

## **BEHIND THE MASK: THE PHILOSOPHICAL DYNAMICS AND SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF MASQUERADES AMONG THE OGONI AND THE GLOBAL FUTURE**

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### **Abstract**

*The Ogoni society is a unity of both the visible and the invisible worlds. In this scheme, human and all concrete objects they create or live with are inextricably linked to a spirit world. Masquerades, in their semi-divine state serve as a conduit between the spirit world and the realm of the living, providing a means for ancestral spirits and supernatural deities to communicate and bestow blessings and protection upon their descendants. However, the Ogoni social milieu in its original traditional settings is no longer as vivid and valid as it ought to be. Consequently, masquerades in the Ogoni communities could be said to have lost its ancestral flavours and heritage of the spirits. The reason for the current neglect attitude shown towards the patronage of the indigenous cultures cannot be separated from globalization and advances in technology, as well as the fact that some of these masquerades are under threat of extinction as much effort has not been done towards its documentation. This study focused on the philosophy behind the mask, and the symbolic significance of masquerades among the Ogoni and the global future. The paper adopted the descriptive method. The paper argued that while these masquerades are designed to entertain, they perform more utilitarian functions than mere spectacle. The study concluded that while not adopting the negative and harmful practices of masquerades in Ogoni, the good part must be preserved and mingles with modern concept, thereby maintaining the people's distinctiveness.*

**Keywords:** Alu (Maquerade), Global Future, Masking Traditions, Ogoni, Ziibalozzii.

### **Introduction**

The Ogoni Masquerade art which embodies the essence of ancestral wisdom, communal bonds, and spiritual reverence, is seen as an eloquent expression of the people's philosophy and worldview. It is a phenomenon that is borne out of the Ogoni

belief in the continued presence of the ancestors in the affairs of the living as well as the co-existence of the three worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn. Thus, serving as a conduit between the realm of the living and the realm of the spirits, offering a mechanism by which the spirits of ancestors and supernatural deities may interact with one another and bestow blessings onto their descendants. Steeped in the rich history and cultural significance, the Ogoni masquerades as testament to the diverse and colorful tapestry of the African heritage. It is possible to trace the origins of the Ogoni masquerade all the way back to ancient times, when it was an essential component of religious rituals and other community events.

In contrast to the prejudiced stereotypes that were prevalent among scholars during the nineteenth century, which portrayed African masquerades, symbols, rituals, and beliefs, as well as those of other traditional peoples, as being the result of ignorance, superstitions, illogical, inchoate, and rudimentary mentality (Levy-Bruhl, 1923), and as meaningless imitative actions. Recent studies have revealed that such masquerades with their symbolic rituals as well as the belief which underpin them are astutely sensible and logical. Scholars and researchers into the African masquerade art have variously described it as a manifestation or concretization of the spirits of particular dead ancestors (Kanu, 2016; Obodoegbulam & Kasi, 2022). It is a physical and abstract creation of man in order to comprehend his world better as he approximates the spirit of dead ancestors and gods; a visitation of the spirits of the dead to their late familiar haunts (Nwankwo, 2017). Masquerades are ancestral spirits personified by maskers who appear in public at seasoned periods; they are manifestations from the spirit realm of the ancestors and other disembodied beings seeking communication with mortals. It follows therefore that the Ogoni masquerade art is the people's mode of concretizing the abstract concept of some ancestral spirit beings and gods which activities have some direct relationship with the living. Consequently, these spirit concepts are closely related to the environment of their creation.

However, the Ogoni social milieu in its traditional settings is not as vibrant and authoritative as it should be. This is a significant change from the past. Consequently, it is possible to assert that the Ogoni masquerades have lost their traditional flavors and the inheritance of the spirits that they formerly had. The current attitude of neglect that is shown toward the patronage of indigenous cultures cannot be separated from globalization and advances in technology. Additionally, the fact that some of these masquerades are under the threat of extinction due to the fact that not enough effort has been put into documenting them is another factor that contributes to this attitude. This study focused on the philosophy behind the mask, and the symbolic significance of masquerades among the Ogoni and the global future. The paper adopted the descriptive method. The paper argued that while these masquerades are designed to entertain, they perform more utilitarian functions than mere spectacle. The study concluded that while

not adopting the negative and harmful practices of masquerades in Ogoni, the good part must be preserved and mingles with modern concept, thereby maintaining the people's distinctiveness.

