

**THE STUDY OF COSTUME AND MAKE UP IN OYISE FESTIVAL OF THE  
OWHE PEOPLE AS A REFLECTION OF THEIR CULTURE**

**BY**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF  
THEATRE ARTS, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,  
BENIN CITY EDO STATE. IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE (B.A HONS)  
IN THEATRE ARTS**

**OCTOBER, 2025**

## **DECLARATION**

This project is based on the research done by me, in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts under the supervision of Professor Christopher Ugolo. All ideas are a product of my personal research, where the views of other people were used, they were duly acknowledged.

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this research project was done and submitted by Owhoaridowho Kate to the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State under my supervision

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**PROF. CHRISTOPHER UGOLO.**  
Project Supervisor

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**DATE**

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**PROF. (MRS) JOSEPHINE EBUWA ABBE**  
HOD, Department of Theatre Arts

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to God almighty for his mercy, wisdom and guidance, and to the Owhe people who have little documentary evidence on their culture.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I wish to acknowledge God for the gift of life. Also to my parents Mr and Mrs Clark Saturday Owhoaridowho who have supported and loved me all through my journey to obtain a degree. They are the best parents in the world. Through their prayers and encouragement I've been able to sail through. I appreciate them for taking me around to do my research. Thank you Mr and Mrs Clark Saturday Owhoaridowho.

I wish to thank my supervisor Prof Christopher Ugolo for his supervision while I undertook this research work. I appreciate all of his efforts, and all other lecturers who have contributed to my knowledge in various aspects of the theatre.

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## ABSTRACT

The study is focused on how costume and make-up used in Oyise festival of the Owhe people reflect their culture as a people of purity and peace. It focuses on the origin of the people, their historical background, identity and the Oyise festival itself. The study examines the Owhe people background tracing it down to the Benin kingdom. It aims to document the Oyise festival performance as it addresses the problem of inadequate documentation of the Oyise festival and its cultural significance, aiming to create awareness and draw attention to the festival's importance in preserving the Owhe people's cultural heritage. The research examines the costume, make up, props and their significance revealing how it reflects the culture of the Owhe people, through the use of primary and secondary method in gathering data including interview with key participants. Research shows that the festival is known to a few people therefore this research is undertaken for the purpose of creating awareness. The research shows how the Owhe people (Isoko) of Delta state place value on respect for culture, spirituality and the Oyise festival. The study focus on the importance of the costume and make up of the Oyise festival and not just a show for aesthetics but a reflection of the people. The research concludes and recommends that the festival is essential in preserving the cultural heritage of the Owhe people therefore the Owhe people should take steps in promoting their culture.

**Key words:** Costume, Make-up, Identity, Cultural heritage, Oyise Festival, Owhe People.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Costume and make up is a key instrument in identifying a particular group of people and their way of life. This research, shall delve into a brief history of the Owhe people of Isoko, research into Oyise festival, examine the Oyise festival, its history and theatrical elements and see how it reflects the culture of the people.

This study shall pay particular attention to the costume, make up and accessories that are worn during the festival and see how the costume, make up and accessories is relevant to the culture and identity of the people.

The study shall also look at the colours, symbols as they relate to the culture of the people. At the end, the research shall provide a detailed documentation of the festival, Oyise costume, make up and accessories to enable the people and the community at large to know the significance of the Oyise festival to the Owhe people and the general public at large.

### **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

It is pertinent to note that festivals are very relevant in every community and at such they should be given maximum attention. This study hopes to carry out research into the Oyise festival of Owhe people.

Although the festival is held annually, little is known of the festival except of course the Owhe people and some neighbouring communities are aware of its existence. Thus, the study is being undertaken to help create awareness and draw attention to the costumes and make-up of the Oyise festival of the Owhe people for the people and see how the festival helps to reflect the culture of the people.

### **1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

This research is being undertaken;

1. To document the historical origin of the Oyise festival of the Owhe people of Isoko North local government area of Delta state.
2. To examine the functions of costume in Oyise festival of the Owhe people.
3. To document the festival and identify how it reflects the culture of the people.
4. To study the significance of costume, make-up and other accessories in the festival.
5. To study how the theatrical elements, for example the music, songs, dances reflect the culture of the people.

### **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In the process of sourcing and gathering information and data for this study, the primary and secondary research method shall be used.

The primary research method shall involve participant observation and interview of the chief participants like the king chief priest, dancers and other celebrants while the

secondary method shall focus on written documented sources in journals, books and articles.

### **1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

The scope of this research shall include a brief history of the people, origin of the festival and the significance of their costume, make up and accessories and other theatrical elements. In the course of this research, there are bound to be certain limitations in the study which includes;

1. Inadequate funds: The researcher may lack enough funds since the research may require the researcher to travel for oral interview and participant observation.
2. Being unable to document some aspects of the festival because of its ritual contents.
3. Being unable to interview the Okpu \_Ozo, chief priest, chiefs and other major participants in the festival.

### **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The importance of this study is to document the Oyise festival and leave behind a document with relevant information for future reference. The research shall serve as a means of information for individuals seeking to know about Oyise festival.

Moreover, it will serve as a very important document for the Owhe people as most of their history about the festival, gods and identity as a people are not properly

documented. It is majorly told orally and passed down from generation to generation. Therefore it shall be a very essential document and a great contribution for future use and reference. It shall also help non indigene to be aware of the festival.

Theatre students and scholars shall find it beneficial and ready source of reference.

## **1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

1. Festival: According to Cambridge dictionary (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>), festival is a special day or period, usually in memory of a religious event, with its own social activities, food, or ceremonies.
2. Costume: According to Wikipedia, costume is the distinctive style of dress and/or makeup of an individual or group that reflects class, gender, occupation, ethnicity, nationality, culture.
3. Make-up: Make up are substances that are intended for application to the body for cleansing, beautifying, promoting attractiveness, or altering appearance, wikipeda.
4. Reflection: According to Oxford dictionary, reflection is serious though or consideration: an idea about something, especially one that is written down or expressed.
5. Culture: According to Oxford dictionary culture is the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society. It is the attitudes and behaviour characteristic of a particular social group.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF OWHE

The history of Owhe is not properly documented thus different scholars tried to trace their origin. Owhe historically comprises of three (3) communities. “Illuelogbo (now known as Owhelogbo) Otor-Owhe and Akiawe from the Owhe clan (Owhe-Arasa). The history of Owhe can be traced down to the Benin kingdom, a place called “Ogbe”. Owhe and his brothers Iyede, Atuah and his half-brother Emevo were chased out of Ogbe due to the assassination of a great warrior named “Ogesa” in Ogbe land. In order not to be killed, they fled through Urogodo and took a rest at Environ. The people of Benin chased them down to Environ, on seeing them they said “*A fie emo aka isie va ha*” meaning “*you don’t fight the battle of the Benin’s twice*” thus they fled to Erowa and settle down there. After so many years, they left Erowa and founded Iyede. Atuah and Azagba decided to reside in Iyede while Emevo left and found Emevo community after his name.

