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Date August, 1977.
DEDICATED

TO

Ugo, Chizor, Margaret Onwuzolum

and to

all the other members of my family
"People will not look forward to prosperity who never look backwards to their ancestors.

To be attracted to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle, the germ as it were, of public affection".

Edmund Burke, 1790.

"Masks may be described as symbols or foci for the spiritual forces that loaned their authority to the edicts and arts thatemanated from the masks.

Further, the masks were recognized as symbols by the initiated, that is, by those possessed of the secret or semi-secret knowledge that these were after all, objects of wood, carved for a price by known artisans and which, between appearances, had to be stored and protected from the effects of climate and insects. Yet, even the initiated believed that these objects carried with them, or within them, a very real spiritual power, which in a sense, invested the wearer and the costume, as well as the mask, during its ritual appearance.

I should like to add, parenthetically, that so much is this the case, that the presentation of an isolated mask in a museum constitutes a gross misrepresentation, not only of the social values inherent in the complex comprised of mask, costume, and dance, music and other related traits, but of the aesthetic component of the mask in its original context".

ABSTRACT

This thesis is part of a larger project that included an exhibition at the Museum of Anthropology entitled "The World of Spirits" (July 5 - August 31, 1977), which served as an introduction to Igbo masks and masquerades as embodying some of the most profound and religious beliefs of the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria. The exhibit demonstrated that underlying the visual diversity of Igbo art is a unity of Igbo conceptions of the supernatural. Accompanying the exhibition were slide presentations and a live performance. All of the components of the project, including this thesis, are related attempts to present Igbo masks, i.e. material objects normally found in museums, within an anthropological context which takes the museum visitor or the reader beyond the objects themselves into their meaning in terms of Igbo culture. The project is thus a demonstration of the necessary relationship between the practice of museology and the discipline of anthropology. Such a relationship is a bilateral one, in which not only do ethnographic data and the theoretical frameworks of ethnology extend a museum's presentation and interpretation of objects, but the attention of anthropologists is directed towards objects as significant foci for study.

More specifically, the thesis provides the indispensable ethnological background upon which the exhibit was based. It includes original ethnographic materials on initiation, masks, and masquerades at Ozubulu, derived from the author's participant observation of both initiation and the Ozoebunna masquerade. This material is augmented with published records from the Afikpo and Awka areas of Igboland to highlight the
necessary connection between initiation and masquerade. Then, using conceptual formulations of E.R. Leach on ritual, Mircea Eliade on sacred time, and Elmer Rice on theatre, Igbo masquerade is examined in terms of the concept of ritual theatre. While ritual gives power and meaning to the mask, the masquerade performance is a theatrical experience which involves the initiates of the mmuọ society as actors and the other members of the Igbo community as audience. The entertainment feature of masquerades has not previously received due attention in the anthropological literature, probably because anthropologists are not normally participants in them.

This project on Igbo masquerade is a presentation of African aesthetics and culture by an African. The number of such studies are growing as it becomes increasingly evident that African scholars must pay greater attention to studying their traditional cultural institutions so as to utilize pertinent aspects of such studies for development and planning, not only in museology but in other areas of contemporary life as well.
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My Master's project, to a large degree, is a collaborative effort, and belongs not to me alone, but to various others. To these, I owe much.

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Finally, I wish to place on record my greatest indebtedness and deepest appreciation, which go to Professor Marjorie Halpin, without whose direction and mature criticism this study could hardly have been done.

Emmanuel C. Onwuzolum

Vancouver, B.C.
A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

One of the difficulties which had beset Igbo studies is the existence of two alternative spellings of "Ibo" and "Igbo"—a problem which the inconsistencies of even Igbo scholars themselves had done nothing to help. Prior to the late 1960's, "Ibo" was almost universally used both at home and internationally. Although a handful of linguists and anthropologists during this period used the technically more correct "Igbo", others opted for Ibo on the grounds that academic usage of the word should differ as little as possible. And, having once opted for Ibo, they naturally retained it on the grounds of consistency.

We are now in the 1970's and it is very clear that things have changed. The overwhelming majority of the Igbos have always preferred the form "Igbo", which they regard as indigenous, in contradistinction to the inaccurate "Ibo" of colonial days, which was a corruption of Igbo so that the "white man" could pronounce it easily. Therefore, Ibo is Anglicized Igbo. In this writing (and even in my discussions), I have always maintained and used the correct term, Igbo. This is logically on the grounds that people should always be referred to by the name with which they prefer to describe themselves.

In the transcription of Igbo words and phrases in the text, I have always followed this principle. Where following a written sound, I have copied the orthography of my source exactly; hence some reference to Ibo instead of Igbo. But the two should be understood to mean the same and refer to the same people.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE MASK

Except in very isolated cases or areas, e.g. the islands of Polynesia and the continent of Australia, there is hardly a major part of the world in which masks are absent or important. I am using the word "mask" at this point in the general sense of a covering for the face. Prehistoric evidence suggestive of masking goes back to the paintings of the Paleolithic, and a long train of later archaeological and historic forms lead up to the latest models available from costume suppliers and novelty shops. In a good sized mask collection from almost any culture area, one may recognize a host of spirits and other supernatural beings, animals and birds, monstrous creatures of imaginary forms, and even inanimate objects, as well as many more or less human faces. Not all masks, however, are designed with representational intent. There are forms which are purely abstract and decorative in design. Examples of many of such could be found among the Igbos of Nigeria and some of these will be described later on at appropriate portions of the thesis.

The materials which have gone into the making of masks in various parts of the world have included almost every substance conceivably usable for such a purpose, including even human skulls. A common basic material has been wood, often augmented by bark cloth or some other local fibre or textile. When dark or bright paints, variegated feathers, ornamental leaves, cowrie shells, and many other items are added,
astonishing variety of effects is produced. The Northwest Coast mask collection in the Museum of Anthropology at this University bears eloquent testimony to this.

While masks have a variety of uses and functions as well, in many parts of the world the masked figure is a frequent participant in the ritual life of these many peoples. He has his place in many curing ceremonies, rituals of divination, sacrificial rites, religious processions and sacred dances. Among the most common settings for such disguises are exclusive "secret" associations and cult groups. With numerous functions, such groups range from the North American Ku Klux Klan and Iroquois false face companies to the poro societies of Liberia, the egungun of the Yorubas, ekine societies of the Ijaws and the mmuo secret society of the Igbos (the last three of the above are from Nigeria). These include also the men's secret society groups common in Melanesia. In such contexts, masks usually are not only concealers of identity but also symbols of status or representations of the supernatural beings or both. Boas (1931:181) wrote concerning this:

"The use of the mask is found among a great number of peoples. The origin of the custom is by no means clear in all cases, but a few typical forms of their uses may easily be distinguished. They are intended to deceive spirits as to the identity of the wearer, and may thus protect him against attack, or the mask may represent a spirit which is personalized by the wearer, who in this way frightens away supernatural enemies. Still others are commemorative, the wearer personifying a deceased friend. Masks are also found in theatrical performances illustrating mythical incidents. Such variations of uses suggest the impossibility of a single origin of the custom."

Wherever they come from in time and space, and whatever their shape or component materials, masks have long been recognized as casting a spell which is peculiarly their own. Even in museum display or in
illustrations in books which present them as static or lifeless works of art, masks have a special appeal which is difficult to describe. The feeling is often expressed that these objects are endowed with a singularly supernatural or preternatural quality. The beholder of the mask is moved to attribute a life of its own to the object. The feeling inevitably arises that a masked performer has somehow undergone a metamorphosis and assumed, in living form, the qualities of his disguise. The watching audience, perhaps knowing that what it sees is a person wearing something that he can take off again, nevertheless is captured by the illusion, or is unable to escape from the belief that the mask somehow belongs to the performing figure and expresses its nature, rather than that of the human inside. Benda (1945:1), a modern mask-maker, has described the peculiar qualities of the product of his art in the following way:

"A mask is a weird, perfidious and singularly perplexing object. It has a place quite apart among things made by human hands. Looking at it, even we who pride ourselves on our realism and sophistication, are seized by a strange feeling of uncertainty whether peradventure it is not alive. When the mask is put on and enacted by someone, this uncanny quality and mystification it creates are intensified."

Similar beliefs are found in many places and are expressed in the religions of many peoples. For examples, this belief is very strong among the seven million Igbos of Southeastern Nigeria. The Igbos as a people possess an ancient and distinctive cultural tradition and speak a common language. Traditionally, farmers, traders, and fishermen, numerous Igbo are now moving into large modern cities and participating in "the developing" global culture and economy. Still, many vital elements of the Igbo way of life persist, most notably their
religious participation in initiation and mask and masquerades, which over a hundred years of British colonial rule and Christian missionaries could not destroy. The Igbos believe and participate in masks and masquerades—a ritual theatre which embodies some of the most profound and deeply-felt religious beliefs of the people. I have studied masks from many Igbo communities and in the exhibit "The World of Spirits" at the Museum of Anthropology (July 4 - August 31, 1977), which is the first element of my Master's project, I tried to show the visual diversity of Igbo art, while at the same time demonstrating the underlying unity of their religious conceptions of the unseen world through the institution of the mmuo—"masquerades". This unseen world is one of ancestors, the unborn, the dead, and the spirits which the rituals of masquerade bring to existential reality through masks, costume, music, song, and dance.

Whenever I had the privilege of interviewing a masked dancer after his performance during my research on Igbo masks, I was told that the dancer felt himself undergo some sort of transformation. He usually felt and acted as if he were another being and not his usual self. I observed it not only among Igbos, but also among some Yorubas of Nigeria. The belief is that the transformation enables the dancer to move and act according to the characteristics associated by tradition to the particular mask. Thus, in the Yoruba Adamuorisa masquerade play, Esu Eligba would perform sacrifices in the public in his role as the ritual cleanser of the community. In the Ijaw ekine play, Nimiaa Poku ("know nothing") acted a moronic character. Similarly, in the Awuka play of the Igbos, Onukwu ("fool" or "funny") acted in a funny, foolish
way to make people laugh. This is also noticeable in the Afikpo okumkpa play.

Such beliefs lie at the core of the mystery which is generally associated with masks. They are due probably in part to the fact that men everywhere know each other by the faces and other personal traits. In a person's face, one reads the signs of his identity, his moods, his attitude towards others, and something of his personality; or so we would like to think at any rate. People everywhere are deeply dependent on these signs in most of their relations with other men. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that a mask should go a long way toward lending a new identity and character even to a familiar face. The illusion is increased, of course, if the masker is a professional performer or someone else not well known to those who watch him, or if, as among the Igbo, he is completely disguised from his audience in some combination of mask and bodily costumes.

These fundamental beliefs are usually heightened still further by various ways in which tradition of mystification surrounding masking and mummery is perpetuated. Among the Igbo, the audience is never allowed to see the masked performer take off his mask; nor do even modern masked actors of the Western theatre, for that matter, usually remove their disguises in public. However, it should be noted that, in some cultures, e.g. New Britain, the masked dancer stops for a while and removes his mask in front of his audience, puts it on again, and continues his performance. More commonly in Africa, as in New Guinea, the uninitiated are told that the figures are spirits; and those not admitted to the mysteries (Igbo women, for instance), are never allowed
to see the mask being put on or being taken off. Therefore, in one way or another, the transformation of the masked figure to the ordinary men is usually hidden from the public gaze, and thus the mysterious distinction between the two is preserved. Also, the construction of the mask itself and the way in which it is fastened or worn on the head is usually more or less private knowledge, restricted to those who make and wear masks.

The importance of these props of mystery can also be seen in the fact that the revelation of their true nature to members of privileged groups usually involves some degree of ritualization. Puberty rites among many peoples involve the acquisition of such knowledge. Revelation of this kind is appropriately described as initiation, i.e. "customary unmasking", which in Igbo is known as *Ima mmuo* or *iba na mmuo* ("knowing the spirit or entering the spirit"). Masks retain their effectiveness even after such revelation, because initiation is traditionally allowed to happen only in specially prescribed social circumstances such as growing out of childhood and becoming a member of a special esoteric group. Further explanations will be given later in the thesis.

It is commonly stated or implied that the contrasting responses to masks differentiate the "primitive" from the "civilized" world. The recognition that the mask is only a mask and the realization that a masked figure is but a human being in disguise are identified with the sophistication of a secular or technologically advanced society. It is said that non-literate peoples believe that their masked figures actually are non-human beings, and that the primitive masker is convinced that he literally becomes whatever his disguises signify. This interpretation of masking has been particularly emphasized and developed by scholars
interested in demonstrating that the mentality of non-literate peoples sets them sharply apart from literate society. Similar views have been expressed by some anthropologists in discussions of various cultural phenomena associated with masks, such as secret societies and "primitive drama". Some of such anthropologists are Webster (1932: 76), Lips (1949:269), Roedringer (1961:158-9), etc. Writers primarily concerned with the aesthetic aspects of masks also often ascribe to both ancient and non-literate peoples, the same distinctive responses to the mask. One could refer, for instance, to the works of Riley (1955:18) and Breton (1960).

While this has generally been the dominant view in discussions of masks, it is necessary to point out that this is wrong. In fact, the ascription of such literal and uniform beliefs to all maskers and their audience outside Western society can be challenged as ethnocentrism or even racism. Further, as was noted earlier, masks have different origins and functions in different societies.

Even a recent attempt by a historian to interpret masks as manifestations of universal play element in human nature concedes much to the dominant view by associating this element "primarily with children and primitive peoples" (Huizinga, 1949:26). Similarly, a contemporary student of mythology interprets masks as a prime expression of the spirit of "as if" or "make-believe", but he also stresses literal identification and finds its clearest expression in "childhood and primitive life" (Campbell, 1959:21). To challenge these very wrong assumptions is one of the strongest and most pressing reasons for undertaking this study of masks.
There is, of course, ample evidence that among numerous peoples the uninitiated are encouraged to believe that masked figures are more than mere humans in disguise. It seems probable, especially where masking is connected with beliefs in the supernatural, as among the Igbos, that such literal identifications are generally accepted. Yet by no means do all masking traditions involve a belief in possession by supernatural beings. It cannot be assumed that in every society which makes masks, the uninitiated are taught or forced to accept impersonation literally, nor is it certain that such teachings are always accepted with full seriousness or without qualification. Thus, it is known among the Igbos that women may know, but pretend ignorance, of the fact that the mask is a man in disguise. I stand to be quoted on this. It is possible that various more or less subtle and complex combinations of beliefs and skepticisms characterize different peoples or even different groups within particular societies.

Moreover, among the Igbos there are masks with no representational intent or value and some such masks appear at performances that cannot be regarded as serious. There is, for example, the Igbo ulaga mask performed by youths between the ages of ten and fifteen with no serious overtones. There are celebrations of the Ngwa of Southern or Owerri Igbo in which both men and women colourfully attired, dance together with their masks without any fear. Further, it is difficult to describe with certainty and clarity, the precise quality of perceptions and beliefs shared by people with respect to these matters. However, I did not find anyone among the Igbos who did not somehow imply that they knew that the mask is a man in disguise.
True, secrecy and mystery surrounds masks, as has been shown and will continue to be shown, but simple delusions as to their nature could not be discovered. Despite the fact that masking has many sacred associations for the Igbo (as with other peoples), and is organized in the form of a men's secret society, mmuo, it is my contention that it is essentially a ritual, festive, and theatrical activity or device whose primary aim is to create religious pageantry and entertainment for Igbo villagers.

In his study of masks among the Melanesians, Valentine (1961:6) arrived at a conclusion which I consider appropriate to the present discussion. He noted:

"Thus it seems probable that contrasting ways of viewing or responding to the mask and the masker do not neatly divide the non-literate world and modern society. Perhaps the attitude of men in exotic societies are not always so different from our responses to our own forms of maskery and mummery. Unqualified realism hardly describes adequately all of our own reaction to masked performances. Indeed, it is our very acceptance of illusion and surrender to a sense of mystery that give masks the peculiar appeal and effectiveness which few among us would deny they have. This remains true in spite of the fact that we also have... realistic responses to maskery as well. It may well be that some such special attitude, compounded of partially contradictory reactions is also a key to the place of masks in cultures very different from our own".

It is indeed because of this, that one must insist that the importance of the mask (seen from the point of view of the Igbo but perhaps applicable to other cultures), should therefore be examined and understood, not only because it transcends mere mundane notions (thereby conjuring up the presence and hence awe of the supernatural), but also because it was and still is a form of theatre which I will call ritual theatre. It is a drama in which those that have been initiated into the mmuo...
society perform as actors while the other members of the community watch as active and participating audience and spectators. It must also be stressed, further, that without this audience, a masked performance or play would be meaningless.

A great deal has been said and written about traditional African aesthetic forms. For the graphic and plastic arts alone, a bibliography published over ten years ago by Gaskin (1965) lists more than five thousand items. Somewhat smaller quantities of materials have been published on African folkways, and much less in the field of music. According to Ottenberg (1971) "despite this vast literature, there is very little that gives the African's conception of his art, using the word broadly to include all art forms". This is true because most of the work on Africa (and Igbos are no exception) has been from the outsider's point of view, basically that of the Western investigators and scholars. We owe a debt of gratitude to these bold scholars who in their own way contributed to knowledge about the art and peoples of the "dark continent". However, such studies have not been entirely without biases from which all kinds of misleading inferences have been made. The time is now ripe for Africans to write about their own art, especially in cultural contexts. This is what I am attempting to achieve in this study of Igbo masks and masquerades.

RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH AND DATA

The objective of this study is to contribute another dimension to
the understanding of the widespread cultural phenomenon of masking. The thesis will address itself to the central problem of providing an anthropological analysis for the institution of masquerading, which, as was pointed out, Western anthropologists have found extremely difficult to explain. Western scholars interested in this field consider the mask as a piece of wood, but maskers consider it as a living force—a reality. The paradox is that the piece of wood has become real. I shall therefore be devoting this study to exploring the problem of illusion and reality in the specific ethnographic context of the Igbos. I shall try to provide adequate explanations and answers to the issue of what transpires when the Igbos engage in masked ritual plays or as Turner (1975) would like to interpret it, the symbolic transformation that occurs in the social drama that is masquerade performance.

Data with which I will attempt to provide some answers to the questions raised earlier are derived from the following sources.

(1) A collection of Igbo masks which I have assembled and exhibited at the Museum of Anthropology. Documentation of these masks will be found in Chapter II of this thesis. Indeed, this thesis is primarily an additional source of information to this major exhibit entitled "The World of Spirits". The collection of masks cover as many Igbo varieties as were possible to collect within the Pacific Northwest in the time available to me, and will be supplemented by photographs taken as part of my research into the facts and function of masquerades among the Igbos.

(2) I will also rely very heavily on my personal ethnographic
experience as a participant observer in Igbo culture generally, and the mmuo ("masquerade") society in particular. I was born and raised in Igbo country (Ozubulu, to be precise), and through the influence of my family (i.e., parents and agnates), I did participate actively in Igbo culture. In my childhood, history and morals were taught through tales and proverbs. Children of the same age grade and those of higher or lower age sets influenced each other through activities like wrestling, games, etc. The mores of the society were taught to children through examples and direct approach by parents and elders. I was especially well-trained because I spent a lot of my time with my late grandfather who held a high civic and leadership position in the village as di-Okpala ("the first born"). I was initiated into the Ozubulu mmuo ("masquerade") society in December 1963 and I have ever since participated as a full-fledged member in their ritual plays.

