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Cultural Resources and Socio-Economic Development in Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria, 1960-2015

Amadi, Edibeth Chimezirim (PhD)
Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Imo State University, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria
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Abstract
This study focused on cultural resources and socio-economic development in Mbaise, Imo State, 1960-2015. The major cultural resources covered in this research are the new yam festival of Mbaise, Iwaakwa in some communities in Mbaise, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Eyiri Eyi Obohia, and places of historical significance in Mbaise. The study was executed using both secondary and primary sources of data. The primary data covered the use of oral interview through which the researcher generates direct information from selected people in Mbaise, Imo state. The secondary data covered published information in books and journals concerning the subject matter. The study discovered that cultural resources in Mbaise helps in attracting lovers of culture, improving cultural acceptance, encouraging home coming and merry making. It was recommended that there is need for the Mbaise traditional council to utilize the media (radio, TV, newspapers and social media) for promotion of Mbaise cultural resources.

Keywords: Cultural Resources, Socio-Economic Development, Cultural Festivals

Introduction
Every community in the world has its cultural identities and traditional values. These cultural significance of the people are the basic cultural resource through which the people can be identifies and recognized Uchendu (2011). In Igboland in general and Mbaise in particular, there exist numerous cultural identities through which other people recognize, respect and acknowledge Mbaise. Some of the cultural resources include the new yam festival of Mbaise, traditional marriage in Mbaise, Iwaakwa in some communities in Mbaise, Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise, Eyiri Eyi Obohia, Mbaise

dialects, traditional marriage in Mbaise, and places of historical significance in Mbaise.
According to Awodele and Ayeni (2019), through cultural resources and activities, many tourists visit different parts of the world to enjoy cultural significance of some communities. Durmaz listed the cultural resources which enhance socio-economic development to include cultural festivals, cultural music/dancing, and places of historical significance (Durmaz 2014). These three basic cultural values within Africa in general and Mbaise in particular promote all round development. Here, culture is a major asset for economic development as well as one of the major beneficiaries of this development. Based on that, there is need to harness cultural resources so as to achieve socio-economic development in Mbaise. In harnessing cultural resources, basic cultural values are the major factors in the attractiveness of most destinations, not only in terms of tourism, but also in attracting residents and investment.
Culture and socio-economic development are linked because of their obvious synergies and their growth potential. Mbaise's vast and rich cultural heritage/ resources need to be strategically repositioned to boost socio-economic benefits for the people. In recent times, cultural resources like festivals are considered to contribute significantly to cultural and economic development of the people if well utilized (Ezeani 2013). Specifically, cultural festivals such as masquerade in different Mbaise communities and Mbaise new yam festival can have positive impact on the socio-economic development of the Mbaise communities.
Basically, Mbaise new yam festival organizers are now using the historical and cultural themes to develop the annual events to attract visitors and creating cultural image in Mbaise by hosting the festivals regularly. Apart from hosting the Mbaise new yam festival which is more general to all, there exist numerous festival for different Mbaise communities. Some of them include oji Ezinihitte festival, eyileyi-obohia, iwaakwa for some communities in Mbaise and selected significant places within Mbaise. In Mbaise, the hosting of cultural festival is very important because of their economic opportunities in addition to social and cultural benefits. Basically, cultural festival have play vital role in development; hence the need for different communities to utilize their cultural festival for the development of the communities Ezeani (2013).
The development of cultural festivals aims to act as a dynamic force behind cultural innovation and social bonding in development support.
Mbaise's vast and rich cultural resources need to be strategically repositioned to boost growth of development. The effectiveness of cultural resource will add value to development for the communities if well utilized. Nigeria's cultural assets/resources, particularly those of Mbaise, such as festivals, historical sites, monuments, sacred groves, and others, are among the most fascinating in the world over Eno & Aniedi 2019. However, lack of adequate promotion of cultural resources may affect development in Mbaise, and other parts of Igboland.

THE MAJOR CULTURAL RESOURCES OF MBAISE NATION

Every community has its cultural resources and cultural identities through which people recognize and identify with the culture. For the people of Mbaise, the major cultural resources include were discussed thus:

The New Yam Festival

The New Yam Festival (NYF) is one unique cultural festival which is celebrated annually all over Mbaise land (Shaw, 1972). It is a festival held in great commemoration of the official

end of the farming year and marks the beginning of a new planting season all over the land. Known among the people, as Emume Iri Ji Ọhụrụ, the NYF is one significant traditional festival which every Mbaise man is duty-bound to observe on the approved day. Among the people, this annual festival is usually held with great festivities; elaborate hosting of friends and relations to varieties of cooked and roasted yam meals, display of traditional musical entertainments, and a number of inter-village wrestling competitions.

