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Otipi Royal Initiation among Yache People of Cross River, Nigeria: African Heritage in Perspective

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Abstract

The existence of man is synonymous with history and culture. As a result, man has a significant link with history and culture because man creates both. While history is a product of culture, the latter serves as the vehicle through which the former is preserved, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigeria is a country endowed with varieties of cultural heritages derived from its trans-cultural ethnic communities. This study investigates a unique aspect of the multicultural history of Nigeria with a focus on Otipi Royal Initiation Ceremony among the Yache people of Cross River State, Nigeria. Since culture reflects the environment that produces it, the primary concern of this paper, therefore, was to explore the traditional indigenous practices of a mainly remote people, utilizing the historical, descriptive approach to spotlight them as cultural heritage. This methodological approach hinges on primary and secondary sources of data collection. The findings revealed that while effort at preserving these heritages face daunting challenges, human actions such as trafficking and exportation through traditional arts thefts, vandalism, Christianity have continued to undermine the culture of the Yache people. Cultural disparity underscores the need for the preservation of people's culture for the sake of generations yet unborn.

Keywords: Preservation, Cultural Heritage, Artifact, Oral Tradition, Otipi Royal Initiation, Ceremony.

Introduction

Nigeria is home to several cultural heritages as a result of its multicultural ethnic configuration. However, the contemporary situation of most Nigeria cultural heritage

(material and non-material) is best described as being endangered. Efforts at preserving these heritages faces daunting challenges, primarily human actions such as theft, trafficking exportation of artefacts, vandalism, Christian belief system as well as other kinds of social change, among others. The above notwithstanding, little attention is paid to cultural heritage policies in Africa (Onyima, 2016) that could provide the enabling environment for the preservation and helps incentivize the balkanization of indigenous cultural heritages. It has significant adverse implication for growth and development in any society. The above assertion undermines the understanding that cultural preservation serves the multi-purpose goal for societal development primarily through tourism.

The purpose of preservation could include an association of a thing, in this case, initiation ceremony, with essential persons or events. Other reasons are the importance of group symbol, present intrinsic qualities, and particular usefulness as sources of intelligence information about the past and typicality of objects to their time (Lynch, 1972b). The value for continuity of cultural memory and heritage, economic and commercial values as essential reasons for conservation or preservation elucidate visible evidence of the past and how this could contribute educationally to the cultural identity and memory of a particular people or place; giving meaning to the present by interpreting the past (Tiesdell, Oc, & Health, 1996).

It is arguable the environment functions as an expression of culture, values, activities and relative status. Social aspects of a city are often judged through the measurement of physical elements, which are associational and symbolic (Rapport 1977, Pp. 317-18). Freeman (1998) in his edited work titled "*Continuity and sense of place: The importance of the symbolic image*" did argue that buildings gain meaning through their association with history. He believes that perception of a place beyond the everyday reality is an abstract connection with human history; and life is how a conscious sense of place is created and reinforced in a community. Furthermore, Rossi (1982) writes that urban form is a repository of culture from the past, and for the future, the long period of culture qualifies it as a heritage. Culture spans from the past through the present into the uncertain future. Cultural heritage as the history of society deserves to be conserved, not just as a monument but also to serve socio-economic purposes such as identity and tourism.

The Problem

The global importance of heritages to countries cannot be over-emphasized due to cultural perception, historical, educational, economic, tourist and research significance. Heritages

are cherished characteristic features of a society handed down from generation to generation through conscious preservation. Put differently; heritages are significant endowments from nature/man to society. However, oral tradition remains an indispensable cultural heritage management strategy among pre-literate societies, especially Africa (sub-Saharan), which continues to be relevant in contemporary times. Most oral tradition obtained through ethnographic studies also provided the lead for subsequent archaeological and historical interrogations into Africa's past. Africans such as kings, priests, master drummers and chiefs, serves as repositories and custodians of these cultural heritages through oral tradition. These precious cultural heritages are embedded in their architectural design, ceremonies, dances, music, folklores, dresses, and so forth. This description aptly captures as well as justifies the need to provide scholarly insight into the Otipi royal initiation ceremony among the Yache people of Cross River State, Nigeria, which is the concern of this paper. In light of the above, this paper carefully examines the Otipi royal initiation ceremony focusing on its origin and development, initiation practices, performance, changes, and the impact on contemporary cultural history.

