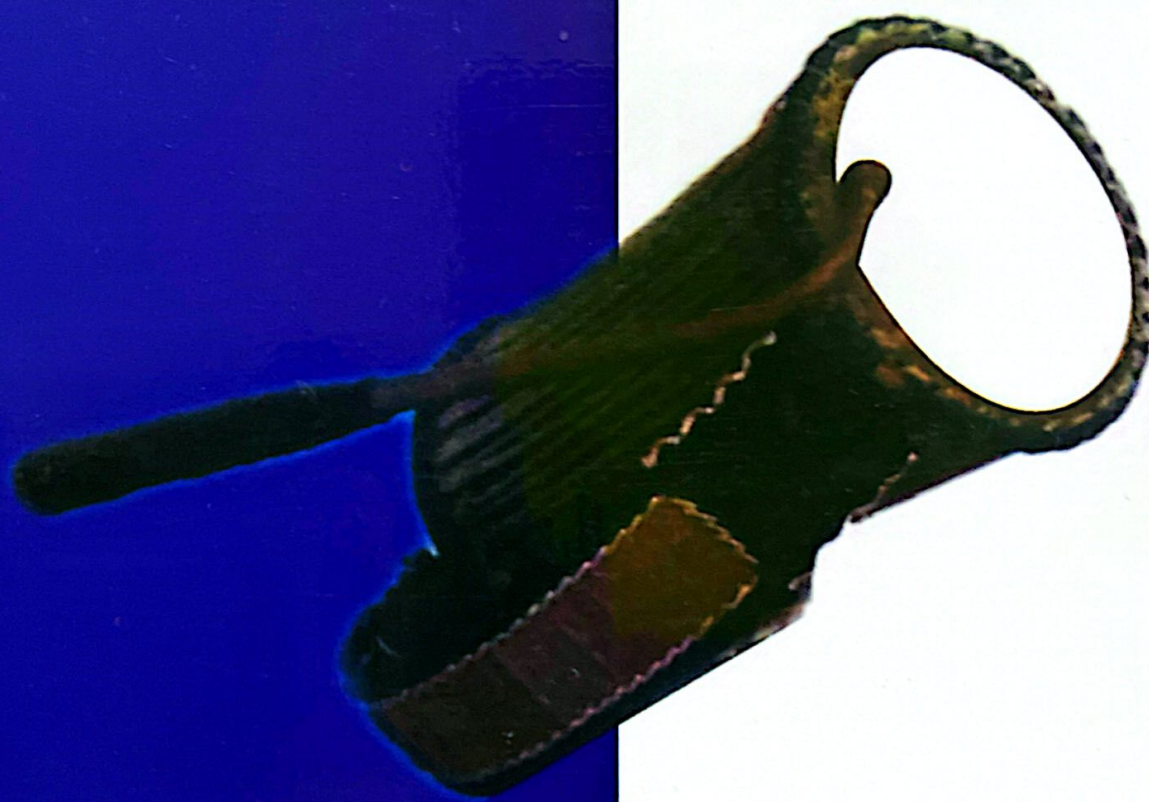


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EDITORIAL NOTE

This edition, coming on the heels of the first edition, includes some articles that were submitted, reviewed and accepted for the maiden edition but could not be published due to space. It is our conviction that with this edition, the anxieties of authors of such articles have been doused. We thank them for their patience and understanding. Some other articles were freshly submitted. The potential of the Journal to sustain itself and gain national and international recognition is evident in the flow of contributions from tertiary institutions across the country and from both budding and renowned academics whose papers dwell on topical and fascinating language and literary concerns.

The fourteen (14) articles that have been published here cover a range of issues in language and literature which attend to our existing realities. Among other essays, that on the multimodal discourse analysis of Christian advertising is very depictive and instructive in the face of the proliferation and commercialization of religious worship in Nigeria; those on the thematization of feminist or womanist perspectives are also timely amid female quest for fairness and equity in the treatment of gender issues; and those on the nexus between language/literature and national development have treated the subject with remarkable depth.

