

AFRICAN ARCHIVES AS INFORMATION PRESERVATION PLATFORM OF MASQUERADE CULTISM, RULES AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN NIGERIA

HABIB SHEHU

Department of Library and Information Science
Federal Polytechnic, Nasarawa, Nigeria

&

NKIRU NNEKA AMACHI-ANI

Department of Social Studies Education
Institute of Ecumenical Education
Thinker's Corner, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria

&

EMMANUEL IKENNA OKAFOR (PhD)

Department of Christian Religious Studies
Peaceland College of Education, Enugu
+2348062384595

EMAIL: agbudugbu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Africa is blessed with numerous cultural endowments. In every cultural group in Africa, the uniqueness of their culture is always glaring and in somewhat attractive, though there are some that are obnoxious in nature. African archives are integral of African cultural and traditional data or information store base. In Nigeria, the masquerading cult is a very popular and renowned cultural outfit and artifact because of its nature, rules and measures of social control. But the problem that bothers this research is that currently, the modern people at a certain level seem to have hate feelings against the masquerading cult without any cognizance to its role in the urban and rural settings in Nigeria. They perceive visiting archives as a waste of time. This paper therefore aims at correcting some wrong impressions against the masquerading exercise in Nigeria peoples' culture and tradition. It also wants to address the value of African and Nigerian archives in preserving traditional masquerading information. It is found in this paper that masquerades frighten people, but have remained significant to the maintenance of traditional norms, rules and order. The study uses historical and phenomenological methodology. Data were collected from primary and secondary materials. It is recommended among other recommendations, that Nigerians should always acknowledge the social relevance of the masquerade cult no matter ones international or alien religious and cultural affiliation. The data collected were analyzed with historical style of data analysis.

Keywords: African Archives, Information Preservation, Masquerade Cultism, Rules, Social Control, Nigeria.

Introduction

In every society, there are people that have lived in the generations past. These people practiced specific cultures peculiar to them. These cultures are all about totality of the peoples' ways of life (Nwosu and Kalu, 1982). These activities found in people's culture include: their ways of greeting, dancing, housing, looking and the food they eat. It also includes: Festivals and activities they convey, occupations, clothing, and so on. But the interest of this paper is on the masquerading cultism, its rules and social control measures. In Africa generally, and Nigerian in particular, masquerading cultism have remained very popular and pronounced that it becomes so relevant in both happy and sorrowful situations. The masquerade appears in festivities/festivals, death and other occasions in African society. But the problem that bothers this research paper is that presently, the modern people at a reasonable length seemed to have hate feelings against the masquerading cultism without any cognizance to its role in both urban and rural setting especially in Nigeria. They also conceive visits to archives where documents, information about masquerading cultism are kept as waste of time. The archive has remained a source of information preservation for Africans and other aboriginals of other continents. On this background, it is a major purpose of the paper to correct some of these wrong impressions against the masquerading activities in the African Peoples' cultures and traditions. The research also aims at addressing the value of African and Nigerian archives in preservation of traditional masquerading information.

It is discovered in this paper that people are always afraid of masquerade because of its frightening outlook, but the cult of masquerade has remained so significant to the maintenance of traditional customs, norms, rules, ordinances, regulations and order. The research employs historical and phenomenological methodologies. Its sources of information or data are from primary source, basically oral interview and secondary sources which include: textbooks, journals, internet materials, dictionary, e.t.c. It is recommended amidst other recommendations that Nigerians/ Africans should always appreciate the social and even religious and ethical importance of masquerading cultism, no matter ones alien or international religious or cultural alliance. It is just as Mr. Samson Irieme (personal communication, 5 August, 2021) explains that religion, culture and education brought by the Whiteman have weakened the joy and happiness traditionally enjoyable in the masquerading cultism. Achebe (1958:1) stresses that things fall apart. The center cannot hold. The Whiteman has used a sharp knife and cut the things that held us together, and things started falling apart." Masquerading cult is one of the things that hold various African communities together, which the Whiteman has used his culture and religion to disconnect. Criticisms are now in the masquerading cultism. This affects the enjoyment the cult expresses.