In the words of Achebe (1958), huge mountains of pounded yam meals, known among the people as ụtara ji are prepared and served with delicious vegetable soup, known in Mbaise as Ụgụmanu. Some families also serve their guests with okro cooked with fermented and sliced oil bean seeds, known in the local parlance as Aragha soup. As an annual event, it holds on every 15th day of August. In the traditional milieus of the people, families, communities, towns, and villages host this cultural event with elaborate pomp and pageantry in their various homes, and market squares where masquerade dances, cultural displays by men and women, traditional wrestling competitions, assorted fashion parades, as well as eating competition are showcased (Osuagwu, 2000).

Thus, among the traditional dance troupes that featured prominently on the Iri ji annual festival was the popular melodious Abiigbo traditional dance, and the hilarious Ekpe traditional dance, for which Mbaise is known all over Igbo land (Ahamba, 1978). During the pre-Christian missionary era, the festival officially commences with the display and deposition of newly harvested yam tubers at the shrine of the different deities owned by specific communities. With yam tubers displayed by their owner-families at the vicinity of the local deities, it then became the responsibilities of the traditional chief priest to conduct the traditional prayers and incantations over the harvested yams.

After praying over the yams and declaring them safe for consumption, all Mbaise families were then invited to prepare the yams and serve them to invited friends and relations who have travelled from far and wide to grace the 'emume iri ji ọhụrụ festival (Agulanna, 2008).' In some cases too, the responsibility of blessing the new yams were also performed by the eldest man in the family or local community. But in these days when Christianity has enveloped the land however, traditional rulers of different communities perform the rites of blessing the new yams, and then, enjoy the privilege of taking the first piece of yam (cooked or roasted) from the mountain of yam foods set at the village square, before others are allowed to do same.

As it was then, the event is usually marked with lavish feasts of assorted dishes of yam-foods and accompanying drinks. Among the Mbaise people, the NYF is significant for a good number of reasons (Ikejiani, 2010). The occasion of the festival presents a beautiful opportunity for different Mbaise towns and villages to take stock of their own illustrious sons who have contributed immensely to community development, honour their worthy and able achievers, who have made indelible infrastructural legacies that have positively impacted community development, as well as bestow traditional titles such as Nze, Okenze, Chief, High Chief, Ezeji and Ọzọ on worthy community members who have written their names on the sands of time and endorsed their signatures on the letters of gold on matters of improving the infrastructural and human capacity development levels of their kits and kin.

For communities therefore, the celebration of the 'iri ji ọhụrụ' festival presents a great opportunity to appreciate the contributions of sons and daughters who have literally elevated

the developmental strata of their different communities through the generous donation of completed road projects, installation of pipe-borne water networks, execution of rural electrification projects, empowerment of the youth, widows, and unemployed community members, as well as the award 74 of scholarships to intelligent indigent children (SevdaKhalilova, 2016). These are some of the rare achievements which Mbaise communities sincerely need to 'grow up.' It is at the occasion of this festival then that different communities appreciate the contributions of their own sons and daughters who have genuinely impacted development through the award of traditional titles of recognition. Most importantly, the celebration of the NYF in Mbaise land presents the desired platform for the people to identify with tradition, celebrate culture, and answer his name worthily in the midst of invited friends and kinsmen.

As peace loving people, a people who literally love oneness, endure unity and togetherness, as well as extend warm hands of fellowship to other persons within and outside the land, the festival presents a wonderful opportunity to celebrate together and fellowship over pots of assorted yam foods (Ekechi, 1971). Meanwhile, the place of kola nuts (Ọjị Igbo) as the number one item among the list of entertainment materials presented to guests on this occasion needs not be overemphasized, most especially as the culture of "kola nutting" among the Igbo still stands out as one fundamental traditional value of the people which Christianity and Western influence could not expunge from the indigenous milieus of the Igbo nation. Thus, legend confirms that the ancestors of Mbaise who kick-started and for whom the culture of celebrating the NYF are made, were never Christians.

They were of African Traditional Religion. Based on that, the festival was then held in the way of African traditional religion, which involved a number of traditional rituals by the eldest son of the family, kinsmen, village and or town at their ancestral hut (Njoku, 1980). Among these were the sacrificing and slaughtering of goats and chickens for the ancestors via the ancestral cult symbols (okpeosi) by the eldest son, followed by series of incantations, prayers, and supplications to the ancestors of the land. It was at the completion of the necessary rites and rituals that the floors were declared open for the celebration of the festival by families and friends of Mbaise. At that, there were no churching activities involved; neither were there any celebration of church services in parishes and other Christian missionary outposts.

Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise

Kola nut is a seed which is very popular throughout Nigeria. It is often widely circulated on important social occasions such as marriages, funerals, child-naming or coronation ceremonies, communal meetings, and so on (Nwadike, 2007). Due to its popularity and importance, kola nut has generated a wide range of literature which focuses on diverse perspectives. More importantly, much of the literature has been about its pride of place in Igboland where its customs and rites were very intricate and a complex encounter. These cannot be detailed in any reasonable form in such a work as this. Therefore, an attempt will be made at skirting a theoretical review of the literature on Ọjị customs in Igboland, rather than on Ọjị Ezinihitte festival – a subject which has received very little scholarly attention.

This review takes a thematic approach, focusing on issues which will help one understand better "the place" of Ọjị –the basis for the cultural festival in focus. Kola nut tree is of African

origin, grown especially in the sultry forests of West and Central Africa as well as in the Caribbean (Nweke, 2015). Its fruit comes in pods of which may contain five to twelve seeds, with each seed naturally stratified into two to seven (or more) cotyledons/lobes. It is somewhat enjoyable – pleasantly bitter and astringent – much esteemed for its stomachic powers and has an invigorating effect due to its caffeine and stimulating kolanin contents. With more than forty varieties, only the cola nitida and the cola acuminata are well known and widely used.

The former popularly called Gworo (Hausa name for kola nut) is the most widely available, while the later is grown mainly in the Igbo hinterlands and is known as Ọjị Igbo (hereafter known as Ọjị). Kola nut is important in Nigeria, as its three major ethnic groups – the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo – have some kind of „interest" in the kola economy which booms in the country, though its symbolic and economic importance amongst them varies almost inversely (Nzekwu, 1961). The Yoruba were the largest cultivators of kola nut but have no more than an economic attachment to it. Its consumption was very high amongst the Hausa but, like the Yoruba, no special ritual was involved. The Igbo, however, did not cultivate it, as did the Yoruba, nor consumed it as much as the Hausa and other northerners who basically ate much of it for its diverse roles.

But it was the Igbo that had the strongest emblematic attachment to kola nut. Ọjị was highly important, widely used and virtually indispensable in their traditional life, thus reverenced and celebrated amongst them. Oji Festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise is one of the cultural resources in mbaise land. Oji (kola nut) has great significance particularly to the Ezinihitte and the rest of Igbo people. To the Igbo, Oji is not all about the small seed - non-juicy unattractive, red or yellowish derived from the pod of a tree called Osisi Oji; it is more of its socio-cultural significance. According to Uchenna, "oji is a present from one person to another, particularly as an acknowledgement of someone/group" on occasions like visits, marriage, sacrifices, covenants (Igba ndu) meetings, naming ceremonies etc. Oji is a symbol of hospitality (Uchenna, 2010).

It shows love, acceptance and appreciation. The Oji festival in Ezinihitte is held every 1st January. The annual cultural festival known as Oji Ezinihitte is celebrated on January 1, in line with the tradition of the people to celebrate and accord respect to "Oji" (kola nuts) in Igboland. The annual festival held on rotational basis among the communities in Ezinihitte was instituted in the early 20th century to replace the annual Ira Ofo Ezinihitte. The landmark event usually kicked off around noon, with the arrival of traditional rulers and other guests both from home and abroad. The event usually featured singing and dancing, in addition to the traditional rites of carrying the Okwa-Oji in turns, amidst pomp and pageantry, by the ancient communities that make up Ezinihitte Mbaise.

Ọjị Ezinihitte cultural festival is one prominent surviving social ritual in Ezinihitte clan, which has become an annual pillar of tradition, culture and development. While oji (kola nut) holds a very high cultural and ritualistic value among the Igbo – playing a fundamental part in almost all segments of their life – it is in this festive ritual of Ezinihitte that Ọjị tradition is meaningfully celebrated in an elaborate manner (Yalae, 2008). The Ọjị festivity has a history that dates back to the remote past, and hinges on the origins, settlement and culture of Ezinihitte people. The festival generates a sense of community solidarity and, like most other African festivals, is a "great instrument for the dissemination of values so dearly needed to

reinforce the philosophy of social harmony and mutual interdependence and the doctrine of community good".

