

No condition is Permanent: The Egigun masquerades of Ikole Ekiti

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This paper is an analysis of the performances of a group of masquerades known generally as Egigun in the town of Ikole-Ekiti, one of the larger and important towns of Ekiti state in South western Nigeria. It is a paper that looks at the way in which traditions of practice are maintained, transformed and re-established as tradition, creativity and innovation operate in Ikole. I examine the relationships between the different performances of Egigun and the way in which that variance might allow an understanding of the differing attitudes that performers and audiences have towards the identity of the differing masquerades that are performed in Ikole. Involved in this analysis is the way that differing notions about self-identity and individuality are in a relationship with the perceived identity of the mask (as the object placed on the head), the different types of masquerade and their performances.

The use of the word masquerade is (to paraphrase Charles Jedrej) "as likely to be misleading as it is informative" (1980:229). When asking about masks, my usual question, "What is this? What is this on?," would be met with the response, "*Egigun ni*," it is *Egigun*. The name that is used in Ikole to describe what I conventionally translate as "masquerade" is *Egigun*. The word Egungun is not used to describe these performances. This marks a distinction not of dialect but of an entirely different form, although there are clear affinities between the two types. The issue is further complicated because within Ikole and its environs there are a diverse number of practices which use what, in the west, is conventionally known as a mask.

Clearly the word Egigun has an affinity with other words used for masquerade in south-western Nigeria. *Egungun* is the name most commonly used to describe that category of masquerades that exist around the area of the old Oyo hegemony (Drewal, 1978:18). Drewal states that, in Yoruba, the name *egungun* (un-capitalised) may refer to any masquerade or masked figure, although the name for mask that I encountered most often was *Egun*. However the words *Egigun*, *Egungun* or *Egun* may not necessarily refer only to masked figures, but have a greater resonance that incorporates a concept rather than, or as well as, a material entity. The name *Egun* is used in Ikole to refer to the metaphysical properties of the masquerades, and does not simply refer to the mask.

The most comprehensive comparative study of *Egungun* still remains the 1978 issue of *African Arts* dedicated to the subject.¹ Bringing together authors whose research covered

¹ *African Arts* Vol 11 (3).



Plate 1: An Agbe masquerade

much of the wide area described as Yoruba (although with a focus on the “central” Oyo region), the documentation and analysis of the range of masquerade types described under the rubric *Egungun* (or to follow Drewal, *egungun*) is impressive. Most of the authors base their work in specific town locales although there is some overlap, at least in the work pertaining to the Oyo *Egungun*. Almost all the authors, however, point to the central problem of classification. Shiltz makes the case succinctly:

“Yoruba classifications of *Egungun* ... are *ad hoc* classifications based on very specific criteria. The result is that one *Egungun* corresponds to two or more folk types, or the same type may have very diverse manifestations from one place to another.”²

Or again:

“The extent to which the choice of an *Egungun* name is definitely related to the style of its mask or to some other attribute like status or office is not always easy to establish.”³

Indeed one of the central points of the issue was to demonstrate the variety exhibited in Yoruba *Egungun* masquerade types. As Drewal says of the articles in the issue, “they offer a variety of approaches to the study of indigenous classifications, suggesting that no single system applies to all Yoruba groups, and that more than one system may operate in a single area.”⁴

Each of the authors in this issue produces separate categorisations of the *Egungun* that they see (or don't see as in M Houlberg's article), according to the position of the masks in the local arena. There is clearly a sense in many of the papers that somehow classification ought to be possible and there is a drive in most of the articles to produce something that looks recognisably systematic, yet what clearly emerges is both a frustration and a celebration that local situations refuse either easy systemisation or assimilation to easy classification. Equally clear is the fact that form, although playing some part in classification, is not the main determinant – and it is only when the analysis is taken beyond local situations by the analyst to a regional classification that form begins to seem significant in the ordering of classification.⁵

What is clear, however, is that in local situations categories of masquerade are prevalent. In part this is a taken for granted assumption, both with analysts and from the evidence of

² Marc Shiltz 1978 *Egungun* masquerades in *Iganna African Arts* 11(3), p. 55.

³ Marc Shiltz 1978 *Egungun* masquerades in *Iganna African Arts* 11(3) 55.

⁴ Drewal 1978:19.

⁵ As in the editor's preface.

local exegesis. However, formal style does not necessarily enter into the way in which masks are classified. More important are names, performances and patrons, all of which are to an extent developed through or upon cosmology and some notion of metaphysical hierarchy. One could argue that this is simply style as "a way of doing", the stylistics of social practice, and clearly there is some truth in this. Calling these factors determinants of style however does damage to how "ways of doing" or social practice operate, because to invoke style is to invoke a notion of constant form, one that clearly cannot deal with the varieties of forms and names that cut across any sense of the constant as either a way of doing or of formal analysis.

Drewal argues that the broader generic term *Egungun* should be used for the masquerades, such as those of Owo described by Poyner (1978:65-76), that fall outside the Oyo derived category *Egungun*. If that is the case, then the masquerades of Ikole, which are in many ways similar to the masquerades of Owo, would also be categorised as *Egungun*. However throughout this paper the term *Egigun* is used, as this is what people in Ikole call their masks. Whether the term *Egigun* refers to an entirely separable category of masquerades, is a dialect difference or is a part of a broader category *Egungun* is an open point, but not one that seemed to concern people in Ikole. My own feeling is that in an area where cosmological divergence can be extreme within a loose overall pattern, concern over rigid naming should not be over emphasised.

In part the emphasis on the specific naming of particular masquerade forms, particularly evident in the literature on regional "Yoruba" masking practices, is a result of a tendency to define specific cultural areas in West Nigeria in relation to types of mask practice. Cultural "areas" of types of masking practice then serve to further reify the concept of "Yoruba Culture" (Obayemi, 1981; Peel, 1989,2000). In these terms a view of Yoruba cultural diversity is that the centralised Yoruba produce *Egungun*, those of the south-west make *Gelede* and in Ekiti it is *Epa* that is the predominant mask form. These categories may be little more than packaging (Picton 1991), providing a route toward an art history (of Ekiti, of the Yoruba, of Nigeria, of Africa) but the persistent underlying model upon which that package is formed are the intertwined concepts of style and ethnicity.

Even in the relatively small area of eastern Ekiti (beyond Ikole) where I conducted research it was clear that masking practice was (and still is) extremely diverse and that often the boundaries of a particular mask's usage are seemingly arbitrary. It was clear that different mask styles were much more likely to belong to particular towns, groups of people or families. It is not uncommon to find two or three different masking complexes coexistent within the same town, although only very rarely would they be performed together. I witnessed performances of masks that were generically known as *Egigun*, *Epa*, *Alasase*, *Egburu* and *Ore*. Then within categories there were definite differences in form and names – thus, for example, in some places *Epa* is one thing and *Egburu* another, in others *Egburu* is known as *Epa* (see Rea, 2000). Diversity overwhelms easy classification throughout this

area.