After a few decades Atuah and Azagba began to fight among themselves on who to rule the land (Iyede), the fight became immense, thus leading Emevo to leave his community to Iyede to settle the dispute but he was unable to reconcile the brothers. Atuah proposed that whoever brought any item from *Aka* (the way the Isoko’s refer to the people of Benin) should be the ruler of the land and the two

brothers agreed unknowingly to Azagba that during the time of chaos Atuah has always had a snail and red sand from Benin. Atuah presented his snail shell and red sand while Azagba was unable to present any item making Atuah, the king of Iyede land, and Azagba the “*okpu ozo*” (meaning big person) who pays homage to the Ovie (king) of Iyede as a follower.

After a few years, Atuah made an announcement that a cotton wool tree (Ahen) will be cut down and he wants his followers to catch the tree while it was falling (*A’ Ko, Ure’Ja*). Azagba could not take it any longer, and so he said “*Oji’ hen na, bi ti guo lo ume kpe*” (the enemy is about to kill me) which is now a popular saying among the people. Thus Azagba fled to “Emede” making it “Uru-Owhe” in Emede (uniara owhe) which translates to a Owhe street in Emede, making Emede and Owhe one.

Azagba returned to Otor-Owhe and chased the people of Emevon away and he resided in Otor-Owhe in a place called Urue-ovo. He got married to a woman called “Owhe” which brought about the name Owhe. Azagba is originally the founder of Owhe but due to his wife, the land was referred to as Owhe and the husband (Azagba) Owhe.

Whenever Owhe gave birth, the child died so her husband (Azagba also known as Owhe), went for divination and they were told to name the child after the father that is the land they came from “Ogbe”. She got pregnant, gave birth and named the first

child Ogbe (present day Illuelogbo/Owhelogbo). She gave birth again and named him Ovo and the third Child Utato (present day Akiawe).

Ogbe fought and chased the people of Abe from their land and resided there (Illuelogbo/Owhelogbo) saying “*me fa illue me ho obo ne*” (I have found my residence). Utato his brother fought and chased Ozo (now Ozoro), Ole and Olomo/olomoro from Akiawe and called it his homeland. They left Ovo at Otor-Owhe, thus making Akiawe, Otor-Owhe and Owhelogbo, the three historical communities that make up the Owhe clan (Owhe-Arasa).

Ovo and his wife lived at Otor-Owhe when a hunter called Ogu (from Olomo) came hunting and saw Ovo’s daughter named “Umugoro”. He asked for her hand in marriage. When they got married, Ovo proposed Ogu and his daughter Umugoro to go and live in one of his lands called Otibio (now known as Otor-Igho). Other communities and villages like Igibuku, Erawa, Otie, Eniagbedhi, e.t.c. are the children of Ovo, Utato and Ogbe.

Hubbard’s “Sobo of the Niger Delta” grouped Owhe among the Sobo clan who traced their origin to the Benin kingdom (Hubbard 1948:131). He associated the foundation of the Owhe clan from the ancient Benin kingdom, thus:

During the seventeenth century, the empire of Benin was at a very low ebb and human sacrifice and other atrocities had been instituted. In consequence, many left the city in order to escape being sacrificed. In the first half of the century, a man called Owhe therefore left Benin with his

family and journeyed South. The name of his four sons are known, they are Uruovo, Uruogbe, Urutato and Ellu (Hubbard 1948:51,74).

Ikime's (1972) work on the Isoko states that Owhe a refugee of Benin who settled himself and found the clan.

Owhe, the founder of the clan was driven from Benin by an Oba who was jealous of Owhe's wealth or power. Owhe and his entourage moved off until they came to a place called Owhe-Otor (land of Owhe), near Iyede where they settled for a long time.... Some claimed that Owhe had four sons; Uruovo, Uruogbe, Akiewe and Ellu (Ikime 1972:10).

From the above, it can be deduced that although they are slightly different, their similarities of the origin of Owhe is traced down to Benin.

## **2.2 WORLD VIEW OF THE OWHE PEOPLE**

The Owhe people of the Isoko clan are known for strong moral values and hospitality. They have a rich cultural heritage, their world view feature tradition, festival and respect for ancestral roots. They have strong sense of community as they believe in communal living and cooperation. The Owhe people are brother's keeper and highly sociable. They are highly entertaining especially when receiving visitors. There must be kolanut, drinks, alligator pepper, pepper fruits and money while entertaining a visitor formally. When receiving a visitor, on a more friendly occasion, they can either use drinks only or money only and sometimes both. The money must

be placed on a plate as a sign of respect for the visitor. The drink can either be a local gin popularly known as “Ogogoro” or any other drink but on formal occasion, it has to be a local drink and garden egg. This is the kind of act the Owhe people show when welcoming a visitor into their home.

The Owhe people have unique beliefs and practices. The people believe the elders hold a significant position and influence in the society, thus giving the elders the room to make certain decisions for their children. For instance, the family approves of divorce before it can happen. The family of the bride makes the decision to return the bride price. The Owhe people value marriages a lot and will never advise their children to go separate ways unless domestic violence is involved. Owhe people consider marriage sacred so they stick with their partners. However if domestic violence is critically the order of the day in the marriage, the elder makes the decision for divorce. The Owhe people values hardworking people and they are known for their work ethics and they strive for success in various areas or their lines of work.

**RESPECT:** The Owhe people place a lot of value on respecting elders, traditions and ancestors, thus in a gathering, drink is first poured out to the forefathers as a sign of respect before drinking it, even during prayers of an elder to the younger ones. The Owhe people place value on the younger ones respecting elders, thus the greeting “Migwor” (Me ri egwe meaning “I’m on my knees”) and “Vrendo” (vre no otor meaning “stand up”). This is only done by a younger and an older person. If the roles

are reversed, it is believed to be a curse, thus it is forbidden for a younger person to answer the greeting of an older person or telling an older person “Vrendo”.

The Isoko people place a lot of value on their traditional rites during ceremonies like burials, marriages and other ceremonies. For example, it is compulsory for Owho soup to be present in marriage ceremonies as it symbolizes the arrival of the bride in a home. She prepares the food and gives it to her husband’s people. It is the tradition of the Owhe people for a man intending to marry a woman from the Owhe clan to go see the woman’s family with money and drinks as a way of showing his intentions. During the marriage ceremonies, he drops an amount of money that is considered the bride price. When it is time to share the drinks among the couple, the bride sits on his lap once and he gives the inlaw money separately in their hands as a token of an appreciation.

**CULTURE:** It is the culture of the people for an “Omote Ukoli” (bride) of a family to greet everyone in her husbands’ family “Migwor” whether or not they are older or not.

Married women of Owhe people are forbidden to have any intimate act with other men. Her clothes are not to be touched by another man.

The Owhe people permit simple traditional dressing in which a woman wears a scarf, blouse and two wrappers and beads while the men wear beads, hats, walking stick, wrapper and a native lace.