### **Masquerade in Ogoni Ontology**

The origins and migration of the Ogoni indigenous people is a source of significant debate among scholars. While many linked the origin of the Ogoni to the Ghana/Namma Theory, some simply see them as a westward expansion of Benue-Congo speakers, others believed the Aboriginal Theory. The above speculations among scholars are attributed to the near absence of written sources that serve as the foundation for conventional history and the near absence of reliable oral traditions that could shed light on the origins and migration of the Ogoni (Deezia, 2024). Consequently, each author's perspective on the source of migration for the Ogoni stock would be different because there has not been a thorough archaeological examination that would pinpoint a particular source of migration for the Ogoni. However, the Ogoni indigenous people, who currently occupy the Eastern part of Niger Delta Nigeria, are said to have settled in the six kingdoms of Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana. Nyor-Khana, Tai and Oyiigbo including Ban-goi special unit. In Ogoni cosmology, community life embraces the living and the dead, thus the emphasis on the continuity of family-lineage through the *Biakē* custom.

According to Horton (1973), a masquerade is a mechanism that is used by a person or group to hide, conceal, and disguise themselves in order to exhibit a concept, an animal philosophy, or a spirit. Masquerade is an artistic construct that is worn by humans for the aim of entertaining an audience via dance, talking, or other diversions while acting under pretence. In terms of form and style, masquerade is an artistic creation. The term "masquerade" may have a variety of connotations depending on the individual, as stated by Onyeneke (1987). Many see it as a representative of ritual symbolism, some as a representative of empirical symbolism and to some others is an illusion. As a ritual symbolism, it is defined as an intermediary between the living and the dead. Libation becomes the channel of communication for the two worlds (of the dead and living), and the visitation of masquerades signify the rapport in the communication (Onyeneke (1987). Better still on ritualism, Turner (1967) defined it as a prescribed formal behaviour for non-technological occasion, indicating beliefs in mystical beings or power. As a representative of an empirical symbol, it is for tourist attraction. This group believes that masquerading is for show where masks, images, shapes, dance, chants and song are expressed to enhance tourism. As an illusion, it centres on make-up, i.e. costume, which stands for art. Masquerade's sensory display is on its bodily coverage. Some participants in Ogoniland covered their entire body with locally made fibre,

leaves, skin or metal while others half- covered their body, so that the hands and legs were exposed.

In Ogoni, masquerade embodies three areas such as ritualism, empirical symbolism and illusion. In the area of ritualism, it is believed that they are spirits emanating from the spiritual world periodically to cleanse the land against the impending doom awaiting its inhabitants due to some evil committed in the area as often signalled by some negative omen. In its empirical symbolism it stands as avenue to showcase tourism. During the masquerading period people from far and near gather to watch the masquerade display at the village square. In spite of the fact that there is no payment or collection of a fee from the viewers, local delicacies and wine are supplied as part of the traditional generosity of the people, and those who are there are allowed to consume as much food and drink as they choose. After everything is said and done, it radiates the aura and awe that are often associated with otherworldly entities.

Masquerade which literally means *Alu* or *Elu* (spirit being) depending on the dialect of the Ogoni group adopted is an ageless practice among the Ogoni indigenous people of Eastern Niger Delta. Among other things, it enjoys durability and continuity over time, which is made possible by the handing down of the art, craft, magic, and culture of masquerade from one generation to the next via the generations of families and communities. Masquerade as a traditional cultural heritage is enclosed in a Mask. A mask is a disguising dress, which hides the personal identity of the one who wears it.

A masquerade is a public display and performance of a masked actor as he strives to present in his action the new identity that is created and expressed in the fashion of the mask that is adopted. In Ogoni, masquerade presents deep seated cultural ideas and forms of Ogoni social organization. These are firstly, the Ogoni view of world order and philosophy, its cosmology; secondly, the structure of social organization and control. This cosmology includes the overriding authority of spirits and the will of dead ancestors on the present living generation. The veneration attached to the masquerade institution is built on these, and its desecration is seen as the violation of cultural values.