I studied anthropology and graduated in 1973 from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. At that institution, I studied and acquired research techniques which became helpful to me in later years as a curator in the National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria. I carried out research as part of my functions and I published "The Museum and the Public" (1975), and "Reorganizing the Museum Service in Nigeria" (1974). The former of these two articles is available on request from the Director of the Nigerian Museum in Lagos. I then began to study masks because my professional interest was aroused as a result of the many mask pieces available in the Lagos Museum. I was allowed to engage in these studies from September 1975 to August 1976. I spent this one year period in Igbo country, particularly in Ozubulu, where I took part in and observed
in detail initiation, and the Ozoebunu masquerade performance. I also spent time in Awka where I studied and observed the Ijele masquerade. I have not yet published on this subject. However, I consider my study unique in the sense that I am not aware of another Igbo initiate who has had the rare opportunity of going back as a professional anthropologist to study the institution of masquerades and write about it.

(3) Although literature dealing with the Igbo culture and social life has been surprisingly meager, yet there are a few Western authors who have done some pioneering work in the area of African arts and have included the subject of masks. Some of them are Segy (1953 and 1975), Jones (1971), Willet (1971), Wingert (1974), Underwood (1952), Sieber (1962), and Frazer (1966). Starkweather (1966) and Cole (1970) wrote documentaries to accompany their exhibits of Igbo art. I must say that their efforts have been praiseworthy, although most of their contribution, as indeed those of the others above, have been purely descriptive.

Recently, and fortunately, Ottenberg (1975) has written a classic on Igbo masks. His emphasis was on the Afikpo Igbos, but what he described could be applied to the other Igbos. He did begin to examine masks in terms of theatre, focussing specifically on the relationship between the actors (masks) and the audience (the community). Ottenberg (1973:32) wrote of this as follows:

"Yet the audience at masquerades at Afikpo and in other parts of Africa is often quite active and expressive... A full understanding of the performance requires very close observation of the activities of the audience as well as players, for in a sense they are acting, and are involved, in sensitive relationships with one another".
The thesis will theoretically answer and extend further the framework used by Ottenberg—namely, looking at the mask as theatre. Further, I intend to use Leach's (1963) formulation of symbolic representation of time and ritual separation, a Durkheimian idea, to demonstrate that this theatre, that is masquerade, helps to elevate or remove the rural Igbos from the secular or everyday life on the farms to another plane of consciousness in which an attempt is made to resolve the question of reality.

By combining (1) and (3) above, it is my hope that I will be able to demonstrate that the mask is a necessity for the Igbos as a medium of relaxation and, most important, for re-enacting those social forces that are necessary for society's continuity and solidarity. This is a first step towards contributing theoretically towards an acceptable understanding of the widespread cultural phenomenon of mask. It is also a contribution towards the rebirth of traditional African drama and theatre. It is not generally realized by outsiders that the forms of drama in Africa most commonly recognized today are a two extremes of a continuum: the traditionally indigenous and the blatantly colonial.

The first is found in elaborate and complex ritual, both liturgical and theatrical. Since anthropologists have been the reporters of these events, they have stressed the social purposes of such activities, being professionally indifferent to the dramatic elements of public performance. In fact, these occasions offer a form of communal theatre-interaction with a participating audience, and much more remains to be said about their deliberate dramatic effects.

The other well-known theatre exists in Universities. In Anglophone
Africa, these were formerly the productions of the classic British repertoire from Shakespeare to Shaw. In the colonial days, this played down the traditional theatre which was seen as evil and primitive. Today the admiration for these Western productions is beginning to diminish because some independent African countries are beginning to reject the inherited colonial arrogance that had affirmed the imported art to be more elegant and civilized than the denigrated residue of native culture. It is studies, such as this one, that will help achieve this important goal, and preserve our heritage.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis itself is organized in six chapters. Chapter I is an introduction to the problem of the mask. It sets forth the central problem of study and data available for the thesis.

Chapter II describes the exhibit "The World of Spirits" and provides detailed information on the displayed masks.

Chapter III gives the geographical, historical and socio-cultural background of the Igbos, as a people. It is my conviction that an understanding of the Igbos themselves, will help us gain a better insight into their masquerade ceremonies. Particularly, I intend to focus great attention on the philosophy and religious beliefs of the Igbos since these will answer so many questions that might arise in later parts of the thesis.

Chapter IV gives an ethnographic description of the masks, initiation
into the mmuo ("masquerade") society, and audience reaction in general. I will try to establish the fact and function of the mask, basing my ideas on the data available to me. I hope also to rely on my experiences as a participant observer.

Chapter V will focus on masks and audience in a theoretical framework suggested by Ottenberg's work, namely, developing "the ritual theatre concept" of Igbo masks and masquerades. This chapter will examine not only the relationship between the masked performers (i.e. actors) and the audience (i.e. the community), but will also use Leach's and Eliade's framework to understand the initiates' and entire community's experience before, during and after the ritual theatre.

There will then come a brief Chapter VI in which I state my conclusions.
CHAPTER I

Notes and References

1. I credit this statement to Valentine who thinks that what obtains in those parts of the world is not masking but body painting. cf Valentine; 1961:1.

2. Ibid. For further descriptive literature one could consult Adam, 1949; Benda, 1945; Boas, 1927; Breton, 1960; Douglas and d'Harnoncourt, 1941; Girth, 1936; Gregor, 1937; Lewis, 1922; Linton and Wingert, 1946; Meyer, 1889; Meyer and Parkinson, 1895; Nevermann, 1933; Riley, 1955; Roedriger, 1961; Underwood, 1952; and Wissler, 1938.

3. Because the masquerade is theatrical dramatization of cultural myths, the masked dancer or performer must act in the manner prescribed by custom as belonging to the character of his disguise.

4. cf Masks and Men Among the Kilenge, Western New Britain. 16 mm colour sound film by Adrian A. Gerbrands. 1970.

5. One immediately recalls statements such as this one made by Levy-Bruhl: "To put on a mask, with these people, is not, as it is with us, a mere disguise". Bruhl, 1935:123-4. Also Bruhl, 1923.

6. cf Lowie (1940:434), where he notes that masks used by other Brazilian tribes to impersonate spirits and terrify the uninitiated are used by the Canella purely for amusement.

7. Ulaga masks obtain among the Central and Northern Igbos. For another example of such masks, see Ottenberg (1975), where he describes Afikpo children's mba mask.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

This is the title I gave to the exhibit of Igbo masks which I organized and presented at the U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology. It was a major part of my Master's project in anthropology (museology) and served as an introduction to the study of masks. It lasted from July 5 to August 29, 1977. In this exhibit as well as the thesis, I presented Igbo mask as ritual theatre. This concept was achieved through the use of appropriate theme statements and photographs (see plates I, II, and III).

The theme statements speak for themselves. The two photographs which accompanied these statements were intended to demonstrate the ritual theatricality of Igbo masquerades. A is the ritual preparation for masquerade, while B demonstrates theatricality by showing masked performers (actors) and their audience (community). See plate IV.

The display was contained in three cases--63, 64 and 65. Case 63 (plate V) which is the longest, contained the Okpa costume from Amaseri near Afikpo, twelve Afikpo face masks, and five ikenga figurines. Afikpo is Southeastern Igbo. I used textiles and raffia from the Museum as appropriate backgrounds for both the Afikpo masks and the ikenga figurines.

Case 64 (plate VI) contained one Okpolumpi or Nwampi mask and four Odogu or Okpoka masks. These masks are from Ozubulu. In case 65 (plate VII) were displayed five agbogho masks from Enugu, Northern Igbo.
Plate I. An overview of gallery space showing the masks as they were displayed in the cases. Photographs of the exhibit were taken by Jean Hamilton, U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology.
THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

Igbo Masquerade

The seven million Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria possess an ancient and distinctive cultural tradition and speak a common language. Traditionally, farmers, traders, and fishermen, numerous Igbo are now moving into large modern cities and participating in the developing global culture and economy. Still, many vital elements of the Igbo way persist, most notably their religious participation in initiation and masquerade, which over a hundred years of British rule and Christian missionaries could not destroy. This exhibition is an introduction to Igbo masks and masquerade—a ritual theatre which embodies some of the most profound and deeply felt religious beliefs of the people. The exhibition features masks from the Northern, Central and Southeastern Igbo and shows the visual diversity of Igbo art, while demonstrating as well the underlying unity of their religious conceptions of the unseen world. This is a world of ancestors, the unborn, and the spirits, which the rituals of masquerade bring to experiential reality through mask, costume, music, song and dance.

While masks are the aspect of masquerade most commonly found in museums, they are merely carved pieces of wood which have been separated from the sounds, costumes, and ritual setting which complete their meaning and existence in Igboland. A mask in an exhibit is a piece of art; a mask in its traditional setting is a being. While it is human men who actually carve and wear the masks, they are only the agents through which the beings represented by the mask come temporarily from the world beyond into the world of here and now. Thus, the masks you see here on exhibit are merely lifeless objects, but they are clues to the more powerful and enduring beings they both represent and reincarnate in three-dimensional physical form.

In order to use your imagination to participate in the experience of masking, you are asked to consider how the mask transforms the man who wears it:
– it hides his own face and identity
– it frees him from the rules of conduct which govern everyday life
– it allows him to become the other being that it represents.
Perhaps the best way to look at a mask is to imagine yourself on the inside looking out.

Plate II. Two of the theme statements used in the exhibit.
Initiation Into the Mmuo

Knowledge of the mask and its deeper meanings, and the right to experience personal transformation while wearing one, is carefully restricted to men who have been initiated into the mmuo ("secret society"). Every male in the community must undergo initiation or experience shame and ridicule. It is a test of courage and endurance and a prerequisite to becoming a man with adult responsibilities. These include maintaining for the community as a whole the vital links between the living and the dead which keeps the visible world in harmony with the powerful unseen world beyond. By gaining the approval of the ancestors through initiation, adult men also take on the responsibility for maintaining social, political, and judicial control in the affairs of normal Igbo life.

Initiation transforms boys into men; masquerade transforms men into spirits and ancestors. Through these methods the spiritual and moral continuity of the Igbo way is maintained.

Plate III. The third exhibit statement. The photograph shows new initiates into the secret society at Afikpo. Photograph courtesy of Simon Ottenberg, University of Washington, Seattle.
Plate IV. Two of the principal exhibit photographs demonstrating the ritual theatricality of Igbo masquerades. A is the ritual preparation.

B is performance before an audience.

Photograph courtesy of Simon Ottenberg, University of Washington, Seattle.
Plate V. Details of Case 63.
Plate VI. Details of Case 64.

Plate VII. Details of Case 65.
I designed and made costumes for the Nwampi and one Odogu mask showing how these are worn in Ozubulu. The costume for these masks consisted of a sewn brown textile and woven raffia which is worn around the neck and waist. Costumes were also made for two agbogho masks. One costume was made from a yellow textile on which I painted red and black colours. The other costume was made from a red textile on which were sewn blue, yellow and black materials.

Descriptive statements were used in all the cases to explain the names and uses of all items in the exhibit. Appropriate photographs were also used in all cases to show the masks in their social context. There were other photographs illustrating a typical Igbo village and showing some other Igbo masquerades such as the Ozoebunnu and Ijelle (see plates VIII and X). There was also a map of Igbo territory.

The masks and ikengas were selected to show a variety of Igbo art. The okpa was introduced into the exhibit to demonstrate that masks are not made from wood only. The okpa is a fibre-net costume with raffia attachments and is used by an energetic village runner or messenger. The twelve Afikpo masks show the art styles of Southeastern Igbos. These masks generally have small frontlets or faces. Their design is geometric, stylistic and at times naturalistic. Except for the Isi ji, all of them were carved from wood and have woven raffia attachments which act both as fastening medium and cushion against the face of the wearer. The isi ji was made from calabash and is the only mask worn just once during the initiation of the first son. All the masks were painted with white, red and black. One notices Ibibio influence in this art style.
Plate VIII. Ozoebunnu from Ozubulu.
(Drawing by E.C. Onwuzolum).
The ikenga ("God of Fortune") has an indirect relationship with the mask because it is given to one after initiation. It symbolizes the achievement of a boy who has now become a man. It was introduced into the exhibit as an example of Igbo statues. All the five ikengas are from Central Igbo. Three are of recent make while the other two have been used in ritual. None of them was painted.

The Ozubulu masks show the art style of the Central Igbos. This style also occurs among the Western Igbo across the Niger River. These masks are larger than Afikpo masks. Their design is abstract since they symbolize death, a non-concrete phenomena. The facial features are intended to frighten and keep away the uninvited from their rituals. The face of the nwampi is painted white while the horn is black. Two odogu have black paints. Two have black and red colours. The red colour in the nose and mouth of this mask symbolizes danger.

The Enugu masks are called agbogho and demonstrate the Northern Igbo art styles. These masks are meant to be beautiful and graceful. Their head-gear is that of a typical Igbo lady who has just come out of the seclusion necessary before marriage. They are all painted white and black and show naturalistic features. They are meant either to be carried on the head or to cover the face only.

Detailed documentation of all the materials used in the exhibit has been incorporated in this chapter. A show of about 75 slides was organized to further buttress the ritual-theatricality of the masks. The slides were shown four times in the orientation theatre of the Museum and twice to a class of senior citizens. There was a live presentation of Igbo masquerade on July 17 at the Great Hall of the Museum.
I am of the opinion that the exhibit and presentations were successful.

However, I am also of the opinion that additional background information is still vital to complete the success of any exhibit. This is necessary to make for a better understanding of the objects and photographs used in a display. The understanding could be achieved by preparing a scholarly catalogue or writing a thesis such as I am doing. Although a thesis is more technical than a catalogue for the public, it is unavoidable in my case since I must satisfy the requirements of scholarship demanded by the University. Therefore, I substitute a thesis as an additional source of information to "The World of Spirits" in place of a catalogue that would have been prepared in usual museum practice.
DETAILS OF THE MASKS THAT WERE DISPLAYED IN THE EXHIBIT

"THE WORLD OF SPIRITS"

CASE 63
Okpa

From Amaseri is a masquerade of physical force and is meant to be worn by an energetic young man because it runs through the village and may punish those who block its path. It is a full head and body net costume with no special design in the facial area. No part of it is detachable. It is coloured dark brown with attached white bands of raffia at the chest and limbs. This costume was made from native fibre (could also be made from European cord), is heavy and is entered through the chest. This mask is foreign to Igbo culture although some Igbos make it today. It is of Ibibio or Efik origin (see McFarlan, 1964:26). Because it is used by the secret society for communication, it is very difficult to purchase this mask publicly.

Measurements
Length - 78"
Arm span - 75"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

(Materials; wood and raffia). Mba is a common Afikpo mask. It is a small white-faced mask with a decorative board protruding from the top of the
head. The board is painted in details of black, yellow, white and red. A woven raffia is attached to the edge to act as fastenings and cushion against the wearer's face.

**Measurements**

- Length - 19"
- Width - 5½"
- Depth - 4"
- Blade - 10" x 4"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

**Acali**

(Materials: wood and raffia). An old Afikpo mask used in initiation and other mask ceremonies. It is a very small mask with rectangular cut-out features in brown and partly varnished wood.

**Measurements**

- Length - 9"
- Width - 4"
- Depth - 1½"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

**(a) and (b). Igri.**

(Materials: wood and raffia). This is also called Okumpka. It is one of the most beautiful masks in Afikpo. Two of these were displayed to show styles.

**(a) Measurements**

- Length - 19½"
- Width - 5½"
- Depth - 5"

This is long-faced, in white, black, red and yellow colours, with geometrically stylized features including diagonal tear marks. This has a sort of rounded edge at the chin.
(b) **Measurements**

Length - 16"
Width - 4½"
Depth - 4"

It is also long-faced, in white and black colours, with geometrically stylized features and a pointed edge at the chin. Has tear marks.

Both of these masks are used in the Okumkpa play (Ottenberg, 1975:87) of the Afikpo.

Both are from the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

**Kpirikpiri or Otogho** ("Woodpecker"). (Materials: wood and raffia).

This is a small bird mask in white, red and black colours, with rounded features and beak-like projections curving downward from the forehead and upward from the chin. Used in initiation plays.

**Measurements**

Length - 9"
Width - 6"
Depth - 6"
Beak extension - 3"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

**Okumkpa**

(Materials: wood and raffia). This is the Okumkpa-play leader's mask. This mask is worn by the organizer and director of this four act play (see Ottenberg, 1975:104). It is a simple, long, oval mask, with the face quartered in dark brown and white details rendered in opposite colours. Broken egg shells were applied to give texture and effect to the mask.

**Measurements**
Length - 13"
Width - 5½"
Depth - 3"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

Bekee ("White person or foreigner"). (Materials: wood and raffia).

An Afikpo small, white-faced mask with brown-black surrounding and detail.

Measurements

Height - 10"
Width - 5½"
Depth - 6"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

Ibibio

(Materials: wood and raffia). Carving of a beautiful woman; this style was copied by the Afikpo from Ibibios who are their neighbours further south.

Measurements

Length - 11"
Width - 6"
Depth - 5"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

Mmaji ("Yam knife"). (Materials: wood and raffia). Afikpo; small-faced mask with abstract features: peg-like knobs and a curving crest in white, red, black and yellow protruding from the mudline of the face. This is used in secret society dances to thank the ancestors for strength (symbolized by the knife) given to members to cultivate in the farm, ubi.

Measurements

Length - 17"
Width - 6"
Depth - 5"
Knife - 9"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

Isiji ("The first or biggest yam"). (Material: calabash). Used only in the initiation of the first son. It is a gourd mask, elongated to resemble a yam. The neck of the gourd, curving upward, is painted white and orange. This is an abstract symmetrical design in white, yellow and orange on brown-black representing the face.

Measurements
Length - 18"
Width - 7"
Depth - 5\frac{1}{2}"
Neck - 6"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

Okpesu
(Materials: wood and raffia). This ugly mask is used to frighten children during the Okumkpa play. It has an oval black face with protruding eyes and teeth and a glued-on beard. Details in brown, red and white.

Measurements
Length - 10"
Width - 6"
Depth - 4"
Beard - 8"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

Mkpi ("He goat")
(Materials: wood and raffia). This is a goat mask in brown-black with very simple features. The mouth
and tear marks are detailed in orange. Two horns protrude from the head.

Measurements

Length - 15"
Width - 5"
Depth - 6"
Horns - 6"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

Opanwa ("Mother carrying a child on the head"). (Materials: wood and raffia). Opanwa is a white-faced mask with elaborately carved and painted detailing of face marks and coiffure. From the top protrudes the pole-figure of a child.

Measurements

Length - 22"
Width - 5½"
Depth - 6"
Child - 13½"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

The Ikengas

1.

A dark brown carving of a naked man seated on a small stool, with a knife in his right hand and a head in his left. Loops commence and terminate at both ears.

Measurements

Length - 20"
Width - 7"
Loops - 3"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.
2. Small, light brown figure with two horns.

Measurements

Length - 8"
Width - 3"
Horns - 2"

From the Starkweather Collection, Michigan.

3. Small, light brown figure, with recognizable human face.

Measurements

Length - 5"
Width - 3"

From the Starkweather Collection, Michigan.

