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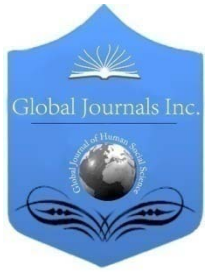

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Masquerade Performance Tradition of Idoma: Issues of Limitation and Methodological Approaches in Research

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Keywords: masquerade, spirits, performance, idoma, worldview, methodology, tools, research, function, procedures.

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I. Introduction

This paper is the outcome of a study conducted to examine contending issues in the realm of Idoma performance traditions. These issues relate to perceptions of the dynamics of performance traditions, artistic processes, functional aesthetics and paradigm-shifts. Other issues raised in the work are stylistic devices and symbolic structures; issues of internal coherence, and the ability of researchers to examine data from the context of derived on the ground evidence of Idoma traditional theatre practices. This study which was conducted in the area of traditional performances encountered numerous challenges. One of such challenges is the fact that masquerades in Idoma are jealously protected and preserved with utmost secrecy. Venturing into the masquerade abode by a stranger is like committing sacrilege. In the traditional abiding places of most masquerades, the tradition remains classified. But the attitude of adhering strongly to secrecy and confidentiality by respondents can present major challenges for researchers. As a researcher factors such as accessibility, receptivity, perceptibility of respondents and user-friendliness of data are invaluable asserts as these tend to validate data and authenticate empirical presentations. From the findings of this research, it can be said that one of the most difficult areas which a researcher can venture into in Idoma is in the area of masquerade tradition.

In Idoma, and indeed in many other African societies that are still predominantly non-literate conducting researches in the area of the peoples' values systems is very important. For such societies, culture remains an essence, perhaps, their humanity's primary archive that need to be preserved, especially in a fast globalizing world. The continuous preservation of the cultures of the subjugated peoples of Africa, in an increasingly customized world of globalization, can be facilitated by the perpetuation of Africa's numerous indigenous theatrical traditions. Masquerade performance tradition archives both tangible and intangible cultures. Masquerade performances in Idoma are traditional structures that articulate the cultures and mores among the people. This performance tradition presents through the expressive communicative processes that enunciate the people's purview of order and reality. Masquerade tradition can be seen as an iconic culture among the Idoma. It is thus a product of the Idoma artistic enterprise, which explains the people's existence within the inexorable consciousness that gives meaning to their theatrical traditions. Researches in the performance tradition therefore needs to be encouraged. Through researches, the business of documenting the masquerade traditions, which is a major repository of the Idoma people's knowledge systems is also achieved.

Masquerade performances demonstrate at various levels the peoples' philosophy of life which tend to illustrate the relationship between mystical and the mundane aspects of life as one of the ways in which nature is preserved. This performance tradition provides the most appropriate practical enunciation of the people's philosophy, and lifestyles. In spite of this, the performance presents with problematic gains. While researching in masquerade performance can be beneficial, especially to the Idoma, it is ironically not a user-friendly exercise as can be gleaned from the discussion below.

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II. Cultural Issues: Protecting the Ancestral Pantheon

The performance traditions acts like a cultural warehouses of the people. According to the Idoma worldview, masquerades are the spirits. Masquerades are construed as functional ancestors that do periodic visits to the living. Masquerades are vehicles for conveying peoples' prayers, aspirations and hopes for the present and future. Idoma masquerades belong to the ancestral pantheon and embody in words and images, the totality of the people's fate through life. It is believed that the ancestor/masquerade dramaturges play very fundamental roles in maintaining the people's well-being and every precaution is taken to protect them from the predatory hands of strangers. In recent times, theft of masquerades from Idoma by traders that deal with antiquity has increased with ignominy. This has heightened suspicion of non-masquerade members that come around seeking for information about their performances. The protectiveness though genuinely instigated, presents with its attendant restrictions to the researcher.

The link between Idoma masquerade performance and the wellbeing of the society is firmly rooted in the traditional psych. Perhaps the phenomenon of transcendentalism in Idoma worldview as extrapolated in the principles of traditional performances tells this story better. The tendency to intermesh secular and spiritual experiences can be explained in the various examples of Idoma masquerade performances. Some of them are: *Alekw'afia*, *Ikyahoho*, *Ogrinye*, *Ikpachukwu*, *Oboche*, *Akpmobe*, *Iglo* and *Okpma*. The core essence of these masquerades is that the performances use the theatrical medium to physically articulate and demonstrate the collaboration between Idoma worldviews and the realities of social life.

