



## **Masks and Masquerades as a Revered Culture in the South East of Nigeria (Igbo Land) in the Digital Epoch**

By

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### **Abstract**

*This is a discourse paper which explores the South Eastern masks and masquerades as conceptual, emotional, communal, and highly symbolic of the African cultures as practiced in Igbo land. The concept is based on the belief system of the people in the Igbo geo-cultural areas of South-Eastern Nigeria, where there is a strong belief in “Chi” (God). They also believe that there is life after death, in the spirit world 'Ala-mmuo'. It is believed that their fore-fathers (ancestors) are alive in the spirit world and are watching how well or not their descendants are playing the game of life. This explains why the Art of Africa is classified under two groups (i) the man-regarding art and (ii) the spirit-regarding art. This study is focused on the masks and Masquerades of the Igbo in the southeastern zone of Nigeria along the west coast of Africa. It discussed the role of these art forms and practices in the contemporary African society (Ndi Igbo), with regard to the challenges of the present digital times. Furthermore, the study set out to determine the extent of the impact of these art forms and ideas on the spiritual, legal, and socio-political life of Igbo people. The study also discussed the importance of these masquerades. The study aims to explore the cultural and educational content of Igbo art for possible development and contribution to learning. This will be useful to scholars who are involved in African studies, particularly those delving into Igbo studies, culture, and the challenges of the contemporary digital epoch.*

**Key words:** Masks, Masquerades, Culture, Igbo land, and Digital.

### **Introduction**

It is interesting to delve into one of the rich cultures of Africa as it can be seen in the life of the Igbo people in the South East of Nigeria, through academic studies and research. The researcher dealt with the rich arts heritage explorations of Africa. This culture can be seen all over the African nations of the world. This study focused on masks and masquerades of the Igbo people. They are known for their strong desire for beautiful artistic entertainments, especially during some significant celebrations like new yam festivals, burial of very important personalities in the land like ndi ozo, ndi Igwe, ndi ichie, titled red cap chiefs in Igbo land. Masquerades are well revered in Igbo land; the mask is its glory. Uzogba, (2018) supports that each type of masking connotes a particular type of spirit worshiped in the land. Therefore, it is revered as 'chi' it cannot be insulted by any man born of woman. They have some particular type of masquerades for different occasions; as such these masquerades have different names that they are addressed with. Moreover, it is forbidden for women to participate in masquerade celebrations; women keep away whenever a celebration involves a masquerade especially some dangerous ones that can even kill. They are talented and committed to whatever they do. It realise that there is need for proper indigenous exploration of art-forms and ideas of Africans arts. (Perani, & Fred (2005) assert that Nigeria's art heritage is a rich one: so also, it boils down to all the states, villages that made up Nigeria. The roots are firmly embedded in its history and



way of life; its techniques have been handed down from master to apprentice, father to son for hundreds of years. As a culture, it is very much alive". It therefore became necessary to first consider the diabolical nature of the arts of the people which is because of their belief system. The idea of the spirit world and the human world, which gave rise to man regarding arts and spirit regarding arts, soon, became an issue for academic discussions. This study investigated these phenomena and facts about them. Though there was not enough imperial evidence, there were other physical as well as historical facts to confirm the assumptions.

### **Man-Regarding Art**

This group of arts of Africa practised in the South Eastern Nigeria includes the utility crafts and the decorative art-forms such as fabric designs, wall-decorations, ceramics and pottery, basketry, tapestry, tusks and calabash carvings and such things that give leisure and are decorative, also recreational and educational. Art-works produced or acquired under this group are man regarding arts; this observation also applies to the music and theatre performances. They can easily be commercialized, advertised, circulated and exhibited to the general public. They are not related on the contrary, their equivalent in the spirit regarding arts Eze & Achebe, (2016)