The masquerades known as *Egigun* in Ikole are acknowledged by people there to be of a different status from other masquerade types. These differences relate to masquerade in two separate ways. The first distinction people make refers to the cosmological divergences between different masquerade types, for example between Epa masquerades and those of *Egigun*. These are masking practices of an entirely different order. The second distinction referred to is difference of style and form (as well as the possible cosmological divergence) between *Egigun* and *Egungun*. Concerning the first set of differences, it is clear that there is no confusion between *Egigun* masquerades and other masked forms such as Epa. In a number of towns I was told that Epa and *Egigun* "should not meet" and it is clear that there are substantive cosmological as well as ontological differences between the two masking practices, although, at a certain level there clearly is a coincidence of cognitive and actual practices shared between the two forms.⁶

The differences between *Egigun* and *Egungun* are more difficult to quantify. Both types seem to inhabit the same sort of dramaturgical and cosmological space as types of masquerade practice, and yet there are substantial differences. It is recognised in Ikole that as a *form* *Egigun* is different from *Egungun*, and this is not simply the product of dialect differences between regions. In particular, people in Ikole insist that *Egigun* use *eio* palm leaves while those masquerades "in Ibadan" use cloth.⁷ Whether as a type *Egigun* are so cosmologically different from *Egungun*, other than as a result of regional variation, that they merit being regarded as a separate category, is an open question. Given that the two types are cosmologically and structurally similar, I would suggest that the "family" resemblance be acknowledged, but this family resemblance may have a resonance beyond the boundaries of Yoruba masquerade practice and may incorporate, or be incorporated within, a wider category of Southern Nigerian masquerading.

There are a number of different categories of *Egigun* in Ikole and these conform to categories of masquerade practice in Ikole. It is in differences in masked performance, however, that differences in attitudes toward *Egigun* are most clearly expressed. In studying differences between masquerades and their performances the analysis may also be able to account for some of the reasons behind the diversity and the range of iconographic creativity in certain masquerade styles.

⁶I have no space to fully detail the schema and practices of the Epa masquerades here. The variation in these masquerades across Ekiti makes easy categorisation difficult. As a general rule, however, the cosmology that structures Epa is that the mask itself is the metaphysical entity, not the fact of masking. In this sense *Egigun* shares more with *Egungun* practices (see Ojo, 1978).

⁷*Eio* is the dialect name in Ikole for *mariwo*. Poyner (1978:92n) gives the spelling in Owo as *emarewo*. In central Yoruba the name is *ope* or *atelewo*.

In part what I am suggesting here is that types of *Egigun* display distinct sets of identities which are developed in performance and which differ according to masquerade type. That this is the case is of no surprise, for at the heart of most general analyses of masquerade is some notion that the wearing of a mask creates the substitution of the performer's known "everyday" identity with that of another identity – that of the masquerade. Add to this the common assumption that masquerade involves the bringing forward of other presences (often described as metaphysical) and many analyses seem to suggest that masquerades themselves have an agency independent of the performer's own. What is clear in the case of *Egigun* is there are distinct differences in performance strategies according to the degree of perceived agentive substitution in the differing types of masquerade.

Care must be taken when dealing with these concepts. The materiality of the masquerade as a human creation is never in doubt, for whatever else is in the mask, so is a man. One should not get carried away by one level of Ikole explanation, that there is no human (agency) in the masquerade, for there will always be women to point out that if that is the case, and it is not a man in the mask, then why is the masquerade wearing so and so's shoes! What is apparent, however, is that certain masquerades are conceived, and perceived, as having a reality outside the strictly human domain and that there are performance and behavioural modes that are associated with the identity of particular masquerades, both as types and, increasingly, as individual characters. At the same time all masquerades have an existence in their performance which is also positioned in Ikole practice.⁸

Immediately it might seem that there is a contradiction between talking about a "real" human world, and the conceptions of human beings in that world, and the application of the above notion of ontology to the (world of) masquerades, which in their very status lie in an at least tangential relationship with the lived in world. This perceived contradiction, I would suggest, is more a product of the "sense of make believe" or the "suspension of disbelief" through which dramaturgical and theatrical forms have been realised in the post-enlightenment West. A separation that is made more generally in the west is between the object of contemplation and the viewing subject, a tendency (often pointed out) that runs throughout western social theory's focus on the individual subject as separable from some form of social totality. It is not a form that necessarily corresponds with the experience of masquerade in Ikole. Here the performance of masquerade is much more indeterminate; both "make believe" and "not make believe" (and indeed has the potential for effect that is very real).

⁸It is no coincidence that David Freidburg begins his book, *The power of images* (1989) with a description of the Nupe masquerade, the *Ndako gboya* mask, made by the anthropologist Nadel. Debates on the relationship between the affective properties of masquerade and the agency of the performer have long swung between Eucharistic and Communal viewpoints.

Rather, it is in the multivalent shifting of levels, between what is the everyday and what might in Ikole be viewed as metaphysical, that the perceptions and identities of Ikole *Egigun* performance must be regarded. The identities of the performed masquerade are shaped by historical habituation, tradition and the audience's expectation of a perceived correctness of performance, but they are also shaped by the performer's identity, the understanding of the (onotological) status of the masquerades they wear and the performances they engage in. It is in the various differences between categories, between the performed being of the different masquerades, that this becomes more apparent.⁹

Masks and Masquerades

To describe *Egigun* as masquerade introduces a problem of translation, for it is clear that the word masquerade may not correspond with the semantic range covered by the word *Egigun*. Where does the English word masquerade arrive from? Picton (1990:185) argues that the word masquerade is derived from the Arabic word *maskhara* from the root word *skhr*. The Arabic verb *sakhira* means to laugh, to scoff, ridicule and make fun, as Picton points out, all things that masquerades have the ability to do. However the *notion*, the idea, of what we perceive to be the mask, the masquerade, comes from another source. Inevitably in Western culture that source is Greece. Hollis (1985:219) reminds us that the origin of what we perceive as the mask derives from Greek theatre. For Hollis the role of the mask takes us from the theatrical in Greece to family rights in Rome, "the route is from masks to privileges of those with a right to masks, to *patres* who represent their ancestors to anybody with ancestors, a cognomen and family property" (Hollis, 1985:219). Hence we arrive at a notion of a person as a possessor of rights. Thus the evolution of the notion of the *person* defined in society and holding rights is in the West intimately tied up with the notion of mask. It is through masks that Europe finds the concepts of role, self and person.

A note of caution should be added here, following Picton (1990). The assumption that putting on a mask effaces the identity of the wearer, transforming him into something different, effacing an identity and defining it as something other, might owe more to a use and understanding of the mask and masquerade found in Euro-American thought than that found in Africa. Whatever the relationship between the mask and the self in the "West", it does not necessarily follow that the same relationship exists in other places. What a mask is and the way the mask is used may have entirely different connotations. Doing a masquerade does not even imply the use of what in Europe is conventionally known as a mask.

Rather than concentrate on the force of the masquerade, or some hidden presence in the masker, it is perhaps more appropriate to regard the mask as a conjunction of various

⁹I do not here mean to suggest that there is a contrast between individual subject (performer or masquerade) and some form of social totality. That this is clearly not the case will become apparent throughout this article and in the conclusion.

elements, all operating to bring about the *effect* of the mask. The *Mask*, that thing that people put on their heads, creates a perceptual space and it is within that space that there is the potential for the effectiveness of masked action, whatever that action might be (and clearly in Ikole, forms of masked action and anticipated effects vary considerably). *Mask* operates a transformation which separates the identity of the performer, but it is the transformation, not necessarily an artifact that we call a mask, that is important. The transformation may not even include the use of a mask *per se* but may depend more upon the context for the transformative idea. Given a context for the transformative action, the mask as an artifact that covers the head might not be required. An example of this is the night festival of Ikole's *Egigun* festival where (maybe) the mask is not worn but carried, the night and the non-presence of women are, in this instance, the masking agent. Or again the *Mask* can be the door that separates the unmasked masquerade from the women and children outside the room.¹⁰

What many of the works that posit masquerade as a transformation of identity fail to recognise is that in Africa masking practice, transformation may or may not be the intended outcome of performance. One of the tightest analyses, because he recognises the range of differing intentions, is Picton's (1990:191-195) four-part scheme for West African mask practice. These, Picton states, are end points in a continuum of overlapping practices rather than discrete categories, concerned with the identity of the masker when he puts on a mask; for the fundamental effect enabled by the wearing of masks is the creation of a social distance. His scheme is as follows:

1. Masking that enables the distance between the performer and the audience for dramatic effect alone.
2. Masking that effects dramatic distance and at the same time denies human agency. The separation between everyday self and the masker is extreme.
3. Masks that create dramatic distance, but which may be regarded as literal embodiments of metaphysical powers. The thing itself is where the energies lie. The mask reveals rather than conceals.
4. Masks which do none of the above. They are "masks" because they have the external attributes of masks but they are not used in the way in which masks are generally used e.g. the Benin hip masks.