To date, the Ọjị festivity has remained a symbol of the people's cultural and genealogical unity. It is a medium through which the people of Ezinihitte interact with one another, re-dedicating themselves to the cherished values of Ọnyeaghala nwanneya (Ihediwa; Nwashindu; & Onah, 2014). However, even as the annual festival is still celebrated – usually as little more than a social function – particularly as a source of joy and gratification over the years, many still lack the appreciation of its original history and significance. Indeed, these have remained "guesswork" to many, thus susceptible to various opinions and suggestive accounts. The Ọjị Ezinihitte festival means different things to different people. Opinions sought suggested that this festive ritual had its admirers, hard critics, as well as a variation of perceptions in-between. There existed many hardcore lovers of tradition who would not compromise the festival, no matter the reason. Representative voice of this group noted thus: this is our culture, so why shy away from it? It is our pride as Igbo that Ọjị is celebrated. God himself blessed us with it. Other places around the world also have what they celebrate as "tradition" and they do so without shame. Many of our "born again" brothers who refuse to partake in the festival go to the Whiteman's land and practice their "traditions". But here, they condemn what God blessed us with. That is unacceptable. I will continue to celebrate Ọjị Ezinihitte festival. Nothing can stop me (Odoemene, 2023). Besides these "lovers of tradition", one needs to acknowledge that there seem to be deliberate denigration of the essence and significance of the festival by many. Some have castigated it as "unfit" because of its "pagan origins". The Ọjị festival is real idolatry and paganism – pure and simple. You need not go far to verify this. Just look at its origins. What does it point to? Idolatry and paganism! And that is what I have been warning the people about; the Bible says "my people die of ignorance". …If the root or origin [of the celebrations] is faulty, then forget it; it is ungodly. According to (Odoemene, 2023), as Christians, it is against our belief and should be abandoned. It is evil and we must put an end to it. A few have assumed and argued, albeit ignorantly, that it is merely an "invented tradition" based on fables and myths, which were adopted without critical examination (Offiaeli, 2015). Similarly, erroneous suggestions of the festival "being forced on the people" were sometimes made.

Contrary to these thoughts, it should be noted that at no time was the Ọjị festival "forced" or made binding on people in whatever form; there were no sanctions whatsoever for not participating in it. Undeniably, some of these views were not surprising; the knowledge of the origins and importance of the festival has largely faded, particularly under the over-bearing influence of Christianity and the people's passionate receptivity to change and Western lifestyles. Nonetheless, this fact has never diminished the festival. On the contrary, it has continued to gain grandeur and prominence both within and outside of Ezinihitte (Yalae, 2008).

Instructively, these competing opinions cut across the religious, the "aristocracy", as well as the "ordinary people". Finally, contrary to views in some quarters that since the revival of the festival in 1953, it has continued to be hosted "unbroken" till date, evidence suggests otherwise. The Nigeria-Biafra (1967-1970) obstructed the festival and the ravages of that war were quite evident in the clan. The "second round" of the festival started in 1977 with Ife

hosting (Offiaeli, 2015). Historically, the festival usually commenced in the mid-afternoon of 31 December every year with the formal hand-over of the treasured Ọba-Ọjị (a giant carved Ọjị container, known as "old man") and sixteen Ọkwa-Ọjị (carved Ọjị bowls) by the Eze (king) and the council members of the immediate-past host community of their equivalents of the next host community.

This traditional "hand-over" took place at the boundary of the new host community nearest to that of the last host. The Ọba-Ọjị was covered with a piece of traditional "George" wrapper. Items, which included a male goat, bottle of "hot drink" and sixteen kola nuts, were presented by the new host community to the immediate past host community as a demonstration of goodwill. A token amount of money was also presented as "transport fare" for the Ọba-Ọjị, which was covered with a piece of traditional "George" wrapper. The hand-over was done amid singing, dancing and the booming of Ntunala (indigenous canon shots) (Ugo, 1995). The Ọba-Ọjị begins its journey to the host Eze's palace after the handover.

It is accompanied by traditional rulers, Ndị Nze (red-cap chiefs), officials of Ezinihitte Development Association (E.D.A.), and other members of the community present. The procession to the palace was often on foot and at a slow pace, with reverence, regality and decorum (Ugo, 1995). At the palace, the chairmanship (leadership) of Ezinihitte Council of Traditional Rulers (ECTR) was then formally transferred to the new host Eze (Ugo, 1995). Celebrations and entertainment continued in the palace till late at night. Other Ezinihitte communities were equally engulfed in celebrations that night of 31 December due to Ịchụ afọ (traditional send-forth of the out-going year) activities.

According to Acholonu (2008), early in the morning on 1st January, a visit to the venue of the festival would reveal the host's preparedness. Booths were constructed with palm fronds for the respective Ezinihitte communities, special guests and dignitaries from the clan and beyond, while a special one was set up at the center for Ndị Eze who would oversee the event. The "Ground Zero" of the festival is marked out indicating the strategic positioning of the different vital groups and actions – for the Ekpe music players, the judges‟ stand (which often has a raised platform), the direction of dance for the Ịchị Ọjị competition among the communities, and the platform where the Ọba-Ọjị would be placed. The arena was richly decorated in traditional motifs, while the booths – complete with chairs –were clearly identified with name tags.