Conceptual clarification

Otipi royal initiation ceremony among the Yache People of Cross River State is the concern of this paper. It is thus, imperative to explain the conceptual meaning of keywords for contextual comprehension, usage and clarity. Cultural heritages are cherished characteristic features of a society handed down as a gift from one generation to another through conscious preservation. Heritages also, refer to rich values of extinct and extant societies which are of economic, educational, recreational and historical importance, preserved and passed down from generation to generation. Heritages are significant endowments emanating from man or nature.

Aside from the above, heritage categorizes into two as natural or ecological heritage, and cultural heritage. Nigeria is endowed with both types of heritages. It is pertinent to state that the former is outside the scope of this paper; therefore, it is the latter, which is a cultural heritage that concerns us. Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a society inherited from past generations, preserved in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

Put differently, "cultural heritage can be defined as the entirety of the peoples' cherished arts, customs, festivals, sacred or worship sites, norms, values, ideologies, dress and dress code, memorabilia, and architecture, conserved for their historical, educational, political,

recreational and religious significance among others" (Onyima, 2016, p. 275). Cultural heritages are, therefore, the total of the material and non-material culture of a particular society transmitted across generations. Culture in itself is "both physical and non-physical in character" (Ogundele, 2000, p. 12)

Tangible cultural heritages include man's physical indigenous products which can be touched and seen such as architecture/buildings, crafts, tools, textile, tomb and grave goods, books, works of art, among other artefacts. Artefacts as a broad concept are objects and features made and used by man/humans in an attempt to cope with the challenges and problems of social and natural conditions. It is therefore essential to state that man cannot survive without the construction and use of artefacts (Ogundele, 2014, p. 5).

Further, this gives a more profound explanation of the function of cultural heritage to society. On the other hand, non-material cultural heritages include all intangible and invincible aspects of a peoples' way of life. Such heritages include ideas, folklore, kinship, values, norms, worldviews, music, dance, festivals, language, and knowledge among others (Ogundele, 2000; Nnonyelu, 2009) which demonstrates complexities in the categorization of cultural heritages. They are moveable (artefacts) and immovable cultural heritage (monuments) grouped based on their nature of portability. They have different specialized skills required for their preservation.

Nigeria is a veritable mine in Africa south of the Sahara Desert because of her abundant manifestation of the vast cultural heritage of the past" (Sowunmi, 2008, p. 88). Most of the artefacts and collections are exhibited in museums and galleries around the globe and consciously preserved. Preservation as Eluyemi (2002, p. 2), notes is "the promotion of cultural property whether of real nature, past or present, written or unwritten/oral. He quickly adds that preservation involves the identification, documentation and proper storage of cultural objects whether in private hands or museums". Human actions arguably threaten the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritage, natural forces, biological, chemical agents, among others (Okpoko, 2011; Ogundele, 2014). However, some level of success achieved over the years in the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages attributable to conscious systematic and scientific efforts. Research by professionals in disciplines of archaeology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, history, ethnography, palynology, and palaeontology are inclusive (Onwuka, 2002; Okpoko, 2011; Ogundele, 2014). Indeed, preservation is very vital because of its capacity to promote past ways or patterns that are useful to contemporary society.

While oral tradition is the body of information concerning history, culture and environment of a people at any given time and space, obtained through the words of mouth. It is also a set of verbally transmitted pieces of information about the experiences and worldviews of people. The experiences and worldviews are preserved in memories of groups of people and transmitted from one generation to another. In this clime, oral tradition as David Henige writes is a testimony of oral narration that came from the remote past through generations (Henige 1982, p. 2). According to him, the most common form of delivery is reciting, drumming, singing, place-names and personal names, folklore, myths, titles, among others. Thus, oral tradition have served sub-Saharan Africa as a historical message transmitted from one person to another for many centuries (Vansina 1965, p. 8)

According to tradition, Otipi is local parlance of the Yache dialect meaning a "queen". This queen is different from a king's wife. Instead, Otipi is a separate institutional organ superior to a king's wife in terms of personality, influence and prestige as that of a king. She is the "soul", custodian and ambassador of Yache culture and tradition, and hence, a community woman leader. Consequent on the above consideration, her initiation ceremony is perceived to be a royal as it is a community service, like a king. That is why her initiation is suggestive of being a royal activity. Initiation generally is a rite of passage making an entrance into a group or society. It could also be a formal admission to adulthood in a community or one of its formal components. In a broader sense, it can also signify a transformation in which the initiate is "reborn" into a new role. Examples of initiation ceremony are replete in history. It is pertinent to state that Otipi fits into this broad category as an initiate reborn into her new role.

