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ILORIN, NIGERIA

FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES IN GENERAL STUDIES: THE HUMANITIES APPROACH

EDITED BY
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FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES IN GENERAL
STUDIES: THE HUMANITIES APPROACH

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MASQUERADE AND THE MASQUERADER: THEATRICAL PRODUCING FOR TRADITIONAL CULTURAL FESTIVALS

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Introduction

Drama, Masks and mask dramaturgies have been studied from different perspectives in all cultures and the studies have generated a large body of research Ogunba (1978), Soyinka, (1979), Oyewo (2006), Kuret (1984), Kovacev (2007), Emigh (1996). They have been seen to represent the ritual and the theatrical across various civilisations even from the early Greek festivals. Relationship between management and culture has also generated wide interest in both the field of Management and Culture/ arts.

There is a fertile relationship between gods and man in most African societies and this relationship is very pronounced in the artistic presentation. Theatre generally are believed to originate from tribal rituals and ceremonies which include dance performance, total arts and total theatre, but the difference between the festivals and the theatre is that these ceremonies were believed to be efficacious; religious as well as aesthetic. This justifies Jahinze Jahn's (1959) assertion that theatre begins in religion and ends in aesthetics.

One of the salient functions of arts especially African arts is the issue of social commentaries and communal celebrations as emblematised in her various traditional festivals. The objectives of most of the African festivals are numerous, for example, in the traditional society; festivals are carried out not only for spiritual uplift but also to engender social cohesion, social control and communal wellbeing. Very prominent are the aesthetic functions and components of the festivals and in this instance, they also serve as economic booster by providing income for the various vocations represented in the festivals. Although the traditional festivals are realised on the levels of the sacred and the civic, the social values and aesthetic expressions taking more prominence while the spiritual is suffused in the very nature of the festivals themselves. The masking nature of the Egungun masquerade and its mythological origin for example connotes an inherent religious rituals observance. Apart from these religious significance, Egungun festivals also serve the following functions; recreation, education, edification, enforce social order, foster unity and cohesion of the community and at the end of each annual celebration gives a sense of rejuvenation. There is a psychological feeling of accomplishment after the festival when the masquerade is returned to either "Aja" the attic or the groove "Igbo Igbaile".

The Yoruba theatre like most African theatre derives from the rich traditional

festivals which are products of their religious beliefs. It is total in nature to the extent that the typical Nigerian performance is a symbiosis of the three aspects of performance; dance, drama and music. Its holistic concept makes the visual art and craft also inseparable from the performing arts within the cultural milieu. For example, the Egungun performance among the Yoruba speaking people in Nigeria is a holistic art where the performing and the visual are inseparable, and an occasion for performance is an occasion to showcase the creative and spiritual essence of the community. In its original form, Egungun theatre was part of religious rituals. As Adedeji (1973, p254-276) has observed, a non-ritual version of Egungun later emerged between 1610 and 1615. The performance combined music, dance, dramatic sketches and colourful costumes. Traditional performances usually take their roots from the religious festivals as a result of which the traditional performances are composed of both the religious and theatrical elements. At the onset of an Egungun festival, there is spiritual and aesthetic re-activation and restoration, sacrifices are offered, venues are prepared, costumes, props and other paraphernalia are restored and prepared.

Soyinka (1997) in an interview with Ulli Beier observes that these activities transcend the issue of saying that the masquerade tradition is evil. He says; "Even if I realised quite early that there was a man in the Egungun Mask that did not mean that a great act of evil was being committed."