According to Nwideede (2022, oral interview), nobody knows for definite when the practice of masquerade began in Ogoniland. Thus, it is as old as the community where it is practiced. Hence, most of the communities contend that they were born into a social system where the mask institution was already in existence. What they needed was to learn the customs and practices attached to it and then to try to pass the same on to the generation following them without must change. However, systematic studies of the masquerade in Ogoniland give opposed opinions in the origin of masquerade institution. One opinion is that, it is something imported into Ogoniland especially

from the ethnic groups who form the immediate Ogoni neighbours (Donatus Bekanwah 2023, oral interview). However, those who are opposed to this opinion see the institution as a genuine cultural development of the Land (Nwideede 2022, oral interview). It is pertinent to note here that in Ogoni tradition today, there is no universal period of masquerading; any community determines the period and modus operandi of their masquerades.

Their performances provide a multi-faceted, dramatic, and tactile experience altogether. They each have music, choreographies, costumes, and drama that are all very different from one another. Moreover, apart from the above period of masquerading in Ogoni tradition, masquerades are also allowed to parade during festivals. Festivals have to do with essential celebrations in a particular community. The Ogoni people have festivals such as the new yam festival, different coronations, and other socio-cultural events etc. This implies that the role of mask and masquerading in traditional Ogoni setting cannot be overemphasised. This can be seen in the coronations of kings and chiefs, age - grades, priest of deities, marriage, and burials ceremonies among others. In other words, Masquerades play important role in the issue of governance, social control and maintenance of peace and order. The people believe so much in them in accomplishing all the above-mentioned roles and even more, because they were seen as spirits in the physical realm. Nwideede (2022, oral interview) opines, “masked figures provide a mechanism through which the probability of sustained divisive conflict is decreased by converting secular actions of rule application into sacred, supra social actions”.

The membership is only open to male individuals, and there is a ceremony that takes place after the ceremony. It is in the initiation ceremony that the secrets are disclosed to the new member. It is also important to note that the initiation ceremony is not a funny experience for the person who receives it. This is because his masculinity is tested during an initiation ceremony. Also, the displays of masquerades are welcomed with pomp and pageantry in Ogoni society. Different communities in Ogoni have so many different masquerades they display. However, most often, what seems to be universal among the masquerades is that they are always on a mask; this is to make the identity of the person obscure. The concept that masquerades posit in Ogoni tradition is that they are representations of the living dead in Ogoni tradition; therefore, some of them dress dreadfully to show the terrifying nature of the spirits they represent. In Ogoni cosmology, women and children are meant to understand that masquerades are not human beings but spirits that came from the spirit world. It can be argued that ancient Ogoni people instilled fear in the concept of masquerades, but it all enhanced the reverence that masquerades enjoy.

Again, despite the fact that the Ogoni tradition has an inconceivable number of masquerades, there are two distinct sorts of masquerades. The first is called the visible masquerades. These are the ones that operate during the day time. To begin, there are what are known as the visible masquerades. These are the ones that start and end their operations throughout the day. For the most part, they are for entertainment purposes, and they participate in activities such as dancing, singing, pestering, parodying, and so on. Among them, one finds very beautiful masquerades and even ones that utter wise sayings. The second type of masquerades is the invisible one. This one operates only at night. In addition to producing a terrifying sound, it restricts the residents of the community's ability to move about throughout the night, which instills terror in them. It is the disguise that is utilized in the execution of criminals, and is always fiercely dressed.

It is the uniqueness of the designs that distinguish Ogoni masquerades' masks, headdresses, costumes, and even attributes is what allows them to be recognized and identified. In other words, despite the fact that they are often referred to as *Alu*, each particular masquerade is distinguished by the uniqueness of the mask or headpiece that it wears. In spite of this, further particular identifications may be established within the basic categorization of these classes of masquerades by referring to the distinctiveness of the masks or headdresses that are worn by each of these classes. Within the Ogoni culture, masks are only worn by those persons who have been deemed to be deserving of the privilege of donning them. Depending on the culture and the kind of mask being worn, this varies from community to community; but, in general, only males wear masks (with a few notable exceptions), even masks that portray feminine creatures. People who have an equivalent social status, such as a king or a chief, are the only ones who are allowed to wear masks that reflect monarchy.

