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THE COMPOSITE SCENE: THE AESTHETICS OF IGBO MASK THEATRE

by

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Thesis Abstract

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VICTOR IKECHUKWU UKAEGBU

An observation of mask performances in Igboland in South-Eastern Nigeria reveals distinctions among displays from various communities. This is the product of a democratic society which encourages individualism and at the same time, sustains collectivism. This feature of Igbo masking has enriched and populated the Igbo theatrical scene with thousands of diverse and seemingly unconnected masking displays. Though these peculiarities do not indicate conceptual differences or imperfections, the numerous Igbo dialects and sub-cultural differences have not helped matters. Earlier studies by social anthropologists and a few theatre practitioners followed these differentials by focusing on particular masking types and sections of Igboland. None sufficiently approached the numerous displays as the product of one cultural consciousness and studies of individual performances merely fostered this picture of disparateness. In addition, the studies did not provide the kind of detailed coverage required to establish the aesthetics of the theatre.

Close to the end of the 20th century, changes and developments in Igbo theatre have not been properly appreciated considering that as a society changes, its theatre reflects such trends. In fact, considering the characteristic problem of accretions in oral traditions, if these developments are not documented and accounted for by the turn of the century, it may be difficult to link theatrical trends and developments in Igbo masking to their past and future with convincing certainty. It is, therefore, not only necessary to retrace

the roots of this theatre, it is equally important to understand and document its present state and to ponder its future.

The need for an inclusive study of Igbo masking and especially of the issues already raised cannot be ignored, particularly, at this period of important social and cultural developments and increase in masking in both urban and rural areas of Igboland. In fact, there is no better time to document theatrical developments, or any phenomenom for that matter, than when they are happening. These factors make it timely and absolutely necessary to establish the aesthetics of this theatre. Most aspects studied here have received more extensive treatment than hitherto, and while disparities exist between performances and zones, the broader picture is one of conceptual unity. Enekwe (1987) anchors Igbo mask theatre on narrative plot, the functions of theatre and ritual but, to establish its aesthetics, it is necessary to widen the study by investigating theatrical components, organisation and other related activities from conception to post-performance evaluation. This study achieves these purposes.

For this study, Igboland is divided into four main zones to obtain the general characteristics and zonal specifics of Igbo masking. Aesthetic factors are not limited by zonal boundaries, they overlap and inter- zonal influences unite this theatre tradition. As part of the research, two field trips were made during which live performances were attended, personal interviews were conducted, recorded displays and other studies were investigated. These provided the main materials for this research.

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One defines the ethnographic and demographic boundaries of Igboland. It looks at previous studies and so far, there are no definite attempts at establishing the aesthetics of Igbo theatre. Studies of individual performances have sometimes resulted in the

kind of conclusions Ugonna (1984) reached in using the features of a performance to paint the aesthetics of Igbo masking. The problem with such methods is that they fail to account for the diversity of performing styles and invariably, fail to draw the right lessons on the underlying unity of the theatre.

Chapter Two explores Igbo heritage. Here, a multilocal approach is adopted in the interpretation of form and practice so that the right conclusions are drawn for any similarities and contrasts. This approach has been adopted because of the Igbo claims to a single cultural and socio-religious root. Available records support the view that despite the differences, the Igbo still have more in common than readily discerned. This differential factor contributes more than any other to the uniqueness of Igbo masking as a communal performance and in making it a theatre of one people, many spirits, and different masks.

Chapter Three explores the use of space and performance structure and the relationship between them while Chapter Four looks at designs, a central feature of the theatre where the sheer volume and depth of artistic input are hardly recognised or sufficiently appreciated. Chapter Five looks at the organisation and management of resources and personnel. It explores the rehearsal process as a medium for the training of personnel and looks at the fact that sometimes, theatre management could be an extension of the socio-political processes of a community. The misconception that sometimes attends traditional education in non-industrialized societies has often obscured understanding of the nature and extent of training in traditional theatres. Chapter Five explores different levels and forms of formal and informal organisations, management structures, training, and the recruiting of theatre personnel.

Chapter Six concludes the study and makes recommendations on how to preserve and strenghten the theatre within a changing social milieu. This chapter defines Igbo masking as distinct from other theatres and establishes its critical criteria as a means of maintaining the theatre's uniqueness and ensuring its survival. Briefly, this study aims to establish a set of aesthetics for the Igbo mask theatre, distinguish it from other theatrical traditions, and expose its arts and artistic traditions to the corpus of global performances. In addition, it updates the knowledge and studies of this theatre, explores its problems and potentials, and makes recommendations for its future.

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V. I. Ukaegbu. May 1996.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.

This study was carried out with the aid of a studentship from the University of Plymouth.

Relevant seminars, workshops and conferences were attended and these proved invaluable in many ways. Other activities include two field /research trips to Nigeria and participation in theatrical productions.

Signed..... Date 9 MAY, 1996.

CHAPTER ONE.

INTRODUCTION:

LIFE, PHILOSOPHY AND THE IGBO MASK THEATRE.

Environment, religion, ritual and theatre enjoy a contiguous relationship in many traditional societies. As metaphors, they determine the nature of relationships in societies and in individuals' interaction with the spiritual and material forces of the universe. A traditional society's institutions are better appreciated with reference to the interaction of these metaphors and especially in the strong links between environment and religion. The latter relationship is strong in traditional societies and informs communal life to such an extent that, their non-recognition as factors in the study of such societies leads to the kind of errors sometimes associated with well-intentioned anthropological investigations among foreign cultures.

The backgrounds of the explorer-missionaries and colonial staff were different from those of the authochthonous groups and civilisations they regarded as primitive. Their hasty generalisations were oblivious of the nature and functions of the institutions and structures of such societies. The facts about traditional societies are different from what is generally inferred. This was the case with Basden (1966) who dwelt among the Igbos of South-Eastern Nigeria for thirty-five years and whose sub-title, "*A description of the Primitive Life, Customs and Animistic Beliefs, etc., of the Ibo People of Nigeria by One Who, for Thirty-five Years, Enjoyed the Privilege of Their Intimate Confidence and Friendship* " actually obscures some misconceptions. He follows this with an emphatic observation:

> The chiefs, as semi-spiritual beings, naturally were the ones to hold consultation with the "spirits" and, so, they were the ambassadors of the gods to the common folk. Indeed, it might almost be said, that they were gods; hence their domineering and superior attitude towards the rank and file (xiv).

While not detracting from the many merits of Basden's work, this erroneous assertion on the place of chiefs in Igboland casts doubts on the claim to 'intimacy and confidentiality' for two main reasons. Firstly, there is a dichotomy between priesthood and chieftaincy, with the former being superior. Chiefs were more of an aberration than paradigmatic in traditional Igbo society. The Eze Nri, the Bini-influenced Onitsha kingdom (Isichei, 1970), and the western Igbos whom Basden studied were among these oddities, for in Igboland, the combination of kingly and priestly functions in an individual is unusual. Secondly, Basden's remarks betray a less than 'profound understanding' of Igbo religion and are almost paradigmatic of the initial understanding of observers in alien cultures. This misunderstanding is more obvious in the arts where the crafts and theatrical performances of many traditional African societies were either regarded as undeveloped and saddled with the sardonic epithet, 'quasi' or dismissed as non-existent. Igboland, like other African societies, has won this unfortunate tag and while the degree of deprecation varies in places and arts, the need for change in the evaluation of cultural activities cannot be over-emphasized. According to Nwoga (1984);

> Different functions are likely to create different systems through which they are served. Any similarities in the particulars of the systems will be accidental. Therefore, any attempt to explain the elements of one functional structure through the structure of another functional intention is likely to distort the real meaning of those elements in their own structure (9).

Nwoga's thesis applies most especially to the arts where 'the more theoretically definitive a statement is, the more difficult it is to discard it even when facts of experience do not appear to support the definition (Nwoga, 8). A study of the Igbo mask theatre requires an understanding of the traditional society that yielded it and the discarding of the often-quoted Aristotelian/Western criteria for Igbo cultural and artistic metalanguage. This will produce both a theoretical framework and theatrical landscape

that are reflective of Igboland and which establish the Igbo mask theatre as a specific contribution to the corpus of global performances. The Western theatre may share a few common elements with the theatrical traditions of other societies but its criteria do not replace those that evolved from and serve these societies.

ENVIRONMENT, LIFE AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE IGBO.

There is no unanimity as to the migratory or settlement patterns of the Igbo because towns and villages render different accounts of their descent from creation, migratory myths, and different genealogical routes to a legendary figure or deified ancestor. It is common to observe among the villages or clans of Igbo towns differing claims to origin and ancestry. In the few places where there is agreement on a community's origins, controversies over genealogical headship, traditional priesthood, and other differences paint a picture of fragmentation that seemingly belies the actual homogeneity of the Igbo. As Isichei (1983) points out;

> The Ibo, however, were a very numerous ethnic group... divided into a very large number of small village democracies. Forms of wider organization existed. A number of adjacent villages were combined into one polity by the use of an often fictitious genealogical charter. A number of such polities formed a clan. Igbo communities were united by trade linkages, markets, fairs, and by attendance at oracles and shrines... as well as by the genealogical charter which united clans and by inter-village marriages (62).

Though their common ancestry is blurred by the accretion process of oral traditions and migrations, the Igbo appear to have lived in their present homeland for a long time as the bleached soils, denuded forests, language and population density suggest. Isichei (1970) again provides an insight when she states that;

> [T]he available evidence suggests that the Ibo [sic] and their forebears have lived in much of their present homes from the dawn of human history. The fact that they and their neighbours speak very different but related languages point to this conclusion... the linguistic evidence certainly suggests ancient and continuous settlement.... The Owerri

> area has a population density of over four hundred per square mile, rising to over a thousand per square mile, one of the greatest densities of a rural population in the world. This again suggests a long period of continuous settlement (19-20).

The traditional homeland of the Igbo is an area of 'about 15,800 square miles (Enekwe, 1987:41), which lies 'between the Niger and the Cross Rivers' (Isichei, 1970:17). The area was originally within the dense rain forest but it was already losing its flora by the time of the slave trade in the 15th century and later colonization on 'January 1, 1900' (Basden, 1966:xi). It is within this spread of defoliated rain forest, now noted for the aridity and acidity of its bleached soils (Isichei, 1970:18) that the Igbo eke a living.

It is difficult to project Igbo population before 1900, but demographic statistics and Nigeria's national census figures of 1991 put their number at over twelve million people. From their hostile and capricious milieu, they spread and migrated, especially on the contact with European trade through the Niger Delta and Ibibioland and today constitute a sizeable percentage of the population of these neighbouring groups. Though groups like Bonny and Opobo have adopted the Igbo language (Isichei, 1970 and Enekwe, 1987), they are not the only Igbo-speaking Eastern riverine areas outside Imo, Anambra, Abia, and Enugu states of Nigeria. Ndoki, Ndoni, Etche, Erei, Asa, Ikwerre and Ahoada in Rivers State, Itu and Obudu in Cross River states are either Igbo or have large Igbo-speaking populations. The Igbo influence and migration are noticed in the West beyond the River Niger in Asaba, Isele-Uku, Ogwashi-Uku, Agbor, Okpanam and other important towns and in the North, in Igala, Idoma, and Tiv kingdoms. The Igbos beyond the River Niger are often referred to as western or Niger Igbos and can be found very close to the Bini kingdom with whom they share some cultural affinities. The trend continues in other regions:

> Northern Iboland merges into the kingdom of Igala, and a number of border towns, such as Ogurugu, are equally at home in both languages.

> In the south-east, Arochukwu, historically one of the most important of Ibo states forms a peninsula in Ibibioland (Isichei, 1970:17).

The lessons from these observations are the mobility of the Igbo from their hinterland home, the kind of influences they exert on outlying areas and, their susceptibility to external influences. It is probable that while the inclement physical environment and the search for economic enterprise outside it contributed to Igbo migratory trends, the desire for territorial hegemony cannot be ignored, especially as Igbos continue to maintain an umbilical relationship with their homeland. This trait is most noticeable in the Arochukwu and Nri who respectively represent the mercantile and spiritual thrusts of the Igbo.

The Igbo are a gregarious people primarily engaged in farming, trading, weaving, mineral-ore works, blacksmithing, pottery and carving. Farming was the mainstay and next to it, trading was and remains a very important economic activity. Trading is so important that the days of the four-day Igbo traditional week are named after markets, Orie (Oye), Nkwo, Eke, and Afo (Afor). The relative importance and chronological order of these days believed to be the legendary hero-sons of the ancestor of the Igbo, their associated taboos and ritual significance, remain controversial subjects. Markets symbolise the meeting of man and spirits and though attendance was a cherished affair for both men and women, people were conscious of prevailing taboos or regulations. Igbo economic activities were conditioned by the exigencies of over-population and a harsh landscape. The intensity of these economic and geographical circumstances combined with external factors and led to the growth of trading centres like Onitsha, Ohumbele and Aba, especially after the slave trade.

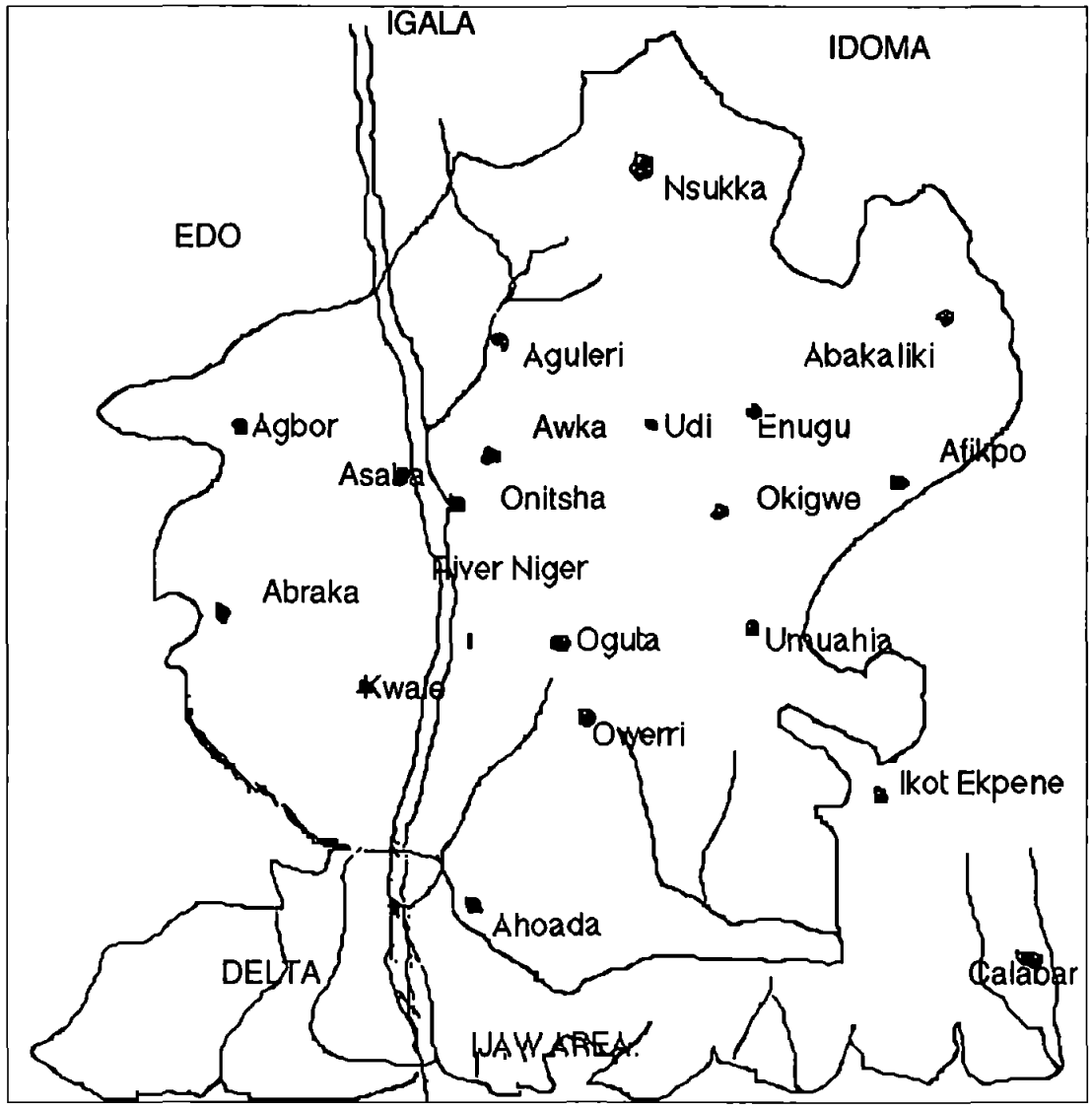

DIAGRAM 1.

MAP OF IGBOLAND INCLUDING HER NEIGHBOURS.

GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL LIFE.

With internal mobility and migrations, small, independent democracies developed. These co-operated with others for mutual benefits but the consequent competitiveness led to social mobility recognized within the polity. Social mobilty still connotes social achievements and respect but, the people's desire for truth and justice was never in doubt. Thus emerged a polity of equal representation in which every one (apart from outcasts whose dedication to a life of service to deities precluded their association

with free-borns) was allowed to speak and be heard. Authority was collectively vested in the council of family, village, clan or town elders. Elders were the repository of communal wisdom and practices, but the people retained the power to question and remove those whose actions breached a community's socio-religious and political codes. As earlier stated, chieftaincy and all forms of authoritarian rule were oddities. The idea and practice of representative democracy and a sense of republicanism were enshrined in the polity as Parrinder (1974) indicates:

> The Ibo of Nigeria and Ewe of Togo had no widely ruling chieftaincies properly belonging to their tradition.... Kingship was never a feature of the Ibo of Nigeria, but it occurred in one or two communities, for example, at the important town of Onitsha on the lower Niger. The kingship derived from the neighbouring kingdom of Benin to the west, and two kindreds which hold the right of succession between them... claim origin from Benin (71).

The centre of government was the family from which representatives (usually the eldest sons, the *okpara* (*okpalla or opara*) and heads of lineages) were selected for clan, village, town and regional councils. These relationships were purely utilitarian and aggrieved parties dissociated themselves from the group and in extreme cases, migrated. Thus, inherent in Igbo socio-political system is the ideal of freedom, individuals were accountable for their actions but without endangering their families and communities, and though religion and the arts enjoyed public and collective expression, both were essentially matters of personal choice and involvement. It is not surprising that with time, such a set-up grew more complex and to the extent that every one of the society's institutions was affected. Mbiti (1989) provides a general view of this complex development in traditional Africa:

> Thus the life of man changed gradually from being fairly simple to becoming more and more complex. People adapted their style of living to their environment in which they found themselves, and according to their needs of survival. They developed arts and crafts, acquired new skills and deepened their thinking about the world, their religious and

> magical ideas spread, they danced and sang, travelled far and wide and moved a long way from the life of their first ancestors (2-3).

What emerges from this discussion is a socio-religious charter with individuals at the centre of the universe. The Igbo strive to subdue the environment, propitiate it, accommodate it, but never to be its slave. This complicated traditional life and the respect for the work ethic further reduced the work-play ratio. Leisure became regarded as restful work. These socio-economic factors and relationships produced a society in which art celebrates life and captures the intricate complexity of the socio-geographical environment and the forces within it. According to Isichei (1970);

> In traditional Ibo society there was no clear dividing line between work and recreation, or between art and utility. Attendance at markets or participation in political meetings had _ and have _ a marked recreational element. The stories told in the evenings had a serious moral purpose _ to instil in the young the values of their society....
>
> Iboland's recreations included music and dancing. Here as elsewhere in Africa, few Europeans can appreciate, let alone emulate their intricate complexities (80).

THE CONCEPT OF SYMBOLS AND MEANING IN IGBO ARTS.

In traditional Igbo society, every activity had an entertainment median and every entertainment had a work component. The implication is that mythical time was not sacrosanct, it could be symbolically expanded and contracted as people squeezed the past, the present and, the future into one moment. To keep a hold on its circumstances, Igbo society found recourse in arts through which it celebrated life in songs, music, dance, drama, story-telling, rituals, festivals, poetry, drumming, painting, carving and pottery.

Igbo art is symbolic and for this reason, form and language are often encrypted and coded. Its understanding demands a careful decoding and an appreciation of the thought that informed and produced it. It combines the past, present and future within a mystic atmosphere which testify to the

society's constant tussle with the surrounding world of spirits and nature forces. Because of the importance of symbolism in Igbo art and life, a mask representing a wild beast is more than an artistic endeavour. It may, as well, convey in movements, dance, music, gestures, costume and appearance, the story of the terror posed by the beast before it was overcome. An appreciation of one or more of the components of the performance presents an incomplete picture. A true appreciation comes with an interpretation of the symbols, the encoded story, the total performance, and not just the spectacle.

Some symbols change but still retain their initial intent and significance while others acquire more profound associations, create new sets of ethics and retreat further into mysteries. In describing the kinds and purposes of symbols in traditional Africa, Mbiti may well have had Igboland in mind:

> There are many kinds of symbols. They are found often where art is found, since they are part of art.... Each people has its own symbols, whose meanings are generally known to almost everyone. But there are other symbols which can only be interpreted by a few individuals, as, for example, the symbols used in initiation, divination and secret societies. Religious ideas have created many of the symbols; and in turn the symbols themselves help to communicate and strengthen the religious ideas (22).

Igbo symbols have a life beyond the immediate and do not only provide links to society's past and present but also, its changing arts and ethics. Turner (1982) maintains a similar view and his study (especially among the Ndembu of Zambia) reveals an insight into traditional Africa's use of symbols:

> Symbols, too, are crucially involved in societal change _ the symbols become associated with human interests, purposes, ends and means, aspirations and ideals, individual and collective, whether these are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behaviours. For these reasons, the structure and properties of a ritual symbol become those of a dynamic entity, at least within its appropriate context of action (22).

Turner goes further to situate the power and meaning of symbols in the communication process within the cultural frame when he states that:

> Most importantly, it [the study of his social drama and the discovery of the relationship among African traditional artists] made me aware of the power of symbols in human communication.... Nor is communication through symbols limited to words. Each culture, each person within it, uses the entire sensory repertoire to convey messages... manual gesticulations, facial expressions, bodily gestures, rapid, heavy, or light breathing, tears, at the individual level; stylized gestures, dance patterns, prescribed silences, synchronized movements such as marching, the moves and 'plays' of games, sports, and rituals at the cultural level (9).

No matter how used, most Igbo symbols cross cosmic zones. This imbues them with a larger-than-life quality and in the mask theatre, it transforms performances from mundane to special and non-ordinary events. For instance, plant derivatives such as alligator pepper (*ose oji)*, Igbo kola-nut, constituting of varying number of lobes (*oji* Igbo), and palm-wine (of which the palm and raffia palm varieties exist) are significant in local diets, social interaction, and traditional medicine. The greater symbolism of these objects lies in their prominence in rituals and religion where they invite and establish the presence of the otherworldly in the communion of men and spiritual essences, and represent the unbroken unity of the people and their gods.

Meaning in Igbo society is framed by sacral, social and geographical circumstances and whether symbolic or literal, it is anchored within an ethnographic motif. Dance is more than choreography and involves the ability to improvise within existing patterns while movement is merely a skeleton for building and developing stage business. A step or pattern that lasts for long becomes monotonous and soon loses its initial impact. This underlying desire for creativity is at the heart of every Igbo public activity, performance and art. So, meaning exists on more than one level and the greater impact of theatre lies active and concealed in symbols. This is evident in the proverbs that spice Igbo language and in fact, poetry and conundrum are neither far apart nor far from theatrical performances.

With mythical time seemingly under control, theatrical space is more than physical. It is a mental attitude translated into physical reality by performances and performers are able to convert mundane places into spiritual realms by their presence. Performers move freely, converting symbols and spaces and flowing in and out of them. The dominant presence of symbols in performances explains why a young palm-frond along a thoroughfare can have the same ritual and spiritual significance as a cult house or shrine. In Igboland, the place does not necessarily determine or designate the space, the purpose and performance do.

IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION.

Despite their cherished individualism and quest to master the environment, the Igbo are very religious and no other sphere of their life has generated so much controversy and underlined the community differentials among them as their religious relationships. This explains why they have no direct worship for a national god or supreme deity as the Yoruba have in *Olodumare* and the Efik in *Nkot Abasi*. Though the terms *Chukwu*, *Chineke* and, *Ezechitoke* variously describe Igbo 'supreme deity', there is no unanimity in the people's perception of his personality or 'their relationship to him' (Nwoga, 1984). Achebe (1975) maintains that *he* exists as the *chi* in every person and thus, situated within the Igbo consciousness of individualism which *he* also nurtures. According to Achebe;

> [E]very person has an individual *Chi* who created him... a person's fortunes in life are controlled more or less completely by his chi.... The idea of individualism is sometimes traced to the christian principle that God created all men and consequently, every one of them is presumed worthy in his sight. The Igbo do better than that. They postulate the concept of every man as both a unique creature and the work of a unique creator. Which is as far as individualism and uniqueness can possibly go! And we should naturally expect such a cosmogony to have far-reaching consequences in the psychology and institutions of the people (98).

Opinions on the supreme deity are inexhaustible, but where there is agreement on *his* personality, *his* actual roles in individual lives and circumstances remain controversial subjects. Thus, different Igbo scholars argue that *he* is either a *deus incertus,* or *deus remotus* while yet another group sees *him* as a *deus otiosus* (Nwoga, 1984:20). The feeling in certain circles has been that the idea of a supreme deity was the early Christian missionaries' attempt to foist a concept on what was termed a void and, this feeling is held because of the absence of a centralized authority in Igboland, a prerequisite for the projection of a central deity. This view is strengthened by the early Christian missionaries who adapted local gods and myths to accommodate and encourage native converts, a practice Achebe faults for many wrong ideas on the supreme deity:

> Chineke, which we have come to interpret as 'Chi who creates' is nothing of the sort, but rather is a dual deity *'chi* and *eke'*. The early missionaries by putting the wrong tone on that little word, *na*, escorted a two-headed pagan god into their holy of holies (100).

The controversies persist and in 1982, a conference on the state of Igbo studies was devoted to the issue of coming to grips with the existence, position and role of the supreme deity in Igbo religion and cosmos (Nwoga, 1984). The theologians, Christian clerics, and anthropologists left the conference with their differences strongly buttressed. Parrinder's (1974) observation on the differing conceptual responses to a supreme deity in many African traditional religions summarises the Igbo attitude:

> [T]he monarchical Yoruba believed in him (God, the Supreme Being) but had no organized worship, while the much less centralized and more individualistic Ibo and Kikuyu believed in God but the latter had regular worship while the former had not (32).

The fact is that the notion of Christianity's godhead, especially the relationship with supplicants, is different from what the Igbo practised. The Christian God was out of synch with this people who regard spiritual relationships as a contractual agreement in which individuals promptly

dispensed with indolent deities and replaced them with more efficacious ones. Though the notion of a soteriological godhead is alien to Igbo religion, the recognition of a supreme deity was part of religious observance in traditional Igboland. This largely explains the equation of the Christian godhead to the Igbo Supreme Deity by the present-day Igbo, but what is not certain is whether this act is one of conversion or the mere resuscitation of a dormant but authochthonous deity. What is in general agreement is the existence of *'chi'* (different from the Creator *Chi*), the personal god or life-force of an individual and even here there are distinctions as to its nature and activities on the material sphere:

> What is in agreement in Igboland is the concept and function of chi, but there are quite a few distinctions as to the nature and form. In most areas chi remains a pure abstraction of the alter-ego, that counterpart of man which satisfies the structural conception of reality as dualistic. In other areas however, chi is identified as the *olo uwa*... the person who has reincarnated in the individual....(Nwoga, 1984: 64).

Nwoga sheds light on the distance between the material and the spiritual and the need to bridge the gap. He highlights the opportunity which this situation has created for both individual and collective expressions of religious thought in Igbo arts and the different interpretations these are likely to yield in the arts when he sums up his argument:

> In talking of the stories of Chukwu in Igbo tradition, there are two ways of approach. One is to see the stories as cosmogonic myths expected to be believed, as the quasi-scientific postulations of knowledge and religion. The other approach is to see them as stories, available for analysis as revelations of the thought pattern of the Igbo without any regard for the credibility of the stories themselves even within those communities where the stories are told (48).

The myths, legends and stories which re-tell different kinds and levels of interaction between material and spirit forces, the differing individual and collective expressions of these relationships and their artistic interpretations provide a rich source of materials for Igbo masking. Beyond this point, Igbo religion is a matter of what is practised instead of what is

believed. The reasons for this include the multiplicity of observances and beliefs and the fact that these differences co-exist in Igbo world view and do not diminish the depth of religious feelings in the society. Lastly, is the fact that no matter how deities are conceived, individuals still remain at the centre of both material and spirit forces.

Generally, the Igbo view the supreme deity as distant and operating through minor deities that populate the pantheon and with which they relate on seven principal levels, though not necessarily in the order described. There are personal, family, clan, village and, town deities. The more removed individuals are from the centre of these deities, the more irreverently they are likely to treat them. Among the deities, *Ala (Ani)* the earth goddess, *Igwe,* the god of the sky, the sun god, *Anyanwu, Orimiri,* the god of the sea, *Ahajioku* the god of yams and harvest, *Amadioha (Amadiora)* of the thunderbolt, and deities that manifest in physical forms such as animals, trees, rivers, and stones are the major deities recognised in parts of Igboland. Those worshipped depend on a community's environment, its concept of the personality of the deity and, its expectations. Others are deified legendary heroes connected to families and clans and the oracular deities (*Chukwu* in Arochukwu, *Igwekala* in Umunneoha, *Agbala* in Idemili area, etc.) which individuals consult within and outside their localities. After these are the nature and spirit forces believed to be responsible for illnesses, catastrophe, good fortune and all inexplicable circumstances.

Ancestral spirits are another source of religious practices but the least in the pantheon are minor spirits like the changeling, *ogbanje,* and other malevolent and benevolent spirits. While people make supplications to receive favour from benevolent spirits, they subdue the malevolent ones and seek protection against them. When necessary, these forces are turned

against enemies and the truth is that generally, the Igbo interact with more than one spiritual force at any particular moment. Standard religious activities are sacrifice, supplication, veneration, loyalty to beneficial deities and forces and, observance of the necessary rituals and festivals. Deities and spirits are propitiated, accommodated, controlled and sometimes worshipped in return for favours. A deity's failure to perform results in a review of its efficacy and failed deities are rejected. Basden (1966) summarises this relationship in his study of the Igbo religion:

> Disrespect is still to be found.... The natives do often neglect their gods and, on occasions, go further and exhibit symptoms of actual contempt toward them.... Shrines are allowed to fall into decay and the gods left to fend for themselves. A god may be completely abandoned or destroyed at a time when feelings run high because of trouble in the village. Either the deity was incapable of intervening, or failed to exercise his protective power. In consequence, he was denounced as an impostor; a useless encumbrance demanding sacrifices for which he gave no return....The people understand what they are doing and manifest no compunction when a deity which has fallen into disrepute is brought to an ignominous end (36).

Individual relationship is part of any religion and the Igbo use it to situate and define their religious relationships, to evaluate themselves within a given praxis and to gain the satisfaction of having played their parts. This is one of the main principles of Igbo religion and polity, and like other African peoples, life and religion are interwoven, each adjusting and adapting to the other in a dynamic landscape that sometimes necessitates changes in form and content.

IGBO COSMOLOGY.

The Igbo believe in reincarnation and view death as a passage into the spiritual realm to which the living aspire and from which souls awaiting reincarnation are secured. People secure or lose the right of reincarnation as a result of their morality and actions while alive, and failure to enter the club of ancestors and the honour of reincarnation means a place among

hated, capricious spirits and forces that plague the living. One's destination at death is outside the influence of gods, so that the Igbo world is founded on moral and ethical codes defined by individual choices and actions.

The Igbo cosmos is cyclic, with individuals at the centre. The earth belongs to *Ala (Ani)*, the earth goddess responsible for fertility and material prosperity. Around individuals are benevolent and malevolent spirits, nature forces and demons. People have been known to draw up a list of questions to pose before their ancestors on arrival in the netherworld. This complex relationship explains the reverence with which babies (who know the minds of the ancestors, having come directly from them) and elders (going to the ancestors with a plethora of requests on behalf of the living) are treated in Igboland. Thus in Igbo cosmology, the living and the dead are in continuous communion and communication through the child, the elders, oracles, diviners, sacrifices and libations.

Within this cosmos, the Igbo are in constant interaction with both benevolent and malevolent forces and celebrate life in religious and social rituals, festivals and performances that dominate their religious and social calendars. In this complicated scenario, cultural homogeneity lies in the internal cohesion of Igbo society and in the many similarities among communities, and not in their few differences. Isichei (1970) summarises traditional Igbo society:

> It had the broad cultural unity which came from a common language __ albeit with marked differences of dialect _ and similar political and social institutions. Although the details of government, and of social customs, differed considerably from place to place, the broad underlying similarities are ultimately more significant than the differences.... Her states were interrelated in a number of different ways .... More rarely, groups of unrelated towns occasionally united for mutual defence against a common enemy (71-72).

SOCIAL CHANGE AND IGBO SOCIETY.

Change in Igboland must have started with the first contact of the Igbo with outsiders, who were actually any of their neighbours and trading partners. This is because of the strong linguistic and cultural influences Igboland exerts on its neighbours, in the diffusion of Igbo language and, in the cultural eclecticism along its borders with other groups.

Igbo society initially ignores, then resists, and fights change and at such times, the society is placed on a precarious balance of collectivism and individualism. While the collective consciousness often triumphs, dissent may be exercised against a backcloth of taboos, ostracism, exile, and even death. In the face of change, three distinct positions emerge; opposition, support and, non-commitment. A new idea may be adopted or adapted to suit local demands even while some dissent remains. Change is never total for a new idea is constantly under observation and can be challenged and jettisoned with robustness whenever it places the community or individual at risk or disadvantage. Isichei (1970) cites Margery Perham's experience of colonial administration and the critical acceptance of the changing social order in the Owerrinta/Aba women's riot of 1929 when the rioting women lamented that their main grievance was that 'we are not so happy as we were before.... Our grievance is that the land is changed' (71). Ninety-six years of colonialism did not intimidate the women into accepting taxation for no matter the circumstances, the Igbo retain their vigorous individualism.

Igbo society has experienced internal and external changes, but slave trade, colonialism, Christianity and Islam, Western-European style formal education and, Nigeria's intractable political dispensation have left the most enduring legacies on its psyche. The slave trade and subsequent

colonization of what later became Nigeria led to the imposition of Indirect Rule, an alien form of centralized authority on Igboland. This disrupted the traditional socio-political set-up and replaced the former council of elders with Warrant Chiefs. This extrapolation by the colonial power was followed by the emergence of a new social class whose claim to power and authority lay in their new economic clout (Afigbo, 1972). This development found an accomplice in Christian missionaries who attacked traditional religious institutions. The consequent schisms mainly affected traditional religion which faced the dual responsibility of protecting and preserving Igbo spiritual life and, at the same time, providing the society with the impetus to resist the emergent consciousness. The conflict was not only reflected in the various clashes between masquerades and Christian converts, it touched the spiritual well-being of the people and demanded changes in all aspects of Igbo life. This was a threat to Igbo ethics, and here were potentials for conflicts between the old and the new, between traditional and alien cultures. One result of this development was that 'some of the ethics will disappear with the old gods, but new gods will create new ethical values' (Parrinder, 1974:146).

The new socio-religious consciousness nurtured by Christianity and Western European ideas was initially manifested in the desecration of shrines and overt disrespect for the indigenous religious order. Traditional art forms became the objects of controversy and the history of this period records some bloody clashes between Christian converts and maskers. Though long in operation before now, secret societies must have retreated further and, to some extent, become the instruments of Igbo reaction to Christianity's challenge to masking in particular and to Igbo arts in general. Thus, where individuals were unable to confront the new order, secret societies continued the masking traditions which had in many places been

relocated in the cult houses, shrines, sacred groves and other special places. According to Afigbo:

> The secret society was another development which probably came later to modify the basic political system.... The institution was characteristic of communities in the general area with the exception of such Ibo groups as the Oratta and Ikwerre. In each village, the society or club embraced all the able-bodied in the community who had paid the necessary entrance fee. The secret societies in their classic type, notably the Ekpo of the Ibibio, the odo and omabe of Nsukka Division, the Ekang of Aba and Bende Divisions and the mmo of most Ibo areas, simulated the spirits of dead ancestors reappearing in corporeal form to play a part in the government of the village or its segments (25).

This basic response by the mask theatre to Christianity's challenge is what Basden, Meek, and Finnegan regard as evidence of the ritual, but non-secular, functions of this performative tradition, its quasi status, and non-theatricality. These early anthropological writings hardly realised that among the Oratta and Ikwerre Igbos, masking did not necessarily retreat into secrecy and that its continued performance during the period enabled both the public and secret displays to retain their artistic and entertainment motifs. The later membership of Christian converts in secret societies and masquerade groups did not provide a lull in the conflict as some churches excommunicated members who joined these groups. The seasonal nature of performances meant that public displays were occasional and the attacks on them were sporadic and spaced out, and for these reasons, they could neither be successfully engaged nor sustained long enough to destroy the theatre. This gained Igbo masking a nostalgic attraction and resurrecting character that continued to draw participants to displays, and it is not surprising that, though it lost many members and participants, it still survived.

Within this unsettled atmosphere, Western-oriented formal education stigmatised masking and many educated Igbo looked down on it. The later penetration of Islam, a religion that abhors totemism, into northern

Igboland, was no relief. The intervening years from Nigeria's political independence in 1960 have witnessed a growing trend in political changes in Igboland. From being a part of the former Eastern Region, it became the East-Central State in 1967, and in 1975, it was split into two. On August 27, 1991, the two Igbo states were further divided into four states with some Igbo towns now components of non-Igbo states. Today, Abia, Anambra, Enugu and, Imo are Igbo states and in addition, Igbos form sizeable populations of Rivers and Delta states and provide the minority elements in Akwa Ibom, Benue, and Cross River states. These political and administrative acts have sometimes strained the unity of the Igbo and have combined with other factors to broaden its cultural base. This would ordinarily have affected its cultural homogeneity but instead, the theatre has endured and grown to national recognition wherever the Igbo are found. This has been achieved by the resilience of Igbo culture and the inability of foreign influences to win a decisive dialectical victory over it. Other reasons include the fact that the seasonal nature of performances and the presence of masking mysteries expose only a few aspects of the theatre to attack at any given time. Secondly, the differences in theatre practice among communities meant that to be roundly successful, Christianity and colonialism had to employ enough weapons to match the diversity of performances, community differences, cults and stagecrafts. Christianity and colonialism were neither able to diversify their approach nor did they understand the theatre enough to destroy it.

THE IGBO MASK THEATRE.

The desire to control, assuage, propitiate, master and engage the material and spiritual forces in the environment are the major themes of Igbo art and theatre. In masking, this is achieved by the symbolic presentation of the non-material into material forms and the creation of a suitable theatre for

such interactions with the unseen. Igbo theatrical symbols are not ends in themselves, they are vehicles of continuity, they represent the past and address the present and future. The combination of nature and art places Igboland on a different philosophical framework from other traditions whose theatres have sometimes been admitted into the study and critique of Igbo theatre. For instance, while Europe aims at conquering nature through a process of de-mythologization and de-mystification, Igbo world view seeks accommodation and a romance of convenience with nature.

Igbo symbols use the entire physical and mental milieu to locate and signify the unseen, the desired, and the expected. The world of animals, plants, and nature forces are recreated in an attempt to probe life and provide a physical parallel to it. Masks fill this role by combining the physical, the historical, the mythical and mysterious in symbols that capture and designate infinite time and space into definite times and specific spots. To achieve this, Igbo masks operate on three main symbolic levels. They initiate the presence of ancestors, spirits, nature forces and abstract qualities. They are characters in performances and thirdly, they represent spiritual entities whose spiritual embodiments are beyond man's attempts at conceptualization and actualization. The last factor is the essence of the spiritual 'absent-presence' (Okagbue, 1993). Igbo masks are expressive, they are neither neutral nor malleable and cannot be transformed into new characters. As characters, they reveal hidden characteristics but do not develop beyond their commonly-known attributes in the course of a performance. Given the predominance of symbols and the celebrative motif of Igbo theatre, the evaluation of performances requires a culturally-relevant index whose meaning is found within the same cultural matrix that shaped it. While a commonly known story may be rooted in a mask, the audience desires no narration but the actualization of the story in symbolic representation.

Words, a story-line or dialogue do not, in essence play the same roles they play in other traditions in Igbo masking. The fact is that the Igbo could not have evolved a theatre tradition other than the mask theatre and for that reason, the temptation to search for the Greek and Western European models in Igbo theatre is unnecessary. Enekwe (1987) puts the argument more forcefully when he states that 'what the Igbo need they have developed, based on their own tastes, outlook, and the resources available to them' (17). Enekwe reiterates the logical evolution of the theatre from Igbo culture but its theatrical and structural uniqueness require further investigation in the face of other masking traditions.

Igbo masking is one of many masking traditions in Nigeria that include the Tiv *kwag-hir* puppet and masquerade theatre, the *ekpo* of Ibibio and, the *owu* of the Kalabari and Ijaw to mention a few. Differences in dialects have yielded interchangeable terminologies, *mmo, mmonwu, mmuo, mma* and *mmanwu* for the concept of Igbo masking. In some places, these general terms are substituted for local performances in the manner of using a species for a genre. Here, the concept includes the interpretation as Ugonna (1984) refers to an Ozubulu performance as *Mmonwu,* a term he recognises as denoting the entire concept of Igbo masking. In a related development, a similar performance in Ogwa is refered to as *Mmuo,* the same term for masking in the area. The cited examples may be rare and even though their performing masks are specifically named, this practice actually subordinates the general to the specific without confusing participants. Generally, the practice is to recognise the concept and to designate specific performances with local names, but the popularity of local performances such as *odo, omabe, omaba, ekpe, ekeleke,* and *owu* eclipse the concept and become synonymous with it in the concerned areas.

Scholars like Ugonna (1984) have ascribed the origins of Igbo theatre to neighbouring groups such as the Igala to the north, the semi-Bantu to the East and the Niger Delta tribes to the south but, these have been adapted to local conditions and according to Nzekwu (1981), 'the adaptation varies from place to place depending on the source of the cult in each Ibo community and its degree of development' (134). Despite the cultural interaction between the Igbo and their neighbours, the foreign origin of the theatre has not been sufficiently established, but its form, practice and functions strongly support its socio-religious intentions. Theatrical practice varies in places, but Igbo theatre has come a long way to arrive at its present stage. It remains a unique performance despite similarities to neighbouring displays.

Masking exist on all continents. The place and time of the first mask(s) have not been convincingly determined, but its primal functions lend weight to the speculation that it was part of early man's artistic and spiritual rendition of the physio-metaphysical environment. The **Encyclopedia Britannica** describes masks:

> A form of disguise... an object that is frequently worn over or in front of the face to hide the identity of a person and by its own features to establish another being. This essential characteristic of hiding and revealing personalities or moods is common to all masks. As cultural objects they have been used throughout the world in all periods since the Stone Age and have been as varied in appearance as in their use and symbolism (586).

This description must be extended for a mask may be borne on the head with the masker's face visible, or it may consist of a head and face piece. Masks are cultural phenomena in all their material and spiritual particulars and these qualities imbue them with a secondary life. The recorded appearance of masks in the theatre in Greece in the 5th century B. C. underlines the antiquity of masking and its much earlier presence in many unrecorded theatre traditions. The appearance of masks at festivals in many

cultures underline their socio-religious functions and significance, features that have remained largely unchanged in Igbo theatre. Masks were used in Europe in the Middle Ages during the mystery plays of the 12th to the 16th centuries. They were used to delineate diverse characters such as angels, demons, and the seven deadly sins. In the 15th century Renaissance in Italy, they flourished in Commedia dell'arte but faded in importance in the 18th century until the second half of the 20th century when experimental theatres gradually resurrected them in European theatre.

Masking in Asia includes the highly stylized and rigidly traditional masks of the Noh drama of Japan which Western conventions and aesthetics are yet to penetrate. Though rare in Kabuki, actors still apply their make-up to resemble masks. Masks appear in the highly representative religious and secular dramas of China, in the Indian Sanskrit and Ramlila, and in Korean, Tibetan, and Mongolian Shamanism. In the authochthonous homeland of the Amerindians, Java, Bali, and Africa, masks are prominent though their actual theatrical and secular values were only recently recognised. The case of Java, an Islamic state, remains a puzzle since Islam abhors images and statuesque represenations. The late recognition of non-European traditional theatres and their purely artistic use of masks, was due to the error of early anthropologists in mistaking the Aristotelian concept as the only evidence of a theatrical tradition. Later studies show almost as many theatre traditions as there are people and for these reasons, performance traditions such as Igbo masking are studied as artistic and theatrical forms with well-defined aesthetics.

Aristotle provided the world with the first documented definition of drama, but what was then not realised, was that he merely described a practice shaped by his native culture, and perhaps, the only culture known to him. He thus posited that drama is predicated upon a narrative,

characterization, thought, diction, a linear plot, and the unities of time, action and place. These factors are very important in European theatre, and though dramatic elements like catharsis, thought, the unities, and characterisation are recognised as relevant and important by many other theatres, this is a mere coincidence. The fact is that, the whole concept of Aristotle's theory is best confined to Greek theatre and its European spin-offs. This is what Finnegan (1970) did not sufficiently recognise in her hasty dismissal of African theatres as non-dramatic:

> [I]t would perhaps be truer to say that in Africa, in contrast to Western Europe and Asia, drama is not typically a widespread or developed form. [There are]... certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena (500-501).

This was the scene into which Echeruo's (1981) essay,*The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual,* appeared and in which he posited that:

> The dramatic content is, in other words, buried in the ritual purity of the festival. What is needed then ... is to force that ritual to yield its story; to cut through the overlay of ceremony to the primary events of the mythos. Ritual is and has always been, a dead end, it cannot grow. It only shrinks steadily into inevitably inaccessible (though powerful) symbolism. The Igbo should do what the Greeks did: expand ritual into life and give that life a secular base. That way, we may be able to interpret and reinterpret that serious view of life which is now only so dimly manifested in our festivals (147).

Controversy followed Echeruo's suggestion probably because it appeared to support Finnegan's remark and while Igbo critics appeared to overlook it, Echeruo's proposal aroused strong censure as it neither provided for how and why the Igbo should follow the Greek example, nor did it sufficiently convince on the dimness of Igbo festivals. His proposal took a light view of the importance of symbolism in Igbo life, especially when he laments the retreat of ritual into symbolism. Echeruo has, to some degree, won some converts in Kalu Uka and others, and while these scholars do not necessarily question the theatricality of Igbo masking, the robust opposition to their views erroneously suggests this. What must be conceded is the fact that Igbo masking is a unique cultural institution that cannot be squeezed

into any other model because of its cultural praxis. This is because the differences between theatres arise as a result of differences in performing conditions, local conventions, the purpose of theatre in the society, and the people's cultural history. Cultural framework and history are the most important of these considerations and make one theatre immensely distinguishable from others.

Igbo masking is familiar to Igbo society from which it evolved and for which it exists. After all, 'any artistic form depends upon some readiness in the receiver to co-operate with its aims and conventions' (Sinfield, 1983:185) and 'established genre indicates a record of what has found its place' (Schechner, 1983:90). It depends on Igbo participants and the fact that the often-cited Greek theatre later abandoned its ritual roots does not render it more theatre than Igbo masking which remains faithful to its roots. The difference is a matter of cultural dialectics, and as Enekwe (1987) points out, 'society and history determine the shape that drama takes at any time or place' (11). Culture and history determine theatre and theatricality and a society determines its dramatic genres, structures, and performative modes. In a study of cultural performances in India, Turner (1986) quotes Milton Singer, whose study appreciates the fact that:

> 'Cultural performances' are composed of 'cultural media'_ modes of communication which include not only spoken language, but such non-linguistic media as 'song, dance, acting out, and graphic and plastic arts_ combined in many ways to express and communicate the content of Indian culture (23).

In the past, sociological and anthropological studies have been used to deny or establish the theatricality of Igbo masking. In 1960, Nzekwu's article, *Masquerade* (1981) traced the origins and functions of masquerade traditions among the ethnic groups of South-Eastern Nigeria and stressed the administrative and religious functions of masking in Igboland. He drew attention to the changing theories and disturbing decline of the tradition in

the face of Christianity and West-European education. Richard and Helen Henderson (1966), studied the socialising role of masks in Onitsha in the '*mmuo*' initiation rituals, while Ahanotu (1971) regards law and order as the main function of Igbo masking and states that:

> Igbo ancestors... appeared periodically to inspect the activities of their respective communities. They would appear in the form of *mmonwu* (masked men or *mmo*). The Igbo utilising this idea of the position of the ancestors vis-a-vis the spiritual world of Ala, gave spiritual attributes to *mmo* displays (25).

Ahanotu insists on the theatricality of Igbo masking while Odita's (1970) illuminating study regards the theatre as a regional phenomena and adopts an ethnographic approach in its investigation of the types, functions, and interpretations of Igbo masks. Jones (1945) emphasises pageantry and play in *The Masked Plays of South-Eastern Nigeria*. Other sociological approaches include that of Rev. Arazu (1982), who underwent initiation to understudy the masking tradition and the frequent clashes between his parishioners and maskers. Arazu appealed to European-style educated Igbos to return to masking and for the introduction of the box-office into this communal form. The call is an attempt to export the theatre from its communal base and accord it western secularism and a supposed veneer of respectability. Ottenberg's (1975) study of *Okumkpo* in Afikpo goes beyond the ritual to unearth the theatre and to mark the beginning of a new approach by Nigerian and foreign scholars in the study of Igbo theatre.

The later more academic approach yielded relevant information and also produced some nationalistic writings. One of the merits of these later studies is the progression of the mask theatre from rejection to acceptance and the anchoring of its dialectics within the performative genre. Secondly, is the wider ethnographic coverage involved. Amankulor (1981) discusses the concept and practice of traditional African theatre and concludes that the Ekpe festival of Ngwaland is religious ritual and dance drama.

Amankulor compares the Ekpe dramatic and festival cycle with the Greek Dionysia, and re-opens Echeruo argument:

> From the drama-theatre development point of view, Ekpe contains the same germs which housed the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. What remains to raise it to the Aeschylean level of drama is a reconstruction of its dialogue to provide for greater communication between the chorus and the chief actor. The Greek idea of the chorus is present in Ekpe and it does the same function of communal representation (127).

Amankulor's suggestion is useful for three reasons. It goes beyond Echeruo's position to suggest the reconstruction of Igbo theatre's symbolic dialogue to provide greater theatrical communication between performers and secondly, it highlights the advanced state of designs in Igbo theatre. Thirdly, it extends the demographic area so far studied to include Southeastern Igboland.

From Central Igboland comes Ugonna's study (1984) which unconvincingly traces the birth of a new and more recent Igbo theatre to Ozubulu in the 1880s. He maintains that the present theatres in the *Mmonwu* areas of Igboland have their roots in this Ozubulu antecedent through one Okonkwo Ogbuchi, an itinerant Aro diviner/medicineman who resided in Ozubulu in the middle 19th century. Ugonna distinguishes the sacred and non-sacred as the two major genres in Igbo theatre. He makes valuable contributions in the areas of structure, proxemics, theatre design, costume, and audience, but his claims to the Ozubulu etymon and the unity of this particular performances in Igboland are unsustainable. The main strength of his thesis lies in the area of performance, symbolism, and aesthetics.

After Ugonna, Enekwe (1987) insists on the 'oneness of ritual and theatre' and identifies a five-point internal structure in Igbo theatre. These are the Encounter, Viewing, Didactic, Composite and, Participational-Climatic structures. Though the first and last appear related, Enekwe's work extends those by Amankulor, Nzekwu, and Ugonna. It covers Northern Igboland

and draws its juice from the flourishing *Omabe, Odo,* and *Okumkpo* traditions. It thematically unites the whole of Igboland into one performance landscape and finally scuttles the arguments that Igbo theatre is still subsumed in the gizzards of ritual and is still awaiting disgorgement. Enekwe's internal structures are related to the functions and practice of Igbo traditional religion. He puts a distance between Igbo theatre and other theatres by employing Echeruo's earlier provocative statement as the tripod for his thesis. He challenges the idea of bringing Aristotle into a discussion of Igbo and non-Greek theatres and argues that:

> All these views are widespread and have been impeding the understanding of theatre, especially that of the Igbo. I, therefore, consider it necessary to examine them in the light of theatre history and practice. I will do so under the following headings: (a) Narrative Plot (b) Functions of drama; and (c) Ritual (12).

Enekwe focuses attention on theatre practice and dispenses with normative concerns like tragedy and comedy. Apart from the five-tier structure, he identifies function and form as the main parameters for delineating the performative modes in Igbo theatre. The modes are reflected in mask-types which he names as Elegant masks, Masks that Dramatize Masculine Strength, Satirical Masks, Lampooning Masks, Wonder-Making Masks, and Ancestral Masks. Enekwe's work is silent on masks that represent deities and abstract qualities, but it is still a more inclusive undertaking in attempting a classification that embraces both secular and sacred masks. The study is anchored on the ritual frame and provides the theatre with deeper roots in the more accommodating term, performance.

Some exponents of the functionalist school, Okagbue (1989, 1991, 1992) and Irobi (1992), have gone further by re-investing Igbo masking with all its ritual and secular grandeur. This has resulted in performative metaphors that view masking as an *ensemble-within-an-ensemble.* Among the present generation of theatre practitioners, and in the face of increasing

social interest in the tradition, Igbo theatre is a study in Igbo history, religion, and anthropology. These subjects share a common denominator in their varying approaches, scope and, depth. The picture that emerges to the unwary is a theatre of disparate practices with no uniting factors, a set of sometimes similar performances without an established aesthetics. Some have even seen the theatre as spontaneous, meaning that it lacks intensive theatrical work and that the depth and scope of its artistic specializations and input are not of the same magnitude associated with contemporary literary theatres. Schechner and Appel (1990) uphold this view and state that:

> But in much of Africa, performance knowledge is transmitted in a more informal manner_ through imitation beginning in very early childhood. Mothers move the arms of infants in time with the drums; young children attempt the dance steps and are lovingly encouraged. Slowly, over many years, skills are absorbed, practised and sharpened (5-6).

This view is far from the truth and begs the issue by presenting an unwholesome picture that dispenses with artistic integrity, engaging theatre work and stagecraft in place of cultural hand-downs. Though these factors have hardly been studied exhaustively, existing facts indicate the great amount of work Igbo theatre demands of its performers and participants.

The main purpose of this study is to establish the aesthetics of Igbo masking. This is undertaken within the confines of performance because as an oral tradition, it is as a performance that the theatre comes alive. The study defines Igbo theatre as social drama, a genre that adapts Aristotle's descriptions to specific ethnographic backgrounds and cultural frames. Cultural frames particularise theatres so that no matter how unbelievable the characters are, no matter how ridiculous and grotesque they may be in appearance, irrespective of the level of abstraction and theatrical symbolism, as long as they contain recognizable modes of behaviour and communication, they are understood and appreciated in performing

communities as authentic theatre. It is only when they overshoot the boundaries of rational and fail to communicate through their constituent activities that they cease to be good theatre.