The canons of aesthetics to achieve the perception of beauty in a work of arts are identified as beauty or value i.e. meaning and interpretation, phenomena that are represented in the form and structure of traditional performances as well as in all aspects of life. Generally, aesthetics is very crucial to civilisation as attested to by Michel Bennet (1991, p60). According to him there is a widely held popular assumption that the dividing line between animals and human beings is marked by "civilisation" and by considerations beyond those of mere survival, among others by an appreciation of the realm of aesthetics. Aesthetics has also been referred to as a mode of intellectual energy, and aesthetic or artistic interest is universal to human cultures. This concept according to (Goldman 2006) has broadened to qualify not only judgment or evaluation but properties, attitudes, experience and pleasure or value as well and its application is no longer restricted to beauty alone. The theories of aesthetics of art as either imitation or as form are resplendent in the codified wisdom of the Yoruba as well as in their traditional festivals and go a long way to stress the value placed on the aesthetics of the people. Five ancient concepts are essential to an understanding of Yoruba aesthetics. These ancient concepts are; "Ase" (power authority), "Ori" (inner spiritual head or personal destiny), "Iwa" (character or essential nature), "Ewa" (beauty) and "Ona" (art). These aesthetics have impacted significantly and have been instrumental to the classification of Yoruba festivals performances along religious and aesthetics boundaries. Adedotun Ogundeji (2003, p25) evolved four types of traditional theatre performances. The masked carrier (Egungun) is one very important role played in the various performances and festivals among the Yoruba.

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There is a popular saying in Yoruba that "Eni ti o go ni o ngbe Iggunnu., enigbon ni i gbowo re" this means that it is the foolish person who carries the "Iggunnu" masquerade while the wise man serves as the guide collecting the gate takings. This belief touches on the aesthetics as well as the management aspects of the masquerade festival traditions among the Yoruba people. This chapter therefore attempts to assess this saying within the concept of the performers, practice and philosophy behind theatrical producing in the various Masquerade festivals/masquerade dramaturgies. We attempt to identify the "eni ti o gbon" i.e the wise one and the "eni ti o go" - the foolish person; examine the institution of the Egungun and see how this relate to the issue of trust among the people. The chapter traces the origin of the various Egungun among the Yoruba, discusses their mode of performance, identifies their functions within the social and religious well being of the society and discusses the implication of the relationship to social cohesion.

Objectives of the chapter

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- i. examine the salience of certain Yoruba traditional sayings and practices in normal day to day living;
- ii. identify the functions of theatrical producing within the traditional Masquerade tradition;
- iii. discuss the implication of the relationship between religious and social to social-political cohesion; and
- iv. identify and appreciate the deep philosophical undertone about theatrical producing for Egungun and trust desiderata in Nigeria.

Definition of Terms

Masquerade and Masquerader are key words that have a dialectical relationship each one dependent on the other. Whereas the Masquerade connotes the art of pretending to be an ancestral personage, the masquerader refers to the person who carries the masquerade. This is in consonance with Ogundeji's (2003), classification of the role of carrier mask (Masquerade) in the carrier roles common to traditional performers. It is crucial to say that both refer to the one and same entity. As soon as the masquerader puts on the masquerade and emerges from the "Igbo Igbale", he becomes inseparable and according to Soyinka (1997, 2) he becomes transformed. There is a close relationship between the masquerade and the masquerader. The potency of the Masquerade (Masks and Costumes) robs off on the masquerader and by carrying the masquerade (gbigbe egungun), the carrier usually undergoes a psychic change. Although there are instances of unmasked masquerade/er, the concept of the carrier (gbigbe Egungun) is salient to all, and the "gbigbe" now connotes a spiritual empowerment/ state of spiritual possession.

Producing is another key term in the study of the relationship between the aesthetic/religious and management of the traditional festivals among the Yoruba.

Producing can be described as the ways of mobilising and harnessing resources both human and material to organise an event either to make profit or not. It is primarily expected to be viable and be beneficial to the community in the instance of festival. A producer is then the person/s responsible for seeing to the organisation and management of the festival. There are people responsible for these roles in the traditional setting and the roles are given to specific lineages in the traditional Egungun festivals celebrations. So, the producer produces the entrepreneurial intervention needed to run a festival and this has brought about a relationship between the Masquerade/Masquerader and the Producer since time immemorial. It is a relationship that permeates all cultures right from the Greek period of primal rituals (Schechner, 2013), the earlier origin of African Theatre and from the beginning of Yoruba civilisation.