### **Some Common Types of Masquerades in Ogoni**

***Ikpong-Kpean Masquerade:*** The history of *Ikpong* masquerade of Kpean community in Ken-Khana Ogoni, popularly known as *Ikpong-Kpean* is shrouded in mystery. According to oral tradition, *Ikpong-Kpean* is believed to have originated from Ibibio, Akwa Ibom state. When *Ikpong* got to Kpean, because territorial defense was emphasized in the pre-colonial era, the people decided to perform *Ikpong-Kpean* on the festival of Yor-Goroo deity, who was and still in charge of Kpean territorial security. *Ikpong-Kpean* has always been associated with Kpean traditional religion and culture. As a result, the date on when it was formed is uncertain. *Ikpong-Kpean* is now considered an ancient traditional practice in the Kpean community, as well as the most dreaded machete-play in Ogoniland. Every October, in honor of Yor-Goroo deity, this masquerade is performed.

In an interview with Hon. Dr. Sunny Bekanwah (2023) during the day one (1) of the *Ikpong-Kpean* Festival, the Honorable described *Ikpong-Kpean* as an ancient cultural practice in Kpean community, and the most dreaded machete play in Ogoniland. This masquerade is displayed every October in honor of Yor-Goroo deity. To him, *Ikpong-Kpean* is a masquerade festival that attracts people from all works of life and from different villages in Ogoni, as such, bringing about unity and peaceful co-existence within Kpean communities, and other neighboring villages.

The significance of *Ikpong-Kpean* lies in the fact that it performs the function of a diviner, therefore divulging secrets and, on occasion, providing solutions to spiritual issues that prevailed within the society. According to Chief Donatus Bekanwah (2023, oral interview), during the festival, particularly on the day two (2) of the display, the *Ikpong-Kpean* masquerade makes a visit to each home in the Kpean community. The purpose of this visit is not only to reignite people's trust in the Yor-Goroo deity, but also to bless members of the family. Ikpong's refusal to visit any ancient compound/family in Kpean community is a hint that something is wrong in such family. *Ikpong-Kpean* also protects the community's spiritual well-being. It promotes peace and togetherness among the six compounds (Nyorkpo, Bara, main communities) that make up Kpean, as well as other neighboring villages. Despite the fact that Christianity and Western education have resulted in the declined and possible extinction of some traditions and cultural practices in Ogoni, the Kpean community in Ken Khana kingdom, has maintained its traditions and cultural heritage amidst modernization.

***Karikpo* Masquerade:** The *Karikpo* is purely an Ogoni masquerade act, reserved for young people who are nimble, vigorous, and courageous in spirit and who are prepared to defy gravity via aerial acrobatics. The heroic nature of the performance was conveyed by a demonstration of acrobatic skill or somersaulting exploits carried out by the actors. Although some of the masquerades are depictions of the ancestors, others are depictions of animals such as the antelope, buffalo, dog, monkey, and so on. Nwikina (2023, oral interview) added that *Karikpo* masks are carved caricatures of ancient creatures that are able to move quickly and are nimble, such as gazelles, antelopes, goats, and sheep. All of the masks are equipped with horns that are precisely the same length as the arms of a grown man extended outward. These horns must not come into contact with the ground as they ascend into the heavens.

Typically, the masquerade acts as both a group that provides entertainment and an agency that is responsible for instilling beliefs and attitudes in the wider population. Having a string of jingling bells wrapped around the top borders of the raffia costume, as well as white camwood dabbing ornaments on the exposed areas of the Masquerade body, the *Karikpo* is prepared to enter the town square. The costumes are constructed of dried raffia palm and are dispersed about the waist of every jumper.

