a powerful ethnic cult, it has established and maintained unparalleled acceptability and relevance, especially in its openness to non-Ogu membership.

Another celebrated value of the *Zangbeto* cult is its recognition of specialisation and attentiveness to professional standards within its ranks. There is specialisation, division of labour, commitment, and synergy among the members of the organisation that serve to guarantee its efficiency and dynamism. Honesty and accountability are other twin characteristics of the *Zangbeto* cult that could guide cultural tourism development efforts and processes in Lagos State and Nigeria. As the police force of the *Aholu* (King) and a member of the Lagos State Informal Policing apparatus, the masked organisation has been known to exhibit a level of honesty and integrity that far outranks those of other policing and social control agents – formal and informal – including the Nigerian Police. These qualities, as expressed in its crime prevention and control measures, have contributed to the high level of public approval and acceptability enjoyed by the cult both in the Badagry Kingdom and the more significant Lagos metropolis. Finally, *Zangbeto*'s success, as expressed in its resilience and continuity, can also be attributed to its resourcefulness. While other masked cults and traditions would cite a lack of sponsorship from governments and other agencies as the reason for their non-development and unsustainability, *Zangbeto* has, from the beginning, been self-sustaining and has often made economic contributions to some local communities.

From the foregoing, we conclude that the skills and knowledge bases deployed in the production of cultural products live in people and usually stay strong even with continuous usage. For this reason, cultural tourism development, which thrives on its valuation and utilisation, must be such that it accepts those who provide the very contexts within which culture derives its meaning. In other words, although cultural tourism development – as indeed the whole of tourism development – is a positive driving force for economic diversification, culture itself lives in people who provide the socio-historical contexts for its consumption and who should always be acknowledged in its uses and exploitation. Such developments' potential or actual economic benefits must not outweigh the human social values and benefits. This will, in turn, guarantee the sustainability of such development. Secondly, *Zangbeto* is highly detribalised and open to every ethnic group. Lagos State is mainly a Yoruba domain by its geographical location. However, it has long transcended the limiting ethnographic exclusivity of a

Yoruba enclave not only because it was once a Federal Capital city, but also due to the active involvement of multiple ethnic groups in defining its contemporary socio-cultural composition, which can genuinely be described as 'cosmopolitan'. Consequently, cultural tourism development in Lagos State could leverage this multi-ethnic composition in such a manner that, while seeking to preserve its local indigenous cultural elements, due regard and recognition are accorded other ethnic cultures that have, over time, come to be an integral part of the region and have adopted Lagos as their domicile. Thus, an inclusive cultural tourism development strategy will be more rewarding than one based on parochial ethnic idiosyncrasies.

Thirdly, *Zangbeto* celebrates professionalism and specialisation. Cultural tourism development strategies in Lagos State and elsewhere must involve deliberate and active collaboration and synergy among tourism entrepreneurs, researchers, specialised government agencies and indigenous communities within Lagos as a tourism destination. Such collaborations should aim at, among others, creating channels like remote resource bases for accessing information on cultural tourism products, including the myths of such products, especially those with localised relevance, that is, those associated with Lagos as a geographical location, as this has been known to be fundamental to propelling and sustaining cultural tourism. As a fourth value, *Zangbeto* espouses honesty and accountability. Among the apparent setbacks to cultural tourism development, not only in Lagos State but across other regions of the Nigerian nation, is the low level of honesty and accountability among persons and agencies tasked with this responsibility.

Honesty and accountability pertain to clearly defined objectives and motives and adhering to them with commitment. It also relates to the mobilisation of available resources for their purposes and in a manner that serves public rather than partisan or individual interests. If honesty and accountability as measures of integrity are applied to the designation and execution of cultural tourism development and, indeed, the whole of development efforts in Lagos State and Nigeria, these destinations will become the envy of others and the level of patronage by domestic and inbound tourists will increase exponentially. Lastly, *Zangbeto* is highly resourceful, devising ways for self-maintenance and support without recourse to governments. Against the view that government support and sponsorship are indispensable to the continuity and sustainability of masquerade traditions across Nigeria, this study argues instead that cultural tourism development and all of tourism development should be the task of tourism entrepreneurs in collaboration with indigenous cultures, destination management organisations (DMOs), researchers, and other actors within the tourism value chain rather than that of the government at any level. The role of the government should, instead, be purely regulatory in addition to creating incentives and relative ease for these actors. Masquerade traditions and other intangible cultural heritage elements should be valued and rearticulated to reflect their overarching impact, overall patrimonial

significance, and historical imports to the nation. This way, the critical internal structural and ideological hindrances, ranging from deceptive policies to negative collective and individual attitudes that currently adversely affect the vibrancy of cultural tourism development efforts, could be discarded and supplanted by proficiency and resourcefulness.

Conclusion

Cultural tourism development , whether in Lagos State or any other domain in Nigeria, requires mechanisms and modalities that can only partially be located within the government framework. It is the task of entrepreneurs and experts with the skill, commitment and zeal to execute; and who are willing to collaborate with indigenous cultural groups. The role of the government ought to be purely regulatory and supportive of such actors. The present quests for alternative income-generating avenues through economic diversification and job-creating ventures in Lagos and Nigeria could find some long-term solutions in an aggressive national commitment to the pursuit of cultural tourism development, including the engagement of academics who are capable and willing to undertake rigorous and relevant research on the subject and provide valuable ideas for implementation by industry players. Personal responsibility, honest and committed participation in national life, and dedication to the principles of social justice, as found in Zangbeto, which are indispensable to the sustainable development of Nigeria's domestic tourism as a whole, are qualities that cannot be acquired through wishes and empty rhetoric; they must be deliberately learnt.

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