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Masquerades and Tourism Development in Igbo Land: Anambra State of Nigeria in Focus

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Abstract: Amongst the Igbo people, masquerades are regarded as spiritual beings, such that when masquerades come out in the society, people are scared and run away from them with entertainment, joyfulness and fear with respect of the belief of the people about its source of powers which are both from the spiritual and physical human worlds. This article will be focused on the masquerade activities in relation to social life and tourist attraction of the phenomenon of Nnewi masquerade. The area of study covers parts of Anambra state which is a state in South East Nigeria. Its name is an anglicized version of the original 'Oma Mbala', the native name of the Anambra River. The capital and seat of government is Awka while Onitsha, Nnewi and Ekwulobia are the biggest commercial and industrial cities. This paper is solely dependent on secondary sources of information and it recommends that there should be regular celebration of the various masquerades not only as a celebration of customs and tradition, but also a source of revenue for communities in the state in terms of tourist attractions as well as the overall socioeconomic development of Anambra state.

Keywords: Masquerades, Tourism Development, Government.

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INTRODUCTION

The word, "masquerade", has its roots in the French word "mascarade," and the Italian word "Maschera", but masquerades likely originated on the West African Italian commedia dell Arte and the masquerade first became popular in Nerice Italy and the practice of masquerade balls quickly spread throughout Europe and England in the 18th century. During the same period, African ceremonial masquerades spread to the Caribbeans and South Eastern United States, where it evolved into carnivals. (Turner, 2019). According to traditional Igbo beliefs, Masquerades represent images of deities or relatives whose identities are kept secret and the roles are performed by man.

Anambra State has boundaries with Delta State to the west, Imo State and Rivers State to the south, Enugu State to the east and Kogi State to the north. The origin of the name is derived from the Anambra River (Omambala) which is a tributary of the River Niger.

The indigenous ethnic group in Anambra State are the Igbo (98% of population) and a small population of Igala (2% of the population) who live mainly in the north-western part of the People. Anambra State has many resources in terms of agro-based activities like fishery and farming, as well as land cultivated for pastoral and animal husbandry, but the state is blessed

with abundant cultural resources which is the reason the state has the highest masquerade in Nigeria.

CULTURE AND TOURISM

Culture and tourism is very instrumental to economic development of many nations particularly in developing nations such as South Africa, Dubai and Nigeria. With the largest population and economy on the continent, Nigeria plays a big part in the rise of African tourism. (Nzenagu, 2020). Every state in Nigeria is blessed with an avalanche of cultural heritage begging for development but Anambra state has outstanding culture and masquerades which have gained international repute over the years, thus contributing to economic development of the nation in general and the state in particular. Notable among these cultural heritages include:

Agulu Crocodile Lake, located along Awka road in Agulu, Aniocha Local Government Area of the state. A potential tourist site, it is home to an estimated three hundred crocodiles and water turtles. Fishing is not allowed on the lake and the crocodiles, being sacred animals to the people, cannot be killed. Legend says that these crocodiles were instrumental in delivering the town from the enemy soldiers during the Nigerian civil war. It is believed that these sacred crocodiles and turtles transformed themselves into beautiful ladies and lured the soldiers unawares into the lake where they

disappeared without trace. At noon, the crocodiles and turtles appear at the banks of the lake to take sunlight.

Ogbunike Caves, listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site is one of the most visited tourist sites in Anambra State. It is classified as a Sandstone cave (Lateritic sandstones of Campanian-Miocene age). It has very scenic vegetation with attractive waterfall. It is situated in the Ogba hills Ogbunike, across the Ugwu-aga Escarpment Umunya by the Enugu/Onitsha Expressway and lies in the coordinates of Igbo-ukwu Museum: is an ancient town known for astonishing metalcrafts and has remained an attraction to tourists because of its bronze artifacts. The bronze which was first noticed in 1938 and later excavated by Thurstan Shaw (an English archaeologist) date back to about the 9th century, are of high value and historic relevance.

Uzu-Oka: Awka is historically known for the great metal foundry, Uzu craftsmanship. Imo-Awka is an annual festival celebrated by the natives.