Kalangu is a peer-reviewed Journal of the Department of English and Modern Languages, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State. The Journal is committed to publishing well-researched articles that dwell on research subjects and theoretical approaches/engagements in English Language, Linguistics, Literature, Cultural and Communication Studies in the humanities. The journal also welcomes scholarly book reviews and creative writing such as short stories and poems.

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Feminist Dimensions in Idoma Masquerade Performances

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Nigeria

Abstract

Nigeria is rich in cultural engagements with masquerade performances. These performances are part of the nation's historical experience. It is pertinent to note that masquerade performances in Nigeria revolve around the past and act as a futuristic telescope through which the traditions of indigenous Nigerian societies are measured. While gender politics comes to play in masquerade performances in Nigeria in ethnic groups such as those in Yoruba, Efik and Ibibio lands, the Idoma people have not paid attention to women in the masquerade process. However, women have been an integral part of the propagation of the Idoma cultural heritage through the medium of masquerade performances. To this end, this study employs the literary and descriptive methodologies to appraise feminist dimensions in masquerade performances in Nigeria, with particular reference to masquerade engagements in Idoma land. The study reveals that the dynamism of masquerade performances in Idoma land has created a new vista for cultural revival and interdisciplinary discourse in the Performance Arts, which made it a suitable terminology for the description of the African masquerade structure and performances. Conclusively, if masquerading must continue to thrive in Idoma land, then the role of the woman in the masquerading process should not be ignored.

Introduction

Masquerade performances in most Nigerian cultures are exclusively a male engagement. In fact, performing arts scholars, such as Enekwe (1987), Nzewi (2009), among others, affirm the fact that masquerade performances had been the exclusive affairs of the male gender. Masquerades such as the *Oro* masquerade of some spaces in Yoruba land attest to this claim, as it is believed that women who participate in it find it difficult to procreate. In the *Omanuku* masquerade performance of the Ughelli people in Southern Nigeria, the male participants assert their prowess in dominating the womenfolk who on the other hand are not allowed visual access to the performance. Hence, rape cases and molestation are not a rarity during the festival.

In Idoma land, an ethnic nationality in Benue State Nigeria, masquerade performances abound. The *Ichahoho* masquerade festival, the *Odumu* festival and the *Ogliye* are clear examples of masquerade festivals in this geographical space.

While gender politics comes to play in masquerade performances in some Nigerian ethnic groups such as those in Yoruba, Efik and Ibibio lands, the Idoma people have not paid close attention to women in the masquerade process.

In the cases of the Greek theatre tradition, the Roman theatre culture and the Elizabethan theatre female roles being performed by male characters also hold sway in the traditional masquerade performance art. According to Shapiro, "acting was an all-male activity in ancient Greece and Rome. The same was true in medieval Europe" (31). At that period, the great women characters, which include *Chytemnestra* in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, *Jocasta* in Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, the eponymous character of *Medea* in Euripides' *Medea*, *Juliet* in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Reagan* and *Cordelia* in *King Lear* and the all-powerful character of *Lady Macbeth* in *Macbeth*, were played by male actors in female toga and garbs. Levine agrees that the "theatre effeminized the boy actors who played women's parts by dressing them in women's costumes" (1). These young actors are virtuously skillful and highly trained to bring out the best of the female characteristics. At this point women act and activities were down played in the theatre with men having the centre stage and relevance.

Women constitute and have been an integral part of the propagation of the Idoma cultural heritage through the medium of masquerade performances. To this end, this study employs the literary and descriptive methodologies to appraise feminist dimensions in masquerade performances in Nigeria, with particular reference to masquerade engagements in Idoma land.

Perspectives to Masquerade Performances in Nigeria

The masquerade art in Africa is essentially ritualistic, and culturally, it is relevant to the worldview of the society in which it is located. Therefore, masquerade performances have continued to be assessed and re-assessed from diverse perspectives by scholars across time and space. Having investigated the likely origins of the masquerade art using the Power Balancing Theory and the Omnipresent Theory, Asigbo attests to the mystic nature of African masquerade performances within the nexus of ancestral worship. In his submission, he maintains that:

The phenomenon of Masquerades, Spirit manifests or Ancestral masks in most places in Africa, has continued to be shrouded in mystery. This is more so in view of the fact that donning the ancestral mask is almost always, an exclusive act. Seen as symbolisation and manifestation of the continuing relationship between the living and the dead, masquerades continue to play a vital role in the life of many African societies. We thus have different types of masquerades for various purposes ranging from those that entertain to those that fulfill ritual functions and those

that are used for war or for the enforcement of justice. Judging by the pivotal role masquerades play in African life, one must therefore of necessity investigate the origin(s) of that phenomenon (1-2).

