

Ụzọ mma: Pathway to Intangible Cultural Heritage in
Otobo Ugwu Dunoka Lejja, South-eastern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Heritage sites and their management remain an issue in Nigeria in general, and in South-eastern Nigeria in particular. These stem largely from the spate of wanton destruction of cultural heritage in Igboland, Eastern Nigeria by some Christian fundamentalists. Otobo Ugwu Dunoka Lejja, South-eastern Nigeria, is an open public square which serves as the traditional parliamentary, judicial and ritual square for the thirty-three villages in the Lejja community. It was also an iron smelting site and has the highest concentration of iron slag blocks in sub-Saharan Africa. Divided into four sections by rows of iron slag blocks, the square is full of monuments connected with iron smelting and community history. These monuments are linked to the rules and ethical values which form the intangible cultural heritage associated with iron smelting in the community. The approach in this study is multi- and interdisciplinary, as recourse is made to sociology, ethno-history, political economy, anthropology and the interface between these complementary disciplines. Based on extensive field work in the community, the researchers interrogate the meaning and essence of some of the values attached to the square and the monuments therein. These traditional values could help address the problems created by iconoclasts who pride themselves on destroying cultural heritage in Igboland, ostensibly in the name of Christianity.

Keywords

Nigeria, Igboland, Iron smelting, Otobo Ugwu Dunoka Lejja, *Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri, Omabe, Adada, Oshuru, Ofo, Mask, Masquerade, Kola nut*

Introduction

Professor Wole Soyinka (2006: p. 11) dubbed Christian zealots 'termites of time', who neither understand nor appreciate the heritage they are bent on destroying. This is in spite of the fact that globally, attempts at preserving heritage are so ancient. For instance, as early as the 6th century BC, a Babylonian king, Nabonidus, preserved some of the stones that were recovered during the repair of a temple in Babylon. In China, around 2000BC, Si-Ma Qien, an early Chinese historian, was said to have examined ancient ruins and relics of the past, along with texts, for compiling *Shi Ji*, an account of Chinese history (Trigger: 1989, pp. 30–31). However, it was the 20th century that witnessed the greatest interest and awareness in preserving heritage. Starting with the 1964 Venice *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*, the scope of heritage and its meaning and application has broadened from a concern for physical heritage such as historic monuments and buildings, to groups of buildings, historic urban and rural centres, historic gardens and non-physical heritage including environments, social factors, and lately, intangible values (Ahmad: 2006, pp. 293-294).

In Nigeria, various ordinances, orders and decrees have been promulgated over the years aimed at preserving the nation's cultural heritage. Driven by the likes of K. C. Murray and E. H. Duckworth in the 1930s, Nigeria in 1943 enacted its first Antiquities Ordinance aimed at preserving works of art (Willett, 1971 and Wangboga, 1972). Ten years later, the Antiquities Ordinance (Ordinance 17) was passed and it led to the establishment of the Department of Antiquities to which was assigned the responsibility of exploring, caring for and preserving the nation's cultural materials. In 1974, Decree 9, known as the Antiquities (Prohibited transfer) Decree, stipulated that *no person shall buy or sell antiquities from or to any person other than the accredited agent*, violation of which attracted imprisonment for upwards of three years and other such punishments. Decree 77 of 1979 empowered the National Commission for Museums and Monuments to preserve, protect and maintain archaeological sites and monuments such as old city walls and gates, palaces, shrines, public and private buildings of historical significance and sculptures (Ajekigbe:2008, pp. 116-126).

In Lejja in South-eastern Nigeria, the iron smelting industry that gave rise to the monuments in the square has been dated to 2000BC (Eze-Uzomaka: 2009, p. 41). One might expect that heritage that is linked with an activity dating to 2000BC would be preserved for posterity, given the enabling legislations of the polity where such monuments exist. In the case of Otobo Ugwu Dunoka, Lejja however, the efforts of the local population to preserve the site and its heritage are threatened by some Christians who defaced some of the monuments in 2012, forcing the local people to seek court action against them. The case is still pending at the Nsukka Magistrate Court 3 (See Charge No.MN/98C/2012, Commissioner of Police vs. Onah Elijah and nine others).

