

**SOCIO-CULTURAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN EDEM FESTIVAL MASQUERADE DISPLAY AT  
EDEM DAY**

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**Abstract**

Masquerade performance in Igbo tradition is a prerogative activity of the male gender. Women are normally excluded from such ritual. The narrative is no more the same at Edem-Ani community on the occasion of Edem Day at Nweke Edem-Ani in Nsukka Local Government of Enugu State Nigeria. This study focused on the emerging roles of women in the socio-cultural practices in Edem-Ani which was observed during masquerade musical cultural display at Nweke Edem-Ani in Nsukka Local government of Enugu State. On the occasion of Edem day which is celebrated every 28th day of every December with particular interest to 2022 celebration. The research employed investigative method using in-depth study and focused group discussions whereby leaders of some of these masquerade groups were interrogated and data regarding the phenomenon under study were collected and analyzed. It was observed that women's involvement in socio-cultural events are gradually taking different dimensions which suggest gradual turn or change in the rigidity of masquerading activities and its membership selections. The finding calls for further studies into the area for more information on women participation in masquerade activities.

**Introduction**

African women prior to the pre-colonial masters have been a very supporting factor to the socio-cultural practices in the African communities. Sometimes they take part in some dance display that helps to enhance the mood of the occasion. There is no doubt that women have specific roles they play in the communities. These roles include preparing special delicacies for their husbands, children and other family members especially on those festive days. They also engage in the spiritual cleansing or rituals in preparation for the event whereby they take ritual items like yams, goats, cola nuts and other farm produce to accompany their husbands to the ritual point or shrine. Some of these women have spiritual duties like the priestess who help in divining for the smooth running of the occasion likewise the men in some parts of Africa. This is also done for the development and progress of the entire community. Before now, women are not seen engaging in masquerade cult dance because, these masquerade cult groups are seen as sacred and representing the spirit being. They are held in high esteem and women are scared of even going close to it let alone leading its dance while the masquerade follows.

Africans have so much been attached to their African culture and have various ways of handling issues in their traditional ways, and women were part of the key role players especially in matters that concern the societies' socio-cultural and moral development. They are also involved in peace keeping, orderliness, children's health, mental and social development, moral and physical development and the general progress of the communities.

The involvement of women in music, dance, drama, becomes a medium of creating awareness and as a medium of communicating the customs and traditions of the community including, maintaining peace and unity despite their individual differences.

Nevertheless, it was said that in Akpa-Edem one of the four major communities that make up Edem, during the pre-colonial era, maidens were selected to be in custody of taking and making offerings to the god's at a particular ritual occasion which is highly celebrated. This is supported by Yerima, (2006), that "in some communities, maidens are selected to represent their folk in the presentation of gifts to the gods in reparation for evil done in the land and blessings from the gods for the sake of the community". In Akpa-Edem in Nsukka Local Government Area in Enugu State, the selection of these maiden involves all the young girls and any maiden whom her bride price has not been fully paid but maybe partially paid. These maidens must partake in that ritual and also has to contribute money for the purchase of the gift which is usually a Ram "Ebule", eggs, and kola nuts etc. This particular Ram "Ebule" is adorned and decorated in red ornaments and the horns are also colored with red. They themselves used the African beautification properties to adorn themselves to make them look practically like god's own property when looked at. They are said to be "Umu-ma" meaning children of the gods. Before the presentation, there are other preparations which would take place, this includes the cleaning of the stream areas and as they do that, they sing and dance around the stream. If you are not yet up to a maiden you cannot partake in this ritual. It is also important to note that it is only maidens who are found worthy and who are virgins and are not in their monthly flow at that point in time that take part in the cleansing activities. After the cleaning of the streams, they dress up and decorate themselves and carry their gifts to the gods and all the men in the village assemble at the shrine to welcome them and the mothers prepare meal that will be used for the celebration.

#### **Brief history of Edem Community.**

Edem is one of the communities in Nsukka local government area in Enugu state. It's a community with a population of about 309,633 based on the national population census in 2006 (national population census, 2006). Edem is divided into 4 communities which include, "Akpa-edem", "Ozi-edem" "Ugwunagbo-edem" and "Edem- Ani Ogwugwu. In each of these communities there are many villages and groups of kindred's that make up these zones. For instance, Edem-Ani is categorized or subdivided into communities which include, Umuchagwo, Umuchoke, Owere, Ogbodo-umuchagwo, Uwani-umuchoke, Ozara, Amaesumesu, Nkofi, Agu-eke, Amenu, Amaogwu, Owere-ugwu, Owere-agbo and Ubogidi. "Ozi-edem" is made up of Umuoko, Ukpara, Amankpume, Amaukpa, Amaukwa, IkweEzike, Amabunegu, Umueyi, Amauwena, Umuoji, and Obineguh. "Akpa-edem" is made up of Owa-edem, Uwenu-obeke, Uwani-obeke, Dimunazu, Amankwa, Igoro-ugwu, Igoro-agbo, Amadimago, Isamani, Ama-oba, Okiti, Amadimba and Nkawushi. And Ugwunagbo-edem is made up of Amenu, Amogu, Isu, and Odojo, (Ezema, 2018).