A brief ethnohistorical description of the Yache People

It is imperative to describe the people of Yache in the Cross River State of Nigeria before highlighting the Otipi cultural heritage, based on an ethnohistorical investigation. Ethnohistory is the study of cultures and indigenous people's customs utilizing historical accounts as well as a myriad of sources of information on their lives and history. It is also the study of the history of various endangered ethnic groups. In a broader sense, ethnohistory uses both historical and ethnographic data as its building blocks. Its historical methods and material go beyond the use of records. It uses source materials such as music, maps, photographs, paintings, folklore, oral tradition, site exploration, among others.

As there are scholars of ethnohistory, different samples of definitions abound for consideration. Fenton(1975, p.75) defines ethnohistory as the judicious use of ethnological

concepts and materials in the examination and use of historical source materials. He regards it as a comparative analysis of cross-cultural accounts. Ethnohistory identifies similarities and differences as well as ascertains changes and developments that have taken place in the cultural area over time and space. Axtell (1979) describes ethnohistory as "the use of historical and ethnological methods to gain knowledge of nature."

Moreover, he argues that the causes of change in a culture defined by ethnological concepts and categories are part of ethnohistory (Axtell 1979). Other scholars have focused this basic concept on previously ignored historical fundamentals. Of course, they explained, for example, that ethnohistory must fundamentally take into account the people's sense of how events occurred and their ways of culturally constructing the past (Schieffelin & Gewertz, 1985). While Simmons contemplated ethnohistory "a form of cultural biography that draws upon many kinds of testimony as possible over as long a time as the sources allowed". He further described ethnohistory as an endeavour based on a holistic, diachronic approach that is most rewarding when it can be "joined to the memories and voices of living people" (Simmons 1988, p.10)

A critic of the above scholarly views, therefore, suggests that there is the possibility for ethnohistory studies of traditional societies in America, Europe as elsewhere. Guy Beiner observed that "pioneering figures in the development of ethnohistory have argued that this approach applies to the study of Western societies. However, such initiatives have not picked up and very few explicitly designated ethnohistories of European communities written to till date" (Guy, 2018, p.10). Africa, especially south of the Sahara Desert, is where oral tradition served as a historical document. Ethnohistory is well established and utilized for historical, sociological and anthropological studies for the benefit of the African societies. Similarly, therefore, we were also using ethnohistory and combined it with other sources to reconstruct the history of Yache.

The Yache people in line with tradition are from Yala Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Yache people are of Proto-Bantu stock that migrated via central Africa to Kano caravan through Ogoja to their present home. Overtime, Yache branch left as they moved toward the area occupied by the Jukun who live north-east of the present-day Ogoja. There was a vast land between the Jukun and Cameroon. This area can be accessed from Obudu and Obalinku Local Government Areas of Cross River State. The ancestral home of Jukun lies north of River Matu, and at Utanga Bechieve looking northward over a cortical mountain, the northern side is the boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria. Here

the Jukun were referred to as Odekwo. Before this period, the Yache people known as Maah-Itele, Aluga-Ama means the son of Uga. This account noted that Uga had children which include the Yache, Igede, Idoma, among others that established many villages such as Mbuo, Agi, Imoro and Ewo (Odo 2018).