Given that the monuments are tangible heritage, the locals pay great attention to the intangible heritage which, they argue, has a greater connection with the now-defunct iron smelting industry through which the monuments were built, as well as with the overall history of the community (Nwani: 2015, and Ekenyi and Nwaiduma: 2007 as cited in Oyata and Apeh, 2012, pp. 32-45). Such intangible heritage relates to the rules about seating, gender, and rules relating to ethical conduct in and around the square. These represent economics, politics, religion and the evolution of social contracts.

McKercher and Du Cros (2002) state that intangible heritage is traditional culture, folklore, or popular culture that is performed or practised with close ties to 'place' and with little complex technological accompaniment. They postulate that whereas tangible heritage assets represent the 'hard' culture of a community, its places and things, intangible heritage assets represent its 'soft' culture, the people, their traditions and what they know. However, the present researchers are of the opinion that a better definition of intangible cultural heritage is those abstract legacies of past human actions that the humans of the society involved continue to practise, and which are likely to be passed to future generations as a mark of their identity and a source of pride, and which provide a window into their collective history and their unspoken collective memory.



Plate 1

A view of a section of the square. The three arrows indicate the three *Ojiroshi* (*ojilisi*) trees.
 Photo: Christian Opata with permission of the custodian of the site in 2010.

of intangible heritage attached to them. First, the *Ojiroshi* tree is regarded as male. Hence, the people refer to it as *Ojirioshi di nwe ala*, translated literally as 'Ojirioshi, the husband who owns the land' (Ugwoke: 2015). These trees feature prominently in sacrifices and rituals associated with healing. Secondly, they remind the people of the three brothers who 'gave birth' to the three quarters in Lejja, and so they also establish the patrilineal character of the community. The trees also remind the people of the herbal pharmacy used by their forebears, especially as parts of them were used for the dressing of wounds and for treating feverish conditions associated with the tedious tasks of sourcing the haematite used in smelting and making charcoal. Iwu (2002, pp. 583-605) confirmed the therapeutic potential of this plant to cure fevers, dress wounds and treat stomach aches. Thus the trees also stand as store houses of indigenous medical knowledge.

The greatest evidence of the link between iron smelting and spirituality in the square is the house of the incarnate beings (masqueraders), called *omabe*. The house is shaped like a blast furnace and is called *Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri*. Anyebe (2012) insists correctly that in Africa, masquerades are conceptualised as an art form that has some spiritual content. Even as an art

form, the African mask, according to Miachi (2012, p. 14), has been misrepresented by Europeans and Americans and those scientists trained by them, so much so that their real meaning has been lost or distorted. As masks are born of religion, preserved from generation to generation, the mask is the 'abode' of a particular power, the breathing place of the spirit of departed elders, the resting place of communal secrets, the sanctuary for the meaning and memory of a people's volatile identity. Being 'the sanctuary for the meaning and memory of a people's volatile identity' (Rotimi: 1983, pp. 25-26), compels us to give priority to the house of the masked spirit and the intangible heritage therein. [Plate 2]

Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri is the house of the incarnate beings of the Umu Inyinye Alanwuma – the people whose descendants occupy Ugwu Dunoka, Lejja. The present writers, in line with Picton (2009, pp. 21-38), contend that the use of the term 'masquerade' is misleading as etymologically 'masquerade' implies a form of disguise and therefore does not capture the essence of the term as revealed by our informants. 'Masqueraders' in Igboland are not playing a game as the name suggests, but are the embodiment of the ancestral spirits of the land, with the male members of society acting as its custodians. The desecration of the



Plate 2
Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri - the masked-spirit house.
Photo: Christian Opata, 4 October 2014.

'masquerade' is the desecration of the land itself. It is because of the spirituality attached to masks that the present researchers chose to refer to the masqueraders as 'incarnate beings'.

Shaped like a blast furnace, *Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri* is a constant reminder to the people of the community that their forebears were iron smelters. However, the intangible heritage associated with this structure is extensive and the rationale for the rules surrounding it form part of the value system of the people that links their economy, religion, legal system and politics. First, it reminds the people that their environment is occupied by two categories of people, the living and the dead. Women were not allowed into the building, even though it was regarded as the 'kitchen' during smelting. This was because the 'cook' who used the building was male – an indication that iron smelting was a masculine activity. What was more, it was feared that women who married outside the smelting community might divulge the secrets of smelting technology which were jealously guarded. Notwithstanding this, during meetings in the square, women are allowed to sit at the base of the house of *Akpurigedege Oshimiri*. This is rationalised in many ways. First, the house is seen as representing females and pregnancy. The building is always assumed to be pregnant because, hypothetically, it is occupied by