Public Address System (PAS) was usually provided so people could hear, understand and follow what was being said and done. Before midday, following sixteen Ntunala shots and the sounding of Uhie (the ancient gong), both of which traditionally announced the commencement of the festival, crowds of people from different communities of Ezinihitte and beyond would begin to arrive at the arena and taking up positions in the booths. They were enthralled by various cultural displays of dances from all around Ezinihitte (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2012). At noon, Ndị Eze finely attired in their full regalia, would dance the Nkwa Ike (power dance) of the Ekpe performers into the arena, amidst cheers and booming of Ntunala shots. At about 12:30 PM the ceremony started in earnest.

The chairman of the occasion was introduced and formal prayers were said by a Christian priest or pastor, giving blessings to the august occasion. Welcome addresses were presented by the host community, the EDA and ECTR, after which the Ọba-Ọjị, bearing all the Ọjị, Nzu

and Ose-Ọjị (alligator pepper) – the main items for the day's ritual (Igbonekwu, 2021) – would then make its entrance. Borne by the host Eze's cabinet members who danced regally to the designated booth, its arrival was heralded with sixteen Ntunala shots. The Ọba-Ọjị was placed on a platform in front of the traditional rulers. Ịchị Ọjị was the climax of the Ọjị Ezinihitte festival. For this event, the different communities were invited according to the present order of kin relationship (listed above) to come forward and received a single Ọkwa-Ọjị which contained Ọjị, Nzu and Ose-Ọjị.

According to Heysel (2013) The Ekpe music performers, strategically positioned for this purpose, provided the music for the invited group to dance enroute the main stand to accept the Ọkwa-Ọjị. Each community's representatives were often well dressed in traditional attire and were sometimes preceded by an Ekpe masquerade. Judges for the dance competition were advantageously located so as to have a perfect view of the rhythmical movements and demonstrations of the representatives‟ dances. It was a moment of excitement. One observed that each invited community stepped out proudly and danced with sufficient measure of seriousness for a good show to out-class other contestants for the trophy.

The representatives stopped in front of the Ọba-Ọjị and with a token sum 43 received the Okwa-Ọjị from the host Eze and Ndị Eze Oboama-na-Umunama, the later in their capacity as the kings of the parent communities. The representatives then danced back to their community's booth, amidst cheers of welcome and shouts of joy and rejoicing. The items in the Okwa-Ọjị were subsequently shared out to everyone in the booths as a demonstration of the bond of unity and love (Figueira, 2018). After the present communities in Ezinihitte would have observed the Ịchị Ọjị activity guest communities were invited to share in the Ọjị communion. The first of such invitees was the "Okwuato group" due to its genealogical and cultural links with Ezinihitte. This same reason goes for Ngwa community, the second to be invited for this activity. Other groups – clans in Mbaise, Ndị Okene (people having Ezinihitte as their maternal home), illustrious sons of Ezinihitte and some dignitaries present were also invited to partake in Ịchị Ọjị.

Eyiri Eyi Obohia

The Mbaise people have festivals which attract both locals and foreign tourists. Eyiri eyi Obohia is one of the popular festivals (new yam) celebrated at the second nkwo obohia market day in August. Eyiri eyi Obohia has remained a foremost cultural festival for Obohia people of Ahiazu Mbaise. It marks the beginning of a new calendar when Ezeala Ogugo eats new yam. Today, Obohia is made up four autonomous communities and they still come together to celebrate this great cultural festival. The highlight is the special ugu mmanu soup only prepared for the ceremony and the ekpe dance at the nkwo Obohia market square. According to Nnaemeka (2013), Eyirieyi Obohia cultural festival is a cultural festival celebrated by the people of Obohia Ekwerazu in Ahiazu Mbaise Imo State.

Eyirieyi Obohia is an August festival celebrated on every second Nkwo Obohia in August. As the name implies it is a festival agreed and fixed by the ancestors of Obohia Clan (ihe eyiri-eyi). Eyirieyi festival existed from the time immemorial as it is difficult to trace the exact date the festival started (Femi, 2021). The elders of the land then, agreed to have a collective feast that will bring the people of Obohia ancient clan together as one. History has it that the choice

of honour was Ezeala Ogugo who was the chief deity or the father of other deities in Obohia. Tradition has it that he led them to win many battles hence the elders decided to honour him through a celebration, and this resulted in a generally agreed celebration of Eyirieyi.