Masks and Masquerades are still strong indigenous beliefs that are not just relic of the past. The ongoing renaissance in cultural festivals in Nigeria for example show that interests in festivals is something that is desired today and may also be needed in future for the conservation of not only cultural heritage but also of moral values and other concrete aspects of natural resources in indigenous societies. Masquerades as one of the ancient means of human expression of culture permeates all human civilisations and performs myriad of functions and are of diverse shapes, sizes and colours. They serve aesthetic and religious functions. They are usually associated with ceremonies and festive occasions but primarily have to do with some form of reenactment of mythological events.

Egungun Masquerade Traditions among the Yoruba

Egungun is usually celebrated in festivals and it is one of the most prominent and pervasive festivals in the Yoruba communities. It is inconceivable to have a Yoruba community without appropriate Egungun, neither is there any Yoruba Compound that does not have an Egungun which is a form of ancestral worship among the Yoruba. Ogunba (1978, p4) sees traditional festival as an indigenous cultural Institution, a form of art nurtured on the African soil over the centuries and which has therefore developed distinctive features and whose techniques are sometimes totally different. He further sees festival as an integral, dynamic part of the culture of an un-alienated African, an occasion to which he responds spontaneously. This spontaneous response transcends the religious and includes the aesthetic as well but it is of a spiritual essence that becomes functional to the wellbeing of the society. The festivals are also regarded as events usually staged by communities in honour of God and gods and traditional festivals are usually marked by feasting, ceremonies and other observances as dances, masquerade, songs, music and other entertainment.

Masquerade traditions among the Yoruba are as diverse as the ethnic representation; there are the Egungun Oyo of the Oyo speaking Yoruba People (Babayemi, 1980) and the Gelede Masquerade popular in the Coastal Yoruba settlements. Layewu (hunters' masquerade) is about the only egungun that belonged

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to a professional guild, but it serves the same purpose as ritual funerary and aesthetic celebration for the "Ode" hunters' guild in Yoruba land. The "Iggunuko" which is common in Ogun area, the Eyo "adamu Orisa play" (Adedeji 1973), masquerade of the "Eko" people, the "Agemo" of the Ijebu speaking people, the "Epa" and the "Elewe" masquerade traditions of the Ekiti and Igbomina speaking people respectively, all lay valid claim to the rich Egungun masquerade traditions in Nigeria. In all these the masked traditions and dramaturgies are prominent features and according to Emigh, (1997, p13), masked performances can be viewed as having the conservative function of maintaining group identity by glorifying the power of the past, they also have a more creative function- extending the sense of the possible through the imaginative attention lavished on the masks (and costumes) and the activities that bear witness to their animation.

There are diverse origins of Egungun among the Yoruba; myth has it that the Egungun cult derives from the relationship between a guerrilla and a woman who had gone to the forest to appease the soul of a departed ancestor who was not given a decent burial. (Babayemi, 1980). Another oral tradition (Adisa Omodunbi. 2008) has it that Egungun and Oro another Yoruba sacred cult were brothers and children of the same parent. They consulted the oracle as was the practice among the Yoruba, and sacrifices were prescribed for them after which they went in search of jobs and prospects outside their domain. The two brothers prospered in their sojourn, but while Egungun invested his money wisely and bought clothes and saved some because of their parents back home, "Oro" was a spend drift. He lavished his money on food, meat and drinks and therefore was wretched and did not even have the transport money to return home at the appointed time. In fact, he returned home naked while Egungun returned prosperous with pomp and pageantry with his robes so flamboyant that they trailed behind him and had to be carried by his followers. Oro out of shame had to cover his manhood with his hand and the people had to cover his nakedness with palm fronds and at the same time shouting "Agan re, a i woo" (This is Agan, it forbidden to look at it). They had to kill a dog for him to march on the blood as a way of dealing with his shame, they sing after him, to usher him to the outskirts of the town, at "Igbo Igbale" and built a house for him there.

Egungun then traced Oro to "Igbale" after paying homage to the King and their parents. The Oracle then decreed that "Agan" referred to as Oro must first come out (agan be) of igbale. before Egungun can come out and go back to the community. Oro is referred to as the first "Agan", It was the forest shrine where Oro went to hide his shame that they set aside as the sacred groove from where the "Agan" must be brought home before the Egungun festival can commence.