### **Spirit Regarding Arts**

The spirit of arts is associated with the spirits and gods. They have intricate choreography and descent callisthenics. Skilled craftsmen make masks, which are usually carved from wood and painted; they may also incorporate cloth, beads, shells, and raffia. West African masks cover the face or the head and are always worn with a costume. Igbo people hold numerous masked performances each year to honour ancestors, ensure bountiful crops, teach moral lessons, and entertain audiences at festivals. Maskers, often referred to as Mm̄nwu in the Igbo language, also perform special rituals at ceremonies and rites of passage. Prior to the early 1900s, masquerades played important judicial and policing roles in Igbo society. Masquerades typically occur outside during the dry season when harvest celebrations take place. Ancestors are revered and commemorated in Igbo culture, and masquerades personify ancestral spirits during performances. Contrasting elements such as good and evil, male and female, and beauty and ugliness are also reflected in both masks and masquerades. Masked performers transform themselves into virtuous maidens, esteemed ancestors, animals, jokers, powerful male figures, and other supernatural characters. The real identity of a masquerade is always hidden. Men play the role of masqueraders, and boys must complete initiation (ìba mm̄nwu) ceremonies to become part of secret masking societies. (Ofomata, 2012)

### **Spirit-Regarding Arts**

This class of arts of Africa includes the artworks produced with reference to spiritual observations, reservations, and or appeasement of some deities. For instance, the 'Mbari Art Forms' of Ndi-Igbo in the Owerri area of Eastern Nigeria. Mbari is simply a collection of Mud-sculptures set up in respect of the earth goddess 'Ala'. According to Chiene, (1990) The central figure depicts the Ala; others are her children and her associates. Other artworks in this class include the 'Ikenga series', the masks, and the masquerades. There are also ritual gongs (wooden and, metal) the ojii, (metal staff with rattles) the carved symbol of authority, 'òfò' and the swaga stick, the monuments, epitaphs, effigies and of course just to mention a few.

Haufbauer & Reed (2003) point out that a mask is a covering up. In most cases, this covering is made to cover one's face wholly or partially as a camouflage during a performance. The masquerade is the theatrical art application of the mask. (The performing mask) it is simply



the wearing of the mask and its apparel and costumes, involving music and choreography. The mask as an art form of spirit regarding art, is supposed to represent one spirit or the other. This is why Ndi-Igbo call the mask; Isi-Mmuo or Isi-Nwɔnwu. ' Mmuo' means spirit, when it is worn as a complete masquerade; it is called Mmuo' or mmuonwu. mmuonwu can be interchangeably used with mmanwu It is common to hear children in Owerri area call the mask Ishi-Ekpo, which is the 'Head Mask', Ekpo is the ancestral spirit of the Ibibios who live in Akwa-Ibom and Cross River States of Nigeria. They share a cultural relationship with the Igbo. This art is represented in wooden form called a mask. The Igbo adopted the name because of intra-cultural relationships between the Igbo and Ibibio. Moreover, the Ibibios do more wood carving (Mask) than the Igbo. But when it comes to the real representation of a deity in mask carving the Igbo carve for themselves. Meanwhile, the purpose behind masquerades is to create physical representations of spirits and ancestors through the adornment of the masks to appear like spirits. Hence different types of masquerades represent different types of spirit.

### **Types of Masquerades**

The basic types are visible and invisible masquerades

#### **Visible masquerades**

The visible masquerades are meant for the public. They often are more entertaining. Masks used offer a visual appeal for their shapes and forms. In these visual masquerades, performances of harassment, music, dance, and parodies are acted out. Isidienu, & Onyekelu (2021) These dramatic performances often depict stories of daily life with a moralistic bent that highlights the social norms that the Mmuonwu so closely enforce. The local instruments used in these depictions are integral to the spiritual intention of the stories and the actual masks themselves include a great deal of artistic drama. It has been argued that this has been the most resilient type of Mmuonwu since the others have sometimes lost prominence with changing social institutions and structures. Ceremonial Mmuonwu has even been incorporated into other religious celebrations, such as the inclusion of Mmuonwu in Igbo Christmas and Easter parades. (Onyeneke,1987)

#### **Invisible Masquerades**

The invisible masquerades take place at night. Sound is the main tool for them. The masquerade uses his voice to scream so it may be heard throughout the village. Haufbauer & Reed (2003) assert that the masks used are usually fierce-looking and their interpretation is only fully understood by the society members. These invisible masquerades call upon a silent village to strike fear in the hearts of those not initiated into their society. The invisible masquerades can be broken down into three groups: *achikwu ocha/ojii*, *agu mmuno*, and *ogbagu*.