They festival has three stages of preparation before the actual celebration. These stages include the fall of Oji (kolanut) and its rituals which is traditionally done with a significant participation of Ihitte (Opara Obohia) and Umuduruji the marital home of Adabadji who is Ada ezeala (Bamidele, 2021) The other two stages are blowing of ntumere (ima ntumere) and "ike Ebo". The festival has a four-market week period of preparation starting with the Oji ritual. This preparation is a very solemn period, and it is treated as the most sacred moment in Obohia. Within this period, fight, quarrels, violence and other form of evil or anti-social acts are highly prohibited. People are rather encouraged to move for peace and reconciliation. Individuals are called to purify their hearts and minds, because Eyirieyi is never celebrated with animosity.

Iwaakwa

According to Agbudinkpa, in Mbaise, Iwaakwa is the formal initiation into manhood (Femi, 2021). The festival is well celebrated by Mbaise people. Iwaakwa attracts different categories of visitors as well as sons and daughters of Mbaise and play a very important role in the lives of these people since is the major consideration for any male child who has come of age to be a full and responsible man. Iwaakwa (Initiation into manhood) in Igbo tradition in general and Mbaise culture in particular is the right of passage in an individual's life while coming of age. This ushers the individual into adulthood. It entails the passage of a young boy transforming into fully fledged man and it is highly valued and respected in the community. The ceremony comes up once every three years and the participants are usually mates of 25 years and above age grade.

This plays a very important part in the culture and tradition of Mbaise people. Iwaakwa has contributed to increase income of the people, business viability, attracting investors, promotion of local business, foreign exchange earnings, wealth distribution, standardization of cultural and social life, improvement of cultural activities/heritages, development of super structures, infrastructural development, and improvement of environmental quality (Agbudinkpa, 2019). Iwaakwa ceremony has been able to improve the quality of the natural environment of Mbaise, the environment continues to improve its quality with little community self help infrastructural development which has clearly impacted very little on the development of Mbaise. In all, Iwa-akwa has influenced the development of superstructures. Iwa Akwa is an adult initiation ceremony practiced in some communities in Ahiazu Mbaise. Iwa Akwa is an initiation into manhood that typically takes place between the ages of 24-30 (this varies).

When a young man reaches the right age, and his family feels it is time for him to partake in the ceremony, they indicate their interest. A thorough investigation is then carried out by the elders of the community to ascertain the character, eligibility and family background of the intended participant. Once given the go-ahead, participants may proceed to buy high-quality wrappers and prepare for the main event. On the initiation day, the celebrants hang the new wrappers at the entrance of their fathers' compounds: a bold declaration that a member of that

household will be initiated into manhood (Bamidele, 2021). According to the National Institute for Cultural Orientation, no one is expected to touch the hung wrappers until elders come and tie it around the waist of the celebrant, while a larger part of the wrapper is draped around him from the back.

In this case, the wrapper is a symbol of coverage - the celebrant was once a naked child, but is now a fully-clothed adult! Before the initiation, the senior age-grade guides the inductees through the customs, providing supervision from the beginning of the ceremony to the market square display, which is the peak of the Iwaakwa ceremony. After initiation, members are eligible to pay taxes, partake in communal discussions and decision-making in the community (Chukwuemeka, 2020). For purposes of socialization in the moral domain, societal values, beliefs, and attitudes must be internalized in the young. Thus, the Igbo elder decided, presumably at the dawn of history, that children must come to adopt adult values as their own and conform to them irrespective of the hope of external reward or fear of punishment.

Society agents began, therefore, by imposing values and by controlling children from without. Thus, the rites, rituals, and accompanying ceremonies of Iwaakwa connected with its attendant are loaded with values, attitudes, and beliefs intended for the moral growth of the adolescent male and even the female. Therefore, the institution and all about it is more or less supposed to help the adolescent to be critical in moral judgment, to be astute, and to be more comprehensive in their strength (Oh 2015). To celebrate it, people come from all walks of life, friends, relatives, in-laws, and well-wishers gather to witness or participate in these rites and rituals. By so doing, socialization is enhanced. Iwaakwa Festival is part of the ancient history of some communities in Mbaise. Whoever dies without performing the rites would be regarded as a child and would be buried the same day just like a child.