Clarification of Concepts

The terms that are designed to be explained in this research are: African Archives, Information Preservation, Masquerading cultism, Rules and social control. Archives are the documentary by-product of human activity retained for their long term value. They are contemporary records created by individuals and organizations as they go about their business and therefore provide and direct window on past events. They can come in a wide range of formats including written, photographic, moving image, sound, digital and analogue (International Council on Archives, 2016:2). The council further states that the following are the expected qualities of archive authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability. Archives have to do with documentation of events. Archival documents or archives could be done or got from

individuals, families, communities, private organizations, government et cetera. African Archives as contained in this paper in the words Prof Rich Okafor (Personal Communication, 14 February, 2016) could be seen or understood as those African documentary by-products of activities done by men, including Africans in the years back which are retained because of their long term value for the consumption of the contemporary Peoples.

Information has been a very common term in English language. Summers (2001:730) defines information as: “facts or details that tell you something about a situation, person, event etc.” Summers (2001:1113) defines preservations as: “the act of keeping something unharmed or unchanged: The degree to which something has remained unharmed or unchanged by weather, age, etc.” Every action or event has its contents. Those participants or observers who have these details are the store room of the action or the event. These participants or observers with time might not be able to retain these details found in those actions or events. Therefore, every attempt or strategy mobilized to retain such details from being changed or harmed serves as a source of the preservation. Preservation itself takes place when originality of any information, action, event, image or document remains unharmed or unchanged in any means. Therefore, archives from what has been said, are one of the mediums of preserving values of past events, activities, information, documents and so on.

Masquerading Cultism: The concept of cultism appears so negative to the ordinary mind. But it is not always true. A common definition would put a masquerade as an individual wearing masks and relevant costumes/outfits to affect a required disguise (Onah, 2004:37). Summers (2001:330) states that cult is: “An extreme religious group that is not part of established religion.” Cult is a spiritual engagement that can exist within or outside a religion. The attachment of certain beliefs in a cult by its members is always at the extreme. This would suggest why anything cult or cultism is conceived by the common man as negative. Cultism could be referred to, as the art of practicing or relating to cult. Masquerading cultism can therefore be taken, as those special and spiritual practices and beliefs attached to the practice of masquerading or masking which in most cases attract initiation rites and so on.

Rules and social control are somewhat interwoven: Barr. Ejike Okeke (Personal Communication, 14 September, 2019) explains that rules are the lighter assumption of law. He adds that rules is a concept that covers central level of rulership, be it community, family, village, groups, association, interpersonal relationship, games e.t.c. Barr. Ejike concludes that these rules assist to controlling excesses in human behaviour thereby acting as a source of social control. For Barr. Okeke Ejike, social control is an art of putting the social wellbeing of the members of a given society in a positively organized matter by controlling social abnormalities that might affect other members of the society negatively. With what Barr. Okeke Ejike states here, the idea of rules and social control could be understood as two edges of an arrow where the pointer is sharp to execute or enforce, the other is soft for positive outcome.

African Archives as Information Stock of Masquerading Cultism: Its Rules and Crime or Social Control Relevance in Nigeria

In Africa, there are so many masquerades and masquerading cult/cultism. In the same vein, different masquerades perform different function. Some are assigned to social function, some religious/spiritual functions, while others are for economic and political functions. Yet, there are others for health lessons and history. But the fact is that information concerning

masquerades and their cultism/cult in Africa generally and Nigeria specifically are always preserved by the archives. In these roles or functions performed by various masquerading cults or cultism, there are rules guiding them in order to enhance social control, and shun criminalities among Nigerian communities. Archives fundamentally document these masquerading images and their functions, and other information about them and preserve them. Onyeakagbu (2021:1-9) identifies 5 masquerades as the most popular masquerades across the various Nigerian Tribes. She elaborates thus:

1. Ijele: Masquerade from Enugu State auto-gen towering at about 12 to 15ft, the Ijele masquerade is the biggest and the most revered in all of Igbo land. It is the biggest masquerade in Sub-Saharan Africa with origins in Anambra and Enugu States.
2. Eyo: The masquerade is native in Lagos state and comes out during the Eyo festival held in Lagos State.
3. Ekpo: The Ekpo masquerade, just like in many parts of Nigeria, are believed by the people to be spirit beings brought back to the land of the living. They are native to the Efik, Ibibio and Anang people of Cross-river and Akwa-Ibom states though some parts of Igbo land have also adopted them.
4. Ekpe: Ekpe masquerade is a visual cultural reference to the leopard society, since its costume, make up and props defines it as such. The Ekpe society is the most renowned traditional institution in Efik history, not because of its spiritual or cultic functions, but also for the fact that the institution was pre-colonial police and judiciary system.
5. Egbabonelimwin: The Egbabonelimwin are an acrobatic dance group native to Esan people of Edo state. They appear in groups at festivities to keep the audience in high spirit.

There are many masquerades and their cults or cultism among Nigerians but what Onyeakagbu emphasizes are the most popular five among them. In her explanations of these masquerades, she explains their places of origin, nature, features and functions. This information among these masquerades are kept at the archives to avoid alteration or change of their history, origin and other information in the present or future.

In Nigeria, people perceive masquerades as negative, evil and cultic. This could be true that masquerades can be of negative relevance and evil, but circumstances surrounding masquerading cultism should be considered. Audience should acknowledge other functions of masquerades, for example, their entertainment role. If masquerades exhibit the arts seen as entertainment, it is obviously not right to stigmatize the masquerade by equating it with evil or negative cultism. This clarification is crucial (Williams, 2021:1)

Williams refers to the art of condemning every secrecy of the masquerading cultism as evil and negative to be wrong and should be condemned. Some masquerading cultic secrecy are absolutely for the protection of human rights through the masquerading rules and maintenance of social order and control crimes. These clarifications are uniquely preserved by the archives with display of different masquerading cultic images and their activities and events they appear. It is equally factual to add that some masquerades are dangerous, and must be carefully related to, and avoid being victims to the charms, amulets etc they use. The archives also document and stress alarms on their dangerous nature and activities to alert people's awareness while approaching them.

In some cases, what prompts introduction of a masquerade and its cult, determine the *modus operandi*. On the case of *Odo* Masquerade cultism in Neke community in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria, Agbo (2002:4) buttresses thus:

The people of Neke were said to have decided that they would not procure normal masquerades that are made of clothing- as most other clans had done. They needed a Masquerade that would be intimidating and scaring to behold. The people were also said to have felt that masquerades made with clothes cannot resist arrows, spears, machetes and clubs, especially when inflicted at a close range. The spears of palm trees are culturally used when people die and also used by some native doctors to cordon-off their premises. Its yellow colour makes it appear arresting while its fetish smell gives it an aura of other worldliness. It is therefore, this yellow coloured spears of palm trees that the founding fathers of Neke used in preparing the *Odo* Masquerade.