It seems that *Egigun*, like *Egungun* and a number of other southern Nigerian masquerades fall into Picton's category two. The denial of human agency is implicit in the performance of the masquerade. Although there is a reflexivity toward the masks and most people know what is in a mask, the metaphysical presence is always implied and can become very real.

¹⁰This is a pretence that is maintained by the young men in the room shouting and shrieking from the closed room where the masquerade is sitting.

It seems that in any discussion of masks there is a point where the ethnographer runs up against the locally taken-for-granted material reality of a presence hidden by a mask.

As is quite apparent from the above, what is being dealt with in masking of the *Egigun* variety in which the mask hides a presence too dangerous to reveal otherwise, is a shift in the way in which the self is presented and in the way in which it is perceived. As pointed out by Picton, this is a shift that can go as far as to turn an identity from that generally known, efface it even, but whatever is "in the mask", the human must remain. It is impossible to divorce the mask from the self, from the intrinsic reality of the man. The analysis must encompass the dialectic relationship that exists between the mask and the carrier.

Two types of masquerade

There is an abundance of masks in Ikole, an array which in their performances, together or separately, constitute a fabulous richness of material creativity. To be present during the Oro Egun (masquerade festival) is to be assailed by a seemingly never ending spectacle of visual and aural sensation. To produce a dry categorisation of the masquerade types that are presented might seem to deny the spectacular effect of their appearance. Nevertheless there are specific categorisations made by performers and audiences in Ikole, and even to the uninitiated eye there are clearly a number of different forms of masquerade performance, costume and display. While I was in Ikole I encountered either directly or through description over fifty named *Egigun*. However the vast majority of these belonged to one particular category – Agbe. It is in working through the relations of different named *Egigun* to specific, named categories that the complexity in Ikole's masquerade scheme becomes increasingly apparent.

A simple list of the types of *Egigun* found in Ikole might read something like this: *Aborogi, Agbe, Agbo, Ajalamo, Ajeboweyin Pomoje, Ede, Ele/Efon, Egun're, Elede, Eye, Mowo, Obo, Olu, Osenyin and Owi*. Certain of these names correspond to a particular category within which there are still more various types. Thus subsumed under the categorical name Agbe is a whole range of differently named masquerades, although they all conform to an overall pattern that is called Agbe in Ikole. On the other hand Ede, Aborogi and Egun're are all identified as a category of masquerade known as Eku but each is an entirely separate type.

Form alone might lead the analyst to suggest an entirely different set of categories than those that are found in local parlance or in the performance of a mask. For instance, to use material type or way of carving to categorise would produce a set of formal distinctions that does not have a particular relation to the way in which masquerades are regarded in the town. Cloth, wood, feathers and palm-leaves are all used in the manufacture of masking devices and the use of material is not fixed to any one particular category, although types



Plate 2: An Aborigi maquerade, with wooden head

of certain types of mask are influenced by the material used in their representation. Thus it would be highly unusual to see an Agbe mask performing with a wooden mask, and impossible for Aborogi to perform without one.

There are several ways of wearing the masks (i.e.: that thing that at the most basic level is the covering worn over the head) and on the whole any descriptive vocabulary relates to specific masquerades and their costumes. Some involve donning a simple weave of raffia palm over the head, material indistinguishable from the rest of the costume (*owi*). Other masks are formed from a weave of string that forms a net covering (*awon*) pulled down over the face (*Agbe*, *Osenyin*, *Ede*), or are formed by large pieces of cloth that cover the entire upper torso of the performer (*Egun're*). The wooden masks are of several types, ranging from the helmet mask worn over the entire head (*Agbo*, *Aborogi*, *Mowo*, *Ajeboweyin Pomoje* and perhaps *Ajalamo*, although I as *Oyinbo* was not allowed to see this mask) to the horizontal animal masks (*Efon* and *Efon* types). There is even a set of masks that make use of calabashes placed over the head (*Olu*). Again, however, the one material that defines the costume of all *Egigun*, except the *Egun're*, is the use of *eió* palm leaves.

Categories vary in local exegesis and different responses are given by different informants. The categorical distinction that was most clearly made by senior members of the cult and by senior performers was between a category known as *Ekú* masquerades and those masquerades that were simply performed for entertainment (usually, but not exclusively identified as *Agbe*). The most easily identified distinction between these categories is that the masquerades that fall into the *Ekú* category do not use *Atorin*¹¹ branches to beat their audience whereas other forms do. In practice the categorical distinction seems to correspond with those masquerades that are regularly seen at the *Ogun* festival and those that have a more discrete presence, either during the *Ogun* festival or at other points in the festival calendar. It is clear that there are further distinctions between the masquerades within the *atorin* using category. Nevertheless there are no doubt differences between senior and junior masquerades, and these differences seem to generally correspond with the differences between those that use *atorin* whips and those that do not, yet there are clearly anomalies that cut across any normative categories that this analysis might produce.

It is the differences between these two broad, yet the most evident, masquerade categories of *Agbe* and *Ekú* that this paper concentrates upon. In comparing the two categories variances and differences that point to changing conceptions of masquerade practice can be observed.

¹¹*Glyphaea Lateriflora*. It is a tree known for its toughness and supple qualities and is used for bows and whips. The *Atori* tree is always planted in the masquerade grove.

The Agbe Masquerades

The Agbe masquerades are the most popular of all the masquerades performed in Ikole. They have no specific time of performance within the constraints of the festivals (Ogun and *Egigun*) in which masquerades appear, and at first sight it might be assumed that the Agbe type was the only type of mask performed in Ikole. During the Ogun and the *Egigun* festival any number of Agbe performers will emerge and come onto the street. As previously pointed out, Agbe are generally performed by young men from their late teens and early twenties, up to the age of thirty. What is also clear is that the performance modes of Agbe have also affected the way that some of the other categories of masquerade perform, this is particularly true of some of the performances of Owi, which in the main seem to act in a very similar way to Agbe.

Agbe performance begins with the dressing of the performer. The masker will dress in houses that claim some affinity to the performer's lineage, in the rooms of their friends, or in rooms inside their compounds but rarely inside their own rooms. The dressing of the masquerade is often done in a partitioned-off area of the room, made either of blankets or palm-leaves, certainly with the window shutters closed and entrance to the room heavily guarded by young male family members or close friends. The period of the costuming can be dramatic, the performer shouts at and instructs his followers and they generally work up the dramatic frenzy. For observers outside the shrieks and calls make it known that something highly dramatic is happening. When fully costumed the Agbe leaps from the compound door and immediately launches into a series of whoops and yells, such that anybody near him will be aware of his presence. From this point on the person in the mask is not to be called by his real name: to do so is more than an insult, it is an "abomination".

