

Writing for Heritage (HPHE7010)

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Portfolio of Writing for Heritage

Introduction

This portfolio contains some of my writings for cultural heritage. It is made up of webcopy, heritage journalism, and psychogeography.

<i>Content</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1
Psychogeography – Igarra Ososo Road	2
Webcopy - Ten Top Places for Students to visit in Abuja	8
Heritage Journalism –	
Cultural Heritage Development	14

Psychogeography

Igarra Ososo Road (a psychogeographical account)

A brief History of Akoko Edo

It is pertinent, for the purpose of the psychogeographical account presented here, to provide a brief history of the area covered.

Akoko Edo local government area was created in 1976 by the then military administration of General Murtala Muhammed. The administrative headquarters of Akoko Edo is Igarra-, which is also its largest and most economically vibrant town.

Geographically, Akoko Edo is the most northerly of all the 4local government areas that constitute Edo north geopolitical zone. It lies between latitudes 70 N and longitude 60 E, occupying a land of about 1,250 square kilometers.

The area is bounded in the west by Ondo State, in the east by Etsako West Local Government Area, in the south by Owan East Local Government Areas, and in the North by Kogi state. Igarra the administrative headquarters is about 125 kilometres North of Benin City the Edo State capital.

Psychogeographical account

One of the things that I find more fascinating about the visiting Akoko Edo local government area of Edo State in southern Nigeria, is the seeming endless and open access to the cultural life and heritage of its multi-ethnic population.

For any visitor to Akoko Edo, whether they have an eye for cultural heritage assets or not, what they cannot fail to notice is the seemingly open display of cultural and natural heritage resources the journey from Igarra to Ososo through Enwan, Akuku, Ojirami, Dagbala, Uneme Osu and Ojah towns. These towns line both sides of this famous road – a road that snakes through Kukuruki hills, descending into Ojirami river and re-merging in Dagbala, climbs up the rocky mountains of Uneme Osu, and then tears through the Ovioja mountains in Ojah town before winding its way around the shoulders of Oruki hills in Ososo from where it proceeds to split Ososo town into two halves.

The Igarra Ososo road holds firm memories for me and everytime I engage with it, the memories pour out like the famed Ojirami natural palm wine which from a bamboo gourd.

As the vehicles set me on my recent encounter with this famous road, it was November, the harmattan season (also known as the dry season) was now in full swing. Hissing winds sweep over Kukuruku Hills to the west as I headed north towards Ososo.

The wind usually begins with a loud hiss as it sweeps down from Kukuruku hills before switching its character when the giant Iroko, kolanuts, and cocoa trees get involved in an ecological dance. The trees bend sideways, backwards and forwards like they were being obedient to the command of the wind to clear the way for it to supply the community with cool breeze which the people in turn celebrate in variegated ways. November and December are the months when the communities lining Igarra Ososo road, choose to have wedding celebrations, first grandchild celebrations (highly regarded ceremony) and celebration of promotion in all of life's endeavours.

I recall my vehicle having to literally drive slower than molasses as hordes of people danced right on the road, in colourful costumes, all the way through to Ososo from Enwan town.

Enwan can be described as the palm oil production capital of the whole of Edo State. For the people of Enwan, the production of palm oil is a skill passed from generation to generation. Along the roadside, pyramids of pure organically produced palm oil stored in barrels catch the eye. Hundreds of large trucks line both sides of the road, some of them already fully loaded with oil barrels meant for markets in the far northern region of Nigeria where the demand for palm oil is high.

The production of palm oil, a skill passed from generation to generation is cultural resource which the Enwan people of Akoko Edo are gradually maximising for their benefit. It is the main economic activity in the community.

As my vehicle grew a lot more fortunate with the emergence of traffic marshals who actively create a way for motorists to snake their way through the crowd under the vigorous and vigilant guidance of the local traffic marshals.

One of the great things Enwan does (driving northwest towards Ososo) is hand you over to the twin fishing towns of Akuku and Ojirami. Both towns host the flow of the Ojirami river and Ojirami is the site of the magnificent Ojirami dam. Ojirami dam supplies water to most towns and villages in Akoko Edo. Lines of fish stalls, hawkers of various river mammals –

fresh, smoked and sun-dried run after vehicles crooning their wares. I would usually stop to purchase some smoked fish and allow myself to be guided to one of the hundreds of quaint little thatched huts built for visitors to relax by the river, soak in some oxygen, and enjoy the natural local palm wine, smoked fish or any of the other edibles on offer.