Edem community like every other community is musically oriented and enjoys music a lot. Music making in Edem varies in context amongst other communities and other clans in Nsukka. Music making and performances for the typical Edem person is a responsibility that one looks forward to attaining in one way or the other, its creative materials is what gives the music of Edem a voice and preference amongst the other musical groups in Nsukka Urban. The emphasis of this research is based on the masquerade musical display on the occasion of the festival called 'Edem Day' celebrated amongst the people of Edem-Ani Ogwugwu in Edem community. Edem-Ani Ogwugwu has a lot of musical practices

as well as various festive occasions by which these musical practices are displayed. These events include:

Egba Omabe- celebrated in three stages namely:

Uda-omabe, Okiti-Omabe and Una-omabe.

There are other festivals and events like- Egba Chukwu, Edem week, OfalaEze, Onunu, Burials, Marriage ceremonies or wine carrying, Chieftaincy and Ozor title taking, Conferment of Loloanyi title, Coronation of Igwe, and New yam festival etc. (Omeje, 2018).

In each of these events there are lots of musical display which include the masquerade display, women dance, maiden dance, youth music display, children musical group display as in the "Akunechenyi dance group" etc. These cultural groups are built on the concept of relationship maintenance amongst the people of Edem-Ani community with an ideological concept of building a healthy environment where people coexist as one entity, therefore building a mutual understanding and co-operations between the community and the neighboring communities. (Esimone & Umezinwa, 2013; Agu, 1999; Onwuekwe, 2013; Agu, 2012; and Esimone, 2015) stipulates that music practices of a community, stirs up the spirit of creativity, acquisition of skills and enquiry in them, and at the same time help to straighten the understanding about who they are and what they do, what kind of musical culture they practice and their ideology and philosophical opinions they hold about their culture. In order words, it is a means through which the system of life which they live in is inculcated. A music performance in Edem-Ani arises as the occasion emerges according to the communities' timeline which is known and observed by the people. According to Blacking, 1976 (as cited in Okpala, 2015:19) " the musical performances provide physical and spiritual well-being through mental, emotional and physical involvements in the performance activities".

### **Statement of the problem**

Women involvement in masquerade at Edem-Ani Ogwugwu Day in Nsukka Local Government Area in Enugu State has provoked serious debates amongst scholars, in recent time. The researcher therefore, investigated the level of women's involvement in masquerade activities and those emerging roles they perform in the socio-cultural activities in Nsukka and its environs.

### **Purpose of the study**

This research investigated those emerging roles of women in today's masquerade cult musical practices and the socio-cultural activities in the community with emphasis on Edem-Ani Day festival of the 28<sup>th</sup> December 2022 in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State.

### **Significance of the study**

The result of the findings aided the establishment of the various roles of women in the cult musical practices and performance and their level of involvement in the socio-cultural activities of Edem-Ani community that have emerged other than the obtainable roles which they are known for. This in essence is to add to the already existing documentation in the area regarding socio-cultural practices and women's involvement which will serve as an archive for future reference and education for cultural preservation as it concerns the people of Edem-Ani community in Nsukka local government of Enugu State.

### **Scope and delimitation of the study**

This work is delimited to Edem-ani community with reference to the masquerade musical display at Edem-Ani Day festival. An event celebrated every 28 December.

### Research Methodology

This research employed investigative research method by which the musical cult groups were investigated and the leaders of these cult groups were also interrogated to know how they operate, what gender comprised their group members, the roles each member plays and what extent and limitations of each member in the groups' activities. If at all there are limitations or hindrances, where there are female genders and the reason for inclusion.



The researcher investigating and interviewing the leader of the 'Ebule' Masquerade cult musical group on their mode of operations, their membership make-ups and the roles and function of each of the members.

**Response from the leader:** "our masquerade group is a group that encompasses both female and male and these have their roles to perform in the group. The male are incharge of wearing the mask, beating the instrument, presenting kola and carrying the official peaceful offering and incantation before every musical display or competition and the females responsible to create awareness and motivation songs possibly move ahead of the male folks in a very loud voice to pull attention to their masquerade so that their will be some level of distractions that draws relivance to their musical group". Which is why they dressed in palm fronds and other distractive attire.

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The same question was asked this group leader, 'akirinti' masquerade group and some of his members, and these were their responses:

"We do not incorporate women in our group but on the day of any performances, our women are allowed to take the lead in the dance and our masquerade follows. This is to create fun and draw peoples' attention to our masquerade group. The men are responsible for everything except dancing.