The "stage" on which the Agbe perform is the road outside the Elekole's palace. This is the central arena of the town, and is integral to the Agbes' performance. By their occupation of the centre of the town their performance places the masquerades directly in the forefront of action; the Agbe achieve a predominance of visibility. Walking through the town toward this space, the masquerade will make its presence known, running after and beating those who get in its way, saluting their supporters or the congregation of small children that follows them. The individual masquerader may join up with other masks from the quarter of the town in which they live, and together they will run to the main street. Once on the main street, the performance of the masks consists essentially in running up and down the street, parading, but at the same time completely dominating the centre of the town. This dominance of space is found in all Agbe performances. In the Egbe-Oba villages, the action of the Agbe masquerades is the same. The most prominent street in the village is chosen and the masks will run back and forth along this road. Each mask is followed by a group of supporters, all carrying the *atori* whips. As the mask runs along the



Plate 3: The Agbe "danger" mask

street, unmasked supporters, those who helped it dress, young men and sometimes young women, join each mask, singing a short *oriki* if the mask has one, or simply chanting the name of the mask.

In the general mêlée of the festival, alliances are made and groups of masks will "run" together, often clashing with other groups of Agbe masqueraders. A mask may act independently, going off with its group of followers and performing some gymnastic set piece, then tumbling, as if exhausted, to the ground, at which point its supporters gather and run (supposedly three times) in a circle around the fallen masquerade, encouraging the mask to get up, after which it generally does, with a great display of shouting and shrieking. To "do" Agbe requires a great deal of stamina and strength. Those masquerades that can keep up the constant running and pleaping are well respected, but more often masquerades will return home, or seek refuge in the nearest beer parlour when tired, reappearing later in the day.¹²

Occasionally two masks will clash with each other, the seriousness of the clash often being dependent on the strength of arguments and rivalries outside the sphere of masquerade practice and may involve continuing lineage disputes. In a serious dispute, one masquerade might endeavour to pull the mask from its rival. To be unmasked in this way is a great disgrace, and if it happens, the net mask and any *eiò* palms that might have been pulled off are left lying on the ground until a senior member of the masquerade cult can be called to come and purify the space in which the mask is lying.¹³ The performer is rushed away by supporters that try to cover his head with their own costumes.

A level of "violence" is not uncommon in the performances of the Agbe and the Owi, masquerades performed by young men. All the outings of these masks that I witnessed had an underlying threat of potentially explosive violence, which at times transformed into actual violence. These masks are the most likely to beat at passers-by with *atori* whips, and at times will beat other masquerades, in itself an abomination. The very performance of these masks has a threatening outlook. The combination of maybe five or six masks and supporters running up and down the main road presents to onlookers a fierce wall of bodies, cloth, palm leaves and whips. A group of Agbe running together is certainly enough to stop drivers on the road and extort a form of festival tax. The inherent violence of the Agbe masquerade is very much a part of the sense of power that these masquerades have.¹⁴

¹²During the Ogun festival one of the beer parlours on the main road of Ikole actually keeps a partition in the back of the parlour so that masqueraders can go and unmask out of sight of women.

¹³This is done by pouring a circle of salt and ashes around the mask. It is said that the mask will disappear during the night.

¹⁴Power is one part of the constitutive relationship between the identity of the masquerade and the identity of the performer.

The wildness, the threatened, and sometimes realised, violence of the Agbe and of the accompanying crowds give an aspect to the festivals of chaotic and sometimes dangerous energy. Agbe and those masquerades that behave in a similar style in these contexts, such as Owi, Efon and Agbo, demonstrate a power that is unconfined. It is an unchannelled wild power that operates without sanction from the everyday norms of society. Except, as in most ritual contexts, there *are* "norms" in place and there are boundaries of behaviour that sanction the limits of the Agbes' activities. The masquerades will push the boundaries fairly close, but by and large will respect them.

If the Agbe performers establish a sense of threatening power to those outside their group, within the Agbe group there is a form of rivalry between masqueraders. A loose form of hierarchy is established based on perception of the qualities of the individual's masquerade and abilities. This "hierarchy" is specifically between those whom perform the Agbe - not just between all young men's masquerades. Those such as the Owi and the Agbo can create an acknowledged position amongst the younger men, but once established this tends to be fairly immutable. The creative potential of the Agbe however allows a greater degree of flexibility to the individual.

What is apparent about the Agbe masks is that *they are inherently individualistic*. Although the Agbe masks make up a coherent category, and within that category display a similarity of type and behaviour, there are deliberate differences created between the masks, and each masquerade may be individually named. The essentially individual nature of the Agbe is demonstrated through their costumes types. Agbe has a basic costume type but the variation within the frame of the Agbe style is extremely diverse. The names and costumes of the Agbe relate to and make material the frame of behavioural action of the masquerades. A simple list of Agbe types and styles demonstrates this diversity within the "frame" of the Agbe style:¹⁵

There are names that illustrate the unpredictable and violent performances:

Ajija - A type of stinging insect.

Esu Odara - "The "devil" is good" (Esu is good - There are any number of Esu related names).

Ajanbula - "Warrior don't fight me."

Abija - "One who is born to fight."

Ikugbebe - "Death has no mercy."

Olukoso - "a man that won't hang himself."

Names that reflect the supposed "metaphysical" power of the masks:

Irere - "A mask that uses a broken calabash."

Olori Awo - "King of secrets." Uses small calabashes around the wooden headpiece.

¹⁵Names were gathered from interviews with various performers, and from asking the masquerades their names at the festivals in and around Ikole.

Then there are a series of Agbe with contemporary names, such as:

Niger - "That has power, and is big, like the river"

Ninja - "Like a ninja warrior"

Danger - Uses a red costume and a chameleon headpiece.

Naira - A mask begun at the change over to the new currency.¹⁶

Rasta - A mask complete with dreadlocks.

Each one of these named masks has a slightly different costume although all are recognisably those of an Agbe. There is no one prescribed way of varying the costume yet there are broadly recognised ways of costuming that have a relationship to recognised themes (iconographies) in a wider cultural sphere. Thus red cloth is recognised as indicating some form of danger, calabashes are synonymous with the containment of juju and the use of horns on the headpiece may relate to the Christian iconography of the devil. Other aspects of iconography are more spectacular, such as pots of burning kerosene. Flags and small wooden figures are all used in the creation of individual masks, relating them to a general theme of unconfined powers (however those may be perceived).

There is a strong incentive to innovate in the creation of Agbe costumes. The diversity of styles that are produced by the performers of the Agbe, obviously contribute in part to the general "competitive" nature of Agbe masquerading. Costume design is an acknowledged factor in the perception of the individuality of the masquerade, but the general diversity of style is also linked to the nature of power, or how power is perceived running through the Agbe corpus. The incorporation of new elements is said to be used to effect shock and wonder; "to make miracles". However, the innovation has to be done in the right way. To have a "beautiful" mask is in many ways synonymous with having a powerful mask, and certainly one that will attract a larger number of supporters to it. When a mask is first introduced the nature of its impact will vary according to the perceived beauty of the mask.¹⁷

The diversity of Agbe masquerade styles is not only produced through iconographic differences. Inscribed into the Agbe performing behaviour is an attempt to make each mask act in some peculiar way, a way which will be outstanding and essentially memorable. However, although the aim of each mask might seem to be to behave in its own manner, there are ways in which all Agbe performances are structured. The display of strength and

¹⁶There is a story of evolution in this mask. The masquerade began as a mask called Ajanbula, a masquerade that gathered a considerable amount of fame to it because of its rough behaviour (see below). The performer altered the name of his masquerade when the Nigerian currency changed to Naira. Recently the performer, now perhaps the leading Agbe masquerade in the town, changed the name of the masquerade back to Ajanbula, at which point one of his friends started a masquerade called Naira.