#### **Belief in Supernatural: Invisible to Visible**

It is a common belief that African art gives form to the supernatural as well as the invisible. So, in an attempt to represent the power and virtue of an ancestor, the invisible spirit is represented in the art form of a mask. It is usually carved to represent his characteristics and mannerisms, not necessarily physical features. It is so because the artist is expected to create something which represents the imagined powers or virtues of the particular ancestor, deity, or God in other words, portray the spirit, which actually is invisible. Therefore, the artist tries to carve some funny faces which look aggressive, if the ancestor was an aggressive man. The



mask is used to project and protect the ancestral belief without letting loose the actual feeling of the ancestors. This agrees with the fact that Africa's art is characterised by secrecy as could be seen in the physical art, oral tradition and literature, and the religion or belief system of the people. Odo, & Asadu (2018) state that knowing too much about a man's ancestors gives another man power over him. The diviner's job is to discover the secrets which people are hiding. This exposes the fact that the mask though it is for spirituals and rituals (Anyasodo, 1999)

### **Names of Some Igbo Masquerades and Their Characteristics**

They use symbolic masks carved to symbolise certain characters, hence the names of some of the masquerades. Ijele is the largest mask system ever to enter the history of the world's masking tradition. Mkpamkpanku is a stern and fully masculine-featured masquerade. Izaga is the tallest Igbo masquerade. Agaba is a fearsome masquerade known for its huge and jutting front teeth and ugly persona. Odo masquerade is the Odo is a masquerade peculiar to Neke, Agbaja (Ngwo and environs) people of Enugu state. Achikwu Ocha/Oji (regulatory Mmṛnwu)It can also be called Ajikwu, it is a night masquerade that is revered because it does not come out for nothing. The achikwu ocha (white) masquerade acts as village surveillance. The "entertainment" activities include "singing, joking, and dancing". Achikwu ojii (black) is the other side of the achikwu ocha masquerade. This is performed not only to protect the village, but also when there is going to be a punishment or execution of a criminal. Masquerade is another means the Igbo people deploy to regulate and discipline members of their society. *Anuka, (2019) opines that* Masquerades work alongside the Igbo community's political assembly, often stepping into action when the political assembly has reached a stalemate in a certain issue. They work to execute pre-determined and long-standing social norms, often using symbolic messaging. Isidienu, & Onyekelu, (2020). Agu Mmuṛ the second group of invisible masquerades is agu mmuno (leopard spirit). In these masquerades, horrible screaming sounds are produced to create fear. Ogbagu This third category is "strictly used for dance entertainment.

### **Adamma (a female masquerade)**

It is the type of masquerade that is masked as a young lady with beautiful attractive colors. The person who masks the masquerade must be a good dancer. Her dance is always second to none. It entertains everyone as they watch her dance, including women and children; while there will be a male masquerade that will be following her to avoid an uninitiated person coming to touch her breast or her stylish hair. This masquerade is mainly seen in Ngwo of Enugu State, Nigeria. **Okoromaa** This one is also a male type of masquerade known for his expertise in dancing and is not harmful at all. Okoromma is just there for entertainment; it does not go with a cane.

### **Omebe and Oriokpa, etc.**

These can be seen mainly around the Nsukka axis; It's full of entertainment but at the same time uses cane always. It derives joy from chasing people with a cane, especially women, young girls, most especially. Odo, & Asadu (2018) point out that some masquerades look like birds; as such, it will bear a bird's name, like we have 'Ugo' (eagle). This masquerade looks exactly like a bird; some of them, during performance, even lay an egg.

While some will look like human beings or any other animals, which they want to imitate according to the belief system of that part of the Igbo land. Thereafter, they start performing the dance of the group to entertain the audience. These include the bigger Ekpo (nnukwuekpo)



Ulaga, Ijele, Atumma, Ojionu, Ogbangwada Iga, Agbogho mmonwu, Ekeleke, Izaga (Izaga is taller than a house), just to mention a few. These are practised by many communities within the Igbo states, for example, Mbaitoli LGA in Imo State, Nigeria. The masquerades normally appear during the festivals, such as “Igba Okorosha.” Most of the Masks are characterised by a smooth wooden face as a Head mask (except the Iga’), they have few layers of raffia around their waist and neck. Eze, (2018) supports that they dance publicly and are appreciated by their onlookers and admirers. People really admire and value their artistry and displays.