For me, Ojirami town offers calm and peace, an incredible place to recharge the mind and body. Ojirami is a testament to the power of natural environments in making us better human beings.

As if to offer more icing to the cake, Ojirami is home to the Ojirami waterfall where the river crashes down from the middle of the northeastern end of Kukurú mountains.

Amongst the Ojirami people, the water from Ojirami waterfall has medicinal properties which cures any disease in the human body, erases infertility and its spiritual properties can provide protection from demons and evil spirits. It is therefore hardly surprising to find scores of vehicles lining the Ojirami town to collect some of this famed water.

The road from Igarra o Ososo is the answer to the dreams of any eco-tourist or anyone who wants to connect/engage with with unspoilt natural environments with offerings of abundant cultural heritage resources.

The lure and beauty of Ojirami town with quaint bijous lining the length of its magnificent river, trees and rocks providing natural avenues, I was soon over the bridge that leads to the mineral rich and gold-producing town of Dagbala.

One of the things the signpost which welcomes visitors to Dangbala does for me, is to remind me that I had done precisely half of the journey from Igarra to Ososo on this magical road. I do not quite recall ever stopping more than once in Dagbala town – I believe the only time I did stop was just to take in the fact that gold and other precious stones were in abundance in this place. The presence of gold in Dagbala meant an abundance of goldsmiths who work to produce jewelry and various other objects which visitors can buy.

Uneme Osu, the next town to Dagbala as you continue northeast towards Ososo along the famous Igarra Ososo road, is a town nestled between three mountains. Driving up the mountain and the descent which leads the visitor straight into the arms of the town, must have been considered expedient, in an engineering sense, for construction firm which handled the project of the constructing that section of the road.

Perhaps even for a non-engineering mind like mine, it was easy to discern the wisdom deployed in the construction of that section of Igarra Ososo road. The length and diameter of the mountains must have instantly confined the engineers to the conclusion that the width of the mountain would offer more complexity and challenge than driving right up and making the descent into the town. In other words, the width of the mountain was more than its height.

This is yet another thrill this magical road offers – your vehicle must be good enough to go right up the mountain. The foot of the mountain plays host to a few vehicles whose skeletons serve as mementos of what to expect if visitors disrespect the gods who dwell inside the mountain by attempting to traverse it using vehicles that were not fit enough for the purpose.

It is also not uncommon to see visitors who have elected to walk up the mountain to allow for their vehicles to make the celebrated drive up the mountains.

I have to say, that I had been unwavering in my commitment to ensuring that I never disregarded this important requirement for vehicles which bring visitors into/through Uneme Osu town must be fit for the purpose.

The descent into Uneme Osu town is a thrilling activity on its own. Engines are turned off and vehicles are freewheeled down the mountain they had so painstakingly driven up earlier.

Uneme Osu town and its mastery of iron and metal work is evidenced along the road. Rocks play host to metalware in various shapes and forms. Colourful metal roofs adorn the beautiful houses and shops lining the roadside. If iron and metalwork is your thing, then Uneme Osu town would be incapable of disappointing you.

Exiting Uneme Osu town brings the visitor over Oyami river. Why Oyami is called a river still confounds me. It is quite a narrow body of water although the locals boast about how deep the river is, and how its narrow outline would deceive the careless to think that it was just a stream.

Ojah town remains a significant part of the journey, for me. It is a bustling small town where thousands of visitors come to purchase terracotta objects and crockery, and numerous earthenware.

I still recall how shocked and elated I was when I first witnessed the vivacity and energy of the town. Hundreds of coaches with the names of the tourist companies that own/run them,

the hundreds of foreign visitors from Europe, Asia, America and other parts of the world, was an unforgettable experience for me.

It was more than surreal seeing people moving around with various terracotta objects, placing them in their vehicles, taking pictures, cultural dance and displays performed by the locals with foreign visitors joining them like it was a carnival in full swing.

Unlike Uneme Osu, where I had driven through to get there, Ojah town is thankfully flat. Getting out of the vehicle meant an opportunity to explore a sea of terracotta objects. The production of terracotta and earthen objects is what the town of Ojah is famous for. There are thousands of objects to delight the eyes, and to purchase.

The tourism capital of Akoko Edo, Ososo town is the next and final stop on this famous road of seemingly endless supply of cultural heritage assets.