**FESTIVAL:** The Owhe people in every three years holds a festive ceremony called Oyise festival to honour, serve and pay respect to their gods.

The Owhe people believe in Oyise Owhe whom they believe as their gods. They believe whenever they call on Oyise Owhe, he answers and comes through for them. They believe Oyise-Owhe as their protector and father, thus the triennial Oyise festival to honour Oyise. Aside Oyise-Owhe, the Owhe people worship other gods like:

1. Aghaluwe
2. Osu – During the worship of Osu, the chief priest sends people to go into the market to collect various items at night, but they never collect gifts from the descendants (daughters) of Ukpato and Unuefe. These gods are served in honour of Unuefe located at Uru-Orie.
3. Uthethe
4. Oworu
5. Awa
6. Ovo Orie-Ofo
7. Ighelue
8. Ofo
9. Oyise-Owhe

All of the gods are worshipped by the Owhe people and Oyise-Owhe is the last (ninth) gods to worship because it is considered the father. The Owhe people value

their language so much as they believe it is what identifies a man so it is very unlikely to see an Owhe child not understanding and knowing the Owhe language (Isoko).

**FOOD:** The Owhe people (generally Isoko people) have varieties of food like Owhe soup and Starch with plantain and yam, banga soup and starch or eba, Iziwo-Otor, e.t.c. Because of their belief of Oyise-Owhe, the people of Owhe clan forbids their descendants and loved ones to come from eating snail, starch, cocoyam, garri (strictly to the chief priest and servants of Oyise-Owhe). A woman on her monthly cycle is forbidden to touch the “Ore” (white chalk). Not bathing after having sexual intercourse is forbidden.

#### **TABOOS OF THE OWHE PEOPLE**

1. A younger sister is forbidden to get married before the elder sister and when she does, only the half ritual is performed till the elder sister gets married.
  2. A man not paying his last respect to his deceased father or mother of his wife. He is forbidden to be intimate with her.
  3. A married woman having intimate acts with another man.
  4. Relatives having suspicious relationships
  5. A child falling an elder
  6. A man killing and eating the head of the animal/bush meat killed by him or the waist part without the permission of the eldest son or when the mother is alive.
- e.t.c

### **2.3 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OYISE FESTIVAL**

Oyise-Owhe is believed to have been a feather fallen from the sky (Uleli Ugo). A woman named Ukpatu who was working in her farmland saw it. She described it as “*Uleli-Ugo no za vhi*” (A white ego feather standing). She rushed back to call her husband Unuefe saying she can’t serve it. She requested her husband to serve it telling him that her children will hold and kill animals for him during the period of the festival and performing rites for the gods (Oyise Owhe).

During the time, Azagba got married to Owhe (his wife from Emede), then her people said to her that they cannot live in the land without nothing fearing evil will come near their daughter, they gave her Oyise as a gift and her protector, thus Oyise Owhe. She erected it and her descendants began worshipping and honouring the Oyise, seeing it as their gods, protector and father.

### **2.4 THE OYISE FESTIVAL IN PERFORMANCE**

The festival of Oyise is celebrated every May 5th or 15th in every three (3) years after divination. When it is getting close to the celebration date, the Oyise gods which serves a symbol of unity, peace and progress appears to various people in different forms. Before Oyise is worshipped, other gods like Aghaluwe, Osu, Uthethe, Oworu, Awa, Ovo Orié ofo, Ighelue and Ofo are worshipped first before Oyise. After divination, a day is fixed to clear the path Oyise Owhe and other gods passed to visit

their children Edheidhe (groove) before the celebration properly begins. The festival lasts for seven days.

**FIRST DAY:** The first day, Akiawe and Owhelogbo dances with a box on their head to Otor-Owhe (Akiawe are the descendants of Utato and Owhelogbo/Illuelogbo are the descendants of Ogbe. While Otor-owhe are the descendants of Ovo). The box of Akiawe is called “Ivri” who is considered the last born. Owhelogbo/Illuelogbo dances to Otor Owhe first with the box on their head to the location ground of the shrine of oyise Owhe. Lastly “Ivri” box dances from the Akiawe and his box is carried by a man on his head with posing, showing off and acting conceited because it is considered the last born. When the boxes (three children Ovo, Ogbe and Utato descendants) are complete, the ceremony begins properly with incantations, killing of animals like bulls, fowls and ram (white). All animals must be female (Erue, Oho and Egbo). When animals are all killed, sacrifices begins as they sing, dances and sing praises to Oyise Owhe as the feast continues.

**SECOND DAY:** The second all animals killed are burnt, washed and butchered while singing, dancing, eating and offering praises and divination of any kind of message and asking for blessing. When the animals are all cleaned, they appoint people to properly share the meats. The first son descendants (Owhelogbo) chooses, then the second son descendants (Otor-Owhe) chooses and lastly, the last son descendants takes what is left by the brothers and the celebration continues.

**THIRD, FOURTH, FIFTH, SIXTH AND SEVENTH DAY:** The people continue to sing, dance, make merriments, worship Oyise Owhe while seeking blessings and protection.

During the process of the festival, those involved usually wear white garments, paint themselves with white chalk as make-up, bells around their wrists and ankles, cowries around themselves.

## **2.5 COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP USED IN THE OYISE FESTIVAL**

Costume and make-up are very vital tools in any festival because it helps identify the people and the festival itself. Different people from different cultural backgrounds wears makeup and costumes and the people of Owhe are not an exception during the festival of Oyise. The Owhe people are simple and values purity and thus, their costumes reflect this. The costumes and makeup used are:

**White Garment:** The white garment worn by the chief priest and followers of Oyise Owhe consists either a white wrapper and blouse for the women (oho avo ewu) or one wrapper and shirt for the girls. A white shirt and trouser for men or oho (ogbru) for the chief priest and elders. The costume is usually white which reflects purity and peace as it reflects the gods Oyise as the god of peace, purity and unity and also to represent the white feather. The followers wears cowries across their chest, legs and hands (Ibiaghabe). The cowries on the costumes represent the powers given by Oyise and it also is for protection of Oyise children from evil and harm.

**The makeup used in Oyise festival; White chalk (Ore):** The Ore or white chalk is grinded into powder and is applied on forehead, eyes, legs and also put in the mouth and tongue. The grounded powder is drawn on the eyes and this is done to enable them see spiritual beings. The grounded white chalk powder is blown into the air before applying in the mouth and tongue to enable smooth communication between the followers and the spiritual beings. The one on the legs covers from the ankle down while the one on the forehead does not have any particular way of application.

The costume used by the followers or those celebrating the Oyise festival, doesn't have any particular style as long as it is white. Those who have more than one costume changes their costume each day at the festival, but it is not compulsory to sew different costumes or have one style for the festival. Rattle bells are added to the costume. The bells are to announce the arrival or announce the coming of the Oyise-Owhe. When the bell is worn, it makes sounds for the indication of the Oyise festival. During the festival, white chalk, coconut, kerosene, kolanut, money, white cock and female ram and bull are offered as sacrifice to Oyise. The festival is considered very important to the Owhe people as it helps them to connect to their root and ancestors. It is a way for them to seek blessing and protection from their mother (Owhe) honouring her as a mother with great concern and compassion for her children.