Masquerade performances and all the associated theatricalities, in many ways reinforce the close relationship between the physical and the spiritual world. In Idoma, the spiritual aspects of life and the social aspects coalesce even in everyday life. For instance, it is believed that everything that happens in a man's life has a spiritual inception. That is, every physical occurrence has a spiritual antecedent. Incidences of rain or drought, achievements or failure, health or sickness are believed to have spiritual conceptions. To this extent, even the names that people bear are believed to be spiritually efficacious. The rapport between the physical, spiritual and social entities provides the major foundations upon which the masquerade conception in Idoma worldview is founded. In this intermeshing relationship, Idoma traditional religion provides the society with the essential devices (theatre in this instance) that rationalize the physical/spiritual collaboration.

According to the Idoma belief systems the collaboration, convalescence and continuity give rise to the various events in the society. For instance, it is believed that even though man exists in corporeal form, his real being is made up on both spiritual and body aspects. Similarly, an ancestor makes appearance in corporeal form but it conceived as spirit. The Idoma name for spirit is *alekwu*, masquerades are called *ekwu*, a short form of *alekwu*. This explains why the manifestation of religion, expressed in worship, propitiation and other attendant extensions of social and even political activities, provide the superstructure of the belief system. Theatrical activities like mime, music, dance and masquerade performances belong to the superstructure in the social substratum. Theatre in Idoma can then be viewed as one of the oldest ways in which man attempts to rationalize the incomprehensibilities of life. Traditional theatre practice in Idoma is in this sense, part of man's social mode of apprehending and coming to terms with the spiritual realities of his universe. With this understanding at the background, traditional Idoma communities do all they can to protect their masquerades from perceived bandits. In the circumstance, anyone attempting to examine a masquerade, and the person is not a member of the masquerade group becomes a ready suspect.

III. Cultural Issues: Canonization of Worldview

From what has been said so far, one can say that Idoma masquerade performances impact on social relations through manifestations of social characteristics, which are in turn factored by spiritual antecedents. Idoma are then among the many societies in the world where the theory that relates theatre to religion is informed. With the Idoma case in mind, one can agree with Rotimi (1983) who argued that "theatre is born of religion" (p.44). Through the beatification of ancestral figures, the various aspects of Idoma worldview in the pantheon are objectified. This view substantiates the theory that theatre has religious origin.

The masquerade theatre, which is the most popular art form in Idoma, revolves around ancestral celebrations. The masquerade theatre in this view is the presentation of a functional aesthetic model, which portrays the entrapment, or localization of spirit beings in socially constructed functors. These perform both theatrical (social) and religious (spiritual) roles. This is why religion and theatre in Idoma cannot be separated from each other. The dramatic quotients of traditional theatre in Idoma, like the theatre of other peoples of the world, patronize ancestral cannons. The ancestors in turn intermediate, and in the process, regulate the cosmic systems that continuously threaten the well-being of man. The situation is however not peculiar to the Idoma alone. Soyinka explained this point in

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reference to Yoruba ancestors. In his view, Soyinka (1976) the ancestors,

> Are represented in drama by passage-rites of hero-gods, a projection of man's conflict with forces which challenge his efforts to harmonize with his environment, physical, social and psychic … a prefiguration of conscious being which is nevertheless a product of the conscious creativity of man. These emerge as the principal features of the drama (pp.1-2).

In traditional societies such as Idoma, the people device and bring to the society's drawing board, social questions, morality standards, behaviors and regulation of aesthetic sensibilities through the vehicle of traditional theatre. Masquerade enactments essentialize these values. These visually depict "a multi-level experience of the mystical and the mundane" (Soyinka 2). In this way, ancestors, "which come alive in the form of masquerades" (Nzewi 47), perform in the theatrical medium and serve social functions by appealing to societal aesthetic, social standards and spiritual sensibilities. Apart from this, ancestors who make appearances in masquerades forms serve judicial functions in Idoma. Encapsulated in the masquerade form, ancestors exercise authority by trying criminals, resolving disputes and taking other legal decisions for, and on behalf of society. It is interesting to note that many societies like Idoma, Nupe, Yoruba, Ibos, Ijaw, Igala and other communities in Nigeria, believe and employ their ancestors, in the form of masquerades, to control and regulate the activities of the living. This view is further enunciated by Amali-Idris (1992),

> At the spiritual and invisible level, the ancestors and the gods of the land play significant roles in uplifting and maintaining social ethics and morality…This belief in the unseen is strengthened by the physical enactment of the ancestors in masquerade forms which are fundamental to the existence of rural … institutions. For example, the Idoma *Alekwafia* masquerade comes out to enforce law when the "law breaking" is very serious (p.58).

