

ASSESSING THE THEATRICALITY OF THE *OKPOKA*: A MASQUERADE PERFORMANCE GROUP OF OKIJA, SOUTHEAST NIGERIA.

JOSEPH EMEKA UKOHA

Dept. of Theatre Arts

Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike

P.M.B. 1010, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State.

Email: emeka.ukoha@funai.edu.ng/

emekaukoha1@gmail.com.

Abstract

The communality and didactic essence of theatre performance in Africa have metamorphosed into a liberal art form with far reaching influence on the people who, sometimes, serve as performers and audience. In this performance situation, spontaneity and familiarity are two major characteristic features of the Okpoka masquerade dance that is known to Okija people of Anambra State. This masquerade dance is used to exhibit masculinity of the men folk while entertaining members of the community. Engaging as this, the work dissects theatrical elements inherent in the performance which are; evolution of the performance, membership recruitment process, management of the troupe and its box office. Other compelling aspects of note are; performance venue, audience engineering and value(s) members are likely to derive from the masquerade cult. The paper adopts participatory enquiry method as research process, done in collaboration with and for the people, not just on the membership and their operations but also on managerial and theatrical elements of the masquerade troupe. This methodology no doubt, is built on the conceptual frame of Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theatre". It is a nexus that explores experimental and non-conventional theatrical engagement that possess attributes of theatre where ever the performance takes place. Consequently, the paper seeks to interrogate the peculiarities that distinguish the Okpoka masquerade dance from other conventional dance productions with its fixed elements. This work therefore, examines the use of Okpoka masquerade as a dance performance that embraces theatrical elements such as costume, venue and natural light to enhance believability and erratic audience participation. It can be established that the most Eurocentric technical elements that define theatre performance are not used; rather, finding has it that the dance possesses imprints of Afro centric theatre. The research will employ participatory method and content analysis in order to have an empirical outcome that is aimed at improving the outlook and intent of the group for optimal performance with the aim of evoking further research by scholars. Also, a number of oral questions were asked and responses provided by some members of the group under study. The work thus recommends that, the Okpoka Masquerade dance be given the needed visibility by integrating the masquerade into the socio-cultural organization of Okija community where issues such as security, economic, politics and cultural interest are discussed and plausible suggestions are advanced.

Keywords: Assessing, Theatricality, *Okpoka*, Masquerade, Performance

Introduction

The lives of Africans, especially Nigerians, are deliberately pervaded by a plethora of events that characterize the total essence of man's existence within and outside his immediate environment. From cradle to adulthood, one does not seem to have complete control over certain patterned occurrences that give actual meaning to living. In the heart of the attempt to enliven the lives of a people and proffer solutions to the often asked question about the infinite relationship between the living and their revered ancestors, communities, also known as cultural environments are replete with performances of various kinds; dance, music, masquerade, puppetry and other forms of organized and semi organized groups. Some are communally owned while a few have local owners whose capitalist intentions are sometimes thwarted by other competitors and freelance performance groups with little monetary appetite.

Based on this note of interest, the *Okpoka* masquerade, a dance performance group of Anambra State, is an aggressive entertainment dance troupe that is basically performed at burials and social events like title taking ceremony. It is important to state that the performance sometimes take place without prior invitation and this explains the suspense associated with it. The *okpoka*, often referred to, in local parlance as "*Egwu Okpoka*"

(*Okpoka* Dance). Characterized by the tendency of chasing onlookers with whips and threatening advances with intention to inflict pain on one hand and provide lively entertainment on the other with didactic content. In the performance under study, there is no stationary performance venue just as it obtains in conventional theatre production. Audience participation is total and complimentary. The restlessness of the masquerade influences the reaction from members of the audience and the singers as they oscillate from the disorder created by the masquerade's wild chase to a transient orderliness. The study is set to examine the historical background, managerial implications, ownership questions, audience engineering and other local contents requirements of the dance and masquerade group. As part of the research focus, the study analyses the issue of conflict resolution, leadership style recruitment of members and the economic values derived from the group.