4. Small, light brown figure, almost a twin to No. 2 with two horns.

Measurements

Length - 8"
Width - 2½"
Horns - 3"

From the Starkweather Collection, Michigan.

5. A small, dark brown figure, with two horns. This ikenga has been used in ritual and the dark brown colour is the result of age and old blood of animals.

Measurements

Length - 7"
Width - 3½"
Horns - 2"

U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology Collection, Vancouver.

CASE 64 Ozubulu Masks

1. Odogu (Material: wood). A large, black-faced mask with
twisted features. There is a red outline. Also on the head is a single coiled, black and white python, an animal venerated in Ozubulu. This is a serious mask used in burial. The black paint symbolizes death while red warns people of danger. The twisted feature is to create awe. The glued eye lashes symbolized its wisdom or cunning.

**Measurements**
- Length - 11"
- Width - 9"
- Depth - 5"

From the Starkweather Collection, Michigan.

2. **Odogu** (Material: wood). This is a particularly dangerous mask. It is a large, black-faced mask with split nose, protruding eyelids and tongue in red. The red shows that its sight, breath and words are dangerous and could cause injury. People are warned to keep at a distance. It, further, has two backward-curving spinal horns and small round ears. Used in burial ceremonies.

**Measurements**
- Length - 15"
- Width - 10"
- Depth - 6"
- Horn - 6"

From the Starkweather Collection, Michigan.

3. **Okpolumpi or Nwampi**. (Material: wood). This is a large, white-faced mask with wide mouth and bared teeth. Its small
eyes, ears and mouth are outlined in brown-black. It has a carved head-covering supporting two massive curved horns painted black. This is a mask of physical force used to demonstrate anger when a member of the mmuo society is dead.

Measurements

Length - 21 "
Width - 8½" 
Depth - 3"
Horns - 11½"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

4. Okpoka

(Material: wood). This is a dark-faced mask with high-set ears, narrow forehead, and protruding features.

Measurements

Length - 10"
Width - 6"
Depth - 3"

From the Lockett Collection, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

5. Okpoka

(Material: wood). A dark brown mask with high-set ears, narrow forehead and sharp protruding features. The mouth is twisted.

Measurements

Length - 10 "
Width - 6½"
Depth - 2"

From the Lockett Collection, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

CASE 65

Enugu Masks

The material used in preparing these masks is wood. These are all called agbogho and represent female
spirits. They depict the beautiful features which Igbo's attribute to the earth-goddess *ala*. The hairdo is typical of Igbo women, especially after their period of seclusion in preparation for marriage.

1. A white-faced conical mask with a long, pointed face and features. The elaborately curved coiffure with its central crest and other detailing is in black and white. The mask is meant to be carried on the head.

**Measurements**
- Length: 15"  
- Width: 8"  
- Depth: 6"  
- Hairdo: 4\(\frac{1}{2}\)"

From the Sawyer Collection, Vancouver.

2. A white-faced mask with the white worn brown with age. It has a small, pointed face and features and carved coiffure. The mask is meant to cover the face only.

**Measurements**
- Length: 12"  
- Width: 7"  
- Depth: 5\(\frac{1}{2}\)"

From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

3. A white-faced mask with long, pointed face and features and an elaborate coiffure of horn-like shapes. The details and coiffure are in light brown.

**Measurements**
- Length: 13"  
- Width: 7"
From the Ottenberg Collection, Seattle.

A white-faced conical mask with a high, elaborate central crest on the coiffure and a sharp detailing in black on white. It is meant to be carried on the head.

Measurements
Length - 17 1/2"
Width - 8"
Depth - 7"
Coiffure - 7"

From the U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology Collection, Vancouver.

A white-faced conical mask with a long, pointed face and small features detailed in brown-black. The coiffure consists of five parallel free-standing crests in brown-black with white, blue and yellowish detailing and is meant to be carried on the head.

Measurements
Length - 19"
Width - 9"
Depth - 7"
Coiffure - 9 1/2"

From the Sawyer Collection, Vancouver.
CHAPTER III

THE IGBOS

The Geography of Igboiland

Below the confluence of the great Niger and Benue lies the forest belt which covers most of Southern Nigeria; and east of this strategic point is the home of the Igbo peoples of Nigeria (Crowder, 1966:22). Numbering over seven million, the Igbos of Southeastern Nigeria, are a people who speak a common language which forms part of the Kwa group of West African languages (Nzimiro, 1972:3). Located between latitude 5 to 7 degrees north of the equator and longitude 6 to 8 degrees east of Greenwich, their territorial distribution over an area of some 15,800 square miles, covers the Niger-Cross River area, with the Ibibios and Cross River people to the east, Ijaw to the south, Edo speaking peoples to the west, and Igala and Idoma speaking peoples to the north. Numerically, the Igbos are one of the principal peoples of Africa; and along with the Hausas, Fulanis, Yorubas, are an important group in present day Nigeria.

Before it enters the Atlantic Ocean through a network of distributaries which characterize its delta, the Niger River divides the Igbo country into two unequal parts. The greater portion lies in what is now called the Anambra and Imo States, while a smaller triangular portion, west of the Niger, is part of Bendel States. Though separated by the Niger and thus falling into other political units, "the western and eastern Igbo have retained their cultural as well as their psychic
Fig. I. Map of Igbo Territory, Nigeria.
(Drawn by E.C. Onwuzolum).
unity. In modern times their attitude towards political questions and their identification with what they regard as their own 'leader' reveal the solidarity between the Igbo peoples on both sides of the Niger" (Uchendu, 1965:1).

Igboland's physical environment is mainly tropical rain forest with marginal savannah in the extreme north. The average annual temperature is between 80 to 90 degrees F with an annual range of between 5 and 10 degrees F. The rainy and dry seasons are well marked; the former begins in April and lasts to October, when the dry season commences. Rainfall is heavier in the south than in the north, many areas having more than 70 inches a year. During the rainy season, a "break" occurs in August and is locally called okochi ji oko (the drought favourable to the growth of yams). Important in the seasonal cycle are the southwest monsoon winds that bring rain and the northeast winds that are dry, dusty, as well as cold. These winds are locally referred to as ugunu ("harmattan") and are the farmer's friend because they are known to open the bush, dry the clearings, kill some of the insects that destroy crops and make the burning of rubbish easy. However, it turns the natives nearly chalk white and cracks the lips.

The dry season is a period of less farm work and is characterized by rituals and festivities such as the masquerades. In this season the community offers sacrifices to the ancestors seeking rain for next planting season, abundant yield in the farms, wealth, good health, and children. Then they give form to the ancestors through masks, and these come temporarily from beyond to judge the living.
The History of the Igbos

When and from where the Igbo came into their present territory has until very recently been a subject of much speculation, because the Igbos have no written record except a few Nsibidi scripts which are a recent discovery and which are still controversial. This lack of written records makes it difficult to ascertain their origin, understand their philosophy, assess their values, master the wealth of their culture, fathom their religious beliefs, explore their history, interpret their customs, and comprehend their political system. Therefore, research on the Igbo must depend primarily on oral history, folk tales and legends, parables and proverbs, observations and experiences, what other people have to say about them, and what archaeological finds of recent times have recorded.

Oral history or folk tales and legends may not lead one far into Igbo history because the Igbos use animals to depict actual events. The reason for this use of animals in stories is two-fold, viz: a) to avoid opprobrium or sometimes violent reprisals from persons (or their relatives) involved, and b) to avoid (as is the custom) speaking ill of the dead or deifying individuals beyond certain limits. This use of animals therefore places limitations on the depth of stories and so hampers research. For example, Igbos have a legend or folk tale about their origin. The story tells of tortoise, Mbe or Mbekwu, who became so powerful and intelligent that he was banished from the animal kingdom by the rest of the animals on account of his prowess. He left with his family and relatives and settled in an ostensibly empty village he discovered. However, as days passed, Mbe realized that this
no-man's-land actually belonged to spirits who had begun to return one after another. When confronted by the spirits, Mbe claimed that he was the first son of the founder of the village but that the spirits were too young to remember that he had been sold away because of a trouble that had erupted in the village. To test his knowledge, Mbe was subjected to so many tests which he accomplished and was allowed not only to remain but to rule the village.

This story is interpreted by the Igbos as evidence that they migrated to their present homes and had a glorious past. In fact, living as an Igbo, one cannot but feel this sense of a glorious past and this buttresses the pride of the average Igbo and gives him confidence. Mrs. Leith-Ross (1939:55) summed this up admirably when in 1930 she wrote:

"Nevertheless, every now and again, one has a sense of an older culture lying behind what one now sees, long forgotten by the people themselves, grown so faint that it is only in certain lights that one catches it, but the glimpse is of something so rich, so vital, that the present sinks into insignificance besides it".

What was speculation in 1930 has now been confirmed as factual by recent historical and archaeological discoveries. We know now for sure that by 3000 B.C. people had settled in the present Igbo homeland and were already making stone tools including ground stone axes and pottery. The work of Shaw at Igbo-Ukwu shows a flourishing iron-age civilization in the ninth century A.D. From all these, Flint (1966:63) put forth a hypothesis which legend confirms in the Mbe story, "that the Igbos migrated into the area en masse".

Isichei (1976:3) maintains that "the first human inhabitants of Igboland must have come from areas further south--possibly from the
Niger confluence. But men have been living in Igboland for at least five thousand years since the dawn of human history. This first settlement was on the northern edge of the rain forest and savanna to its north. This area would have been easier to cultivate with wooden and stone tools. Excavations at Afikpo and Nsukka have confirmed not only this settlement but also the fact that rain forest could be penetrated with stone tools. Also, the cultivation of yam, a crop that is of ritual and symbolic importance, and which was the economic basis of Igbo civilization, confirms this early Igbo settlement in the northern area, around the Cross River and the Anamba valley-Nsukka escarpment. Jones (1964:30), writes that:

"One can assume an early dispersion from this centre to the Nsukka-Udi highlands in the east and an early drift southwards towards the coast...
One can more positively distinguish a later and more massive dispersal... which was mainly southeastwards... into what is now Eastern Isuama area. From this subsidiary dispersal area, there was one movement—south-south-east into the Aba division to form the Ngwa group of tribes, and another movement east into Umuahia area and hence to Ohafia-Arochukwu ridge, with an offshoot that struck north... to develop into the North-Eastern Ibo."

These migrations became extremely necessary because of population pressure; Igbo country having up until today one of the highest population density figures in Africa if not the world. The many centuries of high density cultivation explains why the entire vegetation in Igbo country is of secondary growth.

European contact with the Igbo-speaking peoples dates back to the arrival of the Portuguese in the middle of the fifteenth century. For nearly four centuries (1434-1807), the Niger Coast formed a "contact community"--the contact point between European and African traders: the
Portuguese from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Dutch from the seventeenth, and the British from the eighteenth century. It was a period of trade on the coast rather than one of conquest and empire building in the hinterland. The chief item provided by the Igbo was slaves, many of whom came to the New World. The monopoly held by the coastal slavers (traders from the Niger States) reduced Igbo slavers to the role of middlemen who rarely dealt directly with European slavers. The local trade currencies of the period included manillas, copper rods, iron bars, whisky, guns and later cowrie shells.

With the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, a new trading epoch opened. There was a shift from the traffic in men to the traffic in raw materials for European industries, and therefore palm produce, timber, elephant tusks, and spices became the merchandize of the "legitimate" trade. With this shift, the European traders could no longer be confined to the coast, but saw their real interest, "the traders frontier", in the hinterland, which was still the source of goods (i.e. palm produce). In the struggle to establish a "free-trade" hinterland between 1807-1885, British companies played a decisive role for Britain by combining aggressive trading with aggressive imperialism.

When the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was created out of the former Royal Niger Company and the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1910, the control of the area passed from the British Foreign Office to the Colonial Office. Hitherto, Igboland had been technically treated as a British Colony even before it was formally conquered and pacified. Between 1902, when the Aro "Long Juju" was destroyed, and 1914 when Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated, there were twenty-one
British military expeditions into Igboland. In fact, it was not until 1928, when Igbo men were made to pay tax for the first time in their history, that it became clear to them that they were a subject people.

No sketch of the British penetration of Igboland could be complete without mentioning the missionaries. It was in 1857 that Bishop Crowther successfully established a Church Missionary Society Mission at Onitsha. The Roman Catholic Mission followed in 1885. Onitsha thus became the religious and educational centre of these two great proselytizing missions as well as the base for British military penetration into other areas of Igbo country.

Although the missionaries enjoyed the protective power and the military prestige of the advancing colonial power, it was the mystery of the written word, in the psychology of the "bush schools" founded by them, rather than the military might or the content of the holy book which assured their success among the Igbos.

Today we find both the colonial authorities and the missionaries almost destroyed Igbo culture and made some white men out of blacks in the process of acculturation. Today, also, we still find other Igbos who, though formally educated, try to re-discover the ways of their fathers because the fathers, the ancestors are never wrong. After all there is an Igbo proverb that one does not beget an heir before his father.

A Survey of Traditional Igbo Society

I will now devote some considerable space to an understanding of
the Igbo Society. This is very important because to know how a people view, interpret and organize the world around them is to understand how they evaluate life; and a peoples' evaluation of life, both temporal and non-temporal, provides them with a charter of action and a guide to behaviour.

Occupation

The Igbo nation is made up of a heterogeneous group of people unified by a dominant Igbo culture; this is characterized by a common language (with different dialects), common religious symbols—the ofo or otosi (a ritual staff made from a tree branch), occupation of a common territory, possession of basically identical political organization and in the context of this study, all Igbos possess some type of related masquerade. Initiation into this masquerade society called mmuo or mma is also universal among the rural Igbos.

Agriculture has been the mainstay of Igbo society in what is termed "root crop" economy. Yam, cassava (manioc) and many varieties of cocoyam (taro) are the chief staples and provide the bulk of the population with most subsistence needs. No meal is considered complete without one or two of them. Other products are peanuts, plantains, bananas, maize, pumpkin, egwusi (melon), okro ("okra"), rice, beans, palm oil, palm wine of various kinds, pears, papaya, oranges, etc. These staples have a high yield which is offset to some extent by their long growth period. Their profitable cultivation requires abundant land and cheap labour. Land means many things to the Igbo; it is the
domain of the earth-goddess, *ala*; a burial place for the ancestors; a place to live on, and a place to make a living. Land is therefore the most important asset to the people; it is a source of security and is emotionally protected from alienation through the tenure system which prescribes the rights of individuals or groups over land. The principle is that all land is owned and through the administration of the lineage head (minimal lineage), every member is provided land on which to build his house and on which to raise crops. This is maintained through religious sanctions.

Igbos also hunt and fish; they raise domestic cattle, sheep, goats and poultry. Igbos developed iron technology over the centuries and so there are smiths in Igboland who produce spears, hoes, knives, traps, guns, gates, needles and other iron implements. These are used for farming, hunting, fishing and in occasional warfare. The arts of woodworking and carving were also developed, hence the unique nature of Igbo masks as can be seen in museum exhibits. Pottery, too, is an ancient Igbo craft and this hereditary art is practiced by women. Also weaving is practiced by women and Akwuete Igbos are famous for their fabrics. Thus, within the boundaries of Igbo, agriculture, hunting, fishing, metalwork, woodwork, pottery and weaving were and still are the main occupation of the people.

**Igbo Political System**

Henderson (1972:23), was worried that:

"The societies of the Ibo-speaking peoples have for some time presented a quandry to the student of comparative history. The Ibo live in some of the heaviest population
concentration in all of Africa and they occupy a region long in communication with societies possessing stratified, even hierarchial social systems. Moreover, the Ibo themselves participated extensively and actively in the European slave trade, a powerful and political stimulus that in many areas along the Guinea Coast promoted confederation, centralization, and state formation in diverse indigenous societies. Nevertheless, the Ibo mostly continued to live in small-scale segmentary societies, each structurally differentiated but based strongly on unilineal descent.

This is the case because the Igbo world is based on the principle of equalitarianism. Equality or near equality ensures that no one person or group of persons acquires too much control over the life of others. This is an effective ideological obstacle to the development of a strong central authority. However, no human society can or has achieved absolute equality among its citizens, and the Igbos are no exception. There are distinctions in age, sex and wealth; in fact, Igbos emphasize or put stress on achievement and success. They recognize that "a child who washes his hands clean deserves to eat with his elders". However, there are institutional checks and balances which prevent the emergences of demagogues and this has its root in Igbo morals and religious philosophy. For example, a rich man is made "holy" to keep him in check; in return, the society relies on the "holy wealthy man", the Nze, to maintain an ordered society. The Nze ("holy wealthy man"), is a title which requires not only spending of wealth but religious sanctions and purity. These holy men adjudicate and administer the town and their executive arm is either the age-grade associations or the mmuo ("masquerade") societies.

The political institutions in Igbo land differ in their structure. Some of these, like the kingship institution in Onitsha, Nri and
Aguleri, are intrusive traits. Although age-grade associations, title taking societies, dibia fraternities (a priestly association), secret societies, and oracles are among the traditional instruments of government, the role of each in the political processes of a given village-group differs. Nevertheless, there emerges a general pattern of political process which is shared by all Igbo.

We may distinguish two layers of the political structure – 1) the village, and 2) the village-group. At the village level of government (this varies in size and population), the accepted practice is direct democracy or what Njaka (1974:10) calls "Ohacracy" – a government by all male adults in the village (the Oha) in which decisions are arrived at by common consensus. At the village-group level, a representative system is adopted; equality among the associating villages is maintained through the principle of equal "sharing of Kola" and equal contribution of material resources needed for the survival of the group. This equality is necessary since Igbos are averse and sensitive to outside authority. This means that each village is autonomous and sovereign in all internal matters, but may cooperate with other villages at the village-group level. This solidarity is buttressed by myths of common origin.

The village is segmented into a number of lineages and each of these into major, minor, and minimal sublineages. Each lineage comprises of territorially kin-based units called umunna ("children of same father"); this is a fluid term whose narrowest referent is the children of the same father but of different mothers; its widest referent is the patrilineal members, real or putative whom one cannot marry. Umunna is made of compounds, each consisting of a number of
economically independent households with a man and his wife. It is in these compounds that traditional authority mainly lies because all the householders in the compounds recognize the head of the umunna as the political authority of the lineage. No decision would be made without first consulting this man who is called okpara. As head of the compound, he has numerous ritual, moral and legal rights and obligations. He is the eyes of the members of his lineage while the other members are his ears. He settles problems and offers sacrifices. In return he receives respect, obedience and material token of goodwill. He represents the lineage in disputes with outsiders and is the custodian of the land. This is symbolized by his possession of the ofo (a staff made from the tree Detarium elastica). He maintains authority in the extended family which is the compound. He is the link between the living and the dead ancestors.

Legislative activities of the entire village are the concern of all adult males and this takes place in ad hoc general assembly called Oha. Once decisions are arrived at in the village square, this is given ritual sanction by the oldest ofo holder who would say "this is iwu ("law") in accordance with our custom and may it be respected and obeyed. Ancestors, you are witness". The ofo is struck four times on the ground and each time it is so struck, the assembly will assent "iha" ("let it be so").

In complicated cases, especially where the assembly is acting in a judicial capacity and where the facts are not too clear, the Igbo take recourse to oracles or to diviners. The oracles depended on "sons abroad" for clients and to ascertain the truth. One must concede that
the decisions or judgements of the oracles were fairly accurate. Common sense shows that the reputation and influence of the oracles depended on their ability to be honest and just. The decisions of the oracles were subject to no further appeal.