Igbo theatre is a collective theatrical expression and not the private statement of an individual. It is a pool for the articulation of individual artistic experiences and ideas. It is functional to Igbo society, for the theatre that is most relevant and meaningful to a community is that which is internal and evolves from it. The enduring relationship between social drama and cultural performances like Igbo theatre is founded on the fact that social drama is 'the empirical unit of social process from which has been derived and is constantly being derived, the various genres of cultural performances' (Turner, 1986:92-93). What is needed is to explore Igbo performative circumstances, to relate the theatre's specifics and generalities, and its multifarious interpretations to the entire Igbo socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. It is also necessary to recognise the subtle cultural peculiarities in sections of Igboland, how these shape community and zonal theatrical practices, and how common factors and peculiarities converge into a single theatrical picture in Igboland. This is the first step forward in establishing the aesthetics of Igbo mask theatre.

CHAPTER TWO.

IGBO TRADITIONAL THEATRE:

ONE PEOPLE, MANY SPIRITS, DIFFERENT MASKS.

There are thousands of mask performances in Igboland, and like most oral traditions, there are a multiplicity of forms and practices. This is because accretions in oral traditions lead to individual and group differentials so that the types of a mask or display may be mistaken for different, unrelated types. When the spin-offs of a type spread and develop and, especially if the developments are in different directions, the evidence of their common origins diminish. This situation is typical of Igboland where democratic and individualistic ethics encourage personal and group differences. This results in the varying interpretations that common artistic styles and objects sometimes generate in different communities. Igbo traditional theatre is one of many art forms that accommodate differences in meaning and interpretations. This has transformed it into a colourful collage and the presence of uniformly-inspired, differently-rendered songs, music, and dances has accentuated this picture of seeming differences. The fact remains, however, that despite external influences and local adaptations, displays share common origins and influences, and are united in the common ancestry of the Igbo. In fact, the minor similarities among performances in different Igbo communities reflect the tradition's oneness and the cross-community influences that characterise Igbo masking.

Given the large number of mask-types and displays involved, the study of Igbo theatrical scene requires a zonal approach as most of the common and specific elements of Igbo masking exist along zonal boundaries. These comprise different aesthetic parameters that sustain the theatre within specified areas. The number of mask-types, performing situations and

constituent communities differ in the zones. A particular mask-type may be very popular in its zone but, non-existent beyond it. Similarly, a supposedly widespread performance may not necessarily be staged by all the communities in a zone. Because some areas can be associated with more than one popular performance, the designation of zones is based on the broad cultural affinity and linguistic similarities among closely-related communities. This affinity is broadly reflected in the grouping of the Igbo into four main administrative states in Nigeria, but the spill-over of groups and clans among states is still common. Zonal representatives have been selected randomly, but the availability of materials and information, and the accessibility of such performances to the public have been considered. For these reasons, the secret *Ekpe* display in Arochukwu is dispensed with for the more widespread and public derivative it spawned in Ngwa and other areas. The main consideration here is the fact that, the public is the reason for theatre and despite its overall theatricality, a secret display which elicits little or no artistic discussion or input, is more firmly rooted in ritual than in theatre.

Igboland has been divided into North, South, Central and Central-Western zones and each is represented with a dominant or popular masking tradition or type. The central zone, the highly populated Igbo heartland is divided into two to ensure comprehensive coverage in an area where the theatre is generally believed to have encountered more vicissitudes and experienced a lot of internal and external stimuli in its development and practices. Thus, in Central Igboland, is found among others, the *Mmonwu* or *Mmuo*, the *Ulaga*, *Ojionu*, and *Agaba* mask-types. The Central-Western region which incorporates the Western/Niger Igbo provides the *Ijele*, *Agaba*, *Ojionu*, *Ayaka* and *Ulaga* types and the *Omaba* tradition. The South has *Okonko*, *Ekpe* and *Ikoro* costume-drama as the dominant

traditions. In the North, *Okumkpo* is pre-eminent in Afikpo, while *Odo* and *Omabe* dominate the Udi-Enugu-Opi-Nsukka axis. While most of the stated examples are mask-types, Omaba, Okumkpo, Odo and Omabe are masking traditions.

Mmonwu, Ekpe, and Okumkpo are zonal representatives. Mmonwu or Mmuo can be said to be relatively widespread in its zone, but that does not support Ugonna's (1984) claim that, it is the dominant masking type in Central Igboland. The sheer number of other masks and performances in the zone dwarf Mmonwu. What lends it to this study are its spread and ability to forge artistic links among performing communities. Similar patterns are observed among communities in Southern Igboland where Ekpe (as Ekpe-Okonko in Arochukwu) is dominant. Despite belonging to the same genealogical strands as other communities in Southern Igboland, Obioma Ngwa is one of the few communities without Ekpe, and where its dominant position is occupied by the *Ikoro* dance drama. Other non-Ekpe communities in the zone include Ahoada, Asa, Andoni, Ikwerre, and Etche in Rivers State, whose masking traditions have been influenced by the Ekine masquerade societies of their Kalabari neighbours. Ekpe is widespread in the South and has spread to the southern parts of Central Igboland. Okumkpo combines traditional Afikpo and elements of neighbouring forms (from Annang, Efik, and Ibibio traditions of Cross River State) to produce a unique performance that underscores the ethnocultural eclectism noticeable in Igbo border communities. In addition to the selected examples, is the Agaba phenomenon which crosses boundaries and exists in varying forms and intensity in all the zones. The absence of a definite ethnographic stamp and the popularity of its much more recent secular derivates, *Odogwu, Ozokwamkpo , and Ebiogwu,* commend Agaba to this study.

Of these performances, Ekpe enjoys the singular position of being a masking tradition, type and, festival. This means that, unlike some traditional festivals and such modern pageants as *Mmonwu* and *Omenimo* festivals which attract a host of masks, Ekpe is the focus of the umbrella festival. The Ekpe example neither reflects the nature and scope of masking in Igbo festivals, nor is it axiomatic of the relationship between masks and festivals generally. Festivals celebrate different aspects of a community's life and provide a forum for mask displays, and whenever present, masking provides engaging theatre at festivals. The *Enemma* in Nkpor, is an example of a communal festival that incorporates masking and though different from the mask-types and traditions already cited, this festival display receives attention for five main reasons. Firstly, masking in Enemma is more social than in Ekpe, which has socio-religious significance for performing communities. Secondly, Enemma highlights masking and designing ideas insufficiently exploited in the other displays, and thirdly, the inclusion of a festival performance improves on existing data and broadens the scope of the discussions. In addition, the fact that a festival is only one of the many performing circumstances for participating masks suggests that, some festivals are umbrellas for public theatre. Lastly, the fine distinction between communal festival and theatre is a precedent to non-contextual performances staged outside traditional environments and which excite no overt religious or ritual significance. Herein lies the main difference between theatre and ritual, and it is as social theatre in a festival setting that this work includes mask performances in Enemma.

Each zonal representative is widespread and commands official (religious, secular, or both) recognition in its area. Each remains within the popular imagination and displays evidence of its ability to respond to societal needs and changing values. These are communal performances, they recognize

individual artistic expressions, and are either seasonal celebrations, or communions between the living and the otherworldly. As a result of their influences, the selected performances are strongly positioned to have been the subjects of theatrical innovations that have yielded similar forms within and outside their territories. Lastly, they possess developed and sustainable theatricality as opposed to mere spectacle.

THE COSMIC BRIDGE: MAN AND SPIRIT IN IGBO THEATRE.

Art 'is primarily relevant and meaningful to its creator and audience and it may be said to "express" in another sense, the life of the society from which it stems, to indicate customs, dress, behaviour, and to reflect confusion or decorum, violence or peace' (Langer, 1973:25). Aesthetics deals with the concept and principles of good taste and the appreciation of beauty as understood and practised by any society. It is culture-bound and functions within the specific understanding of a group. Since cultural activities are comprehensively meaningful to the owners of a culture, it is difficult to appreciate the depth of feelings and meanings that underscore a cultural activity outside one's society. The uprooting of a cultural mode of activity and its sanitization for examination is misleading since the dry specimen cannot reproduce the rich associations the activity enjoys in its native environment. It is within the background of a performance that, its ethos and conceptual framework are found. This is what Eliade (1960) meant when he stated that:

> In all traditional societies, every responsible action reproduced its mystical, transhuman model, and consequently took place in sacred time. Labour, handicrafts, war and love were all sacraments. By thus opening out into the Great Time, this sacramental existence, poor as it often might be, was nevertheless rich in significance; at all events, it was not under the tyranny of time (36-37).

Igbo theatre belongs to this genre of cultural activities bound by sacred time and space, and its sacralising factor is the presence of masks, performers,

and participants in a sensitized space. Its aesthetics can only be appreciated in the context of Igbo religion, the concept of time and space, art, meaning, and symbols.

The recognition of formal qualities informs art and the audience's appreciation of it. Aesthetics incorporates the idea that 'beautiful' and 'ugly', and to some extent 'good' and 'bad', are vague and imprecise in application and subjective in meaning. The terms signify different attitudes and feelings, and ideas and artefacts may represent various states and things to different people. This means that though aesthetics is concerned with the appreciation of art, to a great extent, it is more of a referent framework for artists and patrons and not a precise prescription. At least, this is the way it functions in societies where ideas are variously interpreted, and where presentations are more than finished products, but are in addition, regarded as living processes and engagements between artists and patrons in which the former invites the attention and participation of the latter. This is the nature of the aesthetics of Igbo masking which operates within a flexible framework that guides artists and patrons.

Aesthetic flexibility enables performers and participants in Igbo theatre to interpret a performance in ways that may be inapplicable in other performances. As a result, while some designs, space and props have common significance and meanings, others can only be interpreted in the context of specific performances. Here, specific aesthetic factors determine how theatrical activities are conceived and presented, how they are received and interpreted, and how they are analysed and evaluated. This is evident in the various views on the personality of the masker, masking styles and the relationship between religion and theatre in Igboland. Maskers are variously conceived as spirit, man, and human vehicle for the presence and embodiment of spirit and nature forces. The concept of masking and

masker determines the kind of costumes invested in a mask. Thus, while some communities permit the exposure of parts of a masker's body, such is unacceptable and nullifies the whole idea of masking in other areas. Secondly, masked figures are regarded as other presences (both sacred and secular), persons, ancestral spirits, gods, and nature forces, for as Harding (1996) points out about African masking, "the crowd's excitement is given as evidence of their perception of the masked figure as a god and the performer's resultant 'elation' is the activating sensation which alters his own self-perception" (62). Elation is a common factor of Igbo masking, and the notions communities and groups have of the characters in displays determine the nature and type of masks created, the respect accorded them, their associated taboos, the degree of involvement by women, the absence and, where present, the significance of initiation rites. The fact is that however masked figures are conceived and costumed, Igbo masks are created with a sense of power and sacrality which they retain throughout their performing lives.

The third aesthetic factor derives from a mask's supposed functions in a community. In addition to determining the involvement of women and the presence and type of initiation rites, the socio-religious functions of a mask influence the time and frequency of performances, its interpretation, design and preparation of performing space, and the amount and nature of props and symbolism invested in displays. Two main types of initiation can be identified: the common and general type through which a community periodically renews itself by integrating qualified members into full and equal participation in the community's life. This type is part of the rites of passage, it is open to all who qualify, especially by virtue of age and sex, and grants few special privileges to initiates. The other is special, and admits only those who satisfy established criteria into such special institutions and

privileges as the masking society. The latter rites permit initiates to adopt cult names and language, grant them some psychological leverage over non-initiates, and their consequent ritual separation from non-initiates, often described in unflattering terms, is part of the theatre at displays. A community may have more than one special initiation for different institutions, both kinds may exist in a community, and the common variety may be a route to the special form.

The fourth aesthetic factor concerns the presence or absence of overt spiritual elements and the extent of their incorporation in stagecraft. It determines the nature of displays and provides designers and performers with specific characteristics for the creation of masks and performances. Masks are imbued with features that reveal their latent and potential attributes, and sometimes, the influences associated with some mask-types contribute to a community's masking ideas. This is apparent in the designs and subsequent developments in masking in some communities. Lastly, there is no Igbo masking performance without some form of music and dance and, both are important for two main reasons. Firstly, they are distinct art forms and their integration in Igbo theatre is a matter of artistic virtuosity and secondly, they provide a background for interactive stage business between performers and participants.

Aesthetic factors are interpreted variously by communities and such interpretations determine the specifics of their masking aesthetics. The result is that, while a general aesthetic philosophy governs Igbo art forms, communities differ in its applications. The main considerations are effectiveness and appropriateness, and not the mere pre-occupation with questions of beauty and ugliness. The main characteristic features of Igbo masking aesthetics are its flexibility and its progressive expansion and incorporation of new ideas. For these reasons, its scope, content, and

analytical criteria grow progressively from a performing group to the community. It collates aesthetic ideas from the community to the zone and finally culminates in its widest, most collective and embrasive form in the general aesthetics of Igbo art. A community's masking norm is the collation of different performing conditions within the locality. Several community peculiarites combine with those of related communities to form zonal aesthetics. The result is that the aesthetic map of Igbo theatre is a broad canvas of tiny, definite strokes bordered into sections by small distinct lines. Metaphorically-speaking, some strokes cross zonal borders where both strokes and borders are harnessed into a mesh by the more inclusive boundaries of Igboland.

CENTRAL IGBOLAND.

Central Igboland includes the former local government areas of Nnewi, Ihiala, and Ogbaru in Anambra state; Oru, Orlu, Mbaitoli, Ikeduru, Ugwuta, and Nkwerre in Imo State (Ugonna, 1984: 10-11). It includes the derivatives of these local government areas in the present and former Anambra and Imo states. The area constitutes part of the Igbo heartland of Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu and Awka which has been variously called 'the nuclear Igboland' (Uchendu, 1966:3), the 'Ibo centre or core' (Jones, 1963:30), and 'one of the primary cores of the Igbo culture area' (Onwuejeogwu, 1972:25). Archaeological findings by Shaw support its centrality and antiquity, and identify it as the area from which the Igbo migrated to other areas. This dispersal pattern already provides a cultural and artistic link in the area and to the mask theatre.

Central Igboland extends across the River Niger to Asaba, Abor, and Oshimili local government areas of Delta state. The area has many performances among which are the ancient *Ayaka, Ulaga, Ojionu, Agaba,*

Mmonwu, the Wonder Masks and the various community traditions that combine some of these forms in festivals.

The Ozubulu (in Anambra State) performance Ugonna (1984) refers to as *Mmonwu* is known as *Mmuo* in Ogwa and many communities in Imo State. Asuzu Ukaegbu confirmed this difference in terminology when he stated that, 'we married our Mmuo from Ekwe who actually 'married' from Mmonwu Obosi. The Obosi people married from another town' (interview, 23 December, 1993, 6 January, 1994). This statement supports Ugonna's claims on the spread and development of this performance. The use of the terms, *mmonwu* and *mmuo*, must not be confused with their use as the general descriptive terms for the Igbo mask theatre. Its spread in Central Igboland retraces a common traditional pattern in the spread of socio-cultural and artistic ideas in Igboland.

"*Marrying* ", is a form of initiation peculiar to this performance, and it involves groups undergoing special rites, intense training, and the social aspects of Igbo marriage to acquire the practice. The similarity in styles and stagecraft in this performance among performing communities emphasises cultural and artistic unity and underscores Igbo theatre's ability to borrow ideas and still retain its local character.

Most masking in Central Igboland is underpinned by mysteries and rituals. These may be derived through initiations or the special rites of separation by masquerade societies. Most performances are seasonal, but out of season displays are not unusual. Theatre seasons may be annual, biennial or for longer intervals. Here, as in most of Igboland, some masking societies admit few menopausal women, believed to be no longer susceptible to the adverse effects associated with proximity to especially powerful masks. In Mmonwu, there could be more than one theatre-group in a community.

Performing groups have choruses, one for initiated males and another, of non-initiated female singers, usually screened away from the spiritual potency and magical power of masks. Generally, performing groups are instituted by individuals coming together for the purpose of masking, but

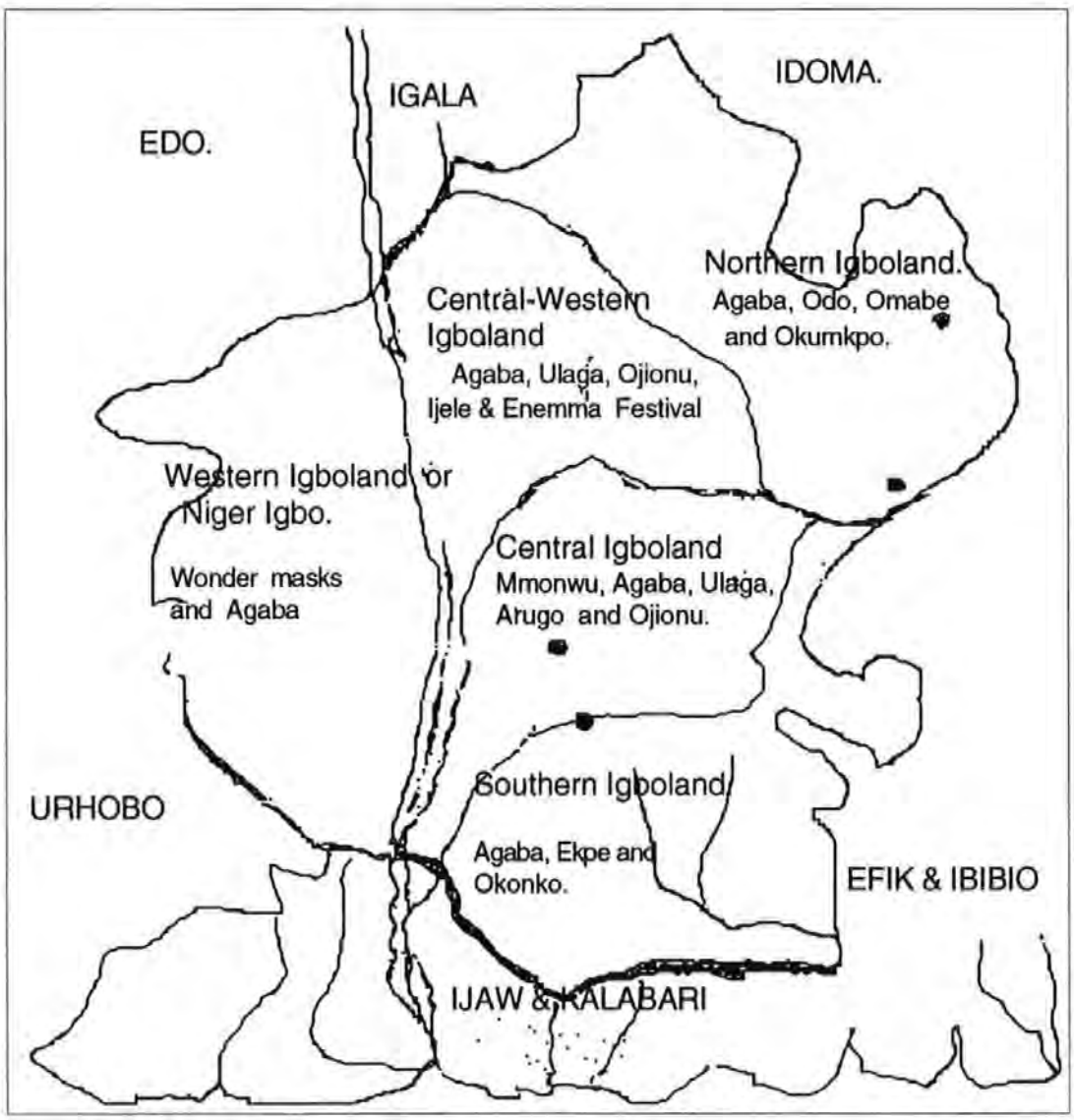

DIAGRAM 2.

SECTIONAL MAP OF IGBOLAND WITH REPRESENTATIVE MASKING PERFORMANCES.

in some places, they are established on the satisfaction of certain conditions other than initiations. For example, the establishment of an *mmonwu*

group is similar to Igbo traditional marriage rites. Aspiring groups consult oracles on the society from which to 'marry the mmonwu' (Ugonna, 136) and the *marrying* process concludes with the initiation of the group at their patrons' cult house.

Igbo masking is generally associated with restrictions which differ among communities. These mainly sacred restrictions are emphasised by the magical feats and aura that surround performing masks in an atmosphere of heightened spirituality. Despite the fact that masking groups are regarded with varying levels of respect and seriousness, they all share a common concern for maintaining masking mysteries and some of the greatest prohibitions include addressing a mask as a human being, desecration, pointing at it, and for a pregnant woman or girl to walk by its left hand. In the specific case of *mmonwu*, the sacrality of masks prevents their close proximity with performers and participants, and to sustain the mystique, initiates maintain this sacred distance and respect at all times. This distance continues in the society house where only special functionaries like the play-director, *Akatakpo*, ventures into the *udide* (mythical spider) chamber where masks rise and descend.

Performances take place in sacred time and place, and all theatrical components reflect and emphasize the presence of the otherworldly. In places, they are timed and staged in venues that reflect mysteries and power as in night masquerades which appear only at night to avert close scrutiny from prying eyes. In *mmonwu*, theatrical space and communication are conditioned by a liminal atmosphere and respect that attends the meeting of different but related essences. Magic, acrobatics, and the display of power and spirituality are essential parts of this union. In Ozubulu for instance, *mmonwu* masks are conceived as inscrutable spirit-beings beyond man's control. They are believed to be capable of deliberately reining in their

powers to commune and celebrate with human beings. A performance is thus, hinged on the precarious balance between danger and safety and must contain enough of the terrifying and dangerous to elicit sacred terror and awe in performers and participants. This is necessary because for both groups, catharsis comes through the massaging of fear and danger and the willing surrender to a 'serious and dangerous play'. Mask charges and the consequent flight of participants are highpoints in almost all displays by aggressive masks. The litmus test for aggressive masks is the seriousness with which participants play the game and the thinness of the balance that keeps performances between controlled danger and chaos. In addition to this general consideration, other specific factors are applied for specific masks and performances. *Mmonwu* is evaluated on the level of its mysteries and supernatural content, the wisdom and authority of masks, their supposed omniscience, and their abilities to terrify and humble the living.

Performers and participants share the same aesthetic considerations and co-operate in performances. Participants can recall accompanying myths and understand the characteristics of each mask and, even when new ones and ideas are incorporated, they reach into their repertoire to interpret and weigh them against the community's aesthetic expectations. *Mmonwu* masks are beings but non-human, so human features will limit them. They have no definable human features, yet they are not beasts under humans. As spirits, they defy categorisation, most tower in height to over eight feet and in a symbolic sense, their height places them on a spiritual pedestal from which they exercise their powers. As spirits, they are omniscient and too elevated to speak as mortals and so, use interpreters. Participants are aware of what to expect in performances and for them, a successful performance releases a feeling of communal continuity, fulfils the

expectations of good music, dextrous dancing skills, skillful instrumentation, and where necessary, frightening mask chases. In some displays, pure entertainment does not rank high on the critical scale. An aggressive display that entertains in music and dance but fails to arouse and sustain terror and fear would be regarded as unsuccessful. Where the emphasis is on communal display and participation as in *Odo* and *Omabe,* success is measured by the level of communal participation since people are often disinclined from engaging in poor performances. In a poor *mmonwu* display, acrobatics and mask chases elicit laughter instead of terror, masks are derogatorily thought of as 'mere men', a term that destroys the basis of a performance as a celebration between the living and the otherworldly. In such a state, a display becomes a 'play', having lost its serious spiritual base.

Igbo masking is not founded on the development and resolution of dramatic conflicts through a narrative plot. What exists, and in a subliminal state, are primordial encounters between the Igbo and their environment and these are not necessarily conveyed through a sustained narrative, as accommodation, rapproachment, conciliation, communion and affirmation are more the norm than the resolution of specific conflicts. Where such conflicts existed in the past, and were part of theatre, as in the origins of *Ekpe* in Umuode-Nsulu (Amankulor, 1981), they are archetypes and more of symbolic representations than the models for new performances. The transfer of archetype to models is only to such an extent that what the theatre celebrates is their denouement. One way of interpreting this theatrical development is in recognising that the Igbo consider interactions between man and society on one hand and, between the two and environment, as a continuous process that is addressed but not necessarily resolved in a single performance. This is because cycle performances and festivals that celebrate communal survival and

continuity as Ekpe and Enemma respectively, are not only preceded with socio-religious ritual, their significance and outcome are felt in the collective consciousness.

What the theatre celebrates is a resolution which comes by way of communion, affirmation and, accommodation. There are no clearly designated protagonists or antagonists, there is instead, a community re-affirming its victories and purging its fears in a celebration. Individual skills are applauded but, greater emphasis is placed on group displays so that performances are evaluated on both the separate components and the total picture. This is more so in performances like *mmonwu,* in which catharsis comes from a sense of danger and fear and the release from these emotions. Thus, most socio-religious performances do not conclude in the arena, they reverberate in the community and instead of creating aesthetic detachment, they invoke and invite aesthetic involvement.

Because Igbo masking involves all cosmic zones, mythologised beings, animals, plants, and objects are never far from it, and their believed involvement in certain secret aspects of a display add to the mystery of some performances and their stagecraft. While extraordinary presences and special objects are accommodated in some places, they are barred in others. For example, the Ekpe mask can be created in the image of any animal other than the snake which in Ngwa society, is regarded as cursed for moving without limbs. Tales associated with mythologised beings and legendary heroes are sources of theatre and the secrecy surounding them contributes to the aesthetic picture and influences a community's masking ideas. While some characters remain in secret places, others are drawn into public displays where stage business is designed and performed around them. For instance, when it is put out that masks rise from specific places, performers go through their acts for such masks to ostensibly emerge.

In *mmonwu*, the mythical creative spider is important in raising masks but it remains in the liminal zone. Benedict Onuoha, a leading member of the *mmuo* group in Ogwa, and Asuzu Ukaegbu, a diviner and traditional healer who claimed to have tested the masks' magical powers, explain the role of the spider in *mmuo* performances in Ogwa. Both respondents claim the spider is a mythical creation that bestrides the worlds of spirits and mortals. It is patient and painstaking, and creates beauty (as in its web) out of seemingly unrelated parts. It creates accord out of disorder and is thus, a symbol of unity in the cult house. Since it is believed to spin the masks' costumes from raffia straw, it unites conflicting views and creates a conducive atmosphere for performances (interview, 11 January, 1994). These views are similar to Eliade's (1961) on the notion of the spider-web as a cosmic centre that connects the three cosmic zones of the universe (51). The village square, market, and sacred grove are mystical centres where human and spirit beings meet and, as staging spaces, they are symbolic microcosms of the Igbo universe. As the medium for the ascent and descent of masks, the spider connects different cosmic zones and is central in *Mmonwu* lore.

Before performances, the juice of secret herbs associated with this performance are squeezed into the *agbisi* ant-hole by the play director in a ritual of ascent in which masks answer in their spirit-voice and appear in the *udide*, spider chamber. Groups determine the style of ascent and only the *omu*, the ritual and symbolic young palm-frond, can prevent the appearance of masks. In some performances, *abosi'* leaves play the dual role of enabling and stopping ascending masks and wherever the ritual takes place, masks may rise anywhere, a grove, shrine, the home of an initiate or, from the forest and still retain their otherworldly splendour.

Mmonwu masks are conceived as spiritual beings with no human parallels. They are apotheosized spirit personae from the spirit world and in appearance, they combine the unimaginable and the probable. This is because, they must bear both points of relationship and dissonance with the human community. The body and facial features of most of the four character-types are neither particularly human nor theriomorphic. These have indistinguishable faces and backs and only the direction of movement is indicative of a face. This indistinction is deliberate and masks move in opposite directions apparently without turning. In fact, they defy the usual expectation of a head-piece and, are covered from head to toes in colourful cloths and raffia straw. The crest of the head is either domed or capped to heighten their mystic and magical aura. Ugonna's description of the character and appearance of an Ozubulu *mmonwu* mask differs slightly from those in other areas.

SOUTHERN IGBOLAND.

Southern Igboland is made up of the Aba-Ngwa-Umuahia and Arochukwu-Ohafia-Igbere axes. It includes autonomous Igbo communities in the border areas between Igboland and Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River states and the southern tip of old Owerri division. Apart from Owerri in Imo State, a great proportion of Southern Igboland is concentrated in Abia State which also contains Northern Igbo elements. Culturally, the Greater Owerri area is like a bridge-head uniting Southern and Central Igboland and it is not surprising that it shares the masking styles of both zones.

Southern Igboland has greater cultural homogeneity than is experienced in Central Igboland. Studies link the communities in this zone to the spread of Igbo populations from their centrally-located homeland in the Awka-Orlu-

Okigwe area (Jones, 1963:30-31; Uchendu, 1966: 2-3.) and their cultural homogeneity may not be unconnected with the slave trade and the strong spiritual influence of the Long Juju, both of which the Aros inflicted on the area. The Aro influence is credited with *Ekpe* and *Okonko*, two of the area's strongest cultural institutions. Other performances include *Obong* and *Ekpo* (among the Aro), *Agaba* and community masking festivals, but Ekpe enjoys the greatest influence in the region. It is at the heart of community festivals and is the core of the socio-economic calender of many communities in the zone.

The term, Ekpe, refers to two distinct masking traditions among the Southern Igbo and their southern neighbours, the Efik and Ibibio of the Cross River. The first is a secret cult also called Okonko, exclusive to men in many parts of Igboland. Originating as an instrument for the propagation of social order, the Ekpe in Efik-Ibibio became a powerful instrument of social control. Its masking tradition is traced to the Ekoi (also called the Ejegham) who live in Southeastern Nigeria and Western Cameroons. The other is the dominant theatrical tradition in Ngwaland, Umuahia and parts of Owerri provinces (Amankulor, 1981). This study is concerned with the latter and though its performance aesthetics appear antipodal to that of the Efik and Ibibio, it grew tangentially out of that tradition.

According to Eze Ezeagwu Arochukwu, Chief Okoroafor Uroh Okoroafor:

> What you have in Ngwa and other parts of Igboland is not Ekpe, but Okonko. We introduced both into Igboland but your people never quite understood the deliberate ambiguity in Aro language. As an Ekpe chief and an Aro traditional ruler, I know the difference between our Ekpe and what obtains in other areas. Ekpe is open to only Aros who meet its initiation requirements. It is the highest government in Arochukwu, a secret society whose mysteries are revealed on pain of death. Only a few of us belong to the highest of its seven stages. The real Ekpe is staged once in a year during the '*Igba Ekpe Unwu*' ceremony to end the lean period and to usher plenitude. This is held around September and lasts from 4-8 days. Non-initiates do not understand Ekpe symbolic language. Like our Obong, real Ekpe comes from Akwa Ibom. So, the public display called Ekpe in Ngwa and Owerri is not Ekpe but,

> Okonko, the less serious affair staged to celebrate the *Ikeji* festival and the secret burial rites of dead Ekpe members (interview, 8 January, 1994).

In pre-independence Nigeria, the Aros used Ekpe for the economic domination of Igboland, but in the southern region in particular, it has remained a legacy of Aro cultural influence. In nearly all Ekpe communities outside Arochukwu, a transposition of concepts occurred so that while the name was borrowed intact, the aesthetics of the related Okonko was imposed on Ekpe. Richard Anaba of Ohuhu-Nsulu, Ngwa, explains what happened:

> Ekpe is the most important communal festival in Ngwaland and was until recently, more important than Christmas. Christians participate actively in it because it is devoid of links to a communal deity since Rev. Whitely, a white missionary who established the Qua Iboe Church in Ngwaland removed and destroyed our traditional shrines. The festival marks the transition from one year to another, is open to all and celebrates the union between us and our ancestors. It is neither a secret affair nor the product of a cult as the Okonko or (Ekpe Okonko) introduced by the Aros and whose members still owe allegiance to Arochukwu (interviews, 10-12 January, 1994).

Going by Ezeagwu's earlier explanations, Anaba could as well, be speaking about Okonko which he however, distinguishes from Ekpe performance.

In its present form, Ekpe has definite Igbo imprints and Amankulor credits Umuode-Nsulu with retaining the original attributes of this performance. Similar claims are made for other communities for Richard Anaba insists that beside the pure form practised by Ohuhu and Umuode-Nsulu Ngwa, communities like Umuosu have added other masking elements like magic and acrobatic displays to Ekpe performances. Both views signify community peculiarities in this performance with known origins and, they persist as communities continually adapt the tradition and expand its aesthetics to meet their specific needs. The Ohuhu-Nsulu practice appears to diminish the religious-ritual stature that Ekpe enjoys in Umuode-Nsulu, but the Umuosu practice broadens its base, dispenses with the sacrifice at the climactic stage, and introduces other masking styles. In Umuosu, the

sacrifice is a private religious affair, performed by individuals and as a collective act, by family, kindred and clan representatives. The public display in Umuosu celebrates the success of individual and collective sacrifices and the expected blessings in the coming year. The Umuode and Ohuhu-Nsulu models are different and provide the framework for further discussions.

Ekpe masking is the highpoint of the annual Ekpe festival to mark the culmination of a performing community's annual rites. It mainly features sacrifices of thanksgiving and propitiation to a community's deities and ancestors, and it concludes with the community celebrating the successes of the old and the security and abundance of the new year. Amankulor uses the Umuode form to trace the Ekpe cycle which begins in April with the *Ikpa-Unwu* (famine ceremony) and moves to June with the *Ira-Ugu* feast (the eating of the fluted pumpkin vegetable sauce) in a rebirth of hope and anticipation of harvest. The *Iwa-ji'* (yam-slicing ceremony) comes in July with sacrifices to Njoku (Ahajioku, the yam deity) to usher in the new yams, while the *Igba-Ogbom* is staged in August-September to celebrate abundance. From October to November are the *Itu-Aka* (thanksgiving prayer) and *Ize-Mmuo* (dedication ceremony) with its overtones of tragedy, anxieties, and fears that a successful Ekpe festival resolves (Amankulor, 1981). Ekpe performance is the last of the ceremonies and from late December to mid-January, various communities stage their performances.

The *Ize-Mmuo* establishes the tone for Ekpe and in Umuode-Nsulu, Alumerechi, the community deity and goddess, selects a priest. It is a period of anxiety and pain for the community and the chosen priest who is separated onto a different order and ceases to have any contact with the living. The anxiety is released in celebration when the priest-elect, Eze Alumerechi, accepts the responsibility on behalf of the community. Since

no actual selection of a priest occurs in the life of a serving one, the *Ize Mmuo* ceremony is observed with a dramatised re-enactment of the selection ritual. In Ohuhu-Nsulu, the absence of a communal deity eliminates this re-enactment and the performance celebrates the community's past. While the absence of a community deity ostensibly lowers the ritual significance of Ekpe in Ohuhu-Nsulu, the believed presence and veneration of ancestors ensure that displays are not the social engagements Anaba implied.

In Umuode-Nsulu, Ekpe combines the tragic overtones of *Ize-Mmuo* and the ribaldry and comic aspects of *Igba-Ogbom*. The spirit of the community appears in a mask to re-enact the ancient adventure in which a member of the community was sacrificed as a result of the conflict that arose over loyalty to Alumerechi. Ekpe is thus, an affirmation of the abiding loyalty of the people to their deity, and a communion between them and their life-forces. The archetype recounted here contains an emotive conflict resolved with the death of the antagonist for refusing to serve Alumerechi. This death does not completely lose its tragic tone because of the supremacy of collective destiny over individual rights. Subsequent re-enactments substitute an animal for a human being and by so doing, the anxiety and suspense that precede the climactic sacrifice often give way to celebration in a successful sacrifice. In the event of an unsuccessful resolution, certain rituals are required to cleanse and re-integrate the masker into the community and to restore the latter's socio-religious harmony. Such maskers cease from further participation in Ekpe for life.

A successful *Ize-Mmuo* indicates that Ekpe festival is imminent in the year and its use to ensure communal survival holds dual significance for a community. In performance, the Ekpe masker is symbolically and spiritually transformed into a combination of man and spirit. As man, he

needs the protection of the deities and ancestors, and the prayers of the community. The transformation to spirit is not total and the masker still has the human emotions the festival expiates. In offering the sacrifice, he re-enacts the archetypal incident and as priest, the sacrifice admits him before the deity and valorizes the community's sacrifice. In this role, the masker is a dual personality, his priesthood makes him a spirit-being but the fears and anxieties that accompany the ritual act keep him essentially human. These factors make Ekpe a marriage of drama and ritual.

The ritual involves the sacrifice of an animal by the masker on behalf of the community. The aim is to purge the community of ills, restore its health, and secure its prosperity for the coming year. While a goat is commonly used for the sacrifice, this is substituted for a cow in the seventh year in most communities. The bigger, seventh year sacrifice is to celebrate the end of a masker's service and his replacement by another performer from a succeeding clan or kindred. This practice is different in Umuosu where the sacrifice is not collective but personal, and where the animal ranges from a cock to cow depending on the economic circumstances of individuals. In Isingwu-Ohuhu, it is a two-day affair preceded by a ritualized sacrifice. Here, a special shrine is set up by the head of each lineage, and the performance includes the ferrocious *ekpo* masquerade that serves in crowd control and police duties. Other characters include *Odumodu*, *Nwaeru*, and *Nwanyi afo ime* (pregnant woman), a parody of wayward women. Ekpe's final act in Isingwu-Ohuhu is to cut the *omu* on a lustrated sacrificial spot. *Omu* substitutes life animals in Umuode and Ohuhu-Nsulu where successful sacrifices are marked by the severance of an animal's head in a single stroke of the masker's machete. Anaba recalls a year in his youth when a young masker in Ohuhu-Nsulu was permitted three ritual strokes on the

sacrificial animal. Despite this concession which reflects the community's adaptability, the young masker accomplished the ritual in one stroke.

The success or failure of this ritual act determines the extent of the accompanying festivities. Thus, Ekpe performance has no fixed duration, though it generally lasts for most of the evening. There is no initiation into Ekpe in Ngwa and most places outside Arochukwu. Maskers do not speak during performances, they are not identified and in Ohuhu-Nsulu, the secrecy is maintained throughout the seven years performance-cycle and sometimes, even after. The total secrecy surrounding Ekpe maskers is shared by the Aros and some others, though such secrecy is less in Umuosu, Umuokpara Umuahia, and Umuode.

The evaluation of Ekpe performance begins with the success of the preceding *Ize-Mmuo* festival, the selection, acceptance and personal preparation by the chief masker. His coded movements and stage business are complemented by the artistic inputs of dance and music performed by choric groups. Other critical factors include the level of acting and impersonation of women by boy-actors, the level of danger and tension created by the bow-man, and the anxiety aroused by Ekpe's ritualised hesitations before the sacrifice. The frequent ruptures of space during displays could easily vitiate a performance, but in Umuode, a chorus of guards establishes a balance of order and active involvement by participants. As dance-drama, music is an important component in Ekpe. The processional songs through the community are important, but the mask initiates and punctuates the story-line in a sustained and dramatized sequence. Through an ingenious and dextrous application of steps to music, the mask recounts the story of the community's already known past adventure. As important as they are in the display, the artistic inputs are

subordinated to the ritual sacrifice which is the climax of both the display and the festival.

Since there is no second attempt on the animal, the anxious wait for the propitious moment for the single determining stroke is both dramatic and real. Ekpe sacrifice is usually successful but there are no indications that performances would conclude satisfactorily. So, while a successful sacrifice marks a successful performance, individual contributions must be weighed alongside the masker's performance since the absence of one negates the psychological wholeness of the presentation. Here, the main consideration is for a successful performance, not a good display. The dramatic conflict is both personal (for the masker) and collective (for the community). Its resolution is linked to the security and assurances obtained for the coming year and the failure of a performance is the failure of the community's future. The main significance of Ekpe is felt in the community and reverberates in the activities and events of the coming year.

NORTHERN IGBOLAND.

Northern Igboland comprises Enugu State and the northern parts of Abia State. It is the areas from Oji-River through Udi to the Enugu-Opi-Nsukka-Abakaliki axis in Enugu State, Afikpo-Amasiri, Uburu-Ohaozara, and the Okpoha-Abba Omege-Amudo areas in Abia State. The area is endowed with a rich cultural heritage and healthy masking traditions. *Odo* and *Omabe* are popular and native to Nsukka while *Okumkpo* is the most popular of the many displays in Afikpo. '*Igbo Omabe* and *Igbo Odo* ' are distinct though they belong to the same ethnic stock. Of the five local government areas in Nsukka, three belong to the former while the other two and another two in Enugu are Odo areas. Both are similar in practice and are the biggest, most lavish traditional festivals in their areas, and are quite

elaborate and comparable to Christmas. Masks in both traditions represent returning dead, displays are preceded by sacrifices, and are centred on the socio-religious relationship between communities and their deities, and ancestors. The main difference between them is their cycles and scope. The very elaborate *Omabe* involves the entire community and takes place every four to five years. On the other hand, *Odo* is an all male, annual affair in which the returning dead sojourn in the community for nine months before returning to the spirit-world. Other mask-types and festivals abound and as Ezeogo Itiri Ubaghala II, the traditional ruler of Amasiri points out, Northern Igboland has not suffered some of the deep cultural and social cleavages experienced in Central Igboland.

Masking in Northern Igboland has been studied widely (Ottenberg, (1975), Enekwe, (1987), and Onyeke (1990). Ottenberg's study conducted between 1951 and 1953, and from 1959 to 1960, complements Jones' (1939-1945) work and Nzekwu's 1959-1960 essays on Igbo masquerades. Northern Igbo masking may have derived some impetus from the active masking traditions of her Igala and Tiv neighbours in the North, and Efik-Ibibio to the South-East if Nzekwu's views on the origins of Igbo masking are to be accepted. Nzekwu (1981) maintains that among the Igbo, masquerading is of foreign origin, having been introduced along with some cult from the Igala to the north, the semi-Bantu to the east and the Niger Delta tribes to the south. In fact, Enekwe (1981) traces Odo's origins to Nri, a town whose links to the Igala goes back to the 9th century, a fact supported by the 1961 Igbo Ukwu excavations by Thurstan Shaw (Oguagha, 1984). Oguagha's study of the Nri-Igala connection corroborates the foreign influence in masking in Northern Igboland and its cultural and spiritual relationship with Central Igboland when he compares his investigations with earlier ones by C.K. Meek and states:

> That Nri ritual and political influence preceded the rise of the Igala state as a powerful kingdom is evident in the traditions of the Nsukka communities that were affected by both cultures. In these communities, it is stated that before Igala political influence became strong in the area, they were under Nri hegemony. Thus their first kings were emigrants from Nri who brought into these towns certain cults such as Ezoguda at Nsukka.... However, with the extension of Igala influence in the area, the towns began to identify more with Idah....(51).

The long Nri-Igala association has been aided by different versions of legends. One version claims that Idah and Nri were half-brothers, while another links Igbo ancestry to Eri, an Igala warrior who settled in what became Igbo country and bore Nri as the first of four sons and a daughter. These views bear out Nzekwu's position on foreign influences in Igbo masking and confirm Onwuejeogwu's (1974) point that Nri provided the cultural charter that unified the northern Igbo groups. This cultural unity is reflected in the many related masking traditions and types in Igboland.

Afikpo society is based on exclusively male secret societies and the age-grade system which demand participation in the community's life. Males are initiated into the secret society at the appropriate age and each society has a shrine, and an appointed chief priest. *Egbele* is the masking spirit common to all Afikpo society. Each village has an hierarchy and secret society which produces a variety of mask performances, the highest of which is Okumkpo. There is no secret society at the town or village-group level, though there are town deities and shrines and a council of elders drawn from the various villages and kindreds. Town councils exercise no control over village secret societies and masking, the responsibility rests in village councils. All Afikpo villages can produce Okumkpo but the elaborateness and financial commitment limit their ability to mount annual performances. The result is that only a few performances are produced in any year and sometimes, on a rotational basis among members of a village-group.

Masks feature in all spheres in Afikpo and though they remain technically on the scene to celebrate the rites of passage, they disappear during the farming season between February and July-August. They re-appear in late August-early September with the New Yam festival. After this, villages celebrate the four-day Rainy Season festival (*Iko Udumini*) and the four-day Dry Season festival (*Iko Okochi*) in late November-early December to signal the period for Okumkpo. Okumkpo enjoys great appeal like the neighbouring Odo and Omabe of Nsukka, and part of its appeal stems from the fact that, like other Afikpo mask displays, all its performers are masked. This produces an assembly of differently-costumed masks that number about a hundred.

Okumkpo is a vaudeville of dance, music, song, and acting in which the community performs aspects of its life. It is governed by pre-performance, in-performance and, post-performance taboos and rituals. On its eve, the performing society's priest offers sacrifices to Egbele to ensure the safety of performers. It is staged on an Eke day that falls on a Sunday in January-February. Ezeogo Itiri, traditional ruler of Amasiri autonomous community in Afikpo, points out that the consideration for Sunday is a modern introduction which became popular for three reasons. Firstly, Sunday creates a relaxed atmosphere for participation in the performance and, secondly, it extricates Okumkpo from the folds of traditional religion to a time acceptable to Christians as a period of rest. Lastly, Sunday removed the stigma traditional religion had among Christians and Okumkpo benefitted from the active participation of all sections of the community. Itiri notes that in recent years, the last consideration has been the source of more friction than understanding between some Christians and Okumkpo performers. Performers sleep in the men's rest house (*Ulogo*) and abstain

from sexual relationships. Costuming and staging areas are sealed off from women and non-initiates.

On performance days, performers undergo the *Rie Mma* ritual and *eat* the spirit (*Oriri Mma*) in the preparation and costuming enclosure (*Ajaba*). This ritual invites *Egbele* inside the masker, for in Afikpo belief, the spirit is not in the mask itself, but is imbibed by maskers. Maskers are costumed by helpers who must neither eat nor drink, nor touch the ritually-symbolic *abosi* tree and the walls of the costuming room. Eating in a costuming room invites *Egbele* inside the helper who then masks and becomes a performer. Itiri explains *Egbele's* place in Afikpo masking:

> Egbele is at the heart of Afikpo masking. It protects and punishes and its powers are real as non-initiates and soldiers who entered the Amasiri *Ulogo* during the Nigerian Civil War learnt to their peril. Egbele punishes culprits for revealing masking mysteries and breaking taboos. To prevent deaths from its wrath, some of our people undergo initiations in Edda in Abakaliki. Edda initiation grants immunity from Egbele's anger, is as effective as ours' and after it, maskers can unmask to answer nature's call. Ordinarily, these are abominations and culprits offer purifying sacrifices or suffer the consequences. This relationship between us and Abakaliki runs deep in our past (interview; 20 December, 1993).

Mirrors are forbidden during costuming and helpers cannot leave before the maskers. Once inside the preparation room, performers leave only to join the mask procession and helpers divest themselves of *Egbele* in the *Meruo Onwegi* (self-cleansing ritual) by touching an *abosi* tree and spitting on the ground. During performances, maskers may only return to the *ajaba* for water, to urinate and after a performance, to divest themselves of Egbele in the self-cleansing ritual. They spend the night in the society house and remain there till the first woman walks across the performing square the following day. Only those who have undergone the *Isubu Eda* initiation take part in Afikpo masking. Okumkpo is mandatory on members of the play-leader's age-grade and on lower age-grades. Senior age-grades participate as volunteers and with the leader's age-grade, constitute the *Ori*

acting chorus. Play leaders stand throughout performances, maintain order and discipline, and signal participants when to present gifts to performers.

Ottenberg identifies eight or nine stages in Okumkpo performances in Ehugbo, most are denoted by particular theatrical activities and name, but the main attraction in the display is the thematic thrust which he summarises:

> The essence of the play is the direct ridicule and satirizing of real persons and topical events, clothed in ritualized and superficially religious terms. The content of the play falls into three broad categories:1. the ridicule of persons who have acted foolishly, 2. the criticism of leaders who do not lead properly and, 3. the maintenance of the relative roles of males and females (129).

Ezeogo Itiri confirms the theme and nature of Okumkpo performances and provides insights on its staging style:

> The play uses real names and can satirize anybody. Members of my family can provide *Ori* with stories about me. We attend performances knowing we may be the subject of the satire and people learn valuable lessons from such displays. We look forward to it as it brings relaxation to the village after the hectic farming and harvesting periods. The topics are contemporary and songs are created to match our social life and drumming styles. Morning performances in the *Ogo* [dancing square] and market square of the performing village precede brief displays at market squares, all registered *Ogo* in the village-group and, *Ogo Ikoro* [communal square of the village-group]. It then returns to the producing village's *Ogo Ikoro* for the final performance in the evening. This is the procession that Ottenberg talks about in Ehugbo autonomous community (interview, 4 January, 1994).

Real names give substance and local flavour to gossips and social commentaries as the performances probe and gauge public morality and social cohesion. The leaders run commentaries on the skits and maintain dialogue with participants whose reactions influence the duration, direction, and content of performances. Sometimes, leaders participate in the skits but soon return to their narrating and commentatorial roles. The maiden Okumkpo (*Agbogho Okumkpo*) remains in the preparation room till escorted out at some stage for the climactic performance.

Stage business is built around the acting, dancing, and singing *Ori* chorus and the dancing and singing *Akparakpa* who imitate females in their costume, dancing, and singing. These are complemented by play leaders, their assistants, and drummers hired from another village for their services. Okumkpo masks may be owned by performers, borrowed or hired from carvers or performers in other villages. Players make few costumes and often obtain some from women relatives. Despite their sacral overtones, Okumkpo masks are not conceived as deities or returning ancestors. They are objects of art and maskers are activated by Egbele. Their purpose is not to induce spiritual communion between communities and spiritual essences, but to help create the avenues for theatre and entertainment. Performances help to restore social harmony but have no overt religious outcome or purpose. This is why a poor performance, especially a poor display by the maiden Okumkpo, does not threaten the life of the community but exposes artistic ineptitude. Egbele is therefore, *eaten* to assist performers.

Okumkpo is thus, not a religious ritual but a ritualized social celebration. The absence of religious motifs, myths and legends means that symbology in Okumkpo is shifted from the religious to the social plane where the subjects and objects of displays are mortals. For this reason, humour, satire, and farce have evolved as suitable dramatic vehicles for communal discourse and instructions. The respect that non-initiates and women accord Okumkpo and all Afikpo masks are predicated on fear of Egbele, the desire to maintain social demarcations, and the need to balance the gender equation. As social drama, Okumkpo songs, stories, and skits deal with current issues and are not repeated in subsequent years. Groups create new ones so that every display is unique, its themes and skits reflect the pulse of the community, and participants are critically engaged. This explains the

thematic contemporariness and biting humour that inform Okumkpo. These general rubrics vary among village-groups.

Okumkpo criticises but it re-affirms communal ethos and institutions. As Enekwe (1987) points out:

> The young men in Okumkpo performance do not see themselves as confronting the elders. All adults are susceptible to their lampoon. Okumkpo is not a ritual of status reversal. . . . The performance is aimed at purging society of evil, by naming the evil and attacking it. Society hopes that once this is done there will be an improvement in social relationships and in the general moral of the community (115-116).

Temporarily, performers become vehicles of social cohesion in place of the elders. Even here, there is no reversal of roles for the older age-grades lead, constitute the important *ori* chorus and thus, maintain the traditional *status quo*. Performances attack evil in a ritually-cleansed environment that protects performers and dissipates ill-feelings from those satirised in the displays. As Ottenberg points out, placing the statements in the context of a particular situation and specific individuals heightens their interest and effectiveness. Okumkpo is a form of morality play, concerned with how persons should behave through showing how persons have behaved. 'The skits act as a tension-reducing mechanism for traditionalistic and progressive young men and for the elders who are watching the performance in a social system in which generation conflicts are inherent' (Ottenberg, 1975:135).

Edda, in Abakaliki, has no Okumkpo tradition, but the presence of Egbele in this community and in Afikpo is symptomatic of the deeper unity of Igbo communities and the differential interpretations that masking subscribes to in both related and different communities. In fact, Abakaliki has greater cultural affinity with the Odo and Omabe staging areas than Afikpo. It is, thus, not surprising that some strong masking trends and types in some

communities and in Igboland have their roots outside those communities and Igbo borders respectively.

CENTRAL-WESTERN IGBOLAND.

The Central-Western zone is part of the Igbo heartland and its constituent communities include Awka-Onitsha axis, Igbo Ukwu and Nri, the ancestral home of the Igbo. Nri is the spiritual root that links all Igbo communities and the starting point of Igbo civilization and spread. Oguagha (1984) recalls the antiquity of Nri and associates objects from the Igbo Ukwu excavations with Eze Nri, and it is significant that the towns of Agukwu Nri and Oreri still possess this kingship institution and are only nine miles and a mile respectively from Igbo Ukwu. He re-states Jones (1963) and Uchendu (1965), and concludes that the Awka-Orlu highlands in which the Onitsha-Awka area is located, was the earliest centre of population from where the Igbo dispersed to the Nsukka-Udi highlands to the east and southwards to the coast. Thomas (1913) who states that Nri influence extended to the West-Niger Igbo and even beyond to Idu [Benin City] described Eze Nri as the spiritual potentate over a large extent of Igbo country. These facts establish Nri influence in the whole of Igboland including the Niger Igbo. The many influences in the area have spawned different masking traditions and types, and the many communal festivals reflect the area's rich cultural heritage and history.

MASKING AND FESTIVALS: THE *ENEMMA* EXAMPLE.

In Nkpor, an annual communal festival of fecundity and thanksgiving attracts different performing masks as the town celebrates with its spiritual essences. This is the *Enemma* festival, a one-day ceremony that begins with sacrifices to the community's deities. The festival is timed to be a week from the *Uzoiyi* festival in Umuoji, a community regarded as a kin to

Nkpor. *Uzoiyi* and *Enemma* are similar in scope and purpose, and the relationship between the two and their respective communities is a common cultural feature that shows that despite the quest for individual identities, Igbo communities share masking traditions and styles in much the same way as related communities espouse different masking styles and stagecraft. The date for the festival is fixed after consultations with oracles. It is usually celebrated in the *Eke* market square on the last *Nkwo* Sunday in February to mark the beginning of the town's traditional farming season. It begins at noon and lasts till dusk. Its purpose is to thank the town's deities for protection, prosperity and a good harvest for the year, and to secure their blessings for the coming farming season. Since rainfall is at the heart of farming, the 'first' rainfall of the year is anxiously awaited in the night after the festival. The festival terminates the socio-economic activities of one year and initiates its successor. Enemma is essentially a masking festival and as previously stated, it provides the opportunity to investigate contextual festival set-up and the nature and range of theatre in festivals.

The festival brings different masks together in a celebratory atmosphere. Since the masks have purposes beyond the festival, their displays and designs are governed by differing aesthetic considerations. The eclecticism and flexibility of Igbo masking enables different ideas and styles to come together in festival performances. Though the many ideas make several demands on participants, the final performance picture is a composite scene.