In the case of *Odo* masquerade cultism in Neke community of Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria, the general intention of initiators of *Odo* Masquerade cultism is to produce for the community of Neke a masquerade cult that will be intimidating, scaring and able to challenge opposing spears from external forces. The implication, simply put, is that this masquerading cultism is expected to be dangerous. The masquerade of *Odo* serves a social purpose or function of defense, internal protection and the role of instigating fear to women, children and strangers or foreigners. Agbo (2002) also makes a salient point on the health and spiritual role or use of *Odo* masquerade component when he states that: “the spears of palm trees are culturally used when people die and also used by some native doctors to cordon-off their premises.” These spears of palm tree both masquerading cultism or masquerade uses are believed to oppose spiritual forces that can come against the person doing the masking or any member of the team. Some who suffer spiritually inflicted illness, in some cases claimed to have received their healing and had become stronger with vigor after masking. Amaobi Opah (Personal communication, 3 November, 2010) states that these masquerading cultism have these healing, spiritual, social roles and efficacy documented alongside their images in the archives for historical consolidation and for present and future use. During Death, Masquerades play both social and spiritual functions. In Africa, some deaths are taken as good deaths and are reverence with some practices that assume them to be immortal. In Africa, it is common for parents to name their new babies after their dead fathers or mothers. Such names among Igbos of Nigeria include Nnenna and Nnanna. Those names implicate their belief in immortality (Madu, 1997:50). This is a clear point that they believe that life continues in the world beyond. In most African States, Those who are believed to have died good deaths are honored with befitting burial rites. Ekeokpara (2005:94-95) stresses thus:

Burial takes place in the family premises or at any place the deceased chose while he was still living physically. The village traditional priest or the oldest man in the village normally presides at the burial. After the dead had been laid to rest, gunshots are meant to herald his demise and to smooth his entry into the spiritual world of the ancestors. After all the grave-side ceremonies, the grave is closed with red earth and leveled, sometimes a small mound is made on the grave for easy identification of the spot.

In most African societies, masquerades are conceived as representatives or symbols of the dead, especially those who died a good death. They are used to depict the physical appearance of the ancestors and even ancestress. This is one of the basic reasons why masquerades appear at the burial of every worthy African man. Hence, masquerades function as the physical representation of the spiritual abode of dead in Africa. This is an aspect of the spiritual or religious significance of masquerade cultism. In the archives these spiritual significance are recorded or documented to avoid alteration in future.

Masquerades play economic roles. Adibe (2009:39) points thus:

Wealth is now seen as a must be acquired by any means by some Igbo people.... Thus many men could not save enough money to marry their women of choice early enough. This has thrown some women into prostitution and change of faith to get marriage dreams achieved. The distress caused by wage and profit economy has led many to seek wealth outside their basic faith principles. Crisis of life puts pressure on individuals to seek solutions from any religion or magician of repute that have immediate answers including solutions from one's belief base.

There are masquerades that are meant to counter wrong/immoral or criminal ways of pursuing wealth, and other abnormal ways of doing things which could be termed as abominations. In some Igbo rural settings, some people who have been known for doing things that harm their neighbor's economic resources, like farms, commodities, or steal people's properties, etc are visited by masquerade team of the special masquerade cultism. In some cases, they are expelled, ostracized or ex-communicated. Today, such masquerading cultic actions are captured on video, pictures, etc and kept in the archives. The masquerading exercise itself, especially those meant for entertainment, where, both males and females costumed masquerades display their entertainment skills, in form of dances, etc fetch a lot of money for the masquerading team. Those who produce mask and other masking regalia also earn living in the profession. These masquerading cultism's information are known and kept in the archive for their long lives, otherwise, that could be lost.

On the political realm, community leaders are traditionally automatic members of masquerading cultism. In many communities in Africa, people are initiated into the masquerade cultism compulsorily at their approximate teenage or adult ages. Of course, in Igbo communities, no male son of the community traditionally is supposed to join any age grade when he is not a member of the masquerade cultism. Mr Kanayo EzeJi (Personal Communication, 7th July, 2012) agrees that this implies that before one becomes a member of an age grade, he must have joined the masquerade cultism. Moreover, before one can traditionally function as a community leader, he must emerge from an age grade group and kindred respectively. It is most of this masquerade cultism that can invite community leaders in their secret meetings to warn and advise them on areas they are not doing well and how and why they should improve. Some masquerades condemn bad leaders with jokes and songs. Information of such political relevance of the masquerading cultism are kept in the African Archives for consumption, for the public, but mostly for the consumption of serving and future political leaders and rulers especially in the traditional organizations or societies.