**AGE GROUP SOCIAL STRUCTURES:** The Owhe people believe in different age groups as each community has different age groups they belong to

- i. The Okpu Ozo – The leader of the people
- ii. The Odionwere – The head of elders
- iii. Edion – The elders
- iv. Ewhe Eya – The women group
- V. Emo Oghe \_ The youth

**OKPU-OZO:** The Okpu-Ozo is the descendant of Azagba who pays respect to the Ovie (King) of Iyede. He is the leader of the Owhe clan. He is revered as a king and well respected in the Owhe communities. He takes the responsibilities of ruling the Owhe clan upon himself as he ensures order in the land. He has with him a group of elders that aids his decisions.

**THE ODIONWERE:** The Odionwere is the head of the elders. He is the oldest man in every community in Owhe. During any ceremony in any of the community, meetings are usually held and the head of an animal is always presented to him and the elders as a form of an invite. Any matter concerning the community is always tabled at his house. There are usually two Odionwere in each community namely:

Odion Aye (Woman)

Odion Oza (Man)

**EDION:** These people are the elders in each community in Owhe. They are very important as they serve as a means or link of communication between the dead or ancestors and the living. They ensure law and order in the land. They discuss matters relating to the people of the community and settle disputes among the indigenes. Without the permission of the elders, disputes among the people cannot be taken out of the community. It is headed by the “Odionwere”.

**EWHE EYA:** These are the group of married women in a community. They function as the mothers of the land. It is headed by the “Odion Aye” who is the oldest. They settle disputes among women. Each “Ewhe Eya” in each community has a day of gathering to buy and sell things “Ede Eki” (market day). On this day, no one goes to the farm or if they do, they have to be back before 10am in order to avoid being fined. The women also function as a body that welcomes brides to the community. They have to be settled and be invited in burial and marriage ceremonies. In marriage ceremonies, they welcome the bride by dancing and spraying her money as a form of acceptance (A’ ho Aye). They settle disputes among women and any dispute they are unable to settle, they take to the “Owhe-Arasa”, the three historical communities that founded Owhe. All women from the Owhe clan gather to settle the issues.

**EMO OGHE:** These are the youths. They have their own leaders who answers to other group leaders like the Edions. They are majorly responsible for clearing and cleaning the community and disciplining any disobedient youth to the elders and parents.

In short, the Owhe people of the Isoko clan is focused on family, community, strong traditional beliefs and values. They believe in oneness (Okugbe) and the ability to have their brothers' back. They believe togetherness is the only path to a fulfilled life.