¹⁷There is one mask known as Arewa, "the beautiful one", whose behaviour is of exactly the same order as the other masks.

force is similar throughout the corpus. All Agbe must be seen to behave in a wild, unconditioned manner, to be uncontrollable. To be even more violent or unpredictable than other masquerades is to garner a greater degree of "fame" upon your own mask. To develop this unpredictability over and above other masquerades means going beyond those limits that are described or are inherent in the behavioural norms of the masquerade prescribed by the elders of the masquerade cult and society. This behaviour alone does not necessarily enhance the reputation of the Agbe mask. To fully gain the repute that guarantees the individuality of the mask, it is necessary to display that mask's power, not only as physical strength, but also as a metaphysical strength.¹⁸ Yet, this so called "metaphysic" of juju, is in the case of Agbe nothing like the serious potentials and efficacies of the senior Eku masks (see below). To suggest that Agbe are "pretending" at juju or metaphysical power, that this juju is simply a dramatic device, is to understate the powers that are supposedly inherent in their performances and costumes, yet it is quite clear that the order of their powers relies more upon a physicality rather than being derived from metaphysical force. Occasionally, and more and more frequently, the Agbe performances run out of control. An incident in which two cars were destroyed during the 1991 *Egigun* festival is not nowadays totally isolated as the masks act in unison and are aware of the co-ordination that surrounds their actions.¹⁹

Agbe masquerades have a symbiotic relationship with their supporters. If a mask is regarded as being "powerful" or "stubborn" then it is more likely to attract supporters to it. Yet a mask also relies upon the number of supporters that it can gain in order to improve its own reputation. By gathering around it a group of people, a mask can make a greater show of strength as it moves through the town. An Agbe's supporters are both young men and women. As a mask begins to obtain a reputation, the number of people following it will increase, and there may even be the invention of different *oriki* for the mask. It is clear that a particular mask can be passed from father to son, but this seems to happen only in circumstances where the father had built up a large reputation in the performance of the Agbe. Often these masks are resuscitated after years of neglect, but the name of the mask

¹⁸An example of this was when the Ajanbula Agbe appeared on the roofs of houses opposite but in front of the Elekole's palace during the Elekole's main address to the town during the Ogun festival. Everybody in the palace courtyard stopped listening to the Elekole and looked up at this "mysterious" creature on the roof. To subvert the Elekole's speech and refuse to come off the roof was certainly a daring stunt and the reputation of the mask as "stubborn" was enhanced, but its efficacy in arriving on the top of the roof "through *juju*" would not be questioned.

¹⁹The increasing violence of masquerades is not isolated to Northern Ekiti. In Okene (Ebira) the more junior of the masquerades there were banned from appearing because they had gone completely out of control. The same was true of various Lagos masquerades that rampaged through one of the central markets in 1991. In Ikole the smashing up of the two cars led to the identified ring leaders having to wear numbered bands around their heads at the following Ogun festival, so that the individuals in the masks could be identified.

will be remembered. If it was a particularly reputable mask (perhaps disreputable would be a better description) then the son must literally "be able to carry it", that is to have the strength of character to fill the father's role.

It could be argued that there is a competitive element to the display involved in the costumes and performances of Agbe. Is this a competition of aesthetics? To reduce to costume design the way in which "hierarchy" between the various Agbe masquerades is created ignores those elements of performance that influence the "hierarchy" of the Agbe. Costume design is but one part of a range of things that are used to generate a position of rank over others. Undoubtedly a really fine costume is regarded as such, and there is criticism of someone who appears badly costumed; such a mask will not gather supporters to it. These critical criteria are not exclusive qualitative judgements; support for the performance of a mask relies upon more than the costume conforming to or extending the range of expected variation.²⁰ Amongst the Agbe it is performance that generates effect which is translated into hierarchical standing. In some senses wearing a costume that is regarded as "too big" for the carrier can be mortifying for the performer, as the supporters of other Agbe will point out and ridicule the badly performed or over ambitious. As it was put to me, "A man's actions must suit his place" or more simply, "E get as e be!".

Individual choices about the mask styles will in fact vary considerably from the inception of the mask to its final version. While working in Ikole, a friend, Kayode, started doing Agbe masquerading. Kayode was in fact from a peripheral Egbe-Oba village but had lived in Ikole for many years, staying in the compound of his mother's sister. He was regarded by many of his elders as being something of a rascal, and he showed little willingness to disabuse their notions. Having started several apprenticeships he had finally settled to work as a carpenter, although still working as a farm-hand for the head of his compound, Chief E. O. Ajayi.

While in Ikole, Kayode had collected around him a large number of friends and informal supporters becoming something of an informal "gang leader" to a number of young men, boys and girls.²¹ In 1990 Kayode produced his first mask, a fairly basic standard Agbe mask, green in colour with no headpiece. This mask he called Niger. The mask was given a tentative first outing at the Ogun festival, but no impressive show was made. Kayode ran up

²⁰Not to conform to the range of expected variation is to introduce an element of the unpredictable that would not necessarily be accepted. As Picton (1992:13-53) has pointed out there is a difference between creativity that involves the manipulation of the established creative frame and innovation that changes that frame, although the two in Agbe masquerade are not mutually exclusive.

²¹This is a very approximate description of Kayode's position, no-one would acknowledge that Kayode was a "leader", but as an older compound member, of about twenty-three, he did have a certain amount of influence amongst younger friends.

and down the main road a few times and then returned home. By the end of the festival (seven days later) Kayode was wearing the mask with more confidence, joining with other Agbe masks and being supported by more of his friends and the young girls from his compound. There had also been some innovation in the iconography of the mask, which had been given a headpiece made of four pieces of wood set at right angles to each other to form a projecting spike, slightly looped at the top.

By 1991 the mask had altered considerably. During the *Egigun* festival it came out as a changed mask. The headpiece was now a different shape, a bigger hooked projection was stuck into the wooden mask, which like other parts of the costume was now coloured red and the name of the mask had been changed to "Danger". In performing, Kayode was more ambitious and would turn on people, beat them, run with the other masquerades and fall down to the ground so that his supporters, by now about ten youths, would run around him, asking that he stand up. By the 1991 Ogun festival, Kayode's Agbe had become an accepted part of the Agbe corpus in Ikole.²²

Obviously there are certain traits in the creation, performance and being of the Agbe masquerade that demand analysis. However, before making any attempt to situate the Agbe in any particular context, the way that they perceive and present their masquerades has to be looked at in relation to other masquerade styles. The category that seems to offer the most comparative difference to the Agbe type are the masquerades of the Eku category.

The Eku Masquerades

Unlike the Agbe masks, which show diversity within a particular style, the category known as Eku consists of three major but entirely different masquerade types: the Aborogi, Ede and Egun're. All three of these senior *Egigun* are regarded as a similar category of masquerade - Eku. They have behavioural traits in common and they are also linked by the mythical exegesis, although their actual performances differ considerably. These masks must never meet each other, for if this happens it creates the potential for some sort of catastrophe.