It is of note that the *Okpoka* masquerade dance has over the years, provided its members and audience community with spontaneous entertainment and platform to socialize with one another. Despite the fact that members of the group are usually recruited informally among less educated members of the community, there is however, a big patronage of their activities even from the elite and educated members of the community who once participated actively before attaining their achieved status. The performance essence of this masquerade besides entertainment is that over the years, social order has been recorded through enforcement. It is in the light of these achievements that the paper seeks to interrogate further the content of the dance as well as suggesting possible solutions to the identified challenges. Before delving into the crux of the matter, it is pertinent to review the place (Okija) where the masquerade situates so as to have a balanced argument on the subject under review. In order to improve and better position the *Okpoka* masquerade performance for a more streamlined experience, this paper advocates a workable approach such as developing the performance of the *Okpoka* into organized dance group such as *Mgbakwu*, *Egedege* and other dance groups in the community. The dance group should be enhanced by making costume part of their paraphernalia, especially for players and singers. There is need to give the performance a global presence through video and online coverage. Also, it recommends that the performance should not be restricted to burials since the aim of the *Okpoka* is for didactic entertainment. It is imperative to state that the term "*Okpoka* masquerade dance" and "*Okpoka* dance group" are interchangeably used in this study to mean one and the same thing.

Concise Background of Okija

According to Martins Ogbeide and oral literature, Okija is the biggest among the ten (10) towns that constitute Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria and one of the largest towns in the state in terms of land mass and population. The town is the oldest of all the towns in Ihiala Local Government Area. It is actually the eldest because the responsibility of breaking kolanut among people from the LGA, in accordance with Igbo tradition, lies on the shoulders of people from Okija. The people of Okija are predominantly Christians but with a good number of African religion worshippers. Okija is the home to Madonna University, Legacy University and a good number of other private owned manufacturing industries. It is bordered to the east by Ihembosi and Ukpok, to the west by Olu, within the north by Ozubulu and within the south by Ihiala. The town is made up of thirty villages, often referred to as "*Okija ohu ebem na iri*" (Okija with thirty villages) by the locals. With a popular insignia of an elephant, the town prides itself to be as huge as the elephant and that, probably, explains the appellation, Okija *Enyi* (Elephant Okija). Legendary tale has it that Okija and Ogidi, a town in Idimmili North LGA, share common ancestral link; the reason for the saying, "Okija *achala* Ogidi". The *Okpoka* masquerade dance is peculiar to the people of Okija due to mythic ascription of the people to historical record of war and conquest in time past. This experience is made manifest in the performance disposition of the masquerade and the erratic response of the audience.

Masquerade as a Cultural Signification

A very potent and vibrant aspect of cultural performances in Africa, especially among natives of Nigeria is the masquerade performance. Different natives engage in masquerade show, either as a reenactment of the bond between the living and the dead, usually referred to as ancestors or as a means of maintaining social order through entertainment. Masquerade in all its functionalities over the years has played a transcendental role that connects the dead and past to the living and the present. It is in that wise that masquerade is seen as visitor to earth and a link between the living and the forebears. Ted Anyebe reveals that, "masquerade performance tradition archive both tangible and intangible cultures"(1). To perform its functions among the living, it

disguises in costume and mask. Similarly, Alex Asigbo says that, "masquerades, derived from mask presupposes that somebody's identity is concealed with costumes and sometimes, makeup"(1).

Although some of the masks worn by masquerade characters epitomize female appearance with other feminine accessories, the masquerade darts about with virility only synonymous with male humans. However, the gender of the masquerade, sometimes, defies gender status. In the works of John Picton, "The nature of the mask, the masker, or the masquerade is not as straightforward as one might first assume. Certainly not within the African context" (181). The complexity of roles and ascription to supernatural beings further accentuates the deified nature attributed to masquerade performance. Ted also maintains that, "Masquerade performances demonstrate at various levels the peoples' philosophy of life which tend to illustrate the relationship between mystical and the mundane aspects of life as one of the ways in which nature is preserved"(2). It is a vital part of the culture of Africans. Writing about *Okunkpo* masquerade of Afikpo, Richard Oko Aka explains that, "the masked major performer/character plays a role of a social commentator, critic and activist, thereby becoming a sacred actor who promotes moral growth and justice in Afikpo social space"(1). Most masquerade cult or group is the exclusive reserve of the men folk. Elochukwu Nwankwo gives an insight that, "the masquerade is a traditional mask festival and celebration for native Africans and an integral part of African culture and traditions"(23). As a result, elements of its theatricality emanate, firstly, as cultural and social before ascription to theatrical heights. This suggests the inherent abundance of actions arising from human interactions in African societies that lend themselves to organized status, characterized by time and space. Conte-Morgan and Olaniyan aver that, "Africa cultures do bear out what Western anthropologists and sociologists, and artists such as Brecht have advanced about theatricality and performance"(25).