The executive function of the village is vested in the youths through their age-grade associations and/or the mmuo societies. Beside serving as a social indicator which separates the seniors from their juniors, the age-grade association is a means of allocating public duties to various segments of the population, guarding public morality through the censorship of members' behaviour, and providing companionship and mutual insurance for members. Members run errands, keep the village clean and keep surveillance over village property. The mmuo ("masquerade") society acted as police--more will be said on this later.

Scholars have sometimes implied in their writing that large political units are "more advanced" than small ones, and that a change from small to large marked progress. Applied to the Igbos, this implication is very deceptive. Even though the Igbos remained organized in small age-graded village units, to them this made true democracy--the government of the people, by the people, for the people, the oha, very possible. Enlargement of scale offered no obvious political advantage to Igbo communities. Democracy, as it is practiced today in the West, is full of limitations. A Frenchman who visited Igbo country in 1906 said that true liberty existed there, through its name was not inscribed on any monument.
Igbo Kinship Network

Normally the Igbo child is brought up in his father's lineage. Later in his childhood, he is constantly brought into contact with his mother's lineage. As he grows up he becomes increasingly aware of the wider social network, the most important of which are the extended father's mother's lineage and the extended mother's mother's lineage. When he marries he also acquires affinal links, with his wife's lineage, playing very important roles in the life of his children. These five lineages constitute for the Igbo their most important kinship network.

Igbo society is one with pronounced patrilineal emphasis. Since agnation determines the membership of a family group, the line of inheritance, and succession to name and office, a person takes most of his jural rights in land and in social, economic, and political position from the lineage of his father. The members of this lineage are called the umunna ("children of the father").

Umunna bu ike ("the fathers agnates are the source of one's strength"), is a popular Igbo saying, because one depends on his agnates for comfort and social and economic security. Agnates help one "to get up" by providing the needed ladder for social climbing. It is to one's patrilineal lineage that one brings home his wife after marriage; and these members are expected to make the marriage succeed by helping provide part of what is required in the marriage ceremony and settling any disputes that might threaten to destroy the marriage. Title-taking ceremonies, marriage feasts, burial rites, initiation and masquerade ceremonies, and other social events through which a wider social group
is activated, succeed or fail because of the type of interpersonal relations between a person and his agnates. The ideal behaviour expected among agnates may be characterized as "brotherlines", i.e. relationship defined by mutual respect, trust, help, loyalty and affection.

If agnates are the greatest prop of success, they also are the greatest sources of hostility. Igbos say that it is the home not the bush rat that knows where the mother keeps her condiments. In other words, agnates know one's strengths and weaknesses and might exploit same, especially in matters of property inheritance. Hence, people are generally careful with patrikins but might be more relaxed among their mother's agnates, where, to borrow on Ozubulu phrase, he is referred to as nwadiana ("the son of the owner of the soil").

A person is most welcome among his ununne ("the mother's lineage") where literally he is free to do anything. Since he does not compete for inheritance in this group, there is no fear of poisoning or hostility and one may eat whatever one pleases in this group. The kinship bond in this case is unaffected by material status and people never allow it to strain. It is one's last line of defence.

The father's mother's and the mother's mother's lineages constitute the extend or "remote" kinsmen. They are also important in the lives of the Igbos, although one does not command any defined privileges. Members assure him of support and attend his ceremonies such as during initiation and participation in masquerade, title-taking, marriage, etc. Members of this extended kingroup are never allowed to marry because of consanguinal relationship.
The classificatory terms employed by the Igbo for naming these agnatic groups vary. Although "this situation may be confusing to the investigator, it is not necessarily so to the Ibo. Every Ibo is conversant with kinship terms within and often far beyond the radius in which he may seek a wife, just as he is aware of dialectical variations in any other field of terminology" (Ardener, 1954:85).

It has been stressed that every Igbo belongs to an agnatic group, a lineage with an unbroken continuity of descent in the male line. This agnatic group (patrilineage), as well as its members or agnates, is called by the same term "umunna" and this is an exogamous unit in one frame of reference. All its female members who must leave the lineage at marriage are called umu-okpu or umu-ada. In another frame of reference it is a term for agnates meaning children of father, its singular being nwanna ("child of father").

By rule of exogamy and virilocal residence, we expect to meet non-agnates as resident members of a lineage settlement, ego's mother is one. Ego's father is nna while the mother is nne. All father's brothers and sister's senior to ego are classified as dede and dada respectively; terms which distinguish between generation and sex but which can be applied to ego's senior full siblings and senior half siblings. Ego's father's father is called nnanna and father's mother is called nnenne, the latter is also applied to ego's actual mother's mother. Ego's father's wives other than his mother are called nwunyenna. Ego calls his wives nwanyi and they call him di. His children are called umu and this includes children of his brothers and sisters. The in-law relationship creates a wider range of affinal links which
are termed *ogo*-a reciprocal term which subsumes all generations and both sexes.

Igbo kinship terms are classificatory covering the widest possible range of kinship. Terms of address are governed by rules which guide and regulate social interaction. Among other features, Igbo kinship terminology embodies the "principle of respect" relationship. This requires a junior to address all his seniors *dee*-a term of respect, based on seniority and always addressed to a senior by a junior and never used among age equals. Reinforcing the principle of respect is what might be termed the principle of "superiority of praise names". This recognizes the superiority of one's praise name or status name over all other appropriate kinship terms of address. A titled man's praise name takes precedence over all other terms of address. *Ogbuehi* ("killer of cows"), *Ezeazuka* (this recognizes the need to have children to replace one), etc., are praise names.

**Religion**

Anthropologists commonly make the analytical distinction, but to the Igbo, the secular and the sacred, the natural and the supernatural, are a continuum. Supernatural forces continually impinge on life, and must be propitiated by appropriate prayers and sacrifices. The Igbo were and still are profoundly religious, and all accounts of their life reflect this fact. Nearly all adherents of traditional religion regard it as a medium of obtaining supernatural power. This does not prevent it from functioning as a system of explanation, a source of
moral injunction, a symbol of social order, or a route to immortality; "but it does mean that it also offers the prospect of a supernatural means of control over man's earthly environment" (Thomas, 1973:27).

The major values of social life among the Igbos are rooted firmly in notions of filiation and descent. When people assess the career of one another, the primary concern or criterion is the number of children he has raised to support and survive him. Children are extolled in proverbs above any other good, even above the accumulation of wealth (aku); "children first, wealth follows" is a proverb affirming the route to success. People consider that a wealthy person who has no children will reap rotten destiny, because his relatives or kinsmen may conspire to seize his fortune. He may very likely die a bad death—ajo onwu. Igbo sayings make it quite clear that maintaining life is a justifiable end in itself only to the extent that it is productive or nurturant of more life. This overwhelming concern with the production and the continuity of life is basic to the fundamental concept of Igbo philosophy and religious thought: the idea of chi. Chi is life (ndu), or life conceived as an animate self that guides the course of existence. The most directly important manifestation of this for any person is the chi in that person, which is thought of as a spiritual essence of the living self that guides and determines the course of that person's life from birth to death. It is believed that when an individual chooses "to enter the world", he makes a pact with a particular essential being (chi) selecting his length of life and his future activities; the choices so made are marked by the chi on his hand as his akalaka ("marks of the hand") or
destiny.  
Since chi in one aspect refers to a single life acted out by each person, there are as many chi as there are living individuals. However, not only does chi have a more general and inclusive meaning as the essence of life, it is also projected as a life essence attributed to the entire universe; a universal self called chukwu or chineke meaning literally "great chi". The term "chukwu" designates an ultimate self, ordering the course and character of the universe as a whole, which in turn is conceived as a multiplicity of "worlds" (uwa). The universal self is addressed in prayers as "chuwku - okike, chineke", etc. meaning "great chi the creator". This great chi is said to have created all physical phenomena and endowed them with force and direction. The sky (igwe), the heavenly bodies as his "messenger" and eyes, the earth (ani or ala), and the streams and rivers (mmili or mmini). Chineke sent trees to grow on land, animals to roam it, men to occupy it, yams and other foods to feed people, and various objects as "medicines" (ogwu) to help men in the course of their lives. When a person dies, his chi ceases to exist as an independent entity, returning to the great ground of being in the sun or in the sky. Chukwu exists as long as the universe which it personifies.

Henderson argues that it is implicit in the logical structure of these terms that chukwu is a subcategory of chi rather than the more general class within which chi may be categorized. We may view the meaning of these concepts as a semantic structure, whose marked terms are a subcategory. It is reasonable to translate chi as "god" and chukwu as "great god". However, Igbos also say that the great god is
the source from which all particular gods of persons originate; it might therefore be equally valid to translate "chukwu" as god and "chi" as personal god. We could therefore conceive of these terms in the following dimensions; ch{i}{i}_2 as "personal god", chukwu as "great god", cch{i}{i}_1 "god without qualification"—and in this latter sense the term also refers to daylight. (See figure below).

![Semantic Structure of Chi](image)

If the description of Igbo belief system thus far makes a concern with life and life forces appear central, individual life itself is conceived not solely in opposition to the notion of death "onwu", but as an imperfect approximation of it. Indeed, acts of attaining the heights of prestige by individuals among the Igbos (e.g. title-taking, initiation into secret societies), are marked by identity-changing rituals that bring them closer and closer to death. The ultimate goal for every person is to lose his chi and thereby become a dead person or
a ghost. (mmuo or mma). The concepts of "god" and "ghost" form the major contrast pair in Igbo religion, two forces in opposition which, however, interpenetrate through the process of reincarnation.

This belief also postulates a multiplicity of worlds (uwa) in which existence occurs. The number of these worlds is indefinite, but from the point of view of men inhabiting this one, the other worlds are all "lands of the dead" (ani mmuo), into which all persons who die should subsequently be incarnated. On the other hand, these lands of the dead are also the sole source of all new human beings in the empirical world. Men, wherever they are, are believed to be looking into the other worlds, communicating with people there, and considering being incarnated there anew. All the dead are believed to take a continuous interest in this world. Indeed, some never leave it, but wander about in it mostly in a state of perpetual, incorporeal unrest; these are the "bad deaths" (ajo onwu), for these violated the world order. They belong nowhere and do little but make trouble for the living.

The dead who are viewed hopefully as sources of human beings are those whose lives were exemplary, fulfilled and who were sent out of this world with glorious funerals which facilitated their subsequent establishment in other worlds, and therefore look back here with pleasant memories and thoughts of returning. These dead are exhorted by the living in rituals and ceremonies to return as infants, and periodically, in other forms, chief of which is the mask.

The worlds of the dead are conceived as located nearby, in the vicinity of the earth in which they were buried. It is believed that
the closer a person was buried to a house, the more likely he or she will choose to reincarnate there as an offspring of its occupants. Hence, highly valued persons are buried within their own house or compound to facilitate their return, while those whose life courses have been condemned, are cast away into distant bush so that they will not return. Those buried nearby also continue to observe and protect their living children; may be periodically fed ritually, and invoked to return physically to the world in the form of reincarnated dead (nmanwụ, i.e. masquerade or mask), to inspect and judge the community, to express their pleasure at the celebrations of their kinsmen or to demand that laws they have helped to support be upheld. They may also be invoked to enter incorporeally into objects constructed in their name to be fed, venerated, prayed to, and thanked for their spiritual assistance in maintaining long lives for their children and in bringing some children into this world.

The major categories of Igbo religion have not been exhausted in the discussion of the personal god, its related but "universalized" concept of great god and ghost, and ancestors; for the objects of the physical universe (which may represent these components) are appropriate symbols because they are believed to be imbued with intrinsic forces and intentional powers that are also relevant to the needs of the living. These forces and powers are subsumed under the terms of spirits (alusi) and medicine (ogwu). These two terms introduce numerous complexities in Igbo belief system. Their meanings interpenetrate not only one another but with the ideas of gods and ghosts. Medicines retained over time can become spirits; spirits, under certain circumstances
can make pacts with personal gods and thereby become attached to individuals; and spirits are regarded as such partly because their power attracts the ghosts of the dead. To make their importance in the belief system clear, some extended discussion of spirits and medicines is necessary.

Igbos believe that when the great god created the universe, he endowed some of its objects with spiritual power. These spirits are abstract but purposeful forces that reside in natural objects, possess moral commitments, and may be helpful or harmful to man. Like personal gods, they are limitless in their duration. Unlike the great god, they are spatially localized forces that act directly and intentionally upon men, and negotiations can be made with them. For example, the sun (anyanwu) and the moon (onwa) are messengers of the great god; they traverse the sky (igwe) over the land (ani or ala) in intersecting paths which divide the earth into quadrants associated with the four days (ewe, oye or orie, afo and nkwo) of the Igbo week and with markets. Thus a conceptual linkage is made between time and space, for each Igbo day is associated and identified with a particular market place held in a particular location communicated and linked with a particular sector of the earth. All these phenomena-days of the week (often represented as four women carrying market baskets or as a four-faced person), sun, moon, the land, etc., are thought of as imbued with spiritual forces. The river or stream is often the king of the spirit for it was there or rather was created at the same time that the (female) land was created. The ogilisi or egbo tree is regarded as the first to grow on the land and is also spiritually
potent. This is why it alone is suitable for an objectification of a personal god and as the tree-shrine of land.

Although the meaning of alusi varies among different Igbo communities, and there are many varieties in a single community, the meaning of the term becomes clear when one considers the most revered and most ancient and also the most common among the Igbos. This is the oath or iyi. When a major dispute arises in the community and each party refuses to admit that the other is right, an object may be brought from a revered shrine and presented to a member of each of the parties to swear the truth of their course. If that member of one of the parties dies within a specified time after swearing to the oath, it is believed that the spirit has killed him for denying a crime of which he was guilty; if he lives the spirit has exonerated him and his cohorts. (If both live then an oracle is resorted to). In brief, these spirits bring illness and death to whoever has violated moral standards, and this power to harm is the basis of their veneration, for they are critical sanctions of morality throughout Igboland.

The most ubiquitous spiritual agent among the Igbo is the land, for its sanction is inescapable. All strongly valued social norms are things of the land (odinani or omenani), i.e. custom. This term covers a wide range of things. Within this category, two kinds of sacred violations are distinguished:

1. Acts not strictly forbidden by the land (Nso or alu);
2. Acts that are forbidden by the land (Nsó ani), abomination.

The acts 1 above are restitutive sanction: one must perform a ritual act that negates their violation, e.g. if a son should push down
his father in an argument or fight, he has committed an nso and has to perform a ritual to lift his father up again. He has to sacrifice a chicken to the family ancestral shrine.

However, acts of the type in 2 above are very serious. These are abominations and the offender must "cover" the abomination. For example, incest cannot be undone, it is a permanent damage. Also, should a member violate the rules of a secret society by unmasking a masquerade, i.e. disclosing the identity of the actor to a non-initiate (outsider), he has committed an abomination (this depends on type of disclosure and the seriousness attached to such information), for which a permanent damage has been done. The land is thus angry and will cease to be inhabitable. A ritual to cover this abomination is serious and in olden times the culprit was either killed or exiled or sold into slavery.

Nso has another related meaning Aso which is "holiness", e.g. the great god is holy. We are therefore dealing with a three-level semantic structure in this class of religious norms (see Fig. III).

![Semantic Structure of NSO](https://example.com/structure.png)

Fig. III. Semantic Structure of NSO. (Taken from Henderson, 1972, p. 116).
Regardless of the kind of morality they support, two distinct kinds of spiritual forces may be distinguished in any Igbo community: those associated with the personal gods of particular human beings, and those with power over a collectivity, e.g. a village group. The same distinction applies to most other spirits. There is an important dynamic relationship between these two categories; specifically, there is a tendency, over time, for personal spirits to become collective. Men know that there are gods, spirits and ghosts, know their putative locations, and know that these may act on them. However, while the course of human lives and communities are presumed to be set by the will of these spirits, they are largely unknown to men. Consequently, men continually seek to bring them into personal or public awareness through acts of communication.

Messenger spirits such as masks (and also udene, "vulture") are believed to serve this purpose, but communication through them in turn requires physical media. These physical media are medicine (ogwu) which are putative intrinsic properties of physical objects—bones, plants, liquids, stones, metals, body parts and effluvial of animals and men—which are believed to produce certain effects automatically by virtue of their properties, e.g. (omu), young green shoots of the oil palm (Elaisa guineesis) is considered protective. The funneled clay of a termite hill (nkpu) is regarded as a channel of communication with spirits and the dead located in the earth, and is therefore used in making powerful medicines. It is believed that masks come up from and retire and rest in termite hills. The most important medicinal medium in Igboland is called ofo (Detarium senegalese), and
it is owned by individuals and groups. Important and serious
masquerades also have this staff of Igbo manhood, the ofo, e.g. the
Ozoebunu of Ozubulu is believed to use the oldest ofo of the village.
And in this regard this mask is a store of knowledge.

Important medicinal media such as the ofo and various combinations
of medicines, cannot simply be obtained and utilized *ad hoc*, for
specialized knowledge is required to make them work. Here-in comes
the importance of the services of the *dibia* ("diviner, medicine-man
or doctor") who controls medicine, giving them relationship to the
messenger spirits. Some dibia are trained by others, while others
inherit the traits.

The dibia supervises the construction of representation of
medicinal objects such as goods, shrines, and objects dedicated to
the ghosts of the dead (at times this includes the carving of masks).
They also dedicate shrines, and must be present before the mask is
worn and would be required to watch in case evil spirits intervene in
a masquerade performance. More will be said about this in the next
chapter. In concluding this discussion it may be instructive to
represent the dynamic aspects of Igbo religion schematically. This
suggests a developmental process that relates persons to roles, collect­
ivities, and to the conceived moral order of the universe.

The discussion in this chapter is lengthy and very important
because it is basic to an understanding of the mask and masquerade per­
formance of the Igbos. It offers a cosmological explanation for the
concept of the mask. The mask fits into this cosmology through the wood
(because of the sanctity of the tree) used in making it, the paints
which put spiritual forces into it and because it is an invocation of the dead. In the next diagram, I have modified Henderson's chart to locate the place of masks in Igbo cosmology.
Ritual theatre
  of
The Dead ← The Living

Return of the dead as masquerades

Initiation (ikenga) ← Death

Making of masks (Rituals & Medicines)

Land of the Dead

REVERSIBLE TIME

IRREVERSIBLE TIME

Fig. V. Place of the Masquerade in Igbo Cosmology.
CHAPTER III

Notes and References


5. cf Buchanan and Paugh (1964:60).

6. Isichoi (1973:7) noted that Thompson, a conservator of forests in Nigeria, reported this astonishing fact over seventy years ago.

7. Virilocal residence results when a couple establishes a household with the husband's parents.

8. Proverbially, Igbos liken children to the tie-cloth which supports a person's belly, helping him to walk the road of life. It is said that before one dies, his offsprings should be as numerous as the grains of sand that bury a yam. The value of children is often affirmed in the personal names given to them, e.g. Nwa-Ka-ego ("child surpasses money"), Nwa-bu-nda ("child is shelter").

9. For a detailed description, analysis and understanding of this concept of "chi", please refer to Talbot (1926), Horton (1956, 1961, 1967), and Bradbury (1960).

