

REIMAGINE THE IKORO WOODEN SLIT DRUM OF UMUNZE AS A TOURIST ATTRACTION, SCULPTURE INSTALLATION, AND NIGERIAN PRIDE

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Abstract

The Ikoro Obibie-Aku wooden drum from Umunze, Igbo West Africa, Nigeria, was the subject of the investigation. Other Ikoro wooden drums have reportedly been discovered around the Igbo region. The Ikoro is so unique that whenever its sound is heard, people congregate in the village square, where it is believed that any of the following would have occurred: a murder has occurred, the land has been contaminated, a war has broken out, or a disaster has struck the community, among other things. Nonetheless, the Ikoro piece's forms and functions within the framework of Igbo cultural philosophy were highlighted, along with its deterioration and advocacy for its preservation in a museum for future generations. Additionally, there is proof that some of the Ikoro pieces were destroyed by fervent enthusiasts. Electronic media, pertinent primary and secondary data sources, and exploratory conceptual research (a document-based qualitative study technique) were used to collect the data. According to the article, the Ikoro wooden drum may bring in money for the local community and the nation as a whole if it is appropriately conserved in a museum as a tourist destination.

Keywords: Ikoro, Sculpture, Wooden Drum, Umunze, Tourist Attraction, Revenue Generation

Introduction

A group of individuals who get together to share specific beliefs and ideals, thinking that these beliefs and ideals are what keep them united. This directs people in whatever they are doing, in the current setting, and in their day-to-day activities. These individuals serve as guidelines for the location and class to which they belong because of their common values and customs. The Ikoro wooding slit sculpture drum demonstrates this enlightenment and sophistication, which is the concrete art form they have acquired via interaction, education, and experience of that existent physical unifying form of culture. Igbo West Africa, Nigeria, is as old as the Ikoro. According to history, a single Oji (Iroko) tree was used to create the enormous Ikoro wooden sculpture drum of Umunze, which men beat by hand or with sticks for both music and communication. An Ikoro is a musical instrument that originated with the Igbo people of Nigeria. Similar to a talking drum, it

is a slit drum that is hammered with a stick or sticks and can be utilised for communication in some Igbo communities. Not everyone in Igbo nation can defeat Ikoro. People congregate in the village square whenever its music is heard because it is so unique. Sometimes it's played with fists and a lot of effort. The Ikoro experience encompasses architecture, music, dance, theatre, sculpture, politics, conflict, religion, and the natural world. The tree is chosen by the god, hacked down, and then carved. During festivals, conflicts, and other important events, such as crises, the Ikoro is played. It disseminates messages among local communities. People in the immediate vicinity presume that one of the following has occurred as soon as it sounds: a murder has occurred, the land has been defiled, a conflict has broken out, a disaster has struck the town, etc. Every time the Ikoro sound is heard, residents have to congregate in the village square to hear the most recent developments. Ikoro adds a feeling of urgency as well. Ikoro is too big for one person to carry, and it is never transported from one location to another. Ikoro is often maintained in the village square. Ikoro and Ekwe are identical but for size. The Ekwe is a common musical instrument used to play a variety of traditional music genres. It is compact and portable (Basden, 1921, Onuora, 2016, and Onyeakagbu, 2018). Because of its enormous size, Umunze's ikoro wooden drum cannot be carried by one person and is constantly installed at a designated location.

History of Umunze

The largest settlement in the former Aguata Local Government Area, which included Aguata, Orumba North, and Orumba South Local Government Areas, is Umunze, according to oral tradition documented by Maduagwu (2013) and Nwachukwu (2024). The 1963 census data also supports this. Although Ihite Town is located in the southernmost portion of the former Aguata Local Government Headquarters, it might have constituted a border town with Arondizogu and Ibinta, all of which are located in Imo State. The Aghomiri, Unyo, and Imo rivers form a network that encircles Umunze. Other rivulets are Ohia mmiri and Ozii. A man named Nze and a few of his brothers—Iwhube, Duru, Amuro, Awa, Ezekwele, and Uga—left their father's home at Agulu-Awka around 300 A.D. with the main goal of finding a place of their own for themselves and their offspring. Prior to this, their father moved from Nri to Agulu-Awka and found that Agulu had firmly established his colony there thanks to providence and the ancestral spirit of his forefathers. The father of the Nze at Nri, where the father of Agulu originated, was reportedly close to the founder of Agulu town. Nze and his siblings lived in Agulu for a few years without any problems because of their strong relationship with the town's founder. Nze initially travelled to Uduma-Ohahia in Abia State, where he wed Lolo, his second wife. He moved out from Ohahia to reside close to Umuahia with his wife and other family members, including Inyimogu. There were perhaps fifteen of them. They lived close to Okigwe with their brother, Iwhube, after leaving Umuahia. It was around 1330 AD. Around 1332 AD, Nze and his group moved over the Imo River from Iwhube, close to Okigwe, to live with their relative Umuduru. The Umunne-Assa (seven brothers) at Abo-Ohia-Umu-Duru at Obi Elemanya constructed an earthen ware vessel at Umuduru known as "Oku Umunne," a brotherly vessel that symbolises their friendly connection. They