The Plot Structure of Egwu Okpoka Masquerade

The origin of the *Okpoka* dates back to the period before slavery. Although there is no historical literature to support this claim, there is however oral and historical narrative handed down from the elders to the young generation of the natives, the origin of the *Okpoka* dates back to the period before slavery. As a dance performance group, members of the "*egwu Okpoka*"(*Okpoka* dance troupe) are made up of male adults whose attachment to the troupe could not be compromised or distracted by their membership of other cultural performance groups such as the "*mmanwu*"(masquerade cult). Although they perform to the admiration of everyone, including women and children, only the adult male are allowed to belong to the fold; a group that is so tenaciously held in high esteem by members of the community. Every sub town and villages in Okija have their *Okpoka* troupe. It is important to note that the masquerade dance is mostly done at burials of male adults from the age of forty and during some social gatherings like chieftaincy title ceremony. Due to the menacing and ferocious nature of the performance that is also characterized by chases and scampering by onlookers, the performance does not have a specific place of action (venue). Nevertheless, the structure is itinerant in nature; commencing from the original venue but continuing outside the designated arena until final receding to the house of the patron accompanied by heavy drumming and music.

The *Okpoka* masquerade is usually held and controlled by a rope tied around the waist of the masquerade. The performance of the *Okpoka* could be likened to what Obiechina, quoted by Anekwe refers to as, "African drama which must not be associated with the performative exigencies of Greek drama from the Dionysian and Apollonian festival"(Enekwe, 149). As a result, the performance area has no specific boundary of operation even as it is usually experienced, first, at funerals before further itinerant schedule that consist of performances virtually at every available space in the village. Whether it is seen as theatre, dance, acrobatic, or masquerade performance is only a matter of nomenclature and archetypal placement as may delude proper understanding thereby applauding the exclusionary position of western scholars. Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theatre" with its experimental outlook comes handy. His allusion to the principle of drama being rooted in spiritual practice, sound and musicality explains the idea of performance in non conventional venue and music; call and response in this case. It validates such performances and spaces to be actual theatre experience in accepted venues. Richard Schechner explains that, "just as a farm is a field where edibles are grown, so a theatre is a place where transformations of time, place, and person (human and non-humans are accomplished" (159). The forward and backward chase movement of the *Okpoka* masquerade transforms audience into active and mobile participants thereby heightening theatrical expectations.

The Theatricality of *Egwu Okpoka* Masquerade Dance

The theatricality of traditional performances in Africa is a theatre of its own. Thus, existing in its virgin state, performed before exhilarating audience, employing realistic costumes and make-up and using appropriate accessories. It is, however, without all the paraphernalia obtainable in a theatre building that makes it a theatre. Andrew Horn avers that, "the fundamental problem of nomenclature in the examination of African performance modes lies in the necessary distinction between "drama" and "theatre", between the "dramatic" and the "theatrical" (n.p). In that case, theatre, in its broadest sense, subsumes elements of most structured performances before an audience, including drama, dance, musical recital, group ritual, secular ceremony, even "classroom lecturing" (Schechner 2005). It is, essentially, spectacle. Since the assertion "art for art sake" is alien to African performative experience, it therefore explains the didacticism that accompany performances in Africa especially masquerade performance. Such performance is usually done following a particular event as dictated by the peculiarities of different communities. Osita Okagbue explains that "a broad range of occasions lend themselves to the appearance and performance of masquerades in Igboland. These include festival, sacred and secular ceremonies, funerals, and sometimes periods of crisis or major breaches and threats to social cohesion and stability" (20).