2.6 COSTUME CHARTS

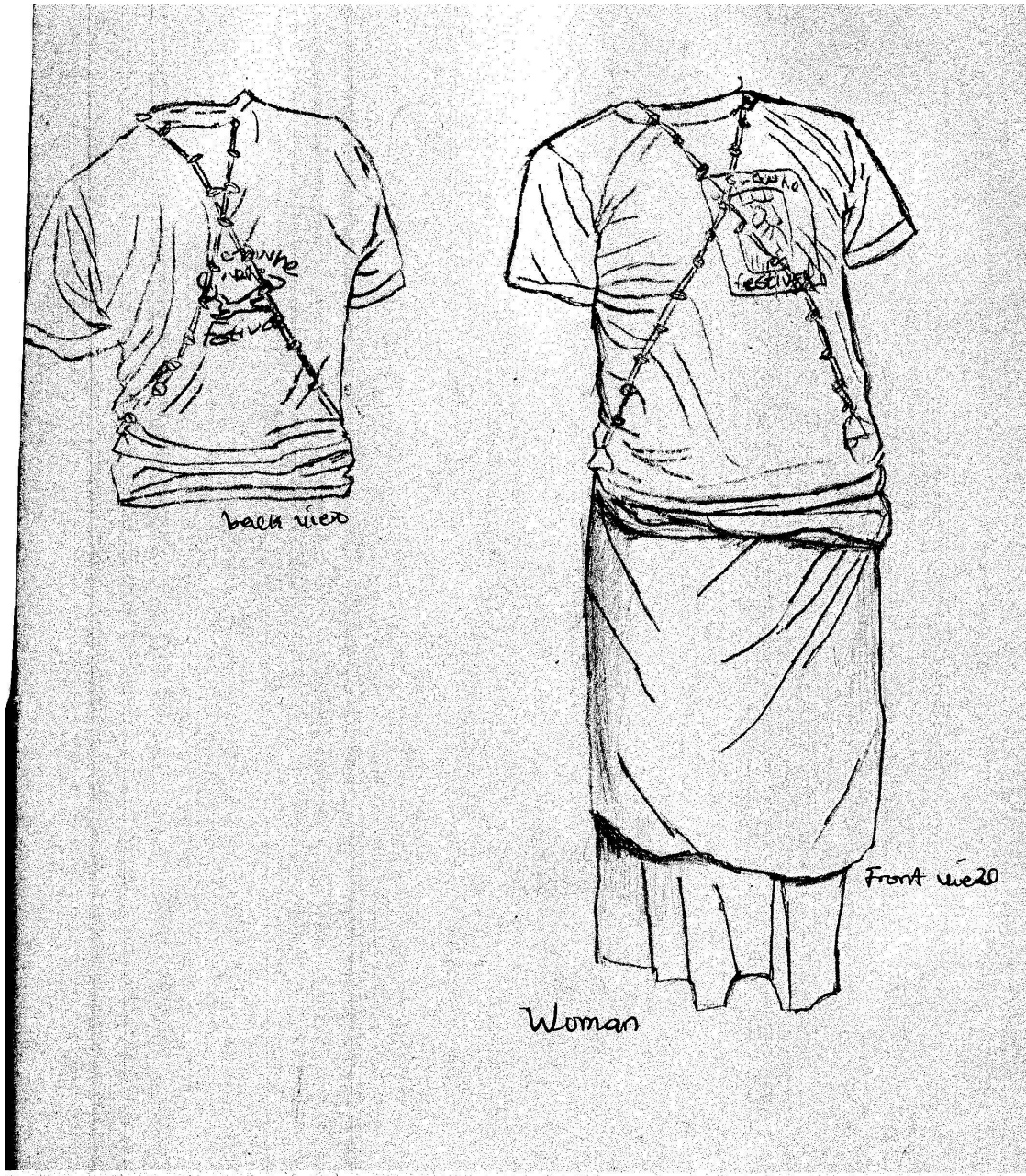


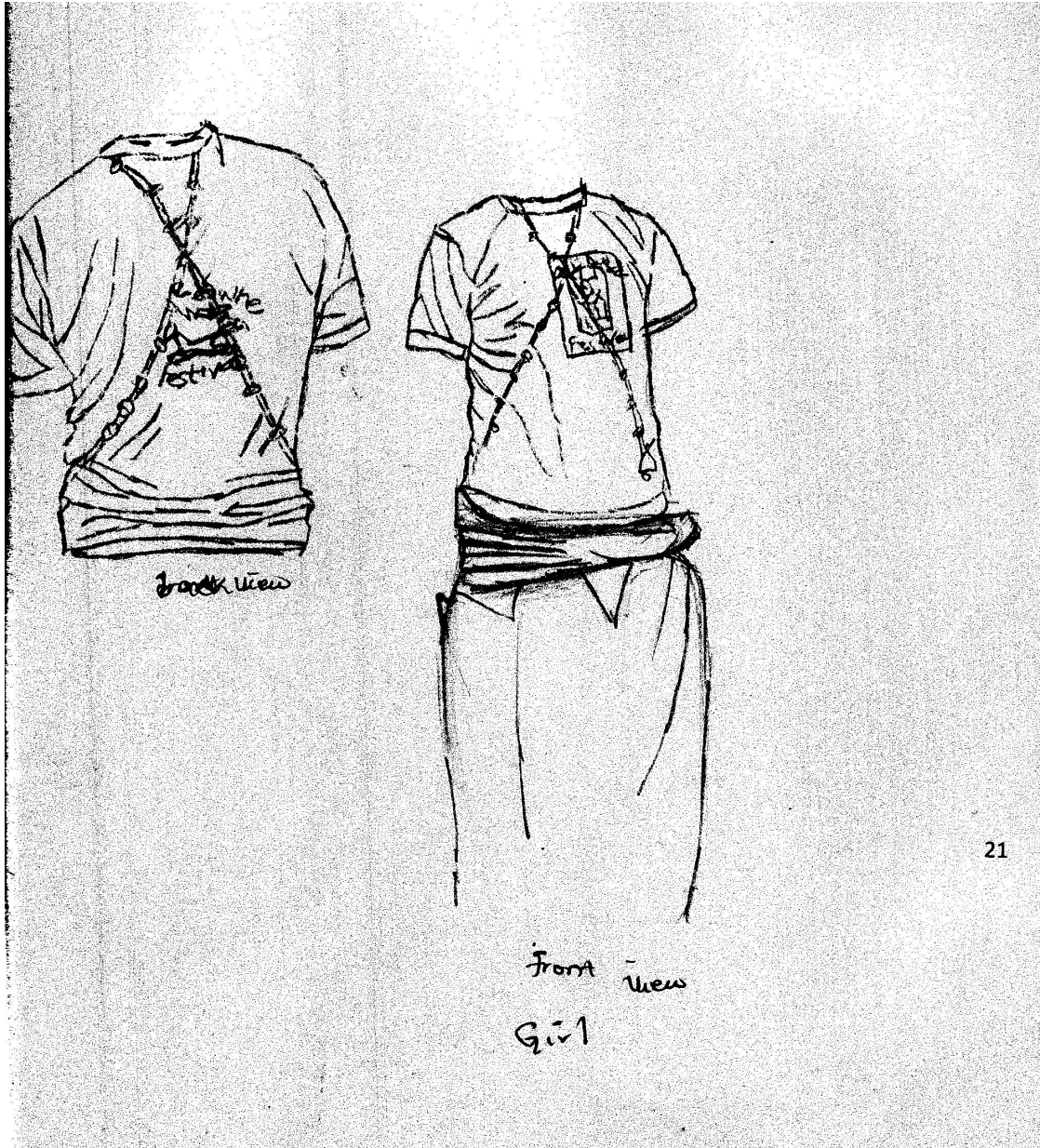
back view

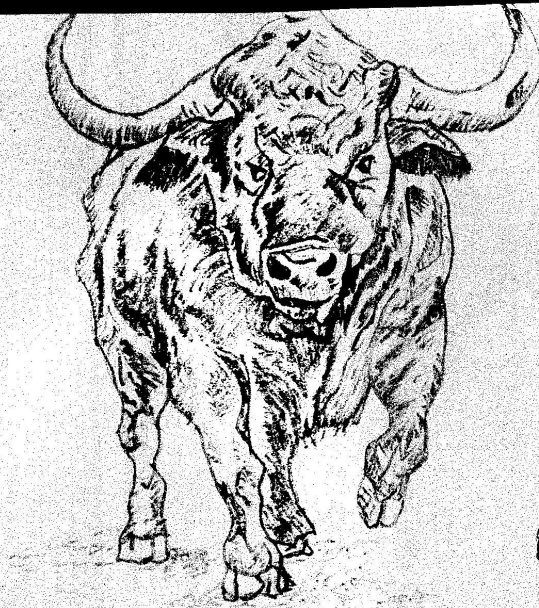


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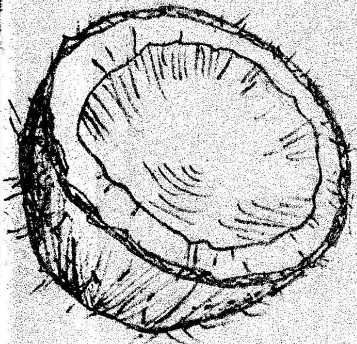
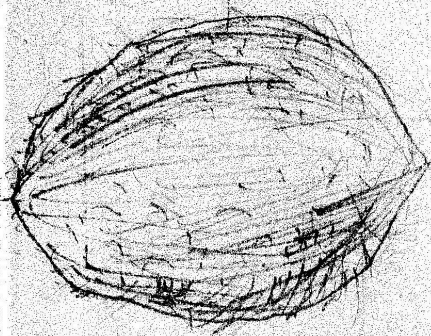
male