Ososo town is the home of the popular Ososo Carnival. A festival of colourful costumes, dance, bonfires, dance performance and cultural displays, a festival of happiness celebrated over a period of seven days in the last week of the month December, annually. The festival draws hundreds of thousands of visitors into the town.

For me, Ososo town is the perfect location for lovers of peace, calm, nature, shall I add, peaceful nature. Sitting on the flat rocks which adorn the rest house building – a building constructed in the 1800s by the British colonial administration. The building stands today as the symbol of the recognition of the breathtaking beauty of the natural spaces Ososo is abundantly endowed with.

How do I capture such stupendous beauty in words? I feel like the words ‘beautiful’ and ‘wonderful’ are somewhat inadequate for the description of Ososo, neither is the word ‘amazing’ enough to describe the feeling of peace and calm which Ososo town engenders.

For me, I am a living testimony to the therapeutic resources which Ososo town supplies its visitors.

I had found out about Ososo town and its breathtaking landscapes, on Instagram. Having viewed hundreds of pictures and read numerous comments on the Ososo Carnival Instagram page, I was convinced it was the sort of environment that I needed in the difficult days of grieving my father’s demise, at the time.

Ososo town was the place which provided me with some emotional equilibrium particularly at a time when it felt like I was destined for the abyss of pain over the loss of a loved one.

Whatever it was that fattened my confidence that the things I had read about Ososo town, on Instagram, were not advertising gimmicks, but true offerings. Whatever that thing was, the two weeks I spent in Ososo town provided me with the light with which I safely navigated the innermost citadels of the cave of grief.

For students looking for a safe, serene, divinely gorgeous landscapes, if, like me, peace and calm occupy the summit of your list of needs, then, a trip to Ososo town through the Ososo Igarra road will emerge the best experience on which you ever expended your time.

Webcopy

Top Ten Places for University Students to Visit in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory



Abuja National Mosque: Situated on the iconic Independence Avenue in Abuja Central, its serene ambience, mesmerizing views, a glittering dome made from pure gold, Abuja National Mosque is truly a national monument and a treasure to be relished by visitors who set their eyes on it. Completed in 1984, Abuja National Mosque was built as an emblem of Islamic heritage in Nigeria, visitors are welcomed from all over the world irrespective of their faith or religion. Various cultural events are held in within its palatial premises. Admission is free, there is no requirement for women to cover their hair when they are within its premises.

Accessibility: Not currently wheelchair accessible. Excellent local transportation.



The Nike Art Gallery: Located along Abuja International airport road and established in 2007 by the famous artist and designer, Nike Davies Okundayo. the building arrests the eye. Standing in pure terracotta clay, the building seems to wear a smile that says come in and experience the wonder that is me.

Beautiful terracotta objects and crockery, and ancient traditional water cooling terracotta pots all welcome visitors...You get to drink naturally cooled water. Terracota soldiers in the front garden.

The Nike Gallery serves to provide and sustain an environment for the growth of African art.

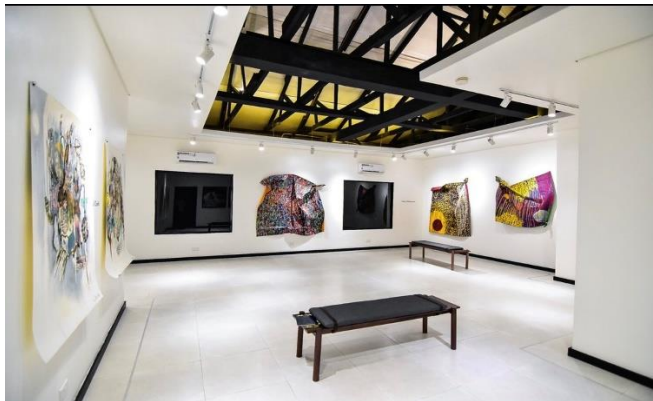


Jabi Lake: An absolute haven for relaxation, recharging the mind for future actions and challenges, Jabi Lake gives you everything you need to find your inner peace. The cool breeze that sweeps over its waters, carrying the fragrant characters of variety of flowers and plants in abundance, this is where you want to re-inhale pure life. If you decide to challenge yourself a bit more, then you are welcome to take in the whole park, on foot or just rent one of several available bicycles – mind you, the bikes are a fair mix including standard push bikes, electric scooters, e-bikes, and segways. The park is mostly flat, so, either way, on foot or bike, you are in for a genuinely surreal time.