### **The Importance of Masquerades in Igbo Land**

They forbid evil and improve discipline and morals in the land. Ofomata, (2002) asserts that Masquerades serve other social functions such as entertainment, big traditional ceremonies, like coronations, etc. It is also used in correcting the ills of society, like stealing, rape, snatching of wives or property from the owner, killing or any form of taboo in the land. Masquerades, to a great extent, handle such cases in Igbo land. It brings the people together, particularly during the festivals, where each clan may bring out their own type of masquerade to perform in ama or obu (a field specially meant for masquerade displays) during the festivals like the New Yam Festival. Of course, without masquerades, there is nothing like new yam festival in Igbo land. It improves the economy of the communities by ensuring that those to do individuals that proves stubborn to pay their tax or any town payment because they feel that no one can come to them because of their influence or affluence, by the time the age-grade members come with a masquerade to his house, he will immediately pay that due with some penalties. Akaeze, & Onyegiri (2018) support that they settle difficult cases in the land that ordinary human beings cannot settle. This is because masquerades are revered in Igbo land in such a way that they are above the law, since it is believed that they are spirits. Therefore, no physical man can battle with a spirit. Masquerades have their respective roles according to their types, as each type has its own function. This is to avoid a confusing mix-up. For instance, the dangerous and spirit-infested masquerades are not expected to function as entertainment masquerades. In Igbo land in the South East of Nigeria, it is realised that there are classifications and grades within the classifications. (Eze, & Achebe, 2018)

### **Social Impacts:**

It is the lower class of masquerades that bears a lot of social impact on society in various ways:

- (i) They provide the much-desired entertainment, particularly during festivals and some other special occasions and ceremonies such as traditional new yam festivals, chieftaincy title installations, outing ceremonies of nursing mothers, and intra-tribal traditional marriages. Eze coronations, etc. The impact of such entertainment on the people is relaxing as well as therapeutic because it can bring down high blood pressure to normal pressure.
- (ii) During the entertainment sessions, some of these ‘oti-mkpu’ small masquerades, in their songs or rapping, reveal and expose the ills in the community. Taboos and incest are exposed to the shame of the culprits (even if they are absent at the gathering).
- (iii) They add color and beauty to every occasion in which they appear. Oftentimes, people are mesmerised so much that they get transformed from admirers to participants. Moreover, under such conditions of high cultural tempo, a lot of money is doled out to the young masqueraders in appreciation of their performance. In the present-day Nigeria, some of these young masquerades, block the highways which pass through their village and forcefully collect money from commuters. This is not the original



- style. It is not Igbo culture. This study recommends that the government should delete such uncultured practices before it degenerates into abnormalities.
- (iv) In diaspora: Masks and Masquerades have influenced the cultural patterns of other people. It is necessary to mention at this point that it is these lower-class masks and masquerades that have made reasonable impact in the Diaspora. This could be because of the above-listed impacts on the western culture (particularly impacts (i), (ii) and (iii)). In the case of impact (ii), it is accommodated but reformed from gossip raps to advertisement slogans and displays. This fact reminds viewers that Africans have always tried to sustain their cultural identity wherever they are even in the Diaspora. They even try to impress and influence their host's culture. These entertainment masks easily found good positions in the Caribbean cultural festivals in Jamaica, Canada, Trinidad and Tobago, in short in all the Americas where the blacks settled. In recent times it has been discovered that masquerades which are known for their Afo-acrobatic displays and other such performing groups from Africa are being invited to feature in cultural concerts and festivals in all the above-named communities. It is not surprising that in tracing the African culture in Diaspora, the mask and masquerade are found strongly established everywhere in the Caribbean, Canada, USA, and others. Some Igbo cultural groups have performed from time to time in big festivals in the USA, the West Indies, Jamaica and so on. This has reshaped the movies and other open theatres. Such groups include the famous Mkpokiti, the Atilogu, the Oji-onu masquerade and the Ogbamgbada, just to mention a few. The reason for the easy spread of these lower-class masquerades is because of their low or non-involvement in "juju" powers or "otumokpo" Other reasons include (a) these masquerades have high aesthetic values (b) they have utility values particularly in Theatre and fine Arts. (Adamma, 2021)