elemental and ontological beings. This was achieved through some ceremonies and rituals conducted by the chief smelter, who was called Ota Mkpume (Stone chewer). Nwaiduma (2007), as cited in Opata and Eze-Uzomaka (2012, pp. 39-49), who posits that women sit at the base of this structure because they (women) own the 'kitchen' which is what the house was assumed to be, since the structure is 'where stone is cooked to form iron'. Here, iron, which is the 'food', refers to political power, as in the community women hand over the paraphernalia of political authority to men – a balance of power designed to place women in a strategic position to deal with men, who pride themselves on being rulers, as part of the social contract. However, this tradition dates to the period when iron was being smelted, and post-menopausal women were those who had kneaded the clay used in erecting the furnace. The place of post-menopausal women in the Igbo political economy probably warrants scholarly attention. Women were regarded as pillars of the industry as they were the ones who laid the foundation of the 'kitchen' (furnace). As a mark of respect and as a perpetual reminder of this vital role, women were allowed to sit at the base of the building. More importantly, women were permitted to sit at the base of this building because *Adada* (the premier goddess of Lejja) is said to be the mother of the *Omabe* (masked beings). The primary intangible heritage related to the latter is that the knowledge of the incarnate beings remained largely a masculine domain, as is evidenced by the saying that *Oonye muru Omabe, me ya neya ekwuyiteg* – 'Omabe were born to women but they do not relate to each other'. Tradition has it that after birth, the relationship between the *Omabe* and their mothers was severed.

The interesting and intriguing aspect of this is that women do not eat any of the food served to the incarnate beings that inhabit the house. The locals argue that the rule is ancient and is a carryover from the practice that prevailed in the community during smelting times when the male smelters were never allowed to eat any food cooked by women during the smelting process, especially not by those women who had not reached the menopause. They believed that menstruating women were unclean, and menstrual blood was counter-productive to the smelting industry and reduced the power of the incarnate beings. This accounts for the exclusion of women from the 'incarnate beings' home - unless such women have undergone the ritual of initiation as *Oyima* (friend of

incarnate beings), thus being purified and enabling them to commune directly with the spirit world and the ontological forces within the community.

When the incarnate beings emerge from the *Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri* (the blast furnace-shaped building), they perform in the square. Part of the intangible heritage relating to iron smelting is rehearsed as the incarnate beings perform. After dancing in the square and entertaining the crowd, the masked spirits would pay homage to the progenitors of the community who were smelters in their now-defunct workshop located on a parcel of land behind the *Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri*. This parcel of land, called *ala nwa Nnadi*, harbours the largest *in situ* slag block and the biggest furnace wall encasing the slag. As a rule, the masked spirits or incarnate beings have to use a narrow path called *Uzo mma* – ‘the path meant for spirits’ – to access the now-defunct workshop. When leaving the site of the former workshop, one of the classes of incarnate beings called *Okokoro* would bend its head backwards. This symbolised the end of the smelting process and the destruction of the furnace. The breaking of the *tuyere* (a clay pipe through which air is supplied to the furnace) was dramatised by this incarnate being (*Okokoro*) as it used its iron staff to strike *tuyere* in the furnace. As the incarnate beings performed, the people praised them. One such form of praise is calling them *ilolo Obu nála mee eja etetughi ya* (‘the termite that lives in the soil yet comes out clean, smooth, unstained and, most importantly, beautiful’). According to Ekenyi and Nwaiduma (2007) this expression means more than its face value, in that while the earth is a metaphor for the furnace, the incarnate being as a ‘termite that comes out of the earth’ is not stained because it has been purified through the process of smelting in the furnace – the metaphorical earth from which it comes. The central message is that such praise mirrors the lifestyle of the departed ancestors who were smelters and are now represented by the incarnate beings.

This signifies that with the code of conduct approved by society – both the living and the dead must lead a good life to qualify as an ancestor at death. Thus, in this community, death is simply a return to where life began, a return that is never final and definitive. Opata (1998, p. 174), drawing largely from this community and their notion of death and dying, posits that *life is a process of coming and returning/going*. Two levels of meaning could be assigned to the

latter statement. First, for one to return as an ancestor as epitomised in the masked spirits, one must be adjudged ‘holy’ by both the living, the dead and the other ontological forces in society – a sign that in the said society, saints are not only canonised by men, but by men through the approval of the ontological beings.