Thought Pyramid Art Centre: Established in 2008 and located at 18 Libreville Crescent, Wuse 2, Abuja, the Thought Pyramid art centre is a paradisaical environment devoted to, and unwaveringly committed to the enablement of fresh new artistic ideas. Its simple mission is to demonstrate the absence of boundaries between art, design, craft, thought, as well as being a platform for debates, dialogue, and exchange of knowledge targeted with unblinking precision for the development of new directions for African art.

I am more than confident that you will not fail to notice the wealth of modern and contemporary African art on offer, and admission is totally free. Soak in the energy and enthusiasm of the gallery staff, and be entertained with creativity, artistic excellence and innovation on display and in practice.



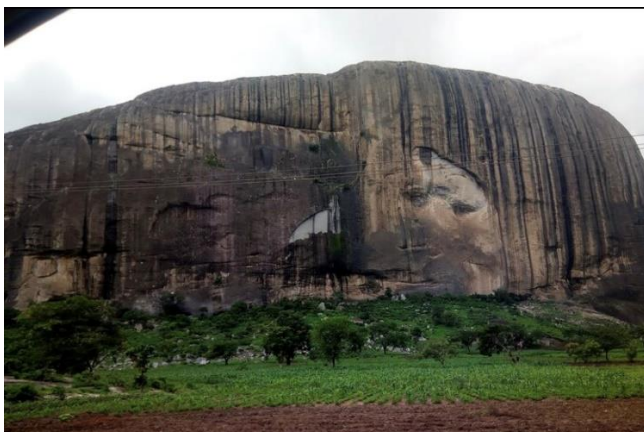
Retro Africa Gallery: Located right at the top of Ukpabi Asiko street in Abuja, Retro Africa Gallery was developed as a platform for the promotion of African contemporary art. Visitors enjoy the depth and breadth of contemporary African art, including exhibitions, international art fares, as well as inter-gallery curatorial collaborations. Retro African Gallery is a treasure trove of contemporary African art. For visitors, particularly university students looking for more information about what contemporary African art means, Retro Africa Gallery has tons of interesting works for you to explore. The gallery holds a wealth of works from the Africa diaspora, artists in Africa, and works spanning the post-independence era – which is what African contemporary art is about.



Farin Ruwa Waterfalls, Abuja: A breath-takingly wonderful sight to behold, Farn Ruwa waterfalls is the second highest waterfall in Nigeria with a height of 150 metres – far higher than the more popular Victoria Falls in Livingston, Zambia which has a height of just 108 metres.

Farin Ruwa waterfalls is a magnet for tourists particularly during weekends where crowds of people queue outside the entry gate waiting patiently to accesss the site.

Legend has it that the water from Farin Ruwa cleanses people of any disease or ill-health they may be experiencing, and that the water from Farin Ruwa brings good luck to anyone who drinks it.



Zuma Rock, Abuja: To have visited Zuma Rock along the Zuba Causeway is to have visited the most famous rock in Nigeria and one of the largest monoliths in the world. Popularly referred to as the beautiful rock a human face, Zuma rock is awe-inspiring in every way imaginable.

Zuma rock is the gateway to Abuja – Nigeria's federal capital territory. Rising 300 metres above its surroundings. Zuma rock is one of the most prominent landmarks in Nigeria.

Locals refer to Zuma rock as 'Zunwa' which translates to a place of guinea fowls because the thousands of guinea fowls in free range around this famous rock.



Wonderland Mountain, Abuja: If you enjoy hiking, see the sprawling city of Abuja from above, Abuja Wonderland Mountain is for you.

Access to Abuja Wonderland mountains is controlled by Abuja Municipal Council. Visitors are allowed from 09.00am until 13.00pm Monday to Saturday. It is closed on Sundays.



Gurara Waterfall, Minna Road, Abuja: The captivating beauty of Gurara Waterfall, The sound the water makes as it crashes down and in between rocks, and if your visit is in

December when the harmattan winds sweeps in from the Sahara, visitors are given a natural treat as the harmattan wind whips up the water into white clouds of spume.



Yankari Game Reserve, Abuja: For students who relish open safari experiences, love animals and nature. Yankari Game Reserve is a large wildlife park located near the northeastern border of Abuja and Bauchi State. Yankari Game Reserve is only free for students in senior secondary schools and in tertiary institutions.

Yankari Game Reserve is home to large range of animals – including elephants, pythons, lions, leopards, various species of monkeys, birds, crocodiles, rhinoceroses, hippos, and more.

All students are required to have their identity cards with them in order to access the park.