It is therefore a matter of relevance that the *Okpoka* masquerade dance is performed at funerals and a few other social gatherings such as chieftaincy title ceremony that evoke atmosphere of joy. For instance, in Okija, during the burial ceremony (rite of passage), just after the corpse might have been lowered into the grave with its attendant rain of tears and bustle by sympathizers, there is usually a general mood swing, even among the bereaved. Having been entertained with refreshment, the mourners-turned-audience are in receptive mood for any form of action that has the tendency of distracting them from the painful reality of losing a loved one. Traditional Dance and music of various forms are performed with the *Okpoka* masquerade dance overshadowing other performances with energetic darting and loud drumbeat. The place of music in *Okpoka* performance cannot be over emphasized. Drum beats are usually syncopated with the rhythmic movement of the masquerade's dance movement and the attendant call and response accompaniment. Impulsively, the audience scampers in exhilarating move only to regroup again in a continual experience. With the sound of the lead singer resonating the atmosphere, the response from the other male singers only eggs the *Okpoka*'s performance in a web of communicative encounter. Songs are raised by one of the group members and echoed by other members and members of the audience. The power of music here is strong and insightful. In the words of Adetilewa:

The music of a people goes a long way to suggest much about the society in which it is created. It reflects the people's culture. It mirrors the society and it sometimes raises questions about the society's norms and values, and sometimes has the power to bring about change. In Africa, music does not occur in isolation. It plays special role for specific occasion. Some music have become symbols for historical events or as a means of passing tradition (np).

Music in the masquerade dance under review has the strength to scare and to make people converge and respond appropriately to the rhythm, voice and demonstration of the performer. In essence, music in this context is not an end in itself as it evolves in consonance with the timing, tempo, rhythm, tone and texture of accompanying instruments and dance movement as dictated also, by the music. The place of music in *Okpoka* masquerade performances is really very powerful. It is in this regards that Patrice Pavis explains that, "In the theatre or in other forms of performance and performance art, music tends to pervade all other stage materials, imposing itself as the 'natural'" (145). There is therefore a cyclical flow of communication, whether in a "call and response" or in an "orchestral rendition" with variations in rhythmic patterns with or without gestural connotations. There is also a great sense of informality with regards to the performance of *Okpoka* masquerade. While writing about the earliest societies that were made up of hunting and gathering bands, Schechner states that, "In other words, people came to a special place, did something that could be called theater (and/or dance and music befall three genres are always performed together in such situations), and went on their (separate) way (thereafter)" (150). This explains the lively nature of the performance as a result of the fusion of different elements of traditional African performative experience that is usually devoid of blackouts, change of scenes and dull moments. The audience disperses in various directions even as some follow the *Okpoka* group as they retire.

Management and requirements for *EgwuOkpoka* Performance

What is Management? Management can be defined as the process of performing the activities of putting ideas together with the aim of improving the quality of decision making in a particular association so as to achieve goals effectively. The expected goals here could mean that of a group or an individual. It is important to reiterate that for the group under study, we are referring to general input and activities intended to enhance the quality of performance with the aim of providing entertainment and financial support for members. Major sources of fund for the group are, monies received from audience participation and some special patrons during performances. There is also contribution from members in support of the progress of the group. Management in the words of Enikanselu and Oyende is seen as:

a process of planning, organizing directing or leading, representing, co-ordination and controlling the efforts of the organization members and the use of organizational resources (human and technical) in order to achieve stated organisational goals(5).

It is important to note that management in okpoka masquerade lends itself to diverse interpretations as there is no particular style of management that is an end in itself. Inclusiveness and synergy are the watchwords that should guarantee efficient management of the group since human resources and materials are the tools inherent in operational structure of the masquerade.

As explained above, the *Okpoka* dance group has at the top of its imaginary organogram, a patron also known as "nna egwu", lead singer(ogu egwu), "ochi udo", one who holds the rope tied around the waist of the masquerade, drummers, flutist, Onye na atutu ego (money picker), clappers and chorus that double as dancers. Since there are no choreographed dance movements, most members of the group are performers with the exception of the patron who may not necessarily follow the group to every performance. Dance movement is synonymous to what the Ogene (metal gong) dance group has; dance movement that irregularly expands and contracts rhythmically following a crescendo or diminuendo from the lead singer's call.

Although there is no former or organized style of managing the group, there is, in any case, an absolute description of responsibilities to every member with the aim of establishing decorum and formality in the discharge of functions. This pattern of management is in tandem with the socio-political governance system that has been in existence among Ndi Igbo before colonialism. It is founded on shared responsibilities and values; the ethos that evolve from the cultural norms and values around which their existential essence is anchored. The management pattern of the masquerade dance group is inalienable. The management of the "egwu okpoka, like other theatre troupes, is plagued by endemic challenges ranging from poor funding to insufficient skills of managers. John N. Bardi states that, "it is observed that the practice of theatre management is faced with myriad of problems, but that the most prominent are the problems of funding and lack of adequate facilities"(109). As a result, most of their instruments, often bequeathed by non performing members of the group occasioned by age, have become obsolete.