Like other African's migratory history, many groups changed their original names to reflect the new realities. Imoro changed its name to Etleva on reaching Akwanyo, for example. In other cases, some of the groups known by the descriptive names given them by their Yala brothers such as Ekpari, Alifokpa (meaning kernel parkers and people of the head river) among others, emerged which the Yache rebuked. For the above reason, the Yala people seemed to claim superiority and seniority, which is not backed by tradition, maybe consequent on their superior numbers (population factor). During the long migration, because the Yache people were more potent than the Yala people, the latter were asked to be at the front to be guarded by Yache, hence the nickname (kernel parkers). The consequence was the Yala acclaimed leadership or progenitor of all Uga offsprings (Odo 2018, p.16)

The traditional practice of the people shown in the divinities of "Okpahe" who created everything. It is the maker of the universe and his wife "Mbache" the earth. The former represents by a tall molie tree at the foot of which are the three large stones surrounded by a fence made up of palm midribs. This place is the sacred worship centre of Yache people; it is a heritage. The people place food items and drinks here daily. Every morning a man takes a calabash of water, washed his hands and threw some on the ground, *praying "O Okpahe and Mbache! Wa nim, wa we' ibi o dor dor a heam. O Mbache! ki opuem kposi"*[1]. Similarly, when clearing a new farm for cultivation, the following prayer is made to the two deities! *"Ya ba yi orah ni ka na, ki ete' kpos a ki"*[2]In this case, one plants two cotton saplings as a

1The prayer is an incantation of Yache people used commonly for example "O! God of Heaven" please guide and protect me from evil but in this context, "O Okpahe and Mbache! You have made me give me good health. O Mbache! Let my feet be blessed."

2It is a simple prayer point said by Yache farmers before they engaged in their farming activities asking God for a good yield. Hence the prayer "we want to make farm here, let the soil be fertile for us.,,

3 The first monthly discharging of the menses, the flow of red blood cells from the living of the uterus in females depicts maturity in women. This period in the life of the girl child is very significant because, in most African societies, this is the time for her to be circumcised or initiated into womanhood which is the first preparatory step for marriage because there was no room for the girl child education. Consequently, once a girl reached that age, her days are numbered in her father's house; this was the situation in pre-colonial times, but not anymore.

4 This prayer is said when Otipi has served her tenure and has been given out for marriage. She prayed for a successful endeavour in future as she knelt to communicate with the ancestral spirits to let her be having served them.

trial; if they flourished, the site becomes a farm, if not another spot is tried (Agabe Abaidowai personal communication, August 11, 2018).

Yache people are very hospitable and sociable. Their social and cultural life finds expression in their interactions and accommodation of neighbours and people from all walks of life. Yache operates a communalistic social structure where the individual play an essential role in the development of the community. They live in lineages, age-grades and governed by chieftains headed by the Chipinambi, which is hereditary. Therefore, marriage is treated with great respect among the people, not just for procreation, but it bestows some privileges and dignity. Other socio-cultural activities such as wrestling, new yam festival, and masquerade display, and Otipi cultural dance, among others, demonstrates the potency and richness of the cultural life of the people. Then the number of a yam barn is used in assessing the power of a man, and that was an essential factor in consideration of who should be with leadership positions. The success achieved by a man in cultivating his yam depended mostly on the size of his family. Consequent on this, men married several wives and had multiple children (David Wonah personal communication, November 11, 2018). However, as would be expected, the coming of Christianity has posed challenges on this age-long cultural heritage on many fronts, as will be seen in subsequent segments of the paper.

Origin of Otipi heritage

Every society relied on oral tradition as a medium of preserving the knowledge of the past even before writing became established as a standard way of recording events. In every society, then, oral tradition was a significant vehicle for the recording of history and continues to play a part in such a process (Alagoa, 2014). Arguably, there are no written accounts on the origin of Otipi, which is handed down to the people orally from one generation to another. According to tradition, Otipi is as old as Yache people. Records have it that after settlement in their present home the elders unanimously agreed to celebrate Otipi to commemorate their migratory history to keep alive the memory of their Bantu ancestry. The idea is that the meaning people derive from events is just as important as what happened. The concern is the significance of how and what people remember, even when memory is sometimes unconsciously flawed, or in cases where people have different or conflicting memories of the same event. What seems to matter most is how events and their consequences have impacted the individual or a group of people.

Similarly, Otipi does not feature real historical facts surrounding Yache. She is a reflection

of the accounts that capture a historical experience, period and context, and inscribes a memory of the past in the narrative (Poghosyan, 2018). Otipi heritage is important because it gives Yache history flow and emotional meaning and knowledge about the people and hence, its preservation from generation to generation.