Igbo Masquerade as a Tourist Attraction

Tourism as a travel for recreation, leisure, businesses and health purposes is one of the fastest growing industries in the world today. In fact the main motive for tourism is to escape from the tussles and hustles of life created by man's continues quest for insatiable needs that result to stress. In order to ease off stress, man engages in recreative activities called tourism. One of the aspect of tourism that interest tourist is cultural tourism. Cultural tourism a travel to unusual environment to experience the alien culture. Cultural tourism which covers traditional life styles, customs and festival is instilling hope in socio-economic development of many nations as it has become a catalyst to revenue generation, employment and cultural liberation of local communities (Agbasiere, 2020). Nigeria is a country endowed with numerous cultural and natural resources scattered all the every state. In anambra state, the exits avalanche of masquerades ranging from Mmagwu, Ijele, ojionu etc. These masquerades are showcased on festive period for entertainment and its experiences act as a soothing balm to tourist general wellbeing. In the opinion of Onyeakabu (2020), Igbo masquerades perform both ritual and entertainment functions and its significance is purely to entertain and attract tourists.

In the past especially before the advent of Christianity, masquerades played important roles of keeping law and order. People were bound to be telling the truth at all times to avoid the wrath of masquerades. In this capacity, masquerades were regarded as the means for maintaining peace and social order. They were primarily used as unbiased law enforcement agents. In those days, it is not unusual to witness tough masquerade walk up to certain individuals and loudly berated them publicly for their hidden abominable bad habits such as coveting a friend's wife, serious crimes

such as poisoning someone or other adjudged misbehaviours to society. As crude as this style seems in present day and age, they were very effective in instilling corrective measures to many would-be deviants of society. Thus the traditional norms and value of the community were preserved without sacred cows flouting them on basis of economic and politic clouts.

Since masquerades were regarded as spirits they were no respecters of individuals. Every member of society paid attention. However, with colonization and Christianity, the spiritual value of the masquerade has ended in many societies with high Christianity index. As a result, masquerades have become more relevant as an institution for cultural display for entertainment only. The law and order spectrum has atrophied as a thing of the past. Nowadays, they come out in colorful regalia accompanied by traditional music and choreographed dancers. No wonder why all sorts of mistreatment, robbery, kidnapping and other nefarious activities have taken exponential dimensions in Ala-Igbo.

In all the mentioned ceremonies, masquerades are used as social displays that should be the more reason for our children to be exposed and educated in this important element of Igbo culture. It helps to build character and maturity and serves as a tool for tourism development by rebranding it to meet the needs of the present day culture-oriented tourists.

The Festive Masquerade of the Igbos: Anambra State in Focus

Apart from the language, the traditions and culture are also some other endangered heritage of the Igbo peoples. One of the branches of this culture that is fast ebbing away is the Mmanwu culture: the masquerade culture. Mmanwu is a traditional masquerade of the people of Igbos, to whom it used to be a major form of entertainment in Igbo land, masquerades can differ from community to community, and from village to village, but its main purpose of entertainment and security remain the same. Masquerades festivals generally last for weeks and some may span over months, and are performed during the end of the harvest or start of new planning season. Masquerade festivals, apart from the belief that it provides security for the people, many also perform masquerade to honor the dead and pray to the gods for successful planning season. In these modern times, masquerades are used during the iriji (New Yam), Christmas, New Year, Easter and other such celebrations. Masquerades became so important as an element of entertainment that Igbo's from all over the world would converge at home during festival in order to 'gbaa mmanwu' that is, to celebrate the masquerade during these ceremonies.

Indeed, in 1986, the old Anambra State began the annual Mmanwu festival, which lasted for days whenever it was celebrated. In those days, the less dangerous ones would come to the display at the Nnamdi Azikiwe Stadium in the day while those regarded as spirits danced at midnight, and it was said that the lights were put off and some of the masquerades did wonders, like emerging from ant-holes in the ground.

With the increasing rejection of Igbo culture, many communities have lost their masquerade traditions, but the more culture-conscious peoples have refused to let go, continuing in the noble entertaining tradition as in the past. Among these communities, the Aro Ndi Izuogu people of Imo State holds its masquerades as the most important entertainment festival, and is perhaps, the greatest celebrators of masquerades in African. Practically, all Igbo towns have their masquerade cults and masquerades, but some have more masquerades than others. For instance, in Enugu State, Uguwuoba, Oji River, Enugwu-Ngwo, Enugu stand out, though for their advanced masquerades like the ones that require a lot of charms, for the Anambra, peoples of Agulu, Agulu-Uzo-Igbo, Igbo-Ukwu, Nnewi, Nanka, Ekwulobia and others are known to run masquerades for weeks whenever there is an outing. Afikpo in Ebonyi, state, has dozens of masquerades such as Okpaa ekpe masquerades, Lugulu masquerades, Njenje masquerades and Okponku masquerades which are featured at different events and dates throughout the year and have special days for the masquerade festival. Arochukwu, Umuahia and other towns stand out with their Ekpo and Ekpe masquerades.