Membership Recruitment Process

It is important to state that masquerade of the *Okpoka* dance is not the same as the "mmanwu" of the masquerade cult. The latter requires intricate, coveted and shrouded means of entry for initiates into its membership while the former (*Okpoka*), members are recruited at the patron's house without any sacred formalities. All that is required for one to become a member of okpoka masquerade is to simply approach any member of the group for informal registration after declaration of interest. Note that members can easily identify themselves since non members cannot join in the performance. Often, the knowledge required to perform certain roles is inherent and as such every member or intended member does not necessarily require any form of structured training to imbibe ideas but practical expression of innate abilities to outwit one another. There is however a loose form of apprenticeship that requires members to watch experts dance, sing, and chant or play any of the musical instruments as they also practice and learn on the job. Members sometimes gather at the patron's house to have rehearsal sessions that is usually propelled by consumption of local gin known as

"*Ada Ogbe*", in the fashion of the open air afro-musical "gyration" by the "Kegites"; a campus highlife musical group peculiar in Nigerian Institutions of higher learning.

Role playing experiences

As has been earlier alluded to, the role playing experience by members of the *Okpoka* masquerade dance group do not require specialized process. This is because members of the group are often recruited among villages with little or no form of western education and training in the art of performance in theatre. The patron supervises the activities of the group using the lead singer who is often more available. The lead singer fixes rehearsals where new songs are taught to every member of the group, however, without the masquerade in attendance. Songs are usually composed from motifs generated from events and experiences of people in the village. A lead singer sings while members and audience respond actively, sometimes with clap of the hands. Members are mostly known by their aliases such as "*aka na eti igba*"(great drummer), "*Onu Ogene*"(golden voice), "*Ozo Igbo Ndu*"(protector of the people), "*Owu aka*"(great clapper) and so on. Roles, sometimes, overlap because every member understands the intricacies of the jobs of others.

Semiotics Implications in Egwu Okpoka Masquerade

Symbolism is evident in the masquerade, gestures and musicality of the performance. The mode of communication by the performance group ensures that necessary information concerning planned performances and venues are timely conveyed to members. *Ekwe*(wooden gong) player, just like the *ekwe* player for the *mmanwu* masquerade cult, has the responsibility of announcing to members about forthcoming programme. This is usually done at the house of the patron and to also alert members of the public that the *Okpoka* is due to appear for a performance. The sound of the gong is echoed by the lead singer whose inviting voice summons the drummers and other instrumentalist. Special signs such as eye contact, waving of the hand, voice modulation, stamping of feet and shuffling movement are symbolic ways of communicating diverse information to members of the group and the audience during performance. The place of communication among members of a traditional performance group and in the actual performance cannot be over emphasized. Adler Ron and Neil Towne maintain that:

All that has been accomplished by humans and all that ever will be accomplished involves communication with others. Many social and organisational problems derive from unsatisfactory relationships brought about by inadequate communication between people. Success on and off the often stems from one's ability to transfer information and express ideas to other (1).

It is this communicative tendency of the *Okpoka* performance that keeps the audience captivated as only strangers that may be confused by the signs emanating from the texture of songs and the masquerade's gestures. Audience response to chases and movement brings everybody to common understanding of impending situation.

Box Office Management

Although there is no known and organized box office management system for *Okpoka* masquerade dance performance, they have a simple way of putting together money thrown at them and the masquerade by the audience and passers-by. The money handler(*onue otutu ego*) gets busy at this point, gathering every penny thrown at the masquerade and the lead singer while wriggling his waist to the inviting rhythm of music and drumbeats. He keeps the money for sharing after each performance. There is, however, nothing like ticketing and collection of money before seeing the performance since it is done in an open arena during burials and some social events that require lively spontaneity of entertainment.