The functions rendered by masquerades are made possible through the theatrical medium and take place in designated venues within the community. The specific time, date and venue of the performance are regulated by the programs of the day to day calendar. Sometimes the exigencies of the moment also determine the time, venue and period of performance. The masquerade theatre is an organized performance that is entrenched in the traditional frame of other societies apart from Idoma. For instance, the use of traditional theatre to inform on social and religious life can also be found among the Ibos of Nigeria. According to Nzewi (1983), traditional theatre,

> Is highly rationalized and organized representations. It becomes necessary every year to fix the actual dates and days to agree with prescribed market days, lunar cycle and features of the moon, as well as the seasons. The organization…would start with advanced acquisition, renovation, repair and replacement of props, costumes etc… the arena would reflect the nature of audience-actor interaction associated with the scheduled activities. And quite often the audience-actor relationship help to determine the arrangement and development of the presentation. The philosophical and psychological ideations about an event basic to its concept were tied up with, and regulated, the artistic, aesthetic and utilitarian features of any given traditional theatre type (p.17).

To this end, Nzewi amply describes, in lucid terms, the many features of masquerade theatre. The various events that characterize the practice of theatre in Idoma are sufficiently reflected in this description. The utilitarian conception of masquerade performance is informed by the cultural attitude of a society that defines its world in terms of the unity or communion between social and spiritual aspects of humanity. In societies where the potency of supernatural forces, the mythic and the mysterious, the legendary, nature forces and deities define the ethno-aesthetic and artistic standards, much protectiveness will be given to those forms. This framework of shared fundamental traits activates the distinctive artistic values expressed in Idoma masquerade performances.

Perhaps, this accounts for the issue of apprehension and anxiety which the Idoma people feel when researchers attempt to have access to data on their masquerades. Since the Idoma are not prepared to mortify their ancestors, the people use every means to protect their kindred masquerades. This posed serious limitation for researchers.

IV. Domination of the Literature by Foreigners

It is paradoxical that in spite of the deep rooted attempt to prevent people from having access to Idoma masquerades, a large percentage of the volume of literature available in the Idoma masquerade performance come from foreign sources. Nevertheless, the explanation for the contradiction may not be too farfetched. Perhaps, the account lies in the very nature of the masquerade. Regarded as an ancestral pantheon, Idoma masquerades are presented with mystical and spiritual cantata. The religious receptacle that shrouds the masquerade tradition may have distanced many of the Idoma literate population who would rather prefer to keep safe distance. In the course of this research, I realized that the more literate the average Idoma is, the more detribalized he became. I found that for the educated Idoma, the dividing line between cynicism and ethnicism is Western education.

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As far as the attitude to the masquerade tradition by a number of educated Idoma is concerned, cynicism and western education coalesce in the mid region of mare. The tendency to conceive the masquerade form as a fetish tradition is likely responsible for the dirt of literature written by indigenes.

As a result, the most highly quoted sources of Idoma art are: Roy Clive Abrahams, Robert G. Armstrong, Sydney Kasfir, William Fagg, Frances Neyt, Alvin Magid, Essenstadt, S. N., Adam and Marie Jeane. Others are Erim, O. Erim, V. G. Okwu, Shamsudeen O. O. Amali and Idris Amali. Of these thirteen canons, nine are of foreign origin. And out of the remaining four, only three are Idoma. Erim, O. Erim, even though of Iyala extraction, is from Cross River State of Nigeria. Like V. G. Okwu, Erim too was a historian, indeed a highly celebrated scholar. Two concerns are flagged by this scenario. While the issue of indigenization lurks in the corner, the manner of presentation and the reading given to masquerade present some red herring of disturbing magnitude. One, none of the foreign authors centered their works on masquerade as an art in the theatre paradigm. R. C. Abrahams, R. G. Armstrong, Alvin Magid, Essenstadt. S. N. Adam and Marie Jeane were ethnographers, while Sydney Kasfir, William Fagg and Frances Neyt are art historians. Of the indigenous authors, Shamsudeen, O. O. Amali's works are essentially on oral literature, while Idris Amali has worked extensively on the language and poetry aspect of Idoma oral performances. That is, strictly speaking, this researcher did not find any author of recognized scholarship who treated the masquerade art of Idoma people from the perspective of theatre or performing arts. This is not to say that they may not exist. They may but I did not find any in the course of my research. This absence of pilot studies, indigenous or foreign, present serious limitations for researchers.