Few people are allowed to see the preparation of these masks. Although they now dress at home, it is clear that in the past they would prepare their costumes in the sacred masquerade grove, and emerge from there. It is possible that they still do dress in the bush at certain times, though this information is not freely given. If the masks do dress in the bush it is done only with the help of selected helpers. This is certainly the case when the masks dress in their houses. Only close friends that are members of the masquerade society are allowed to see the dressing of these masquerades. Before donning one of the Eku masquerades, the

²²There is in fact a substantial amount of borrowing of themes between the Agbe masquerades especially between the various villages of the Egbe-Oba. "Danger" is also the name of a very well regarded Agbe mask in the village of Oke-Araroni. The individual biographies of how masks change in style and name is an area requiring much more research.



Plate 4: Egun'ré masques

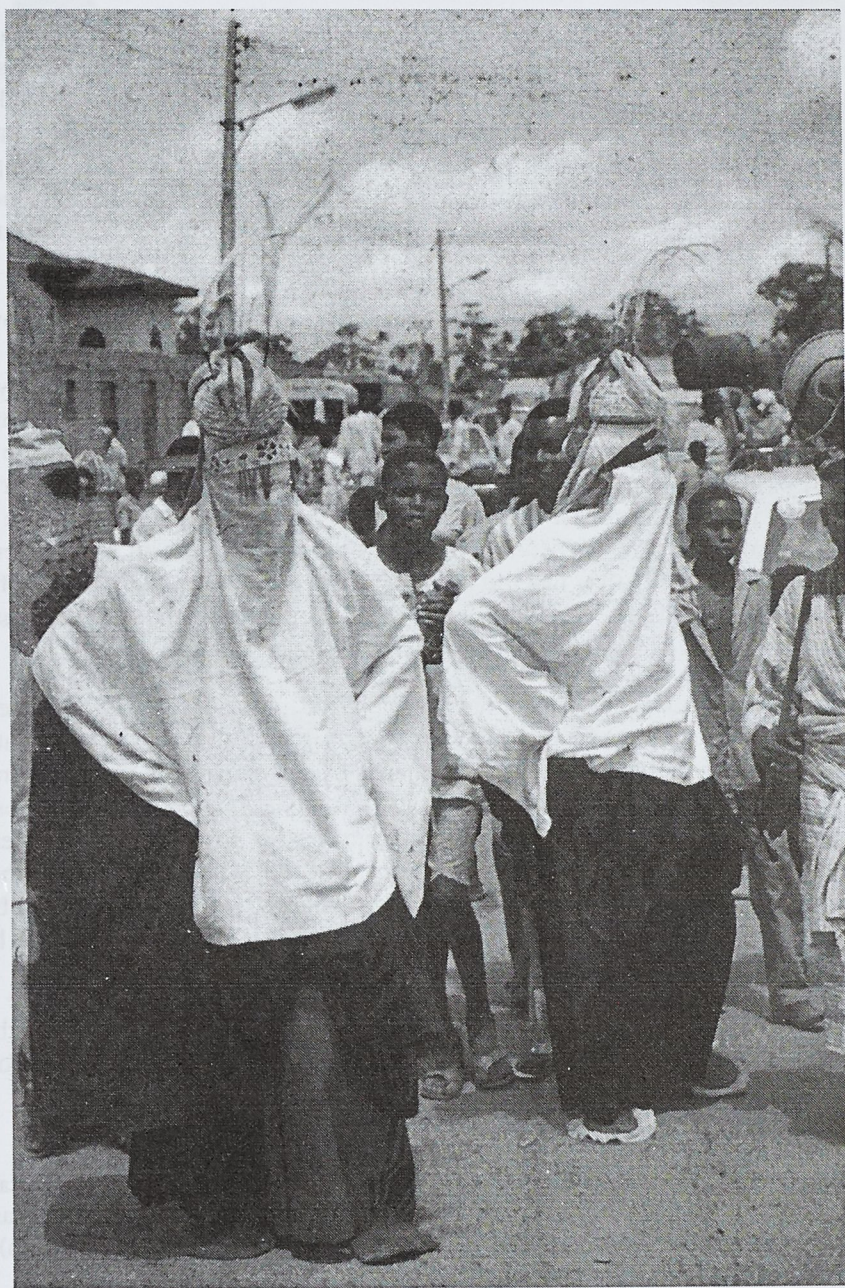


Plate 5: Egun'ra masqueraders

performers have to go through a series of cleansing and "protecting" ablutions that involve the use of black soap. An Eku masquerade will unmask in private, in front of those people that it trusts, but to do so is dangerous and against the "official" practice of the cult. While walking around the town the masquerade may disappear into a house of a friend, take some refreshment and greet the friend. From the inside of the house a continual cacophony of chanting and drumming is maintained by the mask and its trusted followers, from the outside the impression of the mask is maintained.²³ An Eku masquerade must never be unmasked in public; the consequences would be extreme.²⁴

If the main performance area of the Agbe masquerades is the main road of the town, then that of the Eku is generally the small alleyways and interconnecting roads between compounds. They are interstitial. The masquerades will move around without any specific performing area, taking in every quarter of the town. During the Ogun festival the Agbe masquerades will always remain dancing outside the palace, while the Eku (in the instance of the Ogun festival, the Aborogi) are allowed free access to the palace. However all three of the Eku types have specific "contexts" of performative action. In the case of the Aborogi and the Egun're these are particularly related in the first instance to their "roles" in the *Egigun* festival, the only time that the Egun're actually comes out. In the case of the Ede things are a little different. Ede is generally called to perform at special events such as funerals, but as stated before, never emerges during the main festival periods.

All of these masquerades are known for their ability to sing beautiful songs. Whatever their performing area each moves around the town in much the same way, stopping at various compounds, particularly at those whose members have an interest in the masquerade cult. At these compounds the masquerades sing the *oriki* of the compound members, especially if there has been a recent death. The Eku masquerades are also renowned for their ability to give blessings. As they move around the town, women will greet them and then kneel with their backs to the masquerade, which raising its arms, will sing praises and blessings over their heads. The Ede masquerade is particularly known for its ability to create beautiful songs.

The Eku masquerades do not gather the same type of supporters around them as the Agbe. Older men walk around with them guiding and encouraging them, and children follow the

²³I have witnessed an unmasked Eku masquerade greeting a woman, but the circumstances and the woman were exceptional. The incident took place during the initiation of the masquerade chiefs and the old woman (Abigail Oso - apparently the oldest woman in the town) was the daughter of a highly respected practitioner of the Egun're masquerade.

²⁴There are various stories about Chief Sobere's masquerade, an Ede, which young men tried to unmask as Chief Sobere had become unpopular in the town. It proved impossible to remove the mask, a fact that was attributed to juju.



Plate 6: An Ede masquerade



Plate 7: The Ede masquerade again

masquerades around the town. Both the Egun're and the Ede masquerades are accompanied by musicians, beating iron gongs and rattles. In addition the Egun're mask is accompanied by the young woman known as Olodun, who carries a "shield" of office for the mask, which is also used to fan the masquerade. In contrast to the Agbe masquerades, the Eku style do not carry *atori* whips with them. It is quite explicit that these masquerades should not beat people. The movement of these masks is sedate, restrained and careful.

This restrained behaviour relates partially to the nature of their costumes. The costume of the Eku masquerade is a site of many powerful medicines. Elements of the costume are imbued with power simply because they are a part of the masquerade costume. Thus if a palm leaf or feather falls from the costume, it will immediately be picked up by one of the masquerade's followers. To let a part of the costume fall to the ground and stay there offers a potential danger to the masquerade; it (the masquerade) may "enter to the earth like the leaf." But more seriously a loose part of the costume provides a powerful source of juju to those with a grudge against the masquerade or the performer.