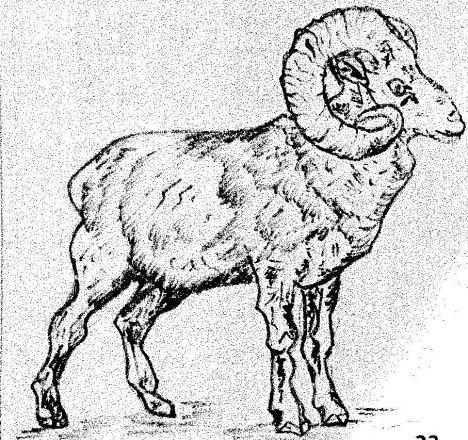




Bull

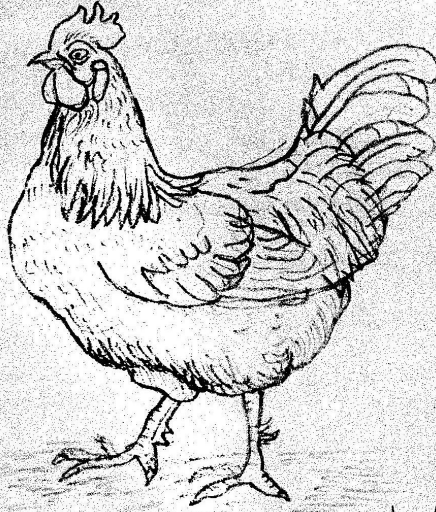


Coconut

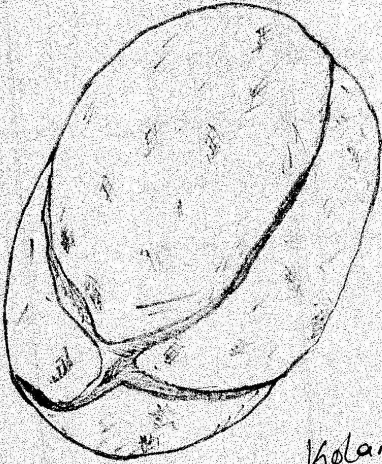


Female ram

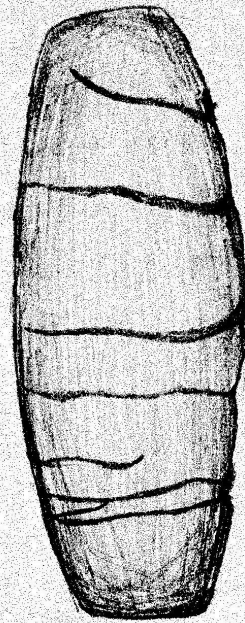
22



White Cock



Kolanut



White Chalk

23

## CHAPTER THREE

### SIGNIFICANCE OF COSTUME AND MAKE-UP IN OYISE FESTIVAL

#### 3.1 SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF COSTUME USED IN OYISE FESTIVAL

The costume used in the Oyise festival of the Owhe people is all white "Ofuafo". The symbolic significance of the white costume are as follow

- I. **Purity:** Oyise is considered as a God of chasteness. The stark white signifies respect for the gods (Oyise) as it requires cleanliness and a pure heart to be able to be a devoted follower. Naturally, the color white is often linked with positivity, cleanliness, purity, and innocence; similarly, it holds great significance in the costumes used during the festival. The white costume represents traditional spiritual presence and a part of the ancestral narrative that bonds the living and the dead. The Oyise feather that fell from the sky was white in color, this connotes that white is not just a colour to the Owhe people but a symbol of purity, innocence and a link between their ancestors and the living. Without the white wrapper (worn by the priest and Oyise worshippers) the "*Ekpeti*" (Box) cannot be carried by whoever is chosen to carry it during the festival. The white colour is chosen by Oyise himself as the only colour to be used during the festival. Legend has it that whenever Oyise appears to anyone, it is always in white apparel.

II. **Peace:** The Owhe people are particularly known as a peaceful people. The white costume used in the Owhe festival also signify peace. Oyise is a god of peace who brings together all her children that has gone to different lands to live through the festival. The festival enables the children in different part of the clan to come together and celebrate their mother peacefully. Peace is demonstrated in the settlement of disputes amongst the children of Owhe in Owhe-Arasa meeting whenever the need arises.

In the costume worn by the priest and the worshippers of Oyise, there is a design of a woman wearing white with an "*Ekpeti*" (Box) on her head and cowries crossed on her upper body. The design is done with red. The back of the costume carries the writing of Oyise Owhe and turks of an elephant (Ubiako Eni). The red represents the killing of animals for sacrificial purpose. The Owhe people believe that Oyise Owhe is their protector whom they can call upon anytime and he answers showering them with blessings, therefore they express their love during the festival. Literally, red connotes power and negativity but in this context it connotes love and passion. The followers show their love for Oyise through the red color design and it's significance of power.

### **3.2 SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF MAKE-UP USED IN OYISE OYISE FESTIVAL**

The make-up used in Oyise festival is white chalk (Ore). It is grinded into powder and is applied on the legs, hands, around the eyes and the tongue. The significance of this is to enable the people to communicate with the spiritual being. The essence of the application of the chalk in the mouth is to enable communication.

The application of the make-up across the eye beginning from the right ear to the left ear is for the purpose of seeing spiritual beings and requesting for good fortunes. It is believed that those who applied it across the eyes see good things.

The application of the white chalk powder on the legs and hands is to enable the carrier of the "*Ekpeti*" (Box of the gods) carry it while others applied to their legs and hands to be able to follow through as it is an instruction from Oyise.

The essence of the make-up is to enable a link between the earthly realm and the spirit realm. The white chalk powder is very significant as it symbolizes purity (white is always associated with purity) and ancestral wisdom. The white chalk powder represents spiritual enlightenment therefore when drawn across the eyes it helps to enlighten those who has it drawn on their eyes while enabling them to see spirit beings.

The Owhe people consider white chalk to be sacred and a symbol of purity. In this regards it is always present in ritual performance.

Traditionally, white chalk is quite significant in the African societies. It is revered and considered sacred.

Lastly they blow the white chalk into the air after applying it on their hands, legs, eyes and tongue. This is done to clear the air of any bad omen and obstacles.

### **3.4 SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPS USED IN THE OYISE FESTIVAL**

It should be noted that during festival, props are highly used and they serve different functions. A lot of festivals in Nigeria use different items and props during festivals. The Oyise Owhe festival is not an exception. During the festivals, props are used. The props used and their significance are as follows.

- I. **Ekpeti (Box of the gods):** This Ekpeti contains various items. Items like cowries, white chalk and other substances that are carried by the chosen carrier fully dressed in the Oyise white apparel. The Ekpeti are three in numbers "Ivri" (Akiawe; the last born) Owhelogbo and Otor Owhe respectively. The box is substituted for a chair used by the Chief Priest to sit in order to begin the process of the rituals properly. The significance of the box to the festival is its substitution for a chair to perform ritual and worship the Oyise. It is a commandment by Oyise.
- II. **Ore (White chalk):** As mentioned earlier, the Ore (White chalk) is sacred and it represents spiritual enlightenment and a link of communication between the

spiritual and human realm. It also symbolizes purity. To Oyise and the Owhe people cleanliness and purity is the right way to living a fulfilled life.

- III. **Kerosene:** The kerosene is used to make fire in order to offer burnt offering and to roast all the animals that are killed during the sacrifice process in order to prepare the meat for sharing among Owhelogbo, Otor Owhe and Akiawe.
- IV. **Cutlass:** The cutlass is majorly for clearing and killing the animals for sacrifice. It is an object for sacrifice
- V. **Kolanut:** The kolanut is placed on the altar of the Oyise. As mentioned in chapter two, the Owhe people entertain visitors with kolanut. Here, it is used to entertain Oyise for his presence in the festival. The kolanut signifies respect, hospitality and the breakage of barrier between the human realm and the spirit realm. The kolanut is placed in the altar while incantations are uttered in order to welcome Oyise in the midst of the people gathered, honouring him and seeking for blessings. With the placement of the kolanut, the Chief Priest offers prayers and welcome spiritual beings to dwell among the human as they honour them. In the festival, kolanut plays the role of welcoming, honouring and seeking for blessings.
- VI. **Money:** To the Owhe people, placing money before a visitor is a sign of respect, hospitality and a welcoming gesture. Placing money in the altar of Oyise simply means welcoming and honouring him.