Also worthy of note is the fact that for a dead man to be considered to have taken the form of one of the masked spirits that emerge from the *Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri* building, he must have been a smelter or a descendant of smelters (Nwaiduma: 2007). This goes a long way towards showing that there are strong connections between the people’s economy, religion and core values. Descent from the lineage of smelters confers some rights which form part of the intangible heritage associated with Otobo Ugwu Dunoka, Lejja.

One form of intangible heritage has to do with the right to say prayers in the traditional way while in the square, using kola nuts. Any person who is adjudged to be an ex-slave or to be of servile origin is not allowed to break a kola nut or say prayers on behalf of others while in this square. Neither are such people permitted to take a kola nut from the plate used for sharing the nuts. The sharer always gave kola nuts to the ex-slaves after all others had taken their share. Ugwoke Nwani (2015) posits that this class of people were always reminded of their ancestry through this practice, and that the essence of it was to ensure that they did not rise up one day with others to contest the traditional leaders. This, he said, is supported by a saying in the community that *Nwa mbunuu anaghi agbayi agada agọ ndushi* (‘A stranger does not, cannot and should not sit at the altar of the ancestors to worship them’). Ugwoke Nwani (2015) asserts that this practice remains one of the measures which today form part of the intangible heritage used by the people to jealously safeguard not only their consanguinity, but also to espouse one of the ancestral rules of secrecy designed to prevent the knowledge of smelting technology from being diffused to people not sanctioned by them. The stance of the community in keeping the knowledge of iron technology secret and making it their special preserve is not unique. Njoku (1989, pp. 28-43), writing on blacksmithing in Igboland, observes that for a long time blacksmithing remained the special preserve of the Agulu Awka, thanks to the stringent measures they adopted to ensure that knowledge of the technology was confined to their ranks.

Any kola nut to be used in the square must have a minimum of three lobes. This is called *oji okike* or *oji akamha* ('kola nut associated with creation and truth'). The person who breaks the kola nut must not be the one to say the accompanying prayers. The person who says the prayers must be seated while saying them, and s/he makes use of just one lobe of the broken kola nut. While praying, s/he invites first Almighty God (*Ezechitoke Abiama Ura*), followed by all the deities and ontological beings in the community to come and partake in eating the nut. After praying, the person who said the prayer peels away the radicle of the kola nut and throws it to the ground. If while breaking the kola nut it is found to have five lobes, the person who broke the nut (usually a man from Amube village) is entitled to one lobe. However, there is a rule which says which of the lobes he should take; it must be the one with the highest number of lines on it. This is called *oji kwọ ibeye* ('the lobe that all other lobes are attached to'). The sex of the lobe of the kola nut to be used in prayer is very important. If a man says the prayers, the sex of the lobe must be male, and this is known by the particular lobe having a single line running from the radicle to the tip. When a lobe has one line running from the radicle but the line is joined by one or more lines at a point and the lines are distinct as if a channel is created in between them, such lobes are regarded as female and are to be used if it is a woman who says the prayers in the square. Rationalising the

choice of the lobe and their sex, Ekenyi (2007) argues that the male elder whose duty it is to say prayers in the square sits very close to Eze Mkpume (King of the slag blocks), regarded as the symbol of the chief smelter, while the women sit very close to *Ọnu Adada Nwabueze Ezema* (the mother goddess of the community; a river goddess).

Another element of intangible heritage connected to the square relates to the use of space and material resources. [Plate 3] During the worship of *Oshuru* (the community's god of war), the chief priest holds the *ofo* stick (*Detarium Senegalese*) in his right hand. The *ofo* so held belongs to the thirty-three villages in Lejja but is kept in the custody of the oldest man from Dunoka village, which has the statutory duty of providing the traditional king (*Eze*). Nwaezigwe (2013, pp. 1-15) observes that:

The ofo as a conceptual symbol is a twig of a tree known among the Igbo by that name, but botanically known as Detarium Senegalese. Its branches fall off naturally on drying. It is this branch that thus represents this concept after formal customary consecration. Viewed in Igbo cosmology, since the ofo cannot be cut or broken off by the agency of human activities, but falls off as nature wills, so it is believed that its inherent authority cannot be acquired by the act



Plate 3
The shrine of *Oshuru*.
Photo: Christian Opata, 4 October 2014.