Participation and investigations of Enemma festivals by Okagbue have yielded valuable information on the integration of masking and festivals, and the incorporation of different but specific masking practices into the more embracing and complex framework of festivals. This development, which highlights the existence and nature of both contextual and non-

contextual displays, reveals a more complex side of Igbo theatre. This is due to three main factors. Firstly, many festivals are flexible enough to accommodate masks other than those created specifically for them while a few like Ekpe and Okonko stage only their specialised masks. Secondly, the admission of different mask types in festivals suggests that while Igbo theatre has been used for religious purposes, it was not created for the service of religion. It is a social and independent institution with little distinction between sacred and secular. Thirdly, the increase in performing circumstances does not only enable the arts in the theatre to develop, the narrow confines of purpose-designed ritual masks have not stifled artistic and theatrical creativity.

Rituals are unprogressive by nature and purpose, they entertain little or no changes. They are quite comfortable in a shrinking environment and though societies re-invent them occasionally, like myths, they 'shrink steadily into inevitably inaccessible (though powerful) symbolism' (Echeruo, 1981:147). In Igboland, festivals provide rituals with the opportunity for periodic renewal and re-enactment for without such a re-living process, they become endangered. Festivals, therefore, play more important roles than hitherto conceded in the development and aesthetics of Igbo theatre. They are rallying points in most societies where their power is harnessed for the preservation and propagation of cultures and ideas. Whether religious or social, as long as they are going concerns, festivals lubricate and sustain their constituent activities. This is why most religions exploit the idea and function of festivals in their rites.

Central-Western Igboland has a very rich artistic tradition evident in masking and in the execution of its music, dance, and costuming. So, in addition to its primary socio-religious role, Enemma, like many Igbo festivals, provides the focus and impetus for artistic expressions. The

consequent increase in the number and level of theatrical performances and developments in the area have greatly influenced the articulated approach now being experienced in other areas. Masking in the area is such that, the occasional lapses noticed in certain parts of Southern and Central Igboland are absent here. While the common youth display, *ekpo* (different from the Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Arochukwu versions), is almost declining in many parts, it has either evolved in other directions or been replaced by more serious, better designed displays in this zone. It is not surprising that the *Ayaka, Ulaga, Ojionu, Agaba* and its derivatives _ *Odogwu Anya Mmee, Ebiogwu* and *Ozokwamkpo* _ are popular and receive similar artistic attention and intensive work as *Ijele* and the mysterious *Egwugwu* in Asaba.

The sheer number of masks and the artistic competitions among performers may explain why more varieties of masks appear to participate in communal festivals in this area than in other parts of Igboland. Ekpe, Odo, and Omabe are linked only to the festivals that bear their names, and as important as they are, the artistic developments associated with them are not on the same grand scale as those of Central-Western Igboland. The former performances are mainly contextual, the latter are not only contextual, they enjoy the additional exposure of non-restrictive festival engagements. This area's ability to influence masking in other areas is due mainly to the mobility of people its commercial centres have encouraged from other areas. Other communities borrow masking ideas from this zone, with the latter becoming richer from ideas and elements incorporated from other areas. Beauty, gracefulness and elegance are intrinsic qualities of masking in the area and these are integrated in theatrical designs.

The approach of festivals and the need to update old displays encourage the creation of new masks which later become part of a community's repertory.

What makes festivals unique is that they re-appraise a community's artistic interpretation of its circumstances while communal participation measures the level of interest in the theatre. This explains why festival masking presents a mini world view of communal life. Okagbue's (1987) summary of Enemma festival highlights the relationships between festivals and communities, between human and spirit-beings, and between life and art:

> In the main, it provides a unique occasion for a communal affirmation of life and continuity for the community.... Every member has a stake in the festival since, apart from possibly having either a personal or collective association with the performing mauquerade, each person realises and accepts the festival as a communal celebration and re-affirmation of society, its underlying ethos and its collectively held views (159).

Enemma festival is a colourful theatrical parade of masks and performers. As festivals elsewhere, it restores the synergy that Igbo communities thrive on and which guarantees their collective survival and stability. While some features may be unique to a year's performance, the artistic inputs soon become components of the community's legacy. It is also possible that absent masks may re-appear in subsequent years or be on their way out of the repertoire. Communal festivals are transient and though celebrated within an established framework, each celebration is unique and different from its predecessors and successors. Whatever a festival celebrates; fecundity, communion, affirmation and consummation of a relationship, surviving the past and securing the future, the theatrical component is important and represents the social dimension to perhaps, a religious engagement.

A communal festival is regarded as the umbrella for theatre for two reasons. Firstly, this is theatre of a more complex and richer complexion and therefore, more representational of a community than a single mask display. Secondly, festival displays provide better opportunities for the appreciation of latent aesthetic elements of the theatre that would go

unobserved from a single mask or display. For instance, the use of *Agaba* to determine a zone's masking ideas produces a less accurate view than one involving many mask-types and displays. In fact, festivals with different performing masks provide a more authentic picture of communal involvement, and a greater range and variety of theatre activity than one which focuses on few activities. The staging style of many communal festivals reveal both their ritual and theatrical intentions as Okagbue again (1987) points out in the Enemma festival:

> This is a typical festival setting which can best be described as a composite form of staging with the various scenes and pockets of dramatic action going on at the same time. The effect of this is that it keeps the audience constantly on the move as their attention is assaulted and compelled from all points of performance within and sometimes outside the circle.... Enemma also provides the environment for the coming together of all masquerades in Nkpor. In scale, it is grand with abundant participatory spectacle for its audience of members of the community and their guests (159).

THE *AGABA* MASK TYPE.

Agaba is one of the most common mask types in Igboland and is adopted as the main masking form in a few communities like Okija in Anambra State. Igbo masks are named for their social and ritual functions and in many communities, Agaba exists outside the ritual umbrella and forms part of the social calendar. It enjoys great following and is staged in circumstances informed by celebration and entertainment. Socially, it constitutes the commonest entry point to the secrets of masking in adolescence. Agaba may be accompanied by rituals and secrecy, but such rituals fall more within the performing group's than the community's aesthetics. In this study, Agaba is viewed as a secular social performance.

The term, Agaba, is used in some sections of Igboland to describe a fearsome and terrifying person, object and phenomenon. It captures the hidden terrors, dangers, and intimidating aggressiveness of the physical and spiritual world of the traditional Igbo. Metaphorically, Agaba symbolises

forces the Igbo fear, flee from, and desire to keep under control. As a social performance, Agaba masks belong to masking groups and could be lone or one of many performers. It is an exclusively male performance open to mainly pre-teenage and mature males. Groups determine their specific rituals and rites and generally seek mystical aura by claiming to rise from the bowels of the earth, an anthill, or other symbolic places. Depending on a group's origins, most rituals and legends associated with Agaba are part of the underlying theatre rather than of its ostensible sacral root. Some performances involve great magical displays, stunts and acrobatics, and can be held at any time and on any occasion. Groups vary in composition, some admit only males of a particular age-range or social status, but all subscribe to the concept of masks as other presences.

Agaba performance is informed by the unique combination of private and public space, the presence of masked and non-masked performers, and transient participants. Against the ritual efficacy of some masks, Agaba lacks the collective allegiance, spiritual relationship and sustained participation of its transient participants for whom a performance holds no ritual significance. Participants do not attend displays because of their socio-religious significance, they do so for the theatre. While a particularly aggressive display may arouse fear and awe, and even threaten social harmony within a community, its outcome does not necessarily impair or imperil the community. The well-being of communities is therefore, not dependent on a successful Agaba display. This weakens the common threshold for a participant-participant relationship and puts performances outside the soul of the community. Such performances celebrate individual, instead of communal circumstances. This helps to explain Agaba's unleashing and purgation of fear and terror in communities. In this strict social application, it is devoid of that special bond and symbiotic

relationship which the living share with the otherworldly and which sometimes, fosters worship and veneration.

Agaba masks are not necessarily conceived as ancestors, deities, or any particular spirits in the pantheon. Agaba is a manifestation of youthful vitality, masculinity and exuberance, and because it unleashes the inexplicable power of nature and spirit forces, the masker is propelled by an inner driving force. Its performance is predicated on the arousal of fear and danger in participants and their resolution through purgation. In such resolutions, performers ascend a psychological and mystical height from which they control the forces their performances unleash.

Agaba staging is flexible and combines homestead and public itinerant performances. As an itinerant performance, its transient participants determine the content, scope and depth of its constituent stages, and groups change their repertoire without inflicting socio-religious disharmony on the genre and the community. Unlike ritual performances, whose staging represents only a part of their socio-religious dimensions, Agaba displays have no such significance outside the stage. The physical intensity of displays seemingly inflict Agaba's presence on communities' psyche, and like communal celebrations hinged on the interaction between cosmic zones, their entertainment components are realised only within a communal set-up. Thus, in their itinerary, performers acquire transient participants as the temporary communities required to achieve and enhance displays. Its music and dance are vigorous and are accompanied by strong staccato instrumentation that is unique to the genre. The music and dance are distinct in their cavernous tones and heavy foot-work respectively.

In many communities in Mbaitoli and Ikeduru areas of Imo State, the absence of initiation rites into masking makes Agaba and its lowest derivative, *ekpo* , the entry points into masking. In communities with such rites, pre-initiation involvement in Agaba at a lower level is common, and initiates graduate from this to higher levels of masking. Agaba is therefore, not uniform in all communities, and from the less serious affair of pre-teenagers, it involves mature men and acquires terrifying mysteries and powers in *Ozokwamkpo, Ebiogwu, Ekwomma* and *Odogwu Anya Nmee* (the red-eyed terror), regarded as Agaba's most terrifying expressions. In fact, the physical intensity and aggressiveness of these derivatives is stunning and suggests developments in a direction different from Agaba's.

WOMANHOOD AND IGBO MASKING: VENERABLE DISTANCE.

Traditionally in Igboland, women and young girls do not wear masks and are generally barred from participation in secret masking traditions such as the Ekpe of Arochukwu and Okonko. In most public masking, they enjoy marginal participation and are usually the butt of satire, the objects of pre- and post-performance separations and initiation secrets. They are usually at the receiving end of the terror unleashed at performances and in many communities, their marginal participation is a concession derived by the lowering of sacred and ritual barriers. In performances like Mmonwu, they constitute part of the orchestra and are protected from the dangerous effects of closeness to masks in a seclusion of yellow palm-fronds. In Okumkpo, they and the children occupy the least important position in the arena, yet their passage through the arena is part of the post-play activity that restores normality to the community. Generally, women do not accompany masks or come very close to them but this barrier is lowered for them to offer gifts to performers. In Ekpe, they constitute a separate chorus and participate actively in dancing but do not join the mask's calls on sections of the

community. Many taboos and secrets are associated with the peripheral involvement of women in Igbo masking and while these attitudes reveal a cultural ambivalence, they affirm the patrilineal nature of Igbo society.

Initiates of masking societies regard non-initiates as women but while the uninitiated man becomes tomorrow's initiate, women have no such privileges. Only a few menopausal women enjoy 'limited initiation' into some masquerade cults in some communities. Generally, uninitiated men enter performance venues but women are accompanied by initiates, sometimes young enough to be their sons. The commonest and perhaps weakest defence for these attitudes is ostensibly for the protection and preservation of the community, for among the Igbo, protecting womanhood is synonymous with preserving community. The level of participation for women, and any associated restrictions, differ among communities, for even in areas where they are seen to be closer to masks, this closeness is often circumscribed by taboos and mysteries. In the Nri and Ozubulu areas, the *Ijele* and *Umu erere* (shimmering offspring) are some of the most spectacular displays and the sheer scope of spectacle, music, and dance require that women participate actively in masking but even here, limits are set. According to Onyeneke (1987):

> In these cases, women or young girls are permitted to be close enough to join in and support the song chorus needed for the dance of the masquerade. Outside a permitted session in their village masquerade troupe, they must continue to run away as the rest of the women. . . .
>
> In a few cases where some women are directly initiated into the secrets, these have to be women whose probity is assured on the word of many trustworthy masquerade members. Even so, they have no right to salute a masquerade in public . . . they must keep out of the way in all deference (78-79).

Some communities insist that the biological and spiritual states of women make them unwholesome for close encounters with masks and spirits whom they may desecrate through their monthly biological rhythms. Such encounters are believed to release destructive forces that impair child-

bearing in women and incur the wrath of spirits and deities on offenders, their families and communities. There is no unanimity on the issue as respondents variously believe that female spirituality interferes with masking spirits and endangers maskers and communities. In fact, the emotional state of both young and old women, and their nature as people of two potential families are believed to reduce their inclination to keep secrets. They are believed to have different loyalties and for the love of child, husband, and family, may reveal secrets to the detriment of the community. For instance, men with non-Aro spouses are neither admitted into the highest forms of Ekpe nor into the *ulo nta* in Arochukwu.

These reasons highlight communal survival to justify the marginalisation of women in Igbo masking. Since Igbo society is patrilineal, men have always had more privileges in the evolution of its culture and art, and Igbo myths and legends reveal a world of unequal partners. Though society uses this to marginalise women, the affirmation of 'communitas' demands their active participation. To harmonize these contradictions, Igbo tradition maintains a venerable distance between women and masking. This is variously interpreted and reflected in the many reasons advanced for this development.

While only a few communities may hold similar views on the origin of this practice, most communities are close to unanimity on its desirability. Studies link the practice to the need to guard masking secrets, the protection of womanhood and community appear to be later explanations. Globally, Onyeke (1990) cites Vulcanescu (1987) and traces the practice to the origin of masking and to gender struggles when he states that:

> The evolutionists link the origin of masks closely with matriarchy and secret societies. They claim that at a certain period, women played a leading role in society and that, as an attempt to escape from their domination, men created secret societies. Their masks were then the

> aggressive means by which they regained power over women (in Onyeke, 1990: 33).

In Northern Igboland where more studies appear to have been conducted on the issue, Onyeke cites two separate reports on the Odo; the first from a study in Abor, a town widely respected for its masking, and the other from a Catholic priest and states that:

> 1. Myths have it that Odo came from the forest at Neke. . . and was first seen by a woman but because women were very flippant, menfolk were accepted by Odo as those who could keep a secret secret (sic) and could maintain seriousness when such need arose. . . . 2. It originated from the minds of the early men who felt that womenfolk are less intelligent and can be cheated at will (165).

Onyeke concludes that Odo society is dominated by men and that it seems to work against the interests of women. The situation is such that:

> In the Odo and Omabe areas, women are not allowed outdoors on special masquerade days, 'the house enclosure days'. There is a strong belief that any young woman who breaks that law, may, on seeing the masquerade, be rendered barren for the rest of her life, or suffer miscarriage if she was already expecting a baby or deliver a deformed baby after the image of the comic shapes in which some masks are set (Onyeneke, 1987: 80).

Other reasons exist concerning other mask-types in Igboland and though the reasons appear to come from the men, Onyeneke (1987) combines the ancient male-female dialogue and the already stated latter-day rationalisations to advance more reasons for the place of women in Igbo masking:

> 1. Women are physically frail and so would not be suited to the energetic activities of the masquerade society, even though some of the masquerades portray the frail and gentle character of women, for example, the *agbogho mmonwu*....
> 3. That the masquerade, in the exercise of its function of social control, places itself above the human law, being a law unto itself and can thus lynch notorious evil-doers and witches, and this would be repugnant to a woman's mentality given to raising young life;
> 4. That the mysticism surrounding the masquerade which may involve the making of charms, protective and aggressive, would also be unsuitable to the mentality of women.
>
> The main reason for excluding women from the system is that it is a symbolic re-enactment of the social structure of the land which is principally vested on the male gender.... The masquerade institution as a symbolic and tangible presentation of the organisational order of the

> traditional community is centred on the men and it relegates the women to the background and periphery.
>
> An answer which is consistently given everywhere is "the masquerade institution is what separates us (men) from the women... it is the only thing that marks off who is a man and who is a woman" (81-82).

These reasons reflect the social structure of traditional Igbo society but women explain and respond to the situation in three main ways. Majority of them insufficiently exposed to socio-political ideas of modern Igbo society accept and see no reason in challenging the *status quo.* The strongest reaction by this categoty of women is to keep away from performing masks. Secondly, urbanised and thus, more exposed women, show the traditional respect to masks as of necessity. These experience no real pleasure at their peripheral involvement and dismiss the reasons given by the men as evidence of the conservatism with which men dominate Igbo society. The third group regards the reasons as evidence of insecurity in men and an unhealthy fear of their domination by women.

FUNCTIONS OF IGBO MASK THEATRE.

The importance of a theatre is determined by the audience for whom it is designed. Since humanity is both the creator and consumer of culture, participants constitute the yardstick for determining the importance and functions of a theatre. On traditional theatre, Nzewi (1979) points out that:

> It documented cultural values and trends in oral tradition, and prescribed a cycle of performances. Traditional theatre expressed the socio-cosmological rationalizations of a community and manifested these in stylized modes and observances. Traditional theatre was an integral part of the life style and socio-religious systems of a community. It was a transcendental artistic medium for effecting communal affirmations of the themes of living and dying in order to vitalize or regenerate the issues of survival as well as probe the mystique of human existence (16).

Nzewi confines the social functions of Igbo theatre to Igbo society where cultural collectivity is strongly expressed and sustained by participants for whom the theatre is created. The society determines whether to define

theatrical content and practice in real or symbolic terms, in what manners they are conveyed, what roles they play as signifiers of culture, and to what extent theatrical communication should be real or symbolic. It is within this context that theatre becomes a meaningful activity with designated functions and boundaries, and a dialogue between performer and participant. On the content, depth and purpose of theatrical performances, Sofola (1979) points out that:

> It is imperative that the characters have an existence based on a human community otherwise they would have no meaning and would consequently become irrelevant.. . . The collective corpus, the organic entity, becomes the articulator of group experiences from which ideas, philosophy and metaphysical thoughts are concretized and codified as the community attempts to make statements on life, the destiny of man, its social institutions and moral values, and the machinery through which they are maintained as well as how they may be modified or changed (68-69).

Put more succinctly, Elam (1980) maintains that 'it is with the spectator, in brief, that theatrical communication begins and ends' (96-97). Igbo theatre demands and compels participation so that while a few people may not be concerned with the socio-religious outcome of a display, majority of those present have some stake in it. While the former may be nominally described as spectators, the latter are active and involved as participants. The relationship between the two in Igbo theatre is similar to that identified by Obeyesekere (1990) who states that:

> In a ritual performance, not all members of the audience can be regarded as audience-participants.... Participants are those involved chiefly in the efficacy of the performance, spectators are those interested in the entertainment aspects. The *Pirit* ceremony thus has participants and no spectators, a play like *Maname* has only spectators... rituals which have highly complex and elaborately liminal performances, which are entertaining as well as efficacious, have categories of both participants and spectators, for whom the significance and meaning of the performance must necessarily be different (1990: 130).

As communal theatre, participants determine the functions of Igbo theatre because, the levels of communal participation and reception signify the

success and relevance of a performance. Wolff (1981) emphasises the complex relationship between culture and community in appreciating the relevance of any art form when she states that:

> Just as the maize grain is conditioned and shaped by the cob, so the audience is shaped by culture. The nature of the audience is determined, amongst other things, by the nature and practice of culture in general in that society... by the general ideology of that society and of its sub-divisions... and by the extent and type of autonomy accorded to general and aesthetic ideology by the state of development of that society (93-94).

In Igbo theatre, artists and *'audience'* participate jointly as parts of a unit and as Rothenberg (1977) indicates, both enter the performance space as participants and the latter disappears as the distinction between performer and audience begins to blur. The **Encyclopaedia Britannica** summarises the relationship between masks and their primary audiences or participants:

> There is, however, a reaction of a very particular kind common to every culture, a response such as awe, delight and pleasure, fear and even terror: these are traditionally determined as the forms and costumes of the masks themselves.... It is thus practically impossible to determine either the meaning or use of a mask by its appearance alone.... The significance of masks can be determined only by reference to accounts or personal observations of the masks in the setting of their own culture (58).

The functions of Igbo theatre are determined by the multifarious factors that inform the varying needs and shape the responses of various Igbo communities. The analysed masking traditions, types, and performing conditions reveal similarities and differences, and the functions of the theatre.

Socio-religious performances restore social and religious disruptions that threaten communities. Through performances, the threats are explored and the health of the community is restored. Seasonal displays re-enact aspects of a community's past and present, recount its successes and failures, and provide an opportunity for stock-taking. In some instances, displays secure a community's wholeness through acts of expiation, purgation, sacrifice and thanksgiving. If they are religious rituals, they link the past, present

and future and, re-affirm the constant communion between the Igbo and the otherworldly.

As an artistic medium, masking educates the community and re-affirms Igbo heritage through myths, legends, tales, humour, satire, and social commentary. Through staging, some performances advise against wrong behaviour and others recommend by commending virtue, justice, bravery, and other acceptable conducts. Masking celebrates the different art forms of music, dance, costume, and spectacle. It ensures the umbilical relationship between work and play, between soul and body, and between communion and consummation. Nzewi (1979) sums up the purpose and functions of Igbo masking:

> Socio-spiritual communion dwells on the myths and mysteries that instituted or informed the society and its traditional theatre: the heroes, the legends, the nature forces, religion and the deities, divine kingship. These communions, although highly theatricalized, served the intrinsic function of sustaining the society spiritually. The communion was dramatized in a manner and sequence that gave strong illusions of reality and yet remained mystifying and transcendental in order to sustain belief and faith. But at the core of every presentation was an entertainment index that diverted the audience [the corporate community] and artists alike from the chores and tensions of survival. It was mandatory for the society to fulfil the obligation of such a transcendental communion in order to re-vitalize their contract of associationship with the mysteries that attended their lives, and that ensured the corporate identity of the society (21).

The mask theatre is a highpoint of Igbo artistic development and it is a symbol for the fusion of social and religious themes. Theatrical displays articulate society's concerns and art for as Schechner (1983) points out:

> [P]erformance includes the impulse to be serious and to entertain; to collect meanings and to pass the time; to display symbolic behaviour that actualizes 'there and then' and to exist only 'here and now '; to be oneself and to play at being others; to be in a trance and to be conscious; to get results and to fool around; to focus the action on and for a select group sharing a hermetic language, and to broadcast to the largest possible audiences (151).

Igbo masks are living symbols, they are theatrical disguises and initiate both social and religious interaction. Symbols are autonomous modes of

knowledge and understanding and Eliade (1961) stresses that, 'they respond to a need; that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being' (12). The universal symbolism of masks-in-performance is recognized by Sorell (1973) who highlights facts similar to the Igbo use of masking for disguise. Sorell states that:

> In masking, the actor needs the illusion of becoming in order to convey the illusion of being what he is pretending to be; the reality of a larger reality created for him the world in which he could do the most unrealistic things and make them believable.... The mask was associated with excitement, danger, and escape and it was part of the social game for its convention was that one was seen but not recognized when hiding behind a mask. Wearing it, your incognito had to be respected (63-66).

Behind Igbo masks are human beings yet, in all appearances and purposes, they represent non-material spirit forms, deities, nature forces, and ancestors. Igbo masks secure the return of spiritual essences at communal congregations. The mundane is dispensed for the all-knowing, a commoner temporarily become priest, judge, noble, deity, and social critic, and whatever the character does and says, the masker remains above censure. Maskers shed social inhibitions and communal strictures and their fears are replaced by the supposed boldness of spirits. In its therapeutic functions, Igbo theatre restores the health and sanity of individuals and community, and strengthens both against the vicissitudes of life. The concept of masks as returning ancestors strengthens the Igbo to accept death as an inescapable reality. As a vehicle for initiations and celebrations of the stations of life, masking is a convenient umbrella for celebration and recreation in a culture where the work-play divide is virtually non-existent. It is, therefore, not surprising that Igbo masking releases great creative and artistic impulses.

On the individual level, it provides the opportunity for exercising the universal desire to flee from social personality by playing another. Maskers

and participants experience the emotional drives they are too frightened to indulge and release the passions that everyday rules frown upon. In the end, it is the other self, the ethereal that may be culpable while the real persona, being incognito, benefits. By performing, maskers play deity and feed the hunger for power and authority over individuals and community. A performance sates the people's thirst for mastery of the material milieu and elevates participants to a state of psycho-spiritual freedom where they hide in a more powerful reality beyond the control of mortals. At the personal level, art and life merge. Performances transcend temporal time, disguise sometimes goes deeper than art and becomes therapeutic, and though performances are constantly refined with varying intensities, they never diminish from the collective consciousness. What has diminished over the years is the crudity of the face, not the spirit; for everywhere and everytime, the Igbo, like people all over the world, encounter life through masking.

CONCLUSION.

The range of activities and aesthetic factors in Igbo masking are wide. It is difficult to itemize them, especially as a reasonable number of them exist in latent states and are activated by performers during performances. This is one reason why it is difficult to replicate Igbo mask performances. The best approach is to look at their structures and settings, constituent theatre activities, and their functions and significance. This is necessary because aesthetic flexibility ensures that even the presumably constant elements of theatrical presentations do not escape multilocal interpretations.

Theatrical and artistic meaning are the products of the structured arrangement of different elements and parts. For this reason, there is no performance without a discernible structure, and there is no structure without the functional combination and arrangement of seemingly

unrelated parts. Igbo masking has a functional structure but the number of constituent parts, the range of activities on display, and the time it takes to exhaust them differ. Performances could run from one to many hours. The presence of a procession stage in many displays makes it difficult to actually attempt a strict categorisation of performance-time in Igbo theatre. Space is fluid and susceptible to constant ruptures and while some presentations aim for a resolution-inducing climax, Igbo theatrical performances may have one or many climactic moments. Metaphorically-speaking, the climactic period is sometimes stretched out like a plateau instead of it being a single, solitary peak on a flat landscape.

Most displays are staged at specified venues and on specific days of the Igbo traditional four-day week. In selecting performing days, groups may consider the significance of the selected day and its place in a community's mythology and legend. A mythological or legendary figure or event can ascribe a great deal of significance on a day. While *Eke* market day appears to be the common trend, some communities mount performances on any of *Nkwo, Orie (Oye)* and *Afor*.

The multilocal nature of Igbo theatre raises questions as to the point, if any, at which its presentational differences converge and blend into one theatre. This question is pertinent considering the contradictory cravings for individualism and collectivism among communities. The fact is that integration is not in the uniformity of theatrical practice but firstly, in the flexibility, eclecticism, and expansiveness of masking aesthetics. Secondly, aesthetic convergence lies, despite external influences, in the common ancestry of the Igbo. Ethnographic and anthropological studies have established the oneness of the Igbo and cited Nri as their spiritual and ancestral homeland. Nri had long spiritual and political links with Igala, a culture Nzekwu credits with the introduction of masking into Igboland.

The Nri-Igala relationship was predicated on economic and military factors, yet the spiritual implications run deep and manifest through the Nri influence on the spiritual and political life of Igboland. The Odo masking tradition in Nsukka in Northern Igboland has its roots in Nri. Nsukka has had considerable influence on Edda and Abakaliki, and *Egbele* , the spiritual essence in Afikpo masking also exists in Edda. Since Igbo masking is linked to traditional religion, the Nri-Igala connection again links the masking traditions in Central-Western and Northern Igboland.

The dispersal of Igbo population from the Awka-Onitsha-Orlu axis to Central and Southern Igboland did not diminish the Nri influence. In fact, Nri diviners and priests continued to participate in the religious and political lives of these zones as representatives of the Eze Nri. The presence of the Aros in Ujali and Ozubulu meant Aros were not far from Nri influence. In fact, the Aro hegemony in Igboland before and during the colonial era left the Ekpe masking tradition. The Cross River-Akwa Ibom-Arochukwu connection, the strong influence of the latter up to Uburu and Afikpo in the north, the influence of the Ijaw and Kalabari on Southern and Central Igboland, and the Nri influence ensured the meeting of Igala, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, the Niger Delta, and traditional Nri (Igbo) factors in Igbo masking. These coalesced into a unique consciousness, different from those of its influencing neighbours. This emergent consciousness combined with local artistic ideas and the Igbo's desire for control and mastery of the spiritual and material milieus to evolve the Igbo masking idea. Igbo communities brought their peculiarities into the emergent society and the Igbo world of many spirits, different deities and uncountable nature forces emerged.

The differing attempts by individual communities to come to terms with

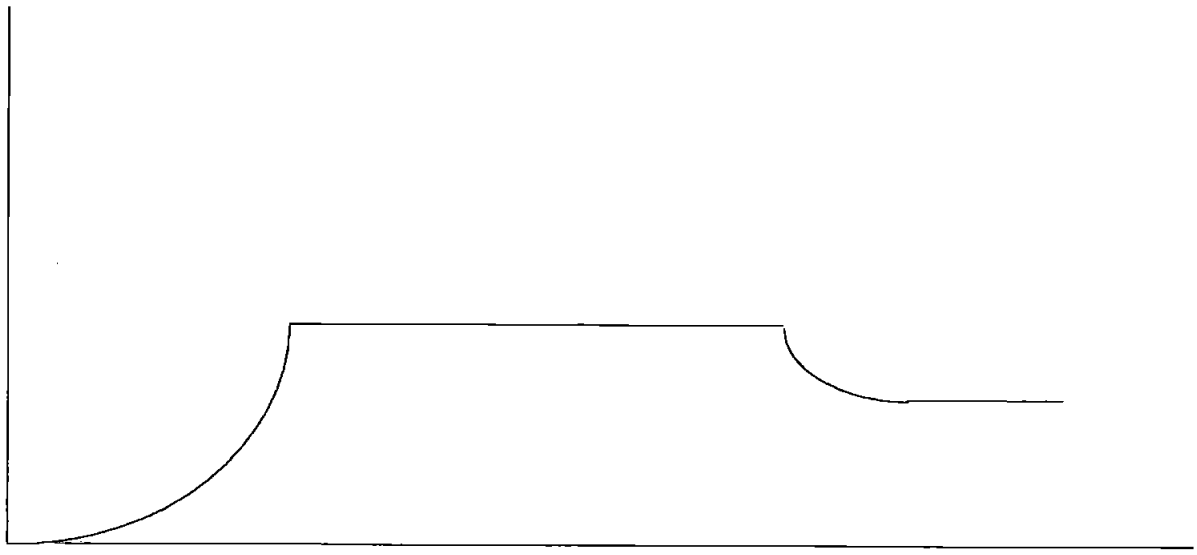

DIAGRAM 3.

PERFORMANCE GRAPH FOR A SINGLE, SUSTAINED CLIMACTIC PERIOD AS IN EKPE AND ITINERANT DISPLAYS.

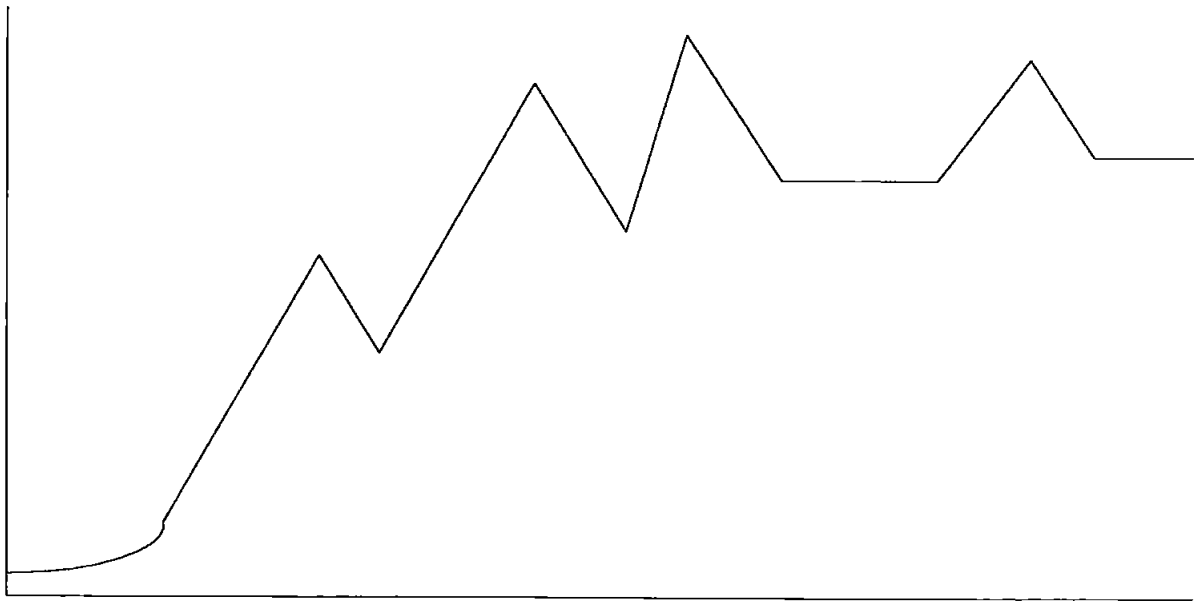

DIAGRAM 4.

PERFORMANCE GRAPH FOR MULTI-CLIMAX DISPLAY AS IN A FESTIVAL FEATURING DIFFERENT MASK-TYPES

their spiritual and material milieus through religion and art are reflected in the mask theatre. What emerges is a picture of one people, many spirits, different masks. So far, attempts have been made to trace the cultural oneness of Igboland and by implication, a unified aesthetics for its theatre. Cultural unity and differential practice are important pillars of Igbo theatre but the total theatrical picture is fully appreciated only by submitting these and other aesthetic factors to such theatrical elements as space, performance structure, and design. This will either support or expose limitations in the theatre's aesthetic theory for only when theatrical purpose and structure are in agreement, when space serves structure and both meet theatrical intentions, and when theatrical designs meet the requirements of space and performance, can practice be in concert with theory. An investigation of theatrical space and performance structure and their relationship would throw more light on the aesthetics of Igbo masking.

CHAPTER THREE.

PROXEMICS AND PERFORMANCE STRUCTURE.

Masking by different Igbo groups and communities yield both uniform and specific characteristics. Uniform characteristics link the many forms of Igbo masking in a common origin while the differences reflect interpretational peculiarities by diverse groups and communities. The multilocal nature of performances and the democratic charter of Igbo society mean that theatrical peculiarities are not aberrations but authentic presentations predicated on both individual and communal specifics. Similarly, most of the theatre's "uniform" characteristics are flexible, and respond to varying applications. Thus, the aesthetics of Igbo theatre allows for both uniform and peculiar features in the various masking traditions and types.

THE CONCEPT OF SPACE IN IGBO THEATRE.

Hall (1965) identified the importance of culture in shaping a society's response to the use of space. Cultural parameter ascribes proxemics with flexibility and this enables the latter to subscribe to internal variations within a general framework. Proxemics has come to represent culturally-determined feelings, gestures and responses to space, the spatial arrangements between different groups of people on one hand, and between these groups and the physical structures within a given space. Traditional Igbo society and cosmology maintain the idea of a flexible space and it is not surprising that the society has fostered different performances that ordinarily use the same spaces.

The remarks that followed a recorded African display at a faculty seminar support Hall's thesis on the use of cultural specifics in determining the

concept and interpretation of space in public performances. The remarks also expose the error in applying the rubrics of a theatre from one culture to those of other societies. The commentator commended the colour and brilliance of the costumes but did not understand what was going on. She had expected to see *a kind of order* in the performance but all she saw was a group of people milling around, *apparently, with no regard for order.* People moved in and out of the arena to dance while masked figures left the stage to chase spectators. The atmosphere was one of controlled chaos. The display baffled her to such an extent that she wondered if there was any structure to the performance, why it was *disorganised* , and what it meant.

These remarks reveal the dilemma faced by many people on encountering an unfamiliar ethnographic activity and re-echo Finnegan's much earlier description of traditional African drama as "quasi-drama". These remarks unnecessarily apply the yardsticks of one society or art to one totally unrelated to it. Enekwe (1987) has already responded to this situation with regards to Igbo theatre but that neither satisfies the curiosity behind such remarks nor does it satisfy the need to subject every theatre and ethnographic performance to some forms of critical inquiry. Schechner (1983) questioned the substitution of a model for the universal when he stated that:

> Many people, trained in the rigid reaction programme of orthodox theatre, are embarrassed by what they feel at environmental theatre. They think that the in-and-out reaction is 'wrong' or an indication that the play 'doesn't work' (68).

Nwoga (1984) highlights the functional and structural differences in ethnographic performances and furnishes the basis for appreciating the concept of space and structure in Igbo theatre:

> Different functions are likely to create different systems through which they are served. Any similarities in the particulars of the systems will be accidental. Therefore, any attempt to explain the elements of one functional structure through the structure of another

> functional intention is likely to distort the real meaning of those elements in their own structure (9).

The nature of theatre as a cultural construct and its differing performing conditions and techniques demand a multilocal approach in its study. Igbo theatre is different from others, its structures, meanings and elements are peculiar to it for as Bharucha (1993) stresses, 'before theorising about any performance tradition, it is necessary to question what it could mean to its own people for whom it exists in the first place' (5). Strauss (1978) was confronted with similar questions and later admitted to the presence of order in every conscious human activity in the confession that:

> My problem was trying to find out if there was some kind of order behind this apparent disorder _ that's all. . . . It is, I think, absolutely impossible to conceive of meaning without order (12).

The meaning and origin of a theatre shape its elements and determine its functions. Igbo masking is not different in this regard and its roots in religion and rituals suppose its close relationship with communal festivals and ceremonies. Kamlongera (1989) traces the routes and functional nature of 'theatre for development' in Africa to indigenous traditional theatres, and his work paints a picture of the communal purposes and functions of both traditional religions and theatres. These common grounds are publicly expressed in the theatre and in the special relationships between socio-religious ceremonies and traditional theatres in Africa. Kamlongera states that:

> Ritual elements are summed up in the overall intentions of those who initiate the ceremonies in an attempt to reconcile man and his environment. Theatre surfaces as part of the fulfilment of these intentions. In this respect, ritual is bigger than theatre. But these two are not exclusive of each other (26).

Furthermore, he insists that:

> Indigenous performances in Africa contain within them some functional elements. In most cases this takes the form of a didactic statement. Whilst performers might engage in doing spectacular movements and dances, they might also carry within the performances special

> messages or lessons to some members of their audience. Some work in Theatre-for-Development is a direct result of recognising this characteristic in indigenous African performances (88).

The result is that theatre is never far from Igbo rituals and ceremonies and these combine with theatre to create a set of meanings, styles, and functions that are sometimes unique to communities and performances.

Different meanings and purposes create different orders, different theatres and performing conditions create different elements and structures. Igbo theatre is non-literary, its themes are drawn from spirit-material relationship and its performance plots reflect this interaction. It is the product of a communal consciousness and psyche and it harmonises the contradictions between the secular and sacred. Time and space, dramatic characters and communal participants come under the same mystical and mythical ambience. Eliade (1960) points out the nature of performances like Igbo masking and the ability of the traditional psyche to unite the sacred and profane in a single performance:

> In imitating the examplary acts of a god or mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society [traditional man] detaches himself from the profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time (23).

The stories and themes of Igbo masking are common knowledge, the "texts" are symbolic of wider relationships in the community. The theatre's conception and creation reflect 'the magic of illusion without which man is unable to live' (Sorell, 1973:16). The theatre demands and sustains communal participation in the way Igbo life thrives on the contiguous relationship between the material and spiritual. This engenders a celebratory mood in performances and creates a festive but sometimes, sacral atmosphere within the community. In a performance, human beings and spirits, performers and participants merge in a dynamic festive environment. It is no surprise that festivals and celebrations of stations of

life provide the umbrella for theatrical performances and that, even solemn displays still manage to excite a festive and participatory atmosphere.

Space in Igbo theatre is fluid and is subject to different interpretations as demanded by theatrical presentations. It can be localised to anywhere and yet, includes everywhere. As Nzewi (1979) points out about the Odo mask and festival, 'the entire town is the venue, while specific natural locations for particular scenes are chosen for reasons of clothing make-belief with garments of actuality' (23). The communal nature of the theatre, and its encompassing theme cannot yield to a circumscribed space and still retain its impetus for the community. Tuan (1990) identifies the flexibility of performing space when he states that, 'the space of a traditional festival is hard to describe because it is heterogeneous, multilocal and shifting. Neither space nor time is likely to be sharply defined' (240). Because of its multilocal nature, Igbo theatre adopts the arena or open-air staging style, with the performance stage usually an open clearing. This is both a recognition of the tendency 'of the ideal Nigerian [Igbo] audience to function as a structural and integrated feature of a presentation' (Nzewi, 1981: 442) and the recognition of localised spots as the symbolic meeting point of different cosmic zones.

With the community as a performance space, active staging spots could be the village square, market place, a clearing in front of a sacred grove or community shrine, a main thoroughfare, the common space in a homestead, or any clearing created and recognised by the community as a performing space. This means that maskers, performers and participants are all that are required to transform and elevate mundane spots into active theatrical spots in Igbo theatre. After all, as Aronson (1981) points out, 'transformed space is simply a pre-existing space that has been altered scenically to create a unified theatrical environment for both the performer

and the audience' (185). While theatrical space in Igbo theatre is derived through the transformation of existing space, the change is more of a symbolic and mental act than the physical and visual alteration indicated by Aronson. Itinerant performances such as Agaba, Ojionu, Ulaga and others, traditionally use the entire community as performing space with localised actions and engagements happening in homesteads and open spaces in the same manner that the Odo of Nsukka visits every homestead in its nine months sojourn in the community. The freedom of movement exercised by maskers can only be sustained in an atmosphere that recognises and admits every available spot in the community as authentic theatrical space. Igbo theatre spaces are not in use at all times and seasons, they become active only during performances and revert to ordinary uses in their dormant phases.

Costuming and preparation generally occur in places outside the staging arenas and the movements to and from these spaces sustain open engagements that turn the community into one huge performance space. In fact, many supposedly localised performances have processions and itinerant engagements integrated into their structures. Ekpe performance includes processions through the sections of a community before the climactic engagement at the main square while Okumkpo begins and ends with such processions. In Arugo in Ogwa, while maskers and dancers participate in opening and closing processions, smaller and lighter masks engage in homestead displays before and during performances. In addition to other functions, festival processions extend the masking component of some festivals outside the active performance arena and into the community. Examples include the annual Mmonwu festival in some sections of Central Igboland and the displays at some festivals.

The arena is either bare or with little physical structures. This is because the symbolic staging and active communal participation characteristic of this theatre demand sparsity in stage architecture. An elaborately-designed and built-up stage would distract from the theatre's symbolism and impede communal participation. The few structures, and sometimes these are of a permanent nature, could be a community shrine, a society's meeting house, community hall, other special-purpose structures like platforms and log-seats designed from felled trees. These structures of some socio-religious importance are integrated in performances and they reinforce a display's theatricality. In some places, a bamboo fence with wide awnings encloses performers, not as an act of separation but of identification. Some presentations allow for the erection of levels to enhance theatricality. In Arugo, bamboo fences separate the active staging area and the musicians perform from a high platform designed to project the instrumentation beyond the borders of the community. In some Mmonwu-performing communities, *Ezemmuo* performs on a slightly-raised platform in a manner similar to the recognition and performance by *Ezemmuo* and his wife in Enemma festival.

Spatial fluidity enables performers and participants in Igbo theatre to move in and out of space and position in frequent ruptures of space as both participate in performances. In some places, girders define actual staging areas but the ease with which these fragile structures are dismantled at climactic moments indicates they are not erected to separate performers and participants. In the performance space, participants usually surround performers, and both generally remain on the same physical level. Even where platforms are erected for some performers as already stated, they are still enclosed by participants. The constantly shifting participants and the

frequent ruptures of space do not indicate a loose unmanageable crowd within a totally fluid space.

Each mask type, performance, festival, and community has a defined proxemic code that harnesses space and people, and places internal limitations on spatial fluidity. The encircling of performers by participants does not necessarily indicate a circle since the shape of the space and its relationship with other structures and landscape may necessitate a different configuration. Where a community shrine is integrated into a performance as in most Ekpe displays and Omabe of Nsukka, the shrine becomes the reference point for the use of space. This informing factor is different for Mmonwu-style masking in Central Igboland where the society house provides the background for performances. While Ekpe and Omabe are respectively informed by a fixed, circular, and free arrangement of participants and performers, Mmonwu is secure in a semi-circular arrangement that places performers before the society house and in front of participants. Outside of this formal space, Mmonwu performers are encircled by participants. In fact, when Schechner (1983) remarked that 'the space and the performance developed together' (61) and that, 'space can be shaped to suit any need' (69), he touched upon a salient fact about Igbo theatre.

Igbo theatre uses both formalised or restricted and free space. The staging area is mentally or physically designated and divisions within it are determined by the shape of the space and the specifics of the performance. These factors dictate formal sitting arrangements (where applicable) which often reflect a community's social orders so that, like the performance itself, space is subordinated to communal harmony and survival. The dramatic and social contents of performances are very important but social harmony enjoys such pride of place that even youthful performers are conscious of

the need to maintain it. The is best reflected in the hierarchical sitting arrangement whose absence would challenge the very social order a performance sometimes seeks to affirm and restore. Enekwe (1987) emphasises this when he insisted that 'the young men in Okumkpo performance do not see themselves as confronting the elders' and that 'the display is not a ritual in status reversal' (115). The attempt to balance the opposing demands of a flexible space code and a rigid social order, and the need to harmonise the specific aesthetic considerations of performances and physical structures have engendered different responses to space in Igbo theatre. A few detailed examples would suffice.

In Umuode, Ekpe performance takes place in the community square. The community shrine is located north in the arena, the elders sit with their backs to the shrine, and Ekpe performs facing them. Musicians back the elders and between them and other performers, is the centrally-located sacrificial spot. These constitute the core performers and space and around them sit gender-determined choric groups, guards, and participants. The innermost circle is occupied by the main chorus of males drawn from all sections of the community. They are followed by the men's, women's, and youth choruses in that order. Outside these is a chorus of community stalwarts, appointed for the guard duties performed by the ferocious and aggressive *ekpo* masks in Isingwu. The guards maintain reasonable performance space and viewing distance for performers and participants respectively. The last circle consists of participants. Westward, and through the choruses is a fluid entrance and an exit in the opposite direction in the east. These open and close according to need, especially as Ekpe does not leave the performing area until the sacrifice and victory dance. The surrounding tree branches provide shade and sitting places for some

participants who wish to escape the sea of heads and watch from vantage positions.

This arrangement, also observed in Umunkpiyi-Ngwa varies in Ohuhu-Nsulu where secondary choruses dance separately from the main one which dances in the centre of the arena. The performance square in Ohuhu-Nsulu is situated at a junction with roads leading to sections of the community and sometimes, choruses from various sections perform on their own stretch of road. This arrangement leaves the central spot for the main chorus and is breached only during the climactic scene when choruses from the masker's ward and performers with a higher stake in ensuring a successful sacrifice enter the spot to encourage Ekpe. To keep the masker's relatives away, guards surround the mask, the sacrificial animal, and observing elders who watch and specially monitor this act. Here, the victory celebration takes each chorus back to its ward while the masker's ward and the main chorus undertake the closing procession throughout the community.

In Mmonwu, space often embraces a special theatre building within the arena. This is the theatre house built to aid performances but never used as the performing space. The building is important and unique to this performance because the mystery that surrounds displays is generated within its walls and the awe associated with the masks is mainly due to the influence of this building. Such buildings could be converted from the houses of long-standing members, the house of a deceased member, or a shared building belonging to a member of the group whose custodianship of masking mystery is not in doubt. This means that performances are sometimes held in clearings close to homesteads as against engagements in community squares. When purpose-built, a high wall shuts out prying eyes from the structure and creates an outer corridor around it. These walls

sometimes carry paintings of masks and complete the picture of ritual and sacred seclusion that the performance thrives on.

Outside the wall and in front of the building is a large open staging arena. The arena comprises three inter-related zones of interaction. These are the exclusive zone, the initiates' zone and the open participation zone. A small strip of open space marks the entry and departure points for the masks and flows into the main staging area. In displays by long-established performing communities such as Ozubulu, Obosi, and Ekwe with specifically designed venues, the staging area opposite the building may contain a raised mound or a low, decorated platform from which a mask may chant pronouncements, address participants, and pass judgment in judicial plays. On one side of the platform may sit musicians and on the other, the women's chorus secluded in 'the house of yellow palm-fronds' (Ugonna, 1984), a structure constructed from painted bamboos and hung with yellow palm-fronds and colourful buntings. In some places, the women's chorus performs only in this spot, secure from the spells and incantations by masks. Since women do not ordinarily approach masks, their peripheral participation does not afford them the kind of protection the men have through initiations. In front of the two choruses sit initiated members who rise occasionally to perform. The area occupied by initiates merges into the open participation zone. The positioning of performers, initiates and participants creates a semi-circle, with the other half completed by the wall and fence of the theatre building. In the absence of a theatre building, circles of initiates and participants enclose performers, leaving a central staging area with exit and entrance points.

In Okumkpo, active performing areas are determined by the positioning of the chorus and orchestra in relation to the position of the men's rest-house. Directly in front, beside or in the balcony of the rest-house sit the elders

with their backs to the rest-house. This determines the acting area which separates play-leaders and elders. Behind the leaders sit the orchestra who maintain their position throughout a performance, and with the elders, constitute the outer fringe of the main performing space. Behind the orchestra sit the chorus and assistant leaders. In some instances, the *Ori* chorus sits in a semi-circle in front and separate from the *Akparakpa* who complete the lower half of the circle. In a chorus of separate units, two assistant leaders sit on both sides or constitute the butt of the *Ori* that connects the *Akparakpa.* From this position, leaders monitor and direct the latter which occupies the least important stage-position. Because the leaders interact with performers and participants, their frequent movements extend active areas and create others outside the central staging area.

The combination of skits, dance, and leader-participants dialogues create pockets of dramatic action within the fluid space. This produces the composite form of staging found in many Igbo communal festivals and performances. The seating arrangement in Okumkpo stems from the position of the elders. On either side of them sit the men and from this position, the importance and composition of participants reduces in significance to boys, women and a mixture of men, boys and children. Women occupy the least important position and this general pattern is sometimes ruptured to accommodate non-initiated boys. It is also common to have women and young girls watch performances from standing positions behind the men and boys. As in most Igbo performances, Okumkpo participants usually surround performers and mill around for better viewing positions. In fact, most Igbo performances assimilate nearby thoroughfares and though this increases the staging area, the incorporation of space with a secondary and proper function during performances generates a great deal of mobility among participants.

Different performances generate different dimensions of space use. In Omabe and Odo, the active performing areas extend into the forest and hillside shrines where performers 'raise' masks and 'welcome' returning ancestors. In both performances, masks and performers appear before town chief-priests and elders already waiting at the community shrine. After the ritual offering of kola-nuts and libations to the returning ancestors, maskers perform around the shrine before entering their various sections of the community. Here, there is no particular formation so that performers and participants adopt free-flowing formations that reflect the respectful and adoring movement of people around an honoured but familiar guest. Omabe and Odo are such guests. This practice is slightly modified in the climactic communion in the community square to mark the end of Odo's long sojourn and its impending return to the spirit realm.

The unrestricted use of space changes into a more structured pattern in displays where structured movements and gestures are regarded as part of a mask's performing style and stage business. Ijele belongs to this category. The weight and dimension of the gigantic Ijele and its aesthetic need for regal deportment require that its maskers move and dance in measured steps. The Ijele mask performs in slow, graceful steps but its performers and participants adopt free-flowing formations. The combination of measured movement by masks, and the expressive free-flowing dance by performers and participants can only be sustained in a fluid space so that, Ijele and similar masks adopt semi-restricted use of space in a free form. The practice of combining restricted and free space enables many performances to incorporate both itinerant and localised components. This style sustains itinerant performances and enables them and other displays with itinerant stages to revert to more formalised spaces in restricted areas. The adoption of either the restricted or free space, or their combinations in performances,

reflect different responses to the Igbo proxemic construct. In exercising the fluidity of space, in harmonising restricted and free movements, and in the use of entire communities as performing spaces, Agaba embodies to a great extent, the typical responses that majority of Igbo performances subscribe to in varying degrees.

Agaba is essentially an itinerant performance, sometimes staged in village and town squares. Itinerancy is not unique to it though this feature has been a growing trend especially with the increase in non-contextual performances. During performances, action can be localised in a clearing before a homestead, a wide stretch of open road, a market, or community square. The presence of performers and participants initiates a communal spirit and confers a surreal atmosphere on such places. Both groups respond to this temporal arrangement and the theatre unfolds in celebration and communion. While spot performances may have other defined proxemic indicators, the dominant positions taken by musicians and masks determine a performance's response to space. This positioning integrates performers, participants, and space into a meaningful theatrical union. Thus, in performing in any place, performers harmonise any contradictions posed by the new place in relation to the tripartite relationship between performers, space and participants. Participants sit or stand anywhere and may constitute a circle, square or rectangle around the performers. They may be positioned on one or more sides, or simply positioned before performers. With more participants, the space responds to the point of combining some of the stated shapes and so, defying strict categorisation. Mask chases extend performing areas and though strictly controlled in homestead performances, space is further stretched in the open-engagement stage during extensive charges, group encounters and skirmishes. Agaba participants are constantly mobile but space still retains

the aesthetic and psychical distance between maskers and participants. Entry and exit points for itinerant groups are the same as space has an almost limitless quality.

The staging of a majority of performances in the arena and the frequent adoption of circular seating arrangements are suggestive of their communal and celebratory overtones. The arena reflects the inclusiveness of communal performances and re-affirms the wider implications and functions of such presentations to a community. Open spaces may be seen as symbolising communal unity while the frequent ruptures of space and time depict the continuous interaction between different cosmic zones. Space in Igbo theatre is therefore, a symbolic recreation of Igbo cosmogony and each performing area is a microcosm of the world. The presence of society houses and other status markers signify communal affirmations and continuity. The unity of the living and otherworldly is fostered in performances which incorporate sacred places and spiritual characters as the returning ancestors in Omabe and Odo. The staging of these performances is both a communion and a consummation in which different zones of the Igbo world sit across from each other as active participants in celebrations affirming the cycles of communitas.

PERFORMER-PARTICIPANT-SPACE RELATIONSHIP.

Bharucha (1993) insists that 'theatre is neither a text nor a commodity. It is an activity that needs to be in ceaseless contact with the realities of the world and' (10) that, 'nothing can be more disrespectful to theatre than to reduce its act of celebration to a repository of techniques and theories' (5). Igbo theatre makes no fetish of theatrical techniques, instead it incorporates the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds in the spatial relationship between performers and participants of which Aronson (1981) identifies four combinations; 'stationary audience - stationary performance,

stationary audience - moving performance, moving audience - moving performance, moving audience - stationary performance' (10). Though Aronson regards 'moving audience - stationary performance' as 'the most common among contemporary multi-space performances' (12), Igbo theatre combines this with 'moving audience - moving performance' in its integration of composite stationary and itinerant performances, and in fashioning its distinctive three-way performer-participant relationship. This relationship which Nzewi (1981) has described as 'the traditional tendency of the Nigerian audience to function as a structural and integrated feature of a presentation' (442) is much more than a tendency. It is an integral element and the main reason for the existence of Igbo masking as a public performance. Igbo theatre obviates the concept of separate identities as performers and participants are complementary parts of a performance. Communal participation is *sine qua non* and as Nzewi (1979) observes, 'involvement as audience and participation is mandatory by virtue of belonging to the community' (23). In fact, as Rothenberg (1977) points out about performances such as Igbo masking:

> Along with the artist, the audience enters the performance arena as participant or ideally, the audience disappears as the distinction between doer and viewer begins to blur. For this, the oral is a particularly clear model (14).