VII. **White cock:** This white cock is use for cleansing before the ritual begins during the festival. The importance of this white cock is to ensure cleanliness in the environment so that when Oyise is called upon he will be able to dwell among the people because Oyise does not like dirt or uncleaned environment. It is a god of cleanliness. Symbolically, white represents purity, innocence and cleanliness therefore Oyise and his worshippers put on white to represent a god and a people of purity.

VIII. **Ubiako Eni (Elephant Turks):** Ubiako Eni is gotten from an elephant. It is used in the festival as a tool for making known the arrival of Oyise. It is blown to indicate the arrival of the carrier of the "*Ekpeti*" Whenever it is blown it means Oyise is coming. The turk when blown signify the arrival of the box and Oyise . It is use to create awareness of Oyise and the box.

IX. **Rattle bells:** The rattle bells is attached to the costumes and tied around the legs majorly for melody. It jingles as the dancers walk.

X. **Erue:** (Bull) This animal is killed and sacrificed to the Oyise and it must be a male bull. It signifies prosperity and blessings.

The Erue, white chalk (Ore) white cock, coconut, kolanut, ram (white) kerosene and money are all offered to the Oyise as sacrifice as a way of worshipping him. All of these items must be present in order for the festival to go smoothly and all must be offered to the god.

The sacrifice will be rejected if the specific colors of the items are not white and there will be consequences which may result to Oyise leaving Owhe and going back to Akiawe where it was before Owhe got married to Azagba and was given the god as a gift for protection. When he returns, the people goes to Akiawe to beg him to return back with sacrifices

The costumes, make-up and props not just merely a decoration but an expressive act enacting beliefs, tradition, communication between the human and spirit realm breaking barriers between the dead and the living. Each layer of costume, each area where the make-up is applied and each item or prop used for sacrifice is a part of the ancestral history that bonds the living and the ancestors (dead) in a divine part. The costumes, make-up and props weaves authority, unity, ancestral respect and reality and spirituality together as every part of the costume, make-up and prop convey a deep rich cultural purpose and relevance.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **COSTUME AND MAKE-UP AS A REFLECTION OF THE CULTURE OF THE OWHE PEOPLE**

#### **4.1 COSTUME AS A REFLECTION OF THE CULTURE OF THE OWHE PEOPLE**

To the Owhe people, costume is not just a clothing for the purpose of covering the human body, it is a cultural expression of their culture, life style, values, beliefs, history, identity and their general worldview. Aside the attire worn during the festival which convey purity, peace, spirituality, ancestral narrative (history) togetherness, cultural heritage and social belonging, their occasional costume (marriage, burial ceremonies e.t.c) convey respect, tradition and age group and social structure. For instance, a married woman is mandated to wear two wrappers, a blouse and a head gear, a girl (youth) wear either skirt and blouse or a gown. It is only on rare occasions that a girl (youth) is seen wearing two wrappers, blouse and a head gear. The men wear a wrapper folded at the front with a top, walking stick and a hat while the youth (boy) wear a trouser and a top. This clearly distinguishes to which age group they belong. The Owhe people believe in the division of power. They believe if power is shared amongst them and every group is functioning well there will be order in the community leading to a peaceful life.

Costumes can be significantly expressed on many occasions to reflect the culture of the Owhe people ranging from marriage ceremonies to Oyise festival. The

bride in the Owhe culture can express their culture and traditional rites through the process of excursion (Asu Aye) to the husband's family. The bride is expected to change clothes everyday during her early days of marriage. This may be done for 3days to 7days or more depending on the bride. She wears two wrappers, blouse, beads, purse and a pair of nice footwear as a form of her making her presence known to the community as a new wife. This is only done after the bathing of the bride by the community women (Ewhe Eya). This reflects the people's belief and respect for obeying the traditions left behind by their ancestors as the Owhe people value respect. This reflect women dignity and respect for the people and their way of life. This is also done as a form of welcoming the bride reflecting their culture of hospitality and warmth in welcoming strangers and visitors. It is a form of acceptance. During the process of bathing the woman, songs are sang, drinks, money, kolanuts are all presented as a form of welcome.

As for costumes in the Oyise festival, it is not just done; it is deliberately and carefully selected to reflect their culture and tradition. Although the colour of the costume is white with no mixture of the colours but it is significantly an expression of the Owhe people respect in purity, peace, spirituality and a bond between the people and their ancestors (living and the dead). The costume of the Oyise festival reflects the cultural pride of the people. For example the colour white is very important to the Owhe people because it connotes peace, purity and spirituality. The Owhe people are a

peaceful people who believe peace brings about a fulfilled life. The aspect of spirituality, the Owhe people believe that there is a very significant unbreakable bond between the dead and the living and this is clearly demonstrated between the descendant of Owhe and Azagba, the festival and the ritual performance in the festival. The bond is clearly demonstrated in the history of Oyise descending in the form of a feather to ukpato later the people of Emede gave it to the Owhe as a gift which she brought down to Owhe land and has become significantly the god, mother and protector. They worship it today because they revered Owhe as the mother of the land and the wife to their founding father.

In addition to the symbolic white colour, their accessories like beads and cowries carry a very deep cultural significance and meaning as they depict social status or rank, marital status and wealth. For instance beads; different amount of beads in women signify different things for instance the bead of a bride is much more in terms of quantity than that of the mother of the bride or a guest at a wedding ceremony. The kinds of beads used are also different. Round beads for chiefs only and not just anybody, while the chiefs wear round beads, the common man wears a long bead almost reaching to their groins showcasing social ranking.

In summary, costume to the Owhe people is not just for aesthetics reason, it is beyond that. It expressed the closeness of the people to their ancestors, the bond

between the dead and the living. It reflects their cultural identity, unity, dignity, peace and respect.

#### **4.2 MAKE -UP AS A REFLECTION OF THE CULTURE OF THE OWHE PEOPLE**

Literally, make-up is meant for enhancement and beautification. They are substances applied to the body or face for the purpose of beautification. Make-up is applied on either the human body or the face to highlight beautiful features of the human. For the Owhe people, it is not just a form of beautification, it is an expression of their spirituality and for communication.

Although make-up during different occasions like marriage ceremonies is to adorn the bride and the costume. It also reflects the beauty of the people's aesthetics, conveying their rich cultural tradition.

Make-up also reflect the Owhe people's cultural beliefs of strong relationship between the spiritual realm and the physical realm. Oral evidence proves that the Owhe people are following the rules by their ancestors. Rules like married woman should not be intimate with another man other than her husband, family members or relatives should not have intimate relationship, younger ones disrespecting older ones or elders in the community e.t.c. The act of engaging in this to the Owhe people is seen as an impure act therefore contradicting their beliefs, and their identity as a peaceful and pure people. It also contradicts the rules of the ancestors which may in

turn lead to a bad omen. The Owhe people believe that their ancestors are able to control the living; in the aspect of not going astray in order to avoid mistakes and live a fulfilled life. The link between the dead and the living is clearly demonstrate not just in the aspect of rules of the land but in Oyise festival performance itself reflecting the culture of the people. An instance is seen when the priest is communicating with the spiritual beings and Oyise to grace the festival with their presence and without this, the festival is incomplete. During the communication, the priest usually pours local gin on the floor offering it to the gods before making any request. This reflect their culture of always pouring drink on the floor when entertaining a visitor or during marriage and burial ceremonies or any other functions as a sign of respect, and in honour of their ancestors before offering prayers and drinking it.