### **Critical Artistic Reviews of Masks and Masquerades**

Generally speaking, it is very correct to say that the masks and masquerades are very interesting art forms which cover all the plastic, literary, and performing arts (the creative arts). This art form is characterised by 'cubism', which is also the original mainstay of African art. (In fact, cubism seems much more purposeful in this noble sculpture than in modern painting. *Plastique Arts*, there is a wood sculpture. (Bacquet, 2002) This is an indigenous wood-carving craft which is a fine sculpture. It is diligently done to ensure that it serves the purpose for which it is initiated. The artist acquaints himself with the motifs he is to explore. He tries to achieve the obvious features, such as the lips, the eyes, the hair-do (horns as the case may be). It is not an easy task because in the real traditional wood carving, the artist is not expected to join his pieces of wood. He continues to explore the wood in relief or in the round, to achieve a whole finished work. However, Bassani (2005) supports that the skill is developed through apprenticeship and inheritance from family, thus early childhood practices. They even know the trees that they use for mask-carving. The Igbo have a tradition of handing down their crafts/skills to their sons and daughters. A family that is known for a particular craft/skill within the community will always try to keep up the fame. So, the carver makes sure that his son(s) start from cradle to get acquainted with the tools and start as early as possible to handle them. The Result is usually perfection at youth. It is difficult for a boy to be accepted as an apprentice in the mask carvers' workshop just because he is talented; rather, he is accepted faster because he is the son of a known carver who is recognised in the community as a talented carver. In contemporary Nigeria, however, apprenticeship is now open to talented/interested youths. This is good because it is widening the scope of entrepreneurial growth in the African Communities.



The educational technologists accept the early apprenticeship as a type of vicarious learning strategy. So, the mask/masquerade art practices employ a peculiar educational strategy which has stood the test of time and is still applied in the modern digital era. (Nwigwe, & Eze 2020)

### **The Masquerade Costumes**

Another art form of the masquerade is in the textile or fabric designs. Most of the upper-class masquerades (Nnukwu Mmṛnwu) are costumed in typical native hand-woven stuff, which is woven in stripes and joined by hand knitting to achieve wider pieces. These pieces are used to sew the costumes, including the upper garments of the masquerades. Obuh, (1984) opines that a lot of metal and other stuff of pendants and attachments are fixed on the upper garment in particular to achieve rattle/tambourine sound as the masquerade walks about or dances around. Both the fabrics and the attachments are usually finished in bright raw colours of the primary group (Red, Blue and Yellow). It is ready flashy, majestic and interesting. This study found that these woven cloths are produced locally within the communities. It confirmed that the weaving skills are also vicarious learning approach. Venice Lamb and Judy Holmes in another book, *Nigeria Weaving*, commenting on the Igbo weaving characteristics of Akwete, weavers, observed thus “In Akwete the weaver attaches special importance to her weaving sword, which she may well have acquired from her mother and which in turn she hopes to hand down to her own daughter. This textile craft which provides heavily for the masquerade offers the learning strategy down then skills to the going ones through apprenticeship as family inheritance. The raffia appendages are not left out. They give the spirit-like impression, particularly around the waist of the masquerades. (eg. Ojionu, Ogbangbada, Obani and others)