Audience Engineering Process

Every good performance must be presented before a waiting and expectant audience whose viewership determines the degree of credence placed on a particular performance having enjoyed maximum satisfaction after the event. As a result, the purpose of any performance is to create communication and satisfaction that is endearing. In the words of Muiyiwa Awodiya:

There is the public and the needs and concern of the public, whether you consider the public to be the student body, the faculty, the community, performance-goers. Then there are the needs of the artists; they tour to make a living. But they also need exposure and feedback for their own growth. That means good artists must be brought together with receptive and appropriate audience (5).

The audience here is spontaneous in their response to the performance because they are actively involved in the entire process. They are forced by the *Okpoka's* chases to be mobile and responsive to the music and dance. Whether arrangement for the audiences for *Okpoka* masquerade dance performance is appropriate or not is a case for further study. The reality is that the audience is receptive and responsive. Since the performance is not a static one, the audience are made to scamper, clap, sing along and re-converge outside the venue of commencement of performance to another spacious and thrilling environment. There is therefore an omnidirectional movement of the instrumentalists. As a result, publicity of any kind to get audience for the performance is not required, but, audience management here is achieved through the coercive chase by the masquerade and instantaneous response to the music and dance by the audience.

Leadership style and succession plan

Leadership and succession in Arts administration and management, especially for traditional performance groups is inalienable. It is a responsibility that is prone to changes as a result of the dynamic nature of duties and persons that occupy such positions. For the *Okpoka* performance, singers, drummers and dancers are naturally replaced by younger members considering the waning input of predecessors and the cycle goes on successively. Learning is almost instinctive for new members whose performing-apprenticeship role already places them in leadership positions as it were. As a result, there is no distinctive leadership recruitment process, but, leadership status is ascribed according to age, experience and physical strength.

Conflicts and Resolution

Human interaction, the world over is characterized by degrees of conflicts, however, not without means of resolving remote and immediate causes of such conflicts. Among the Igbos, masquerades have remained potent means of conflict resolution because their judgments are acceptable and irreversible. Samuel Okpan supports that, "there is ample evidence in literature of extra mundane options for conflict resolution among the Igbo group of Nigeria through the continuous interaction between the living and the dead"(8). The "mundane option" alluded to, is the role of masquerades in conflict resolution. Conflict and its resolution are also attributable to the activities of members of the *Okpoka* masquerade. It is one of the unintended effects of social action, particularly when issue of finance is involved. Like war, it has become a furnace that produces a better outcome of what is blazed in it. Performers sometimes argue among themselves. Chief Titus Okeke one of prominent Patrons of *Okpoka* masquerade that was interviewed on the likely conflict prone situation, reveals that "some members of the *Okpoka* group engage in free for all fight as a result of unresolved issues bothering on inequality in sharing financial gains after performance and due to attitudinal matters". However tough the reason for the scuffle is, a resolution is eventually reached, but sometimes, with punitive actions meted out against defaulters. For instance, any act of misbehavior arising from excessive consumption of alcohol is met with stiff punishment from leaders of the group.

Human/Public Relations Management

As a collaborative art, traditional performance groups are vested with the responsibility of meeting the yearnings of their target audience by ensuring thrilling outcomes through rigorous rehearsals and meetings. To achieve a good performance and keep the audience abreast with information on place and time for subsequent performance, the *Okpoka* masquerade group utilizes informal means of keeping the public informed. As a

community based performance group, every member and individuals belonging to family units, is responsible for disseminating information among other members of the community usually at informal gathering, funeral, and market place. The wooden gong player is also a mouthpiece for the group through the initial sounding of the ekwe before the commencement of the performance. It is important to note, however, that people anticipate the appearance of *Okpoka* masquerade during burials even without prior notice.

Conclusion

Jerzy Grotowski's "*poor theatre*" assisted the researcher in realizing the set objectives through depicting the *modus operandi*, paraphernalia and thematic content of the *Okpoka* masquerade group. There is no organized venue for the performance. The masquerade and other performers do not use costumes and other theatrical elements. Natural light, however, enhances the visual content of the performance. These are the focal points of Grotowski's "*poor theatre*" as depicted in the administrative and performative life of the group.