The make-up of the Oyise festival is "Ore" (white chalk) grinded into powder that is applied on the eyes, legs, mouth, hands and blown into the air to enhance communication between the dead and the living which reflects sacredness and purity; seeking knowledge from the spiritual realm in order to live a peaceful, harmonious and a fulfilled life. This expresses the belief of the Owhe people to live in peace and purity. This helps to uphold their values, traditions and cultural identity as a people. The strong link between the ancestors and descendants can also be seen in the legends of the people as they believe Oyise appears to people with pure heart and he is clothed in stark white. This means even among the living, the dead dwell to give protection

and direction to the right path to life showcasing ancestral wisdom. The make-up done on the body is to honour the gods of the land and ancestors. It also reflects their communal heritage.

Make-up to the Owhe people is not just for beautification but an act of preserving their culture, tradition and beliefs especially in the Oyise festival where simple yet deliberate and specific make-up is done to revere the gods of the land preserving their historical background, identity, values and culture of the people. It reflects and expresses how a simple people (Owhe people) live and hold their cultural values in high regards giving them a sense of communal life. Passing down their traditions, history and values to their descendants orally making sure their culture doesn't fade away and it continues to live on.

#### **4.3 THE USE OF PROPS AS A REFLECTION OF THE CULTURE OF THE OWHE PEOPLE**

Props are items used in different occasions like performances, marriages, festivals and other ceremonies. Props are not just tools or items to the Owhe people instead they are a symbol of the culture and their heritage. It is not just an aesthetics to the people, it is a symbol of respect.

Props generally express cultural values, tradition and an identity or a people of a community.

The props used in Oyise festival for instance are the "Ekpeti" , cutlass, kolanut, money, ore e.t.c. to express the culture of the people which is respect. The Owhe people value respect and the substitution of the box for a chair reflect how the people consider respect to be a thing of absolute importance. According to oral evidence, Oyise commanded the use of the "Ekpeti" and it's substitution. This shows the respect the people have for their gods and their instructions. This highly reflects the people's culture of restraining from various taboos in the land as they follow the rules laid down by their ancestors. These rules are followed out of respect for the dead (ancestors).

Props like kolanut and money used in the Oyise festival reflect the people's way of life of welcoming a visitor. The Owhe people are known for their hospitality. The kolanut and money which is used to welcome Oyise to the festival reflect how warm the Owhe people are not just to themselves but to strangers. It reflects and suggest the Owhe people as a highly hospitable and entertaining people . Props represent the history and worldview of the Owhe people as "Ekpeti", ore, white bull e.t.c all express the link between the living and the dead showcasing their cultural beliefs which reflects in their daily lives. This shows their cultural identity and history. Props also highlight hierarchy within the Owhe clan for instance the "Ekpeti" can only be touched by the chosen carrier and the chief priest as they are highly regarded as the highest amongst themselves and the closest to Oyise. This reflects social structure of

the Owhe people ranging from the "Emo oghe" to the Edion (Youth to elders) to keep a balance, law and order within the community in order to enhance peace and also reflect their cultural identity as a peaceful people.

In essence, props are not just decorative items but a tool to preserve the cultural identity, history, traditions, beliefs and values of the Owhe people. Props such as Ekpeti, white cock, ore, e.t.c. all express the people's lifestyles as it reveals their respect, purity and peaceful life to the world. It reveals their simplicity and hospitality reflecting their everyday life, beliefs and values.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 SUMMARY

The chapter one of this research explores the Oyise festival, costume and make up used during the festival of the Owhe people in Isoko, Delta state. It explores their identity as a people particularly focusing on its cultural significance, history, beliefs and values. This research is carried out in the hope to leave behind a document with relevant information about the Oyise festival of the Owhe people. The research aims to uncover and document the history and the evolution of the Oyise festival, emphasizing the relevance to the Owhe people.

In overview this research aims to provide the general knowledge of the Oyise festival and appreciating the Owhe people's cultural heritage.

Chapter two of this research is majorly concerned about the history of the Owhe people; According to oral evidence, Owhe and his brothers migrated from Ogbe quarter (Benin) and settled at Owhe in Isoko land after the death of Ogesa. Owhe consist of three main communities; Illuelogbo (currently known as Owhelogbo), Akiawe and Otor-Owhe. These communities are the descendants (children) of Owhe and Azagba. Ovo, Utato and Ogbe.

Although there is a little variation in details, but there is an agreement that the Owhe people migrated from the Benin Kingdom.

The worldview of the Owhe people; the people's value respect, morality, communal living and purity. They have a rich cultural heritage and strong cultural practices. For example they welcome a visitor with money, local gin, pepper fruits e.t.c.

While chapter three discusses the significance of the costume used in the Oyise festival, purity and peace. The white apparel worn in the festival signifies respect for the gods as it's basic requirement is purity and cleanliness as a devoted follower the costume represents the presence of Oyise , it is used to express love and passion for Oyise. The costume projects Oyise as a God of purity as it unites it descendants.

The make up which is a grinded white chalk, is applied on the hands, eyes, tongue and legs as it enables communication between humans and spiritual beings.

The props use in the festival serves different symbolic purposes for instance items used in the festival such as

1. ORE: Is a representation of spiritual enlightenment emphasizing purity.
2. EKPETI: This is meant to hold various sacred items used in the festival.
3. KEROSENE: The kerosene is meant for burning sacrifices and roasting of meats.
4. CUTLASS: Is used for clearing paths.

Chapter four of this research examines the costume worn during the Oyise festival and other functional ceremonies by the Owhe people as a cultural expression of their culture, lifestyle, values, beliefs and history. It conveys respect and traditions

emphasizing their identity as a people. It convey their social structure and their identity as a peaceful people, their ancestral beliefs and the bond between them and their ancestors.

## **5.2 CONCLUSION**

Costume and make up is not just for aesthetics, it is a reflection and an expression of a people's culture as it examines their deep cultural beliefs, values and identity. The Oyise festival of the Owhe people's, costume and make up is very significant as it reflects the Owhe people's existence, their history and their identity. It showcases the purity and innocence of the Owhe people.

## **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion I recommend that:

1. The Owhe people should not just tell their history orally but they should ensure they document their history particularly the history of the festival
2. The Owhe people should also attempt publish and document their performances such as festivals and place it in different schools, libraries for future use
3. They should ensure to teach Isoko language and histories as subjects in school to their children to promote their cultural heritage for future generations.

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