V. The Issue of Orthography, Oral Tradition, Technology and Globalization

Another issue which confronts the researcher in Idoma masquerade performance is the lack of a universally acceptable orthography. In Idoma, Westernization and its accompanying perilous inundations have seriously impeded the development of cultures and traditions. This is exemplified by the fact that up till the time of this paper, Idoma people have not been able to develop an acceptable Idoma orthography. This is a major setback that can inhibit research.

Closely tied to this is the problem posed by what I call in this paper as "cultural dumb show" [1]. The inability to communicate and document in one's mother tongue is a major obstacle hindering the development of Idoma people. Because of lack of orthography, English has become the first language of many Idoma people, especially the literate class. That the language is only spoken but not written makes it very difficult for the people to have complete education. Perhaps this explains the inability of the indigenous Idoma to develop their own literature. This problem may have aggravated the associated recurrent of problems of social, cultural, economic and technological underdevelopment. There is no way a foreign language can sufficiently represent, interpret or decipher cultural expressions and thoughts of another language. Inhibited by the trajectories of cultural patina, the average educated Idoma thinks first in English and translates his thoughts later to Idoma language. This bifurcated conflation can only lead to confusion that blurs the edge of development. Ngugi (1986), refers to this festination as the

> The … cultural bomb … **[which]** annihilate[s] a people's belief in their names, in their **languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle**, in their unity in their capacity and ultimately in themselves. **It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own** (p. 3).

Although in principle, the colonial masters may have long left the shores of Nigeria, the machinery for cultural assault is still perfectly in place. The presence is noticeable in the different phases of multilateral imperialism like globalization, imposition of lingua franca (English language), and American Democracy. The device is intended to retard development, the continuous impoverishment of the colonized world, and other strategies that keep them in perpetual servitude. The mechanism is working perfectly according to the design in many parts of Africa.

This situation, coupled with other teething problems associated with underdevelopment have entrenched the predominance of oral tradition in the construction of theatre forms among Idoma people. Nevertheless, even though much of Idoma traditional theatre practices are essentially oral, the viva voce tradition was and is still an important source of history. The fact still remains that many of the problems associated with the practice of masquerade tradition results from lack of better and scientific documentation. Even at the dawn of the 21st century, much of the practices still remain essentially oral.

These have affected the value and authenticity of the available literature, especially those provided by foreign authors. Even though masquerade performances are endorsed by the communal presence and celebrated by the people of that community, the masquerade groups do the performance proper. By implication, majority in the communities where the performances take place are ignorant of the pre

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performance plots, designs and technical details behind the scene. This situation pose serious limitation for researchers most of who are not allowed to step beyond the performance arena. As a result, the data available to most foreign researchers are limited to the visual knowledge of an already made masquerade. The other details of what the masquerades really constitute are lost to the researchers who are not an insiders.

Globalization has resulted in the commoditization of the ancestral pantheon. Art collectors in Europe have made the sale of African masquerade parts very lucrative business. In recent times there have been many cases of masquerade theft. Traders dealing with antiquities connive with some village miscreants to steal ancestral masks. These masks eventually found refuge in museums and galleries in Europe. This has not helped the development of the masquerade tradition. Rather, it has presented as serious problems for both the Idoma people and for researchers especially who are often regarded as masquerade creeps.

VI. Documentation and the Idoma Lifestyle

Traditional Idoma people, in their pre-literate disposition, are very suspicious of documentation in books and other print media. Among the Akweya people, for instance, kindreds and lineages own masquerades. Only members of the particular linage can have direct access with their ancestral masquerades. Others are not. This is the situation is peculiar with ancestral masquerades. The secular masquerades are open to all in the community, but sacred masquerades are restricted to members only. The situation is worst for people who are not from the community. For instance, this I had attempted to record the performance of *Okpma* masquerade in Adim on March 28th 2006. The attempt ended in a fiasco. *Okpma* masquerade is very highly respected and celebrated among Akweya people. It is performed publicly but documenting the performance through photograph or any electronic format is outrightly prohibited.