As an oral form, Igbo masking depends on the active participation of the people for whom it is created, before whom it is profoundly relevant and meaningful, and for whom it holds more than a curious interest. Nzewi (1981) recognises participants as the focus of the theatre and insists that 'as long as the audience remains the focus and consumer of modern theatre creations, it should, as in traditional practice, retain the right and clout to guide creators and artists towards a relevant sense of direction' (442). Igbo participants are critical and vocal, and indirectly exercise directorial influence on presentations.

Communal participation is not peculiar to Igbo theatre, its absence from some theatres at some developmental stages created gaps that later theatre innovations aim to bridge. The radical proposal by the Futurist, Filippo Marinetti, for restoring the wholeness of modern Western European theatre shows the importance of participation in traditional theatre and the necessity for its restoration where it is absent. Marinetti suggested the creation of a single undivided ambience for performers and spectators through the 'use of itching and sneezing powders, coating the auditorium seats with glue, provoking fights and disturbances by selling the same seat to two or more people' (in Kirby, 1971: 22-23). The Greek model from which European theatre evolved was never separated from its audience. If anything, it enjoyed the undivided attention of the populace within a free space as Walcot (1976) points out:

> [T]he chorus in the orchestra shows that no physical barrier separated performer from audience; the presence among the spectators of the cult of a god who might also be active on the stage further reveals that the absence of a physical barrier was matched by the absence of any 'spiritual' barrier. Stage, orchestra and auditorium formed a single unit and so too did actors, chorus and spectators, all of whom were sharing in a common act of devotion (4-5).

The importance of participation in Igbo theatre cannot be over-emphasised as Elam (1980) maintains. In fact, Nzewi (1979) describes Odo festival masking and throws some light on this structured relationship:

> The Odo festival theatre is a people's show _ a structured and imperative necessity in the calendar and programme of the corporate and individual lives of a community. They have days that run into weeks that stretch into months during which to re-enact in theatre, the story of this vital communion with Odo. Involvement as audience and participation is mandatory by virtue of belonging to the community (23).

Involvement in theatre is determined by cultural expectations and a performance's ability to provide participants with enough reasons and opportunities for engagment. This could be in any structured form but the most effective of these in Igbo theatre is the level of identification

participants have with events on stage. This is what differentiates them from non-participating, non-native audiences as Myerhoff points out:

> As heroes in our own dramas, we are made self-aware, conscious of our consciousness. At once actor and audience, we may then come into fullness of our human capability _ and perhaps human desire to watch ourselves and enjoy knowing that we know (in Turner, 1982: 81 - 82).

Communal participation in Igbo theatre is vibrant, it is invoked by performers who use it as a guiding stimulus. It is anticipated by participants who attend performances, aware of their responsibilities and willing to fulfil them. The structured presence of participants in Igbo theatre has generated a complex three-cornered relationship similar to Beckerman's (1970) 'three-way communication' between the play, the individual and the collective audience. A display 'projects doubly, to each member of the audience as an individual and to the audience as a whole in that distinctive configuration that it has assumed for a particular occasion' (Beckerman, 133). The resulting performer-participant-theatre relationship is shaped by space, masks, and community. These factors combine with the presence or absence of initiations and the sometime incorporation of religious motifs and structures to yield three distinct relationships; performer-performer, performer-participant, and participant-participant in Igbo theatre.

The first of these, the performer-performer relationship, establishes the theatrical exchange among masked characters and between them and non-masked performers. As spirit-personae, masks relate with human beings through initiations and other rituals, yet they remain primarily ethereal. Non-masked performers are their primary hosts and link with the larger community and the bridge to the living. This brings the community into active participation in performances. Through song, dance, music, metaphoric and symbolic dialogue, performers engage in relationships and encounters that go beyond performances. Such relationships mirror the

bigger world. Music, humour, satire, and the occasional use of actual names and scenarios elevate the performer-performer relationship to an exercise in self-exorcism and group therapy. Participants engage in the therapy by using the lessons from the skits and other stage activities to secure a community's socio-religious harmony. Humour and satire encourage communities and individuals to laugh at themselves without impairing their sense of judgment, criticism and censure.

The performer-performer relationship is especially strong in performances like Odo, Omabe, and Ekpe that re-enact myths and legends and constitute part of their communities' social and ritual calendars. In Ekpe, performers and participants remain on the same level but the carefully arranged choruses symbolise an ordered classification in which distinct groups find collective recognition. Ekpe mask engages primarily in an all-performers relationship with other characters and role-players. The relationship moves outward from the centre to accommodate the entire community represented in the gender/age choric groups symbolically bound together in the main chorus. At every moment, the performers' roles are sustained as they perform in relation to others with whom they share a common purpose and to whom they are united in the act of communicating with participants. Most of the communication is encoded in music, dance, songs, props, and masks.

This relationship is better articulated in performances and festivals that admit different masks. Such performances are held together by an internal structure that binds masked and non-masked performers in a troupe. Since Igbo masks incorporate widely-known underlying myths or tales through which participants relive performances as man-spirit encounters, performers act out the plots with symbolic sketches and skits that represent the multiple parts of an ensemble. A troupe is not only a complete unit, it is

also a part of the composite picture involving other troupes. Since troupes may have similar performers and plots, and perform in the same space, an inter-troupe relationship exists between performers of the same mask and dance genres. Different components and roles are replicated by other troupes and this creates the stimulus for inter-troupe relationships. In relating with spirits through masks, non-masked performers cross the liminal zone, becoming partly human and partly spirit. These latent relationships leave their imprints on participants now drawn into a special relationship with performers. Group participation is thus, active, but on a different level and scope from that of performers.

The performer-participant relationship is easy to gauge and sustain. It is sometimes founded on a bilateral relationship that recognises the distinct compositions and roles of performers and participants. This relationship is underscored by a symbiotic and sometimes mercantile relationship, a system of production and patronage which enables performers to create meaningful dialogue with participants who respond in ways that include offering of gifts to performers. While mask chases pre-suppose the structural and active involvement of participants, the spontaneous but structured dialogue between masks and participants strengthens the relationship. Comic and satiric displays are tested on participants whose responses comment on their relevance and effectiveness, and on their fidelity in gauging the pulse of the community. The chorus-actors in Okumkpo re-enact current incidents based on real and named persons easily identified among participants. The rascally Onuku and the recalcitrant hunter in Enemma and Oriokpa in Omabe and Odo, visit their mock-serious attentions on participants during their respective festivals.

In social explorations of this relationship, Okumkpo and law-enforcing masks such as Ekpe-Okonko of Arochukwu typify communities' use of the

theatre to heal social cleavages, restore order, and affirm their collective destinies. Participants relate with performers through music and dance, they enter into spontaneous dialogue with the dialogue-loving Ulaga, Ojionu, and the sphinx-like Ekpe-Okonko, and fence off the attentions of rascally masks. Since Igbo masking celebrates accommodation and control over spirit and nature forces, participants respond with awe before the majestic Ijele and flee from the terror unleashed by aggressive masks. In many instances, they taunt aggressive masks and provoke chases and skirmishes. In *Ogburukwe* performance in Ogwa, Ugbonti (boat-shaped ears) and Ishiukwu (big-headed fellow) are taunted by participants and sometimes, by instrumentalists for their disproportionate features. The resulting chases take the masks some distance from the performing arena and by so doing, both groups extend the active staging spot into other areas of the community. The performer-participant relationship is so important that itinerant performances are based primarily on it. Communal participation in itinerant performances is transient as performing masks acquire different participants on their rounds. The secular Agaba has no ritual efficacy and its participants experience no religious fulfilment in its success or failure, yet its very nature compels and invites participation. This is in contrast to ritual performances that are predicated on socio-religious significances and collective aspirations. Agaba celebrates accommodation and control over terror and this elicits strong involvement from participants. The relationship between performers and participants in secular performances is contractual. This should naturally invite detached participation, but the cultural frame ensures that participants are a structured part of the performance text and enjoy active participation. An inactive or detached participation signifies an unsuccessful performance.

Igbo participants do not constitute a single unit with a uniform level and scope of participation. A participant-participant relationship maintains socio-religious balances and satisfies the desire for participation and celebration. Various factors determine such activities which affect performance space, extend it, or influence it in other ways. The internal relationship among performers sustains theatrical relationships with participants, whereas the need for participants to return such role-fulfilling attentions yields two distinct forms of discourse determined by the presence or absence of initiations, the purpose of performances, and the level of overt socio-religious motifs and symbols in masking in a community.

Initiation introduces categories in communal participation for among participants are uninitiated men, marginally-participating girls and women, and initiates from within and outside a community. Despite the differing levels of participation by the three groups, they share collectively in maintaining the internal harmony of a performance and share similar stakes in a community's survival. Through initiations, initiates cross the liminal zone and become the vehicles for the communion of men and spirits. Non-performing initiates engage in a different level of participation as the primary hosts of the visiting spirits. Their presence in the arena restricts spirit-personae to the ethereal plane and they also provide the link to non-initiates. Initiates perform three roles. They are spiritual shock absorbers, the convergence between performers and participants, and the shoulders over which participants lean to share in performances. Non-initiates are thus, drawn into active participation, but in a different degree from initiates whose privileged position grants closer identification with masks. The union of performers and participants, especially in the event of non-native initiated participants, fosters greater communal participation and masking links between communities. This is especially true of

performances with cross-community links and roots beyond the performing community. This is what Ugonna relies upon to trace the Ozubulu artistic trend and "mmonwu marriage" that links Mmonwu [Mmuo] masks in Central Igboland.

In the absence of initiations, communities still recognise the distinctions between the sexes. Adult men enjoy uninhibited association with masks while a majority of girls and women maintain peripheral participation and the least important positions in the arena. While many reasons have been put forward for this gulf in women's participation, the exceptions are the very few menopausal women and the fewer others of special social and spiritual stature who enjoy a relatively close participation in masking in some communities. In mixed crowds, these distinctions are upheld so that while men may hold their ground and exhibit respectful deference and greetings, women flee, seek the protection of a man, or cower before performing masks. This distance remains even before "maiden" masks that represent the female component in Igbo masking. In Odo areas, masks sojourn in the community for about nine months, visiting families and being entertained to lavish feasts of wine and food prepared by the women who speak freely with them as returning ancestors. In Aku, Nsukka, the climactic communion is the dedication of the community to *Uhamu,* its guardian deity and Odo's ritual identification with the community amid drumming, trumpeting, and a most impressive singing of Odo praise chants by the women (Nzewi, 1979). Despite the close association with Odo masks over a long time, and their participation in every level of performance, women in Odo communities still maintain deferential distance before Odo masks. The differing levels and kinds of participation between men and women generate new relationships as the two share in a

performance. The result is performances with sharply defined boundaries on the scope of participation for initiates, non-initiates, men, and women.

The relationships between initiates and non-initiates, and between men and women create differing proxemic responses. All operate in the same fluid space, encouraging mobility and interactions among participants. This represents a primary level of participant-participant relationship. The relationship between performers and participants is spontaneous and this creates divergencies of interaction. A scenario in which a participant offers money for a piece of kola-nut from the trader mask in Enemma, in Nkpor, could be a response to another who obtains imaginary goods for his/her money, or one who haggles without 'making a purchase' or offering money in appreciation of a good performance. The differing individual responses are acceptable and the masker is simply a vehicle for the re-enactment of a participant-participant discourse. On a different level, there is excitement and dialogue among participants in relation to their appreciation of on-going performances. Some of the dialogue bears on participants' response to performers at the performer-participant level. Communal participation is so important that despite the absence of a strong spiritual hold and the transience of homestead participation, itinerant performances manage to arouse discourse through mask charges, group encounters and skirmishes in the open-engagement stage.

The diversity of mask characters and the nature of individual communities necessitate a fluid space, for despite their sacred and symbolic significations, masks are performed only through human agency. The contradictions in this relationship are harmonised through a flexible proxemic code that permits abstractions and life to exist side by side. A performance thus, temporarily lowers both sacred and secular barriers and unites different cosmic zones in an atmosphere that respects the separate identity and

character of each zone and yet, allows for communion, consummation, and celebrations between the sometimes opposed essences. A static and limiting space would contradict the spirit and concept of the theatre, weaken the continuum that connects all the cosmic zones in the Igbo world, and unhinge the foundation of this theatre of man and community. Spatial fluidity enables performances to reflect aspects of Igbo life, but communal festivals involving many masks and different responses to space come closest to a composite theatrical picture. Okagbue's (1987) description of masking during an Enemma festival is one of such pictures:

> The masked figures in the Enemma festival are characters created through the use of masks, costumes and movement and acted out by selected actors from the community. These characters span the whole spectrum of human experience. There are spirits and men, gods and ancestors, even animals, ideas and other forms of abstraction feature in the festival plays . . . _ the Enemma is a joyful celebration filled with abundant entertaining spectacle for the community (160).

PERFORMANCE STRUCTURE.

To be effective, theatrical structure must be internally-derived and to remain relevant, borrowed forms must yield to the dictates and adaptations of the borrowing performance. The structure and performative forms of a theatre must be informed by the uses to which they are applied and the extent of their reception in the practising community. The structure of Igbo theatre must be viewed in terms of its ability to accommodate Igbo life within its conceptual framework and integrated activities. As Nzewi (1979) points out:

> The cultural attitudes and tendencies of a society would determine the dramatic quotient of its theatre. In a society where recreation is not a cult, but is rather structured into the various transactions of living, the tendency would be to present such essentials of dramatisation as would be relevant to enhance and endorse a theme or a story. A more relaxed society that structures leisure as a programmed end in the business of living, would offer more developed versions of the same theme or story (19).

Nzewi touches two distinguishing characteristics of Igbo theatre; the mainly symbolic nature of its staging and presentations, and the great scope to which it employs symbolism.

The theatre's component activities are drama, dance, music, mime, visual arts, plastic and cosmetic arts. Its thematic concerns and activities reveal a consciously organised structure of parts and components, and a high degree of rationalised presentations. Such presentations can be a combination of all or any of the theatre's constituent activities, sometimes deliberately coded and arranged in metaphors, and presented in a sequence understood and accepted by performing communities. The communal and celebratory nature of the theatre and the sometimes underpinning ritual purposes necessitate the dominant use of symbolic communication. Symbolism does not obscure the meaning and outcome of performances, it serves exclusive secular and sacred interests for the community. Participants are therefore, like the audience in Brecht's Epic theatre, exposed to ideas and instructions that are of specific value and relevance to their own life's experiences. Benjamin (1973) puts it correctly when he states that:

> A double object is provided for the audience's interest. First, the events shown on stage; these must be of such a kind that they may, at certain points, be checked by the audience against its own experience. Second, the production; this must be transparent as to its artistic armature (15-16).

The primary issue here is a matter of contextual relevance and convention for as Sinfield (1983) indicates, 'any artistic form depends upon some readiness in the receiver to co-operate with its aims and conventions' (185). While the stated considerations inform communal participation, Igbo theatre does not require elaborate presentation of communally-held beliefs and myths. That will be repetitious and will marginalise participants who require only symbolic pointers to participate and interpret performances. Such distancing will weaken the basis of the structured participation the

theatre thrives on and without which it will be differently constituted. After all, as Bennett (1990) points out, 'the audience affects not only the performance but the dramatic text too' (20).

Staging in Igbo theatre is symbolic, sketchy and economical. Though elaboration is unessential, music, dance, and mask charges destroy whatever claims elaborate staging would have had in it. This is because participants' interest is less in stories than in the interpretation of theatrical components. Most aspects of performances are symbolic representations; the dance, the movements, and the physical and facial gestures of masks and performers are based on 'ethno-texts' and carry layers of meaning. Theatrical activities are frames of reference deconstructed in the imaginations and experiences of participants. Nzewi (1979) explains the irrelevance of an elaborate story and summarises the argument for representational staging by citing the Odo of Aku to stress the point:

> [But] the dramatic exposition is symbolic, epitomatic, notional .... The story line is latent in the significant and symbolic features of the presentation. It is drama not about life, but of life, and for an aware and empathic audience. So, superfluous explanation or verbiage is unnecessary... that would really be necessary only for our contemporary literary drama designed for audiences that are strangers to the latent nuances and symbolisms of the performance. An enculturated indigene of Aku knows, and is involved in the story. What is essential to him would only be those aspects of the staging that allow him a measure of direct participation as well as emphatic spiritual identification (19-22).

Each performance is a mixture of play-acting and real-life participation and sometimes, a combination of secular entertainment and religious activity. It is a staging technique in which a performance is essentially the completion of an all-embracing process. As Turner (1982) puts it, 'to perform is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act. To perform ethnography, then, is to bring the data home to us in their fullness, in the plenitude of their action meaning (91). The nature of Igbo theatre necessitates the fusion of acting and reality so that, only selected

portions or activities are emphasised before participants whose main interests are in a stylized and symbolic presentation, rather than an elaborate plot. Enekwe (1981) describes the nature of these presentations in a comparison of traditional African and Asian theatres:

> While the Asian and African traditional theatres are not averse to intellectual activity, they are not interested in syllogistic action. Moreover, they are more presentational than their European counterpart. By presentational, I mean that there is considerable interest in activities that are designed to astonish and delight the audience __ dancing, acrobatics, etc. Also, traditional African and Asian dramas are stylized. This means that the actors are not interested in an exact or elaborate imitation of reality (154).

Enekwe's notion of stylization is similar to Pronko's (1974) which simply means 'approaching reality through a different perspective, choosing what is more significant, meaningful, pleasing, or dramatically effective' (188) and who challenges the use of European theatre as a universal paradigm for the critical evaluation of theatrical performances. This staging technique creates an ensemble of masks, performers, and participants amidst a tableau of dramatic actions taking place in different sections of the performing area. Communal participation and the socio-religious intentions of some performances would ordinarily arouse some concern about the place and depth of acting in Igbo theatre, but the performance structure and purpose allows both acting and reality to co-habit.

Behind or under a great majority of Igbo masks are human beings. A few like the "speeding basket" and "wonder masquerades" of Okpanam among the Niger Igbo require no human carriage despite their amazing displays. The combination of make-believe and reality, and the socio-religious intention of the theatre have evolved a unique style that places emphasis on acting as a creative process rather than as a purely mimetic impulse. Here, the role grows and the actor becomes the vehicle in a creative process instead of the interpreter of an established role. The combination of diverse spirit personae, the desire to placate the malfeasant, commune with the

benevolent, and consummate the relationships between communities and their spirit forms have evolved masks that are both distinct characters and symbols of relationships. What exists here are established characters and relationships, not established roles, for the inscrutable nature of spirits means their roles cannot be limited or codified into recognisable human behaviour. At any time, maskers may manifest in trance or possession and in any of these states, they are capable of expressing themselves within and beyond human levels and possibilities. Acting in Igbo masking, therefore, involves a willing surrender of the self to another force, a suspension of one personality for another, and yet, the masker, as an actor, remains conscious of his personality and that of the character or force represented. Harding (1996) explores this relationship and rightly insists that:

> This sense of being in control in body and mind, but different in consciousness and behaviour is what I would call 'acting' and 'characterisation'. The performer is 'no longer himself', because he is no longer *presenting* himself (63).

The distinction between actor and character is special and complex, the actor is himself and another rolled into one. As a member of a performing community and especially in socio-religious displays, he is present as himself and also, for himself. Igbo communities recognise maskers in both capacities, they can neither be all human nor all deity or nature force, and participants expect them to clarify this relationship through their actions. Harding again explains the position:

> The experience available to the human performer is that of an actor becoming a character: he has to maintain both an identification with the character and a distance from it. That experience can be understood in two stages: first by approaching the relationship of the performance to the encompassing socio-religious context, and then that of the performer and audience to that context (61).

J. de Graft (1976) describes the nature of this relationship and states that:

> The decision to enter into an act of impersonation is always a conscious one, more or less, requiring some kind of physical and psychological preparation. But the form of impersonation, in terms of what the

> impersonator does and how he does it, is sometimes not possible consciously to determine (5).

The presence of two personalities in the masker indicates that mimesis in Igbo masking developed differently from the West European form in which an actor aims for perfection in his imitation of a character. Igbo mask performers and participants engage in dual signification; they are both communicants and performers, and the lines between communion and entertainment, work and play, and between acting and life are almost blurred. According to Turner (1982):

> This is a different style of acting from that which relies on superb professional technique to imitate almost any Western role with verisimilitude. [It] aims at poeisis rather than mimesis; making, not faking. The role grows with the actor, it is truly created through the rehearsal process which may sometimes involve painful moments of self-revelation (93).

The presence of religious relationships makes actors conscious of themselves while acting another in a special place and time which Eliade (1960) describes as 'sacred time' (23). He describes this "concentrated time" as the specific dimension of the theatre and the cinema (35). The specialness acquired by performance time and space, costumes, make-up, symbolic staging, and entertainment mean that even when it is achieving a ritual purpose, Igbo masking is an act put together by different actors employing differing levels of mimetic action.

In Ekpe, the masker performs the ritual sacrifice and at the same time, acts out and re-affirms the ancient relationship between the community and its deities. Aggressive masks re-enact the presence of malevolent forces in the community while escaping participants employ various symbolic acts and dialogue to re-affirm the individual's escape and containment of such forces. Sometimes, participants taunt masks into chases and dialogue so that, both parties re-enact man's primordial fascination with danger and the desire to engage the unknown. Okumkpo actors integrate real names into

biting humour and satire as they dramatise contemporary events and aspects of human behaviour. The Njenji in Afikpo uses movements and costumes to satirise the mannerisms of women and the unwholesome imitation of European values of behaviour and dress. In exchanges with Oriokpa in Alumona and Onuku and Hausa in Nkpor, participants and performers jointly re-enact the foibles of the rascally fool and the presence of the ubiquitous Hausa hawker encountered in most Igbo communities. The satire and acting in these displays are obvious for the masked figures imitate the movements and mannerisms of the characters they represent.

Acting in Igbo theatre fuses reality and art into a co-existent process. There is usually no special scenery for the skits and though acting is often stylised and representational, it could incorporate bits of realistic acting. Mkpi, the amorous billy-goat is a mask character in Ogburukwe. After costuming behind his mother's house, Mkpi's performance begins in a flurry of elation by the entirely men followers announcing his emergence after supposedly mating with his 'mother'. The masked character goes after only unmarried women, and bleating in imitation of a billy-goat in rut, he playfully mounts his victims from behind and hurriedly re-enacts the energetic mating act of his life counterpart. No sexual act occurs in this mime but the action momentarily leaves some scars on victims whose chastity become temporarily suspect. The supposed mother-offspring mating is a reflection of animal life and a caustic comment on Oedipal relationships, an abominable act in Igboland. The character represents amorous males whose libidos are oblivious of blood lines, and the therapeutic outcome of these encounters does not belie the efforts and acting involved. Everything in this performance is an act and the main criticisms, if any, will be for actors' inability to "behave" like the characters they set out to imitate. In socio-religious displays, this complex acting style

transfers emphasis from mimetic proficiency to results and the subordination of the former to ritual efficacy, but not its total exclusion. Accomplished actors are appreciated but only to the extent that a performance yields the desired results and here again, entertainment is secondary to socio-religious outcome. Nzewi (1979) summarises these positions:

> The stage business serves to impress on the already committed audience that the drama [of rain-making which] is vital to their existence and to the credibility of their religio-economic aspirations demands a level of expertise to achieve the desired fulfilment. If there is tragedic ending, failure to achieve real-life resolutions, then it would not be because the actors were not accomplished or committed. Other explanations would be sought (19).

The emphasis on results does not militate against Igbo theatre or fail to draw the line between theatre, life, and religious activity for as Schechner (1983) indicates:

> By using masks, costumes, and physical actions arranged in a set way, or improvised according to known rules; by performing following a script, scenario, or set of rules; by performing in special places or places made special by performing in them; by performing on holidays or at times set aside 'after work' or at crises in the life cycle such as initiations, weddings, and funerals: by all these means, and more, theatrical reality is marked "non-ordinary __ for special use only".... What is performed is encoded, trapped, contained, distilled, held, restrained, metaphorized in one, or more, special kinds of communication (90 -91).

The highest form of acting in Igbo masking is embodied in the physical presence of masks and maskers' movements. Masks are social and theatrical disguises, as well as props for performers and participants. They enable actors to get into character and in the masker, the mundane is replaced by the special. Here, the actor changes roles and becomes priest, judge, noble, deity, god, and social critic, and whatever he does and says, he remains above censure. Sorell states that the convention was that the masker 'was not recognised when hiding behind a mask. Wearing it, your incognito had to be respected' (66). Masking is an act and the masker is an

actor. In Igbo theatre, as in classical Greek theatre, men use masks and costumes to depict women characters and there is no higher act than men pretending to be women in speech, movement, and mannerism. What the masker does is to bring the character he is impersonating alive by giving it his own vitality and dynamism, his movements and gestures. Masks separate actors from their real socio-religious personalities and make them performers and communicants. They accord performers that special status which the theatre grants actors and lifts them unto a pedestal from which they explore and comment on society.

Acting must be sustained with 'stage business' and Igbo theatre is full of impressive stage business. Nzewi (1979) regards stage business in Igbo masking as one that employs the 'make-belief technique of literary drama but the objective, the finale is reality. It is one that impresses on the participants, the idea that the expected results are achieved with some degree of expertise' (19). Through stage business, characters are established and recognised by participants who also identify them with certain modes of behaviour or expect them to exhibit particular traits. This is because, 'it is imperative that the characters have an existence based on a human community otherwise they will have no meaning and would consequently become irrelevant' (Sofola, 1979: 68). Stage business generally takes the form of symbolic movements and exchanges between masks and performers. Speech is often absent and when present, it is usually in monologue, and in the event of a dialogue, the spiritual character of masks may necessitate the use of an interpreter for as Nzewi points out,' a speaking actor might undertake to report the responses of his protagonists especially when they are not tangible participants (20). This practice is common in performances that reflect a communion of essences or the consummation of

relationships, and in which initiation rites create distinctions among theatre participants.

Dialogue is employed in *Mmonwu* performance when a mask engages participants and initiates. These are mainly teachings and anecdotes in which masks lead participants to self-examination with the help of interpreters who guide them through the thoughts and esoteric language of the otherworldly. In reply, participants adopt deferential attitudes of fear before the honoured spirit representatives. Here, individuals do not speak directly but apostrophise before masks as an act of respect while masks display superior wisdom and power. Ugonna (1984) furnishes an example from Ozubulu area:

> **Ekwueme:**
> Seven! Eight!
>
> **Ezeigboezue:**
> .....
> To beget an idiot is the same thing
> as to lose a child.
> It happens that when humans
> assemble for a meeting
> It is agreed that it would be held
> at cock crow.
> Humans, some have cocks, some
> have none (119 - 121).

Other features of this dialogue are its poetry, unique syntax and symbols. It is based on self-praise, rhetorical questions, communal aphorisms, juxtapositions and repetitions, and the dexterity of its delivery. The level of witticism separates good and poor performances. Ugonna's example again suffices:

> Audience, you all,
> It is ancient spirit that speaks
> .....
> If a child knows mmonwu,
> He knows the death that kills him.
> I am the earth that cannot be beaten to death.
> The tall palm that upsets the climbing rope,
> I am on the stage.
> The hornbill is brother to the chameleon.
> The hornbill is brother to the chameleon.

> When a thief refuses to hearken
> He carries a rope around his wrists. (104 -106).

The peculiarity and complexity of this syntax requires interpretation especially in the transposition of meaning, and in the use of opposites to express what is meant. According to Ugonna:

> Although at first sight mmonwu speech appears difficult and almost incomprehensible, it is in fact easy to understand when it is known that to address an mmonwu a person uses a positive statement when a negative meaning is intended and vice-versa. In addition to this reversal of meaning the time suffix, "ri" is freely used, so also is the suffix "chara":
> ....*Ejeghi m ri ahia* (I did not in fact go to the market; which here means, I went to the market).... *Ejechara m ri ahia* (I did in fact go to the market, meaning, I did not go to the market (109).

Mmonwu masks do not speak in literal terms and Ugonna points out that people are often overawed by the mask's sphinx-like attitude to anyone who addresses it without mastering this mode of language (110). Water for example, is known by an onomatopoeic expression for a 'thing that flows audibly'. While these symbolic terminologies apply to the Ozubulu area, other communities adopt different onomatopoeic expressions because of differences in dialects. Dialogue in Igbo masking is not used for plot development since performances are centred around a series of enactments by spirit and human characters who depict aspects of spiritual and human life.

Acting in Okumkpo involves only the *Ori* and play leaders, and is usually above average though some performers display great acting skills. This is not sustained for long because of the episodic nature of the performances which string many unrelated tales together. There is little room for mediocre acting as the *Ori* actors acquire experiences from earlier performances and pass through rigorous and intense rehearsals before they are assigned roles. Good acting is expected, and participants often rupture the performer-participant relationship to remove a poor actor or halt a

performance. This is especially the case in the highly anticipated dance-act of the 'maiden' mask, who is expected to be the best dancer in a community. Active communal participation calls for commitment from the actors whose performances display an awareness of this responsibility.

The skits in Okumkpo have engendered a tradition of improvised dialogues. They are improvised from actual events and the dialogues developed in the course of rehearsals, artfully recreate these events as realistically as possible. Though actual character development is filled through the leader's explanations, dialogue is sustained to such a level that every skit is presented as a complete unit. The language is witty, humorous, and direct in order to underscore the satirical purpose of the performance. As Ottenberg (1975) points out, by placing 'the dialogue and the story in the context of particular situations and specific individuals, there is heightened interest which gives the performance social and moral effectiveness' (135). Dialogue would be ineffective in the face of voice distortions caused by masks created for non-speaking parts. The situation is addressed by leaders' explanations which help participants to follow every action, plot, and significance. Unlike *Mmonwu*, Okumkpo does not employ symbolic language because the performers are viewed as human beings employing masks for theatrical disguise. Okumkpo language is therefore, simple, direct and devoid of the linguistic complexities of *Mmonwu* performance, and its dramatic meaning is spared symbolic detours.

Music and dance are structured components of Igbo theatre and every performance incorporates forms of one or two of them. Both are variously employed to denote the sections of a display and because they may flow through sections, it is difficult to designate the parts of a display merely by them. This is because the beginning or end of a dance and music sequence does not necessarily indicate the initiation and completion of a stage. In fact,

the stages of some displays contain more than one music /dance and these may on occasions, stop for other activities to terminate the section. Apart from dance/music, stage business is the main pointer to the structure of a display. In *Ogburukwe* and *Arugo*, after the opening procession of masks and performers (*Ikwo Amara*), a development that appears to be common in displays with many masks, masks return to the costuming enclosure to be summoned for their special displays. Between the procession and the summons, smaller masks engage in itinerant performances in sections of the community. After special displays, most masks perform near the arena without actually distracting participants from others still displaying in the arena. This is where the similarity ends for the two engagements differ in their climax and conclusion.

In Arugo, the climactic stage recalls masks for a second or third special act which often concludes proceedings and hastens the departure of huge and heavy masks like *Olokirika, Arugo, Igirigiri and Ogumabiri.* Further performances by these masks is neither special nor guaranteed though they either remain to mill among participants or retire for divestiture. Contrary to this, smaller masks remain throughout the display and participate in the closing procession. Ogburukwe has two climaxes; the first is multiple and special to each mask, and the second recalls all participating masks for a final display that concludes with mask charges. The concluding climax sometimes involves aggrieved masks chasing musicians out of the arena, but its highlights are its anticipation by performers and participants and its ability to surprise even the most prepared with its variety of activities. The main difference in these two displays from one community is that Arugo ends in a procession while Ogburukwe ends in the *disruption* of order. In the latter, such *disruptions* are not only required, maskers, performers, musicians, and participants collude and contribute in various traditionally

expected and structurally guaranteed ways to make it happen. The analyses of some performances explain their structural flexibility.

CONTEXTUAL PERFORMANCES.

Two main types of performances, the contextual and non-contextual exist in Igbo masking. Contextual presentations are staged within their traditional, seasonal, and ritual umbrella while the latter identifies performances outside these circumstances. Groups and communities evolve and define both types but the determinants of a contextual performance may be the prescriptions for non-contextual engagements elsewhere. For example, wherever it exists in Igboland, the Okonko mask performance is a secret affair presented in society groves during the initiation of new members and at the burial of dead members of the Okonko society. Late in the night of its performance, an ingenious but secret staging technique projects music and other sounds into the community. As has been stated earlier, through a transposition of concepts these practices and functions apply to the secret Ekpe display in Arochukwu which incidentally, is the only Igbo community that stages Okonko as a public spectacle. So, though the Ekpe in Arochukwu and Ngwa share common names, they represent different and almost opposite practices.

There are two main differences between contextual and non-contextual displays and most groups and communities stage both kinds. Contextual performances happen in traditionally determined venues and times, and are aimed at the achievement of pre-determined purposes while the non-contextual variety is presented outside these stipulations and is more overtly social in purpose. Secondly, theatrical components may be altered to suit non-contextual displays regarded as special outings. Non-contextual displays such as Mmonwu festivals (in former Anambra State), Omenimo

(in former Imo State), and the national festivals of the arts and culture have roots in traditional festivals and itinerant displays of the past, and though they are not novel in concept, they bring a new approach to an old practice in Igbo masking. Simply put, contextual performances have socio-religious functions and intentions while the non-contextual variety are theatre devoid of strong, overt significances. The main intention of the latter is social, the celebration of Igbo heritage. The displays and structures analysed in this study are mainly contextual and provide a framework which can be altered to suit non-contextual forms. Agaba is one example.

AGABA PERFORMANCE.

An itinerant Agaba performance lasts from about mid-day to early dusk when light permits performances. This includes localised actions or spot-performances in homesteads and the movement of performers and transient follower-participants from one performing spot to another. Agaba is an intense engagement and the aesthetics of the performance are respected at all levels and spots.

There are five stages in Agaba performance; Setting the scene, the Entry flourish, the Climactic stage, the Conclusion/Departure and, the Open-engagement stage. On arriving for a performance, musicians and dancers position themselves in the available space. Initially, masks remain outside this space, straining on their leash or charging at follower-participants while restrainers struggle to bring them into the staging spot. Where present, the staff-bearer strikes the rattling staff into the ground and his mystical pleas bring masked figures into the staging space. This is part of 'setting the scene' and as a mask arrives, usually with its back, the Entry flourish begins. Sometimes, this involves heavy stomping and menacing activities that end with greetings to the patrons. Generally, Agaba masks

take heavy exploratory steps in the circle or square before dominating centre-stage. Satisfied with the potentials of their patrons, performers go through an authoritative music and dance sequence that terminates the Entry flourish. This is followed by the climactic third stage of more music and dancing, when the group performs in the energetic and vigorous Agaba tradition. Most dances end with mask charges and other actions that arouse fear and terror. The climactic stage builds a sense of danger and ends on a frenetic dissipation of raw energy. Mask chases can ensue at any point as groups interpret the mood of participants to determine the content, number of music and dance sequences, and the duration of each stage of the performance. The fourth stage is made of two parts and marks a transition from the charged atmosphere of earlier stages to one of pure entertainment which signals the conclusion of proceedings and the group's departure. Participants appreciate this stage and show their delight through monetary and material gifts to the group. Good gifts attract more displays and songs of thanksgiving. A poor gift may attract satirical songs in the departure part of the consequently shortened fourth stage. The group's satirical songs may lead to humorous and comic exchanges from participants and the banter continues till the group is outside the homestead and into the open-engagement stage. The departure stage is delayed or hurried in response to the extent of patronage the performers receive.

The open-engagement stage covers the period and actions between spot performances. It involves road performances as groups move from one performance to another, and the tests of strength among rival groups in community squares and major roads. This stage is anxiously awaited by participants and groups who relish the drama of group skirmishes. Dangerous mask charges and encounters happen at this stage which is devoid of the circumscribing censure of homestead displays. The presence

of moving and transient-participants creates the rationale for this itinerant theatre of skirmishes and ensures that a group's exploits are noted and spread in the community. Participants are usually prepared for this stage, and the drama involves encounters at which stronger groups temporarily arrest weaker groups. Since 1970, Obiagu (lion's heart) Street in Enugu has become famous as the venue for the open-engagement stage in Agaba performances during festive seasons. The Obiagu Street display is different from the traditional contextual performance from which it grew. It takes place in an urban area and draws huge participation from a cross section of the mixed community, similar in composition and expectation to the follower-participants in traditional displays. This is where the similarity between the two ends. The main difference between traditional Agaba and this special urban derivative is that the latter reduces or excises other structural stages and mainly reinforces the Open-engagement stage which becomes its focus. Groups in and outside Igboland travel long distances for these encounters whose official and controlled versions are the annual Mmonwu and Omenimo festivals. The absence of this stage denies groups the opportunity of arousing fear and terror in participants. In fact, the excision of such a structurally important stage amounts to a very poor display since the performance motif in Agaba is the re-visitation of these emotions on the living.

The Open-engagement stage begins on a low, leisurely tempo as groups announce their pedigree and their instrumentations telegraph taunting messages to other groups in the vicinity. The ego-boosting music brings participants from nearby homesteads. Weak and out-numbered groups make safe detours on hearing the instrumentation from dreaded groups, yet it is the high point of Agaba performance and is so important that groups seek opportunities to divest themselves of the spirit and force of the

performance by terrorizing road-users. The excesses of Agaba Ojinma in this stage in 1976 led to its proscription by the Umuezelakpa village in Ogwa. This was one of the major sources of conflicts between early Christian converts and maskers at the dawn of Christianity in Igboland. This particular ethos of the Agaba tradition has persisted and is noticeable in similar traditions in other cultures such as Sierra Leone where freed Igbo and Yoruba slaves settled in the 19th century. It may not be totally incorrect to suggest that the influences of Agaba in Igboland and Ogun worship in Yorubaland metamorphosed into the forceful character and physical intensity of the masquerade tradition in Sierra Leone that is claimed to originate in Yorubaland. Nunley (1988) comments on a major feature of Freetown masking that is found in Agaba and many mask performances in Igboland:

> Despite the expertise of the artist who made it and the aesthetic quality and completeness of its creation, Ode-lay maskers must be placed at risk to be successful. The performance must be dangerous. Restricted to a confined and private space, the performance failed to reach its potential intensity, and the disappointing first night resulted in the cancellation of the remaining presentations (109).

Citing Roger Abrahams' theory of enactment, Nunley sees restrictions on masquerades as interference and blames it for the failure of performances.

Agaba incorporates entertainment and requires patronage for its sustenance. It also requires an atmosphere of danger to capture its performative spirit and ensure its success. The controlled homestead performances satisfy mainly the entertainment and patronage motif, yet a performance built on danger and which is devoid of entertainment or patronage is incomplete. The combination of homestead and open performances balances the two aspects for a successful performance. The homestead performance is a precursor to the open-engagement stage and is its systemic complement.

CONCLUSION.

An investigation of the proxemic constructs and structures of performances reveals that each display is more unique for its specifics than for its uniformity with a similar or different performance. Performances differ among groups and the only common ground is the presence of a broad and flexible framework on which they are designed or created. This brings into Igbo theatre a dynamic structure with an almost limitless ability to accrete, borrow and spawn derivatives. The result is the numerous styles, approaches, and experimentations with performance frames and structures that is common in this theatre. The situation is complicated by the desire of individuals and communities to leave specific imprints on performances. The resultant ethnographic character of performances imbue Igbo theatre with an inherent spontaneity which can sometimes be misconstrued by non-native observers as evidence of structural disorder. In fact, whether viewed as a religious or social ritual, or as a merely ritualised display, Igbo masking is sustained by a clearly defined structure of verifiable parts and components. There is no performance or meaning without a known order of activities. All theatrical movements, music, dances, props, and gestures in this theatre are timed, there are reasons for their positions in the plot, and they are underscored by symbolic or real meanings. As Moore and Myerhoff (1977) point out:

> Collective rituals are by definition an organised event, both of persons and cultural elements, having a beginning and an end, thus bound to have some order. It may contain within it moments of, or elements of chaos and spontaneity, but these are in prescribed times and places (7).

The parts and components of performances differ in places and performances. Echeruo (1981) identified five stages in the Odo of Aku which he likened to the Greek Apollonian festival. These are Preparation, Welcome and Return, Communion, Dedication and, Departure and

Blessing. Amankulor' (1981) reveals three major dance movements in the climactic stage of Ekpe performance. The inclusion of procession and conclusion stages gives this performance which Amankulor regards as retaining the traditional and original attributes of Ekpe (128) a five-part structure. This study also reveals a five-part structure in Agaba and other itinerant performances; Setting the scene, Entry Flourish, the Climactic stage, Conclusion and Departure and, the Open-engagement stage. This basic five-part structure may not be clearly discernible in other performances, or indeed, in all performances of a particular masking tradition or mask-type. This is the situation in Ekpe and Odo festivals, especially in the latter where there is no ritual link between Aku Odo and other Odo in the Nsukka area (Echeruo, 143). In an interview, Richard Anaba expressed concerns over certain changes like the introduction of other masking practices in Ekpe. Anaba's concern and Amankulor's claim mean that Ekpe, and in essence other performances, have flexible performance structures that respond to specific demands and influences. Some stages may be subsumed in others, extended, or broken into smaller units, but the community still recognises and understands such performances. Most often, sections flow uninterrupted from one to another and this sometimes, makes it difficult to distinguish the parts of a performance and to attempt to categorically define and situate some stages. In fact, while Ottenberg identified nine stages in Okumpko, recent studies show that Okumkpo stages may be reduced or extended to meet specific purposes. This is similar to Ugonna's realisation that the eleven varieties of displays and the three major structural stages he identifies in Mmonwu-type performances; Opening Acts, Main Acts and, Closing Acts (134), do not necessarily exhaust the number of varieties which differ in their purposes and contents (141).

The different types of displays by mask-types or masking traditions are determined by specific circumstances which inform the number of component parts, the length, and scope of theatrical activities which vary extensively. Yet, each display is sustained with a clearly-defined beginning, a middle section characterised by one or more climactic moments, and an end. Between these sections and in them, are indeterminate number of activities such as dance, music, mime, stylised gestures and acting, acrobatics and in a few cases, dialogue and magical displays. The plots of the scenes may or may not be linked to a general theme. Each section incorporates a range of related or unrelated activities linked by any of theme, time, and purpose. The scenes in a section may or may not be linked, there may be several complete, or unrelated units of differing tones and tempo. What matters is that they communicate effectively with participants and achieve their intended results. In this regard, Igbo theatre is similar in some respects to masking elsewhere for Sorell's (1973) summary of Korean masking can be applied to the relationship between theatrical activities and structure of Igbo theatre:

> Each of the various different scenes of these mask plays is a unity in itself, different in tone and style. Their plots have little to do with a general theme. But all the theatrical elements __ masks, music, movement, songs and dialogue __ contribute to a highly theatrical production which is close to a Greek satyr play or, in certain ways, to a modern burlesque variety show (56).

The flexibility of performance structure is a quality shared by space in Igbo theatre. This feature links the structure and space of performances into a symbiotic relationship. Performances have flexible structures that can be adapted to available spaces. What this means is that the need for performances is a stronger factor for the staging of displays than considerations for space. This is what enables presentations to happen at any time, in any selected or available space, along definite or special purpose structures, and for any length of time. For these reasons, displays

are what they are, as a result of their content and context, for their significances and functions, because of the performers and participants, and not necessarily because of their structures and venues. The structure of a performance affects its presentation style and while the end is generally known and anticipated, it is difficult to predict exactly how a display concludes. This element of unpredictability is part of performance structure, and an informing factor in the consideration of proxemic codes. The relationship between space and structure is of such a nature and importance that, while suspense is part of theatricality, the element of surprise is a strong indication of good performance. Surprise reinforces the flexibility of performance structure and space.

An itinerant group can perform in any space, arrange its performers around an imaginary circle in a rectangular or square space. A display in which theatrical activity follows a fixed pattern can still be achieved in differently-shaped venues with participants arranged to represent the expected shape. Though it has been mentioned earlier that some Ekpe performers and chorus usually move westward through the north to the east, and in concentric circles, large participation and small venues may necessitate changes in this style. Because the community square in Ohuhu is small, its intersection with roads leading to sections of the community is adapted and incorporated into the performing space while the central square becomes stage-centre. This is the idea behind the incorporation of thoroughfares into staging areas. The adaptation of spaces is a pragmatic move and has at least, witnessed some Ekpe displays where choruses dance separately. In Arugo, non-contextual performances are held in homesteads and places outside the community square, and where it is impracticable to erect platforms for instrumentalists. The lack of projection in the music, unlike in contextual displays, does not lower the significance or theatricality of the play. What

matters is how performance subjects and brings space into use, and this feature is not necessarily a reaction to the characteristic ability of open-air staging to transcend the limitations of physical space, it is a recognition of an important aesthetic factor that Igbo theatre is neither constituted nor limited by structured space. It is the product of a relationship between space, performers and participants. Where the structure and scope of a performance demand it, space can be re-structured or created specifically for displays, and this greater influence which performance structure exerts on it explains why space returns to other uses after theatrical presentations.

Flexibility is the main feature of Igbo theatrical space and performance structure. It creates hybrids and sustains a multiplicity of styles, conditions and spatial interpretations. This feature runs in the theatre and manifests strongly in designs without which there can be no theatre. This explains the wide range of designs in Igbo theatre.

CHAPTER FOUR.

DESIGN IN IGBO THEATRE.

Specialisations and formal studies in the artistic, technical, and administrative functions of literary theatres have led to their designation as separate disciplines and professional areas in the theatre. In such theatres, set, costume, sound and lighting designs are regarded as separate disciplines. Designs define the technical features of any theatre, be it formal or informal, traditional or modern, and irrespective of whether a society's performance culture, environment and aesthetics permit only of open-air performances, force performances into enclosed spaces, or permit both styles to co-exist. Designs are environment and culture-specific and those for theatrical performances must take the nature of the theatre and its audience into account. Similarly, the nature and presentation styles of a theatre determine which aspects of design are highlighted or lowered. This helps in communicating theatrical intentions in the best and most appropriate styles for both the theatre and its public. Thus, different theatres emphasise different aspects and elements of design, and the appearance of uniform ideas in different theatres is merely coincidental and does not necessarily indicate a uniformity in purpose and form.

Different theatrical performances require different approaches and attitudes to existing concepts of design in any society, and the fact that 'the theatre is a collaborative art form in which each part must be considered in relation to the whole' (Rowell, 1968: 81) means that theatre designs are adaptable and exist primarily to contribute to the total theatrical picture and to serve a theatre's production styles. Theatres and productions differ in places and some peculiarites of design in one theatre may be submerged or absent in

another. This is what Rowell (1968) means that, 'in each production the balance alters: the visual statement, dominant in one type of production, will be subservient in another' (81). Designers recognise that particular elements of design yield themselves to many interpretations and that 'the varying contribution a designer makes to a production depends on the total stage entity as envisaged by the director and the designer himself' (Rowell, 81).

The emphases on results and total production picture make designs and designers very important pre-requisites for good theatre in Igbo masking. This is evident in the applause that greets spectacularly-designed masks and costumes, effective props, good songs and music, and well-choreographed dances. Symbolic images and communal participation in arts in Igbo society and the open-air, representational staging styles shift the focus of theatrical communication from verbal to visual, and encourage the movement of performers and participants to different action spots in the arena. This requires designers to design masks, costumes, music, and props that are interdependent and simultaneously imbued with enough individuality and vitality to exist separately. This is why spectacle, with its assaults on the visual senses, constitutes a very important factor in communicating and designing in Igbo theatre. There are three main benefits in the incorporation of spectacle, interdependence and individuality as principles of Igbo theatre design. Firstly, they help participants to monitor their involvement in performances. Secondly, design and spectacle are critical tools in the appreciation and critique of performances and lastly, since the 'collective nature of production corresponds to a collective form of reception' (Pfister, 1988:11), the designs reflect the consciousness of the Igbo.

The challenge to designers in this theatre is initially imperceptible considering the Igbo attitude to professionalism in the arts. This is because

the 'collective nature of production and reception' shifts the spotlight from the contributions of individual designers to a collective repertoire of variously inspired designs. Though Igbo theatre emphasises spectacle, this development does not sufficiently recognise the difficulty in designing for it. According to Rowell:

> [New] dramatic forms which use subtle mutations of acting, singing, dancing and mime require a visual equivalent, and the achievement of this is a constant challenge to the designer. If we accept the premise of the inter-relation of the arts, we see that a designer should be aware of the entire aesthetic climate of his own time (7).

Since Igbo theatre designs are essentially visual, designers confront the task of creating masks, props and costumes that are of necessity, structured parts of performances, and which complement other theatre activities. This is why groups create masks that translate their aesthetic ideas into visual forms. Apart from commissioned ones, some masks, costumes and props are not specifically designed. These are bought from within and outside communities. The ability of groups to acquire masks and costumes, and to localise them, indicate that some individual designs and styles are generally guided by similar aesthetic considerations.

Igbo theatre is multilocal and different theatrical activities go on at different spots and symbolic levels. Participants are simultaneously engaged by many activities in which they sometimes participate, but mask-chases and open-engagement phases weaken the basis of a sustained verbal dialogue. This would be destroyed by activities that keep performers and participants constantly on the move. What Igbo theatre needs and employs is the kind of visual dialogue and enhancing spectacle that can only be achieved through three-dimensional designs. Where verbal dialogue is employed to some extent, these remain sketchy, deliberately scanty and suggestive, to encourage group participation at both mental and physical levels. In Ulaga and Ojionu displays, dialogue is chanted to reduce the distance between

performers and participants. Songs are loaded with messages and symbolic meanings, dance movements, and other gestures are more or less coded signals to participants. Though masks, costumes, and props are primarily designed to enhance performance plots, they are highpoints in Igbo theatre designs.

IGBO MASK DESIGNS.

Masks and masking exist in most Igbo communities (Dike Nafai has no masking tradition) and are informed by a community's aesthetics. Ezeogo Itiri stated that in creating their masks, the Afikpo usually have a particular person, idea or story in mind and yet, maintain the traditional features of particular kinds of masks. He claimed that while some are bought in Cross River State, they are soon localised. This practice is neither unusual nor is it limited to masks alone, it is a common phenomenon in Igbo masking and with time, new designs are recognised and accepted as the product of communal and individual consciousnesses. These become part of the masking lore of communities. This is a universal feature of masks, but it is in accepting and appreciating the real and symbolic meaning of particular masks and designs that communities contribute in shaping designs in Igbo theatre. After all, masks are the products of the same collective consciousness that influences individual artists into combining their inner consciousness with a high degree of social awareness to create masks recognizable and identifiable by members of a community (Sorell, 1973).

In creating masks, designers accomplish what Malraux refers to as 'not only what the eye perceives but what it cannot see' (in Sorell, 1973: 11) so that, Igbo masks reflect mystical power, terror, aggressiveness, beauty and ugliness, masculinity and spirituality. The notions of beauty and ugliness are relative, they are neither literal nor the mere disjunctions of

conventional features for as Sorell puts it, 'masks can be beautiful and ugly, but because of their heightened expression, their dehumanized and often overemphasized humanness, they are also beautiful in their ugliness' (12).

Some Igbo masks are not worn as complete head or face-pieces, these may be displayed or borne aloft with the bearer(s) partially visible and identifiable to participants. This is the idea behind the Mammy Water or Mermaid mask staged in riverine communities such as Otuocha, Osomari, Aguleri, and Asaba and among non-Igbo communities in Rivers, Cross Rivers, and Delta States. The different displays have some common features. The masks are similar in appearance, represent a sea deity, and the localities belong to the Niger Delta area. The presence and popularity of mermaid masks in these places point to an origin that transcends sectional boundaries and underscores the cross-community influences in Igbo masking. The masks are designed in the mythical figure of a mermaid with the face of a beautiful woman, a partly-human and partly-fish body, and a waist fringed by pythons. Most of the theatre in this display is in the mystery and awe surrounding the mermaid, her mythologised generosity and jealous anger against offending worshippers and supplicants.

The existence of active mermaid cults in the areas means that displays are either presented as pure theatre, or they are integrated in rituals in which the deity casts her mystical presence on a presentation. In such displays, maskers build bridges into another time-frame and other cosmic zones and for this reason, designers take account of not only the ideas invested on masks, but also, their significance and the feelings they are expected to generate. This is why Igbo masks are imbued with great symbolism and invested with potential powers and personalities only fully realised in performances. Igbo masks are therefore, expressive, reflective and responsive. They are neither neutral nor malleable, and the nature of

displays as an encounter between man and spirit, and the large number of masks and performances demand appropriate and functional characterisations that can only be achieved through design specifications. For this reason, Igbo masks are invested with both the characteristics of their types and individual features. In fact, since most masks bear descriptive names and qualities besides those of their type, their creation demands that their physical appearance reflect their distinguishing attributes and claims to power and sacrality. Physical features enhance characterisation to such an extent that the actions and movements of Igbo masked figures must be in concert with their characters.

As has been pointed out elsewhere (Nzewi, 1979, 1981; Ugonna, 1984; Enekwe, 1987 and Okagbue, 1987) and in this study, Igbo theatre uses stylised staging and acting styles. Its form and space encourage mobility of performers and participants, and this ostensibly creates some distance between performers and participants, and between different performers. To bridge this distance, designers evolve distinctive masks that provide performers with enough visual handles for sustaining theatrical suspense in participants. The form of a mask, its masker's anticipated movements and stage business are therefore, central to the principles of mask designs in Igbo theatre. To attract and hold the interest and imagination of participants, mask and costume designers make assaults on the visual senses. This cannot be otherwise since maskers are actors and as actors, their masks perform the dual and somewhat opposed functions of hiding their identities as well as establishing the characters they are portraying. Devlin (1989) emphasizes the inherent duality in the design and function of masks when he notes that:

> Actors often put on a disguise, changing their appearance from their normal selves. The effect of the disguise is, not only to present whatever character is being portrayed, but to protect the actor's identity, to signify to the audience that this is acting as opposed to

> real life. Since human beings express their thoughts and feelings most fully through the face, it has long been a theatrical tradition for actors to cover their faces with masks when performing (53).

Maskers do not interfere with the identities of masks. In hiding their own identities, maskers release their energies and skills into the masks so that, the various latent designs acquire the qualities and attributes of spirit and nature forces, and become authentic characters.

The main challenge for designers is to create masks that can be visually appreciated, even from a reasonable distance. They are conscious of the need for striking masks that carry strong mental and physical impressions. The designs must be theatrically effective and of a nature that can help participants recall their peculiarities. This is why the mask-face has been the focus of attention and creativity as designers interpret their personal or their society's ideas. The mask-face enjoys this importance in Igbo theatre because as Devlin correctly points out, 'human beings express their thoughts and feelings most fully through the face'(53).