travelled from Umuduru to the northeast in order to get at the current location of Mbara-Izo, which is close to the enormous Akpu tree known as "Akpu mgbatiri okpa," where the current Eke Izo at Umuizo is situated in Umumze. He didn't need to keep travelling in quest of green grass because the area was fertile and there were many of animals to play with. Because Nze was said to have spent some time at Ndi-Uduma, Ohahia, Abia State, there is a false belief that he is from Ohahia. This is untrue; Nze is a native of Nri, which is located in Nigeria's Anambra State. Umu Nze, which means "children of Nze," refers to the seven offspring that Nze gave birth to. Umumze is also known as Umunze Asa, Amalasa, for this reason. Umulasa. Among Nze's children, the oldest is 1. Nsogwu, also called Omogor; 2. Ugwu (Ugwulano), also called Ojingba; 3. Lomu, also called Uroagu; 4. Ubaha, also called Ishingwu; 5. Ururo, also called Chekeigbo; 6. Ozara, also called Okpontu; and 7. Amuda, also called Diala. For the record, it was also said that Nze had many wives, the first of whom gave birth to a boy named Dara, who was Nze's first kid. Dara was subjugated and outnumbered by his other half-brothers after Nze's death, so he had to forge his own path. When he first settled in what is now Eziagu town, Logu town provided him protection and a place to live inside its borders. It is customary for the rich to have staff nearby to assist with household duties. Nze hired subordinates to assist him with household duties. History claims that Nze had more attendants in his palace who were known as Umu Izo, which translates to "children of Izo." Nze named the stream after his father, Mmiri Izo, who is Izo's father. Their duty was to assist in maintaining the Mmiri Izo shrine. Ekeizo is a market that bears Izo's name. According to Maduagwu (2013:141), "Nze decided to deify his father Izo in mud sculpture (clay). He created a massive statue in crude art and sought his guidance and protection every morning." He kneeled in front of the statue, pleading with his cherished father to shield him from all kinds of disaster on his travels. Another way to interpret this deed would be as sympathetic magic. Later, Nze died and was buried at Umuizo next to his father's monument (see fig.). I am the statue of Nze, together with my wives and servants. Other deities present in the Umunze village were also noted, including Iyele, Ahoudo, and Obibiaku, which has Nkwo Obibiaku adjacent to the market where the largest ikoro is located. Ohadu, Ogbudibia, Ogbuokwe of Amuda village, Udu of Ubaha, Ajalaegbo, and Ighionwu Ozara.

The seven children of Nze (seven villages) still congregate in Mbara Izo for general meetings. Significant events are also conducted there to remember and celebrate occasions for Umunze communities. Ibezimako is derived from Nze's second son, Ugwu (Ugwulano). The community in Umunze with the highest population density is Ugwulano. She is thought to make up around half of the Umunze's overall population. This is because Ugwu, the progenitor, was given a place that was closest to Agba and Logu's natural environment. In order to fend against future threats from the enemy, she was keen to cultivate a large and devoted populace. According to reports, Ugwu wed from nearly every significant kindred family in Agba, Logu, and the nearby hamlet of Ezira. She also wed from Ohahia, the house of Nze's second wife. All of them were done to increase her population and create friends in times of conflict. Her population quickly increased to the point

that it could rival any other settlement. Her number is comparable to the sum of Agba and Logu. Additionally, she was highly accepting of outsiders who were given housing in her community. She always wanted to own the wealthy, alluvially filthy Aputu from Agba and Logu, which explains her relationship with the hyena. Aputu and its surroundings eventually came to belong to her.