Iwa-Akwa or Aju festival which can also be translated as cloth wearing is a traditional ceremony that is practiced by some communities in Ahiazu Mbaise local government areas of Imo State. It is used to indicate that a boy has become a man. Apart of some communities in Ahiazu LGA, some other communities in Imo State that engaged in iwaakwa in include Obowo, Ihitte/ Uboma and Ehime Mbano. The major processes of iwa-akwa are discussed below:

1. **Investigation stage:** The members of the community would investigate the boys who are going to participate in the initiation. The age of the boys, the mother of the boys and the father of the boys would be investigated (Ojo, 2017). The boys are supposed to be between the age of 21 to 26 years, the mother must have been married and known by the community and the father must have passed through the process.
2. **The preparation stage:** After the investigation has been completed, the family of the participants go to the market to buy high quality clothes that would be used for the initiation and also make sure that the reception venue is ready for the guests (Nkamigbo 2014).
3. **The initiation stage:** The participants are to follow strictly what the elderly men who have passed through the process dictate for them (Greenbaum & Nelson 2002). The families of the participants are expected to spread wrapper in front of their compounds to receive the blessings of a spiritual leader who walks barefooted along the streets.

4. **The rationale for iwaakwa:** The rationale for iwaakwa is to allow the boy adolescent to graduate into manhood properly and completely with not only the knowledge, commitment, and involvement of his immediate environment but also with the knowledge, support, and blessing of the spirit world. Greenbaum and Nelson, in an interview with the researcher, captured it succinctly this way: "No man in our land can face the challenges of this life if he fails to anchor on the supernatural (Kalu 2011)". The spiritual world controls the physical world, and for anybody to succeed here, he must connect to the supernatural to be able to survive. The rites and rituals of iwaakwa fortify every man with this all-important and essential power. The adolescent boy is opportune to taste the challenges of endurance, humility, and perseverance as he goes through all the processes before becoming a man.

Significance Places in Mbaise

There are many significance and historical places in Mbaise, Imo State. Some of them include:

1. **Catholic Diocese of Ahiara, Mbaise:** "Catholic Diocese of Ahiara" is named after one of the five ancient clans of the territory now called Mbaise. The clans or communities of the area are Ahiara, Ekwerazu, Ezinihitte, Abajah and Oke Ovoro. The Catholic missionaries first settled in Ahiara from 1933. And from there Catholicism began to spread to all Mbaise land (Nkamigbo, & Deixis 2009). It established in Ezinihitte in 1947 settling in Amumara Community. It went to Ekwerazu and Nguru in 1948 and settled in Umuokirika and Nguru Centre respectively. And, on and on, the Catholic Church began to capture the hearts and souls of the Mbaise people. And that was how the great romance and subsequent marriage between Mbaise people and the Catholic Church had begun. That union has been growing stronger ever since. And nothing can put asunder this marriage that was made in heaven!
2. **The Anglican Diocese of Mbaise:** This is one of 12 within the Anglican Province of Owerri, itself one of 14 provinces within the Church of Nigeria. The diocese was inaugurated on 30 November 1992, the inaugural bishop being Cyril Chukwuka Anyanwu who died in 1999 and was succeeded by Bright Joseph Egemasi Ogu. The current bishop is Chamberlain Chinedu Ogunedo, who was consecrated Bishop on 21 February 2010.
3. **Alaogbaga deity:** This is an arbitrator of justice and morality. This deity IS revered and respected by the people. Alaogbaga deity is believed to be a powerful spirit force highly reverenced and respected by Chokoneze people (Ikekeonwu 1987). Chokoneze is a town in Ezinihitte Mbaise made up of two autonomous communities; Umuchoko and Umueze. Umuchoko is made of small kindred's like Umuola, Emedike, Umuajala (where the shrine of Ajala deity is located, although it is no longer functional) etc.
4. **Palm wine production in Itu:** Itu is a community in Ezinihitte Mbaise local government area of Imo State. Most people refer to it as Itu Mbaise. This is because there is another town known as Itu in Cross River State. Itu is a town known for palm wine production business, palm oil and agricultural produce.
5. **Small London in Obizi:** Obizi is an autonomous community in Ezinihitte Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo state, in South-Eastern Nigeria (Keniston 1977). It is notable among the communities in the Local Government as having produced many notable public figures, and is referred to as "Small London" by the inhabitants who take pride in the community.