In performing arts, still focusing on the Masquerades of Igbo land as reference, there are a lot of intricate dance-steps, acrobatic displays, coupled with dramatizations and floor shows. There is also, music both vocal and instrumental. The instruments are indigenous, featuring the metal gongs (ogene), wooden gongs (ekwe) skin drums (igba), the native flute (oṣja), the rattles (ichaka), the sound-pot (udu), the xylophone (ngelenge) and others. Some solo vocals with choruses etc. the music generally goes with fine rhythm but fast tempo most times. Okpara, & Adeseye (2019) assert that sometimes there is a lead instrument which actually directs the movements it would be the big metal gong, the big ekwe, the oṣja or any chosen solo instrument. Finally, there is a general consciousness of the aesthetic appearance of the masquerades and the entire crew particularly if the masquerade must appear publicly to dance or perform. There is an intentional display of bold colours, varied shapes and graceful but rhythmic movement, including calisthenics. The dancers themselves and other members of the crew, try to decorate their bodies and wear colourful things like the garrula-coloured raffia waist bands (mbenugwu), with small rattles attached. The rattles increase the sound percussion thereby making the total music more interesting. The young boys are initiated into some Nmonwu cults such as Oḃonyi and Oḃonko. So, from there, members of the community can fix themselves within the social strata of the community. (Eze, & Achebe, 2016)

### **The Big Masquerades and the Mmonwu Concepts**

It will be incomplete to review the masks and masquerades without a focus on the big masquerades in relation to the Nmonwu concepts. The big masquerades are actually the mainstay of the Mmṛnwu concept which is spirit bond. As a matter of fact, African art is generally spirit bound and religious, this is why the artists are referred to in Igboland as ‘Ndi-Oka’, (gifted or talented people), whereas the ordinary craftsmen who also mass-produce



artistic works are referred to as Ndi-nka. (Oka means inspiration-artistry but nka means skilled craftsmanship), so considering the big masquerades such as the 'Ijele'; there is a conscious display of inspired artistry. Creativity speaks in visual language. There is naturally a creative use of colours thereby achieving fantastic colour harmony and a lot more of the creative artistry.

### **Ijele (a close look at the Ijele)**

Ijele is one of the biggest masquerades with height above six meters and a breadth not less than four meters, it is originated from Enugu-Ukwu in Anambra State of Nigeria. Eze, & Achebe, (2016) support that it actually symbolizes the ancestral spirit of the Enugu-Ukwu people. They are Igbos with giant strides towards big achievements right from the olden days till date. Physically, the indigenes of Enugu-Ukwu are very creative in business and are culture-bound. The Ukwu added to their name Enugu is just an Igbo adjective meaning "Big". They believe that their ancestors originated the Ijele with that concept of a colossal group of progressives. Whenever Ijele is coming out to the masquerade arena to display, every other masquerade will disappear. Nowadays, Ijele has become an annual figure. It is the most intricate and most beautifully decorated masquerade in Igbo land.

### **Ikeji Masquerades of Arondizuogu: (A Brief Look)**

The Ikeji masquerades, natives of Arondizuogu in Imo State, Nigeria. These are not only spirit-bound but spirit-infested. According to Anyasodo (1999) They are not actually for fun, but for matters of cultural seriousness which have to do with the gods and spirits of the land. It is for these gods and their spirits that the people of Arondizuogu instituted the annual cultural festival called Ikeji. Every Arondizuogu son and daughter must attend the Ikeji festival annually, no matter where you are in the world. These masquerades use what they call 'Atikpa' or (juju in common language) to drive away other unwanted spirits from their land. During some of these Atikpa combats, some people may be caught in the cross-current of the juju powers, and they are struck down or may even die or become seriously disabled. Some of the masqueraders even lose their lives when they encounter spirits tougher than they are.

### **Other Big Masquerades:**

Many other dangerous masquerades exist all over Igbo land.

The Mm̄nw̄ Okija in Anambra State, the Mgbadike or Mm̄nw̄ Oghe in Enugu State, Mm̄nw̄ shilne (the Mm̄nw̄ Ūm̄n̄oha in Imo State, the Agaba-Idu (A violent masquerade usually worn by huge fellows with fierce gait). The Idu-spirit controls it. It is from Enugu State. There are other dangerous ones in Asaba and Uga both Igbo land areas of Nigeria. Jenewari (2012) asserts that Opongi Masquerade is a masquerade that comes out during festivals. He added that "Ekine Masquerade-dancing focuses on free spirits". Though the Opongi masquerade is in the riverine areas of Rivers State, Nigeria, it is still operated with the same spirit-based concept.