Due to the multi-dimensional nature of masquerade performances in Africa, especially in Nigeria, numerous scholars have initiated relevant discourses on the phenomenon of masquerade performances in Nigeria. Some of these scholars such as Adedeji (1978), Ogunba (1978), Echeruo (1981) and Ododo (2001) have, with great paroxysm, contextualised masquerade performances, costumes, performance space, socio-cultural relevance, ritual essence and so on in Nigeria and, indeed, in Africa.

The Egungun masquerade of the Yoruba people cannot be discountenanced in the discourse of masquerade performances in Nigeria. Willis' study of the Egungun within the wider frameworks of gender, power and spaces in masquerade performances in Nigeria becomes germane here due to his insistence that:

Egungun is a Yoruba ancestral masquerade ritual that has been practiced for centuries. Shifting coalitions of individuals and factions have vied for social and political influence through this practice. In the nineteenth century, when western missionaries, explorers, and colonial officials first documented this phenomenon, any individual who could sponsor an Egungun performance was a force to be reckoned with in Yoruba society. To this day, Egungun masquerades are understood as vehicles through which individuals and groups can assert influence in their communities (322).

In the same locus of agreement, the nature of the performance art of the Egungun masquerade has been put in clear perspective by Stanley-Niaah, cited in Willis, who stated that:

Egungun masquerade performances are enacted in a number of public places – the town square, the market, the street, the war camp, and the war front – as well as in private places such as shrines and family compounds. Egungun performances are nomadic; performances move from space to space, and in the process, entertain, honour, and police all of the inhabitants of a community: men, women, and children, as well as the spirits believed to influence every aspect of human endeavour (327).

It should be stated, however, that the central theme of the submissions from Stanley-Niaah (2004) and Willis (2012) is re-contextualised by Akubor that, "all over Yoruba land, the Egungun represents the spirit of the ancestors who have descended from heaven/mountains. It celebrates a period when the dead

interact with the living, as it is their responsibility to compel the living to uphold the ethical standards of past generations" (32). In 2001, the Facekuerade theorist and technical theatre expert, Sunnie Ododo brought to the fore a critical introspection into the Ekuechi masquerade ensemble of the Ebira people of Nigeria within the purviews of the theatrical aesthetics and functional values of the masquerade. Ododo is of the view that:

As a popular festival, Ekuechi is full of pomp and pageantry, with a dynamic integration of poetry, chants, mimicry, mime, dance, song, music, drumming, mask, make-up, costume and significant cultural symbols. All these cohere vibrantly to attest to Ehusani (181) claim that "it is in Eku that the vitality and vivacity, and also the artistic genius of Ebiras find the highest expression." Eku is ancestral masquerade. Eku, which represents the ancestors, is believed to 'descend' (Chi) from the world beyond during Ekuechi festival. Eku and Chi thus respectively form the prefix and suffix in Eku e Chi. Literally translated, it means, "the ancestors are descending." This partly explains how the name of the festival is derived (3).