The attempt to photograph the masquerade during the performance was greeted with stiff resistance. It took a long time getting the Royal Fathers of the different kindreds to understand that an attempt to document the masquerade tradition of the people is not in any way inimical or harmful to the preservation of their ancestral cannons. Even though they understood the point, and I was permitted to record performances of some masquerades, as for *Okpma* and Iglo, they blatantly refused. For this reason, pictures of the masquerades studied in this research are not presented. Even though I was allowed to participate in some of the masquerades, as a matter of cultural policy, the idea of photograph was prohibited.

It is important to note that the Royal Fathers and elders in Idoma can be more understanding and cooperative in the matters of masquerade protection. Particularly in Akweya, dealing with the teeming youths posed serious problems. In the course of my field work the youths proved to be rather intolerant. They constituted themselves into an opposition group, and at every given opportunity, accosted whoever attempted to photograph or record masquerade performances.



Second from left to right, Chief Hycenth Ogbu (*Agabaidu*), Chief Ingwanya *Ailekplor* and some members of the Chief's cabinet. Picture taken by author on 26th April 2008.

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On the one hand, the custodians of Idoma tradition were aware of the implications that lack of documentation has had on the development of the area. The far-reaching impact of a well-developed language, the understanding and widespread dissemination of information with signs and symbols of all kinds, as understood within the context of an indigenous language system, were not lost on these paramount rulers. They consented even to photographic documentation of the masquerade performances as indigenous symbolic structure for posterity. But on the other hand, the youths vehemently opposed the view. On a number of occasions, the youth had accosted this me, seized my camera and threatened to break it. But thanks to the prompt intervention of *Oj'Ankpa, Agabaidu*'s second in command. When, at an instance, he came into the matter in Otogwi, the boys took to their heels. At one point, during the course of my research, one *Anagbogbo* masquerade mistook a young man for me and gave him serious trashing. When the case came up before the Council of Chiefs' meeting two days later in [2]*Ogakwu*'s palace at Otogwi, the boy who wore that *Anagbogbo* masquerade that day was sanctioned. He was barred never to perform again in his lifetime. His *Anagbogbo* costumes were confiscated and handed over to the representative of *Ogakwu*. To this extent, it was clear that this research received the backing of the Akweya traditional Council.

At one instance, *Ogamode*, Chief Peter Oglegba, in order to put his authority behind this work, appointed this author as his official photographer during his coronation, which took place in Adim from 19th to 26th of April 2008. It was a seven day event. The then *Orgbabe*, Chief Adei Okpe, also endorsed this permit. The *Otrugboko* of *Ekwe-Ogbe* kindred also shared the view that the traditions of Akweya-Idoma should be documented. With the Royal Fathers, the custodian of traditions solidly behind this research, the constraint in gathering data for this work was minimized to an extent. As a result, a tradition that has never been documented before or put in print in the history of Akweya are, for the first time researched in this work. This difficulties discussed here are important information that researchers would need to be aware of as they go to the field. A pre-informed researcher is better equipped to carry out his study.



Seven *Analoo* masquerades awaiting call for performance in Ogyoma-Akweya. Picture by author on 2nd December, 2006.

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VII. Recommended Methodology for Researching in Idoma Masquerade Performance

This section deals with the methods of data collection recommended to researchers that choose to work in this study area. Having undergone a level of experience this author has proposed some suggestions in studying the masquerade theatre traditions of Idoma. It is advised that researchers should employ a multi-disciplinary approach since, in the main masquerade performances assume a multimedia form. The inductive nature of this methodological approach and the special significance that it gives to participants' perspective necessitate the use of models that can give credence to the experiences of the people that are studied. The understanding is that the people whose theatre traditions are to be studied should give voice to what is written about them. By using the qualitative research methodology, the study will be capable of analyzing the people's theatre activities based on their interpretations. The fact that qualitative research can be adequately employed in the investigation of behaviors as they occur in natural situations where there are no manipulations of conditions or experiences can be a perfect justification.

The masquerade by its very nature is a cultural material. In the study of a purely cultural art form, it is important to use models that will fully appreciate what the study considers as important facets of the people's values, politics, essence and cosmogony. This is why qualitative research method is considered most appropriate for such studies. Other tools that can be used following the multi-dimensional approaches employed include:

VIII. Oral Interviews

The interview method can provide the researcher with opportunity to discuss face to face with the masters and owners of the masquerade art. With this methodological tool, the researcher has the advantage of exposition to original materials and data, which is capable of providing greater dependability and validity. One can design the format of the interviews to reflect semi-structured form and to be applied in three phases. Since masquerade performances are mostly associated with festivals and ceremonies in Idoma, the researcher can schedule some of the oral interview sessions to agree with the period before the festivals. Another interview session can be arranged for the periods during the selected festivals when masquerades perform. Other interviews can yet take place after the performances.