The Egungun cult thus emerged and parades the following titles in order of seniority; "Alagbaa", "Oloiko", "Olojowon", "Ogogo" and "Alapinni" the youngest of them. Egungun can be classified into three; "Egungun Oje", these are magicians called "Egungun Apidan" and they often perform to entertain the Kings. Their peculiar trait is the overflowing nature of their robes that trail behind them. "Egungun Eleru" or "Egungun Idile", are identified in most instances by their masks

and the loads they always carry on their head. These are the real carrier masquerade because they assume the role of the carrier for the community by carrying sacrifices during period of turbulence to appease the gods for the spiritual wellbeing of the community. These egungun are also noted to have been used to fight wars in the olden days. The third category is the "Paka", and these are referred to as "Egungun Olore", and often times they are the ones that are followed about by followers whipping themselves in ritual observance. Elebuibon (2008) in an interview further classifies the Egungun tradition into three along functional lines namely; "Egungun Alare" for entertainment, "Ara Orun" for the ancestral/religious and "Tombolo" apprentice masquerade for and by Children. During a typical Egungun festival, the Egungun prays for the people and or also entertain them. This attracts gifts from the community as an appreciation.

Theatrical Producing in Masquerade/Masquerader

The Igunnuko Masquerade Tradition

The Igunnuko has also gained prominence as a sacred masquerade tradition among the Yoruba people. Believed to be of Tapa origin, they are said to have been borrowed from them because it was customary of the Yoruba people to acquire the gods of conquered territory. Story had it that the Tapa people and the Dahomey where the Igunnuko tradition was strong used this unusual masquerade to frighten the Yoruba in the intertribal wars of the period. Onikoyi Elempe, commander of Alafin Gbope of Oyo made incursions to these lands and it was said that Onikoyi married the daughter of Elenpe during one of his war expeditions and that was how the Igunnuko Masquerade came to Yoruba land. Because Onikoyi was Alafin's commander, the first point of call was "Oyo Igbope". Alaafin Oranyan was also said to have used it for warfare. This cult is strong in Egba area because of their proximity to another original owner, Dahomey. Igunnuko is also a cult with its own unique "Igbale" (shrine) which is only for the initiates. The sacred ritual traditions and the aesthetics of masque dramaturgies salient to the Masquerade tradition are very prominent in the Igunnuko masquerade. Igunnuko is usually very tall and frightening masquerade, but there are short ones who are deemed to be very wicked and also perform acrobatics to entertain. The costumes of the tall ones usually have seven segments while that of the short ones are segmented into threes.

Characteristics common to all the Egungun traditions

Certain characteristics are common to all the Egungun traditions among the Yoruba people; they are referred to as "Ara Orun Kinkin" meaning that they are from heaven as ancestors. Festivals are primarily done in remembrance of these departed ancestors. They all have their "Igbo Igbale" which has been described as a place of transformation from where they emerge, according to Soyinka (1997) to "bless the community, entertain and beg for alms". All the traditions represent a kind of continuity between the living and the dead and this is a central element of the

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cosmology of the Yoruba people. In all, they go round the community and offer prayers for people who offer them gifts and money in appreciation of the blessing as well as the entertainment.

There is a very dynamic relationship between the Masquerade/Masquerader and the Producer in the Egungun festival celebration. The Yoruba have captured the economic relationship in wise sayings defining in the process this relationship, a situation that has also been observable in theatre practice in Nigeria.

"Eniti o go ni o ngbe igunnu, Eniti o gbon ni on gba owo re," (it is the foolish person who carries the "Igunnu" masquerade while the wise man serves as the guide collecting the gate takings) is one of such and defines the inextricable link between the producer and the masquerader on the one hand and explains the aesthetic and the religious on the other. *"Owo olowo Leegun nna"* (The Masquerade spends someone else's money), also suggest that the egungun depends on some external sources of funding and that its duty is to perform and be rewarded. This is strongly at variance with Soyinka's statement that they beg for money but rather one opines that the Egungun are only rewarded for fulfilling a salient communal role of serving as the carrier and of providing entertainment. Inherent in this philosophy, is the quantification of the communal appreciation signified by another Yoruba wise saying; (Elebuibon: 2008) *"owo ni ngo gba nko gba sere owo mo"* meaning that the Egungun would appreciate money rather than just applause through mere clapping of hands. He bears a great burden which must be endured manly as *"Iso inu eku arunmora ni"* (farting in the masquerade is requires to be borne with dignity and a lot of perseverance) and as a result must be amply rewarded.