So, Igbo sons and daughters still invest millions to ensure the success of the masquerade celebrations during festivities. Between Christmas Eve and two weeks into January, some of these towns sustain a tempo of dance, performance and magic, while the masquerade is known for entertainment, the Mmanwu, like humans, come in different ages and looks as well as fame. For instance, there are masquerades that nib the hub on its body on well-dressed girl-like and is seen as a soothing balm to the soul. These types do not usually go with charms. The Omewaluigwe on its own side is a wise masquerade in the sense that it is known for its talkative nature. It goes around making proverbs and speaking parables, while its followers and the audience applaud it. Ada-mmanwu is a masquerade who dresses beautifully with handbags, and face paints. It also swags like a girl. However, the masquerade cult is restricted from women, and no woman goes close to one. Indeed, it is a taboo for a woman to go close to one and that is one of the many reasons why it carries canes in order to scare them away. There is also the Odo an mmanwu peculiar to the Agbaja (Ngwo and environs) masquerade. The Ojionu masquerade is a water spirits character represented by a head-dress of crocodiles, sharks and other water

creatures. The major attribute of Ojionu is creative non-stop dancing. Versions of the Ojionu masquerade varies from those that perform voices only and possess superior mystical powers to those that dance predominantly with minimal voices and less mystical. Another type is the Agaba. The Agaba masquerade is a warrior-like mmanwu, who, in actual sense, is a leopard masquerade.

The Ijele masquerade is a peculiar type of masquerade. It is felt in every part of Igbo land. The Ijele masquerade is most popular in Anambra State, and to some extent, Enugu State. This masquerade is very serious, fully masculine-featured masquerade. Mkpamkpanku is brisk, aggressive, agile and notorious in its own way. It has the appearance of a person. This masquerade is active to the extent that about two or more strong men is ever around its waist to draw it back from over acting.

The Okwomma is the type that carries a cutlass, well sharpened. It uses this to shake hands, to collect money and to greet people who are in the cult, or other great masquerades. But it chases people with other masquerades include the Enyi Mmanwu (Elephant), mmanwu Ugo (Eagle), mmanwu Mbe (Tortoise), Odum Mmanwu. These assume the appearance of the creatures that they have their names attached. And during their display, they do things that are peculiar to those creatures. But there are more mystical mmanwus, like the Otawaru Ikop-dreadful masquerade with charms that enables it dance on cassava leaves. Another terror is the Odegwu Anya Mmiri, which sheds fears when it is about. It is a two-face mmanwu, and can move simultaneously in two directions as village surveillance. The "entertainment" activities include "singing, joking, and dancing".

Achukwu Ojii (black) is the other side of the achukwu ocha masquerade. This is performed not only to protect the village, but also when there is going to be a punishment or execution of a criminal. The second group of invisible masquerades is Agu mmono (tiger spirit). In these masquerades, horrible screaming sounds are produced to create fear. The third group is Ogbagu. It is strictly used for dance entertainment.

Igbo Masquerade and Related Socio-Cultural Activities

In Igbo culture, the masquerade embodies the spirit and human worlds. The mystique surrounding the masquerade is one key component of the Igbo culture that survived western influences. It is generally believed in the Igbo land that the masquerade is a spirit which springs from the soil. Depending on your point of view, it may be true or only a myth. The masquerades are classified into categories based on specialization. Each masquerade possesses particular attributes (warrior-like prowess, mystical powers, youthfulness, and old age)

and specializes in or more skills (dancing skills, acrobatics, and other ritual manifestations).