Generally, Otipi heritage links to traditional religious practices of Yache. Otipi is a Yache young woman of Cross River State; and a rare woman significantly shaped by her culture. She is an epitome of beauty and circumcised from inception. The Otipi is the physical embodiment of "Ndum"- the chaste goddess of Yache. She punishes immodesty, immorality, promiscuity, among other vices in society. The beauty of any chosen Otipi is contributory to her referral to as a queen though not a king's wife. She possessed these distinctive attributes of self-personality and socials relationship that defines the wellness of the Yache people.

The process of choosing Otipi is very complex and sometimes intriguing. The elders of Yache will search for a girl of about four or five years old. When they discover this beauty queen, the elders will capture her without the prior knowledge of the parents since she is from Yache. In some cases, if her place is far away from "Ndum's" shrine, they will send some gallant youths to bring her. This incidence takes place in most cases when the child's parents are not around, or the child is out of the home. She is caught either on her way to the stream, market, farm, playground, among others. Once Otipi is caught and presented before the people, she becomes the pride of the entire Yache people. She must not be above the age bracket of four or five because the Otipi must be a virgin until she is given out for marriage. Similar processes evolve when the incumbent Otipi is given out in marriage after necessary rituals conducted by the Yache elders (Ayipa Margret, personal communication, October 11, 2018).

The Otipi Initiation ceremony

Before the initiation proper, once an Otipi is chosen and accepted, she will be taken to an old woman who is vast in the norms, customs and tradition of Yache called "Okpahi Gangara" for seven days leading to her initiation. Immediately after the initiation ceremony, which is a secret exercise conducted by the older women, the chosen one goes to her first patron/matron. She leaves because she would no longer live with her parents for the rest of her life. After that, the Otipi is lead to a stream called Orowi Otayi (a stream dedicated to Otipi for spiritual cleansing).

After this purification exercise, she is asked to dance around Ndum deity (represented by

trees) for about three times at intervals, and they will bring her back home for another spiritual cleansing. During the seven days initiation period, Otipi would sojourn into the spiritual realm taking communion with the ancestral spirits for guidance in her new role as the chief custodian of the Yache culture. While still in the spirit realm, the women will start practising dance with her. If she refuses to dance, they will threaten to take her to the stream to drown. If she still insists on not dancing, she is taken to the stream and thrown into it. After a while, she will be brought out for more ritual cleansing (Awupri Agnes personal communication, November 21, 2018).

After these rigorous spiritual cleansing, she will quickly accept to dance to honour the ancestral spirits of the land. The practice begins in earnest, and she will readily comprehend the dance steps. Otipi will engage the practice at every five days interval, which is usually the market days until she is perfect. Once she is deemed perfect by the older Otipi (former Otipi), she is engaged in dancing for different occasions within and outside Yache. She would also entertain any government officials that come for a visit to Yache. However, there is a political economy dimension to it. Otipi normally serves as a source of wealth to the community as services she rendered are paid into the community coffers and is also one way of generating funds for the community.

According to tradition, Otipi once chosen will become fair in complexion no matter how dark the girl was before her induction as the Otipi. She is given a specific substance she must rub over her body over a period; which begins to tone her skin in order to make her fair in complexion. It is a locally made laser substance (particles gotten from a tree, and pounded until it takes the form of a pap). Also, for Otipi to function efficiently, two persons are involved. The first is the master drummer who beats the drum for her to dance. After she had learnt the songs, she might easily forget it, so she is usually taught using the beat of the drum to assimilate them. When she is perfect, the drumbeat will never depart from her. The second is the lady singer that will be singing for her. She does not just sing but also demonstrates the dance steps for Otipi. The two persons (drummer and the singer) are very vital to the success of any Otipi. They continue to teach her various dance steps. It is also the practice that when an Otipi marries, she would be in a position to teach the next Otipi the processes (Omari Osabu personal communication, November 20, 2018).

The above assertions aligns with Vansina's view that the esoteric tradition is a clan or group history learnt by a particular group and transmitted by few individuals tied to that group or institution. They control it for accurate transmission from generation to generation through

a laid-down procedure including chanting, drumming, and singing, among others by specialists in the group. These are fixed tests of a privileged few. Thus, it is history in a popularized form, expressed in poems and given in public performance (Vansina, 1965, p. 35). Jones (1963, p. 2) corroborates that words accosted into drum beats forever remain unchanged as long as the festival lasts. The Otipi is well-grounded in the Yache culture and therefore, a heritage.