From the analysis of the *Okpoka* masquerade dance group above, it is evident that the origin of the group predates members of the group with far reaching influence on members of the community and visitors whose appetite for traditional performance is quenched by the didactic and entertaining nature of the performance. For example, the songs for the performance teach morals and respect for elders in the community. They include:

Igbo	English translation
1. Nwokolo jibe ozi, Nwokolo jebe ozi Oga abaligi uru	Young man, young man, always run errand for people, You will benefit for it.
2. Unu adi zi one, unu adi zi one? unu adi one iji abarum mba, Obi nwoke di ka agu o...	How many are you? Are you man enough with your number to shout at me? (Refrain) members respond as above

From the first song, young people are advised to be obedient and run errands for their seniors because they will benefit from it while the second song eulogizes the brevity of man and advice him not to be lily livered but to stand up and defend his community no matter the number of opponents or opposition.

It is noteworthy that members of the group are indigenes of the town. Among the artists are drummers, instrumentalists and singers with varied functions, but, towards a syncretic outcome. They manage their performance with little or no formal training, deploy necessary traditional instruments required and provide leadership to members among other responsibilities. The masquerade dance group performs mostly at funerals and some social events. The *Okpoka* mask and costume are not attractive as a result of the combative nature of the performance and this also is seen in the audience since they have to move from place to place, running from the masquerade.

The paper however recommends that, there is the need to take the *Okpoka* performance outside its domiciled place to a more organized environment under trained handlers in order for it to have a wider performative outlook in our global world that is digitally influenced. *Okpoka* masquerade performance should be covered with video camera so as to give it global visibility. Members of the group need to have good costumes just as the masquerade does in order for them to have the benefit of elements of theatre that distinguishes them during performance.

Works Cited

- Adler, R and Towne, N. *Looking out/looking in*. New York: Reinhardt and Winston, 2nd ed. (1978), 1-292, accessed January 7, 2020.
- Anyebe, Ted. "Masquerade Performance Tradition of Idoma: Issues of Limitation and Methodological Approaches in Research". *Global Journals*. [https://www.social science research.org](https://www.socialscienceresearch.org), (April 2008), accessed 26th May, 2024, 1-15.
- Asigbo C, Alex. "Transmutations in Masquerade Costume and Performance: An Examination of Abuja Carnival 2010. *UJAH Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*. Vol. 3, No. 1. DOI: 10.4314/UJAH.v13i.1.1(No. 2012), accessed 28th May, 2024.
- Awodiya, Muiyiwa. *Perspectives in Theatre Management, Arts Administration and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria*. Lagos: Concepts Publications, 2017, 5-242.
- Bardi, J. Ndubuisi. "An Evaluation of the Challenges of Theatre Management in Nigeria. *Performing Arts Journal*. <https://www.researchgate.net>, Vo. 4, No. 3(Feb. 2023) accessed 25th May, 2024, 109-118.
- Conte-Morgan, John and Olaniyan Tejumola. *African Drama and Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, 25-274.
- Enekwe, Ossie. Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria : A Critical Source Book* UK: The Pitman Press Ed Yemi Ogunbiyi, 1981 pp 149-163.
- Enikanselu, S.A. and Oyende, A.I. *Introduction to Management*. <https://www.ijilter.net> (2009) accessed 24th May, 2024, 5-208.
- Nwankwo, Elochukwu. "Women and Masquerade Traditions in Africa: Insight from the Ikechi Masquerade Cult of the Postcolonial Igbo". *Asian Women*. Vol. 40, No. 1, <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2024>(Sept. 2022, 23-42.
- Okagbue, Osita. *African Theatres and Performances*. London: Routledge, 2007, 20-200.
- Oko Aka, Richard. "Okunkpo Masquerade Concert: Traditional Public Theatre and Social Commitment in Afikpo, Southeastern Nigeria". *Horizons Theatre*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/by.1583>. (2019), 1-20.
- Okpan, Samuel C. "Extra Mundane Means of Conflict Resolution among the Igbo Group of Nigeria: An Anthropological Appraisal". *Journal of Law and Judicial System*. Vol.2, I 1. DOI: 10.22259/2637.5893.0201002 (Jan. 2019), accessed 29th May 2024, 8-13.
- Ogbeide, Martins. 'History of Okija from 1776 to 2015'. <https://www.academia.edu>, accessed 20th July, 2024.
- Picton, John. "What's in a mask". *African Languages and Culture*. <https://www.si.edu>(1990), accessed 25th May, 2024.
- Pavis, Patrice. *The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre*. New York : Routledge, 2016, 145-295.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Theory*, Great Britain: Routledge, 1988, 38