Although there are less initiation rites in *Karikpo*, once one come of age, and had acquired some individual somersaulting skill, such person is ripe for *Karikpo*. However, it is not everyone that is able to somersault, that qualifies to wear the *Karikpo* mask for town square performance. In order to happily dance in the air, you must be an Ogoni by birth. Sequel to the above, *Karikpo* dance has scanty choreography in terms of the dancing style; yet, the consistent beat of the giant drum, and other supportive drums creates an electrifying atmosphere that compels everyone to come out and participate in the *Karikpo* dance. Its inbuilt magical power for audience involvement is communal.

Each and every somersault has to be performed at such a great height that the audience will see your agility in the air, as you disobey gravity. It is not recommended that anyone who are not from Ogoni and who have not participated in *Karikpo* somersault classes under the guidance of practitioners try to do *Karikpo* acrobatics. This is because of the possibility that one may get a neck injury in the process of somersaulting. The *Karikpo* masquerade dance is a unique dance that no other ethnic groups in the Niger Delta has been able to replicate. Do you want to understand, how a Masquerade, with two long horns, is able to summersault, while ascending into the sky, without clearance from the control tower? The *Karikpo* acrobatics is a traditional homemade spiritual hot air balloon exclusive to the Ogoni people.

**The *Kanutete* Masquerade:** This is an Ogoni indigenous comic traditional play. Its literary significance is conveyed via the masks, which have been painstakingly carved into a variety of unattractive forms to reflect a wide range of unfavorable features of human nature. Their songs, which are mostly composed of proverbs and metaphors, are designed to entertain the audience, lampoon disputants and infamous personalities or unpopular causes, and especially those whose behavior is culturally inappropriate. This is done with the intention of stigmatizing and making them remorseful for the offense that they have committed. It is possible for a specific song's topic to be dominated by a person who is responsible for adultery or a notorious housewife, for example.

During events like funerals, festivals, feasts, and other festivities, the *Kanutete* masquerades are often performed to provide enjoyable entertainment for the audience. *Kanutete*, an indigenous play that started in Bodo, has spread across every village and is now ingrained in the cultural framework of the whole Gokana kingdom of Ogoni since it has spread throughout the entire kingdom.

**Waaroo Masquerade:** The sighting of *Waaroo* masquerade is indicative of an important season in Ogoni cosmology. In Luawii, the traditional headquarters of Babbe Kingdom, it is believed that the display of *Waaroo* masquerade during the new yam festival marks the presence of the ancestors, communing with the living members of their family and the community at large. *Waaroo* masquerade is celebrated annually; to usher in harvesting, eating, and gifts of New Yam, otherwise called *Deedua/Deezua* (New Yam festival). Ogoni oral tradition, preserved over generations says, before the new yam is harvested and eaten, *Waaroo* masquerades, made from 100% farmland grass, locally called *sengen*, must be tied in the forest, and dance round the community. It carries a long cane, for flogging only young unmarried girls, and maidens. No serious ritual is attached to this cultural practice. No initiation is also required. Any male child from Ogoni is eligible to *yiikue waaroo* (enter *waaroo* masquerade). Women participate actively in the festivities by singing and dancing, in the market square, and taunting the *waaroo* openly, but risk being flogged by these iconic grassy masquerades. Much fun and communal laughter is derived from running around, outsmarting, and making jest of these grassy creatures. The Ogoni people return home for the *Deedua/Deezua* (new Yam festival) every year. Communities have their local ways of fixing dates for this masquerade, as it is not uniformly scheduled.

**Agaba Masquerade:** The history of the *Agaba* masquerade could be traced to the violent contours of the Ogoni indigenous people and the Nigerian petro-state. However, the mask slipped from an ethnic designation to a generational one, as the *Agaba* masquerade was taken over by local young men. Over the course of the last several years, the *Agaba* groups have been linked to instances of political violence and drug use. Despite the fact that it distinguishes itself from violent gangs, *Agaba* provides us with an understanding of the youth culture, including the language, aesthetics, and idioms of solidarity that are shared by a variety of youth cults that have created intricate political connections between the streets of the city and the creeks of the Ogoni-Niger Delta area.