The kindred families are as follows: -

1. Ochenechieoma, which stood for Obibie-Aku, claimed the position of father in the village. She was from the beginning honoured with Nhu in all shares in the village. This is where the famous biggest Ikoro is housed.
2. Umuezeanakwere which stood for the shrine of Okparanozie was the first son and took the first share.
3. Ndikpa and Ndiabo-two brothers of one family took the next share for Ohadu shrine, which they represented.
4. Ugwuagbada represented Ezewulite shrine
5. Ugwuikpa represented Ajalla Nwururu, while
6. Amabo also represented the shrine of Ibemedo

The village directly and indirectly succeeded in winning the rich Aputu as the sole property of Obibie-Aku. This is partly due to the combined efforts of Agba and Logu.



Plate. I. Sculpture representation of Nze, flanked by his wives and servants

Artist: Unknown

Dimension: Unknown

Medium: Concrete, metal and oil paint finish

Year: Unknown

Source: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Location of the Ikoro wooden drums in Umunze

The Nkwo market in Umunze, Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State stands of what remains of the biggest wooden slit drum in Igbo land, or perhaps, in the world, also known as the Ikoro Obibie-Aku, it measures about 9feet diameter and 8feet long and requires the use of a ladder to get to its top to play it. In this ancient, carved, site-specific ritual and ceremonial tourist attraction are also contained some history, art and power. The Ikoro is one of the many such drums standing in the seven villages in Umunze. Others are Ikoro Lomu in Lomu village, ikoro Izo, Ikoro Ngele Ojii, Ikoro Ogbudu, Ikoro Ahudo. Ikoro Nsogwu, Ikoro Amabe, Ikoro Ugwu ikpa. Ikoro Ugwu Agbada, Ikoro Amuda and Ikoro Orie Ohadu. The Ikoro was the focal point of the public, commercial, social and political center with its relatively big shelter and large adjoining performance space. Over the years however, due to neglect resulting from lack of use and maintenance, this once monumental symbol of the village unity has progressively degenerated so much so that the large performance spaces around it have been overrun by commercial activities while the carved decorations on the body have almost been obliterated by over a century of weather and termite attacks (Onuora, 2016 and Uzor, 2025). These features depicting the history of a people would eventually disappear if nothing is done to salvage the situation.

Physical characteristics of Ikoro drum

The simplest form of an Ikoro drum is a big slit drum from a cylindrical tree trunk. Except for its huge size and the monumental importance attached to it, is little or no difference between it and other slit drum types in Igboland. Some areas around Umuahia (like Ohuhu) have examples of such Ikoro drums lacking extra projections or relieved designs on their bodies. This type, however, does not really help us much in understanding the Ikoro because it is in the minority. The Ikoro drums with extra projections and body decorations, in their simplest forms represent visual imagery of a male figure lying on his back. The abstract cylindrical mass of the drum forms the main body. It is on this cylindrical mass that a cavity is opened to produce the Ikoro sound. The mouth of this cavity is in the form of two rectangular shapes joined by a narrow slit. See plate VII, images of

Ikoro design symbols

Ikoro drums usually have intricate carvings, since they are made from big wood. They represent cultural identity and are more than just musical instruments. As highlighted by Onuora, (2016), Nwokiki (2024), and Uzor, (2025), fertility and continuity are symbolized by the carvings which depicts a lady and child on one end of the drum. To represent duality and balance in the community, some drums feature both masculine and female figures. A picture of a man lying on his back is displayed, with his head protruding from one end of the drum and jutting out at the other. Ikoro projections in a number of Igbo communities depict human heads on either side of the drum. These skulls span from absolute abstraction to almost naturalism. One can observe from the figures' hairstyle that these projections frequently feature both masculine and female individuals. A significant proportion of them hold both hands behind their heads. The figures on Ikoro Obibie-

Aku in Umunze, which have three male heads at one end of the drum and three female heads at the other, are an example of this. They have very expressive faces. The carver is portrayed as a genius and master of his era by the accuracy with which the lines illustrating these expressions were drawn. Additionally, careful detailing was applied to the hands behind their heads. In Ururo Village, Umunze, Ikoro Ogbudu seems more abstract. The carver depicted the "hands behind the head" as a head on a rectangular wooden block on either end of the drum. Other example in Umunze depict projections in the shape of a man clutching a victim's head as a prize. While it appears on one side of the drum on Ikoro Izo and Ikoro Ngele Ojii at Umunze, it occurs on both sides of Ikoro Udo in Ubaha Village, Umunze facing different directions. In Ikoro Ngele Ojii, the man stands on a protruding pedestal with his back fixed to the drum end. He carries a head with some ichi marks on it and wears a scarified face (ichi), this image is similar to the Igbo Ukwu pendant, and there are scarification on the face of the small pendant.