Igbo mask designs tilt in favour of striking and impressionable face and head-pieces that evoke different kinds of feelings. These can be made from pure wood, cloth, raffia, their combinations, and in a few exceptional cases from metal and calabash. The materials are usually finished in bright, primary colours applied in broad, loud strokes. Generally, colours are few, and contrasting colours are applied to achieve some degree of abstraction and distortion of normal features. Ugbonti and Nwishi in *Ogburukwe* are mainly black in colour but the addition of other colours contrasts this image and draws attention to those over-sized features that set them apart. Ugbonti's large ears are white while Nwishi, the large-headed fellow has a large hanging tongue and wide, red nostrils through which the masker sees. The effect of these features would diminish if they were of the same colour as other parts of the mask. Additional colours may be used to achieve

special effects. Some of the masks that performed in Enemma in 1993 bore healthy, ruddy complexions, and though costuming was used to identify individual characters, additional highlighting colours were used as make-up to distinguish women characters. Agaba provides extensive examples of the use of contrasting colours to achieve theatrical effectiveness. The combination of form and colour holds the attention of both performers and participants for whom the theatre is incomplete without spectacle or dissonance of some sort. Colour, spectacle, dissonance and terror are heightened as the overall appearance of masks is complemented with appropriate costumes and props. Though colour is important, some designs arouse expected feelings with one or no colours at all. In fact, some night masks and others that seek to create a feeling of terror and age eschew bright colours for dark ones, or some forms of smoke-effect.

In full costume, Igbo masks could be lavishly colourful, austere or strictly functional. They could be beautiful or ugly, elegant and comely, vulgar or grotesque and here, the ideas of beauty and ugliness are not in relation to comeliness. This is because, a single disproportionate feature of form, costume, movement, or dance could change the way a mask is received. In fact, when designed in comely features, aggressive masks lose their effect and become ludicrous. Igbo masks may be anthropomorphous, theriomorphic, a combination of both forms, the distortion and abstraction of a force or quality, amorphous bundles of raffia, and innocuous heaps of cloth that rise and shrink during performances. The two-feet high running "Wonder Basket", the "Elongating Drum-cloth" and the "Snake" masks common among the Niger Igbos are some of the many shapes and forms of Igbo masks. Parts of Central-Western Igboland are famous for theriomorphic masks, so craftly designed and performed that designers appear to use live forms as prototypes. Some masks are awash in bright

colours and spectacular costumes while some employ a few colours and scanty costumes. In sizes, they range from less than two feet (in the bundles of raffia and cloth types) to the life-sized and the gigantic and spectacularly huge ones that rise to over twelve feet in height. Among the latter are the *Izaga* (*Ekeleke* in some areas) stilt mask and the majestic *Ijele* which is performed on rare occasions in recognition of great deeds and achievements and of which Isichei (1983) has written:

> One of the most interesting, visually, is the Ijele masquerade in its Anambra form _ a towering mass of three dimensional sculpture, carried improbably, on a dancer's head, which like the mbari houses, which in some ways it resembles, depicts every facet of village life (288).

Ijele is a mask and term which in common Igbo parlance, is synonymous with regality. Like the Igbo cosmos it represents, Ijele is constantly growing for it incorporates any new experiences and ideas within performing communities. It is regarded as the king and epitome of masks and its conceptual idea is employed in similar masks in areas outside the Ijele tradition. Examples include Igirigiri and Ogumabiri in Arugo. Though smaller in size, both Arugo masks capture the same feelings of grandeur behind Ijele and reflect similar majestic and encompassing attributes. Igirigiri is an onomatopoeic term used in the area to describe a gigantic, noble, unwieldy and inscrutable phenomenon or person while Ogumabiri is the general name for big local markets. The huge size and the scope of the contents on these masks symbolise Igbo society, and the significance of the market as the convergence of individuals and cosmic zones is obvious. In fact, this is why the head-pieces contain different images of community life.

Movement is essential in mask designs since the form of a mask must complement its anticipated theatrical acts. Visual forms prompt understanding and meaning in the minds of participants who enter into certain modes of engagement with performers. These engagements sum up

the feelings a mask evokes and the movements it makes to either sustain such feelings, or to dissuade participants from misconceptions about its nature and display. As a result, comic and satirical masks complement their appearances with appropriately funny and awkward movements while aggressive ones often charge forward while straining on their restraints. Whatever feelings a mask evokes, and whatever its performing style, both issues are difficult to express without due consideration for form and movement. Mask movements range from the demure and impressive, through the gentle, the aggressive and acrobatic, to the grotesquely obscene and incongruous. Different masks reflect different performing conditions, and the facts that all do not sing, dance, or engage in verbal dialogue help determine their designs and sizes.

Generally, most dancing masks are nimble and graceful, and sometimes, spectacular in appearance. Aggressive masks are agile but may combine this feature with a ferocious or deceptive visage to confuse participants. Huge and heavy masks move ponderously, but the main considerations in their designs are their utility and practicality during performances. Though appearance and size can be linked to movements, they are not the sole determinants in mask designs. Some have normal or distorted features that purposely negate conventional ideas. Some colourful masks in parts of Central Igboland have features that should incline them towards dancing dexterity though experience shows them performing more of symbolic movements than actual dancing. The size and form of the Ijele should have reduced it to a lumbering figure with little dancing skills and few movements, but this expectation is invalidated for Ijele actually performs a graceful combination of brisk dancing with swift, sure-footed movements.

Igboland is a land of masks. It is difficult to classify them conveniently, and the fact that mask-types sometimes change names, purposes, and functions

in different localities make the exercise unnecessary. Examples include the transposition of concepts in Ekpe and Okonko displays in Arochukwu and Ngwaland, the multiplicity of Agaba mask-types, the adaptation of some masks by different localities, and the fact that such adaptations usually enable unrelated and unidentical masks to perform in similar styles. As unique as it is in consisting of both a head-piece and body covering, and in being a sole masked performer, Ekpe comes in varying designs. In Umuode, the head-piece is a carved wooden totem of *Ngwu*, the Ngwa symbol of strength, and the masker is covered from head to toe in a white, net material. In Ohuhu, the head-piece, *Isi-Ekpe,* is either a human figure or any graceful animal other than a snake while the body covering of rich wools is woven to look like a tiger or zebra. Both animals are not native to Igboland, the idea behind such choices is definitely new and reflects the notion of widening the concept of nobility and gracefulness to incorporate even foreign ideals. Before now, the image of a leopard or other local animals of such stature must have been in use. Both masks have stylized apertures for eyes, nose and mouth. Even so, it is inappropriate to ignore form and attempt a classification of Igbo masks strictly on the basis of performing styles in the manner Enekwe (1987) did. Enekwe identified six broad categories; elegant masks, masks that dramatize masculine strength, satirical masks, lampooning masks, wonder-making masks, and ancestral masks. This classification mirrors the inherent difficulty in the exercise for Igbo masks do not all fit into secure niches. Some defy this neat classification and spill over into more than one genre. For instance, while Agaba fits into the group that displays masculine strength, Ijele, Ekpe, Odo, Igirigiri, and Ogumabiri are not only elegant, they also display masculine strength. Detailed descriptions of some masks within the context of their performances would shed more light on the wide variety of forms and ranges of characterisation among masks of a type.

In Ogwa, Mmuo is similar and related to the Ihiala performance of which Ugonna has written extensively. The performance has four mask-character types; king-mask, youth-mask, commoner-mask and "maiden" mask. As dramatic characters, each has a distinct personality and name, and these reflect their different roles and nature. It is usual to prefix king-masks with *Eze* as a reflection of kingly authority. *Ezedimma* (Good King), *Ezebude* (the king that ushers peace), *Ezeigboezue* (king of the assembly of the Igbo), and others have been recorded by Ugonna. Youth-masks bear names that reflect vigour and exuberance such as *Akpasuoanu* (rustled beehive) and *Egbeigwe* (thunderbolt) while the names of commoner-masks, *Anyaso* (fearless eyes) and *Okoroikpa* (wild and untamed one) match their ebullient, impoverished status. Names like *Adamma* (beautiful daughter) and *Adaugo* (radiant or Eagle's daughter) reflect wealth, beauty, and elegance in "maiden" masks. Since Igbo masks are conceived as stories in visual and physical forms, naming corresponds with appearances.

Apart from the commoner-mask, the others are tall and rise up to between ten and twelve feet. As previously indicated, their features are non-defined and are neither particularly anthropomorphic nor theriomorphic. This heightens their inscrutability. Of the four types, Ezemmuo is the tallest and most expensively costumed, followed by youth and maiden masks, and the commoner-mask usually being diminutive and unseemly in appearance. Ugonna's long description of these masks in Ihiala area provides an indication of the summation of form, character and attribute in the physical appearance of Igbo masks:

> The mmonwu character in general is symbolized by *asangwo* (raffia straw) costume, though the female mmonwu is exclusively costumed in cloth.... The akakpo is almost entirely of straw, with a round patch of cloth on the crest of the head.... On the other hand, the dimkpammuo and the ezemmuo are partly costumed in raffia and partly in rich cloth. Their rather elongated, slightly conical trunk and neck, a neck that often carries a maned head...is costumed in rich cloth. Two velvet bands of cloth run along the front and back of the majestic straw-clad

> figures of the ezemmuo and dimkpammuo and pendants of multi-coloured tassels, red, yellow or orange, are neatly arranged along both velvet bands, so that the mmonwu appears to have two fronts, hence the reference to ezemmuo as ...(mask of two faces or fronts). This artistic rendering of their figure is symbolic of their all-knowing and all-seeing attributes. The female mmonwu has silken coverings that symbolize grace, swiftness, sophistication and refinement. The dimkpammuo is slightly shorter than the ezemmuo who may be as tall as four meters and both are costumed almost alike except that the ezemmuo is more expensively decorated (70).

In addition to the general features of their type, some masks bear specific features and props which distinguish them from others in their category. The versatile and ubiquitous Agaba thrives in this scenario and though performing groups may have one or more masks, each is unique in appearance. The creative motif is to capture these forces in a background of the fear and awe they arouse in participants, and the idea sometimes yields masks with abstracted and ludicrously exaggerated anthropomorphic and theriomorphic features. They may have offensively large heads, grotesquely large, spaced, protruding teeth, large lolling tongue, bulbous eye-balls, gaping nostrils through which the masker's face could be seen, rugged cheeks, and unseemly ears. Some have large mouths that open and close and through which the masker breathes and sees. Most Agaba features are not put to normal use and are deliberately distorted to create a sense of dissonance and disturbing abnormality.

The dominant colours of black, red, and white combine with the exaggerated features to yield masks that may look offensively grotesque, vulgarly elaborate, incongruous and frightening. They are usually bigger than should be expected and constitute a face-and-head piece worn over the face and above the head. The picture of incongruity is completed in most cases with horns and other animal features on the crest of the head. In some places, their terrifying appearances combine with costumes and props to accentuate the names Agaba masks bear. Such names as *Ajo Ohia/Ofia*

(Evil Forest), *Ikuku Amanonya* (Untrappable Wind), *Oku Nagbaozara* (Fire that consumes the wilderness), and *Ekwensu* (Satan) are themselves terrifying. In fact, out of Agaba has emerged more ferocious derivatives, *Odogwu Anya Nmee* (the red-eyed terror), *Ozokwankpo* (destroyer), *Ekwomma*, and *Ebiogwu* (prickly porcupine). The overall aim of Agaba designs and name is to excite danger and exude an atmosphere of raw power. According to Sorell:

> The grotesque mask, in its licentious, fantastic, and often frightening irrationalities, has never died.... The creative power of man's subconscious experiences found, in its most rudimentary form, expression in colourful and often artistically impressive masks. Their demonic character, once a living reality for early man, has become more and more a playful symbol (8).

Abstract, distorted and terrifying masks are not the only ones in Igbo theatre as some designs incorporate a great degree of realism in the creation of different kinds of masks. Anthropomorphous and theriomorphic types are common and despite the large number of other types, the two categories are the most widespread. They cut across sections of Igboland and though other types may be more popular in certain places, a larger proportion of places have both anthropomorphic and theriomorphic masks. Great artistry goes into designing these masks which may constitute a head-piece, face-piece or both, or a contrivance to envelope the masker(s). In 1993, Okagbue filmed the Enemma festival in Nkpor and his recording reveals both main kinds of masks. The anthropomorphous forms are admirable for their comely human features and reflect the essence of Igbo masculine and feminine beauty. Some of the characters in the display were hunters, Hausa traders and elegant forest animals. The theriomorphic masks required the choreographed dancing and rehearsed movements of a masker or two craftily hidden inside to operate and perform. This was necessary for the masks to act, dance, and imitate the mannerisms of their life counterparts. Ezemmuo, the king-mask had a wizened physiognomy and a red-cap with

an eagle feather symbolic of its honoured status. Ezemmuo's wife complemented her rich matronly features with an expressive face, rich in character and complexion. The designs incorporated form and costume to create mask-personae with admirable features, whose interactions with participants were essential features of the theatre from the costuming rooms to the arena and back.

A general and notable feature of designs in Central-Western Igboland is the great attention to details, and going by the number of such masks in comparison to abstract and grotesque ones, there appears to be an artistic inclination towards the creation of life-like masks. Designers draw the theatre into the community and by using contemporary characters, mask designs narrow the gulf between theatre and society, and between imagination and reality. This is why Devlin insists that of all the arts, 'theatre consists in presenting human behaviour directly' and in such a manner that the 'borderline between what is theatre and what is real life is sometimes hard to distinguish' (53). The practice in Central-Western Igboland is different from other sections where the kind of detailed attention in mask designs is not observed in costuming. For instance, Agaba costumes do not exhibit great flair and creativity and are neither as elaborate nor as colourful as many in Central-Western Igboland. In Afikpo, costumes follow traditionally established styles.

Evidence (Ottenberg, 1975; Enekwe, 1987 and present study) shows that though Afikpo boasts a rich masking tradition, its mask designs follow regular patterns and features and the freedom of artistic expression which designers display in Central-Western Igboland is discouraged here. This, at least, is the notion given when designers work within established traditional principles and where individual styles are mere variation of established forms. The fact that individual costuming is the norm in

Afikpo indicates that in sections of Igboland, aspects of design are not equally emphasised and the possibility of a mixture of styles and elements in a single performance is strong. The four main mask forms Ottenberg identified in Afikpo are the wood and non-wood forms, the calabash, coconut shell, and the net forms adapted from the Efik, Ibibio and Annang of the Cross River area. Each has different mask-types most or all of which appear in different mask performances (Ottenberg, 1975). Okumkpo attracts the largest number drawn from the wood variety. There are twelve major wood mask-types in Afikpo and the eleven which appear in Okumkpo are the *Acali, Beke, Mba, Ibibio, Igri, Mkpe, Mma-Ji, Nnade Okumkpo, Nne Mgbo, Okpesu Umuruma, Opa Nwa* and *Otogho* . Like other Igbo masks, the names of Afikpo masks combine physical characteristics and behavioural patterns.

Generally, Okumkpo masks measure about five to six inches in width and are of varying heights as dictated by the specific features borne on the crests. The face often measures from six to ten inches in height in the longest masks and the total height of a mask and its crest hardly exceeds two feet. Each has a basically oval face which is about eight and half inches high, four and half inches wide at the back irrespective of the total size and the presence of projections. They have a characteristically narrow face, no moveable parts and few attachments. The shape of the mouth and eyes differ among masks though square, rectangular and oval shapes are common. Ears are exceptions and some have no mouth. The ferocious and grotesque ones have distended teeth and a few wear small beards. They present a melange of colour combinations with black, white, orange, yellow, red, and their hues dominating. As a rule, not more than four colours are used on a mask (Ottenberg, 61), and long facial marks that run from below the eyes to the base of the mouth are common. The marks are done in bold,

intricate, or mixed designs. Eye-brows are high up the forehead and are prominent. According to Ezeogo Itiri the nature of Afikpo mask designs:

> In creating our masks, we have a particular person, idea or story in mind and maintain the traditional features of our masks. We buy some from Cross River State, we localise them and they become part of our tradition. Some village-groups like Ehugbo have borrowed aspects of Cross River culture but even there, Okumkpo has only been slightly influenced but not defiled (interview, 21 December, 1994).

On the back rim of many Afikpo masks is a matted raffia base of a few inches. This base often has a hole for stringing the mask to the head. This means a mask is worn as a projection on the face instead of covering the head and face. This presents a double level of disguise that recognises the separate identities of masker and mask. The masker is an actor wearing a disguise. He is not subsumed in the character and role, and in typical Brechtian style, the masker recognizes the distance between actor and role and is free to comment on, and remain a part of the performance. This is a variation of the practice in many parts of Igboland where the masker notionally surrenders his personality to a mask. During displays, the top and back of a masker's head are covered with a cloth, leaves, or animal skin.

The head or face-piece, or their combination represents one aspect of mask designs in Igboland. Some are designed exclusively with raffia, leaves, matting and netting materials. While some combine this characteristic with a head or face-piece, majority of them are totally clad in any one or more of the stated materials. Such masks which bear nothing on the crest or at most, a few oddments, have extended the scope of mask designs and widened the concept of masking as a face-covering to include masks achieved through the sole agency of costumes. Here, the masker is concealed with the same material from head to sole or ankles, and mask design incorporates costuming. The evidence is that though the material sometimes reveals the

masker, the mask still retains its purpose and aura. In fact, in some places, these forms are feared and revered more than their 'more appropriate' counterparts and despite sharing some Agaba features, they are a different category of masks. Among the group are the aggressive common types, *Odogwu* and *Ozokwamkpo* , designed with multicoloured netting. These come in a variety of sizes and forms. The former is becoming widespread though more common in the Udi-Enugu-Nsukka areas and some sections of the Central and Central-Western zones. Odogwu exists in Odo and Omabe areas, but the use of fabrics as main designing material has diversified the range of mask-types like the comic Oriokpa in Northern Igboland and the rascally Onuku in Nkpor. The texture of the fabrics and costuming styles sometimes heighten the comic effect of some masks.

What emerges from this discussion is a practice with many connected parts and features, and from which it is difficult to draw firm dividing lines between designing styles. While some mask forms are strongly associated with particular areas and performances, it is difficult to link specific designing styles to particular areas. Some features identify some masks as typically Igbo, but because of the cross-community influences and adaptations, it is difficult to isolate any of these as being exclusive and unique to one Igbo community. The result is that while some designs may be strong in particular areas, they are not to the exclusion of others. What can be claimed is that whatever the design, and no matter what its origins, the Igbo are comfortable with masking and are able to respond to designing concepts outside their primary localities.

MUSIC AND DANCE DESIGNS.

In contemporary literary theatre, sound, may or may not include music. It is used mainly for the creation of special audio effects, to further the plot, to fill the gaps between scenes and when employed as music, it is part of the

performance structure. Sound in literary theatre is useful as an interlude, an enabling environment for performers and audiences to rest between the excitements of one scene and the beginning of another. In Igbo theatre, sound is more diversely utilised. It is a component part of theatrical activity and the major impetus for group participation. When used as an interlude, sound combines the roles of being a source and channel of information and while functioning as a vehicle for plot development, it is an essential part of performance plot. It is difficult to determine the proper place of music designers in Igbo theatre since this is music of the kind that grows and evolves through accretions, repetitions, and the input of other people during rehearsals and performances. The fact is that sometimes, the originators of specific music and dance barely recognise the original from the final product. In Igbo theatre, music is linked to dance and performance, both are the different sides of a single phenomenon, and the consideration of one affects the other. A discussion of both is thus, undertaken simultaneously. In fact, the flexibility of Igbo music and dance, their loose patterns, frequent adaptations, and their extensive capacity for individual expression and variation have not particularly encouraged ventures into music and dance notations in Igbo theatre. This is why only a contextual discussion of both is undertaken in this study.

Every Igbo theatre performance incorporates forms of music or dance, or both. They are forms of communication and the external indicators of emotional and psychic states. Because Igbo theatre celebrates life and is the culminating point of other art forms, it is not surprising that it incorporates a lot of music and dance, costume and spectacle. Nzekwu (1962) underscores the importance of dance among the Igbo in the statement that:

> Dancing was and still is the most developed art form. That dancing occupies this unique position in Ibo (sic) life is due to its being the one medium through which the Ibo (sic) express the whole range of their experience and emotions (35).

The implication of this statement is obvious and the place of dance and music in Igbo masking cannot be over-emphasised.

Music and dance owe their presence in Igbo masking to their celebratory and participatory impetus. The origin and purpose of a performance, the degree of communal participation and other aesthetic considerations determine their kinds and scope in any performance. Cross-community influences foster similarities in music and dance patterns, yet presentations are injected with certain communal imprints that make them community-specific. This imbues music and dance with such dynamism that established patterns and traditions undergo adaptations with successive performances. There are different levels of emotional and physical participation in theatre and as the channels for the expression of physical and emotional states, music and dance are designed to satisfy Igbo theatre's celebratory spirit. The absence of both would limit the theatre's ability to express the whole range of psychical, emotional, and physical states and active participation. Different kinds of music and dances are designed for each outcome in Ekpe and each emotional state can be conveyed in music and dance. In Ekpe displays, the uncertainty before the sacrifice is conveyed in muted songs exhorting the masker to follow the courageous tradition of his forbears. This contrasts the exclamatory praise music and vigorous celebratory dances that follow successful performances. A dirge announces a failed performance and the sorrowful state of the masker, his family, and the village thrown into uncertainty. Shocked, subdued participants and invitees leave the arena in a background of instrumentation that echoes the calamity all over the community. In this way, music and dance in Igbo theatre are used to express the rhythm of communal life and their rendition unlocks several layers of meanings and responses in participants.

Sorell (1973) emphasises the importance of dance in traditional theatre, most especially in masking and notes that:

> Dancing was an instinctive reaction of the individual within the communal spirit, it took the place of heightened communication. . . and the mask was the first instance in the spiritual growth of man in which the synthesis of idea and matter reached an artistic form (9 - 10).

Apart from providing and sustaining theatrical celebration and participation, music and dance serve other purposes in Igbo theatre. As symbols and metaphors for theatrical communication, they punctuate performances and initiate interludes in two basic ways. In displays like Okumkpo with thematically unrelated skits, they link separate skits and create a tableau of events and incidents. On another hand, communal festivals provide a collective focus so that different performing masks re-enact only aspects of the general theme. In thematically-connected performances such as Ekpe, Odo, and Omabe, they define the scenes and sections of displays. They enable performers and participants to keep pace with theatre activity and time, and serve as prompts and regulators of stage business. As comments on theatrical scenes and episodes, music and dance reinforce the stage picture. Nzewi (1979) summarises the roles of theatrical music and dance:

> The role of music in traditional theatre is to rally the community, establish the mood of a performance, to generate and sustain a desired level of psychical upliftment for the actors and audience alike, to structure aspects of dramatic activity, and to celebrate an occasion or an event as a cultural fulfilment.
>
> Dance adumbrates the temperament of life of a given society. Ethno-dance encodes as well as communicates ideas and life patterns in symbolic and stylized corporeal-spatial gestures meaningful within its cultural context. When dance as cultural-artistic presentation is elaborated to illustrate or outline a story-line, it becomes dance-drama (19).

As in all dance-drama, Igbo theatrical music and dance are both symbolic and real, they are symbolic by virtue of the meanings they convey and real for their being structured parts of the performance plot. Structurally, the

opening sequences are suitably informative without necessarily divulging the entire action and events in one music-dance sequence. This sustains theatrical suspense and succeeding sequences are structured towards a suitable climax. *Ogburukwe* concludes with a chase by Nwishi, Ugbonti and other aggressive masks. Though participants specially anticipate this stage of the display and the comedy involving the two characters, they are never fully prepared for the final chase. To heighten the dramatic impact, both characters perform their normal dance routines in the opening scenes. They are applauded by appreciative performers and in the process, they receive gifts and occasional taunts which they note. Other scenes follow with suitable interludes and other characters taking to the stage till the director/leader is convinced that proceedings should conclude. The director signals instrumentalists on the impending climax and by an ingenious application of music, characters are recalled in no particular order. The atmosphere becomes frenetic as participants seek safe detours out of the arena. In the ensuing confusion, masks hide and position themselves for the final chase. Since no mask appears until invited by its own distinctive music, instrumentalists continue the game of deception by switching from one music to another until without warning, a climactic music unleashes Nwishi and Ugbonti and the chase explodes. This final chase concludes displays but the combination of individualised and general music at different points enables characters to put on their best displays.

The use of song-leaders and an answering chorus is common but practice varies among communities. The response pattern opens singing and dancing to performers and participants who join in though the leader's authority is recognised. Song-leaders liaise with instrumentalists as performers are confused when song and instrumentation are in tandem. Mask-dance is a series of music-directed, stylised movements and gestures

recounting the myths, legends, comments, and adventures that a mask symbolises and re-enacts. This explains the numerous dance-music in Igbo masking and why masks may either reflect different aspects of their characters in different dance-music patterns or adopt particular sequences to re-enact their stories.

Music and dance are vehicles for action and spectacle and generally rise from a slow, gentle tempo to a crescendo during which maskers and performers express themselves in a controlled frenetic display of skills. Masks dance in styles that befit their attributes and character. King masks like Ijele perform in dignified regal steps, aggressive masks stomp and charge to underscore their masculinity and youthful strength while simple mask-characters and rascals dance with the kind of unmitigated frenzy and abandonment that depicts their unrefined commoner statuses. "Maiden" masks are a spectacle to behold as their displays reflect feminine deportment and refinement. The movements of masks may be distinct from those of performers and participants who as a mark of artistic virtuosity, exhibit individual skills within the general format of the song, dance, or acrobatics before returning to the dominant mode. In moments of heightened activities by masks, participants may engage in ululations and applause that raise a display to great heights.

Igbo dance is not simply the stylised and structured movement of the body or its parts in a time-space medium. According to Nzewi (1981), 'dance in the traditional Nigerian context also includes mime, gymnastics and acrobatics structured to, or orchestrated by music' (433 - 434). Music in Igbo theatre is less of an adjunct to, and more of a part of performance structure. Performances evolve specific music and dance patterns from the dominant patterns peculiar to an area. Thus, performances in one area may yield variations of a common music and dance or a completely different pattern.

While some performances deviate from the general music-dance sequence, majority exercise flexibility within a common mode. In some places, musical and dance styles peculiar to an age grade or society may lend themselves to displays influenced by the group. This extends the scope of such music-dance as performers improve or evolve new ones from them. This practice is common in festivals which admit different mask-types and dance groups, and explains why the pulsating and stylishly choreographed Atilogwu and Igbaike dances and musical styles, and their derivatives peculiar to Central-Western Igboland sometimes find themselves in mask performances. Atilogwu instrumentation is tightly-controlled and fast, and like all Igbo music, it begins on an even tempo and rises to a pulsation of fast, snappy, catchy beats. This produces a flowing rhythm as performers respond with a series of bold and elaborate body movements and gestures.

The need to choreograph theatrical dance encourages the formation of different steps, poses and positions, and while the display of individual skills is expected, this does not permit the undignified rupturing of movements and patterns. In fact, performers and participants are constantly aware of the need to remain within established formations and movements. Space is therefore brought under strict control, no matter how fluid and expressive a dance step may be. At times, the musical exchange between musicians and performers transfers the inner rhythms of dancers into their hands, legs, and face where they become telegraphic invitations to participants who often oblige. Participation happens because performers and participants share a common understanding and response to the message in the gestures for as Turner (1982) points out, the performers have available 'the kinesthetic forms of dance and gesture and cultural repertoires of facial expressions, to bring them into significant performative rapport, a symphony or synergy of varied symbolic operations'(81-82).

Dancing is often led by a leader, sometimes conspicuous in costume and positioning. The leader may be a musician whose instrument dictates and dominates performances. From the leader's position, other dancers cue in on the tune and step at the beginning and end of each dance. The natures of masks determine how they respond to music and different masks may respond differently to the same music. In a recording of the 1993 Enemma festival, masks and performers responded to the same *Igbaike* music. The anthropomorphous masks performed in dignified regal gaits in a mixture of intricate dance-steps and deportment. Onuku spontaneously broke into rhythmic movements and abandoned his body and limbs to controlled comic rascality. The *policemen* danced in stiff upright stances to achieve a balance between their roles in crowd control and convincing characterisation. The hunters danced in surreptitious steps and re-enacted the posturing of real hunters, while the Hausa trader danced gently with a goods tray delicately balanced on the left palm. These different movements reflect individual expressions of the same dance. The widespread Agaba contrasts the music and dance patterns described here.

Agaba music is rhythmic and vigorous. It merges pulsating instrumentation and forceful solo-response chanting to relay its distinctively youthful and aggressive style. It employs praise and heroic poetry to restate Agaba's great exploits and some are rendered for their onomatopoeic effects. Agaba singing is robust, hollow and deep-throated, and almost raucous in imitation of the supposedly deep cavernous voice of spirits and nature forces. They are accompanied by clapping and stomping and some are pure instrumentation devoid of lyrics. Like the music, Agaba dance is an expression of masculinity and robustness. Apart from the occasional display by instrumentalists, only the non-masked performers dance with masks or alone. Body movements are concentrated below the

waistline where energy is generated for the sequential lifting and stomping of the feet. Sometimes, Agaba dance combines muscular movements of the chest and torso in a display of rippling muscles. Like many Igbo dances, it starts on a slow even tempo and rises to a rapid frenetic stomping, and between the two distinctive moments, improvisations occur and the ground vibrates to torrid, heavy stepping. Dancers are usually grouped in a formation around or beside masks and established dancing styles are often interspersed with free, open dancing. After the opening sequence, music can rise to a crescendo at any point to initiate mask charges at participants always poised to flee. Nzekwu (1962) highlights features of Igbo social dancing that are also integrated in masking:

> At first they move slowly, gradually gathering speed. Their movements become more intricate and confusing, changing in rapid succession. Basic steps are few, but as the dance progresses, each dancer improvises; yet he fits perfectly into the general scheme of the dance proving that he has a highly developed sense of time and rhythm. They dance with complete abandon and each movement though vigorous, elaborate and exhausting is free, clean, sure and decided, showing absolute muscle control (41).

The structured integration of music and dance in Igbo theatre enhances the spatial relationship between performers and space as in some Ekpe displays with concentric circles of choruses. Without music and dance, the procession stages, where incorporated, would lose their significance as a precursor to performances. Since both distinguish the stages of a performance, sections may contain songs and dances linked by theme and function, or consist of dances and songs performed by related masks. In the latter, artistic pragmatism may supersede thematic considerations. Music and dance are therefore, employed for both aesthetic and practical purposes. For instance, Amankulor (1981) describes Ekpe as dance-drama and links its structure to three major dance movements; Entry Dance, Second Dance, and the *Okoro-Oji* Victory Dance. He regards these as 'the vehicle for plot advancement' (119) as they indicate the beginning, middle, and end of a

performance. Usually, different choric groups dance together, each maintains its circle though circumstances may warrant separate performances. This basic three-dance structure in Umuode varies in Ohuhu and Umuosu and may actually vary in other communities. In multi-mask displays, a performance is hinged on the co-ordination between musicians, dancers, and maskers. Any distance between them is bridged with music so that dancers and masks performing some distance away end on the same cue.

Generally, music and dance are accompanied by forms of lyrics though some performances are sustained only by instrumentation. Where lyrics exist, they are used in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons and consist of a combination of local wisdom, history, satire, gossip, moral instructions, social commentary, and sometimes, tales of a mask's power and inscrutability. In Ulaga, Ojionu and *Mmonwu*, performers engage in chanted dialogues that extol particular masks, expose human foibles and puniness, or praise some individuals. Ugonna maintains that *mmonwu* masks 'usually engage in admonitory chants' (104) and employ their ancient wisdom to advise and comment on community affairs. The poetry associated with these lyrics led Ugonna to conclude that Mmonwu drama is 'nothing short of poetic drama and its poetry, heroic or praise poem' (104). According to Ottenberg (1975) and Ezeogo Itiri, Okumkpo leaders double as choric leaders and the songs are sketchy, hardly repetitive, and provide only some clues which the main leader fills and fleshens in his explanations. The call-response pattern is common and this may be between leaders and assistants, or between the former and the chorus. This style encourages lyrical flexibility and requires great creativity for its sustenance. Lapses interfere with the pace of performances and since performers continually monitor the pulse of the participants and their reception of a display, songs

may be altered or dropped midstream as the leader makes changes instead of following a rigid pattern. Lyrics may feature name substitution which, as Ottenberg has pointed out about Okumkpo, 'allows the satire to be broadened' (141).

The primacy of music and dance in Igbo society makes instrumentation an essential part of music and theatrical designs. In choosing instruments, music leaders contend with the limitations of the open-air arena, especially the absence of sound-proofing, the absorption and muffling of sounds by human bodies and clothes, and the diffusion of sounds over long, open distances. This poses a dual challenge to music designers to ensure that the texture of design materials and the calibre of instruments produce the right kind of music that is also understood over long distances and that are capable of advertising on-going performances to outlying areas. What is required is sound that is sufficiently audible and controllable in theatrical environments and so far, this is achieved through the careful selection of instruments and their co-ordination during rehearsals and performances. This situation has led to two main developments. Firstly, it has led to training that requires instrumentalists to control their beats, and for the design and production of instruments that produce notes and beats susceptible to close control. Secondly, this development requires that while the design for dance and music must be closely-integrated and inter-dependent, each component should be markedly discernible and independent of its associates without actually impeding or interfering with them. During the rehearsals for an Arugo performance in 1992, two expert instrumentalists drove some distance from the rehearsal venue to listen to the music. On their recommendation, the group changed some drums and the positioning of instrumentalists on the performing platform. Both moves were respectively criticised for their hollowness and discordant

cadences but the experiment's success was attested to by another group adopting similar proceedures in 1993. In fact, central to the design of Igbo theatrical music and dance, is the amount of harmony and balance instrumentalists achieve in the integration of different instruments.

Instrumentation is provided with any, or some of a variety of differently sized traditional musical instruments. The number and nature of instruments, their availability, the composition of lyrics, and the nature of theatrical activities determine the level and nature of instrumentation. These are used variously to develop a repertoire of loosely-arranged beats that can be adapted to different performing circumstances. In fact, over a long period, some instrumentation become the hallmarks of particular performances. For instance, the hollow metal gong (*ogele / ogene*) weaves intricate and distinctively hollow tunes with other instruments to distinguish Agaba instrumentation. It controls the mask in the absence of the flutist, initiating and dictating various dance-steps and activities. In some *Mmonwu* performances, membraneous drums (*igba*), slit wooden pieces (*ekwe*), metal gong (*ogene*), and the horn (*odu*) are combined to create the distant and haunting music that is synonymous with this performance. In some performances, instrumentation enhances such participation activities as singing and clapping. Other instruments in Igbo theatre are basket rattles, calabash and basket shakers (*osha*), traditional flute (*oja*), traditional xylophone (*ngelenge*), and in some cases, the rattling metal staff employed as a partial instrument and prop. Others are wooden hand-pieces (*okwa*) and flutes made from wood and animal-horns. In recent years, some traditional instruments have been modernised and their range and calibre extended. This has produced a diverse range of musical instruments and performances now incorporate more of these as performing groups diversify the range and quality of their instrumentation.

COSTUME, PROP AND MAKE-UP DESIGNS.

The fine line between life and art, and between the sacred and the secular in traditional societies continues in the theatre and to such an extent that, the distinctiveness of each can be shrouded and overlooked especially in the areas of costume, make-up, and props. In Igbo theatre, costuming is often elaborate. The celebratory nature of theatrical performances and their being special events distinct from normal engagements confer 'non-ordinary status' on normal clothes worn by performers. In fact, the clothes won by participants acquire symbolic significances and assume the quality of costumes for the particular occasion. In addition to everyday clothes are special costumes designed specifically for theatrical displays. These could exist as a uniform costume for performers and participants, or as separate sets for performers and participants. The third is a variation of the second, and here, core performers such as masked figures and instrumentalists wear costumes that distinguish them from other performers. The third style does not only enhance spectacle, it creates levels in costuming and characterisation, establishes contextual dialogues and at the same time, emphasises dramatic conflict(s) in the same way that 'the opposition of left and right can be interpreted semantically in terms of conflict or consensus' (Pfister, 1993: 257).

A notable feature of Igbo theatrical costuming is the fact that while uniform designs (for performers and participants) easily breach the boundaries of theatre and emerge as part of communities' fashion, categorized costumes rarely undergo this metamorphosis and even then, they do not enjoy the spread and acceptance the former enjoys. Secondly, the multilocal and multifunctional nature of special costumes enable groups to acquire different costumes, some retain their specific uses, but others more easily adapt to functions outside the theatre. This explains the sometime

emergence of costumes as part of ordinary dressing and the ability of ordinary clothes to acquire costume status in performances. As a result, there are no feelings of misfunctions and disjunction in performers and participants even when clothes are recognised and linked with specific performances and individuals. This is because, despite the status and theatricality associated with special costumes, the use of *conventional and ordinary* clothes does not diminish the theatricality of a performance for as Renwick (1980) points out, what is seemingly insignificant and commonplace may in fact be a coded and meaningful signifier. This is especially the case in Igbo masking where theatrical symbolism permits different relationships and meanings to co-exist simultaneously, and where despite the costume-status conferred on ordinary clothes by virtue of performing in them, specially designed and elaborate costumes are in fact, more common than usually assumed.

Ugonna's study of *Mmonwu* reveals two broad costuming styles for Ezemmuo in that particular performance. These are the *Egwurugwu* (rainbow) and the *Abatete* (mirror) styles distinguished by the fact that 'in the former, the cloth part of the mask has symmetrical patterns of various colours which lend the whole form a rainbow appearance. In the latter, the mask has reflective mirrors all about him' (151). In addition to these defining factors, other *Mmonwu* masks are costumed principally with raffia straw and expensive, brightly coloured cloths. The dominant colours are red, yellow, orange, and gold. Here, the "maiden" masks differ from male masks and are exclusively costumed in appliqué to match their grace and appellation, "cloth mask". Ugonna's claim on uniform costuming for non-masked performers is different in Owerri-Orlu areas where these are dispensed with and replaced with a broad strip of colourful cloth worn as a sash. The sash is usually worn over ordinary clothes though

instrumentalists sometimes wear these over their bare torso and shoulders. In fact, variations in uniform and differential costuming and instances of the adoption of common clothes as costumes is almost inexhaustible in Igbo theatre.

Elaborate costuming is used in Ekpe and Ikoro performances. In Umuode, Ekpe wears an all-white costume dispensed with in Ohuhu for rich, woollen material spotted like a leopard or striped like a tiger or other noble animal. Where present, the comic bow-man and wife wear soot-blackened jute bags. The 1995 display in Ohuhu had a 'devil' claimed to be unique and original to Ohuhu and incorporated in the performance in the 80's. The 'devil's' entire body was covered in soot with the lower eyelids ingeniously painted in red. On its back was a pair of black filmsy wings like a bat's and it carried a black three-pronged fork and a matchete. Some costumes in an earlier display by Umunkpiyi-Ngwa, depicted disciplines in tertiary institutions, professionals and trades. The latter costuming may have been influenced by the Ikoro costume drama in Obioma-Ngwa. The inference here is that costuming is not only central to characterization, it is more important and more widely employed than hitherto appreciated and reflects the theatre's incorporation of new trends.

In Umuode, young boys extend the scope of dramatic impersonation by dressing and behaving like girls to the extent of deceiving spectators. Here and in Umunkpiyi, the chorus of girls and women display different costumes and while in the past, they wore large waist beads and halters, beads are now scarcely employed or simply worn over short skirts. Theatrical costuming is so important in Ngwaland that the non-mask *Ikoro* in Obioma-Ngwa is based entirely on it. In *Ikoro* costume-drama, the concept of masking and acting are integrated in costuming and embodied in characters who comprehensively imitate white colonial officials and their

black functionaries. Ikoro players mimic the burdensome effects of foreign contacts and neo-colonialism and expose the effects of these influences on their agents through the eyes of their subjects and victims. Similarly, the *Njenji* of Afikpo is a parade of costumed masks, representing different characters in the contacts between the Afikpo and outsiders. The characters include professionals, praise-singers, Aro merchants, hunters, children and women in all kinds of European dress. The emphases in *Ikoro* and *Njenji* are movement and costumes. Njenji's elaborate costumes satirize European values, ridicule neo-colonial attitudes and their restrictive effects on people as shown in the tight and uncomfortable movements of the Euro-costume masks. The contrasting freedom of movement by masks in traditional costumes and the fact that 'no participant comes to Njenji in European-style dress' (Ezeogo Itiri, interviewed January, 15, 1995) indicate the emphasis on costuming.

The free-style costuming noted in Njenji and Ikoro do not reflect the general costuming tradition in the two communities as some displays do not permit of such freedom but instead, admit of only variations and additions to standardized forms. In the latter practice which appears to be more the norm in Igboland, costume designs must enhance established styles and be practicable as in Okumkpo.

Costuming in Okumkpo is determined by maskers' roles and age-grades, and though maskers represent personalities or professions, any distinctive costumes merely supplement the traditional *Ori* and *Mba*, the two main Okumkpo costumes. Ottenberg (1975) provides a detailed description of these costumes:

> The two leaders ... wear the powerful generally ancient and sacred *nnade okumkpa* masks. They each wear a floppy, wide-brimmed hat; a raffia mat, sleeveless shirt; a dark raffia waistband; and khaki shorts.... Sometimes they wear the skin of a deer or some large animal on their backs....

> About one-half of the players wear the dark raffia *ori* costume, which covers much of their bodies; underneath they usually wear khaki shorts and an undershirt of some kind.... In contrast are the *akparakpa* dancers who form the other half of the chorus... wear the *mba* costume, consisting of a light-coloured raffia waistband, a white singlet, shorts of white or khaki material, and a coloured wool chest halter called *nwea ere* (breast- shirt)....
>
> The *akparakpa* often also wear the *mba* headdress, like the ceremonial dress of unmarried girls but exaggerated.... Sometimes the players also wear one or more plastic waistbands composed of strings of thin, flat, round plastic disks that are usually pink but sometimes other colours.... While the *ori* dancers appear quite male, the *akparakpa* are dressed to represent young, unmarried females, even though the costume has mixed male and female features (92 - 93).

In some places, the standard of costuming is high and though designers incorporate realistic details in the creation of masks, realistic costuming heightens a display's dramatic impact and spectacle. In the 1993 Enemma festival already cited, some anthropomorphous masks were costumed in rich velvet, brocade, and other suitably expensive materials made in the form of Igbo traditional ceremonial wear. One had a rich, embroidered chieftaincy robe under which was an expensive wrapper. The *women* masks wore ceremonial outfits, expensive shiny lace blouses, expensive wrappers, head-tie, shoes, and traditional jewellery of beads and ivory. Costuming was so elaborate and extensive in this display that though the masks were part of a type, costuming established them as distinct characters and the examples are endless. The Hausa trader was costumed in the traditional Hausa garments of *sokoto, dashiki,* jumper, trousers and *Kano* cap.

In the rascally Onuku characters, costume and role blended. One wore a one-piece garment of long-sleeved shirt and trousers comically shorter than normal, and in contrast to its weatherworn shoes. The character's incongruity was emphasised by a phallus it carried in a deliberately conspicuous and obscene pouch in the phallic region. The pouch was designed in a differently coloured material and incorporated an element of dissonance. The pouch symbolically transmitted the incongruity in the

character's behaviour and secondly, it created a visual contrast to the realism embodied in the costumes of other characters. This created the focus required for Onuku's display and for the entire performance to avert a diminishing of the visual and comic effects with which such characters enliven performances.

In contrast to the realism exhibited in costuming in some performances, Agaba costumes emphasise and use distortions to enhance individual attributes and characterisation. The primary colours of white, red, blue, green and, black are combined in the onomastics of masks to intensify their visual effects. There is no general costume for Agaba and since they number in thousands, an example is merely representative of the tradition. Agaba Ojinma which performed in Ogwa in the 1970s was costumed in a thick, striped, grey and cream woven cloth. The masker wore bands of cowrie shells and tiny bells on the upper arms and wrists, and ankle rattles made from local plants. Large snake-like girdles and ropes for the restrainers wound around the waist and rose up to the navel. On each flank dangled two sheathed machetes. Non-masked performers wore uniform costumes of shorts, white singlets and *George* wrappers tied in *manly* fashion above the shorts. Each wore a red headband and yellow palm fronds on both wrists. Uniform costuming for non-masked performers is not unique to Agaba. It is common in such non-contextual displays as the recently-instituted Masquerade Festivals which employ colourful, multi-patterned costumes to heighten theatrical spectacle.

Costuming in Igbo theatre is not determined by religious or social factors and groups are at liberty to design, adopt and use uniform costumes. Many communities tend towards uniform costuming though some groups adopt irregular ones. This is common in long and extended performances with a strong socio-religious impetus and outcome. Omabe and Odo belong to this

practice where normal clothes are used as costumes by active non-masked performers. In such prolonged celebrations, the climactic and concluding performance may be honoured with uniform-type costumes, and the closest that these come to uniformity is the adoption of a particular type of material which invariably comes in different designs and colours as in the use of the *George* wrapper in Ekpe and Arugo. In fact, *Omu Aro*, the uniformly-designed *George* material used in Ekpe-Okonko and in all cultural celebrations in Arochukwu comes in hues of brown and red. The flexibility in costuming is best reflected in the fact that though participants are encouraged and coaxed into adopting uniform costume codes, they are usually under no strict obligations to participate in them.

The aspects of costuming highlighted in this study are instances of the general trends and are by no means exhaustive of the costuming styles in any locality or performance. There can be variations and changes in these general formats. Costuming can be symbolic, it transcends sacred and secular boundaries, and since majority of them belong to secular displays, they change according to the wishes of performing groups. Costuming, like the theatre itself, is a dynamic process and a 1994 visit to Amasiri Afikpo revealed new trends in the Okumkpo costumes that Ottenberg encountered in Ehugbo between 1951 and 1970.

Theatrical make-up is essential in Igbo stagecraft and implies anything actors use to adapt and heighten their stage appearance. In Igbo masking, the masker is an object of transubstantiation and the spirit he embodies is the actual dramatic character. The masker is therefore made-up and costumed to impersonate and physicalize the non-material. In this general sense, the mask, though a disguise, is a form of make-up which provides performers and participants with a character to relate with. The second aspect of make-up in Igbo theatre involves non-masked performers and

this appears in different forms in different performances. Some non-masked performers wear patches of white chalk and camwood around their eyes. These are believed to play roles that bring them in direct contact with the masks as the 'discerning eye' and '*omu-wielder* ' in *Mmonwu* (Ugonna, 1984). The women chorus in *Mmonwu* and Ekpe wear make-up of intricate designs on their shoulders, arms, bellies, and the exposed parts of their legs. These designs of various shapes and sizes are applied with dye (*uli\uri*), white chalk (*nzu*), indigo ink (*uhie*), and camwood (*edo*). These are sometimes complemented with special hair-styles. In Umuode, the impersonating boys apply powder, lip-sticks, eye-pencil and other beautifying marks to accentuate their profiles. The '*ufo-bearer*' wears charcoal dust all over his body while the comic bow-man and his consort wear white and black facial make-up with the man's exposed body smeared with charcoal dust. In Umuode, both performers contrast the white and ritually-clean Ekpe and increase the dramatic impact of displays by their appearance. The decrepit blackness of the former symbolise the dark forces and conflicts which Ekpe sacrifice confronts and resolves.

Usually, make-up is built into masks. Originally, masks bear the colour of the materials from which they are made, and imbuing them with additional complexions represents a primary level of make-up. This is mostly reflected in anthropomorphous masks with human complexions and especially in female masks created with beautifying marks. Igbo theatre is conscious of the place and importance of make-up and a mask like the Hausa trader in Nkpor bears the facial marks of the Hausas. Make-up in Okumkpo is in the form of beautification marks and abstractions on the faces of the masks, while in aggressive masks, it is part of the distorted features which intensify the feelings of dissonance. Make-up is part of characterisation in Agaba masks, but its non-masked performers may wear

such body and eye markings as spotted chalk, camwood and charcoal markings on selected parts of the body. The large number of masks and performing conditions neither place obligations for, nor limit the extent of make-up employed by performers. Make-up is determined by aesthetic considerations, need and environment. Body make-up has waned in recent years and like other types of make-up, it is unlikely to disappear in the face of cultural resurgence, theatrical characterisation, and the desire to identify mask performances as special, non-ordinary engagements.

Like theatres everywhere, Igbo theatre employs real and symbolic props. Props in Igbo theatre reflect spiritual and social factors and can be broadly divided into common and personal props. Common props are borne by designated active performers, performer-participants such as town priests, or as part of a set. Wherever they are, they exercise a common influence and significance over the entire community and participants. Common props are usually employed in socio-religious and aggressive displays where the presence of mystical and spiritual power is a latent threat or where they represent a rapport between man and spirits. Common props remain characteristically constant in status, purpose and roles, both inside and outside performances. They cross cosmic barriers and yet, retain their powers and functions in all zones. Though they sometimes change in appearance, they do not change in significance. As types, they epitomise on-going relationships inside and outside performances. This is the background for community festivals that celebrate relationships between a community and its spirits as the Odo, Okumkpo, Mmo, Ekpe, Omabe, and *Mbom Ama* Festival in Umunumo. The most generally-applied of common props in Igbo theatre are *Omu*, used in among other functions, to restrain and curtail the aggressiveness of masks during chases and magical displays, *Oju*, the metal rattling staff, *Ofo* (*Ufo* in some dialects), the Igbo

traditional symbol of divine and religious authority, and in some performances, eggs. In some displays, the community shrine, kola-nuts, alligator pepper, palmwine, and sacrificial animals complete the picture. The symbolism and significance of common props cut across regional boundaries and are recognised in all sections of Igboland where they are put to similar uses in and outside performances. Common props are not designed for performances, they exist outside them and are borrowed and activated by performances to serve as a bridge connecting different cosmic zones.

Personal props are determined by the role and character of masks and the aesthetic requirements of a community and performance tradition. In time, some masks become identified with particular props and this defines their characters. Personal props belong exclusively to performers who use them to draw meanings and to re-affirm the significance of common props. They exist for performances and where they cross cosmic barriers, they more or less return to the secular sphere after performances. Masks are major props for they combine the features of both kinds. Personal props may be used exclusively or in conjunction with common props, but the latter cannot exist in performances without the former and most commonly, both are simultaneously employed in performances. In many *Mmonwu* displays, personal and common props include the *Okuku*, the symbol of a mask's mystical powers and the rattling staff that symbolises Ezemmuo's kingly authority. Personal props sometimes transcend particular displays and become the attributes of some masks and this is how props like animal skulls and machetes become the distinguishing characteristics of certain masks. Personal props combine with names, costume, behaviour and occasional magic to establish the personal attributes of masks as Ugonna (1984) points out:

> Ezeanuforoude... is made famous by the fact that he was the first *ezemmuo* to rise with shoes on.... Ezegborogu... used to rise carrying what looked like a human skull.... Akpasuoanu... was famous for throwing missiles at people... Omewubuogu, is characterised by going about with a wooden spoon....(72-77).

Props are introduced in Igbo theatre in three main ways. They may be part of a set as is the case with most common props, or part of a performer's costume, in which case, they appear with the performer's initial entrance. Lastly, they could be introduced later to signify a particular stage of a display. Ekpe receives the machete for the climactic sacrifice at a pre-determined moment though other performers carry their props on their initial entrance. In Arugo lore, *Mbe*, the wily, crafty tortoise favours *Ona*, the three-leaf yam and *Upu*, a special local sauce. Mbe performs with a wooden bowl containing a mixture of this meal which it craftily smears on participants who taunt it endlessly for its culinary preference. In Ogburukwe, Nwamkputu surreptitiously moves about the town with sharp machetes, harvesting mature plantain and banana fruits so that, while most masks are limited to a few props, Nwamkputu acquires more during performances.

In performances with unrelated skits, props define settings, create and change scenes in the same way that costumes establish characters and roles. Most are personal, and are usually representational though some are real. Ottenberg recounts that a log with four representational legs represented a goat mentioned in an Okumkpo skit while a bigger log stood for the wooden drum that was the subject of controversy in another skit (109). What can be inferred from Okumkpo performances is that props are either introduced with each skit or lie dormant in the set until activated. Most props in Igbo theatre are designed in detail and include every conceivable household utensil, working tools, socio-religious objects, status markers, animals, and items of fashion.

Aggressive masks like Agaba employ props to enhance their awe-inspiring reputations. Initially, Agaba Ojinma performed with machetes, rattling staff, and other oddments, but in the early eighties and after a period under proscription, it reappeared with its formerly terrifying images and props dispensed for a tuft of blood-soaked feathers, yellow palm-fronds, and a live, white cock dangling from its huge horns. To explain this metamorphosis, the group insisted the mask was Ojinma's brother and medicine-man sent up in reply to the group's summons. This drama reflects the group's adherence to the mythos that masked personae are spirit beings. Here, the change in mask design was accentuated with new and different props and by this singular move, the group did not only create a plausible reason for Ojinma's absence, it underlined the ability of props to transform the character and personality of masks. Thus, while the element of danger was reduced in Ojinma, it was not abolished for it persisted in a potential state in the props. As in other theatres, props help actors and suggest local idioms. They create mental images and pictures, fill out the plot, and provoke theatrical activities as in a rattling staff planted in the ground, or the yellow palm frond thrown across the road. Both props and their associated symbolic acts provoke and intensify theatrical activities; the former act is a rallying sign for spirit-personae and masks while the latter regulates and controls their behaviour and potential excesses.

SET DESIGN.

Igbo theatrical performances take place in the open-air and most usually, in spaces created for other purposes, but converted for special use by the theatre. This is what Schechner (1983) meant when he refered to theatrical reality in performances like Igbo masking as being 'marked "non-ordinary _ for special use only"' (90-91). The conversion and designation of public places, shrines, and homesteads into special performing areas can be

achieved by acts of lustration, by the erection of temporary structures, and by the occasional dismantling of existing structures to create room for theatrical activity. However it is realised, performance space is a temporary and transformed space for as Aronson (1981) points out, 'transformed space is simply a pre-existing space that has been altered scenically to create a unified theatrical environment for both the performers and the audience' (185). Aronson reiterates the temporariness of performance space and scenic designs, and his theory contains unquestionable evidence of the spatial planning that goes into open-air performances. This is more so in spaces created for other purposes as in Igboland where even specially-created theatrical spaces return to other uses after performances.

It is easy to conceive of set designs in conventional theatre buildings but nowhere is the concept more strongly required and challenging than in open-air theatre where activities and incidents outside and beyond the staging area contest vigorously with events on stage for the audience's undivided attention. The contest goes beyond a passive interest to actual commitment, and the latter is the real emotional and psychological state required of participants in open-air performances. To achieve this kind of attention, Igbo theatre works on the concept of *an enclosed space within the open space*. This means that theatrical activities such as dance, music, acrobatics, mask chases and participation are confined within a definable space. The major challenges for designers are to design spaces that allow diverse and sometimes contradictory theatrical activities (mask-chase and participation are essentially contradictory) to take place in displays, and to balance the different stages and activities of a performance without disrupting the relationship betweeen the 'stage' and 'participants' areas. In fact, the mere presence of performers and participants requires the proper designation of space and stage for while both groups share theatrical

experience, they contrast with each other in the way the stage and auditorium complement and yet, contrast with each other in literary theatre.