Today in Ogoni, *Agaba* has spread right across Ogoni communities to become a mask of, and for the youth. Its vernacular is Pidgin English – a kind of lingua franca. From an aesthetic standpoint, the mask is grafted onto the traditions and customs of the local community. On a physical level, the mask serves as a venue to exhibit one's ability, courage, and might. The music of the mask is the finest example of the open-ended, improvisational, and subversive features that it has. The metal gong, known as the *Gira*, and the wooden flute, known as the *Aja*, are historically connected with the music that is played during the *Agaba* masquerade. However, the song repertoire is reminiscent of the "king" of highlife, Cardinal Rex Lawson of Port Harcourt. Additionally, the songs draw from jail songs, Kegite - a society that promotes drinking

palm wine, varsity cults, inverted hymns, and the *jarassis* or slang of what is often referred to as "gyration music."

The songs are rich in irony that undermines a stereotypical image of these young men's societies as being sinister and violent groups. They reveal a surprising frankness about their precarious livelihoods and personal insecurities, despite the fact that the context in which the songs are performed is one that is vigorous, noisy, and empowered. When it comes to metaphorical use, the *Agaba* songs that use maritime and mafia imagery to convey the difficult lives of young men living in the area are the ones that are the most imaginative. When it comes to the topics that they sing about, they compare this to the world of gangster rappers. It is a world that is referred to be "worsky," which is slang for its warlike arbitrariness, and it is inhabited by "winchy" people, which is a combination of witches and evil people with the police being the most common example. The corruption of the police, which is shown by officers accepting bribes at the side of the road, is mocked in another chorus: *Every junction police e-dey* - The political order is never far from the surface and folk heroes including the murdered rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Through this masquerade play, young people are able to construct a male persona that is strong, tested, and both physically and spiritually "rugged" via the use of this mask. *Agaba* masquerade presents a powerful critique of the Nigerian social fabric. It is a space in which young males reveal the disparities and inequities of their position from the periphery, projecting advantage onto their own disadvantage.

### **Philosophical Dynamics and Symbolic Significance of Masquerades**

The Ogoni society is a unity of both the visible and the invisible worlds. In this scheme, human and all concrete objects they create or live with are inextricably linked to a spirit world. Thus, the *Ziibalogzii* philosophy- which literally translates to the state of being human in an interconnected web; seeing reality in terms of a universe of forces that interlinked together, and that are in constant interplay with one another (Deezia, 2023). Masquerades, in their semi-divine form therefore serve as the link between the world of the physically living and the world of the ancestors. Every Ogoni community understands and acknowledges this experience, which is the reason why tribal heroes and leaders are revered after they have passed away. The masquerades are a representation of these deified personages, who continue to have a significant impact on the lives of those who are still alive. Therefore, the only way for human society to have purpose and value is in connection to the world that is either unseen or transcendentally present. As a result, individuals are better able to organize their lives in the physical environment. To the Ogoni, the masquerade transforms into a potent physical depiction of the ancestors who are responsible for ensuring and legitimizing

the community's ethical code. According to this point of view, masquerade is a significant part of Ogoni cultural life that has not been completely eradicated by the impact of western culture. This is because of the powerful religious significance as well as the fact that the masquerades satisfy many social and aesthetic demands in the community.

In Ogoni, the Mask is also seen as an expression of thought. It gives idea about the great richness of the world history of the mask as well as about the strange under-estimation of the autonomous value of the mask. Masks stand as one of the higher performances of human thought. To be masked is an expression of the thought. This point of view challenges the current thought for which the mask disguises, falsifies and hides. In the great traditions of the mask, the mask has a great spiritual quality. It brings transparency to reality, and at the same time makes an opening, brings about transcendence towards the very other. Thus, a discussion about masks obviously has to consider the modalities of transformation, alteration and enchantment.