When it is realised that the masquerader undergoes a psychic change when he carries the masquerade, his total being is affected and he might not be in the right frame of mind to handle the business aspect. As an *"Ara Orun"* he is too preoccupied with spiritual matters to be conscious for keeping record of financial dealings. According to Eliade (1965), during a traditional performance, "secular time" is stopped and "primordial mythical times made present". It is not the person that is performing again but has taken on the role of the ancestor. In the case of masked performances, he has both the role playing and the mask to contend with. A man in the egungun mask is used to facilitate the entry of a "spirit helper" into the performer's body" (Emigh 14) and thus combines ritual magic with mimetic play both of which are very engaging.

Summary and Conclusion

The role of the masquerade traditions generally indicates that the religious significantly influences the arrangement of the business and as such a traditional Egungun performer needs an honest and hardcore business man to sustain the financial aspect of the ceremony. The Igunnuko is worst hit than the other Egungun who collect the cash gifts with their own hands. The Igunnuko on the other hand has another physical handicap that makes the Masquerade to be regarded as the purview

of the foolish while collecting the money is that of the wise. The costume and masks of the Igunnuko become so cumbersome that, in addition to the spiritual possession, he can not afford the luxury of collecting money himself. In fact, the costume has no provision for a hand to collect money because he has to engage both hands to control the complex mechanism. He thus depends more heavily on the leader (Atokun) for direction and on his honesty for financial reward.

The Egungun festival celebrations of the Yoruba has greatly expressed the relationship between aesthetic/religious and the entrepreneurial and have implication for the management of festivals and theatrical practice in modern day Nigeria. Writing about Yoruba masked dramaturgy, Ogunba (1978, p3) observes that certain lineages were identified with certain artistic specialisations. For instance, the "Lebe" troupe was renowned for poetry (ewi) and dance, "Eiyeoba" was popular for acrobatics and dance, "Agbegijo" was famous for sketches and "Aiyeloabola" for "tableau vivants". It also has a deep philosophical undertone about the desiderata of trust for the promotion of the salient traditions and also offers moral lessons for the Nigeria nation. It suggests the need for social sanctions to enforce balance of power between the artistic and the financial in the inherited socio-political relationship through the preservation of prescribed social tradition.

Recommendations

Mutual trust is crucial to the development of the nation not only in artistic aspects but also in the social political spheres of life. As such, for the masquerade to perform dexterously, the "wise" man entrusted with the treasury must do his work with the fear of God. Apart from legal remedies, some social sanctions that make the trust mutual should be employed against breach of public trust in every aspect of the Nigerian polity.

Revision Exercise

1. To sustain the financial aspect of the Egungun Ceremony, requires;
 - (a) Honest and hardworking personality.
 - (b) A hardcore business man alone
 - (c) A Juju Priest
 - (d) All of the above
2. During a traditional performance, "secular time" is "stopped and primordial mythical time is made present"
 - (a) Yes
 - (b) No
3. Masquerade performs myriad of functions:
 - (a) Aesthetics and economic only
 - (b) Religious and social only
 - (c) Political function

(d)

4.

(a)

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- (d) All of the above
4. The Igunnuko Masquerade collects his gifts:
- (a) With his own hands
 - (b) Through the "Atokun"
 - (c) Through the "eni ti o go"
 - (d) By the spirit of the masquerade
5. Differences between festival and theatre:
- (a) Festivals are efficacious, religious and aesthetic
 - (b) Theatre ends in religion
 - (c) Festival is about entertainment only
 - (d) Theatre begins in aesthetics and ends in religion

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