If you are up for more adventurous experience and prefer to explore Yankari Game Reserve from above, for a nominal sum, you can add the cable car experience on offer.

Yankari Game Reserve is closed on Sundays.

Heritage Journalism

Cultural Heritage resources for sustainable development in Akoko Edo, Edo State (magazine article – Afrikoko Heritage)

This article is an excerpt from a longer piece of my writing

In this article, I argue for the need to explore the developed and maximisation of the cultural heritage resources available in Akoko Edo local government area of Edo State. This article is a call on the Nigerian federal government to consider maximising the rich cultural heritage resources in the area.

Although brief, I believe that this article is particularly timeous given the accelerated drive by the Nigerian federal government to diversify the Nigerian economy and reduce dependence on crude oil as its economic pivot.

Philosophically speaking, the overall socio-economic development of any society is a very heroic enterprise: socio-economic development calls for the entire strength, and positive capacities of the members of that society. Visionary planing, a strong sense of commitment, and robust political will are only but the beginning. Ultimately, the socio-economic development of society is a pointer to, and evidence of the collective worldview of the members of that society: that is, their culture and way of life.

In this article, cultural heritage resources are the festivals, sites and monuments, local crafts and industries, traditional medicine and others in Akoko Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, which can be documented, developed, and optimally utilized, especially in the areas of tourism and industrial development, and targeted at the sustainable development of the local government area.

In terms of landmass and population, Akoko Edo is one of the largest local government areas in the entire Nigerian federation. Unfortunately, it is one of the poorest and least developed. Interestingly, the area is blessed with a wealth of unnoticed cultural, and natural heritage

resources. If creatively organised, documented and publicised, they can stimulate the tourism industry in Akoko Edo, create jobs and inspire related and other economic activities.

This is particularly important as the local government area is wholly dependent on federal monetary allocations which is often insufficient for any socio-economic initiative once recurrent expenditure are serviced.

Cultural heritage resources in Akoko Edo include,

The wealth of cultural heritage resources in Akoko Edo local government area includes festivals, historical sites and associated artifacts such as historical buildings, battle grounds, material culture such as pottery, weaponry, basketry, sacred grooves and shrines, local crafts and skills, and others too numerous to mention.

Sites and Monuments

Akoko Edo Local Government area is not very rich in terms of statues and monuments. However, the area is fairly rich in historical sites and buildings. These are places where according to Agbaje Williams and Ogundiran (1992) describe as those places where not only important historical events are reputed to have taken place, but also where material remains of past populations exist as evidence of human activity (Agbaje and Ogundipe, 1992).

These sites and monuments include Ososo Tourist Centre (recognised nationally and internationally), Odegburu rock, Ojirami river shrine, Ulokwaigbe Shrine in Somorika, Ekiza battlefield in Ibillo, Ivokoto Grove in Igarra, Ogun Shrine in Oyami town, Olokpe Ancient Palace in Okpe town, Oyara Sacred Grove in Ojirami, pottery production sites in Ojah town dating back 300 years, and several others.

Local crafts and Industries

Farming is the dominant occupation of Akoko Edo people. The main cash crops grown include cocoa and cassava, and food crops like yam, rice, beans, various fruits and vegetables. Farming in Akoko Edo is largely a male occupation and is fast disappearing today except for small-scale subsistence farming.

The identification and documentation of the indigenous economic activities which make the

multi-ethnic people of Akoko Edo unique, is invaluable for any sustainable socio-economic initiative.

These are the local crafts centres and industries, which produce handcrafted artifacts and food products made from local materials. Some of the local craft centres and industries in Akoko Edo include, mat and cloth weaving, pottery, blacksmithing, basketry, palm oil production, garri processing and local beverages dating back 300 years.

Akoko Edo is well known for its production of pottery, Palm oil, garri and basketry. It is worthy of note, that the area can achieve increased self-sufficiency through the exportation of finished products on a much larger scale.

I must not forget to mention, also, that Akoko Edo local government area is comprised of 50 towns and villages, each with its own language and unique way of life. To this end, any discussion or debate about cultural heritage must take due cognisance of this reality, and broadly speaking too, in cultural heritage terms, what constitutes a cultural heritage asset in England (for example), may not receive the same amount of value appreciation in the Congo.

The basic premise of this article is that cultural heritage resources can be maximised, with support from various stakeholders – particularly the Federal and State government, for the sustainable socio-economic development of Akoko and help shine light on the way forward for other parts of the country.