When it comes to comprehending masquerades, the concept that they are symbols is of utmost importance. They are depictions of the ancestors who have passed away and are no longer visible. The concept of symbols was first articulated by Fairchild (1965) as anything that represents something else. In particular, a representation that is more definite and explicit of an item or set of things that is more generic, diffuse, and ethereal. In agreement with Fairchild, Ejizu (1986; 2017) described a symbol as anything that is commonly recognized as typically typifying, symbolizing, or remembering something with a great significance. There is a similar connection that can be drawn between it and what it represents. Turner (1968) provided more explanation by stating that symbols might take the shape of things, actions, events, gestures, and unique units that are present in a ritual setting. Due to the fact that they are symbols that were created by a people, they are exactly what the people who hold them believe they are. Because of this, the nexus between symbols and cosmology is strengthened even more.

There is a significant amount of symbolism involved in Ogoni ceremonial and ritual traditions. There are use of symbols in language, and herbs and prescription. The foundation of human society and the social existence of individuals is the use of symbols. They are a way of saying or expressing abstract ideas, values or notions which would be difficult or even impossible to say or express directly. The meaning of symbols therefore transcends the physical intrinsic property of the object, and can only be understood in terms of the meaning which the people of that culture invest in them. In Ogoni masquerade, the visible stands for the invisible, the material for the immaterial, and the touchable for what cannot be held or seized by sensory organs. The Mask is therefore, a visible, tangible representation of some conception or of some

spiritual or intellectual reality. According to an Ogoni proverb, “You do not stand in one place to watch a masquerade.” This might be taken literally, but also contains a metaphor signalling the masquerade’ multiple dimensions; it comprises tangible and durable, intangible and ephemeral, as well as male and female components.

The songs and chants used during the masquerading performance are extremely communicative based on the contextualization of the songs and chants. The content of song and chant symbolically reminds or reflects the situation of things in the community, especially before, during and after the various seasons and festive periods in the community. Based on this, the audience understands the thematic potency of the various songs and chants sang at any given time.

### **Significance of Masquerades in Ogoniland**

In spite of the fact that masquerades serve a variety of purposes, they seem to be grouped into certain groups. There are masks that are linked with rites of passage, such as initiation celebrations for teenagers, other rituals related to age, and death. Masking in seasonal festivals and renewal rituals is associated with the earth’s fertility and the path of the sun as it appears to us from Earth. There are also psychological and emotional advantages that may be acquired from rituals that include the performance of masquerades. Initiation ceremonies and rites of passage are two examples of the ways in which members of a community might commemorate significant moments in their lives. Birth, puberty, and death are the three stations that make up this stages. Marriage sometimes coincides with puberty and even though it is important, some people do not get married while others do so more than once (Deezia & Obodoegbulam, 2016). Considering the profound psychological effect each stage has on a person it is important that adequate preparation is made to guide him/her through with minimal risk, pain or loss.

There was an important role that masquerades performed in the past in terms of upholding law and order, especially before to the coming of Christianity. It was ingrained in the minds of young people that masquerades should be revered. People had a responsibility to always speak the truth in order to escape the wrath of the Masquerade parties. In the framework of this discussion, masquerades were seen to be a means of preserving social order and preserving peace. In other words, Ogoni masquerades are mechanisms of social control and are powerful method for eliminating or controlling behavior that is deemed abnormal or inappropriate. Masquerade could detect any social ills in the society without information. They do not hesitate to notify the authorities quickly in the event that any stolen item is brought to their attention or is held at a location that they happen to visit by chance. Thieves, fornicators, lazy and bad individuals, and sorcerers, as well as men who are diabolical, girls and women who are wayward, murderers, and any act that is potential of ruining the reputation of their

communities, are all exposed and disciplined by Masquerade. Masquerade disciplines people through physical confrontation. They use proverbial words that are loaded with facts and meaning to psychologically chastise offenders. Masquerade publicly rebukes erring members of the society, calling out their names, warning and cursing them. Through this function, the societal values, mores and cultic resources are transmitted significantly.