Also to be noted is the fact that some masquerades perform on days other than festive periods. For instance, some masquerades perform during burials. For such performances the researcher can arrange interviews without necessarily waiting for a particular time of the year as is the case with festival associated masquerades performances.

In using the interview method the following category of persons recommended for consultation are:

a) the Royal Fathers of the different Idoma communities who by tradition have ancestral connection and are more properly positioned to discuss matters concerning the ancestral masquerades of their kindreds. The Royal Fathers referred to here are not the political heads whose origin is entrenched in modern institutions of the Local Governments Administration in recent historical records. The reference is to traditional kindred heads that intermediate between the people's ancestors and the living. These are the *Ond'Ajes, Och'Ojilas, Och'Nokwus, Och'Ajes* of the different kindreds in the Idoma communities under study. These luminaries can offer the researcher with very useful information about the different masquerade practices, origins and history through the ages;
b) other custodians and keepers of kindred masquerades. These are usually the oldest men in the kindred. In Idoma worldview, old age gives spiritual empowerment to occupy revered positions in societies. For instance the *Ad' Alekwu* who draws much respect and reverence from the people;
c) the leaders and custodians of society based masquerades that are not kindred based. For instance, *Animawowo*, *Omunkpara* and *Analoo* masquerades of the Akweya, as well as *Ukpokwu*, *Ogantete* and *Ogarumpa* of *Aiy'Ona* communities in Idoma. These are secular masquerades performed purely for entertainment and other social events. They have their leaders separately from the lineage inclined masquerades who have more critical consequences,
d) the leaders and custodians of community based but secret masquerades like the *Ikyahoho*, *Onyompko*, *Achukwu* and *Ogblo* masquerades,
e) the performers themselves, if the researcher is able to access them. By engaging with the performers using unrestricted interviews, invaluable data can be collected.

The privileged positions of these groups of respondents makes them better informed about masquerades more than other members of the public. As a result they are able to provide the researcher with useful information regarding their operations and practices. When these groups are involved in the process of data collection, the study will be able to give appropriate academic readings to the research. This will enable the researcher's close identification with the physical entity of the masquerades even during the pre-performance stages.

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It is important to note this because, very often, researchers make lots of assumptions based on what they already know or what they think they know about their case studies. Most often researchers, equipped with certain levels of confidence, assume that they know quite a lot about their case studies before they go into the field. Once in the field they soon find out that they took too much for granted. Such assumptions in a culturally closed area like the masquerade tradition of the Idoma can be very misleading. It can be misleading because, shrouded with utmost secrecy, the body of knowledge which exists in the practice of masquerade is essentially representational and symbolic.

Sharrock and Anderson (2009), identified the notable position of close nit relationship between the researcher and the owners of the subject matter. They noted that the researcher must as a matter of necessity, accept his level of ignorance. They discouraged the overuse of abstract assumptions. This will enable the researcher to treat with respect, meanings as understood by the "natives". He would then discover "meaning as an achievable phenomenon" (p. 133).

IX. Participant Observation

As noted above, Idoma, masquerade performance is a physical expression of the people's socio-spiritual life style. Information about the coming into being of the masquerade is most often classified. But top secrecy is enforced only in the practice of the ancestrally predisposed masquerades. The secular masquerades are not treated with so much secrecy. Adequate consultations with the community leaders can facilitate the researcher's required access to the masquerades during performances.

Applying the participant observation tool for collecting data enables the researcher to personally venture into the "official" residence [3]*Ip'Odoko* from where the masquerades are constructed. As argued by Dalton (2011), "the method of participant observation enables the researcher to see, note, and describe certain latent practices and codes, which can be referred to as 'inner circle'" (p. 21). In the course of research, specifically took advantage of this instrument. Equipped with this tool it was easier for me to understand the fundamental philosophy underlying public presentations of masquerades. Concerning this instrument, Eneoma (2004) said, "participant observation means experiencing the case study live" (27). That is having close and personal study of the subject matter at very intimate level. This to a great extent can increased the validity of the data collected. Using participatory observation, this author was enabled to have better and deeper knowledge and insight into the values and customs that gave birth to the masquerade tradition of the Idoma.