#### **Data Analysis**

It was gathered from the discussions with the leaders and members of some of the masquerade music groups that, since the women are also part of the community and supporters or cheerers of the masquerades, they are permitted to dance as well as present themselves in a way that informs the people that they are solid supporters of the masquerade musical cult group. Which is why some are seen leading the dance group whereas others are seen putting on palm leaves on their waist with animal tusk in their hands moving in an authoritative way to the display ground or arena and others playing the wooden gong. These women in practical sense are young girls some are married while some are not. These women are being pre-informed of what to do before any performance or display. The interrogated masquerade groups amongst others were, the 'Ebule masquerade group of the Umuchioké village' and 'akirinti' Masquerade from Ubogidi.

#### **Research Findings**

Finding from this research shows that, the women's involvement in the socio-cultural activities especially masquerading activities have moved beyond the normal primary role of preparing different dishes for the cultural events to the point of following and leading the dance of the spirit, some on a distractive attire and as well play some of the instrument like the timeline and shakers, and finally create attention to the direction of their masquerade as a support and moral energy with which their masquerade determines to succeed in any competitive event.

This has become a norm among the people of Edem-ani community and the rest of the three communities that make up Edem. Notwithstanding, there are still other masquerade cult groups that still maintain its strictness of allowing only men both in composition, masking and performances like the 'akpushi-agba' in Amogu, 'esato' the village police, 'Esoyig-okwu'naloenwureh and 'ogbaru' in Umuchiagwu, etc.

### Summary

Generally in Africa, women's involvement in the socio-cultural activities only limits them to the primary role of presenting dance, watching and cheering the performances as well as the domestic duties of cooking for the occasion, taking sacrifices to the gods in company of their husbands and gracing the occasion in their best outfits. But the narrative is practically different with the recent events where women are now a part of the masquerade musical cult display and are seen partaking in the dance of the spirit. The most amazing aspect is that some of these women lead the dance and the masquerade follow behind which prior to this day, it was a taboo. In fact women were not even allowed to come near the performance arena in the history of Edem-Ani. In contemplation to this resent phenomenon, from the research which is geared by inquisitive, there are findings that in some part of the country, women are initiated into the masquerade musical cult but with some limitations. This assertion suggests that some feministic limitations are becoming eased off unlike what it is used to be, as opined by some scholars like (people and Bailey: 2006). There has also been an established Concept of Cultural Construction and Gender Asymmetry in music with regards to women's involvement which points to the Abdulmalik's perception of gender participation. He states that "human beings think and act within the framework of a cultural system that affects worldviews and social behavior among others. (Ampene, 2005; Charry, 2000; Smith & Riley's 2009; and Burns, 2009,) from the discussions, such cultural constructions about gender roles actually defines the female gender.

With different views about culture been an autonomous force for steering society, there is a manifestation in the different roles and limitations found in every performance. Gender asymmetry in music is also manifest in the work of Ebeli, (2015). These constructions are linked to hegemonic processes of gender type of cultural reproduction and resistance. In the face of such cultural typecasts females in contemporary times have proven beyond every doubt that they are capable of performing some roles traditionally reserved for men.

This is evident in academic institutions where males and females are required to undertake the same task in drumming for assessment. "Hence, this standpoint must inspire music practitioners to break away from the classification of music and differential roles based on the premise of seemingly natural biological differences" (Pp.20-21). Supporting the above assertions, Amali, (2020) disclosed some African society whereby women perform pivotal role in creating a masquerade and thus involve in its performances. Such is that of the Idoma community. Here according to him, women play important role in the origin of masquerade and that if a man does not have a female child, while alive, he cannot be re-incarnated into the Alekwu masquerade spirit because that child will be sacrificed to the service of the masquerade cult. But Lawal in contrary stipulates that women are not allowed to participate in 'Gelede' masking for it is believed that women involvement would draw the spirits' anger on them or be interference to their reproductive power or nature. This is also same with the people of Edem-Ani whereby since the inception of the community masquerade cult performances have been done and performed by men alone excerpt for recently where it has been a reoccurring events where women are seen partaking in the performances of some of these masquerade display as observed in the current Edem-Ani day celebration at Nweke Edem-ani in Nsukka Local Government of Enugu State on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 2022.

### Conclusion

The emerging roles of women in socio-cultural practices, in Edem-Ani in Nsukka Local Government of Enugu State, like that of the Idoma community and some African communities that would be discussed in subsequent works, have opened up another explorative direction or stage in the study of ethnomusicology. According to Akunna (2016), "these stages have socio-cultural significance and relate differently to the formal and informal power structures within communal existence". This means that there are still a lot to explore as far as ethnomusicology is concerned. These findings highlighted the emerging roles women play in the socio-cultural environment in the African community which are very important especially when it comes to the social, economic, political and religious affairs that enhance the smooth running of the African community with regard to gender balancing and equity.

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#### Appendix

Below are the pictures of Ebule masquerade & Akirinti masquerade and his wife behind him.



Women taking lead in the dance of the spirit. See pictures below



Above are the pictures of two women in white and black taking the lead in the masquerade dance display while the masquerade follows also the next picture with two women, one dressed in a masquerade-like manner with animal tusk or horns with palm leaves tied round her waist and the one with timeline which she plays as member of the masquerade cult group, both heading to the display arena.