Masquerading usually involves one person team or a team made up of instrument players, vocalists dancers, masquerade advisers, and the masquerade itself. Most masquerade are covered from head to toe with some piece of clothing or/and bamboo rafters. Finally, a wooden mask is worn over the face. The mask will vary depending on the type of masquerade and the place of origin within the Igbo land. Some masks are designed to be beautiful intimidating or downright sinister. Most masquerades claim to have some mystical powers and are constantly competing to see which one has the most mystical powers, whenever they appear together especially at village squares or funerals.

The masquerade appears during traditional celebrations (funerals) and festivals (New Yam festival). The level of apprehension and the noise that cut the appearance of a masquerade will vary, depending on the type of the masquerade, and the size and make-up of the audience. And the umunna men's cultural masquerade group performs three different masquerade acts.

- Ojionu – This is a water spirit
- Agaba – A warrior represented
- Odogwu – A youthful and aggressive

Masquerade Dance

Masquerade dance is a very interesting performance usually done for the purpose of entertainment during festivities. It has ageless practice in most African communities and enjoys, among other things, durability and continuity over time made possible by family and communal inheritance of the art, craft, magic and culture. It is generally believed that masquerades are spirits, springs from the ground and the spirits and ancestors of the community are embodied in them.

Masquerade is played all over the in various forms and in various occasions. Santa clues, Halloween, Cloths masquerade balls as played in European and American countries, are forms of masquerade where people disguise, wear masks and special costumes to perform and entertain people. The mathorn (Limba Devil) and Gihongorli are some special masquerades played in Sierra Leone of Africa. The Elewe, Aja dudu are some types of special Egungun (masquerade) played in Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. Also, the Mbakara Ajofia, Mgbada Ike, Ebule are some special Mmonwu masquerade played in Eastern Nigeria.

In Nigeria, as part of culture, masquerades are mostly played during New Yam festivals (Iriji) burial ceremony of a great man, chieftaincy coronation and other special festivals. Also, played in celebrations. These masquerades come in various forms and sizes

and for different occasions. There are ones played during the daytime and ones played only during the nights. All are generally explained to be spirits and are not humans.

The night masquerades such as Ogba agu, Icheoku (Eastern Nigeria) culturally is played in a night following a new yam festival and during burial of a great man in the community. These masquerades require special membership initiation and are not to be seen by anybody that is not a member, especially the children and women. They are regarded as spirits and any non-member who sees it dies that same night. The Yoruba's also have night masquerades, "Oro", also not seen by non-members, when Oro is played in the daytime women are told to stay indoors.

The masquerade that plays in the day (Ajofia, Mgbada Ike, Ebule, etc) membership is also by initiation which is only for men in some communities. While the non-members can only watch from far. They are mainly for entertainment to grace special occasions. In Enugu town of Eastern Nigeria, Easter celebration is climaxed on Easter Monday by a display of masquerade dance from all parts of the town and neighboring towns. On that day, different types and sizes of masquerades, big masquerade (oke mmonwu) and small masquerade come to display at Obiagu town where people will gather to watch. It is a day that people who bought new masquerades come to display them for really enjoyable as masquerades of different forms, colour, sizes come to display in different dance steps and music.

One bad thing about masquerade dance in African is that some men use it for evil. It is noticed that after the masquerade display, people, especially the youths began to die one after the other. It is said that the members engage in cultism and use juju (charm) when performing and that the groups try their powers on each other to see which is more powerful. That is the reason they begin to die after the performance. This has made some communities to stop masquerade performance during their festivities.

In those good days, many masquerade performances were exhibited during the Christmas in Enugu and many other towns in eastern Nigeria. Masquerades (mmanwu) are held in accordance with local native calendars during festivals such as Christmas and New Yam festivals, burial rites and other serious social gatherings. The masquerades are adorned in esoteric regalia and colorful masks made of wood and other fabric materials. Masquerades are hierarchical or age related some masks appear only at one festival, but others appear more regularly. According to popular Igbo belief, masquerades are very important spiritual elements of society. They have symbolic representation and serve many important roles in society. Depending on the locality in Igbo land, masquerades can have replica images of deities and important ancestral

relatives of the society. Consequently, the identities of the masquerades are well-kept secret from children, women and the uninitiated men of society. Only strong, exclusive and trusted men of society are allowed to perform any masquerade with a high reputation.