As has been argued elsewhere (Nzewi, 1979, 1983) and stated in this study, the community is the performance venue with actions merely localised to certain staging areas. It has equally been stated that this theatre starts from the community, is localised in designated spots from where it spills back into the community. How this relationship functions in reality is the function of set, stage, and performance designs. Another issue is how performances reconcile the inherent conflicts and physical separations in the relationship between human beings and spirits in Igboland against the theatre being a shared experience and a consensus of supposedly opposed characters and personalities. How does the need for participation in the theatre interfere with the mask-chase and the ostensible distance between spirit-performer and human-participant? Do these factors undermine the need for set design in Igbo theatre? The fact that the two main groups and structural sections in theatre; performers and participants, stage and auditorium exist on the same level, and often without any physical barriers increases the need for set designing. Pfister (1988) sees both as indispensable and imperative in creating a successful theatre and he puts the importance of set designs and planning in proper perspective when he states that:

> As far as the spatial relationships within a single locale are concerned, the juxtaposition of different figures or groups of figures are already inherent in the dialogical form of the drama. The presence of several figures on stage at the same time who communicate dialogically with one another implies some form of spatial relationship of distance and proximity, and the opposition of left and right can be interpreted semantically in terms of conflict and consensus (257).

No matter the venue, Igbo performances take place in well-designed, regulated spaces. Set-designing and performance-planning establish order

and balance and make theatre a rationale experience. Since Igbo theatre is essentially a sharing process, the principle for its set design lies in the need to balance physical and mental spaces. Put differently, Igbo set design is both physical and mental, and the mental aspects create performance boundaries and sustain space-performer-participant relationships. The mental aspects relate to the theatre's use of symbols to stimulate certain meanings and invoke otherworldly presences and participation. Secondly, the absence of segregating structures between performers and participants, and the need for their occasional convergence without destroying the characteristics and identity of either group, require that performers and participants be constantly and mentally aware of separate performing spots in the arena.

The stage in open-air theatres can be designated into active and dormant spaces. Apart from distinguishing the 'auditorium' from the 'stage', this theory categorises sections of the stage as special because of the nature and intensity of theatrical activities that take place in them. For this reason, while the whole staging area is active, within it are dormant spaces with little activity. A dormant space includes spots occupied by participants and guests (spectators). It seats potential performers who may participate in displays but who do so only in active spots. Active spots are designated by stage business and include positions occupied by dancers, musicians and masks, and any other spots set aside for specific actions such as the sacrificial spot in Ekpe, and the space before the instrumentalists in Arugo and Ogburukwe where masks begin and terminate their special displays. In *Mmonwu* and Okumkpo respectively, it includes the platform for admonitory chants and the space between the elders and chorus where skits are performed. In Enemma festival, it is the space before the platform where groups receive Ezemmuo's blessings before performing. Generally, in itinerant displays and festivals where different troupes perform in the

same venue and at nearly the same time, active and dormant spaces shift as groups move from one spot to another. With the entire community as performance venue, active space can be anywhere but such specified spots are still subject to the principles described here. Active spaces are determined by the dramatic intensity and climactic moments in a display, and the fact that performers and participants are in constant motion indicates communities' recognition of both active and dormant spaces.

Performers and participants are conscious of the need to strike a balance between these spaces thereby, recognizing and respecting the relationships and boundaries between them. The mental aspect of set design is intangible and perhaps, the bid to secure the mental and physical boundaries in performing spaces has led some theatres to employ physical barriers to address potential transgressions of boundaries between places and groups, and the digressions from theatre to reality and vice-versa. In Igbo theatre, this resolution is untenable in material terms given the need and desire to bridge the gulf between the secular and the sacred, as well as the desire to retain the mental and psychological distances between them. The use of physical structures would interfere with the concept of the theatre and create an unwelcome separation between its principal protagonists, performers and participants.

The physical aspects of set design in Igbo masking are obvious in the acts and gestures of performers and participants. These acts and gestures are symbolic and constitute transformed mental ideas which have with time, evolved as forms of symbolic theatrical language. During displays, they become performance behaviours, portray mental boundaries and spaces, and they symbolise and conceptualise potential physical structures as if they were actually present. These symbolic representations have often been adopted by the literary theatre in its staging and set-designing techniques

and in Igbo theatre, they include the use of certain actions to indicate the limits of participation for performers and participants.

These indicative actions sustain the internal boundaries of performances, they are incorporated in performance-structures and vary among groups. They could either be proactive or reactive depending on how a performance is viewed. For instance, participants ensure their safety and limit the activities of masks in such proactive actions as women and non-initiates hiding behind mature men and initiated members, and behind closed doors and thresholds beyond which masks may not venture except where such a breach is permitted as part of a mask's aesthetics. In such few instances, other acts are introduced to limit such masks. Other proactive acts by participants are initiations into masking societies and the mastery and use of a mask's secret language. Reactive responses require participants to respect and defer before masked figures, abstain from actions considered to be inimical to the well-being and success of performing masks and generally, to keep safe and respectable distances from them.

By their nature, masks are proactive and this feature determines the staging limitations Igbo theatre imposes on masked performers. Igbo maskers display self-imposed restraint. This is translated into a loose code of behaviour and includes the prohibition of masked figures from performing outside stipulated places and times. Secondly, maskers are aware of their complementary relationship with participants and the fact that the entertainment and shared values of the theatre outweigh personal or selfish considerations. Maskers eschew excesses, keep masking secrets and practices from outsiders and non-initiates, and re-affirm the masking institution's elevated position. The most proactive principle in controlling maskers is the fear of desecration by design or accident. Unmasking and tripping reduce maskers to the human sphere and in some areas, this

constitutes a form of death, a situation that requires other social and sometimes, religious activities to redress. These restraints determine the limits of performances and combine with the mental and physical boundaries of space and symbolic theatrical behaviours to yield set-designs that operate on the two distinct levels. The mental aspect of design exercise a dominant influence in the theatre but the physical aspect, though less prominent, is strong enough to determine the actual arrangement and use of performing areas.

The physical aspects of set design involve the designation of particular areas and spots for particular theatrical activities. The central staging areas where masks, dancers and instrumentalists perform are separated from the main area where participants partake in displays, and from which they occasionally penetrate active spots. The costuming rooms are separate from staging areas and in performances like *Mmonwu*, scene design is accomplished through paintings (on nearby walls), banners, posters, decorations and girders that mark out ground spaces in the staging arena. Sometimes, spots for specific scenes are designated with ground-marking and by the erection of platforms. It is common to position instrumentalists, singers, and dancers separately and to seat participants according to status. Other designs are the clear identification of entry and exit points for performers and participants and the arrangement of venues to keep performers and participants in their respective positions while encouraging their mixing at specifically designated places and instances.

The absence of professionalism has meant that the development of designing in Igbo theatre has followed lines of communal derivation similar to those that generally inform Igbo arts. Apart from the occasional non-musical sounds produced by some masks and participants in imitation of various animals and phenomena, sound in Igbo theatre exists within the

orbit of music. The non-professional, communal nature of the theatre allows for individual designing ideas but these are taken over by groups to an extent that individual initiative is subordinated to group needs. Like some of its other aspects, it is difficult to identify strong personal influences and actual developmental trends in theatrical designs apart from those for which a community or performance is generally known. This has meant that despite the efforts and ingenuity that go into it, designing is group-inspired and geared towards collective goals. Designers remain amateurs or at best semi-professionals, and going by this trend, the different design components and ideas, being collective, have not necessarily coalesced into definite or individually-inspired design schools. What is witnessed in Igbo masking is the integration of individually-inspired and collectively-derived designing ideas working together for the success of performances.

While individual ideas are subordinated to collective purposes, Igbo theatre depends on the integration of different designs and components in performances. This necessitates artists working together for stated goals, and the successful integration of different artistic ideas, components, and temperaments into a satisfactory performance tests the integrity of the organisational and administrative umbrellas responsible for such theatrical productions. This challenges performers to exercise their individualism in a collective set-up. The blending of individual styles, different artistic components, and collective goals measures a group's effectiveness in managing its human and material resources and the appropriateness of its administrative structures. These factors determine the survival of Igbo theatre as a collective engagement.

CHAPTER FIVE.

ORGANISATION AND PERSONNEL TRAINING.

Every conscious human activity involves some organisation, management, and planning. These measures and strategies for ensuring the sustenance and development of an activity are often unique in their particulars and are either foisted on an activity, or they evolve over a period of time. This explains why similar and sometimes related systems may serve different functions and purposes. Theatre is a dynamic institution and it exists primarily as a lived and shared experience. To be worthwhile, it must be meaningful to performers and participants. Theatre materialises with careful planning and a supporting organisation though audiences and participants are more conscious of a display than they are of its planning. Actual theatre does not happen, it is planned and the fact that it is retrievable means that every theatre is based on clearly designed principles of organisation, planning, and management.

Whether traditional or modern, African, Asian or European, theatre is consciously designed and requires different human skills and activities to plan and stage. The needs to harmonise and organise the different skills in a theatre and to channel them into a pattern of meaningful activities before a sharing public, are the reasons for theatre management and organisation. Theatrical skills are not static, they respond to prevailing circumstances and are changed, upgraded, and replaced with more appropriate ones. Personnel give way to others and theatre fashions both systematic and systemic processes of ensuring such replacements and developments. This is the root of theatre training, and it is only reasonable that training be systemic so that different theatres evolve training styles that satisfy their specific needs.

While this fundamental position has long been held and associated with some, theatres like Igbo masking that retain majority of their traditional practices have had to wait for the recognition and appreciation of their unique artistic and production skills. The situation is further complicated when a traditional theatre is closely linked with *ritual* and thus, wrongly regarded as synonymous with ancient unrehearsed practices. In the past, the actual dramatic contexts and theatricality of Igbo theatre, like its counterparts in Africa and Asia, were generally misunderstood and subsumed in the study of festivals and ceremonies. Such developments were based on the erroneous assumptions that since these theatres were more or less 'non-theatrical' and at best, 'quasi-theatrical', they lacked technicalities and professional input. These assumptions were unmindful of the fact that performances and institutions have functional structures and that every structure depends on some forms of organisation and management. These views fail to recognise that theatrical organisation, management, and training must take cognisance of the creative processes in the theatre and its functions, and as Bharucha (1993) points out, 'what it could mean to its own people for whom it exists in the first place' (5). This means that differences in content and context inexplicably show up as distinctions in organisation, management and planning styles. Mda (1993) emphasises different factors in the study of traditional African theatres and recognises the need to focus on only those elements that are relevant to the practice and purpose of traditional and community theatres when he states that:

> The method of creativity is pegged to the nature of the function that drama is supposed to fulfil in a ceremony. Ceremonies themselves are loaded with ritual significance, and this is what has been studied most in this area. The stress has been on ceremonies, festivals and rites and how drama functions in them, rather than on *performance* [my emphasis]. The aesthetic qualities embedded in the ceremonies is (sic) not fully recognised, in spite of the acknowledgement that most of the action of these ceremonies is performed through song, dance, mime and even dialogue (7).

Management, organisation and training in Igbo theatre are genre-specific and so, different from those of other theatres. Even when foreign terms are used to simplify their meanings and draw similarities with other theatres, the roles and responsibilities in Igbo theatre are peculiar to it and 'any similarities' with other theatres 'in the particulars of the systems will be accidental' (Nwoga, 1984:9).

Nwamuo (1990) defines theatre administration:

> The art and science of planning, staffing, organising, motivating, directing and controlling human and material resources in the arts of the theatre, and their interaction in order to attain the predetermined objectives of guaranteeing satisfaction, having a full house and maximising profit (2).

He considers the rationale for theatre administration to be 'the ability of the artist-entrepreneur to co-ordinate the many and often conflicting, diverse social and technical energies in the arts into a single unit' (2). The profit motif, the emphasis on theatre buildings and audience figures, and the quest for specialisations in theatre work form the basis of Nwamuo's thesis. In many places, this foundation essentially sets the contemporary literary theatre apart from its traditional precedent and counterpart. In Igbo theatre, and to a large extent in many traditional theatres in Africa, specialisation and profit are not the goals, and artistic expertise and ingenuity do not necessarily lead to professionalism. Expertise and ingenuity are responses to a theatre's aesthetics so that, individual skills benefit both performances and communities, and in a comparably small measure, the artists themselves.

Contemporary literary theatre prides itself on specialised and professional skills but in being communally-inspired and collectively-presented, traditional theatre highlights collective individualism and its goals are of collective concern. It emphasises different factors and not necessarily the

exclusion of those that define management in contemporary theatre. Specialisation in traditional theatre is for art's sake but in the latter, it has in addition, a mercantile motif and aims at individual accomplishments. The differing perspectives on specialisation account for the different purposes and styles in managing, organising, and training personnel in traditional and modern theatres.

Management in Igbo theatre aims at organising and harnessing the diverse artistic components and vast human resources required for performances. The purposes are to ensure participation and communal harmony, and to satisfy the aesthetic intent of a community and performance. The goals and practices of traditional and modern theatres do not only reveal differences in concepts and terminologies, it also implies and indicates the subsuming of certain terms in one theatre in a more relevant and more embracing application of the other. Terms such as director and producer, technical functions such as lighting and stage designs, and such roles as property-man and prompter, are either non-existent or subsumed in other forms in traditional African theatres. In fact, while *director* applies in contemporary literary theatre, *leader* is more appropriate in Igbo theatre since 'theatre leadership is simply the process of influencing the activities, abilities and decisions of theatre artists or groups of performers in their efforts towards the realisation of the goal achievement of a particular theatre organisation in a given situation' (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977: 84). Developmental trends inform the use of these terms in both theatres but the absence of professionalism and the seasonal nature of performances inform this study's adoption of *leader* for Igbo traditional theatre in place of the director in literary theatres. This trend appears in most aspects of both theatres but it is a theatre's overall aims, functions and practices that determine its organisation and management style.

Whatever their differences, professional, contemporary, and traditional theatres share similar administrative and organisational concerns for as Nwamuo puts it:

> Theatre administration involves the understanding of human relations, artistic temperaments, the planning of viable arts programmes...pulling of resources to guarantee satisfaction and ultimately, to create conditions as nearly ideal as possible in which the production side of theatre may have the best showing, and in which the audience may be predisposed to enjoy what they have come to see (2).

In place of an audience Igbo theatre has participants and the fact that they are part of performance *text* does not make theatre leadership easier. If anything, leadership is more arduous and includes the leader's active participation, management of a large cast, the ability to take spontaneous decisions on the structure and direction of on-going displays, and to some extent, crowd control. The co-ordination of different artistic components, the management of different human temperaments, and the accommodation of various levels of participation from a broad spectrum of the community require a great deal of organisation and administration. In fact, compared to the contemporary director, leadership in Igbo theatre is more demanding and more complicated because the performers are also the leader's first critics.

Igbo theatre exists on the two main levels of organisation and performance. As an organisation, it could be the external apparatus for a secret or gender society, an age-grade or status group. It could be an umbrella for a losely-defined group of people bound together by a purpose. Societies are differently constituted and structured, their purposes and activities require different kinds of sustaining administrations which in turn determine the nature of their performances. This determines the personnel and their degrees of involvement in the staging of performances. In some places, the social and administration structure of a society is distinct from those of its

displays while in some, organisational and theatrical functions and roles merge and are largely vested in the same persons. Where an organisation is separate from its performance, a selection system often exists for filling positions in the theatre.

Though this is not the norm in Igboland, a group's administrative roles may be linked to positions in its presentations. In its most extensive form, this practice merges roles and functions in both areas so that organisations are inseparable from their performances. This is sometimes to the extent that the same persons perform the most important roles in both organs. In the latter, one administrative structure is synonymous with the other and one set of roles fulfil the other. In some places, the community extends its influence over masking societies, their performing arms, and even over their performances. This practice differs in some communities such as Afikpo where the council of elders have no real influence on performances. These variances exist because of the absence of professionalism and the differing responses to performers among communities. This means that, like theatres elsewhere, what is perceived in Igbo theatre is simply part of a complex relationship involving many people and moods, different artistic skills, many interactive roles and functions.

Good theatre administration requires organising, staffing and planning. It requires the co-ordination and evaluation of activities and ideas. It involves assessing, motivating, directing and controlling the diverse individuals whose contributions make theatre. It also involves 'a thorough understanding, appreciation, handling and recognising of the performing artist and his talents in such a way that he is encouraged to give the optimum best' (Nwamuo, 1990:4). These activities demand serious work and competence from artists, play leaders and organisers. This is different from the feelings sometimes held by some outsiders and a few locals

insufficiently exposed to the tradition that in being a collective undertaking, Igbo theatre does not require consummate skills and complex organisational structures to stage and administer. The repetitive nature of traditional performances and the emphasis on professionalism in contemporary theatres do not highlight the intricate organisations that imbue traditional theatres with a complex form and order. In fact, in traditional performances, 'order is the dominant mode and is often quite exaggeratedly precise. Its order is often the very thing which sets it apart' (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977:7). Differently stated, Moore and Myerhoff, and Levi-Strauss (1978) insist that, the presence of order renders an activity non-ordinary and special, and that order exists only in the presence of organisation and management. The contention here is that despite its communal and repetitive nature and the absence of paid professionals, there is no Igbo theatrical performance without a system of planning, organisation and management, and that these differ in places and performances.

Administrative activities operate subliminally at the organisational level in Igbo masking for were they absent, communal participation and mask chases would certainly create disorder. This is, however, far from the order and cohesion that confine performances to specific activities, time and venue. No matter the performances, communities exert direct or indirect, strong or weak influences on them so that, their umbrella organisations maintain order in communities during and after displays. Since the theatre is an extension of Igbo society, a socio-cultural freeway leads its activities to the community where it functions in specified capacities. This relationship is sustained by masking regulations and taboos and in many instances, actual theatre administration and organisation are part of a community's overall structures. This is why elders and priests sometimes extend their

social positions and roles into performances where they play both themselves and others. This practice is not unique to Igbo masking or to traditional theatres for that matter. The special recognition enjoyed by people in socio-political authority and those of high social standing in contemporary African and European theatres, is an extension of their actual status into the theatre even when they have no parts in performances. The difference in both practices is that the Igbo sustain this relationship through communal participation while contemporary theatre audiences sanitise the relationship, maintain a distance from the theatre, and require professionals to renew their links with performances.

Theatre administration is integral to Igbo theatre organisation and is determined by both communal and performance specifics. An organisation comprising different age groups is likely to be differently administered from one based around a particular society or open to the whole community. The theatre's collective nature means that everyone is expected to participate and any specializations that arise are in the interest of the art and not a means of monopoly. For these reasons, society frowns on people investing too much time on an exercise with little earnings and which is unflatteringly viewed as a seasonal engagement that is incompletely demanding and incomprehensively exerting. In fact, despite the painstaking efforts, rehearsals, planning and costuming that go into staging performances, traditional Igbo theatre artists are only regarded as hardworking, committed amateurs or at best, semi-professionals. In Afikpo and Owerri areas, this attitude has meant that consummately gifted maskers who measure less favourably in other spheres are viewed as unmanly. Yet, a genuine desire for artistic excellence demands that only the best performers, skills, and components be admitted in performances. This

ambivalent response means that Igbo maskers can be viewed as both unenterprising and as exciting personalities.

In the 1950s and '60s, Albert (founder and leader of *Agaba Albert*), an itinerant masker, toured with his group and performed in Aba, Umuahia, Owerri, Port Harcourt and other towns in the then Eastern Nigeria. The group was so famous and feared that it became part of Agaba lore and some mask music were composed around it. Following this trend, another group, *Agaba Fifty-Fifty*, named after its founder and leader, rose in Port Harcourt. Performances by both groups at festive seasons were heralded and anticipated, and sometimes spiced with rumours of impending confrontations that never materialised. Despite the popularity of these groups and the high level of expectation that surrounded their displays, the host communities recognized the seasonal nature of the displays and appreciated that they were no substitute for formal work. Fifty-Fifty was a printer's assistant and later, a tailor who also made mask costumes.

These attitudes to the arts persist and Ezeogo Itiri insists that though Afikpo people enjoy and feverishly anticipate Okumkpo, Okonkwo and Njenji displays, play leaders are seen as investing too much time and effort in art instead of in farming. He admits that artistic and social considerations require elders to select the best of many aspiring leaders, and a candidate whose mastery of performance styles and proven abilities to turn situations into humour and satire are not in doubt. This attitude actually serves the theatre well for it heightens its artistic impetus and craving for successful and edifying performances. The ambivalence towards theatre practitioners is not unique to Igbo theatre. In the early days of Western European theatres, some societies and laws viewed 'theatre artists as vagabonds whose attitudes rendered them unsuitable either as wives or husbands for proper men and women. At the same time they were viewed as exciting,

lively, romantic and sexually attractive' (Cameron and Gillespie, 1980:23). Though these attitudes have discouraged professionalism, they have actually underscored the importance of qualitative leadership so that, whatever their composition and background, masking groups are headed by artistically endowed leaders, elected or appointed in accordance with a group's regulations and goals.

Leaders are selected for their proven artistic awareness, co-ordinating and organisational abilities, and the ability to motivate and inspire other performers. These qualities are essential in communal performances where a leader may neither be the best performer nor be versed in all aspects of a performance, and where he has to work with people who are sufficiently aware of what to expect and contribute in a performance. A majority of the performers are knowledgeable about performances and desire to contribute, learn new skills, and share theatrical experience with other performers. As Nwamuo (1986) points out:

> [The performer is] involved in a constant and conscious search for the best ways to interpret and express his understanding of the nature of life and man's existence on earth. He is usually keenly aware of his metaphor, the centrality of the setting and the props and, recognises that his performance occurs within a set of co-ordinated and purposeful elements in a system (36-37).

Igbo theatre administration involves all performers and the conscious submission of their expertise and artistry to the directions of the leader, who is to an extent, a leader among equals and in this regard, different from the modern play director who interprets a script and forces it to yield its message. This does not mean leaders have little to impart, their experience and proven expertise offer a lot, but to a critical following who weigh leadership judgments and decisions against their own experience and expectations. Leaders are confronted by knowledgeable performers in a concept of leadership which Nwamuo (1986) describes as 'a relationship

between leaders and followers; a relationship that at its best, finds leaders engaged in the process of raising the consciousness of followers' (55). Performing communities and societies have the final say and stake in any performance, they supervise performances in various ways and in this regard, are similar to executive producers. Nwamuo touches some basic principles of management in Igbo theatre when he states that 'this consciousness refers to what their [performers] goals and expectations are, what their values and priorities, their personalities and needs are (55).

In communal performances, leaders could be chosen by election, appointed by elders, or by a collective leadership vested with such powers and in exceptional cases, by local deities as in Ekpe, Odo and Omabe. Here, the socio-religious significance of performances sometimes forces priests of local deities to play themselves or retain supervisory roles while someone else leads and directs presentations. Arugo and Ogburukwe belong to different villages in Ogwa and enjoy no special religious significances. The former has only been weaned from its Kalabari roots and localised in the last fifty odd years. In both performances, aesthetic considerations and inter-village rivalries necessitate that the best candidates lead performances. In Afikpo, performance leaders are chosen by a village's council of elders from a list of aspiring leaders, and in all instances, experience, skills, commitment and leadership qualities count. Most masking societies have established selection criteria and most times, someone other than the head of a group leads and directs performances.

Groups sometimes have descriptive local terms for theatre roles and functions. In Afikpo, Njenji and Okumkpo leaders are selected soon after a performance or years of non-performance. In Okumkpo, this may be from already rehearsing troupes or from a group of desiring leaders known as *Odudo Okumkpo* . In communities where different villages present the

same displays, an administrative system ensures that each village has the time and facilities to stage its performance. This is important so that no village produces more than one performing troupe or is denied the opportunity of performing in a given period. This curbs destructive competitions so that a village or society can pool and channel its artistic resources towards successful performances. Leaders may be appointed for life, for a stated period, as long as they satisfy the desires of a group, or for as long as they are willing to participate in that capacity.

While communities are more likely to adopt formal methods in the selection of performance leaders, societies, and especially loosely-organised Agaba groups usually adopt informal, *ad-hoc* processes. This sometimes causes the overlapping of selection processes which may be unique only to the extent that they achieve results. Given the multiplicity of displays, there are many administrative processes in Igbo theatre and while some widespread factors can be identified, these do not constitute a trend all over Igboland. What is uniform is the desire for great displays and an awareness of the challenges in achieving these goals. How individual communities address these issues determines the organisational and administrative peculiarities of their performances. In Ogwa, Arugo groups belong to villages, membership is open to all, and while village councils oversee the selection of play leaders, they defer on certain issues to an elected Arugo executive. Deadlocks are decided by a simple majority of voting villagers or registered Arugo members at a general meeting. Arugo leaders are elected from registered members to provide the required artistic direction for performances, to manage and organise performers, and to supervise performances from planning to post-production activities.

After their selection, play-leaders manage the diverse talents and skills available to them and hone these into good performances. They evaluate

resources and skills, study the various components of a performance, weigh their individual strengths and weaknesses, note how to build on their strengths, and how to transform their weaknesses into strength. Leaders note other artists whose co-operation is required to create and fashion successful performances. Assistants may double as sub-leaders charged with overseeing components such as music and instrumentation, songs, costumes and props, maintenance of order, and the acquisition of new components. Decisions on new masks and re-costuming may be vested in another committee or in the village council.

In many places, responsibilities are assigned and if performance dates are known in advance, leaders plan rehearsals around such dates to ensure groups do not peak early. If performance dates depend on the progress of rehearsals, leaders consider the availability of performers and rehearse the group on time-frames. Each stage requires personal sacrifices and leaders deal with diverse moods and temperaments and sometimes, become advisers and guardians, teachers and conflict-resolvers. At all times, they must lead by examples. The psychological and emotional responsibilities of a leader-teacher-adviser are obvious during difficult rehearsals. The peculiarities and auspices of rehearsals, training, and performances vary in Igboland and it is only possible to describe a general framework that yields to different possiblities at the hands of groups and communities.

Igbo theatre operates on tasking administrative and organisational lines and public enactments are simply the culmination of long periods of artistic enterprise. In most performance, communities and societies select leaders to serve as artistic leaders of a year's performance, or ensure that the incumbent continues in office. Decisions are reached on the types and scope of proposed displays, number and category of masks to 'raise', and the performance dates. Other resolutions may include the introduction and

costuming of new masks, re-costuming existing masks, introduction of new songs and dances, erection of temporary structures in the performing area, and the appointment of artistic leaders. The performance is budgeted and resources are raised through contributions, donations, sponsorships, and other means. In some places, these issues are settled before leaders are appointed.

Rehearsals are held any time but usually at night and away from public attention. Nights provide cover and secrecy for maintaining the mystique of performances and enabling advisers, elders and experts from within and outside communities and groups to comment, teach and advise performers on all aspects of a performance. Nights release performers from other engagements, and since rehearsals should not interfere with performers' primary engagements, night rehearsals strike a balance between performers' availability, the level of artistic competence and expertise expected of them, and the time required to achieve these. When displays have nothing new to incorporate, rehearsing is reduced, and increased if otherwise, but groups work closely together as performance approaches.

Rehearsals are exerting training periods for potential and actual maskers to understudy experts and develop their acts. They study their characters and rehearse the stages of the performances under the scrutiny of leaders and others who have previously performed similar roles. Experts preview performances and offer corrections, dancers and musicians rehearse familiar steps and tunes, erase rustiness and integrate new movements. The music and dance components in Igbo masking are very important and are so demanding that, they can raise or destroy a performance. This is because they are not necessarily incorporated to fill the time or create avenues for entertainment and participation. They are structured parts of displays, they re-enact incidents and tales, and in symbolic terms convey the

themes of a performance. The scope of training in music, dance and other activities, and the responsibilty these entail for leaders and performers can be gleaned from a statement of their purposes in Igbo theatre. According to Nzewi (1981):

> The ideal role of music and dance in drama, based on our traditional models, should be that of ideational and structural relevance to the dramatic intention. Music and dance should be synthesized and symbiotic factors conceived for projecting and propelling the plot, or used to sustain dramatic action, or to enhance the dramatic presence of an actor, location, or to evoke a psychological moment.
>
> These recommendations are pertinent as theoretical propositions. For effective application any music or dance used (whether original composition or adaptations) must of relevance convey the artistic-aesthetic characteristics of music and dance of the human environment and the socio-cultural sensibilities prescribed by the theme, plot and script (if available) (455).

Since music and dance come from broad classes, individual interpretations and expressions are worked out during rehearsals. New songs and dances are developed or learnt from other groups, old and new styles are put to rigorous, time-consuming sequences till each is mastered and integrated into the group's repertoire. Occasionally, some styles and patterns are discarded, new forms are tried and discarded or re-designed so that performances grow and evolve slowly and laboriously. Rehearsals involve tiresome repetitions and as Schechner (1983) points out about this kind of process:

> From all the doing, some things are done again and again; they are perceived in retrospect as 'working', and they are kept. They are as it were, thrown forward in time to be used in the 'finished performance'. The performance 'takes shape' little bit by little bit, building from the fragments of 'kept business' so that often the final scene of a show will be clear before its first scene _ or specific bits will be perfected before a sense of the overall production is known (93).

Thus, in rehearsing a performance, 'new business is accumulated and stale business is eliminated' (Schechner, 1983:93). Skits and acrobatics are honed to perfection under experts and the fluidity of performers' steps and movements during performances underscore the time and efforts put into

artists' training and managing performances. In fact, Nwoko (1981) recommends the level of expertise and scope of work required of leaders in Igbo theatre for directors in modern African theatres:

> Traditionally, in dance performances and, more recently, in our vernacular troupes, the director (or manager) is a super-artist who is often writer, actor, musician, dancer and designer as well as an effective co-ordinator of the whole production. Of course, he is all these in varying degrees but has enough knowledge of each to enable him to take a clear decision on the final result.
>
> In the new African theatre, my chosen director would be a good dancer and choreographer, and along with these accomplishments, he should have developed an ear for good music. He should have become so conversant with shape and the use of space that he can decide the most practical use of costumes and props... since the visual form comes before the text in importance (476).

Nwoko's revelation of the nature of leadership in Igbo performances shows the depth of organisation and training involved and the fact that majority of the problems in contemporary African theatres are due to its weakened links with traditional theatres. The problem with training and management in contemporary African theatres is in not building the new on those traditional roots they have largely ignored. After all, 'it is still true that even when the form to be communicated is entirely new, it has to be introduced through the known older forms' (Nwoko, 1981: 474). Thus, rehearsals are used to introduce new ideas and styles and with the performers, these go through rigorous processes at the hands of leaders and seasoned artists.

The need to achieve set goals and the presence of specific communal cultural environments for artistic enterprise have evolved various systems of order in Igbo theatrical performances. Dance, music, songs, props, skits (where and when necessary), costumes, and the enforcement of order may be vested in assistant/artistic leaders. These preside over specific skills and components and with the leaders, decide on the most appropriate style for structuring the various theatrical components and performers into a unit.

Such structuring usually follow established patterns though they may also provide the opportunity for experimentation with new and existing styles. The influence of assistant leaders extends from particular artistic groups to other performers and functionaries in a complex chain of relationships. The maintenance of order is usually handled by assistants who may also record attendances and absences, grant permissions for abstentions, and collect fines imposed on performers for misdemeanours committed during rehearsals and performances and sometimes, thereafter. Thus, performers come in contact with many functionaries and yet, maintain other social structures and hierarchies in the community or group. The most important consideration here, is that the organisation and structure of performing groups permit leaders to monitor theatrical activities and ensure they meet collective visions and expectations. Through periodic meetings, groups review rehearsals and other pre-production activities and take corrective actions where necessary.

In some places, and especially on the debut of certain masks, organisation involves a unique arrangement where leadership is complemented by a patron appointed by a community or group to take personal responsiblity for a successful outing. Patrons, known as *Nna Mmonwu,* 'father of the masquerade' in some places, consider this appointment an honour and a challenge and so, support performing groups with resources. Their greatest honour is the respect of the community and group, and the personal satisfaction of having been instrumental for the successful outing of such masks. In such instances, the 'father' also provides a costuming place for the group and even women members of his family have the special privilege of closer association with such masks. The association between the 'father' and a group may be brief or sustained over a long time but such considerations do not interfere with the overall purpose of performances.

Theatre management includes the care of a group's property. Where masks belong to individuals and families, as in Okumkpo and Njenji in Afikpo and Omabe in Nsukka, or are hired as in Ogburukwe in Ogwa, owners and performers care for their masks, costumes and props. Collectively-owned property is itemised, stored, and committed to the care of appropriate officials or individuals. Sometimes, masks and associated properties are kept with a community's priest, stored in the shrine or in the community hall. Thus, the management of performances in Igbo theatre exists at both personal and group levels and the involvement of many individuals requires greater co-ordinating efforts for leaders, performers, and the community.

The traditional calendars of communities determine the date and sometimes, the duration of performances. Participation requires that communities and their friends be well-informed of the dates and venues. Here, the need for public information is without box-office considerations. In the past, the announcement of feasts and new moons by town-criers were used to calculate the dates and times of performances. This was complemented by drum messages to neighbouring communities and the urgency of such instrumentation on a performance-eve relayed information about impending displays. The Igbo expression, *"Mmonwu ga apu echi"* (masks will display tomorrow), shows that such messages are understood. In addition, performers send personal invitation to friends and relatives, and even where public information is forbidden by local regulations as in Afikpo, other channels are employed to communicate information about performances. In Afikpo, drum messages invite elders and initiates to the final rehearsals to choose the skit players and "maiden-mask" performer. The performance date is also released and early on that day, the mask procession through the community ensures further publicity.

Ekpe and Agaba achieve the same purpose through similar processions on the eve and morning of performances.

Information management is essential for good theatre administration and by occasionally withholding and releasing information in symbolic forms and times, groups create palpable suspense and interest in the community. The release of information is orchestrated to provide the kind of heightened interest and expectation that draw participants to performances. With Nigeria's independence, radio and television advertisements are bought, descriptive posters and colourful buntings are hung at performance venues to supplement traditional modes of publicity.

Many Igbo performances are based around seasonal cycles and can be staged annually, biennially, triennially and even beyond. Performances operate on internal structures but the level and scope of organisation and management depend mainly on the performance cycle. Annual performances are current and may not necessarily require the kind of intensive work required by a four or seven- year cycle performance. This means that performing groups either create or evolve specific administrative and organisational structures that best solve their theatrical problems and meet their performance needs and goals.

Some groups and performances adopt hybrid styles as Okumkpo and Agaba illustrate. The seminal actions in Okumkpo are the selection of a leader, the *Odudo Okumkpo* , from a group of aspiring leaders and the choice of age-grades charged with the major responsibility for a successful performance by the council of elders. Participation is mandatory for lower age grades which provide the *Akparakpa* dancers while the higher leader's age-grade provides the *Ori* chorus, the main actors and dancers. This arrangement maintains Afikpo socio-political systems so that the theatrical licence that

permits performers to comment on social issues and criticise individuals is balanced against the need to maintain a rigid social order in and outside performances. The result is not the subjugation of critical and radical impulses to outdated notions of communal order. What is witnessed is the use of accepted channels of redress to comment on matters that excite the creative imagination of performers without causing dislocations in the community's social fabrics.

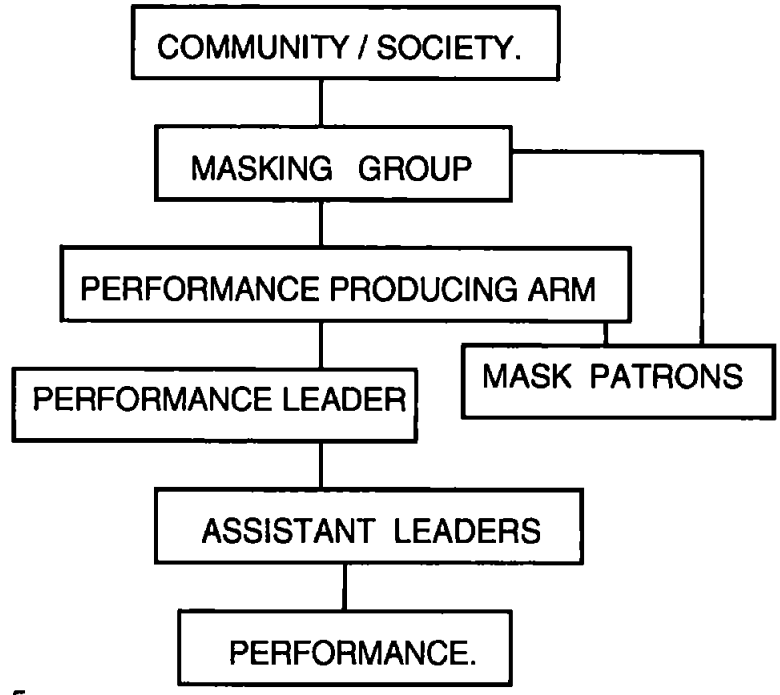

DIAGRAM 5.

ORGANISATION FOR COMMUNAL PERFORMANCES LIKE ODO, OMABE, ARUGO AND OKUMKPO.

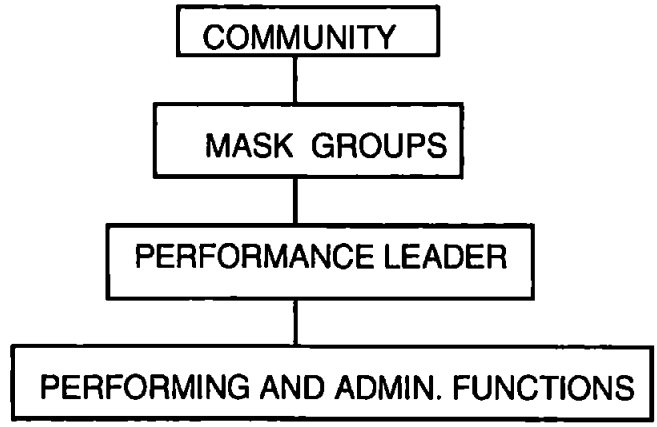

DIAGRAM 6. SAMPLE ORGANISATION CHART FOR SMALL SOCIAL GROUPS LIKE AGABA AND OJIONU

There are two phases of rehearsals in Okumkpo. The first, and the longer of the two involves the core management team and the senior leader while the second phase starts weeks before a performance and involves the leadership team and the two choruses. The senior leader selects a second leader from his own age-grade, one who shares his artistic vision and who is himself an experienced and gifted Okumkpo singer and actor. The two select two assistant leaders and with a handful of selected or volunteer *Ori* players, constitute the production team while the senior leader retains overall directorial influence. The group work secretly for about one year or more, gathering juicy local gossip and tales of misdemeanour, piecing and arranging criticisms and comments on events within the village and beyond. These are worked into humorous and biting satire, farce and social commentaries presented through song, dance, mime and drama.

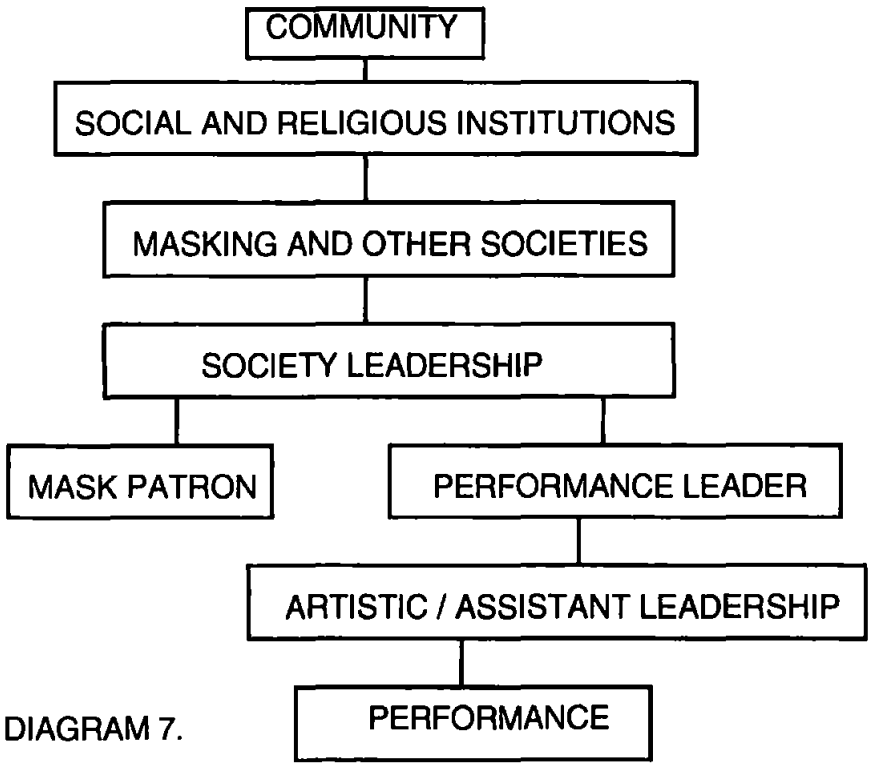

DIAGRAM 7.

SAMPLE COMMUNAL ORGANISATION CHART AND THE POSITION OF INDEPENDENT PERFORMANCES SUCH AS OKUMKPO AND ITINERANT DISPLAYS

These must be original creations for Okumkpo does not accommodate old, rehashed tales, dances and songs. For about nine months, a performance takes shape, skits are created and theatrical components are aligned by the directing group. In the meantime, village elders monitor these secret activities, serving as advisers and as a censorship board despite the official policy of non-interference.

About three weeks to a performance, word is released through the secret societies about an impending Okumkpo and the second phase of rehearsals begin. Elders, volunteers of potential Ori players, members of the selected age-grades, and the directing group assemble daily for the second round of secret rehearsals. The second rehearsals are held to pass the new songs, dances, and skits to other performers in the group. Drummers from another village are contracted for a fee to join in the rehearsals. This practice has a commercial ring without the suggestion of professionalism and appears to be peculiar to Afikpo area. While the elders monitor preparations, they do not influence the stories and skits selected for performance. This is by tradition, the prerogative of the senior leader. Preparations and rehearsals go on till the elders fix the performance date, an action that generates excitement and precipitates a higher level of rehearsals and other pre-performance activities. The performance date is set in view of the progress made at rehearsals and the elders' satisfaction that the level of training and acting match previous performances by the community and its neighbours. In the second phase of rehearsals, performers sharpen their skills and competence while leaders integrate diverse theatrical activities into successful performances.

At this stage, elders supervise the selection of actors for the skits, with the special role of *Agbogho Okumkpo* going to whomever the senior leader adjudges the best dancer. This choice will return to vindicate or haunt the

senior leader after the performance. With casting over, performers secretly assemble their costumes, masks, and props. Two days to the performance, activities move to the men's rest-house for the costuming, repainting and repairing of masks. The leader-director ensures that performers' costumes, masks, and props satisfy the aesthetic requirements of the performance. The community square is lustrated and put in the right spiritual state through sacrifices to Egbele. Other pre-production activities include the ritual separation of performers in the *Ulogo,* the men's resting house while post-play activities culminate in their re-integration into the community. The high level of performance expected by participants, most of whom have been involved in Okumkpo and other mask performances, necessitates painstaking efforts going into the acquisition of new music and dance-steps. The long phase for creating and integrating the different skills and components in communal performances requires a more sustained and involving theatre management than is noticed among younger Agaba groups.

Agaba groups exhibit a different approach to theatre management. Each group manages its performance to achieve artistic success measured by the arousal of danger among participants. At the end of a season's performances, a group may meet to review its activities and plan for future performances. Its property is assembled for storage and since performers own their costume and props (where appropriate), they retain and store these for coming performances.

Agaba rehearsals begin close to a performance and involve the learning of new songs and dances and sometimes, the re-working and adaptation of old ones and re-costuming. The majority of these activities are carried on at night and in great secrecy. Instrumentation is kept low to avert exposing a group's musical repertoire before its performance. Dance, music, songs and

other stage business are rehearsed under the direction of the group leader who may not necessarily be the best performer but who is either selected for his administrative and leadership qualities or for his acute aesthetic vision of Agaba lore. The leader exercises his authority to enhance a group's interests and sometimes, secures invitations for it to perform at special occasions. Groups may also decide the music and songs to be performed in the course of the season, the places to perform in, the list of possible opponents to engage, and the number and days for performances. Sensitive issues like the sharing of gifts received from performances may be settled in advance. The common practice is to pool the gifts for equitable distribution. This removes ill-feelings since most of the gifts may come from the display by masks or by a few gifted performers who still appreciate the contributions of other performers to a group's success.

On performance days, a group assembles in a selected place for costuming, secrecy is maintained and the identity of the masker is cleverly disguised. As the group steps out, its members are bound together by their allegiance to the communal spirit and the group's social codes and ethics. From this point, the leader who is not usually the masked figure controls the group. In groups led by a masked figure, an assistant exercises control in close partnership with the masked figure. Thus, some of the supposed spontaneity noticed in performances are rehearsed, controlled behaviour. A performing group's conducts are bound by masking parameters and this defines the nature and level of interactions between performers and participants. The proxemic consideration means that apart from being structured into performances, participants and communities also come under the management of performances. In practice, while the leader retains directorial influence, communities indirectly participate in theatre

management through censuring and maintaining existing social and space codes.

TRAINING AND PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT.

Theatre cannot survive without personnel and Igbo theatre is no exception. The need for greater artistic and administrative controls may force a leader to assume additional artistic functions instead of delegating them. This is more noticeable in social performances like Agaba than in performances with socio-religious significance and sacral overtones. Generally, artistic direction and vision rest with the group, but theatrical interpretation is essentially the leader's forte. Major artistic components of dance, music, songs, props, and costumes may come under assistant leaders who oversee training, supervise roles during rehearsals, and are directly answerable to the performance leader. Usually, the preparation of the stage and performance venue are placed in the charge of an assistant leader responsible for administration, but in big performances, the tasks may be carried out by the performers, the entire community, or by both groups.

The administration and definition of roles usually go unappreciated by outsiders for three reasons. Firstly, is the over-emphasis on individual artistry and creativity. Secondly is the mistaken assumption that spontaneity is synonymous with the absence of formalised order, and lastly, is the assumption that cultural transmissions substitute formal training in the arts in Africa and are mainly responsible for the transfer and propagation of artistic skills. The predominance of particular skills in a given location may owe more to artistic tradition and interests than to genetic spawning. In Igboland and in fact, in most of Africa, performance skills are not totally hereditary or hand-downs as Schechner and Appel (1990) erroneously believe, but skills acquired through laborious and formal processes of training, retraining and participation in performances. The

contributions of imitation and cultural transmission in the acquisition of performance skills, as in all forms of learning, do not substitute formal training but constitute parts of it. This is a universal practice and the admission with which Schechner and Appel conclude their remarks prove the point when they state that 'the question of transmission of performance knowledge is not limited to how one generation learns from another, but also includes how performers learn from each other' (6). In fact, Schechner (1983), had earlier conceded in a study of the *Ramlila* of India, the training and management skills that go into such performances when he insisted that 'because performance behaviour isn't free and easy, it never wholly 'belongs' to the performer' (92). This assertion indirectly admits the place and importance of training and the acquisition of skills in performances like Igbo theatre. For instance, acting is a very important component of Okumkpo and starts early in life as uninitiated boys imitate adult mask plays. This early beginning is complemented with the apprentice stage in the *Akparakpa* before graduation into the more mature *Ori*, the acting chorus. As *non-formal* as this Afikpo training may be, what cannot be denied are its seriousness and scope, the time involved, the stages of the training, and the fidelity of Afikpo society in presenting only experienced performers who have successfully gone through the training stages in role-play.

The emphasis Schechner and Appel place on 'informal' learning and 'imitation beginning in early childhood' lead to the wrong conclusions about training in traditional theatres. Such conclusions leave training, an important condition for successful theatre, to the imagination. The statement does not adequately recognize that performances like Igbo masking have an extensive range of artistic activities to which performers and participants are exposed and that it is neither possible nor desirable for

an individual to master all of them. It assumes that a mere cultural interest is synonymous with actual performance and participation in such a serious enterprise as traditional theatre, and fails to identify the real purpose of training in it. Igbo masking requires a lot of artistic and administrative efforts to stage and these cannot be suitably addressed by the casual interest of individuals and children or even by the common communal associations of the marginalised women 'guiding the hands and feet of their children to the beat of the drums'. Drumming and dancing alone do not constitute this theatre, they are simply two of its many components, and it is surprising that the informal angle, occasional association and interest in an art or skill are assumed to substitute formal, consciously-designed, in-depth training. Harding laments this misconception of training requirements in African mask performances and also traces the reasons for such mis-representations:

> For the influential Christian missionary and anthropologist, it was the spiritual and social meaning of the masked figure which concerned them. Thus with a secular and mimetic-centred emphasis in western acting, the extent to which the masked performer _ albeit in a socio-religious context _ is undergoing a personal experience similar in its techniques of retaining part of the self from the character to that proposed by Stanislavsky or the Method was mostly overlooked. The focus of the end product however is nearer to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in the sense of an unmediated performance, than to a structured and fictionalized re-presentation of reality such as Aristotle defined. Failure to separate the end-product from the techniques used to achieve it has contributed to the idea of the experience of a masked performance as an uninhibited personal transformation, unmediated by personal controlling devices (65 - 66).

In fact, while a few versatile individuals display great skills and interests, and may actually be versed in many theatrical activities, more theatre practitioners are less than averagely skilled or versed in one or two areas and a majority enter theatre with little or no skill at all. The most that childhood associations and collective cultural interests achieve in Igbo theatre, as is perhaps the case in other theatres, is a heightened awareness in the large number of mediocrities waiting to be trained in the real art of the

theatre. This is in contrast to the community of supposed expert performers that social anthropologists see in ethnographic performances especially in Africa. In fact, the large body of ostensibly skilled performers, casually interested, or culturally conscious beginners and active communal participants from which ethnographic performances draw their personnel pose a unique problem in traditional theatres.

The absence of professionalism and the presence of communal participation open most performances to all qualified members of a group or community. There is thus, a glut of aspiring performers whose presence underscores the need for a structured organisation, sound theatre management, training and selection, and a performance that accommodates instead of alienating members of a community. Performers are not uniformly gifted, even as all the roles and artistic components are neither equally attractive nor uniformly desired by them. Since roles require filling and theatrical components to be sharpened and harmonised for the best results, Igbo theatre has evolved an effective training process with an in-built modality for identifying and selecting good performers and for eliminating mediocrities and poor ones. Many factors come into the selection process, but fairness in the system, the possession of skills or raw, trainable talents, adaptability, and sensitivity to group needs are major considerations. The commonest means of achieving these objectives in Igbo theatre is by competing and training for roles over a period of time and in an atmosphere that allows for evaluations to take place.

Theatre training is geared towards achieving the specific needs of any theatre. Nwoko (1981) articulates the basis and nature of this training and insists that the starting point in the training of artists for the modern African theatre can only be found in the training systems and goals of traditional theatres. He states that 'during the training of artists, equal

emphasis is laid on the original individual styles and aesthetic formulations of the masters of the young artists against any of the masters so he can be exposed to all, and left to choose his influences later' (466). Skills in Igbo theatre are individual-specific and the principle of training is not to impart skills where they are non-existent, but to recognise and build on latent skills and to expose performers to a range of expert skills from which to draw and create their own distinctive styles. This shifts the focus of training from the performer's total dependence on some tested skills and styles as in European theatre, to a system that allows trainees uninhibited access to a repertoire of skills and styles, and which at the same time expects them to be independent of the experts. The system enables artists to create their own unique styles within a general stylistic framework and explains the variations in artistic components and styles. Training in Igbo theatre is more geared towards the impartation of aesthetic values than the acquisition of an empirical system based on theoretical constants. Where theoretical constructs exist as in the number and type of masks and pre-performance rites, they are subordinated to the overall aesthetic picture.

The emphasis on aesthetic considerations and functions present difficulties in the evaluation of training outcome in Igbo theatre. The training of personnel for contemporary literary theatre emphasises the acquisition of specific theatrical skills as a step towards professionalism, but Igbo theatre emphasises the use, re-shaping, and the building upon available skills as forms of individual contributions to a performance. European theatre and to some extent its modern African derivative, aim for the definition of roles. The result is individuals displaying expertise in one area and remaining novices in others, but training in Igbo theatre produces artists who may display expertise in one or two areas while displaying considerable knowledge and varying strengths in almost all aspects of the

theatre. The latter training results in the combination of the three learning outcomes (affective, cognitive and psychomotor) in Igbo theatre artists. The outcome is complex and to the extent it is difficult to evaluate training results on the strength of single components like dance, music and costuming. Here, a performance is a growing and creative act and as such, it is difficult to adequately evaluate a performer's skills and roles on the basis of a few displays. At any given time, what performers do is to present aspects of the skills and expertise they have acquired through many trainings and performances. Formal training in contemporary theatres may aim at goals similar to those of traditional community theatres, but the results manifest themselves differently. In the former, it is distinctive and externalised but in the latter, it is embracing and internalised. In Igbo theatre, the processes of learning and training are slow and tedious, and success depends on the amount of discipline and commitment that trainers and trainees invest.

Nwoko (1981) describes the training of graduates of theatre arts for contemporary African theatres and his description is like a comparison of the differing problems and goals of training in contemporary and traditional theatres like Igbo theatre. The problem is two-fold; firstly, there are distinctions in methods and results between the non-professional background of traditional theatre trainees and the professional, individualistic goals of contemporary theatre. Secondly, contemporary theatre seeks to bridge the gap with its traditional counterpart with a formal academic training that merely recognises the strength of traditional training methods, but is unable to draw from or adapt to it. Nwoko emphasises discipline, scientific enquiry, aesthetics, the difference between the formally-educated academic and the traditional artist, and from the slant of his reasoning and proposition, more is expected of the artist for whom aesthetic

issues take precedence over scientific investigations. He draws distinctions between the professionally-trained academic and the artist, the craftsman for whom the theatre is an aesthetic expression rather than a livelihood. In addition, he argues that the traditional artist, who is more of a craftsman than his academic counterpart, is more faithful to the theatre and it is therefore, not surprising that he possesses the training styles and commitment that are seriously lacking in contemporary African theatre. This is the nature of the training and commitment that go into Igbo mask performances.

During rehearsals, leaders identify skilled performers and others who lack skills but are willing to learn and acquire new ones, and who understand the rudiments of particular artistic components. The latter are sometimes given special extended trainings by known experts. In some places and performances, a select few undergo more rigorous training at the hands of experts from other communities or even journey to other communities for intensive, prolonged training. This specific mode of training is what Ugonna (1984) describes as '*mmonwu* marriage' when one community goes to another at great expense in time and resources to acquire the rudiments of a performance.