10. Talbot (1926:2:40-41) clearly perceived the central significance of the notion of "chi" and its relation to the conceptions of self and universe.

11. For a better and deeper explanation of significance of the four days of the Igbo week, see Horton, 1956:17-28.
In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the reader to an example of the appearance of the mask. The concept and meaning of the mask will then be discussed. This will be followed by a description of the carving of the mask, and making of costumes. The remaining part of the chapter will be devoted to initiation into the mmuo.

The Setting

It is very appropriate to commence with an introductory illustration of the appearance of the masks. In the dry season, i.e. between the months of October and March but particularly in December, it has become customary for Igbo to exhibit or display their masked ritual plays on eke days. These plays are performed either in the market square, the village square, or on ritual play-ground prescribed and therefore reserved for such an occasion. In one Igbo community, Ozubulu, such a play-ground has a little hut built nearby. Both the hut and the square are collectively called obimmuo, meaning literally "the abode of spirits". It is on such obimmuo, abbreviated to obom, that masquerades perform on eke days to entertain the community.

Since eke is the holy day of the Igbo week, and little or no work is done, adults perform ritual sacrifices to thank the gods and
ancestors. Individuals may sacrifice chicken to their *ikenga* (the personal god of fortune) and ask for life and further achievements. Lineage heads, *di-okpala*, may also sacrifice to the lineage ancestral shrine to ask for protection and blessings for the kinsmen. Also, the entire community will offer sacrifices through the village priest to the village gods, ancestors and other spirits asking for forgiveness of the transgressions of the people and praying for blessings in the form of life, health, children, food, and generally peace, harmony and prosperity. This is a corporate responsibility.

In a similar fashion, members of the mmuo secret society perform sacrifices to the gods and ancestors through their masks. The mmuo society is comprised of only adult males who have been initiated into the masquerade society. Women and children are never members. The mmuo society may sacrifice some palm wine, kola nuts and chicken. Later, the meat of the fowl is cooked and eaten by members present. In the evenings of such eke days, members put on masquerade performances to demonstrate that the gods and spirits have heard the prayers of the community; that the ancestors are happy and have accepted the sacrifices and supplications of the community. It is believed that when evoked, the ancestors (the dead members of the community), would appear as masked and costumed figures—masquerades—thus giving the impression that the dead have temporarily returned to the world of the living in happy moods. In a religious sense, this re-enacted return gives credence to a belief in the participation of the spirits in human affairs.

One important point needs to be made here. The reason for the masked ritual plays of the Igbos in the dry season (when there is little
or no work on the farms), on funeral occasions and on such important tribal ceremonies like the New Yam festival, is not only to demonstrate that the entire community is at the mercy of the supernatural forces, but also to entertain the community who are at the same time the audience at such performances. People have told me that originally these performances were arranged by a guild of masked actors, but later on the guild expanded into the mmuo secret society, which operates even today, and required the initiation of all able-bodied, courageous Igbo males. This evocation of the ancestors and spirits to perform for the community as masquerades is an explicit aspect and function of Igbo religion and what Adedeji (1972:255) calls "ritual festival drama" when describing the egungun of the Yorubas. Donald Baker (1976:58) calls it the festival drama phase of theatre. In this thesis I would like to describe Igbo masquerades as ritual theatres.

The rituals and prayers of the secret society members are preliminary to the appearance of the mask; and after those, the masks and costumes are put on and the stage is set. Firstly, through the wooden gong, the appearance of the mmuo is announced to the community, who quickly assemble at the obom or holy square. Then, with the mask in front, members dance to the rhythm of music and songs to the square and to the welcome cheer of their audience. If the performance is good, the audience cheers and sometimes participates in some of the songs. Later, they present gifts to the masks; this is giving gifts to the spirits.

The mask is admired with awe and reverence. The uninitiated are not supposed to look at the mask in the face while women and children watch at a safe distance. We have already noted that, among the Igbo,
masks and masquerades are male affairs and though women may organize their own dance performance, they never put on masks. After its performance, the mask retires into the hut in the obom where the costumes and other masquerade paraphernalia are stored until required again for performance. It is usually the duty of the most senior member of the mmuo society to cater to the need of the mask and avoid its desecration or pollution by unauthorized persons. If this is not done, the ancestors will wreak vengeance on the community in the form of illness or famine.

The Concept of the Mask

The above illustrates the Igbo belief that masks give visible identity and form to the unseen supernatural. The mask is spirit and also a means of communicating with spirits. It stood in its original right as an individual and group expression of the likeness of the spirits.

A great many people, especially the Western visitors to museums or art galleries, think of the mask as a separate entity and as largely distinct from its costumes. This must have led Jones (1973:58) to define a mask as "a term which is popularly used to refer to any kind of concealing headpiece worn by an actor in a performance given by an association, which in West Africa is called a secret society". To most Westerners, the mask usually has one meaning--it is, say, a beautiful white mask that looks feminine and they think of it that way.

The mistake in this type of assumption is that the Igbos do not
just look at the mask as a headpiece. It is not a separate entity, distinct from its costume. As one who has participated in these ritual plays and also as observer, my research points unmistakably to the fact that when an Igbo thinks of a mask, he generally conceives of it as an integral part of a costume rather than in isolation, and as belonging with a particular dress style and forms of play and dance. The name of the mask may also be the name of the costume worn with it or the play or the dance in which it is used. The Igbo agbogho mmuo ("female spirit mask") (see plate IX), refers not particularly to the headpiece but also to the beautiful dress (signifying feminine qualities) as well as the music and dance that accompany it. The mask is an element in a larger whole. The symbolism of the mask varies according to its particular use in a particular context. The face of agbogho can be used in another context to represent Onukwu ("fool"). Thus, the meaning of the "face" depends upon the whole.

The form of the mask is ordered by religious concepts which permits the artist or the carver a latitude of individual expression in his representation of the spirit, deity or ancestor, but usually within traditional limits. This could be seen in carvings of Igri masks with the traditional Afikpo geometric patterns, recognizable as distinctly Afikpo but showing individual artistic expression of the carver. Also, carvings of the agbogho masks of the Northern Igbo show this traditional art styles incorporating individual creativity. In the exhibit "The World of Spirits", one notices individual expression within traditional styles. See details in the photographs accompanying the documentation of exhibit in Chapter II.

(Photograph was taken by William McLennan, U.B.C. Museum of Anthropology).
In one respect, the mask has, for the Westerner, the same claim to existence as a work of art such as the carved or painted Madonna of Florence and Venice. However, the mask in its Igbo frame of the carved headpiece, costume, dance, ritual and ceremony, has not the same separate existence as the Italian Madonna surrounded by a gilded moulding. The Igbo mask is not so detachable from its framework--such as the church in the case of the Madonna. The mask is not an idol; it may be thought of as an identity of the deity or ancestor, but mostly it is recognized as a carved representation or countenance. It is further a focus on the broader effect in its elaborate framework of ritual, in which myth and belief are ceremonially expressed in music, dance, pageant, drama and sculpture.

The dancer who wears the mask is called mmuo or mma, meaning the spirit or ghost. He is supposed by its aid and his skill to evoke the presence of the supernatural. His body is mostly completely covered by costume, although there are local varieties. In Afikpo, the hands and legs may be left uncovered, but in Onitsha the entire body and limbs are covered. The reason for the complete covering of the body is to make the disguise complete. The dancer even talks in strange tongue to disguise his natural voice. Another reason for the complete disguise is that often men versed in "medicine" may decide to "try out" the dancer by causing him bodily harm in an effort to test his manhood or to disgrace him if he is not powerful. To safeguard against such an occurrence, the dancer in the costume is fortified with traditional protectives.

Even to the casual traveller in Igbo country (or in Africa generally),
versed in the beliefs and customs of the people, music and dancing stand out as the ruling passions. It is the form in which both visual and aural expression has place and origin or is in some way connected. Head worship or the cult of the head which is present in various forms all over Africa, gives the mask a predominating importance. The head, regarded by the Igbos as the seat of all human wisdom, is symbolic. Igbos say that one's head "is not correct", meaning that the person has been attacked by evil spirits or is possessed, i.e. the person is mad. In this way, the mask represents the countenance of wisdom and in the case of evil masks, inverted or diabolical wisdom. This is logical because the mask is spirit, and according to Igbo belief, the spirits are omnipresent and omniscient in world affairs. On account of this importance of the head, the mask, as the piece de resistance of dance and ceremony, is often times given grotesque proportions depending, of course, on circumstances.

Underwood (1951:1), in comparing Greek and African sculpture, noted that both have a strong alliance in myths and belief. However, in Greek sculpture the body dominated the head because, with their great admiration for physique, the Greeks centered their expression in the muscular features of the body. The countenance of the deity became suppressed and his face or mask gained more and more an expression of immobility. But the masks of Africa generally, and those of the Igbos in particular, maintained livelier expressions. This vitality of the African's direct expression in his art continued to develop until it met the cataclysm from the West.

The point has already been made that masks and masquerades are
facts of life among the Igbos; what needs to be emphasized further is
that to the Igbos, they also represent a symbol or foci for the
spiritual forces that loaned their authority to the edicts and acts
that emanated therefrom. This fact had and to some extent still has,
various social consequences for which the mask is indispensable to
Igbo society.

To understand this, and in order to use your imagination to par­
ticipate in the experience of masking, one is asked to consider how
the mask transforms the man who wears it:

(a) It hides his face and identity from the public;
(b) It frees him from the rules of conduct which govern everyday
    life;
(c) It allows him to become the other being that it represents. In
    this case, it represents the spirits and ancestors who keep
    watch as guardians and custodians of morality in Igbo society.
    Their decision is subject to no appeal.

This is where the mask derived its power in Igbo society and this
authority took root in Igbo philosophy and religion. Apart from the
rituals necessary for masking, the mask also acted directly to make
sure that society does not transgress. Because a man covers himself
with a mask which therefore invests him with powers outside the ordinary,
he takes liberties which he otherwise could not, and may criticize that
which is considered obnoxious in and to the society. In this way, the
excesses of the elders, youths, women and children, are checked. By
checking possible transgressions, the Igbos hope to avoid the anger
and hence harness the protection of the supernatural.
In the Afikpo Okumkpa play, performers ridiculed members of the public. In this way, the masks act as check on public morality. A boy of twenty wearing a mask could talk directly to a drunken and lazy grandfather of fifty who does not care for his wife, children and relatives. People would laugh at the man in public and because the mask is spirit, the young performer who had taken such a liberty would not be penalized as would have been the case had he done so in normal life. This is an example of the mask acting in role reversal.

In the olden days and to some extent today, the mask acted as the executive arm of the Oha (Igbo legislative assembly). It was the mask that punished offenders by collecting fines from culprits, chasing out from the community those who committed incest and hanging murderers. In this regard the mask acted as the police of the community. It did arrest rogues and protect community property. It undertook to consult diviners to find out what sin the community had committed and to offer appropriate propitiatory sacrifices. It was the guardian and protector of the weak. Harley (1950:VIII) did report such police function of masks of the go ge ("god spirit") masks of the Poro tribes of Northeastern Liberia. Also, Wissler (1966:238) noted similar police function of the Kachina spirits of the Pueblo Indians in the United States. It does appear, therefore, that the police function of masks is widespread. It was the spirits and ancestors that performed the police function through the mask and so their action was never challenged.

Although this has changed with the introduction of modern courts of law, the police force and the prison system, yet in some Igbo communities the mask is required to collect fines from recalcitrant offenders.
This happens when an offender has been found guilty by the assembly and has refused to pay. The mask goes to collect the fine by confiscating some of his property which the offender would come to redeem by paying yet an additional fine. If this fails, the offender is subjected to social ostracism. He is told "to go and buy some matches" which means that he should never enter anybody's compound for fire or any other form of social interaction and vice versa.

In the olden days, the mask also performed a direct judicial function not only within and among members of the mmuo society but to the entire community. This type of judgement is better referred to as arbitration because the mask was brought in when a case was at an impasse. Its decision was usually subject to no appeal because the spirits are omniscient. However, secret society members made every effort to ascertain the truth of the matter so that the decision of the mask would be just.

Although more will be written on this later, it is only necessary here to point out that initiation into the mmuo society is both a religious and festive occasion which the entire village looks forward to with great anticipation. It is a way in which boys graduate into men and take up responsibilities in their communities. Initiation is a clear example of the overlap of the religious and social functions of masquerades. In fact, the very notion of community underlines the inseparable nature of the two, because there is no clear demarcation between the sacred and secular functions of masks in traditional Igbo communities.

Some masks perform for burial or funeral ceremonies to express
anger and sorrow at the death of a member of the community. They also perform rituals to assure the deceased safe passage into the underworld and acceptance by the spirits. By giving a fitting farewell to the dead, they create peace and harmony for the living. Since these masks perform on such sad and solemn occasions, they at times are given the bold features the Igbo attribute to death, who is also known as the Rogue. For example, some of such masks are the odogu or okpoka, and while they are performing, the audience stays at a safe distance away, for there is no predicting what dangerous actions they may do.

Masks also perform on festive occasions such as the New Yam festival and in this case they glorify the earth-goddess ala for giving fruit to the living. Such masks are usually gentle and beautiful; their dancing is graceful and accompanied by melodious music. One of such masks is the agbogho which represent female ancestral spirits.

What is being highlighted here is the social function of entertainment and aesthetics surrounding masquerade ceremonies. When masks perform in the village square on eke days, they entertain the villagers and make them happy. Thompson (1974) writes that "art and goodness are combined". The mask is an attempt of man to come to grips with the powerful forces which he cannot command, while at the same time giving expression to man's innate desire to create pleasure and goodness. One cannot help but admire the rapt attention with which the community, the audience, watches masquerade performances. The aesthetics of masquerades is in participation. When the drum beats into a crescendo, along with the gong and sound of flutes reaching the high heavens,
everyone around the obimmuo finds himself following the inviting rhythm. Igbos have a saying that "when the gong of the mask sounds, even the cripple walks to the obimmuo--the village 'spirit square'". And so may it be for all times.

The Making of Masks

The point has been sufficiently made that Igbos consider the mask very seriously. In the same light, the making of the mask is taken equally seriously. The traditional artist is usually a trained craftsman, not only in his trade proper, but also may undertake priestly or religious functions in the course of his job. This is so because the very wood he cuts from a tree for his work is considered to contain spiritual forces. There is belief in the sacredness of the tree among the Igbos and this is associated with the ancestor cult.

The ritual preparations for sculpture in traditional circumstances reflected this mystical attitude toward the tree. The Igbo artist would firstly select what part of a tree he intends to use for his work. This is usually determined by his anticipated outcome. When he cuts down the tree, a ritual is performed to pacify the spirit of the tree. This is achieved by a sacrifice of kola, gin and chalk; sometimes this includes chicken. He might invoke a more powerful spirit to provide protection against the spirit of the tree but this requires the services of a professional, the dibia--medicine man. The log might be left lying in the bush for a while, to give the spirit time to leave it; but mostly the cut piece is immediately hauled to a
secluded place, where the sculptor gives it a crude preliminary shaping. This feeling that the wood to be carved contained a spiritual or life force, contributes to the carver's deep feeling for his materials. For him it was already endowed with power before he even shaped it into a mask.

The Igbo sculptor working on a mask, addresses himself to his task directly without preliminary sketches. He has a remarkable vision of the end-product from the time of making the first cut. It is an amazing experience to watch a carver cut an elaborate interlace design covering a large panel or cutting out the fine stylized designs in a mask without ever having to change line, or modify the size of the design to make the whole to fit. This must have to do with the long period of apprenticeship required for this trade. An acknowledged craftsman of the community trains young apprentices who may be his children or relatives or other village youths who, at an early age, demonstrate potential aptitude and skill and a seriousness of purpose in such a vocation. The period of training ranged from five to ten years, during which time trainees lived with their master. At the end of this period the trainee artist has achieved the motor skills necessary to match his vision.

Father Caroll (1967:94) writes: "No matter how complicated a work may be and though he has no drawing to aid him, Bandele never cuts away by accident any wood he may need later; he would be ashamed to have to add another piece". Though referring to Bandele, a Yoruba, his remarks are equally applicable to Igbo carvers as well, for the only Igbo sculpture I know of in which an error was made in cutting was the
work of a young apprentice. The master destroyed it even before it was finished as very shameful.

Traditionally, the sculptor or carver working on a mask must do his work in secret either in the bush or in an enclosed hut. This is so because the knowledge of the mask is the exclusive preserve of the mmuo society members. Halpin (1975) noted a similar seriousness in the carving of masks among the North West Coast Indians. She wrote: "Barbeau (1930:789) recorded "... the gitsontk (people secluded) carved masks and other naxnox paraphernalia. If an outsider unexpectedly came upon them while they were at work, the only outcome was death... No mistakes were tolerated and the penalty for any lapse was death". This seriousness attached to the carving of masks also appears to be widespread.

The Igbo mask is carved or hewn out of a single block of wood, i.e. it is monoxylous. The sculpture emerges out of a mass of material by subtractive technique. The force or life or spirit which the wood was supposed to have, seems to show in the massiveness of the wood and its beautiful grain. The carver takes pains to keep this intact while cutting out the shape of the mask. The contours follow the cylindrical form of the log, to which all parts are kept subordinate. This emphasis on vertical lines gives most masks a vertical axis to which the different parts of the sculpture have an organic connection. Segy (1975:81) notes that "if divided along this vertical axis, many African statues (and masks) would separate into two symmetrical halves".

When the artist has finished his work on the wood, bringing forth as it were, a "new life", he colours his product. The most outstanding
characteristics of all Igbo masks, as could be seen from the exhibit, is that they are all painted either chalk white (which is the traditional colour for purity, beauty and peace), camwood red (signifying danger), orange or yellow (portraying life) and black made from unyi ("pot black") and which was meant to depict ugliness or evil. Masked dancers wore elaborate costumes and this is in agreement with our definition of masks. Sometimes the costumes are ornamented with mirrors to create effect and awe.

Painting is not only to beautify the mask. Horton (1966:21) has pointed out that painting is not simply an enrichment of the sculpture (in this case the mask), but is a means whereby the appropriate spirit is brought to occupy it. Thus after carving an agbogho mask, it is painted white to bring into it the female ancestral spirits or that of the earth goddess. The costume is then attached to the new creation and it is ready for performance after the necessary rituals.

Until recently, the aesthetic judgement of traditional people has usually been ignored in literature. Achebe (1965:250-1), an Igbo writer, shows very clearly in his novel that Igbos judge works of art. One of his characters, Edogo, is a carver. "When he had finished carving the face and head he had been a little disappointed...but the owners of the work had not complained; in fact they had praised it very highly. Edogo knew, however, that he must see the mask in action to know whether it was good or bad". To appreciate the mask as it was conceived and carved by the artist, one needs to see it with all the necessary attachments and in movement. I emphasize again that masks are intended to be seen in movement, perhaps above the eye level, and in a dance, before the quality could be judged. This is what the Igbos
do.

The artist is as we have seen, a professional—hired on commission to create a mask either out of wood, fibre, cloth, raffia or any other types of costume for masked drama. His client or patron is usually an Igbo elder, a leader or a spokesmen for the community or group that needs his services. Although the artist is held in high esteem, he has no extra privileges. He is supposed to create within traditional styles. This exercise of restraint and control of the artist by his society or his clients, means that the traditional art styles in every area are perpetuated and held fast by the conservatism of the group that maintained the apprenticeship tradition. This is very academic and is very clearly seen in Afikpo masks.