The above submission translates how masquerades are perceived, understanding and interpreted as they relates to their communities in their peculiar circumstance. In their review of the mask, masking and curtailment of domestic terrorism in Ika through Akakum performance of Nto Usuh people in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, Akpan and Udofia also provide critical perspectives on the historiography and performance dynamics of the Akakum masquerade performance by averring that:

traditional performances maintain in-built principles that prevent members from transgressing . . . Akakum is also called Asakum but following the nature of its performance, it is traditionally addressed as afum (wind). Akakum and Asakum are onomatopoeic, conveying two sounds: aka which suggests the breaking off of a tree branch while kum suggests a hit. Both asa and aka before kum are descriptive sound conveying the process and the result. Akakum and Asakum mean the same thing. The performance gains the nomenclature from its performances activities not by myth, deity, or spiritual label. The origin of this performance in Nto Usuh is conflicting. In an interview with Essien (2010), Akakum was formed in 1472. It was introduced as an entertainment to mark the fullness of harvest time. During this period, Nto Usuh sons and daughters wherever they stay would come home and celebrate Uchoro Ilok (harvest celebration). The most significant of the season was in addressing all offences,

granting offenders pardon, and making general reconciliation. The emergence of Akakum will mark a total sanctification of the land. Akakum used to be played once in seven years and it was highly ritualised (14-17).

Flowing from the above, the fact that masquerade performances cannot be disconnected from societal functions is incontrovertible. The first side of the coin remains that this fact accounts for the constantly growing perspectives from scholars of the masquerade art and tradition in Africa and, indeed, across the globe. The other side of the coin is that these functionalities vary according to the perspectives from which human societies view the masquerade art.

Masquerade performances are therefore, used to achieve a remarkable number of goals in the societies that own them. A typical example is found in the theoretical summation from Amaechi (2018) who examines critically how masquerade performances, especially the Umu-Ada fraternity (Igbo Daughters), can be a veritable option for the attainment of peace and conflict resolution in Eastern Nigeria (Igbo land). In the case of land disputes or communal clashes, for example, Amaechi reveals that the masquerades:

will surround the disputable environment, bound people not to cross nor penetrate into the environment for some period. Sometimes, palm front will be tied at the disputable environment, warning people not to make use of the place. The masquerades will later invite the people concerned who are involved in the matter, listen to their various grievances after interviewing or questioning them as mediator. Whoever that is at fault will pay penalty for defaulting or punished accordingly to restore peace (87).

Another critical work from Akubor (2016) investigates masquerade performances and their roles in societal control and stability using the masquerade performances of the Esan people of Southern Nigeria as paradigm. The hallmark of Akubor's postulation is that:

Masquerades occupy a central position in the mythogonic structure of Esan pantheon. They are organic to their myth of creation. In this way, they function as the major stabiliser of people's destiny. Thus, the masquerade in Esan society (just like in other African communities) is the process of man's attempt to give being to those very significant aspects in the depth of thought in his universe. For this reason, *elimin* appears as a robed figure who is designed specially to give the impression that the deceased is making a temporary reappearance on earth. This impression is enhanced by the complete coverage of the individual. It is absolutely essential that not a single particle of the human form

should be visible; for, if this rule is broken, the man wearing the dress must die (*elimin ki khue lo*). It is therefore not surprising that they are considered as having power over life and death and people who have committed the most evil crimes against society were summoned before the masquerade and could expect the most severe punishments. Thus, an appeal to this masquerade was the highest appeal a group or an individual could make. Thus, the *elimin* indeed provided a certain amount of stability and control on Esan people and their society (47).

In light of the above, the perspectives to masquerade performances in Nigeria remain elastic due to the dynamic nature of the masquerade art in Nigeria. Masquerade performances are, however, struggling to maintain their core values in the face of religion, modernisation and technology, to mention but three pivotal factors. In view of this fact,

chaos are developing in communities as sub-cultures like traditional performances which were viable tools for curtailing antisocial manners have been relegated to the background because of the constant absorption of foreign cultures that do not fit into the context of Nigeria's perception of social manners (Akpan and Udofia 14).

Despite the truism in the submission of Akpan and Udofia (2019), it is worthy of mention that, masquerade performances are still being celebrated in some parts of the country, irrespective of the constant torrents of the above-mentioned factors. In another development, Willis examines the Egungun masquerade in light of gender divisions by asserting that:

Western scholars have portrayed Egungun as a hegemonic masculine performance space through which men assert their dominance over women. In privileging the writings of English missionaries, explorers, and colonial officials, we have tended to neglect the oral traditions and histories of specific Egungun masquerades in which women feature prominently. Scholars have oversimplified and misrepresented the complex ways in which these performances are gendered as well as the ways in which they offer women opportunities to shape the identities of the places they inhabit (322).