Ogoni masquerades are able to fulfil duties that are comparable to those of missionaries, including those of priests, prophets, and kings. As priests they prescribe sacrifices to their followers in order to placate the spirit of their ancestors. As prophets they foretell the imminent disaster that will befall a community or a person, and they provide potential sacrifices as a solution to the approaching crisis, and as kings they sit in judgment. They are often connected to the rites and practices of many religious traditions. In many cultures, they function as a way of bridging the gap between the material and the spiritual realms. It is thought that the performers are possessed by ancestor spirits, gods, and other supernatural beings, and these are the entities that are invoked via their usage. On the other hand, the performers serve as mediators between the spiritual and physical realms, communicating messages and blessings to the community in which they are performing.

In Ogoniland masquerades could be consulted for oath taking. If the gravity of the offence committed is high and defies possible human solution, the accused may go beyond swearing in the shrine. The traditionalist proceeds to present the masquerades before the accused for oath taking. Through oath taking, the truth, integrity and reliability are better determined and morality is enforced. Since oath is taken for exoneration or punishment, it has the function of deterring liars or would-be offenders and thereby reducing crime rate in the community. The masquerade diagnosis illness and provides medicines for their cure; knows and can detect witches and ask them to publicly confess that they are witches.

### **Masquerade in the Global Future: Towards the Concluding Remarks**

The thrust of this paper is the attention it has drawn to the philosophy behind the mask, and the symbolic significance of masquerades among the Ogoni in the global future. In Ogoni culture, masquerade embodies the spirit and human world. Mask is fundamentally a spiritual and metaphysical value before it transformed into a socio-cultural value that helps the Ogoni people to create their sense of what constitutes order, law, authority and the proper way people should be governed. Masks are the representation of the Ogoni ancestral origin and authority that account for what constitutes human value, worth and meaning. The spiritual ancestors are the source of life, order and continuity in any African community.

However, the unprecedented exposure of traditional cultural systems to alien values, ideas and patterns particularly from the nineteenth century onwards has created an enormous upheaval and disruption in the different facets of life of the Ogoni indigenous people. The change is a radical one. And the stimulators include the multiple forces of colonialism, Christianity, Western education and culture, urbanization and scientific technology. Imageries drawn from many areas of awareness have been employed by various writers to depict the ensuing uneasy experience of traditional Africans. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and *No Longer at Ease* (1960), readily come to mind.

Specifically, in the context of traditional perception of the philosophy behind the mask, and the symbolic significance of masquerades in Ogoni, the tidal wave of change has actually engendered a significant revolution. There has been a systematic erosion and displacement of traditional value-scales and life orientation. New values and parameters of evolution have successfully been introduced in most part. This resultant consequence is the fact that the Ogoni social milieu in its original traditional settings is no longer as vivid and valid as it ought to be. This may be associated with the influx of cultures and social leanings which came into the Ogoni geographical area as a result of western acculturation and colonialism. It could be said that the belief in the effectiveness and sacredness of the masquerading cultural heritage has weighed down to compare its status in the period or era prior to the western infiltration of the traditions, customs and cultures of the Ogoni people. The majority of the masquerades seen along the streets of the Ogoni communities today are not traditionally linked to deities, neither are they a true invocation of the ancestral spirit to come and live awhile amongst the living.

What is seen in the Ogoni communities today in the name of masquerading are mostly youths who cloak themselves with rags, torn clothes and well-sewn pieces of clothing, with fixed palm fronts, colour variations, and a mask for a cover-up. The youths who impersonate the masquerades are even known amongst the people. As such, the masquerading in the Ogoni communities could be said to have lost its ancestral flavours and heritage of the spirits. These days, the practice of masquerade is not only utilized as a way of begging money and undoing their imagined opponents, but it is also employed as a tool of extortion, an embodiment of molestation, and discrimination, all of which are not worthy of being practiced. The recommendation made by the study was that, although it is important to avoid copying the bad and damaging behaviors of masquerades in Ogoni, it is also important to retain the positive aspects of these rituals and combine them with contemporary ideas in order to preserve the uniqueness of the people. The work finally disclosed that the Ogoni people have array of colourful traditional cultures and masquerades that distinguished them from other tribes, the

unique traditional masquerades if well packaged can increase foreign exchange and create employment opportunities to the people. In other words, Government should pay more attention to the Ogoni cultural heritage and masquerades for tourism development, not to solely depend on oil and gas as the only source of revenue and economic development.

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