X. Case Studies

This tool is used to study specific masquerades per time. The instrument makes it possible for the researcher to study and concentrate on one specific masquerade and a specific performance per time. It enables the researcher to zero in and have enough time to study each masquerade in detail within a given period. Using the tool, the researcher is able to properly appreciate the levels of meanings and representations of symbols at every particular instance. The data that can be gathered through this method always proves to be very essential in the formulation of theories, concepts and probable conclusions.

In addition, the approach which is applied each time the masquerade in question is performing, allows the researcher enough time to concentrate and study the performance in its real and natural state. In this way performances are studied in their original form. This prevents situations where performers would be conscious that someone is recording them. It prevents unnecessary exaggerations such as melodramatic performances inherent in the Western theatre practice.

With the use of this tool, the researcher can avoid doing what other researchers do previously. Previous researchers, particularly non-indigenous scholars, would routinely request the people to do a performance, as if masquerade plays were some typical "wait and take" practices that could be commissioned for fee-paying audiences. Such approach would invalidate originality because the players, conscious of the fact that they are being recorded or videoed, would attempt to add color and vibrancies that are not included in normal performances. This would not be African traditional theatre in practice but African performers in Western command.

XI. Holism

This approach is necessitated by the understanding that masquerade theatre in Idoma cannot be treated in isolation of other aspects of their living systems. Aspects like cosmology, history, religion, politics, philosophy, environment, ecology and other psycho-social conditions that regulate their life styles are embodied in the masquerade performances. The researcher can employ this approach by having this understanding at the background. The understanding forecloses the presentation of the masquerade being as the merging of social and the spiritual aspects in cultural performances. The use of this instrument foregrounds the logical connection between the masquerade theatre of Idoma people and the expression of their thought pattern, language, perception of law and order, habits, aspirations, social and political organizations, cosmic valuations and dreams. The data collected through this process can help the work greatly in presenting the

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understanding of the masquerade as the physical expression of the people's essence.

XII. Behind the Scene Involvement

Every important and revered masquerade in Idoma undergoes a series of preparations before the final performance in the open arena. This preparation takes place in a venue called *Odoko. Odoko* is the abode where masquerades make their initial acquaintances and dramatic proceedings with the elders and those who are responsible for its coming into being. From *behind the scene* the researcher can witness vital aspects of the masquerade's cultural repository. For instance, the researcher can access relevant information about the mystery dimension of Idoma traditions. This can prove very important in conceptualizing masquerade practices as part and parcel of Idoma theatrical tradition. The researcher will discover through this instrument the important place of the mysterious essence and the intradermal embodiment in Idoma worldview. Working with the owners of the masquerades in their own abode will provide the researcher with very important data for research. Pre-performance dramatic plots are very essential in understanding the masquerade performance in the arena. Equipped with this the researcher can have the privilege understanding some vital activities concerning the form. This tool provides the researcher with a rare opportunity to study the Idoma performance tradition from within their closet.

XIII. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to discuss the relevance of important background cultural manuals for would be researchers in Idoma masquerade performances. It has bent backwards to interrogate expected outcomes of such researches. The paper used recent field experiences to highlight some of the probable difficulties that a research is likely to face when conducting studies in the area. An area that is shrouded with much secrecy and confidentiality can pose major challenge for researchers. Recognized as an important aspect of culture that the people guard very jealously, masquerade performance is a very difficult terrain in Idoma for researchers. The paper has attempted to provide an academic compass for future researchers by presenting advance directories. Issues relating to perceptions and the dynamics of performance traditions, artistic processes, aesthetics are not as tangible as other aspects of material cultures. As a result caution and cultural education are scholarly guides that future researchers would need to be equipped with.

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Notes

1. "Cultural dumb" This expression refers to the attitudes of Western civilization which predisposes the recipients to leave everything that are indigenous and assume in its place the Western cultures. It is a figurative illustration that is reminiscent of the character of dumb.
2. *Ogakwu* is the title of the Second in Command of the *Och* Idoma. *Och* Idoma who is the head of the Idoma Traditional Council leads with the assistance of the Council of Chiefs with its hierarchical order. The Ogakwu acts as his Deputy.
3. *Ip'Odoko* is the abode where masquerades make their initial acquaintances and dramatic proceedings with the elders and those who are responsible for its coming into being.

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