It is uncommon to find animal motifs projected at the ends of drums. Only at one end of Ikoro Ngele Oji does it appear in Umunze, where it takes the shape of a painted animal head with a smaller mammal likely a cat at the top of it. But there are a lot of animal designs on the body of Ikoro drums. The sacred python, goat, ram, crocodile (or lizard), tortoise, scorpion, and bird are among the various animal motifs that are utilized in addition to human representations. The python is the most often used animal, particularly in Aguata. It can be spotted consuming an animal on the Ikoro Ngele Ojii and Ikoro Udo. On the bodies of Ikoro Umuehu, Ikoro Ezira, and Ikoro Ajala (in Eziagu, Orumba North Local Government Area), it is also displayed with various themes. It frequently coexists with the tortoise and crocodile motifs. The little one at Owerre Ezukala is an excellent example of this type of ikoro. The drum's body features some aggressively etched lines, along with a seated figure at one end. The influence of the Ikoro drum is not limited to music. It is essential to communication, cultural identity, and social cohesiveness. Its sound could provide communal connectivity by transmitting messages across long distances. Social hierarchies were also validated by the drum. Giving the Ikoro a trophy head was a sign of achievement and courage. The Ikoro's communal nature promoted harmony, the music of the Ikoro brought people together during festivals, encouraging cultural engagement and social cohesiveness. Presently, it is sad that what is left of some of these Ikoro's are eye-saws, they have been eroded with termites, and left unkempt as seen in Plates: II, III, IV, V and VI.

Maintenance culture

Maintenance culture is the shared values, beliefs, and practices within a society or organization that prioritize the upkeep and preservation of infrastructure, resources, and assets. It's a mindset that recognizes the importance of regular maintenance to ensure functionality, safety, and longevity, ultimately leading to cost savings and improved efficiency. Maintenance culture defines the values, way of thinking, behaviour, perception, and the underlying assumptions of any person or group or society that considers maintenance as a matter that is important (priority) and practices it in their life. Preserving and keeping in good order as near as possible in their organized state.

Infrastructure is a generic term for basic structures and facilities that are essential for development and subsequently for economic growth. Preserving Ikoro drums is vital for understanding Igbo heritage. These artifacts offer insights into traditional practices, artistic expressions, and social structures. Documenting and studying these cultural treasures is crucial to maintaining the legacy and cultural identity of the Igbo people. Chukwubueze, (2024) emphasised, the survival of the Ikoro in any community is a testament to the resilience of indigenous knowledge and cultural pride. If your community still possesses an Ikoro, it is worth celebrating and preserving as part of our collective Igbo heritage.

Today, the Ikoro drum continues to inspire artists and cultural practitioners. Its legacy lives on in music, dance and visual arts. Contemporary Igbo and Ibibio artists draw on Ikoro imagery and themes to explore identity, heritage and social change. The various methods such as chemical treatment, seasoning and proper storage are employed to protect timber from decay, insect infestation and weathering condition. According to Onuora (2016) *“In this ancient, carved, site-specific ritual and ceremonial tourist attraction, are also contained some history, art and power”*. In fig. VII, is a suggested image of the Ikoro housed in a museum. In other words, preserving the ikoro, especially the one called ikoro Obibie-Aku, located at Nkwo market, it measures about 9feet diameter and 8feet long and requires.



Plate. II. Ikoro Obibie-Aku

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excela*)

Year: 2025

Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu



Plate. III. Ikoro Obibie-Aku

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (Chlorophera Excelsa)

Year: 2025

Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu



Plate IV.: Ikoro Obibie-Aku

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (Chlorophera Excelsa)

Year: 2025

Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu



Plate. V: Dilapidation and termite invasion (Ikoro Obibie-Aku)

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excela*)