### **Masks and Arts, Past, Present and Future:**

In realisation of the fact that these peculiar Arts of Africa the masks and masquerades have sustained the culture of Africa for an estimated period of not less than 9,000 years. Onyeneke, (1987) believes that, it suffices to say that it has become a fundamental issue of the existence of Ndi-Igbo and all Africans including the entire black people. Western culture overran the continent of Africa through explorations, colonisation and exploitations yet the masks have stood their ground in the culture and belief-system of the people. Not even the church could



eradicate it. It therefore, follows that to Ndi-Igbo, Mm̀onwu is an inevitable factor of their culture. Presently, as mentioned earlier in this study, the art-form of the mask has spread beyond the continent as utilitarian art-form, utilised in interior decorations, advertisements, promotions, and fashion. Yet, the original concept (spirit) is not totally eradicated in each case. The mask and masquerades join the foremost African Art-forms which traversed the world and went into diaspora with very remarkable impact.

It is believed that the future holds many cultural conquests for the mask of Africa. This is possible because of the strategic cultural position of this form which the world has found difficult to expunge, they are eager to explore and adapt. Mmonwu has continued to uphold and project the traditions, the belief patterns and ambitions of Ndi-Igbo (very daring, hardworking, persevering and dogged in their strides). These qualities of Ndi-Igbo and Nigerians in general "Art exposes both the traditions and aspirations of a people, what they have experienced in the past; and what they consider desirable for the present and the future". (Eze, 2018).

### **Masquerade in the Digital Epoch**

Masquerades are still revered in Igbo land till today, just like the Odo masquerade represents a deity who provides the living with a chance to commune with their dead in line with belief and especially in every traditional ceremony. This is because it brings a special type of joy to the people whenever a masquerade appears in their gathering because it seems like that is the climax. Nowadays, even politicians involve masquerades in any serious gathering to crown a leader, or to enthrone a king. (Okpara, & Adeseye 2019) These are symbolic that both man and spirits acknowledged the kingship of that person. They also use the masquerade called Iga during jubilation when a political aspirant wins. However, some elites and some Christians are no more comfortable with these masquerades as they believe that it is barbaric, and that it has some diabolic powers to display some of their performances which make them extra-ordinary. Uzogba, (2019) points out that it is realise that modernisation generally has done a lot to shift to Mm̀onwu practices really to the point it could derail from the original culture concept. He observes that, "If care is not taken it may totally eradicate it". But he also saw the Mm̀onwu culture of Ndi-Igbo as "Art-producer and educator, ancestral spirit connector and fund raiser". He finally in one of his recommendations based on his findings from oral interviews said, "it Is necessary to ensure that there is continuity of the masks and masquerades of Africa as an original feature of African culture". This is supported by Denis Douden's expression "One of the features of African Art is continuity". However, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the quest to acquire wealth are influencing masquerades celebrations negatively. Most of the Igbo boys that supposed to be at home empowering it, are already in diaspora in search of greener pastures. They now prefer to make names for their family and community at large rather than being in the village carving the masks or masking themselves.

### **Conclusion**

In Igbo land, Masquerades, Mm̀onwu or Mmanwu as some parts of Igbo land call it, are seriously revered, celebrated, and almost worshipped by some people, especially the elderly men. It is masculine, abhors anything feminine. Those initiated into it can do anything whatsoever; even to kill to uphold the dignity of Mm̀onwu in their area. Hence, they believe that it is the ancestors. Therefore, they must do their best to protect the spirit of their ancestors. However, civilisation has brought a lot of changes to the whole practices. Educated ones do not want to believe instantly all that their forefathers told them sheepishly. In this epoch even women come very close to those without juju. (Isidienu, & Onyekelu, 2020) supported that



most of them are now for entertainment while few are for rituals. However, some still have strong belief in their ancestral practices. Hence, sponsor it with their money and some travel back home whenever it is time to perform any ritual concerning their masquerades. Some rituals are annual, while some are bi-annual. Therefore, some schools of thought in Igbo land believe that masquerades should be eradicated as it is gender biased while some believe that “*ọkụ agunyere nwata n’aka agaghị eregbu ya*”. (Coals of fire given to a child in the hand cannot kill the child) meaning that their ancestors cannot give them what will destroy them. (Akaeze, & Onyegiri, 2018)

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