Arugo is another instance of this training process and though some people from Ogwa were for many years exposed to this Kalabari tradition by virtue of their sojourn amongst the latter, the decision to borrow the performance was followed by three months of intensive training. This involved over fifty people and when the performance eventually came to Ogwa, all the songs were in Kalabari language and Igbo songs gradually replaced them only in the last two decades. The adoption of a particular masking style in a community and its eventual spread do not replace the need for training. There are periods of re-training for the introduction of new styles and

components. In fact, in any year in which Arugo is to be staged, core performers return from different places for intensive rehearsals and training. This lasts for about two weeks before the general pre-performance training.

There is no substitute for training in Igbo theatre, existing skills need sharpening as performers aim for greater heights. There are few experts, there are some great and good performers. A large majority of potential performers are best classified as poor. Nothing in Igbo theatre is common and since barring a few exceptional individuals with consummate skill, majority of performers everywhere start out as mediocrities, effective theatre organisation and administration are required to blend differently-endowed performers into coherent performances. To achieve this, gifted performers occupy vantage positions, others learn from them, see their shortcomings and improve on them. This has the advantage of helping groups blend their performers so that no performer or participant is marginalised from this theatre whose purpose and practice demand participation.

The non-professional status of the arts in Igboland means that theatre organisation, management and training are carried out on an ad-hoc basis. A characteristic of this set-up in an egalitarian society as the Igbo have, is the large number of formal and informal meetings, consultations, and discussions that accompany performances. Though most discussions may be undertaken by the leadership of a community or group, they are still demanding and require performers and leaders to take decisions of the same kind for which contemporary theatres have had to rely on specifically trained professionals.

In conclusion, it can be asserted that instead of removing the need for intensive management, organisation and personnel training from the theatre, the non-professional status of Igbo arts and the theatre's communal and participatory nature demand them. After all, 'performance is a period of intensified presentational behaviour distinct from that of everyday behaviour and controlled within recognized parameters. It is never original for, however spontaneous, it draws on already known behaviour' (Harding, 60). If anything, organisation and training roles and responsibilities have spread in different directions and along lines that have come to involve more people than the modern professional theatres can ever contemplate.

One result of this development is that in recognising the place and importance of artistic expertise and excellence, Igbo theatre dispenses with the need for strict separation of responsibilities along professional lines and has instead, opted for a more inclusive distribution of roles and responsibilities that allows performers and participants access to nearly every role in the theatre. While this is in accordance with the Igbo sense of collective consciousness, it has ensured that positions are never in danger of remaining unfilled for longer than is necessary. It is this exposure of performers and participants to different artistic skills, the indistinctive involvement of many people in aspects of theatre management and administration, and the diffusion of the theatre's organisational structure into a community or group that have not been sufficiently appreciated and understood by some observers. This is an intricate set-up and in some places, foreigners have had considerable difficulty in distinguishing between the different roles in traditional theatres and have equally been unable to understand the intricacies of the trainings involved.

The complexity of Igbo theatre is now beginning to be appreciated. Its history and development are linked with changes in Igbo society but what

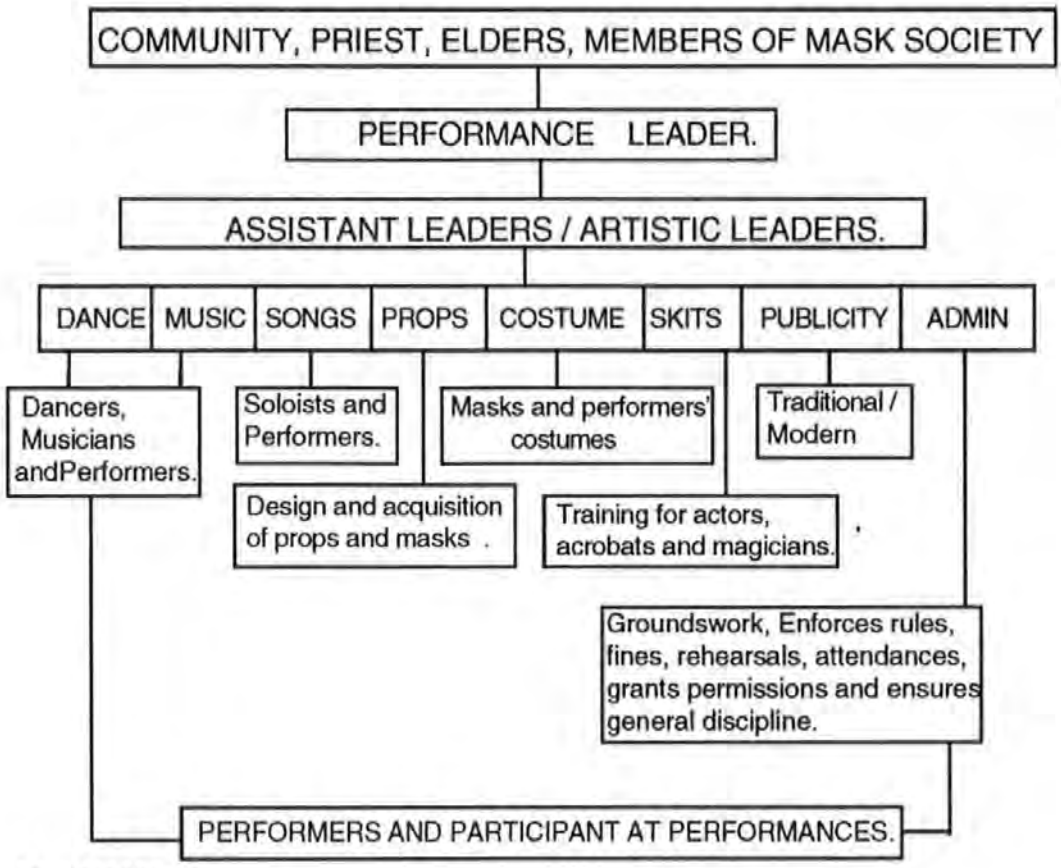

DIAGRAM 8..

STRUCTURE OF ROLES AND FUNCTIONS IN A COMMUNAL SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PERFORMANCE LIKE EKPE, ODO AND OMABE.

has not been sufficiently studied are the effects change has left on it. Such an investigation is a necessary step towards an understanding of the changing status and functions of the theatre and a means of identifying its future in a fast changing Igbo society.

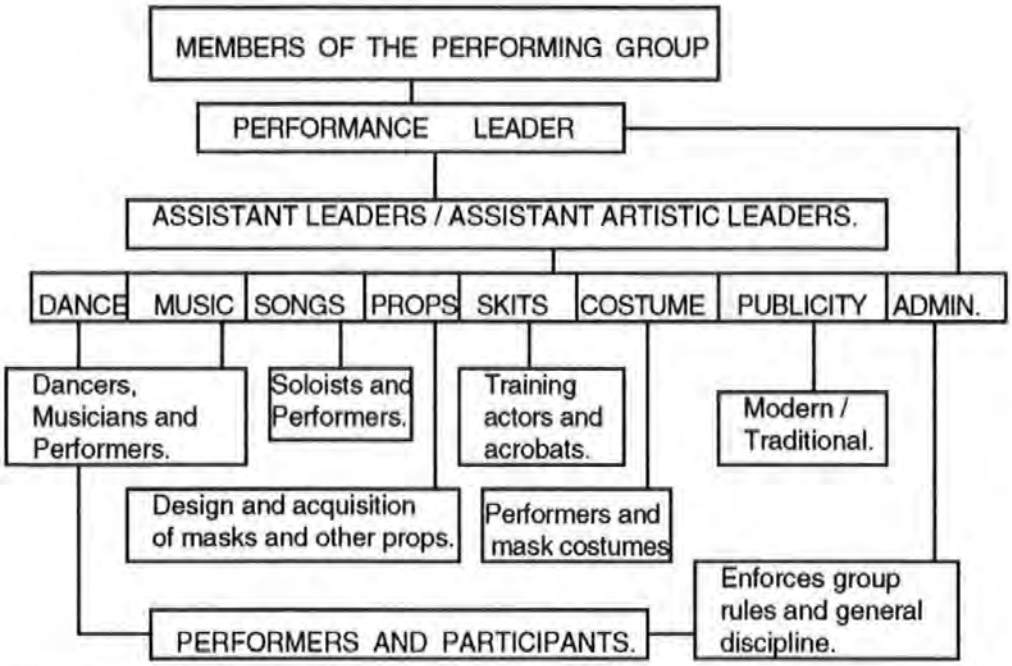

DIAGRAM 9.

STRUCTURE OF ROLES AND FUNCTIONS IN ITINERANT PERFORMANCES LIKE AGABA, OJIONU AND ULAGA..

CHAPTER SIX.

CONCLUSIONS : THE FUTURE OF IGBO MASK THEATRE.

THE ONENESS OF IGBO THEATRE.

Despite being held together by a common ancestry and culture, the small independent democracies that constitute Igboland have, after many years of social engineering and non-uniform contacts with neighbours, emerged on the modern Nigerian landscape with both common and peculiar socio-cultural features. Each confronts its socio-geographical environment in its own fashion and with its own resources as the cultural peculiarities of Igbo sub-groups and dialects indicate. Though the similarities between Igbo communities are many and easy to recognise, familiarity has muted such similarities so that they often go unheralded. Contrary to this, the few differences draw more attention and are usually and unnecessarily exaggerated. The grouping of Igboland into seven of the thirty administrative states in Nigeria appears to support these differences, yet there are more cultural similarities than distinctions in Igbo society and arts, and especially in the mask theatre.

Masking is one of the most enduring of Igbo cultural and artistic legacies and like Igbo culture itself, it has faced many vicissitudes and been subjected to different communal interpretations. Where it borrows from neighbouring forms, such borrowings are soon localised and transformed with traditional Igbo ideas and imprints. The result is that Igbo forms, whether as originals or derivatives, are preserved and what is usually encountered in Igbo masking is a dynamic institution keeping pace with socio-political and cultural trends in the society. These factors shape Igbo masking as it re-defines its place in changing and differently-composed Igbo

communities. In some places, it has witnessed developments that its founding institutions never imagined. In fact, such factors as cultural collectivism and repeated performances have transformed or influenced most Igbo masking styles for as Moore and Myerhoff (1977) indicate, 'collective ceremony can traditionalise new materials as well as perpetuate old traditions' (7). The outcome for the theatre has been numerous and challenging. There has been a multiplicity and assimilation of theatrical components and styles. Some performances have spawned offspring in communities outside their supposed roots, but the most outstanding development has been the ability of the different performances, designs, staging styles, forms, and mask-types to identify with Igbo tradition.

Uniform characteristics abound among Igbo communities and sub-cultures but this is emphasised in masking for three main reasons. Firstly, the democratic nature of Igbo society fosters a strong desire for communal and individual distinctions and in the arts, this has led to distinctive local imprints. Despite the resulting multiplicity of forms and styles, the prevalence of uniform characteristics belie the ultimate intentions of theatre practitioners to differentiate displays. Secondly, the competitiveness fostered by individual distinctions heightens artistic awareness and input in masking and again, creates the wide-ranging diversities and similarities in mask, costume, dance and music designs. Thirdly, Igbo culture has a deeply-rooted aesthetic consciousness and a formidable ally in Igbo religion. The marriage of religion and art explains the hold which the former exercises on the theatre and though weakened primarily by colonialism and Christianity, the hold remains and is far from dead. In fact, while the theatre's origins may be cited as reasons for its relative oneness of form and purpose, the existence of common artistic styles in different communities

and performances provide further corroborating evidence of the oneness of Igbo mask theatre.

Briefly stated, Igbo theatre has a religious and ritual origin and even its more secular expressions have not escaped this linkage. It is underpinned by such religious significance as the believed sacrality of masks. Maskers are variously conceived by different communities as either spirits or human beings employing the mask as a disguise to represent another reality which could be a local deity, ancestral manifestation, quality or nature force.

However communities view masks and maskers, they recognise the spirit and human dimensions of the masked figure and masking performances. This enables communities to accept and integrate alien masking ideas without feelings of spiritual and social disjunction. Generally, performances take place in an arena setting but the presence of masks, instrumentalists, performers and participants lustrates mundane places and transforms displays and venues into metaphysical realities for the drama of human beings, spirits, and nature forces. The ordinary acquires 'special and spiritual' status and within this festive atmosphere, music, dance, songs, acting, mime, stage business, and costuming acquire social and symbolic significance. A display could bring different cosmic zones into communion or consummate the ever-present human-otherworldly relationships that Igbo society thrives on. The ethereal atmosphere and elaborate symbolism of such performances create layers of meaning and metaphors for performers and participants. The theatre's preference for symbolism makes verbal language and dialogue unnecessary. There is instead, the presence of symbolic language, a form of theatrical idiom which exists in the forms of proverbs, aphorisms, plauditory chants, songs, rhetorics, praise poetry, juxtapositions and witticisms. Even then, it is usually more esoteric than real, dialogue is minimal and unsustained, and when employed in skits, it

complements visual spectacle instead of being the purveyor of a carefully structured story or fable. In fact, language in the form of theatrical dialogue is secondary to action. Monologue is more common and combines with physical gestures and movements to intensify symbolic theatrical communication.

In place of plots, Igbo mask performances are built on 'story lines' (Nzewi, 1979). Stories about specific individuals are almost non-existent and in their place are legendary and mythical tales. Knowledge of the 'story lines' requires no elaborate expository language and since language is employed in some theatres to reinforce the playwright's ideas, Igbo theatre is like Brecht's Epic theatre which 'addresses itself to interested parties 'who do not think unless they have a reason to' (Benjamin, 1977:16). The undesirability of an elaborate story line and its accompanying mental demand on performers and participants does not deny Igbo masking philosophical and ideational contents. These exist in numerous symbolic forms where they activate feelings, meanings and responses in performers and participants, and where they demand a different kind of intellectual response and greater mental commitment. This is because Igbo masking is in a sense, a collective ritual 'intended to produce at least an attentive state of mind, and often an even greater commitment of some kind' (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977:7). An attentive and heightened state of mind is all that is required since each performance 'has a social meaning' (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977:8) for performers and participants.

Rappaport (1971) is emphatic about the undesirability of an elaborate language in such performances when he states that their 'very occurrence contains a social message' (in Moore and Myerhoff, 1977: 8). Igbo theatre is non-literary, its performance *texts* are neither scripted nor of individual authorship, they are collectively created and owned. Performances are made

up of dramatic units or skits whose meanings and relevance lie in their being of collective purpose and origin. A performance is built around a variety of themes, or it can be a series of unconnected episodes linked to a theme. Performances are character-oriented and encourage the creation of character-types which in turn increases the social context of displays.

The use of character-types and enhanced social context make Igbo theatre similar to the 'social drama', Turner (1986) describes 'as the empirical unit of social process from which has been derived and is constantly being derived, the various genres of cultural performance' (92-93). Performances are thus imbued with latent and sometimes, overt humour, satire, lampoon, social commentary, and ridicule. While comedy and humour abound even in the appearances of masks, movements, dances and songs, individual tragedy remains in the shadow and though a fact of communal life, it is subordinated to the more generalized conflict between a community and its environment. Igbo world view does not celebrate communal threats but their expiation, control, and a community's survival from them. There is thus, no developed conflict to resolve and in its place are communion and consummation, and in place of a climax, there are climactic moments. The mask theatre's religious roots and the relationship between the Igbo and the otherwordly imbue the theatre with awe and mystery. This is sometimes intensified by secret initiations and the marginal participation of women.

Mysteries, thematic and social symbols, social, and religious rituals accentuate the mystery and ethereal consciousness of this theatre, but they do not deny it a material quality. This is an inherent quality of social dramas Turner (1986) describes:

> From the standpoint of relatively well-regulated, more or less accurately operational, methodical, orderly social life, social dramas have a "liminal" or "threshold" character. The latter term is derived

> from a Germanic base which means "thrash" or "thresh", a place where grain is beaten out from its husks, where what has been hidden is thus manifested (92).

The 'liminal or threshold' character enables Igbo theatre to straddle different cosmic zones and its full potential is realised through an episodic, representational, and symbolic staging style. The staging style encourages religious ritual and ritualised social displays. Its theatrical action is such that symbols acquire quasi-realistic meanings, the unreal is received as real, and material and non-material realities merge. Performances are therefore, less of literal and more of symbolic communication. Moore and Myerhoff (1977) articulate the merging of symbols and ritual in traditional performances and insist that:

> Ritual discourages inquiry not only because it presents its materials authoritatively, as axiomatic. It is itself a message stated in a form to render it unverifiable, separate from standards of truth and falsity. (It may be good or bad, effective or ineffective, but it cannot be tried by the usual empirical standards of verifications). So often, as Langer (1942) has pointed out, symbols used in rituals are presentational rather than discursive. . . . For rituals frequently portray unknown and unknowable conditions _ ideals or imaginings _ and make them tangible and present, despite the fact that they are ineffable and invisible (18).

Moore and Myerhoff cite Geertz who points out that, 'in a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms turn out to be the same world' (in Moore and Myerhoff, 1977:18) and because Igbo society is constantly in flux, its theatre presents the past and the present in actions, characters, and events that capture communal life and rhythms.

Geertz's 'sameness' reflects a fluid world in which Igbo masking shows selected aspects of a community's life, with each aspect being a microcosm of the worlds recognised by performers and participants. Turner (1986) recalls the symbolism, scope, content, and context of ethnographic performances and his description is similar to the presentational styles employed in Igbo theatre. As he puts it:

> To frame is to discriminate a sector of sociocultural action from the general on-going process of a community's life. It is often *reflexive*, in that, to "frame", a group must cut out a piece of itself for inspection (and retrospection). To do this, it must create _ by rules of exclusion and inclusion _ a bordered space and a privileged time with which images and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be 'relived', scrutinized, assessed, revalued, and, if need be, remodeled and rearranged. . . . Some use special vocabularies, others use the common speech in uncommon ways.... Other modes of 'play' framing are more elaborate, including theatre and other performative genres (140).

The social and religious purposes (where applicable) condition the performance structures and designs in Igbo theatre. The theatre incorporates all forms of virtue and is an interplay of the energetic and fierce, the gentle and the sublime. Terror and threat exist beside control and accommodation. Plauditory and satirical songs relate in the same manner that burlesque, farce, and mimicry interact with humour and serious social commentary. Performances adopt any of the dominant conceptual and stylistic patterns and components, combine them, or mutate them to something new for, as a dynamic institution, the theatre constantly strives to accommodate trends in Igbo society. Performance structures are not rigid; an on-going display is not an entirely finished product or complete process, it has an in-built potential for growth and is actually undergoing a process of creation. The pulse of a display is constantly monitored by leaders and such assessments could warrant immediate structural changes in an on-going display. Such spontaneous adjustments do not impair participants' understanding and enjoyment, or weaken the basis of their involvement since the display's purpose and functions remain unchanged.

Other common factors in the theatre include the localisation and extensive use of costuming and props for both character delineation and stage business. This explains why masks bought from a carver or market are transformed and ascribed with sacrality when donned by maskers. Cross-community influences are common, mask characters, presentation styles, and artistic components are easily borrowed and localised. Characters may

be replaced and older ones rehabilitated and though masks are respected, as soon as they lose their place in a community's life, they are treated with a passionate disrespect equal to the status they hitherto enjoyed. Generally, secrecy surrounds the masking art and institution and even when a masker's identity is obvious as a result of his movement or costume, he is not recognised. This is because as Harding points out:

> Performers ... can either be secretive and disguise themselves so that their personal identity remains hidden and the identity of the character is revealed, or they can exhibit the self through performance and seek to embellish or expand their own identity. Performances given by several performers contain examples from both categories: revealing the self more fully and concealing the self to a greater or lesser extent in order to reveal another (60)

For instance, Odo masks are heavy and members of a family bear them alternatingly during performances. Here, maskers can unmask in public and be replaced by other carriers but the mask itself must not fall to the ground. A fallen Odo mask is not only a disgrace, as in all of Igboland, it is an abomination and here, the consequences of a fallen mask outweigh all considerations for secrecy.

The importance and structured use of dance and music have been discussed in this work and more elaborately elsewhere by Igbo scholars: Nzekwu (1960 and 1962), Nzewi (1979 and 1981), Enekwe (1981, 1987), Ugonna, (1984), Amankulor (1981) and Echeruo (1981) to mention but a few. Basden (1921), Talbot (1932), Jones (1950), Meek (1937), Ottenberg (1975) are some of the foreigners that have written about these performing arts which dominate Igbo social life. Both sets of writers provide a broad picture of the use of music and dance in Igbo masking. Acording to Nzewi (1981), 'the truth remains that stage presentations not structured to, sequenced by, vected through, or tippled with music and dance or stylized movement is alien to the inherent Nigerian theatre sensibilities' (433). The importance of music and dance in this theatre has not diminished with foreign influences and

contemporaneity, for 'a major cross section of the modern theatre audience in Nigeria expects modern drama for Nigerian stage to be lacquered with some degree of music and dance' (Nzewi, 433). Music and dance combine with other designs to accentuate theatrical spectacle in Igbo masking.

Masks are spiritual presences and the Igbo maintain a reverential distance from them and though individuals undergo initiations into masking secrets, they still maintain a healthy and respectful reverence for masks. The reverence is such that 'an initiate keeps well out of the way of a masquerader belonging to a cult from another community, partly out of respect but more from the fear of falling a victim to the magical powers which are worked into his mask or costume' (Nzekwu,1981:132). Enekwe (1987) describes how this reverential attitude and distance work:

> One must behave towards them as if they were unusual and charismatic in their appearance. The uninitiated people must observe masks from a distance and take to their heels if they approach. Similarly, the initiated must stand aside when a mask is approaching, especially if it is believed that the magical powers worked into their headpiece and costume may constitute danger. If one is assaulted by a mask, one must not retaliate (110).

In the past, reverential distance was maintained, wilful deviations were frowned upon and almost equated with actual desecration. Participants avoided acts 'that would bring a charge of wilful exposure of the secrets of the cult against them, and such severe punishment as, in more recent times, has replaced the customary sentence to death' (Nzekwu, 131-132).

Reverence is not one-sided and maskers justify this privilege by respecting the identity and place of participants. This places a respectable distance between them and participants and creates a set of rubrics around which both parties interact. In fact, no matter how *possessed* a masker is, his act is circumscribed to some degree. This does not only sustain performer-participant interaction, it is part of theatrical act and ensures socio-cultural harmony as de Graft points out:

> So it is that the actor who understands his art knows that he must strike a balance between his awareness of the fictional world of the characters impersonated and his awareness of the work-a-day world of his audience and his artistic self; he knows that no matter how deeply he immerses himself in the role of the fictional character there is always a psychological point of safety beyond which he dare not go, lest he be swept out of his depth and get carried away on the uncertain currents of hysteria and ecstasy. In simple theatrical terms this means that the actor loses control of himself, and with that loss of control, his grip on the role and the audience, if it is an *artistically* sensitive audience. It also means that acting is at its most electrifying when it dares to go as close as possible to the psychological safety point, *the farthest limit within control* _ the brink of possession (6).

Thus, the behaviour of maskers vary in places and some acceptable acts in one locality may be unacceptable or viewed differently in another. In fact, a mask's act may challenge conventional expectation but instead of negating established notions of masking, such acts may actually be a theatrical means of projecting the mask *beyond* human control and discouraging familiarity with it. Mkpi, the amorous billy-goat in Ogburukwe chases and mounts its victims everywhere and is only dissuaded by a bolted door or pleas from participants. Its behaviour is not a breach of socio-cultural ethics but rather, a part of its performance aesthetics. Minor differences exist in places, but Onyeneke (1987) summarises the principles and forms of mask behaviour and participants' response in Igboland:

> It is forbidden to molest a passing stranger so long as the person yields right of way on an open road by making a small detour into the bush. Nor should it molest a woman who is escorted across its play area by an initiated person. Athletic masks pursuing a spectator must halt their chase, as soon as the victim runs into a building or home for shelter and this includes a workshop, a shed or shop. Masks must maintain their posture as they play and are forbidden even to trip or fall over objects or uneven ground even accidentally. Youthful masks may fight one another with whips, but never to the extent of damaging any one's enveloping gear, and none is allowed in such fights to show any noticeable sign of pain by shouting or crying out (106).

The close proximity between the secular and the sacred, the meeting of cosmic zones, and the relationship between art and religion in traditional societies enables Igbo masking to cross the thresholds of art into religion.

While this perpetuates the reverence for masks, it has sometimes, confused observers such as Basden (1982) who insists that:

> It is difficult to gauge the extent of the Ibo man's belief that these *maws* [masks] are re-embodied spirits. . . . Amongst the women and children the belief is complete, and so tenacious is the idea with them, that even when it is disproved they cannot abandon it; it is too deeply ingrained (237 - 238).

The reverence for masks neither confuses Igbo participants nor does it separate performers and participants during performances. It does not lead to a nightmare from which people, more or less, desire to escape. It is a theatrical act and collective performance, and what it does instead, is to sustain a structural and ideational dialogue between performers and the community of participants. According to Harding:

> In African masquerade performance, a collusion is in place between the performer and audience, which relies for its continuance largely on the maintenance of secrecy in the period(s) of preparation (rehearsal) and on the (apparent) acceptance by the audience of the absence of the human person in the presentation (performance) of the masquerade. The transformation in status from person to a non-human being is as much a response to the external stimuli of audience expectation, applause and music, as it is to the physical change experienced by the masker. . . . At the same time and within the ambit of his role, the performer, whose 'psychophysical' condition is directly affected by the experience of masked performance, makes performative decisions based on purely human considerations (60 - 61).

Apart from communal participation narrowing the distance which respect creates between performers and participants, the gap is bridged further through an intensification of spectacle in the form of masks with elaborate, colourful features that would be long remembered by participants. Most designs are complemented with colourful costumes so performers are appreciated from long distances. In fact, to use the words of Gordon Craig, Igbo theatre 'stresses the priority of the eye' (in Ugonna, 1984:145). This is because as Tuan (1990) points out, 'separated physically from the object of attention, audience involvement can nevertheless be total' (in Schechner and Appel, 1990: 244). There is no real separation between performers and participants, and even where events seemingly lead to such conclusions,

participants remain 'deeply involved' 'by virtue of belonging to the community' (Nzewi, 1979: 23).

Igbo theatre is based on the concept of communal participation and to such an extent that 'participation was not only a method of theatre; it was the goal' (Mda,1993:15). Traditional theatre depends on the level of communal participation and the community-oriented activities and designs in it. Communities identify the themes, activities and designs in the theatre, understand them, and relate to them. Designs challenge the aesthetic sensibilities and capacities of participants, and communities contribute to performances and theatre development by constituting the critical barometer for evaluating performances. Like performance, evaluation is a collective affair and communities are quite informed on aesthetic parameters. Though some members of a community may be versed in masking, and may have more to contribute in performance analysis, there are no professional critics. The thrust of performance analysis is in comparison and contrast, and individuals rely on their appreciations of past and other performances in the evaluation of fresh displays.

With due regards to local differences, a display can be evaluated on eight main criteria. These are the use of space, mood and atmosphere, the structural integration of artistic components, and visual designs and spectacle. The others include staging and presentational style, the level of communal participation, functions of a performance within a community, and the ripple effects of performances. Each criterion indicates specific theatrical requirements and involves the use of specific indicators to analyse specific skills and components. For instance, while the use of space emphasises stage and performance management, mood and atmosphere evaluate a group's ability to arouse expected feelings and responses. Mood and atmosphere focus on how the integration of even seemingly opposed

components sustain the mood of a display. Integration of components considers how dance, music, singing and their off-shoots, movement and stage business are designed, executed and linked. A motley display of disconnected dance sequences, unco-ordinated movements and raucous singing where the ideal calls for sonorous singing, amounts to a poor performance. Spontaneous displays must be convincing and mask charges must remain within a mentally-conceived space. Thus, a performance is meaningfully ordered and organised, and its activities follow a discernible pattern.

The presentation style must suit the message and the main consideration here is effectiveness in the arrangement and alternation of components and their overall effects on space. In addition, staging and presentation styles require a special kind of behaviour, an act that maintains the fine line between life and art and at the same time, enables collective participation. Here, 'actions or symbols used are extra-ordinary themselves, or ordinary ones are used in an unusual way, a way that calls attention to them and sets them apart from other, mundane uses' (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977:7). Theatrical boundaries are set and maintained for ordinary actions to acquire symbolic stature and for performances to be capable of restoring harmony and re-affirming a community's relationship with its life's forces. Whatever its purposes; to resolve conflicts, to banish the ghosts of an old year and usher in a 'new' year as in Ekpe, Omabe, Odo and many others, a performance must be seen as achieving these goals. The socio-religious functions of a performance may be confined to one or more masks, masks may display alone or as part of festivals, what matters is the achievement of a display's objectives.

Some performances are based solely on the arousal of fear and danger and great emphasis is placed on their ripple effects in the community. Most

Agaba displays belong to this category and a successful outing is judged on a group's ability to arouse fear and awe in participants. Mask chases, magic, gymnastics and acrobatics expose participants to danger and further a group's claims to power and spirituality. The main difference between aggressive, non-ritual performances and those with established socio-religious significance is the emergence in the former, of ripple effect, as the main critical indicator of a successful performance.

Ripple effect refers to the level of elation participants feel, the acclaim and applause maskers receive from participants, the recognition performers earn from their displays, and the theatrical incidents that communities and participants recall, savour, and discuss after a performance. In Agaba, this is not necessarily lowered, it is overshadowed by the high profile accorded the arousal of fear and danger. The result is that in aggressive performances, ripple effect is based primarily on terror and not necessarily on the artistic merits and components of a display. With fear overshadowing theatrical mood, mask designs, movement and chases establish an unsettling mood over a display. Stage business like magic and acrobatics heighten this feeling and earn grudging respect and admiration for performers. This is an unconventional, non-abhorrent kind of respect that differs from real social respect and acclaim. It is part of the aesthetics for aggressive masks and accords them a mixture of respect and awe. In such performances, dance and music are not subjected to the kind of detailed scrutiny received by movements, props, costumes, and mask designs. If designs are considered appropriate, other deficiencies may be overlooked, but where they fail to meet expectations, musical dexterity and sonorous renditions are despised as unmanly.

Perhaps, the most important critical elements in performance analysis are visual designs and communal participation, and in a non-literary theatre

such as Igbo masking, visual designs provide a point of contact and focus for performers and participants. Spectacle is important and is intensified with elaborately costumed masks, choreographed dance and stage business. Performing skills and designs hold the attention of participants and when properly blended, they create great performances and invoke the kind of communal identification that stimulates participants into clapping, ululations, plauditory chants, the proffering of gifts and ultimately, joining in displays. Some performances and local norms dictate when and where participation occurs, but in most communities, individuals enter performances when the magnitude and intensity of events on stage compel participation. An individual's participation may be aroused at a point in a dance while another experiences similar emotions from pulsating instrumentation and spectacle. The result is that whatever the points and reasons for participation, and whatever the kinds of response, performances accommodate them.

The absence of communal participation is the highest form of negative criticism for performers and since the theatre thrives on it, every display needs its community, not only as a reference point, but also, as an encouragement for performers. Through participation, the community becomes a modulating and directorial influence and a source of constructive criticism. In this way, participants influence performances in two ways. Firstly, they contribute towards the evolution of specific evaluation criteria and secondly, they determine the level of importance ascribed to them. Theatre designs, therefore, establish mental contacts between theatre and society and without such contacts, the sustenance and survival of a performance is doubtful.

Communities may have different performing groups but group differentials are less obvious in village set-ups than in urban areas where

groups are an amalgam of peoples, ideas and sub-cultures. The composition and location of performing groups determine the kind of structure and components they favour and the analytical factors emphasised in evaluating them. Thus, there are general and specific analytical criteria and displays are evaluated differently. A "maiden" mask should exhibit feminine deportment even as a male mask is expected to display a manly approach to the same music. The former performer would be judged on movement, stage business, dance, costume, music, and use of space. In fact, the parameters of a homogeneous village display does not apply in urban performances. Urban areas are heterogeneous and lack the strong, communal consciousness of the village and because of cultural eclecticism, their norms are sometimes, completely different from those of their constituent members. Urban displays may emphasise spectacle and entertainment over symbolism and socio-religious significance. In fact, except in some details, Agaba performances in urban and village areas require two contrasting analytical approaches.

Both performances share similar or slightly varying concerns for mood and atmosphere, visual designs and spectacle, space, and ripple effects, but the village display may not necessarily emphasise costume, props and presentational style. It will be more concerned with its functions in the community, its use of space, the structural integration of artistic components, and the level of communal participation. Urban performances will focus on staging and presentation, visual designs and spectacle, mood and atmosphere, and ripple effects and it may be little concerned with the integration of artistic components and communal participation. In fact, when groups or localities stage similar performances, they place different emphases on the same analytical considerations for four reasons.

Firstly, is the differing purposes and functions of both presentations and secondly is the fact that the common ancestry and collectivism that knit members of a village together are largely absent in urban areas, and while collectivism gives the former its distinctive character, the latter operates on the principles of individuation. It is difficult to create a display around any one representative village since its concerns can neither be truly transported nor can they be adequately addressed in an urban performance staged by people of diverse backgrounds. Thirdly, is the fact that Igbo urban areas represent a new social consciousness that is essentially different from its pre-colonial counterpart. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, is the fact that in Igboland the notions of village and urban area connote two different relationships to the environment. The village symbolises spiritual attachment and the root where life begins and ends while the urban area is viewed as a temporary place with no spiritual holds on its inhabitants. It is difficult to replicate the emotional and spiritual relationships of the Igbo and their ancestral home in another locality and in all specifics, urban areas are no substitutes for Igbo villages. The result is that different performances attract different analytical factors, yet performers are aware of the need for excellent performances and the expectations of an articulate and critical public.

The meeting between Igboland and Western Europe can be said to have occurred in three main waves and each can be identified with the imprint it left on Igbo society. The initial contacts were through the Niger delta, the Bini, and Yoruba across the Niger in the days prior to the trans-atlantic slave trade. This opened the way for slave trade and later gave way to the third and final thrust occasioned by official colonialism. Each preceding move paved the way and laid the foundations for its successor. So, while slave trade scarred Igboland, colonialism launched the greatest assault on its

psyche and culture. Colonialism came with three weapons; a foreign system of administration in the form of 'indirect rule', trade, and Christianity. Of the lot, Christianity was the best organised and the most effective and in attacking Igbo religion, it challenged the mask theatre.

Christianity identified its success and propagation in Igboland with the death of its traditional counterpart epitomised by the mask theatre. In attacking Igbo religion, it sought to rob it of avenues for public expression and engagements that would leave it in the consciousness of the people. With many Igbo shrines destroyed or left as empty shells, masking and festivals became the main avenues for the public expression of the Igbo world view and religion. In addition, the mask theatre was the only activity that still expressed vibrant forms of Igbo arts and united members of a community through collective participation. Colonialism and Christianity saw Igbo religion as retaining its hold on the people and perpetuating itself through the theatre. Ironically, whenever it suited their purposes, as in the enforcement of laws and rules promulgated by the new administration, colonialism and Christianity were usually unopposed to Igbo masking performances and even encouraged them.

The main result of the contacts between Igboland and Europe was the dialectical socio-religious conflicts that arose in Igbo society. On the religious sphere, the conflicts (of serious consequences) between Christian converts and adherents of traditional religion caused breaches between upholders of traditional norms and customs and those who challenged the old socio-religious order. Again, the masking institution was both the battle ground and the instrument for these conflicts. The introduction of European-style formal education intensified the struggle and widened the gulf between the two groups. Conflicts between the theatre and Christians were rife and frequently led to the burning of church buildings and the

colonial courts' imposition of fines and prison terms on maskers. Some churches discouraged converts from participating in masking with threats of excommunication, denial of sacrament and other punitive measures while the new church schools influenced pupils against identifying with masking.

With time, the line of division widened as some Christians viewed masking as returning to a past that Christianity sought to replace while maskers felt it was synonymous with being in tune with one's soul and life's forces, and the fostering of commonly-held social values. Later, both groups learned to co-exist, conflicts became fewer and less frequent, and though disapproval and suspicion remained on both sides, these were not to persist for long. The pull and power of the theatre remained strong and some churches discovered they could neither destroy the tradition nor keep their members away from it. The years before Nigeria's independence saw a changing attitude towards masking by many Igbos and a softening of Christianity's stance. This uneasy co-existence persisted till independence in 1960 when some churches began to indigenise the faith. Events in the struggle and subsequent independence coincided with a hunger for traditional ways and masking practices. The result was that while not openly supporting masking, some churches did nothing to discourage it. In fact, while some churches officially opposed masking at the group level, some of their local congregations refused to condemn it. A few churches even designed limits of participation, some allowed members to follow their conscience, but a few increased their opposition to masking.

These positions remained from the immediate post-independence era to the end of the Nigerian Civil War (1967 to 1970) which marked a new period in Igbo society. There was little or no masking during the war and the end of hostilities called for celebrations. The sheer fervour that

accompanied the emotional and physical release from war could only be expressed in an atmosphere that allowed communities and individuals to re-enact those aspects of their life that had hitherto been suspended. Only the theatre and the cultural revival that marked this period of Igbo life could sustain this multitude of feelings. Performances were resuscitated, new ones were introduced, and the artistic quotient of displays was for the first time since the contact with Europe, emphasised and on the increase. Ideas and responses to events in the war appeared in masking as communities incorporated that part of Igbo history into the arts.

The active involvement of surviving adherents of Igbo religion in masking at this period ensured that there was essentially no break from the past and from traditional religion. For the first time since Christianity was introduced in Igboland, the post civil-war performances were staged with few conflicts, a majority of Igbo Christians participated and communal participation was extremely high. This romance between the theatre and Christianity was brief, for the end of the war also saw the introduction of Christian fundamentalism in the shapes of Evangelical and Pentecostal movements (the term, Evangelicals will be used for further reference).

The Evangelicals do not distinguish art and religion in masking and like the early Christian converts, consider it as resuscitating ancestral veneration, spiritism and magic which they oppose. This argument may be tenuous to some Christians but the Evangelicals find qualified support in some church congregations and elsewhere for as Nzekwu (1981) has indicated, 'the truth is that the manifestation of ancestral spirits is a vital facet of ancestor worship'(132) and 'among the Ibo, masquerades are intended, by their performances, to convey certain attributes and qualities of ancestral spirits' (Nzekwu, 135). Though arguments persist as to whether this is ancestral worship or mere veneration and the extent to which they

should be allowed in such a communal engagement, the fact is that the differing views on this subject reflect the kind of association individuals have with Igbo masking.

This time, the theatre is defended by some of its former enemies and the split over its continuance is within the Christian community where the size and constitution of its supporters signal theatrical renewal. The supposed death of traditional religion would have been the death of Igbo theatre but this has not been the case. The resilience of Igbo culture (Dike, 1985) and the fact that many Igbo combine traditional socio-religious beliefs and Christianity keep Igbo religion latent, and both factors account for the adoption of the theatre as a cultural and theatrical centre-piece by sections of Christianity in Igboland. The re-awakened interest in traditional Igbo arts and customs explains the vitality and impetus that masking enjoys at the close of the twentieth century.

One outcome of these developments is that though the late 1970s and 1980s saw the restorations of some ancient performances and the introduction of better organised, more artistic displays, the corresponding spread of Evangelical movements has renewed the old conflicts between masking institutions and segments of the Church in Igboland. Both groups have similar roots and their different positions are informed by the same set of circumstances, but the conflict has left some marks on Igbo masking. It is difficult to predict the effect of these developments beyond a certain point and only a closer analysis would indicate any lasting effects they may have had and the future of the theatre.

CHANGES IN THE CONCEPTS OF IGBO SOCIETY AND THEATRE.

Colonialism, Christianity, and Western-style formal education brought about some changes in Igbo society. These include the desire in some people

for defined boundaries between the sacred and the secular, and the seeming attempts to replace collective consciousness with individualism. This period could be regarded as the beginning of a new Igbo society, not in terms of modern artefacts and institutions, but because it marked the introduction of new concepts and ideas and the modification of existing ones along lines that were out of synch with traditional values and models. The period created a situation similar to the Durkheimian concepts of social and cultural changes which Thompson (1991) cites in a study of the conflict between traditional British politics and the modern Church of England in the Thatcherite years:

> At the most general level of cultural processes the theoretical framework is broadly Durkheimian....Two central aspects of Durkheim's sociological problematic are drawn on: the dilemma of modernity concerning increasing individualism and the problem of social integration, and the question of the persistence or decline of the sacred-versus-profane dichotomy as a basis of symbolic community.... The nature of the dilemmas can be illuminated by focussing on issues concerning the boundary between the sacred and the profane, and disputes about individualism and community (277-278).

In Igboland, Christianity became an alternative, and in opposition to traditional religion, it challenged the basis of socio-religious collectivism. Its insistence on a separation between the sacred and secular was a dialectical discourse, and this empowered some Igbo Christians to question the authority of masked figures and their identification as spirit-beings. The implication of this stance was the equation of art with reality so that, the ancient knowledge that maskers are human beings was subordinated to their theatrical characterisation as spirit-beings. Some Christians questioned the abiding relationship between masks and ancestors and the view that masks are the manifestations of spirit and nature forces. Strengthened as it were by the new law courts, and encouraged by the more robust expression of individualism, individuals opposed the use of masking for the enforcement of law and order. This threat to the traditional

communal social equation was contrary to Igbo collective consciousness in which communities were over and above individuals. Prior to these developments, communities countered challenges to their collective survival with special 'law and order' mask performances which till then, and to an extent, even now, were very important instruments for the re-alignment of socio-religious discords. The contrasting postures of collectivism and individualism projected the theatre into the centre of this struggle. Onyeneke (1987) highlights the nature of this conflict and states that:

> In relying on their personal human and civil rights, Igbo Christians on their own right as indigenes began to challenge the traditional attitude of unquestionable submission to the overriding authority of the masquerade. In the crisis of opposition which arose, they would have recourse to the modern institution of justice, the police and the modern courts of law, to defend their rights as citizens (10).

The introduction of Christianity and the subsequent secular sentiments forced the mythological base of Igbo society into the open. Changes in the society meant that mythology could not suffice as the only source for answers on life and it was only a matter of time before it spawned opposing views. The fact that Igbo mythology and traditional religion were homogeneous and occupied a homologous position in Igbo life meant that the advent of a changing society and new religions would inevitably seek the removal of the mask theatre from the grip of a mythology intrinsically linked to one of the society's religions. Before now, Igbo mythology was elaborate and carried into the theological sphere which it conveniently subsummed for as Berger and Luckmann (1971) have pointed out, 'more elaborate mythological systems strive to eliminate inconsistencies and maintain the mythological universe in theoretically integrated terms. Such 'canonical' mythologies, as it were, go over into theological conceptualization proper' (129).

Igbo masking is based on myths and legends around the primal encounters between the Igbo and their material and spiritual milieus. Before Christianity and colonialism, this idea was unchallenged and supported by mythology. The need to re-define Igbo society in the light of its European-contact experiences and to distinguish its theatre as a secular activity distinct from its mytho-religion are the rationale behind the search by some Igbo, for secularism in masking. This is because in present-day Igboland, some believe that 'the cosmos may still be conceived of in terms of the sacred forces or beings of the old mythology, but these sacred entities have been removed to a greater distance' and by the fact that, 'with the transition from mythology to theology, everyday life appears less ongoingly penetrated by sacred forces' (Berger and Luckmann, 1971: 129).

The changing attitudes to Igbo mythology and religion have affected individuals' perceptions and for long, Igbo theatre would be saddled with the question of whether its roots have been, and should remain in mythology and sacrality, or be forced into the secular sphere. The answers to these questions inform the different attitudes that modern-day Igbos hold on the mask theatre. The roles of Igbo religion and Christianity, and sometimes, their changing perceptions of life and society mean the arguments may not be settled, even with the return of Christians to masking. In fact, they have been renewed and sharpened by the Evangelicals and a few others in the face of greater urbanisation and the steady erosion of community ethos. Most studies on this theatre show that despite its ever increasing artistic components, its sacral roots remain and that its future direction and development need addressing. If heeded, the calls for secularisation would yield a different theatre and this secular view is actually what Echeruo (1981) intended when he appealed that 'the Igbo

should do what the Greeks did: expand ritual into life and give that life a secular base' (147).

The theatre has not been forced onto the secular sphere, yet the arguments over sacrality and secularity are central to its life, its staging and reception. In fact, the near absence of atheism and the close relationship between the sacred and secular in Igbo life make religion a central issue in the theatre. This explains why religion has been difficult to dislodge from this argument and why some Christians and adherents of traditional religion view 'sacred' and 'secular' as sign-posts in discussions on the theatre. The implication is that the connotations given to the two terms shape attitudes towards the theatre. According to Thompson:

> A cultural analysis approach to religion focuses on boundary issues, particularly the most fundamental boundary: that between the sacred and the profane. The sacred is holy ground in the sense of being territory of *la vie serieuse* distinguished from the "profane" which is territory of the mundane. The appropriate attitudes toward the sacred are "reverence", "awe", "submission", "fidelity", and "total commitment". These attitudes contrast with those characteristic of the profane, which include scepticism, playfulness (as in the play of the imagination in fiction), relativity, and only partial commitment. When profane attitudes seem to creep into the sacred sphere, then the latter is believed to be under threat (285-286).

Igbo theatre straddles the sacred-secular divide, uniting both and yet maintaining distinctions. It is an act, a play that combines the social and religious in re-enactments that incorporate both spheres. Its performances demand 'commitment' and though a 'play', it may still satisfy a ritual outcome. To some, the theatre should neither transgress the sacred-secular boundary, nor make demands they are unwilling to meet. The latter persuasion insists on precise definition: if it is sacred, to whom and to what religious situations should it be addressed, and if it is secular, should it be subject to mytho-religious rites or entertain exclusions determined by religion? So far, and to a large extent, Igbo communities still uphold

collective values but urbanisation and Christianity continue to foster the 'cult of the individual' (Thompson, 1991: 286).

Initially, masking enjoyed great authority in Igboland and on such a pedestal, it was open to influences and attacks by the proponents of change. This is why colonialism and Christianity saw changes in the concept of masking as the route to strengthening their positions and why for traditionalists and Christian converts, the theatre became a testing ground. Events in the community were repeated in people's attitudes to masking even as the theatre's ideological conflicts were played out in socio-political relationships in the community. The umbilical relationships between Igbo society and theatre became strained to the point that individuals challenged the authority of maskers. This reduced the reverential distance between maskers and participants especially in the urban areas where 'non-initiates feign the awe, born out of traditional usage', and watch masks 'at close quarters' (Nzekwu, 1981:131). To some degree, this attitude affected the basis of performer-participant interaction and indirectly sought new reasons for the theatrical relationship between the two. This was synonymous with advocating a new framework for communal participation considering that the respect and awe demonstrated before masks are expected and given as part of theatrical act.

The Igbo society, which was till then supreme, and had evolved internal systems of dealing with change, now confronted an external and powerful force that tried to split it. This led to social tensions hitherto alien to Igbo communities and for the first time, the concepts of Igbo arts in general and the mask theatre in particular were challenged and supposedly open for debate. Sofola (1979) describes the relationship between traditional society and individuals and the place of the two in the arts:

> Man lives, not as an island unto himself, but in a community where the individual becomes a part of a bigger body. The collective corpus, the organic dynamic entity becomes the articulator of group experiences from which ideas, philosophy and metaphysical thoughts are concretized and codified as the community attempts to make statements on life, the destiny of man, its social institutions and moral values, and the machinery through which they are maintained as well as how they may be modified or changed. This also embraces... punishment for actions which threaten the well-being of the group, be the unit a family or the community at large (68-69).

Traditionally, masking represented the collective consciousness of Igbo communities, individuals had a stake in it and changes were internally designed and derived. The contact with Europe suggested changes in the state of the theatre and its continued existence. This is to the extent that 'today masquerading has lost most of the religious ideas which brought it into being and sustained it' (Nzekwu, 1987:131) and it is 'often scorned and misrepresented by the younger generation who decry it as a mere fraud, a clever device of the man desiring to terrify and dominate his womenfolk' (132).

IGBO THEATRE AND SOCIETAL CHANGE.

Wherever it existed in pre-colonial Igboland, the theatre had numerous participants from which it drew its personnel. European-style education changed this by highlighting the theatre's roots in traditional religion which early Christianity opposed. Education is a formidable weapon for the preservation and perpetuation of cultural ideals, but in Igboland, school and church used these powers to lure young, impressionable pupils, and new converts away from masking and from any ethnographic performance that retained the potentials for perpetuating Igbo culture. Societies everywhere require different kinds of rituals and their destruction calls for replacement by another. Christianity harkened to this need by detaching Igbo school pupils and converts from their communities, their traditional religion and social rituals, and supplanted these with those it furnished.

The reasoning was that the more the converts and pupils identified with Christian rites, the less their inclination to participate in Igbo religion and less still, their fascination with masking. The purpose was to deny both Igbo religion and theatre avenues for public expression thereby, reducing their chances of survival since 'religion, like art, lives in so far as it is performed, in so far as its rituals are 'going concerns'(Turner, 1982: 86).

In time, these people despised the theatre and viewed it as the expression of a religion they no longer espoused. The arguments were sociological and religious instead of focussing on the arts. The conflicts between maskers and early converts shook the conceptual framework of Igbo masking as the latter painted the mask as a device and the masker as a man wearing a disguise and pretending to be a spirit or nature force. These attitudes undermined the theatre and its components, and weakened the hold the community had hitherto exercised over individuals. The new schools failed to develop Igbo culture and instead, sought to destroy and replace it with something alien. Nzekwu (1962) describes the involvement of colonial administrators in the fate of Igbo dance and its declining participation reflected the trends in the mask theatre of the period:

> Within the last few decades [Ibo] dances lost the physical and moral support of some [Ibo] men and women who because of their education and position in the society could have enhanced them....Together with European missionaries and administrators they looked down on their own heritage.... Again, the value placed on formal school education by students and parents has left the younger generation with little or no time to fritter away on dancing (37).

Urbanisation came to Igboland with colonialism, trade, Christianity, and formal education. The initial effects of these activities differed in places but by independence, they were at least, well-established in the collecting centres originally set up by slave traders and later acquired by the colonial administration. The centres became the centres of missionary activities and formal education, and attracted people for other reasons like trade and

work. The influx of Igbo and non-Igbo peoples of varying backgrounds created a cultural mix in the centres which lacked the cohesion, homogeneity and the unifying deities of rural communities. The set-up occasionally enabled people of a common heritage to come together but the more heterogeneous the group, the more readily its constituent members lost the strong allegiance to their roots. In fact, the larger the urban area, the further the pull away from the roots and the easier it has been for Igbo masking in these areas to imbibe non-Igbo ideas and practices.

The outcome is that Igbo performances in urban centres are sometimes influenced by foreign ideas and apart from eroding communal consciousness (Onyeke, 1990), urbanisation has lowered the traditional religious components and significance of some displays. This has brought about greater secularisation. The theatre has progressively shifted from its previous identification with traditional religion to a stage where its overall theatricality is recognised and many of its activities acknowledged as theatrical acts, instead of as signifiers of religious relationship. The view being expressed here is that while mimesis has always been an element of Igbo theatre, it went beyond the thresholds of theatre in ritual displays and became a means for the achievement of religious and social purposes. Urbanisation and other influences removed the emphasis on the latter and fostered the former. The believed negative effects of the reduction of religious ideas was noticed early by Nzekwu in an article originally published in 1960 and reprinted in 1981:

> Today masquerading has lost most of the religious ideas which brought it into being and sustained it. Yet, at first sight it still appears to have all the essence, vitality and prestige which characterized it not so long ago. In the rural areas, one sees only a reflection of its more glorious past, but even that is dwindling in importance as the people become more and more used to Western ideas. In urban areas, the change, though greater, is veiled. There non-initiates feign the awe, born of traditional usage. They watch him giving his display at close quarters.... (131).

By the 1990s, the effects of urbanisation had became more pronounced as city-dwellers participated in joint displays with villagers at both Christian and traditional festivals. The interest of the former is generally more artistic than religious and the implication is that despite being an avenue for the articulation of human experiences, the introduction of new ideas by urban dwellers tends to encourage displays that are insufficiently reflective of local communities. No matter the processes they undergo locally, alien ideas lead to greater secularisation and Nzekwu (1981) describes their effects on the theatre:

> In borrowing the art from other peoples, they have left out the myths which surrounded individual masquerades in their original setting. What is more they never gave them any themselves. The result is that while the basic principle __ that masquerades are physical representations of ancestral spirits __ has survived to control their display and their relationship with men, masquerade displays have become more of a social appendage to the religious festivals and observances to which they were attached. This explains why the Ibo were the first in the country to make masquerade displays and traditional dances the highlights of such Christian feasts as Christmas and Easter (134-135).

Very few of the borrowed components of these displays are viewed and received with the accustomed traditional level of sacrality. Onyeke's (1990) argument for the active participation of Igbo Christians in masking does not sufficiently recognise that urbanisation will lead to greater secularisation and changes in its concept and presentation styles. He blames Christianity and urban-rural interaction for the disrespectful handling of masking materials and other changes, and provides a comprehensive picture of the effects of urbanisation on Igbo masking:

> With the absence of a community sentiment in the townships, the basis of the sacred power of the masquerade is effectively lost. Masked displays may continue to be staged there but they will be devoid of the traditional awe and respect which are exerted in the rural villages. The masquerade becomes secularized as a simple staging of mask plays, dances and drama. As no special community identifies itself with the masquerade as the force behind the given mask, the whole occult system of the institution becomes irrelevant....

> The chances of the full expression of the new urban attitiude will depend on the degree of persistence of the traditional community sentiments in the village. . . . (136-137).

Igbo society is open but with more urbanisation and given its paradoxical habit of freely borrowing elsewhere and holding tenaciously to its culture, more changes will be demanded of the theatre and any ensuing conflicts will be resolved by pluralism and co-existence. These developments have meant that while traditional communities lose their influence over individuals, urban areas exert more influence on villages. The different approaches by local and urban areas have already introduced ideational and artistic arguments in the theatre and the results so far, have seen advancements in the conceptual ideas of newer performances and in the purely artistic elements of the theatre. The shift to artistic components is significant and beneficial because of the commitment of both groups to this area where they have precedents to draw upon. According to Nzekwu (1981), 'these non-religious, "purely aesthetic" values which keep the art going nowadays were extremely important even before traditional religion went into decline' (134).

While Igbo masking articulated its new position, Christian converts returned to masking as a result of the doctrine of inculturation espoused by the Roman Catholic Church and the now familiar cultural resurgence that societies experience periodically. The church's new position was the outcome of the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965 summoned by Pope John XXIII to bridge the gulf between the laity and the church hierarchy, to address the conflicting positions of the two groups, and to ease the potential threat the dialectical struggle between tradition and modernism posed in the church. According to Vaillancourt (1980), Pope John XXIII thrust the church 'towards an embrace not only with other Christian communities but even with other faiths' and he 'did not oppose the involvement of

Catholics in the secular arena' (77). Christianity did not provide an alternative ethos for Igbo masking, instead the traditional base of the theatre continued to enlarge in line with the changing society. Antoine Casanova stresses the importance of Vatican II in allowing the laity to exercise discretion on issues like masking. Before Vatican II, the clergy exercised this authority and ex-communicated converts for participating in masking. He maintains that:

> Equal in religious dignity, direct beneficiaries of Christ's mediation, these people can be considered as responsible beings and as the makers of their own history at the level of salvation _ a divine salvation with human dimensions that cannot be realised except in a collective way, that passes through the transformation and the animation of a social world (in Vaillancourt, 1980: 90).