Plates 4
Sacrifice in session at the square.
Photo: Christian Opata, 4 October 2014.



Plate 5
Sacrifice in session at the square.
Photo: Christian Opata, 2 May 2015.

of human effort. When therefore defined in political and religious terms, it is the symbol of authority founded on an ancestral heirloom by divine commission, which represents the continuity between the people living and their dead deified ancestors. It embodies the dual concepts of truth and justice.

Drawing on Nwaezigwe's explanation, we can conclude that even though *Oshuru* - as represented by his shrine - is tangible heritage, the use of the community's *ofo* in his worship is indicative that the various villages trace their ancestry to a common father, the *ofo* serving as a tool to confirm consanguinity and as a signal of collective identity and involvement in establishing the shrine, an indication of collective ownership. Also worthy of note as part of the intangible heritage is the use of the right hand in holding the *ofo*. The right hand in Lejja culture represents seniority in terms of age and experience. Ejuona and Uwani Lejja are collectively called *Eka Utara Areje Obodike* ('right hand home of strong people') while Ekaibute (another quarter in Lejja) is called *Eka Ibute Ubunaruagha* ('left hand that stops wars'). Hence the act of holding the *ofo* by the Chief Priest from Ejuona quarter, to which Dunoka belongs, is a constant reminder that Ejuona and Uwani are senior to Eka Ibute, but in matters of war, people from Ekaibute are the leaders.

Regarding the use of space, neither the officiating priest nor anyone else, may normally use the road dedicated to the departed folks of the community, *Uzọ*

mma, as it is assumed that the ancestral spirits will need to use the road when coming to monitor the affairs of the day and to join in the worship. Consequent on the supposed or assumed presence of the living dead, the items used for the worship must be those prescribed by native law and based on precedence. The wine used in the worship of *Oshuru* must be palm wine tapped from an oil palm tree in Lejja. [Plates 4 and 5] Unlike what happens during the worship of other deities, or during religious festivals where some of the palm wine used for worship is deliberately spilled on the ground as a libation, wine used in the worship of *Oshuru* is poured directly into the hole in the mound. This is done by the officiating priest before drinking commences. Also, the palm oil (*mmanụ néke kee arah egbele* - 'palm oil that is as red as the comb of a cock') used for the worship must be procured from a palm tree in Lejja and processed by those whose traditional job it is. The yams must be cultivated by those who traditionally cook the food to be used during the ceremony. The firewood used in cooking the food must be sourced from the *Akpaka* tree (*Pentaclethra macrophylla*) which was used by smelters of old. Opata and Apeh (2012) observe that items used in the worship of *Oshuru* are not allowed to fall on the ground and they should not be taken home; rather leftovers are poured into a hole in the mound. It might sound as if the intention is to waste resources, but this was not so; the *Oshuru* deity's role in the community's various wars was to occupy and secure their present homeland, and this showed the people that in war, the emphasis should be on victory and not booty. Thus, one

element of intangible heritage in this square is that valour is based on individual achievements and input into the security and safety of the community. A major criterion used in measuring achievement by the community is one's ability to generate resources locally, even at short notice, as shown in the laws about the items to be used in worshipping *Oshuru*. Thus, Ibeanu and Okonkwo (2014, pp. 104-116) aver that traditional industries encourage the sustainable use of natural resources and the preservation of cultural values. In the same vein, Okpoko (2014, pp. 15-26), opines that local taboos are common among various cultures in traditional Nigeria, and some communities believed, and still believe, in the efficacy of traditional laws, particularly those deriving from sacred sanctions and local taboos. This is very true of Lejja and the intangible heritage associated with iron working.

Yet another form of intangible heritage connected to the square relates to the use of traditional medicine and the link between such medicine and spirituality. As the blood of menstruating women is said to be counter-productive in the smelting industry and to reduce the power of the incarnate beings, the community developed a medicine called *Oya Ogwu* (anti-poison or neutraliser). In the community it is believed, and many elders attest, that when one is poisoned and a sacrifice is made at the

shrine of *Oya Ogwu*, one recovers after smearing the affected part of the body with the blood of the sacrificed beast. Hence spiritual healing is also part of the intangible heritage of this square.