Year: 2025

Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu

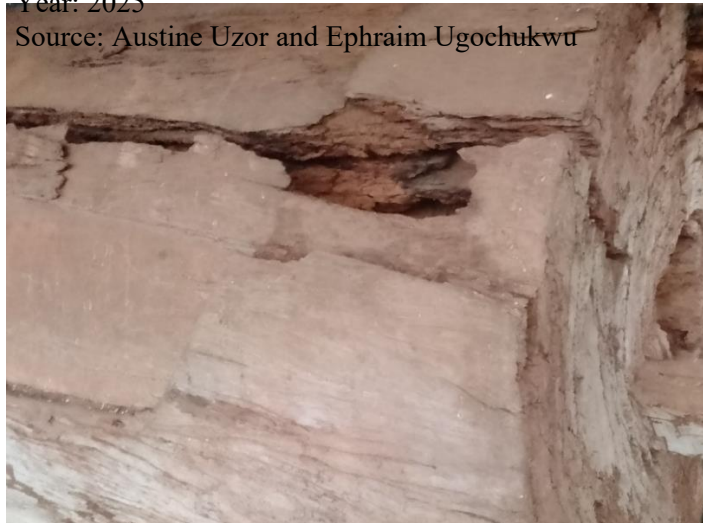


Plate VI: Dilapidation and termite invasion (Ikoro Obibie-Aku)

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excela*)

Year: 2025

Source: Austine Uzor and Ephraim Ugochukwu

Proposed image of the Ikoro housed in a museum



Plate VII: Proposed, AI generated and constructed image of the Ikoro Obibie-Aku housed in a museum

Dimension: 275 cm diameter X 244 cm high

Medium: Oji, Iroko tree (*Chlorophera Excela*)

Year: 2025

Source: Ephraim Ugochukwu

Burning of the Ikoro by Christian missionaries

Christians in Nigeria comprise an estimated 49.3% of the population. Christians are dominant in the southern (south-east/south-south/South west and central region) in Nigeria. Nigeria has the largest Christian population of any country in Africa, with more than 80 million persons in Nigeria belonging to the church with various denominations. Christian activity started in 1515 with the primary objective of converting the ‘heathen’ or the benighted African to Christianity via education. The Christian missionary school in Nigeria was without any doubt an adjunct of the Church. It was a replica of a similar development in Britain during the Dark Ages. The missionaries were generally strong disciplinarians and they had abiding faith in manual labour and the rod as the cure to all ills idleness, laziness, slow learning, truancy, disobedience, and irregularity of attendance. They were unable to convert the kings and traditional rulers as these leaders were only interested in the guns and mirrors the Europeans offered them (school software, 2022). Most of the art works produced at the earliest period served religious and cult purposes. The artist had a sacred duty to create art objects that represent the various deities venerated in their communal and private worships. Utilitarian objects were reserved for the use of the royal courts and for daily usage of the individuals in the

community. The colonization of Nigeria by Britain created vacancies in the colonial offices that required the natives to fill. These vacancies required cheap semi-skilled labor to fill as the colonial business concerns continued to grow. The Christian missions which came along with colonialism had need for interpreters and junior teachers to help in the spreading of the gospel to the natives. This led to the establishment of schools by the Christian missions in Nigeria. This missionaries was more of a utilitarian one, geared towards serving the purpose of evangelism with a focus on reading, writing and arithmetic. The schools were mainly attended by converts and stubborn children whose parents would like to be disciplined by the teachers. The encouragement and teaching of the new converts who had been indoctrinated into branding their native art objects as idols which were destroyed in bonfire by the missionaries. Art and aesthetic sensibility were crucial signifiers of the civilized which constituted the gap between savagery and culture (Blaise *et al*, 2015).

The activity of the early Christians missionaries in Nigeria, would not be forgotten in a hurry. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, narrates the Christian activity as a disruptive force that dismantles traditional Igbo social and political structures, introducing a clash between indigenous beliefs and Western religious and cultural norms. His novels portray Christianity as both a source of conflict, creating internal divisions and undermining established customs, and as a transformative element that compels characters to navigate the complexities of modernity while confronting the power and ideology of the colonizers. The first time we learn of the Christians is at the end of Okonkwo's exile. The new religion is considered "foolish" and its followers are seen as a harmless flock of *efulefu*, useless people who are not really attached too much importance. The arrival of the white man in the late nineteenth century was gradual and one of the techniques employed to destroy Igbo society was the infiltration of Christian missionaries who introduced new ideas and undermined the local system of beliefs. The final surrender of Umuofia, symbolized by the suicide of its great warrior, Okonkwo, was preceded by an increasingly aggressive challenge to its local religion and sacredness ... Those who join the Christian Church do not do so on any intellectual ground, but because of some direct experience of its power. Thus, there is no substantial change in the minds of the Igbos, they are just changing the names of their sources of divine power: the basic system of beliefs remains unaltered. The Church grows in numbers. Some Igbos turn Christian and the Church turns more Igbo. As the number of converts rises some of them try to overstep the bounds and challenge the clan and its beliefs (Galvan & Galvan, 2008). This explains why some of the ikoro wooden drum found in Umunze was destroyed by the so called naïve early Christians. Furthermore, the novel revealed many attitudes of the Christian new faith. The people of Mbanta were told about a brotherhood which is not based on blood-links. This new concept, that allows white and black men to be brothers, opposes the main brotherhood of the Igbos: the clan. Next, the speech belittles the local religion as well, they told them that they worshipped false gods, gods of wood and stone and subsequently threatens those who follow it. Evil men and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone (sculptures) were thrown into a fire that burned like