The restraint that these masks display in their performance also relates to their status as senior masquerades. Like older members of society, they must know how to behave in a manner appropriate to their position, restrained and "cool" (Thompson, 1966), although this "coolness" disguises the inherent power that these masquerades carry beneath their costumes. The dignity of these masks offsets them from the other masquerades, but in no way negates their "powers".

Eku and Agbe: Differing Identities in Modern Practice

If the Eku masquerades do constitute a separate category of masks and quite clearly there are behavioural differences between the masks of the Agbe and Eku categories, how are these differences accounted for? An answer to this question requires the analysis to go beyond simply regarding the prescribed behavioural types of the masks and raises fundamental questions about the attitudes that people hold toward their masks, their transformational status and the perceptions that the performers themselves have of their masked practice. If intimately involved in the wearing of a mask there is some notion of transformation of the self, then how that transformation of self in the performer's practice is conveyed is of importance to the analysis of mask practice. It is my contention here that between the two types of practice outlined above, alternative conceptions of "being" are implied. The wearing of different masquerades operates in different ways according to differing conceptions of role and personhood in the town. The above section allows the investigation to proceed toward trying to grasp how different masking practices are related to differing notions of the self, and within that, how these notions relate to certain differences in how the "being" of the masquerades are regarded.

Fundamental to Eku practice is what the mask embodies within it its own persona. By putting on Aborogi or Egun're, the performer creates not only a dramatic separation, but also a separable identity that effects a change upon his own personality. The effacing of the performer's identity is total; while masked, the performer is an Eku, and in effect remains in character to those who never see the unmasked figure—hence the chants and calls made while the masquerader is unmasked. Agbe makes a pretence of this but in effect the identity of the mask is linked closely to the individual identity of the performer. There is a dialectic in operation in Agbe masking, where the personality of the mask is generated by that of the performer but the performer's personality may also be established or enhanced by the identification with the mask. Each reacts on the other. The performance of the Agbe is not forgotten once the mask is removed, and further feeds the reputation of the performer outside the arena of masquerade.

That the Agbe masquerade should be like this is unsurprising since the iconic creativity of the individual's masquerade ensures that the performer be recognised as an individual masquerader amongst a host of similar masks. The creativity of the type becomes more important the closer the similarities between the masks. As Kayode's mask demonstrates, it is possible to have a mask that is continually changing from one year to the next, for within the archetype of the Agbe mask, the room for innovation appears to be limitless. The innovations within this mask type rapidly pick up on the concerns of the performer, concerns which, although constrained by the way that the Agbe mask is meant to behave (i.e.: wild, dangerous, unpredictable and forceful), also have a relationship with the way that these attitudes are perceived in the material culture (visible and aural) of a young man's experience of living in Ikole, and the wider sphere of Nigeria, in the late twentieth century.²⁵ It is therefore within the aesthetic limits of the corpus for an Agbe mask to appear complete with dreadlocks. Reggae music performed in Nigeria, not only has the connotations of being something from "Overs" (i.e.: overseas and therefore prestigious) but is also regarded as being a music, not only of protest, but something for the young and is performed at a much faster tempo, and danced to in a wild and unpredictable "stomp", somewhat like "punk rock".²⁶ This is but one example, perhaps the most striking, of a number of themes that the performers of the Agbe masquerade draw upon in the creation of their masquerade ensembles.

As if the costume does not provide enough individual identification, the masks are themselves individually named. However, despite this individuality of the mask, the actual personality of these Agbe types is largely the same. Differences in the masks remain an in-group phenomenon, since a group of Agbe masks running up the main street all look as

²⁵It should be borne in mind that many of the performers of the Agbe return to Ikole to perform their masquerades from urban centres such as Lagos and Ibadan.

²⁶Records such as "Was Gwan" by Ras Kimono have had a great impact amongst the "Youth" of Nigeria.

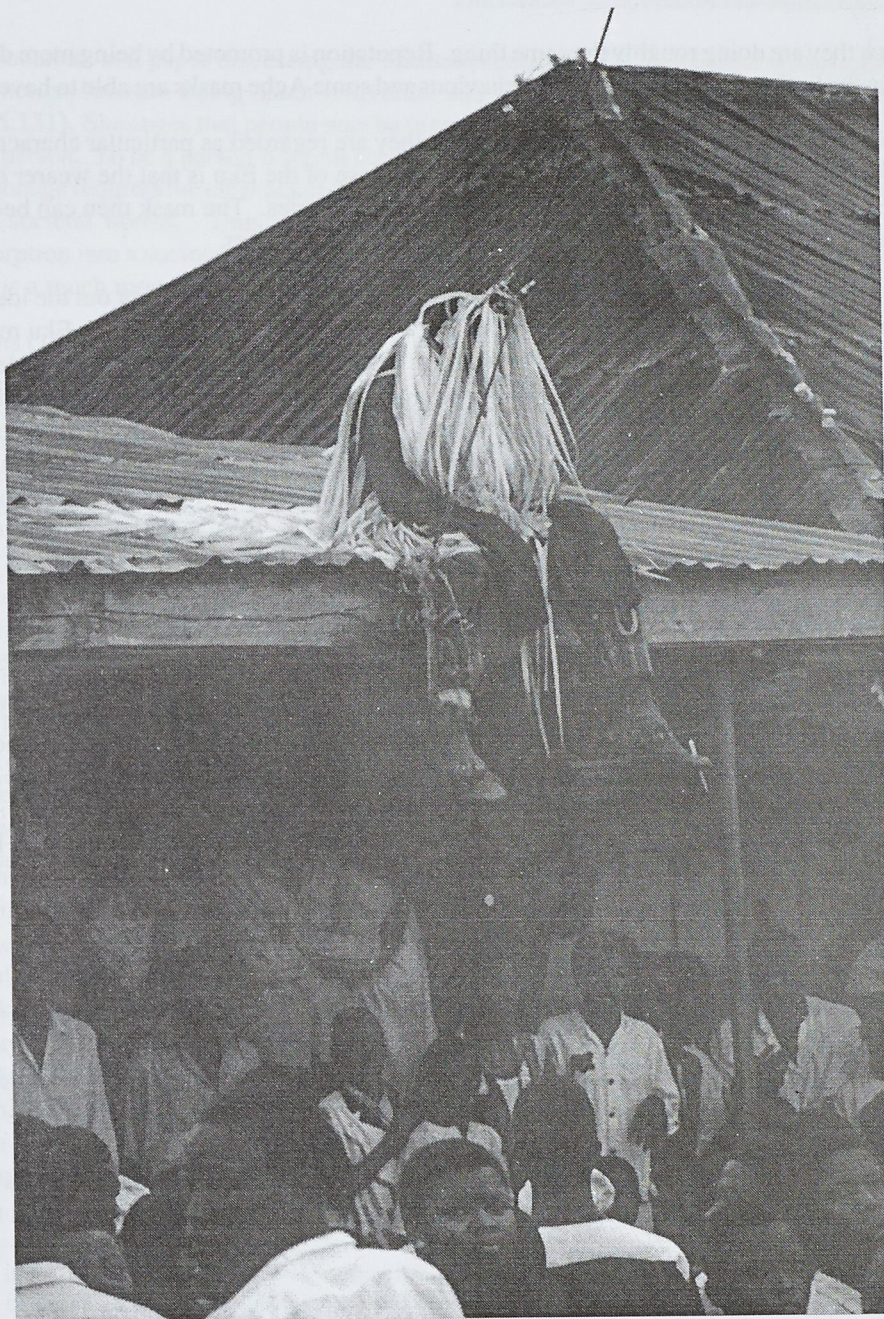


Plate 8: An Ajanbula masquerade

though they are doing roughly the same thing. Reputation is promoted by being more daring within the limits of the masquerade's behaviour and some Agbe masks are able to have their "personalities" accepted to such an extent that they are regarded as particular characters.²⁷ The key difference between the Agbe masks and those of the Eku is that the wearer of the Agbe mask is generally known, at least to his contemporaries. The mask then can become a vehicle for promoting the individual character of the performer.