Going forward, from the moment of initiation, she no longer belongs to her biological parents. She instead belongs to the community. Anything that concerns her is communal. As a result of this commonality, they introduced her to two patrons and two matrons. With the identification of the patrons and matrons, they will send palm fronds through a messenger who pins the items on their doorpost, once the inhabitants of such houses notice the palm fronds; the people immediately understand that they are the patrons/matrons of the chosen Otipi.

Throughout her reign, as Otipi she will not live with a set of patrons/matrons but rotates from patrons/matrons continually. When Otipi reaches adulthood (first menstruation), the patron/matron she lived with at the time will inform the elders of the community that Otipi is now a woman[3]. The elders will ask the patron/matron if any suitor has come to ask for her hand in marriage, if any, the elders will ask the suitor to see her parents for further discussions. If the engagement becomes fruitful, they report back to elders, and after that, the Otipi is handed over to her husband. At this junction, the elders will cut off a piece of hair from the Otipi and retrieve all the things she had used in waiting for the next Otipi (Angela Mohie, personal communication, August 13, 2018).

Furthermore, when the Otipi experiences her first pregnancy, the husband is expected to bring her to the community (elders) for the final purification exercise. He will be asked to come along with some unique items. These will include; millet, corn, native kola, dried fish and meat and money (seven pieces of bronze coins in precolonial times). The tradition uses the millet and guinea corn for the preparation of a native drink called burukutu or matse for the community. After that, they fix a day for him to come back for the ritual proper-primarily for the husband to host the entire community with a lavishing dinner. If he does not perform this ceremony to the satisfaction of the community, the Otipi will cease to conceive for the rest of her life (John Ajebaiyni, personal communication, October 11, 2018).

Lastly, the Otipi goes to the ancestral playground of the community where she will be asked to dance with her pregnancy. The Otipi will dance around the square with her knees on the ground dancing around the trees, kneeling for each of the ancestral trees and praying *"ma douw ka luo chu chu bu jim*[4]. If she refuses to undertake this purification oath with Ndum goddess she might have a stillbirth.

After the performance of this ceremony, the elders of Yache both men and women will take the Otipi to a specific river called lwi-Otaiyi (spiritual residence of Ndum goddess). Here, they took the hair that was taken from Otipi when they gave her out for marriage and threw into the river. The event is significant as Otipi is now free to live a healthy life, and free from the interference of spirits of Yache. After all these ritual ceremonies, she can now have her first baby free from rancour. At this junction, the community elders will meet to choose the next Otipi. This is how they preserve the cultural heritage from one generation to another (Clement Ogbudu & Angela Mohie personal communication, October 11, 2018).

Performance on stage

When Otipi is about to perform on stage, to entertain her audience, the women will start clapping for her. It is one way of arousing her zeal to perform well. She is usually dressed up with a unique attire, short trouser made from cotton and assorted colours of beads on her waist. The beads often weaved in the form of cap on her head. Other ornaments such as irons on her legs (bracelets) provide some sound rhythm to the drumbeat as she dances. The beads on her waist, adorned with beautiful costumes get initiated, and therefore, an ordinary person are not permitted to wear them.

While she prepares for the performance, the drummer and singer will be entertaining the audience, as they await Otipi. As she approaches the arena, a young man will carry her shoulder- high, and the Otipi commences her performance right there. This stylistic arrival excites her audience with gyrations and suggestive body movements. After the welcoming episode, she jumps down from the man's shoulder; immediately, she starts dancing to the music (Margret Angwe, personal communication, August 2018).

Moreover, the Otipi dance is a specialized way of expressing and celebrating the deep-felt cultural heritages of the past given in public performance. In this dance, three relevant groups are involved; the drummer, the Otipi and audience. The Otipi relies on instrumentation because, through it, the conversation grew among these groups. In the dance scene, the drum talks and Otipi understands and reacts. The drum speaks the local

environment language, such that anyone who understands this language, whether an initiate or not can decode the language. Therefore, this challenges the drummer. The drummer encodes the language with the drum and Otipi decodes this on the spur of the movement. It reflects the dance step action and reaction. The dance begins with a preliminary performance by the drummer while the dancer usually stayed away to get set with her costumes. So it is the drum that interacts with Otipi to know if, and when they are ready. The drum can also ask them to hurry up, where they are behind schedule by tuning the local dialect which an ordinary audience can also decode. In the next segment, we shall discuss the prospects, changes and impact of the Otipi ceremony.