palm-oil. Despite the local metaphor used to explain the Christian hell to the Igbos, there is a lack of understanding and a direct rejection of the local religion. This prejudiced view came from the Europeans claim to be messengers of a god that is the only true one. Thus the first approach of the missionaries is fundamentally aggressive, because it is not based on acceptance or understanding but is single-mindedly oriented to imposing a worldview and erasing another. A further interesting detail is that the white man promised to bring some iron-horses and condescendingly smiles about it. The Christian Church offers as gifts objects that have never been seen before, as Galvan (2008) describes it as “playing with the fascination that they can generate among the locals”. The bicycle, regarded as an iron horse by the Igbos, is the first example. In this way the white man attempts to transform African bewilderment before new objects into a halo that presents the whites as superior, and even supernatural, in the eyes of the blacks. For Maduagwu (2013; 212) the Christian Church came to Umunze during 1910. Many of Umunze sons and daughters imbibed in the doctrines of the new faith which was; love of ones neighbour, no matter his or her colour, tribe or origin; forgiveness of others trespasses and the love and service of the true God, the maker of Heaven and Earth. If these are perfectly observed by anyone, he/ she will at the time of death will be placed in a beautiful garden, where there will be no suffering or desire for anything. This was the technique adopted to woo the sons and daughters of Umunze. Over the years, the Ikoro has faced significant threats, primarily from external influences and misinformation.

In many communities, overzealous pastors have led campaigns against the Ikoro, labeling it as a source of spiritual bondage. These claims often result in the destruction of this invaluable cultural artifact, with some communities burning their Ikoro in the name of religion (Chukwubueze, 2024). Maduagwu (2013; 445-446) also warned, the activates of our over-zealous Christian religions leaders who move from one shrine (sic) to destroy the relics of our past ancestors and set the ikoro drums on fire, instead of preserving them for the education of posterity, this should be brought to a check. They will be told in clear language that such is not ideal. No one could in the near future come across trees big enough to match those used to carve those Ikoro’s again, and in the future, our children will not know how our ancestors were worshipped before the advent of Christianity. In the Western world such icons are normally preserved in museums and galleries. These must be preserved for posterity, so that we may have history.

The problem identified by this study are in three folds; 1. Cultural preservation, 2. Documentation, 3. Religion and fanatics are the major issues that bedeviled the ikoro Obibie-Aku’s existence as cultural heritage. The ikoro is a cultural identity of the people of Umunze, bestowed and handed over to Ugwu-lano as a custodian. Obibie-Aku, means in Igbo language; ‘the spoiler of wealth’ is believed to be one of the ancestral gods of Umunze that was taken from the shrine of Izo by Ugwu as a protection for his family. It would be out of place for one to spoil wealth, but rather nourishing and prospering it would be the ideal thing. It would be appropriate to also trace the history of how Obibie-Aku became the custodian of the biggest Ikoro wooden drum. A personal communication reviled that indeed Obibie-Aku was believed to be the custodian of the biggest ikoro wooden drum

in Umunze as Maduagwu (2024) and Nwachukwu (2013) narrates: It happened that when Nze founded the land of Umunze, he equally discovered a similar stream in the present Izo forest. He deified it, as was the case In Ndiuduma Ohafia. This stream, together with the face of his son, Izo junior, convinced him that his beloved father, Uduma Ezema, had come down to live with him in the lonely area at Umunze. He left for Ndiuduma and from there, invited the chief priest of the original god to render his new places sacred. The Priest and his chiefs arrived Umunze with a shrub from Uduma shrine, which they planted near Izo shrine. They also had one of the late patriarch's chairs, his basket, one of his 'Oho' and a walking stick 'Oji' in which was incorporated a fragment from the original one. The relics were handed over to Nze, who at that time of his death transferred them to Izo, His first son. It then became the responsibility of Ndiuduma to come to ordain a new priest of Izo at the death of any holder of the post.