Akpan and Udofia's statement fully articulates the origin of Idoma masquerades which has often been located within the framework of the female gender. To this end, the next section of this study will examine the feminist dimensions in Idoma masquerades.

Feminist Dimensions of Idoma Masquerades

In Idoma culture, women play significant roles and are part of the masquerade culture. Though they are not allowed to take part in the actual wearing of the mask or be involved in the inner circle and preparation of masquerades, however they historically play important roles in the masquerade institution. The prominence of women is reflected in the oral historical chant of Alekwu masquerade of Odegwudegwu, who is a woman. This myth was converted to a drama through the artistic creation of S.O.O. Amali in 1985 titled, *Odegwudegwu*.

The story recounts an elderly woman, Odegwudegwu, who broke the taboo on her way in hurrying to take medicine to her sick children by seeing the nakedness of the ancestral spirit masks which is forbidden for women to see, and her punishment is to be buried alive. By this taboo, the chief arranged an inquest for her in seven days' time. The punishment for this taboo was when she is buried alive, according to the age-long tradition that the entire community can be cleansed. When she was about to be buried, her children, who are also major components of the ancestral spirit masquerade, and without whom the masquerade cannot exist, came to the square and insist to be buried along with their mother. As it is forbidden in Idoma culture for children to be buried with their mother, the situation compels the elders to do a rethink, and after consultation with the ancestors, they instruct mankind not to bury any woman in the kingdom alive anymore, but instead they should be replaced with a spiritual cleansing of a livestock and payment of a fine.

Women play integral roles in the origin of masquerades in Idoma mythology. According to an oral history in an interview with Ismail Amali (2018), is believed that most masquerades in Idoma culture were founded by women, and this is why it has extricated hatred for them. One of the prominent examples of the myth is the Ekwootokpa masquerade actions whenever it comes out. The tale is that it was founded by women but controlled by men. This is the core reason why it goes round to destroy women's pounding mortar with its spear whenever it comes out to perform.

Females perform pivotal functions in the creation of the Alekwu masquerade. If a man does not have a female child while alive, he cannot be re-incarnated into the Alekwu masquerade. The last child of the man to be re-incarnated into the Alekwu masquerade spirit is used in the final ushering of the masquerade into the human world in order to give voice to the masquerade to speak. This important and final spiritual role can also be played by females.

Women are also prominent in the creation of new Alekwu masquerades. They must be the ones to perform the final rituals called *Okpa Ochoje* (Owu Obiyinla), a night before the Ikwu festival. This ritual ushers in new sets of Alekwu masquerades from the spirit world to the human world. Another major

ritual role played by women is called *Ikpa okwo okwu*. During this ritual, a woman and Alekwu masquerade pair together to perform a compulsory ritual called *Ikpa okwo okwu*, which is a major ritual used to navigate and shape complex systems of power through ritual acts and bodily form for a departed elderly male person. The particular woman who anchors the ritual must have passed her menopause stage and does not have any form of sexual contact. This ritual is done in a spiritual partnership with an Alekwu masquerade. *Ikpa okwo okwu* is performed according to Idoma cultural interpretation, to spiritually confirm that the deceased is indeed dead and is also qualified to be reincarnated to the human world in form of masquerade.

In Idoma culture, the involvement of women in masquerade traditions could be symbolic or essential to organic existence to the culture and the people, which aids the comprehensive understanding and the proper interpretation of masquerades in Idoma society. Some masquerades emerge into the performance arena in pairs of male and female. However, "men always perform the masquerade, while female characters are . . . portrayed" (Spring 26). In other words, while the male which is the principal masquerade performs, the female character is merely symbolic. This also give cognisance to the respect, understand and the need to have the feminist presence in masquerading for the acceptance of the fundamental role women play in masquerade institution. It also adds to the general acceptance to for public and compliance with social relevance.