Traditional African Peoples festivals are culturally brightened with the appearances of different masquerades depending on the communities and the types of festivals they are celebrating. In Some communities, Masquerade cults have their own festivals attached to them, separately from other festivals in the same community. Anigbo (1987:115) emphasizes on Ibagwa-Aka masquerading exercise thus:

Although masquerades may feature during feasts such as *Egba Eze* and *Onwa Asaa*, *Omabe* is primarily a masquerade feast in Ibagwa Aka since a very significant emphasis is placed on the issue of masquerading during that festival. It is also only the occasion when youth are initiated into the secrets of the society. *Omabe* differs also from *Egba Eze* and *Onwa Asaa* in

that invitation to share in the festivities is based on friendship instead of ascription which characterizes the feasts of Egba Eze and Onwa Asaa.

It means that this festival is a special festival for Omabe masquerade cultism. Such festivals in some African or Igbo societies are always kept aside for the initiation of those youths who have not been initiated into the masquerade cultism of the entire community. The festivals are not always annual festivals. They come and go in two, three to four years intervals. The frequency or time of appearance of these masquerades and their images are kept in the archives for preservation. Today, masquerades appear on African Streets in and out of seasons with and without traditional festivals or ceremony. Masquerades appear during political rallies or solidarity visits, Sundays, Children's Day, Democratic Day, First October – Independence Day anniversary, Good Friday, Easter, Christmas etc. African archives keep their records and images to help users identify developmental changes in the masquerading cultism and culture.

Summary of Some Rules of Masquerading Cultism and Social Control in Africa that are Found in Archives to reduce crimes

In the Masquerading cultism, in Africa, there are observable rules to control crimes. They include:

1. Women are not permitted to be part of the initiation exercise.
2. In some African communities women do not move freely on the streets when masquerades are part of the events or occasions.
3. Masquerades operate or move only on the allocated time and days.
4. Masquerades do not ride bicycles, motor-cycle, drive cars or any mobile machine or automobile. Masquerades must use their legs.
5. Masquerades do not stay long in any household except or special group or team mission
6. Women do not peep at masquerades from their windows, doors etc.
7. Nobody is permitted to reveal the secret of the masquerading cult either through verbal means or physical display, etc.
8. Masquerades do not move alone without anybody following or guiding it.
9. Masquerades do not hold phones or telecommunication devices.
10. Masquerades do not hunt women in their hiding places.

There are other rules numerous to stay here, but these rules have created the sense of orderliness and control over social abnormalities. In situations people default both the masquerading rules and the community rules, masquerades are used to punish these offenders.

Highlight on the Factors Militating against the Masquerading Cultism

A lot of factors disturb the proper or original attention or systems of practicing the masquerading cultism. They include: Christianity, Islam, Westernization, urbanization, industrialization, modernization, civilization, etc. For many Christians, they see masquerade as a symbol of devil, because most masquerades are ugly and scaring. Opata (2005:18) examines the Igbo mind set of *Ekwensu* as equivalent of the Christian devil thus:

Innumerable person and groups in Igboland today believe and are schooled to believe that *Ekwensu* is the conceptual equivalent of the Christian devil. The big company is comprised of

the following: a majority of the Christian clergy, including Bishops, Reverend Fathers, Reverend Sisters, Pastors etcetera; a vast majority of lay Christians; a great majority of non-Christians and translators of the bible into Igbo, especially as there is no known Igbo translation of the Bible in which the devil has not been glossed as *Ekwensu*.

For the fact that the White Christian missionaries have condemned all the traditional religious culture of Africans as fetish, barbaric, heathen etc and devilish, the masquerading cult can never be an exception. In fact, early Christian missionaries brand the masquerading cultism as devilish, and this weakens the attention towards the masquerades. Onyeidu (2004:35) states that:

As in their mission fields, Christianity has left an abiding and far reaching impact on the primal world view of Asaba people. The impact which began in distant past is still going on today. The gospel has changed their attitude to the traditional gods and the rituals associated with them; their concept of taboos and totems; their practice of oath taking, their traditional music and dances.