It must not be construed, however, that the traditional Igbo artist was so completely restricted by the traditionalism of his training that he becomes reduced to ahmeticásyślím through shapes, forms and patterns are fixed by custom, it is evident that most of the pressures for the invention and development of new forms are self-induced, coming from an innate aesthetic desire rather than by group or societal demand. The master carver could endow the traditional Igbo forms with his own interpretation and insight; and these spring from his personal genius as a perceptive and creative artist.

This fact is better appreciated when it is remembered that the artist also participates in the social and ceremonial functions of his mask. His participation has special significance because his forms are substantially derived from human and animal forms. By observing his fellowmen during moments of physical and emotional stress at rituals
and ceremonies, he is better able to endow the traditional art-forms with his perception and sensitivity. In Ozubulu, one easily recognizes the work of such gifted carvers such as Obi (two of his Odogu masks are displayed in the exhibit).

Like artists everywhere, Igbo carvers of masks give form and reality to abstraction within their social milieu. The famous dancer Isadora Duncan was once asked to explain what her dancing meant. She replied that "if I could say it, I would not have to dance it". Also the famous artist Picasso said that if he knew, if he were conscious of what he intended to express in his work, he would not have to create it. So it is with the Igbo mask-maker. He cannot explain it, it is the tension of expressing what is as yet unknown to him, but astir within his inner-self, that drives him, as creator to action. For this he may perhaps be exempted from some other hazardous communal activity (although this is an exception rather than the rule). He would then have as much time as he needs for the long and patient carving or fashioning of the masks and other ritual objects needed for the well-being of his community.

Initiation into the Mmuo

The "mask business" is a guarded secret of only those men who have been sworn into it. This is what initiation is all about, and this is a cultural trait of all the Igbos. There are local variations in its administration but still its concept and content are largely the same. Oath is administered to new initiates to protect the rules and secret
of the mmuo. No one dares contravene this rule of secrecy because of the punishments attached thereto. In the olden days, anyone who leaked out the secrets of the mmuo was either killed, exiled or sold into slavery. Today such a person is never entrusted with serious responsibilities and is a laughing stock of the community.

Information within the society is disseminated only through interpersonal communication. Messages are passed from the elders or leaders of the society through appointed messengers to members directly. Members could also give such information to other members only.

All male youths in Igboland must be initiated into the village secret society. This event marks the transition from the time when the boys use children's masks and imitate adult ceremonies, to the period when they participate in adult society and its masquerades. After the initiation, they cease being emulators and observers of the activities of the secret societies and become active members not only of the mmuo society but of the entire village community.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the initiation ceremonies the boys are in direct contact with some of the adult masks and costumes and wear them for the first time.

Boys are initiated usually between the ages of thirteen and their early twenties. The age of entrance depends upon:

a) Whether the father of the novice is alive; if not his initiation might be delayed;

b) The wealth of the father of the novice;

c) Whether the boy is the eldest son, and

d) How many brothers he has.
Most Igbo communities have one, though costly, initiation ceremony; others have more than one type of initiation. One feature seems to be universal however—the initiation of the first son of a man appears to be a costly affair throughout Igboland. This is simply a prestige affair because a man is supposed to signify his place in society not only by the number of wives and titles he has personally taken, but also the success with which he establishes his sons, most especially his first son, okpala or okpara, who is to take over and care for him in his old age and give him a befitting burial at his death.

Masks are used in most types of initiation among the Igbos. There is stress on physical hardship and competition and the observation of numerous taboos, such as avoiding certain foods, not touching the ground with your back, not showing one's teeth, etc. All forms of initiation involve the separation of the novice from his home, parental care and normal life activities for a period of time. There is a period of instruction and test.

Simon Ottenberg (1975) has written extensively on initiation into the masquerade society of Afikpo Igbo. What I am about to describe is the initiation into the mnuo society in Ozubulu.

Ozubulu, which I use as case study, is about ten miles south of Onitsha and has a rich masquerade tradition. Here, the initiation takes place between October and March, i.e. the dry season. After the ufejioku or ili ji ceremony (meaning "eating of the new yam"), people get their yams from the farms. It is time now for hunting, fishing and other social activities aimed at entertaining the villagers. Initiation and masquerades provide one of such entertainments. Every
effort is made to provide masquerade entertainment. Burial ceremonies are often postponed to this time so that the rain would not disturb the appearance of masquerades.

In Ozubulu there are two main types of initiation—a unique child initiation and the regular Igbo adult initiation. The child initiation is that in which a child of about five to thirteen years is initiated into the mmuo society and the burden of this is entirely borne by his father. Only an rich father undertakes this initiation for his sons, mostly his first son (di-okpala). The uncertainties of life compel fathers to do this in case of death. He would then have achieved the ambition of most parents, and would therefore rest in peace in the land of the dead. It is then left to this di-okpala to take over from his father, and make sure that his brothers are initiated.

This type is a token one and the initiate is not supposed to participate in seniors masquerades until he is an adolescent. He may receive traditional returns from the proceeds of further initiations after his, but until he participates in the ordeals of initiation which entitle him to look at the mask in the face, he is not considered adult.

The other type which I have called adult initiation is the most serious one. Every man in Ozubulu must go through this initiation because it is a means of transition from childhood to maturity. It is not by chance that one goes through this between the ages of thirteen and twenty, the adolescent, pubertal period. Girls of this same age group are called the umueleke ("virgins") and they have their own initiation which prepares them for the life of wife and mother. Any
adult male who refuses to be initiated into the mmuo is subjected to ridicule or social ostracism.

The elders of the community decide on a date for initiation and preparations begin. This is a yearly affair aimed at up-grading youths, i.e. initiates, into civic positions in the community, to replace the dead or ageing members of the community. The period of preparation is usually about two weeks. To qualify for admission into this "school of wisdom", one must firstly be of age; nature must approve of his admission. Secondly, he must be known to be respectful, honest and hard-working. This is a selective process because the society demands its future leaders to be men of proven integrity. This also accounts partly for the disparity in the ages of initiates. I have seen boys of thirteen and others of eighteen being initiated at the same time. Wealth is the other part of this selection process. The father of the novice (initiate-to-be) has to pay a stipulated amount of money. If the father is dead, then a guardian, brother or the initiate himself has to pay. The mother also could pay this sum through a paternal uncle of the boy if she is rich enough. However, the decision on who is to be initiated rests with the elders.

In addition to this stipulated sum of money, there are other items which every initiate must provide. These are:

a) Two kegs of wine; one keg contains *nkwu* from the palm tree while the other contains *ngwo* wine from raffia palm and is milder than the first.

b) Four kola nuts corresponding to the four days of the native week.

c) A live chicken, preferably *abuke* ("white chicken").
d) A head of tobacco.
e) Some yams, coco-yams, etc.
f) Some traditional colours like ulii ("black"), ufie ("yellow"), nzu ("white").

These are distributed as follows: some of the kola, fowl (especially the abuke), tobacco and wine are given to the priest of the village shrine, Ndiekwili. He distributes some of these to other priests who attend to other duties. With these they are supposed to offer prayers to the gods and ancestors asking for blessings on the initiates and for peace and prosperity for the entire community. Part of the kola, wine, chicken and tobacco are also given to the elders of the village. As leaders, they select those who are to instruct the new initiates and guide them into spiritual life. The remainder of the tobacco, wine, fowl and kola nuts are given to the selected instructors, the "first among equals". Their number depends on the number of people to be initiated. It could range from five to fifteen. The yams, coco-yams and other food items are used by the boys themselves during this period of separation from home.

The money paid by the initiates is used to purchase any new costumes that may be required, to prepare the framework for new masks, and to pay for other services such as those of a diviner. He chooses the most favourable spot and date for initiation. Usually this falls on the eke day.

When the materials have been distributed according to custom, and the diviner has located a spot favourable to the ancestors for preparation, the initiates assemble at the obimmuo. They get there in the
morning and the oldest of the instructors prays and sacrifices to the ancestral tree (usually iroko) and shrine at the obimmuo. He calls for blessings, and informs the ancestors of the intention of the boys, their fathers and the village at large that initiation should take place. At the end of his prayers, he sanctifies himself by rubbing white chalk on his forehead—everybody does the same. He then leads the boys to the bush which the diviner has selected. One feature of this spot is that it contains a termite-hill. It is the belief that masquerades appear from underground through the termite-hill. The priest prays as follows:

Enu ta oji, ani ta oji - ("We offer kola nuts to the sky and the earth")

Ndu nwoke, ndu nwanyi - ("Life of everybody male and female of the village")

Anyi na eme omenani - ("We are performing traditional rites")

Ukwu akponafa, isi awanafa - ("Let there be neither broken legs nor headache for the initiates")

Ka anyi me ka nnanyi fa - ("Let us do like our forefathers")

Di ka ndi mbu - ("Like the first people")

[Everybody] Ihia - ("Let it be so")

A goat is roasted and eaten by the priest, the elders and the instructors. The novices do not partake, they have yet to eat with the spirits. The wine is shared in a similar fashion. After this ritual, the area for the instruction is delineated and omu ("palm fronds") are used to mark out the entire area as holy. Omu is a religious symbol of holiness among the Igbos. At the centre of this
holy spot stands the anthill. Around this the initiates erect structures to house themselves during the period of initiation.

After the area has been marked out and all necessary rituals performed, the priest and elders take leave. Immediately the initiates get into work. They clear the area of bush and trees and get busy cutting sticks to build shelter. They usually come with ubejili, the first gift of a man to his son. Ubejili is a strong knife with sheath and symbolizes strength. After building shelter, fire is made by one group on which yam and other edibles are roasted. Another group goes to fetch spring water because initiates never drink water that flows on the ground. They drink water from a spring. This is considered very original and pure water. It is not polluted and therefore holy.

When they have settled down, the initiates begin to receive instructions on how to prepare for a masked performance. They are instructed on the language of the mask and how to read meaning from the sounds of a gong. For example, the masked performer uses igwe (a wind instrument) to speak. Outsiders, except those who have been tutored, do not understand this language. The boys learn how to dance to various types of masquerade music.

In between periods, they practice by going to neighbouring villages to watch performance or put on a performance themselves which the nearby village audience appraises. But until the final day of initiation, they never put on a public performance in Ozubulu. During this period too, initiates prepare other paraphernalia used in masquerading such as preparing agwo ("raffia") and making of igwe. They also learn how
to compose masquerade music and here specialization occurs. There may be those gifted in drumming, those gifted in blowing the flute, those gifted with rattles, etc. There are also gifted dancers and singers. All these preparations are geared towards putting on an impressive performance. These boys also learn village rules, proverbs, myths and meanings of signs and cues. Through stories they learn about the virtues of honesty, labour and happiness, and respect for elders and traditions. Above all, they come to value group life when they wrestle, fight or disagree, but still must live together as brothers. The food is mostly roasted yam; it is a most trying period in which one is compelled to live in scarcity and in an impoverished environment. At night a huge fire is lit and here various devices are used to frighten the initiates. One of such is that without warning, a frightful mask may appear when the fire is dying out and chase the boys about. Initiates are not supposed to be terrified but stand their ground.

As the weeks pass and they perfect, the day of the initiation is chosen. Initiation takes place usually between midnight and morning. Notice is sent through to families telling them of the day of initiation. This is a day of rejoicing. Nearby villagers are often invited to come and watch; however, invitation is usually through friendly family and agnatic relationships. Mothers make food ready for festivity. Fathers get as much palm wine as possible for friends and relatives. In the morning the father must sacrifice to the family shrine to give his thanks to the gods for keeping him alive to witness the event of his son's initiation and for protecting the youngster throughout the
period.

In the bush the initiates are busily getting ready for their encounter with the spirit. On this day, they eat an early supper and then make a big fire. After a little while the gong sounds and chants begin. There might be dancing. Towards midnight a mask called ukwu-mmuo ("the leg of the spirit"), appears and begins to chase the boys about. He may flog them but not too severely; one is supposed to take it like a man, no crying or shivering or showing of any signs of physical discomfort. A little after, the Nne-mmuo or ozoebunu ("king of masquerades") appears in its majesty. There is hilarious singing and dancing but the initiates are not supposed to look at its face. This ozoebunu and the chief instructor, in the presence of the priest of the village shrine, questions everybody whether they wish to know the mmuo. The answer is usually yes. One by one the initiates take oath, holding an alusi ("shrine figure") in their hands. They promise the forefathers and the ozoebunu that what their eyes have seen tonight will never be uttered to any living soul; that their mouths will remain silent against flipancy. They end by saying okuku tofie onu gbajie ya ("if a fowl does not peck well, let its neck break"). The symbolic meaning of this is that should one break his oath, death awaits him. The shrine figure is rotated from person to person for the oath and is finally given to the priest.

When everybody has taken oath, the tempo of the music increases. The two masquerades ukwu-mmuo and nne-mmuo begin to dance to the rhythm of the music. Everybody who is to be initiated watches carefully. Gradually the fire begins to down and simultaneously the masked
performers begin to remove their masks and costumes. The boys stand with their mouths open watching the giant ozoebunu remove its apparel and reveal the man inside. The aim of the initiation is thus accomplished. The initiates are made to realize that after all it is a human being who puts on the mask. Yet they are required not to discuss this outside their new circle.

By this time it is getting to morning. The mask dresses up again to avoid any unauthorized intrusion or interruption. Everybody begins to prepare for the final ritual. The mask and the boys dance to the obimmuo and there perform a ritual of integration by sacrificing an ebunu ("he goat") to the shrine there. The body of the slain animal is taken back to the bush, i.e. where the instructions took place. The mask also goes with them and there everybody helps to unmask the dancer.

Meals are prepared with the carcass of the sacrificed goat. Everybody partakes of this meal unlike the beginning when the novices were forbidden from eating such meals. The boys then sacrifice anything they wish to the gods and are happy that the end has come. It is now afternoon and the wooden gong is sounded again to announce to the community that a performance must take place in the evening. People begin to gather at the obom. Meanwhile, the boys destroy the camp and everything is burned. They then follow the mask to the square, wearing only emblems. Here top performance is put on because everybody in the audience is watching to see how his or her relative is performing. Mothers are especially anxious because on the one hand they are happy for their sons but on the other hand, they are afraid of what
must have happened in the bush. Everyone is happy and the initiates are proud.

At the end of this public performance which last for about three hours, everybody disperses to their homes, rejoicing. There is feasting in the village. Families whose sons were initiated, declare open house and feast neighbours, friends and relatives. In this way the village is achieving the ideal state of mankind which is to live in a state of community.

The initiates have become one with the spirits—they have been transformed into men. As a matter of fact, the song with which they approach the village square is significant. They sing: ojije mmanwu adi ka una ya. This means literally that "going to the spirit is quite different from returning from the spirit". In other words, they are saying that the novice that went into the bush a few weeks ago has been transformed into another person.

They are now mature by the rites of which they were part. It is very significant that after initiation, the "boy-man" receives a second gift from his father. He can own an ikenga. He may purchase a carved one but the first offering to this "strength of man" is performed by the boy with the assistance of his father. The boy could now own a house and could marry.

It would be appropriate to comment on this paradox, initiation; namely, the unmasking or showing that the mask is after all a human being in disguise. One would suppose that this revelation should disenchant or disillusion the initiates. On the contrary, it reinforces or appears to reinforce their belief in the power of the spirit and
the mask. Perhaps they keep searching for the ultimate answer or maintain their silence so that others coming after them would be as curious as themselves were before the initiation. However, the former observation is in agreement with the conclusion of Gill after a study of a number of cross-cultural initiation, rites. Wrote Gill (1976:7):

"In these few examples from a broad spectrum of religious contexts, there appears the common structure of a technique of disenchantment used to initiate the mature religious perspective and to promote authentic apprehension of the sacred. The apparent effect of disenchantment is itself illusory. Acts which seem to spell the end of religion have been found to be technique that thrust the initiate into the area of adult religious life with incentives to plumb its full depths. They lay bare the limitations of naive views of reality so that through deepened participation in a religious community and celebration of the day-to-day events of life in religious ritual, the individual may increasingly experience the mysterious fullness of the sacred, sustaining realm. And a native sense emerges that the sacred symbols can reveal the sacred without ever exhausting its reality".

Commentary

The initiation ceremonies have survived among the Igbos for so many reasons. They satisfied basic human drives; they cemented the social order with blood and suffering; they rested on sacred, ancient custom. Last, but not the least, the rare male who evaded initiation into the masquerade society found himself a social outcast. It is difficult to discuss the masquerade elements of the secret society initiation without discussing these aspects of the rites and features of initiation. Throughout Igboland and in every form of initiation,
the boys are introduced to some types of masks and associated costumes. Net, calabash, fibre, and wooden face coverings are involved. The net forms are most common, suggesting their greater antiquity. After initiation the youth is free to use any of the secret society masks appropriate to his skills and age. While the initiated boys no longer play in the back of the compounds with the uninitiated boys in their plays and masquerades, they bring the experience of that time to bear in their own initiation and in their adult masquerading lives. They have worn masks and costumes and learned how to dance and to play. Initiation, therefore, does not represent a sharp break with the past but a transition, with rites, from non-sacred masks of the boys to the spiritually more powerful ones of the secret society. The point to note is that it is quite clear that the initiated does not perform for a limited audience (largely of their own age and often in the back of the compound), but before large numbers of the general public and on occasions such as after initiation before virtually the entire village population, as well as strangers.

When, before the initiation into secret societies, the unininitiated youths operate, they do so largely on their own, without parental support. This is true in a sense of the youth's activities within the real secret societies. But, in another sense, in the initiation ceremonies, rituals and masquerades, there is a strong sense of family support, of the interest of the father and mother, and other relatives of the boys, particularly agnatic ones. The initiation is sponsored by the father, backed by his patrikins and provides status for the sponsor. It is the one time in the masqueraders' life when there is a close
association of masquerading and family.

Social Implications of Initiation

Aside from the earlier comments, it is quite clear that initiation performed and still performs certain important functions among the Igbos.

Berger and Luckmann (1966:27) have posited that initiation is one of those secondary socialization processes of society. The primary socialization is that which turns the human organism into an individual. But this individual needs to undergo other culturally patterned processes to be acceptable to the community. Secondary socialization takes place when youths are initiated into the mmuo society. This is the acquisition of role-specific knowledge. The mmuo society or the masquerade society has a specific duty. It is the executive arm of the political leaders of the Igbos, the mask acted as police—it drove out those who committed Nso ani, i.e. abomination, it executed murderers and punished minor offenders. Therefore, to initiate one into the mmuo society is a serious affair. It is as if one were being commissioned into a police force.

Furthermore, secondary socialization requires the acquisition of role-specific vocabularies, which means, for one thing, the internalization of semantic fields structuring routine interpretations and conduct within an institution—in this case the secret mmuo society. The society has to learn and understand the language of the mask—a knowledge preserved within the society and guarded jealously. Therefore,
tacit understandings, evaluations and affective coloration of the semantic field are also acquired. The "subworlds" internalized in initiation are partial realities in contrast to the "base-world" acquired in primary socialization. Yet the rules of the secret society are more or less cohesive realities characterized by normative and affective as well as cognitive components. This is why secondary socialization, i.e. initiation, requires the rudiments of legitimating apparatus and must generally be accompanied by ritual which achieves this end. I will argue further that the aim of the ritual is not only a rite of incorporation into a group but also a rite of separation, accompanying the transition from primary to secondary socialization, i.e. from youth to adulthood. The ceremony which follows, at which the initiates eat with the gods (eating sacrificed animal), and the little masks they receive as emblems, is society's further acceptance of this legitimization.