Prospects, changes and impact of the Otipi Ceremony

Cross River State and Nigeria at large stands to benefit a lot with proper preservation of the Otipi cultural heritage. It has high potentials to boost the Nigerian economy through tourism. When cultural heritages are appropriately preserved and advertised through print and electronic media, they stand the chance of attracting tourists across the globe. It would be a plus to national revenue and gross domestic product, which will enhance national development. Nigerian cultural heritages also are capable of promoting mutual understanding and respect among Nigerians. When people attend state or national cultural festivals, they will learn to appreciate the various cultures exhibited by other Nigerian people and this will engender unity in diversity.

Before the colonial era, the Otipi was chosen at the ages of four or five and restricted from doing every form of public and domestic activities. During her reign, she does not associate with her peer group because of some special spiritual powers she possessed. She does not go to school or church. However, with the advent of the western culture or civilization (church and education), Otipi now attends church and school; interact freely with her peers; though she does not go outside of Yache land except on an invitation. Another significant change in the Otipi is circumcision, which is an ancient practice of Yache that involved both sexes. However, the ceremony for female circumcision is more elaborate, like in many other parts of Africa. Female circumcision is a tradition as it is a way of life in Yache and a rite of passage for female which denotes maturity. It is often the first step of being accepted into the institution of marriage. Female rites of passage are regarded as being challenged: a consequence of Westernization agents of socialization such as Christianity and Education.

There are some myriads of the impact of Otipi cultural heritage on Yache people. The Otipi cultural ceremony has a way of uniting people and brings unity, peace and harmony.

During the celebration, the people always come together to celebrate this important cultural heritage hence bringing unity to them. Also, Otipi ceremony brings about the friendly relationship among the various communities, anytime Otipi is to perform, the people from the neighbouring communities are expected to participate and share the flavour. They come around to participate, and in the process, people get to know each other and after that become friends.

Furthermore, it is one of the most important cultural heritages handed down from time immemorial that has brought the activities of the past into the everyday life experience of the Yache people. Besides, it helps inculcate the spirit of collectivism as the mutual benefit targeted toward a particular goal. For any community to have achieved any fame, it must harness its human capital endowment which Otipi cultural heritage is well known for among the Yache people. Otipi ceremony also fights the moral decadence by creating a public avenue through which the culture of Yache people can be revived and sustained. In a broader context, Otipi serves as a medium for social control. The communicative aspect of it provides an avenue for projecting the social norms and values of the community. The participation of the audience ensures that such issues remain within the psyche of the people. Through this chain, the cultural heritages are passed down from one generation to another.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to peruse through dimensions of Nigerian cultural history and how social activities such as festival, carnival and ceremonial practices form the bulk of all aspects of the cultural heritages man creates for aesthetic appreciation. It represents in a country endowed with a lot of cultural heritages occasioned by its multicultural status. The paper has made an effort to identify the importance of cultural heritage among the Yache people and its nexus to development as well as the contributions cultural resources could make to economic development. Efforts can be made to cherish our culture by promoting them. The Otipi ceremony reflects the rich diversity of Nigeria, which serves as a common platform to promote national unity. This paper has, therefore presented the argument that festivals and other cultural heritages can go a long way to create potentials for tourism, which drives economic growth and development if adequately harnessed in Africa. However, it is the opinion of this paper that oral tradition is the best form of cultural heritage preservation.

Arguably, Otipi ceremony performance as it is in most parts of Africa is by no means

accidental the harmony in steps and movement of the dance as well as the rhythm of the drum percussion is by no means accidental. Such is the product of the linguistic resource coded by the drum and decoded by the Otipi. The external manifestation in the form of choreography is understood inwardly through the language of the drum. It is performed outwardly as choreography.

Therefore, the art in the dance does not only come from the music percussion, but it also involves the use of the percussion instrument to speak the human language and easily decoded. This aspect of the Otipi dance can be appreciated by those who speak the language associated with the Yache drum tunes. Thus the beauty of art to a great extent comes from its environment. Culture is the product of people. It functions in its environment, before gaining a universal appeal.

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