The identity of the performer of Eku is definitely secret. Women will point out the identity of the wearer of Agbe masks, whereas this never happens with the Eku. In the Eku masks, the separation of the identities between mask and performer is made complete. The identity of the wearers may be known, even by women, but is never articulated by those outside the society or when the mask is in performance - the pretence is seriously maintained by everybody. The Eku masqueraders will never make any hint of the human character in the mask. There is a complete change of voice, movement and action. Blessings are delivered from the masquerade and not from the person inside the mask. Even in their undressed state, the Eku masquerades maintain the separation of identities to the uninitiated.

The individual and the person: an ontology of masquerade?

It is now possible to begin to account for some of the differences that are highlighted in the contrast between the Agbe and the Eku masquerades and their "modes of being / modes of performance". It seems that the initial contrasts lie not so much in the masquerade, since all masquerades wear masks, but in the differing approaches to the performance of *types* of masquerades in Ikole. Understanding the contrast that exists between the individuality of the Agbe and the identity of the Eku relies upon an understanding of the differences in Ikole between the "modern" youth masquerades and a perhaps literally older system of masquerade. More importantly, looking at these contrasts can lead to an understanding of the popularity of the Agbe, and may begin to provide some sort of historical explanation for the growth in the popularity of these masks. The differences in the two masquerades clearly relate to the varying ways in which masquerades are perceived by the people doing them. As I have been arguing, the relationship between the two types of masquerade depends ultimately upon different conceptions of the self in masquerade performance. The Agbe masquerades clearly display a reflexive attitude toward the transformation of self in the mask, whereas (as I have stated before) the Eku transforms the identity of the wearer completely. Is it possible then to relate masquerade practice to more generalised categories of self in Ikole society?

²⁷Such as the Ajanbula masquerade, which has a definite identity, one which the masquerader has to work hard to maintain. Once established, however, the recognition of a masquerade's name allows the potential for the inheritance of particular masquerades.

La Fontaine, in a paper discussing the Maussian concept of *La personne morale*, draws a distinction between being as an individual and the concept of the person (La Fontaine, 1985:131). She states that people may be regarded as being individuals, but not have a status as a person. To be a person it seems that certain categorical obligations need to be fulfilled. Personage requires the clear acknowledgement of role and more often than not, this is linked into societal norms. Thus when speaking of person, one might argue that this is an absorption into a societal *we*. Individuality on the other hand requires no such prescription, and is a much more fluid category of the self, that of the moral human being.

Hollis (1985:231) points out, however, that La Fontaine's argument seems almost to re-run the culture / nature debate assigning individuals to nature and the person to culture. From a formal perspective, the Agbe masquerades do seem to have an element of natural wildness, whereas the Eku seem to make a statement about cultural norms backed by an idea of pure ancestral legitimacy. However, although this is a tension that seems to partially structure the differences between the Agbe and the Eku masquerades, it is obviously not the entire story.

It is clear that the individualism displayed by the Agbe masks relates to changes in the perception of what it is to be a young man in Ikole. The reflection of this individuality in the masquerades may well be something that owes much to the continuing and prevailing structures of style and iconography of the Agbe corpus, though I think there are also changes in the perception of the self amongst the young men who are the performers that account for much of the dramatic efflorescence of this masquerading type. Certainly there are structures in Ikole which are intrinsic to promoting the notions of the "warrior" age group. However, a prevailing structure of a young man's "warrior" status does not necessarily provide an answer to the dramatic individuality of these masquerades. An explanation of the Agbe corpus has to be sought elsewhere.

The simplest answer, but not the most simplistic, is in the development of modernity in Nigeria. The complex development of Nigeria into a modern state cannot be satisfactorily described here. However it is not entirely inadequate to suggest that the changes that have taken place in the modern Nigerian state have effected perceptions of people of themselves as individuals and there has been a consequent rise in individuality. Perhaps, as with Baudelaire's Paris of the nineteenth century this is a modernity that has its most direct expression on the street (Berman, 1980; Lash and Friedman, 1992) and masquerades are as much a part of that modernity as any other cultural form.²⁸ While it may seem that in the context of modern Nigeria, "all that once was solid has melted into air", at the same time it has to be acknowledged that more than the traces of culture will be left in the "fall out". The

²⁸If indeed the areas of "dramatic" social life, such as taxi parks and the main street of the town can be regarded as primary cultural arenas, then masquerade could be seen as one of the cultural forms of late twentieth century Nigeria, for the action and drama that is inherent in masquerade is structured in part by the same sense of drama found on the "street" in any medium, or large, scale town.

has to be acknowledged that more than the traces of culture will be left in the "fall out". The question then becomes one of asking how the new is shaped and formed by the old. Colonialism, education, mobility, all factors of modernity as much as Nigeria's recent relatively abundant wealth, may all have contributed to an increasing awareness of the self as individual, especially as the structures that once guaranteed the "construction" of the person, as acknowledged person, within the parameters of Ikole, or any small town begin to break down or undergo the rapid changes wrought by modernity.²⁹ The rapid oil boom of the 1970s irrevocably changed many of the structures of the "traditional" Nigerian town as had been constituted through the twentieth century.³⁰

Much of the answer to the question of how masquerades are perceived (and about the distinction between the Eku and Agbe types) lies in the way typologies of individual and person are structured in the performance of the masquerades. How far this experience can be attributed solely to the process of modernity and modernism is a moot point, for there are several factors to be accounted for. Not least is the relative value changes in the perception of masquerades as entertainment or as potential powers or powerful things, an area that is inevitably hard to quantify. I think that there is undoubtedly a base point in the distinction between the Agbe and Eku types. They have always been different, yet the historical process inherent in the individualising of self has opened up these differences, leaving us I suggest with two ontological categories: that of the masquerade as an identity and that of the individual identity operating on masquerade.

²⁹An analysis of the kinship links between a city such as Lagos and Ikole town would provide invaluable material on the transmission of modern material culture. Lagos with all its connotations of materialism and modern growth is regarded as a gateway both to material reward and also to "Overs", a generic word for outside Nigeria. The kinship links between relatives in Lagos/Overs and people in Ikole mean that the transfer of material goods and information about the "latest" fashions and innovations is extremely rapid.

³⁰The context of the changes wrought by modernity must be regarded in the light of the "continual" flux that pervaded throughout southern Nigeria and especially in the Yoruba-speaking areas through the nineteenth century. That is, is there anything peculiar in the experience of modernity, and the changes that it has put into motion, that might plausibly account for the individualism found in the Agbe style? or does the flux of Yorubaland in the nineteenth century predicate the changes of the last part of the twentieth century. Barber and Waterman (1993) address this issue in relation to similarities between *Fuji* music and *oriki* praise poetry. Rejecting a straight-forward creolisation model, they argue that certain elements of Yoruba culture certainly predate a global modernity, although seemingly "post-modern" in their outward appearances. I would suggest that the same argument may well apply to the way in which Agbe masquerading is constituted, which does not deny that the process of modernity has undoubtedly wrought changes in perceptions of the self, or the relative influence of the individual, within towns.

Editor's note:

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