Masquerade vary in size, display and function some masquerades perform competitive dancing moves. These are known as Ojionu or Ogba Mgbada masquerades, others perform acrobatic and other eye-popping feats. Some of these are seen in Arondizuogu during Ikeji festivals. The popular names for some of these rugged Mmanwu (masquerade) are Okwo Mma. In those days, in Coal City Enugu, Coal Camp had one of the toughest Okwo Mma masquerades hat cast spells on other. It was known as Mmanwu Obesie. Whenever it appeared, everybody ran away including other masquerades of minor leagues. That seemed to explain the popular saying in Ala Igbo NNUKWU MMONWU PUTA OBODO AWALU OSO whenever a big masquerade appears, the town runs away. Some other masquerades chase people around and whip non masquerades on its trajectory. These are called EKPO, variant popular in Ovim in Isiukwuato is the Okonko, popularly seen around Calabar, Arochukwu, Ohafia, Igbere and Isuikwato axis of Abia State Nigeira. Udunkulu or Ajonkwu are spectacular masquerades that chase participants who shoot at it with den guys with bullet (Akidi). Non participants are holed up in the surrounding bushes with palm frond (omu) barricades. Udunkulu is performed in Item, while Ajonkwu is performed in Ovim, Ahaba and elsewhere in Isiukwuato Local Government Area. Nwanyi Otila Ukwu (The woman with huge behind) is another heartless and gentle masquerade for pure entertainment and its style of dancing is a contagious laughing stock amongst observers especially children. The other festivals with high octane value in social significance carried out by most communities in Ala-Igbo are the new yam (Iriji ohuo) festival, which marks the beginning of the harvest seasons for new yam. As mentioned before, Arondizuogu seems to have the gold standard for this important festivity in Ala Igbo. The festival takes place around August and October, though the time varies from place to place. The new yam festival raises the occasion for celebration while offering special prayers to Supreme God for a bountiful harvest. It is marked with colorful displays of cultural songs, dances and masquerades including roasting and toasting of new yams (ji ohuo or ji ofuo in Anambra).

Other important festivities and ceremonies worth mentioning her are

- Traditional marriage ceremonies (Igba Nkwu) and funeral rites (Ikwa Mmadu).
- Ozo title taking involving ritualistic initiation by other initiated folks.
- Ezeship and chieftaincy coronation, an installation rite carried out by titled men.

- Political cerebrations where surpluses are displayed with reckless abandon.

The Essence of Masquerade in Social Development

- Before the advent of Christianity, masquerades played important roles of keeping law and order, children and young adults were made to be sacred of masquerade and so it served as a mechanism of social control.
- People are bound to tell the truth at all times to avoid the wrath of the masquerades thereby being an instrument of super natural influence.
- Masquerades were regarded as the means for maintaining peace and social order, and therefore a tool for maintenance of social security.
- Masquerades play entertainment roles, and they also display a dual role of combining dancing, acrobatic displays and other extra-ordinary feats that awe doubting local and foreign spectators.
- Masquerades were regarded as spirits and were no respecters of individuals but every individual paid attention to it.
- Masquerade is more relevant as an institution for cultural display and not for entertainment only.
- Masquerade is marked as a colorful display of cultural songs, dances and roasting of yams.
- Masquerades were held with local native calendars during festivals such as Christmas and New Yam Festivals, burial rites and other serious social gatherings/engagements.
- Masquerades have replica images of deities and important ancestral relatives of society and therefore embody rich heritage and historical content.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mmaawu is found on the belief of life after death; and it is regarded as the soul or ghost of ancestors that return to the land of the living in masquerade form to participate with their kinsmen in communal festivals such as farming and rites of passage. As a secret society, membership is strictly by initiation; hence, every aspect of any of the masquerades is designed to strike away fear and caution among women and non-initiatives. In the pre-colonial era, Mmawu as it is popularly called is among the notable masquerades served by the government of the entire Igbo people. From the pre-civilization era, the Igbo people used traditional cultural institutions such as Mmawu and the various traditional herbalists to maintain order in the society. These institutions stood out as government of the time. Masquerad is founded on the belief in "life after death". They served as the government of the entire Igbo people performing such functions as judicial, administrative and religious duties.

Given the uniqueness, importance and capacity of the cultural practice of masquerade in various communities in Igbo land and Anambra state in particular, this paper advocates that the culture of masquerade should be encouraged and sustained for greater tourists attraction and the overall socioeconomic development of Anambra state and Nigeria.

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