6. **Afor Ogbe Market:** Afor Ogbe Market is a popular daily market in the Ahiazu-Mbaise council area of Imo State. It is a very busy market and place and requires one to be extra careful of the vehicular traffic at all times. It is one of the richest markets in the state, offering a diverse amount of produce for sale.
7. **Afor Oru Market:** This market holds every four days at Amato, and it is known for the sale of yams, cassava, and other foodstuffs (Emenanjo 2011).
8. **Nkwogwu Market:** This is a weekly market that holds every Friday at Nkwogwu, and it is a popular market for the sale of livestock, including goats, sheep, and cows.
9. **Ahiazu Mbaise LGA (Local Government Headquarters):** This is a local government area in Imo State, Nigeria. It is located in the southeastern part of Nigeria and has its headquarters in Afor-Oru. Ahiazu Mbaise LGA is one of the 27 local government areas in Imo State and it is made up of several towns and villages.
10. **Best choice supermarket and bar:** Best choice supermarket and bar was incorporated in Mbaise, Nigeria with Registration Number 2434440. It was registered on 09 Aug 2016 and its current status is unknown. Company's registered office address is Nwambara's compound Umuezuo, Ekwerazu, Aboh Mbaise LGA (Ukaegbu 2018).
11. **Sacred Heart Villa Secondary School, Enyiogugu:** It is one of the best missionary secondary schools in Imo State.
12. **Non fee paying special vocational college:** The non fee paying special vocational college was established by federal government at Amuzi Mbaise.
13. **Diocesan Specialist Hospital Obohia Ahiazu Mbaise:** This is a hospital established by Ahiara Diocese.
14. **Nkwobi Afor-Ogbe:** It is a very big Joint and it is well known in Mbaise and Obowo. Nkwobi Afor-ogbe is situated along Owerri-Umuahia road beside Afor-ogbe Market. It is a place where you can have a nice African delicacies like Nkwobi, fish barbeque Moi-moi, different kinds of soup, oil-bean fruit salad (ugba), bread fruits (ukwa) and so on. The place equally serves as a recreation centre where you can see different kinds of domestic animals, fish farming (Agulanna 2008). However, there is an abbatua behind the Nkwobi joint at Nkwobi Afor-ogbe, there is a school called St. Patrick secondary school, there is also a Community bank adjacent the joint where one can easily make some transactions.

    The most interesting thing about this very joint is that, there is a bureau de-change (foreign exchange) center. Those who came from different parts of the world can easily exchange their currency and make their transaction and purchase of any kind. Thus, there is big well known market called Afor-ogbe at this very spot. People from far and near especially Obowo, Umuahia, Mbano, Owerri and Ngor-okpala usually trade at this market every four market days (Ilemona 2010). The road leading to this Nkwobi-Afor-Ogbe is very accessible and well strategized in Ahiazu Mbaise Local Government Area. In this same spot where we have this popular joint, there is a motor park where one can easily board a taxi/bus to their various destinations at any given hour. It is indeed a very nice and interseting place to explore in Mbaise Nation.
15. **Eke Ahiara Junction:** This is another interesting and well known bus stop in Mbaise. It is however, a centre of Mbaise. Thus, at this spot, there is four major roads, each of the road leads to different towns, It's like a four cardinal points. North leads to Umuahia-Obowo, South leads to Owerri, East to Ehime Mbano while the West leads to Ngor-Okpolar/ Aba. Eke-Ahiara Junction is the only place in Mbaise where you can find different banks, business centres, markets, super stores, Malls, Parks, and the Mbaise Cathedral (Nnaemeka 2013) At Eke Ahiara, you find different kinds of Hotels, fast foods. It is at Eke Ahiara that you can find one of the five stars Hotel called Chris

VI. It is a well known hotel, well equipped with a Gym house and swimming pool. Eke-Ahiara is safe and sacured with military personnels. It is the heart of the Mbaise Nation. According to history, it is a place where the Biafran War Lord made his declaration during the Biafran war and had a bunker called Ojukwu's Bunker and even till date, it is still there.

Conclusion

Mbaise people are endowed with different cultural activities. Some of the cultural resources within Mbaise include the new yam festival of Mbaise, iwaakwa, oji festival in Ezinihitte Mbaise, eyiri eyi Obohia, and places of historical significance in Mbaise. The above cultural resources have economic environmental social and cultural benefits. Such benefits include development of Mbaise nation, infrastructural development, self help development efforts, love sharing, home coming, maintenance of environment/cleanliness and promotion of Mbaise culture to the outside world. However, the cultural activities as mentioned above have many challenges affecting its growth and development. Some of the challenges include misconception about Mbaise people and Mbaise culture, low level media and stakeholders promotion of Mbaise culture, political interference from political stakeholders to the Mbaise culture, low level of public recognition and public promotion of Mbaise culture, neglect of Mbaise dialect, chieftaincy tussle among the tradition council within Mbaise land, lack of general agreement on issues pertaining to date of cultural events, location of cultural events and appropriate people to fix the date for cultural events.

Recommendations

The study recommends:

1. That there is need for the Mbaise traditional council to utilize the media (radio, TV, newspapers and social media) for promotion of Mbaise cultural resources.
2. Cultural activities within Mbaise should be effectively utilized to attract and encourage social development, infrastructural development, unity among the people/community and sustainability of the cultural activities.
3. The government and political office holders should stop interfering on cultural matters and stop influencing the activities of traditional institution so as to achieve unity and progress of Mbaise cultural activities.

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