Berger and Luckmann further observed that secondary socialization involves the institutionalization of an elaborate initiation process, such as we discussed earlier in the case of the mnuwo society, with the aim of getting individuals to commit themselves in a comprehensive way to a new reality. Why is this so? We should examine the advantages to the Igbos of initiation into the masquerade society to answer this question.

The submissive role of the initiated into the secret society and his family is good for the society. His training in traditional customs makes this natural for him. The new-phase of his life, in the group, consecration among its mature males, appears to him a phase of
destiny in which he will be able to express his will and his potency upon nature. In this exalted imagery, so characteristic of the great non-material culture of Africans generally, one can understand the role the Igbo youth sees for himself and the meaning of initiation ceremony to him.

The psychological implications of initiation are enormous. I believe that the ceremonies could not have been invented without such knowledge of their advantages on the part of our forefathers who originated the rituals, and who thereby showed deep insight into the drives which motivate human behaviour. Similar understanding underlies other customary regulations.

The role of the secret society is that of an institution where innate impulses are organized and this has advantages for the initiates. The ritual enables them to express and act out, under the mask, their most hidden impulses. At the same time, the rituals fix the restrictions and taboos, and guides action into traditionally accepted customs. In the first phase of the initiation, he faces hardship and lives through these freely, and in the second, his actions are transformed in the traditional manner, into customs sanctified by Igbo society. The fact that the initiated underwent these psychological processes communally and in a group gives the processes the power of integrated social forms.

By the purification it affords, the initiation provides absolution for the expression of the taboood basic instincts, which, at the end of the ceremony, will lead into social sublimation. This is social sanctification for the individual; the ritual being communal, the initiate
does not feel isolated with his problems but feels that his emotional experiences are shared. The sanctified traditional character of the rituals, their sense of continuity with the past, and the future, saves the adolescent from loneliness. The Igbo initiate emerges from the rituals with a clear conscience and a new liberated identity. He is now secure as a member of a valued social group to whose rules and traditions he must adhere. Moreover, he gains admission into this society on an exalted emotional level. He now knows for sure that a human being transforms into other forces by wearing the mask. The joy of all his suffering in the camp is that the initiate is now an actor in a drama that becomes the most memorable event in his life—the participation publicly in a masquerade performance.

The initiation ceremony is, among other things, an intensive educational course in the history and institutions of the society. This is not written history but oral mythology, transmitted with an amazing faculty of memory, from generation to generation. Myths and their psychological significance have been the subject of extensive studies. Here I only wish to point out that myths form a part of the instructions in the initiation. Mostly the myths relate how supernatural forces instructed the ancestors in various crafts and ways of life.

The instructors at the initiation "school" also relate to the novitiates myths which record the glorious tribal past—the deeds, often connected with supernatural forces and animals, of the founding fathers, and incalculates the idea into the Igbo youth that the human race (seen as an extension of his society), owes its existence to the
great forefathers. This mythology gives the youths an exalted opinion of themselves. Huxley (1950) pointed out that this evokes a concept of distinctiveness, "which almost always rationalizes into superiority-feelings". This feeling is universal and not particular to Igbos alone. The early Jews and the Greeks dismissed all non-Jews and non-Greeks as gentiles and barbarians, respectively.

The initiate feels that by following customary laws, he would be spared agonizing personal decisions. He has no need to revolt against accepted customs which have been established by the sacred ancestors, and which have sacred and infallible meaning. He feels part of a community in direct contact with supernatural forces. As a member, he too has entered into the world of spirits. This is emphasized by the secret language used only by members of the mmuo society. This desire to belong in a group that can protect, to be among the elect who enjoy honour, is a deep human drive. Even the Western society has preserved organizations which also impose secrecy and practice initiation ceremonies with symbolic objects.

Initiation ceremony is used to teach the laws of the society and this dramatic occasion was well chosen to impress the initiate with its canonic force. Also, respect for the elders is given special stress. It is thus an institutional device to overcome the revolt against the father, and connected with the emotional complex of the father-son relationship. We earlier noted that Igbos regard a fight between a child and his father as an abomination and that the son is required to offer a sacrifice to the earth goddess to clean the earth of this sin. Instituting such instruction at the impressionable period when the
youth is ritually admitted into the group, is further evidence of the great insight into the basic human drives shown by the founders or forefathers. Respect for the aged, for the father and the dead, has developed into a vast institution called ancestor worship or cult and this engrosses the whole adult life of the Igbos. This powerful, all-embracing religious concept, gave birth to an amazing richness of sculptures in wood, ivory and bronze not only among the Igbos but within the entire continent of Africa.

Collective work in the initiation camp had been noted earlier. Aside from the immediate material advantage such as the saving in time and labour when twenty men, instead of one, built a house, it gives an added feeling of security in other dimensions. The youth knows that should sickness or accident befall him, members of his secret society would stand by; if he travelled he could find welcome in the home of a member society or of an affiliated society. From this institution that satisfied basic human drives, symbolic and highly developed rituals have evolved. This rite stresses purification and the achievement of a new life, a new identity. By eating sacred food, containing the energy of the spirits, the initiates achieved communion with the world of spirits.
CHAPTER IV

Notes and References

1. Eke is Igbo sabbath and the holiest of the four days that make up the Igbo week. Little or no work is done on this day reserved for worship of the gods and ancestors.

2. Ikenga figurines represent the "gods of fortune". They are symbols of achievement, prowess and intelligence and are associated with a man's right hand. At the attainment of adulthood, a young man acquires an ikenga to symbolize both his initiatory achievement and to inspire him to greater actions in the future. When such actions are achieved, he makes sacrifices of chicken, kola nuts, or palm wine to his ikenga. An ikenga is also given to a warrior going into or returning from battle or to any man who has achieved or is about to achieve a brave action.

3. There are a number of possible reasons why women are never initiated into the mmuo society. As a matter of fact, masking is a male affair in Igboland. These reasons may be any or combination of the following:
   a) To keep women in their place,
   b) A division of labour in society in which women and other males come to be entertained by men of the secret society,
   c) Since women ensure the genetic continuity of society and since masks are spirits, who might be good or evil, men do not wish to endanger the survival of the race by letting women gamble with supernatural forces. Although there are women native doctors who deal with spirits, the number is insignificantly small compared with the fact that every male is supposed to be initiated into the mmuo (spirit) society.
   d) Masquerade or masking requires force, fearlessness, courage, etc., especially during initiation. Men do not wish to torment or expose women to physical dangers.
   e) Because of their monthly menstrual periods, it is feared that women might pollute the spiritual purity of masks.

4. This is a point that requires further investigation. I obtained the information that the mmuo society evolved from a guild of masked actors at Awka.

5. There is no clear demarcation between the sacred and the secular activities in rural communities. For a deeper understanding of the concept of the community, please refer to Nisbet (1968:2).

6. I observed this in Umahia in December of 1975 in the workshop of Nduka. Carvers of skill according to Nduka never cut twice, neither do they add pieces that had been cut away.
7. cf Halpin (1975) unpublished seminar paper, entitled "Masks As Metaphor of Anti-Structure".

8. The bracket and enclosure are mine.


10. Messengers may be in masks such as the okpa. However, they are selected because of their maturity in handling such secret responsibilities. They are men or youths of proven integrity.

11. For a better understanding of the psychological implication of myths, refer to Campbell (1949).
In this chapter, I will argue that Igbo masquerade is both ritual and theatre by showing how masks correspond to theoretical models of both ritual and theatre. The model I will use for the structure of theatre is that developed by Elmer Rice (1955), while that of ritual is the one developed by Edmund Leach (1963). While combining the ideas of these two, I will also apply Eliade's (1959) formulation on festivals to demonstrate that during masquerades, Igbo recreate and live in the sacred time of their ancestors.

The problem of the thesis, which is of prime museological significance, is that the mask as seen in museum displays is a lifeless piece of carved and painted wood. But to the Igbo it has a force of its own. It is considered a being. The paradox is how to convert the piece of wood into a spiritual force. One is therefore compelled to examine the relationship between illusion and reality, in terms of the models for theatre and ritual, two of the contexts within which masks are often worn, and which contain within themselves the same paradox; especially the paradox that ritual can both create and reverse time. This in itself is also illusory. In order to solve these museological problems, one must put masks and masquerades into an appropriate ethnographic context which I have done in detail in the preceding chapters.

Briefly, these consist of the various rituals involved in carving
the mask itself, those rituals involved in initiating novitiates into the secret societies associated with masks, and finally, those rituals necessary for putting on the mask. This last part needs further elaboration. When the occasion is right for masquerade performance, the leaders in the men's secret masquerade society assemble in the men's rest house or the obimmuo and decide which mask is to appear. Then they make sure that the mask and its associated costumes are in good shape. Finally, they announce their decision to other members, especially those associated with this particular mask through a peculiar sounding of the ekwe (wooden gong). Only those associated would understand this secret language and would therefore assemble at the appropriate place. Here a ritual is performed to give life force to the latent mask. This is done by offering some kola nuts to the ancestors and throwing of white clay or chalk (nzu) to signify that members are pure. Then an egg is thrown on the face of the mask to ritually put life into it. A live chicken is sacrificed to the ancestors to protect the mask. Members roast and eat the meat of the chicken. This sharing of food with the supernatural is what anthropologists would refer to as commensality or communion. The mask is then put on and goes on display to the audience. This happens anytime the mask is to appear for whatever reason throughout the Igbo country, although forms may vary depending on local circumstances.

I will now begin my discussion on the ritual theatricality of Igbo masks by first presenting masks as theatre.
**Igbo Masquerade as Theatre**

Basden (1966:117) wrote concerning the Igbos as he saw them in the early 1900's: "Holding the most profound beliefs in the supernatural, the Ibo is deeply conscious of his relationship to the unseen world, and every precaution must be observed in order to keep the spirit of the departed in a state of peaceful contentment". One of these intricate and elaborate devices for keeping the spirit of the departed in a state of peaceful contentment is to give a dead relative a proper burial, and in this the mask plays an important part. When a "full grown" man dies, he is supposed to be buried with appropriate rites. Perhaps one needs to define a full grown man as the Igbos see him. He is a person who was born a free citizen of his community, has lived a useful and successful life (by joining the secret societies, taking titles, etc.), has a house, a wife and perhaps children. When such a man dies, the community is sad to lose a real "son of the soil". Youths dressed in masks must appear to wish him, who has been a member of the society, a final farewell to the land of the dead. Being spirits, the masks show that he is welcome to their domain. This has always been the general interpretation given to the masquerade performance of youths at burials. This truly reinforces the religious nature of the Igbo masks.

What has often been overlooked in literature is the fact that these masked performances during burials are also to lighten the mood of people deep in grief. Writing on death and burial rites of the Igbos, Basden (loc.cit.) continued, "These quaint apparitions, needless to
say, are men disguised in grotesque fashion, with their bodies completely enveloped in cloth, and uttering peculiar sounds by means of air instruments fixed between the teeth. To the excited audience these are verily believed to be figures animated by spirits from the underworld. He failed to examine the mask as exciting an audience in grief but dwelt in his work on the religious implication of the masked appearance. My argument is that masquerade performance at burial ceremonies of the Igbo are as well drama enacted to create pleasure and diversion and thereby lighten the mood of an audience in a "death house".

Fortunately, contemporary studies of Igbo masquerades have begun to examine this cultural trait in a theatrical framework, focussing attention specifically on the relationship between the actors (masked performers) and their audience (the community). Ottenberg (1973:32), who must be seen as one of the pioneers, commented that "a full understanding of the performance requires very close observation of the activities of the audience as well as the players". Because he saw masks as theatre, he described some of the Afikpo masquerade performances he had observed as plays, with acts and scenes (see Ottenberg, 1975).

This interpretation of mask as theatre is shown by the fact that singing, dancing and jesting are subjects on which instructions are given in initiation camps in the forest. Music and dancing are most important to the Igbo because every step has to be mastered and repeated without fault at masquerade performances. Traditionalism had a significant part here since it was the belief among the Igbo, that
if there is a change, the effectiveness of the dance would be lost. We have now arrived at the issue or core of the thesis; namely, that masks among the Igbos could also be interpreted or looked at as theatre.

But let us examine the nature of theatre to see if our conception of the mask as theatre is correct. Whether or not art can be defined, every artist knows or would know if he thought about it, that the artistic impulse is compounded of two elements. One is a need for self-expression in whatever context, and the second element is a desire to communicate what is expressed. In other words, the purpose of art—be it sculpture, painting, dancing, poetry, music or whatever—is not complete except when it is communicated to others who understand and appreciate what the artist has done. I will say further that this process of artistic communication like most other human-phenomenon, follows cultural patterns, and that artistic tradition depends upon a collective body of appreciators. This is what drama and theatre mean and are all about. There must be an audience. With respect to drama, the essential requirement of communication is simply stated: plays are to be performed before an audience. Collectively, the performance, the audience, the auditorium and many other elements constitute an institution which in the modern sense is called the theatre. The theatre, one may say, is therefore an instrument for the communication of drama, much as it has today an independent social and artistic existence of its own.

In traditional or rather pre-literate societies, the problems of communication of the work of art are fused. But in today's Western
society, the processes of creation and of communication are wholly
dissimilar. One is the spontaneous or planned, self or group initiated
activity of an individual, group or community; the other, an organized
industrial or technological process, a business. Rice (1955:2)
writes that "in primitive societies this disparity may not be evident,
but it widens rapidly as the social texture becomes more intricate
and complex; so that in the modern world, the machinery of communi-
cation has almost acquired an identity of its own, with a relationship
to the artistic that is mechanistic rather than organic".1

Writing on the essential characteristics of the theatre whether
professional, amateur, commercial, subsidized or academic, Rice
maintains quite rightly that theatre is a collective process, to
which I add that the Igbo masquerade performance is a classic example.
To Rice, the collective nature of the theatre is apparent in three
respects. In the first place, plays are performed in the presence of
a collective entity—the audience. He maintains that plays are supposed
to be communicated to a numerous group gathered in one place at one
time. In the context of this study, the Igbo audience gathers at the
obimmuo or village square or the market square to watch the ritual
and mythical drama that is masquerade performance. The organization
and assemblage of the group calls for a special set of procedures,
because the difference between a collective response and an individual
response is not only one of degree, but one of kind. This temporal and
physical collective assemblage make it imperative that the play, both
in creation and in performance, be immediately apprehensible. There
is no lingering, no turning back. The audience must move forward with
the performers because what is not instantly grasped may be lost. It is noteworthy that Igbo audiences, as Ottenberg (1975) has shown, are active observers at the masquerade plays. They clap and often move to the rhythm of the music, they join in singing at times, and they cheer top performance but jeer a poor show.

Rice continues that secondly there can be no direct communication between the dramatist and the audience. The projection of his play entails the services of a director and actors, designers of costumes and scenery, stagehands, etc. All these must be co-ordinated in the carrying out of an organized plan. Individualism must both express itself and be to a large extent subordinated to the overall scheme. This creates cordial relationships and also at times conflicts. We have examples of this co-ordination from the Igbo masquerade performance. In the Okumkpa play of the Afikpo Igbos, there is a leader and assistant leader who act as directors of the play. These are carvers, makers of costumes, etc., whose collective individual skills make the masquerade play possible. In this connection, one must take cognisance of the fact that the essence of drama is not words but action. Plays are written to be acted. In Aristotle's classic definition, for example, a tragedy (that is, a play), is an imitation of an action. Comedy means a festivity with music and dancing or a festal procession. A revue is a re-seeing, i.e. a re-enactment of topical incidents. Such words as act, play, show and spectacle put the emphasis upon doing and seeing, so do director, producer, actor, performer, mime, etc. Scene, stage, and theatre all refer to a building or structure designed for performers and spectators, while audience
indicates that people come to see and to hear. It is submitted here, taking into consideration earlier accounts of masquerade performance in this study, that Igbo masquerades qualify as theatre in their own right.

Thirdly, Rice states that the two collective characteristics of the theatre shown earlier, i.e. the audience and the executants, produce the next characteristic of the theatre which is its public nature. Other works of art may be enjoyed not only by individuals, but in private. Failing a publisher or an exhibitor, a poem or a painting may be passed from hand to hand. Or, if it is considered subversive or indelicate, and hence unacceptable, it may be read or displayed in a locked room behind drawn blinds. But the further essence of a dramatic performance is that it is public. It is practically impossible to keep secret an activity that demands the facilities and the number of participants required for the showing of a play. I must qualify this last statement by pointing out that although in the masquerade performance, internal knowledge of the organization of the play is secret within the secret society and its members, their performance is done in the open; otherwise it would be meaningless to the community. The theatre by its very nature is out in the open. This makes it subject to many forms of traditional and/or public scrutiny, influence, supervision and regulation, covering matters that are fiscal, political, religious, social and governmental by nature. The masquerade play of the Igbos, as indeed such performance either by the Kwakiutl or the Melanesians, qualify in this category also. All that has been written in earlier chapters fits in nicely.
We can therefore summarize that the theatre can truly be said to have form, a structure, an identity of its own. It exists, even in the modern sense, for the purpose of serving drama and vice versa. In a larger sense, drama and theatre narrowly defined are the same. This is the case with the masquerade performance of the Igbos. It should be appropriate to use an Igbo example to demonstrate this. Ottenberg has written on the Okumkpa plays of the Afikpo in which he showed that the play has four acts. I did write on the Ozoebunu performance of the Ozubulu when I discussed initiation ceremony. Let us therefore examine further another Igbo community and the account of the ijele masquerade as recorded by Boston. Boston (1960), wrote of the masquerades of the Nri-Awka Igbos. It should be noted in passing that Nri is considered the cradle and ancestral home of the Igbos. His writing can be summarized as follows:

All masks among the Nri-Awka Igbos are credited with supernatural powers, but in some cases this importance is also founded on the social facts, such as their cost or the impact of their performance on the locality. The summit of masquerading in terms of ostentation and social prestige is occupied by a mask called ijele and is owned by all the four clans. This mask requires years of effort to purchase and meet the cost of undertaking its performance. In its social aspect, the ijele is not unlike the potlatch, since the prodigal expenditure is calculated to make an impression over a wide area. The aim of the ijele is mostly religious, since it is a symbol of continuity and ritual well-being in the community of its owners. The mask itself, like the Ozoebunu of Ozubulu, is treated with great respect, and, after use when
Plate X. The ijele masquerade.

(Photograph by E.C. Onwuzolum).
its parts are dismantled, they are carefully preserved as ritual objects with powerful ancestral sanctions against disposing them to anyone outside the umunna ("clan"). The ijele is therefore public property.

The mask, ijele, is a tableau of figures with trappings hanging from its bottom edge to conceal the performer who carries the structure on his head (see photograph). The tableau is supported by a framework made of cane and slats of palm midrib which consists of a circular base about six feet across, a pair of arches spanning the base and intersecting at right angles some eight feet above its centre, and a light open work cone fitted to the base, with its apex attached to the junction of the arches. No part of the framework is visible when the mask is finished, as the cone is covered with red cloth and the struts of the arches are bound also in red cloth and finished off with tassels. The theme of the tableau that occupies the upper section of the ijele is the life of a typical Igbo community. Human figures are in the majority and are arranged to depict either sacrifice of animals or the playing of musical instruments, etc. Realistic figures of local animals and birds are also depicted, so also are some masks of the area.