One more aspect of intangible heritage in this square has to do with the laws relating to traditional practices for registering births. The rituals pertaining to birth registration only apply to people whose biological fathers are from Dunoka. The registration is done at the foot of *Odegwo*, who is associated with birth, procreation and human fertility. [Plate 6] Any child born in Dunoka (the village where the square and its monuments are located) was brought to this monument for the traditional ceremony of registering a birth. The items used during registration were determined by the sex of the child. According to Ekenyi (2007), for boys, the objects include alligator pepper, kola nut and a cock that must have crowed, preferably one of the red-feathered ones called *egbele awu* - the colour red symbolising fire and the heat generated during smelting - another indication that smelting was the preserve of men. For girls, the items include palm oil, fish, and yellow ochre. The officiating priest of this deity is an adult man of Umulolo lineage from Dunoka, preferably the oldest man of the lineage. The logic of the choice of priest is based on knowledge of traditional maternity and post-partum health care which



Plate 6
Odegwo deity.
Photo: Christian Opat, 2014.

was said to be the preserve of the Umulolo. Be that as it may, all women experiencing their menstrual cycle are forbidden to pass through the square. Those who violate that rule are said to have their cycle continue indefinitely until the *Odegwo* deity is propitiated (Onyugwu Agu and Oyima Orefi: 2014).

With respect to the purity of the men, men who have had sexual intercourse the night before are not qualified to offer sacrifices to *Adada*. If it becomes necessary for such a man to offer the appropriate sacrifices, he must first undergo purification rites using *Oji* that has three or more lobes and is yellow in colour. It must not be *Gworo* (*Cola nitida*) that is identified by its inability to produce more than two lobes. The *Oji Igbo* (*Cola acuminata*) that is yellow in colour is called *Oji Ugo* (this literally means 'eagle kola'), the type of kola nut used in the worship of bodies of water and the goddesses associated with them. Water fetched from the Adada River and four seeds of alligator pepper are also used in the rites of purification. The person who the gods choose to fetch the water must not talk to anyone while going to the river or returning from there. To ensure that he does not talk to anyone, he holds a tender palm frond tied in a knot between his lips. When he gets to the river, he dips the container into the river four times and then utters a prayer. After this, he draws water from the river making sure that his back is turned to the river. The regulatory role of *Adada* is evident in this exercise, ensuring that the rules are not broken.

In relation to truth and the dispensation of justice, any complainant must stand at the centre of the square while presenting his petition to the council of elders. This means that the complainant - or the accused - stands between *Okiti Akpurigedege Oshimiri*, *Oshuru*, *Eze Mkpume*, *Uzọ Mma*, *Utu Udeleigwe* and *Onu Adada*. A person in that position fears those deities and the spirit forces associated with them. The fear of *Utu Udeleigwe* ('heavenly vulture') is even greater as that is the monument that is directly linked with the administration of justice; it serves as the executioner's stake and reminds the people that, like vultures, truth is

untouchable and unchangeable. It is believed that those in attendance at the hearing will include both the living and the dead and other spirit forces.

Conclusion

Human societies have, over the years, constructed many ways of preserving their past. It is such considerations that gave rise to the discourse on heritage - whether tangible or intangible. In most cases, intangible heritage bridges the gap between different generations and their ancestors as is made evident in Otobo Ugwu Dunoka, Lejja. This is achieved through various rules and observances that govern the social and political economy of the people. Otobo Ugwu Dunoka Lejja is a venerated public space and this arises from its significance and the antiquity of iron smelting in the history of the community. Most observances associated with the monuments in the square are linked in one way or another to the ancient iron smelting industry. Such observances form the intangible heritage of the community in the areas of politics, economy, justice, class distinction, medicine, gender balance and belief system, as well as establishing the link between them.

Unfortunately, some overzealous Christian fundamentalists are bent on destroying these heritage elements, claiming that they hinder the development of the community. On the contrary, heritage elements act as symbols of the collective identity of the community as well as helping to sustain the disciplinary boundaries set by the community's ancestors. Therefore, it is imperative that such citizens be educated to understand and appreciate what they are unknowingly destroying. Such heritage has a great potential for turning the community into a major tourist centre, which means it should be preserved, not destroyed. There would be a collective sigh of relief if Nigeria would nominate Otobo Ugwu Dunoka, Lejja to be inscribed on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*, and its tradition of iron smelting and the associated traditional practices were to be included on its *ICH Representative List*. 🇳🇮

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