The prominent and important role women play in masquerade performances in Idoma society is also very visible in the masquerade performances such Odumu, Ichahoho, Ogliye, Ibo, Alinga and others. In these instances, the *Enekwu/Enatuma*, a woman plays the role of taking care of the masquerade in the performance processes. She is directly responsible for providing the rappers for use in making the *Ajanja* round the waist of the masquerade and those worn by the members round the waist in the performance arena. She is in charge of providing comfort by following the masquerade around in the performance arena with a hand fan and blowing air on the masquerade. Part of her duties, the *Enekwu/Enatuma* makes sure that the floor of the performance arena is cleared of any sharp object that will injure the masquerade on the feet while dancing. She also leads the ululation of in cheering the masquerade in performance and galvanising support for the masquerade in performance.

Masquerade Culture in other Societies

In Idoma culture, masquerades such as Ichahoho, Alinga and Ibo appear in pairs to symbolise the male and female genders. This however is emblematic as the actual masquerading is done exclusively only by men. This is similar to the masquerade of Abeokuta people in Yorùbá culture in which it is believed that "Gèlèdè masks represent Yorùbá women, but are actually danced by men who

dress like women and employ movements that mimic feminine attributes" (Scruggs & Fellow 1).

Lawal is of the opinion that women cannot be associated with *Gèlèdè* masking, "because of its male association; can metaphysically interfere with the innate reproductive powers of a woman" (79). This fully captures the spiritual potency of masquerades. The actual masquerade performance is completely men's affairs which is also identical to the Igbo people who have a contemporary maiden spirit masquerade called *Adanma* which, according to Ezeliora, is "literally translated respectively as 'the princess or beautiful daughter' and 'the lady/queen of dance'". They are costumed in female attire with female nuances but "generally, women and girls were excluded from participating in masquerading in Igbo society. In the same vein, Chukwu (2016, p. 64) agrees that, "masquerade and masquerading are exclusively men's affair" (46). Despite the submissions from Ezeliora (2014) and Chukwu (2016), it should be mentioned that women are still recognised in the masquerading culture among the Igbos, as indicated by Afigbo (1972), Nwabueze (2003) cited in Amaechi that:

masquerades symbolise societal conception of certain qualities, for instance, while the "agaba" symbolises strength and masculine vigor, the aggboghommanwu (the maiden masquerade) that usually depicts feminine beauty portrays acceptable qualities of maidens as exemplified in their beautiful outlook, careful gout and dancing ability (85).

Drawing from the above, masquerade performances among men are more visible than among women in Nigeria and most parts of Africa. It is worthy of note, however, that, masquerade performances among women is practised in places like the Sande Society of the Mende people in Sierra Leone, which is responsible for teaching young girls the skills and knowledge needed to become a woman. Kleiner acknowledges that "the Mende and neighbouring peoples of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea are distinctive in Africa because the women perform masquerades. The masks and costumes they wear conceal the women's bodies from the audience attending their performance" (1075). Joyce notes that female masquerading can also be found among the women of Ejagham society of Cross River, Nigeria who, "have two different types of women's masquerades; *Ekpa* masquerades reveal the dancer's identity, and *Agot* masquerades conceal it" (487).

These rare situations are however very different from the Idoma culture, where masquerade and masquerade performances are exclusively a man's affair. Masquerade beliefs are enveloped in myth, having only male initiates, and most times members of the community understand the mysteries behind it. Women are generally kept away from the affairs of masquerades, as it is referred to in the Idoma culture as a terrain exclusively for men. Masquerades generally have a

secluded environment created for them, with restrictive access to those who are non-initiates or members.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the dynamism of masquerade performances in Idoma land has created a new vista for cultural revival and discourse in the Arts, which makes it a suitable terminology for the description of the African masquerade cultures. The study gives the appreciation of masquerade and understanding of female role in making women integral to the African cultural system. Feminist dimensions in masquerade performances in Idoma is phenomenon culture and the masquerade existence and society such as; women the been credited as the founders of masquerades, provision of costume material, giving support and enhancing masquerade performances in entertainment by making good supporters and followership to help in actualizing the purpose of the masquerade. Hence, if masquerade performances must continue to thrive in Idoma society, then the role of the woman in the masquerading process must be respected.

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