The embracing of other faiths allowed many Igbo to either subscribe to Christianity and traditional religion simultaneously, or to practise one fervently and borrow freely from the other. Those engaged in this dual religious relationship feel no disjunctions, but see their positions as central to their connection with both Igbo traditions and the ideals of the modern society. To many of these, the concept of saints is not entirely unique to Christianity and the idea of a relationship with the messengers of a big deity is not strange to the Igbo world of spirits and nature forces. For these reasons, those engaged in the practice viewed the occasional use of magic potions and occultic displays in masking as not being in conflict with Christianity. Despite the spread and acceptance of this dual religious relationship and practice, some churches did not relax their oppositions to such ideas and to masking as later events proved in some places.

The return of Christians to masking precipitated a struggle for its control. While some churches had earlier opposed and sought its abolition, they later modified this position and called for the expurgation of all aspects of traditional religion from the theatre. This situation is unique because while

a small but influential group of people like Onyeke (1990) laments the reduction of religious sentiments and subsequent secularisation, such a move represents the greatest and most viable opportunity for greater communal participation in masking. The two positions represented a new approach to the sacred-secular arguments and Onyeneke (1987) explores their effects in the theatre in sections of Igboland:

> As the clashes reached a point where they could no longer be ignored, a working agreement was struck between the Mmanwu (masquerade) society and the Catholics in some parishes. In the case of Ukpor (and some other nearby parishes and towns), the accord reads:
>
> The representatives of the Ukpor community and members of the Mmanwu society of Ukpor have unanimously agreed on the following terms laid down by the Parish Priest of Ukpor, Rev. Fr.... as conditions under which the Catholics of Ukpor may lawfully participate in *iti Mmanwu* in Ukpor.
>
> 1. That no charm be made, kept or used by the Mmanwu society. Any previous charms made, kept or used by the said society are discarded.
> 2. That all 'Obom' or playgrounds used by the masquerades are to be blessed by the Reverend Father.
> 3. That swearing by a Catholic during his initiation into the society must be on the Bible only.
> 4. That Catholic women and girls must not be required to go out at night in order to participate in any activities connected with masquerading.
> 5. That the Catholics of Ukpor be adequately represented in the policy-making committee of the Mmanwu society.
> 6. That initiation into the society be entirely free. That is to say, no molestation or force is to be exerted on any person to enter the society against his or her will.
> 7. A person already initiated and wishing for some reasons to discontinue membership (is to inform the policy-making committee of the society for their consideration) can do so freely.
> 8. That no masquerading is to be done on Sunday except in emergency __ unanimously agreed to by the ruling committee. Catholics may not participate in *iti mmanwu* for that emergency.
> 9. That an oath confirming acceptance and promise to abide by these conditions be sworn by both parties, and it was accordingly sworn on the 17th day of August, 1970 (10-11).

This agreement was unusual but it indicated the path that some communities followed or improved on, and though many did not document such agreements, similar understanding spread. This practice which masked the church's broader purpose is not peculiar to Igboland for in all of its history, 'the Church has always been ready to divert even

heathen rites to its own purposes' (Sampson, 1970:196). Sampson traces the development of English drama from its heathen roots to the Miracle Plays, its emasculation by the Long Parliament in 1642 and later re-birth, and concludes that, 'there is clear surviving evidence for the existence of primitive religious drama and no surviving evidence for the existence of primitive secular drama. The line of development is not clear' (196). Secular English drama must have come from the Church's appropriation of primitive religious drama and its later diversion to Christianity's purposes. Inculturation is similar to baptism and in England, it made heathen drama acceptable to the Church which gave drama a secular base and later restored it to a differently-constituted society.

Forces similar to the ones in pre-Christian England operated in pre-colonial Igboland, and Igbo theatre, like its counterparts elsewhere was confronted with three choices; assimilation, adaptation, or destruction by the new emergent consciousness fostered by colonialism and Christianity. The third option is essentially unattainable in many traditional institutions, the first and second are reached with time, and though the Ukpor situation is peculiar and unrepresentative of the general trend, the continued existence of the theatre in different forms points to a development synonymous with adaptation. Experiences elsewhere and trends within them suggest that Igbo theatre and religion are likely to go the way of their counterparts in England. Anglo-nationalism and heathenism could not stop the Church from assimilating and diverting traditional religious English drama into the secular sphere. Igbo society treads a similar path and some churches' acceptance of masking is already witnessing conceptual changes in the theatre. There are, however, differences between Igbo and English theatres and societies. The English church willingly incorporated the theatre but in Igboland, Christianity's foreign origin was a sore point and its rejection of a

core and vital institution such as masking caused the fractious relationship between the two. Secondly, church plays in England had religious themes so that, Church and theatre shared similar goals. This scenario was, and is still different in Igboland where Church and theatre were mutually opposed in their purposes and functions. Thus, in seeking to eliminate whatever it opposed as in Ukpor, Christianity was removing the converts' spiritual allegiance to masking and traditional religion, and in that singular act, undermined the concept of masking. For some in Church-sanctioned performances, the theatre lost most of its sacral significance.

The return of Christians was a new dimension in the theatre. Where they existed, the church/society agreements sought to remove the religious base of masking without providing alternatives or actually replacing traditional Igbo religious icons and ideas with Christian ones. What it has created is a theatre with a different soul, a theatre that is traditional in form and to some extent, in purpose, but whose meanings and functions lack the clarity and vision of its pre-colonial counterpart. The effects of this development are yet to be fully studied as many performances still incorporate aspects of traditional religion, but the term, '*Mmanwu Uka* ', 'Church Masking', by which Onyeneke (1987) and Onyeke (1990) define this development suggests, if nothing else, differences in concept and practice between this kind of masking and its traditional counterpart and originator. The pattern of this emerging phenomenon is still unclear but it portends increasing inculturation and secularisation in Igbo theatre. Writing on *Christian Inculturation in Nigeria* and *Bringing the Masquerade into the Church,* Onyeke (1990) cites Neudecker (1983), and restates the progressive state of inculturation and probable developments in Igbo masking:

> The fundamental transformation of a culture through 'inculturation' is not meant to be a subversive process. It is in time and with time that it reaches its final goal.... The different moments of interaction could

> well follow the ups and downs of either a polemical or peaceful course... (in Onyeke, 1990: 241).

By the close of the 20th century, masking and Christianity in Igboland are still experiencing internal adjustments whose significance would be fully ascertained in years to come. Frictions persist and in December 1993, an Evangelical group advocating further restriction or even abolition of masking had its church burnt by maskers in Afikpo. Beside the two views on modified masking (church masking) and its abolition, are traditionalists opposed to the two and who favour a return to the theatre's original roots. Most performances of the late 20th century are therefore, the products of a 'select' collective consciousness, different from the inclusiveness of Igbo communities. While these performances represent the combined inputs of Christians and traditionalists, they still reflect responses to oppositions and changing circumstances.

At present, Igbo theatre can still be termed traditional and communal, but it is also 'modern' in its incorporation of contemporary events in Igboland. 'Tradition' and 'modern' defy strict definitions but in using the term, 'invented tradition', Hobsbawm (1983) establishes the fine line between them and at the same time, highlights the fact that while tradition is often associated with the past, 'modern' ideas have very short life-spans and are soon incorporated in 'tradition'. Hobsbawm states that:

> The term 'invented tradition' is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period.... 'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past (1).

Post-European contact Igbo theatre incorporates new ideas and styles, and the fact that it is not entirely dissociated from the pre-colonial form suggests that though the former shares some characteristics of invented traditions, it

is not an invented form. While new performances may evolve or be initiated, the theatre is not invented because in it are elements of its traditional counterpart. What is witnessed is a regeneration, a modifying and modernising process in, and by a theatre and culture adjusting to rapid social and religious changes.

Going by these developments, it may be tenuous to classify 'traditional' and 'modern' Igbo masking, but contemporary societal changes imbue the latter with a certain amount of modern character that separates it from its past, and differentiates some of its activities from its primeval counterpart. Both forms of the theatre are repetitious and share some common features but the main distinction emerges in the kind of relationship they share with the past. This is what Hobsbawm mainly achieves in distinguishing traditional and modern societies, though his notion of 'invented tradition' is inapplicable to post-independence Igbo theatre.

The pre-contact theatre in Igboland exercised a strong hold on a community's sense of loyalty, duty and communal ethos, and individuals were quite aware of the functions and importance of displays. Participation was not only mandatory for some people on certain occasions, individuals engaged in it with great anticipation. This cannot be said for many modern-day performances which mainly demand loyalty to performing groups instead of the community, and in which performers and participants only 'play the game'. Traditionally, the theatre encouraged community-wide social cohesion but the 'modern' form has succumbed to the 'cult of the individual' and as such, it insufficiently arouses the spiritual bonding and participation of traditional communities. In fact, the greater secular dimensions of modern displays distinguish them from their more 'traditional' counterparts and the reduced reverential distance between

performers and participants in the former encourages secularisation and a more artistic attitude to Igbo theatre.

EFFECTS OF SOCIETAL CHANGES IN IGBO THEATRE.

Real and lasting societal change affects the fundamental concepts of a society and prods it into harmonising conflicts between old and new social orders. Change is a society's attempts to re-define its strengths and weaknesses, to re-shape and re-design its cultural activities and institutions to serve the present and future. Societal changes generate new relationships and create a broader cultural base so that, emerging socio-cultural institutions, though similar to their progenitors, are essentially different from them. Because societies evolve continually, it is difficult to exhaust the types of societal change, and what are measured are their effects on a society's institutions. The influences that came with contacts with other cultures and the evolution of Igbo society have occasioned new relationships to which the theatre has responded. It has withstood opposition to its existence and responded to the need for change in its own way. Its survival lies in the manner in which it continues to meet both challenges and integrates externally-induced and internally-generated changes in its theatrecraft. The predominance of one of these factors would amount to a lop-sided development and an uncertain future for the theatre. Some theatrical innovations and influences may be decried in the short term, but in the long run, they indicate a healthy future for the theatre.

Some of the developments in the theatre are the decline in participation, the emergence of different kinds of participants, and the re-definition of motives for participation. Igbo society has moved from a common purpose and identification with its arts to one of greater individualism in which communities and groups lack the power of the traditional community and

often refrain from punishing deviants because of new legal systems. Participation in the theatre is neither mandatory nor now expected of some individuals among whom are opponents of the theatre in its present state. Even among its active supporters, attitudes range as to what is fact or fiction, and the nature and extent of sacrality incorporated in displays. In addition, the former high level of communal participation has increasingly given way to selective participation and in extreme cases, to indifference. The need for the peaceful co-existence of different views in communities and the fact that participation is the *raison d'etre* for Igbo masking have lowered the religious element of some displays to accommodate more participants. Some participants, especially among Christians, do not share in the socio-religious significances of these displays.

Initially, the changing socio-religious attitudes of the Igbo to the theatre led to declining participation, but with time, the latter has encouraged further changes in attitude. The second and newer attitudes that came with the return of Christians to masking has led to the emergence of two distinct but mixed kinds of participants who have different motives for participating in the theatre. For the first group, the theatre retains its religious significance and is an extension of the communal ethos and for the other, having been dissociated from the collective consciousness, the theatre 'has now become an entertainment' (Nzekwu, 1981:133). The latter group shows the beginnings of audience/spectatorship in Igbo theatre going by Obeyesekere's (1990) description of participants as 'those involved chiefly in the efficacy of the performance and, spectators as those interested in the entertainment aspects' (130). Obeyesekere refers to two performances in Sri Lanka and observes that though audience and spectators may exist in a traditional community, the main condition for their presence is the significance individuals attach to performances. He points out that:

> The *Pirit* ceremony thus has participants and no spectators, a play like *Maname* has only spectators. . . for whom the significance and meaning of the performance must necessarily be different. This is perhaps why present day Sri Lankans can, and without any feelings of disjunction, be participants/spectators in any one or all of the different performances discussed (130).

Spectators have emerged in Igbo society and theatrical displays hold different meanings and significances for different people who attend as participants or as spectators. This development has been encouraged by urbanisation and social mobility, especially as the fame of some performances crosses local boundaries and attracts people who primarily cherish certain aspects of a display. These come on the invitation of friends and relatives, or to acquire new styles for their own performances. Such displays may be profoundly significant to local participants but they only arouse strong levels of spiritual empathy in foreigners, and irrespective of the strength of these feelings, the displays generate only broad spiritual connotations with visitors and are devoid of actual sacral significance among people with different local deities. Non-traditional participants constitute an audience of interested spectators and to their numbers must be added locals, who do not share in the significance of displays, but who continue to attend performances as a result of the fascination and pull that masking generates in Igboland.

In embracing Igbo theatre, the Roman Catholic Church, at least in Ukpor, opened the way for others and reduced the use of charms and occult influences. The restrictions on certain initiation rites, the power of civil authorities in post-independence Nigeria, and the closer participation that these changes ensured for women meant that Christians of stature returned to masking. The returnees brought more openness but many retained masking mysteries and secrets and still kept masking and its associated mysteries within the ambits of tradition. Tradition and modernism became partners, Igbo religion and Christianity found themselves sharing

performances with individuals not necessarily expected to share, believe, or participate in all of their wider ramifications. The returning Christians' determination to revive and sustain masking made it the highlight of Christian feasts and in time, different performing contexts evolved and displays focused mainly on theatrical art.

Beside the 'acted' awe and respect which masks receive, is an actual reduction of religious images and a shift towards greater artistic inputs in Igbo theatre. Performing groups now tend to create more elaborate costumes, songs, music and dances. The emphasis on art and the accommodation of individualism alongside collective consciousness has discouraged to some degree, the use of masking as an extension of a community's administrative and judicial machinery. Such occasions are few and when used, the outcome is nothing compared to the past when desecration was answered with the death of a culprit. The reverential distance between masks and participants has been reduced and the level of sacrality lowered to encourage participation. So far, the active involvement of Christians has not removed the prohibitions and regulations concerning women's participation because the initial ideas that determined them are not peculiar to masking, they are enshrined in the traditions of communities where they still stand as cultural pillars. A few regulations like the 'house enclosure' rule for women during some displays in Nsukka and Awka areas have merely been relaxed in some communities but have not been overthrown, and these continue to give the theatre its peculiarity.

The religious argument remains a touchy issue in some quarters but the Church's involvement and feasts have created more performing occasions and more varied performing conditions than was the practice. This is to the effect that unlike in the past when communities had few masks, styles, and performances, they now have many masks and countless displays at both

traditional and Christian festivals. In some places, issues like the use of magic and occult components, or even the choice of mask-types and costumes have split groups and spawned competing displays. The fact that differently-composed groups stage simultaneous displays of the same mask-type with distinguishing music and dance mean that in place of anxieties over declining performances, Igboland now has more masks and performances. The long and rigorous mini mask festivals to select groups to represent Igbo communities and states at the biennial Nigerian National Festival of Arts and Culture, the Mmonwu Festival instituted in Enugu in 1986 by the military administration of Group Captain Samson Omeruah and its offshoot, *Omenimo* in Imo State, are pointers to the explosion in masking. In a positive sense, the three umbrella festivals and the competitions among village and city mask groups would continue to create heightened interests in the purely artistic elements in the theatre.

These changes and developments can be summed up in 'secularisation'. While some insist on returning the theatre to its roots, events in Igboland and elsewhere appear to put more distance between religion and society, and between the sacred and the secular. In fact, secularisation appears to be the stronger option for the theatre for many reasons. A majority of its patrons and active participants are Christians, most of whom already regard the larger majority of these displays as 'Church masking' and so, devoid of allegiances to other religions with which they may co-operate in the art of masking, but to which they would not necessarily submit or offer religious services. Traditional religion, like any other religion, is all-embracing and its re-capture of the soul of masking would renew the old conflicts in which it is presently disadvantaged. Mda (1993) stresses that participation was both the method and the goal of traditional African theatres and for Igbo society without a clearly defined leisure sphere, communal interests and

participation are paramount to the theatre's survival. Antagonising the large number of Christian participants from the theatre would cause a dearth of participants since as presently constituted, the idea and purpose of 'Church masking' is only partially and notionally divorced from the traditional model.

As this study has already stated, the Church's adoption and acceptance of masking in many Igbo communities was the beginning of a contemporary form of Igbo masking. This distinction is made not because as Tuan (1990) states, 'a critical distinction between "traditional" and "modern" theatre is that whereas the former is a celebration of life, the latter is a criticism, a deconstruction of life and a cold look at death' (241). In Igbo theatre, Tuan's thesis does not hold for the contemporary form is not a deconstruction of life; and both forms of the theatre share the same concerns for form, style, and staging techniques. The distinction is mainly for two reasons given that traditional drama is constantly moving, borrowing and integrating materials. Firstly, this is because of the different purposes and functions, and the different performing auspices that most Christian performers bring to the theatre. Secondly, this is as a result of the complex factors that brought modern-day Igbos and Christians to the theatre after the years of separation. The present Igbo theatre is still linked to the 'traditional' form but is in a sense, an outgrowth and an extension of it. For these reasons, the Igbo theatre of the close of the 20th century can be more appropriately regarded as contemporary.

Tuan distinguishes traditional and modern theatres on the basis of style and purpose, but the traditional and contemporary forms of Igbo theatre are not clearly perceptible. Their distinctions are more of conceptual, philosophical, and ideational approaches than their styles, contents, and techniques. Herein lies the peculiarity of this theatre, for while some other

theatres distinguish forms through styles, techniques, and sometimes, through distinctive language, those of Igbo theatre are similar in most particulars. They are not necessarily exclusive of each other but actually co-exist in an uneasy relationship. While not being exactly representative of indigenous Nigerian theatres, Nwamuo's (1990) broad analysis of the relationship between literary theatre and traditional Nigerian theatres reflects the uneasy association between the old and new forms of Igbo masking:

> We had stated elsewhere that traditional theatre in Nigeria was a communal affair, which dealt with matters of community concern.... It had a face, a masked face, respectable face, a face that embodied the living and the dead, a complex face.
>
> Colonialism tended to have brought with it, a different face for the Nigerian theatre. The major purpose of the theatre during this period, appeared to have been mainly entertainment.... A new face emerged on the Nigerian theatrical scene, a face which boldly confronted the original and left a scare on it .... Since this event, the two faces of Nigerian theatre have remained strange bed fellows in the same dressing room (62-63).

Traditional and contemporary Igbo theatre wear similar masked faces. The former wears old faces and the latter has its soul occupied by considerations other than community cohesion and survival, and it wears newer faces. As earlier stated, societal changes have increased the entertainment motif of the theatre and edged the contemporary form towards emphasising art over sacrality. The implication is that though largely unheeded, the extrication of the theatre from its ritual roots is behind the call in some quarters to secularise the theatre.

Change and contemporaneity have not proved disastrous but have instead, encouraged theatrical creativity. The de-emphasising of religious content and purposes would in the long run, encourage greater communal participation. Social influences and developments have moved the theatre from a historical point into modern Igbo society where it is fated to develop with the society. Whatever advances it has already made, Igbo masking is at

a unique point in its development and requires a pragmatic response to its past and present to ensure its future. Monumental social changes affect society's institutions and the characteristic reaction is for affected institutions to die or adapt, to metamorphose or regenerate into stronger entities. Contemporary Igbo theatre regenerated from such backgrounds and though Hobsbawm describes a different process (invented tradition), his thesis reflects some of the features of the regenerative process in Igbo theatre:

> However, we should expect it to occur more frequently when a rapid transformation of society weakens or destroys the social patterns for which 'old' traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable, or when such old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated: in short, when there are sufficiently large and rapid changes on the demand or the supply side (4-5).

Because Igbo masking did not die with the advent of colonialism and Christianity, it did not require re-invention. Its frequency and number were initially affected but with time, it tapped into the resilience of Igbo culture, took on the challenge of a changing society, regained its customary vibrancy, and regenerated itself.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF IGBO THEATRE.

With political independence and cultural re-awakening, arts festivals were instituted and these contributed in reviving Igbo theatre, but that alone is not sufficient to keep the theatre as a dynamic institution. To grow is to develop in line with prevailing circumstances and to participate in the events of a changing society. Igbo theatre must face the demands of the future with suitable and adaptable systems, it must confront uncertainties and overcome any historical and traditional problems. In recalling its glorious past, it must respond to modern Igbo society. This is what *Alarinjo,* the traditional and professional Yoruba travelling theatre has

always done by using contemporary ideas to update its themes and content. The Tiv *Kwagh-Hir* puppet and masquerade theatre has semi-professional status, but the combination of relevant socio-political themes and tales of man-spirit encounters produce displays saturated with contemporary socio-political satire and innuendoes. Enem (1981) remarks that:

> Tivs recall a time in the early political days when *kwagh-hir* was prohibited as the satiric impulse of this theatre was exploited by opposing political factions to aggravate social strife. This again attests to the elastic structure of *kwagh-hir* which is capable of accommodating new experiences in addition to the traditional repertoire (250).

Both Yoruba and Tiv theatrical traditions retain their roots but beyond that, they remain relevant to their societies with the inclusion of contemporary materials. Igbo theatre is different, and given its symbolic presentational style and non-literary tradition, the absence of a developed story line has meant that contemporary ideas are usually conveyed in symbolism, costumes, dance, music, and other stage business. Its contemporaneity is seen, heard and recalled in metaphors, themes emerge through spectacle, and participants are given idea-enhancing and thought-provoking images in place of elaborate ideas and themes. So far, the theatre has risen to the challenge. In fact, the weakening of some aspects of Igbo culture and the bias for literary models by the modern Nigerian theatre have not alienated most Igbo from appreciating its performances. The inclusion of contemporary ideas in costume, props, mask, music, and dance mean Igbo masking is not a closed shop and that thematic contemporariness would continue to function through designs, music and dance. This appears to be the logical trend since performances like the singing Ojionu, Ulaga, and other satirical displays have always used contemporary stories for their comments and songs. Similarly, the explanations that accompany some displays and the interpretation of esoteric language in some performances like *Mmonwu* are exploited for the incorporation of current issues.

From the foregoing analysis, the theatre's present response would largely determine its future development. Present developments do not point to an easy solution and one wonders how much longer it would enjoy stylized staging and presentation in the face of further changes and fragmentation in Igbo society. This is another way of looking at Echeruo's call for secularisation and the further broadening of the theatre's base with the inclusion of contemporary themes. To do this, Igbo theatre must confront present posers and be aware of others that are likely to confront it in the future.

The Igbo society of the late 20th century is different from and has experienced more fragmentation than its predecessor, especially with some individuals feeling alienated from some of the communal ethos of the traditional society and masking. While some feel alienated, others see present masking as a vital link to a cherished past and tradition. The theatre must address itself meaningfully to all sections of Igbo society, and the question is how it can re-engage the alienated and still retain the participation of other members of a community. The problem Igbo society and art confront is symptomatic of the larger African picture but this does not diminish the need for an appropriate response. What is needed is to integrate the many facets of the changing society in which traditional religion and Christianity have fostered the kind of inconsistent mythological traditions that Berger and Luckmann (1971) have identified in the social construction of reality. Though writing about Nigeria generally, Nwoko (1981) recognises the need for such integration in the essay, *Search For a New African Theatre* , and points out that, 'the duty of the artist of this new society will be to create an art that will express the life and aspirations of this new super-tribe' (473). Future Igbo theatre should retain symbolic presentation for its strength, but it must acknowledge that the

cosmos painted in broad strokes of good and evil in which communities constantly battled malevolent forces has to be broadened to include the struggles of individuals in the society. The latter was not the focus of traditional theatre and presently, it has not been sufficiently integrated in contemporary Igbo theatre.

How can Igbo theatre satisfy the call for secularisation and the opposing desire to retain its roots (including links to traditional religion)? How would meeting these contrasting aspirations affect the content and form of the theatre? Does it have to address contemporaneity with elaborate themes, content and form, or be satisfied in addressing it in designs and context only? If it does not, how can it, as an instrument for documenting societal change, explore the challenges of modern Igbo society? What is its significance in its present state to younger generations weaned on environments and circumstances different from those that yielded the theatre ? How does the theatre reflect the aspirations and draw from the world of new generations bred with a strong sense of individualism, and for whom it is increasingly becoming a rich form of entertainment?

As Mda (1993) indicates that 'in parts of Africa, 'theatre for development' continues the functional nature of indigenous theatres into our modern age' (10), the future of Igbo theatre must be pondered. He asserts that theatre develops with community and in order to address their modern societies, indigenous African theatres must contain ideas and themes that are relevant to the needs of their changing societies. In its traditional mould, Igbo mask theatre contains the kind of very important functional elements that Kamlongera (1989) describes:

> Indigenous performances in Africa contain within them some functional elements. In most cases this takes the form of a didactic statement. Whilst performers might engage in doing spectacular movements and dances, they might also carry within the performances special messages or lessons to some members of their audience. Some work in

> Theatre-for-Development is a direct result of recognising this charateristic in indigenous African performances (88).

As a socio-political institution, Igbo theatre evolved more like community and popular theatres than as 'theatre-for-development', yet it possesses the grassroots appeal that shaped the latter into an instrument for the mobilisation of communities for socio-political action. Community theatre, popular theatre, and theatre-for-development explore contemporary situations and encourage communities to appreciate their circumstances. Contemporary Igbo theatre should do this as a bridge between the past and present, for while theatrical conventions deal with the peculiarities of a people's life, theatre should place itself in a position to reflect societal changes. Community and popular theatres do this and Nzewi (1981) identifies it as a logical expectation of Igbo masking when he states:

> If it is possible to capture the ideational and theatrical objectives of a traditional festival drama in a modern theatre work in which the traditional characters, venues and effects are portrayed in their modern equivalents, it would be discovered that there is a continuum of the traditional dramatic aspirations in a modern dramatic situation (441).

The modern equivalents of situations and personalities are what must be introduced in Igbo theatre to complement their historical and archetypal antecedents. This can be achieved through new designs and dialogue, symbolic or real, in which performers and participants articulate specified individual circumstances and come to grips with different aspects of a given situation.

The use of relevant messages would encourage participants to take corrective actions as masters of their own destiny. Local environments would then be de-mystified so that individuals are liberated from traditional constraints and given a life and voice in the theatre. Ahura (1990) states that, 'liberation is the main function of popular and participatory theatre' (57) but since these goals are achieved through the

participatory impetus, community and popular theatres continue and extend the functional intentions of traditional African theatres. Igbo theatre did this effectively in the past and still possesses the potentials for social mobilization, but what is difficult to determine are its willingness to retrieve its meanings and mode of communication from the symbolic plane, its readiness and need to release these on the common level of communication.

Societal developments have created a more open society in which symbolic communication may still be valued highly but in which literal communication is not necessarily inferior if not equated with it. Though the theatre has always shown a preference for the former kind, there is sufficient scope within it to suggest that in time, it would incorporate more sustained bits of the latter given the diversity and individualism within the society. This is one of the strongest means of broadening and furthering its contemporaneity and enhancing individual identification with displays.

Ahura's description of the functions of popular and participatory theatres recall not only what Igbo theatre did in the past but, what it could do in the present and future:

> Popular theatre is the theatre of the people which uses the expressure [expressive] medium of the people and which treats the actual problems of the environment highlighting the problems in new light for the purposes of reopening discussion on them as a way of seeking solutions to them. It is a theatre that recognises the creative potentialities of the rural masses and seeks to activate these potentialities for the common good.... Participatory theatre on the other hand emphasises the mass mobilization of the rural masses so that they come to actively participate in the theatre (55).

Igbo theatre was used for communal mobilization but at present, it is not in complete agreement with popular and participatory theatres. It presents social changes symbolically, but this would be more effective with recourse to a mixture of symbolic and literal dialogue of ideas and themes. The

balance would tilt in favour of the former but the latter would neither die nor stagnate. The presence of individual and collective consciousness, and of people exhibiting three broad categories of identification with the theatre; sacral, secular, and varying mixtures of both provides suitable theatrical themes and the theatre would still retain its mythological root since 'the cosmos may still be conceived of in terms of the sacred forces or beings of the old mythology' which have now been 'removed to a greater distance' (Berger and Luckmann, 1971: 129).

Igbo theatrical performances do not present personal conflicts and are not thematically specific. A performance is a broad canvas speaking about many things and to all in the community, but to none in particular and about little in details. Except in the few examples that comment on current social issues and satirise personal behaviour, most retain this traditional theme and give little attention to specific events and individuals. If its future is to follow the path of modern popular and community theatres, it would yield different staging techniques. So far, it is not inclined towards a developed story line and thematic base, the prerequisites for engaging in the kind of conscientization that community theatre, popular theatres, and theatre-for-development have championed. This is what the Yoruba *Alarinjo* and Tiv *Kwagh-Hir* puppet theatres have done in their respective societies. Igbo theatre is different and has different functional purposes, but the main reason why it has not, and may not completely follow the path of contemporary community and popular theatres is the use of action lines in place of story lines and the preference for general over specific themes.

In three respects; message, meaning, and communal participation, Igbo masking is like community and popular theatres but while the latter function on contemporary themes sustained with dialogue, the two dramatic elements function at symbolic levels in Igbo theatre. Theatrical

message is broad and generalised and the theatre requires an extension of the general didactic impulse into specific ideas, identifiable themes, and recognisable human and spirit characters. The traditional collective consciousness of the Igbo society enables the theatre to present events and ideas in broad strokes and while individuals find their niche within this set-up, specific ideas and themes are worked into the collective image. This style does not allow for the exhaustive treatment of issues and ideas, and the suggestion is for the theatre to address itself primarily to individuals as a part of a collective, instead of subsuming the former in the latter.

This discussion raises questions on the theatre's future because while it is functional and meaningful, developments in the society indicate that like other social institutions, it must identify with change in the society. It has not reflected enough of these changes, it has neither traced their paths nor articulated them in individual cases. Igbo theatre ought not to dwell mainly on and be a reflection of the past, it has to be a very strong part of the present and future. It has never been a pure entertainment devoid of philosophical content, what is recommended here is the broadening of this philosophical base with more contemporary themes. The accusation levelled against it as being 'only an entertainment' comes from the difficulties encountered by people who have not been sufficiently challenged by its symbolic philosophical contents, or have missed them altogether. This concern is because theatre is a viable tool for articulating social developments. It is in this light that attempts can be made to answer some of the questions already raised on the effects of social changes in the theatre and its likely future development.

Nwamuo (1990) resists the temptation to provide answers to similar questions in other traditional Nigerian theatres in the wake of foreign

influences, but he suggests a framework which could be the basis for future theatre developments in Igboland:

> While not attempting to answer any of these questions, it seems to me that part of the success of future Nigerian theatre will depend on its relationship with the masses, the rural people who originally owned theatre before it left them to the cities. Future Nigerian theatre must identify with the issues...of the common man.... Future Nigerian theatre should aim at using the medium to communicate ideas effectively....[it] must address itself to the people, to issues relevant to the Nigerian situation, to language of the people and their presentation modes (65-66).

Nwamuo reiterates the importance of contemporary themes and though only slightly reflected, Igbo theatre is not averse to thematic contemporariness since it grew out of the people's desire to engage their then environment and to harmonise its contradictions. What it should do is to identify more with personal struggles as a means of furthering its identification with contemporaneity and opening itself to a wider audience. This trend, though imperceptible, has already started in music, dance, mask and other designs, and though the extent of its diversification and continuation are uncertain, the indications are for a more secular direction in the future.

Christianity is primarily responsible for the trends presently noticed in Igbo theatre. Christianity changed the face of pagan Europe and accommodated its festivals and ceremonies. After many failed attempts to destroy the theatre, especially the comprehensive bill by the Long Parliament in 1642 (Sampson, 1970), the English Church assimilated traditional English drama and it re-emerged in society as a secular engagement. The same social forces and inculturation that changed English Drama are at work in Igboland. The agreements between some churches and masking societies effectively dealt with the hitherto fractious religious questions, it created new levels of participation and introduced 'Church masking' as a new dimension in the theatre. This development was only a matter of time considering the

fascination masking and religion wield in Igbo society. The co-existence of Church and masking continues despite the fact that occasional incidents flare to suggest that the theatre's religious base would always be challenged. This process will regenerate the theatre, eventually supplant its religious soul with secularisation, accommodate all sections of the society, and create more performances.

Though already open to previously unconceived levels of secularisation, Igbo theatre is not threatened. As a living institution, it may have owed its origin to religion, but its actual survival has always rested on the degree of communal participation. Secularisation is a way of returning the theatre to its roots instead of being its bane. Onyeke (1990) recognised the roles of urbanisation, education, and Christianity as agents of secularisation in masking:

> Of the influences that work necessarily for change in the masquerade tradition, education and urbanisation seem to be the strongest, followed closely by the Christian missionaries.... The chances of change of the mask tradition in Igbo society can now be summarized:
>
> 1. The rate of erosion of the community common sentiment in a locality is directly related to the degree of secularisation of the masquerade. The urban setting which is the place where the common consciousness has been most eroded is therefore the place where masquerading is or will be rendered most secular.
>
> 2. The rate of diffusion of Christianity in a community, both in the quantitative and qualitative sense, will affect the secularisation of the masquerade in those 'sacred' areas of the institution that conflict with the new religion....
>
> 4. The existence of colonial modern channels for enforcing common law is a necessary condition to the secularisation of the masquerade. It is a condition rather than an agent in so far as the colonial and subsequent Nigerian administration after independence still toys with a dual system which seeks to respect existing traditional social-political channels within reasonable limits.... (136-137).

Secularisation will not be achieved at the same time in all places, or even in all performances, but the trend shows that the influence of urban areas is continually felt in rural communities where it affects other aspects of village life. This trend and social mobility provide some indications on the nature of secularisation in Igbo theatre of the future. These are that:

a) Full secularisation will not lead to an instant transformation in theatrical content, form, staging styles and dramatic components.

b) Where wide-ranging secularisation eventually occurs, some aspects of traditional religion will remain in place for a long time.

c) The level of secularisation will increase despite oppositions from quarters wishing to retain the theatre in its present mould.

d) Dialectical conflicts will create two broad categories of performances bound by either of social and secular, or traditional religious sentiments.

e) Sacral performances diminish in importance and frequency with the decline of their sustaining religions and are often replaced by secular performances. In this set-up, should both Igbo religion and Christianity decline, any references to religion in Igbo theatre will be merely artistic.

f) The occasions for traditional festivals and ceremonies will eventually lose their religious purposes and rituals and, through the process of inculturation, these will be taken over for more social and secular display of new theatrical trends.

The call for inclusiveness involves the further broadening of the theatre's conceptual base and not a departure from its roots. These suggestions can only be implemented from within, and the call for the increasing injection of contemporary themes is not synonymous with its literariness. The latter's eventual advent in the theatre, if ever, will be determined by societal development and the level of literacy in Igbo society. Regeneration must build on such traditional strengths of the theatre as its high artistic quotient, its oral nature, and communal participation as already stated.

Theatrical regeneration will continue because Igbo society has experienced rapid changes and its old institutions designed for other functions need to

respond appropriately. While not stating that its institutions were, or are unadaptable, conflicts between maskers and individuals and a previously unacceptable level of individualism and religious assertiveness necessitate such regeneration. The theatre's transformation from a historical past to the present and future, and the inadequacy of old theatrical practices to effectively meet contemporary challenges have long been recognised for as Nzewi (1981) had earlier indicated:

> [Thus], theatre as a specialized creative-interpretative process is no longer primarily a specialized mode of fraternizing with the forces and effects of the cosmos. Rather, it becomes an affected system for complimenting [sic] life. The stage, traditional and modern, in Nigeria is still in a process of shifting from the effective-affective to the impressive since most, if not all, of the traditional roles of theatre have been appropriated by the modern state and religious systems (435).

Igbo society cannot return to its pre-European contact state or remain static. Its institutions and communities are imbued with the capacities to confront and adapt to change, and it is most likely to move towards greater technological, educational and social advancements. These three factors affect cultures and any subsequent dislocations are articulated for the evolution of a new society. In present times, masks are sometimes challenged, litigations are instituted against them, some are desecrated in isolated incidents, and some are simply shunned. These developments reflect greater expression of individualism and the changing status of masking in a changing society. What is needed is for the Igbo to exercise these capacities in more obvious and contemporary forms in the theatre. A conceptual change may encourage less secrecy, fewer mysteries and taboos, closer participation for women, and a continuing reduction of the excesses at some displays.

At present, the religious argument may be more imagined than real, and if it is subsumed to theatricality as the case appears to be, Igbo theatre cannot justify any excesses and the marginalisation of sections of a community.

Since participation is its soul, the continued marginalisation of women must be questioned. If masking was a gender symbol to mark out men from women (Onyeke, 1990), socio-political changes show that modern Igbo society and theatre must evolve new systems for dealing with old circumstances and new realities. Igbo masking and the position of women in it are cultural construct, and it is not out of place to expect a culture or tradition that continually renews and regenerates itself to evolve a system for the closer integration of women, like the men, into all aspects and secrets of masking. The physiology of women may not be suited to all forms of masking, but the argument that their sensitivity is not suited to the rigours and mystique of masking has neither been tested nor sustained. The argument is premised on the relationship between Igbo cosmology, theatre, and traditional religion. In fact, the weakened hold of traditional religion on Igbo masking means that such a fundamental change in the concept of masking will take the institution into uncharted regions and necessitate changes in the status of women in Igbo society. Like the idea of 'Church masking', this will lead to 'women masking', an idea that is latent in the theatre and remotely echoed in "maiden masks". At present, Igbo masking has many women figures in the form of "maiden masks". This special identification with particular masks can be broadened to experiment with the idea of women maskers playing these characters themselves.

This suggestion affects the whole concept of Igbo masking and the traditional *status quo,* but valuable lessons can be drawn from the eventual rapport between Christianity and the masking institution. The present position of most churches with regards to masking shows that if accepted, the anticipated opposition to the idea of 'women masking' will eventually give way to grudging acceptance. In fact, the idea will have the added advantage of hastening the secularisation of Igbo masking and eventually

enriching it. Igbo masking is a thriving traditional theatrical form, its dependence on a community of men and women, and its important position and functions in Igbo society underscore the suggestion to open it to all sections of the society. Such a move will not necessarily lead to the exposure of the institution and art. Gender does not influence the ability to keep secrets as the few women initiated into masking secrets have proved. In fact, even in their present level of participation, a majority of Igbo women have shown their ability to keep secrets and maintain masking mysteries in their *acted* reverence and respect for performing masks. With women, the mystique and sacrality of masking and masks will remain, for in Mokonde in Sierra Leone, the sacred mask of the Mende women's Sande masquerade society is worn and performed by women who have maintained all its secrets and sacrality (Harding, 1996).

The arguments on theatrical practice re-surface in other guises and the frequency of their re-appearance suggests that the theatre needs to discard the practices responsible for these conflicts. This will sharpen its artistic elements and anchor the theatre in modern Igbo society. This is what Onyeke (1990) meant when he suggested that:

> There will be need first to ensure through an effective control of the system of the elders of the community that what is displayed is tradition and not the excesses of youth who would like to turn violence and physical assaults into sport. There will also be need to respect the human and civic rights of citizens especially as regards freedom of innocent movement in the village and the right to practise one's religion in a society that has a plural system of worship. Any meaningful future for the masquerade must blend together the past with the present, the respected age old tradition with social developments of modern life (139).

These processes can be hastened through formal education by incorporating studies in Igbo masking into the syllabus for theatre and performance studies. This study has among other recommendations, proposed the incorporation of specific themes and increasing injection of contemporary

issues, the continued regeneration of the theatre, and qualified support for sections of Echeruo's (1981) argument for secularisation. If these proposals, in addition to Nwamuo's (1990) blue-print for modern Nigerian theatre, Onyeke's (1990) suggestions for the blending of old tradition and 'social developments of modern life' (139), and the separation of theatre from excesses take hold as they presently appear to be doing, Igbo theatre will largely retain most of its present elements and its future developments would be with Igbo tradition. The Igbo fascination with masking, the abundant celebratory impetus and collective participation foreclose the possibility of the theatre becoming primarily concerned with the past. The theatre should re-enact Igbo past for that is its root, but it should not lose itself in its concern for the past, thereby, reneging on its responsibility to the present and future. What the theatre needs is to complement the re-enactments of primordial man-spirit encounters with specific contemporary themes that reflect present Igbo society. The use of contemporary designs does not compensate for specific themes. To this end, future directions in Igbo theatre should aim at ushering in some changes in staging techniques, a move towards more explanatory acting styles, skits and stage business.

With the emergence of audience/spectators, performing groups will either concede to the need for displays that reflect more individualised circumstances or confront dwindling participation. This will lead to more simplified theatrical symbols, more expressive stage business and increased acting. These do not necessarily require more verbal dialogue for a community of performers and participants already familiar with the theatre's symbolic communication. Masks will remain the focus of the theatre. Dance, music, and acrobatic displays will remain prominent features and for these reasons, elaborate plot-developing dialogue will

continue to be relegated as a theatrical element. In its place will be the present interfacing of stage business and symbolic, suggestive ideas delivered in music, dance and acting. This will be complemented with designs that require more of the co-ordinated movement of performers than words to articulate. This view is informed by the present high level of designs and the fact that most Igbo masks are not created for speaking roles. Presently, they are mostly conceived as non-human beings and even when they begin to represent specific human beings, common ideas and states, the need to preserve their mystery and reverence would obviate the need for sustained speeches from them. The little there is of dialogue will remain at its present level among non-masked performers and it will continue to take the forms of music, dance, chants and other forms of stylised communication.

So far, dialogue exists in the theatre either as physical action (dance and music) or in the isolated verbal exchanges and explanations during some performances. While the former is the favoured mode, the few performances that blend physical activity and dialogue have proved successful. Ulaga, Ojionu, and Okumkpo excel in this. Praise and chanted poetry, sketchy public dialogues between masks and their attendants, and between the latter and participants will always be present and the scope of these exchanges should in future be further exploited to unearth the theatre's richness presently hidden in images and symbols.

Igbo theatre can sustain changes because of its rich artistic and cultural vein and an expansive aesthetic background from which it draws its many components and activities. The range of issues and events in Igbo society and the peculiarity of the various occasions for celebration are enough considerations around which theatre can be created and sustained. What these situations portend are the injection of more vibrant artistic

dimensions into the theatre and the emergence of more and different displays alongside the existing corpus of performances. The lesson from this is that, the fears in certain quarters about the continued existence of the theatre are largely exaggerated and unfounded. The participatory and celebratory motifs in Igbo life and arts dispel fears about its disappearance. If anything, it will continue to respond to prevailing circumstances and this will lead to its total transformation and secularisation through the involvements of Church and society.

The concern for the theatre's survival has largely been because of the decline in communal participation and reverence for masks and perhaps, the absence of professionalism in the arts in Igboland. While the first factor is a necessary step in the move from communal religion to community theatre, the second is a matter of societal development. The apathy towards professionalism in the arts has been observed to some extent among other Nigerian groups and has militated against the development of professional practice in the literary theatre in Nigeria. Nwamuo (1986) laments that the Nigerian society is insufficiently aware of the place of theatre in general Nigerian education and that, the 'graduates of theatre and dramatic arts departments of our universities find it difficult to practice theatre as a profession' (46). It is time for educational authorities in Igboland to integrate studies in masking in school curricula. The foundation already exists in traditional dances and music. The next step is to teach the history and development of this theatre as part of Igbo history and to incorporate its practice and staging as part of theatre and performance studies.

This recommendation aims to enshrine Igbo theatrical practice in the impressionable psyche of youths and accord it a place of pride in their consciousness, place it on equal footing with other theatres, and remove every stigma that colonialism foisted on it. This is a slow process, but it will

enable the theatre and society to grow simultaneously. The borrowing of traditional theatrical skills and components, and their successful impartation to students of theatre arts in Nigerian universities show the possibilities in this suggestion.

The suggested approaches may tempt practitioners with commercialism and professionalism but this must be resisted since both come at a price. Both ultimately change the face and purpose of a theatre and distance it from its community. In fact, the nature of leisure and theatre in Igboland and the attitudes to professionalism in the arts do not particularly support such aspirations. Nwamuo (1990) points out some of the problems in the development of professional status in traditional Nigerian theatres:

> The period between independence and the end of the civil war marked the beginning of professional theatre in Nigeria especially in the Western part of the country.... The existence of these groups was in itself a great development but one that tended to detract from the purpose of the traditional theatre [which] was beginning to lose its face....
>
> Theatre was taken to buildings in the cities...the mode and language of presentation tended to obfuscate a few of the community people who tried to attend the city performances, to the extent that they wondered what was going on and what the whole thing was about (63).

Literary drama was a great development, different in purpose and practice from traditional theatre. Since it cannot take the place of community performances, the likelihood is for the two to co-exist. This will be a good development but despite the introduction of specific contemporary themes and the literary status that should accord it respect from urbanised Igbos, literary drama still faces problems as a result of the Igbo attitude to leisure and art. Because leisure is 'non-work and non-professional', and art is shared communal experience, the commercialisation of any art still considered a leisure activity is difficult to sustain in Igbo society. The strongest possibility in the near future is the kind of semi-professionalism now present in some places in dance and music. This process may lead to

full professionalism in the distant future and though the incorporation of specific and contemporary themes will definitely hasten it, professionalism will come with more social changes. In fact, since professionalism is synonymous with commercialisation, the introduction of the box office will reduce communal participation. This will not only amount to taking the theatre away from the community, it will be a negative step when societies that previously walked that path are retracing their steps and returning theatre to the community. Professionalism helps propagate a theatre but in Igbo society, it should complement theatrical development and not necessarily be a goal.

These trends and suggestions indicate that more and more people will participate in masking for art's sake, instead of engaging in it as part of religious expression or experience. This will be irrespective of its occasion and functions. In fact, while the future of the theatre lies in the pace and scope of inculturation within Igbo churches, the tendency is that a majority of the population working both within and outside the auspices of their churches are likely to have their way in the theatre. These will take the mask theatre, render it more secular until like its counterparts in Europe, it loses its religious roots and face.

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GLOSSARY OF IGBO WORDS AND TERMS.

Abatete: a town in Igboland; a name used here to describe one of two costuming styles in a mask performance in Ozubulu.

Abosi: green leaf plant used in Igbo rituals and medicine and often found in shrines and hedges, and as grave markers in some areas.

Afo : one of four Igbo week-days and one of four market days, mythical hero in some areas.

Agaba: a famous, aggressive and youthful mask-type denoting youth, vigour and masculinity. It also denotes a fearsome phenomenon.

Agbala: a famous oracular deity in Awka.

Agbisi: general name for ants in Igboland.

Ahajioku: the yam god venerated all over Igboland and worshipped by some as a personal or community deity.

Ajaba: ritually secluded traditional costuming enclosure in Afikpo masking. Its taboos forbid the use of dressing mirrors and touching its walls. In addition, maskers and their helpers are forbidden from eating or drinking within its walls.

Akatakpo : a local name for the director of theatrical performances in Mmonwu in Ozubulu.

Akparakpa: the dancing chorus of boys and young men in Okumkpo in Afikpo whose distinctive performance is to imitate women's behavioiur.

Ala / Ani: the earth, the Earth goddess, the female spiritual essence responsible for fertility and good crops. The goddess is generally venerated and worshipped as a high deity in some places.

Amadioha / Amadiora: the Igbo god of thunder and lightening.

Anyanwu: the sun god.

Ayaka: night masks and one of the most ancient of Igbo masks.

chi: the personal principle responsible for individual character and fate in Igbo religion and cosmology. This is sometimes misrepresented as *Chi*.

Chi: Fate, the creative essence, also regarded as the manifestation of the supreme deity.

Chineke: supreme deity in Igbo religion, the creator god.

Chukwu: the big deity, another descriptive term for Igbo supreme deity.

Dashiki: jumper, the upper part of the traditional Hausa dress.

Edo: yellow camwood powder used in religious rituals and medicine.

Egbele: the masking spirit in Afikpo, invited into maskers through initiations and pre-performance rites.

Egwurugwu: rainbow in Igbo language, name of a very famous, secret, highly exclusive mask performance in Asaba and the name of a beautifully designed mask in Ozubulu. The latter is named because of its lavish and colourful costumes that reflect and symbolise the colours of the rainbow.

Eke: name of Igbo market and one of four Igbo traditional days. Depending on the tone, it could stand for destiny, python and a proper name.

Ekeleke: stilt masquerade.

Ekpe: masking tradition and community festival in parts of Southern and Central Igboland. Applies also to a secret society in Arochukwu and among the Ibibio and Efik of the Cross River valley.

Ekpo: secret, terrifying society and mask in Arochukwu, Efik and Ibibioland. Its spin-off and more general but less aggressive form, *ekpo riorio,* is common among young boys in Igboland.

Ekwe: town in Igboland and depending on tone, it also stands for wooden cylindrical instruments famous for their hollow resonance. Smaller forms of the instrument, *okwa aka* (wooden handpiece) and *okwa* (with penetrating sound) are also common in Igboland.

Ezechitoke: another name for the supreme deity.

Igba: skin drum, of which many varieties, different skin types and sizes exist.

Igba Otaekpe: an eve of processions before Ekpe festival and mask display.

Igwe: the sky, but more appropriately, the sky god.

Igwekala: famous oracular deity in Umunneoha in Central Igboland. Similar in attribute to *Ibin Ukpabi,* the long juju in Arochukwu and *Agbala* in Awka. It means 'the sky that is mightier than the earth'.

Ikoro: a costume drama in Ngwa area, also a large wooden instrument synonymous with the performance. In most places, the distinctive instrumentation is used to announce unusual events or the death of heroes and nobles. In some places, it represents a wrestling square or important venue in communities that use the terminology.

Isubu Eda: initiation into male adult secret societies in Afikpo and Abakaliki. It is only through successful initiations that performers can invite *Egbele* in the *rie mma* ritual to help them in performances. The Abakaliki rite grants initiates liberties like answering the call of nature and temporarily unmasking for a drink of water. Ordinarily, these acts are not permitted in Afikpo masking.

Kano : a big commercial city in Northern Nigeria.

Kano cap: a stylish and intricately designed handwoven colourful skull cap peculiar with the weaving and artistic traditions of Kano.

Mba: one of two costuming style in Okumkpo in Afikpo.

Meruo Onwegi: a self-cleansing and post-performance ritual to re-integrate performers and mask costumers into the community after masking displays in Afikpo. It involves touching an *abosi* tree, spitting outside the *ajaba* to divest oneself of *Egbele* , some incantations, and eating.

Mma: a form of the Igbo idea of masking often used in Enugu-Udi-Nsukka and Abakaliki-Afikpo-Abbaomege areas of Northern Igboland.

Mmo: the masking idea in Igboland, sometimes synonymous with particular masks in some areas and often used in Owerri-Orlu-Okigwe areas of Imo State in Central Igboland. Different dialects of the Igbo language have spawned different terms for the Igbo concept of masking.

Mmuo: a variation of *Mmo* but with the connotation of a spirit form.

Mmonwu: the Igbo masking idea often used in mainly parts of Central and Central-Western Igboland.

Mmanwu: similar to the masking terms above and often used mainly in Enugu State in Northern Igboland.

Nkot Abasi: the supreme deity among the Efik.

Nkwo: one of four traditional Igbo days and market.

Nnade Okumkpo: the leader and director of Okumkpo performances.

Nwea ere: small breast-dress worn by chorus boys in Okumkpo.

Nzu: white chalk used in a variety of medicines, ritualised greetings and also worn as make-up in masking and traditional religious services.

Odo: secret society and masks in Nsukka area. They are regarded as the

returning dead and ancestors, they sojourn in the community for nine months and are the chief maskers in the annual festival of the same name.

Odu: traditional horn fashioned from animal horns.

Ofo / Ufo: Igbo traditional symbol of hereditary, genealogical, religious and divine authority.

Ogbanje: a changling, ' born to die', a spirit child believed to be in a recurrent cycle of reincarnation and death. A source of anguish to families.

Ogele / Ogene: metal gong. These come in different sizes and tones.

Ogo: a traditional multi-purpose square in Afikpo villages.

Ogo Ikoro: a communal multi-purpose square for all the constituent villages of a village group or town in Afikpo. Usually bigger than the village *Ogo.*

Ojionu: loud-mouthed satirical mask known for its peculiar instrumentation, hair-raising tales and dancing dexterity.

Oju: metal rattling staff usually struck into the ground to produce a distinctive metalic clanging sound.

Okonko: secret society in many parts of Igboland and public masking by the very secretive Ekpe society in Arochukwu.

Okpara: first male child, family and lineage head in Igbo society.

Okuku: symbol of spiritual authority and masking proficiency in Mmonwu performances in Ozubulu and areas with similar display.

Okumkpo: one of many mask displays in Afikpo with over a hundred masks in attendance, distinguished for its music and dance, satiric impulse, characterisation and costuming.

Okwa: hollow, wooden cylindrical musical instrument of varying sizes and and tones.

Olodumare: supreme deity of the Yoruba.

Omabe: a triennial masquerade festival observed in memory of village ancestors. The huge and heavy Omabe masks are regarded as the spirits of dead ancestors.

Omenimo: a festival featuring all aspects of Igbo life, education and traditional technology, masking and art in Imo State in Central Igboland.

Omu: young, yellow palm fronds used in rituals and sacrifices, believed to possess the powers to stop the ascent and movement of masks and spiritual forces.

Ori: chorus of mature males and main actors in Okumkpo.

Orie / Oye: name of one of four Igbo week days and markets.

Oriri Mma: the ritual act of ingesting the masking spirit into maskers in Afikpo.

Ose Oji: alligator pepper.

Osha: musical instrument, shakers made from beads and calabash, or small sealed wicker basket.

Oshimiri / Osimiri: the sea deity, also name for seas and oceans.

Owu: masking performances in parts of Central Igboland and Rivers State. The two types of performance share the name only.

Rie mma: another name for *Oriri Mma.*

Sokoto: a town in Northern Nigeria, seat of the Sokoto Caliphate.

sokoto: pronounced differently from the above, local baggy trousers and part of the traditional Hausa garments of *daskiki and sokoto.*

Udide: spider, believed to be a mystical figure in masking lore in some places.

Ulaga: mask-type famous for its satirical songs and distinctive tone believed to replicate the supposed raspy voice of spirit beings.

Ulogo: men's secret society rest-house in Afikpo.

Ulo nta: literally means small house, an exclusive dwelling place for family deities and ancestral spirits in Arochukwu. Only free born males whose spouses come from Arochukwu can enter the house and bring petitions to its guardian.

Uhie / Ushie: indigo ink used in body and house decorations.

Una / Ona: three-leaf yam.

Upu: a local sauce in Ogwa, prepared from palm oil, oil bean, pepper and other spices.

Uri / Uli: dye made from plant derivatives.