Christianity really affected the primal culture of African people, including the masquerading cultism. Islam also has its own impact, likewise western education and culture, industrialization, urbanization, modernization, etc. These factors are supposed to be discussed but the nature and scope of this research will not accommodate all these factors

Recommendations

It is recommended as part of the solutions to the research problem as follow:

1. Nigerians should appreciate the social relevance of the masquerading cultism no matter one's foreign cultural and religion affiliation.
2. The Masquerading cultism should avoid the use of harmful charms and amulets.
3. The comprehensive roles of masquerades in fighting abominations and criminalities should be improved and encouraged by both Africans and Nigerians.
4. The archives in Nigerian traditional and modern societies should be upgraded with the help of government, communities and individuals.
5. Nigerian should establish private and personal archives for commercial or tourist values.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Africans are endowed with rich cultural heritage. The culture has intermingled with other cultures of the world, thereby introducing disagreements in the primal culture and religion. This cultural diffusion created international relationship and interaction that have affected some perceptions for and against the local practices at least in Nigeria. The masquerading cultism has faced a lot of criticisms accruing from these alien exposures from foreign religious, cultures, urbanization and so on.

The masquerade society has its positive roles in the society that favours the economic, social, health, spiritual/religions and political welfare of both Nigerian traditional and modern citizens. It has been observed that the masquerading cultism applies some negative practices with the use of dangerous charm and amulets, but this research advocates for elimination of such dangerous practices in the masquerading cultism. Finally it is concluded that it is wrong to condemn everything in the masquerading cultism. The archives have been appreciated as the viable source of preserving masquerading information against harms and alterations.

References

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*, London: Hermann Books
- Agbo, J.N. (2002) *Odo cultism in Neke: End of a pharaohnie stronghold*. Lagos: Covenant House Publishing.
- Anigbo, O.A.C. (1987). *Commensality and human relationship among the Igbo. An ethnographic study of Ibagwa Aka, Igboeze L.G.A, Anambra State, Nigeria*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria press
- Ekeokpara, C.A. (2005). *African traditional religion: An introduction* Calabar: Natos Affairs Publications
- International Council on Archives(2016). "What are Archives". www.ica.org PP1-5. Retrieved 7/8/2021
- Madu, J.E. (1997). *Fundamentals of religious studies*. Calabar Franedoh Publishers Nig. Ltd
- Nwosu, H. and Kalu, O.L.I. (1982). "The study of African culture"(e.d) O.U. Kalu
Readings in African Humanities: African Cultural Development, PP3-14, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing.
- Onah, R.C(2004). *Experiences of tradition, custom, and religion: An Igbo example*. Nsukka: Chuka Educational publishers.
- Onyeakagbu, A.(2021). "5 most popular masquerades from across the various Nigerian tribes." www.pulse.ng Pp. 2-8, August 13, 2021 Retrieved 8/9/2021.
- Onyeidu, S.O. (2004). *Christianity and Asaba culture*. Enugu Fulladu Publishing company.
- Opata, D.U. (2005). *Ekwensu in the Igbo Imagination: A heroic deity or Christian devil?* Nsukka: Great Ap Express Publishers Ltd.
- Summers, D.(2001). *Longman dictionary of contemporary English*. England: Pearson Education Limited.
- Williams, L.(2021). "Masquerades: Arts of cultism". Vanguardngr.com pp1-9, *Vanguard newspaper* 14 September, 2021. Retrieved 14/9/2021

Interview

1. Mr. Samson Irieme, Enugu State, A Community Leader, 66 years 5/8/2021
2. Prof Rich Okafor, Enugu State, Lecturer, 82 Years, 14/2/2021
3. Barr. Ejike Okeke, Anambra State, Public servant, 43 years 14/9/2019
4. Mr. Amaobi Opah, Delta State, Trader, 37 years, 13/11/2010
5. Mr. Kanayo Ezeji, Imo state, Traditional/Native doctor, 44 years, 7/7/2012