Ijele is made by professional men who work in an enclosure especially prepared for them at the edge of the clearing in which the mask will eventually perform. The completion of the work is usually in time for the middle of the dry season feast period and invitations are sent out to persons of both sexes over a wide area to come and watch. Much of the time of the actual performance is taken up by the owners and
their male relatives, in singing and dancing and displaying the
cows, goats and yams, and money that are being presented to the ijele.
But from time to time the field is cleared and the ijele orchestra
takes command whilst the mask dances out of its hiding place, following
its guide who is the director of the play, swaying and turning grace­
fully as it goes to visit each section of the huge audience.

We need not belabour the point that the ijele play and performance
is theatre because the description demonstrates quite clearly the three
characteristics of the theatre which Rice postulates. Rice (1955:12)
has himself shown that theatre like other human activities is shaped
and developed by the social environment. He used the examples of rural
Mexico and industrialized Germany to demonstrate this, and for the
purpose of our analysis it is quite necessary to quote his Mexican
example:

"The theatre...is a village affair, a communal enterprise
known as fiesta, in which the entire population usually
participates either as performers or as spectators. Often
these fiestas take on the aspect of a fair, lasting for
several days, and combining with the theatrical performance
a market, religious observances with various forms of diver­
sion...Usually the dramatic feature of the fiesta is performed
by a group of villagers who specialize in the skills of
dancing, singing or playing musical instruments. These
skills are frequently handed down from father to son, so that
the performers have almost a professional status, though of
course performing is an avocation with them. Many of them
have great theatrical talent and perform most artfully...
The dramas are simple...are similar to the medieval mystery
and miracle plays with a strong emphasis on the supernatural".

Rice concluded his examination of the Mexican village theatre by
pointing out that such a theatre can flourish in a pre-industrial
society among people who are rooted in the village and deeply imbued
with tradition. This is the case with Igbo masks and plays; in fact,
his observations are apt for our present study and for most other societies that have masks. For example, Machon (1966:39-46) described the drama of the Kwakiutl masked ceremonies thus: "Songs and rhythm were important factors in the creation of a theatrical mood. Each performer required a number of secret songs which stressed his spiritual powers, and these were composed by the song-maker. The chorus learned the songs in secrecy, public presentation occurring for the first time during the initiation ceremony. The beat of the song was kept with a drum and with batons which were beaten upon a board. The beating of time and the words of the songs served to impress upon the spectators the supernatural powers of the performance".

**Igbo Masquerade as Ritual**

It has been demonstrated that Igbo masquerade is theatre. However, this is only part of the story because, to the Igbos, the masquerade has religious implications. It was noted earlier that the Igbos believe that the mask is imbued with real meaning and carried very real supernatural powers which invested power in the wearer, the costume, and the mask itself during (and even after) such times as it was brought forth in ritual ceremony and theatrical performance. Even the preparation or carving of the mask seems to agree with Cole's concept of "art-for-life sake; since in most cases the mask was closely allied to those cultural mechanisms dedicated to the maintenance of order and well-being among the Igbos." The mask is oriented to those social values upon which depend the sense of individual and community security.
There is a puzzle to be solved. All over the world men mark out their calendars by means of festivals, which are forms of transformation, and in all these festivals, rites of passage are used to mark social development of both individuals and the society. Why should time be demarcated in this way? Why should it be appropriate to wear top hats at Western funerals, and masks on ifejioku ceremony among the Igbos? Frazer explained such behaviour by treating them as survival of primitive magic. His explanation is quite inadequate. It is not good enough to explain a world-wide phenomenon in terms of particular, localized, archaic beliefs. The oddest thing about time is surely that men have such a concept at all. We experience it, but not with our senses. We do not see time or touch it, or smell it, or taste it or hear it.

According to Leach (1963:132-6), human beings experience time in three ways. Firstly, we recognize repetition which brings out time intervals. Time intervals--durations--always begin and end with the same thing, e.g. a pulse beat, New Year's day, etc. Secondly, we recognize entropy, ageing. Living things are born, grow old and die. Ageing is the irreversible fate of us all, but ageing and interval are surely two quite different kinds of experience. We lump these two experiences together and describe them both by one name--time--because according to Leach (1963:133), "We would like to believe that in some mystical way birth and death are really the same thing". Thirdly, our experience of time concerns the rate at which time passes. There is evidence to show that the individual ages at a pace that is ever slowing down in relation to the sequence of stellar time. The feeling that the first
ten years of childhood "lasted much longer" may not be an illusion. Biological processes such as wound healing operate much faster (in terms of stellar time) during childhood than in old age. This irregular flow of time is observable in plants; they grow much faster in the beginning of their life cycle.

Such facts show that the regularity of time is not an intrinsic part of nature; it is a man-made notion which human beings project into the environment for their own purposes. Men try to fix a "chronometer" by which to measure the affairs of life. It is the annual sequence of activities which provides the measure of time. For people who do not possess calendars of the nautical almanac type, the progress of time, especially the year's progress, is marked by a succession of festivals. Each festival represents a temporary shift from the "normal - profane" order of existence into the "abnormal - sacred" order, and back again. The total flow of time then has a pattern which might be represented as shown below.

![Fig. VI. Ritual Separation](Taken with modifications from Leach (1963:134)).
Such flow of time as shown above is man-made. It is ordered in this way by the societies (the "moral person" to use Durkheim's terminology), which participate in the festal rites, and this agrees with the definition of comedy. The rites themselves, especially sacrificial ones (after which masquerades may appear among many peoples, the Igbos in the context of our analysis), are techniques for changing the status of the moral person from profane to sacred, or from sacred to profane. Viewed in this Durkheimian way, the total sequence embraces four distinct phases of states of the community.

Phase A. These are rites and rituals of sacralization and/or separation. The moral person is transferred from the secular to the sacred world. This is most symbolic of initiation into the Igbo mmuo or masquerade secret societies. The whole society is offering sacrifices to make the transfer successful and beneficial to all.

Phase B. The marginal state. The moral person is in a sacred condition, a kind of suspended animation. Ordinary time has stopped. This is symbolic of festivity—masquerades among the Igbos. Both the performers and the audience (i.e. comprising the community), are in a state of suspended animation. Prayers and sacrifices have made the society peaceful and pure. The masks (spirits-­mmuo) appear to shower blessings on the people and to dramatize the mythical foundation and beliefs of the ancestors and their present representatives—the community. The society is reversed to the time of the ancestors. We shall return to this later.

Phase C. The rite of desacralization. The moral person, the community, is brought back from the sacred to the profane world. He
is reborn, secular time starts anew. The community has reaffirmed itself through ritual and accompanying masked performance.

Phase D. This is the phase of normal secular life, the interval between successive masquerade performances.

So much for Leach, but let me draw attention to certain features in the foregoing theoretical argument. Firstly, it should be emphasized that, among the various functions which the holding of masquerade performance or social drama may fulfill to the Igbos, one very important function is the ordering of calendrical time. The interval between such masquerade and/or initiation ceremonies and festivals of the same type is a period, usually a named one, e.g. izu ("Igbo week"), afo, ("year"), etc. Without the festivals, such periods would not exist, and all order would go out of social life.

Secondly, there is the matter of role reversal. If we accept Leach's analysis of the structure of ritual which I have outlined above, then one might argue that the rituals of Phase A and the rituals of Phase C ought, in some sense, to be the reverse of one another. Similarly, according to the diagram, Phase B ought somehow to be the logical opposite of Phase D. These opposites or reversals are exemplified in Igbo masquerade performance.

We may distinguish three seemingly contradictory types of behaviour in masquerades as, in fact, on most ritual occasions. On the one hand--and this corresponds to Phase A in Fig. VI--there are behaviours in which formality is increased. Differences of status are precisely demarcated by etiquette; moral rules are vigorously and ostentatiously obeyed. This is especially the case with rites and rituals during
initiation and/or before the mask is "brought forth into life", i.e. put on a dancer for public performance. In contrast, the second behaviour (Phase B) is that in which the individual seeks to disguise his social personality and his official status. The world goes into a mask (sacred time) and the formal rules of orthodox life are forgotten. Finally, in some instances of Igbo masquerades, we find an extreme form of revelry in which participants play-act at being precisely the opposite of what they really are; men dress up and act as women, e.g. the agbogho mmuo of the Northern Igbos and the njenje parade of the Afikpo. In such situations, normal social life is played in reverse. The youths might openly disrespect and chastise the elders, taking licence from the mask. This is part of Phase B and also Phase C. It becomes Phase C towards the end of the masquerade ceremony when the acts are about to engage in rituals for stopping the celebrations. They may joke and behave in contrast to etiquette.

Let us recall that these three types of ritual behaviour found in Igbo masquerade drama, i.e. formality, masks, and role reversal, are in practice closely associated even though they are conceptually distinct species of behaviour. A rite which begins with formality ends in masquerades and role reversal, and vice versa.

Eliade has written further on the nature of time in another dimension. For him, annual periods of festivities and accompanying rituals such as masquerades, are ways of creating not only calendrical time but sacred primordial time. Writing of such time, Eliade (1959: 68) commented:

"For religious man, time too, like space, is neither homogeneous nor continuous. On the one hand there are the intervals of sacred time, the time of festivals
(by far the greater part of which are periodical); on the other there is profane time, ordinary temporal duration, in which acts without religious meaning have their setting. Between these two kinds of time there is, of course, solution of continuity; but by means of rites religious man can pass without danger from ordinary temporal duration to sacred time".

One essential difference between these two qualities of time strikes immediately: by its very nature sacred time is a primordial mythical time made present. Every religious festival, any liturgical time, represents the reactualization of a sacred time that took place in a mythical past--in the "beginning". Religious participation in a festival implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegation of the mythical time, reactualized by the festival itself. Hence, sacred time is indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable. From one point of view, it could be said that it does not pass, that it does not constitute an irreversible duration. It is an ontological time; it always remains equal to itself, it neither changes nor is exhausted. With each periodic festival, such as annual ifejioku, initiation ceremonies and masquerade plays, the participants find the same sacred time--the same that had been manifested in the festival of the previous year or that of a century earlier. It is the time that was created and sanctified by the gods. In other words, the participants in the festival meet in its first appearance, i.e. the first appearance of sacred time, as it appeared ab origine, in illo tempore. In such annual Igbo festivals, it is only natural and logical that masquerades which are the dramatization of the myths of the people, should be put into performance. My argument hence follows closely the first, that masquerades at annual festivals are to create not only the religious
framework for the festival itself, but also to create additional pleasure and amusement for a people in a state of religious joy. It is a means of getting the community together as an audience to move into sacred time—the time of the ancestors.

Igbo Masquerade as Ritual-Theatre

Thus far I have presented two aspects of the masquerade—namely, theatricality and ritual. The ritual of the mask enables the Igbos to separate space and time and temporarily live in the mythical beginnings of their society, the time of the ancestors. The paradox of the mask with its ritual and theatricality becomes the same as the paradox of the present and the past. The mask is that potent symbol through which device the Igbos look at the past. This is very important because the mask is not just an artistic expression, but a much bigger phenomenon. Through its theatricality, Igbos relax and entertain themselves. Through its rituals they also relive their historic past, in the company of their ancestors, the founding fathers of the society who have been evoked and given form. The mask represents the paradox of man and the unseen or abstract forces. Through it, man communicates with these unseen but supernatural and superpowerful forces. The wood that is mask is given power through ritual, and this is a very important and powerful medium of communication with the past. The mask is therefore not the wood we hang on museum walls but an important ritual and theatrical agent.

My argument or thesis then is that Igbo masquerade performance is
not only drama or theatre in its own right, but is symbolic of a complete transfer from the secular-profane world of everyday life to the sacred festal time of the ancestors during which time the myths of Igbo societies are dramatized. Further, masquerades enable the Igbos to live other types of life, i.e. live in the past, and helps them to overcome monotony. By so doing, they reaffirm the continuity of their society, because the mask helps them retain the indivisibility of their actions, purposes and values, all of which are necessary for the maintenance of the community. Community represents the yearnings of men "for a commonality of desire, a communion with those around us, an extension of the bonds of kin and friend to all those who share a common fate with us" (Minar and Greer, 1970:IX).

Because the masquerade performance achieves this, it is a proper ritual-festival. In the artistic sense it is also theatre. One is therefore right to interpret masks and masquerades as ritual-festival and theatre, or ritual theatre for short.
In this study just concluded, we have tried to present the masquerade plays of the Igbos in a ritual-theatrical context. But why should one devote attention to the study of masks in the first place? What are the advantages that come from the study of masquerade as theatre?

Firstly, I believe that presenting the mask as ritual theatre has obvious museological implications. We now know that the mask is not just a face covering, but also has associated costumes and is used as social drama. Further, as Sieber (1962) has rightly pointed out, displaying a mask in a museum as an isolated piece, constitutes a gross misrepresentation not only of the social values inherent in the mask, but also of the aesthetic component of the mask in its original context. Masquerade performance, looked at in terms of ritual theatre, includes music, dance, scenery, etc., as well as the rituals connected thereto. These are ideas curators, designers and other museum officials should bear in mind in displaying Igbo, any African, or masks from any other cultures. We did intend to put the mask in its proper context in the exhibit "The World of Spirits" which preceded this thesis.

Having studied the mmuo society, one is inclined to believe that to the Igbos, the secret society remains an indispensable institution. It is so to the Yorubas, Kalabaris and Ibibios, all of whom are the
neighbours of the Igbos. The Egungun masks of the Yorubas "brought back the spirit of important ancestors and gods to the towns"\(^7\).

Among the Kalabari, the \textit{ekine} dance societies perform elaborate mask plays, whose purposes are not only to reflect the life of Kalabari towns and villages, but also to create entertainment for the people. It had the other function of establishing the presence of the spirits\(^8\).

The mask as an institution is therefore not unique to the Igbos alone but is common to most other societies in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large. I, therefore, consider it necessary that since similar attributes are found in masks of other societies, the mask is a subject that requires detailed study as a human institution. This study therefore helps to answer the socio-cultural questions related to why men disguise themselves in masks, and why they behave differently when they put on the mask\(^7\). Although the study is primarily concerned with the Igbos, as a humble beginning, it nevertheless could be used to study this institution in other societies and cross-culturally. I think that this is what anthropology is all about, i.e. helping us, according to Sanday (1976:XV), "to seek a greater understanding of how the culture in which we live affects our lives". I wish to point out that this is even more demanded in anthropology today, because of the need to study and describe cultures, and in order to build a body of knowledge and theory that portrays and explains "both the similarities and the differences in the condition of mankind, to get at what is common through the differences that have arisen through an interaction of men with external nature and each other in different settings" (Hymes, 1969:12).
Studies of this type have become indispensable to the emergent countries of the third world, of which Nigeria is one. The author of this study is himself from Nigeria where he has worked and may continue to work in a museum. The museums are part of those mechanisms through which societies protect their cultural heritage. The advantages to societies or countries to protect their culture can be seen from the definition of that technical anthropological term itself as given by Belshaw (1969:12). To him, culture has three aspects:

a) "That aspect in which it is considered as the end result of social action".

b) "Its nature as a stock of resources and capabilities which can be used for further action".

c) "Its nature as an operational system which influences action, that is, as a cultural organization or the analogy of social organization".

Masquerade performances in the past and present depict some if not all of these characteristics or aspects of culture as I have shown. It is not an institution that should be allowed to disappear with social change, and happily the mmuo society of the Igbos has adapted to change and this has made it functionally dynamic. This mmuo society could be utilized for development in such areas as in community efforts and development. But this is a political question.

We in the museums have the priestly duty to:

a) Preserve both objects of cultural heritage and information pertinent to them.
b) To systematically and delightfully present what the museum has preserved to the public.

c) To interpret what it has presented in different ways for the various sections of the community; hence I believe that labels, diagrams and photographs should be so used in display that the visitors could relate them to the artefacts on exhibit.

d) To stimulate and encourage research and study into culture, and also to provide entertainment and enjoyment in an atmosphere of beauty and relaxation.

The decision to encourage the utilization of our cultural objects and the information connected with them for the purpose of development, may be the responsibility of political leaders. Nevertheless, I think that education and development that does not take into account the cultural realities of the society is like building a house without a foundation. Such a house will surely collapse with time and external pressure. It is in this connection that anthropologists can come to be helpful, if allowed to be, in development planning. When museums in Nigeria undertake and publish works such as this one, dealing with the masks of a part of Nigeria, it could be correctly said that Nigeria's government is taking care of its cultural heritage. The advantages of such a measure are fourfold:

1. To inculcate a sense of pride among its citizens, thereby promoting national pride and identity;

2. The preservation of cultural heritage is the foundation on which to build adequate and everlasting political frameworks, because the present has its basis in its past, and the future will have
its basis in the present. It is important, therefore, to preserve the institutions of society so that the youths will be better able to interpret the social happenings in the country of their birth;

3. There is, of course, the indisputable advantage of both the educational and historical importance of culture. As said earlier, education is not meaningful which does not reflect its cultural setting;

4. It is through the museum, with its function as a place where objects are preserved, that such international organizations as the UNESCO and ICOM derive part of their function. It is in this respect that culture helps to foster the universal or international brotherhood of mankind, which the world requires so much in this nuclear age if it is to survive.

It is hoped that this study of Igbo masks fits into the general attempt to preserve the past of not only Nigeria, but should form a start for such studies elsewhere. It may not have all the answers, especially when it is noted that Igbo society, like most African societies, has undergone a lot of change recently because of the urge to modernize and there is the temptation to forget tradition as archaic and concentrate on industrialization. Rice believes that theatre of the sort demonstrated in this study can flourish only in a pre-industrial society, among people who are rooted in the village and deeply imbued with tradition. As industrialized urban centres multiply and villagers are drawn to them by better means of transportation and opportunities for employment, the village unity and the heritage of
skills will be weakened, and gradually the machinery of mass communication--movies, radio, television--might push the fiesta or masquerades into obsolescence. I sincerely hope that this does not happen to Igbo tradition, because this is too important for reasons already demonstrated. In the words of Njoku, "this aspect of the Igbos and Nigerian culture should never be allowed to be forgotten, else posterity will not forgive their predecessors"[^9], i.e. ourselves.

I will end this thesis with a statement by Edmund Leach (1963:5). He wrote:

"Generalization is inductive; it consists in perceiving general laws in the circumstances of special cases, it is guesswork, a gamble, you may be right or wrong, but if you happen to be right you have learnt something altogether new. In contrast, arranging butterflies according to their type and sub-types is tautology. It merely reassents something you know already in a slightly different form".
Notes and References

1. Elmer Rice is an artist and has written extensively on drama and theatre. Also, Freedley and Reeves (1941) have written on drama and theatre, especially their origin and communal nature.

2. cf Rice (1955:14-28) for a detailed analysis on the characteristics of theatre. Also cf Freedley and Reeves (1941:8).


5. This fact has already been made in Chapter II on Igbo history. cf Basden, 1966; Isichei, 1973 and 1976.


9. cf Njoku (1974) "Death and Burial Customs, Before Culture Change in Traditional Ibo Society".
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