This tradition and sacred duty was broken at the rise of the Aro's. It was said that there was a period in the history of Igbo land when the Aro's became the over lords of the rest of Igboland. They alone could travel to any part of Igboland without any fear of being killed, sold or molested in any way. It then became impossible for the Ohafia's to travel from their place to Nze land to perform any sacred duty, as the life of any adventurer of this kind was in great peril. Ndiuduma Ohafia then entrusted the people of Arochukwu, their neighbouring town, to exercise this duty on their behalf. The Aro's then became increasingly prominent in our history. After many years, a group of Aro's settled near our town. They were known as the people of Aro-Ikpa. These people were introduced to the people of Umunze by Arochukwu, as their representatives. We were asked to consult them whenever any sacred duty was to be performed at Izo god. Arochukwu and Aro-Ikpa were one people. Since then, Aro-Ikpa people had been exercising all the important sacred duties at Izo (B.O. J Maduagwu and A. Nwachukwu personal communication, August 22, 2024). The problem as was identified are the inability to preserve, document and protect the ikoro from destruction. Cultural heritage is a reflection of the society and its preservation is important for maintaining cultural diversity, fostering a sense of belonging and passing down to generations. Cultural heritage plays a crucial role in the lives and history of the people and history, influencing the values, beliefs and sense of belonging. One is expected to contribute positively by participating in cultural events, documenting traditions through story telling or recording and advocating for legal and financial support to protect cultural heritage sites. All actions and aim at preserving cultural heritage could also be through conservation of one's cultural heritage. The elements could be defined as to retain its heritage value and extend its physical life. It is believed that in the modern time, cultural preservation could be about honoring the values, identities, and histories, ensuring that they continue to inspire future generations, thus the clamor for the ikoro to be housed in a museum. According to Aniakor (1983) and Onuara, (2016), cultural heritage helps define our distinct national and ethnic identities. It brings us together when used as a diplomatic tool to promote peace and conflict resolution.

Methodology

The research methodology was qualitative. Interview of focused groups, observations, and document analysis. There were personal encounters, those that gave useful information that enabled the researcher document and analyse the data were the likes of A. Nwachukwu, B. O. Maduagwu, C. Onyebuchi and A. Uzor (personal communications, July 10th and 14, 2025). They all confirmed that in the past, the people of Umunze customary laws were not written anywhere, they were disseminated orally from generation to generation. If these laws were codified they would be easier to amend. The Customary Courts are temple for the dispensation of customary justice. To be able to achieve this objectives, the royal Fathers of all communities would first sit together to write all the customary laws of the land, followed by a careful study and editing, after which the document should be made available to the customary court authorities of the various areas, as well as the respective town and village bodies handling settlement of disputes to ensure justice. The book published by Maduagwu Benedict Okeke (2013), titled; Revised History of Umunze with the Intelligent Repot of 1929, alongside other publications and internet materials were useful accessed to gather information that helped to put this paper to shape. The researcher gathered data by visiting and taking photographs of the various sites and locations where Ikoro wooden drum could be found in Umunze town. The researcher had the privilege of also meeting various Umunze sons and daughters who shared their views on the Ikoro as a cultural heritage, all these helped to build and shaped the idea, and how the town can benefit from the iconic symbol of the Ikoro.

Conclusion

Cultural heritage is central to the protection of our wellbeing because it is about protecting and preserving our artifacts or sites. In preserving ones cultural heritage these includes environmental conservation and protection; making sure that there are existence of national parks, urban open spaces. Historic preservation, having cultural parks, open air museums, ornamental gardens, historic districts, and general regional planning, especially of transportation, land use, recreation and tourism. Considering that the ikoro slit drum, usually associated with the mythical stories behind the establishment of the ikoro as well as its physical characteristics point to heroic accomplishments in war and head hunting by community champions. In addition, the ikoro assembles the community to the village square in periods of danger and announces the commencement and end of important festivals as well as the death of a community hero. It is also believed that no one can tell a person's story better than the individual.

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